

# Prayer: The Language of the Spirit

A Bible Study on Prayer

by

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## I. PRAYER: THE LANGUAGE OF THE SPIRIT

A forty-five year old mother of five is told that she has cancer of the colon and must have surgery. The night before the operation she has her minister and the elders of her church anoint her with oil and pray for her healing. The next day when the surgeons operate, they find no trace of the malignant mass that had been present the day before.

A fighter pilot becomes disoriented out over the Pacific Ocean and is headed for a watery grave. Thousands of miles away his wife is burdened to pray urgently for his safety. Suddenly another plane appears at his wing tip, signals the right direction, and then immediately disappears in the clouds. The pilot of the jet corrects his flight pattern and returns to home base on the last drop of fuel. No one can identify the plane that had saved his life.

A young service station attendant is kidnapped and faced with certain death at the hands of a madman. He prays for protection, and the gun pointed directly at his head misfires twice. He runs, but the gunman overtakes him in the car and hits him from behind. The victim is thrown onto the hood of the car and over the top and is left for dead. He suffers only minor cuts and bruises.

All three recipients of answered prayer are filled with a strange calmness at the point of their greatest danger.

What is this mysterious force called prayer that can bring healing, give direction, provide protection, and instill serenity in the midst of trouble?

Other people die of cancer. Why not this mother? Other pilots crash and die. Other youths are shot and killed. Some of these have, no doubt, been prayed for. Why are some prayers effective and others not? Are all prayers heard and answered? Are there certain rules or methods to go by to make sure our prayers receive satisfactory answers?

In the next few pages we will try to answer some of these questions and, perhaps, raise some others concerning this force called prayer. But in conclusion, when all has been said and done, we will admit that we do not know all the answers

and that we will never know all about prayer. For after all, we are finite human beings with a limited ability to understand the world of the Spirit.

There are things we can know, however, that, if applied, will make our prayers more effective and will open up new dimensions in our communication with God. For that is what prayer is: communication or communion with God.

Let us look at some other definitions of prayer:

"Prayer is meeting God in conscious, glad attention."  
(unknown)

"Prayer is the breathing and the panting of the spirit after God." (Cameron Thompson)

"Prayer is a mighty, invisible force that lifts our hearts and minds to God and through which His Spirit flows to other men." (Frank Laubach)

"Prayer is a dialogue between two people who love each other. God and man." (Rosalind Rinker)

"Prayer is the souls' sincere desire, unuttered and expressed." (James Montgomery)

"Prayer is the education of desire." (Lewis Maclachlan)

"Prayer is a rising up and drawing near to God in mind, and in heart, and in spirit." (Alexander Whyte)

Summarized, these definitions say that prayer is communication with God. What a fantastic thought --- that we mere human beings can speak with the Creator of the Universe and that He desires this communication! How humble it should make us to know that this privilege is ours.

It has been said that at some time in our lives we all feel the need to pray. There is something in all of us that reaches beyond ourselves to a power greater than we are. Everyone has an inborn sense of something missing in his life, some feeling of emptiness, some sense of unfulfillment. There is a longing to find the purpose for which we have been created, to be made whole and complete. This vague sense of loss or incompleteness is our spiritual nature longing to communicate with the Spirit of God.

Sadly, most of us never identify this strange hunger but go

through life trying to satisfy this nameless desire by striving for wealth or power, popularity or recognition, or the satisfaction of our fleshly appetites. But nothing the world offers can fill this void in our lives.

The only thing that can fill it is God Himself. St. Augustine has said, "There is a God-shaped vacuum in the heart of every man. We are made for God, and our hearts are restless until they rest in Him."

We human beings have three aspects of our nature --- body, soul, and spirit. Our body is the physical part of us that provides the way we relate to the material world around us. Our soul, which is composed of our will, intellect, and emotions, is the means by which we relate to other people. Animals also have bodies and souls, but the aspect of our nature that distinguishes us from animals is our spirit through which we relate to God.

When God created man, He made him perfect in all three dimensions --- physically strong, healthy and beautiful, with a keen intellect and controlled emotions, and with the spiritual capacity for fellowship with God. The first two chapters of Genesis tell us that God created man in His image and pronounced His creation "very good". The Lord walked in the Garden with man and communed with him, and they enjoyed each others' company.

But God did not want man to be a puppet on a string, obeying Him because he had no alternative. He wanted Adam to be a free moral agent who would voluntarily choose to do His will. So He gave Adam a chance to disobey. We know the rest of the story: how Adam made the choice to disobey, and how the fellowship he had enjoyed with God was destroyed.

God, who is perfectly holy, cannot commune with anything sinful; and Adam's disobedience had tainted him with sin. At that point, something else happened to Adam --- his spiritual nature died, and he and his descendants could no longer enjoy unlimited access to God and close communion with Him. Man would be forever doomed to being a restless, unfulfilled creature, searching for meaning to life and for peace with God.

God, too, was left with a problem. He loved this creation of His, but it no longer served the purpose for which it was created. He was faced with a choice: destroy this man He had made or find some way to restore fellowship with him. Fortunately for us, He chose to give us another chance. But nothing we in our sinful state could do would rid us of the contamination of sin. Nothing we could do would breathe life into our shrunken spirits. We were totally dependent upon God to provide the way for fellowship to be restored and our spiritual natures revived.

And God, in His great mercy, did just that! He sent His Son to become one of us, a human being, and take upon Himself the punishment for our disobedience. For all of us sinned with Adam. As Romans 5:8 tells us, "But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us." Jesus Christ, a perfect man, became the perfect sacrifice for our sins.

Then, this Jesus rose from the grave, breaking the bonds of sin and death, and promising that all who believe in Him can share in a new spiritual fellowship with God the Father. For, as we believe, His Spirit comes to indwell our spirits, and we come alive spiritually. In the third chapter of John, Jesus told Nicodemus, "you must be born again", meaning, "you have been born once physically; now, you must be born spiritually". Now, with our new spiritual natures, we can have communion with God and feel whole and fulfilled.

This communication of our spirit with God's Spirit is called prayer. We could say, further, that prayer is the language of the spirit as we communicate.

Now, we begin to see why some prayers reach God and others "bump against the ceiling". A soulish prayer (originating in our minds or emotions only) doesn't really "commune" with God. Only the prayers which originate in our redeemed spirit reach His throne and receive His attention. These are the prayers which the Holy Spirit helps us to pray (Romans 8:26). These are the prayers prayed "in the Name of Jesus" (John 14:13), these are those prayed "according to the will of God" (I John 5:14). These are effective prayers.

## **I. PRAYER: THE LANGUAGE OF THE SPIRIT**

- 1. How would you define prayer?**
- 2. Do you think prayer is natural to man or must it be learned?**
- 3. What are the three aspects of man's nature? I Thess. 5:23  
(Note: the "soul" includes the intellect, will, and emotions)**
- 4. Which of these aspects was/were made in the image of God? Eph. 4:23, 24**
- 5. Which of these aspects of man's nature were affected by Adam's sin? Gen. 3:19b, 6:5; Rom. 5:12, 7:18, 8:7, 23; Eph. 2:1**
- 6. What other words does the Bible use for man's spirit? Rom. 10:10a; Eph. 3:17; Rom. 7:22**
- 7. What happened to man's heart when he sinned? Jer. 17:9; Matt. 15:19; James 1:14, 15**

8. What happened to fellowship between God and man when Adam sinned? Col. 1:21
9. What provision did God make to restore fellowship with man? Col. 1:22; Eph. 2:13; Rom 5:8-10
10. What is our part in restoring this fellowship? John 3:16; Acts 16:30, 31
11. When fellowship is restored, what is our privilege? Heb. 4:16; Matt. 7:7,8
12. What happens to man's spirit when he accepts Jesus as his Saviour? Ezek. 36:26,27; John 3:3-6

Questions for contemplation: Have I accepted reconciliation with God through the blood of Jesus? If so, do I have confidence to approach His Throne boldly?



## II. THE PURPOSE OF PRAYER

In the previous chapter we said that prayer is the language of the spirit as we communicate with God. Now, let's look at some of the reasons we talk to God. We call them the purposes of prayer, remembering that communication is a two-way street. Prayer does not consist of only our talking to God, and indeed, it should not. The very word "communication" implies conversation between two people and not a monologue where only one person does the talking.

In another chapter we will discuss ways we can know when God is speaking and how we can learn to listen to Him. So let us turn our attention now to some of the purposes of prayer.

The first reason we pray is simply for the pleasure of His company. Psalm 34:8 says, "O, taste and see that the Lord is good." In the first chapter we remarked that it is exciting to realize that the Creator of the Universe wants to fellowship with us. And to know that this Creator God knows us intimately and loves us extravagantly is mindboggling!

All of us enjoy being in the company of people who love us and whom we love in return. It is satisfying, comforting, and stimulating. One of the ways we know we are "in love" is the desire we have to be with that wonderful person as much as possible. How special is the quality of that time together and how quickly the time passes! Something similar happens when we love the Lord. We look forward to time spent in His presence, and we experience a joy and a contentment while there. We call this expression of our love and devotion to Him "worship".

The second purpose of prayer is for our "perfecting". Matthew 5:48 tells us, "you are to be perfect as your heavenly Father is perfect". That is a tall order, and Romans 8:29 does not make it any easier. Paul says we are to be "conformed to the image of His Son." Ephesians 4:15 commands us to "grow up into Christ". But before we get discouraged and give up, let's see just what these passages mean.

Psychologists tell us that we become like the people with whom we associate. When I was growing up, I remember think-

ing that my grandmother over stressed the kind of friends I should have. However, when my own children came along, I realized the wisdom of their choosing friends wisely. We are told that peer pressure is the greatest influence on us in forming values and establishing life-styles. When we model our behavior upon some person or group of people, we limit ourselves and our potential; however, when Jesus is our yard stick, we continue to stretch our capability to fulfill our potential. Luke 5:52 tells us that, "Jesus increased in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and men." Our goal should be to become as spiritually mature as possible and to realize our potential physically, intellectually, and socially as He did. When we spend time with the Lord, we will become more like Him and will want to grow in all four dimensions.

A third purpose of prayer is for provision. Matthew 7:7-11 urges us, "Ask, and it shall be given to you; seek, and you shall find; knock, and it shall be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives; and he who seeks finds; and to him who knocks it shall be opened. Or what man is there among you, when his son shall ask him for a loaf, will give him a stone? Or if he shall ask for a fish, he will not give him a snake, will he? If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more shall your Father who is in heaven give what is good to those who ask Him!"

Likewise, in the Lord's Prayer Jesus taught his disciples to make requests of their Father, "Give us this day our daily bread."

As children of our Heavenly Father we are instructed to request from Him whatever we need to sustain life and to help us live it abundantly. As His heirs this is both our right and our privilege. The Bible explicitly states that God wants to be our Provider.

The Scriptures are clear also that we are to ask for spiritual blessings as well as material ones. A fourth reason for praying, therefore, is for possession. The following is a partial list of blessings that can be possessed through prayer.

1. Heb. 4:16 "Let us therefore draw near with confidence

to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and may find grace to help in time of need."

2. John 16:24b "Ask, and you will receive, that your joy may be made full."

3. Phil. 4:6, 7 "Be anxious for nothing, 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 comprehension, shall guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus."

4. James 1:5 "But if any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God who gives to all men generously and without reproach, and it will be given to him."

5. I John 1:9 "If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness."

6. Isa. 40:29 "He gives strength to the weary, and to him who lacks might He increases power."

Mercy, grace, joy, peace, wisdom, forgiveness, strength, power --- these and more are ours to possess just for the asking. James 4:2 tells us that "we have not because we ask not," and that applies both to material and spiritual blessings.

Not only do we pray to possess what the Lord would want us to have, but through our prayers we re-possess what is rightfully His. Adam's sin gave Satan and his forces territory that belongs to God. Through prayer we reclaim that lost ground.

In Luke 10:19 Jesus gave his disciples (now us) authority over all the power of the enemy, and in Matthew 18:18 he gave us power to bind or loose (forbid or permit) on earth what has been bound or loosed in Heaven. This is done, not in our own authority, but in the Name of Jesus. Using that Name, which Satan fears, we have authority over him and can command that he take his hands off situations not in God's will.

Sadly, few of us know and use this authority. J. Oswald Sanders in his book "Prayer Power Unlimited" states that by His death and resurrection, Christ rendered the Devil powerless. Any power he now exercises over us is either

because we fail to apprehend and appropriate the completeness of Christ's triumph or because we have conceded territory to him through the toleration of sin in our lives.<sup>1</sup>

Jack Heyford in *"Prayer Is Invading the Impossible"* says that prayer is the determining factor in whether God's goodness is released toward a specific situation or whether the power of sin and Satan is permitted to prevail.<sup>2</sup>

Through prayer we can use our authority to push back the enemy lines and reclaim territory lost to sickness, hate, drugs, fear, bitterness, immorality, and other demonic influences in our society.

Related to repossession as a purpose of prayer is protection. Eph. 6 tells us that we are engaged in a spiritual warfare and that we must pray without ceasing for protection. I Peter 5:8 warns that our adversary is like a roaring lion seeking whom he can devour. Strange, that we would not think of going out in freezing weather without a coat, but how often we face our day without asking for the Lord's protection against our Enemy who is seeking to destroy us! The sickness we might suffer as a result of our lack of protection against the cold is not nearly as destructive as that which we suffer at Satan's hands.

Is it that many Christians do not really believe that Satan is alive and well? Is he but a symbol for vague forces of evil in the heart of man? Or is he just the scapegoat for the paranoia of many Christians? When we underestimate his power or believe that he does not exist, we play right into his hands. Prayer gives us the protection we need to engage him in battle.

These, then, are some of the purposes of prayer --- for pleasure, perfecting, provision, possession, re-possession, and protection. What great loss is our when we fail to use the resources of prayer!

