

A PRAYER STUDY GUIDE

21 STEPS OF WALKING THROUGH THE TABERNACLE IN PRAYER

LIVING FROM INSIDEOUT PRINCIPLES

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21 Steps of Walking Through the Tabernacle in Prayer

A Journey into Maturity:

The 21 Constructs of Effective Prayer

A Training Manual in Nine Sessions

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How to Use This Manual

This manual teaches effective prayer as a journey through the tabernacle. It has nine sessions. The first lays out the pattern, the next seven follow one furnishing each from preparation through encounter to manifestation, and the last turns the whole journey into a practice the learner can keep. Two appendices close the manual: the thread chart and a prayer journal page.

Every session follows the same shape, so the facilitator and the learner always know where they are. A session opens with learning objectives and a key text. The teaching follows, and in the thread sessions it moves through the furnishing itself and then through the three stages of the thread: what we do before prayer, what God works in us while we pray, and what we become afterward. Each session then closes with a section called Living From Inside Out, a practice for the week and questions for reflection.

Suggested Session Plan

A session suits ninety minutes, and the times below can be adjusted to the group. Open with prayer and a short report on the previous week's practice, about ten minutes. Teach the furnishing and the three stages, about forty minutes. Give twenty minutes to Living From Inside Out and the reflection questions in pairs or small groups. Spend ten minutes on the practice for the week, and close with a time of prayer in which the group walks the stage just taught, about ten minutes.

A Note on Scripture and Method

Scripture quotations follow the New Revised Standard Version unless stated otherwise. The learner should read each passage aloud in the session before the teaching begins. The tabernacle is a type of Christ, which means that each furnishing teaches us something about Him before it teaches us anything about technique, and a facilitator who keeps the person of Christ at the centre of each session will keep the pattern from turning into a method.

Session One: The Pattern and the Path

Key texts: "See that you make them according to the pattern for them, which is being shown you on the mountain" (Exodus 25:40). "…until all of us come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to maturity, to the measure of the full stature of Christ" (Ephesians 4:13).

Learning Objectives

By the end of this session, the learner will be able to:

- Explain why prayer is the place where maturity is formed in us.
- Define the tabernacle as a type of Christ and name what each furnishing shows of Him.
- Describe the three degrees of effective prayer and the seven threads that run through them.
- Answer the question of why a believer who has access through the torn veil still needs a pattern.

Prayer and the Formation of Christ in Us

Prayer matures the church because it forms Christ in the one who prays. Paul names the goal of every ministry gift as maturity, "to the measure of the full stature of Christ" (Ephesians 4:13), and the writer of Hebrews calls us to "go on toward perfection" (Hebrews 6:1). Paul describes maturity as the pain of a birth that continues "until Christ is formed in you" (Galatians 4:19). Knowledge gained and years served do not produce it.

Many of us pray for years without feeling that formation. We bring our needs, we receive some answers, and we rise from our knees as the same person who knelt. A prayer life can sustain a ministry and still leave the one who prays unchanged, because a request can be made without our ever being seen. The place where we come to know Him, to see Him and to become like Him asks for more than a list. It asks for a way in, and Scripture gives us that way in the form of a building.

The Tabernacle as a Type

God gave Moses the tabernacle as a pattern shown on the mountain (Exodus 25:40), and the writer of Hebrews calls the priests' service "a sketch and shadow of the heavenly things" (Hebrews 8:5). A shadow of that kind is a type, an object, person or institution that God shaped beforehand so that it would point to Christ. Because the tabernacle is a type, every part of it finds its fulfilment in Him.

John writes that "the Word became flesh and lived among us" (John 1:14), and the verb he chooses means to pitch a tent, to tabernacle. Christ is the gate through which we enter (John 10:9). He is the sacrifice offered on the altar (Hebrews 10:10), the water that washes us (Ephesians 5:26), the light by which we see (John 8:12), the bread on which we feed (John 6:35) and the intercessor whose prayer rises before the Father (Hebrews 7:25). He is also the mercy seat. Paul uses the Greek word for it when he says that God put Christ forward as a "sacrifice of atonement" (Romans 3:25), and Hebrews 9:5 uses the same word for the cover of the ark. Each furnishing therefore shows us what Christ is to us, and the way through the tabernacle becomes a way of coming to know Him more fully.

The Question of the Torn Veil

Someone in the group will ask why a believer needs stages at all, since the veil was torn from top to bottom when Jesus died (Matthew 27:51) and we have "confidence to enter the sanctuary by the blood of Jesus" (Hebrews 10:19). The facilitator should answer the question directly, because it decides how the rest of the manual is heard.

The access is complete, and no stage of this journey purchases any part of it. The stages describe what happens to the one who enters, because a person can stand in the Most Holy Place by right and still arrive there distracted, unreconciled and full of himself. The finished work of Christ settles our right to enter, and the pattern of the tabernacle shows what has to be formed in us once we are inside.

