



# abcLinks

connecting personal and small group studies with this week's sermon

For the sermon on July 25-26, 2009

## this week's coreverse

*Cast all your anxiety on him  
because he cares for you.*

**1 Peter 5.7**

## usingabclinks

### Personal Bible Studies (inside pages)

- Personal studies that explore Scripture passages related to this week's sermon. They are broken down into three or four days. Some days you will simply read, meditate or think about a passage of scripture. Other days you will be asked to dig into a passage through reading, studying, answering questions.

### Small Group Discussion (back page)

- Small group questions that connect with the sermon and your personal Bible study. This series of questions act as a funnel to help your group discussion flow in a purposeful point.
- If you are not in a small group, contact one of our small group staff members to get more information on ABC Small Groups or go to [adabile.org](http://adabile.org)>small groups.

See [adabile.org](http://adabile.org)>message recaps & Links for *ABCLinks* archives.



Part One of a Five Part  
Sermon Series

## "The Window of Prayer"

**W**hen my daughter was five, she absolutely loved Winnie the Pooh. You can imagine her delight when she received a pair of Winnie the Pooh mittens for Christmas. The week after Christmas break, I was home to greet her as she stepped off the school bus after a day of kindergarten. Rather than bounding through the snow with her usual enthusiasm, she trudged up the driveway with sadness draped around her rosy cheeks.

"What's wrong, kiddo?" I inquired. "I lost my mitten today," she replied with a quivering voice. "One of your new Winnie the Pooh mittens?" "Yes... and they were my favorite!" she burst out as she could no longer hold back the floodgate of tears that had been building. Instinctively I went into the role of the strong superhero daddy and assured her that all would be made right in the world of lost mittens. I would rescue her lost mitten, further establish her confidence in me as the fixer of all things and restore her joy. Immediately I went into action and began interrogating her with the usual lame parental questions we ask when our kid loses something. "When did you have it last?" "When do you last remember seeing it?" "Did you have them at recess?" "Did you have them on the bus?" All this was in vain. We were no closer to locating her mitten.

So I grabbed the phone book and went to work calling the school. No answer. I tracked down the number for the school's bus garage and called to inquire if they maintained a lost-and-found. Again I was stymied as I was informed that lost objects are kept on the bus and my daughter would have to wait until the next day to learn the possible fate of her lost mitten. I had exhausted all my resources. I had done everything I could think of. My daughter was neither impressed with my efforts nor any bit happier. Wiping tears from her cheeks and watching her little, curled lower lip still quivering I had to tell her I had nothing left. I didn't know what else to do. I felt like I had failed her. In a last effort to console her, I asked her, "Honey, do you want to pray about it?" Her big brown eyes widened in astonishment. She replied almost as if in disbelief, "Daddy... I already did that." "Really?" I asked. "When?" "When I first realized it was lost," she said.

I was immediately jolted into seeing how I used prayer as a last resort instead of it being my first response to crisis, no matter how big or how small. Jesus taught that we should pray always (Luke 18.1) and now my innocent five-year-old daughter was teaching me to pray first and act second. My little girl had given me a precious gift. She had given me a fresh look at prayer. I realized how, in my humanness, I attempted to solve all problems by my own power and, consequently, pulled God in only when I've got nothing left. It was a lesson from a little child that comes back to me over and over again.

In case you're wondering, the mitten was found the next day. Hope and happiness were restored once again in the life of a five year old...and her dad.



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# personal bible studies

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Imagine you come to an old house. From the outside, you can tell it has some tremendous character and history. But, it's a tad rundown and unkempt. As you walk up the driveway, you see that the trees and bushes are overgrown, hiding the beautiful windows that once brought light and fresh air to the inside. Dark and dreary is what you feel in the room as you step through the door. Smells of mustiness and mold are made more potent by the humidity in the room. Light and fresh air are what the place needs first and foremost.

You grab some tools and attempt to pry open the shutters, only to realize that the windows have been painted shut. It takes a lot of effort to free the windows from the caked paint. When the windows are hoisted open, you feel the light burst on your face and you smell the freshness of the outdoor air replace the musty, mildew stench. The building now has hope. Life is returning.

Have your habits of prayer grown musty and stale? If so, don't fret. It happens to most Jesus-followers from time to time. We need to do the hard work of prying open those windows of prayers so God can bring in light and air to our communication with him. This week, we'll explore some passages that may help you get those sticky windows open in your prayer life.

