

# Faithful & Afire

LCMS Circuit Bible Studies — 2012-2013

## Called To Be Christ's Witnesses

**Called to perceive by faith and to proclaim the unseen works of God amidst the things that are seen.**

Participant's Guide – April 2013

**Topic: God's Witnesses to the unseen works of God IN PRAYER ....**

**Series Theme Verse:** "So we do not lose heart. Though our outer nature is wasting away, our inner nature is being renewed day by day. For this slight momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison, as we look not to the things that are seen, but to the things that are unseen. For the things that are seen are transient, but the things that are unseen are eternal" - 2 Cor. 4:16-18.

**Session Verse:** "But when you pray, go into your room and shut the door and pray to your Father who is in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will reward you" - Matt. 6:6.

**Be cognizant of the amount of time you are allotted for the study. If time is limited determine which passages and questions you will use.**

**Opening: Read Matthew 6:1-18**

### 1. Focus of This Study

In our blessed Savior's discourse (Matt. 6:1-18) on almsgiving, prayer, and fasting, He calls upon the disciple to exercise a piety that is hidden; yet, the Father, who sees that which is hidden, "rewards" the disciple "openly" (KJV).. Bonhoeffer wrote, "Prayer is the supreme instance of the hidden character of the Christian life." (*Cost of Discipleship*, p.163).

Not only did Jesus teach His disciples to pray (Matt. 6:9), they themselves asked to be taught (Lk. 11:1). Even in our weakness and ignorance we have the promise that the Spirit intercedes for us (Rm. 8:26)

- Do you wish that you would not only be known as a "Jesus Preacher," as Valrius Herberger, but also a "Man of Prayer?"

John Kleinig wrote, "More than anything else, I would like to be good at praying ... Yet I must admit that I have been anything but a man of prayer." (*Grace Upon Grace*, p. 151)

- How about you? How's your prayer life?
- Do you see yourself as "anything but a man of prayer"? What hinders your prayer life?

### 2. Scripture Search

Read 1 John 5:13-15.

Prayer is rooted in the command and promise of God. To whom is the promise made?

How does the promise of "eternal life" engender confidence in one's prayers?

Read James 1:2-8.

What might cause one to doubt when asking God for wisdom?

How does the promise "... gives generously" create confidence and strengthen one in prayer?

Read 1 John 3:19-24.

In what way(s) do our hearts condemn us?

How does knowing and believing that "God is greater than our hearts" move us to prayer?

Read Genesis 32:22-30.

With whom might Jacob initially have thought he was wrestling?

Why did Jacob name the place “Peniel”?

J. Kleinig comments on this text: “Jacob won his greatest spiritual victory when he was defeated by God.” (Grace Upon Grace, p. 153)

Do you agree or disagree with this assessment? Why or why not?

In what way(s) was/were the unseen works of God in prayer manifested?

Read Ephesians 3:14-21.

Why does the Apostle erupt in praise to God?

Why does Paul pray for the saints as he does?

When and how might you use this prayer for the members of the flock over which the Holy Spirit has made you overseer?

Read Exodus 32:7-14

How does Moses’ intercession for the Israelites correct and move you to pray for the fallen, the hard-hearted, and those violently opposed to the Gospel?

Read Luke 11:1-13.

After responding to an unnamed disciple’s request, “Lord, teach us to pray...” Jesus teaches the disciples the “Our Father” and gives additional instruction on prayer. How does Jesus teach us to be persistent, even “impudent”, in our prayers?

What promise does the Savior give regarding prayer?

In what way(s) is the Holy Spirit the greatest good gift the heavenly Father gives?

### 3. From Our Lutheran Perspective

**“In the same way, our prayers as our own work would not amount to anything or accomplish anything; but what makes it amount to something is the fact that it proceeds on the basis of His commandment and promise. For that reason it may well be regarded as a sacrament and as a divine work rather than a work of our own.” (M. Luther, AE 21:15-151)**

In what way could Luther consider prayer a “sacrament”?

How is this radically different from the way many understand prayer?

How does praying the Kyrie in Matins and Vespers before the Lord’s Prayer underscore prayer as a gift?

**“Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven.**

***What does this mean?*** The good and gracious will of God is done even without our prayer, but we pray in this petition that it may be done among us also.

***How is God’s will done?*** God’s will is done when He breaks and hinders every evil plan and purpose of the devil, the world, and our sinful nature, which do not want us to hallow God’s name or let His kingdom come; and when He strengthens and keeps us firm in His Word and faith until we die. This is His good and gracious will.” (M. Luther, SC, Section 1)

In this petition we pray against our will. Why?

Some argue that praying “Thy will be done,” demonstrates a lack of faith. How would you respond to such an assertion?

### 4. Points to Ponder

***The apostle wrote, “If then you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth. For you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. When Christ who is your life appears, then you also will appear with him in glory.” Colossians 3:1-4.***

Where is the reality of our life seen?

In that this life is hidden with Christ, what tensions arise in the life of the Christian including one's prayer life in this 'hiddenness'?

In a sermon in 1534 on the second Sunday in Lent on Matt 15:21-28, the story of the Canaanite woman, Luther used Joseph as an example of unceasing prayer.

**"For about thirteen years Joseph cried and continued to pray God to help him. But the longer, the worse; the more he prayed, the worse he fared. To this day this is what happens to Christians. When they have called and cried for a long time to God, they feel no improvement, but things grow worse, as they did with Joseph. ... However, since the help was delayed so long, he became a lord over all Egypt ... Thus God intends to deal with us. After He has denied us our petition for a long while and always said no, but we firmly cling to the yes, it shall be finally yes, and not no, for His Word will not lie: 'Whatsoever ye shall ask of the Father in my name, He will give it to you' ... Something will come of our prayer in the end, and God will give far more than we asked Him to give" (John 15:16). (Plass, Vol. II. #3483)**

How do the promises of Jesus sustain you in your prayers when congregational life appears to be ebbing, your faith languishing, and nothing is changing for the better?

## 5. For Conversation

Luther wrote in the Large Catechism,

**"This we must know, that all our safety and protection consist in prayer alone. We are far too weak to cope with the devil and all his might and his forces arrayed against us, trying to trample us under foot. Therefore we must carefully select the weapons with which Christians ought to arm themselves in order to stand against the devil. What do you think has accomplished such great results in the past, parrying the counsels and plots of our enemies and checking their murderous and seditious designs by which the devil expected to crush us, and the Gospel as well, except that the prayers of a few godly men intervened like an iron wall on our side? Otherwise they would have witnessed a far different drama: the devil would have destroyed all Germany in its own blood. Now they may confidently ridicule and mock. But by prayer alone we shall be a match both for them and for the devil, if we only persevere diligently and do not become slack." (LC, Part 3, para. 30-31)**

Why are we often tempted to "go it alone" or think we are alone when dealing with trials, tribulations, temptations?

When asking others to pray for you, have you ever envisioned their prayers as Luther: "... except that the prayers of a few godly men intervened like an iron wall on our side"?

## 6. Closing

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