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Session Outlines / Sermon Starters

Session One: The Priority of Prayer: Staying Connected 24/7

Memory Verse: "Before daybreak the next morning, Jesus got up and went out to an isolated place to pray." (Mark 1:35 NLT)

Jesus made prayer the highest priority in his life. Many times in the Bible we see Jesus setting aside time to be alone with God despite a hectic schedule. We will discuss how Jesus handled his busyness, what kinds of things he prayed about, and why.

1. Jesus had a very busy ministry. Jesus was a man of action, whose ministry was a whirlwind of teaching, healing, casting out demons, and proclaiming the kingdom of God.

"After John was put in prison, Jesus went into Galilee, proclaiming the good news of God. 'The time has come,' he said. 'The kingdom of God is near. Repent and believe the good news!' As Jesus walked beside the Sea of Galilee, he saw Simon and his brother Andrew casting a net into the lake, for they were fishermen. 'Come, follow me,' Jesus said, 'and I will make you fishers of men.' At once they left their nets and followed him. When he had gone a little farther, he saw James son of Zebedee and his brother John in a boat, preparing their nets. Without delay he

called them, and they left their father Zebedee in the boat with the hired men and followed him. They went to Capernaum, and when the Sabbath came, Jesus went into the synagogue and began to teach. The people were amazed at his teaching, because he taught them as one who had authority, not as the teachers of the law. Just then a man in their synagogue who was possessed by an evil spirit cried out, 'What do you want with us, Jesus of Nazareth? Have you come to destroy us? I know who you are-the Holy One of God!' 'Be quiet!' said Jesus sternly. 'Come out of him!' The evil spirit shook the man violently and came out of him with a shriek. The people were all so amazed that they asked each other, 'What is this? A new teaching-and with authority! He even gives orders to evil spirits and they obey him.' News about him spread quickly over the whole region of Galilee. As soon as they left the synagogue, they went with James and John to the home of Simon and Andrew. Simon's mother-in-law was in bed with a fever, and they told Jesus about her. So he went to her, took her hand and helped her up. The fever left her and she began to wait on them. That evening after sunset the people brought to Jesus all the sick and demon-possessed. The whole town gathered at the door, and Jesus healed many who had various diseases. He also drove out many demons, but he would not let the demons speak because they knew who he was" (Mark 1:14–34 NIV).

2. Mark 1:35 shows us that, as busy as he was, Jesus took time to pray to his heavenly Father.

"Very early in the morning, while it was still dark, Jesus got up, left the house and went off to a solitary place, where he prayed" (Mark 1:35 NIV).

3. Jesus had just had a successful ministry in Capernaum healing many sick and demon-possessed people. Early the next day, Jesus went out by himself for a time of prayer. By the time the disciples found him, he was ready to face the day.

We must follow Christ's example by making time for personal prayer. Those who help and serve on Sunday especially need to set aside time with God to restore their strength. Our ability to serve will be hindered if we neglect times of spiritual replenishment. During his ministry on earth, Jesus was in constant prayer with the Father. Mark recorded three of these times (see Mark 6:46 and 14:32–42).

4. There was a connection between Jesus' decision to make time for prayer and the way he dealt with people's expectations.

"Simon and his companions went to look for him, and when they found him, they exclaimed: 'Everyone is looking for you!' Jesus replied, 'Let us go somewhere else-to the nearby villages-so I can preach there also. That is why I have come.' So he traveled throughout Galilee, preaching in their synagogues and driving out demons" (Mark 1:36–39 NIV).

5. "If we are too busy to pray, we are too busy."

6. Jesus prayed at key transitions and crisis points in his life. For example, here he prayed as the Holy Spirit descended on him after his baptism. He also prayed in the Garden of Gethsemane and even on the cross.

"When all the people were being baptized, Jesus was baptized too. And as he was praying, heaven was opened and the Holy Spirit descended on him in bodily form like a dove. And a voice came from heaven: "You are my Son, whom I love; with you I am well pleased." (Luke 3:21–22 NIV).

