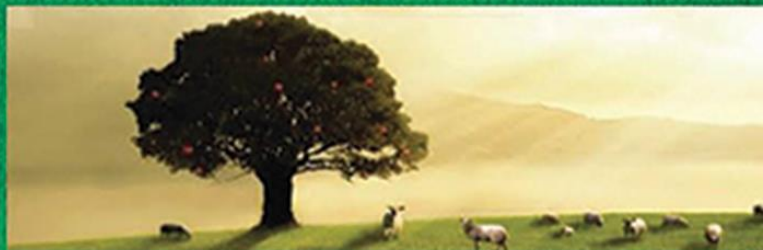


Communion With God



Series Council of God 

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Introduction

No longer do I call you servants, for a servant does not know what his master is doing; but I have called you friends, for all things that I heard from My Father I have made known to you. John 15:15

This is a very special subject. There is an invitation from the heart of God to his children. He calls us to walk in his presence and to enjoy His blessed company. His heart longs for our presence. He invites us to a personal and intimate relationship.

What a mystery! God Almighty desires to be in fellowship with us. We are invited to dive into the adventure of getting to know Him. If we marvel at the inspired Scriptures, what a superior experience is to know the One who inspired them. If the privilege of being his servants is great, what an incomparable honor and pleasure there is in being His friends.

In this booklet, we will deal with some practical aspects of our relationship with God. It is part of the set of basic themes for the formation of a disciple. The other booklets are: Elementary Principles; The Eternal Purpose of God; Life in Christ; Family; The Gospel of the Kingdom; The mission of the disciple; Character; Work; Finances; The relationship between siblings; The church and the return of Christ.

We want to express our gratitude for the life of the beloved Ivan Baker, who was for everyone an inspiring and challenging model, always manifesting intense communion and dependence on the Lord, until he left to meet his precious Jesus a few months ago.

The desire of our Lord and also our expectation is that you become a friend of God, and that your life will be an ongoing experience of knowing Him and walking in His presence.

Let us know and pursue the knowledge of the Lord. Hosea 6:3

Salvador, March 2006
Presbytery in Salvador

How should we teach in the Church

The disciples who both learn and teach must be prepared to handle simple studies. Jesus said: “I thank You, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that You have hidden these things from the wise and prudent and have revealed them to babes” (Matthew 11:25). The church does not need an academic and intellectualized teaching (1 Corinthians 1:18–31; 2:1–16) to please the Lord.

It is good to remember the example of the first church in Jerusalem. That church is the model for everything throughout the ages. The brothers from that time were simple, and many of them did not know how to read nor write. They did not have a printing press, nor paper. They also did not have Bibles. However, the church was holy and glorious – a model for us.

Looking at the way they lived, we noticed that the apostles used the method of constant repetition (catechism). Those who learned could assimilate and keep the Word in their minds and hearts. They were not looking for novelties nor wanted to invent things. The important things that they taught were repeated multiple times until everyone had learned them well (Philippians 3:1, 2 Peter 1:12–15).

The apostles were well aware of the need to convey the entire counsel of God and not mere biblical or theological studies. Each disciple had to be shaped into the image of Jesus Christ (Acts 20:26–27; Philippians 4:9; 2 Timothy 2:2). The teaching of the apostles pointed essentially to three things:

- Revealing Christ: His person, His power, His promises;
- Teaching all the commandments of Jesus;
- Establishing all the principles for the functioning of the Church.

It is necessary to return to simplicity so that the whole counsel of God may be received and absorbed by all brothers, in particular by the simpler ones.

God will not examine our knowledge concerning the contents of the Bible. He will ask us how we lived it. Doctrine consists of practical commandments for the life of the disciples (Titus 2:1-15).

How to work with this material

This booklet is divided into lessons, to be studied by the disciples alone or with their disciplers.

Since we want you to benefit from searching the scriptures and meditation, each lesson has two sections: **Seeking Insight** and **Understanding More**.

Seeking Insight

In this section, we want the disciple to have contact with God and with His Word, as well as to gain insight and knowledge of God and His Word through prayer and meditation.

He or she should read each of the writings listed in **Bible Reading**, praying to the Lord to gain insight.

You should also try to answer in your notebook the questions listed in **Meditation**, writing everything you have learned in addition to your questions.

In each lesson, there are also some phrases and Bible verses for **Catechism** (teaching by repetition). They must be repeated in the same way that they are written in the booklet so that all disciples will work with the same verses.

Understanding More

In this section, the disciple has material to deepen and enrich your understanding of the subject that he meditated on his own.

However, disciples should only proceed to this section after carefully completing the previous section - **Seeking Insight** - and having shown their meditations and notes to their discipler. Then they should read and study together the content that is in the second section - **Understanding more**. In case the disciple has difficulties going through the first section alone, the discipler must help him.

Part 1 | **Communion with God: the good part**

“... but one thing is needed, and Mary has chosen that good part, which will not be taken away from her.” Luke 10:42

Lesson 1 | An invitation to the good part

Seeking Insight

Bible Reading

- John 15:15; 17:3; 1 Peter 1:8; Luke 10:38-42.

Meditation

- What is the difference between a servant and a friend and why does Jesus make this statement?
- What does John 17:3 mean?
- In Luke 10: 38-42, what does Jesus call the good part?

Catechism

For what kind of relationship does the Lord call us?

The Lord calls us into a personal and intimate relationship with him.

No longer do I call you servants, for a servant does not know what his master is doing; but I have called you friends, for all things that I heard from My Father I have made known to you.

John 15:15

Understanding More

An invitation to a good part

No longer do I call you servants, for a servant does not know what his master is doing; but I have called you friends, for all things that I heard from My Father I have made known to you. John 15:15

A disciple of Christ is not a simple follower of His commandments and laws. He's a friend of His. What a great honor!

