

*Bible Studies on Being  
Devoted to Prayer*

William Gibbs

# ***Bible Studies on Being Devoted to Prayer***

Copyright © 2012 by William Dixon Gibbs, III

All rights reserved.

AUTHOR'S ADDRESS

P.O. Box 165688

Irving, TX 75016

All Scripture quotations, unless otherwise indicated, are taken from the HOLY BIBLE NEW INTERNATIONAL VERSION ®, *NIV* ®, Copyright © 1973, 1978, 1984, by International Bible Society. Used by permission of Zondervan Publishing House. All rights reserved.

Quotations designated (NET) are from the NET Bible ®, copyright © 2005, by Biblical Studies Press, LLC. ([www.bible.org](http://www.bible.org)) All rights reserved. Scripture quoted by permission.

# *Bible Studies on Being Devoted to Prayer*

## **Table of Contents**

Introduction.....	1
We Are Instructed to Pray.....	2
Praying for Each Other: The Great Exchange.....	4
A Regimen for Prayer.....	8
Things to Pray For or About.....	11
Relationships Impact Prayer .....	14
Christ Intercedes for Us and Gives Us Access to the Father.....	17
The Format for Prayer.....	20
Ps. 86: A Prayer of David.....	23
Pray in the Spirit.....	25
Fellowship Precedes Prayer.....	28
Walking in Jesus.....	35
Praying in Jesus' Name.....	38
Study, Growth, and Prayer.....	40
God Will Not Hear the Prayers of Those Who Refuse His Word.....	46
God Hears Us When We Are Humble.....	48
Drawing Near to God in Prayer.....	51
The Prayer of Faith.....	55
Praying According to God's Will.....	61
Waiting in Faith.....	68
Worship.....	72
Summary.....	74
Endnotes.....	76

## **Introduction**

Prayer is a powerful tool. But, like any tool, we must know how to use it. Prayer is communication with God, a way to approach Him with all that we are, in search of all that He is. It is the path of our connection with God through our Savior Jesus Christ, and the way we express our reverence and humility toward the Father.

All the techniques discussed in our previous studies connect with, or operate through, prayer, including confession of sins, study of Scripture, giving thanks, acknowledging God, showing fear of the Lord, being conscious of God, waiting on God, meditating on the Word, surrendering to God, learning His will, submitting to His will, and so on. Even faith is expressed in prayer. Prayer is paramount in every part of our Christian experience, every day we are alive. Without prayer there is no light and no direction. We are blind and defenseless. With prayer, we can access the overwhelming power of God, and allow Him to be glorified in us as we seek to ensconce ourselves in His holiness.

But there are things we did not know about prayer that need to be disclosed. These will be surprising, and perhaps sobering. Prayer is a specific process requiring exact conditions. Whether we are praying continually or at specific times...publicly or privately...our hearts must be prepared, so that our prayers will be effective. Most of this study will be about preparations for prayer.

We will look at conditions for prayer, but we will also look at commands to pray, when to pray, things to pray about, how to pray, hindrances to prayer, things that assist our prayers, the role of Jesus Christ in our prayers, and the outcome of prayers offered in faith. By the time we finish this series, we will know the importance and place of prayer in our lives, and we will choose to embrace it as the core and center of our thought life and spiritual walk. On the other hand, we can choose to trust ourselves and try to make it on our own without prayer. This is not advisable. It is my prayer that you will make the choice to devote yourself to prayer, as you learn its importance in your relationship with God.

## **We Are Instructed to Pray**

**Devoting Ourselves to Prayer.** Col. 4:2 says, “Devote yourselves to prayer, being watchful and thankful.” If we ever wonder what we should be thinking, or what God wants us to do, or what we can be fully committed to, here it is: *devote yourself to prayer*. Prayer is the thing we can do anywhere, anytime, in all kinds of circumstances. It is an opportunity for us to engage the God of the universe in our moment-to-moment living, drawing on the infinite power of our Creator to enable us to negotiate our way through the difficulties of life in a hostile world. God’s friendly face is always a glance away, and the more we look His direction, the more comfort and security we will feel. The key is consistency...being devoted to prayer.

We are told in 1 Thess. 5:17, in a very short verse, to “...pray continually”. Short on words...long on meaning. Prayer is to be done without stopping. The thought that goes into prayer comes from a heart that is focused on God. As long as we are conscious of God, aware that He is within us and available to us, we will be in an attitude of prayer. The more mature we become over time, the more automatic it will become for us to integrate prayer into our thoughts, so that an attitude of God-consciousness becomes a practice of *speaking* to the God we acknowledge and revere.

**Pray in Everything.** Phil. 4:6-7 tells us, “Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.” Already, we are seeing the effects of prayer. By praying to God and presenting our requests to Him, we are giving up control of our problems to Him, believing that He can create an outcome that will match His plan and put us at the center of His will for us. Notice the term, “in everything”. Here is the constancy of prayer, the never-ending expression of our thoughts to Him and about Him. This is where the anxiety evaporates, and the “peace of God” sets in. For this, and for *all things*, we can be thankful.

**Pray Everywhere.** Paul stated his desire that people *everywhere* would pray, adding place to time as another component of our command to pray. So we are not only to pray at all times, but in all places. Paul said, “I want men everywhere to lift up holy hands in prayer, without anger or disputing” (1 Tim. 2:8). We’ll have much more to say about relationships and their impact on prayer, and about clearing out sins (cleaning our hands) to remove impediments to prayer, but the truth that we want to see first is that prayer should be ubiquitous in our lives and in our churches. Whether it’s undercurrent or overtone, silent or heard, prayer should be going on in us and among us *all the time...everywhere*.

**Be Faithful in Prayer.** Prayer is crucial to Christian living. Rom. 12:11-12 says, “Never be lacking in zeal, but keep your spiritual fervor, serving the Lord. Be joyful in hope, patient in affliction, *faithful in prayer*” (emphasis mine). Being “faithful” in prayer can mean “full of faith”, of course, but the application we want here is that we should be trustworthy and consistent in prayer. Pray constantly. It is the underpinning for joy and hope, and the greatest expression of

“zeal” and “spiritual fervor”. Prayer is a demonstration of our enthusiasm for God, without which we will be bland, blank, and blossomless (fruitless).

**Pray for Everyone.** Paul also wants us to pray for *everyone*, as he instructs in 1 Tim. 2:1-2, which says the following:

I urge, then, first of all, that requests, prayers, intercession and thanksgiving be made for everyone—for kings and all those in authority, that we may live in all godliness and holiness. This is good, and pleases God our Savior.

He wants all kinds of prayers to be offered for everyone (ourselves included) because it is good to do so, and because it pleases Christ. When we pray, God is pleased. So we have instructions to pray...all the time, everywhere, for all kinds of people (and ourselves), with all kinds of prayers, with a faithfulness that can be characterized as “without ceasing”. We can see the importance of prayer, then. It is what we are told to *never stop doing*.

**When Trouble Comes, Pray Night and Day.** 1 Tim. 5:5 tells us that when someone (such as a widow) is destitute, that person should offer prayer non-stop. This verse says, “The widow who is really in need and left all alone puts her hope in God and continues night and day to pray and to ask God for help.” This tells us that the more serious the situation, the more we need to pray. Otherwise, we can fret and despair, and bury ourselves beneath the enormity of our circumstances, or we can pray continually...night and day...and put our hope completely in the Lord, so that we can find relief in Him. An example of this was seen in Luke 2:37, where an eighty-four year old widow “never left the temple but worshiped night and day, fasting and praying.” God will comfort us if we will devote ourselves to Him in prayer.

**Prayer is Central.** Prayer needs to be primary for each of us...central and God-centered. This was true of the early church, where it was said of believers, “They devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer” (Acts 2:42). Bible study, mutual edification, and fellowship, all ensconced in an atmosphere and practice of perpetual prayer...there’s the makings of a growth-oriented church. That’s how it’s supposed to work. Prayer and study was at the heart of all they did.

Once Again: Be Devoted to Prayer. When we are devoted to prayer, praying all the time, we will be making good use of our time. When we pray, we please God and accumulate rewards for “creditable service”. Sometimes we think we’re not doing enough for the “kingdom”, but if we are praying faithfully, we are chalking up credits for meaningful service for the Lord, and we will have an effect. Thus we should “pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests. With this in mind, be alert and always keep on praying for all the saints” (Eph. 6:18). Pray all the time, in all places, on all occasions, for everyone, with all kinds of prayers. That is prayer. That is our command.

## **Praying for Each Other: The Great Exchange**

**The Great Exchange.** When we pray for others, we can see this as a service to God, a way to express love to other believers and a time to ask God to strengthen them in their walk. Prayers work, as we shall see, so when we pray for someone, we are providing them with definite benefits. We are “giving” in a sense, and are adding to their lives as a result of our praying for them. There is a benefit for us all, when all believers are praying for each other. We pray for them as they pray for us, and *everyone wins*. This may sound a little selfish, but the purpose, remember, for our using the techniques and opportunities God gives us is so that God can be glorified and His Son exalted. Anytime we follow God’s Word in ways that strengthen us and make us more effective, we are fulfilling His will for us and conducting business His way and in His power. The divine production that results will accrue to His credit. It is good for us to ask others to pray for us, and it is excellent when we pray for them.

**Paul Asked for Believers to Pray for Him.** Paul was unabashed in his asking for prayers. He did this repeatedly. In Phil. 1:19 Paul expresses happiness over the prayers of the believers in his audience, knowing that these would result in his deliverance from chains (see “chains” cited in verse 13). He told them in this passage, “I know that through your prayers and the help given by the Spirit of Jesus Christ, what has happened to me will turn out for my deliverance.” It is as though their prayers were increasing the effects of God’s power to produce results in the life of Paul.

In 1 Cor. 1:11, Paul said, “...you help us by your prayers. Then many will give thanks on our behalf for the gracious favor granted us in answer to the prayers of many.” He saw favors being granted as a result of prayers offered for him and those serving with him. This outcome from prayer prompted him to ask of the Thessalonians (5:25), “Brothers, pray for us.” This happened again in Eph. 6:19, where Paul made another prayer request, “Pray also for me, that whenever I open my mouth, words may be given me so that I will fearlessly make known the mystery of the gospel,” and yet another in Rom. 15:30-31, as follows:

I urge you, brothers, by our Lord Jesus Christ and by the love of the Spirit, to join me in my struggle by praying to God for me. Pray that I may be rescued from the unbelievers in Judea and that my service in Jerusalem may be acceptable to the saints there.

Paul was planning to go to Jerusalem to preach the gospel message, and he knew he would be targeted there in a way that would require divine intervention, or “rescue”. He knew that the prayers of the Romans would help him succeed, and he would be able to deliver the gospel message to unbelieving Jews in Jerusalem.

Another case of prayers being requested is seen in Heb. 13:18, where the writer asks for prayers on the basis of his being in fellowship and being spiritually “clean”. This verse says, “Pray for us. We are sure that we have a clear conscience and desire to live honorably in every way.” A clear conscience comes when we have a pure heart, because all known sins have been confessed

and we are walking in fellowship. This gave the writer boldness to ask for prayers from fellow believers, assured that sin on his part would not stand in the way of their prayers being answered. This encourages us to keep our sins confessed to make prayers for us more effective, and also helps us understand why our prayers for others are sometimes not answered...because there is unconfessed sin in their lives.

**Paul Prays for Others.** Paul prayed for others all the time. His prayers were given in fellowship, or were offered “in the Spirit”, and were obviously highly effective. Paul is instructive to us in his prayers, in that we can be assured that the things Paul prayed for corresponded with God’s will. Paul’s prayers are loaded with truths that teach us about prayer and about God. We will watch for doctrinal truths in Paul’s prayers, as well as observe how he used prayer in his ministry.

In 2 Thess. 1:11, Paul said the following:

With this in mind, we constantly pray for you, that our God may count you worthy of his calling, and that by his power he may fulfill every good purpose of yours and every act prompted by your faith. We pray this so that the name of our Lord Jesus may be glorified in you, and you in him, according to the grace of our God and the Lord Jesus Christ.

This prayer shows how we should pray that other believers would be strengthened by God’s power, and indicates that we should pray for their *behavior*, and their *faith*. Finally, we should pray that their *focus* will *remain on Jesus Christ*. From this verse, we also learn that it is important for us as believers to *look to God* for the power to do the things that will glorify Him.

In 1 Thess. 1:2-3, Paul told believers the following:

We always thank God for all of you, mentioning you in our prayers. We continually remember before our God and Father your work produced by faith, your labor prompted by love, and your endurance inspired by hope in our Lord Jesus Christ.