Three Degrees and Seven Threads

No one in Israel walked straight from the gate to the mercy seat. Every approach to God followed an ordered path, and each stage prepared the worshipper for the next. The outer court, with its altar and laver, was the place of preparation. The holy place and the Most Holy Place, with the lampstand, the table, the altar of incense and the ark, were the place of encounter. Then the priest came out to the people carrying what he had received inside: "Moses and Aaron entered the tent of meeting, and then came out and blessed the people; and the glory of the LORD appeared to all the people" (Leviticus 9:23). That coming out was the place of manifestation.

These three parts give us three degrees of effective prayer: Preparation, Encounter and Manifestation. Each degree holds seven elements, which makes twenty-one in all. The elements run through the degrees as seven threads, and each thread is anchored in the gate of the tabernacle or in one of its six furnishings. What we do before prayer becomes what God works in us during prayer, and what He works in us becomes how we live after prayer. The first element of each degree belongs to the first thread, the second element to the second, and so on through the seventh. The chart below shows all twenty-one.

Living From Inside Out

Prayer works from the inside out. Paul asks that the Father would grant us "to be strengthened in your inner being with power through his Spirit" (Ephesians 3:16), and Peter speaks of "the hidden person of the heart" as the place where God looks (1 Peter 3:4). The tabernacle teaches the same direction. The worshipper started at the gate in the court, passed through the furnishings, and ended in the dark room where the ark stood, and the whole movement carried the person from what could be seen toward what only God sees.

The outer life we present to others is formed there. A change in conduct that has not been preceded by a change in the inner person will not last, and so this manual spends its time at the furnishings and leaves behaviour for the third degree of each thread, where it belongs.

Practice for the Week

Read Exodus 25 to 27 and Exodus 30 this week, one passage a day, and write down each furnishing and the measurements or materials God specified. Then read the chart at the end of this session each morning and mark the thread that seems most absent from your prayer life. Bring that thread to the next session.

Questions for Reflection

1. What have we most often brought to prayer: needs, or the desire to be changed? What would a prayer life look like that produced Christ formed in us?
2. Why did God give the tabernacle as a pattern with fixed measurements, when He could have simply told Moses to build a place of worship?
3. How does the answer to the question of the torn veil change the way we approach the stages of the journey?
4. Which of the seven furnishings do we know least about, and what do we expect to learn from it?

The Chart of the Twenty-One Constructs

Thread	Tabernacle anchor	Before: what we do	During: what He works	After: what we become
1	The gate	Examine our motive	Desire is purified	Priorities are reordered
2	The bronze altar	Lay down our strength	The flesh is silenced and the Spirit takes over	Authority under authority
3	The laver	Settle accounts	We are searched and cleansed	Holiness and character
4	The lampstand	Withdraw from distraction	We are lifted into the heavenly position	Heavenly perspective
5	The table of the bread of the Presence	Fill ourselves with the word	We begin to hear	Wisdom to build
6	The altar of incense	Quiet the soul	Peace guards the heart	Endurance
7	The ark and the mercy seat	Come expecting to hear	Our will agrees with His	Execution and witness

Session Two: The Gate

Key text: "I am the gate. Whoever enters by me will be saved, and will come in and go out and find pasture" (John 10:9).

Learning Objectives

By the end of this session, the learner will be able to:

- Describe the gate of the court and what it shows of Christ.
- Examine our motives in prayer and name the difference between seeking a gift and seeking the Giver.
- Explain how desire is purified in His presence.
- Describe how a purified desire reorders the priorities of a life.

The Furnishing: The Gate of the Court

The court of the tabernacle had one entrance. It was a screen, twenty cubits wide, woven of blue, purple and crimson yarn and fine twisted linen (Exodus 27:16). Everyone who came near to God came through it, whether priest or layman, and no other way into the court existed. Jesus says the same of Himself: "I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me" (John 14:6).

The gate is where prayer begins, because it asks the first question of all: why have we come? The first thread of the construct starts here and runs through all three degrees, from the motive we examine, to the desire He purifies, to the priorities that reorder our lives.

Before Prayer: Examine What You Are Seeking

Before we step through, we ask what brought us. Sincerity alone cannot answer that question, since a person can pray earnestly for years while seeking nothing more than relief. We often come for the bread when Jesus offers Himself as the bread. He put the question to the first two men who followed Him, "What are you looking for?" (John 1:38), before He told them where He lived, and James explains why many prayers go unanswered: "You ask and do not receive, because you ask wrongly, in order to spend what you get on your pleasures" (James 4:3).

A request offered to survive the week and a request offered to know Him can use the same words and travel in opposite directions. Examining our motive is where prayer turns from a search for survival into a search for His presence. One question can be asked at the gate: if He gave me nothing I asked for today, would I still have come?

During Prayer: Your Desire Is Purified

We came through the gate asking for many things, and in His presence the list shortens. David arrived at the same place: "One thing I asked of the LORD, that will I seek after: to live in the house of the

LORD all the days of my life, to behold the beauty of the LORD" (Psalm 27:4). Asaph says it again from another angle: "there is nothing on earth that I desire other than you" (Psalm 73:25).

The motive we examined is now reshaped by Him. Those of us who came asking for bread find ourselves hungry for the One who said, "I am the bread of life" (John 6:35). We cannot produce this by trying harder to want Him. It happens as we remain in His presence long enough to be changed.