We are called to a personal relationship with Christ. We cannot live only by knowing His commandments. We would be missing the best of the Christian life. If someone does not have a relationship to God, even if he fulfills some of His commandments, he is a "religious" person. Someone can know the words of God and not know God.

Furthermore, we cannot live only from communion with the brothers, although it is something very important. We need a personal and intense relationship with the Lord. Let us not replace our relationship with God for anything else in this life. Not even with the relationship among the brothers.

And this is eternal life, that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent. John 17:3

The most important thing in the present and future life is knowing God. We will spend eternity enjoying our relationship to Him and knowing Him better. In heaven, this will be everything: to relate to the Lord, to know Him and to love Him more and more. What a bliss! Even in this life, there is nothing better than developing this knowledge. What a tremendous and desirable adventure: to know and

relate to the beloved and Almighty God of the Universe. If we want to cooperate with God we must know his desires and his heart. Everything we do will only have eternal value as we cooperate with God's purpose.



In life, nothing compares to our relationship with God

As we develop this relationship, the moments with the Lord will become more pleasing until a day will come when there will be nothing else that we would rather do than enjoy that communion.

An intense relationship with the Lord will produce in us such love for Him that any service or commandment from Him will be smooth. We will never think of abandoning him. With great joy, we will endure to the end. Even without seeing Jesus with our human eyes, our love for Him will grow and will not diminish as time goes by.

(...) whom having not seen you love. Though now you do not see Him, yet believing, you rejoice with joy inexpressible and full of glory, 1 Peter 1:8

The good part

“Now it happened as they went that He entered a certain village; and a certain woman named Martha welcomed Him into her house. And she had a sister called Mary, who also sat at Jesus’ feet and heard His word. But Martha was distracted with much serving, and she approached Him and said, Lord,

do You not care that my sister has left me to serve alone? Therefore tell her to help me. And Jesus answered and said to her, Martha, Martha, you are worried and troubled about many things. But one thing is needed, and Mary has chosen that good part, which will not be taken away from her.”

Luke 10:38-42



*Let us not exchange our friendship with
Jesus with our service to Him*

Martha served the Lord, but she had exchanged her relationship with the Lord with her service. Her intention was good, but she was missing out on the best part, enjoying that moment of the Lord in her home. Mary saw this and preferred the Lord which pleased Jesus. He wanted to be with them, talk to them, and enjoy His relationship with them. This is a scene that is far too often repeated today with us. Let us learn this precious lesson: let us not exchange Jesus for our service.

Serving the Lord is very good, and is a great privilege, but having a relationship with Him is unequally better.

Let us accept His invitation of love. Let us do what Mary did, let us choose the good part.



*Serving the Lord is good, but having a
relationship with Him is the best part*

Lesson 2 | The basis of our communion

Seeking Insight

Bible Reading

- Hebrews 10:19-22; John 4:23

Meditation

- How can we approach God?
- What is the only way to access Him?
- What kind of worshipers does the Lord seek? What does this mean?

Catechism

How can we approach God?

Jesus is the new and living way of access to God.

Therefore, brethren, having boldness to enter the Holiest by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way which He consecrated for us, through the veil, that is, His flesh, and having a High Priest over the house of God, let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience (...).

Hebrews 10:19-22

Understanding More

The basis of our communion

How can we approach God?

Therefore, brethren, having boldness to enter the Holiest by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way which He consecrated for us, through the veil, that is, His flesh, and having a High Priest over the house of God, let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience. Hebrews 10:19-22

Since the beginning when God created man, His desire was to have a relationship with him. Sin however, separated man from God and the Lord could no longer have communion with the fallen mankind. Luckily for us God did not give up on His purpose. Hallelujah. He himself provided the only mean to restore man and to reconcile him with Him: Jesus Christ. He is the new, living, and only way of access to God. This becomes possible when a man repents, is born again and is justified from his sins through the blood of Jesus.



*Jesus is the new, living and only way of
access to God*

Today, we can reach God and have an intimate relationship with Him. This is the truth: God is not far away from us.

It is very important to understand that we do not come to Him through our merit, but through the blood of Christ. Let us never try to draw near to God through our good works. God could not receive us. Our access is not granted because we are good. It does not depend on feeling good. It is because of the precious blood of Christ. If we are living a life in Christ, walking in the light as He is in the light, we have communion with Him. We can approach Him with boldness and full assurance of faith, having our hearts cleansed from a bad conscience. Hallelujah!

What to do in the presence of God?

Our Lord knows us better than any man. Therefore, we should not seek artificial ways of talking to Him. On the contrary, the only thing He requires is that we be very sincere and truthful. More so, the text above states: “Let us draw near with a true heart”. He does not like exterior images that do not manifest what we are and feel within us.

But the hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth; for the Father is seeking such to worship Him. John 4:23

We must be natural in our relationship with God. Do not use beautiful words that are not from the heart. Say what we feel. Declare to Him our love. Tell Him also our weaknesses and our sorrows. Share with Him our joys, giving Him thanks for all that we are and for all we have.

Part 2 | Prayer

Now it came to pass in those days that He went out to the mountain to pray, and continued all night in prayer to God. Luke 6:12

Lesson 3 | Praying without ceasing

Seeking Insight

Bible Reading

- 1 Thessalonians 5:17; Ephesians 6:18.
- Song of Solomon 2:14; Proverbs 15:8.

Meditation

- What does it mean to pray without ceasing?
- Is this possible? Explain what this relationship looks like?
- Why does the Lord desire this continual communion?

Catechism

What does it mean to pray without ceasing?

To pray without ceasing is to have an ongoing conversation with God.

The Holy Spirit commands us to pray without ceasing.

Praying without ceasing.