## II. THE PURPOSE OF PRAYER

1. What purpose of prayer is suggested in the following passages?
  - a. Psa. 34:8
  
  - b. Psa. 116:1
  
  - c. Psa. 122:1
  
2. What is God's desire for us?
  - a. Matt. 5:48
  
  - b. Rom. 8:29
  
  - c. Eph. 4:15
  
3. How does prayer help us reach His goal for us? John 15:1-11
  
4. How do we know the Lord wants to be our Provider?
  - a. Matt. 7:7-11

b. Matt. 6:11

5. List the spiritual blessings we can possess through prayer:

a. Heb. 4:16

b. John 16:24b

c. Phil. 4:6, 7

d. James 1:5

e. I John 1:9

f. Isa. 40:29

6. Why don't we get what we want from God? James 4:2, 3

7. What authority did Jesus give His disciples?

a. Luke 10:19

b. Matt. 18:18

c. Matt. 12:22-29

8. Who are Jesus' disciples today? John 13:34, 35; 14:21
9. With whom are we engaged in battle? Eph. 6:12; I Pet. 5:8
10. List our armor against our enemy. Eph. 6:11-18

Question for contemplation: Is my purpose in praying primarily to get things from God that I want? Does He have a better purpose for me?

### III. BELIEFS NECESSARY FOR EFFECTIVE PRAYER

What we believe about God will determine in large measure how effective our prayers are and whether or not we pray.

There are at least three beliefs about the Lord that are so basic to prayer that without them there is no point in praying. It becomes a meaningless exercise and a waste of time and energy. All three beliefs are so simple that an immediate response might be, "Of course, I believe that!" Further contemplation, however, might reveal a hidden doubt in one of these areas that could be hindering our prayer life.

The first statement is that God is our loving Father who wants us to bring everything that concerns us to Him in prayer.

Phil. 4:6 tells us, "in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God."

I Peter 5:7 reminds us to "cast all our cares upon Him because He cares for us."

In Matt. 7:7, 8 Jesus urges us to ask, seek and knock.

But perhaps we are like a friend of mine who believes that God is much too busy to be burdened with our insignificant troubles. He has the Middle East to worry about, and world-wide economic collapse, not to mention keeping the planets from colliding in space. According to Bob, we should not bother God with our petty problems. After all, He gave us a mind of our own, didn't He? Now, if Bob's wife should leave him, or he should develop cancer, or if the stock market should collapse, then he will resort to prayer. In the meantime he will just muddle along on his own.

But nothing in my Bible indicates to me that our troubles have to measure a certain degree on the seriousness scale before we bring them to the Lord. He says to bring "everything" to Him, to "cast all our cares upon Him." Because He loves us far more than our earthly parents can, nothing about us is unimportant or inconsequential to Him. The very hairs on our head are numbered, Jesus said.

Therefore, if we are concerned about our job, Susie's braces, atomic warfare, a persistent cough, or new slip covers,



we should pray about it. Whatever concerns us concerns the Lord, because He loves us as though we were His only child. When I finally got it into my head that Jesus would have died for me had I been the only person on earth and that He is interested in every facet of my life, I began bringing things to Him in prayer that had never occurred to me before. And the more I brought, the less I worried. What a difference it makes in our prayers and in our lives to realize how much God loves us!

The more aspects of our lives we pray about, the more we will learn to trust Him to lead us. The more we allow Him to lead us, the more we will want His will to be done through us. And our prayers will begin to reflect a change in our attitude. It will be no longer "Give me what I want," but, "Do according to Your will, Father." This maturity in our prayer life develops as we pray and will begin as we learn to bring all our concerns to Him.

The second belief is related to the first and is just as simple and just as basic to effective prayer: that God is good and wants good things for His children.

James 1:17 says, "Every good thing bestowed and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of light, with whom there is no variation, or shifting shadow."

Psalms 34:8 invites us to "taste and see that the Lord is good."

Psalms 103 extols the benefits He bestows upon us. Matt. 7:9-11 reminds us that if our earthly Father would not give us a stone for bread or a snake for fish, how many more good things will our heavenly Father give us!

Despite the Biblical evidence, however, many people see God not as a loving, heavenly Father, but as a stern, harsh Judge just waiting to punish us for some infraction of His Holy Law. As has been said: at best, we see Him as a dispenser of some foul tasting medicine that is somehow good for us.

One friend actually gets fearful when life is flowing smoothly because she is sure something terrible is about to happen. And very often it does because there is an underlying principle at work: we usually get what we expect.

Have you noticed how often the cheerful optimist has good things happen to him while the pessimist receives trouble? Some would be quick to point out that the optimists are cheerful because nothing bad happens to them, while the pessimist has reason to be that way. But which is cause and which is effect? I believe that, in some way we do not quite understand, our expectations attract to us whatever we anticipate.

We see a good example of the law of expectation in the book of Job. God had blessed Job with wealth, health, family and friends, and had hedged him about (1:10) with His divine protection. When illness and disaster struck, Job made a revealing confession. In 3:25 he admits, "For what I fear comes upon me, and what I dread befalls me." Is it possible that Job's fear created "the hole in the hedge through which the serpent bit"? (Eccles. 10:8)

Certainly, fear and faith cannot co-exist, and where there is little faith, Satan has permission to work.

Now we begin to see why what we expect is often what we get. Our faith allows the Lord to shower us with the blessings He has stored up for us, whereas our lack of faith permits the Devil to do his dirty work. Therefore, it is vitally important to expect good things from our loving heavenly Father!

The third statement about God that is basic to our praying effectively is that He can do anything we ask.

Matt. 19:26 states that "with God all things are possible". And Luke 1:37 tells us "for nothing will be impossible with God". Toward the end of Job's ordeal he tells the Lord, "I know that thou canst do all things . . ." (42:2)

We say we believe in His almighty power, but, even while we are praying, doubts creep in. Of course, we believe the Lord can cure pneumonia and strep throat (particularly since the mycins and penicillin came on the market). But what about cancer? Isn't it true that we lose all hope when we hear that dreaded word?

Can the Lord really help an alcoholic stop drinking or change the heart of a rebellious child? Down deep do we fear that some things are just too hard for God?

For many, our God is too small. He is a weak, ineffectual, mythological figure, who pacifies those too insecure to make it on their own. For others, He may have had something to do with creation but exerts no influence now in the lives of men.

Moses did not think Jehovah God was too small to lead the Israelites out of Egypt. Joshua did not think He was too weak to lead them against the entrenched heathen in the land of Canaan. David did not think Him incapable of helping him defeat the Giant, nor did Hezekiah think Him too powerless to defeat the mighty forces of Assyria. In the Gospels Jesus did not believe God was too ineffective to take twelve men and turn a world upside down. Throughout the Bible we read accounts of people calling upon the Lord to do amazing things, and He honored their faith by accomplishing what they asked.

We are the ones who limit what God can do by our lack of faith. To believe God can do anything we ask is to provide Him with the opportunity. Someone has said that prayer is not overcoming God's reluctance but taking hold of His willingness.

These three beliefs, then, however simple, are basic to effective prayer: that God loves us and desires that we bring everything that concerns us to Him in prayer; that He is good and wants good things for His children; and that He can do anything we ask.

### **III. BELIEFS NECESSARY FOR EFFECTIVE PRAYER**

- 1. What should we pray about? Phil. 4:6; I Pet. 5:7**
  
- 2. What is God's relationship to Christians? Matt. 23:9; John 1:12; Rom. 8:15**
  
- 3. What is His attitude toward us? I Pet. 5:7; Duet. 7:7, 8, 13**
  
- 4. Who is the giver of all good things to us? James 1:17; Matt. 7:9-11**
  
- 5. List some of the blessings of God to His children. Psa. 103:1-18; Psa. 145:14-20**
  
- 6. How do we create opportunities for the Devil? Matt. 17:14-20**
  
- 7. Is anything too hard for God? Matt. 19:26; Luke 1:37; Job 42:2**

**Questions for contemplation: What do I really believe about God?**

#### IV. CONDITIONS FOR EFFECTIVE PRAYER

The question was asked in the first chapter, "Are there certain rules and regulations in prayer that will insure the answers desired?" We would hasten to say "No". Christianity is not a legalistic religion of do's and don'ts but is a way of life lived in fellowship with the Lord. The Bible, however, offers guidelines for the living of that life and for keeping in close communion with the Lord.

Likewise, in prayer there are no set methods or requirements that must be observed, but the Bible does point out some conditions for prayer that make it more effective.

We see the first condition in John 14:13, 14 where Jesus promises His disciples, "And whatever you ask in My name, that will I do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son. If you ask me anything in My name, I will do it."

What does it mean to pray in Jesus' name? Is it just a magic phrase like "Open, Sesame" that turns on the switch in the communication lines to Heaven?

A person's name stands for his character, his nature, his values, his work. There are over 100 names or titles given Jesus, and each sheds some light on Who He is. When we use His name, we come before God on the basis of His sinless life and His redeeming work, on the basis of who Jesus is.

R. A. Torrey in *"Power and Peace in Prayer"* says that we pray not on the grounds of our credit but of His. It is like taking a check given to us by Jesus to the Bank of Heaven and cashing it. We have no claims on God whatever but must approach Him on the ground of Christ's claims.<sup>1</sup>

In other words, when we come before the Throne of Grace in Jesus' name, we are, in effect, saying, "Father, I do not presume to come before you asking that you grant my request on the basis of my worthiness, for my righteousness is like filthy rags. But I come in the name of the One Who loved me enough to die for me and Whose blood has covered my sins. Grant my request, I pray, on the basis of His worth, not mine." We can be assured by the Scripture passage in John 14 that the Lord hears and answers such a prayer.

John 15:7 describes our position in Jesus, "If you abide in Me and My words abide in you, ask whatever you wish, and it shall be done for you". When we abide in Jesus, we have the privilege of using that precious name.

Colleen Evans explains that when we are abiding in Him we are wrapped in Him --- He in us and we in Him. Our will is lined up with His will and our desires become more nearly His as we acknowledge God's ownership of our lives and submit ourselves to Him.<sup>2</sup> We ask that He live His life so fully through us that what we want and what He desires for us are identical. Then we can know we will receive answers to our prayers, for we are truly praying in Jesus' Name.

Secondly, I John 5:14, 15 explains, "And this is the confidence which we have before Him, that, if we ask anything according to His will, He hears us. And if we know that He hears us in whatever we ask, we know that we have the requests which we have asked from Him". "According to His will" is the key phrase here.

In *"The School of Prayer"* Olive Wyon states that the object of prayer is that God's will should be done in, through, and by us.<sup>3</sup> It is not getting what we want from God but obtaining what He wants for us.

Colleen Evans calls this the "nevertheless" prayer when we tell our Father we are willing to carry out His desires even if we find this very difficult to do or to understand.<sup>4</sup>

In order to pray "according to His will" and to mean it, it is helpful to remember that God's will is always good, perfect and acceptable (Romans 12:2), so that we are really asking for what is best for us. The author of *"Prayer Power Unlimited"*, J. Oswald Sanders, points out that God's sovereign purpose and plans cannot be improved upon because they are perfect. His will is that we become more Christ-like, and often that takes trouble to bring about. We, however, characterize what is good in terms of creature comfort, and our requests are denied when they are against our highest interest. We can come to God's will through praying as our wills are redirected and aligned with the will of God.<sup>5</sup>

But how can we know the will of God and make sure our prayers are in accordance with His purposes? We can know His general will concerning moral and spiritual principles by reading the Bible. It is our guide and authority and "is profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness that the men of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work". (II Tim. 3:16, 17) We can be sure that anything against the intent of Scripture is outside the will of God.

The following is a very brief list of some of the things we can know by reading the Bible that are according to His will:

1. II Pet. 3:9 salvation for all. "The Lord is not slow about His promise, as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing for any to perish, but for all to come to repentance."

2. Rom. 13:1 our civic duty, "Let every person be in subjection to the governing authorities."

3. Eph. 5:2 "walk in love", and John 13:34 "Love one another."

4. I Thess. 5:17 "pray without ceasing."

5. I Thess. 5:18 "in everything give thanks."

6. II Tim. 2:19 holy living. "Let every one who names the name of the Lord abstain from wickedness."

7. John 15:14 obedience, "you are my friends if you do what I command you."

8. Mark 10:43 service to other, "whoever wishes to become great among you shall be your servant."

9. I Cor. 16:2 giving . . . "upon the first day of the week, let every one of you lay by Him in store, as God has prospered him . . ."

10. Mark 1:41 - healing - "I am willing; be cleansed."

(Note: to pray "if it be Thy will" in asking for healing is to inject doubt into the prayer. The Lord healed all who came to Him.

But when we pray for healing "according to His will", we are asking Him to heal us physically, spiritually, emotionally, or in our relations with others, whichever He thinks is best.)

We could fill pages with similar Biblical statements that

leave no doubt as to God's will. We can pray for any of these with confidence that we are praying "according to His will".

Sometimes there is no clear Biblical principle to point out the will of God, however, so we go directly to the second step: We ask the Holy Spirit to guide us. As we place our dilemma before the Lord, we eliminate all selfish considerations, ask Him to give us a discerning spirit, and wait upon Him. As we continue to open ourselves to receive His leading, we will receive a gentle nudge in one direction, or perhaps advice will come through a friend who has been prompted by the Holy Spirit to speak.

Finally, He adds confirmation through circumstances. A door will open or one will close showing us the way we should go. But circumstances alone can be deceiving and must be accompanied by Scriptural backing and by the Spirit's guidance.

When all of these elements of guidance came together, you will have a peace about your decision. You will know the Lord has guided you, but if you still feel troubled and unsure, continue to pray for guidance and wait for further confirmation.

Closely related to "praying in Jesus name" and "according to the will of God" is "praying in the Holy Spirit" (Jude 20 and Eph. 6:18). Oswald Sanders defines praying in the Spirit as "praying in harmony with the will of God" or "prayer whose supreme object is the glory of God." The believer is surrounded, penetrated and transformed by the Spirit, our advocate.<sup>6</sup>

Rom. 8:26, 27 says, "And in the same way the Spirit also helps our weakness, for we do not know how to pray as we should, but the Spirit Himself intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words; and He who searches the hearts knows what the mind of the Spirit is because He intercedes for the saints according to the will of God".

The believer has two advocates or intercessors: Christ before the Throne of God and the Holy Spirit in the hearts of men. We cannot interfere with Christ's intercession, but we can help or hinder the Spirit's intercession in us. When the believer is at the disposal of the Holy Spirit, praying in the Spirit becomes a reality.



