**Being a Spiritually Minded Christian**

**Part Twelve**

**Surrendering to the Will of God in Prayer**

* ***As believers we have a choice: We can be naturally minded, carnally minded, or spiritually minded.***
* ***The three areas that enable us to develop into spiritually minded Christians are our relationship to the Word of God, Prayer, and Christian Fellowship.***
* ***We spent a number of weeks studying how to become spiritually minded Christians in relationship to the Word of God.***
* ***Three weeks ago, we began studying how to become spiritually minded Christians through our relationship with God in prayer and we looked at the delight of prayer.***
* ***Two weeks ago we looked at the supernatural aspect of prayer in terms of speaking in tongues and how it assists us in becoming spiritually minded.***
* ***Last week we answered the question, “Why do we pray?***
* ***We looked at the purpose of prayer and why it is necessary to actually ask God to intervene in our lives although He already knows our needs and already wants to help us and meet our needs because He loves us.***
* ***We saw that the key to answering the question of why we need to pray was found in the creation narrative and the authority that God gave to man when He created the earth.* Then God said, “Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness; let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth.”” *(Genesis 1:26).***
* ***We learned that when God said,* “let them have dominion over … all the earth” *it meant He gave man authority over all the earth. Therefore, authority over the earth does not lie with God or Satan, but with man and that has never changed! Our choices still matter!***

* ***We also learned that there is a clear distinction and difference between authority and ability or the power to actually do something.***
* ***Although God gave man authority over the earth it does not mean that God created man with the freedom or ability to carry out all that he wishes.***
* ***Man is a limited, created being, meant to rely on God’s power and strength and the leading of the Holy Spirit.***
* ***There is a distinct difference between authority and ability. Authority means one has the freedom to choose what one wants to do. Ability means one has the strength, power, and resources to carry out one’s choices.***
* ***Therefore, God did not give man the power to do whatever he wants. He gave man “dominion over all the earth” so he has the authority to choose whose power and plans will be manifest in his life and on the earth.***
* ***The entire Bible from Genesis to Revelation is a story about the choices people made and how those choices shaped their lives. Some chose to submit to the will of God while others chose to act contrary to His will. The Bible is filled with examples of the consequences of those whose choices opposed God’s will and the blessings received by those who chose to submit to God’s will.***
* ***The first choice made by man which is recorded in the Bible is in Genesis, Chapter 3, when Adam and Eve were confronted by the serpent. They had to choose whom they would believe and whose words they would act upon—God’s Word or Satan’s word.***
* ***Unfortunately, Adam and Eve chose to agree with Satan’s words and gave him “building rights” to establish his kingdom on this earth. Without Adam’s choice to believe and act upon Satan’s words, Satan would have been powerless to do anything on the earth.***
* ***We can see the importance of agreement and how that one choice changed the course of history for mankind with devastating consequences.***
* ***Every day, even as believers, we are confronted with the choice of whom to believe, either God and His Word or the lies that fill this world. In similar fashion, Joshua challenged Israel,* “choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve.” *(Joshua 24:15).***
* ***Prayer is one of the central ways in which we come into agreement with the will of God. Before we embark on any course of action, the first thing we should do is submit our will to God’s will and come to Him in prayer and ask for His guidance and blessings. Jesus is our good Shepherd, and if invited to, He will lead us.***
* ***To experience the power of God in our lives we must make clear consistent decisions to yield to God and agree with Him in prayer.***

**1 John 5:14 (NKJV)
14 Now this is the confidence that we have in Him, that if we ask anything according to His will, He hears us.**

* ***When our prayers line up with God’s will then we will see God’s will released in our lives and those around us.***
* ***Our prayers on their own are powerless. It is important to understand it is not our prayers that have the power to change things but it is God who changes things when our prayers line up with His Word and His will.***
* ***When our prayers are motivated by fleshly desires or selfishness they are powerless,* “You ask and do not receive, because you ask amiss, that you may spend it on your pleasures.” *(James 4:3).***
* ***When we pray according to God’s will, our prayers will be like well-placed arrows hitting their intended target. They will bring forth eternal results.***
* ***If we do not come into agreement with God’s will in prayer, we will not see God’s will done in our lives.***
* ***Some Christians don’t seek to know God’s will. Others fail to pray into God’s will, even when it is revealed to them.***
* ***Some Christians speak about freedom, but fail to agree with God in prayer until that freedom is fully manifest.***
* ***Every revival recorded in the Bible or in the history of the Church, was birthed through people waiting on God and continuing to pray, “Your kingdom come. Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven” until it was fulfilled.***