1 Thessalonians 5:17

Understanding More

Praying without ceasing

Praying without ceasing, 1 Thessalonians 5:17
(...) praying always with all prayer and
supplication in the Spirit (...). Ephesians 6:18

We are facing a very important revelation that the Lord wants to lead us to a very special way of life. Living all the time in prayer, in communion with Him. Brother Lawrence said: "There is no way of life in the world that is more pleasant and more delightful than the continual conversation with God."

Our Lord is with us all the time and His expectation is that we should speak to Him throughout our day. We can keep in constant contact with Him, making Him the object of our thoughts and the companion of our conversations.

∞
*There is no
more pleasant
way of life
than the
continuous
conversation
with God*

The Lord rejoices in the relationship with his bride, who is the Church. He wants our company all day long! He rejoices to hear our voice: "... let me hear your voice; for your voice is sweet ..." Song of Solomon 2:14. The Lord rejoices at the prayer of the righteous: "... the prayer of the upright is His delight". Proverbs 15:8 And how sweet is your company for us too.

What a glorious experience: to spend all day in the presence of the Lord Jesus! Talking to Him all

the time and hearing his voice: as we walk down the street, talking about what we see, giving thanks to Him for the day, for the people, for the works and even for the difficulties.

When we come before someone, we ask the Lord how we should act and what to say. Then we hear his voice, guiding and directing us. We depend on Him and ask for His help for everything from the simplest things, such as preparing a meal or a conversation with someone, even the most important ones, such as a change of job or a decision about medical treatment. What security! What a joy!

When we are in His presence all day, there is also no room to sin or to do our will. He keeps us from evil and guides us on His way.

He is also pleased that we do not trust our ability or our wisdom. He wants us to seek and hear His advice under all circumstances. Even for situations where we think we already know what to do. This is the true attitude of dependence that pleases God. This reality of life is within the reach of all the children of God, and is more than a bliss, it is a commandment.



*The Holy Spirit, through Paul,
commands us to pray without ceasing*

Ivan Baker wrote:

Pray for your decisions,
Pray for your thoughts,
Pray for every step of your path,

Pray for your meditations,
Pray to control your lips;
That the fruit of your lips may be
blessed.
Pray when you feel empty,
Pray when you feel full, Pray
when you are sad, Pray when
you are happy. Pray all the
time; "pray without ceasing ..."

All this may seem childish, but it is indispensable to be guided by God. Paul advises me: "With all prayer and supplication, praying at all times in the Spirit, and watching for it with all perseverance and supplication for all saints." The Holy Spirit, through Paul, tells me to pray without ceasing.

Let us go through all the activities of our day with the awareness of the presence of God, making silent prayers, which flow continuously from our heart. Brother Lawrence¹ urges that intimate prayer be our last act of the night and the first act of the morning.

Let us be determined to live on this glorious path of incessant prayer and total dependence on God.

¹Brother Lawrence lived in France in the seventeenth century and became known for his experience of walking in the presence of God.

Lesson 4 | **Dedicating a special time to prayer**

Seeking Insight

Bible Reading

- Matthew 6:6.
- Matthew 14:23; Mark 6:46; Luke 6:12.

Meditation

- What does Jesus teach us in Matthew 6:6?
- Why do we need a special time of communion with God?
- Why did Jesus try to have moments of prayer alone?

Catechism

What does it mean to pray without ceasing?

We need exclusive, intimate and solemn moments with the Lord.

But you, when you pray, go into your room, and when you have shut your door, pray to your Father who is in the secret place; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you openly.
Matthew 6:6

Understanding More

Dedicating a special time to prayer

This is another very important aspect of our relationship with God.

But you, when you pray, go into your room, and when you have shut your door, pray to your Father who is in the secret place; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you openly. Matthew 6:6

Although we have a good relationship with God throughout our day, the word of the Lord exhorts us to have an exclusive time for communion with Him. These moments of our day are very special and precious.

During our daily rush, we cannot be completely still to talk to our Father, to open our hearts and, especially, to listen to Him. It is essential that we have moments of intimacy with the Lord. We will enjoy an indispensable form of communion with our God.



We need exclusive, intimate and solemn moments with the Lord

We need solemn moments to know His holiness, to confess our sins and to experience His mercy and forgiveness. We need places of intimacy to worship Him, to pour ourselves at His feet, and to experience His love and comfort. We need special and long times to meditate on Him and His word and to listen quietly to His desirable voice.

We need moments to cry out to the Lord, lifting our prayers and supplications.

Jesus and His Intimacy with the Father

And when He had sent the multitudes away, He went up on the mountain by Himself to pray.

Matthew 14:23

And when He had sent them away, He departed to the mountain to pray. Mark 6:46

Now it came to pass in those days that He went out to the mountain to pray, and continued all night in prayer to God. Luke 6:12

Jesus, despite his extremely overloaded life of commitment and care, could not be without the moments alone with his Father. Even though He was the Son and fully knowing the Father and His will, He could not live without this communion with Him. It was for Him a need and a pleasure. Surely, He kept waiting for the time of day in which He could go a little aside to have His special time of intimacy with His Father.



Jesus kept waiting for the time of day to have His special time of intimacy with the Father

In the same way so should we, despite the many activities, must prioritize and crave to have this practice. Luther devoted daily a good amount of time in prayer. But on busy days he said: "Today I need to pray more, since the day will be full." We often do the opposite, in the days of many occupations, we run out of time for prayer.

Lesson 5 | Giving thanks for everything

Seeking Insight

Bible Reading

- 1 Thessalonians 5:18; Ephesians 5:20; Psalm 100:4.
- Matthew 10:29-30.

Meditation

- What does it mean: "In all things give thanks"?
- What is the practice contrary to this? To whom we complain?
- Why is it right to give thanks to the Lord for everything?

Catechism

What does "giving thanks for everything" demonstrate?

"Giving thanks for everything" shows gratitude and trust in the Lord.

In everything give thanks, for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you.

