

MASTERWORK®

ESSENTIAL MESSAGES FROM GOD'S SERVANTS

Lessons from

SLAYING THE GIANTS IN YOUR LIFE

by David Jeremiah

THE POWER OF PERSISTENCE

by Michael Catt

F A L L 2 0 1 4

 **LifeWay**
Biblical Solutions for Life

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We believe that the Bible has God for its author; salvation for its end; and truth, without any mixture of error, for its matter and that all Scripture is totally true and trustworthy. To review LifeWay's doctrinal guidelines, please visit www.lifeway.com/doctrinalguideline.

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GETTING THE MOST OUT OF MASTERWORK

Here are a few suggestions to help you get the most out of this resource:

Group Members

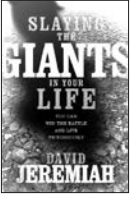
1. Read the daily assignments prior to attending the group time. Complete the personal learning activities in bold type. Record your notes and questions.
2. Review your notes and questions a few moments prior to the group time as a means of preparing to be an active part of the group.
3. In the margins of this book, record insights gained during the group time.

Group Leader

1. Complete step 1 above.
2. Identify the one main idea and goal for the lesson. The main point of the lesson and the goal are printed on the teaching plan pages at the end of each lesson. (See p. 18.) Focus on the session goal as you lead the session.
3. Read and study the key Bible passages listed in the margin of the teaching plan. Supplemental Bible commentary and Bible background articles are available in the MasterWork Leader Supplement. (See below.)
4. Develop a group time plan. Two options are offered in this book. One option is to follow the teaching plan at the end of each lesson. A second option is to use the discussion questions in the margins of the lessons. Some group leaders use a combination of both group time plans.
5. Consult LifeWay's *nExtra* site for additional teaching ideas (www.lifeway.com/nExtra).
6. Review and refine your teaching notes as you move toward the group time.
7. Arrive early, praying for the group time.

MASTERWORK LEADER SUPPLEMENT

Bible commentary on key passages used in *MasterWork* lessons and related *Biblical Illustrator* articles are available for download at www.lifeway.com/masterwork. Look for "MasterWork Leader Supplement – Fall 2014" Cost: \$5.75 per quarter.



ABOUT THE WRITERS

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MARGARET COLSON

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Slaying the Giants in Your Life

The people of God paid a great price to reach the land of their dreams, but what did they find when they arrived? Giants known as the Anakim. Naturally they would be in the land of milk and honey; the giants always get there first, and they take what they want. Our first impulse is to listen to the delegation that brings back a recommendation to surrender. It's a big world; why not find some other land? Maybe milk and honey are too rich a diet, anyway. Perhaps water and stale bread will be enough. We can learn to settle for less.

The giants we face have different names: Fear. Discouragement. Worry. Guilt. Temptation. Doubt. Failure.

Isn't it about time we stand tall and face the giants in our lives? This study is our training manual, but don't forget we'll need the heavier artillery for the battlefield: the sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God; the helmet of salvation; the shield of faith. Above all, we go with God Himself, who always makes two promises before sending us out to grapple with giants: He will be with us and He will empower us.

That means you'll never walk alone, and you'll never walk in weakness. God has the strength to bring you victory over any oppressor. You could ask Joshua about that. Or Moses, for that matter. Or Abraham, Daniel, Isaiah, David, or any of the apostles. Giant-killers all, and in the end they became giants themselves.

Perhaps that will happen to you. Read on, and prepare to do battle in the land of the giants.

— DAVID JEREMIAH

Fighting Your Fear



DAY ONE

The Ultimate Enemy

Aaron Swavely was at a softball tournament when the news came. A gorgeous April day, the simple joys of softball—and here was the blackest nightmare he could imagine.

Aaron learned that his little family was spread among three different hospitals. His beloved wife, his nine-year-old son, and his seven-year-old daughter had been pulled from the wreckage of a head-on collision. Standing in the infield of the baseball diamond, he seemed incapable of moving or of doing anything other than thinking that he couldn't remember kissing his wife good-bye that morning.

A thought and a cry began to take form inside him; the thought, that he might lose his whole family; the cry, for God to wipe away the last terrible five minutes.

Ivory Wilderman knew the truth when she saw her doctor's eyes and heard his solemn greeting: "Did you come alone?" The message on his face was a poor biopsy for Ivory. Minutes later, it was confirmed: the doctors had found breast cancer.

Only minutes ago, Ivory's life had never held more promise. At 46, she felt the best things in life lining up for her. There was a new job, a new apartment, a new car and—best of all—a new relationship that could lead to marriage. Life was good; God was blessing. "I wanted to press the pause button and just enjoy the moment I was in," she says today, looking back.

Discussion Question

What is the greatest fear you have experienced in your life?

But life has no pause button. Suddenly Ivory's world began to race out of control in fast-forward. "There was nothing to do," she says, "but to call out the name of Jesus."

There's no feeling quite like the icy grip of fear. And it comes in so many varieties. I've been there; so have you.

Fear is a part of the fabric of living. Any pastor can tell you stories like the ones at the beginning of this chapter. We sit in hospitals with terrified family members. We hold the trembling hands of those who face uncertain futures. We're often present in the waiting room when the doctor brings the message that dashes hopes, or when the police lieutenant tells us there's no trace of the runaway child. And what about life after the unexpected divorce? The death of a spouse? The loss of a livelihood?

I've had my own moments of overpowering fear. I've stood before huge crowds, afraid to speak. I've sat in football stadiums and watched two of my sons take vicious blows near the neck, then lie motionless on the turf for minutes that seemed like hours. I've sat in the hospital with my daughter Jennifer after she suffered a severe concussion in a soccer game. I doubt any fears are more terrible than those with our children at the center. I've also known the fear of my own impending death, when the doctor brought news of serious disease.

Fear has been described as a small trickle of doubt that flows through the mind until it wears such a great channel that all your thoughts drain into it. Tiny fears, almost unperceived, can build up day by day until we find ourselves paralyzed and unable to function.

1. Identify a small trickle of doubt that you are experiencing now. In the space below, write a prayer, giving that small trickle of doubt to God so that it does not wear a great channel for your thoughts to become immersed. Continue to give that trickle of doubt to God daily. _____

Fear is a part of the fabric of living.



