

Growing Disciples – Witness To The World

Growing Disciples Series – Living In The Word.

What True Discipleship Requires

Week 5: Prayer and Building Bridges (PG)

"I have become all things to all people, so that I may by all means save some."—1 Corinthians 9:22

Prayer is not just a religious activity you do before you begin your work for the Lord. Prayer is a relationship with the Master of the universe. When you pray, you enter the throne room of heaven, where decisions are made that govern the universe. God invites us to pray so that when He answers, we will know He did it. He will receive glory.

This week we will explore the crucial role of prayer in cultivating relationships and seeking to win the lost. You will learn to pray for wisdom and discernment as you seek to meet needs and share Christ. You will learn to pray that God will engineer circumstances in the lives of others to draw them to Himself and to His Son, Jesus Christ. You will pray for the people in your surveys and watch to see where God is working in their lives. Then you can join God and show His love to the needy person.

You will also learn ways to build bridges through your relationships with lost people. Building relationship bridges is a key tool in a witnessing lifestyle. Continually building relationship bridges to your family, relatives, friends, neighbors, associates, acquaintances, and even to Person X keeps you attentive to their needs. Then you will have opportunities to reach out in love and to share Christ with those who need to know Him.

OVERVIEW OF WEEK 5

Day 1: Intercession: The Greatest Work

Day 2: Be Specific

Day 3: Build Bridges

Day 4: Building Bridges in Times of Loss

Day 5: Show God's Love by Meeting Needs

VERSE TO MEMORIZE

"I have become all things to all people, so that I may by all means save some" (1 Corinthians 9:22).

DISCIPLESHIP HELPS FOR WEEK 5

Your Most Wanted (P. 14)

Day 1: Intercession: The Greatest Work

God's Word for Today

"I have become all things to all people, so that I may by all means save some" (1 Corinthians 9:22).

↕ **Read and meditate on "God's Word for Today" above and spend a moment in prayer as you begin today's lesson. Create a Scripture-memory card and begin committing this verse to memory.**

The one indispensable ingredient in a close walk with God is knowing how to pray. But real prayer is more than asking God to bless a meal, praying before a Sunday School class, or pulling the alarm of prayer in a time of trouble. We need to pray with intensity in emergencies, but someone who wants to witness to the world must "pray constantly" (see 1 Thessalonians 5:17 below), as Paul did. We need to continually pray through our concentric circles and trust that Sovereign God is working through circumstances to draw people to Himself. Keep in mind that He wants them to be saved more than you do. Prayer aligns your heart and will with God's desire to save them.

"Pray constantly."—1 Thessalonians 5:17

Believing in a supernatural God does not mean that you become passive and do not do anything. No, you are moving out to make a difference in your world; but as you go, remember that you are God's instrument. He sets your course. Your job is to intercede—that is, to pray for people—and to meet needs as God reveals them in your relationships.

① Look over your survey forms for circles 2-6. List three ways God has answered your prayers for people in your concentric circles since you began this study.

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

Can you imagine what would happen if our church uses concentric circles as its outreach program? We would complete surveys on our relationships and begin to intercede every day for those in our circles. Intercession would become a lifestyle for our church. Ruptured relationships would be made right. Members would show God's love to people in the community, and hearts would turn to Christ. We would go into worship services expecting God to work in hearts and lives.

Dick, one of the students of Dr. Thompson went out to pastor a little country church. The church had been there for many years, and members planned to remain there forever. But they did not plan to do anything.

Dick asked, "Dr. Thompson, what should I do? I preach, but nothing happens. I want them to pray, but they don't want to. They say they hired me to pray. I want them to go visiting, but they don't want to go visiting because they say visiting is my job."

Dr. Thompson responded, "Dick, why don't you share concentric circles with them?" He did.

Afterward one of the deacons said, "Preacher, I have a son who was married in this church last summer. He and his bride have not been back since. I had not even thought about it. I'm going to put them down in my circles and pray for them."

Then a grandmother said to Dick, "You know, I have a granddaughter who is 14. She has never made a profession of faith. I'm going to pray for her." Several others told Dick that the message had reminded them of someone to pray for.

