

Begin with the first item in our “preflight checklist”:

Ask for God’s blessing:

Pray: Father God, as I seek a deeper encounter with your Son, speak directly to my heart and mind through your Holy Spirit. Guide my prayers that they might be sincere. May the truth of your word accomplish its purpose in me. Please thwart any attempt by the evil one to interfere in any way with what follows. Amen.

Pray for the people you know who need physical healing.

Demons and the Demonic

a brief introduction

(Part 1)

C. S. Lewis wrote: “There are two equal and opposite errors into which our race can fall about the devils. One is to disbelieve in their existence. The other is to believe, and to feel an excessive and unhealthy interest in them.”

Because Jesus frequently interacted with demons and taught and warned about the demonic, those who recognize Jesus as Lord aren’t likely to fall into either of the errors C. S. Lewis mentions. There are, however, errors into which Christians often fall. These include:

- Underestimating demonic influence.

Many believers fail to appreciate the extent and influence of demonic activity. Those who make this error will not be motivated to learn about or exercise their spiritual authority because they will see little need to do so.

- Overestimating demonic influence.

Some Christians credit the demonic realm with more power and influence than it has. Many who fall into this error will end up avoiding the issue out of fear.

- Irrational bargaining.

Some Christians seek (at least unconsciously) to cut a “deal with the devil”, something along the lines of, “I won’t give you any notice if you won’t give me any notice.” Ultimately, any deal of this nature is irrational because demons are under no compulsion to keep their end

of the bargain—they'll happily accept the surrender of your God-given authority while continuing their work unabated.

The above errors are unfortunate because Jesus demonstrated complete authority over the demonic—an authority he shares with his disciples.

Consider the following:

Mark 1: 23 - 27 Just then there was a man in their synagogue with an unclean spirit, and he cried out, "Leave us alone, Jesus the Nazarene! Have you come to destroy us? I know who you are—the Holy One of God!" But Jesus rebuked him: "Silence! Come out of him!" After throwing him into convulsions, the unclean spirit cried out with a loud voice and came out of him. They were all amazed so that they asked each other, "What is this? A new teaching with authority! He even commands the unclean spirits and they obey him." (NET)

The above account is typical of encounters between Jesus and demons: The demon (or impure spirit) is terrified; Jesus' authority is unquestioned and absolute; Jesus is in complete control. Tomorrow, we'll see how Jesus shared the authority to drive out unclean spirits with his disciples.

Questions:

- 1) Are you more prone to underestimate or overestimate demonic power/activity?
- 2) What would it be like for you to witness Jesus' complete mastery over the demonic?
- 3) Have you ever adopted something akin to a "demons can't cause me any grief if I don't acknowledge their existence" strategy? Would you recommend this strategy when dealing with other unpleasant aspects of life?

Worship:

Reflect on Jesus' complete mastery over the demonic and note how he uses his mastery to set people free.

What emotions come up for you as you consider this? Express these emotions to God in worship. (For example: "Jesus, I am so thankful for how you use your authority to release those who are captive to the demonic." or "Jesus, thank you for releasing me from that which would enslave me.")

Concluding Prayer:

Jesus, teach me the truth about the spiritual world. Lead me into an accurate understanding of the strength of the enemy I face and of the protection I have under your name. Amen.

[Text your Accountability Partner(s): Finished Monday's Exercises.]

Important:

Christians have been given spiritual authority by Jesus to speak and to issue commands in his Name.

Nonbelievers should not attempt to do so.

Nonbelievers may ask God
to protect them from the evil one
(as in the first item of the Preflight Checklist),
but they should not attempt to exercise
authority in the spiritual realm.

(This relates to tomorrow's addition
to the Preflight Checklist.)

Pray for the people you know who need emotional healing.

Begin with the first item in our “preflight checklist”:

Ask for God’s blessing:

Pray: Father God, as I seek a deeper encounter with your Son, speak directly to my heart and mind through your Holy Spirit. Guide my prayers that they might be sincere. May the truth of your word accomplish its purpose in me. Please thwart any attempt by the evil one to interfere in any way with what follows. Amen.