Paul gives thanks for them, and prays for them in their work, their love, their faith, and their perseverance. Notice how Paul prays for things that matter...things that feature Jesus Christ and His program for us.

Paul also prayed for believers to grow. In Philemon 1:4-6, Paul expresses thanks for the faithfulness and love of Philemon and his fellow-workers, and he tell them that his prayer is that Philemon, et al, would be “active in sharing your faith [here, faith is “knowledge”], so that you will have a full understanding of every good thing we have in Christ.” The process of sharing knowledge with and among believers, whether it is from a pastor, exhorter, deacon, teacher, or just a friend, has the effect of building up the saints. Believers grow by edifying each other. That is the way gifts operate in love in the church to enable believers to assist each other toward maturity. Prayers *for* each other contribute *to* each other, and have the effect of increasing the growth of all believers.



### *Bible Studies on Being Devoted to Prayer*

Paul and his associates prayed intensely for the maturity of believers. An example of this was seen when Paul reported to the Colossians that Epaphras was praying for them to grow. In Col. 4:12, Paul said, “He is always wrestling in prayer for you, that you may stand firm in all the will of God, mature and fully assured.” This verse tells us that when we mature and have strong faith (are “fully assured”), we will be able to stand firm against the attacks of the world and Satan, and from that potent foe, the sinful nature. The prayers of others help us achieve this.

As we see, the number of times Paul tells believers he was praying for them are numerous. Here are even more:

- 2 Cor. 13:7—Now we pray to God that you will not do anything wrong. Not that people will see that we have stood the test but that you will do what is right even though we may seem to have failed.
- Phil. 1:3-6—I thank my God every time I remember you. In all my prayers for all of you, I always pray with joy because of your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now, being confident of this, that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus.
- Eph. 3:16-17—I pray that out of his glorious riches he may strengthen you with power through his Spirit in your inner being, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith.
- 1 Thess. 5:23—May God himself, the God of peace, sanctify you through and through. May your whole spirit, soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.
- Col. 1:9—For this reason, since the day we heard about you, we have not stopped praying for you and asking God to fill you with the knowledge of his will through all spiritual wisdom and understanding.
- Eph. 1:16-17—I have not stopped giving thanks for you, remembering you in my prayers. I keep asking that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the glorious Father, may give you the Spirit of wisdom and revelation, so that you may know him better.

And that’s not all. Still other prayers were offered for believers by Paul. More than we can include here. One more noteworthy example of prayers offered by the apostle is seen in Phil. 1:9-11, which says the following:

And this is my prayer: that your love may abound more and more in knowledge and depth of insight, so that you may be able to discern what is best and may be pure and blameless until the day of Christ, filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ—to the glory and praise of God.

Paul is praying for these believers that the following would occur:

*Bible Studies on Being Devoted to Prayer*

1. That their love would grow.
2. That knowledge and depth of insight would spur growth.
3. That their discernment would increase.
4. That they would be pure and blameless.
5. That they would be filled with the fruit of righteousness from Jesus Christ.
6. That all of this would accrue to the glory and praise of God.

These items for prayer call for improvements among these Philippians, and each of the items in the prayer represents a doctrinal study all its own. Look at these again: love, knowledge, discernment of truth, beating sin, being filled with the fruit of Christ, and glorifying God in our lives. What a list. These are worth praying for as we intercede for others, and worthy of our own spiritual aspirations as we grow and mature. Certainly, Paul's prayers are great examples for us to follow as we pray for each other.

## **A Regimen for Prayer**

**Prayer Takes Many Forms.** Prayer can take many forms, as we have already suggested previously. In *Maturity*, within a chapter titled “Holiness”, we said the following:

Prayer is seen in many forms: confession, acknowledgement of God, a way to show humility, an expression of love through intercession, an opportunity to give thanks, and a time of surrender to the wisdom and will of God. Prayer is a means of submission, recognizing that God is good and fair and just...and loving...and that what He does is right, and that it will be for our good, because he has promised it would.

Prayer can be as simple as a thought about God, or a perpetual attitude of faith and humility before Him. But prayer can also be elaborate, involving specific words and sentences formed for the purpose of submitting our insufficiency to an all-powerful God. In order to get specific and definite in our prayers, we need a time apart, where we can focus exclusively on God to 1) get closer to Him, 2) get concrete about our concerns for others, and 3) address our own needs.

Such structured and organized prayers cannot be conducted in the mold of “praying without ceasing”, as we are commanded to do. We cannot ordinarily conduct focused prayer all the time. Truly concentrated prayers will be separate times, scheduled events, with all attention given to God during each session. Praying without ceasing requires a time-shared arrangement with all other daily functions, whereas scheduled prayers involve time that is dedicated fully to God.

We have to be careful in distinguishing ongoing prayer from scheduled prayer. Both represent “prayer” and honor God, and both serve important purposes in our lives and our relationship with God. Still, the distinction exists. In “non-ceasing” prayer, thoughts may not even be complete as we maintain an abiding awareness of God’s presence within us and around us. The difference has to do with thought completion. The definition of a sentence is “a complete thought”. To complete our thoughts and get very specific about the items on our “lists”, we will need to go into the closet, or the forest, or the bathroom, or the car, or the roof-top, or the yard, or SOMEWHERE that is apart from the distractions of our busy lives, so we can frame our prayers in words and sentences.

Of course, let’s face it, there may be times when our concentration is off and words may not come easily, but we can always “lift up our soul” to God, as David did in Ps. 86. At such times, we can be comforted, knowing that the Holy Spirit is still praying for us, and that Jesus is continuing His intercession. Also, if we are in a place where we can, praying aloud may help us concentrate and form complete thoughts.

**A Prayer Regimen.** Thus enters the regimen for prayer. The term “regimen” applies generally to exercise routines that are followed daily for the sake of health and productivity. A prayer regimen is a schedule that provides a predictable time of focused communication with our heavenly Father. We do this AS CONSISTENTLY AS WE CAN. The vicissitudes of life

disrupt consistency, and God knows about such times (and has planned around them), but as faithfully as we can do it, we need to follow a pattern of regularly-scheduled private talks with God.

**Examples of Believers Who Followed a Regimen.** David knew well the importance of a regimen for prayer; he prayed at a specific time each day. In Ps. 5:3, David wrote, “In the morning, O Lord, you hear my voice; in the morning I lay my requests before you and wait in expectation.” It was David’s routine to pray in the morning. Ps. 119:164 also cites a routine for prayer, saying, “Seven times a day I praise you for your righteous laws.”

The prophet Daniel had special times for praying. Dan. 6:10 reports his pattern for scheduled prayers, as we see here:

Now when Daniel learned that the decree had been published, he went home to his upstairs room where the windows opened toward Jerusalem. Three times a day he got down on his knees and prayed, giving thanks to his God, just as he had done before.

Daniel’s prayer regimen was so important to him that he was willing to face death to keep it. In Daniel 6, we see that the king’s decree mentioned above was that anyone who prayed to any “god or man” other than the king would be thrown into a den of lions (verses 6-9). In verses 11-17, Daniel is indeed observed praying according to his schedule, and is consequently thrown into the den with the lions. The story of his miraculous protection from the lions is a well-known example of faith and accessing God’s power, but that part of this valuable lesson will not be explored here any further. The point we want to emphasize from this passage is that a prayer regimen is important...really important...and that displacement of our prayer routine should be stringently avoided.

**The Effects of Following a Prayer Regimen.** We have seen the value of a prayer regimen, and we can be assured that fruit will be borne when we follow it. An interesting outcome of Daniel’s faithfulness in prayer is worth noting. When the king came to the den the next morning after Daniel’s night with the lions, he found Daniel still alive and unharmed. King Darius knew immediately that Daniel’s rescue had come from the living God, and the king was instantly converted. He had Daniel’s accusers thrown into the lion’s den, and then issued a startling proclamation, which reads as follows:

I issue a decree that in every part of my kingdom people must fear and reverence the God of Daniel. For he [God] is the living God and he endures forever; his kingdom will not be destroyed, his dominion will never end. He rescues and he saves; he performs signs and wonders in the heavens and on the earth. He has rescued Daniel from the power of the lions. (Dan. 6:26-27)

The outcome of Daniel’s slavish adherence to his prayer regimen was that an entire kingdom was moved to be converted to the living God.

Ps. 55:16-18 confirms our need for a prayer regimen, saying the following:

*Bible Studies on Being Devoted to Prayer*

But I call to God, and the Lord saves me. Evening, morning and noon I cry out in distress, and he hears my voice. He ransoms me unharmed from the battle waged against me, even though many oppose me.

Pray without ceasing, but also allow time for focused, structured prayer that will provide opportunity for 100% concentration on the Lord. The results will amaze you.

## Things to Pray For or About

**What Should I Pray For, or About?** There are many things to pray for or about...which includes virtually *everything*. The Bible provides examples of the kinds of things that we need to remember when we pray. We will not attempt to be exhaustive in this review of things to include in our prayers, merely representative. We all have unique lives with circumstances indigenous to each one of us personally, so prayers differ from one believer to the next. There are some things that we are “commanded” to pray for, so some things in our prayers will be standard for everyone. As we go through our studies on prayer, we will see that the best answer for the question, “What should I pray for (or about)?” is this: anything you are interested in or concerned about. We will see later in this series that adjustments and refinements in the content of our prayers will take place as we mature.

**Pray for Our Leaders.** One of the things we must remember to pray for has to do with our leadership. This would include our bosses, instructors, managers, mayors, governors, legislators, presidents, law enforcement agencies, pastors, and all other authorities within and around our society. 1 Tim. 2:1-3 calls for us to pray for our leaders, and for “everyone”. This passage says the following:

I urge, then, first of all, that requests, prayers, intercession and thanksgiving be made for everyone—for kings and all those in authority, that we may live peaceful and quiet lives in all godliness and holiness. This is good, and pleases God our Savior....

When a specific population or any group of people has a significant number of believers, especially mature Christians, the leadership God puts in place will tend to provide stability, consistency, predictability, and reliability, with clear and necessary policies and guidelines. Leaders at higher levels will provide laws and regulations that will preserve peace in society and offer opportunities for the practice of godliness and holiness. When a constituency consists largely of unbelievers or baby Christians, the leadership will not create an environment of freedom that would encourage spread of the gospel message and the growth of individual Christians. The more prayer there is for our leaders, the greater the likelihood that the atmosphere we live and work in will be one in which believers and the church will flourish.

**Pray for the Sick.** James 5:14-15 gives us parameters for prayers regarding the sick. Here is what these verses say:

Is any one of you sick? He should call the elders of the church to pray over him and anoint him with oil in the name of the Lord. And the prayer offered in faith will make the sick person well; the Lord will raise him up. If he has sinned, he will be forgiven.

We will have a great deal more to say about the “prayer offered in faith” later in this series. For now, we will say that “praying for the sick” is certainly legitimate, the outcome of which depends on several things. Among them are 1) fellowship, 2) our faith, and 3) God’s will. The “forgiveness of sins” cited here will take place as a result of confession of sins *only*, and if the

illness has been due to divine discipline, the confession will lift the discipline and the illness will be removed. But no “prayer of faith” will take place if any known sin goes unconfessed.

**Pray for Messengers.** Luke 10 tells how Jesus appointed seventy-two followers to go out two-by-two to villages where He was scheduled to go. He cited the need for them to pray to God for “workers” to pull in the harvest, which meant asking God for messengers to prepare the people in these villages for the coming of the Lord. Christ said in Luke 10:2, “The harvest is plentiful, but the workers are few. Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field.” Applied to our situation today, this would represent a prayer that God would send out evangelists and witnesses to spread the gospel message to people throughout the world. We are all to tell about the sacrifice of Christ and the salvation He makes available, but there are those who are gifted especially to persuade unbelievers to accept Christ. We are to pray for all of these, that the message would be proclaimed clearly and often. Rom. 10:14-15 verifies this need in the following:

How, then, can they call on the one they have not believed in? And how can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without someone preaching to them? And how can they preach unless they are sent? As it is written, “How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news.”

Our prayer should be that God will provide for those who are sent and that He will supply as many “preachers” and “witnesses” as are needed to get the word out that Jesus saves all those who believe.

**Pray for Your Enemies.** In Matt. 5:44a Jesus tells His disciples to love their enemies and pray for those who persecute them. We will be persecuted as Christians. The way the world deals with persecution or mistreatment is to retaliate, or to slip into hatred or anger. The way for believers to deal with mistreatment is to pray for those who have committed infractions against them. This turns the problem over to God, and is healing for us as we deal with unjustified abuse.

