

“Lord Teach Us To Pray”

A Study in the Exposition of the Prayers of Paul: Excuses for Not Praying¹ Two Week Study Guide

Week One

Introduction to the mortification of our excuses for not praying.

There was a season of life in which I was meeting with a professional physical fitness trainer every week. He was uniquely qualified with a background of impressive credentials and a wealth of knowledge and personal experience. He was extremely fit himself and knew exactly how to assist me in the areas of my greatest need and desire for progress. He generously provided me logs of my training and instructions on what exactly to work on between our meetings as he knew I had free access to all necessary equipment and I had articulated a desire to progress and succeed. However, I never quite made it to the gym between those training sessions and while my progress was tangible, it was nevertheless minimal and quickly lost when my prescribed number of weeks of training were completed. At the time of completion I had enough to excel on my own, but never quite did. Today I make various levels of concerted effort to stay respectable and sufficiently healthy and though I would gladly affirm the value of applying more effort I would also concede it is not as high a priority in my life and I do not have the time to invest in more effort. Excuses. We are natural born generators of excuses and at their core they reflect our affections, disciplines, and beliefs.

We are eight weeks into an intensive study on prayer in a church that already has and continues to give intentional attention to the high value and place of prayer. By now there should be tangible evidence of progress in your life of prayer – more than the “Sunday Morning Training Sessions.” Have you more progress or excuses?

To address this, we are setting aside an overt exposition or examination of a singular text and addressing the pastoral concern that there are still too many excuses. In his book on the Prayers of Paul, D.A. Carson perceptively addresses a number of the primary excuses that believers express (overtly by conduct alone) for not praying, and for every excuse he poses the necessary question of “What is God’s response?” It is under the weight of that staple follow up question that every excuse crumbles and is left undone. May this time in our study be the beginning of the end of our excuses.

“I Am Too Busy to Pray”²

Of the excuses, this is likely the most common and it is erroneously esteemed as the most noble as being busy is frequently attributed with some special merit. An overbooked schedule appears to carry the perception of maximizing life and giftedness, of being in necessary demand at all times, and as being busy about God’s work. However, all too often being too busy is a matter of poor stewardship, of improper valuations in an already overly

¹ Prepared by David Crowe for Pray’s Mill Baptist Church Adult Sunday School
ALL Scripture Quotations are from the ESV Bible unless the Scripture reference is in a quote from another author – their original translation was kept.

² A Call to Spiritual Reformation: Praying with Paul; D.A. Carson; Baker Academic, 2014; (Hereafter: Carson), Pg.91

professionalized ministry, and of always being busy and yet never really doing. Carson states of this disposition of always being too busy, “The result is that we seldom take time to think, to meditate, to wonder, to analyze; we seldom take time to pray.”³

This however is in direct contrast to the Psalm 1 man whose deep-rooted and fruit bearing life is one that has given a preeminent value to the Scriptures, to meditation, and to prayer. Delighting in the Law of The LORD is not a process that can be expedited or plugged into tightly choreographed schedules that have equally prioritized a dozen other things. This is also in contrast to the beautiful and thoroughly expressed love for God’s truth in the Scriptures as expressed in Psalm 119. Such a thorough expression cannot be articulated by one who has so generously filled their time with “God’s work” or otherwise.

It is here that Carson asks, “What is God’s response?” to your being so busy that you fail to pray. Our attention in turn is directed to Luke 10:38-42 where we observe the well-known account of Mary and Martha. Mary chose the good portion that would not be taken away from her, not the urgent, not the most demanding, not that which would secure her accolades for sacrificial labor and service, but the good portion – that which was enduring and best. Mary chose the intimate presence of her Lord over the necessary service of the day and this was commended.

With this passage in Luke in view remember that this was a historical event in the ministry of the incarnate God as he dwelled among men. This was not a parable told by Jesus that was driving toward a singular point, but not intended to have its every element qualified and examined. Rather, this was a direct act of Jesus – a relational interaction among people in which God himself personally affirmed one person’s choices and conduct over another.