As these individuals interceded for those in their concentric circles, the church had 17 people who gave their lives to Christ, doubling the size of the congregation! The people were so excited that they kept adding to their surveys. They had caught the vision of how intercession could produce a hunger for the gospel among those in their concentric circles of concern.

↕ **Now that you have done your surveys and have been interceding for several weeks, it's time to plan ways to pray more systematically for the people in your concentric circles. One suggestion is to pray for a different circle each day of the week. Or pray for a long and a short circle each day. Or divide your circles into 30 groups and pray for one group each day of the month. It does not matter as long as you have a plan. Develop your prayer plan now. Then outline your plan below.**

↕ **Praying for My Circles Today**

Continue to develop your prayer plan as suggested at the end of today's lesson. Begin praying according to your plan. As you pray, ask the Lord to reveal to you the needs of those in your circles. Ask Him to teach you how to intercede for them.

Day 2: Be Specific

God's Word for Today

"First of all, then, I urge that petitions, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgivings be made for everyone, for kings and all those who are in authority, so that we may lead a tranquil and quiet life

in all godliness and dignity. This is good, and it pleases God our Savior, who wants everyone to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth" (1 Timothy 2:1-4).

↕ **Read and meditate on "God's Word for Today" above and spend a moment in prayer as you begin today's lesson.**

As you intercede for the people in your circles of concern, do not pray in blanket generalities. God expects us to pray for specific things. If you do not pray specifically, "you do not have because you do not ask" (see James 4:2 below). How will you ever know if God answers prayer unless you pray specifically?

"You do not have because you do not ask."—James 4:2

As you pray through your concentric circles, be sensitive to the Holy Spirit's leadership to draw your attention to those who have the deepest needs. Although several hundred people may be on your survey forms, God will help you know when and how He wants you involved with a particular person. When you become aware of a need, that awareness may be your invitation to join God's work in that person's life. If you sense a particular burden for someone while praying, you may want to call or write to that person and see what needs surface from that contact.

Paul showed us how to intercede. He said, "I pray this: that your love will keep on growing in knowledge and every kind of discernment" (see Philippians 1:9 below). Paul specifically prayed for the Philippians to have wisdom and insight to meet people's needs through their love. Have you ever prayed Philippians 1:9 for anyone? Have you ever prayed for God's wisdom to meet another person's needs?

"I pray this: that your love will keep on growing in knowledge and every kind of discernment."—Philippians 1:9

When you pray, pray for wisdom. You may ask, "Holy Father, give me wisdom to deal with this person." God will give it. When you pray for wisdom, do not sit around waiting to feel wise. Begin to move. As you go, God will supply the wisdom you need: "If any of you lacks wisdom, he should ask God, who gives to all generously and without criticizing, and it will be given to him" (see James 1:5 below).

"If any of you lacks wisdom, he should ask God, who gives to all generously and without criticizing, and it will be given to him."—James 1:5

Remember, though, that before we can pray effectively for others, we have to be right with the Lord. We have to take self (circle 1) before the Lord and clear out the sin in that circle; then we can give attention to circles 2-7.

Do you want to intercede for others? Start with your relationship with God. Let me suggest a pattern for your prayers.

- "Lord, make me a clean channel for Your love."
- "Give me godly wisdom."
- "Father, engineer circumstances in their lives to draw them to You. Create circumstances through which I can love them and meet their needs."
- "Lord, make me available."
- "Lord, make me aware of their needs and show Your love through me as I seek to meet their needs."
- "Give me boldness to engage them with Your love and message of forgiveness."

↕ **Is there a relationship in your life that requires wisdom on your part? Use the suggestions above to pray for that person and for yourself. You may want to copy this list on a card to guide your prayers until this pattern becomes second nature to you.**

Follow up your prayers with loving actions. Some people may not immediately respond to you in love, so don't expect them to. Sometimes people do not know what to do with your love because they have never really been loved. Consequently, when you do something loving toward them and meet their needs, they may wonder what you want from them.

Regardless of the way the person responds to you, keep loving. Be genuine and do not expect too much too quickly. Make yourself available to God as He leads. After a while, others will learn that you really care. Meet their needs and ask God for wisdom as you work with them.

As you intercede and ask for wisdom, also ask God to engineer circumstances to draw people to Him. Sometimes it gets cloudy and dark when you start doing this. Sometimes a crisis comes, but do not let that alarm you. Sometimes darkness increases before the light breaks through. Sometimes it is a desert for months. But keep loving as you keep praying.