Arthur Wallis in *"Pray in the Spirit"* says that when the mind and will are yielded to the Spirit, the Spirit expresses Himself through the believer without his necessarily being conscious of it. It is almost instinctive. If there is a conscious response to the Spirit, it is like a radio with both receiver and transmitter. We need to know how to listen to God and wait on Him. The way He speaks to different people varies --- through impressions, burdens, stimulation of memories, recognition of sin, illumination of Scriptures, or names or circumstances for which to pray.<sup>7</sup>

Praying in the Spirit can be with the cooperation of the mind or it can be without words as the Spirit groans within our hearts as we travail in prayer. God knows what the Spirit is conveying. We are instructed to pray in the Spirit just as we are instructed to live and walk in the Spirit.

Praying with the spirit is only found in I Cor. 14, and this means praying in tongues. It refers to one of the spiritual gifts which is manifested through the human spirit, such as the gifts of prophecy and healing. It is given by the Holy Spirit as He wills. Paul undoubtedly received this gift of a prayer language which he used devotionally. (I Cor. 14:18) The primary uses of this type of prayer are to bring refreshment to the pray-er, to intercede for others when the one praying does not know how to pray, and for praise and thanksgiving. The reader may be interested in reading more about this gift of the Spirit in Larry Christenson's, *Speaking in Tongues*, Dimension Books, Bethany Fellowship, Inc., Minneapolis; or *They Speak with Other Tongues*, by John Sherrill, published by Guideposts, Carmel, N.Y.

The Bible promised that when these conditions are present (praying in Jesus' name, according to the will of God, and in the Holy Spirit) we can know that our prayers have been heard, and we will receive the answers which we have requested.

Sanders sums up all three when he quotes S. M. Zwemer, "True prayer is God the Holy Spirit talking to God the Father in the name of God the Son, and the believer's heart is the prayer room."<sup>8</sup>

#### **IV. CONDITIONS FOR EFFECTIVE PRAYER**

- 1. What is the first condition for making our prayers effective? John 14:13, 14**
  
- 2. Explain in your own words what you think this means.**
  
- 3. What is the second condition? I Jn. 5:14, 15**
  
- 4. Characterize God's will. Rom. 12:2**
  
- 5. What is God's ultimate will for us? Rom. 8:29**
  
- 6. What must we experience to accomplish His will for us?  
Phil. 1:29; Rom. 8:17**
  
- 7. How can we know the general will of God? II Tim. 3:16, 17**
  
- 8. What do the following scriptures tell us about God's will?  
a. II Pet. 3:9**

**b. Rom. 13:1**

**c. Eph. 5:2; John 13:34**

**d. I Thess. 5:17**

**e. I Thess. 5:18**

**f. II Tim. 2:19**

**g. John 15:14**

**h. Mark 10:43**

**i. I Cor. 16:2**

**j. Mark 1:41**

**9. What is the second step in seeking God's will? John 16:13;  
James 1:5**

**10. Name the third condition for praying effectively. Jude 20;  
Eph. 6:18**

**11. How does the Holy Spirit help us in prayer? Rom. 8:26, 27**

**Questions for contemplation: Do I honestly want God's will for  
my life? Even if it means suffering for His sake?**

## V. PRAYING WITHOUT CEASING AND PERSISTENT PRAYER

Paul tells us in I Thess. 5:17 to "pray without ceasing" and in Eph. 6:18 to "pray at all times . . .". It is hardly likely that he envisioned our spending all the time on our knees beside the bed, so what did he mean?

In *"What Happens When Women Pray"* Evelyn Christenson states that praying without ceasing means to turn the dial of our communication system with God to "on", making possible a two-way conversation with Him at anytime.<sup>1</sup>

Brother Lawrence, a 17th century monk, learned to "practice the presence of God" throughout the day, so that even when he was the busiest in the monastery kitchen, he could converse with the Lord and sense Him speaking to him.

Frank Lauback in *"Prayer: The Mightiest Force in the Universe"* pointed out that there were hundreds of chinks of time during the day into which people could shoot "flash" prayers --- while driving the car, riding a bus, waiting for a red light, or riding an elevator. If added up, these "fractional prayers" would amount to two or three hours a day. He states that beaming a prayer at someone releases spiritual power and activates a creative and spirit-changing force in the people prayed for.<sup>2</sup>

Think what changes could be made if every Christian would direct flash prayers into situations they read about in the paper! The combined power of all those prayers could change lives and alter situations. Many people whose stories have been printed in the paper have testified that their condition has improved as hundreds of people have written to say they have prayed about the situation.

Throughout the day we can direct our requests to the Lord and receive His guidance as we keep the lines of communication open. When passing the house of someone whom we know is suffering, we can direct a "flash prayer" toward him asking the Lord to work in his situation. When we pass people on the street who seem burdened by cares, we can lift them to the Lord. We may be surprised to note how often they will square

their shoulders or begin to smile.

Be alert to situations about which the Lord would have us pray. Names of people may come into our minds unbidden, or we may dream about someone or meet them unexpectedly. God has ways of getting our attention, and He desires that we follow through with prayer.

R. A. Torrey writes, "Our whole life should be a life of prayer. We should walk in constant communion with God. There should be a constant upward looking of the soul to God. We should walk so habitually in His presence that even when we awake in the night it would be the most natural thing in the world for us to speak to Him in thanksgiving or petition."<sup>3</sup> That is what it means to pray without ceasing.

In Luke 11:5-8 and 18:1-8 Jesus tells two stories about the value of persistence in prayer. In the first a friend begs his neighbor to give him some bread to feed an unexpected guest, and because of his persistent request, the neighbor obliges. In the second, an unjust judge is moved to provide legal protection to a widow who is bothering him with her endless entreaties. Oswald Sanders says that the basic idea of both stories is that if even a selfish friend or an unjust judge is moved by persistence how much more moved will God be.

We have already said that prayer is not overcoming God's reluctance but is laying hold of His willingness. He does not need to be coaxed. The need is not in Him but in us. There are lessons we need to learn as we pray.

First of all, as we pray, our desires and motives are purified and lifted into agreement with God's will. Lewis Maclachlan says that prayer is the education of desire, the purification of the heart.<sup>4</sup> Many times our prayers are selfish and shallow; but as we pray, our desires are clarified, and we begin to see God's point of view. A young lady may pray determinedly that she have a certain man for her husband. As she prays, a change may take place. From "I want him and must have him", her prayers may become, "whatever is best for us both" and finally to "Thy will be done." The Holy Spirit deals with us as we pray and helps us to want what the Lord wants.

A second reason for persistent prayer is to help us learn to walk by faith and not by sight. The Lord desires that we become strong in faith, and He often compels us to pray long and hard for the best things. R. A. Torrey tells how George Mueller prayed for sixty years for two men, never giving up. One was converted at his last service and the other a year after Mueller's death. Two lives might have been lost had Mr. Mueller stopped praying.<sup>5</sup> God wants us to depend upon Him and may delay in answering our prayers to accomplish His purpose. E. M. Bounds said, "To be little with God is to be little for God."<sup>6</sup>

Sanders speaks of a third reason answers to our prayers may be delayed. Perhaps they encounter satanic resistance as the angel did in Daniel 10. We need to persist in prayer to summon reinforcements for the Lord's side.

Eph. 6:12 warns. "For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the powers, against the world forces of this darkness, against the spiritual forces of wickedness in the heavenly places." Prayer is not only part of our defensive armor but is also an offensive weapon with which we reclaim territory surrendered to Satan.

There is no way of knowing how many souls have been lost or how many people left crippled by disease because Christians gave up praying too soon. Let us determine to win and to persist until we do.

## V. PRAYING WITHOUT CEASING AND PERSISTENT PRAYER

1. How often are we to pray according to I Thess. 5:17 and Eph. 6:18?
2. Does this mean on our knees or having an attitude of prayer? Phil. 2:5
3. Is the reluctant neighbor in Luke 11:5-8 compared or contrasted to the Lord?
4. What about the unjust judge in Luke 18:1-8?
5. Do we have to overcome God's reluctance to give us what we ask? Matt. 7:11
6. What does persistent prayer do for the pray-er? Jer. 29:12, 13; Rom 12:2
7. What is the reason for delayed answers to prayers given in Dan. 10:12, 13?



8. Does Eph. 6 shed light on the passage in Daniel? How?

**Exercise:** Write out three requests that you desire from the Lord. Pray for them daily until they are answered. Date the requests and the answers.

## VI. ATTITUDES BASIC TO EFFECTIVE PRAYER

In the last chapter we talked about the necessity of keeping the lines of communication open between us and God. Let us turn to a discussion of some of the ways which that can be done, realizing that any problems that develop are always on our side, never on God's. He is ever ready to listen and have fellowship, but we short-circuit the prayer lines by the attitudes we bring into our relationship with the Lord.

The first attitude that is basic to open communication is faith. We have already stated some of the beliefs about God that are necessary to praying effectively: that He loves us and wants us to pray about all of our concerns, that He desires our highest good, and that He can do anything we ask.

Heb. 11:6 states that, "without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of those who seek Him."

The kind of faith we are talking about that is necessary to effective prayer is not faith in faith itself nor is it faith in prayer. It is faith in the object of our worship --- God Himself. There is no merit in having faith in prayer because prayer can do nothing by itself. God is the One who can do anything we ask; and when we come to Him believing that this is so, He rewards our faith. Our faith, then, is not based on how we feel at the moment, nor on external circumstances, nor on the amount of time or intensity we spend praying, but is based on the character of God.

Rom. 10:17 states that "faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of Christ." Thus, our faith increases as we learn more about the Lord. Faith is not something we manufacture within ourselves but is a gift of God (Eph. 2:8) as the Holy Spirit applies that Word to our hearts.

In "*Prayer: Conversing with God*" Roalind Rinker suggests making a study of the prayer promises in the New Testament to see what God is like. Some references she mentions are Matt. 6:8; 18:18-20; Mark 11:22-26; Luke 11:9-11; John 14:12-14; James 1:5-8. At the conclusion of such a study the reader will be convinced that God is willing to give good gifts to those who

call upon Him.<sup>1</sup>

Ms. Rinker also advises us to pray faith-sized requests ---requests that are just the right believing size for our faith. She explains, It is not a request which is so large that the very size of it makes you wonder if God will answer. It is a request for a particular situation, in which you pray for a special person or thing, and ask only for that which you can really believe God will do, in a given time limit. This does not limit what God can do, but it honestly recognizes the size of your faith. And there is every reason to believe that you will be asking for larger things as your faith grows.”<sup>2</sup>

In Mark 11:20-24 Jesus makes a remarkable promise, “All things for which you pray and ask, believe that you have received them, and they shall be granted you.” Believing we have already received is the key. Doubt prevents our prayers from being answered.

So many of us pray glibly for things we do not really believe can happen. “Lord, save everybody in the world” or, “Father, heal all who are ill.” We need to learn to pray for specific things that we believe He can bring to pass, one step at a time.

Let’s take an example: perhaps there is someone in our family for whom we have prayed for years who drinks too much, and matters have only gotten worse. Let us look at our prayer honestly. Do we really believe that he can be helped, or are we just salving our conscience by praying? Let’s take one step at a time and only pray for what we can believe. First, we will pray that he will admit he has a problem. When he has done that, we will pray he will admit he is powerless over the problem and needs help. Next, we pray that he will agree to receive counseling or attend A.A. meetings regularly. Finally, and most importantly, we pray that he will put his faith in Jesus to help him get through each day sober. Before long we will see the answer to our original prayer for sobriety come true, one step at a time.

If faith is the first attitude necessary for keeping the lines of communication open, truth is the second. In John 4:24 Jesus told the Samaritan woman, “. . . those who worship Him must

worship in spirit and in truth." In Psa. 145:18 we are told, "The Lord is near to all who call upon Him, to all who call upon Him in truth." We recall that Jesus condemned the Pharisees who made a mockery of prayer by their pretense of piety and vain repetitions. He desires that we be totally honest with Him, and He will not deal with us until we are.

In the book *"Prayer Can Change Your Life"* Drs. William R. Parker and Elaine St. Johns tell how they conducted an experiment using methods of modern psychology and prayer. They used three control groups composed of fifteen people each who had been given personality tests but had not been shown the result. Each of the forty-five were suffering discords of mind and body in some degree.

The first group was given psychotherapy in weekly individual counseling sessions.

Those in Group Two were asked to pray alone every night just as they had been accustomed to doing. They were not given any psychotherapy.

Group Three was the prayer therapy group which met weekly to talk and pray together about the maladjustments pointed out to them from the personality tests they had taken.

At the end of nine months another test was given to determine which group had made the most progress in overcoming problems and personality maladjustments.

Group One had made some progress but felt they needed more psychotherapy. The researchers reported that psychotherapy had pointed out the problems but had failed to provide solutions, much as an X-ray shows the broken bones but cannot set them.

The random pray-ers in Group Two had made no progress because they had no insight into their maladjustments, which tests showed were responsible for their emotional upsets.

Group Three, the Prayer Therapy group, showed the greatest progress because they had used a combination of psychotherapy and specific prayer techniques. They had been given an honest look into their subconscious through psychological tests which had unveiled detrimental aspects of

their personality. Each participant prayed earnestly for each disturbance pointed out to him and with the Lord's help was able to begin to correct the problem.

Parker and St. Johns concluded that prayer is the most important tool in the reconstruction and rehabilitation of man's personality, but it is not effective without the key to the "kingdom within" --- honesty or acknowledging the truth about oneself.<sup>3</sup>

Certainly, the intention is not to suggest that everyone needs psychotherapy but, rather, to point out the need for honesty in facing ourselves and what we are trying to hide from the Lord, others, and ourselves. God knows our frame, so nothing is achieved by covering up the truth. He can help us get rid of the ugliness in our lives as we let the search light of the Holy Spirit shine into the inner-most recesses of our being and point out that we need change.

When we are willing for the Holy Spirit to help us unveil the truth about ourselves that has kept us from communicating freely with the Lord, then an attitude of repentance will emerge. We will see that it has been our unconfessed sin that has separated us from God, and we will want to confess it and ask for forgiveness.

The story of the prodigal son in Luke 15 is the story of all of us at some point in our lives. We all attempt to control our own fate and turn our backs on our Father --- God. It is to be hoped that all of us come to our senses, as the wayward son did, and realize the truth of our situation: namely, that we have sinned against God and have fallen into poverty of spirit. The next step is the hardest of all --- to admit our mistake and ask for forgiveness. But, oh! How eager the Father is to forgive and reinstate us to our former privileged position! Like the prodigal son we need to come into the Lord's presence saying, "I have sinned against heaven and in thy sight."

