

SESSION 3

A PRAYER OF SURRENDER

▶ **The Point**

Approach prayer with humble submission to the will of God.

▶ **The Passage**

Matthew 6:10; James 4:6-10,13-17

▶ **The Bible Meets Life**

In the last few years, a new word has entered our vocabulary: *selfie*. The word refers to taking a picture of yourself with a cellphone, and the word fits our culture perfectly. We have become a “selfie” culture, catering to a self-centered life.

We can experience positive benefits when we’re self-reliant and independent, but that’s quite different from being self-centered and narcissistic. Parents know how strong-willed toddlers can be when demanding their own way—even when what they want may be the worst thing for them. Unfortunately, too many of us never grew out of that phase; like toddlers, our “selfie” culture demands life on its own terms and tends to forget God’s rule.

The “selfie life” is the enemy of spiritual growth. As believers who want to develop a prayer life, we have to surrender our will to find God’s will. We must reject the seeming appeal of a “selfie life,” and when we do, we gain so much more.

▶ **The Setting**

Jesus gave His disciples a model to guide them as they prayed. Using the model, He taught them to honor God’s name as holy. Then He instructed them to surrender their lives to God. James also instructed Christians on the meaning of surrender. In his epistle, he addressed the need for believers to give their lives to God with humility. Also, he insisted God’s people should give themselves to doing God’s will as their first priority.

What does the Bible say?

Your kingdom (Matt. 6:10)—
The eternal community in which God rules as king with complete authority over His people who have received His gift of salvation through Jesus Christ.

Matthew 6:10; James 4:6-10,13-17

Matt. 6:10 Your kingdom come,

your will be done,

on earth as it is in heaven.

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Jas. 4:6 But he gives more grace. Therefore it says, "God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble."

⁷ Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you.

⁸ Draw near to God, and he will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded.

⁹ Be wretched and mourn and weep. Let your laughter be turned to mourning and your joy to gloom.

¹⁰ Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will exalt you.

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Jas. 4:13 Come now, you who say, "Today or tomorrow we will go into such and such a town and spend a year there and trade and make a profit"—

¹⁴ yet you do not know what tomorrow will bring. What is your life? For you are a mist that appears for a little time and then vanishes.

¹⁵ Instead you ought to say, "If the Lord wills, we will live and do this or that."

¹⁶ As it is, you boast in your arrogance. All such boasting is evil.

¹⁷ So whoever knows the right thing to do and fails to do it, for him it is sin.

GET INTO THE STUDY



5 minutes



Notes

DISCUSS: Question #1 on page 85 of the Personal Study Guide (PSG): “What’s the most entertaining selfie you’ve seen or taken?” Allow time for each person to respond.

GUIDE: Direct group members to “The Bible Meets Life” on page 86 of the PSG. Emphasize the importance of submission to God’s will by reading or summarizing the text—or by encouraging group members to read it on their own.

GUIDE: Call attention to “The Point” on page 86 of the PSG: “Approach prayer with humble submission to the will of God.”

ACTIVITY (OPTIONAL): In advance, create a flag of surrender using some white cloth and a stick or branch. As you begin the study, wave the flag. You may even want to shout, “I surrender!” Lead a discussion of what the white flag typically represents.

Ask: “What was the party who was waving the white flag supposed to do when they wanted to surrender? What was the party who was witnessing the waving of the white flag supposed to do for the party waving the flag? As Christians, what does it really mean for us to surrender?”

PRAY: Transition into the study by asking the Lord to reveal areas of our lives that we have yet to surrender to Him. Thank God for desiring the best for us and for helping us find His best as we submit to Him.

Dotted lines for taking notes.

Matthew 6:10 Commentary

[Verse 10] Honoring the Lord when we pray opens the door for surrendering to Him. Jesus taught us to honor the Lord's name as holy when we pray. (See 6:9.) Then He taught us how to move from honor to surrender. The kingdom of God doesn't consist of a castle with walls. His kingdom consists of relationships, not territories. It's a kingdom without borders composed everywhere of people who have given their lives to the Lord. In His eternal kingdom, He possesses complete authority and exercises unending power. When we invite Christ into our lives, we become citizens of His kingdom. Life as a kingdom citizen is filled with joy and fulfillment from a growing relationship with Him. As kingdom citizens, we reach out to others so they can experience kingdom citizenship by God's gift of eternal life through Christ.

In a way, the kingdom of God came to earth when the Messiah arrived in Bethlehem. But in another way, God's kingdom has not yet come completely. Jesus instructed His disciples to understand His kingdom would come when He returned. (See 25:31-46.) Therefore, His kingdom has already come in Christ, but it's not yet complete here. Between now and the day Jesus returns, kingdom citizens have been challenged to advance and promote the fulfillment of God's kingdom in the world. Kingdom citizens devoted to God allows His reach to be extended through them as they live according to His ways and reach others in His name. We make the fulfillment of His kingdom our priority when we pray.