① **Turn to page 14 and list people whose salvation you need to pray for every day—your Most Wanted. This list should include lost persons in your immediate family as well as persons God has given you a special burden to reach.**

↕ **Praying for My Circles Today**

Use the prayer plan you developed in day 1 to pray for the appropriate concentric circles today. Also pray for your Most Wanted. Remember to pray for specific needs.

Day 3: Build Bridges

God's Word for Today

"Although I am free from all people, I have made myself a slave to all, in order to win more people. To the Jews I became like a Jew, to win Jews; to those under the law, like one under the law—though I myself am not under the law—to win those under the law. To those who are outside the law, like one outside the law—not being outside God's law, but under the law of Christ—to win those outside the law. To the weak I became weak, in order to win the weak. I have become all things to all people, so that I may by all means save some" (1 Corinthians 9:19-22).

↕ **Read and meditate on "God's Word for Today" above and spend a moment in prayer as you begin today's lesson.**

Building bridges is simply meeting needs in a person's life or showing an interest in them in such a way that you establish or cultivate a relationship. A relational bridge is a structure that allows you to cross from one side to another. For Christians, building a bridge is building a relationship that lets you cross into another person's world. Building a bridge makes the other person feel safe. Later the person will feel comfortable crossing into your world. The process of building bridges creates a relationship.

① Read again 1 Corinthians 9:19-22 below. Underline the reason the apostle Paul built relational bridges to people.

Paul built relationships to bring others to salvation in Christ. He did this by trying to identify with the needs and lifestyle of individuals around him.

Sometimes your relationship with someone is so shallow or distant that you have no way to reach out to the person in love. When you become aware of a person who needs the Lord, your job is to intentionally begin building a relational bridge so that God's love can flow to him or her.

② Look at your concentric circles and list below some persons with whom you are intentionally building witnessing relationships.

Building relationship bridges should be a continual process in your life. It should become a part of your lifestyle. The closer we are to the Lord, the more person-oriented we will become. Continually building relational bridges to our family, relatives, friends, neighbors, associates, acquaintances, and even to Person X is a significant strategy for witnessing to the world. Not only do bridges allow you to share Christ with others, but they also allow you to experience more of the abundant life Jesus came to give you. In addition, when people come to Christ through existing

relationships with Christians, they are far more likely to follow through in establishing a growing relationship with a church—probably our church.

Doing something like sending a birthday card may be a great way to start your lifestyle of bridge building, but it is only a start. The process is a continual one. We should utilize as many points of contact as possible in bridge building. We need to become experienced master bridge builders.

How do you begin to build bridges? When you sense that God wants you to reach out to someone, begin looking for points of contact with the person. If you do not have a point of contact, create one by asking questions, listening, and discovering things that interest him. If you can get on the same wavelength with him, you can begin establishing a relational bridge.

You can build relationship bridges to people in a variety of ways. You can show an interest in them during times of joy or stress. You can build bridges through shared interests or hobbies. One of the best ways to build a relationship is to rejoice when the person has an occasion to rejoice.



③ As you read the following examples, think of people in your concentric circles whom you could reach through these ideas. Write their names below the ideas.

The birth of a baby. A wonderful way to touch someone's life is to show attention and consideration when a baby is born. Gifts and cards can express your interest at this time, but personal expressions of interest make greater impressions. Visiting in the hospital shows far more interest than sending a card. When mother and baby go home from the hospital, think of ways you can meet the family's needs. Take a meal. Clip a birth notice out of the local paper, laminate it, and send it with a note. Send flowers. Or volunteer to babysit one night so that the new parents can have a break.

Birthdays. Sending birthday cards is another important way to build bridges. A birthday is a very special day. Include your business associates, business partners, business contacts, colleagues, and employees.

Congratulations. Showing people that they are special builds bridges. Congratulate people for promotions, anniversaries, marriages, and graduations. Be creative. If teenagers win a district competition or a football game and are featured in the newspaper, cut the notice out of the paper, circle it in red, and write on it, "That's great. I'm proud of you." Sign your name and send them the clipping. You will have an open door into their world.