DAY TWO

Where Faith and Fear Meet

The Bible doesn't paint a picture of the fear-free life. Judging from the Scripture, God's people seem to be tormented by the same fears as everyone else. Perhaps most notable of all biblical stories about the power of fear is the one about the delegation of spies who were sent into Canaan. They were commissioned to go on a fact-finding expedition into the unknown territory that lay ahead. This was the promised land—home at last, after generations of slavery in Egypt. The land held as much mystery as promise. No doubt about it, Canaan was the bend in the road of the Exodus, and the Israelites couldn't see what loomed around that bend. So they assembled in Kadesh Barnea and decided to send out the scouts.

The experience of these men had an impact on Israel that lasted 40 years. It cost them years of heartbreak and tragedy. The majority failed to see the lay of the land with the perspective God wanted them to have. God didn't ordain the spirit of fear that drove the committee's recommendation.

As we study this narrative carefully, we find key principles about the tyranny of fear and the freedom of faith.

1. *Fear Disregards God's Plan (Deut. 1:19-21)*

God's mandate was clear: *Here is your land. Here is My gift to you. Now go grab it!*

The Israelites should have surged forward with joy. They should have claimed all the abundance and fulfillment God wanted them to have. Yet having come so far, having made it through the wilderness with its dusty despair, its hunger and thirst—they couldn't cross the finish line. They had prevailed over Pharaoh's army, over the high tide of the Red Sea, over the challenge of the journey, but they couldn't take a stand against this final obstacle: fear.

You may stand at the threshold of God's greatest promise for you, but you'll never claim His blessings if you let fear dominate your life. He wants so much richness for you in His perfect plan, and only your shortsighted fear can withhold it from you. Listen carefully to the words of Paul on this

Discussion Questions

Can you think of other biblical accounts where the people of God were tormented by fear?

How did God work in those situations, and how can His work give you hope amidst your fear?

"Look, the LORD your God has set the land before you; go up and possess it, as the LORD God of your fathers has spoken to you; do not fear or be discouraged."

— DEUTERONOMY 1:21

subject: “God has not given us a spirit of fear, but of power and of love and of a sound mind” (2 Tim. 1:7). Power doesn’t shrink back in uncertainty; love isn’t conquered; a sound mind doesn’t deal in irrational speculation. God has a rich territory, a promised land with your name on it, and He wants you to charge toward it with a cry of victory, not a wail of fear.

“And you complained in your tents, and said, ‘Because the LORD hates us, He has brought us out of the land of Egypt to deliver us into the hand of the Amorites, to destroy us.’”

– DEUTERONOMY 1:27

2. Fear Distorts God’s Purposes (Deut. 1:27-28)

Fear distorts our view. It robs us of our perspective. It brings out our worst. It ushers in complaining, distrust, finger-pointing, and despair. God had provided victory over the Egyptian oppressors. He had given deliverance through the wilderness. He had offered a new plan for living through the commandments on Mount Sinai. And now He was offering real estate—the gift of a new land for building a nation. But in fear, the people were cowering in their tents to gripe about God’s intentions. “He has brought us out of the land of Egypt to deliver us into the hand of the Amorites” (Deut. 1:27).

Fear does that to us, doesn’t it? When you talk to a terrified friend or family member, you find yourself wanting to say, “But that’s silly!” For it’s easy for us to see the irrationality and absence of perspective of other people ruled by fear. The spies brought back a distorted picture, and they infected the whole nation with it. “There are giants in the land! *Anakim!*” That word held terror for the Israelites. It was synonymous with monstrous, marauding giants. But of course, while they did see a giant or two, the only formidable one was the giant inside their heads—and that giant’s name was *Fear*.

It’s worth reading the parallel account in Numbers 13:32-33, where we find the fears of the spies painted in even darker tones. The land “devours its inhabitants,” they said. “We were like grasshoppers in our own sight, and so we were in their sight.”

Fear is an army of giants, for it multiplies one into many. At the same time it does that, it also makes us grasshoppers in our own eyes. We lose sight of the promise that we can do all things through Him who strengthens us. We lose the ability to see anything in its true perspective. Fear, not the object of the fear, devours its inhabitants.

Fear, not the object of the fear, devours its inhabitants.

1. Mark the following statements true (T) or false (F):

- Fear that we give in to today can impact our lives for years.**
- Fear can cause us to miss out on some of God’s greatest blessings.**
- Fear robs us of perspective.**

In the imaginations of the spies there were massive, fortified cities teeming with giants. So great was their distorted perspective that they even made an evil giant out of God. “Why, He brought us all this way to make us food for the heathen,” they said. I defy anyone to find any logic at all behind their conclusion. But haven’t we all said such a thing? “God is out to get me! He’s brought me all this way to make me miserable!” The greater the fear, the weaker our reasoning.

Fear distorts our perception of God’s purposes. It shows life through a fun-house mirror—without the fun.

2. Has fear ever caused you to disregard the plan of God or distort His purpose? YES NO

What did you learn from that experience? _____



DAY THREE

Where Faith and Fear Meet, Part 2

Today let’s consider three more key principles about the tyranny of fear and the freedom of faith.

3. Fear Discourages God’s People (Deut. 1:28)

Discouragement is contagious. When you give in to your fears, you make the world around you an environment of discouragement. That word, *discourage*, means to take away courage. Fear causes us to drain away the vitality of people we care for.

This is a devastating principle, isn’t it? Ten men out of 12 came back with a “bad report.” The golden hopes and dreams of the Israelites were ruined for 40 years because of the fear of 10 men. When the spies returned from their journey, they brought a giant back with them—one much more

Discussion Question

What examples of the contagiousness of fear have you witnessed?

“Where can we go up? Our brethren have discouraged our hearts, saying, ‘The people are greater and taller than we; the cities are great and fortified up to heaven; moreover we have seen the sons of the Anakim there.’”

– DEUTERONOMY 1:28

terrible than the mere men they had seen. This giant of fear prowled through their camp and devoured the faith and courage of a nation.

“Then I said to you, ‘Do not be terrified, or afraid of them. The LORD your God, who goes before you, He will fight for you, according to all He did for you in Egypt before your eyes, and in the wilderness where you saw how the LORD your God carried you, as a man carries his son, in all the way that you went until you came to this place.’ Yet, for all that, you did not believe the LORD your God, who went in the way before you to search out a place for you to pitch your tents, to show you the way you should go, in the fire by night and in the cloud by day.”