Now, mindful of this one must be very careful when they would speak to qualifying a statement by Jesus, particularly one of his evaluating one action and choice over another. However, the problem is not with the completeness of Jesus’ statement, but with the propensity of abuse by men. So, while Jesus is saying that Mary chose the good portion he is not excusing her from all of life’s charges and responsibilities. This is not an affirmation to the monastic abandonment of the daily affairs of the world to give exclusive attention to things of God. That is foolish and fails to see the value of the glory of God in our work, relationships, and responsibilities.⁴

Sidebar: Leadership that is too busy with “ministry” and not busy in prayer.

Most of us have never needed to be “officially rescued” from imminent peril (accidents, fires, flooding waters, lost in the wilderness, etc.). However, we most certainly would hope and even expect that those who have been “set aside” for the purposes of rescuing to be thoroughly trained and prepared for just such a moment – even if a need does not come for years we want them in a constant state of readiness as the moment will be unforgiving when it does arise. Consequently, such persons are in a consistent state of training and preparation, even to the exclusion of other matters – even “valuable matters.” So why is it that the work of pastoral ministry, the service of the Deacon, and the work of the ministry leader so diminished in regard to its emphasis on the necessity of prayer? Need they only be a people of vigorous

³ Carson, Pg.91

⁴ For further on this matter consider Paul’s discussion in 1 Corinthians 7:25-35 where he speaks of the responsibilities that come with a naturally divided focus – then consider how he used his “freedom” – he did not isolate himself from the world, rather he worked, ministered, traveled, etc.

prayer when crisis comes? Do they execute a consistent pattern of prayer for the work and service they have been entrusted and for the benefit and welfare of their own souls? Do you expect a unique and vigorous commitment to prayer for leadership or need they completely consume their schedules and spend their strength on all those other busy matters that will quickly fade with time? Strange that we have a higher standard of setting apart for emergency workers than we do for those set apart for service in ministry. Does not sound like a very New Testament emphasis, does it? Perhaps instead of expecting a calendar jammed full of “ministry activities” we should look for consistent times set aside for laboring in prayer.

Personal Examination & Response

Prayer is a staple element of the life of the church body and the members thereof. Prayer has also been the central focus of eight weeks of study through our Sunday School Fellowships. Does your life reflect this – that prayer is a critically central element to your person and walk with the Lord? Or are you just too busy to pray? Write out reflections and plans of action in response.

Consider your lack of tolerance to miss too many meals, enough rest, acts of basic hygiene, or perhaps even exercise. Is prayer simply one of those elements that you hope to get to and if you do not on a given day it is casually accepted? What does it say of your priorities when you would sooner speak to a friend on the phone, browse social media, or go have a lunch social and not prioritize your discipline of prayer? Is prayer a protected agenda for your daily life experience? Write out reflections and plans of action in response.

What about leadership, from Pastors and Deacons to those fulfilling the variety of ministries of the church, do you expect them to be a people of prayer or are they just too busy with “the work of the Lord”? As leadership goes so goes the church and as the expectations for leadership goes so goes the expectations of the people. What do you expect of your leaders and what does this say about your own standards regarding the discipline of prayer?

“It matters little whether you are the mother of active children who drain away your energy, an important executive in a major multinational corporation, a graduate student cramming for impending comprehensives, a plumber working overtime to put your children through college, or a pastor of a large church putting in ninety-hour weeks: at the end of the day, if you are too busy to pray, you are too busy. Cut something out.”⁵

“I Feel Too Dry Spiritually to Pray”⁶

It is a deficient evaluation of the whole person to dismiss emotions – there is no special merit with being overly stoic and not recognizing the complexity and wonder of the range of our experiences in this life – including the dynamic of emotions in our engagement of the range of our possible experiences. However, emotions serve a subordinate role and to allow them to reign supreme on any level is potentially dangerous if not wrong. This is especially true when we do not submit to necessary disciplines of life in Christ when we simply “do not feel like it.” An easy example would be allowing anger or hurt to prevent our readiness to extend forgiveness. Now, is it any less offensive and dangerous to disregard the high call and privilege of prayer when we are not in the mood to pray, when we do not feel like we are up for the work of petition, praise, thanksgiving, mourning, etc.?