Demons and the Demonic

a brief introduction

(Part 2)

Yesterday we looked at a typical encounter between Jesus and the demonic and noted Jesus’ complete authority over them. Today, we’ll see that Jesus shared his authority with his disciples:

Matthew 10: 1 Jesus called his twelve disciples and gave them authority over unclean spirits so they could cast them out and heal every kind of disease and sickness. (*NET*)

Later, when Jesus expanded his ministry, he gave the same authority to seventy-two others and sent them out on a mission. After which...

Luke 10: 17 ...the seventy-two returned with joy, saying, “Lord, even the demons submit to us in your name!” (*NET*)

Still later, the apostle John reminds believers that...

1 John 4: 4 You are from God, little children, and have conquered them [spirits who are not of God], because the one who is in you is greater than the one who is in the world. (*NET; brackets added.*)

We are called and equipped to engage and defeat the demonic—not by elaborate ritual or by the speaking of smooth words and phrases, but by simply asserting the spiritual authority Jesus has given us.

This brings us to the second item in our preflight checklist:

Assert spiritual authority:

Say aloud: As a child of God and with the authority of Jesus, I forbid any spirit that is not of God from interfering in any way with what follows. I command this in Jesus' Name.

Questions:

- 1) Is the idea of wielding spiritual authority new to you?
- 2) When the seventy-two returned, saying “Lord, even the demons submit to us in your name!”, why do you suppose their attitude was one of joy?
- 3) Would you like to share in the joy of the seventy-two?

Worship:

Consider how Jesus trained, empowered and sent his disciples out to heal and drive out demons in his name, and what this says about the level of trust Jesus had in his disciples.

Praise God for inviting you to share in the bringing about of his Kingdom. (For example: “Jesus, thank you for trusting me with a role in bringing about your Kingdom.” or “Jesus, thank you for equipping and commissioning me to act in the spiritual realm with your authority.”)

Concluding Prayer:

Jesus, help me to understand the authority you've given me in the spiritual realm and teach me to exercise it appropriately that I might share in the joy of your earliest disciples. Amen.

[Text your Accountability Partner(s): Finished Tuesday's Exercises.]

(If you'd like to learn more about the authority believers have over the demonic, check out the book recommendation at the end of this week's devotionals, below.)

Pray for salvation and/or spiritual breakthrough for friends and family members who need it.

Begin with the first two preflight checklist items:

Ask for God's blessing:

Pray: Father God, as I seek a deeper encounter with your Son, speak directly to my heart and mind through your Holy Spirit. Guide my prayers that they might be sincere. May the truth of your word accomplish its purpose in me. Please thwart any attempt by the evil one to interfere in any way with what follows. Amen.

Assert spiritual authority:

Say aloud: As a child of God and with the authority of Jesus, I forbid any spirit that is not of God from interfering in any way with what follows. I command this in Jesus' Name.

Forgiveness

In the eighteenth chapter of Luke, "Jesus told this parable to some who were confident that they were righteous and looked down on everyone else":

Luke 18: 10 - 14 "Two men went up to the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. The Pharisee stood and prayed about himself like this: 'God, I thank you that I am not like other people: extortionists, unrighteous people, adulterers—or even like this tax collector. I fast twice a week; I give a tenth of everything I get.' The tax collector, however, stood far off and would not even look up to heaven, but beat his breast and said, 'God, be merciful to me, sinner that I am!' I tell you that this man went down to his home justified rather than the Pharisee. For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, but he who humbles himself will be exalted." (NET)

This parable should be of great encouragement to all but those who are confident in their own righteousness, for it reveals that God's heart is inclined toward those who know they're in need of forgiveness. Take a moment to let this sink in: The one who is most offended by our sin is eager to forgive!

Forgiveness is the gateway into the presence of God, the first of the salvation gifts. (More on the salvation gifts later.) A brief survey of scripture reveals that:

Everyone who believes in Jesus receives forgiveness of sins:

Acts 10: 43, (Peter:) "...all the prophets testify, that everyone who believes in him [Jesus] receives forgiveness of sins through his name." (*NET; brackets added*)

Forgiveness of sin is at the heart of the gospel message:

Ephesians 1: 7 In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, in accordance with the riches of God's grace... (*NIV*)

Colossians 1: 13, 14 He delivered us from the power of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of the Son he loves, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins. (*NET*)

Forgiveness is offered to those who confess their sins:

1 John 1: 6 - 10 If we say we have fellowship with him and yet keep on walking in the darkness, we are lying and not practicing the truth. But if we walk in the light as he himself is in the light, we have fellowship with one another and the blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin. If we say we do not bear the guilt of sin, we are deceiving ourselves and the truth is not in us. But if we confess our sins, he is faithful and righteous, forgiving us our sins and cleansing us from all unrighteousness. If we say we have not sinned, we make him a liar and his word is not in us. (*NET*)

These last verses are of particular importance because each verse helps us to contextualize the other verses. Taken as a whole, we learn that:

God desires for us to no longer walk in darkness, that is, in our sinful ways, but the solution isn't to deny our sinfulness (because we are lying and/or self deceived if we claim to be without sin). The solution is found in the forgiveness God offers to those who confess their sin.