– **DEUTERONOMY 1:29-33**

“Nevertheless you would not go up, but rebelled against the command of the LORD your God.”

– **DEUTERONOMY 1:26**

4. Fear Disbelieves God’s Promises (Deut. 1:29-33)

The challenge before the Israelites wasn’t something that came out of nowhere and demanded that they trust some mysterious, untested providence. This was the invitation of the God who had gone with them throughout their journey. This was the loving Father who had remained so steadfast by their sides, and who had provided every need.

When the spies were appointed, the children of Israel were given a test to reveal whether they really trusted God or not. The people had everything they needed to pass this test. But I believe they experienced a principle that seems more true and clear to me with every passing day. It seems to me that every defining moment of faith is just like starting over. Yes, we have the past to build on; just like the Israelites, we should be able to look back and say, “God has brought us this far; He will bring us home.” Memory and experience should empower us. But we struggle to do that very thing; the moment’s crisis seems to magnify itself. The rearview mirror should give us perspective, but we don’t look at the mirror at all—our eyes are frozen by what’s in the headlights.

The Israelites certainly are a testimony to that. There were giants in their headlights. And those giants seemed so fantastically massive that they blocked out what God had done in the past, what He was doing in the present, and His Word on the future.

5. Fear Disobeys God’s Principles (Deut. 1:26)

Fear is disobedience, plain and simple. How can fear be anything other than disobedience to God, when He has given us everything we need to walk in faith?

There’s a little phrase in the Bible—such a simple phrase, and one that God sees fit to repeat so often, all throughout the Scriptures. It goes like this: Fear not. That phrase is stated in the imperative tense—which simply means it is a command. How many times must God command us not to fear? The next time you find yourself overcome by fear, remember, to dwell in fear is to live in sin.

Your first response might be, “But I can’t help it! I don’t want to be fearful, but it’s out of my control.” And if that’s how you feel, you’ve forgotten that God has given us everything we need to deal with fear. He has provided us with principles of faith that help us live courageously.

When all is said and done, any alternative to His way boils down to simple disobedience—something that is always costly. For the nation of Israel, it meant a lost generation. The adult group of that time was forbidden from finding their journey’s end for 40 years. They were sentenced to a restless, nomadic life of wandering homeless in the desert. Only two of them were permitted entry into Canaan: Joshua and Caleb, who had stood firm in their faith. Courage earned them their home, yet they, too, wandered beyond the borders during those forty years, attending the funerals of their friends. When the last body was laid to rest, the nation could finally claim its true home.

1. Write the antonym of each of the five verbs related to the tyranny of fear:

- Disregards _____
- Distorts _____
- Discourages _____
- Disbelieves _____
- Disobeys _____

Draw a circle around the positive verb (such as “encourage” or “obey”) that you will consciously seek to develop in your life in the coming week.



DAY FOUR

Facing the Giant of Fear, Part 1

God longs for you and me to simply accept the gifts from His hand. I often counsel friends who are feeling God’s tug at their hearts. He has something special for them to do, and they can look forward to blessings in abundance if they’ll only be obedient and trusting.

They want to accept the call—but fear holds them back, always some new fear. *What if I’m making the wrong decision? What if this isn’t the right partner for me? What if my business venture fails? What if I get homesick on the mission field? What if, what if?* Somehow they can’t hold to a simple assurance of God’s trustworthy and loving nature. It doesn’t seem

to register that He never calls His children only to desert them. (*Would He lead us this far only to deliver us into the hands of the Amorites?*)

I've seen where this failure of trust leads—right to the doorstep of heart-break. Those who shrink back from accepting God's gift condemn themselves to lives of fitful, restless wandering through the wildernesses of their jobs and their communities and their broken dreams. Fields of milk and honey stood in wait, but they settled for less.

Isn't that kind of disappointment in life far more to be feared than the risk of taking God at His word? Of course it is. The question, then, is what to do about it. How can we face our fears?

1. Confront Your Fear Honestly

First, understand what is at the root of your fears. Often people have come to me and said, "I don't know what I'm afraid of; I just have a spirit of fear." Is that your experience? Ask God to search your heart for you. He knows where the problem lies, but you need to let Him show you. Otherwise, you're going to simply run away—and like Jonah, you'll find that you can run, but you can't hide. What is it that really concerns you? Why?

2. Confess Your Fear As Sin

We've already seen that fear boils down to disobedience. God says, "Fear not." But we fear; we're therefore in sin. The only thing to do is to come to God for honest confession.

Again, some may feel this stance is harsh or unrealistic. After all, we can't help what we feel, can we? Up to a point, that's very true. Emotions come to us on their own. But it's also true that we have the power to act on our feelings. We can choose by will to obey God's voice. We can make it our daily, serious intention to fill our lives and thoughts and plans with His Word and His truth. "I sought the LORD, and He heard me, and delivered me from all my fears" (Ps. 34:4). To walk with God is to walk fearlessly.

As we bring our fear before God and own up to it, we do one other thing. We repent. That means to disavow the sin completely, to turn and walk the other way.

3. Claim God's Promises of Protection

The next step is all about taking advantage of wonderful, untapped resources. Most people simply don't realize the treasure that lies at their

fingertips. The Bible is filled with practical promises. Any one of them, if we choose to take hold of it, leads to liberation from some tough problem of life.

1. Match the Scriptures with their promises. (Some Scriptures may have more than one correct answer.)

- | | |
|----------------------|---------------|
| ___ Deuteronomy 31:6 | a. Presence |
| ___ Psalm 27:1 | b. Salvation |
| ___ Psalm 118:6 | c. Courage |
| ___ Proverbs 3:25-26 | d. Protection |
| ___ Proverbs 29:25 | e. Safety |
| ___ Isaiah 41:10 | f. Strength |

The inspired biblical writers knew what it was like to be afraid. Peter and Paul had to face fear. Jesus prayed in Gethsemane, knowing exactly what lay ahead for Him in the hours to come. All of these found their strength in God, and you can benefit richly from their spiritual wisdom. Look up *fear* in your Bible's concordance, and then look up *afraid*.

Take in all these passages, soak in their power, and the next time the Devil comes to get a response out of you, you'll be ready. Pull five verses from the living water just like five smooth stones in David's pouch, and let them fly! Don't worry about that fearsome giant; the bigger they come, the harder they fall.