Accompanying the attitude of repentance is one of humility. James 4:6 asserts, "God resists the proud but gives grace to the humble; "and in the 18th chapter of Luke, in the story of the Pharisee and the publican who went to the Temple to pray,

Jesus told his disciples, "He that humbles himself shall be exalted." Turning to some children, He took them in His arms and said, "Whoever does not receive the Kingdom of God like a child shall not enter it at all." He was indicating that a little child is humble. He looks up to other people and is trusting and open to them, not proud or conceited. A child is also teachable, a characteristic of an humble person. He is willing to listen, learn, and give credit to others.

A lady in our church, named May, who is now deceased, comes to mind whenever I read this passage on humility. May had a child-like faith and was an humble person, genuinely loving and appreciative of everything that was done for her. She had a sweet innocence about her, a trusting openness. She did not hold any positions of importance on earth, but I will not be surprised to see her ruling over galaxies or planets in the world to come. For, "to such belong the kingdom of God."

Forgiveness is a fifth attitude that helps to keep our lines of communication open. Jesus told his disciples in Matt. 6:14, 15, ". . . if you forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you." It is interesting that the only phrase in the Lord's Prayer on which Jesus elaborated was the one on forgiveness. He obviously thought it extremely important. He taught in parables about it and admonished his followers to forgive "seventy times seven".

Paul in Galatians, Ephesians, and Colossians urged Christians to be forbearing and forgiving. The supreme example of forgiveness in the Bible is that of Jesus on the Cross asking God to forgive those who crucified Him. Stephen, too, as he was being stoned to death, asked the Lord to forgive the very people who were killing him. With examples like these, how do we dare harbor a grudge?

Often in the advice column "Dear Abby" someone will write in to tell how grievously they have been wronged by a philandering husband, or business partner, or gossipy friend. They will say to Abby, "I have forgiven them, but I just can't forget it," and each time Abby wisely answers, "Then you haven't really forgiven." Forgiveness lets go of the memories,

too.

The last line-cleansing attitude we will name is obedience. In John 14:15 Jesus pleads, "If you love me, keep my commandments." In John 15:7 and I John 3:22 He promises that if we keep His commandments, He will grant whatever we ask of Him.

There have been times when I have asked the Lord for direction in a certain matter and have gotten nothing in answer. Perplexed, I review my discipleship over the last few weeks. Almost invariably I will discover some step I had felt the Lord was leading me to take that I had either neglected or refused to do. When I have taken that step or confessed my failure to do so and asked for forgiveness, then He provides the answer I have been seeking. Disobedience in following His guidance will always clog up the lines of communication.

The key word in inter-personal relationships today is "communicate". Marriage counselors urge husbands and wives to talk to each other and to listen to what the other is saying. Parents are urged to communicate with their children. Labor unions and management, the heads of governments, ministers and laity, black and white, all are told to communicate so that each will have some perspective of the other person's point of view. Then people and nations will get along with each other, and this world will be a more peaceful place in which to live.

If it is true that communication on a human level is important, how much more true is it that communication between God and man is essential to establishing peace on earth? Keeping the lines of communication open with attitudes of faith, truth, repentance, humility, forgiveness, and obedience is the Christian's greatest challenge.

## **VI. ATTITUDES BASIC TO EFFECTIVE PRAYER**

- 1. What is the first attitude we must have to pray effectively?  
Heb. 11:6**
- 2. How do we acquire this attitude? Rom. 10:17**
- 3. What is the key to receiving what you ask from God in  
Mark 11:20-24?**
- 4. What is the second attitude basic to praying effectively?  
John 4:24; Psa. 145:18**
- 5. What attitude follows all-out honesty before God? James  
4:6; II Cor. 7:9**
- 6. What attitude is necessary on our part before requesting  
the same from the Lord? Matt. 6:14, 15**
- 7. What attitude proves one love for God? John 14:15**



8. What does God promise us if we keep his commandments? John 15:7; I John 3:22

Questions for contemplation: Is there an attitude in my heart that I have not been willing to face that is interfering with my communication with the Lord? Are there any buried memories that need to be acknowledged and released?

## VII. HINDRANCES TO EFFECTIVE PRAYER

From a look at the attitudes necessary to keeping the lines of communication open between God and man, let us turn to a consideration of the things that clog up the lines or garble the message.

As we have pointed out already, faith in God as our loving, heavenly Father is essential for effective prayer. Therefore, a lack of faith or a wavering faith is the biggest obstacle in our line of communication.

James 1:6-8 reads, "But let him ask in faith, without any doubting, for the one who doubts is like the surf of the sea driven and tossed by the wind. For let not that man expect that he will receive anything from the Lord, being a double-minded man, unstable in all his ways."

I am reminded of the story of the man who was out hiking and fell over a cliff. On his way down to certain destruction he managed to grab a tree limb and to hang on.

"Help!" he cried. "Is there anybody up there?"

"Yes," came a Voice from Heaven.

"Thank goodness," the man exclaimed. "Who are you?"

"God," the Voice pronounced.

"Wonderful! Now, get me off this cliff," the man implored.

"Do you believe in Me?" asked the Voice.

"Yes, indeed, I do," asserted the man. "Now, please help me!"

"Do you trust me?" again asked the Voice.

"Absolutely! I trust you completely. Now, just get me out of this mess," the man pleaded.

"If you trust me," came the Voice, "let go!"

There was a moment's silence, and then the man called out, "Help! Is there anybody else up there?"

We say we trust the Lord, but do we really? Can we "let go" and have faith that He will catch us? Isn't it true that we put our trust in our own wits, or our bank accounts, modern medicine or a strong national defense instead? Lack of faith in a loving Father who provides a safety net for us is the greatest hindrance to effective prayer.

A friend once remarked that in prayer we take a great risk. "What do you mean?" I asked.

"Whenever you release the control of a situation to another, you are taking a risk, and that's what you are supposed to do in prayer," she answered.

Her reply illustrates our natural reluctance to "let go" even when we know "letting go" gives the Lord the opportunity to provide the solution.

Likewise, a lack of truth or sincerity in our prayers garbles our prayer communication. James Burton expresses it so well:

"I often say my prayers,  
But do I ever pray;  
And do the wishes of my heart  
Go with the words I say?

I may as well kneel down  
And worship gods of stone.  
As offer to the living God  
A prayer of words alone.

For words without the heart  
The Lord will never hear:  
Nor will He to those lips attend  
Whose prayers are not sincere."<sup>1</sup>

Another stumbling block to good communication is unconfessed sin. Psa. 66:18 warns, "If I regard wickedness in my heart, the Lord will not hear." The only way to restore fellowship with the Lord in this case is to confess the offending sin and ask for forgiveness.

King David had been Jehovah's chosen leader for the people of Israel. The Lord had blessed him with victory over his enemies and with the love of his subjects. But David sinned greatly when he entered into an adulterous relationship with Bathsheba and contrived to have her husband killed. However, when the prophet Nathan confronted him with the enormity of

his sin, he realized he was responsible before God. In Psalm 51 he confesses his transgressions and prays for forgiveness, "Against Thee, Thee only, I have sinned, and done what is evil in Thy sight . . . Purify me with hyssop, and I shall be clean; wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow." The Lord did forgive David, and he became known as the one whom the Lord loved. Fellowship was restored when David confessed his sin and asked for forgiveness.

In order to receive the Lord's forgiveness and to have a clear channel of communication with Him, we need to forgive others, also. Mark 11:25 says, "And whenever you stand praying, forgive, if you have anything against anyone; so that your Father also who is in heaven may forgive you your transgressions." Later manuscripts add, "But if you do not forgive, neither will your Father who is in heaven forgive your transgressions." If our forgiveness from God is contingent upon our forgiving others, Lord, help us! Unforgiveness is sin and needs to be confessed as such. Then, we need to let it go. To continue to harbor resentment and bitterness is to continue to block the channel of blessings the Lord has in store for us.

Other hindrances to effective prayer are enumerated in the Bible:

James 4:3 states, "You ask and do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives, so that you can spend it on your pleasures." The Christian's goal in life is to bring glory to God and to enjoy Him, so to pray for things that would only satisfy our selfish desires is to "pray amiss." (KJV)

Psalm 37:4 tells us, "Delight yourself in the Lord; and He will give you the desires of your heart." Peggy is a lovely Christian who has had to work hard as a nurse and mother of five children. She loves the Lord and delights in serving Him in her home, work, church, and community. Now Peggy had always had a secret desire to go to Hawaii but realized there was little chance of ever getting there. One day her employer called her in to tell her she was to attend a meeting for her nursing specialty, all expenses paid, in the land of her dream --- Hawaii! Had she prayed to go there for selfish motives, she might never

have gone, but she delighted in the Lord and received her heart's desire.

Prov. 28:9 points out another hindrance to prayer --- indifference to God's word.

Prov. 21:13 warns that if we shut our ears to the cry of the poor, we will cry and not be answered.

Finally, 1 Pet. 3:7 indicates that our prayers will not be heard if our home relationships are not right.

But suppose we have stripped away all the hindrances to good communication as carefully as we can, believed that our request is according to His will, placed ourselves as completely as we know how in His hands, and still our prayers go unanswered. What then? We need to remember that God's time and our time are not the same. He may be delaying an answer to teach us to trust Him more, but His timing is always perfect. We also need to remember that He desires our highest good, and the delay may be in order to give us something even better than that for which we asked.

Jesus tells us to keep on asking, to keep on seeking, and to keep on knocking, and then promises we will receive answers. The bottom line is to keep on trusting.

## VII. HINDRANCES TO EFFECTIVE PRAYER

1. List the hindrances to effective prayer noted in the following passages:
  - a. James 1:6-8
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  - b. Isa. 59:14b, 15; Psa. 51:6
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  - c. Psa. 66:18
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  - d. Mark 11:25
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  - e. James 4:3
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  - f. Prov. 28:9
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  - g. Prov. 21:13
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  - h. 1 Pet. 3:7

2. In David's song of repentance, Psalm 51, what type of sacrifice does God want?

3. In addition to effective prayer, what does unconfessed sin destroy in Psa. 51:12?

Question for contemplation: In what or in whom do I put my trust?

## VIII. ASPECTS OF PRAYER: THANKSGIVING AND PRAISE

When eight-year old Johnny came down to breakfast one morning, his mother asked him, "Did you say your prayers last night, Johnny?"

"Nope," he replied.

"Why not?" his mother questioned.

"Cause I didn't want anything," he answered, surprised that she should ask.

Sadly, many people hearing that story would not understand what was wrong with Johnny's reasoning, because they too only utilize prayer when they want something.

But prayer is much more than just petition. In fact, in the greatest prayer ever taught, the one we call the Lord's Prayer, petition holds a minor place.

Praise and adoration, thanksgiving, confession, and intercession should also be included in our prayers. Just as our diet should include items from all of the food groups in order for us to be physically healthy, our prayers should include all types of prayer to maintain our spiritual health. To over-emphasize any one aspect to the exclusion of the others is to become unbalanced spiritually.

Our prayers should always begin with thanksgiving for God's great blessings to us. Psa. 107:8, 9 advises, "Let them give thanks to the Lord for His loving kindness, and for His wonders to the sons of men! For He has satisfied the thirsty soul, and the hungry soul He has filled with what is good."

Psa. 103 enumerates the many ways the Lord has blessed us: He pardons our sins, heals our diseases, redeems us from destruction, blesses us with love and forgiveness, satisfies our desires, and renews our youth. Psa. 84:11 tells us that the Lord withholds no good thing from those who walk uprightly.

It might be said that the key word in the Old Testament is "Remember". The children of Israel were constantly being reminded of the way the Lord had watched over them, how He had chosen them, given them a land, brought them out of bondage, sustained them through their wilderness journey, and given them victory over their enemies. The purpose of calling



them to remembrance was to inspire them to thank Him and trust Him for their continued guidance and protection. We, too, need to remember daily how the Lord has blessed us with families, friends, material possessions, and health. He has given us a purpose in living, work to do, guidance and protection, and the promise of eternal life with Him. We should also remember to thank Him for what He has done and is doing in our community, state, nation, and world.

Thanking Him for what He has done will turn into praise and adoration for who He is as we continue in prayer. Lance Webb in *"The Art of Personal Prayer"* states that adoration is the heart and soul of prayer. It does two things nothing else can do: (a) it puts us and our problems in proper perspective so that all things begin to take on rightful proportions, and (b) it enables us to accept and receive the love and help of God and, thereby, enables us to love and serve others. He goes on to say that no experience can be more productive of creative power for worthy living.<sup>1</sup> For this we are made, and in this our lives are at their best.

The first question in the Shorter Catechism of the Westminster Confession of Faith asks: What is the chief end of man? And the answer: Man's chief end is to glorify God, and to enjoy Him forever.

Reading the Scriptures, particularly the Psalms, helps us to praise and worship the Lord for Himself because in them we see Him as both the Creator of the Universe and as our personal Saviour. We were created for fellowship with God, and as we fellowship, we are led to praise and worship Him. We see His majesty, His awesome power, His magnificent love, His absolute holiness, and His gentle mercy. We see Him revealed in the Person of our Saviour Jesus Christ.

As we thank and praise the Lord, our hearts and minds are opened to accept His will in our lives so that we become one with the divine purpose. Our lives become channels for His love to extend beyond ourselves to others, and we are molded into the persons He wants us to become.

It is easy to praise the Lord and thank Him for His bless-

ings when things are going smoothly for us, but what about when trouble comes and sorrow overtakes us? What then?

Eph. 5:20 tells us to give thanks for all things, and I Thess. 5:18 says, "in everything give thanks." The words "all" and "everything" are inclusive of both the good and the bad. Someone has called giving thanks in seemingly bad situations the first step of faith in action because we are acting out our conviction that the Lord can bring good out of a situation even when we ourselves are unable to see that good. Perhaps that is what Psa. 116:17 means when it refers to a "sacrifice of thanksgiving" and Heb. 13:15 a "sacrifice of praise" --- praising the Lord when we do not feel like it, but our faith in His ultimate goodness overrides our feelings.