Here's one way to confess sin and ask for forgiveness:

Pray: "God, please bring to mind anything I've done that is offensive to you." (If nothing comes to mind, skip the next prayer. If something comes to mind, continue:)

"Father God, I want to confess my sin to you and ask for your forgiveness. Specifically, I confess the sin (or sins) of _____. (Be as specific as possible. Make a list if necessary.) Please forgive me and change me and cleanse me. Please grant me strength that I might truly turn from my sin. I receive your forgiveness. Thank you. Amen."

Questions:

- 1) Are you able to identify the area in which you most struggle with sin?
- 2) Jesus' parable reveals God's favor toward those who know their sinful brokenness. How would confidence in one's own righteousness be a barrier to a relationship with God?
- 3) Does God make it easy or hard to be forgiven?

Worship:

Consider how willing God is to forgive us and then enter into worship by expressing your thankfulness directly to him. (For example: God, it is hard for me to believe your readiness and willingness to forgive. Thank you for your graciousness to me. Amen.")

Concluding Prayer: (Pray the prayer for forgiveness in the shadow box above.)

So important is the seeking of forgiveness that it will become the third item in our preflight checklist.

[Text your Accountability Partner(s): Finished Wednesday's Exercises.]

A note on the preflight checklist: With the addition of “seeking forgiveness” our checklist is three quarters complete. You may find this latest addition to be initially time consuming. Be assured that after a few days of daily confession the time it takes to complete this step will diminish.

Pray for the specific needs of immediate family members and loved ones.

Begin with the preflight checklist:

Ask for God's blessing:

Pray: Father God, as I seek a deeper encounter with your Son, speak directly to my heart and mind through your Holy Spirit. Guide my prayers that they might be sincere. May the truth of your word accomplish its purpose in me. Please thwart any attempt by the evil one to interfere in any way with what follows. Amen.

Assert spiritual authority:

Say aloud: As a child of God and with the authority of Jesus, I forbid any spirit that is not of God from interfering in any way with what follows. I command this in Jesus' Name.

Ask for forgiveness:

Pray: "God, please bring to mind anything I've done that is offensive to you." (If nothing comes to mind, skip the next prayer. If something comes to mind, continue:)

"Father God, I want to confess my sin to you and ask for your forgiveness. Specifically, I confess the sin (or sins) of _____. (Be as specific as possible. Make a list if necessary.) Please forgive me and change me and cleanse me. Please grant me strength that I might truly turn from my sin. I receive your forgiveness. Thank you. Amen."

Forgiving Others

In the Lord's Prayer, Jesus links God's forgiving of our sin (or debts) with our forgiving those who have sinned against us:

Matthew 6: 12 (Jesus, in the Lord's Prayer:) "...forgive us our debts, as we ourselves have forgiven our debtors." (*NET*)

Two verses later, Jesus provides this commentary:

Matthew 6: 14, 15 "For if you forgive others their sins, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive others, your Father will not forgive you your sins." (*NET*)

In another place, Jesus says:

Mark 11: 25 "Whenever you stand praying, if you have anything against anyone, forgive him, so that your Father in heaven will also forgive you your sins." (*NET*)

Clearly, the forgiving of others is something Jesus both desires and requires of us.

The apostle Paul, likewise, reminds believers that we should forgive others as the Lord has forgiven us:

Colossians 3: 12, 13 Therefore, as the elect of God, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with a heart of mercy, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience, bearing with one another and forgiving one another, if someone happens to have a complaint against anyone else. Just as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also forgive others.
(NET)

Forgiving others may well be the hardest thing God asks of us. This is especially true when the sin against us was severe, of long duration and/or at a time when we were particularly vulnerable.

Forgiving others is the forth item on our “preflight checklist”.