DAY FIVE

Facing the Giant of Fear, Part 2

Today let's conclude our five steps to facing our fears.

4. Cultivate a Closer Relationship with God

Think back to those spies who entered Canaan. Up to now, we haven't mentioned that there were two dissenters in the group. They went on the same trip, saw the same walled cities and the same giants, and they brought back a minority opinion. Joshua and Caleb listened patiently to all the worst-case scenarios and calmly said, "We can do this."

Discussion Question

Can you share a biblical promise that has helped you face your fear?

Discussion Question

What is the difference between measuring the giants in our lives by our own stature and measuring them by the stature of God?

As I've read this narrative over the years, I've always felt the difference between the ten and the two was that they used different yardsticks. The negative group measured the giants by their own stature, while Joshua and Caleb measured them by God's stature.

What made the difference for Joshua and Caleb? The Scriptures state it clearly.

In Numbers 32:12 we read: "For they have wholly followed the LORD." (See also Deut. 1:36 and Josh. 14:9.) The Bible makes it clear that Joshua and Caleb were absolutely filled with the Spirit of God, and they walked with Him in every way. It caused them to think differently, act differently, decide differently. And when the time of crisis came—the time when we find out what people are made of—Joshua and Caleb were living proof of what it means to have godly courage. These two looked at a land that "devoured its inhabitants" and said, "This is God's will for us. Let's do it!"

1. When you face a fearsome situation in your life, is your response more like the response of Joshua and Caleb or more like the response of the 10 other spies? Explain your answer. _____

How can you develop your relationship with God so that your response will be more like the response of Joshua and Caleb?

Your fear level is ultimately a referendum on the closeness of your friendship with God.

Your fear level is ultimately a referendum on the closeness of your friendship with God. It's a spiritual yardstick. Do you see things in human dimensions or godly ones? After you spend time with your Creator, you're simply incapable of shrinking in fear at the appearance of every human anxiety. You've seen His power. You've seen His love and faithfulness. You've seen that His purposes are the best for us. If you have "the fear of

God,” as we used to say, you won’t fear the things of this world. If you don’t have the fear of God, then everything else is to be feared.

Harry Ironside, a great preacher from years ago, told the story of playing a game called Bears with his young son. The grownup would be the bear, and he’d chase the boy all over the house. But one day the game got a bit too intense. The boy was cornered by the “bear,” and he suddenly became truly frightened—it wasn’t a game anymore. He hid his face, trembling, and then turned around quickly and threw himself into his father’s arms with the words, “I’m not afraid of you! You’re my daddy!”

Our Father wants us to leap into His arms that way when we’re afraid. He wants us to realize who He really is, and that we need never fear.

5. Commit Your Life to Jesus Christ

There is one ultimate fear every human being must face—one fear that stands taller than all the others. The ultimate giant is death itself.

I know now that I’m not afraid of death. I can say this because I’ve been right out to the edge of mortality, looked death in the face, and discovered that I’m not afraid. I’m willing to move on to my next destination—though I’m not eager to get a head start. I happen to love life. I’m devoted to my ministry and my family, and I have no desire to die. But it’s a wonderful thing to come to a sense of peace about the finality of this life. It’s good to be able to say, “I’m not afraid to die.”

Paul understood that it’s a win-win situation for God’s people. He wrote, “For to me, to live is Christ, and to die is gain” (Phil. 1:21). We can stay on earth and experience the joy of Christ, or we can move on to the next life and occupy those mansions He’s gone to prepare. Either way, we’ve got it made. Why fear things in this life? Why fear the doorway that leads to the next one?

The cross and the empty tomb changed everything. The power of death has been broken. Death has no power outside of the lies and distortions of the deceiver. The Devil wants you to believe that death is still a giant. He wants you to believe your sins still give death the final word, and that you must therefore live in terror. But the truth is that Jesus paid the debt. Your sins will not be held against you now if you’ll accept the gift that Jesus purchased with His life. We can rest in that assurance and find liberation from fear. Fear not! There are giants in the land, but next to our Lord they’re little more than grasshoppers.

Discussion Questions

According to the writer, “Your fear level is ultimately a referendum on the closeness of your friendship with God” (p. 16). Do you agree or disagree? Why? What does your fear level reveal about your friendship with God?

LEADER GUIDE



The big idea of this

lesson is: Believers can live victoriously over the giant of fear.

Focus on this goal: To help learners learn five steps to facing their fears

Key Bible Passage:

Deuteronomy 1:19-36

Find additional Bible commentary and a related *Biblical Illustrator* article, "Caleb: All We Know," in the

MasterWork Leader

Supplement. Go to www.lifeway.com/masterwork.

Answers to Day Four activity 1:

Deuteronomy 31:6 – a, c

Psalms 27:1 – b, f

Psalms 118:6 – c

Proverbs 3:25-26 – d, e

Proverbs 29:25 – e

Isaiah 41:10 – a, f

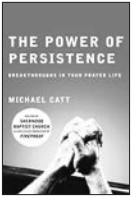
Before the Session

1. Invite a participant to share a brief (3-5 minute) testimony about a fear faced in life and overcome by faith in God.
2. Obtain two or three Bible concordances and a yardstick.

During the Session

1. Open the session by inviting the person enlisted to share the brief testimony.
2. Quote David Jeremiah by stating: "Fear is a part of the fabric of living" (p. 8), and then by reading his description of fear as "a small trickle of doubt that flows through the mind until it wears such a great channel that all your thoughts drain into it" (last paragraph of p. 8). State that just as fear is a part of living for us, it was also a part of living for those who lived in biblical times. However, God does not want us to live in fear. Ask a volunteer to read 2 Timothy 1:7. Explain that in this session the group will examine biblical principles for fighting our fears.
3. State that perhaps the most notable biblical example of when fear trumped faith for God's people is found in the account of the delegation of spies who were sent to scout out Canaan, the land promised by God to His people. Reading the account carefully reveals five key principles about the tyranny of fear. Call on a volunteer to read Deuteronomy 1:19-21. Write a large letter *D* on the board. Beneath the letter *D*, write the word *disregard*. Ask: *How did fear cause the Israelites to disregard God's plan?* Invite someone to read Deuteronomy 1:27-28. Write the word *distort* on the board. Discuss: *How did fear distort God's purposes for the Israelites?* Form participants into groups of two or three and challenge the groups to discuss their answers to Day Two activity 2 (p. 11). As time allows, encourage groups to share with the large group the lessons learned.