**Acts 1:14 (NKJV)**

**14These all continued with one accord in prayer and supplication, with the women and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with His brothers.**

* ***On the Day of Pentecost the Church was born. Subsequently, there was an outpouring of the Holy Spirit and the first revival meeting of the Church was held. Each of these events was birthed through prayer. Jesus’ disciples spent ten days in prayer waiting in the Upper Room for the promise from the Father.***
* ***From Genesis 22, we studied the significance of Abraham sacrificing his son Isaac as a whole offering.***
* ***When Abraham took Isaac, his only son by his wife Sarah, and offered him up on Mount Moriah as a whole offering unto God, this was not only an act of faith and obedience. It was truly an act of worship and prayer before God.***
* ***To fully comprehend the significance of what Abraham did we must understand that God did not just say, “because you had faith in Me all the nations shall be blessed” but* “because you have done this thing, and have not withheld your son, your only son.” *(Genesis 22:16).***
* **“In your seed all the nations of the earth shall be blessed, because you have obeyed My voice.” *(Genesis 22:18). Abraham, in his act of worship and prayer, gave up not only his son Isaac, but dedicated all his descendants to the will of God which would ultimately result in the birth of God’s Son, Jesus, in the lineage of Abraham to be “the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!” (John 1:29). Through Abraham’s obedience Jesus was able to come as the Son of Man to redeem mankind.***
* ***The person referred to by God as* “in your seed all the nations of the earth shall be blessed” *is not Isaac but Jesus, just as Paul stated in Galatians 3:16.* “Now to Abraham and his Seed were the promises made. He does not say, “And to seeds,” as of many, but as of one, “And to your Seed,” who is Christ.”**
* ***Unless Abraham had agreed with God’s will, Jesus could not have come into the world as the Son of Man through the offspring of Abraham. God would have had to find another person who would believe and agree with Him to surrender his descendants to the will of God. The authority over Abraham’s descendants did not belong to God, but to Abraham who chose to give his descendants into the hands of God.***
* ***Throughout the Bible we read of men and women who surrendered to the will of God and came into agreement with God so His will could be done on earth. We can follow the stories of faithful men and women, such as Rahab, Ruth, David, and many others in the linage of Jesus, who came into agreement with God, ultimately resulting in the birth of the Son of Abraham, the Son of David—the Son of God.***
* ***Prayer is the first and most important thing we can do to see the fulfillment of God’s will done on earth as it is in Heaven.***
* ***Prayer is the difference between seeing God’s will done in our lives and failing to see the fulfillment of God’s will in our lives.***
* ***The naturally minded person doesn't pray much because he sees little value in prayer and would rather be engaged in activities that appear to be more practical.***
* ***The carnally minded person does not continue in prayer because he quickly tires when he does not see immediate results. But the Bible exhorts us that by faith and patience we inherit the promises. (Hebrew 6:12). Paul exhorts us,* “rejoicing in hope, patient in tribulation, continuing steadfastly in prayer.” *(Romans 12:12).***

* ***The spiritually minded Christian sees the true value of prayer and is able to patiently wait on God in agreement, whether it takes a few minutes or a few decades until the fulfillment of God’s promises and purposes are manifest.***
* ***We will look at two examples in the New Testament whose surrender to the will of God in prayer impacted mankind and resulted in advancing God’s plan of salvation on the earth.***
* ***The first example is the birth of John the Baptist.***
* ***The birth of John the Baptist, the forerunner who prepared the way for the Messiah, is a wonderful example of how persistence in prayer resulted in His kingdom coming and Jesus Christ being manifest.***