④ List three persons on your Most Wanted list (p. 14) and write one idea for building a bridge to each person. Then follow through with your plan.

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

↕ Praying for My Circles Today

Remember to follow your plan for praying through your concentric circles. Pay special attention to your Most Wanted list (p. 14). Ask the Lord to reveal ways you can build relational bridges with the people for whom you are praying. Write notes on your survey forms as God gives you ideas or insights for reaching out to a person.

Day 4: Building Bridges in Times of Loss

God's Word for Today

"Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and the God of all comfort. He comforts us in all our affliction, so that we may be able to comfort those who are in any kind of affliction, through the comfort we ourselves receive from God. For as the sufferings of Christ overflow to us, so our comfort overflows through Christ. If we are afflicted, it is for your comfort and salvation; if we are comforted, it is for your comfort, which is experienced in the endurance of the same sufferings that we suffer" (2 Corinthians 1:3-6).

↕ **Read and meditate on "God's Word for Today" above and spend a moment in prayer as you begin today's lesson.**

Yesterday's devotional lesson talked about building bridges of relationship(s). Utilizing your points of contact can make an eternal difference in the lives of others'.

One of Dr. Thompson's first pastorates was in a newly planted mission church. Because the roads were gravel, they were dusty and noisy. Rocks flew when the members drove to and from church. Dr. Thompson decided the roads should be paved.

The construction-crew supervisor who did the paving job was a big, likable man named Gus. When the job was done, Dr. Thompson wrote him a long letter of appreciation and told him what a fine job he and his crew had done and how much he appreciated their work. A few days later Gus's wife stopped Dr. Thompson in town. As she spoke with him big tears welled up in her eyes. She said, "Pastor, Gus has worked for the city for years, and no one has ever written him a letter of appreciation. He read your letter over and over and just cried."

The next Sunday Gus and his wife were in church. Until this time neither had been in church. Six weeks later Dr. Thompson baptized them both.

Several months later Gus died of a heart attack. A letter of appreciation opened the door to a relationship with Jesus Christ and he's now spending eternity in heaven with our Lord. Expressing appreciation and care is a powerful way to build bridges.

① Identify a lost person in your concentric circles to whom you can express appreciation. Who will it be? What will you thank them for? Decide how and when you will express appreciation.

Building bridges takes time, but nothing bears more fruit. In addition to the times of joy that we examined yesterday, times of stress and loss provide opportunities to build a relationship. Here are some examples.

Sickness. When people are ill and especially if they are in critical condition, they are open to your outreach and often to a relationship with God. During these times of the Covid19 pandemic I hope and pray that you will make it your business to reach out by phone, text, email, a card or note in the mail or even a virtual visit to lost people you know who are sick or in the hospital. Before making visits, learn the do's and don'ts of visiting the sick or those people going through periods of difficulty. Our Elders, Deacons or Life group facilitators will be able to guide you as the Lord leads you to be His hands and feet to reach them.

Sorrow. You have a tremendous opportunity to build relational bridges when you reach out and love people during times of sorrow. Sometimes we do not know what to say when someone loses a loved one, but remember that what you say is not as important as the fact that you care. Sometimes you do not need to say anything. Being there says enough. It is not possible for us to physically be there for people today during this time, but you can call, text, email etc. When people are hurting, they will remember that you cared enough to be there. Your thoughtfulness in reaching out however you can be like your presence itself and it will make a significant and perhaps lasting impression.

Remember to be attentive to surviving family members in the weeks following a loss. Sometimes the pressure and grief will hit hardest several weeks after the funeral, when decisions have to be made. Often at this time the person needs a good listener. Send prayer notes, make occasional phone calls, a virtual visit, or sending a meal or some fruit by a delivery service is a very easy way to show an act of kindness. Just providing an opportunity to talk about the loss can be very healing.

Put the date of the person's loss on your calendar for next year and contact them on the anniversary of the loss. That is another time when they will need comfort. You may also want to make a contact during the first year around holidays and anniversaries. At those times memories are strong, and grief may be difficult to handle. A friend who remembers these occasions means much to a grieving person.

Stress. Anytime you can reach out and build bridges to people in times of stress, they will never forget you. Such times may include a financial reversal, the loss of a job, or a crisis in the marriage or with children.