4. Continue the discussion, focusing on the three final principles about the tyranny of fear. Call on a volunteer to read Deuteronomy 1:28. Write the word *discourage* on the board. Discuss: *How did fear discourage God's people?* Ask learners if they agree that discouragement is contagious. Invite someone to read Deuteronomy 1:29-33. Write the word *disbelieve* on the board. Ask: *How did fear cause the Israelites to disbelieve God?* Ask someone to read Deuteronomy 1:26. Write the word *disobey* on the board. Discuss: *How did fear cause the Israelites to disobey God's principles?* In the same small groups used earlier, challenge groups to discuss how fear has ever caused them to discourage God's people, disbelieve God, and disobey God's principles as well as lessons learned from those experiences. As time allows, encourage groups to share lessons learned.
5. State that David Jeremiah has provided five biblical and practical principles for facing the giant of fear. Each of these principles begins with the letter C. State that the first C is "Confront your fear honestly." Challenge participants to brainstorm common fears. Say that we must name our fear in order to claim it. State that the second C is "Confess your fear as sin." Lead in a brief debate about whether or not fear is sin. Ask those with concordances to determine how many times the Scripture tells us to not fear. Conclude by saying that since God said, "Fear not," then fear is disobedience and, thus, sin. State that the third C is "Claim God's promises of protection." Invite participants to share their favorite promises of God.
6. State that the fourth C is "Cultivate a closer relationship with God." Hold up the yardstick and challenge participants to explain the writer's concept of measuring the giants in our lives by God's stature (p. 16). State that the fifth C is "Commit your life to Jesus Christ." Call on a volunteer to read Philippians 1:21 and ask: *How does knowing God take away the fear of death?*
7. Acknowledge that some in the group may be experiencing fear that they have not even admitted to themselves, much less God. Encourage them to be honest about their fears and to give those fears to God. Close in prayer, seeking a closer walk with God so that all will learn to live in faith, not fear.



ABOUT THE WRITERS

MICHAEL CATT

has served as senior pastor of Sherwood Baptist Church in Albany, Georgia since 1989 and is the executive producer of *Flywheel*, *Facing the Giants*, *Fireproof*, and *Courageous*. He also authored *Prepare for Rain*, *Fireproof Your Life*, *The Power of Desperation*, *The Power of Surrender*, and is the founder of the ReFRESH revival conference.

AMY SUMMERS

wrote the teaching plans and learning activities. Amy lives in Arden, North Carolina and is a member of Trinity of Fairview Baptist Church.



The Power of Persistence

When we work, we work. But when we pray, God works.

Everything good in my life and in the life of the church I pastor, I attribute to praying people. Every blessing has come from a prayer environment. Every time I've seen Satan win the day, I know we've let our prayer guard down. And every time we've moved forward as a church family, it has been on our knees.

Much has been said about our church in recent years. The stories of Sherwood Pictures in particular, including our successful films *Flywheel*, *Facing the Giants*, and *Fireproof*, have made national news. We've been featured in national media outlets, both secular and Christian.

We are often asked why God has blessed us in this way. The answer is simple. We have a praying church that is walking in unity. We pray over every ministry and every decision that affects how we "reach the world from Albany, Georgia." In recent years we've focused on this truth: whoever wants the next generation the most will get them. I want to see the church militant, aggressive, passionate, and revived. It will not happen apart from prayer and unity.

When we pray, we partner with God. The strength of the church has never been in programs, numbers, or events, but in prayer and obedience. God is not interested in our innovative methods. God is moved by the prayers of simple saints who learn in the quiet place to lay hold of the throne of grace. Prayer is not incidental to the work of God—it is the work!

— MICHAEL CATT

The Prophetic and Profitable Work of Prayer



DAY ONE

The Example of Elijah

Most of us are familiar with the Old Testament prophet Elijah. We know the story of his battle on Mount Carmel, but I think we often overlook the significance of his prayer life. The battles in Elijah's life were won through prayer. Prayer is the most profitable work any person can do. It pays dividends that cannot be put into words or measured in a ledger.

When you think about many believers, the last word that comes to mind when describing their prayer life is *power*. Yet prayer is the key to the throne of heaven; it is the secret to power and access to the throne of grace. In prayer, we partner with the Holy Spirit who is, even right now, praying with our Lord Jesus and interceding for us at the right hand of the Father. This fact alone should infuse our prayer life with power. Right?

Then why doesn't it?

I think of it this way. Our house has separate air conditioning and heating units, one that operates on half the house and one on the other. On a cold morning not long ago, I walked to the other side of the house and found it was freezing. I pushed the thermostat up warmer, but nothing happened. At that point I knew that either the heater was broken or a circuit had been

Discussion Questions

What would you say is the most profitable work you've ever done? Why is that?

What one word would describe your prayer life? Why?

Why do you think many Christians do not have powerful prayer lives?

blown. How did I know? Because the hall light was on. Obviously we had available electricity on that side of the house, but no power for the heater.

Isn't this our problem in prayer? We have available power, but it doesn't seem to be working in us or through us. Our churches are powerless because they are prayerless. We generally do a lot more worrying on our knees than praying, then we get up and continue to worry.

Where is the power that can call down fire from heaven? Where are the kinds of prayers that lead to divine intervention? It's not that God's heart is cold; it's that we have forgotten what God is looking for. If I am not walking in power, the problem is with me, not with God. If I am living in fear of the forces of evil, it is because I lack confidence that God will show Himself in power.

I believe one reason Elijah was chosen to represent the prophets on the mount of transfiguration is that he was a powerful man of prayer. Think about how significant Elijah is, even in the New Testament. He represents the high water mark of the prophets. When John the Baptist came, he was said to be like Elijah. When Jesus asked, "Who do men say that I am?" some said, "Elijah."

We generally do a lot more worrying on our knees than praying, then we get up and continue to worry.

1. Read Luke 1:17 in your Bible. How did the angel say John the Baptist would be like Elijah? _____

The New Testament does not present Elijah as a superhero but as a man just like us. Therefore, he knew something about prayer that we can know. He had the kind of prayer life we too can have. Here's the key: he faced his problems and opportunities in believing prayer. He believed God was his source and resource. Maybe the reason we don't receive answers to many prayers is we really don't expect God to answer. We might kneel down, say a few words, and quote a Scripture, but in truth—in our hearts—we don't believe anything is going to change.

