

Lesson 9 | April 30, 2023

Prioritize Personal Time with God

Study Text: Psalm 63:1–6; Isaiah 26:7–9; Mark 1:32–38; Luke 6:12–16; Hebrews 3:12–15; 4:4–7

Central Truth: We draw closer to our Lord as we read God’s Word and pray day by day.

Key Verse: Hebrews 3:15

To day if ye will hear his voice, harden not your hearts, as in the provocation (KJV).

Today when you hear his voice, don’t harden your hearts as Israel did when they rebelled (NLT).

Learning Objectives

- Students will recognize the importance of personal Bible study and prayer.
- Students will desire the closer relationship with God that comes through Bible study and prayer.
- Students will commit to their own personal daily time of Bible study and prayer.

Introducing the Study

Say: Someone has said, “We practice daily what we truly believe; all the rest is just religious talk.” Is this true? Are there exceptions? If true, what does it say about our genuine beliefs? Would someone who observed your daily schedule this week recognize that your relationship with Jesus is the most important relationship in your life? √ (**Play the video available at [RadiantLifeCurriculum.com/Adult](https://www.RadiantLifeCurriculum.com/Adult).**)

Opening Activity—Routines

Ask. What things do you routinely do every day? Why do you do them, how do you remember to do them, and what happens if you don’t do them? Does having a routine help you remember your responsibilities?

Say: When we truly grasp that something is important to our continued well-being, we manage to fit it into our day no matter how full our schedule is. Personal time with God is absolutely vital. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

God created us for relationship with himself, and the need for that relationship is hard-wired into us whether or not we realize or acknowledge it. In the oft-quoted words of Augustine, “Thou hast made us for Thyself, O Lord, and our heart is restless until it finds its rest in Thee.” In this lesson we will discover spiritual reasons, see biblical precedents, and share practical suggestions for prioritizing personal time with our

Creator. Ideally it will become as reflexive as brushing our teeth—benefiting ourselves and those around us.

Part 1—Set a Time—Day or Night Desiring God Himself

Psalm 63:1–6

Say: In his *Reflections on the Psalms*, C. S. Lewis¹ wrote of his own discovery that we do not worship God because He needs our accolades and adoration. Instead, we worship because His very being and presence demand it, much as awe-inspiring pieces of art or spectacular views of nature “deserve, merit, or demand, admiration.” Through our worship, God “communicates His presence to men.” As He does, our enjoyment of His presence bursts forth in praise. We call others to worship Him much as we would invite others to observe the beauty of art or nature that we enjoy. The more we get to know God, the greater our need to spend regular time in His presence. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

The psalmist David speaks of seeking the Lord morning and night, flowing out of an intense recognition of his need (Psalm 63:1). If we grasp as clearly as David how much we need God’s presence, power, glory, and lovingkindness (verses 2–3), we too will seek Him. Our God is soul-satisfying and joy-producing (verse 5).

Knowledge of God that comes through studying His Word can also increase our enjoyment of God, fostering thirst for Him. Who will most appreciate an exquisitely prepared meal: a chef or an ordinary diner? Whose heart will soar higher upon hearing a well-performed symphony: a musician’s or an untrained listener’s? Our heightened awareness and knowledge of the deep riches, intricacies, and themes of God’s story will increase our enjoyment of His presence.

Setting aside time with God allows our relationship to flourish. David mentioned seeking God in early morning and at night. While any time is good, something about starting and ending the day in communion with the Lord is particularly inviting. The schedule will differ from person to person, but prioritizing time with God is important for everyone’s spiritual vitality and soul satisfaction.

A recent study indicated that tying a new activity to an existing habit can help one incorporate a new routine into their schedule. You might tie a form of exercise to brushing your teeth, so that when you did the one you were reminded to do the other. Perhaps keeping a scheduled time with God may be aided by such a strategy.

Resource Packet Item 1: Time Management/Scheduling Tool

Distribute the time management sheet provided in the Resource Packet, and suggest that class members utilize it to help them prioritize their time with God.

Discuss

? Thinking again about the list of your daily routines, how can you make sure time spent with God becomes thoroughly anchored in your schedule?

? What practical tips might you be able to share for creating a habit (of any kind, but particularly related to spending time with God)?

Desiring God's Kingdom

Isaiah 26:7–9

Say: Isaiah here adds to David's point about desiring God, expanding his reasoning to include the desire for God's righteous judgments. Seeking first God's kingdom and His righteousness (Matthew 6:33) became a prominent theme in Jesus' ministry as well. When Jesus taught His disciples to pray, He emphasized that God's name be hallowed, His kingdom come, and His will be done. The Lord's Prayer and Isaiah 26 keep before us the mandate to align ourselves in prayer and action with what furthers God's purposes in the world. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

Like David, Isaiah sought God day and night, identifying his motivation in this passage: "For when thy judgments are in the earth, the inhabitants of the world will learn righteousness" (Isaiah 26:9, KJV). Like many of God's people through the centuries, Isaiah was disgusted with the arrogance of the wicked, their unjust deeds, and their flagrant disregard for the Lord. He longed for God to come and set things straight; in other words, he longed for the righteous kingship of God.

