

“Praying Up Your Sunday School”

Preparation Manual

We have a great responsibility and a wonderful opportunity!

We can touch every member of our Sunday School and every friend in the community who needs Christ with the wonderful love of Christ. AND...we can do so with the most powerful and effective tool in the Kingdom of our Lord...PRAYER!!!

God wants us to seek Him individually and corporately to impact our world for Christ. He told His disciples in Acts 1:8 “But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.”

In John 15:7 Jesus said, “If you abide in Me, and My words abide in you, you will ask what you desire, and it shall be done for you. By this My Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit; so you will be My disciples.”

What if...

every member of every Sunday School class had a daily time of prayer and devotion seeking a renewed walk with Christ?

And...every Sunday School class in your church prayed for every member every week?

And...every member of every Sunday School class prayed for a friend that is not a Christian every week?

And...every member of every Sunday School class prayerfully sought to enroll that friend in Sunday School?

And...every member of every Sunday School class kept praying for that friend until they came to know Christ as Savior?

Could these “what ifs” become reality? If we get serious about “Praying Up Your Sunday School”, we could see every Sunday School class experience spiritual renewal and community impact like never before.

My friend Bob Mayfield, Director of Sunday School for the Baptist General Convention of Oklahoma, recently shared a testimony of a small church in his state that had a six week prayer emphasis as described above. As a part of this strategy a class of senior adult ladies posted a list of friends and family who did not yet know Christ as Savior. In just a few weeks that list grew to 88 individuals. By the end of their six weeks of prayer, **22 of the 88 had become Christians!** They had never seen anything like that before. They vowed to continue praying for each other and their friends who did not yet know Christ. They continued praying for new Christians that they might grow into strong mature disciples.

This is not a difficult strategy; nor is it complicated. But, it does take organization, determination, and perseverance. We must remember the enemy will not like what you are doing. We just have to convince him he has been defeated and has no power over us, because our Lord has already won the victory.

Preparation

Now just how do we begin “Praying Up Your Sunday School”? There are just a few things we have to do in preparation.

- 1) We must prepare our hearts in prayer.
- 2) We must be sure our hearts are clean before the Lord. Read Psalm 66:18, 1 John 1:9
- 3) We must remember God wants us to seek Him. Jeremiah 29:11-14a
- 4) We must remember God really wants to bless us. John 10:10
- 5) We must realize God calls us to show our love for Him in obedience. John 14:15
- 6) We will realize just what God can do through us as we follow in obedience. John 14:11-13

Planning

Now let's look at just a bit of organization to help us.

- 1) Prayerfully enlist a Prayer Leader for your Sunday School. (At least three weeks prior to the beginning of the Sunday School year.)
- 2) The Prayer Leader will keep the church informed and challenged during “Praying Up Your Sunday School”. (See job descriptions)
- 3) Each Sunday School class will prayerfully enlist a Prayer Leader. (At least two weeks prior to beginning of Sunday School Year. See job descriptions for responsibilities)
- 4) Each Sunday School class will commit just ten minutes of each Sunday's class time to reporting and prayer.
- 5) Each class will prepare a list of members to give to each class member.
- 6) Each class member will submit names of friends who are not yet Christians.
- 7) Each class will seek to get every member involved in personal and corporate prayer.

Purpose

Why this emphasis on “Praying Up Your Sunday School”? Have we not already been praying through the Sunday School? Do not most adult Sunday School classes have prayer every week? Well, yes, and sort of. It is true that most of our Sunday School classes do pray every week for folks in their classes who are sick or have special needs. But, do they pray for every member every week? Do they pray for church leaders every week? Do we pray for unchurched friends and neighbors every week? If the answers are NO, then we need to change our “prayer practices”. We need to intensify our prayer practices AND make them much more intentional. We want to see measurable results that will excite our churches and bring greater glory to our Lord.

Participation

Can we really get every member of every class involved in intentional prayer? Only God has the answer. But, we will never know if we do not present a strategy that has the potential of seeing this come to pass. We need a simple plan which any class in any church in any location can follow. The following is such a simple plan.

This is a six week strategy designed to get every adult and youth Sunday School class involved in intentional prayer every week.

Week 1 – Every Sunday School class member will pray daily for your pastor, staff, and Sunday School leadership.

Week 2 – Every Sunday School class member will pray daily for every Sunday School teacher and Sunday School leader of the church.

Week 3 – Every Sunday School class member will pray for every member of the class of which they are a member.

Week 4 – Every Sunday School class member will pray specifically for inactive members and seek to make a contact with a specific inactive member to encourage them.

Week 5 – Every Sunday School class member will pray daily for at least one friend not enrolled in Sunday School.

Week 6 – Every Sunday School class member will continue to pray daily for their friends not enrolled in Sunday School and make contact with them asking them to attend. Pray for an opportunity to share Christ with those who are not yet Christians.

After Week 6 – Continue to pray for every member of your class. Continue to pray for church leaders. Continue to pray for friends not enrolled in Sunday School and those who do not know Christ as Savior.

We have included a devotional guide as a guideline for your daily devotions each week as you pray individually and as a class.