Not Elijah.

2. Read of Elijah's first appearance in the Bible in 1 Kings 17:1-6. What insight do you gain into the source of "the spirit and power of Elijah" (Luke 1:17)? _____



DAY TWO

Believe It or Not?

Elijah lived in a godless time. If he were to arrive on the scene today, he would not be shocked by our culture. Idolatry, sensuality, corruption, and godlessness were rampant. He lived in the day when Ahab was king of Israel. Ahab and Queen Jezebel would make some of today's corrupt politicians look like Mr. Rogers. They introduced Baal worship and even built a temple to Baal in Samaria.

When God's people face godless times, that's when they need to turn up the heat in prayer. Tough times are no time for God's people to sit by, cold and indifferent. As you read 1 Kings, you will discover that before the showdown on Mount Carmel, God was preparing Elijah in prayer. Elijah was learning how to ask God for the impossible and believe God in desperate situations. Before he ever stood on Carmel and confronted the false prophets, Elijah was a man of prayer and faith in the promises of God. All of us must be tested as to whether we will take matters into our own hands or take them before the Lord.

1. Read 1 Kings 17:7-24 in your Bible. Identify ways Elijah was tested. _____

How do you think he was able to pass those tests? _____

In that passage you see clearly that powerful praying is tied to the Word of God. We can believe what God has revealed in His Word. Elijah, in communion with God, was able to see a power working through his life that was not available otherwise.

Powerful praying is tied to the Word of God.

If Elijah had followed the normal pattern, he would have said, “Lord, comfort this woman in her grief.” Instead, he asked God to raise the boy from the dead! This is an incredible request, a bold request in light of the fact that no one in recorded history had ever been raised from the dead.

Powerful praying begins with believing God to be our provision. Elijah had seen God protect him and provide for him through the drought and famine. He knew that if God could provide for him in the wilderness, He could provide for this widow in the city. When he met the widow gathering sticks, she thought it was near the end. Elijah arrived to show her it’s not over until God says it’s over.

Because God had taught Elijah to trust Him for provision as Jehovah Jireh—“God who provides”—it was nothing for him to first challenge the widow to trust God’s power for her provisions and then to trust God for her son. Elijah had a big view of God. Our tendency is to have a big view of our situations and a small view of God’s sovereignty. We tend to see God through a microscope and our problems through a telescope, but it should be the other way around. Our problems are miniscule compared to the vastness of God.

Prayer is faith acting like it’s supposed to act. Elijah “stretched himself out over the boy three times.” Not once. Not twice. Powerful praying demands discipline and patience. God is not a bellhop who comes running at the snap of our fingers. God wants us to stretch ourselves in the realm of prayer. When is the last time you asked God for something you couldn’t figure out?

2. Record three seemingly impossible situations in your family or church family. Over the course of this seven-week study, pray like these situations aren’t impossible, but HIMpossible.

(1) _____

(2) _____

(3) _____

Powerful praying begins with believing God to be our provision.

Discussion Questions

What does exposure to blatant godlessness make you want to do?

What relevance do the miracles performed by an ancient prophet have on our own prayer lives?



DAY THREE

Fire on the Mountain

Elijah is on Mount Carmel the next time we see him praying. There's a battle at hand between Elijah and the prophets of Baal. He proposed that two altars be set up on the mountain, one for Baal and one for God. The prophets of Baal would pray and then Elijah would pray. The god who answered by fire would be the true God.

The false prophets jumped up and down, cut themselves, and cried out to Baal all day long, but nothing happened. Then Elijah set up his altar, poured water over it to make it even harder to ignite, and said a brief prayer.

1. Read 1 Kings 18:36-39 in your Bible. What did Elijah pray for specifically? _____

How was that specific prayer answered? _____

There are several truths I do not want you to miss. *First, this was a show of power.* Israel had bought the lie that Baal had power, and they put their faith in idols. They needed a lesson from the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. They needed a reminder that the one true God delivered the people out of bondage, across the Red Sea, and into the Promised Land. Jehovah was not a distant deity, nor was He a symbol or a statue. He was the living Lord. He had clearly stated, "You shall have no other gods before Me."

Secondly, Elijah tied obedience to power. He wasn't afraid to be identified with the Lord God of Israel. He was outnumbered, but he wasn't outgunned. He was unashamed of the Lord, willing to hitch his wagon, his future, and even his life to God's ability and power to intervene.

Thirdly, he was confident God would hear and act. Elijah didn't pray with a wavering faith; he believed God. He soaked the altar so there would be no doubt as to God's ability to do exceedingly, abundantly beyond what he ever hoped or imagined.

The false prophets and the people of Israel believed Baal was the god who controlled the weather. Unfortunately the people had forgotten their history. The God of Israel was able to send manna from heaven and bring forth water from a rock. Over and over throughout their history God had shown His power to rule and overrule the laws of nature. Yet they couldn't decide. They halted between two opinions. They weren't willing to believe God.

Doesn't that still happen today? We fail to believe in God and His ability to provide because we trust in ourselves and our own abilities. No, we don't have Baals in our houses or altars to Asherah in our yards, but we give evidence daily that we don't believe God has the power to meet us at the point of our need. We trust in our ability to work and make a living. We fail to tithe because we don't believe God has the power to do what He says He will do for those who obey His Word regarding tithing and giving.

Why was such a demonstration needed? Why such a big show? Why not just deal with Ahab one-on-one and forget this? What if God didn't show up? What if neither God nor Baal could answer?

God was going to answer, but the people needed to see for themselves the futility of idolatry. These false prophets prayed, but they had no power. They went to extremes, but their god did nothing. Their gods were false with no power or ability because they were empty and incapable.

Finally, the nation needed to turn back to God. While it is always encouraging to see God move here and there, the longing of my heart is to see God move again across this land. We are in desperate need of revival to sweep our nation. But it will not come if we are hesitant or content with business as usual. It only comes to those who see the need and ask the God who can part the sea, raise the dead, heal the sick, and feed the multitudes to once again show Himself in power.

Much like the day in which we live, Elijah lived in a backslidden nation. The laws of God had been forgotten, and His miracles were a distant memory. The nation was in a spiritual and physical drought, desperately needing a fire to burn away the dross—living water to quench their thirsty hearts. They had been drinking from broken cisterns that could not even hold water. The nation faced judgment, and only the intervention of the power of God could change things.