In II Chron. 20 there is an account of the people of Judah under Jehosphaphat issuing a sacrifice of praise when the circumstances did not seem to warrant thanksgiving. The forces of Ammon and Moab had assembled to do battle against Judah, but the word of the Lord came to the people telling them not to fear for the battle was the Lord's. While the people of Judah gathered to sing praises to the Lord, the enemy forces were confounded by the Lord and destroyed each other. Psa. 22:3 tells us that the Lord inhabits the praises of His people. His power is released in a supernatural way through praise.

We live in a broken world, and we are part of a fallen humanity. Trouble and sorrow will come to us, but that is not to say that evil is God's intentional will for us. As our loving heavenly Father, He wants good things for His children. However, in order to allow us to have free will, and because Satan and his forces are alive and well, He permits bad things to happen to us.

Remember the story of Job? God permitted the Devil to afflict him, but in the end, because Job remained faithful, the Lord brought good out of his sorrow. He not only came to know God better, but he had everything he had lost returned to him two-fold.

Rom. 8:28 gives us the reason we can praise God in and for all circumstances, "And we know that God causes all things

to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose." We praise Him regardless of the circumstances because we know He can bring good out of it.

When Joseph's brothers came to him fearing punishment for what they had done to him years before, he said to them, "You meant evil against me, but God meant it for good in order to bring about this present result." The whole Hebrew race was preserved from certain death because ten jealous men had sought to get rid of their brother. God had not put that evil thought in their minds, but He used what they did for His own good ends.

Someone has said that when we put ourselves in God's hands, He covers us with His loving protection. Anything that comes to us must come through that love, and He can use it to bring about His divine purpose.

We have already stated in an earlier chapter that most of us come to know the Lord through trouble. While everything is going smoothly, we tend to ignore His presence. If for no other reason than to get our attention, God must permit trouble to come to us. Rather than becoming bitter and resentful, we should praise the Lord and trust Him to bring good out of any situation.

## VIII. ASPECTS OF PRAYER: THANKSGIVING AND PRAISE

1. List the different aspect of prayer:
  - a. Psa. 107:8; Psa. 118:1
  
  - b. Psa. 51:15; Psa. 71:8
  
  - c. Psa. 32:5; I John 1:9
  
  - d. Psa. 86:6, 7; I John 5:14
  
  - e. I Tim. 2:1; Matt. 5:44
  
2. List some of the ways the Lord has blessed us from Psa. 103.
  
3. Should we thank God for everything that comes to us?  
Eph. 5:20; I Thess. 5:18
  
4. What do we call praising God when we don't feel like it?  
Psa. 116:17; Heb. 13:15

5. What happened when Jehosphaphat and the Israelites sang praises to God? II Chron. 20

6. How can we praise God in and for all circumstances? Rom. 8:28

7. Name any instance you remember from the Bible when God caused something good to come out of a bad situation.

Question for contemplation: Can you recall a disastrous event in your life from which good has come? Can you trust the Lord to bring about good results from bad situations in the future?

## IX. ASPECTS OF PRAYER: CONFESSION

One of the best words of advice ever given is "Keep short accounts with God." Confession of sin is another aspect of prayer and one that should be used daily.

We have already seen how unconfessed sin clogs up the lines of communication with the Lord. Isa. 59:1, 2 warn, "Behold, the Lord's hand is not so short that it cannot save; neither is His ear so dull that it cannot hear. But your iniquities have made a separation between you and your God, and your sins have hid His face from you, so that He does not hear."

God, being perfectly holy, cannot fellowship with anyone who harbors sin in his life. The relationship of Father and child is not destroyed but fellowship between the two is.

I remember one particular day when my children had gotten on my nerves terribly, and we had had several altercations. I had vented part of my frustrations on their little bottoms and was venting the rest on the pots and pans as I was getting supper when my five-year-old son sidled up to me. "Momma, I'm sorry," he said. "Now, could you smile a little louder?" I had not been smiling at all, but immediately peace was restored, and I did smile. All that day as the battles had raged, those children were still my children. The relationship had remained intact, but the fellowship had been decidedly impaired until my son had thrown out the olive branch, and peace was restored.

Unconfessed sin not only creates problems with prayer communication, but it also causes emotional and physical difficulties. Doctors and psychiatrists tell us that guilt feelings can cause and worsen ulcers, colitis, migraine headaches, arthritis, alcoholism, and other stress-related diseases. Guilt can disturb the mind, creating emotional and mental maladjustments.

The remedy is found in I John 1:9, "If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness." Forgiveness is immediate for the acknowledged sin, and cleansing of unknown sins is accomplished also.

Confession must be accompanied by true repentance for it to be accepted, however. There must be not only an

acknowledgement of sin but a determination to avoid it in the future. Humility and penitence always follow true repentance. Once confessed, that sin can be forgotten.

My friend Molly is a happy, faithful Christian who shares her faith exuberantly. She was not always that way, however. Having made a profession of faith as a child, she had drifted away from her enthusiasm in the Lord for several years until tragedy struck. Her youngest child died on the operating table during a routine tonsillectomy. In her grief she turned back to the Lord, and He became the most important Person in her life. She was consumed with guilt for the years she had ignored Him, however, and daily pled with Him to forgive her.

One day she was reading in Isaiah and verses 24 and 25 in Chapter 43 seemed to stand out in headlines, “. . . you have burdened Me with your sins, you have wearied Me with your iniquities. I, even, I am the one who wipes out your transgressions for My own sake; and I will not remember your sins.”

She said it was almost like an audible voice saying, “What sins, Molly? Don’t you know I forgave them long ago and forgot them? Now, stop wearying Me with them, and get on with your life!” It was like a huge load had been lifted, and she laughed and cried at the same time. Ever since, she has been a happier, freer person and a more effective witness for Jesus because she knows she has been forgiven.

The Holy Spirit convicts or reminds us of sin so that we will confess it, but the Lord does not condemn us for it. Rom. 8:1 tells us, “There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.” It is Satan who condemns. It is he who causes us to carry heavy burdens of guilt that rob us of our joy and peace. This is not to say that Jesus condones sin; rather, He condemns sin but not the sinner.

Some might say that they do not have anything to confess --- they lead a good, moral life, attend church and maybe even tithe. What do they have to confess? Measured by the rest of society, it is true that they look pretty good, but a Christian’s yardstick must be Jesus.

I remember disliking the song “Amazing Grace” because I

never felt like a "wretch", and I thought it should only be sung in the Salvation Army soup kitchens in the Bowery. But then I saw myself beside the Lord's standard of perfection, and "how precious did that grace appear, the hour I first believed!"

Everyone sins daily by failing to live up to God's standard or by breaking the moral law . . . sins of omission and commission. But we can be assured His forgiveness is swift and sure the instant we repent and confess.



## **CHAPTER IX. ASPECTS OF PRAYER: CONFESSION**

- 1. What is one thing that clogs up the lines of communication with the Lord? Isa. 59:1, 2**
- 2. What do we need to do about it? I John 1:9**
- 3. Does everyone sin? Rom 3:23, I John 1:8**
- 4. Which is destroyed by sin --- our relationship or our fellowship with the Lord?**
- 5. What does the Lord do with our sins when we confess them? Isa. 43:25, Isa. 1:18**
- 6. Does Jesus condemn us for sin? Rom. 8:1**
- 7. Who does? Rev. 12:10**
- 8. What must accompany confession? Psa. 51:17, Mark 6:12**

**Exercise:** List the ways you broke the Ten Commandments in the last 24 hours. Now, list the things you should have done but didn't in the last 24 hours. Do you need to repent and confess anything? Remember to appropriate His forgiveness when you confess.

## X. ASPECTS OF PRAYER: INTERCESSION

Harry Emerson Fosdick has given us a good definition of intercession. "Intercession is taking on your heart the same burden that God has on His; it is joining our demand with the universal desire. In this system of personal life which makes up the moral universe, we take our places alongside God in an urgent, creative outpouring of sacrificial love."<sup>1</sup>

When we intercede in prayer for someone, we are allowing God to do the work He wants to do in their lives. Because He ordained that we have free will, He limits Himself to respond to our requests. In some way that we do not understand, our prayers focus the love of God upon the person or situation for which we are praying and provide a channel through which help can flow. Lance Webb calls intercession prayer that is cooperation with the love of God.<sup>2</sup>

Intercession is the unselfish aspect of our prayers that puts another's need before our own and asks the Lord to meet that need.

The Bible is explicit about the need for intercessory prayer. 1 Tim. 2:1 states, "First of all, then, I urge that entreaties and prayers, petitions and thanksgivings, be made on behalf of all men."

In the next verse Paul becomes more specific and urges that we pray for rulers and those in authority. A few verses later he indicates we should pray for the lost, that they might be saved. In Eph. 6:18 and 19 he reminds us to pray for all of the body of Christ and for God's servants --- pastors, teachers, evangelists, missionaries.

In Matt. 9:38 Jesus entreated prayers for more workers to be sent into the harvest. Certainly He would expect us to remember our family members daily and anyone for whom we are concerned. In addition to these the Holy Spirit will bring to mind people for whom we should pray, and many times people will ask for our prayers.

Hardest of all to pray for is the group named in Matt. 5:44 --- our enemies. I am reminded of an episode that occurred in our church during the Civil War in regard to praying for one's

enemies. A contingent of Union soldiers was billeted in town, and their commanding officer informed the pastor that they would be attending church on Sunday. He indicated to the minister that he should pray for them during the service. Rev. Wilson, being an outspoken, strong-willed Southerner, refused to do so, whereupon the Union officer threatened him with a court martial. The minister replied that if the officer knew anything about prayer he would know that unless prayer was from the heart, it would not avail. He said, further, that the only prayer he could pray from his heart for the Union soldiers would be for the Lord to send them back up North where they came from! Fortunately for Rev. Wilson, cooler heads prevailed, and the Union officer was ordered to leave the minister alone.

Rev. Wilson was wrong in refusing to pray for his enemies but was right in insisting that intercession must be sincere to be effective. It is also necessary in intercession that the pray-er be concerned enough to become a part of the answer. If we pray for someone's salvation, we must be ready to talk to him about it. If we are troubled enough to pray for someone having financial problems, we must be willing to share what we have with that person. There is little point in praying unless we are willing to get involved. Mark Dunman remarked that praying for another will bring you to love them. Loving them will lead you to serve them. Serving them will be the open door through which God can move to save, heal, and make whole.<sup>3</sup>

Not only should we be sincere, compassionate, and willing to get involved, but we also must be willing to persevere in our prayers. If we are sincere, our prayers will cost us something in time and effort. It may take years before answers are seen in the lives of the people for whom we pray. We are engaged in spiritual warfare with the forces of evil, and the battle is often hard and long. But the stakes are high and the victory sweet when we see the Lord's will brought to pass. Every Christian parent will declare that the hours spent in prayer were worth it when their children turn to the Lord in faith and trust.

Our prayers for another should always seek their highest

good and desire their salvation. There is no way to know how many countless thousands have become believers because of someone's prayers, and it may be safe to say that all who become Christians have been the object of someone's intercessory prayer. The unbeliever is spiritually blind; but when someone prays, the scales are removed from his eyes, and he is able to see the truth. Paul was blinded by sin when he persecuted the Christians so that he believed he was doing God's will. It was not until Stephen prayed that the Lord would forgive his tormentors that Paul's spiritual eyes were opened, and he was able to recognize the Lord on the Damascus road.

The primary reason that we do not see more people make professions of faith is because we Christians have not prayed for them. It may be that we will be judged more on the basis of this sin of omission than for any of the sins we commit. Intercessory prayer should be our number one priority.

George Mueller who helped bring over 30,000 people to the Lord, gave five Biblical conditions for answered prayer in saving souls:

1. I Tim. 2:4 - have no doubt about God's willingness to save.
2. John 1:14 - plead for their salvation on Jesus' merits alone.
3. Mark 11:24 - believe in God's willingness to hear your prayer.
4. Psa. 66:18 - do not be yielded to any sin consciously.
5. Luke 18:7 - be persistent in believing prayer.<sup>4</sup>

Prayer for another's salvation is not the only kind of intercessory prayer. Prayers for healing and health, guidance, protection, strength to overcome temptation, friends, peace of mind, jobs, victory over sin --- in short, anything in line with the will of God that is needed in the other person's life should be the subject of intercessory prayer.

The following poem speaks eloquently of the value of this type of prayer:

## Someone Has Prayed

The day was long, the burdens I had borne  
Seemed heavier than I could longer bear,  
And then it lifted - but I did not know  
Someone had knelt in prayer.

Had taken me to God that very hour,  
And asked the easing of the load, and He  
In infinite compassion, had stooped down  
And taken it from me.

We cannot tell how often as we pray  
For some bewildered one, hurt and distressed,  
The answer comes - but many times those hearts  
Find sudden peace and rest.

Someone had prayed, and Faith, a reaching hand,  
Took hold of God, and brought Him down that day.  
So many, many hearts have need of prayer ---  
Oh, let us pray.<sup>5</sup>

Grace Noll Crowell

## **CHAPTER X. ASPECTS OF PRAYER: INTERCESSION**

**1. List specific people for whom the Bible entreats us to pray:**

**a. I. Tim. 2:1-4**

**b. Eph. 6:18, 19**

**c. Matt. 9:38**

**d. Matt. 5:44**

**2. In what specific action were Jesus and Stephen alike? Luke 23:24 and Acts 7:60**

**3. George Mueller listed five Biblical conditions for answered prayer in saving souls, what are they?**

**a. I Tim. 2:4**

**b. John 1:14**

**c. Mark 11:24**

d. Psa. 66:18

e. Luke 18:1-7

4. Name two Old Testament figures who interceded for large groups of people.
  - a. Gen. 18:22-33
  
  - b. Exo. 32:9-14
  
5. For what large group of people did Paul pray? Rom. 9:3, 4; 10:1
  
6. Who helps us in intercession when we don't know how to pray? Rom. 8:26, 27
  
7. Who is constantly interceding for us? Rom. 8:34, Heb. 7:25
  
8. Note the specific requests Paul makes in prayer of intercession:



a. Eph. 3:16-19

b. Phil. 1:9-11

Question for contemplation: Am I willing to get involved and be a part of the answer to my prayers of intercession for others? If not, do I really desire what I am asking?