Jesus didn't stop with a request for God's kingdom to come. He went on to address the priority of doing God's will. He directed us to live out the priority of His kingdom by submitting ourselves exclusively to God and doing nothing less than what He wants. We surrender ourselves to God when we pray so we can do His will. Jesus gave us a pattern to follow. We surrender to God so His will can be accomplished on earth just like it's done in heaven. The mere idea of heaven strikes a chord of hope in our hearts. The closer we grow in our walk with God, the more we look forward to being there. One of the most favorable features about heaven involves the lack of resistance to God's will there. Whatever God wants is done without question or delay. Sin doesn't exist there. Rebellion against God can't be found there either. We can hardly begin to imagine the perfect joy of serving Him in such a splendid environment. But we're not in heaven yet. We live in a world in which sin slows us down and trips us up as we try to carry out the Lord's directives. We do our best when we surrender our lives to do God's will every time we pray. In doing so, we affirm that we want His will to be accomplished on earth through us in the same way that it's carried out in heaven. When we submit ourselves to doing God's will in prayer, His kingdom agenda can be accomplished through us.



STUDY THE BIBLE

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ALTERNATE QUESTION:
What are the consequences of pride in our lives?

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- Four Ways to Surrender to God
- ▶ Submit to God.
 - ▶ Resist the Devil.
 - ▶ Draw near to God.
 - ▶ Confess your sin.

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James 4:6-10

⁶ But he gives more grace. Therefore it says, “God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble.” ⁷ Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. ⁸ Draw near to God, and he will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded. ⁹ Be wretched and mourn and weep. Let your laughter be turned to mourning and your joy to gloom. ¹⁰ Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will exalt you.

READ: Ask a group member to read aloud James 4:6-10 on page 88 of the PSG.

GUIDE: Use the Commentary on the next page of this Leader Guide to help group members understand the seriousness of sin.

DISCUSS: Question #3 on page 88 of the PSG: **“What are the benefits of humbly surrendering to God?”**

SUMMARIZE: Highlight the main points from pages 90 of the PSG. Living under Christ’s lordship with a desire for His will begins and ends with humbling ourselves before Him. How do we do this?

- ▶ **Submit to God.**
- ▶ **Resist the devil.**
- ▶ **Draw near to God.**
- ▶ **Confess.**

LEADER PACK: Display **Pack Item 9**, the “Surrender” poster, to help group members understand the importance of surrender. Invite group members to consider each of the four ways we can surrender to God. **Ask:** “How can we put each one into practice?” Discuss with your group what it looks like to surrender.

TRANSITION: The next verses show us how we can humbly surrender our plans to God’s plans.

James 4:6-10 Commentary

[Verse 6] James affirmed the need for disciples to surrender to the lordship of Christ with humility. When we examine his instruction in James 4:6-10, we gain a stronger grasp of what it means to surrender to the Lord. James urged followers of Christ to surrender to God so His kingdom can come through their lives. Granted, surrendering to God and following through with obedience each day can become a daunting task. At times, living out our surrender to God can appear to be nothing less than impossible. We address the struggle by turning to the Lord with humility. When we humble ourselves before the Lord, we can count on Him to be gracious to us and give us what we need so we can serve Him effectively.

[Verse 7] The Lord wants to help us so His kingdom can be advanced through us. Therefore, we don't need to resist God and what He's trying to do in and through us. He's waiting for us to turn to Him and seek His grace so His kingdom can come on earth as it is in heaven. Instead of resisting the grace of God, James taught us that we should resist the manipulation of the devil. He's the predator who's behind every attempt to make us throw up our hands and quit serving the Lord. He's also the one responsible for the lies that would deceive us into turning our backs on the Lord.

[Verse 8] The certainty of God's grace urges us to nourish a close relationship with Him. Because we need His grace in our lives, we're wise when we draw closer to Him. According to James, coming closer to the Lord involves our hands and hearts. Our sin leaves us with filthy hands. If we want the gap between us and God to close, we must get honest about our sin. In other words, we wash our hands clean. We're also required to examine our hearts. Surrendering to God means ridding our hearts of a desire to build our own kingdoms. Then we can turn our hearts toward the coming of His kingdom on earth.

[Verse 9] If we take our sin seriously, we begin to see it's a painful matter. Our sin makes us feel dreadfully ashamed of ourselves. In turn, we're seized by a deep sense of agony over the way we've broken God's heart. Our agony gives way to sorrow that's exhibited in the tears of remorse we shed when we come before God to confess our sin.