**Luke 1:5-17 (NKJV)
5 There was in the days of Herod, the king of Judea, a certain priest named Zacharias, of the division of Abijah. His wife was of the daughters of Aaron, and her name was Elizabeth.
6 And they were both righteous before God, walking in all the commandments and ordinances of the Lord blameless.**

**7 But they had no child, because Elizabeth was barren, and they were both well advanced in years.**

**8 So it was, that while he was serving as priest before God in the order of his division,
9 according to the custom of the priesthood, his lot fell to burn incense when he went into the temple of the Lord.**

* ***The story of the birth of John the Baptist commences with the backdrop of his parents experiencing years of disappointment* “because Elizabeth was barren.”**
* ***The narrative in Luke, Chapter one, introduces both Zacharias and Elizabeth as* “well advanced in years” *emphasizing the impossibility for them to have a child at that time in their lives. It also reinforces their disappointment at being childless for so many years.***
* ***However, in spite of these disappointments they did not allow this to jade their view of God, nor did it cause them to give up serving Him faithfully.* “And they were both righteous before God, walking in all the commandments and ordinances of the Lord blameless.” (verse 6).**
* ***They did not give up on God. They did not allow the disappointments of life to distort their view of God nor to question His faithfulness although their prayers for a child seemed to go unanswered and possibly unheard.***
* ***Their faithfulness to continue to serve God in spite of difficult and even painful circumstances reveals that their true motivation was pure, because they loved God and harbored no selfish reasons.* “For this is the love of God, that we keep His commandments. And His commandments are not burdensome.” *(1 John 5:3).***
* ***Sometimes in life, we may experience apparent setbacks or disappointing circumstances even though we are seeking to walk with God and submit fully to His will. These experiences test the true motivation of our hearts and provide us opportunities to increase our faith. God will use those very circumstances, which we may regard as negative, to bring forth the glorious purposes of His will and His kingdom in our lives—if we are willing to persistently trust Him and continue steadfastly in prayer.***
* ***When it says,* “they were both righteous before God” *it didn't mean Zacharias and Elizabeth never sinned or that everything they did was perfect. It meant they dealt with their sins in a godly way by* “walking in all commandments and ordinances of the Lord blameless.”**
* ***Specifically, it meant going to God in faith and acknowledging and confessing their sins and failures and making the appropriate sacrifices at the Temple to atone for their sins and looking forward in hopeful expectation to the Anointed One, the Messiah, who would come and fulfill all the righteous requirements of the Law resulting in the promised redemption.***
* ***Zacharias’ faithfulness and desire to follow the commandments of God was punctuated at the start of the story when he, as a priest, took his turn to burn incense in the Holy Place as prescribed by the Law of Moses.***
* ***Zacharias’ wholehearted devotion to God is also evidenced because at his age he would have been exempt from serving at the Temple. The priests were only required to serve at the temple from the ages of 25 to 50 years old. (Numbers 8:24). However, if the priests and Levites wanted to, they could choose to continue to minister beyond age 50. (Numbers 8:25). Zacharias was one who chose to continue to serve at the Temple even though he was advanced in years.***
* ***How many times do Christians give up on God when things don't go the way they would have wanted? But Zacharias and Elizabeth are two examples of believers who continued to persevere in prayer and service to God in the face of great disappointment.***
* ***Their hopes for a child faded as old age overtook them, but their faithfulness and trust in God never faded.***

**Luke 1:9-15 (NKJV)**

**9 according to the custom of the priesthood, his lot fell to burn incense when he went into the temple of the Lord.
10 And the whole multitude of the people was praying outside at the hour of incense.
11 Then an angel of the Lord appeared to him, standing on the right side of the altar of incense.**

* ***We need to cultivate an atmosphere of expectation in our hearts because we don’t know when God will suddenly invade our circumstances with a supernatural manifestation of His presence.* “Then an angel of the Lord appeared to him, standing on the right side of the altar of incense.”**
* ***When our hearts are constantly filled with expectation because we know that God is always attentive to us, our prayer life will be energized.***