Regarding this matter Carson provides two monstrous presuppositions⁷ that feed this fallacy of conduct that yields to the powerful, but subjective whims of emotions:

1) “...the acceptability of my approach to God in prayer ought to be tied to how I feel.”⁸

A likely element of this presupposition is that we need to be “feeling” or “experiencing” God to sincerely engage God. This is a criteria that is strikingly subjective and wholly without Scriptural merit. It also sets one up for a dangerously mystical engagement that must be cautioned against. So, while one might object that they are communicating all of this when they link feelings with prayer, they are still wrong in their decision and this is ultimately the end to which they are heading.

Among the resolutions to this dangerous pattern of thinking is speaking truth to oneself and pressing oneself to respond not in their emotional state, but in a way that reflects truth regardless of how “I feel”.

2) “...my obligation to pray is somehow diminished when I do not feel like praying.”⁹

Carson states here, “This is to assign to my mood or my feelings the right to determine what I ought to do. And that, of course, is unbearably self-centered. It means that I, and I alone, determine what is my duty, my obligation.”¹⁰

To further appreciate the absurdity of this pattern of thinking apply it to another context for perspective. Would such an approach be acceptable with an employer? Would you be afforded “excused absences” because you just did not feel like working that particular day? What about the responsibilities of parenting? Can a mother or father just whimsically

⁵ Carson, Pg.94

⁶ Carson, Pg.94

⁷ This is Carson's own wording, “Hidden behind this excuse are two presuppositions that are quite monstrous.” Carson, Pg.94

⁸ Carson, Pg.94

⁹ Carson, Pg.95

¹⁰ Carson, Pg.95

dismiss their responsibilities to feed and care for their children on a given occasion because they just are not feeling up to the obligation?

To these matters, Carson again asks, “What is God’s response?” to your being more reliant on the fickle nature of your emotions than to the clear imperatives and expectations to pray. Our attention in turn is directed to two parables in Luke, both showing persistence in petition (Luke 18:1-8, 11:5-13).

The first parable referenced, in Luke 18, is the persistent widow and it plainly draws out that if a wicked judge will respond to a widow’s persistence, how much more will God respond to the persistent petition of the righteous? Carson states, “Indeed, as far as Jesus is concerned the real question is not whether or not God answers prayer but whether or not we have the faith to persevere; for the passage ends with Jesus’ asking the probing question, ‘However, when the Son of Man comes, will find faith on the earth?’ (18:8). To fall back on the excuse that we feel too dry or the like is merely to admit that we do not exercise the kind of faith that perseveres.”¹¹

The second parable referenced, in Luke 11, is the man who is duty bound to serve a friend in need through hospitable action. Now, while not duty bound as this peer was to show hospitality in service, the Lord nevertheless is prepared to respond to the one who would properly petition. To not feel up to the act of petition and therefore not pray is to not feel up to raising the fork to the mouth while starving at the generously prepared banqueting table. Perhaps like the starving man, one’s disposition would improve and the emotions quickly follow if one would simply act with resolve over emotion.

Carson concludes this section with two very helpful statements:

“Implicit in both of these parables is the assumption that God may not answer immediately, that it is part of his wisdom to wait, even to resist us, so that we may exercise our faith and pursue him with sincerity.”¹²

“God insists that we learn not to hide behind our feelings of dryness, behind our chronic unbelief, behind our lapses into discouragement. He wants us to learn to trust him, to learn to persevere in prayer. In short, in prayer as in other areas of life, God wants us to trust and obey.”¹³

What is most telling is that our conduct in general will speak to our understanding of God and when we capitulate to feelings, no matter how persistent or strong, we are communicating their superiority to Christ’s sufficiency – a wicked fallacy that is easier to accept when it is not so plainly identified.