After Prayer: Your Priorities Are Reordered

The promise of the gate includes going out, for those who enter "will come in and go out and find pasture" (John 10:9). A purified desire produces a reordered life. Jesus gives the order we begin to follow: "strive first for the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well" (Matthew 6:33). We leave prayer pursuing His intention rather than our survival, and our decisions begin to show it. The calendar, the money and the conversations of the day begin to rearrange themselves around what we saw.

Living From Inside Out

Motive sits beneath every outward act, and Scripture treats it as the source of the life: "Keep your heart with all vigilance, for from it flow the springs of life" (Proverbs 4:23). Jesus says that "out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks" (Luke 6:45). A person whose heart seeks gifts will pray, give and serve as one who seeks gifts, however correct the outward form.

The gate therefore tests the inside before the court is entered. The conduct of the third degree follows the desire of the second, and the desire of the second begins with the honest examination of the first.

Practice for the Week

Write down five requests you have brought to God most often this month. Beside each one, mark whether you were asking for a gift or seeking Him. On three mornings this week, stand at the gate before you pray and ask the question aloud: what am I looking for?

Questions for Reflection

5. What do we most often ask for in prayer, and what does that list say about what we are looking for?
6. When have we left a time of prayer wanting Him more than we wanted the answer? What produced the change?
7. Which of our recent decisions would look different if our priorities had been reordered by prayer?
8. What does the single entrance of the court teach us about how we come to God?

Session Three: The Bronze Altar

Key text: "I appeal to you therefore, brothers and sisters, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship" (Romans 12:1).

Learning Objectives

By the end of this session, the learner will be able to:

- Describe the bronze altar and what it shows of Christ.
- Explain what it means to lay down our strength and agenda before we pray.
- Describe how the flesh is silenced and the Spirit takes over in prayer.
- Explain what it means to exercise authority as one under authority.

The Furnishing: The Altar of Burnt Offering

The bronze altar stood just inside the gate, in the open court, and no one went further without bringing an offering to it. It was a hollow chest of acacia wood overlaid with bronze, with a horn at each corner (Exodus 27:1-2). The fire on it was to burn continually: "A perpetual fire shall be kept burning on the altar; it shall not go out" (Leviticus 6:13). Everything offered to God in the court passed through that fire.

The altar shows us Christ as the sacrifice. "We have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all" (Hebrews 10:10). The altar of the court therefore asks us to do nothing to atone for ourselves. It asks us to put ourselves on what He has offered. The second thread begins here, and it runs from the strength we lay down, to the fire that comes, to the authority that comes back to us.

Before Prayer: Lay Down Your Own Strength and Agenda

The counterfeit of this step is the prayer in which our plans are already finished and we ask God to sign them. When Saul clothed David in his own armour, David tried walking in it and said, "I cannot walk with these; for I am not used to them" (1 Samuel 17:39). He took it off. We put aside borrowed strength in the same way, along with our plans, our cleverness and our preferred answers, and Paul gives the instruction directly: "present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God" (Romans 12:1).

Fire needs something laid down before it can fall. We arrive empty enough to be filled, and the strength we keep for ourselves is the strength that He cannot use. The Lord told Zerubbabel, "Not by might, nor by power, but by my spirit" (Zechariah 4:6), and the prophet's word applies to every one of us who has brought a finished plan into the place of prayer.

During Prayer: The Flesh Is Silenced and the Spirit Takes Over

When Aaron offered the first sacrifices, "fire came out from the LORD and consumed the burnt offering and the fat on the altar" (Leviticus 9:24). The fire fell on what had been laid down, and it

cannot fall on what we keep. What we surrendered in the court is now taken up by the Spirit, who "helps us in our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we ought, but that very Spirit intercedes with sighs too deep for words" (Romans 8:26).

Paul says that "those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires" (Galatians 5:24), and prayer is where that crucifixion becomes experience. As the flesh quiets, our inner faculties awaken to His voice. The writer of Hebrews describes the mature as "those whose faculties have been trained by practice to distinguish good from evil" (Hebrews 5:14), which means that the training of those faculties belongs to maturity.

After Prayer: You Exercise Authority as One Under Authority

What was laid on the altar returns as boldness that does not depend on force. The centurion understood the principle: "I also am a man under authority, with soldiers under me" (Matthew 8:9). His authority came from the one he served, and the same is true of us. When the believers in Jerusalem had prayed, "the place in which they were gathered together was shaken; and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and spoke the word of God with boldness" (Acts 4:31).

We decree and act under His leading, free of control and manipulation, because the authority was received at the altar and we have nothing to defend.

Living From Inside Out

Paul states the principle of the altar in the first person: "I have been crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I who live, but it is Christ who lives in me" (Galatians 2:20). The inside of a person is either governed by self or governed by the Spirit, and Jesus puts the choice plainly: "If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me" (Matthew 16:24).

The authority that shows in a life is the outward form of that inner governance. A person who has laid down his own agenda carries himself differently, and those who watch him can tell the difference between boldness and bluster.