## XI. ASPECTS OF PRAYER: PETITION

We have left the discussion of petition as an aspect of prayer to the last, more to counter-balance the prominent place it assumes in our prayers than for any other reason. Petition is a valid type of prayer but should not be used to the exclusion of the other kinds.

We are told by Jesus to ask, seek, and knock, and we have noted already that the Greek is in the progressive tense which translates, "keep on asking, keep on seeking, and keep on knocking." The Lord has ordained that we ask. Lewis Maclachlan notes that God is ceaselessly active for our good; but His work, being a work of grace, cannot become completely effective without our cooperation. Many things God will not or cannot do without our asking. He does not impose His will upon anyone.<sup>1</sup>

In a pamphlet on prayer Theodore P. Ferris says that God respects our freedom and integrity to be ourselves and limits Himself to respond to our requests. He further states that our petitionary prayers do not persuade God to do something for us; they permit Him to do it.<sup>2</sup>

The story is told about a believer who died and was being shown around Heaven by St. Peter. The man was overcome by the magnificence of everything he saw but was puzzled by a mound of bundles of all sizes and shapes over in one corner.

"What is in all those packages?" queried the newcomer to Heaven.

"Those," said St. Peter, "contain all the blessings the Lord had for you, but He couldn't send them because you didn't ask."

In "*Commonsense about Prayer*" Maclachlan goes on to say that the purpose of petition is not to tell God what we want but to discipline our own desires. It is not getting what we want from God but obtaining what He wants for us. Petition brings our vague desires into focus.<sup>3</sup> There is a difference between what we want and what we need, and God helps us to distinguish between them.

In Matt. 6:8 and 32 Jesus says that God knows what we

need even before we ask. Note that in verse 8 Jesus is cautioning his followers not to make a show of prayer but to pray simply and sincerely. In verse 32 He is admonishing them to put first things first: to be primarily concerned about the things of the Kingdom of God, and the Lord will supply the things needed to sustain life.

When we petition God, we are admitting our helplessness and are asking that He supply our needs according to the way He appoints. We pray for shelter and food, and He gives us jobs and the strength to do them. We pray for protection from trials, and He gives us the courage to go through them. We pray for healing, and He provides doctors and medicine. This is not to discount miracles of healing and protection and provision which do occur. But, most of the time, our prayers are not answered by the miraculous but by other ways that God appoints.

Sometimes His answers are "No" or "Wait awhile". Remember that God desires our highest good, and like a wise parent, must sometimes withhold from us what we think we need. As we place ourselves in His hands through prayer, we begin to want what He wants for us, and then we can understand the wisdom of God's negative answer and can thank Him for it.

We have already said that the Lord is interested in everything that concerns us, and He desires that we bring all concerns before Him in prayer. As we mature in our relationship with Him, our prayers change to reflect our desire or receive Him rather than His gifts. Our petitions will seek to bring to pass on earth what He has ordained in Heaven, rather than "to spend it on our pleasures". (Jas. 4:3)

To review, aspects or types of prayer include intercession, praise and thanksgiving, confession, and petition. Someone has put these in the form of an acrostic to help us remember:

Adoration and praise

Confession

Thanksgiving

Supplication ---

intercession and petition

Effective prayer includes all of these aspects of communication with the Lord.

## CHAPTER XI. ASPECTS OF PRAYER: PETITION

1. What are we told to do in Matt. 7:7?
2. What happens when we do as we are told? Matt. 7:8

3. What is the promise in John 14:14?

What is the condition?

4. Why don't we get what we request? James 4:3
5. Can we know that the Lord hears us? Psa. 86:6-8, Psa. 91:15
6. What is the condition in I John 5:14, 15 for answered prayer?
7. Why can we come asking with confidence to the throne of grace? Heb. 4:14-16

8. Does God always give "yes" answers to our plans?  
a. I Chron. 17

b. Acts 16:6-8

9. What is the secret for always having our needs provided?  
Matt. 6:33

Exercise: List three petitions you most want to be answered.  
Now, answer as honestly as possible why you want them. Do  
you have to change your requests?

## XII. THE LORD'S PRAYER

The prayer in Matthew 6 that we call the Lord's Prayer should properly be called the Disciples' Prayer. The disciples came to Jesus with the request that He teach them to pray. They had seen the Lord in prayer, knew the comfort and strength He received from it, and wanted the same for themselves.

The prayer He taught them was brief, concise, contained all of the elements necessary for effective prayer, and was undoubtedly meant to be used as a pattern for our prayers, not as a memorized formality. It can only be prayed (not repeated) by those who are disciples of Jesus, those whose spiritual natures have been reborn through their acceptance of Him as their Saviour.

J. Oswald Sanders notes that this prayer is brief yet profound, wonderfully comprehensive, of universal application, and reveals the priorities to be observed in prayer, namely: the first three petitions concern God and His glory, and the last three concern man and his needs.<sup>1</sup>

We see that all of the types of prayer we discussed in the four previous chapters are included in this short prayer: praise and thanksgiving, confession, petition, and intercession. The use of the personal pronouns "our" and "us" indicate that we come to our Father God as a member of His intimate family, and that our concerns are for all of the other members of that family.

"Our Father, Who art in Heaven" brings us into the presence of our loving heavenly Parent, whom we love and worship. Philip Keller in *"A Layman Looks at the Lord's Prayer"* notes that prior to Jesus, God was regarded as someone remote and august, a stern judge. However, Jesus showed us that God's outstanding attribute is love of magnificent and unchanging proportions, constant and unconditional, so that we can relate to God as Father. The evidence of that love is shown in II Cor. 5:19 which tells us that, "God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not counting their trespasses against them." Keller further states that no other religion in the

world carries such a happy, contented concept of communication between God and man.<sup>2</sup>

“Hallowed be Thy Name” is a prayer that this Father God Whom we worship will be held in reverence by all people. His name implies all that He is --- His majesty, power, love, authority, grace, mercy --- His character and His works. We pray that all the world will recognize Him for Who He is and that we ourselves might always honor Him with our lives.

To pray “Thy Kingdom come” is to ask that God’s reign be received now by us and that it extend throughout this earthly sphere even as it does in Heaven. His Kingdom came to earth with Jesus, but it remains for us to receive it in faith. The Jews were looking for a restored political order, but the Kingdom Jesus talked about is a spiritual one, one in which God is the Ruler in the hearts of men. It cannot come until men can sincerely pray the next petition. “Thy will be done.”

When a man’s heart is yielded to the Lord so that his life is lived in submission to God’s will, the Kingdom of God will exist wherever that man is. The characteristics of the Kingdom of God will be evident in his relationships and in his personality --- peace, joy, goodness, truth --- and evil is defeated.

The prayer for the Kingdom’s arrival also has apocalyptic meaning as it anticipates a future time when God will bring earth’s history to a climax. The author of the book of Revelation foretells a time when God will destroy the old and inaugurate a new order with Jesus on the Throne and all men in willing subjection to Him. That new order is the Christian’s ultimate hope.

“Thy will be done on earth as it is in Heaven” should be the central, dominant concern of every Christian. It should motivate everything we do as we realize His will is perfect and the source of every blessing. His will is the purpose for which we are made, and He has equipped us with special abilities and opportunities for the accomplishing of it. In praying this prayer, we are also expressing our concern that His will be done throughout the world and are acknowledging our willingness to help achieve that end.

“Give us this day our daily bread” is a request for

everything necessary to sustain life --- food, clothing, shelter, work, income, and friends. In this petition we are admitting our helplessness and our dependence upon God as our Provider. As Keller points out, the natural resources of this earth are supplied by God and are more than adequate for our basic needs. We are asking Him to help us expend ourselves wisely in meeting those needs as we voice this petition.

“Forgive us our trespasses . . .” acknowledges our sinfulness and asks for God’s mercy. All “miss the mark” and, therefore, need to confess failure regularly and to receive forgiveness. There are sins of omission and sins of commission that should be named specifically and renounced in humility and repentance. Only then will the lines of communication be completely opened between the sinner and God.

Note that the petition for forgiveness hinges on our forgiving our brother, “. . . As we forgive those who trespass against us.” This is the difficult part of this petition and must be prayed sincerely. God is interested in our relationships with our fellowmen and desires that we show mercy to them even as He shows mercy to us.

“Lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil” is a prayer for protection from Satan, the Evil one. The word “tempt” should be translated “test” according to the renowned Biblical scholar, William Barclay. In his study on the Gospel of Matthew he states that this phrase does not mean God is trying to seduce us into evil but that He tests our strength, loyalty and ability for service. Temptation is not designed to make us fall but to make us stronger and better.<sup>3</sup>

Keller notes that temptation is part and parcel of our Father’s plan for producing people of strong character and Christ-like qualities. Our characters are the sum total of the choices we make in a life fraught with temptation.<sup>4</sup> The Lord not only helps us make those choices but then gives us the strength to take the necessary action.

“For Thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, forever. Amen.” The closing doxology is only found in about half of the translations but is a fitting climax of praise in which



everything --- all authority and all power, both now and in the future --- is placed in God's hands.

To pray the Lord's Prayer, then, is to acknowledge our Father's Lordship over everything --- past, present, and future; to reclaim territory lost to Satan through sin; and to bring His Kingdom to earth within our sphere of influence.

## CHAPTER XII. THE LORD'S PRAYER

1. Why do you think many scholars believe the Lord's Prayer is mis-named?
2. In Matt. 6:9-13, how many petitions concern God and His glory? How many concern man and his needs? Which group receives priority in the prayer?
3. What words indicate this is a prayer of intercession?
4. What image of God does this prayer present? See also Rom. 8:15
5. How do we know God loves us as a Father? II Cor. 5:19, John 1:12
6. How do we hallow God's name?
7. Are we praying for the Kingdom of Heaven to come in the future or the present or both? Dan. 7:13, 14; Rom. 14:17

8. What do we call the section Matt. 5 through 7 where Jesus reveals much of God's will?

9. All four Gospels recount an event which shows God is concerned with providing our physical needs. What was it? Matt. 14:13-21, Mark 6:31-44, Luke 9:10-17; John 6:1-14

10. Upon what does our forgiveness from God depend? Matt. 6:12

11. Compare 6:13 with 26:41. What are we asking God to do in the petition?

12. What promise does God give in I Cor. 10:13?

### XIII. PRACTICAL ASPECTS OF PRAYER

Someone has said that the person who is too busy to pray is too busy. Prayer should be our number one priority throughout the day, but if we wait until we find the time for it, we will never get around to it. One has to make the time to pray. We make time for everything else we really want to do, why not prayer?

We have already said that we should pray throughout the day, keeping our lines of communication open, snatching brief intervals of time for "flash" prayers. In addition, sometime during each day, we need to have a regular time of prayer and Bible study, for if we do not, we lose our spiritual vitality. Prayer is to the spirit what food is to the body, and our spiritual natures become listless and weak without it.

Since each person is different and our life-styles vary, no one time for prayer can be said to be essential. For most, the earliest time during the day when it is possible to be alone with the Lord is best. One can maintain a sense of His presence all day if contact is made early. However, the early morning hours are too rushed for some: mothers with young children, or people who go to work unusually early, or some folks who may not be alert enough in the morning for good communication with anyone, even the Lord! Each person needs to determine the time that best suits him and then stick to it. Start with fifteen minutes and increase the time as led. Do not let the Devil distract you from keeping your appointment with the Lord, and be aware that He will certainly try. It has been said that Satan trembles when Christians pray, so he will use every means possible to keep us from it.

It should be noted that even if this quiet time is not first thing in the morning, you should make contact with the Lord early to get your spiritual "receiver-transmitter" turned on. One dear saint says that before her feet touch the floor in the morning she says, "Good morning, Lord. This is Your day. I am Your child. Show me Your way."

It is good to have a special place for your quiet time where you can have privacy and no distractions. Jesus told his

disciples to go into their inner room, shut the door, and pray. Take the telephone off the hook and turn the television off so that you will not be distracted. It is a good witness to the rest of the family to know you are at prayer and are not to be disturbed. Susannah Wesley, mother of John and Charles and seventeen others, had difficulty getting away by herself, so she would throw her apron over her head when she needed to pray. With nineteen children she probably needed a lot of prayer! All of the children knew she was not to be disturbed when she retreated into the "inner room" of her apron.

Your prayer room can be beside your bed on your knees, sitting in a favorite chair, at the breakfast table after the family has gone, in your car going to work, at your office desk during lunch hour, in the basement, bathroom, dining room --- wherever you can have privacy and quiet.

Keep your Bible there, a daily devotional guide, if you like, and a notebook and pencil to use during you devotions. It is usually best to begin by reading the Bible in a systematic way; that is, have a plan that you follow. Either read it straight through, or a book at a time, or research a topic. It is not wise to just let the Book fall open where it may and read there. As you read, ask the Lord to speak through the Word in a personal way and be conscious of the verses which stand out in your mind. Use a devotional guide if this is helpful. Buy an inexpensive Bible you can mark, and jot down anything that comes to you as you read.

As the Word soaks into your heart, prayer naturally follows your Bible reading. Pray naturally as you would talk with another. Praying aloud or semiaudibly helps to keep your mind from wandering.

Begin with praise and thanksgiving, and go on to confession, intercession, and petition. Prayer lists can be helpful, but remember to ask the Holy Spirit to bring to mind those for whom He wants you to pray. When prayer lists become too long and you feel guilty about omitting someone, you might find that a different list for each day is helpful. For instance, on Monday you could pray for your extended family (you want to

pray for your immediate family daily); on Tuesday, you could include your closest friends; on Wednesday, your less intimate friends; on Thursday, those in trouble and those who have on-going needs; on Friday, special ministries or organizations in which you are interested; Saturday, government leaders, the nation, and global concerns; and Sunday, church and religious leaders. Remember, however, to be alert to any person or situation which the Holy Spirit may place upon your heart.

Some days your whole prayer time may be spent in worship and praise. Other times you may be so burdened about something, it occupies your entire meditation period. Do not feel constrained by rules and regulations, but let the Holy Spirit lead your quiet time.

Since we cannot specify any one time or place as being the best for prayer, neither can we specify any one position. Some prefer kneeling, while others would rather sit. It is a great temptation to pray lying in bed, and perhaps some can do it effectively. For most, however, even with the best intentions, prayer time in bed ends prematurely as sleep overtakes the pray-er.