¹¹ Carson, Pg.95

¹² Carson, Pg.96

¹³ Carson, Pg.96

Personal Examination & Response

If on account of one's feeling they cannot casually dismiss their professional or parenting responsibilities, does it not communicate something quite telling that one feels free to more casually dismiss their rights, responsibilities, and privileges before God in prayer? Have you found yourself submitting to your emotions over and against submitting to God? What will you do to address this offense in the days ahead?

With the whole of this subject's elements in view think about the critical necessity to press on regardless of one's internal disposition. It must be a daily maintenance and labor in prayer to petition the Lord for that which breaks our hearts in Christ (our failure to adorn the gospel, the persistence of our flesh, the lack of unity within the body, a failure to maintain an eternal perspective, etc.). Can one concede to not feeling up to praying when this most critical of disciplines and privileges would beckon otherwise? Think through this and record your thoughts and how you might better submit to that which is best rather than to our lack of internal drive and immediate delight.

Will you concede to the extraordinary pull of your emotions or the supernatural power of Christ – by fostering a life of consistent petition and trusting in God's means that comes through consistency, persistence, and the faithful act of asking?

Week Two

“I Feel No Need to Pray”¹⁴

This may at face value be regarded as the most absurd subject headings, but tragically it is exactly what too many lives are explicitly communicating. Regarding this, note what Carson states about “affirming” prayer’s value verses “treating” prayer to be of no regard for the secure and strong.

“Although abstractly I may affirm the importance of prayer, in reality I may treat prayer as important only in the lives of other people, especially those whom I judge to be weaker in character, more needy, less competent, less productive. Thus, while affirming the importance of prayer, I may not feel deep need for prayer in my own life.”¹⁵

Perhaps the absurd element is not the subject heading, but that it likely reflects a grave number of persons consistently within the church.

“What is God’s response?” to your testimony of indifference about your need to pray? Carson’s first conclusion is that if you effectively find yourself living the fallacy that you do not need to pray, then you had better be prepared to be reminded of your need by divine provocation. Strong words, but they should serve to sober the prayer-less life – mindful that those whom the Lord loves he disciplines. “If Christians who shelter beneath such self-assurance do not learn better ways by listening to the Scriptures, God may address them in the terrible language of tragedy. We serve a God who delights in disclosing himself to the contrite, to the lowly of heart, to the meek. When God finds us so puffed up that we do not feel our need for him, it is an act of kindness on his part to take us down a peg or two; it would be an act of judgment to leave us in our vaulting self-esteem.”¹⁶

The example provided is one that is well known and quite striking, Joshua 9. This is the account where the Gibeonites hoodwinked the leadership of Israel, including Joshua into making a preservational covenant with them when they should have been destroyed along with the other peoples under judgment. The chapter details the crafty deception that was employed, but the central element of their “success” and Israel’s embarrassing failure in this matter was that the leaders “...did not ask counsel from the Lord.”¹⁷ There appears to have been a measure of complacency and self-reliance in this moment. But what was a grave aberration for this leadership in Israel’s history is all too frequently the pattern of others today, namely a self-reliance that manifests itself as deficiency in prayer.

This is the folly of functionally having too confident a dependence and comfort in historic success/victory. It is not unlike the unconditioned athlete defending their title – forgetting that it was the daily grind of disciplined labor and training that first secured them their title and that will be required to maintain it too. You cannot depend on historic victory/success/help/wisdom, but that which was the means of securing such victory/success/help/wisdom.

¹⁴ Carson, Pg.97

¹⁵ Carson, Pg.97

¹⁶ Carson, Pg.97

¹⁷ Joshua 9:14

Now, transition from the treatment of being overly dependent on historic “success” and to the more direct matter of who should so find themselves so completely reliant on prayer to begin with. With this we can bypass any general hero of the faith from both the Old and New Testaments alike and go to the superior example of Christ. If ever a man could depend on their personal spiritual capital or maturity or strength in insightful decisions and actions, it was Jesus. Jesus who was frequently in prayer and Jesus who at two notably critical times labored intensely in prayer: the choosing of the twelve and in the garden before his arrest, trial, and crucifixion.

