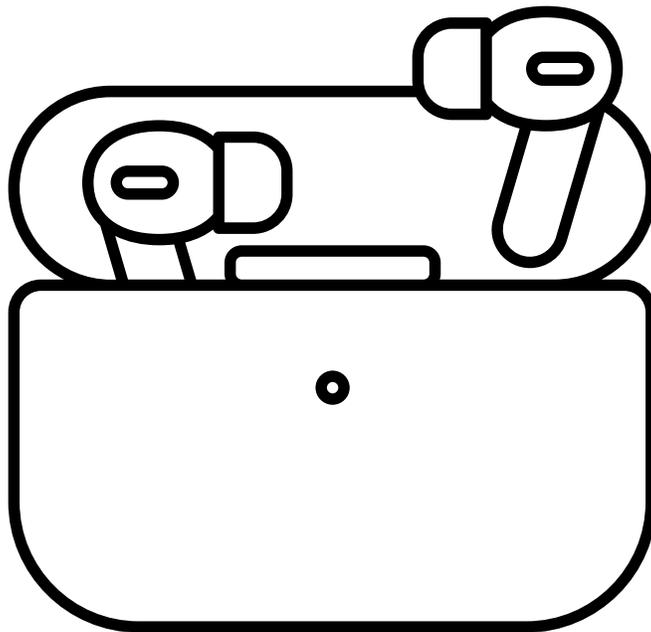


OUR FAITHFUL FATHER LISTENS

A CHURCH WIDE STUDY OF PRAYER

MAY 2023



Participant Guide

For you, Lord, are kind and ready to forgive, abounding in faithful love to all who call on you. Lord, hear my prayer; listen to my cries for mercy. I call on you in the day of my distress, for you will answer me. Psalms 86:5-7

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Series Introduction

As a church, this spring, we will use this life group guide to facilitate discussion around our 2023 focus on Prayer! However, you might be reading this guide and have never connected with Jesus Christ. You might be asking, "why do I need to pray to God," or "what does it even mean to pray?" We are glad you are asking those questions, and we would love to talk with you about any questions you may have regarding living a life for Jesus! Give us a call or send us an email! FBC@fbcgarner.org or (919) 772 1772.

Our Faithful Father Listens

In this season of staff transitions, hiring leadership for both our worship and children's ministries and coming off of three culture-shifting years surrounding the pandemic, your pastors felt strongly that we needed to focus on one of the most basic and vital aspects of our relationship with Jesus, prayer. Although much has changed in our church family and in our world over the last few years, our mission remains the same; to know Christ and to make Him known to all people. Both knowing Christ and making him known are entirely dependent on prayer.

This spring, we are not merely studying prayer; we are praying. Church Family, I hope you realize that we need to cry out to God in utter dependence. Not only do we need to cry out, but we must also understand that when we cry out, our faithful Father listens! This truth is expressed in Psalm 86:5-7 which states, "For you, Lord, are kind and ready to forgive, abounding in faithful love to all who call on you. Lord, hear my prayer; listen to my cries for mercy. I call on you in the day of my distress, for you will answer me." What a beautiful description of the relationship between a child of God and their heavenly Father. Our aim is that through this study, you realize that our God is always faithful, ever-present, and listening for His children to call out. Do you call out to Him?

George Muller, the director of the Ashley Down orphanage, states, "I believe God has heard my prayers. He will make it manifest in His own good time that He has heard me. I have recorded my petitions that when God has answered them, His name will be glorified." We need God to intervene in our lives, our families, our church, and our community. Let's be a church full of individuals longing to see the Lord use us for His glory and for the expansion of His name! We earnestly long to see God transform lives through the gospel of Jesus, and we acknowledge that we cannot transform anyone; we must call on our faithful Father!

HOW TO USE THIS STUDY

LIFE GROUP STUDY

Your Life Group should be a community of believers discussing and studying the scriptures together. Life Group is not lecture time, that occurs during the Sunday sermon. During Life Group, you will break down the weekly Scripture passage and seek to apply it specifically to your life. In addition to studying the word, we want to encourage you to keep each other accountable, pray for one another, and encourage each other to remain obedient to God's word!