1 Thessalonians 5:18

Understanding More

Giving thanks for everything

In everything give thanks, for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you. 1 Thessalonians 5:18

(..) giving thanks always for all things to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ (...)

Ephesians 5:20

God is sovereign over the earth, especially over his children. All things are under your control, nothing happens without your consent.

Are not two sparrows sold for a copper coin? And not one of them falls to the ground apart from your Father's will. But the very hairs of your head are all numbered. Matthew 10:29-30

Therefore, the Lord is pleased that we give thanks for all things in our lives. Both the good ones and the ones that do not please us. This reveals a heart of faith before the Lord.

There should never be in our mouths words of demand and complaint. Never. Complaints cannot come out of the same mouth as praises. If we praise the Lord when we are together, then we must give thanks to him because the bus is running late. This pleases the Lord.

Every nation has their own language which identifies them.



We give thanks for everything because the Lord is our Father and takes care of every detail in our lives

Complaining is the language of people who do not know God. They complain all day, about everything. They complain about the heat, the cold, the rain, the mayor, the economy, the job, the husband, the wife, and finally, about everything. It is the language of a kingdom that has no hope. It should not be so among the children of God. He is our Father and takes care of every detail in our lives.

When we complain about something, we are complaining about God himself, for He is the one who gives us all things.



*Our joy does not depend on the
circumstances, nor does everything
depend on it*

As His children, we should thank the Lord all day long; in every little moment. Let us give thanks as wake up, walk, eat, talk, lie down, rest, for a new day, for His goodness and mercy, that we can talk to Him, for breakfast, for the delay of the bus, for those who hurt us, for work, for family, for everything we are, for everything we have and for everything God is.

Enter into His gates with thanksgiving, and into His courts with praise. Be thankful to Him, and bless His name. Psalms 100:4

What a life of faith, victory and joy we can experience, when we give thanks to the Lord for everything! There is no better way to live. And there is no other way to please Him.

In everything give thanks, for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you. 1 Thessalonians 5:18

Lesson 6 | Praising from the heart

Seeking Insight

Bible Reading

- Ephesians 5:19; Hebrews 13:15; Psalm 104:33; 113:1-3; 150:6.
- Revelation 4:8; 5:11-13.
- Psalm 35:28; 63:4; 141:2; 47:1; 150:3-5; 95:6; 2 Samuel 6:14.

Meditation

- Why do we praise the Lord? What is our response to His love?
- What will it be like in eternity?
- What practices do we find in the above texts that express praise to God?

Catechism

What is praise?

Praise is the fruit of lips that confess the name of the Lord.

Therefore by Him let us continually offer the sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of our lips, giving thanks to His name. Hebrews 13:15

Understanding More

Praising from the heart

(...) speaking to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord (...) Ephesians 5.19

Therefore by Him let us continually offer the sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of our lips, giving thanks to His name. Hebrews 13:15

Praise to God is the natural fruit of the lips that confess



*Praise is
the answer
of our
hearts to
the love of
God*

His name. It is the spontaneous manifestation of the heart of those who have tasted the love of the Lord. We like to praise and honor those with whom we have a loving relationship.

To praise God is to express our love to Him. It is to give Him glory and honor. It is to exalt Him. It is to remember His virtues and His deeds. This is just and meets a need of our spirit. For that we were created. We need to praise the Lord. And that pleases Him too. He receives as an expression of our love and honor.

The most extensive book of the Bible, the book of Psalms, is essentially a book of praise. It is a source of inspiration to those who love the Lord.

I will sing to the Lord as long as I live; I will sing praise to my God while I have my being.
Psalms 104:33

Hallelujah! Praise the Lord! Praise, O servants of the Lord, Praise the name of the Lord! Blessed be the name of the Lord, from this time forth and forevermore! From the rising of the sun to its going down, the Lord's name is to be praised.
Psalm 113:1-3

Praise and worship in the Heavens

The book of Revelation gives us a sign of what will happen in the Heavens. We will spend eternity, together with the angels, praising the Lord and worshiping Him. Hallelujah!

The four living creatures ... and they do not rest day or night, saying "Holy, Holy, Holy, Lord God Almighty, who was and is and is to come!"
Revelation 4:8

Then I looked, and I heard the voice of many angels around the throne, the living creatures, and the elders; and the number of them was ten thousand times ten thousand, and thousands of thousands, saying with a loud voice: "Worthy is the Lamb who was slain to receive power and riches and wisdom, and strength and honor and glory and blessing!" Revelation 5:11-12

And every creature which is in heaven and on the earth and under the earth and such as are in the sea, and all that are in them, I heard saying: "Blessing and honor and glory and power be to Him who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb, forever and ever!" Revelation 5:13

We will give praise, glory and honor to the Lord forever and ever. That is what we will do most in eternity. Pleasure and glory will be full. We will absolutely adore Him. A brother once said: "If anyone does not like to praise the Lord, he will not like heaven."

Praise and worship today

Even if we spend eternity giving praise, glory, and honor to the Lord, from now on we have genuine experiences of praise and worship. This begins in our personal relationship with God. Spend the whole day praising the Lord with your heart, but also have special moments in which you bow in adoration, sending to the Lord the purest declarations of love and gratitude.

When we are together, we praise God. This is one of the first things we want to do together. The Holy Spirit himself inspires us to do so. Let us declare His works. Let us exalt His name. Let us give Him all glory and honor. Let us give thanks for all that we have and are.

Let us praise the Lord not only for what He has done, but especially for who He is. Let us praise Him because He is holy and righteous. Let us praise the Lord because He is great. Let us praise Him because He is good. Because He is faithful. Because He does not change. Blessed is the Lord and praiseworthy forever! Hallelujah!