Practice for the Week

Each morning this week, name three things at the altar before you pray: one plan you hold, one strength you rely on, and one answer you have already decided on. Write the three things down, and note on Friday what happened to each by the end of the week.

Questions for Reflection

9. What plan or preferred answer do we find hardest to lay down?
10. How do we tell the difference between boldness that comes from the Spirit and boldness that comes from the flesh?
11. In what way does the permanent fire of the altar change how we think of surrender, as something done once or something renewed?

12. What does the centurion's understanding of authority teach us about how authority is received?

Session Four: The Laver

Key text: "Who shall ascend the hill of the LORD? And who shall stand in his holy place? Those who have clean hands and pure hearts" (Psalm 24:3-4).

Learning Objectives

By the end of this session, the learner will be able to:

- Describe the laver and what it shows of Christ.
- Explain why settling accounts with God and with people comes before prayer.
- Describe how God searches and cleanses us in His presence.
- Explain how cleansing becomes holiness and character.

The Furnishing: The Bronze Laver

Between the altar and the tent stood the bronze laver, a basin on a stand, where the priests washed their hands and their feet "so that they may not die" (Exodus 30:20-21). God made it from the mirrors of the women who served at the entrance to the tent of meeting (Exodus 38:8), so that those who washed in it saw their own faces in the metal. The laver sat on the path, and no priest could reach the tent without passing it.

The laver corresponds to the washing that Christ gives. Paul speaks of "the washing of water by the word" (Ephesians 5:26), and Titus says that God saved us "through the water of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit" (Titus 3:5). The third thread starts here, and it runs from the accounts we settle, to the cleansing He gives, to the holiness that shows in our conduct.

Before Prayer: Settle Your Accounts with God and with People

The hands stand for what we have done and the feet for where we have walked. David asks the question that the laver answers: "Who shall ascend the hill of the LORD? And who shall stand in his holy place? Those who have clean hands and pure hearts" (Psalm 24:3-4).

Jesus applies the same order to us. We forgive before we pray: "Whenever you stand praying, forgive, if you have anything against anyone" (Mark 11:25). We reconcile before we bring our gift to the altar (Matthew 5:23-24). Spiritual busyness can cover a grievance for a long time, and a grievance kept alive will block the dialogue before it begins. We do not need a long inventory. We need the honesty to name what the Spirit brings to mind, to confess it to God, and where a person is involved, to move toward reconciliation or at least to release the debt. John promises, "If we confess our sins, he who is faithful and just will forgive us our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness" (1 John 1:9).

During Prayer: You Are Searched and Cleansed

His light shows us what we could not see by ourselves. Isaiah saw the Lord and cried, "Woe is me! I am lost, for I am a man of unclean lips" (Isaiah 6:5), and only then did the live coal touch his mouth and his guilt depart (Isaiah 6:6-7). David asks for the same searching: "Search me, O God, and know

my heart; test me and know my thoughts. See if there is any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting" (Psalm 139:23-24).

The repentance we brought to the laver dealt with what we knew. His light deals with what we did not know, and the washing of water by the word reaches deeper than our own examination because He sees what we have grown used to. The laver was made of mirrors for a reason: prayer is where we see ourselves as He sees us.

After Prayer: You Walk in Holiness and Character

The cleansing received in prayer becomes conduct. Peter writes, "as he who called you is holy, be holy yourselves in all your conduct" (1 Peter 1:15), and Paul names the fruit that grows in a washed life: "love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control" (Galatians 5:22-23). Character shows the change before any miracle does, and those who live closest to us are the first to see it.

Living From Inside Out

The author of Hebrews describes the washing as both inward and outward: "let us approach with a true heart in full assurance of faith, with our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water" (Hebrews 10:22). The conscience is cleansed first, and the body follows. A person who has been washed inwardly no longer needs to manage his image, because there is nothing left to hide.

Holiness that begins outside the person produces rules. Holiness that begins at the laver produces character, and character is what the people around us eventually live with.

Practice for the Week

Set aside thirty minutes this week to ask the question of David's psalm: search me and know my heart. Write down what comes to mind, and deal with one item in a concrete way, whether by confessing it, making restitution or approaching someone to reconcile. Before each prayer time this week, wash your hands deliberately as a reminder of the laver.

Questions for Reflection

13. Is there a debt, a grievance or an unconfessed sin that we have carried into prayer more than once?
14. Why did God make the laver from mirrors, and what does that teach us about self-knowledge in prayer?
15. What is the difference between the repentance we bring and the cleansing He gives?
16. What changes in our conduct would those closest to us notice first if the laver became part of our daily prayer?

Session Five: The Lampstand

Key text: "But when you pray, go into your room and shut the door and pray to your Father who is in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you" (Matthew 6:6).

Learning Objectives

By the end of this session, the learner will be able to:

- Describe the lampstand and what it shows of Christ.
- Explain why withdrawal from distraction is a choice of attention.
- Describe what it means to be lifted into the heavenly position in prayer.
- Explain how a heavenly perspective changes the way we meet earthly challenges.