Many of you already read through the guide and answer the questions before Life Group. I want to encourage more of you to try this method. Answering the questions beforehand makes it easier for you to have a discussion and gives you time to process the encouragement and conviction you felt in response to the passage of Scripture! Then in Life Group, you can share that with others!

FAMILY DISCIPLESHIP: PARENT CONNECT

Each week contains a Parent Connect page. Parents, we include this page as a resource to help you engage with your student during the week. Use it to help start the conversation of what you learned in Life Groups or the sermon, and find out what the Lord is teaching them! Our pastoral staff believes strongly that you play the primary role in discipling your kids! Engage with their spiritual growth!

SERMON NOTES

Please use this section to take notes during the Sunday Sermon. Taking notes helps you to retain what you hear and will help you reference this teaching of God's word in your Life Group the following week!

Interactive Learning Guide:

Matthew 18:18-20

MAY: WEEK 1

MAIN IDEA OF THE TEXT:

The Apostles were granted the authority from Christ to enforce God's holy standard of right and wrong here on earth, based on what was already determined by God in heaven. This authority has through time been given to the church.

SERIES CONNECTION:

Authority! A word that intimidates some, concerns others and is misunderstood by most people. In our society today, respect and understanding of authority is something that needs to be restored. As a follower of Christ, you must understand the authority of heaven has been entrusted to the Church. For our church family, we must understand God has placed His authority with us to carry out the purpose of doing His work and will in our community and in the world. To illustrate the role of the church in God's kingdom work, Tony Evans compares the local church to an embassy. In an article entitled "The Church as Heaven's Embassy" he states, "the church is supposed to be a little bit of heaven a long way from home. It is to be that place where the values of eternity operate in time".

In most countries of the world, our nation has an American embassy. The function of an American embassy is to be a little bit of America a long way from home. When in a foreign country, if an American citizen has a problem or need, they can go to the American embassy and know that the rules and laws applied at the embassy are the same as those back home. While a long way from home, the embassy is recognized as a sovereign territory, governed by our nation and granted the authority of our nation to execute the same rule of law as in our home land.

In our text, Jesus is teaching His disciples the biblical principle of binding and loosing. He states in Matthew 18:18, "Truly I tell you, whatever you bind on earth will have been bound in heaven and whatever you loose on earth will have been loosed in heaven. Literally, what Jesus is saying is "whatever you bind (declare unlawful according to the teachings of Christ and His Word) on earth will have been (already) bound in heaven, and whatever you loose (declare lawful according to the teachings of Christ and His Word) on earth, will have been (already) loosed in heaven. In other words, the church as heaven's embassy is to uphold the truth of God's Word and His holy standard as it has been established already in heaven. We are not to pray and seek to change heaven to fall in line with the brokenness of this world, but rather our prayers and our applying God's standard through the church should be consistent with what God has already declared as holy and just.

READ MATTHEW 18:18-20 (CSB)

18 Truly I tell you, whatever you bind on earth will have been bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will have been loosed in heaven. 19 Again, truly I tell you, if two of you on earth agree about any matter that you pray for, it will be done for you by my Father in heaven. 20 For where two or three are gathered together in my name, I am there among them."

GROUP DISCUSSION

QUESTIONS

1. Take a moment to write down your initial observations and summarize the text.
2. What is the context of the teaching that Jesus shares in Matthew 18:18-20?
3. What does it mean to “bind and loose”?
4. Who has been granted the authority to “bind and loose”?
5. How does the church determine what is to be forbidden and what is to be allowed?

APPLICATION

6. For a local church to properly use the authority of binding and loosing, what must be the heart and desire of the church body and its leadership?

7. The word "agree" in the Greek gives us our English word "symphony." This speaks to the way we are to pray about matters of heaven. What would it look like for our church to agree about matters of heaven?

8. What are some areas in our society that have shifted away from the teachings of Jesus Christ and His Word?

9. How should the church respond to the shift of society away from biblical truth?

10. How does this passage prompt me to pray?

Parent Connect

Family Discipleship Guide: Matthew 18:18-20

Get your family to discuss what you are learning at church during the week. Help your child navigate the truths of Scripture and apply it to their lives.

BED TIME

Prayer &
Scripture Memory

Read the memory verse and pray in alignment with the prompt every night.

Memory Verse: "For where two or three are gathered together in my name, I am there among them." - Matthew 18:20

Prayer Prompt: Lord, I thank you for your presence in my life and in my church!