Throughout Scripture, God is extolled as the true King of the earth whose righteous rule alone will restore the world and bring an end to the ravages of sin. John the Baptist pointed attention to Jesus, announcing that God's kingdom was at hand. The kingdom of God is at the center of Jesus' own teaching, preaching, healing, and deliverance. He announced its presence in His own ministry. Like Isaiah and David, when we desire the kingdom of God, we are longing for the presence and power of King Jesus to be among us.

In Jesus' first coming, the kingdom of God was inaugurated but not yet consummated. God's kingdom is alive and well, victorious and advancing, but not yet present in its ultimate manifestation. It is "already" and "not yet." And so we join our prayers with believers' through the centuries: "Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done" (Matthew 6:10, KJV). Such a prayer should be a staple in our personal time with God, day and night, and it should inform our actions as God's people.

Discuss

? What kinds of things in this world make you long for God's righteous judgments and His kingdom to be fully consummated?

? How should praying as Jesus taught us shape our actions in this world? How might it shape your own personal actions this week?

Part 2—Prayer Gives Direction

Direction for Action

Mark 1:32–38

Say: We have looked in part at the prayer Jesus taught His disciples. According to Luke, Jesus taught the prayer in response to their request, “Lord, teach us to pray” (Luke 11:1, NLT). They had seen firsthand that Jesus was a Man of deep, powerful, regular prayer, and they wanted instructions for following His example. We too must look to Jesus’ example. As Hebrews says, we should fix “our eyes on Jesus, the champion who initiates and perfects our faith” (Hebrews 12:2, NLT). (Share your highlights from the following text.)

Mark recounts how, at the outset of Jesus’ ministry, He got up well before daybreak to find a solitary place to pray. Jesus’ fame was growing, and He was surrounded with human needs of all kinds. Certainly He would be tired and pressed on all sides and would have needed refreshing. Jesus had many things to talk over with His Father. We do, too!

Prayer is communication with God, both talking and listening. It is meant to be a two-way conversation, not a monologue. Though one does hear accounts of God speaking in an audible voice, for many of us the normal experience will include hearing His voice in the Scriptures we are reading with the Spirit’s promptings and witness.

Notice that immediately after the mention of His extended prayer time, Jesus again faced the prevalent needs surrounding Him: “Everyone is looking for you” (Mark 1:37, NLT). The “but” that introduces verse 38 (NLT) may point to a decision stemming from His time in prayer, that He must move on and reach other people in different towns. His decision was rooted in His purpose: “That is why I came.” Perhaps we are intended to observe that a fresh articulation of and commitment to Jesus’ mission flowed out of His time in prayer as He talked and listened to the Father.

Discuss

? Do you ever feel overwhelmed by the needs of the people and the world around you? What do you do in such times?

? When facing multiple good courses of action, how do you decide among them? What example can you share of a decision made with God’s guidance through prayer?

Direction for Decisions

Luke 6:12–16

Say: Christians often pray about big decisions: whom to marry, what career to pursue, where to live, etc. We should be seeking God’s guidance in all decisions, but some

matters have a great impact upon the “work of the ministry” each one is called to do (Ephesians 4:12, KJV) and the ways we may be called to participate in God’s kingdom. Jesus spent an entire night in prayer—and perhaps more, as not every moment He prayed is recorded—over one such decision. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

Jesus’ choice of the Twelve—the smaller subset of men among His many disciples that included both men and women—would be momentous. The Greek word for apostles means “sent with a commission.” These men would travel with Him for three years, be sent out in ministry, and bear witness to Jesus’ messianic identity and resurrection. They would become pillars in the communities of believers they would be called to nurture and lead. Their testimony and teaching would carry Jesus’ own authority and be foundational for the Church.

On the eve of calling these Twelve, Jesus went up on a mountain (a classic Old Testament location for receiving revelation from God) and prayed. This time His communing with God lasted all night. Though we are not privy to the details, one wonders if the inclusion of the last-named disciple was one of the points of discussion. Judas Iscariot’s betrayal with a kiss would take place on another night-long prayer session when Jesus would largely agonize over the consequences of that impending betrayal.

Decisions made with God’s input and guidance are generally not going to be self-serving or focused on self-preservation. In fact, they are likely to be the most selfless decisions imaginable. Maybe that is what keeps us from extended prayer, waiting on God’s direction until we are sure we have heard His voice. The Church needs courageous decision-makers who will, like Jesus, spend sleepless, prayer filled nights discerning God’s leading.

Discuss

? From what you know of the later ministries of the Twelve, how did Jesus’ choices work out?

? When was the last time you prayed fervently about a decision you needed to make? How did you discern God’s leading? How did things turn out? Are you currently facing any major decisions? Is there any matter you would like your fellow class members to pray about with you?

Resource Packet Item 2: Direction and Decisions in the Book of Acts

Distribute the worksheet, divide the class into small groups, and assign one Scripture passage to each group. After a few minutes, ask the groups to report their findings. If time is short, you might prefer to send the sheet home with them.