I wonder, where are the Christians, the churches, that are believing God for revival? Where are those who long to see God move as He did in days past? Are we so entrenched that we cannot wake ourselves from our

Discussion Questions

In your opinion, do you think the prayers of many Christians are too small? What leads you to feel that way?

What would it take for us to pray big prayers?

lethargy and seek once again the power from on high? Elijah didn't pray so that people would think he was a great prophet or talk about his power. He didn't pray in order for his church to grow. He asked God to answer him so the people would know that the Lord was Yahweh, the Lord God.

The power and fire of God will fall on His people when three things happen:

(1) When we are willing to serve God with our whole heart. "How long will you hesitate between two opinions? If Yahweh is God, follow Him. But if Baal, follow him" (1 Kings 18:21).

2. In what situation do you find yourself hesitating between two opinions rather than fully committing yourself to God? _____

How can you move towards a wholehearted commitment? _____

(2) When we think more about the glory of God than our personal safety and take our stand with God before this pagan world.

(3) When we are willing to believe God and do something about it.



DAY FOUR

Keep On Keeping On

A powerful prayer is one that does not let go. It does not quit. It is profitable and powerful because it is persistent. I consider the following passage to be the greatest story in Scripture on the power of prevailing prayer.

Elijah said to Ahab, "Go up, eat and drink, for there is the sound of a rainstorm." So Ahab went to eat and drink, but Elijah went

up to the summit of Carmel. He bowed down on the ground and put his face between his knees. Then he said to his servant, “Go up and look toward the sea.” So he went up, looked, and said, “There’s nothing.” Seven times Elijah said, “Go back.” On the seventh time, he reported, “There’s a cloud as small as a man’s hand coming from the sea.” Then Elijah said, “Go and tell Ahab, ‘Get your chariot ready and go down so the rain doesn’t stop you.’” In a little while, the sky grew dark with clouds and wind, and there was a downpour. So Ahab got in his chariot and went to Jezreel. The power of the LORD was on Elijah, and he tucked his mantle under his belt and ran ahead of Ahab to the entrance of Jezreel. (1 Kings 18:41-46)

Elijah never interpreted the delay as denial from God.

Three years before, Elijah had prayed for the rain to stop as a sign of judgment. Now it was time to pray for rain again because judgment had been rendered. When Elijah went to pray, he wasn’t hoping, he was expecting. He was watching and waiting for God’s answer. Note that Elijah never interpreted the delay as denial from God. He called out seven times before there was the slightest indication that rain was coming. Six times he heard, “There is nothing.” Yet he never quit praying.

Throughout the Old and New Testaments, we are reminded to persist in prayer until God breaks through.

Discussion Questions

Would you say a more powerful prayer is one that sees results immediately or one that keeps praying when nothing seems to be happening? Explain your reasoning.

Describe the difference between hoping in prayer and expecting in prayer.

1. Read the following passages in your Bible. State from each phrase that describes persistent prayer to you.

Isaiah 62:1,6-7 _____

Luke 18:1 _____

Colossians 4:2 _____

1 Thessalonians 5:16-18 _____

There had not been a drop of rain in Israel for three and a half years, but Elijah prayed nonetheless. James writes, “Elijah was a man with a nature

like ours; yet he prayed earnestly that it would not rain, and for three years and six months it did not rain on the land. Then he prayed again, and the sky gave rain and the land produced its fruit” (5:17-18).

According to James, Elijah was a man just like us. But the question comes: Are we men just like him? I read the stories of prayer warriors and find I have far to go. I probably have no business writing a book on prayer. Based on prayer warriors I know, I’m still a novice. When I hear some people who get hold of God, I wonder if I’ve ever said anything in my prayers.



DAY FIVE

It Could Be You

James begins and ends his epistle with a call to prayer, presenting Elijah as the poster child for it, holding up this one specific person as an example of how to pray. The book of James is filled with references to prayer—prayer in the midst of trials, prayer when you lack wisdom, and so on. Someone has said, “Faith’s finest work is when believers are effective in prayer.”

In James 4 we are reminded to draw near to God. Then in James 5 he tells us who to pray for and how to pray.

1. Read James 5:13-18 in your Bible.

Who should pray? _____

Who should we pray for? _____

How should we pray? _____

He tells us to pray in problems, in pleasure, and in pain. “Therefore, confess your sins to one another and pray for one another, so that you may be healed. The urgent request of a righteous person is very powerful in its effect” (5:16). Effective praying is specific praying that has specific results

Effective praying is specific praying that has specific results in mind.

in mind. It's far more than merely, "Bless those for whom it is our duty to pray." It means a humble, begging plea. It's a picture of someone asking God for help, not demanding it, but approaching heaven with integrity in prayer and intensity in their intercession. Elijah is our example. He prayed earnestly, which literally means he "prayed in his prayers." He didn't just spout off high-sounding words. He didn't try to impress God with what he was saying.

Jesus made an incredible promise in the gospel of John: "I assure you: The one who believes in Me will also do the works that I do. And he will do even greater works than these, because I am going to the Father" (14:12). He talks about works and greater works. Would you agree that "greater works" would be powerful and profitable witnesses in these cynical days? Jesus would soon ascend into heaven, and the Spirit would come to live within His disciples. He tried to teach His followers that the life of believing prayer would result in a life that bore fruit.

"I assure you: The one who believes in Me will also do the works that I do. And he will do even greater works than these, because I am going to the Father. Whatever you ask in My name, I will do it so that the Father may be glorified in the Son. If you ask Me anything in My name, I will do it."

– JOHN 14:12-14

2. Read John 14:12-14 in the margin. How will those "greater works" through Jesus' followers occur? _____

Ron Dunn, in his book on prayer, writes of four truths we need to learn from the teachings of Jesus on prayer.

(1) When Jesus encourages us to pray He always uses limitless language. ("Whatever you ask," "Ask, seek, knock"—don't pray as if God has declared bankruptcy.)

(2) Jesus reminds us to ask in His name. ("Whatever you ask in My name"—according to His character, to honor His name.)

(3) Jesus reminds us He Himself is the answer. (He didn't say, "I'll give you advice," or "I will help you." He said, "I will do it." Many of our prayers are limited because we limit in our minds what we think God can do.)

