*DAILY DEVOTIONAL*

January 30 – February 4

“Asking Prayer”

**Monday, January 30 1 Samuel 1:1-20**

*“I asked the Lord for him”*

Hannah’s pain is more than she can bear. A barren wife was seen as an embarrassment in the ancient world. Children were gifts of God, but they were also important economically in the ancient social structure. They contributed to the family wealth through their work, they cared for their parents in old age, and they ensured the future of the family by inheriting the family wealth. When Elkanah follows social custom by having a second wife so that children can be brought into the home, the second wife proves to be a constant source of pain to Hannah.

Hannah’s earnest prayer in the Shiloh sanctuary is followed by Eli’s blessing, after which she is able to eat and “her face was no longer downcast.” There is a striking contrast between the Hannah who is too despondent to eat and the Hannah who emerges from God’s presence full of hope and confidence. Though her circumstances have not yet changed, she has found a peace with God, a peace that leaves her lighthearted and able to return home with her family. The conception and birth of Samuel is the Lord’s answer to her prayer.

*As with Hannah’s prayer, Lord, may mine be spoken in faith. Amen.*

**Tuesday, January 31 1 Chronicles 4:9-10**

*“And God granted him his request”*

Jabez, we are told, was more distinguished or honored than any of his brothers. Since we know nothing of his brothers it is hard to determine exactly what this means, but at the very least it tells us that Jabez was thought of favorably by others. Yet, in spite of his seeming good standing, he carried a significant handicap: his name. When he was born his mother named him Jabez, the Hebrew term meaning “distress” or “pain,” as a result of what she endured during his birth. Given the ancient belief that one’s name represented an individual’s character and in some cases personal destiny, Jabez prayed that God would overturn any curse associated with his name into blessing.

Two of his four petitions focus on physical circumstances (expanded territorial holdings and freedom from pain) and two deal with his relationship to God (blessing and protection). The effectiveness of prayer to the God of Israel is an important theme in Scripture, and the author of Chronicles is using Jabez to remind his audience that God is responsive to prayer.

*I pray that you will bless me, Lord, so I can be a blessing to others. Amen.*

**Wednesday, February 1 1 John 3:21-24**

*“Receive from God anything we ask”*

The astonishing statement that we will receive whatever we ask echoes other similar forms of confidence found in Scripture. And, like other such statements, the statement in modified with a condition. For example, 5:14-15 in this same letter says that if we ask anything *according to God’s will*, we will obtain what we ask. Here John says that we must “obey him and do what pleases him.” Thus, prayer according to God’s will is prayer that understands what is pleasing to God and makes its request in view of that understanding.

John goes on in verses 23-24 to outline what it means to “obey him and do what pleases him.” The command of God to obey has two aspects, and they are united (that is, one can’t obey one without obeying the other). We are to believe in God’s Son, Jesus Christ, and we are to love one another. The success of such love only comes when we are living in intimacy with the Son, an intimacy that takes place when the Son is genuinely living in us and we in him. John goes on to point out that this indwelling, this intimacy, is made possible by the Spirit he gives us.

*When I ask with faith and love in my heart, Lord, I will receive what I ask. Amen.*

*DAILY DEVOTIONAL*

January 30 – February 4

“Asking Prayer”

**Thursday, February 2 James 4:1-3**

*“You do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives”*

James asks why there are interpersonal conflicts among his readers. He answers his own question by stating that people are involved in outward conflicts with each other because of their desire for inward selfish pleasure. The word translated “selfish pleasure” is the word *hedone* from which we get the English word “hedonism” – the pursuit of riches and self-centered pleasure. This selfish pursuit results in all types of conflict. In order to have what we want we have to take it, and those from whom we take it will resist.

The problem is not that we desire good things for ourselves, but in how we go about trying to attain them. Instead of engaging in the types of sinful behavior he has pointed out in verse one and the first part of verse two, James suggests in the second part of verse two that we Christians don’t have these good things because we don’t ask God for them. But, when we ask, we need to do so with the motive of desiring what is good for God (that is, according to his will) and good for others, not just what is good for us.

*You, Lord, give to the person who prays with humility. Amen.*

**Friday, February 3 John 14:12-17**

*“Ask in my name and I will do it”*

If it is true that the power of God resides in Jesus and that the disciple is invited to know Jesus and gain life from him, then in some manner the disciple will share in God’s power. Once Jesus departs, returning to the Father in heaven, the power of God will be revealed as great works will accompany those who believe (verse 12) and prayer will be answered (verse 13). This will be accomplished through the ministry of the Holy Spirit in the life of the disciple.

Jesus stated earlier that his “sheep” (his disciples) hear his voice. Now we learn that the shepherd can hear their voices in the same manner. The promise is that Jesus will do what his disciples ask in prayer that is given in “Jesus’ name” and directed to Jesus. In this way the disciples’ lives will be a continuation of Jesus’ life in the world. Both great deeds and answered prayer glorify the Father because it is Jesus who is at work still accomplishing them. But because this is so, such prayer is predicated on the assumption that it fits with the will and purposes of Christ in the world.

*May my prayer always by in your name, Lord, to accomplish your will. Amen.*

**Saturday, February 4 John 15:5-8**

*“Remain in me and your request will be granted”*

The picture of attachment to Jesus as a branch is attached to a vine is an appropriate description of the interior spiritual life Jesus desires for his disciples. To “remain” or “abide” means that the disciple in whom the Father and Son live through the Spirit is one whose life is utterly dependent on Christ. Living the Christian life is not just a matter of acknowledging who Jesus is; it is having Jesus spiritually connected to our inner lives.

The evidence of the branch remaining in the vine, of being truly alive, is that it produces fruit. Here it is important to note what the metaphor is not saying. Fruit-bearing is not a test; that is, a branch does not have to demonstrate a level of productivity to be safe from destruction. Rather, fruit-bearing is a byproduct. To be connected to the vine means that the life of Jesus is flowing through us, and this leads to fruitfulness. One of the areas of fruitfulness is in our prayer life. Those whose lives are in harmony with Jesus will find their prayers controlled by his word, and such prayers will be answered and bring added glory to God.

*Guide my requests by your word, Lord, and they will be granted. Amen.*