When Jesus chose his twelve apostles from among his many assorted disciples he first labored in prayer through the night (Luke 6:12-16). When Jesus was at the moment of his great passion (having secured this plan from before the foundations of the world), he wrestled with painful intensity in prayer with his Father (Matthew 26:36-46).

Personal Examination & Response

Does your prayerlessness communicate that you feel that you have no need to pray?

What does your present discipline and habit of prayer communicate by way of needfulness of prayer? How might you improve this testimony of conduct?

What can be learned from the tragic example of Joshua 9 regarding having too great a confidence in historic success and ability?

Looking to the preeminent example of Christ are you in less in need of laboring in prayer than the Son of Man? To even entertain such a question is absurd... but what says your life and what will it say in the days ahead?

“I Am Too Bitter to Pray”¹⁸

This subject speaks to two matters primarily: 1) a small or low view of God and 2) a cherishing of sin over the cherishing of Christ.

The small or low view of God is most plainly demonstrated with statements within the family of “my God would not let _____ happen....” or “I want no part with a God that allows _____ to happen....” or “God is unjust/unfair for _____ reasons....”

These statements are commonly made when matters of life and difficult providence directly touch one’s own life, and while one might be rooted in a knowledge of God themselves, such truth has not effectually taken root in their heart. Such persons are gladly prepared to dispense affirmations of truth about God and his sovereign and good ways to someone else in their struggles. However, when struggle touches them personally, they do not blossom in truth, but shrivel in bitterness. They are betraying that in their own heart of hearts they have a small, a low, a deficient, and an unscriptural view of God. In this state of mind they have no appetite for petition, praise, or thanksgiving to God in prayer – they are too bitter to pray.

The second sphere of offense and obstruction under the subject is the cherishing of sin over the cherishing of Christ, and it is most plainly brought to bear when obedience will very plainly require the forsaking of sin, even cherished sin. Among the most overt offenders here is forgiving others when one would rather nourish the offense, when one does not feel that they can be as satisfied in forgiving as they would be harvesting bitterness, anger, and resentment at least for another season when the emotional cycle has had its fair opportunity to have been run. “In other words, many of us do not want to pray because we know that disciplined, biblical prayer would force us to eliminate sin that we rather cherish. It is very hard to pray with compassion and zeal for someone we much prefer to resent.”¹⁹

“What is God’s response?” to your deficient view of God and the resulting bitter disposition it can foster in choking out your desire to pray?

Job wrestled with his most extreme season of testing – not having the vantage point that we do when reading the account, all he knew was pain, severe emotional, relational, and physical pain. Yet he steadied his words and did not sin with his lips. However, Job pressed the subject of his perplexing suffering and The LORD answered. In The LORD’s answer and in Job’s response is not a complete resolution to the tension if one is hoping to understand every nuance of the pain. Still, there is a resolution that comes with submitting to a proper view of God which will humble, break, and produce not bitterness so as to not to pray, but awe that one is afforded such generous access to God in prayer.

Note the following excerpts from the conclusion of Job and how they contribute to a four chapter intensive that demands submission to a right view of God which is a high and esteemed view of God.

“Then the Lord answered Job out of the whirlwind and said: ‘Who is this that darkens counsel by words without knowledge? Dress for action like a man; I will question you, and you make it known to me. ‘Where were you when I laid the foundation of the earth? Tell me, if you have understanding.