**Pray for Mercy.** In essence, this prayer is a plea for forgiveness. We want God’s mercy because we have sinned (and *are* sinners). The best example of a prayer for mercy is the confession of our sins to God. We subject ourselves to openness before God, exposing all our mistakes to Him, so He can prompt our awareness of specific sins (Heb. 4:12) and afford us with the opportunity to confess them. A prayer for mercy recognizes our inability to beat the world, the devil, and our sinful natures without the power of the Holy Spirit. A prayer for mercy might look like this one prayed by David in Ps. 30:10: “Hear, O Lord, and be merciful to me; O Lord, be my help.”

**Other Items For Our Prayer Lists.** As we see, there are many things that could be included on our prayer lists. Here are a few more:

### *Bible Studies on Being Devoted to Prayer*

- Pray for guidance and direction under pressure. Ps. 5:8—“Lead me, O Lord, in your righteousness because of my enemies—make straight your way before me”.
- Pray for safety. Ps 16:1—“Keep me safe, O God, for in you I take refuge”.
- Pray for wisdom. James 1:5-6a—“If any of you lacks wisdom, he should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to him. But when he asks, he must believe and not doubt....”
- Pray for weapons to use against the enemies of Christ. 2 Cor. 10:3-5—“For though we live in the world, we do not wage war as the world does. The weapons we fight with are not the weapons of the world. On the contrary, they have divine power to demolish strongholds.”
- Pray for power over demonic forces that are much stronger than us. Eph. 6:10-12—“Finally, be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power. Put on the full armor of God so that you can take your stand against the devil’s schemes. For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms.” Verse 18 says, “...pray in the Spirit on all occasions”, which gives us a weapon against demonic forces.
- Pray your worries away. 1 Pet. 5:7—“Cast all your anxiety on him, for he cares for you.”

There are numerous other things that we need to pray for (and about) that are not included here. Many of these will be discussed as we proceed through this series.



## **Relationships Impact Prayer**

**The Impact of Relationships.** When we are having trouble with friends, family, or *anyone*, and we feel upset or hurt or “vexed”, or whatever term you like that shows loss of peace in human relations, it is going to be hard for us to focus on our prayers. It is hard enough for each of us to deal with his own sin nature, let alone having to deal with all the other sin natures we encounter every day. A big part of our spiritual walk is being strong enough in our faith and maturity and our access to God’s power that we are able to control our own sinful tendencies, even when everyone else’s is on a rampage. Somehow, we have to be calm, even when everyone else is going nuts. Even if we lived in a monastery in the Himalayas, we would find a way to sin, but with all the sinful natures on the loose around us, the task of maintaining a pure walk is very difficult.

The ideal environment is one in which a maximum number of believers have great understanding of Scripture, mature faith, clear operation of gifts, abiding love, ongoing fellowship, and constant walks under the control of the Holy Spirit. Sounds like heaven. But such a condition is rare. So we have to work with what we have. And the very ones in our Christian circle that we hope will edify us may be the ones who undermine our faith and prayer life. We have to get prepared to pray and walk in the Spirit, even when relationships are strained.

**Husbands and Wives.** One of the most common areas of serious impact on prayer life concerns the relationship between a husband and a wife. An unsettled home life hinders prayer. So who’s responsible for fixing it? It’s probably no surprise that the heaviest burden for maintaining a spiritual atmosphere in which prayer can operate seems to fall to the husband. I Pet. 3:7 says, “Husbands, be considerate as you live with your wives, and treat them with respect as the weaker partner and as heirs with you of the gracious gift of life, so that nothing will hinder your prayers.” Husbands must take the lead to establish spiritual priorities and loving practices so that conditions can be maintained that are conducive to prayer. And when husbands take the spiritual lead, wives should follow.

**Building Good Relations.** Because of egos, pride, sensitivity, quick tempers, competitiveness, jealousy, inconsideration, hostility...in short, because of the operation of sinful natures...human relations are precarious and spring-loaded, ready to snap at any point. And when relations crumble, so do prayer lives. This is why maturity and spirituality are so important. We must walk in the spirit, even when no one else is, and even when we are under attack. Eph. 4:31 to Eph. 5:1a spells it out for us very clearly, in the following:

Get rid of all bitterness, rage and anger, brawling and slander, along with every form of malice. Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you. Be imitators of God, therefore, as dearly loved children and live a life of love, just as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us....

To live a life of love, to love as Christ loved, we must marshal all the divine forces available to us, so we can be filled with the Spirit, walk by faith, live by the truth, and be devoted to prayer. To love as Christ loved is an impossible task for us on our own, but we do not have to do it by ourselves. We only have to know how to tap into God's power and love, so that He can do it through us. To relate to others in a peaceable and profitable way, we need the full empowerment of the Holy Spirit. Only then do we take on the character ascribed to "imitators of God". And notice the call for us to "forgive" in the passage above. When we are wronged or when someone takes something away from us—if we believe that we can lose *nothing* that God wants us to have—our faith will prompt our forgiveness. If we have faith, our trust will outweigh our response to being wronged. God can replace or repair anything we lose many times over, including our bruised emotions.

**More on Forgiveness.** In Luke 17:4, Jesus told His disciples to forgive offenses over and over. In Matt. 18:22, He said to forgive "seventy-seven times", meaning endlessly. We are to keep on forgiving. Once again, the problem we have with "offenses" is that we feel something is being taken from us that will cause our existence to be threatened. This can even include our pride and our fragile self-esteem. And, of course, we seriously want to protect our "stuff". Obviously, if someone commits a crime against us, he must face the full force and penalty of the law, but as for us, the standard is always to forgive, especially when someone admits an offense to us.

Lack of forgiveness is a sin, because forgiveness is directly commanded in Scripture. Jesus included forgiveness of others as a part of the prayer He taught His disciples, as we see in Matt. 6:12, "Forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors." Verse 14 adds to this principle, saying, "For if you forgive men when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you." If we are not forgiving, we are sinning and we will not be forgiven...until, of course, that sin is confessed. The point is this: Not forgiving will put us out of fellowship and we will not be forgiven until we are restored through confession. Once you return to fellowship, you will be able to focus on forgiveness, aided by the Holy Spirit in the re-establishment of love.

When a fellow believer has wronged you, every effort should be made to reconcile with him. Matt. 18:15 says, "If your brother sins against you, go and show him his fault, just between the two of you. If he listens to you, you have won your brother over." But even if this brother will not listen, and you are unable to associate with him, you should still forgive him, as a matter of principle.

When you have peaceful relations with believers (and others) in your periphery, you will forego disturbances in your prayer life caused by dissonant feelings that come when relations are bad. Sometimes, you are the one that causes the problem, because you are out of fellowship or have not been faithful in your studies. In this case, confess and study. Then you can seek to reconcile with the person you have offended by going to them and confessing your offense to them. When you have agreement, the prayers of both you and your brother are empowered, as we see in

*Bible Studies on Being Devoted to Prayer*

Matt. 18:19, where Jesus said, “Again, I tell you that if two of you on earth agree about anything you ask for, it will be done for you by my Father in heaven.”

So make the effort to heal the wounds, even if you caused them. Our behavior should be characterized by forgiveness, admitting our wrongs, and reconciliation; the power to perform this comes from God as a result of our growth and fellowship. Relationships are extremely important. That is why love and unity are so heavily emphasized by Paul and John, whose views reflected the commands of Jesus Christ. When relationships are strong, they will encourage, rather than disrupt, our prayer lives.

## **Christ Intercedes for Us and Gives Us Access to the Father**

**Christ Intercedes for Us.** Jesus Christ sits presently at the right hand of God our Father, where He represents us as our advocate and the one Who pleads our case with the evidence of His own blood. He speaks in our behalf, becoming our link with the Father. He intercedes for us. Heb. 7:25 says, “Therefore, he is able to save forever those who come to God through him, because he always lives to intercede for them.” Those who come to God through Him are those who have believed and thus have been regenerated. Now, they keep on being saved because Christ *always* intercedes for them.

Rom. 8:33-34 emphasizes the role of Jesus’ intercession to keep us saved. This passage states the following:

Who will bring any charge against those whom God has chosen? It is God who justifies. Who is he that condemns? Christ Jesus, who died—more than that, who was raised to life—is at the right hand of God and is also interceding for us.

By constantly extending Himself to the Father on one side and us on the other, Jesus Christ our Savior provides a divine link between us and God. He is there, even when we sin. The link stays. 1 Jn. 2:1-2a tells us how this works:

My dear children, I write this to you so that you will not sin. But if anybody does sin, we have one who speaks to the Father in our defense—Jesus Christ, the Righteous One. He is the atoning sacrifice for our sins....

We have the defense of Jesus Christ, God Himself, to justify us before the Father, because Jesus satisfies everything about us to Him. Our defense lawyer is also the judge. The deal has been struck in our favor. We can’t lose. Not ever. 1 Tim. 2:5 tells us, “There is one God and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus....” He is our High Priest and Mediator. Take the time to read Heb. 7:26-27. Christ sacrificed once for all and now stands as our *Connection* with God.

Since we have an intercessor and link, we are able to connect with God, and can come before Him to pray. We have access to God through Jesus Christ.

**We Have Access to God the Father Through His Son.** Eph. 2:18 says, “For through him we both [Jews and Gentiles] have access to the Father by one Spirit.” This access applies to *all* believers, regardless of human origins or conditions. We are united with each other and have the same access to the Father through His Son.

John 14:6 gives a clear statement from Jesus about His singular role in establishing our relationship with the Father. In this verse He says, “I am the way the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.” Christ is the only pathway to the Father. This is true at salvation, and in our Christian lives. Apart from Him the Father is not approachable by us. But

because of Him, we can, as believers, approach the throne of grace for forgiveness and grace. We will see later how this “approach”, or access, can be disrupted by sin and loss of fellowship. When the approach is obstructed by sin, even though the eternal link between God and us remains intact, we will not be able to enter the Most Holy Place until we are “cleansed”. When we are in the Most Holy Place, we have direct audience with the Father. We will discuss this process in more detail later in this series.

**Whom Do We Pray To?** We pray only to God, of course. 1 Ki. 18:26-29 shows the futility of praying to anything or anyone else besides God, as follows:

Then they called on the name of Baal from morning till noon. “O Baal, answer us!” they shouted. But there was no response; no one answered. And they danced around the altar they had made. At noon Elijah began to taunt them, “Shout louder!” he said. “Surely he is a god! Perhaps he is deep in thought, or busy, or traveling. Maybe he is sleeping and must be awakened.” So they shouted louder and slashed themselves with swords and spears, as was their custom until their blood flowed. Midday passed and they continued their frantic prophesying until the time for the evening sacrifice. But there was no response, no one answered, no one paid attention.

How empty it must feel to pray to a non-god. How desperate and hopeless. How excellent is it that we can pray to a living, caring God, Who is a whisper away!

The God-person we address in our prayers is usually the Father, but not always. In the prayer Jesus used to give the disciples a format for prayer, He addressed the Father. And in John 16:23 He seems to suggest that we should pray to the Father. This passage says, “In that day you will no longer ask me anything. I tell you the truth, my Father will give you whatever you ask in my name.” Jesus was telling His disciples that when He was no longer on earth, they could not ask Him face-to-face, as they were accustomed to doing. They would have to direct requests heavenward...through Him...to the Father.

But there are cases when other members of the Godhead have been addressed in prayer, as well. We can pray to Jesus, according to specific examples in Scripture. In Acts 7:29, Stephen spoke directly to Jesus while he was being stoned, saying, “Lord Jesus, receive my spirit.” In 1 Cor. 16:22, Paul prayed that Jesus would return soon, saying, “Come, O Lord!” And there are other instances when prayers were directed to Jesus, giving us the position that it is permitted for us to address Him directly in prayer.

As for prayers to the Holy Spirit, there seems little doubt that it would be acceptable to pray directly to Him, since He lives within us. In John 14:16-17 Jesus told us the following about the Holy Spirit:

And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Counselor to be with you forever—the Spirit of truth. The world cannot accept him, because it neither sees him nor knows him. But you know him, for he lives with you and will be in you.

*Bible Studies on Being Devoted to Prayer*

The Holy Spirit lives in every believer, and illuminates Scripture for us as we examine God's Word. We see this in John 14:26, "But the Counselor, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you." It seems to follow that we can address the Teacher that has been given to us. He also gives us our gifts for service (1 Cor. 12:11), and communicates to our spirits the assurance that we are God's children. Surely, we can talk to this giver of confidence within us.

God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit: These are One. These are God. By All, and by One, we are loved and attended. When we speak, we have a devoted audience.