The following poem settles the prayer posture questions once and for all:

"The proper way for men to pray,"  
said Deacon Lemuel Keyes;

"The only proper attitude  
is down upon his knees."

"Nay, I should say the way to pray,"  
said Reverend Doctor Wise,

"Is standing straight with out-stretched arms  
with rap and upturned eyes."

"O, no, no, no," said Elder Snow,  
"Such posture is too proud,"

"A man should pray with eyes fast closed  
and head contritely bowed."

"It seems to me his hands should be  
austurely clasped in front,

**“With both thumbs pointing to the ground,”  
said Reverend Doctor Blunt.**

**“Last year I fell in Hodgkin’s well  
head first,” said Cyril Brown,  
“With both my heels a-stickin’ up,  
My head a-pointin’ down.  
“And I done prayed right then and there;  
best prayer I ever said,  
“The prayin’est prayer I ever prayed,  
Was standing on my head.”<sup>1</sup>**

**Sam Walter Foss**

**We can conclude that the time, the place, and the position  
in which we pray is a matter of personal choice; but the attitude  
must be sincere.**

**When you catch your mind wandering, bring it back to  
prayer with confession of your inattentiveness, but do not let  
feelings of guilt so burden you that your prayer time is consum-  
ed by it. No matter how often you have to corral straying  
thoughts, do so with repentance and then go on immediately  
with your prayer. The Devil loves it when we grovel in self-  
condemnation and fail to go on to victory over our flesh nature.**

**After you have voiced your prayer, sit quietly with your  
notebook and pencil, meditating upon the Lord. As thoughts  
come to you, jot them down. A plan for your day may present  
itself, or you may be led to write a letter, pay a visit, apologize,  
or undertake a project. Memory may return of some long  
buried event that is the key to a problem you have been having,  
or the true motive for some action you are contemplating may  
reveal itself. When these thoughts line up with Scriptural prin-  
ciples and feel right in your spirit, you can trust that it is  
guidance from the Lord. He speaks through your thoughts  
when you have prepared your mind to receive His guidance  
through sincere prayer and Bible study. To neglect to “listen”  
in prayer is as foolish as trying to build a house without a**

blue print or going into battle without a battle plan or a commanding officer.

Someone has said that prayer is first a duty before it becomes a delight, and it may take years of disciplining our minds and our wills before we reach the place of delighted anticipation and joyful communion that prayer can become. The secret is in not giving up --- the rewards are too great to miss.



## **CHAPTER XIII. PRACTICAL ASPECTS OF PRAYER**

- 1. Is prayer an option or a necessity for a Christian? Luke 18:1**
- 2. When should we pray? Eph. 6:18a**
- 3. When is the best time to have a quiet time with the Lord? Psa. 5:3**
- 4. Where should we have our quiet time? Matt. 6:6**
- 5. Does our position matter when we pray? Mark 11:25, Psa. 95:6, I Kings 19:4**
- 6. What is Scripture reading to the Christian? Psa. 119:105, I Pet. 2:2, Jer. 15:16**
- 7. List what a study of the Bible does for the reader from Rom. 15:4 and II Tim. 3:16, 17.**

8. What besides Bible reading and prayer should be included in our daily quiet time? Psa. 63:6, Psa. 77:12

9. What is the "still, small voice" through which God speaks to us? John 16:7-14, I Cor. 2:9-16

Question for contemplation: Am I still trying to find time for a devotional period or have I made time for it?

Exercise: Read Helen Hosier's book, *How to Know When God Speaks*, Harvest House Publishers, Irvine, Calif.

#### XIV. PRAYER AND FASTING

Until recently fasting has been one of the most neglected tools in spiritual growth and prayer development, but now we are beginning to hear more about it. Why such an obviously scriptural practice fell into disuse is not known unless it was a reaction to the ascetic movement of the middle ages. In recent years, however, the discovery of fasting as a means of making our prayers more effective has caused Christians to take a new look at it.

In the Old Testament, among other passages, we see Moses fasting on Mt. Sinai, the Israelites fasting to be delivered from the Philistines, David weeping and fasting for his infant son, Daniel fasting in Babylon, and the prophets calling for a fast of repentance. In the new Testament we have the examples of Jesus in the wilderness and His instructing His disciples about fasting. John, his disciples, and the believers in the early church also prayed and fasted. We note that Jesus said, "When you fast . . ." not "If you fast", assuming that fasting would be as much a part of the disciples' lives as prayer and alms-giving.

It has been noted that through the ages all great reformation movements in the church were led by men who believed in the value of fasting, among them Luther, Calvin, Knox, and Wesley. Certainly today, when the church so desperately needs revival, Christians should rediscover the value of augmenting their prayers with fasting.

Arthur Wallis, in his helpful book *"God's Chosen Fast"*, says, "Fasting is a God-appointed means for the flowing of His grace and power that we can afford to neglect no longer."<sup>1</sup> He goes on to point out from Isaiah 58, the classic chapter of scripture on the subject of fasting, that the acceptable fast to God is the one He chooses. Like prayer, it must be God-initiated and God-ordained if it is to be effective.<sup>2</sup> God is interested in the motives for everything we do. If we are fasting to coerce Him into giving us what we want, or if we fast to be seen of men, it will be to no avail. However, when our desire is to bring His will to pass and we are led to undertake a fast, He will send blessings upon us too numerous to mention.

Two of the greatest values of fasting accompanied by prayer are a clearer mind and a release of supernatural power. People who fast report that, after a certain time, they are able to think more clearly and to concentrate on spiritual things more keenly, that they have a sharper sense of being able to discern God's will and to see as He sees.

At the same time a power is released that does battle with the enemy and brings down strong holds that have never before wavered. Fasting puts Satan on notice that the pray-er means business. Satan's hold over a person often can be broken by fasting and in no other way. It is an effective weapon in our warfare with the forces of evil.

Times to fast include before making major decisions, when we are especially troubled or concerned, or when we have a pressing need. Certainly we should fast when under Satanic attack, when we need to know God's will in a given situation, or when we desire a closer walk with the Lord. These are all legitimate, Biblical occasions for fasting. A further reason implied in Scripture is to discipline our fleshly appetites so that they do not dominate our spiritual natures. Fasting helps keep our body in its place and aids in self-control.

Since fasting is a new experience for most, perhaps it would be good to look at some practical aspects from Wallis's book. To fast is to abstain from food for a certain period in order to give oneself more completely to prayer. Normal fasts last from one to forty days but usually no longer, as beyond that time it could be dangerous. They can consist of abstaining from all solid food during the period, or eating only certain foods, or of deleting one or two meals a day. It is not advisable to do without liquids unless one is very sure the Lord is calling for an absolute fast (no food or drink), and then for no longer than three days.

If there are medical problems, one's physician should be consulted before undertaking a fast. It is probably not wise for pregnant women to fast.

First fasts should be of short duration, abstaining from food for only one or two meals at a time. If only water is to be

Drunk during the fast, coffee and tea should be discontinued several days early so that caffeine-withdrawal headaches will not be a problem.

Breaking a long fast should be done gradually, beginning with fruit juices and then small amounts of non-starchy foods eaten slowly.

During the fast, as much time as possible should be spent in prayer and Bible study. Care should be taken to guard against discouragement or other of Satan's devices by spending much time in praise and thanksgiving.

In Matt. 6 Jesus warns about making a show of fasting but says, rather, to fast in secret, going on about your daily business.

Down through the ages fasting has been used to bring about positive results in the body as waste products, excess fat, and decaying tissues are burned up and a renewal of mind and body begins. However, as beneficial as fasting may be for our bodies, the primary purpose of fasting is to bring our souls and spirits under the Lord's control so that His purposes might be achieved. In that spirit, fasting can be a power-adjunct to prayer.

## **CHAPTER XIV. PRAYER AND FASTING**

**1. Note the occasions and purposes for fasting listed below:**

**a. Judges 20:24-28**

**b. II Sam. 12:15-23**

**c. Ezra 8:21, 22**

**d. Neh. 1:1-6**

**e. Jonah 3:5-9**

**f. Acts 13:2, 3**

**g. Acts 14:23**

**2. How did Jesus say we should fast? Matt. 6:1, 16-18**

3. Note the value of fasting when fighting spiritual battles in Matt. 17:14-21.

4. Why didn't Jesus's disciples fast and when did He predict they would? Mark 2:18-22

5. From Isaiah 58 answer the following:  
a. Why did the people fast? vs. 3a, 4b

b. Were the people "religious"? vs. 1, 2

c. What did God want instead of an outward form of worship? vs. 6-12

Exercise: Read Arthur Wallis's book, *God's Chosen Fast*, and ask the Lord to guide you about fasting.

## XV. PRAYER AND HEALING

There is, perhaps, no other type of prayer more debated or less understood than prayer for healing. On one end of the spectrum are those who insist that God wants everyone healed, and if the sufferer is not healed by prayer, it is his lack of faith that is the problem. On the other end of the debate are those who insist that miracles of all kinds, including healings, ceased with the apostolic age, and there is no point in praying to get well. God is either punishing us or using illness to teach us something, so we should just accept it. The truth about healing lies somewhere between these two extremes.

People get sick for one of three reasons: because they bring it upon themselves, or because Satan afflicts them with it, or simply because they are members of the human race.

When God created man, He made him whole and healthy; but when man chose to sin, all creation was placed under the curse of death. Man and the world around him became subject to death, disease, and decay. It is part of our fallen condition that we get sick and die.

But God did not leave us without a remedy --- the person of Jesus Christ, His Son. In Isaiah 53, the Gospel of the Old Testament, we are told that our atonement was secured for us by Christ's dying for our sins. "He was wounded for our transgressions, He was crushed for our iniquities." (53:5) By His death we are justified (made right in God's eyes), and by His stripes we are healed. Matt. 8:17 re-phrases verse 4. "He Himself took our infirmities and carried away our diseases." From this chapter we find that both our salvation and our physical healing were purchased for us in the atonement, but we know there are aspects of both that will not be fully realized until Christ comes again. In salvation we have already been saved from the penalty of our sin; we are now being saved from the power of sin; but we will not be saved from the presence of sin until the resurrection. Likewise, we will have to wait until that glorious day to receive perfect bodies and perfect health, although we can enjoy better health by trusting in Jesus now.

Let us look first at what is obviously true concerning Christ-



ians and good health. We said that one reason people are sick is because of what they do to themselves; however, a Christian recognizes that his body is the temple of God and as such should be maintained properly. That means eating a balanced diet and getting sufficient rest and exercise. He is not as likely as the non-Christian to be subject to lung cancer from smoking, alcoholism, or venereal disease. He should not suffer from the effects of stress as much as the non-Christian. Stress is the underlying cause of many diseases -- ulcers, high blood pressure, colitis, arthritis, migraine headaches, and lately research is indicating a link with cancer. The Christian has the safety valve of prayer to a burden-bearing God to help relieve his stress. A recent newspaper article cited a poll which reported that church-goers live longer and healthier lives than non church-goers, bearing out our contention that Christians do fewer harmful things to themselves.

Secondly, we said disease is part of Satan's territory, and he uses it to afflict and destroy people. But Christians have the victory over Satan in Jesus, Who gave us authority over all the power of the enemy (Luke 10:19). We have the right to use that authority to bind our enemy and to order him to take his demons of infirmity and be gone in the Name of Jesus. Jesus used this authority in the case of the epileptic in Matthew 17 and the Gadarene demoniac (Luke 8), among others. We are told in Luke 13 that Jesus healed a woman who had been bound by Satan for eighteen years by laying his hands on her and telling her she had been freed. His authority superceded that of Satan's, and she was released from her bondage and could stand straight.

Unfortunately, we have not been taught how to use our authority as we should, and thousands are left on beds of pain and languishing in mental hospitals.

The third reason we get sick is simply because we are human. Jesus did not promise that we would escape the sorrow and pain that is inherent in our broken condition, but He did promise to be with us through it. He also told us to ask anything in His name (John 14), to bring everything to Him in prayer

(Phil. 4), and to pray for whatsoever we desire (Mark 11). While not mentioning healing specifically, all three passages certainly imply it with the words “anything”, “everything”, and “whatsoever”.

In James 5, we do have a specific promise concerning healing and prayer in verses 13 through 16: “Is anyone among you suffering? Let him pray. Is anyone cheerful? Let him sing praises. Is anyone among you sick? Let him call for the elders of the church, and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord; and the prayer offered in faith will restore the one who is sick, and the Lord will raise him up, and if he has committed sins, they will be forgiven him. Therefore, confess your sins to one another, and pray for one another, so that you may be healed. The effective prayer of a righteous man can accomplish much.”

It is a sin of our modern, faithless “churchianity” that we have not practiced the directions in these verses. We “scientific” Christians run first to the doctor when we get sick, and then, when he declares there is nothing else medical science can do, we resort to prayer. Certainly there is nothing wrong with going to the doctor and taking medicine, but our first line of attack should be to pray. When our own prayers do not seem to be effective against our illness, we should call for the elders of the church to pray for us after we have confessed our sins to one another. Often unconfessed sin can be the cause of our illness, and when it is dealt with, healing can begin. Perhaps the greatest sin to be confessed may be the sin of unbelief that prayer can bring healing! Unless an elder believes in the power of prayer, he should not participate in the service, as unbelief can hinder the Lord’s ability to heal. (Mark 6:4-6)

The oil used to anoint the sick is a symbol of the Holy Spirit Who does the healing. There are no medicinal properties in the oil itself, but as in Old and New Testament times, it signifies a setting aside for the purpose of serving the Lord.

Thankfully, more and more Christians are taking this passage seriously and finding that there is healing power released through believing prayer. We hear about and know

people who have been healed when all medical hope has been exhausted. I am reminded of Cheryl Prewitt, Miss America of 1980, whose leg was miraculously lengthened during a healing service, and of Catherine Marshall, well-known author, who overcame a lung disease through prayer. These are but two in a rapidly growing group of people who have received divine healing through prayer.

But what about those who are not healed, who have prayed just as earnestly and have believed just as sincerely as the others who recovered? Can we really say that the Lord wants everyone to be healed? Is it always the fault of the pray-er when healing does not come? These are questions that demand an answer, but how can we reply? Our minds are finite; we do not understand all of God's plans and purposes and can only guess at part of the answer.