② Look over your concentric circles and try to identify at least one person who is experiencing one of the following.

Sickness: _____

Sorrow: _____

Stress: _____

Write what you will do to reach out to one or more of these persons.

As you pray for those in your concentric circles, watch for and seek times to build relational bridges. Keep your eyes and ears open to opportunities that may arise in your daily routine. Trust that God will call them to your attention also. Building relational bridges through your concentric circles is the key to witnessing to your world. A person's deepest need is Christ. As you build bridges, opportunities will open for you to share the good news of Jesus.

↕ **Praying for My Circles Today**

Ask God to show you what you can do to build bridges to the people you identified in activity 2. Also pray for their specific needs.

Day 5: Show God's Love by Meeting Needs

God's Word for Today

"Little children, we must not love in word or speech, but in deed and truth" (1 John 3:18).

↕ **Read and meditate on "God's Word for Today" above and spend a moment in prayer as you begin today's lesson.**

One of the best ways to be used by God in reaching your world is to show God's love. Love is meeting needs. As God engineers circumstances in the lives of those for whom you are praying, He will create an opportunity for the person to experience His love through your life. As He loves the person through you by meeting his or her needs, He will begin drawing that person to His Son. God engineers the circumstances so that His love can be shown. He works in your heart to motivate you to love a person who may not be very lovely. He also provides the resources to meet needs through you.

Your life becomes a channel of God's love. When you allow God's love to flow through you in this way, people will experience God. They will know that the Heavenly Father loves them. They will begin to sense His invitation to become a part of His family by adoption and by the saving grace of His Son.

Jesus said that the first and greatest commandment is to love God with all our hearts and souls and minds (Matthew 22:37-38; Mark 12:30). You might ask, "How do I love God?"

One morning after a class, Rob, said to Dr. Thompson, "I'm not really sure I understand something. I understand that love is meeting needs and that God wants to meet even the deepest need of people through me. But the first and great commandment is to love the Lord God with all our hearts, souls, and minds. The Bible says to love the Lord first, but how do I love God? He doesn't have any needs. How can I show God that I love Him?"

Dr. Thompson said to him, "Matthew 25:35-40 gives the answer to that question. You may also have asked that question, the same scripture applies.

① Read Matthew 25:35-40 below. Underline ways we show we love God.

"I was hungry and you gave Me something to eat; I was thirsty and you gave Me something to drink; I was a stranger and you took Me in; I was naked and you clothed Me; I was sick and you took care of Me; I was in prison and you visited Me.' Then the righteous will answer Him, 'Lord, when did we see You hungry and feed You, or thirsty and give You something to drink? When did we see You a stranger and take You in, or without clothes and clothe You? When did we see You sick, or in prison, and visit You?' And the King will answer them, 'I assure you: Whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of Mine, you did for Me.'"—Matthew 25:35-40

When you love people in Jesus' name, you are loving Jesus. When those who are precious to Jesus become precious to you, you are loving God with all your heart and soul and mind. You are not really loving Jesus until you become a channel of His love in meeting needs. Love is meeting needs.

Matthew 22:39 and Mark 12:31 tell us that the second great commandment is "Love your neighbor as yourself." So you may ask, "How do we love people?" We are to love people the same way God loves people—by meeting their needs 1 John 3:16-19 , 1John 4:20.

② Think about or look at your concentric circles. Note below some ways you have met others' needs since you began this study.

Loving others includes even your enemies. Jesus said, "You have heard that it was said, Love your neighbor and hate your enemy. But I tell you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you" (see Matthew 5:43-44 below). How do you love your enemies? By treating them the same way you treat those you love. Love is treating all people the same way. When Jesus becomes the Lord of your life, you forfeit forever the right to choose whom you will love.

"You are the salt of the earth. ... You are the light of the world."—Matthew 5:13-14

In your concentric circles you will find people who are not lovely. They may be cantankerous and unreceptive to a relationship with you. But you must pray, "Father, reveal their needs to me. Here I am. You know all the responsibilities I have, but wherever I go and whomever my life touches, I will be salt. I will be salt to touch and preserve, to help and heal and love. I will also be light to show the way to the Savior" (see Matthew 5:13-14). When you find someone who seems to be impossible to love, pray, "Father, engineer circumstances in his life to draw him to You, to meet his need."