## The Format for Prayer

**Prayers Must Have Meaning.** The way to pray has been provided for in Scripture. Jesus wanted sincerity and meaning in prayer, not just rote litany or lengthy invocation. In Matt. 6:5-7, Jesus cautioned against self-centered, repetitious, public prayer, saying the following about this practice:

And when you pray, do not be like the hypocrites, for they love to pray standing in the synagogues and on the street corners to be seen by men. I tell you the truth; they have received their reward in full. But when you pray, go into your room, close the door and pray to your Father, who is unseen. Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you. And when you pray, do not keep on babbling like pagans, for they think they will be heard because of their many words.

Loud and lengthy loquacity leaves little to laud, or... many words spoken loudly in public places do not guarantee worthwhile or meaningful content in prayers. The next verse in Matt. 6 (verse 8) says, “Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask him.” This carries us to a central point that will be elaborated in the remainder of this series, and that is this: The most important aspect of prayer is in recognizing the One to whom we pray. As the verse above says, He already knows! The point of prayer is not so we can acquaint God with our needs; it is to allow us to focus on Him and acknowledge His adequacy to meet our needs *in the way that He chooses*, because His provision is perfect and will enable us to do what He plans. Prayer is our submission to Him. The level of our God-consciousness in prayer is more important even than persistence. *Persistence* can become *repetition*, which may not be all bad, but which can become meaningless over time. Heart-felt acknowledgement trumps lengthy speeches.

**Jesus’ Prayer Life.** Jesus often got away from the crowds to pray. Mark 6:46 tells of such an occasion, saying, “After leaving [a crowd of five thousand] he went up on a mountainside to pray.” On another occasion where He had dealt with large crowds, he rose early to pray, as it describes in Mark 1:35, “Very early in the morning, while it was still dark, Jesus got up, left the house and went off to a solitary place, where he prayed.”

When Jesus was ready to choose his disciples, here is what happened:

One of these days Jesus went out to a mountainside to pray, and spent the night praying to God. When morning came, he called his disciples to him and chose twelve of them, whom he also designated apostles. (Luke 6:12-13)

Jesus also prayed alone in Gethsemane right before his capture. He asked the disciples to keep watch, but they were exhausted and fell asleep repeatedly. Jesus stayed awake, however, agonizing in the hours before his being seized to be tried and crucified. In this most crucial of all times in history, Jesus acknowledged His Father, addressing Him as “Abba, Father”, and surrendered to Him with the words, “Not what I will, but what you will.” (Mark 14:36) Jesus

knew the perfection of His Father's will. He surrendered to Him, not as a risk, but with the certainty that His Father's way was the only way.

**The Disciples and Prayer.** In Acts 1:14, we see the pattern followed by the disciples. This verse says, "They all joined together constantly in prayer, along with the women and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with his brothers." The power of intense prayer was helpful for the disciples after Jesus' ascension. It is almost certain their prayers followed the pattern Jesus had given them in the prayer known as "The Lord's Prayer".

In Luke 11:1-4 we see the model prayer Jesus gave to his disciples. This prayer is more like a blank form for prayer, allowing us to fill in the blanks with the details of our own lives. Matt. 6:9-13 gives a similar account of how this outline for prayer was taught to the disciples. Open your Bible to this passage in Matthew. This prayer was not intended to be mimicked *verbatim* as a standard one-size-fits-all kind of prayer. It is a *framework* for prayer that includes the most important parts of a prayer. This model prayer in Matt. 6 incorporates all of the following:

1. Address God the Father, v. 9a.
2. Acknowledge His holiness, v. 9b.
3. Invite His timing and administration of all future events, v. 10a.
4. Submit to His will for now and for all eternity, v. 10b
5. Petition Him for physical and spiritual provisions, v. 11.
6. Fill in the "forgive-us-our-debts" blank, which is a place for us to enter our own sins, thereby confessing them to God, so we can be forgiven, v. 12a.
7. Take time to use the fellowship that comes from confession as an opportunity to forgive others, as relationship problems will impede prayer, v. 12b.
8. Ask God to direct our pathways away from temptation, v. 13a. Remember, God is not the *source* for temptation...*ever*, as per James 1:13.
9. Deliver us from evil, namely: Satan, the world, and our sinful natures, v. 13b.
10. Some manuscripts add, "...for yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen." It seems appropriate that prayer should begin with an acknowledgement of God's holiness and end with a recognition of His divinity and sovereignty.

This prayer is "model", but not comprehensive. Other components of prayer were taught in other passages that supplement this lesson taught by Christ. An example is the requirement to include "thanksgiving" in our prayers. We will see others as we go through this series.

Another condition required for prayer is persistence. Luke 18:1 and following presents a parable (recommended reading) to teach the disciples not to give up, but to keep on praying and hoping. Importunity in prayer pays off. We should persevere in praying and not lose heart.



If our prayers are not answered or answered in ways that we do not prefer, we must always remember that one of two things exist: 1) we are out of fellowship and/or not studying, or 2) God's will is being done in the withholding of the answer we want. If we are being disciplined because we need to confess or study more, we can remedy that. If we are suffering according to God's will for our growth, we can give thanks and be glad that we are worthy of God's training. As we persist in prayer, we learn that God will conduct affairs in ways that please Him, and that He always knows best. It is *with* that stream, and not *against* it, that we must swim. To resist God is perilous; to trust Him is perspicacious (wise).

**A Comprehensive Form for Prayer.** The structure of prayer was discussed in an earlier study, *Getting Closer to God*, in the chapter, "Prayer":

A model prayer would probably line up something like this:

- Confess, or name, known sins to God
- Acknowledge God...as God
- Take time to forgive anyone who has wronged you (must be heart-felt)
- Pray for people other than yourself or conditions outside your own
- Ask for what you want or hope for
- Thank God for everything
- Pray in Jesus' name and by His authority.

This is a comprehensive prayer model to be used for scheduled prayer done in private. To apply this to the "continuous" (without ceasing) prayer mode, confession needs to be done frequently, which would then allow the other parts of the prayer to be merged as needed with events and responses occurring in the life and mind of the believer.

**Jesus' Prayer for Himself, His Disciples, and Us in John 17.** The prayer of John 17, prayed by Christ and recorded by John, is an excellent prayer, to be sure. But—more than that—it is a moving and resounding proclamation of Christianity by Jesus Christ Himself. The words of Christ to His Father declare the truths of our faith as nowhere else, and we can read this prayer with joy and a sense of confidence that Jesus Christ was indeed the Son of God, sent to redeem us and make us palatable to the Father. To frame this prayer or to try and describe it or dissect it would not be as effective as just referring to it, and asking you, my friend and reader, to take the time to read this passage in your Bible. Get by yourself. Meditate on this passage. It is powerful and edifying. Break from this volume and direct your attention to this pivotal passage in God's Word, John 17.

## **Psalm 86: A Prayer of David**

Psalm 86 is a comprehensive prayer uttered and written by David at a time when he had kept his sins confessed, but also at time when he was feeling unsafe and in need of God's provision and protection. Almost every doctrine we have considered in the studies we have done in previous volumes is cited in this prayer. We want to milk this passage for its content, and will look at the concepts it presents. To do this, we will identify the doctrines we see, and cite the scriptures that correspond with them. This will provide a concise reference for the truths found in this prayer. One main point should be specified at the outset: the more Bible-centered our prayers are, the more vigorous and powerful they will be.

Here are the concepts we glean from Psalm 86, with the verses where we find them:

- We should address the Lord at the beginning of every prayer. V. 1—"Hear, O Lord, and answer me..."
- Humility should be shown and weaknesses exposed, as we pray. V. 1—"...for I am poor and needy."
- We can expect God's protection if we have studied His Word and are in fellowship with Him. V. 2—"Guard my life, for I am devoted to you."
- We must always acknowledge God in our prayers, as we see in these verses:
  - V. 2—"You are my God..."
  - V. 8—"Among the gods there is none like you, O Lord; no deeds can compare with yours."
  - V. 10—"You are great and do marvelous deeds; you alone are God."
  - V. 15—"But you, O Lord, are a compassionate and gracious God..."
- We may ask for deliverance from troubles if our faith is strong. V. 2—"...save your servant who trusts in you."
- When we confess and pray, we can expect mercy, forgiveness, fellowship, and answers, as we see here:
  - V. 3—"Have mercy on me, O Lord, for I call to you all day long."
  - V. 4—"Bring joy to your servant, for to you, O Lord, I lift up my soul."
  - V. 5—"You are forgiving and good, O Lord, abounding in love to all who call to you."
  - V. 6—"Hear my prayer, O Lord; listen to my cry for mercy."
  - V. 7—"In the day of my trouble I will call to you, for you will answer me."
  - V. 16—"Turn to me and have mercy on me..."

- Acknowledge the sovereignty and supremacy of God our Father on the earth. V. 9—“All the nations you have made will come and worship before you, O Lord; they will bring glory to your name.”
- We should ask for wisdom and knowledge, and an understanding of God’s will, with a commitment to submit to that will. V. 11—“Teach me your way, O Lord, and I will walk in your truth...”
- We can ask for stronger faith and greater spiritual focus. V. 11—“...give me an undivided heart, that I may fear your name.”
- We should express praise and worship in our prayers. V. 12—“I will praise you, O Lord my God, with all my heart; I will glorify your name forever.”
- We should acknowledge and give thanks for His love, grace, and care, as per these verses:
  - V. 13—“For great is your love toward me...”
  - V. 13—“You have delivered me from the depths of the grave.”
  - V. 15—“But you, O Lord, are a compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness.”
  - V. 17—“...for you, O Lord, have helped me and comforted me.”
- We can ask for strength and deliverance because Satan, the world, and sinful natures are out to destroy us, as we see in the following:
  - V. 14—“The arrogant are attacking me, O God; a band of ruthless men seeks my life—men without regard for you.”
  - V. 16—“...grant your strength to your servant and save your faithful son.”
  - V. 17—“Give me a sign of your goodness, that my enemies may see it and be put to shame...”

Notice the process of spirituality developed in this prayer. It includes each step: from humility to confession to fellowship to faith to divine provision to acknowledgement. This prayer can easily fit into a prayer regimen. After you go through your personal prayer list, meditate your way through this psalm...then your prayer will assuredly be couched in His Word.

## Pray in the Spirit

**Strong Faith and “Spiritual” Prayer are Connected.** Jude 20 says, “But you, dear friends, build yourselves up in your most holy faith and pray in the Holy Spirit.” There are two steps in this process: 1) building up “holy” faith, and 2) praying in the Spirit. They are linked. Holy faith is faith that operates only when all sins are confessed and we are “walking in the Spirit”. When we are in fellowship, controlled by the Holy Spirit, we can pray in the Spirit with holy faith. This is a powerful combination, and we will have much to say about this later in this series. For this present study, we want to introduce the role and importance of the Holy Spirit in our prayer life.

**The Holy Spirit is Given.** The Holy Spirit lives within all of us. Ezek. 36:25-27 anticipated the role of the Holy Spirit in our lives, citing the unique ways He would interact with us. Notice in this passage also the cleansing role of the Holy Spirit, which has to do with our purification at salvation and the cleansing of our sins as believers when we confess them. This passage in Ezekiel says the following:

I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you will be clean; I will cleanse you from all your impurities and from all your idols. I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you; I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh. And I will put my Spirit in you and move you to follow my decrees and be careful to keep my laws.

The future event of this special indwelling of the Holy Spirit was expected to result in the softening of our hearts to the Word, and to move us to follow it.

The introduction of the Holy Spirit in a special way was also anticipated in Joel 2:28-29, which says the following:

And afterward, I will pour out my Spirit on all people. Your sons and daughters will prophesy, your old men will dream dreams, your young men will see visions. Even on my servants, both men and women, I will pour out my Spirit in those days.

The day was coming when the Holy Spirit would move in special, sometimes spectacular, ways. This was particularly true in the early church. All believers receive the Holy Spirit now, and He can do marvelous things through us. Jesus anticipated the ministry of the Holy Spirit in John 7:37-39, which tells us the following:

On the last and greatest day of the feast, Jesus stood and said in a loud voice, “If anyone is thirsty, let him come to me and drink. Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, streams of living water will flow from within him.” By this he meant the Spirit, whom those who believed in him were later to receive. Up to that time the Spirit had not been given, since Jesus had not yet been glorified.

But now the Holy Spirit is with us...and in us. And it is that presence within us that offers hope that we can do great things in the power of God. For starters, we can pray in the Spirit.