The Furnishing: The Golden Lampstand

The holy place had no window. The priest left the daylight at the entrance of the tent and worked by the light of the lampstand, which was kept burning before the LORD from evening to morning (Exodus 27:20-21). It was made of pure gold, hammered from a single piece, with a central shaft and six branches that carried seven lamps (Exodus 25:31-40). Moses made it according to the pattern, and it was fed with pure oil.

The lampstand shows us Christ as the light. "I am the light of the world," Jesus says. "Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness but will have the light of life" (John 8:12). The oil is the Spirit, who lights the lamps, and Zechariah's vision of the lampstand makes the point explicit (Zechariah 4:2-6). The fourth thread begins here and runs from withdrawal, to elevation, to the heavenly perspective we carry back into the world.

Before Prayer: Withdraw from Distraction

Jesus gives us the same pattern: "Go into your room and shut the door and pray to your Father who is in secret" (Matthew 6:6). The door we shut is the noise of the mind as much as a door in the house. We can sit in a quiet room while managing a dozen things in our heads, and that is how many of us pray.

Withdrawal is a choice of what we attend to. Mary chose "the better part" while Martha was "distracted by many tasks" (Luke 10:40, 42), and Jesus Himself "would withdraw to deserted places and pray" (Luke 5:16). We leave the light of the world outside so that we can be given another light to see by.

During Prayer: You Are Lifted into the Heavenly Position

By the light of the lampstand we see what the world outside cannot see. The lampstand in the tent was a copy of something in heaven, and John saw the original: before the throne "burn seven flaming torches, which are the seven spirits of God" (Revelation 4:5). Before he saw it he heard an invitation, "Come up here, and I will show you what must take place after this" (Revelation 4:1).

Paul states our position as a fact already given: God "raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus" (Ephesians 2:6). We do not climb to that place through effort. In prayer we begin to see from where we already sit in Christ, which is the place of advantage, and the problems that looked large from the court look different from the throne.

After Prayer: You See Life from the Heavenly Position

The light of the lampstand goes out with us. Jesus said, "You are the light of the world" (Matthew 5:14), and Paul tells us to "set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth" (Colossians 3:2). Those who have been lifted come back down with a different perspective, and their challenges lose the power to define them.

Asaph shows what this looks like. He nearly lost his footing as he watched the prosperity of the wicked, "until I went into the sanctuary of God; then I perceived their end" (Psalm 73:17). The facts around him had not changed, and the place from which he viewed them had. The psalmist says of those who live in God's house that they are "ever singing your praise" (Psalm 84:4). We engage the earth from the place of advantage.

Living From Inside Out

Perspective is formed inside before it is applied outside. Paul prays that "the eyes of your heart may be enlightened" (Ephesians 1:18), and the light of the lampstand falls on that inner eye. Two people can stand in the same circumstance, and the one who has been lifted in prayer reads it differently from the one who has not.

The way we interpret what happens to us decides how we respond, and the interpretation comes from where we have been standing. A life that regularly enters the holy place carries a different reading of every event.

Practice for the Week

Choose a place and a time this week for uninterrupted prayer, and put your phone in another room. Write down what pulls your attention away in the first ten minutes. After each time, record one challenge you face and describe how it looked before you prayed and how it looked afterward.

Questions for Reflection

17. What fills our minds when we sit down to pray, and what does that tell us about what has our attention?
18. What did Asaph see in the sanctuary that he could not see outside it?
19. How does knowing that we are already seated with Christ change the way we pray?
20. Which challenge in our lives needs to be seen again from the light of the lampstand?

Session Six: The Table of the Bread of the Presence

Key text: "One does not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God" (Matthew 4:4).

Learning Objectives

By the end of this session, the learner will be able to:

- Describe the table of the bread of the Presence and what it shows of Christ.
- Explain why the word of God gives prayer its language and boundaries.
- Describe how the word we read becomes the word spoken to us.
- Explain how the word received in prayer becomes wisdom to build.

The Furnishing: The Table of the Bread of the Presence

On the table in the holy place lay twelve loaves, "the bread of the Presence" (Exodus 25:30). The Hebrew phrase means bread of the face, because it lay continually before God. The priests ate it in the holy place, a portion for each sabbath (Leviticus 24:5-9), so that those who ministered before Him were first fed by what lay before Him.

The table shows us Christ as the bread. "I am the bread of life," Jesus says. "Whoever comes to me will never be hungry" (John 6:35). The word of God is the bread that He gives, and the fifth thread begins at this table. It runs from the word we fill ourselves with, to the hearing that follows, to the wisdom to build that we carry out.

Before Prayer: Fill Yourself with the Word

The apostles set their priorities in this order: "we will devote ourselves to prayer and to serving the word" (Acts 6:4). Prayer that depends on need alone runs out of language, and we start repeating ourselves. The word gives prayer its vocabulary and its boundaries. Jesus said, "If you abide in me, and my words abide in you, ask for whatever you wish, and it will be done for you" (John 15:7), which means the promise attaches to requests formed by what He has already said.

The psalmist says, "Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path" (Psalm 119:105). We read until a passage turns into a prayer, and then we pray it. Prayer that begins in Scripture begins already aligned with His will.