↕ **Would someone in your concentric circles qualify as your enemy? Stop and pray for that person as suggested in the previous paragraph. Open yourself to God's use in reaching that person.**

Opening yourself to God's use this way will cost you, just as it cost Jesus to go to the cross. Remember, love is action. Love is meeting needs.

③ **What will you do to start meeting needs in your enemy's life?**

God's plan for your life is that His love flow through your life, reach out to others, and meet their needs. You do not meet their needs from your reservoir. You meet needs from God's reservoir. Your resources and your love are from God, and you must draw them from Him. That's why your love for God must precede your love for the lost. If you love God, you will love those He loves. To love without action, without meeting needs, is not love. Jesus always expressed His love for people by meeting their needs.

Maybe you object that your own needs aren't being met, so why should you meet somebody else's? Go to the cross and die to self. Romans 6-7 says you must die to self and let Jesus live through you. Then He funnels His love through you. You'll find that when you are meeting others' needs, your needs will also be met.

↕ **Praying for My Circles Today**

Pray, "Father, fill me from Your great reservoir of love. I'm depending on Your love to flow through me to meet the needs of those around me." Then pray for those in your concentric circles according to the plan you have established. Allow God to meet needs through you.

Your Most Wanted

Examine your survey forms for circles 2-6. Pray and ask the Lord which people are on His Most Wanted list for you. Begin making them a special matter of prayer. Begin watching for ways God works through you to show love to them or to build deeper relationships with them.

SURVEY FORM

Name _____

Address _____

City, state, ZIP _____

Home phone _____

Work phone _____

Cell phone _____

Relationship

Single

Widowed

Married

Separated

Divorced

Prayer requests/needs/circumstances _____

Birthday _____

Anniversary _____

Occupation/place of employment _____

Hobbies/interests _____

Times of joy or stress to remember and date _____

Strategy _____

Date gospel presented _____

Response _____

BIBLE STUDY_ OUR WITNESS TO THE WORLD

Session 5: Prayer and Building Bridges

OPENING ACTIVITY

Prayer

Reviewing Week 4

Guided Discussion through Week 5

1. *Why is intercession important in reaching the lost for Christ? Have you seen any breakthroughs in reaching any of those in your circles since you started interceding for them? How has your prayer life changed?*

2. *Based on your experiences, what are the greatest barriers to your sharing the gospel with others? How have you experienced God's help in overcoming those barriers?*

3. *What would you say are barriers to our church's sharing the gospel? What are some things we can do to remove those barriers so that the gospel will flow freely through our members to the lost world?*

4. *Considering the ideas of days 3-4, what are some ways you have built relational bridges with lost people this past week and what are some ways you seek to build bridges since you've done this study?*

5. *How can you build relational bridges to people in your circles and with whom?*

6. *Can you describe instances in which you experienced God's love through others who met your needs? What did they do? Wat was your response?*

7. *What are some ways God is teaching you to show love by meeting the needs of others?*

8. *Are you struggling with the idea of meeting needs in any way? How do you feel about loving your enemies and the unlovely? How can you/someone overcome these difficulties?*

9. *How does God want us to respond when our love is not returned? What did Jesus do when His love wasn't returned?*

10. *What have you done or experienced in the past week as a result of our study so far? How is God working in your relationships?*

Interacting with the Scriptures

1. After reading James 1:5; 4:2. *Why do you think it is important to pray specifically? Can you share your experience using the prayer pattern suggested in this study on page 4-5.*

2. After reading 1 Corinthians 9:19-22. *How did Paul build relationships to bring others to Christ?*

3. After reading Matthew 25:35-40. *How does meeting the needs of others show love to God?*

Connecting with Concentric Circles

1. Share your plans for praying through your concentric circles on a regular basis (p. 4).

2. Tell about the persons you added to your Most Wanted list (p. 16). How can you build relational bridges to these and others on your lists?

Praying Together

How can we pray for you this week?

How can we/you form smaller prayer groups in our life groups...

- for their Most Wanted;
- for opportunities to build relationships with the lost and to meet their needs;
- for your attitude toward your enemies and the unlovely on their lists;
- For the Lord to engineer circumstances to draw people in your circles / lives to Him.