The expression of praise today

Let us learn to be true worshipers. Let us praise the Lord with all we have, in every possible way. Even when we are tired or unwilling. Let us express ourselves from the heart, with fervor, praise, honor and glory to the Lord. The Bible teaches us various ways to express our praise. We should practice them, without barriers or shame.

Let us praise the Lord:

- Talking and singing: Psalms 35:28
- Raising our hands: Psalms 63:4; 134:1-2; 141:2;
- Applauding: Psalm 47:1; 98:8;
- Playing musical instruments: Psalm 33:2; 150:3-5;

Lesson 7 | **Bringing Prayers and Supplications**

Seeking Insight

Bible Reading

- 1 Timothy 2:1; Ephesians 6:18; Philippians 4:6; Matthew 7:7-11; Ezekiel 36:37; 22:30.
- 1 John 5:14-15; Hebrews 11:1-6; James 1:6-7; Jeremiah 29:13; Matthew 6:5-6;
- 2 Corinthians 7:14-15; Luke 18:9-14; Matthew 15:25-28; Luke 11:5-10; James 4:3.

Meditation

- What does Jesus and the apostles exhort us to do?
- Why does God want us to ask Him, if He already knows all the things we need?
- What principles about prayer do we observe in each of the above texts?

Catechism

What does God expect before performing His will?

God waits for prayers and supplications before doing His will.

(...) with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, being watchful to this end with all perseverance and supplication for all the saints
Ephesians 6:18

Understanding More

Introducing prayers and supplications

Therefore I exhort first of all that **supplications, prayers, intercessions**, and giving of thanks be made for all men. 1 Timothy 2:1

Praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, being watchful to this end with all perseverance and supplication for all the saints. Ephesians 6:18

Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God. Philippians 4:6

The Holy Spirit here exhorts us to present our petitions before God with prayer and supplication.

Again, we are facing something very important, both for our relationship with God and for fulfilling His will on earth.

Why is it necessary to ask God?

Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives, and he who seeks finds, and to him who knocks it will be opened. Or what man is there among you who, if his son asks for bread, will give him a stone? Or if he asks for a fish, will he give him a serpent? If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father who is in heaven give good things to those who ask Him! Matthew 7:7-11

Jesus again urges us to ask our Father for all the things we need. But why do we need to ask Him if He knows what we need before we ask Him (Matthew 6:8)? Why should we ask Him for something? The answer is simple; God knows all things, but He wants us to ask them. He does not want to act alone. God wants to cultivate a father-son relationship with us.



*God does not want to act alone. He expects
His children to ask him.*

This is the principle of prayer. He wants His children to work with Him through prayer. Through prayer, we work with God for the fulfillment of His will.

Thus says the Lord God: I will also let the house of Israel inquire of Me to do this for them: I will increase their men like a flock. Ezekiel 36:37

In the verse above, we see clearly the Lord wanting to be requested by His children. The verse can be broken down:

- First: God has a plan. He knows the need of man and wants to supply it. That is His will.
- Second: He reveals His will to man, and waits by the prayer of man.
- Third: Man asks God to fulfill His will. "Your will be done, ..." Matthew 6:10
- Fourth: God fulfills His will and heeds man's prayer.

What a mystery! The Lord has established a principle: He expects His children to pray before fulfilling His will. How much responsibility and fear come upon us!

God waits for prayers and supplications before doing His will.

So I sought for a man among them who would make a wall, and stand in the gap before Me on behalf of the land, that I should not destroy it; but I found no one. Ezekiel 22:30

Let us note that the fulfillment of the Lord's will may be delayed by lack of prayer. Many things God wants to do in our lives may not be happening for lack of prayer.

How to pray?

- Always according to the will of God: 1 John 5:14-15 God only heeds requests according to his will.
- With faith: Hebrews 11:1, 6; James 1:6-7. Without doubting. Without faith, we will not receive what we ask of Him.
- With all our heart: Jeremiah 29:13; Matthew 6:5-6. Not indifferent, hurried or playing "lip service".
- With contrition and humility: 2 Corinthians 7:14-15 Luke 18:9-14
- Without demands or claims: Matthew 15:25-28 Although the Lord is our Father, we cannot have a demanding attitude in our hearts, as if He had an obligation to attend to us.
- With perseverance: Luke 11:5-10. Do not give up. Even if it takes time.

- Not selfishly: James 4:3. Not targeting our interests.

Practical advice

In addition to praying without ceasing, we must all separate a specific daily time to present our prayers and supplications before God. In that time alone, let us observe some advice:

- We should make a list of practical and specific subjects including the needs to pray about, this helps us not to forget anything important and not get distracted.
- When we become distracted, and our thoughts drift off, we must "bring it back" and then continue.
- We can present each subject calmly, detailing it before our Father, giving Him all our burden.

In addition to the time of prayer alone, the Lord teaches us to pray with one another. The early church used much of their time in prayer. We should pray a lot together (Matthew 18:19–20, Acts 2:42, 4:23–31). Let us note some aspects of this type of joint prayer:

- Each one must be attentive to the prayers of others and participate, agreeing. This encourages each other. "Amen" expresses agreement.
- One single brother should not pray about all the subjects of the group, as if he were alone. Someone should bring up one subject at a time, allowing others to pray for it too, "covering" every detail. Only then should we move on to another subject.

Lesson 8 | The efficacy of prayer

Seeking Insight

Bible Reading

- 1 John 5:14-15; James 5:16; 1 Psalms 12:23
- Luke 22:31-32; John 17:11-12.
- Romans 1:9-10; Ephesians 1:16-17; Philippians 1:4-5; Colossians 1:9-10; 4:12

Meditation

- What promises do we find in the texts above? What do they mean?
- What is the fruit of Jesus' prayer for the disciples?
- Meditate on Paul's practice of prayer for the brothers.

Catechism

What is the benefit of prayer?

Prayer is our most effective work.