**Praying in the Spirit.** Eph. 6:18 says, “And pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests. With this in mind, be alert and always keep on praying for all the saints.” When we are “in the Spirit”, this does not mean that we are “trance-like” or transported or functioning on some transcendental plane of spirituality. We do not have to be spinning emotionally or gyrating physically...we simply have to be under the control of the Holy Spirit, rather than our sinful natures. If we are not controlled by the Spirit, meaning that we are out of fellowship, we cannot pray in the Spirit.

Preparation for praying in the Spirit begins by “living in the Spirit”. Rom. 8:2-5 gives us the following:

...because through Christ Jesus the law of the Spirit of life set me free from the law of sin and death. For what the law was powerless to do in that it was weakened by the sinful nature, God did by sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful man to be a sin offering. And so he condemned sin in sinful man, in order that the righteous requirements of the law might be fully met in us, who do not live according to the sinful nature but according to the Spirit.

By living in the Spirit we fulfill the requirements of the law, which means that, when we are controlled by the Holy Spirit, we will not sin. We will have our minds focused on spiritual things, as we see in verse 5:

Those who live according to the sinful nature have their minds set on what that nature desires; but those who live in accordance with the Spirit have their minds set on what the Spirit desires.

This is a very important concept that we will be developing throughout this study. When our minds are set on the things which God (as the Holy Spirit) wants, we will be living in fellowship with Him, and our thoughts and our prayers will match God’s will. The Holy Spirit is inside of us...and when He controls us, our minds will be attuned to God and our prayers will line up with what He wants us to have.

Rom. 8:26-27 tells about our dependence on the Spirit, even when we pray, in the following:

In the same way, the Spirit helps us in our weakness. We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groans that words cannot express. And he who searches our hearts knows the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints in accordance with God’s will.

The Holy Spirit knows God’s will...He *is* God, after all. 1 Cor. 2:11b says, “In the same way no one knows the thoughts of God except the Spirit of God.” So He knows what to pray for. When we pray with Him in control, it will match God’s will. And if we pray according to God’s will, we get what we ask for. The power of prayers offered by the Holy Spirit supersedes ours by a margin of *one infinity*. Our attempts at prayer will be puny and ineffective if we count on our own creativity and imagination to generate our messages for God. Prayer is more than composition; it is communion, which we can have only if the Holy Spirit is in control.

## **Fellowship Precedes Prayer**

**Unconfessed Sin Halts Our Prayers.** Anytime we pray when we have unconfessed *known* sins in our hearts, we can be sure that we will not get what we ask for in our prayers. James 4:1-5 tells us why we ask and do not receive.

What causes fights and quarrels among you? Don't they come from your desires that battle within you? You want something but don't get it. You kill and covet, but you cannot have what you want. You quarrel and fight. You do not have because you do not ask God. When you ask, you do not receive, because you ask for wrong motives, that you may spend what you get on your pleasures. (verses 1-3)

Carnality and immaturity prevent productive prayer. It is all laid out in James 4. Sin is the problem: killing, coveting, quarreling, fighting, lusting (v. 4), and pride (v. 5). Our prayers are not answered because our motives are not spiritual and our requests do not represent faith and surrender toward God. This is because we are weak, disobedient, and unbelieving. To fix our motives, we will need to mature through the renewal of our minds by the Word of God. Verse 3 says that we "do not have because we do not ask God". In a sense, any prayer prayed out of fellowship is not a prayer at all, and is not actually "asking God". We're just talking to the walls or trees or whatever, not to God.

To get our prayers heard, we've got to get cleaned up. Jer. 17:10 tells us that God "searches the heart and examines the mind" and if He finds sin there, the plug is pulled on our prayer. Perhaps the first item on the prayer list ought to be a request for God to call attention to our infractions, so we can confess them. We may not be aware of our sins, but God is. Prov. 21:2 tells us, "All a man's ways seem right to him, but the Lord weighs the heart." He knows when the heart is not pure. Matt. 15:18-19 confirms this, saying the following:

But the things that come out of the mouth come from the heart, and these make a man 'unclean'. For out of the heart come evil thoughts, murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false testimony, slander.

Evil in the heart blocks the control of the Spirit, removes fellowship, and puts a lid on our prayers. Prov. 15:29 tells us, "The Lord is far from the wicked but he hears the prayer of the righteous." Look back at verse 8 in this same chapter, where it says, "The Lord detests the sacrifice of the wicked, but the prayer of the upright pleases him." The sacrifice He accepts from us is that of His Son, which we claimed at salvation, and which benefits us now as believers when we confess our sins to receive forgiveness.

It is worth repeating: God will not hear our prayers if sin exists in our hearts. Ps. 66:18 says it plainly, "If I had cherished sin in my heart, the Lord would not have listened..." When we have trash in our souls, we must remove it by pointing it out to God so He can burn it up. We have to get this right. We must take confession seriously. If we miss this, our prayers will not matter, and our lives will be unfulfilled and frustrating, and we will not honor God.

Let's see this one more time. Is. 59:1-3 gives us the following:

Surely the arm of the Lord is not too short to save, nor his ear too dull to hear. But your iniquities have separated you from your God; your sins have hidden his face from you, so that he will not hear. For your hands are stained with blood, your fingers with guilt. Your lips have spoken lies, and your tongue mutters wicked things.

Sin separates us from fellowship and cuts off our prayers from His hearing. Staying in Isaiah 59, look at verse 12, where confession is seen as the solution: "For our offenses are many in your sight, and our sins testify against us. Our offenses are ever with us, and we acknowledge our iniquities: rebellion and treachery [etc.]." Verse 20 shows the outcome of confession, saying, "The Redeemer will come to Zion, to those in Jacob who repent of their sins," declares the Lord." The primary view here is of the Second Coming, but the application to us clearly implies confession, or "repentance", for the forgiveness of our sins. The outcome of confession is good, as we see in the middle of verse 21: "My Spirit, who is on you, and my words that I have put in your mouth will not depart from your mouth." When we have God's Spirit in control, we can pray, study, and walk by faith.

**God Disciplines Us to Get Us Back in Line.** What if we didn't get the memo on confession? Or we got it but chose to ignore it? God will not let us wander for long without consequences. He will discipline us to get us back on track...to get us to confess and/or return to our studies. Heb. 12:9-11 describes the procedure that God uses to rein us in, as we see here:

Moreover, we have all had human fathers who disciplined us and we respected them for it. How much more should we submit to the Father of our spirits and live! Our fathers disciplined us for a little while as they thought best; but God disciplines us for our good, that we may share in his holiness. No discipline seems pleasant at the time, but painful. Later on, however, it produces a harvest of righteousness and peace for those who have been trained by it.

God loves us enough to discipline us to help us grow and produce. Sometimes, the discipline might be delayed, but we can be sure it is coming. It is much better to avoid the discipline altogether by staying on God's good side. Delayed discipline is illustrated in Eccl. 8:11-13, as we see here:

When the sentence for a crime is not quickly carried out, the hearts of the people are filled with schemes to do wrong. Although a wicked man commits a hundred crimes and still lives a long time, I know that it will go better with God-fearing men, who are reverent before God. Yet because the wicked do not fear God, it will not go well with them, and their days will not lengthen like a shadow.

It may seem as though some people who are following a destructive or sinful pattern are getting away with it, but there is a process of justice at work for those who turn their backs on God, and a waiting blessing for those who seek Him. When we have "fear of the Lord", it will turn

out well. Everything goes better when we confess and study and trust and pray, thus avoiding God's divine discipline.

An out-of-fellowship condition is illustrated well in Lamentations. In chapter 3, verse 8, we see this: "Even when I call out or cry for help, he shuts out my prayer." In verses 16-18 in this same chapter (chapter 3), we see again a picture of our sorry predicament when we are out of fellowship. This passage says the following:

He has broken my teeth with gravel; he has trampled me in the dust. I have been deprived of peace; I have forgotten what prosperity is. So I say, 'My splendor is gone and all that I had hoped from the Lord.'

Now we can look at verses 40-41, still in Lamentations 3, in search of a solution to this tooth-smashing, heart-rending dilemma:

Let us examine our ways and test them, and let us return to the Lord. Let us lift up our hearts and our hands to God in heaven, and say: We have sinned and rebelled and you have not forgiven.

When we have sinned and have not been forgiven because we have yet to "examine our ways and test them" and have not lifted up our hearts and hands to God and returned to the Lord, we can expect God's heavy hand of discipline to be laid on us until we get the message. Please don't challenge this principle. God's discipline can really disrupt your life. And why would anyone want to be on the "outs" with God?

**More on the Link Between Fellowship and Prayer.** If we "walk in the Spirit", we will have fellowship with God. When we walk in God's truth, and endure His training, we will get maturity. With fellowship and maturity, we will acquire love for people and for God. If we don't love people, but say we love God, we are not telling the truth. We must first love people. Love is assuredly a requirement for us, but it is one of those things we cannot achieve apart from a close relationship with God. It should be pointed out that love for people does *not* come out of a recognition of their merit or some kind of inherent "lovability" on their part. It comes from God, and is weighted toward spiritual issues and conditions. For example, love for unbelievers will be seen in the fact that we want to see them saved. Love for fellow believers is seen in the operation of our gifts to help them grow, because we want to see them walk in Christ and become mature. This is the love of grace, the same kind of love the Father has for us. This love will become stronger as we mature. If we do not grow, this love will not grow, and our grace toward others will degenerate into dysfunctional relationships and rancor between us and others.

Ps. 91:14-16 points up the need for us to love God, which we know means we must first hold in our hearts a love for people. This passage shows us what happens when we love God:

"Because he loves me," says the Lord, "I will protect him, for he acknowledges my name. He will call upon me, and I will answer him; I will be with him in trouble, I will deliver him, and honor him. With long life will I satisfy him and show him my salvation."



When we love God, which assumes fellowship and a walk in the faith of maturity, God will hear our prayers and will sustain us through any event or condition in our lives, and He will take us OUT of the trouble and put us in a place of “honor”. Honor means recognition that comes from God toward us, not in the worldly sense of awards or our names up in lights, but in the sense that He will sanctify us and credit us with righteousness. This happens, at salvation, of course, but we are also “honored” with righteousness in life when we get close to Him.

Prayer is important, which means *conditions* surrounding prayer are crucial. We saw above that answers to prayers depend on love. It also depends on our praying in a way that submits to Him and seeks to know and do His will. In addition, we must be students of the Word, and stay humble. And we must confess our sins to keep the Holy Spirit in control. By the time we finish this series, we will see that these and other conditions for prayer are quite specific, and very stringent. And if they are not met, our prayers go nowhere.

We understand at this point that we must be in fellowship, walking in faith, loving God, and praying according to God’s will to maximize the effects of our prayers. If we walk away to sin, our prayers evaporate before they reach the ceiling. The truth is, we probably won’t *try* to pray if we are being controlled by the sinful nature, but—in case you try—don’t expect too much. We see this principle stated or illustrated over and over in Scripture. One example involves a king of Judah named Manasseh. Like all humans, he sinned, along with those under him, but he did not confess these sins for a long time; plus, he was not listening to God’s messages. This brought him under divine discipline. 2 Chron. 33:9-14 describes this event:

But Manasseh led Judah and the people of Jerusalem astray, so that they did more evil than the nations the Lord had destroyed before the Israelites. The Lord spoke to Manasseh and his people, but they paid no attention. So the Lord brought against them the army commanders of the king of Assyria, who took Manasseh prisoner, put a hook in his nose, bound him with bronze shackles and took him to Babylon. In his distress he sought the favor of the Lord his God and humbled himself greatly before the God of his fathers. And when he prayed to him, the Lord was moved by his entreaty and listened to his plea; so he brought him back to Jerusalem and to his kingdom. Then Manasseh knew that the Lord is God.

Seriously, if you want a hook in your nose and want your prayers ignored, just wander off and live life on your own...make yourself “proud”. If you find yourself in Manasseh’s situation, you will know it’s time to realign your perspective of your little-bitty self, confess your sins, and acknowledge who God is, so your prayers will be heard. Or you may be like Jonah, who repented, but only after being placed in a very unusual and uncomfortable situation after an extended period of rebellion and stubbornness. The second chapter of Jonah tells us how this turned out: “From inside the fish Jonah prayed to the Lord his God....” The next eight verses tell about him confessing and praising God, and then the last verse (verse 10) tells the result of this turn-around: “And the Lord commanded the fish, and it vomited Jonah onto dry land.” Much better.

### *Bible Studies on Being Devoted to Prayer*

Isaiah also understood confession. Is. 1:15-16 depicts his frustration with the Israelites, reporting what God had said to him about them. This is cited here:

When you [Israelites] spread your hands in prayer, I will hide my eyes from you; even if you offer many prayers, I will not listen. Your hands are full of blood; wash and make yourselves clean.