(4) Jesus assures us He will answer. ("That the Father may be glorified in the Son"—the motive behind our asking is the glory of God.)

I wonder how much praying we really do in the church. We say we pray, but we mainly just ask God to bless our fleshly efforts. We pray for the

Lord to help us make the batter and sell the pancakes. The truth is that God wants us to trust Him and get out of the pancake business.

One of my favorite books is Raymond Edman's *They Found the Secret: Twenty Transformed Lives That Reveal a Touch of Eternity*. I still own the copy I bought as a young preacher. Although the spine is broken, the truths within are still as real today as ever. In one chapter Edman writes about John Hyde and the prevailing life:

It is recorded that ... John Hyde gave himself to much prayer ... praying that he might indeed be filled with the Spirit and know by actual experience what Jesus meant when He said: "Ye shall receive power, when the Holy Ghost is coming upon you; and ye shall be my witnesses both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth."

In 1904 a group of missionaries, inspired by Hyde's prayer life, formed the Punjab Prayer Union. Those becoming members were required to sign these five simple yet searching principles:

- (1) Are you praying for quickening in your own life, in the life of your fellow workers, and in the church?
- (2) Are you longing for greater power of the Holy Spirit in your own life and work, and are you convinced that you cannot go on without this power?
- (3) Will you pray that you may not be ashamed of Jesus?
- (4) Do you believe that prayer is the great means of securing this spiritual awakening?
- (5) Will you set apart one-half hour each day as soon after noon as possible to pray for this awakening, and are you willing to pray till the awakening comes?

It is difficult to measure the impact and importance of Hyde's service that came as a result of his Spirit-filled prayer life.¹

May God send us men and women who will once again lay hold of Him in prayer until the Spirit falls, the windows of heaven open, and we can once more see a cloud the size of a man's hand.

Discussion Question

What are the attitudes that undergird profitable and powerful prayers?

1. Raymond Edman, *They Found the Secret* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1966).

LEADER GUIDE



The main point of this

lesson is: Prayer is the most profitable work any person can do.

Focus on this goal:

To lead learners to seek the power of God in believing prayer

Key Bible Passages:

1 Kings 17:1–18:45;
John 14:12-14;
James 5:13-18

To the Leader

Read and be very familiar with 1 Kings 17–18 so you can relate it to your group as the very fascinating story that it is.

Find additional Bible commentary and a related *Biblical Illustrator* article, “Elijah, A Man of God,” in the **MasterWork Leader Supplement**. Go to www.lifeway.com/masterwork.

During the Session

1. Ask learners to list the five most important things churches do. Determine what one thing churches absolutely must do. Read the last paragraph of the study introduction on page 84. Guide participants to find in the next to the last paragraph good individual and corporate goals for this study. Ask learners to state how they best learn to do something. Explain the group will learn about prayer in this seven-week study by studying and by doing.
2. Today’s study focuses on the example of Elijah. Ask: *What percentage of Christians and/or churches do you think could really be described as powerful? Why?* Read the second paragraph of Day One (p. 85), pausing after each sentence to ask if learners agree. Consider why believers’ prayer lives are so often not infused with power. Discuss Day One activities 1 and 2 (p. 86). Invite someone to read the paragraph on page 86, beginning with “The New Testament does not present Elijah as a superhero ...”
3. Using the material in Day Two, describe the culture in which Elijah lived. Determine options believers have for responding to godlessness in their culture. State it is obvious from Elijah’s example we must start with prayer and then keep praying because that’s how God tests and builds faith. Discuss Day Two activity 1 (p. 87). Ask: *Do you think Elijah was born with this kind of faith or was it developed? Elaborate. What does that say to us about our own prayer lives? Read the paragraph beginning with “Because God had taught ...”* (p. 88). Discuss ways participants can start looking at their problems through a microscope and God through a telescope. Note that Michael Catt challenges learners to stretch themselves in prayer. Invite learners who have not already recorded three situations on Day Two activity 2 (p. 88) to take a minute to do so. Pause for a time of prayer, inviting learners to pray about the situations they recorded, either out loud or silently.
4. Summarize 1 Kings 18:1-29. Invite a volunteer to read 1 Kings 18:30-35. Consider why Elijah had so much water poured on the altar. Complete

Day Three activity 1 (p. 89). Comment that God's power was shown through Elijah's prayer and actions. Ask: *How might Christians give evidence they don't believe God has the power to meet their needs?* Point out the role of obedience in Elijah's answered prayer. Discuss whether Christians should expect God to answer their prayers if they're not willing to obediently do what He tells them to do. Ask why Elijah made this showdown so public rather than confronting Ahab privately. Draw attention to the final italicized truth Catt drew from this biblical account (p. 90). Ask: *What does that say to us about our responsibility as citizens of our nation?* Discuss three things that must happen if God's power is going to fall (p. 91). Request learners consider the situations they recorded in Day Two activity 2 (p. 88) and consider silently: *Are you willing to serve God with your whole heart in this situation? Will you give more priority to God's glory than your comfort? Are you willing to believe God and do something about this situation?* One thing you can do is to pray daily for God to work and keep praying even when nothing seems to be happening.

5. Ask learners to state words they associate with persistence. Ask how they see those qualities of persistence in 1 Kings 18:41-46. Ask: *Did Elijah's faith make the rain come or did his faith keep him persisting until it did? What's the difference?* Draw attention to the quote in the margin of page 92. Evaluate why we often equate delays with denials. Ask: *What will it take to keep persisting?* Complete Day Four activity 1 (p. 92). Ask how participants can know from James 5:17-18 that it is possible for them to pray as powerfully as Elijah did.
6. Complete Day Five activity 1 (p. 93). Ask what participants can learn about effective praying from Elijah. Request someone state the incredible promise Jesus stated in John 14:12. Evaluate why Christians struggle with that promise. Ask if participants agree with Catt about those "greater works." Discuss Day Five activity 2 (p. 94). Point out there is a connection between Jesus' promise and His followers' prayers. Discuss the four truths believers need to learn about prayer from Jesus on page 94.
7. Read the five principles signed by the Punjab Prayer Union. (See p. 95.) Challenge learners to read those principles every day in the coming week and determine whether they will commit to make those attitudes and prayer actions a part of their lives. Read the final statement of Day Five (p. 95) aloud as your closing prayer.