Now this is the confidence that we have in Him, that if we ask anything according to His will, He hears us. And if we know that He hears us, whatever we ask, we know that we have the petitions that we have asked of Him. 1 John 5:14-15

Understanding More

The efficacy of prayer

The effective, fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much. James 5:16

Prayer is not only a delight. It is a potent spiritual resource within our reach. The work of God is spiritual and we cannot do it with material resources.

No one can convert someone. This is the work of the Holy Spirit, and prayer is required to make it happen. No one can keep a disciple from falling. We can only keep and protect the disciples by prayer. No one can transform a heart. This is the work of the Holy Spirit, and we need to intercede for that to happen. No one can heal a sick person. Only God. And He commands us to pray that He can work. No one can give revelation of the Word of God to another. This is the work of the Lord, which takes place from prayer.



Prayer is our most effective work.

It goes where we cannot go.

A blank check

Now this is the confidence that we have in Him, that if we ask anything according to His will, He hears us. And if we know that He hears us, whatever we ask, we know that we have the petitions that we have asked of Him. 1 John 5:14-15

What trust we have! What assurance of faith! There is no doubt, all the prayers we do, according to the will of God, are heard and answered.

This is an unlimited blank check. Prayer is a powerful resource. May the Holy Spirit give us full faith and revelation of the efficacy of prayer. Understanding that when we are presenting prayers to God, we are performing our most potent and productive work. There are many things to accomplish and needs to be filled waiting for our prayers!

It is important to remember that God answers prayers, but not always in the moment and in the form that we expect or would like, but always according to His will, which is perfect and good.

Jesus prayed for the disciples

“Simon, Simon! Indeed, Satan has asked for you, that he may sift you as wheat. But I have prayed for you, that your faith should not fail; and when you have returned to Me, strengthen your brethren.” Luke 22:31-32. Now I am no longer in the world, but these are in the world, and I come to You. Holy Father, keep through Your name those whom You have given Me, that they may be one as We are. While I was with them in the world, I kept them in Your name. Those whom You gave Me I have kept; and none of them is lost except the son of perdition, that the Scripture might be fulfilled. John 17:11-12

How could Jesus keep and protect Peter and his disciples? The only way was by prayer. That is why Paul exhorts us: “... praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, being watchful to this end with all perseverance and supplication for all the saints”.

Ephesians 6:18



Through prayer, we guard and protect our brothers.

Paul prayed for all brothers

For God is my witness, whom I serve with my spirit in the gospel of His Son, that without ceasing I make mention of you always in my prayers, **making request if, by some means, now at last I may find a way in the will of God to come to you.** Romans 1:9-10

Do not cease to give thanks for you, making mention of you in my prayers, that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give to you the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of Him. Ephesians 1:16-17

Always in every prayer of mine making request for you all with joy, for your fellowship in the gospel from the first day until now.

Philippians 1:4-5

For this reason we also, since the day we heard it, **do not cease to pray for you,** and to ask that you may be filled with the knowledge of His will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding; that you may walk worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing Him, being fruitful in every good work and increasing in the knowledge

of God (...). Colossians 1:9-10

Paul had the conviction that their faith depended on him praying for them. That is why he worked incessantly in prayer for them. Certainly, the spiritual growth of those brothers and the astounding advance of Paul's work were due to this secret: intense intercession.

Part 3 | **Fasting**

Then, I proclaimed a fast there at the river of Ahava, that we might humble ourselves before our God, to seek from Him the right way for us and our little ones and all our possessions. Ezra 8:21

Lesson 9 | Fasting to God

Seeking Insight

Bible Reading

- Matthew 6:16–18; 9:15; Acts 13:2–3.
- Psalm 69:10; 35:13; Ezra 8:21–23; Nehemiah 9:1–3; Jonah 3:4–10;
- Joel 2:12–14; Daniel 9:2–3, 21–22; Mark 9:29.

Meditation

- What does Jesus teach about fasting?
- What was the apostles' practice of fasting?
- What are some purposes of fasting?

Catechism

What are the fruits of fasting?

Fasting breaks us, gives power to prayer, and makes us more sensitive to the voice of God.

As they ministered to the Lord and fasted, the Holy Spirit said, Now separate to Me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them. Then, having fasted and prayed, and laid hands on them, they sent them away. Acts 13:2–3

Understanding More

Fasting to God

The practice of fasting

Moreover, when you fast, do not be like the hypocrites, with a sad countenance. For they disfigure their faces that they may appear to men to be fasting. Assuredly, I say to you, they have their reward. But you, when you fast, anoint your head and wash your face; so that you do not appear to men to be fasting, but to your Father who is in the secret place; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you openly. Matthew 6:16-18

Fasting should be a normal practice in a disciple's life, such as prayer and generosity. In this chapter of Matthew, Jesus is guiding various normal practices in the life of the disciples, contrasting with the errors of the religious hypocrites. Jesus teaches giving alms (verses 2-4), to pray (verses 5-15) and to fast (verses 16-18). Let us place the practice of fasting next to the practice of prayer. Fasting is part of our normal devotion to God. It must be something true and spontaneous, fruit of our love for Him.



*Fasting is a normal practice in the life of
a disciple, such as prayer.*

And Jesus said to them, Can the friends of the bridegroom mourn as long as the bridegroom is with them? But the days will come when the bridegroom will be taken away from them, and then they (the disciples of Jesus) will fast.

Matthew 9:15

Jesus said that when the church was going through the period of the bridegroom's absence, it should fast. That moment is now. We are living the time of the bridegroom's absence. It's time to fast!

And as they served the Lord, and fasted, the Holy Spirit said, Now separate to Me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them. Then, having fasted and prayed, and laid hands on them, they sent them away. Acts 13:2-3

The Church at first fasted and prayed intensely. Before doing anything, they sought God with fasting and prayer. That is why the Holy Spirit led them so vividly.