**12 And when Zacharias saw him, he was troubled, and fear fell upon him.
13 But the angel said to him, “Do not be afraid, Zacharias, for your prayer is heard; and your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son, and you shall call his name John.
14 And you will have joy and gladness, and many will rejoice at his birth.
15 For he will be great in the sight of the Lord, and shall drink neither wine nor strong drink. He will also be filled with the Holy Spirit, even from his mother’s womb.**

* ***When God shows up in even a fraction of His power and glory it overwhelms us,*****“when Zacharias saw him, he was troubled, and fear fell upon him.”**
* ***The angel’s words brought both reassurance and surprise to Zacharias.* “Do not be afraid, Zacharias, for your prayer is heard; and your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son, and you shall call his name John.”**
* ***Zacharias found reassurance that God’s favour was upon him.***
* ***Zacharias was surprised that their prayers for a child were being answered at this late stage in their lives.***
* ***Probably, as a young married couple, Zacharias and Elizabeth had prayed for many years for the Lord to give them a child. However, as the autumn of their lives began to overtake them, their hope and prayers for a child likely faded and eventually ceased long ago.***
* ***However, just because they had stopped praying for a child didn’t mean that they had stopped praying or looking to God. Like most devoted Jews, they would have continued to pray and wait with expectation for* “the Consolation of Israel” *(Luke 2:25), the Messiah, who would bring deliverance and usher in God’s eternal kingdom.***
* ***In fact, the birth of John was not only the answer to their prayer for a child, but also the answer to their prayers for the Messiah because their son’s ministry was to prepare the way for Jesus Christ.* “And he will turn many of the children of Israel to the Lord their God. He will also go before Him in the spirit and power of Elijah, ‘to turn the hearts of the fathers to the children,’ and the disobedient to the wisdom of the just, to make ready a people prepared for the Lord.” *(Luke 1:16-17).***
* ***Rather than being filled with delight at this marvelous news, Zacharias’ response was marred by a tinge of skepticism rooted in his years of disappointment.* “And Zacharias said to the angel, “How shall I know this? For I am an old man, and my wife is well advanced in years.” *(Luke 1:18).***
* ***Zacharias’ question,* “How shall I know this? *was not asking with wonderment “How is God going to do this? but skepticism, “How can I know this is really going to happen?”***
* ***Sometimes as believers we pray so long for a breakthrough that we lose hope and begin to think, “Can things really change?” But God wants us to continue to look to Him in prayer believing that He is hearing us and He is at work behind the scenes and at the proper time and in the best way He will answer us.***
* ***and Elizabeth’s prayers for a son were in agreement with God’s will, they just didn’t understand God’s perfect timing. Timing is extremely important in God’s plan.* “But when the fullness of the time had come, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the law.” *(Galatians 4:4).***
* ***Although they had stopped praying for a son many years before, God had not forgotten their years of prayers and was now preparing to answer.***

**Luke 1:19-25 (NKJV)**

**19 And the angel answered and said to him, “I am Gabriel, who stands in the presence of God, and was sent to speak to you and bring you these glad tidings.
20 But behold, you will be mute and not able to speak until the day these things take place, because you did not believe my words which will be fulfilled in their own time.”**

* ***Because Zacharias doubted the word of the Lord, the sign that was given to him was* “you will be mute and not able to speak until the day these things take place.”**
* ***If he had believed he could have immediately proclaimed the word of the Lord, but because he doubted he could not speak until the birth of his son. However, God used his muteness as a sign to the people that he had a supernatural encounter with God.***

**21 And the people waited for Zacharias, and marveled that he lingered so long in the temple.
22 But when he came out, he could not speak to them; and they perceived that he had seen a vision in the temple, for he beckoned to them and remained speechless.**

**23 So it was, as soon as the days of his service were completed, that he departed to his own house.
24 Now after those days his wife Elizabeth conceived; and she hid herself five months, saying,
25 “Thus the Lord has dealt with me, in the days when He looked on me, to take away my reproach among people.”**