Part 3—Obey God’s Word Today

Mutual Encouragement Today

Hebrews 3:12–15

Say: Jesus is our example for spending time in prayer with the Father and obeying His voice. In the hour of His deepest challenge and agony He prayed, “I want your will to be done, not mine” (Matthew 26:39, NLT), and He “became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross” (Philippians 2:8, KJV). Jesus’ unfailing obedience was unique, but we too are called to be obedient to God’s Word. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

How is obedience to God’s Word nurtured in one’s heart, will, and emotions? One key is the mutual encouragement of Christian community. “Exhort one another daily,” says the author of Hebrews, “while it is called To day; lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin” (Hebrews 3:13, KJV). Believers should be concerned enough about one another to speak up about the things that really matter.

A similar point is made in the next chapter: “Let us think of ways to motivate one another to acts of love and good works” (Hebrews 10:24, NLT). This verse speaks of a focused effort to spur one another on to obey Jesus’ commands. Later, the author elaborately illustrates the walk of faith as a race run amid a great arena of spectators, the “cloud of witnesses” (Hebrews 12:1, KJV) described throughout chapter 11. The community of God’s people across the centuries can encourage our hearts toward obedience, but our ultimate encouragement is found in Jesus. We are to fix our eyes on Him, because He has run the race ahead of us and finished victorious.

Discuss

? Do the Christians in your life generally fulfill this daily exhortation role for one another? Why or why not? What could better facilitate this mutual encouragement to obedience?

? Are there any heroes of the faith you think about as an encouragement to run your race? How does their memory inspire you to faithful obedience?

Tender Hearts and Obedience Today

Hebrews 4:4–7

Say: The author of Hebrews certainly models the kind of daily exhortation and warning he desires his readers to pursue. He uses various illustrations and arguments to warn them to listen to God’s voice and respond in obedience. In this passage and throughout the book, he draws heavily upon examples from the ancient Israelites. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

One of the frequent prophetic critiques of God’s people, Israel, concerned their hard-heartedness. They refused to be receptive to God’s voice, instead stubbornly steeling themselves in disobedience. Rather than submitting to God’s ways, they wanted autonomy, to rule and decide for themselves. The author of Hebrews says God eventually got fed up with them and their grumbling and idolatry and denied them entry into the promised “rest” (i.e., the promised land of Canaan). The author of Hebrews

warns that, if we are hard-hearted like Israel, we will share their fate. By contrast, there is a reward for the faithful, obedient people of God who do not harden their hearts. It is not Canaan but God's ultimate and superior "rest": salvation and eternity in His presence.

So how does one avoid a hard heart? Is it possible to "tenderize" a heart that has been hard in the past? Perhaps there is a key in the author's emphasis by repetition of the "today" message: Respond today; do not put it off; now is the time to submit. The earlier a doctor diagnoses and attempts to correct hardening arteries, the easier they are to alleviate. Perhaps similarly, the earlier a believer diagnoses and attempts to counteract a hard heart, the more easily it is accomplished. No matter when or how it happens, it is surely by God's grace.

The tender heart submits to God and does not turn away from His voice. It is receptive, God-trusting, and humble. The tender heart says, like Jesus, "I want your will to be done" (Matthew 26:39, NLT). Such a heart will naturally be marked by compassion, mercy, and love for others.

Resource Packet Item 3: Avoiding a Hard Heart

Distribute the case study, and divide into small groups. If your class is small, read it and respond to the questions together. Pay particular attention to the class challenge at the bottom of the page.

Discuss

? How does one avoid a hard heart? What practices are conducive to acquiring tender hearts?

? Is it possible to "tenderize" a heart that has been hard in the past? Have you seen such a miracle before? How did it happen?

What Is God Saying to Us?

Say: Your Creator desires a deep, joyous, soul-satisfying relationship with you. Will you make time for this relationship to prosper? Will you allow His desires and the priorities of His kingdom and righteousness to become yours? Will you consult Him for direction in matters where there may be consequences for your actions and decisions? Will you be receptive and submit to His wise and just commands, keeping a tender heart before Him and also toward others? Will you respond in obedience today to His voice and encourage others to do the same, prayerfully and thoughtfully spurring them on toward love, good deeds, and ultimately, entrance into God's promised rest?

Living It Out

Ministry in Action

- Strategically analyze your daily schedule in order to identify and implement consistent personal time with God.
- Through your prayerful talking with and listening to God, ask Him to direct the activities or important decisions in your life.

- Select one person or group and give careful, creative, thoughtful attention to how you can encourage them in obeying God.

Daily Bible Readings

Monday:

Tear Down False Altars.
Judges 6:22–32

Tuesday:

Make Room for God's Presence.
1 Kings 8:1–13

Wednesday:

God Will Destroy False Teachings.
Jeremiah 23:20–30

Thursday:

Pray to Proclaim the Gospel.
2 Thessalonians 2:13 through 3:5

Friday:

A Prayer of Impartation.
2 Timothy 1:5–7

Saturday:

Praying for Fellow Believers.
Philemon 1–7