This is the message he gave to the Israelites: To be heard, *get clean*. Jesus Himself confirms this mandate in Matt 23:25-26, which says the following:

Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You clean the outside of the cup and dish, but inside they are full of greed and self-indulgence. Blind Pharisee! First clean the inside of the cup and dish, and then the outside also will be clean.

Behavior change is an *outcome* of fellowship, not a *means* to it. We have to start on the inside with internal cleansing; then the outside can (and will) be changed. And then our prayers can be heard.

Romans 8:6 says, “The mind of sinful man is death.” This tell us that the life of a believer out of fellowship is “snuffed out”, a kind of death. This death is defined as a mind controlled by the sinful nature. The spirit is alive, but the body is devoid of spiritual control. When the flesh controls, the Spirit doesn’t. Verse 13 (Rom. 8) confirms this, saying, “For if you live according to the sinful nature, you will die.” This can refer to physical death, of course, the pinnacle of divine discipline, but in context, this death refers to the relinquishment of the mind to the control of the sinful nature. When that happens, we are “out of control” in all possible ways, we are non-active spiritually, and all communication signals are going dark.

The idea of being spiritually dead is echoed in Eph. 5:14, where we are told to “arise from the dead, and Christ will shine on you.” When we return from carnality by confession, the character of Christ will be exhibited in our demeanor. In this current study, the beauty and value of being “alive” is that our prayers will be coming from a live person and not a voiceless zombie.

**More on God’s Forgiveness.** 1 Jn. 1:9 tells believers, “If we confess our sins, he is faithful and righteous, forgiving us our sins and cleansing us from all unrighteousness.” (NET Bible) Confession brings forgiveness. We see this again in Ps. 32, where David said the following:

When I kept silent [did not confess], my bones wasted away through my groaning all day long. For day and night your hand was heavy upon me; my strength was sapped as in the heat of summer. Then I acknowledged my sin to you and did not cover up my iniquity. I said, “I will confess my transgressions to the Lord”—and you forgave the guilt of my sin. (Verses 3-5)

David follows this with a declaration that his prayers and the prayers of others who had confessed their sins could now be heard, saying in verse 6, “Therefore let everyone who is godly pray to you while you may be found...”

### *Bible Studies on Being Devoted to Prayer*

In 2 Tim.1:3, Paul tells the young pastor Timothy, “I thank God, whom I serve, as my forefathers did, with a clear conscience, as night and day I constantly remember you in my prayers.” Paul can pray for Timothy effectively because Paul’s conscience is clear, meaning all sins have been confessed and forgiven.

We see this principle again in Is. 6:1-8, where Isaiah’s prayer of confession results in forgiveness, restoration, and return to service. Quoting verses 5-7, we see the following:

“Woe to me!” I cried. “I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips, and my eyes have seen the King, the Lord Almighty.” Then one of the seraphs flew to me with a live coal in his hand, from the altar. With it he touched my mouth and said, “See, this has touched your lips; your guilt is taken away and your sin atoned for.”

Confession brings forgiveness. For believers under the New Covenant, this happens 100% of the time. And notice that Isaiah’s sins were atoned for *and* his guilt was taken away. God forgives our sins...the ones we can remember and name...and cleanses us from *every single hint of all other unrighteousness*. We are then WITHOUT GUILT, controlled by the Spirit, and ready for our next assignment. Confession removes the greatest impediment to our Christian walk: *sin*.

In 1 Ki. 8:33-34 we see the people of Israel confessing and receiving forgiveness, as follows:

When the heavens are shut up and there is no rain because your people have sinned against you, and when they pray toward this place and confess your name and turn from their sin because you have afflicted them, then hear from heaven and forgive the sin of your servants, your people Israel. Teach them the right way to live, and send rain on the land you gave your people for an inheritance.

Forgiveness removes divine discipline; forgiveness restores God’s favor; and forgiveness reinstates prayer.

1 Sam. 12:8-10 provides our final example of the process of forgiveness and restoration by confession. Samuel is recounting the delivery of the Jews from Egypt and their settlement in the Promised Land. He tells how they later forgot the Lord, with the result that they had been beleaguered by invading armies. At long last, they found the solution, which was to pray (after confession, of course). Verse 10 says, “They cried out to the Lord and said, ‘We have sinned; we have forsaken the Lord and served the Baals and Ashtoreths. But now deliver us from the hands of our enemies, and we will serve you.’” Confess and then pray...it’s a winning combination. The result for these Jews is seen in verse 11, “...he delivered you from the hands of your enemies on every side, so that you lived securely.”

When we are clean, we can pray effectively. James 5:16b makes this clear, saying, “The prayer of a righteous man is powerful and effective.” 1 Pet. 3:12 confirms this: “For the eyes of the Lord are on the righteous and his ears are attentive to their prayer, but the face of the Lord is against those who do evil.” When all our sins are forgiven, God is looking at us and listening to

us. We have, not only His attention, but His pleasure. Otherwise, we have no audience in heaven.

**Final Word on Sin and Forgiveness.** Sin embodies everything that is opposed to God. Sin cuts off prayer, as we have established very well. We have studied the things that result in *less* sin. These include being closer to God, fellowship (control of the Spirit as a result of confession), God-consciousness, and faith, among other things. Godliness (a life-pattern based on the work, power, Word, and character of Jesus Christ) crowds out sin...crushes it. Sin and godliness cannot control the same space. If we have unconfessed sin in our hearts, God relinquishes control of our hearts to our flesh. If we have fellowship with God, godliness will be evident. But the sinful nature is never dormant. It is always clamoring for control, scrambling and searching for an opening, like a caged Tasmanian devil. That's why constant confession of our sins must be done...it is God's solution for sin.

The following poem from *Desert Pathways*, by Venetia Taylor, encapsulates the process of forgiveness quite well. The name of the poem is "Forgiveness". (Endnote 1) Here it is:

### **Forgiveness**

To the One who knew me before I was,  
Who created me in the darkness of my mother's womb,  
Who knew my name and the color of my eyes,  
I lift up my soul, my spirit, my body.  
There is nothing about me that I can hide from You.  
I am naked.  
I am exposed.  
So shine Your light into my darkness to disclose my shame,  
And I will confess it.  
And when You hear it, You will forgive.  
I am in pieces, but  
It is Your hand that puts me back together.  
I am blind, but  
It is Your lips that kiss my eyes to give me sight.  
I am alone, but  
I feel Your arms around me.  
Your heart beats within my chest;

Your tears roll down my cheeks;  
Your smile beams from my face.  
But when I walk away to sin,  
And know that I have stepped back from You,  
The heaviness comes,  
Consumes the air...  
I cannot breathe  
Without You  
Near.

## Walking in Jesus

**Walking as Jesus Did.** The command to walk as Jesus walked is directly linked to prayer. Jesus lived in a constant attitude of dependence on His Father, and prayed both unceasingly and in times of separated, concentrated prayer. He is our model for prayer, as for all of life. If we can walk as He did, our lives and our prayers will be synchronized with Him. We want to look at this important aspect of our Christian walk...walking as He walked. We see in 1 Jn. 2:6b that, if we advertise that we are believers, we should *walk the walk*. This verse tells us to "...walk as he did."

Gal. 2:20-21 sets the stage for this walk, in the following:

I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved and gave himself for me. I do not set aside the grace of God, for if righteousness could be gained through the law, Christ died for nothing!

We identify with Christ at salvation, thus dying with Him. As a result of our new identity with Him, we get His righteousness forever. Once we are saved, our new goal becomes having that righteousness exhibited in our lives, showing in our attitudes and behavior each day. We want Christ to produce in us the same character that He displayed in His humanity on earth. To do this, we will have to *live by faith in Him*, which *lets Him live through us*. When His righteousness is seen in our lives, we can reign *in life* through Him, as we see in Rom. 5:17:

For if, by the trespass of the one man [Adam], how much more will those who receive God's abundant provision of grace and of the gift of righteousness reign in life through the one man, Jesus Christ.

Because of His righteousness, we qualify to reign, and when we reign, we will exhibit that righteousness in our lives. But without clean hearts and fellowship, there will be no reigning for us, and we will live in a desiccated desert of sin and separation. Jesus was the model for reigning, and He is our *access* for participation in His holiness.

Reigning with Him is not a chance for us to don a crown and walk proudly down some aisle bordered by admiring onlookers. No. This is a time when we acknowledge that our part in the kingdom, our "reign", is to humbly surrender to Him with full dependence on Him for our sustenance and provision, just as Jesus did with his Father. Jn. 14:10 tells us how Christ "reigned". He said, "Don't you believe that I am in the Father, and that the Father is in me? The words I say to you are not just my own. Rather, it is the Father living in me, who is doing his work." Christ Himself, though He was God Himself, committed the will and way of His humanity to His Father. He acknowledged that it was His Father that was doing the work. This is the secret for reigning, and for living, obeying, growing, and producing. We must commit

our will and our way to Him, because He does the work. Christ did not work through His own flesh; He worked by the power of the Father. So should we.

**Christ is Our Example Regarding Faith.** 1 Pet. 2:21-24 shows us how Christ trusted His Father, setting an example for us. This passage says the following:

To this you were called, because Christ suffered for you, leaving you an example, that you should follow in his steps. "He committed no sin, and no deceit was found in his mouth." [Is. 53:9] When they hurled their insults at him, he did not retaliate; when he suffered, he made no threats. Instead, he entrusted himself to him who judges justly.

When Jesus was attacked, He trusted His Father to administer justice on the basis of divine wisdom. The more we have the view-point of Jesus, which sees the ultimate wisdom of the Father, the more we will be able to respond to life's circumstances as Jesus did, by trusting God. That is faith, and that is the example we are to follow. Jesus counted on the power and wisdom of His Father. He did not depend on His own humanity. Neither should we.

Notice that Jesus trusted the Father through all His suffering. That trust gave Him a relaxed view toward His mistreatment. He knew God was at work. Phil. 4:10-13 illustrates how this should work in our lives. In this passage Paul expresses the attitude we should have at all times, whether we are prospering or struggling, healthy or sick, winning or losing. We may suffer, but we should maintain an attitude of trust through it all. Paul kept this Christ-like attitude, as he shows us in these words from Philippians:

I rejoice greatly in the Lord that at last you have renewed your concern for me. Indeed, you have been concerned, but you had no opportunity to show it. I am not saying this because I am in need, for I have learned to be content whatever the circumstances. I know what it is to be in need, and I know what it is to have plenty. I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want. I can do everything through him who gives me strength.

The secret of confidence, peace, and contentment can be found in our arranging everything carefully so that all things in our lives are perfect and comfortable. Right? Wrong! The secret to contentment is *recognizing that we do "everything" through the power of Jesus Christ*, just as He did everything through His Father. With basic provisions, which God can provide, and with trust in Him, we can be content. 1 Tim. 6:6-8 says, "But godliness with contentment is great gain. For we brought nothing into the world, and we can take nothing out of it. But if we have food and clothing, we will be content with that." When we are in fellowship and growing in the Word, and we are resting in contentment because we believe His promises, we are rich. This is the richness we seek...not money and things, but godliness. That is where we will find peace of mind and personal contentment, a place where prayers flow naturally and freely.

**Put on the Lord Jesus Christ.** As we have stated previously, deity and divinity have no truck with iniquity. God and sin will not mix. When we provide for the cravings of the sinful nature, we will be separated from the power of Christ. Rom. 13:12-14 gives us an alternative, as we see in the following:

The night is nearly over; the day is almost here. So let us put aside the deeds of darkness and put on the armor of light. Let us behave decently, as in the daytime, not in orgies and drunkenness, not in sexual immorality and debauchery, not in dissension and jealousy. Rather, clothe yourselves with the Lord Jesus Christ, and do not think about how to gratify the desires of the sinful nature.

To deal with sin, we must “put on the Lord Jesus Christ”. What does this mean? This means “clothing ourselves” with Christ in our daily lives, rather than serving our flesh. When we put on clothes, they are right next to us, up close, covering us. They conform to our shape and fit us, the way Christ fits us and is close to us when we learn about Him and when we are in fellowship with His Spirit. This is similar to his being “at home” in us, living in us and being in charge of our minds and bodies because we are spiritually aligned with Him.

Eph. 3:16-20, tells us that, when Christ controls us because our faith is mature, and when we are operating in the power of the Holy Spirit because we are “filled with all the fullness of God”, He will do more than we ask, more than we pray for, and more than we can even imagine. This depends on *how much* His power is “at work within us” (Eph. 3:20), which is governed by our level of maturity and our being in fellowship with Him. A lot is riding on our knowing that we are only strong “in his mighty power” (Eph. 6:10). 2 Cor. 3:4-6a, adds to this, saying the following:

Such confidence as this is ours through Christ before God. Not that we are competent in ourselves to claim anything for ourselves, but our competence comes from God. He has made us competent....