"About eight days after Jesus said this, he took Peter, John and James with him and went up onto a mountain to pray. As he was praying, the appearance of his face changed, and his clothes became as bright as a flash of lightning. Two men, Moses and Elijah, appeared in glorious splendor, talking with Jesus. They spoke about his departure, which he was about to bring to fulfillment at Jerusalem" (Luke 9:28–31 NIV).

7. It's important to examine what specific things Jesus prayed about so we can do the same. First, Jesus prayed before making decisions such as in the case of choosing his twelve disciples. This should serve an example to us that we, like Jesus, need the strength and wisdom of the Father in our lives.

"One of those days Jesus went out to a mountainside to pray, and spent the night praying to God. When morning came, he called his disciples to him and chose twelve of them, whom he also designated apostles..." (Luke 6:12–13 NIV).

8. In Luke 22:41–44, Jesus prayed before going to the cross. In the garden Jesus' prayer was agonizing. Yet, his prayer brought clarity to his situation. On the cross, Jesus gave up his spirit and died.

"He withdrew about a stone's throw beyond them, knelt down and prayed, 'Father, if you are willing, take this cup from me; yet not my will, but yours be done.' An angel from heaven appeared to him and strengthened him. And being in anguish, he prayed more earnestly, and his sweat was like drops of blood falling to the ground" (Luke 22:41–44 NIV).

"Jesus called out with a loud voice, 'Father, into your hands I commit my spirit.' When he had said this, he breathed his last" (Luke 23:46 NIV).

Jesus made prayer the highest priority in his life, knowing that he could only accomplish his mission through complete dependence on the Father. It is so with us as well. Prayer is the primary means by which we stay connected to the Father, Jesus, and the Holy Spirit. And apart from that connection, we can do nothing (John 15:5).

3 Levels of Deepening

By Mark Strauss

Session 1: The Priority of Prayer: Staying Connected 24-7 (Mark 1:35-39; Luke 3:21; 6:12; 9:28; 23:46; John 15:5)

Level 1

Jesus made prayer the highest priority in his life, knowing that he could only accomplish his mission through complete dependence on the Father.

Level 2

Making prayer a priority (Mark 1:35-39). Despite his hectic schedule of teaching, healing and exorcisms, Jesus set aside time to be alone with God.

Turning to God during times of crisis and decision (Luke 3:21; 6:12; 9:28; 23:46). We find Jesus praying before the most important and difficult times in his ministry.

Staying connected to the only source of strength and power (John 15:5). Jesus taught his disciples that as the “branches,” staying connected to the “Vine” (himself) was the only way to live a successful Christian life.

Level 3

Making prayer a priority (Mark 1:35-39).

- Mark describes Jesus as a man of action, whose ministry was a whirlwind of teaching, healing, casting out demons, and proclaiming the kingdom of God (Mark 1:14-28).
- After a busy day of ministry, Jesus worked late into the night healing people and casting out demons (Mark 1:32-34).
- Despite this exhausting schedule, Jesus arose at the crack of dawn to pray, knowing that he could be successful only by knowing and doing the will of God.

Turning to God during times of crisis and decision (Luke 3:21; 6:12; 9:28; 23:46)

- Jesus is found in prayer at key transitions in his life, such as his baptism, the inauguration of his public ministry, and the transfiguration, which occurs just before he sets out for Jerusalem to suffer and die (Luke 3:21; 9:28).
- Jesus prays before the most momentous decisions of his life, such as choosing the Twelve who will carry on his ministry after him (Luke 6:12).
- Jesus prays during the times of greatest crisis in his life, such as his agony in the Garden of Gethsemane (Luke 23:46)

Staying connected to the only source of strength and power (John 15:5).

- In his final instructions to his disciples before going to the cross, Jesus warned them of dangers ahead and promised he would send the Holy Spirit to guide and empower them (John 14-16)
- Using the metaphor of a vine and its branches, Jesus told the disciples to stay connected to him, their only source of life and sustenance.
- Application: Prayer is the primary means a branch (a disciple) stays connected to the vine (Jesus), because apart from him we can do nothing.