DRIVE TIME

Discussion / Check-In

"Truly I tell you, whatever you bind on earth will have been bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will have been loosed in heaven." - Matt 18:18

Ask the child if they struggle with accepting or understanding any of God's standards in the Bible.

DINNER TIME

Family Devotion

Read Matthew 18:15-18!

Keep it simple, and talk about the importance of church with your children!

Start by asking, what is the church? Why do we gather as a church?

Interactive Learning Guide:

2 Kings 20:1-11

MAY: WEEK 2

MAIN IDEA OF THE TEXT:

The Lord used Hezekiah's prayer to accomplish a mighty work and bring glory to His people, Judah! A mighty work of destroying Assyrians both militarily and spiritually!

SERIES CONNECTION:

This spring, we are studying how our faithful God listens to the prayers of His children. In 2 Kings 20, we are going to read about King Hezekiah, one of the greatest kings of Judah. Hezekiah ruled the southern kingdom of Judah shortly after the northern kingdom of Israel was taken into captivity. We are told that Hezekiah was a king who honored God in 2 Chronicles 31:20, which states, "Hezekiah did this throughout all Judah. He did what was good and upright and true before the Lord his God." It seems that this upright king was facing the Assyrian army in battle, the same army that had captured the northern kingdom a few years earlier. However, King Hezekiah was ill, and the word of his illness was starting to spread to the surrounding nations. We are going to see God use the pleading of Hezekiah to intervene in a powerful way, and to spread His glory throughout the generations!

READ 2 KINGS 20:1-11 (CSB)

1 In those days Hezekiah became terminally ill. The prophet Isaiah son of Amoz came and said to him, "This is what the Lord says: 'Set your house in order, for you are about to die; you will not recover.'" 2 Then Hezekiah turned his face to the wall and prayed to the Lord, 3 "Please, Lord, remember how I have walked before you faithfully and wholeheartedly and have done what pleases you." And Hezekiah wept bitterly. 4 Isaiah had not yet gone out of the inner courtyard when the word of the Lord came to him: 5 "Go back and tell Hezekiah, the leader of my people, 'This is what the Lord God of your ancestor David says: I have heard your prayer; I have seen your tears. Look, I will heal you. On the third day from now you will go up to the Lord's temple. 6 I will add fifteen years to your life. I will rescue you and this city from the grasp of the king of Assyria. I will defend this city for my sake and for the sake of my servant David.'" 7 Then Isaiah said, "Bring a lump of pressed figs." So they brought it and applied it to his infected skin, and he recovered. 8 Hezekiah had asked Isaiah, "What is the sign that the Lord will heal me and that I will go up to the Lord's temple on the third day?" 9 Isaiah said, "This is the sign to you from the Lord that he will do what he has promised: Should the shadow go ahead ten steps or go back ten steps?" 10 Then Hezekiah answered, "It's easy for the shadow to lengthen ten steps. No, let the shadow go back ten steps." 11 So the prophet Isaiah called out to the Lord, and he brought the shadow back the ten steps it had descended on the stairway of Ahaz.

GROUP DISCUSSION

QUESTIONS

1. Take a moment to write down your initial observations and summarize the text.
2. Put yourself in Hezekiah's shoes. A mighty nation is coming against you, and you, as an upright king, are relying on God. Then, you develop an illness and you are unable to lead your people. How would you describe Hezekiah's situation?
3. Then God's prophet Isaiah comes to give you a message, "set your house in order, for you are about to die; you will not recover." He is given a terminal diagnosis and responds to God by prayerfully pleading. What is significant about Hezekiah's prayer?
4. How did God respond to Hezekiah's prayer?
5. Does this passage mean that God changed His mind because of Hezekiah's prayer?
6. Given our understanding of question 5, why did God tell Hezekiah that he was terminal and need to get his house in order?

7. What sign does God give Hezekiah as proof that he will be healed?

8. Why would this sign have carried deep significance for the Kingdom of Judah?

APPLICATION

9. Do you truly believe that God uses your prayers as part of His sovereign plan? Does your prayer life reflect this understanding?

10. You are not in battle with the Assyrians, but you are in a battle against two enemies every day, the devil and sin. When you realize your sinfulness, do you run to God or try to fix it yourself?