¹⁸ Carson, Pg.98

¹⁹ Carson, Pg.99

Who determined its measurements—surely you know! Or who stretched the line upon it? On what were its bases sunk, or who laid its cornerstone, when the morning stars sang together and all the sons of God shouted for joy?” Job 38:1-7

“And the Lord said to Job: ‘Shall a faultfinder contend with the Almighty? He who argues with God, let him answer it.’ Then Job answered the Lord and said: ‘Behold, I am of small account; what shall I answer you? I lay my hand on my mouth. I have spoken once, and I will not answer; twice, but I will proceed no further.’” Job 40:1-5

“Then Job answered the Lord and said: ‘I know that you can do all things, and that no purpose of yours can be thwarted. ‘Who is this that hides counsel without knowledge?’ Therefore I have uttered what I did not understand, things too wonderful for me, which I did not know.’” Job 42:1-3

“What is God’s response?” to your cherishing of sin and the resulting bitter disposition it will foster in choking out your desire to pray?

The instructions are not ambiguous – forgive as you have been forgiven. No loopholes, exceptions, delays, settling of offenses, or obstruction of prayer permitted. Forgive as Christ forgave you.

“Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, along with all malice. Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you.” Ephesians 4:31-32

Further, if it is a matter of affections, delight, and cherishing... then there is simply no room for discussion. Delight in and cherish Christ or find that you have no part in him, in which case it is of no wonder that you are not praying, the obstruction is of your own designs.

“Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world—the desires of the flesh and the desires of the eyes and pride of life—is not from the Father but is from the world.” 1 John 2:15-16

Personal Examination & Response

Do you maintain a high/proper view of God when matters of life and difficult providence directly touch your own life? In other words, does your theology and life of prayer reflect that you are able to handle tragedy, grief, injustice, frustrations, and hardship?

Are you presently deficient in prayer because what you affirm in a worship service and what you experience in the daily grind of life appear to be in conflict? If so, where does the problem lay and how might this dichotomy be resolved?

How can you further mature a high/right view of God in your life and thereby strengthen your prayers as well as your worship and capacity to weather the storms of life?

What sins have you cherished in place of Christ and his call to obedience? Bitterness, anger, lust, pride... what lingers in the hidden heart that is either obstructing your prayers or that have been nurtured in place of your prayers? What will you do to mortify these offenses and properly cherish Christ?

"I Am Content with Mediocrity"²⁰

"Some Christians want enough of Christ to be identified with him but not enough to be seriously inconvenienced; they genuinely cling to basic Christian orthodoxy but do not want to engage in serious Bible study; they value moral probity, especially of the public sort, but do not engage in war against inner corruptions; they fret over the quality of the preacher's sermon but do not worry much over the quality of their own prayer life. Such Christians are content with mediocrity."²¹

"What is God's response?" to your being content with mediocrity and the prayerlessness it produces?

Diagnose the offense, recognize it for what it is and then forsake it, mortify it, put it to death in vigorous repentance and submission in faith.

Observe how James speaks to the matter:

"What causes quarrels and what causes fights among you? Is it not this, that your passions are at war within you? You desire and do not have, so you murder. You covet and cannot obtain, so you fight and quarrel. You do not have, because you do not ask. You ask and do not receive, because you ask wrongly, to spend it on your passions. You adulterous people! Do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God? Therefore whoever wishes to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God. Or do you suppose it is to no purpose that the Scripture says, 'He yearns jealously over the spirit that he has made to dwell in us'? But he gives more grace. Therefore it says, 'God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble.' Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. Draw near to God, and he will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded. Be wretched and mourn and weep. Let your laughter be turned to mourning and your joy to gloom. Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will exalt you." James 4:1-10

²⁰ Carson, Pg.100

²¹ Carson, Pg.100

James 4:1

The language here is shameful and even shocking that it would be so identified among the beloved.

Quarrel, is consistently translated war and battle - severe language.

Fights, is consistently translated quarreling - effectively personal conflict.

Now note that the cause of these intensively divisive and antagonistic actions within the church is that one's passions (selfish craving to be temporally and artificially satisfied) are waging combat within one's person.

Passions:

Luke 8:14 speaks to the devastational effect of pleasures on one's response to the gospel and its demands.

Titus 3:3 speaks to the "former" disposition of those outside of Christ: "...slaves to various passions and pleasures...."

James 4:1,3 speaks of passions at war and seeking to further feed one's passions.