What is fasting to God?

To fast, for God, is to offer Him a period of total or partial abstention from food. That is, to choose a portion of time in which we will stop eating voluntarily, and to devote ourselves more actively to prayer.

Let's note that fasting is not just "starving" or going without food by chance. It's something we do for God. That is why it is important that during fasting we apply ourselves to prayer.



In fasting, we should devote ourselves to prayer.

We must also be careful that there is no hidden desire to impress others with spirituality. The great fasts that find in us the desire to be seen by men are useless. Let us do the fasts in the most discreet and natural way possible.

We can fast for some specific purpose, for some special situation that we want to present before God. However, we should not fast and pray only when we have some need of that kind. We should have a regular life of fasting and prayer.

What are the Purposes of Fasting?

- **For individual sanctification:** Psalm 69:10; 35:13. Fasting is a divine way of perfecting ourselves. When we fast we are humbling ourselves before our God. Fasting breaks pride, humiliates the soul and disciplines the body. Fasting separates us from an important part of this world: food. Fasting sanctifies us, "strengthens us."
- **For God to hear us:** Ezra 8:21-23, Nehemiah 9:1-3. Fasting gives power to prayer. Fasting expresses ardor and zeal for what we ask for, deepens and confirms everything we ask of God.
- **To release the captives and defeat Satan:** Mark 9:29. Fasting gives strength and power against Satan. It forces him to let go of the men who are his slaves. Jesus' statement that "this caste can only come by prayer and fasting" does not refer to fasting only when casting out the devil, but rather to a life of prayer and fasting.

- **To express repentance and ask God to have mercy:** Jonah 3:4-10; Joel 2:12-14. Nineveh ceased to be destroyed because it repented with fasting and prayer.
- **To receive understanding and revelation of God's will:** Daniel 9:2-3, 21-22. We constantly need revelation of God for our lives.
- **To subjugate the body:** 1 Corinthians 6:12-13; 9:27. Fasting helps us to discipline the body. The body's appetites are lawful, but we must keep them under control. We should keep the physical submissive to the spiritual. Fasting for the disciple should be a normal practice, just as physical exercise is for an athlete.

Types of Fasting?

Normal Fasting: Matthew 4:2

It is the abstention of solid or liquid foods for one or more days. That is, not eating, just drinking water. This is the most common fast. Usually, it is not harmful to health. It can last for a few days. It should not be done by people with some types of illness. You should start with short periods (24 hours). One should not eat much the day before, nor "break" the fast with heavy foods. Someone should prefer fruits. Fasting for short periods, one day, can be made during normal work, although rest is advisable and dedication of the maximum possible time to prayer.

Absolute Fasting: Acts 9:9; Deuteronomy 9:9; 1 Kings 19:8.

It is the total abstention of food and water. Stay without taking anything, not even water, for a while. This type of fasting should not be prolonged as it is harmful to health. The fasting of Moses and Elijah were supernatural (absolute fasting for 40 days).

Part 4 | **The Word**

Your words were found, and I ate them; and
Your word was to me the joy and rejoicing of my
heart; for I am called by Your name, O Lord God
of hosts. Jeremiah 15:16

Lesson 10 | Feeding on the Word

Seeking Insight

Bible Reading

- Jeremiah 15:16; Matthew 4:4; Hebrews 4:12.
- Psalm 119:50; 1 Peter 1:23; Romans 10:17; Romans 15:4; Psalm 119:11, 105,165
- 1 Peter 2:2; Psalm 119:48,103, 120, 161; Isaiah 34:16.

Meditation

- What does the Word of God represent to you?
- What does the Word produce in us?
- What is in our heart before the Word of God?

Catechism

What does the Word produce in us?

The Word of God nourishes us, gives us life, produces faith, comforts, guides us and keeps us from sinning.

But He answered and said: It is written, Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God. Matthew 4:4

Understanding More

Edify yourselves with the Word

Your words were found, and I ate them; and Your word was to me the joy and rejoicing of my heart;
Jeremiah 15:16

How special is the Word of the Lord! It is unlike any word we know. The Word of the Lord has creative and life-giving power. It was through it that He created the universe and created man. In fact, Jesus is the Word itself (The Word of God in Greek = The "Logos" of God = The Word of God).



*The Word of God is food for us.
Jesus is the Word itself*

The Word is food for us. It is a source of life. Through it we also grow in the knowledge of God and of our beloved Jesus. That is why it is another very important means of communion with Him. We must seek each day to have our heart filled with thirst and desire for the Word of God.

What a high and attractive goal to reach the full knowledge of the Son of God and His will! The key is in the Holy Scriptures. The Lord wants to reveal Himself. He expects us to look for Him with all our heart. But this demands willingness, diligence, and sacrifice.

What does the Word produce in us?

For the word of God is living and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the division of soul and spirit, and of joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart. Hebrews 4:12

The Word of God is different from the word of man. Our word produces nothing (sometimes it produces confusion). But the Word of God is powerful and produces life in us.

The word of God:

- Feeds:

But He answered and said, It is written, Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God. Matthew 4:4



The Word of God is different from any other word. It is powerful and produces life in us.

- It vivifies and regenerates:

This is my comfort in my affliction; for Your word has given me life. Psalms 119:50
(...) having been born again, not of corruptible seed but incorruptible, through the word of God which lives and abides forever. 1 Peter 1:23

- It produces faith:

And so faith comes by preaching, and preaching, by the Word of Christ. Romans 10:17

- It consoles and gives peace:

For whatever things were written before were written for our learning, that we through the patience and comfort of the Scriptures might have hope. Romans 15:4

Great peace have those who love Your law; and nothing causes them to stumble. Psalms 119:165

- Guides:

Your word is a lamp to my feet, and a light to my path. Psalms 119:105

- Avoids sinning:

Your word I have hidden in my heart, that I might not sin against You. Psalms 119:11

What is in our heart before the Word of God?