We serve a God of all power and knowledge. A God that can move back time or stop it in its place. That same God loves you and hears your prayers! He might be waiting on your prayer to intervene so He can get the glory.

11. Is there something you need to bring to God that you've been afraid to ask about?

12. Is there a prayer God's already answered in your life that you've not given Him the glory and praise that He deserves? Consider sharing it with your Life Group!

Parent Connect

Family Discipleship Guide: 2 Kings 20:1-11

Get your family to discuss what you are learning at church during the week. Help your child navigate the truths of Scripture and apply it to their lives.

BED TIME

Prayer &
Scripture Memory

Read the memory verse and pray in alignment with the prompt every night.

Memory Verse: "Please, Lord, remember how I have walked before you faithfully and wholeheartedly and have done what pleases you." - 2 Kings 20:3

This is the prayer of Hezekiah, but we also want it to be said of us, "Well done, good and faithful servant." Pray in alignment with this idea!

DRIVE TIME

Discussion / Check-In

"Then Hezekiah answered, It's easy for the shadow to lengthen ten steps. No, let the shadow go back ten steps. So the prophet Isaiah called out to the Lord, and he brought the shadow back the ten steps it had descended on the stairway of Ahaz." - 2 Kings 20:10-11

God literally moved back time itself to provide proof of His Word!
What do you think about God's authority to move time backward?

DINNER TIME

Family Devotion

Opening Question:

Does God always fulfill His promises? When did God fulfill His promise to Hezekiah? (19:35-37)

Read 2 Kings 19:35-37 Together!

"That night the angel of the Lord went out and struck down one hundred eighty-five thousand in the camp of the Assyrians. When the people got up the next morning—there were all the dead bodies! So King Sennacherib of Assyria broke camp and left. He returned home and lived in Nineveh. One day, while he was worshipping in the temple of his god Nisroch, his sons Adrammelech and Sharezer struck him down with the sword and escaped to the land of Ararat. Then his son Esar-haddon became king in his place."

Interactive Learning Guide:

1 Samuel 2:1-10

MAY: WEEK 3

MAIN IDEA OF THE TEXT:

Our prayer of thankfulness and praise should always be for the One who answers our prayers.

SERIES CONNECTION:

We all know the deep hurt and desperation that comes with this temporary life. Sometimes all we can do is cry out to the Lord. Paul acknowledges that there are times when all we can do in our hurt is offer “inexpressible groanings”. In 1 Samuel 1, Hannah was in a very hurtful situation. 1 Samuel 1:10 states, “Deeply hurt, Hannah prayed to the Lord and wept with many tears.” The Lord heard her cry and answered her prayer by providing her a son, Samuel. In Chapter 2 she offers a prayer of praise and thanksgiving. In our discussion today, we will see that Hannah offered her praise and thanksgiving to the Lord. The One who answered her prayer. We must always offer our expressions of praise and thanksgiving to the Lord who answers our prayers and not for the answered prayer itself.

READ LUKE 7:1-10 (CSB)

My heart rejoices in the Lord; my horn is lifted up by the Lord. My mouth boasts over my enemies, because I rejoice in your salvation. 2 There is no one holy like the Lord. There is no one besides you! And there is no rock like our God. 3 Do not boast so proudly, or let arrogant words come out of your mouth, for the Lord is a God of knowledge, and actions are weighed by him. 4 The bows of the warriors are broken, but the feeble are clothed with strength. 5 Those who are full hire themselves out for food, but those who are starving hunger no more. The woman who is childless gives birth to seven, but the woman with many sons pines away. 6 The Lord brings death and gives life; he sends some down to Sheol, and he raises others up. 7 The Lord brings poverty and gives wealth; he humbles and he exalts. 8 He raises the poor from the dust and lifts the needy from the trash heap. He seats them with noblemen and gives them a throne of honor. For the foundations of the earth are the Lord's; he has set the world on them. 9 He guards the steps of his faithful ones, but the wicked perish in darkness, for a person does not prevail by his own strength. 10 Those who oppose the Lord will be shattered; he will thunder in the heavens against them. The Lord will judge the ends of the earth. He will give power to his king; he will lift up the horn of his anointed

1. Take a moment to write down your initial observations and summarize the text.

GROUP DISCUSSION

2. Hannah, in verse 1, begins her prayer with rejoicing. What is the source of her joy?
3. As Hannah focused on the Lord, how did she describe Him?
4. In her prayer of Thanksgiving she acknowledges in verses 4-8 the Lord's comfort in her life. How did the Lord assure and comfort Hannah?
5. In the closing verses of 9 and 10 Hannah expresses a confidence in how the Lord will work. What confidence does she express in these verses?