When we put on the Lord Jesus Christ, we are dressed for all occasions, especially for the work He has planned for us.

**The Prayer Aspect of Our Walk in Christ.** As we trust God the way Christ trusted God, and as we “walk in Christ”, we will pray with the same attitude of surrender that Christ did. In the lesson Christ gave when he was teaching the disciples to pray, He let them know that He depended on His Father completely (see Matt. 6:9-13). Of this, J. Hampton Keathley said the following:

They came to recognize that while they could be believers in the Lord, they could not be true disciples who became like their teacher (Luke 6:40) unless they learned to pray to the Father like the Lord Jesus in the intimacy and dependency that He constantly demonstrated. (Endnote 2)

To pray like Jesus, we must become God-dependent. To be God-dependent, we must be aligned with the Father, as Jesus was. Jesus was never out of fellowship; He never grieved the Holy Spirit; He never stepped away from the filling and power of His Father. He wanted His disciples (and us) to have the same ongoing relationship with His Father that He did, so that their prayers (and ours) would offer the same opportunity for closeness with the Father that He maintained throughout His life.



## **Praying in Jesus' Name**

**What It Means to Pray in His Name.** We have heard the command that we are to pray in Jesus' name, and we always close our scheduled prayers, and pieces of our continuous prayers, by saying something like, "...and we ask these things in Jesus' name." This is appropriate, as the name of Jesus Christ thunders within us when we hear it, and conjures up a sense of reverence and respect when we say it. But there is more to this practice than meets the eye, and there are aspects of "praying in Jesus' name" that we need to understand—and incorporate with our prayers—so that the full power of this name can come into play in our lives.

Wayne Grudem discussed praying in Jesus' name, telling us that using His name...

does not simply mean adding the phrase, "in Jesus' name" after every prayer, because Jesus did not say, "If you ask anything and add the words 'in Jesus' name' after your prayer, I will do it." Jesus was not merely speaking about adding certain words as if these were a kind of magical formula that would give power to our prayers. In fact, none of the prayers recorded in Scripture have the phrase, 'in Jesus' name' at the end of them (see Matt. 6:9-13; Acts 1:24-25; 4:24-30; 7:59; 9:13-14; Rev. 6:10; 22:20)." (Endnote 3)

Grudem also said this:

To come in the name of someone means that another person has authorized us to come on his authority, not on our own....Praying in Jesus' name is therefore prayer made on his authorization on the basis of his mediatorial work for us. In a broader sense, the "name" of a person in the ancient world represented the person himself and therefore all of his character. (Endnote 4)

This perspective of praying in Jesus' name creates a new view for the meaning of this phrase, and perhaps challenges our previous notions about how we should use it. According to this, can we just say at the end of a prayer, "in Jesus' name", and expect this to qualify our prayer, or add credentials to it? No. There's more to it than that...much more, and we'll try to see what this consists of.

Simply put, praying in Jesus' name means praying *in the Spirit, by faith, and according to His will*. This adds some really big conditions to the requirement for praying in His name, which we have assumed before is nothing more than pronouncing the words, "in His name". But, as we saw above, and shall see in more detail shortly, the requirements include the following: 1) We must be in fellowship; 2) we must have a certain degree of knowledge and maturity (to be praying by faith); and 3) we have to know and surrender to His will, so that we are praying in accordance with what God wants us to have.

**Praying Within the Person and Character of Christ.** In John 16:23-24, Jesus told His disciples the following:

In that day you will no longer ask me anything. I tell you the truth, my Father will give you whatever you ask in my name. Until now you have not asked for anything in my name. Ask and you will receive and your joy will be complete.

We understand from this that the Father will give us anything that we ask for “in Jesus’ name”. Think about the words “in” and “name”. If “in” means “inside” or “within”, then this requirement means we must be *within* something. And what is it that we are to be “in”? His name. And what is His name? According to what we saw above, it is His person and His character. This means Jesus must control us and we must be operating within the power and scope of His being. Does this sound familiar, as in “being in fellowship”?

Effectiveness in Prayer is Conditional. When we ask in Jesus’ name, we are operating in the power of His Messianic divinity and authority. This requires fellowship, understanding, and faith. To have our prayers access the power of the One we are praying to depends on the condition of the one doing the praying. If the person praying is filled with “all the fullness of God”, the prayer will be generated by God’s power, and in His wisdom, and will be in perfect line with God’s will. Then the thing prayed about will be done, exactly as it is asked for. If these conditions are not met, the prayer will fall to the floor unheeded. This is a central point in this series: The *quality* and *effectiveness* of a prayer *depends on the spiritual state of the believer* who is doing the praying. We may honor Christ by finishing our prayers “in Christ’s name”, but powerful results in prayer will be generated only when these words are backed up by strong spiritual preparation.

Go back to the study, *Getting Closer to God*. Look again at the checklist in the last chapter, “Being Still”. When you can satisfy this checklist, you can be sure you will be praying in His name. Your prayers will be in line with God’s will and will have the effect you want. You must be in fellowship, walking in the Spirit, consistently studying, believing, surrendering, etc., for your prayers to work. If you are not in fellowship or studying, your prayers won’t even be heard, let alone be answered.

Do you see? The power of prayer is **CONDITIONAL**. So how does this fit in with grace? Grace still abounds. All the conditions for effectiveness in prayer depend on grace: forgiveness, impartation of the divine nature through the Word, honoring non-meritorious faith, and providing the power of God through the person and finished work of Jesus Christ. See our work in any of this? No. The conditions that have to be met are made available by grace and through God’s love for His children. Soup’s hot. But we have to come to the table. Not getting answers? Check your condition.

John 14:13-14 says, “And I will do whatever you ask in my name, so that the Son may bring glory to the Father. You may ask me for anything in my name, and I will do it.” Jesus does it...He “will do it”, not us. He will do it when we are ensconced within the power of His holy Self, and are operating in His name. At that time, when He goes to work in His name, be ready to move out, because He is going to use us to do it.

## Study, Growth, and Prayer

**Bible-Based Zeal.** We have emphasized over and over in all of our studies that we must maintain a study schedule that shows an enthusiasm for the Word. If we are interested in God, we will be interested in His Word. The Bible is the center of Christianity; it is the heart of God, a powerful testimony to creation and salvation, the essential expression of His divine nature, and the sole guide for Christian living. It should be the focal point for all schedules and routines for every believer. Without a daily feeding on the Word, we will not grow as God intends, and we will not achieve what He wants.

Our “zeal” for God must be based on our understanding of the Word of God. There are many false doctrines and practices out there. The only way to spot them and avoid them is to bury our noses (and our hearts) in the Word. Otherwise, we may have excitement about things that include the name of God, but if we do not embrace the Bible as His projection of Himself, we are dabbling in forces that undermine Him, rather than promote Him.

In Rom. 10:1-3, Paul said of the Israelites that he wished they would be saved, but their enthusiasm for God had missed the mark. They were establishing their own truth and righteousness. Verse 2 says, “For I can testify about them that they are zealous for God, but their zeal is not based on knowledge.” Our devotion does not need to be strong, so much as it needs to be well-placed. Ironically, when it is directed toward the Word of God, devotion will get stronger.

The Word must be the basis for all worship, prayer, praise, thanksgiving, acknowledgement, and fear. Self-styled, emotion-centered, experience-driven, logic-derived, philosophy-based alternatives, encoded in documents or messages other than the Word of God, *should not be embraced*...unless they match exactly the doctrines and truths taught in the Bible. And, of course, if they match the Word, they come from the Word. Why would we want to seek truth from any other source? God can dispense knowledge in any way He chooses, but the one sure way we know He speaks to us is through His Word. Stick with the Word. That is the proper basis for our zeal.

**The Effects of Study.** The growth of our faith is based primarily on our increased understanding of the Word. Faith is built in tiny increments, each brick or stone or board coming to us in the form of scriptures and doctrines. These are the baby-steps for walking by faith. As we believe the truths we learn, and as they accumulate, our faith grows into a super-structure called maturity.

We have seen before an interplay between two variables in Scripture that work together to make our growth and maturity possible. These are two pillars in the Christian walk. One is “understanding”; the other is “faith”. As you *understand* more in your study of the concepts of the Bible, you will *trust* God more. As you trust more, you will seek truth and study more, and you will build up a holy faith that is focused fully on God. We must distinguish *knowledge* from

*understanding*. You can know the Bible without understanding it. Understanding occurs when you learn a truth from the Bible and *believe* it. As understanding accumulates, faith grows, you mature, and you will be able to live the transformed life. The power of the Word cannot be overestimated. It changes you at a cellular level, and enables you to experience the power and love of Christ in every area of your life.

Heb. 11:3a says, “By faith we understand...” Our faith increases as we understand more...by increasing understanding, we grow. And by growing, we believe more. These are interactive and symbiotic. As we understand these things better, the complex becomes simple. Truths about the Christian life are exact, but they are actually not complicated. God has made it simple for those who want it...and believe...to prepare for service to Him.

**Psalm 119.** We will not treat Psalm 119 completely here, but it should be referenced, given its power as a prayer that makes a resounding defense of the Word. Almost all verses in Ps. 119 are individual prayers. These prayers exhibit commitment to God’s Word and adoration for Scripture. They also contain the following: appeals to God for preservation, a desire to walk in God’s truth, praise for God’s love and power, and an expression of faith in God’s promises. There is even a prayer of confession in this psalm (v. 176). But mostly it is a tribute to God’s Word. Ps. 119 also makes a statement of commitment to God’s *will*, as He presents that will to us in His Word. The Word is seen as a guide leading to correct thinking, righteous living, and divine viewpoint. The psalmist was storing God’s precepts in his heart, and he wanted to learn more and more about them. More than anything, he wanted God’s wisdom, a concept we studied previously in James 1:5, where we are told to *ask* for wisdom. This psalm is an invitation to wisdom, and points the way to its source, the Word of God.

This huge and powerful psalm begs your reading. It will convince you as never before of the importance of God’s Word in your life. Allow some time for this assignment, as Psalm 119 is long, eight to ten pages in most versions. It is well worth your while to read it. For a complete discussion of Ps. 119, see pp. 36-37 of “Faith Under Fire”, an article by J. Hampton Keathley, freely available online at *bible.org*. (Endnote 5)

**Training in the Word.** There are two basic components in God’s training. The first is in the classroom; the second is on the practice field. Whether it is in the military, around an athletic team, or within a corporation, time must be spent in “skull sessions”, mental preparation periods conducted in rooms designed for planning and learning; and time must also be spent in “practice” under simulated and real “field” conditions to sharpen skills. God trains us in His Word (in the classroom), as we have established, but He also trains us in the field, where we incorporate what we learn into our daily lives. Our focus in this study is on the classroom part of our preparation. To see more on the “testing and practical-training” part of our growth, see our previous study, *Walking by Faith*. Look for the chapter titled, “Faith is Strengthened by Testing and Training”.

In 1 Tim. 4:7b Paul tells Timothy to “have nothing to do with godless myths and old wives’ tales; rather, train yourself to be godly.” Timothy was instructed to avoid false teachings and to

“train” for godliness. If myths are “godless”, and Timothy is instructed to learn to be “godly”, it follows that the thing that makes you godly is the opposite of false teaching, and the opposite of false teaching is the Word of God. In verse 11, Timothy is told to “command and teach” the things that had been described in verses 9 and 10, which are the gospel and the truth. He was to teach what he had studied that was making him godly. Then in verse 16, he’s told, “Watch your life and doctrine closely. Persevere in them....” By persevering in the Word, training for godliness was happening for Timothy, and for those he was teaching. All of us can train for godliness, as well, if we will persevere in the Word.

**Training Our Minds.** The Word, as the center of our spiritual training, is seen in Phil 4:8-9, where we see that our thought life and Christian practice are based on what we have heard and learned. This passage says the following:

Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable—if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—think about such things. Whatever you have learned or received or heard from me, or seen in me—put it into practice. And the God of peace will be with you.

The Bible helps us focus our thoughts on things that are worth thinking about, and prepares us for “practice”. As we gain a deeper understanding of the Word, our minds will be God-focused and we will be submitting to Him.

Here’s another circuit: Focus and submission (deepened through study) function through prayer, while prayer prepares us for study. Prayer should always precede study. Pray before you study; study to increase the power of your prayer. It’s the “building” process at work again. Start by confessing and praying before you study. God has made it clear that we can then ask for wisdom and understanding. So when you enter your study time, pray first, asking God to illuminate your mind. If you are in fellowship and believing, *He will do it*, and your study time will count.