- Burning desire:

(...) as newborn babes, desire the pure milk of the word, that you may grow thereby (...).

1 Peter 2:2

- Supreme love:

My hands also I will lift up to Your commandments, which I love, and I will meditate on Your statutes. Psalms 119:48

- Fear:

(...) But on this one will I look: On him who is poor and of a contrite spirit, and who trembles at My word. Isaiah 66:2

Princes persecute me without a cause, but my heart stands in awe of Your word. Psalms 119:161

Daily Reading and Meditation

Simple reading.

A simple reading of Scripture is already precious food. We should read the Word daily. Especially the New Testament. (Romans 15:4; 1 Timothy 4:13). It is very helpful to have a plan for daily reading of Scripture.

Meditation. Joshua 1:8; 1 Timothy 4:15; Psalm 1:2.

Meditation is the quiet reading of the Scriptures in prayer, thinking of them, seeking understanding and revelation. We must do this daily, listening intently to the Lord's voice.

How sweet are Your words to my taste, Sweeter than honey to my mouth! Psalms 119:103

I rise before the dawning of the morning, and cry for help; I hope in Your word. My eyes are awake through the night watches, that I may meditate on Your word. Psalm 119:147-148

Lesson 11 | Being shaped by the Word

Seeking Insight

Bible Reading

- Colossians 3:16; Colossians 1:28; Acts 20:20, 26–27.
- Hebrews 5:12–13; 2 Timothy 2:2; Deuteronomy 6:6–9.

Meditation

- How does the formation of a disciple occur?
- What should a disciple study in the Word?
- What problem is the apostle correcting in Hebrews 5:12–13?

Catechism

In which ways the disciple must be instructed?

A disciple must be instructed and catechized in all the counsel of God.

Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom, teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord. Colossians 3:16

Understanding More

Being shaped by the Word

Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom, teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord. Colossians 3:16

The Word of God is not only a powerful food and source of comfort. It is also a fundamental resource for training a disciple. Besides the daily reading and meditation of the Word, the disciple needs a study plan for his personal formation.

A Disciple's goal and the Word of God

Every disciple has a goal: “to be a perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ” (Ephesians 4:13). The Word of God is one of the key resources that moves us toward that goal.



*The Word of God is one of the main
resources to shape our lives*

Him we preach, warning every man and teaching every man in all wisdom, that we may present every man perfect in Christ Jesus. Colossians 1:28

How I kept back nothing that was helpful, but proclaimed it to you, and taught you publicly and from house to house. Therefore, I testify to you this day that I am innocent of the blood of all men; therefore, I testify to you this day that I am innocent of the blood of all men. Acts 20:20, 26-27.

Paul was so zealous in teaching all of God's counsel because that was the way those brothers came to the stature of the fullness of Christ.

The Council of God

All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for our edification, but we need to be clear about what are the essential teachings for the formation of a disciple so that we do not get lost.

In the text above (Acts 20:26-27), Paul states that he had announced, for three years (v. 31), "all of God's plan" or "all the counsel of God." Certainly, what Paul called "the counsel of God" was a definite and clear package, with all that Jesus and the apostles taught which was essential and fundamental to the formation of those disciples.

Edification goals

For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you again the first principles of the oracles of God; and you have come to need milk and not solid food. For everyone who partakes only of milk is unskilled in the word of righteousness, for he is a babe. Hebrews 5:12-13

We need clear goals in edification. Without goals we get lost, we get tired, and we do not advance towards the target. Paul says that he did not run without a goal (1 Corinthians 9:26).



The apostle had a goal when edifying the Hebrews and a time to attain it.

In the letter to the Hebrews, the apostle complains of the slowness of those brothers to become masters. He calls them children. We can say that the apostle had in mind:

- A target for them: to become masters;
- A period of time, so that they would reach the goal.

Personal Study of the Word

To advance toward the goal, each disciple must, together with his discipler, plan his study of the Word. This plan should include the subjects that are essential to your training. It is also necessary to set a time to complete this work. The disciple must be diligent and zealous in his study.

The Word in Discipleship

And the things that you have heard from me among many witnesses, commit these to faithful men who will be able to teach others also. 2 Timothy 2:2

The flow of God's Word must be a strong mark on relationships of discipleship. Let the disciples be washed by

the Word of the Lord when they are with their disciplers. Let's not meet just talking about problems and situations. The disciples must have thirst and interest in the Word. And the disciplers must be faithful in nourishing them and transmitting to them "the whole counsel of God," without diminishing or adding anything to what they have received.

Catechism

Catechism was a practice of the Church in Acts of the Apostles. It consisted in the oral repetition of teaching, phrase by phrase.

We see the term "catechize" in several New Testament texts, which were translated into our Bibles from the word "instruct" (Luke 1:4, Acts 18:25, Romans 2:18, 1 Corinthians 14:19, Galatians 6:6). Teaching by repetition is an effective and important way of teaching (Deuteronomy 6:6-9).

Each disciple should have the aim of being "catechized" in the whole counsel of God. A "catechized" person is not simply someone who has heard all the teachings. He is someone who, through many repetitions, is ready to speak about any of them. We can practice catechism in several ways:

- By the oral repetition of the teaching by the disciplers to the disciples;
- By the memorization of the biblical texts and catechism of the booklets;
- By the oral repetition of the summary of the teaching given in the various meetings;
- By repeated reading of scriptures, booklets and sermons.



*Humility is
needed to
practice and
value
catechism.*



How lovely is Your tabernacle,

O Lord of hosts!

My soul longs, yes, even faints

for the courts of the Lord;

Even the sparrow has found a

home, and the swallow a nest

for herself, even Your altars.

My King and my God.

Blessed are those who dwell in

Your house;

They will still be praising You.

(Psalm 84:1-4)