[Verse 10] James turned our attention to humility once more. We approach the Lord with humble submission when we acknowledge that we want His kingdom to come on earth. When humility moves us to fall on our faces before God, He responds by picking us up and putting us back on our feet. God exalts us so we can be effective in the work involved with the coming of His kingdom.



STUDY THE BIBLE

Notes

James 4:13-17

13 Come now, you who say, "Today or tomorrow we will go into such and such a town and spend a year there and trade and make a profit"— **14** yet you do not know what tomorrow will bring. What is your life? For you are a mist that appears for a little time and then vanishes. **15** Instead you ought to say, "If the Lord wills, we will live and do this or that." **16** As it is, you boast in your arrogance. All such boasting is evil. **17** So whoever knows the right thing to do and fails to do it, for him it is sin.

READ: Ask a group member to read aloud James 4:13-17 on page 90 of the PSG.

DISCUSS: Question #4 on page 91 of the PSG: "How does an awareness of the brevity of life help us live surrendered lives?"

RECAP: As we pray for God's kingdom to come, we also are to pray for His will to be done. We focus on His will—His plans—not our own. His plans are always better for us. God knows the future. Unfortunately, we often forget that simple truth. Just as we pray for God's kingdom to come, we are to pray for God's will to be done—nothing less and nothing else. We surrender our lives and our plans to Christ. We discover His plans only after we have aligned with His heart.

DISCUSS: Question #5 on page 91 of the PSG: "How can we help each other surrender our plans to God's plans?"

DO: Direct group members to complete the activity, "Give It Up," on page 89 of the PSG to help them wrestle with what it means to surrender to God in prayer.

Draw a line from items in the left column that demonstrate our surrender to God to match His responses on the right hand column: [The PSG has two columns of sentences.] Write a prayer of surrender as you give up specific areas of your life to the Lord.

GUIDE: Refer back to "The Point" for this session: "Our prayers are driven by the desire to honor God."

ALTERNATE QUESTION:

When have you discovered God's plans are better than yours?

James 4:13-17 Commentary

[Verse 13] In the Model Prayer, Jesus underscored the necessity of surrendering our plans to God's plans. James helped us understand how to put Jesus' instruction to work in our daily routines. He brought up a common mistake Christians make. We tend to make our plans without any consideration of what the Lord wants us to do. Our plans for the days ahead unfold with a view toward advancing our kingdoms. When we're in that frame of mind, we think only about what we want to do, and we plan accordingly.

[Verse 14] When we live in that frame of mind, we make two mistakes. First, we don't have a guarantee that tomorrow will come our way. Planning for tomorrow with the Lord's direction for us in mind enables us to trust Him to give us tomorrow if He sees fit to provide it for us. Second, we fail to account for the time we'll be given to live. When we make our plans without thinking of His will for us in keeping with His kingdom, we let ourselves begin to believe we'll live for a long time. Our lives can be over in a flash, and we never know when the last day for us will come. We're foolish if we overlook the frailty of our lives.

[Verse 15] Only the Lord knows when the time will be right to call us home to heaven. Wise believers take God into account in planning each day. Our daily plans are submitted to His will because doing His plan matters most of all. When we surrender to God's will as we plan, we place each day in His hands. God's fully aware of the challenges we'll face and the opportunities we can embrace as the day unfolds before us. In turn, we plan our day and our lives under His leadership so His will can be done through us.

[Verses 16-17] When we plan our days without surrendering to the Lord and what He wants, we run the risk of turning into braggarts. When we give no thought to submitting our plans to His plans for us, we grow more self-centered. Eventually, we think about nothing but what we want and exclude the Lord completely. When our arrogance consumes us, our boasting grows more audacious. In the Lord's eyes, arrogant bragging is evil. It's evil because we're focused on the success of our plans and disregard what God wants us to do. Our eagerness to do what we want takes supremacy over our willingness to do God's will. We usually think about sin as something we do that's wrong in God's eyes. Indeed, we sin against God when we decide to take actions that reflect rebellion against Him. We refer to such actions of rebellion as sins of commission. But sin can also involve what we decide not to do. When we refuse to do what's good, we sin against God too. It's called a sin of omission. When we know that we should surrender to His will but we ignore Him anyway, we sin against Him.

Previous *Biblical Illustrator* articles "Kingdom of Heaven' in Matthew" (Spring 2017), "Genuine Humility" (Summer 2009), and "A Christian Ethic of Business" (Summer 2003) relate to this lesson and can be purchased, along with other articles for this quarter, at lifeway.com/biblicalillustrator. Look for Bundles: Bible Studies for Life.