We encourage pastors to preach on prayer preparation to get the church ready and committed to this prayer strategy. Dr. Jim Futral, our Mississippi Baptist Convention Board Executive Director-Treasurer, has prepared two sermons to give direction and encouragement for that sermon.

Praise Reporting – Praying Up Your Sunday School

Class Name _____

Number of people praying when you begin. _____

Number of people prayed for

Week 1 _____ Week 2 _____

Week 3 _____ Week 4 _____

Week 5 _____ Week 6 _____

Number of personal contacts made Week 4 _____ Week 6 _____

Number of people praying after Week 6 _____

Number of people enrolled in Sunday School _____

Number of people who prayed to receive Christ as Savior _____

Descriptions for Leaders of “Praying Up Your Sunday School”

Pastor

- 1) Set the example through personal devotions in preparation.
- 2) Champion the strategy through pulpit promotion.
- 3) Preach on the priority of prayer to raise the commitment level.
- 4) Visit each Sunday School class at least once during the 6 week period to pray with them.
- 5) Work with Sunday School Director and Nominating Chairperson to enlist a Church Prayer Leader for Sunday School.
- 6) Recognize the Church Prayer Leader each Sunday for results of prayer each week.

Sunday School Director

- 1) Follow the example of the pastor in personal devotions in preparation.
- 2) Assist the pastor in selection of a Church Prayer Leader for Sunday School.
- 3) Visit each Sunday School Class at least once during the six week period to pray with them.
- 4) Celebrate with each class the results of their prayer efforts.

Church Prayer Leader for Sunday School

- 1) Follow the leadership of the pastor in personal devotions in preparation.
- 2) Assist each class in the selection of a Class Prayer Leader.
- 3) Make certain each class has a list of members and prospects.
- 4) Make certain each class has a posted list to pray for friends not enrolled in Sunday School and those not yet believers.
- 5) Make certain each class turns in reports of their prayer efforts each week.
- 6) Report to the church the results of prayer each week in celebration.
- 7) Make certain every class has adequate copies of the daily devotion guides.

Class Prayer Leader

- 1) Follow the example of the pastor in personal devotions in preparation.
- 2) Lead the class in prayer participation each week. Limit the prayer and reporting time to ten minutes to give adequate time for Bible study and discussion.
- 3) Post a prayer list large enough for everyone to see and add to each week.
- 4) Share the results each week with the Church Prayer Leader for Sunday School.
- 5) Ask member for names of friends and family not enrolled in Sunday School and/or not yet believers in Christ.

Sermon by Dr. Jim Futral The Challenge of Prayer - Jeremiah 28:11-14

When I was given the assignment by our Sunday School Department of the Mississippi Baptist Convention Board to prepare a message from Jeremiah 28:11-14, I wondered why such an obscure passage was chosen when there are so many major emphases in prayer found throughout the Bible. However, once I opened the Scriptures and begin to look, I saw enormous truths imbedded in this incredible experience. They not only helped me to grow in my understanding of prayer, but they broadened my appreciation for the brilliant and insightful people in the Sunday School Department.

The setting for this passage of Scripture is one where there is trouble and difficulty in every direction. The people of God were living in perilous times and difficulties stood as huge obstacles to them in every way. Obviously, with so little hope their only hope was to be found in the power of God unleashed through prayer. Consider the various components of prayer found in this passage of Scripture.

The first thing to notice is that they were called upon to contemplate. Jeremiah spoke to the people, "Thus saith the Lord." Contemplate, stop, and think about what God wants to do in your midst. Think about what He was going to do in the people and what He was going to do through their leaders. Often we just go through life and do not stop and have times of contemplation. We do not stop and contemplate that maybe God is at work in the leaders of our country. Maybe He is at work in the people who are leading our churches, towns, and institutions. We so rarely stop and contemplate. I do not know about you, but as for me and I think for many of you we do not like to wait. We see problems and we want them fixed. We see needs. Let's take care of them.

In verse 11, God says that within the space of two years, He is going to do a mighty thing. Two years -- Why doesn't He do something today? I think of that passage in Acts 1, when Jesus tells His followers to go back to Jerusalem and there wait until you have been endued with power from on high. This is the component of prayer that we so seldom want to give validity to, but sometimes God calls on us to stop, wait, and contemplate what He is doing.

The second thing that I would point out in this passage of Scripture that is vitally important is to coordinate. Notice in verse 11 and following that God was at work in the people, but He was using Jeremiah the prophet and He would bring all of these parts together to accomplish His Kingdom victory. In our day and time, we are so self-centered that we actually believe that God is going to do everything through us. We may not even notice and may not understand that God wants to use many others along with us to achieve His goals. We pray individually. We pray with self-centered, me-ism ruling our thoughts and fail to see that generally God is in the process of trying to coordinate with all of His people.

We do not live in a vacuum. We do not exist alone. We are a part of a community, a city of faith, and are the people of God. When Jesus asked about prayer and the disciples wanted Him to teach them how to pray, one of the things that He taught them was to pray with other people in mind. You know the Lord's Prayer. "Our Father which art in heaven, hallowed by thy name. Thy Kingdom come, Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread."