## Part One | Remember Who He Is

One closed window to prayer life is the belief that God doesn't really care for you. Do you ever question God's goodness? You may say outwardly that God is good, but do you ever inwardly have doubts? In your heart of hearts, do any one or more of these statements seem true? *God is distant. God cares for others, but not me. My circumstances don't show God to be good.*

Take a few minutes to meditate on these verses. Meditation simply means to mull the same thought over and over. Then do the prayer exercise below.

***Cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you.***

1 Peter 5.7

***Cast your cares on the LORD and he will sustain you; he will never let the righteous fall.***

Psalms 55.22

### Prayer Response

How do you cast your cares on God? Find a quiet place where you won't be disturbed for several minutes. Read each of these verses slowly 3 to 4 times. Then pray for the first thing that comes to your mind. It's amazing, your greatest cares will usually surface fairly quickly; or God will place something new and important on your heart. In your prayer, say to God, "I give this care to you."

## Part Two | Remember Who You Are

When you pray, it's good to remember who you are in God's eyes. How does he view you? What is your identity in God's terms? Read these verses and underline or write out the words and phrases that describe you in God's view.

*How great is the love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God! And that is what we are!*

I John 3.1

*How precious are your thoughts about me, O God. They cannot be numbered! I can't even count them; they outnumber the grains of sand!*

Psalm 139.17-18a

### Prayer Response

In prayer we speak, but we don't hear God speak back to us. Remember, God already did much of the talking; he created all we see in nature. When we pray, we are responding to a voice that has been talking since the beginning of time. Remember who you are talking to. He's good. He's creative. He's generous. He's interesting. He is exquisite in his creation. Read Psalm 19.1-6.

## Part Three | Anxiety vs. Thanksgiving

When you bring requests to God with a heart of thanksgiving, it means you reflect on what God has already given-- what you already have. This has the potential to reform your mind and mood. When you begin your day seeing yourself as an incredibly blessed person, a recipient of the Father's continued goodness, anxiety is replaced by gratitude.

*Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice! Let your gentleness be evident to all. The Lord is near. Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.*

Philippians 4.4-7

### Prayer Response

Take a minute to honestly identify the elements of worry in your life. What things wake you at night? What areas in your life are unresolved? Do you envy anyone? Why?

Now count your blessings. What things do you see as blessings, gifts, and elements of joy in your life? What is most meaningful and priceless to you? Remind yourself of God's care and provision by saying, "When I live a life of thanks, it is harder to live in worry, envy, and self pity."



# small group discussion

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Open your small group time by briefly talking about the following questions.

Where did you learn to pray? Who modeled prayer to you when you were growing up? Who is a model of prayer for you today? On a scale of 1-10 (1 = musty and stale and 10 = heavenly!) how would you rate your prayer life?

Let the remainder of your small group time be an opportunity to pray together, rather than a discussion time.

## Step One | Cast Your Cares

One closed window to prayer life is the belief that God doesn't really care for you. Do you ever question God's goodness? You may say outwardly that God is good, but do you ever inwardly have doubts? In your heart of hearts, do any one or more of these statements seem true? *God is distant. God cares for others, but not me. My circumstances don't show God to be good.*

### Prayer Response

Have someone read *1 Peter 5.7 and Psalm 55.22* slowly 3 to 4 times. Allow each other to pray for the first thing that comes to mind. It's amazing, your greatest cares will usually surface fairly quickly; or God will place something new and important on your heart. In your prayer, say to God, "I give this care to you."

## Step Two | How God Sees Me

When we pray, it's good to remember who we are in God's eyes. How does he view us? What is our identity in God's terms?

### Prayer Response

Read *John 3:1 and Psalm 139.17-18a*. In prayer, we speak, but we don't hear God speak back to us. Remember, God already did much of the talking; he created all we see in nature. When we pray, we are responding to a voice that has been talking since the beginning of time. Remember who you are talking to. He's good. He's creative. He's generous. He's interesting. He is exquisite in his creation. Spend time praying words of acknowledgement of who God is and who we are. These are prayers of praise and adoration.

## Step Three | Turn Anxiety to Thanksgiving

When you bring requests to God with a heart of thanksgiving, it means you reflect on what God has already given-- what you already have. This has the potential of reforming your mind and mood. When you begin your day seeing yourself as an incredibly blessed person, a recipient of the Father's continued goodness, anxiety is replaced by gratitude.

### Prayer Response

Read *Philippians 4.4-7*. Take time to honestly identify and discuss the elements of worry and envy in your life. What things wake you at night? What areas in your life are unresolved? Do you envy anyone? Why?

Now count your blessings in prayer. What things do you see as blessings, gifts, or elements of joy in your life? What is most meaningful and priceless to you? Remind yourself of God's care and provision by saying in prayer, "When I live a life of thanks it is harder to live in worry, envy, and self pity."