APPLICATION

6. How does this passage help you understand God's love for you?
7. What truths about the Lord in verses 2-3 bring you the most comfort? Why?

8. In the context of this story Hannah was placing her trust in the Lord by keeping her promise to dedicate Samuel to the Lord's work. Can you trust God with your children, family, and other important relationships? If so, what does that trust look like?

9. What is the most inspiring or instructive take away from Hannah's prayer? Why?

10. How does this passage prompt you to pray?

Parent Connect

Family Discipleship Guide: 1 Samuel 2:1-10

Get your family to discuss what you are learning at church during the week. Help your child navigate the truths of Scripture and apply it to their lives.

BED TIME

Prayer &
Scripture Memory

Memory verse and pray in alignment with the prompt every night.

Memory Verse: "There is no one holy like the Lord. There is no one besides you! And there is no rock like our God." - 1 Samuel 2:2

Prayer Prompt: Pray and thank God for being the rock of your salvation!

DRIVE TIME

Discussion / Check-In

"He guards the steps of his faithful ones, but the wicked perish in darkness, for a person does not prevail by his own strength." - 1 Samuel 2:9

During one of the drive times this week, spend some time praying over your child a prayer of supplication as you ask God to guard the steps.

DINNER TIME

Family Devotion

Read 1 Samuel 1:26-28

"Please, my lord," she said, "as surely as you live, my lord, I am the woman who stood here beside you praying to the Lord. I prayed for this boy, and since the Lord gave me what I asked him for, I now give the boy to the Lord. For as long as he lives, he is given to the Lord." Then he worshiped the Lord there."

Hannah gave her boy (Samuel) to the Lord! What is significant about Samuel in the Bible?

Interactive Learning Guide:

Mark 11:20-25

MAY: WEEK 4

MAIN IDEA OF THE TEXT:

This text is not about having the power to move mountains, forgiveness being dependent upon your actions, or believing a prayer into actuality. Instead, this passage is about the importance of having living faith and true trust in Jesus!

SERIES CONNECTION:

Following Jesus' triumphal entry into Jerusalem at the beginning of chapter 11, we see Jesus repeatedly overturn, both literally and figuratively, the religious and cultural expectations of the Jewish people. Our passage study of Mark 11:20-26 takes place on the Tuesday of Holy Week, directly following the turning over of the money tables and cursing the fig tree the previous day. This immediate context is important for understanding Jesus' often misunderstood teaching in the following verses. However, we must also understand the minor prophets, like Zechariah and Micah, to interpret Mark 11 correctly. Jesus is not telling us to change our prayers or to believe our prayers into existence. Instead, Jesus is telling us that when we have faith and trust in Jesus, He gives power to our prayers! It's not about the religious system surrounding the Jewish temple, a place that was no longer a house of prayer. It's about faith in the new and eternal temple, Jesus Christ! R.C. Sproul states, "Christ is the temple, and all men are commanded to come to Him in order to worship and serve the one true God." As we study this passage, remember that you are approaching the one true God in prayer with Jesus, through Jesus, and because of Jesus!

READ MARK 11:20-25 (CSB)

20 Early in the morning, as they were passing by, they saw the fig tree withered from the roots up. 21 Then Peter remembered and said to him, "Rabbi, look! The fig tree that you cursed has withered." 22 Jesus replied to them, "Have faith in God. 23 Truly I tell you, if anyone says to this mountain, 'Be lifted up and thrown into the sea,' and does not doubt in his heart, but believes that what he says will happen, it will be done for him. 24 Therefore I tell you, everything you pray and ask for—believe that you have received it and it will be yours. 25 And whenever you stand praying, if you have anything against anyone, forgive him, so that your Father in heaven will also forgive you your wrongdoing."