During Prayer: You Begin to Hear

The word we fed on becomes the word spoken to us. The bread eaten in His presence turns prayer into dialogue, and the child Samuel received the pattern for it: "Speak, for your servant is listening" (1 Samuel 3:10). The LORD promises, "Call to me and I will answer you, and will tell you great and hidden things that you have not known" (Jeremiah 33:3). Prayer passes from monologue into communion.

What we hear in prayer is tested by what Scripture has already said, and Paul gives the instruction, "test everything; hold fast to what is good" (1 Thessalonians 5:21). The table in the court of preparation is also the standard in the place of encounter. A word that contradicts the written word has not come from the One who wrote it.

After Prayer: You Carry Wisdom to Build

The word received at the table becomes a pattern for building. Moses built "according to the pattern … shown you on the mountain" (Exodus 25:40), and the man who made the furnishings was Bezalel, whom God had filled "with divine spirit, with skill, intelligence, and knowledge in every kind of craft" (Exodus 31:3). Daniel carried heaven's answer into Babylon, and he confessed that God "reveals deep and hidden things" (Daniel 2:22).

Solomon states the principle: "By wisdom a house is built, and by understanding it is established; by knowledge the rooms are filled with all precious and pleasant riches" (Proverbs 24:3-4). This is the intelligence to fix, create, build and engineer in the earthly realm, and it belongs to people who have first received the pattern in prayer.

Living From Inside Out

The word enters through the mind and settles in the heart. David says, "I treasure your word in my heart, so that I may not sin against you" (Psalm 119:11), and Jesus describes the one who "brings out of his treasure what is new and what is old" (Matthew 13:52). What a person has stored inside is what he produces outside.

A person who has filled himself with the word does not need to search for wisdom when a decision arrives. The wisdom is already formed, because it was received at the table before it was needed in the field.

Practice for the Week

Choose one passage this week and read it each day before you pray. Turn each verse into a sentence of prayer, and write down anything that rises in you while you pray. At the end of the week, test what you wrote against the rest of Scripture. Identify one thing you need to build or fix and write down what the passage says about it.

Questions for Reflection

21. How much of our prayer language comes from Scripture, and how much from habit?
22. What is the difference between talking to God and hearing from Him, and what has helped us make the move from one to the other?
23. How do we test what we hear in prayer against the written word?
24. What does Bezalel teach us about the relationship between the Spirit and ordinary skill?

Session Seven: The Altar of Incense

Key text: "Let my prayer be counted as incense before you, and the lifting up of my hands as an evening sacrifice" (Psalm 141:2).

Learning Objectives

By the end of this session, the learner will be able to:

- Describe the altar of incense and what it shows of Christ.
- Explain why stillness comes before asking.
- Describe how peace guards the heart that has rested in His presence.
- Explain how the peace received in prayer becomes endurance outside it.

The Furnishing: The Altar of Incense

The altar of incense stood before the veil, and incense rose from it every morning and evening, "a regular incense offering before the LORD throughout your generations" (Exodus 30:1-8). It was made of acacia wood overlaid with gold, and the incense was a special blend that no one was to copy for common use (Exodus 30:34-38). When Zechariah the priest was chosen by lot to burn incense in the sanctuary, "the whole assembly of the people was praying outside at the hour of the incense offering" (Luke 1:8-10).

John sees the same picture in heaven: "the smoke of the incense, with the prayers of the saints, rose before God from the hand of the angel" (Revelation 8:4). The altar shows us Christ as the intercessor, since "he always lives to make intercession" for those who approach God through Him (Hebrews 7:25). The sixth thread begins at this altar and runs from stillness, to peace, to endurance.

Before Prayer: Quiet Your Soul

Incense rises without noise. The psalmist says, "I have calmed and quieted my soul" (Psalm 131:2), and the verb makes the quieting his own act. God commands us, "Be still, and know that I am God" (Psalm 46:10), so stillness is something we do on purpose, and it takes time. Isaiah gives the promise: "In returning and rest you shall be saved; in quietness and in trust shall be your strength" (Isaiah 30:15).

Anxiety turns prayer into a list of complaints, while stillness turns it into inquiry. We come to rest before we ask, and the hurry we carry in from the day has to settle before we are able to listen.

During Prayer: Peace Guards Your Heart

The incense we offered in quietness becomes His rest within us. Paul writes, "do not worry about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus" (Philippians 4:6-7). The word he uses for guard is a soldier's word. Peace stands watch over the heart and over the mind.

Jesus says, "Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. I do not give to you as the world gives" (John 14:27). The peace of this altar is His own, and it comes while the circumstances are unchanged. Fear loosens its hold, and the soul that came in anxious finds itself at rest.

After Prayer: You Stand Firm Through the Valley

The incense burned morning and evening without ceasing, which means the peace of the sanctuary was renewed every day. That peace becomes endurance outside prayer. Isaiah promises that "those who wait for the LORD shall renew their strength" (Isaiah 40:31), and the psalmist says that those whose strength is in God, "passing through the valley of Baca, make it a place of springs" (Psalm 84:6).

Jesus describes the house that stands when rain falls and floods come: it "had been founded on rock" (Matthew 7:25). The rock is the word heard and kept, and the peace we receive at the altar of incense is what holds the house firm while the storm lasts.

