



CALVARY
TUSCALOOSA

TEACHING PLAN
DECEMBER 30, 2018



TIMES HAVE CHANGED AND ARE CHANGING!

MARK 1:35-39

DECEMBER 30, 2018

TEACHING PLAN

PREPARATION

- > Spend the week reading through and studying Mark 1:35-39. Consult the commentary provided and any additional study tools (such as a concordance or Bible dictionary) to enhance your preparation.
- > Determine which discussion points and questions will work best with your group.
- > Pray for your pastors, the upcoming group meeting, your teaching, your group members, and their receptivity to the study.

HIGHLIGHTS

TAKEAWAY: During Jesus' earthly ministry, He took regular times of private prayer to God the Father. This passage describes Jesus' habit of prayer and its place in His public ministry.

WHY IT'S IMPORTANT: Followers of Jesus should seek a biblical view of prayer and be moved to become people of prayer by the Spirit's help.

GOSPEL CONNECTION: Followers of Christ receive His power for daily life by means of prayer.

INTRODUCTION

As your group time begins, use this section to help get the conversation going.

- 1 If an irreligious person asked you to define prayer, what would you say?
- 2 Do you think prayer is offensive to people in our culture? Why or why not?
- 3 What do you think distinguishes Christian prayer from the prayers of other religions?

For people who do not practice any religion, prayer seems strange. It may even come across as psychotic. And, if there is no God, then people who are praying to an unseen Deity are certainly out of touch with reality.

But for any religion, prayer is a central part of their subjective religious experience. All faiths practice prayer in some form or another. What distinguishes Christian prayer from that of other faiths? The difference is found in its spring, or basis. Christians approach God with boldness because of their position before the Father. That position is one of sonship, acceptance, and justification due to the work of Christ on the cross. All other religions approach prayer within a spiritual economic system that is based on merits. In fact, prayer itself is a currency in these systems. The more prayers you say, the more spiritual coinage will hit your spiritual bank account. This currency can be used to cancel out debts (sins) or to purchase blessings. For those in Christ, our spiritual debt has been paid completely and finally by Him. We seek God in prayer not as those seeking His favor, but as those who already have it.

ALTERNATE INTRODUCTION

Do you think Americans tend to pray more out loud or silently? Why?

Do you think Americans pray more alone or in groups? Why?

Prayer is a multi-faceted practice across the world. Not only are there vast differences in praying across religions, but even in Christianity across culture and denominations there are major differences in the way this habit is carried out.

In 2017, the Barna group released the findings of a study the organization conducted concerning prayer in the United States. They concluded that the individualistic and private bent of Westerners has deeply affected the practice of prayer.¹

Let's look together at Christ's example of prayer and think about how we ought to put this ancient and central habit of grace into practice.

1. "Silent and Solo: How Americans Pray." Barna Group. Accessed November 12, 2018. <http://barna.com/research/silent-solo-americans-pray>.

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Notes:

UNDERSTANDING

Unpack the biblical text to discover what Scripture says or means about a particular topic.

After healing a man with an unclean spirit in the synagogue in Capernaum (Mark 1:21-28), things escalated quickly. Following that miraculous event, Jesus' fame spread everywhere throughout the surrounding region of Galilee. Jesus and the disciples retreated to Simon and Andrew's house, where they found Simon's mother-in-law in bed with a fever. Jesus healed her. Meanwhile, word was spreading and the sun was setting. Sundown marked the end of the Sabbath and people were now allowed to carry their sick to Jesus.

Mark reported that after sundown, the whole city gathered at the house (v. 33). Mark and the other New Testament writers often employed hyperbole, and that is likely what Mark was doing here. Mark explained that Jesus healed many and cast out many demons (v. 34). Maybe the whole town wasn't there, but many from the town were.

It was this intense episode of public ministry that drove Jesus to private prayer. We are not Jesus, but His example is valuable and intended for us. If Jesus sought times of private prayer, how much more should we?

Our lives are full of changes and challenges. As we seek to serve the Lord in whatever position He has placed us, it is inevitable that we will need refreshment, stabilization, and guidance. God is our firm, unchanging foundation, and prayer is our anchor to Him.

> Have a volunteer read Mark 1:35a.

35a Very early in the morning, while it was still dark

- When did Jesus pray? Is this significant? Why or why not?

Notes:

In this episode recorded by Mark, Jesus prayed very early in the morning. That isn't to say that He never prayed during other times, because He did. It was at night during His time of prayer in the Garden of Gethsemane. The high priestly prayer of Jesus (John 17) was uttered during the daytime.

This account in Mark, however, is different. Mark gave a glimpse into Jesus' secret prayer life. The high priestly prayer was a ministry to His disciples. The prayers in the garden were precipitated by His impending betrayal and crucifixion. The episode in Mark, though, is a picture of Jesus' regular time of prayer.

- What are the benefits of praying early in the day?

There are two primary benefits of praying in the morning. One is practical; the other is psychological. But both of these reasons help us avoid the rush of the day and give way to focused prayer.

First, Jesus desired private prayer with His Father. Jesus was becoming increasingly well known in the area and highly sought after. The whole town was at the house just the day before seeking His help. By waking early, Jesus was able to make use of a time when most people would have been asleep. There weren't any demands on Him at this hour. Was He tired? Of course He was. But He craved intimacy with

His Father more than sleep. Times haven't changed so much. Early in the morning is still an ideal time for us to have uninterrupted time to pray and seek the one true and living God.

Notes:

Second, Jesus knew He would face a slew of demands on His time and energy that day, and with them all the worries, stresses, and challenges. By waking early and spending time with His Father, Jesus was able to set His heart and mind on things above before engaging with the earthly. Praying first sets the trajectory for the work of the day. C.S. Lewis explained, "The very moment you wake up each morning...[a]ll your wishes and hopes for the day rush at you like wild animals. And the first job each morning consists simply in shoving them all back; in listening to that other voice, taking that other point of view, letting that other larger, stronger, quieter life come flowing in."²

> Have a volunteer read Mark 1:35b.