GROUP DISCUSSION

QUESTIONS

1. Take a moment to write down your initial observations and summarize the text.

2. What does a fig tree represent throughout all of Scripture?

Read Micah 7:1-3 & 7

1 How sad for me! For I am like one who— when the summer fruit has been gathered after the gleaning of the grape harvest— finds no grape cluster to eat, no early fig, which I crave. 2 Faithful people have vanished from the land; there is no one upright among the people. All of them wait in ambush to shed blood; they hunt each other with a net. 3 Both hands are good at accomplishing evil: the official and the judge demand a bribe; when the powerful man communicates his evil desire, they plot it together.

7 But I will look to the Lord; I will wait for the God of my salvation. My God will hear me.

Read Mark 11:12-14

12 The next day when they went out from Bethany, he was hungry. 13 Seeing in the distance a fig tree with leaves, he went to find out if there was anything on it. When he came to it, he found nothing but leaves; for it was not the season for figs. 14 He said to it, "May no one ever eat fruit from you again!" And his disciples heard it.

3. Why does Jesus curse the fig tree? What does it tell us about the Israelites?

Reread Mark 11:23: “Truly I tell you, if anyone says to this mountain, Be lifted up and thrown into the sea, and does not doubt in his heart, but believes that what he says will happen, it will be done for him.”

Read Micah 7:18-20 “Who is a God like you, forgiving iniquity and passing over rebellion for the remnant of his inheritance? He does not hold on to his anger forever because he delights in faithful love. He will again have compassion on us; he will vanquish our iniquities. You will cast all our sins into the depths of the sea. You will show loyalty to Jacob and faithful love to Abraham, as you swore to our ancestors from days long ago.”

4. What mountain is Jesus talking about? Why is this mountain significant?

5. Does Jesus’ statement about prayer mean that our prayers are answered or not answered depending on our amount of faith?

6. What does Jesus' statement, “Therefore I tell you, everything you pray and ask for—believe that you have received it and it will be yours,” teach us about prayer?

7. Jesus highlights forgiveness in verse 25. Does this verse mean that our salvation is dependent upon our forgiveness of others? If not, what does it mean?

APPLICATION

8. Do you have something against someone?

9. Once you bring something to God in prayer, do you trust Him to answer it? What about if the answer is no or not right now?

10. How is your faith in God? Do you trust that His plan is superior to your plan?

Parent Connect

Family Discipleship Guide: Mark 11:20-25

Get your family to discuss what you are learning at church during the week. Help your child navigate the truths of Scripture and apply it to their lives.

BED TIME

Prayer &
Scripture Memory

Read the memory verse and pray in alignment with the prompt every night.

Memory Verse: "Jesus replied to them, Have faith in God. " - Mark 11:22

Pray for God to daily strengthen your faith and trust in the finished works of Jesus!

DRIVE TIME

Discussion / Check-In

"And whenever you stand praying, if you have anything against anyone, forgive him, so that your Father in heaven will also forgive you your wrongdoing." -Mark 11:25

Why is forgiveness so important for Christians? Is there anyone you need to forgive?

DINNER TIME

Family Devotion

Read Mark 11:23 Together:

"Truly I tell you, if anyone says to this mountain, 'Be lifted up and thrown into the sea,' and does not doubt in his heart, but believes that what he says will happen, it will be done for him."

Can you look at a mountain in North Carolina and tell it to move if you have enough faith? (NO) What does Jesus mean by moving mountains? (It's telling us our faith is in Jesus, not the Jewish Temple)

Resources

Use these links to explore the Scriptural passages and questions in more detail!

1. Commentary Matthew

https://drive.google.com/file/d/1tYI27rLZjNi7paOeCbFm-F28ecd7_b5k/view?usp=sharing

2. Commentary 2 Kings 20:1-11

https://drive.google.com/file/d/1ZhmBbiayeQUJRNmV8vMiSE90eu6BHdJC/view?usp=share_link

3. Commentary 1 Samuel 2:1-10

<https://drive.google.com/file/d/1g350dx8Cdev2ECptFaohdt0GjjUOctoN/view?usp=sharing>

4. Commentary Mark 11:20-26

<https://drive.google.com/file/d/15nWWyMBbtwgkPFBkoc4HIQjbO90L4X4t/view?usp=sharing>



5. Precepts Austin - Search for the Scripture Passage for Numerous Resources

<https://www.preceptaustin.org/>