As you think through the Lord's Prayer, think through the pronouns that are used and you will begin to understand that Jesus did not intend for us to pray in the vacuum of our own will. Our Father is a plural pronoun. Lead us and forgive us are plural pronouns. Isn't it fascinating when you look at that prayer through those eyes and you begin to understand it is not about you? It is about the people of God and God coordinating His work through us.

What would happen if we started praying in that manner? What if we begin to look at the world through God's eyes? What if we saw our great God at work through other people, through Hananiah, through Jeremiah, and maybe through the leaders of our church, state, and even our great country that God may be doing something through them? We need to pay attention to the way that God goes about trying to use all of us to coordinate His work.

The third prayer component is to celebrate. In verses 12-13, it says that God is going to break the yokes and the burdens that were on the people. The glorious thing in this passage is that God comes through. He always does. You and I can come boldly before the throne of grace before our Heavenly Father knowing that He is capable and in His time and in His purpose, He will come through. We do not need to be discouraged and neither do we need to wring our hands as though God is impotent and unable to intervene in human affairs to change things and break the yokes that burden us. God has, He can, and He will come through.

With great encouragement, Paul would close out the resurrection chapter in I Corinthians 15:58 by saying, "Therefore my beloved brothers, be ye steadfast, unmovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord so that your labor is not in vain in the Lord."

Sermon by Dr. Jim Futral
Discovering God's Design for Your Life - Jeremiah 29:11

If you want to know God's will for your life, ask Him. He created you. He is the one who recreates us and He is the one who reveals His plan for us. Probably most of us at least at one time or another stumble along and stumble into the will of God. Maybe we stumble along in life and ignore the fact that the great God of heaven who designed us desires for us to know what His plans are for us. In Jeremiah 29:11, it is not only a word from God to Jeremiah but also a word from God to Jeremiah to deliver to the captives in Babylon. It is a word from God for you and me. God is at work in your life today. His plans though oftentimes are unfulfilled because of our disobedience, rebellion, or detours in life are not what He wants for us ultimately. He has something glorious for us if we would simply ask Him. Thinking about God's great design and you finding it, I want you to consider three things in this verse.

"The Plan" – God has a plan. Amazingly, wonderfully God has a design and a desire for your life. Planning is actually to organize a series of actions to achieve a specific outcome. Listen to what this verse says that God says, "I know the plan." It is His thoughts about you. He is speaking about His thoughts about what He wants you to do. President Dwight Eisenhower once said, "Plans are nothing. Planning is everything." When you stop and think about it the plans themselves are not going to do anything, but the planning process in getting in on preparation for something is extremely important. Here God says engage with me in the planning. I will unveil it and unfold it before you. We will walk into the future together. It might be important to notice that He does not say that He will tell you all of the plans for all of the days ahead of you. If you knew everything that was ahead, it could distract you and keep you from following right now. God says I will lead you. I will give you the plans. Walk with me! For me, a lot of what I know about the best of the will of God is what I have been blessed to see through the rearview mirror of life. Life moves on and you have to face it in the windshield of life, and it is there that the plan unfolds.

The second thing I want you to consider about this verse is "the span" of the plan. It is not just a momentary thing, just a single decision, and a now and know forever plan. No, it is an on-going experience. The span is from this end and on into eternity. God says I know the full thing – the full span of the plan that I have for your life. While you may try to interpret that as where am I going to live, who will I marry, or when will I die, He certainly knows those things. But more than that, you need to see the great substance in what He has involved in the plan. He said what I have planned for you throughout this entire span is peace and not evil. The Word says, "Plans to prosper you and not to harm you."

Isn't that good to know that God is looking at you and the unfolding plan of your life and wants to do good things in you. That my friend is glorious. This same verse points out that He has prosperity in mind for us. I want to do good things in your life. I want you to prosper. Sometimes when I hear people who are preaching the prosperity Gospel – you know the name it and claim it get what you want life – it is not so much talking about something good for folks as it is good for the folks that are talking about the folks. I do want to point out that God says, "I want to do you good." I want you to prosper. Indeed, He does. The span of the plan reaches all of the way to an expected end. What in the world is the expected end of which God is speaking? He is talking about hope. He is talking about things being really okay and really good. I want to give you the future for which you had hoped. That is the conclusion of the full span of the plan.

The third thing to consider is "the ban" of the plan. If you read pass verse 11 to verse 12 and following, you will find that God says, "Call on me!" Pray and I will listen. He said that the ban that would keep us from discovering the great design of God's will for our lives is that we do not ask. James indicated that when he said, "You have not because you ask not" (James 4:2b). Jesus on the positive side said, "Ask and you shall receive; seek and ye shall find; knock and it shall be opened unto

you” (Matthew 7:7). If you don’t ask, seek, and knock nothing is coming. God offers to us His great plan, and we put a ban on it simply by not seeking it.

In other terms you would say, we don’t have because we don’t seek God’s wonderful plan. We may seek our own. We may ask others to inform us, but God Almighty opens the door to the wonder of the future and eternity. He tells us to come and participate with Him. “I know the plans I have for you.” Today look up, listen, and get in on God’s marvelous plan for you.