We see plainly here that when one chooses to wage war with their passions rather than mortify them, they produce a disunifying and combative context among believers. This is morbid, this is wrong, and this is displeasing to Christ.

James 4:2-3

James then goes on to unite this shameful conduct with the discipline of prayer - this selfishly antagonistic conduct is intimately knitted with one's prayers and the failure one experiences in their petitions as experienced in two distinct ways: 1) not having from not asking (lack of petition) and 2) not having from selfishly asking (improper petition).

James 4:4-10

James speaks plainly to what these problems reflect: a disposition that identifies with this world and not with Christ, an abhorrent offense and one that secures the charge of spiritual adultery. He then presses the matter further, not leaving off with simply exposing the offense, but calling on his readers to seek repentance and the fruits thereof. It is implicit that in this their petitions will be properly rendered and will therefore be heard and answered.

The severity of the language in James 4:1-10 has persuaded John MacArthur to conclude that here James is addressing unbelievers who have externally identified with the church, but who have no true part in Christ - they are the tares among the wheat.²² However, D.A. Carson comes from the conclusion that this is a severe rebuke to wayward believers and this appears to find its strength in that James is writing to believers and he provides no clear indication that he has transitioned to address those who only claim, but do not know Christ. I have come to the same conclusion as Carson – not by strength of personality, but because it appears consistent with the larger context of the book. With this conclusion, one is then pressed to resolve whether or not such strong language is consistent in application or even reference to believers. MacArthur persuasively argues that this not the case. But I think that this is what James is intending to demonstrate - language that is too strong and wholly uncharacteristic of those in Christ to plainly show its great shame and the need of repentance. The tragedy is that believers have the capacity to offend in ways that are

²² The MacArthur Study Bible, NKJV. Word Bibles, 1997, Pg.1932

inconsistent and not able to be reconciled - actions that demand an examination of the soul and radical repentance. Now, with this in view its impact on one's prayer life is clear - one walking in such egregious selfishness is not one who is strong and effective in prayer. They do not petition and when they do they spoil their petition with their delighting in themselves over Christ. Further, having assumed such failed petitions they become divisive and antagonistic to others within the body. What a striking contrast to the righteous man in chapter five, "The prayer of a righteous person has great power as it is working." (James 5:16)

Personal Examination & Response

It is imperative to recognize that there is a permeation of the world in so much of the church and most certainly in the individual members therein. This is not good, it is not okay, and it must be repented of on the corporate and individual levels. My fear is that too much of the church has forgotten (or perhaps never properly understood) holiness so that the charge to be a holy people is casually disregarded and much of this evidence lies in the prayerlessness of the church. It would be sobering and wise to genuinely work through the level of tension or slack that exists in our being in the world, but not of the world. Among the first places that this examination can be most plainly executed is the degree to which you are making excuses for not praying (if you are even still making excuses). Would you, for your soul's sake and for the glory of God, examine what excuses you have made for your lack of a robust prayer life? Will you do something about it? If so, what? Now, if your life is marked by consistency and strength in prayer, then let the fact that you are in a minority among the American Evangelical church properly grieve you and know how you can pray for the strengthening of your brothers and sisters in Christ.

Write out your concluding thoughts including, after a time of genuine reflection, what your excuses are for not praying. Has mediocrity lost its stench to you? Have you become so familiar with your own coveting, quarreling, fighting, and passions that you are not even aware of their pervasive presence in your life and the devastation they are producing to your call to prayer?

This Lesson's Final Personal Examination & Response

Now... go beyond writing out *how you will* respond or change – on the following page record *how you have* responded to what has been addressed throughout the lesson and how you have changed so as to promote a life of prayer and not a life of excuses for prayerlessness.

Date How *I have* responded and changed.

Date How *I have* responded and changed.

Date How *I have* responded and changed.

Date How *I have* responded and changed.

Date How *I have* responded and changed.

Date How *I have* responded and changed.

Date How *I have* responded and changed.

Date How *I have* responded and changed.