Living From Inside Out

Stillness reveals what the soul is carrying. The noise of a busy day covers an anxiety that surfaces the moment we stop, and it is inside the person that peace either rules or does not rule: "Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts" (Colossians 3:15). The word rule here describes an umpire who settles the matter.

Endurance is peace made visible over time. A person who has been rehearsing rest at the altar every morning carries that rest into seasons that would otherwise break him.

Practice for the Week

Begin each prayer time this week with five minutes of silence, with no requests and no reading. Write down what comes to the surface during the silence. On the evening of the third day, return to the same stillness for two minutes and notice what has changed in your day. At the end of the week, name one valley you are walking through and write out Psalm 84:5-7 as a prayer over it.

Questions for Reflection

25. What happens in us when we try to be still for five minutes?
26. Why does the altar of incense stand just before the veil and not at the entrance of the court?
27. What is the difference between the peace the world gives and the peace Christ gives?
28. Which valley in our lives is asking for the endurance that this altar supplies?

Session Eight: The Ark and the Mercy Seat

Key text: "There I will meet with you, and from above the mercy seat, from between the two cherubim that are on the ark of the covenant, I will deliver to you all my commands for the Israelites" (Exodus 25:22).

Learning Objectives

By the end of this session, the learner will be able to:

- Describe the ark and the mercy seat and what they show of Christ.
- Explain what it means to come expecting to hear.
- Describe how our will comes into agreement with His at the mercy seat.
- Explain how agreement becomes execution and how others come to see Christ in us.

The Furnishing: The Ark and the Mercy Seat

Beyond the veil, in the Most Holy Place, stood the ark of the covenant. It was a chest of acacia wood overlaid with gold, covered by a lid of pure gold called the mercy seat, with a cherub at each end whose wings covered it (Exodus 25:10-22). Once a year the high priest sprinkled blood on the mercy seat, and God accepted the offering for the sins of the people (Leviticus 16:14-15). God also made a promise concerning that place: He would meet Moses there and speak. "When Moses went into the tent of meeting to speak with the LORD, he would hear the voice speaking to him from above the mercy seat" (Numbers 7:89).

The mercy seat shows us Christ as the place where God meets us. Paul uses the same word when he says that God put Christ forward as a "sacrifice of atonement by his blood" (Romans 3:25), and Hebrews 9:5 uses it for the cover of the ark. The seventh thread begins here, and it runs from expectation, to agreement, to the execution and witness of a life that has been with Him.

Before Prayer: Come Expecting to Hear

The mercy seat was a meeting place where God spoke and instruction was given. Habakkuk took the posture of a man who expects an answer: "I will stand at my watchpost, and station myself on the rampart; I will keep watch to see what he will say to me, and what he will answer concerning my complaint" (Habakkuk 2:1). The writer of Hebrews adds that anyone who comes to God must believe "that he exists and that he rewards those who seek him" (Hebrews 11:6).

A prayer that ends when we finish speaking has treated God as a listener only. When we come expecting to hear, we leave room in the conversation for Him to answer.

During Prayer: Your Will Comes into Agreement with His

At the mercy seat God met with Moses and gave His commands. Agreement happens in the same place. We stop asking for what we brought in and begin to ask according to His will, "and if we know that he hears us in whatever we ask, we know that we have obtained the requests made of him" (1 John 5:14-15). Jesus prayed this way in Gethsemane: "yet, not my will but yours be done" (Luke 22:42).

Agreement is formed by beholding. Paul writes, "all of us, with unveiled faces, seeing the glory of the Lord as though reflected in a mirror, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another" (2 Corinthians 3:18). The mercy seat is where the earlier six threads meet. The desire has been purified, the flesh has been quieted, the heart has been searched, the view has been raised, the word has been heard and the soul is at peace, so that our will is able to agree with His. Jesus describes His own life in this way: "the Son can do nothing on his own, but only what he sees the Father doing" (John 5:19).

After Prayer: You Execute What Was Revealed, and Others See Christ in You

The commands received at the mercy seat are carried into the earth. Jesus taught us to pray, "Your kingdom come. Your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven" (Matthew 6:10), and prayer is complete only when the will we agreed with is carried out on earth. When Moses came down from the mountain, he "did not know that the skin of his face shone because he had been talking with God" (Exodus 34:29). Moses had not announced anything, and the people saw it anyway.

Peter and John were arrested after the lame man was healed, and the council in Jerusalem was not present at their prayer meeting and could not weigh what had been said there. It judged the men by what it saw, "and they recognized them as companions of Jesus" (Acts 4:13). Effective prayer ends in a life that others can see.

Living From Inside Out

The ark was hidden from sight, and what happened there happened in the most interior room of the tent. The outward evidence of that meeting is a life that carries the stamp of it. Paul says that we are "a letter of Christ … written not with ink but with the Spirit of the living God" (2 Corinthians 3:3), and the letter is read by those around us.

Execution is the third degree of agreement, and the first sign of agreement is obedience in a small matter. A person who obeys what he heard in the most hidden place becomes, over time, a person whose life is read without a word.