* ***Elizabeth and Zacharias had to wait many years and endure much disappointment before the birth of John; however, their years of sorrow were not in vain. God had a very specific purpose that would be used in His plan of salvation.***
* ***What was God’s reason for them to have a son in their old age after a lifetime of barrenness?***
* ***John the Baptist’s ministry was like no other before, because he was preparing the way for the Messiah. In fact, Jesus said this about him:* “For I say to you, among those born of women there is not a greater prophet than John the Baptist.” *(Luke 7:28).***
* ***John the Baptist’s ministry was unique in a number of ways, but chiefly in two ways:***
* ***First, he was the one to prepare the way for Jesus’ ministry. “*Behold, I send My messenger before Your face, who will prepare Your way before You.” *(Luke 7:27).***
* ***Second, although he was the greatest Old Testament prophet he did not perform one miracle, produce one sign, or heal a single person.***
* ***How did all of Israel know that John had a very special message from God if he did not perform one miracle, sign, or wonder? It was through John’s miraculous conception and birth! If Elizabeth’s pregnancy was supernatural, what kind of child would she bear?*  “And all those who heard them kept them in their hearts, saying, "What kind of child will this be?" And the hand of the Lord was with him.” *(Luke 1:66).***
* ***All the eyes of Israel were fixed on John the Baptist from his birth, eagerly anticipating the day he would speak the message God had given him.* “So the child grew and became strong in spirit, and was in the deserts till the day of his manifestation to Israel.” *(Luke 1:80).***
* ***Zacharias and Elizabeth bore years of shame, sorrow, and disappointment so God’s message could go forth. What a privilege!***
* ***Because of Zacharias and Elizabeth’s sacrifice, they were blessed to be not only observers to see His kingdom come, but participants in God’s kingdom coming and His will being done on earth as it is done in Heaven.***
* ***Sometimes prayer and intercession take on the form of waiting on God patiently for His perfect timing. Only in God’s timing is His will done on earth as it is already done in Heaven.***

* ***Mary provides the second example of agreeing with God in prayer.***

**Luke 1:26-38 (NKJV)
26 Now in the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent by God to a city of Galilee named Nazareth,
27 to a virgin betrothed to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David. The virgin’s name was Mary.
28 And having come in, the angel said to her, “Rejoice, highly favored one, the Lord is with you; blessed are you among women!”**

**29 But when she saw him, she was troubled at his saying, and considered what manner of greeting this was.
30 Then the angel said to her, “Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God.**

**31 And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bring forth a Son, and shall call His name Jesus.
32 He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Highest; and the Lord God will give Him the throne of His father David.
33 And He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of His kingdom there will be no end.”**

* ***Mary was greeted by an angel with the most remarkable news that a woman ever heard,* “you will conceive in your womb and bring forth a Son … He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Highest … And He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of His kingdom there will be no end.”**

**34 Then Mary said to the angel, “How can this be, since I do not know a man?”**

* ***Mary had one simple question:* “How can this be, since I do not know a man?”**
* ***Although Mary and Zacharias both responded to the words of the angel with questions, the difference in their motivation for asking their questions is striking.***
* ***Zacharias’ question was rooted in disbelief while Mary’s question was simply trying to understand what the Lord was saying to her and what was required of her.***
* ***Mary asked the question out of an honest heart of faith while Zacharias asked the question out of a heart of unbelief and disappointment.***

**35 And the angel answered and said to her, “The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Highest will overshadow you; therefore, also, that Holy One who is to be born will be called the Son of God.
36 Now indeed, Elizabeth your relative has also conceived a son in her old age; and this is now the sixth month for her who was called barren.**

* ***The angel told Mary that it would not be a natural conception. It would be accomplished by the power of the Holy Spirit and she would conceive a Son who would be called the Son of God.***
* ***Her cousin Elizabeth’s miraculous conception in her old age was also a sign to Mary that the words spoken over her regarding the virgin birth of her Son would also come to pass.***
* ***One woman was too old and one was too young, but both agreed with the will of God and He visited both of them with His power and glory.***

**37 For with God nothing will be impossible.”**

* ***The angel’s words ended with a revelation that God’s power is infinite, His plans are perfect, and His glory beyond comprehension. “*For with God nothing will be impossible.”**

**38 Then Mary said, “Behold the maidservant of the Lord! Let it be to me according to your word.” And the angel departed from her.**