We earlier discussed praying to be healed "according" to God's will, not "if" it is His will. The word "if" implies doubt, and we never read of Jesus refusing to heal. We believe healing is His intentional will; however, we know He allows sorrow and disease to come to us through His permissive will. But the promise of Rom. 8:28 still applies, "for we know that God causes all things to work together for good to them who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose." Therefore, we can be confident that the Lord will use our illnesses to work out His good purposes, and that healing of some kind (physical, spiritual, emotional, or of broken relationships, etc.) will take place "according to His will."

Joni Eareckson, a young woman paralyzed from her shoulders down, has inspired millions with her faith. She paints with a brush held in her mouth, speaks and sings all over the world, has written two books, and even acted in a movie about her life. She has struggled with the question of why some are not healed, and in her book "A Step Further" has this to say: "I sometimes shudder to think where I would be today if I had not broken my neck. I couldn't see at first why God could possibly allow it, but I sure do now. He has gotten so much more glory through my paralysis than through my health! And, believe me,

you'll never know how rich that makes me feel. If God chooses to heal you in answer to your prayers, that's great. Thank Him for it. But if He chooses not to, thank Him anyway. You can be sure He has His reasons . . .

"The New Testament stresses that God loves to use weak vessels (people) to do His work so that He, and not they, get the glory. And in light of all the spiritual benefits resulting from sickness and suffering, God may choose that our very sickness be His way of moving the mountains before us.

"As we grow in our faith, our way of looking at things changes. Once it seemed as if the only way God could glorify Himself would be to remove our sufferings. Now it becomes clear that He can glorify Himself through our sufferings."<sup>1</sup>

In the Shorter Catechism of the Westminster Confession of Faith the question is asked, "What is the chief end of man?" And the answer, "Man's chief end is to glorify God and enjoy Him forever." For some of us it may take suffering to bring us to the place of glorifying God.

We cannot say, therefore, that it is always God's will that we receive physical healing, but we are told to pray to be healed "according to His will". God will receive glory, and we will receive the kind of healing we most need.

## CHAPTER XV. PRAYER AND HEALING

1. Name three reasons people get sick.
  - a. Gen. 3:16-19, Rom. 5:12
  
  - b. II Cor. 12:7, Job 2:7, I Pet. 5:8
  
  - c. Gal. 5:16-21, 6:7-8
  
2. What remedy has God provided for our healing? Isa. 53:5, Matt. 8:16-17
  
3. When will the complete healing of our mortal bodies come? Rom. 8:18-23, I Cor. 15:20-26, Rev. 21:1-5
  
4. How should a Christian regard his body? I Cor. 3:16, 17; 6:19, 20
  
5. If the works of the flesh bring stress into our lives, what does the fruit of the Spirit bring? Gal. 5:22, 23

6. According to James 5:13-16, what four specific things should a person who is sick do?

a.

b.

c.

d.

What should the elders of the church do?

a.

b.

c.

d.

7. What does unbelief do to our prayers for healing? Mark 6:4-6 (see James 5:15)

8. As Christians what can we know about the things that happen to us? Rom. 8:28

9. Even in the midst of trouble we can be serene. Why? Rom. 8:35-39

Question for contemplation: Can you think of incidences when healing took place despite the medical prognosis?

Can you think of incidences where God received glory despite the lack of healing?

What, then, should be our chief aim in seeking healing?

## XVI. PRAYER AND WORRY

If there is such a thing as a Christian sin, that sin is worry because most Christians are guilty of it. And, sadly, most are not even ashamed of it. In fact, we almost boast about how much we worry, thinking it makes us appear to be more serious-minded individuals! Now we would never dream of boasting about lying or stealing, but somehow worrying seems less sinful and more acceptable than the other sins. It may even come as a shock to many Christians that worry is a sin.

The Bible is explicit in condemning worry. Throughout its pages we are told to "fear not" but to put our trust in the Lord. Fear or worry is the opposite of faith and trust, and the two are in inverse proportion to the other. The more we worry, the less we trust; but the more we trust, the less we worry. Worry, therefore, is lack of faith, and lack of faith is sin.

Knowing that worry is a sin and that we should not do it is not much help in conquering the habit, unfortunately. Neither is knowing why we should not worry. We have heard that 92 percent of the things we worry about will never happen. We also know that worrying about the other eight percent will not keep them from happening, but still we worry. It is impossible to will ourselves not to worry, so what is the answer? The only thing we can do is to replace worry with something constructive.

Phil. 4:6-7 tells us what that something is. "Be anxious for nothing (or, 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 comprehension, shall guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus." We are advised to pray instead of to worry --- to bring everything that concerns us to the Lord in prayer. When we do, we are promised His incomparable peace.

Thus, when a worrying thought comes to mind, we should take it immediately to the Lord in prayer, thanking Him for the answer in advance, and leaving the problem with Him. That sounds so simple! In theory, it is; but not in practice. It requires a conscious, deliberate effort to refuse to give in to worry and to



conquer a life-time habit. We can pray for years for the Lord to help us not to worry, but until we are willing to develop a new mind-set, there is little He can do for us.

I am reminded of a problem we had with our youngest child when she was about three years old. She would wake in the middle of the night, come to our room, and get in bed with us for the remainder of the night. None of us got much sleep from that point on, and we knew she would have to be broken of the habit. Having made up my mind it had to stop, I struggled out of bed when she appeared the next night, took her firmly by the hand, led her to her room, tucked her into bed, and said, "Laura, you must sleep in your own little bed now. You can no longer sleep with Mommy and Daddy. Goodnight, Dear." And I left her and went back to bed. Approximately two minutes later, a little voice whispered in my ear, "Mommy, I want to sleep with you."

Praying for patience, I struggled out of bed, took her firmly by the hand, led her to her room, tucked her into bed, and said, "Laura, you must sleep in your own little bed now. You can no longer sleep with Mommy and Daddy. Goodnight, Dear." And I left her and went back to bed. About ten minutes passed, and a little voice whispered in my ear, "Mommy, I want to sleep with you." Praying more urgently for patience, I struggled out of bed again, took her firmly by the hand, and repeated the whole process. Laura and I spent most of that night traversing the hall between the two bedrooms!

The next night was little better, but by the third night Laura was beginning to realize she had to stay in her own bed, and I was on the verge of total exhaustion. But, because I was willing to persist, it worked, and a bad habit was broken.

That painful episode is an example of what we must do when worry presents itself to our consciousness. Instead of letting it worm itself into our thoughts, we must take it firmly by the hand, lead it to the Lord and tell it to stay there, return to our daily business, and refuse to let it gain entrance to our mental processes. If we persist in refusing it admission to our conscious attention but, instead, take it to the Lord in prayer, it will

eventually become automatic to pray and not to worry.

We may not be able to keep anxious thoughts from coming to mind, but we can refuse to let them linger. Worry cannot exist in a trusting, prayerful atmosphere.

The passage in Philippians 4 goes on to the next steps: "Finally, brethren, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is of good repute, if there is any excellence and if anything worthy of praise, let your mind dwell on these things.

"The things you have learned and received and heard and seen in me, practice these things; and the God of peace shall be with you."

In addition to thankful prayer we are to fill our minds with beautiful, thoughtful, pure thoughts. Reading the Bible and other good books and magazines, conversing with people about things of the Spirit, watching Christian television, and meditating on Christian truths will take our minds off the things that worry us.

A final step is to put into practice the truths we have learned, and we will be too busy to worry!

Prayer, meditation on happy, positive values, and a life of Christian service leave no room for fear and worry.

## CHAPTER XVI. PRAYER AND WORRY

1. What does the Bible specifically tell us not to do? Exo. 14:13, Isa. 41:10, Luke 12:32
2. What does the Bible specifically tell us to do? Prov. 3:5, John 14:9-12
3. What should we substitute for worry? Phil. 4:6
4. What should accompany our supplication? Phil. 4:6
5. What will be the result? Phil. 4:7
6. How can we learn to be content? Phil. 4:11-13, 19
7. What should be our priority instead of worrying about the necessities of life? Matt. 6:25-34

Questions for contemplation: Is worrying a sin? Is it easy to learn to substitute prayer for worry?

## XVII. THE NEED FOR PRAYER

To say that Christians need to pray is, perhaps, the understatement of the age. Prayer changes things, both people and situations, and there is much in our world today that needs changing. Powerful countries rattle their nuclear warheads at each other, and the not-so-powerful spend more for military equipment than for the education of their citizens. Our own once great nation has become riddled with moral decay and has exchanged its motto "In God We Trust" for "Whatever Is Expedient". Our public schools have become battle grounds; and our universities, founded to educate Christian leaders, are now pulpits for Marxism and secular humanism. The institution of marriage has been made a mockery, and wholesale murder is done legally in abortion mills. Ministers provide ineffective panaceas for man's spiritual distress, and our churches are losing members by the thousands. "Me First" has replaced the Golden Rule and "Whatever feels good" the Ten Commandments. Alcoholism and venereal disease are epidemic in affluent countries, while malnutrition destroys millions in the Third World. We long to be beautiful, bright, and wealthy while inside we are ugly, confused, and empty.

Prayer can change all of that --- believing prayer from the hearts of people who not only pray but are willing to get involved in the answers. Frank Lauback calls prayer "The mightiest force in the universe"<sup>1</sup> and James McCorkey says, "As we pray, God works. All the power of an omnipotent God is ready and waiting to be put into triumphant, irresistible action at the prayer of His children. The hosts of heaven are marshalled against the powers of darkness when we pray according to His will."<sup>2</sup>

It is essential that we pray. Jesus told us we have the keys to the Kingdom and that the Kingdom is among us, but we are to ask, seek, and knock to establish the authority and reign of God's Kingdom.

Jack Heyford, a minister in Van Nuys, California, has defined prayer as essentially a partnership of the redeemed child of God working hand in hand with God toward the realization of

his redemptive purposes on earth.<sup>3</sup>

Olive Wyon makes the same point when she says that the purpose of God is the restoration of the whole created order to the end for which He made it; and as we cooperate with Him in prayer, we know we are a part of that eternal purpose.<sup>4</sup>

Sometimes we lose sight of prayer's larger purpose as we get caught up in praying for "Me, my wife, and my son John". Prayer certainly has a personal dimension as we use it to receive comfort, guidance, healing, and joy in fellowship with the Lord. But we should never be content to stop there. A world is waiting to be restored, a Kingdom is waiting to be established --- both are waiting for our prayers. Someone has said, "Without Him we cannot; without us, He will not." God has chosen to limit Himself to respond to our requests in order to reclaim lost territory. How tragic if we lose the battle with the Enemy by default!

Prayer is the language of the Spirit --- our spirit communicating with the Spirit of God, and He with us. Through this communication a power is released that brings order and wholeness, refreshment and restoration. To neglect to pray is to prevent that healing flow from being poured out, to dam up the living water that brings life and hope.

As we conclude this brief study on prayer we can picture prayer in three different ways. In the first we see prayer as a potent tonic that puts new vitality and vigor into the life of the believer. In the second we picture prayer as a mighty weapon, assaulting and bringing down enemy strong-holds. And, finally, in the third we see prayer as a refreshing torrent of water pouring into irrigation ditches causing the desert to bloom with life and beauty.

All three of these pictures of prayer portray an aspect of prayer's blessings, but even they cannot fully convey all of the results of believing prayer. Yes, prayer changes things, and all it takes is belief in a loving, heavenly Father Who hears, understands, and acts.

## APPENDIX I

### Footnotes

#### Chapter 1

1. All quotations from the Bible are from the New American Standard Bible, World Publishing, unless otherwise noted.

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2. Heyford, Jack, *Prayer is Invading the Impossible*, (Logos International, Plainfield, N.J., 1977) p. 63

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2. Evans, Colleen Townsend, *Give Us This Day Our Daily Bread*, (Doubleday & Co., Garden City, N.Y., 1981) pp. 54, 63
3. Wyon, Olive, *The School of Prayer*, (MacMillan Co., New York, N.Y., 1963) p. 29
4. Evans, p. 80
5. Sanders, pp. 40-41
6. *ibid*, pp. 54-56

7. Wallis, Arthur, *Pray in the Spirit*, (Christian Literature Crusade, Ft. Washington, Pa., 1970) pp. 75-79

8. Sanders, p. 53

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2. Lauback, Frank, *Prayer, The Mightiest Force in the World*, (Fleming H. Revell, Old Tappan, N.J., 1948) p. 75ff.

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4. Maclachlan, Lewis, *Commonsense About Prayer*, (James Clarke & Co., London, 1962) p. 139.

5. Torrey, p. 38

6. Bounds, E.M., *Power Through Prayer*, (Zondervan, Grand Rapids, Mich., 1972) p. 81

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## Chapter X

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2. Webb, p. 91
3. Dunman, p. 83
4. Murray, Andrew, *The Prayer Life*, (Moody Press, Chicago, Ill.) pp. 101, 102
5. Maus, Cynthia Pearl, *Christ and the Fine Arts*, (Harper & Bros. Pub., New York, N.Y., 1938) p. 684

## Chapter XI

1. Maclachlan, p. 22
2. Ferris, Theodore P., pamphlet *On Prayer*, (Forward Movement Pub., Cincinnati, Ohio) p. 15
3. Maclachlan, p. 16



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1. Sanders, pp. 94, 95
2. Keller, Philip, *A Layman Looks at the Lord's Prayer*, (Moody Press, Chicago, Ill., 1976, pp. 11, 16, 24
3. Barclay, William, *The Gospel of Matthew, Vol. I*, (Westminster Press, Philadelphia, Penn., 1958) pp. 225, 226
4. Keller, p. 134, 135

## Chapter XIII

1. Shedd, Charlie W., *The Exciting Church Where People Really Pray*, (Word Books, Waco, Texas, 1980) pp. 31, 32

## Chapter XIV

1. Wallis, Arthur, *God's Chosen Fast*, (Christian Literature Crusade, Ft. Washington, Pa., 1968) p. 26
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## Chapter XV

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## Chapter XVII

1. Lauback, *The Mightiest Force in the World*

2. McCorkey, James, pamphlet, *Prayer*, (Back to the Bible Broadcast, Lincoln, Nebraska) pp. 4, 5

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