Here’s one way to pray for forgiveness:

Pray: God, please bring to mind anyone I need to forgive.

(If no one comes to mind, skip the next prayer. If someone comes to mind, continue:)

Pray: God, I forgive _____ (name of person) for _____. (Name the sin as specifically as possible.) Please help me to forgive them from the heart. Amen.

Questions:

- 1) Why, do you suppose, Jesus so closely ties our receiving forgiveness with our extending forgiveness to others?
- 2) Is there someone you aren’t sure you could ever forgive?

Worship:

Reflect on the fact that God’s command to forgive is not only a command for you to forgive others, but a command for others to forgive you. How does it feel to know that God is not only eager to forgive you, but also insists that others do the same?

Take these feelings into God’s presence and express them as worship. (For example: God, it is almost too much for me to accept

that the freedom you want to give me includes the freely given forgiveness of everyone I have sinned against. Thank you for your graciousness to me. Amen.”)

Concluding Prayer:

(Pray the prayer of forgiveness to others in the shadow box above.)

One additional thought: Those who have been severely wounded by others may find it difficult, if not impossible, to forgive. If this describes you, know that Jesus understands the depth of your hurt and desires your healing. As you grow spiritually you’ll grow in your ability to forgive others (and forgiving others will enhance your capacity for spiritual growth). Forgive those you’re able to forgive and pray a prayer like this for those you can’t: “Jesus, you know why it’s so difficult for me to forgive _____. Please help me to desire to forgive them and to be able to forgive them from my heart. Amen.”)

[Text your Accountability Partner(s): Finished Thursday’s Exercises.]

Begin with the preflight checklist:

Ask for God's blessing:

Pray: Father God, as I seek a deeper encounter with your Son, speak directly to my heart and mind through your Holy Spirit. Guide my prayers that they might be sincere. May the truth of your word accomplish its purpose in me. Please thwart any attempt by the evil one to interfere in any way with what follows. Amen.

Assert spiritual authority:

Say aloud: As a child of God and with the authority of Jesus, I forbid any spirit that is not of God from interfering in any way with what follows. I command this in Jesus' Name.

Ask for forgiveness:

Pray: "God, please bring to mind anything I've done that is offensive to you." (If nothing comes to mind, skip the next prayer. If something comes to mind, continue:)

"Father God, I want to confess my sin to you and ask for your forgiveness. Specifically, I confess the sin (or sins) of _____. (Be as specific as possible. Make a list if necessary.) Please forgive me and change me and cleanse me. Please grant me strength that I might truly turn from my sin. I receive your forgiveness. Thank you. Amen."

Forgive others:

Pray: God, please bring to mind anyone I need to forgive.

(If no one comes to mind, skip the next prayer. If someone comes to mind, continue:)

Pray: God, I forgive _____ (name of person) for _____.
(Name the sin as specifically as possible.) Please help me to forgive them from the heart. Amen.

(If you find yourself unable to forgive someone, pray this prayer: "Jesus, you know why it's so difficult for me to forgive _____. Please help me to desire to forgive them and please heal me so completely that I am able to forgive them from my heart. Amen.")

Pray for government and world leaders—that God would grant them wisdom, courage, knowledge of the truth and genuine faith in him.

Our Identity as Believers

On the journey into a deeper encounter with Jesus, most of our focus has been and will remain on Jesus. But it's important to remember that believers, those who have trusted Jesus with their lives, have already had a life changing encounter with him.

Those who have placed their faith in Jesus have received salvation, but few understand the multifaceted nature of the salvation they've received. When God saves us, he does so by means of a variety of gifts—a gift package—which, together, bring us into the fullness of life he intends for us to have and enjoy. The gifts include forgiveness, justification, adoption, spiritual rebirth, the giving of the Holy Spirit and eternal life. Having received the salvation gifts, this is how Peter describes who we now are as a group:

1 Peter 2: 9 - 10 But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's special possession, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light. Once you were not a people, but now you are the people of God; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy. (*NIV*)

Questions:

- 1) Which of the salvation gifts listed above is most familiar to you?
- 2) Which of the salvation gifts do you know the least about?
- 3) The salvation gifts, as a whole, express God's extravagant love for us. Which of the gifts strikes you as being the most extravagant?

Worship:

Meditate on the fact that all who trust in Jesus for salvation have become (together with all other believers) "a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's special possession".