* ***Mary’s response resounds with faith and a full and unreserved surrender to the will of God,* “Behold the maidservant of the Lord! Let it be to me according to your word.”**
* ***Once Mary agreed to God’s will being done in her life and specifically agreed for her body to be used for the glory of God, the angel departed from her. His job was done and hers was about to begin!***
* ***With Mary’s agreement with the will of God, the last piece of the puzzle had been put in place to bring about the birth of Jesus, the Messiah, the Son of God, and the Saviour of the world.***
* ***While in the story of Zacharias and Elizabeth the role of prayer is self-evident, one may ask how does prayer play a role in the story of Mary for it is clear she wasn't praying to have a supernatural conception or give birth to the Son of God?***
* ***Mary’s response to the angel is her prayer,* “Behold the maidservant of the Lord! Let it be to me according to your word.” *God revealed His will for her life to Mary and her response was, “Yes, I agree with You. Let Your will be done in my life.” Prayer is much more straight forward than many understand, because it is simply speaking with God. Prayer should be a two-sided conversation.***
* ***To more fully appreciate Mary’s response to the angel it is important to understand the last words the angel spoke to her,* “For with God nothing will be impossible.” *The literal Greek words are* “For no word from God shall be void of power.” *(ASV).***
* ***Therefore appreciating the flow in this conversation between the angel and Mary, the angel said,* “For no word from God shall be void of power” *and Mary responded,* “Let it be to me according to your word.”**
* ***Through the birth of Jesus Christ the Word was made flesh.***
* ***Mary’s agreement with the will of God brought forth the Living Word of God.***
* ***Being in agreement with God’s Word releases the power of God.***
* ***Mary’s word of agreement was what God was looking for and once she said, “Yes,” the angel immediately departed.***

**Luke 1:45 (NKJV)
45 Blessed is she who believed, for there will be a fulfillment of those things which were told her from the Lord.”**

* ***Because Mary was willing to believe and agree with God, then God was able to fulfill His plan of salvation.***
* ***Through one woman’s agreement with Satan, sin entered the world.***
* ***Through one woman’s agreement with God, the Saviour entered the world.***
* ***Both Elizabeth and Mary came into agreement with the will of God for their lives. Was it more difficult for Elizabeth or for Mary to come into agreement with the Word of the Lord, for one was too old and one was too young?***
* ***Even though Elizabeth had endured many years of disappointment, the promise of bearing a child would remove the shame and social stigma she felt.* “Thus the Lord has dealt with me, in the days when He looked on me, to take away my reproach among people.” *(Luke 1:25).***
* ***However, for Mary, as an unwed woman, to agree with the word of the Lord for her life, meant she would be misunderstood, reproached, and possibly forsaken by her family or even put to death.***
* ***The promise given to Elizabeth would remove her reproach.***
* ***The promise given to Mary would bring her reproach.***
* ***Often, when we choose to surrender to the will of God we will be misunderstood by family and friends and even by this world,* “and you will be hated by all nations for My name's sake.” *(Matthew 24:9).***
* ***When we hear the words of Mary, they resound with the great faith and love she had for God.* “Behold the maidservant of the Lord! Let it be to me according to your word.”**
* ***Mary’s response was, “Here I am, do with me what is pleasing in Your sight.”***
* ***God entered history as the Son of Man through Mary’s sacrifice of agreement.***

**Luke 1:48 (NKJV)
48 For He has regarded the lowly state of His maidservant; For behold, henceforth all generations will call me blessed.**

* ***The Catholics have almost deified Mary and the Protestants almost ignore her. In reality she is an example of a woman of great faith who was fully submitted to the will of God.***
* ***With the story of Elizabeth and Mary we can learn a number of things:***
* ***1st It is essential to agree with God’s will if we want to see God’s will to be done in our lives.***
* ***2nd What God does in our lives will impact people beyond ourselves to those around us and even other nations.***
* ***3rd Initially things may not work out the way we would expect or like.***
* ***4th The timing is in God’s hands not ours.***
* ***5th The ultimate outcome is far more wonderful and glorious than we could have hoped for or even imagined.***