35b Jesus got up, left the house and went off to a solitary place

Where we pray and when we pray ought to never become law for us, but where and when we pray does matter. The idea here is that we should take practical, sacrificial steps to give ourselves to prayer as we would do for anything that we highly value and make a priority in our lives.

- Where did Jesus pray? Why do you think He went there?

Jesus woke early and went to a "desolate place." Jesus was staying at Peter's mother-in-law's house along with His disciples, and possibly others. It wasn't the best place for private prayer, with people all around. By going to a "desolate place," Jesus was able to pray without hindrance.

2. Lewis, C. S. *Mere Christianity*.
New York, NY: Touchstone, 1996,
170.

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- Do we need to find our own desolate places to pray? Why or why not?

Notes:

- Why is it important to have time for uninterrupted prayer?

Along with waking early, finding a place that is solitary helps us limit distractions and truly pray unhindered. Jesus probably walked some distance from the house and found a secluded place outside. We may need to find a part of our home that is off to itself. There are many places that we go to be alone to pray, but it does take intentional planning.

> Have a volunteer read Mark 1:35c-39.

35c where he prayed. 36 Simon and his companions went to look for him, 37 and when they found him, they exclaimed: "Everyone is looking for you!"

38 Jesus replied, "Let us go somewhere else—to the nearby villages—so I can preach there also. That is why I have come." 39 So he traveled throughout Galilee, preaching in their synagogues and driving out demons.

Just as important as the place and time is the activity. What did Jesus do? Well, He prayed. But prayer must be learned, and we need guidance to know how to pray. You may remember that the disciples marveled at Jesus' prayer life and asked Him to teach them how to pray. We should also seek to learn from Christ on the subject of prayer.

- How would you describe prayer? What is important to include in our times of prayer?

Unfortunately, many Christians view God as a vending machine and prayer as the change that we put in to get what we want. This view is neither helpful nor biblical. An oft quoted passage in relationship to prayer is Matthew 7:7-8. We should be careful not to misread these verses. We may like the idea of a God who gives us what we want, even if we have to do a little persuading. We'll go to church, read the Bible, and try to be a good person, as long as God gives us what we ask for. However, we should be careful not to stop at verse 8 and fail to let the truth of Matthew 7:9-11 sink in.

Notes:

Verses 9-11 teach that God is like a good Father who will never give His children evil gifts. But, here's the key. God is the One who has the right to decide if a gift is good or if a gift is evil. So, God will never give an evil gift to His child when His child asks for a good gift. Also, God will never give an evil gift to His child when he asks for an evil gift. Just because we ask for something doesn't mean that it is good. God won't give us a snake, even if we ask for it.

- In verses 36-39, we read of Jesus' action that followed this time of prayer. What does this indicate about our need for prayer to precede action?
- Where does this show that Jesus sought His power for action?

It is important to recognize our need for prayer in living out our daily lives. In this account, we see that Jesus made prayer a priority before He ministered to the people. Jesus had a deep dependence on His Father for the power He needed every day. As His followers, we are to have this same level of dependence. We live in times of continual change, but God is our firm, unchanging foundation and prayer is our anchor to Him.

APPLICATION

Help your group identify how the truths from the Scripture passage apply directly to their lives.

Notes:

- 1 When do you pray? Is there a better time that you could pray unhindered? Is prayer a priority in your life? Do you make time and sacrifice to engage in it? Why or why not?
- 2 How does a commitment to prayer change our relationships with others?
- 3 How might a commitment to prayer give us greater awareness of opportunities to share the gospel, as well as the power for boldness to share the gospel with others?

PRAY

Pray and thank God for Christ's example of dependent prayer. Pray for a greater desire and commitment to prayer, seeking power for ministry through the Spirit of God.

FOLLOW UP

Notes:

Midway through this week, send a follow-up email to your group with some or all of the following information:

- > Questions to consider as they continue to reflect on what they learned this week:
 - What needs to change in your current approach to prayer?
 - How have you sought to move toward change in prayer this week?
- > A note of encouragement, following up on any specific prayer requests mentioned during your group gathering.
- > The challenge to memorize Mark 1:35.

MARK 1:35-39

1:35-37. The events up to this point had been rapid, coming one after the other. They also would have been emotionally and spiritually exhausting. The humanity of Jesus is evident in these words: Jesus got up and went off to a solitary place, where he prayed. Even Jesus needed to recharge his batteries by withdrawing from the crowds and talking with his Father. This was a time of renewal and preparation for Jesus. Two other times in Mark's Gospel we see Jesus getting away to pray (6:46; 14:32-41). Each time he was preparing for a crisis.

Notes:

While Jesus was concerned about focusing on God's mission for him, the disciples seemed to be caught up in the increasing popularity of Jesus. Perhaps they felt they should seize the day: Simon and his companions went to look for him; and when they found him, they exclaimed, "Everyone is looking for you!"

1:38-39. Jesus' desire to go to the nearby villages showed his desire not to be seen as just a popular miracle worker. He reiterated his purpose by saying, so I can preach there also. That is why I have come. Jesus' primary mission was to preach the good news. The miracles of healing and casting out of demons was secondary—a means to the end of presenting the gospel and getting people to respond to that good news. Jesus continued a pattern of presenting the gospel by going into their synagogues and driving out demons. The synagogue was the primary place where the Scriptures were interpreted. What better place to proclaim the good news to the people and their leaders? The preaching of the word preceded the demonstration of miracles, showing that the miracles backed up the authority of the Messiah's proclamations.