Turn to God and try to put into words what this means to you. (Example: God, I can scarcely believe that I am counted as one of your special possessions. I am in awe of your generosity and grace. Amen.")

Concluding Prayer:

Father God, thank you for sending your Son to purchase the salvation gifts for me. Jesus, thank you for loving me so much that you were willing to die for me. Holy Spirit, please bring me into full awareness of all that I now am and possess so that I might truly live as one of your chosen people, as a member of your royal priesthood. Amen.

[Text your Accountability Partner(s): Finished Friday's Exercises.]

Begin with the preflight checklist:

Ask for God's blessing:

Pray: Father God, as I seek a deeper encounter with your Son, speak directly to my heart and mind through your Holy Spirit. Guide my prayers that they might be sincere. May the truth of your word accomplish its purpose in me. Please thwart any attempt by the evil one to interfere in any way with what follows. Amen.

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Forgive others:

Pray: God, please bring to mind anyone I need to forgive.

(If no one comes to mind, skip the next prayer. If someone comes to mind, continue:)

Pray: God, I forgive _____ (name of person) for _____. (Name the sin as specifically as possible.) Please help me to forgive them from the heart. Amen.

(If you find yourself unable to forgive someone, pray this prayer: "Jesus, you know why it's so difficult for me to forgive _____. Please help me to desire to forgive them and please heal me so completely that I am able to forgive them from my heart. Amen.")

Pray for those in any of the daily categories who have the greatest need.

Justification

The salvation gifts include forgiveness, justification, adoption, spiritual rebirth, the giving of the Holy Spirit and eternal life. Together, the gifts bring us into the fullness of life God intends for us to have and enjoy. Since we've recently discussed *forgiveness*, we'll begin our consideration of the salvation gifts with *justification*.

The concept of justification is difficult to convey because the word is not used today the way it was in the Bible. That said, if God had a book, a ledger, within which he kept a record of our every sin, and if we think of sin as a debt for which God will hold us accountable, forgiveness can be likened to the cancelation of the sum total of our debt. But with justification, when we examine the ledger, we see that not only has our debt been forgiven, but someone else's great wealth has been transferred into our account. Forgiveness cancels our debt; justification credits our account with riches.

Monetary debt is, of course, just a metaphor. What we're really talking about in God's ledger is a record of our sin. To be forgiven is to have the record of our sin erased; to be justified is to have someone else's goodness (Christ's goodness) credited to our account. Those who have been forgiven and justified by God, therefore, enjoy a new standing with God—not only is there nothing in the record to condemn us, there is everything to commend us.

When it comes to having righteousness before God, we have two options: The first is to earn it ourselves (and good luck with that). The second is to receive righteousness as a gift—a gift which God credits to the account of those who put faith in Christ. When we believe, God credits Jesus' righteousness to us and we are said to have been *justified*.

In the third chapter of his letter to the Philippians, the apostle Paul notes that he has cast aside whatever righteousness he might have earned by his own efforts in favor of the righteousness that “is through faith in Christ—the righteousness that comes from God on the basis of faith.” (*NIV*)

Imagine how anxious you'd feel walking into God's presence clothed in sin-stained garments. Contrast this with how you'd feel walking into God's presence having been cleaned up and clothed in Christ's righteousness. The gifts of forgiveness and justification make it possible to be in God's presence without fear. Paul put it this way: “Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ...” (*Romans 5: 1; NET*)

Questions:

- 1) Can you articulate the difference between the gift of forgiveness and the gift of justification? Refer to the second paragraph (above) if you need help.
- 2) Can we be justified before God by our own efforts?
- 3) Picture a Christian standing before God. How might the posture of a believer who understands justification be different from the posture of a believer who doesn't understand justification?

Worship:

Consider how, as a believer, you have been clothed in the righteousness of Christ.

Express to God whatever feelings come up for you. (Example: Jesus, I don't understand how you can give the gift of righteousness to someone like me, but I am grateful that you have done so. Amen.")

Concluding Prayer:

Father God, help me to understand and be aware of your precious gift of justification. Help me to embrace it fully so that I can experience the peace you intend for me to enjoy in your presence. Amen.

[Text your Accountability Partner(s): Finished Saturday's Exercises.]

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The majority of the biblical quotes are from the New English Translation (NET)

NET

New English Translation

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