Practice for the Week

Each day this week, close your prayer by writing down what you heard, even if it is small. Act on one thing you wrote within twenty-four hours, and note what happened. At the end of the week, ask one person who knows you well whether they have seen any change, and record their answer without defending yourself.

Questions for Reflection

29. What do we expect when we begin to pray, and does that expectation leave room for God to speak?
30. Where in our lives is there a gap between what we have heard and what we have done?
31. What did the council in Jerusalem see in Peter and John that they could not explain?

32. How would our families describe the change in us if the seven threads were forming Christ in us?

Session Nine: Putting the Journey into Practice

Key text: "And have them make me a sanctuary, so that I may dwell among them" (Exodus 25:8).

Learning Objectives

By the end of this session, the learner will be able to:

- Walk through all twenty-one constructs in a single prayer session.
- Use a prayer journal to track the three degrees across a season.
- Identify which thread has stalled in their life and name the stage at which it stopped.
- Explain why the pattern is a map for formation and no toll on access.

Walking the Journey in a Single Session

A full session of prayer follows the path of the tabernacle in order. The learner begins at the gate and asks what he is looking for. He lays his plans on the altar and washes at the laver by confessing and forgiving. He withdraws from distraction at the lampstand, feeds on a passage of Scripture at the table, and quiets his soul at the altar of incense. He comes to the ark expecting to hear, and he remains there as long as God keeps speaking.

In the early days, working through the court slowly may take most of a prayer session. With practice the preparation becomes quicker, because the habit of examining motive, laying down strength and settling accounts becomes a posture we take on as we begin. The second degree cannot be hurried. It is the reason for the first, and we give it time with no agenda, no list in hand and nothing to accomplish. The third degree begins when the session ends, and it is measured by what the learner does with the rest of his day.

The Prayer Journal

A prayer journal helps us keep the three degrees together. We can record what the court required of us, what He said and showed in the place of encounter, and at the end of the day or week what the third degree produced in our decisions, our conduct and our relationships. A sample page is included in the appendix. Over a season the record shows which threads are forming and which have stalled.

The Thread Audit

Once a month, the learner should read the chart at the end of this manual and ask of each thread whether he can trace it from preparation to manifestation. A thread that has stalled at the first stage means the preparation was skipped. A thread that has stalled at the second stage means the encounter did not take place or was not received. A thread that has stalled at the third stage means that what God worked in prayer has not been carried out into daily life. Each of these points to a different correction, and the audit tells us which one applies.

A Map, Not a Toll

The pattern remains a map, and no sequence compels Him. He can meet us anywhere along the path, and no one who calls on Him from the far end of the court is turned away. The tabernacle serves our formation and sets no toll. God commanded it to be built so that He could dwell among His people, and the one who travels its path becomes the dwelling that it pointed to, for "you are God's temple and … God's Spirit dwells in you" (1 Corinthians 3:16).

Living From Inside Out

The whole journey is an inward movement that produces an outward result. The three degrees describe the same pattern at every scale: what we do privately becomes what He works in us, and what He works in us becomes what the world sees. Jesus says, "No good tree bears bad fruit, nor again does a bad tree bear good fruit" (Luke 6:43), and the manual has taught us to tend the tree, with the fruit following in its season.

Practice for the Week

Walk the full journey once, from the gate to the mercy seat, in a single extended time of prayer, and write it up in the journal. Then complete the thread audit and choose one thread to carry into the next month as your focus.

Questions for Reflection

33. Which stage of the journey do we find easiest, and which do we most often skip?
34. Which thread has stalled in our lives, and at which stage did it stop?
35. What would change in our families, our work and our ministry if the third degree were as deliberate as the first?
36. What has this manual shown us about Christ that we did not see before?

Appendix A: The Thread Chart

Each thread begins at one point in the tabernacle and runs through all three degrees, from what we do, to what He works, to what we become.

Thread	Tabernacle anchor	Before: what we do	During: what He works	After: what we become
1	The gate	Examine our motive	Desire is purified	Priorities are reordered
2	The bronze altar	Lay down our strength	The flesh is silenced and the Spirit takes over	Authority under authority
3	The laver	Settle accounts	We are searched and cleansed	Holiness and character
4	The lampstand	Withdraw from distraction	We are lifted into the heavenly position	Heavenly perspective
5	The table of the bread of the Presence	Fill ourselves with the word	We begin to hear	Wisdom to build
6	The altar of incense	Quiet the soul	Peace guards the heart	Endurance
7	The ark and the mercy seat	Come expecting to hear	Our will agrees with His	Execution and witness

Appendix B: The Prayer Journal Page

Copy this page for each time of prayer. Record the date and the thread under attention, then complete each stage.

Prompt	Entry
Date and thread under attention	
At the gate: what am I looking for today?	
At the altar: what have I laid down?	
At the laver: what have I confessed, forgiven or settled?	
At the lampstand: what did I withdraw from?	
At the table: which passage did I pray?	
At the altar of incense: what surfaced in the silence?	
At the mercy seat: what did I hear?	
After prayer: what did I do with what I heard?	
At the end of the week: what changed?	