We have plenty of reasons for keeping our minds focused through study and prayer. 1 Pet. 4:7 says, “The end of all things is near. Therefore be clear minded and self-controlled so that you can pray.” A clear mind comes from scriptures stored and used daily. “Self-control” is seen as discipline for study. If you want it, or see a need for it, you will just do it, without shirking it or avoiding it. You will do it because you see its value, and the closer we get to the return of Christ, the more valuable it will seem.

2 Tim. 3:1 tells us, “There will be terrible times in the last days.” When terrible times come, all mental faculties are placed on alert. I am reminded of a saying I heard many years ago, source truly unknown, which goes like this: “If you know you are going to be hung in a week, your concentration will tend to become focused.” Looking at our situation in this nation and the world, things could unravel quickly. If things truly hit the fan one of these days, watch to see how many apathetic Christians will suddenly become devoted disciples of the Word. All at once, concentration will focus. They will learn quickly, and then they will pray. But why wait? We should start early. We should start now.

**Making the Word a Priority.** In Acts 6:1-4, the apostles were fielding complaints that they were not giving proper attention to practical matters, such as the distribution of food to widows. They recommended the appointment of believers who were gifted in such matters. Verse 2b reports that the apostles said this: “It would not be right for us to neglect the ministry of the word of God in order to wait on tables.” They followed this with a declaration: “We will turn this responsibility over to them [gifted administrators] and will give our attention to prayer and the ministry of the word” (verses 3 and 4). Their focus was on prayer and the Word, because they knew that life is more than food and clothing...and they knew they needed to dispense the “spiritual” bread that nourishes and energizes believers for the rigors of Christian living. *None of us*, let alone pastors, missionaries, evangelists and church leaders, can allow busy-work to displace our study times. Study every day. Convenience is not primary; growth is. Even rest is secondary...God will sustain you...do what it takes to study.

In this same vein, new Jewish converts were said to have devoted themselves to the *content* of the apostles’ instruction. Acts 2:42 says, “They devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer.” Through learning the Scripture and the edifying experiences of fellowship among fellow disciples (students), and through communion and prayer, these believers were on the pathway to maturity. By focusing on the Word, we can hop onto the same trail.

**The Word Multiplies When You Believe It.** In Mark 4:20 Jesus said, “Others, like seed sown on good soil, hear the word, accept it, and produce a crop—thirty, sixty or even a hundred times what was sown.” This is the multiplication of Scripture. When you accept the truths of the Bible, their meaning and power will expand within you. When you believe the Word, its power to transform you and prepare you for your ministry, or the function of your gift(s), will increase and grow within your spirit, soul, heart, and mind. A truth you learn today may seem small and insignificant, but it has the potential to grow in the fertile soil of positive volition and an earnest search for God. If you want it and believe it, the doctrines you learn will affect your life in powerful ways.

In verse 23 of this chapter (Mark 4), Jesus continues this theme, saying, “If anyone has ears to hear, let him hear,” followed in verses 24-25 by this:

“Consider carefully what you hear,” he continued. “With the measure you use, it will be measured to you—and even more. Whoever has will be given more; whoever does not have, even what he has will be taken from him.”

Here again, we see the principle of the “Multiplication of Scripture”. When it is learned, it increases. The more you learn, the more you *can* learn. And the less you learn, the more you will lose the little you already have. This is extremely important. The multiplication factor described here can work for you or against you. You must not neglect the Word, and you must believe it to understand it. The Word grows within us to make us bigger than we are.

**Preparation in the Word.** God’s care is our hiding place. And His word tells us where to hide. 1 Ki. 17:2-4 shows Elijah looking for a place to hide. This passage says the following:

Then the word of the Lord, came to Elijah: “Leave here, turn eastward and hide in the Kerith Ravine, east of the Jordan. You will drink from the brook, and I have ordered the ravens to feed you there.”

When we follow the Word, God will care for us, perhaps in surprising ways. But if we ignore the Word, this care will not be seen. God’s Word will always direct us *into His care*. For us to be prepared, even if that means to hide, we need God’s instruction to tell us where. God’s Word contains all the directions we need for living under God’s care, to allow Him to tend our growth toward maturity and productivity.

We keep pounding on this point, repeating it over and over: *Study the Word to grow and be a fruitful believer*. Peter did the same thing in 2 Pet. 1:12-15, where he told his audience he would keep on repeating the concepts in Scripture:

I will always remind you of these things, even though you know them and are firmly established in the truth you now have. I think it is right to refresh your memory as long as I live in the tent of this body.... And I will make every effort to see that after my departure you will always be able to remember these things.

Peter knew the importance of repetition for training and preparation. In learning theory, it is said that to really learn anything new, it needs to be repeated fourteen times. We know there is a spiritual aspect to learning Scripture and that the Holy Spirit teaches us and helps us remember, so learning theories may not fit exactly, but we still need to have concepts repeated. And there is assuredly a *fading* process that takes place when we get away from our studies, which causes spiritual weakening. It is then, unfortunately, that what little we have will be taken away. So repetition is still necessary for all of us, because all of us need to get refreshed, and stay prepared.

Regarding repetition, there is a topic hidden in this part of our study that needs to be addressed squarely, and that is this: All learners are different. Some learn Scripture from reading it, or reading about it; some learn better by hearing it explained; some need it portrayed, or illustrated, or acted out in some way to get the full meaning. And there is a “pace” issue that pertains to learning. Some learn more quickly than others. And some are better at dealing with abstract concepts than others. But get this: It does not *matter* who you are, your learning style, or your cognitive acuity, *if you have positive volition for the Word of God, you will be given what you need to represent Jesus Christ, in this world, in a way that earns rewards for you and brings glory to Him*.

Here’s all you need to know and do:

- When you do something wrong, admit it to God. He will forgive you.
- Learn all you can about God from the Bible.
- Believe that what you learn from the Bible is true.
- Talk to God all the time.

- Believe that God will take care of you because you are His child, and He loves you.

That is the Christian life. It is not complex and doesn't need to be. From these seeds will grow all the doctrines and truths that need to be explored and repeated until you have the full picture of the greatness of God, and know how much He cares for you. God's basic truths are within the reach of every single believer, and there is no excuse for not attending to His Word every day. All believers can grow. *Child-like faith* is what God wants from us, more than professorial, linguistic expertise. It is not by our prowess or brilliance or wisdom that we will live the life of Christ, but by His power and might. The most important thing is for us to think about God, and realize how big and powerful He is.

**Study and Growth Enhance Prayer.** As we study and grow, our prayers will improve. We will pray more consistently, and about the right things. God knows what we need. When we know what He wants, then we too will know what we need. And our requests will increasingly match what He wants us to have, or what He wants to happen. The Bible is our source of knowledge about God, the place where we learn His will, so we can do it. We don't need to look further. It's all at our fingertips in the Word. Our learning approaches may differ, but the knowledge is the same. We all grow by learning the Word, and by accepting His way as the true and right way for us to pray, and serve, and live.



## **God Will Not Hear the Prayers of Those Who Refuse His Word**

**When We Ignore the Word, God Ignores Our Prayers.** We have established that carnality, or being out of fellowship, or being controlled by the sinful nature, will prevent our prayers from being heard. We have mentioned before that an absence of study will also hamper our prayers, and we want to look at that issue more closely, to see how we can prevent our prayers from being cut off. This study will help us do preventive maintenance on our prayers, to make sure they are operating according to design.

The principle is clear: If we vacate the Word, or neglect or ignore it, we will see divine influence diminish in our lives, and a worldly point of view will increase within us. As divine influence fades and connection with God weakens, we may find ourselves confused and uncertain, and may even pray in frustration or desperation, but we will not find relief. When we walk away from the Word, we will not remember to confess our sins, so our prayers, however pleading, will do us no good.

To keep God's ear open to our prayers, we must attend His Word. Prov. 28:9 says, "If anyone turns a deaf ear to the law [Scripture], even his prayers are detestable." God *hates* the prayers of a believer who is refusing to study the Word. A Christian who is trying to figure things out for himself, apart from God's wisdom, and who is rejecting God's truth, will not be heard. This is a choice we must make, whether to embrace Bible study on a daily basis, or not. If we don't study, just as when we don't eat, we will get weaker. And our prayer signal will become so faint it will only (pardon the expression) "irritate" God.

In Zech. 7:11-13, we see the following, which confirms and illustrates what we are saying:

But they refused to pay attention; stubbornly they turned their backs and stopped up their ears. They made their hearts as hard as flint and would not listen to the law or to the words that the Lord Almighty had sent by his Spirit through the earlier prophets, so the Lord Almighty was very angry. "When I called, they did not listen; so when they called, I would not listen," says the Lord Almighty.

If we will not hear His Word, He will not hear our prayers. When we refuse to study, we need not waste our time trying to pray, because *He will not answer*.

We see this again in Prov. 1:27-29, which says this:

When calamity overtakes you like a storm, when disaster sweeps over you like a whirlwind, when distress and trouble overwhelm you. Then they will call to me but I will not answer; they will look for me but will not find me. Since they hated knowledge and did not choose to fear the Lord....

When trouble comes, we think of rescue. If no rescue is in sight, we think of God. But if we are without knowledge and faith and a clean heart, we are on our own...without God's help. God will not hear us. The best thing for us to do in a predicament is to confess, and then pray...keep on confessing and keep on praying. And then race to the nearest Bible class. If our troubles have been due to our not being in fellowship or not staying current in our studies, then the troubles will subside when we make it right, but if they are for testing and training, then we can thank God for them and go on, knowing that God's will is being done...for our benefit...and that rescue will come in God's good time.

**Returning to Study Restores Communication.** On one side of the coin failure to study prevents contact with God. On the other side, confession and study can equip us for everything we are to do, including praying. The Word brings us back to life, as we see here in Ps. 19:7-8:

The law of the Lord is perfect, reviving the soul. The statutes of the Lord are trustworthy, making wise the simple. The precepts of the Lord are right, giving joy to the heart. The commands of the Lord are radiant, giving light to the eyes.

This tells us that the Word does the following:

- Revives the soul—attunes the mind to God.
- Makes wise the simple—helps you work with what you know already and enables you to learn more.
- Gives joy to the heart—brings about the peace and assurance of faith.
- Gives light to the eyes—illuminates truth for living in the light.

When we pay attention to scriptures, we will be efficient in our Christian walk, and our prayers will be heard by God. When we ignore God's instructions, we will not be keeping ourselves in a condition that will cause God to hear us or answer our prayers. The only prayer He will hear when we have fallen behind, and are controlled by the flesh, is the prayer of confession. Our humility is the only thing He is looking for, seen in the form of confession and willingness to hear what He has to say in His Word.

## God Hears Us When We Are Humble

We Should Be Humble. 2 Ki. 22:15-20 records the words of a prophetess that were told to the king of Judah, regarding the king's having to see God's anger poured out on his nation. The heart of her message was this:

Because your heart was responsive and you humbled yourself before the Lord when you heard what I have spoken against this place and its people, that they would become accursed and laid waste, and because you tore your robes and wept in my presence, I have heard you, declares the Lord. (verse 19)

The key attitude God looks for when He looks at us is humility. Humility recognizes the bigness of God and the smallness of man. From the beginning, when we came to God in search of salvation from our condition of condemnation, we recognized that we could not be sufficient in ourselves to qualify us for connection with the life of God. We accepted the work of His Son, and surrendered our own solutions for life and eternity to Him, allowing Him to give us the benefit of His grace and effort. We were humble. We saw the truth. We saw reality. God is everything. We are nothing. That is the correct perspective.

Now that we are living the Christian life, we are not free to roam around in self-sufficiency, or to go our own way of self-dependency. To have the right outlook, we must humbly acknowledge God's infinite power and our great weakness. He offers us life, but we do not "possess" life. We belong to Him. We depend on Him, one way or another, for everything. That should also be our *mindset*. Whether it is in confession, prayer, faith, study, acknowledgement, surrender, or service, the backdrop for everything we think or do must be that we are dependent on God. This is humility. Knowing His all-sufficiency. Knowing our place before Him.

**Humility and Prayer.** When we are humble, God will hear our prayers. In 2 Chron. 7:13-15 we see a perfect statement of this truth, as follows:

When I shut up the heavens so that there is no rain, or command locusts to devour the land or send a plague among my people, if my people, who are called by my name, will humble themselves and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then will I hear from heaven and will forgive their sin and will heal their land. Now my eyes will be open and my ears attentive to the prayers offered in this place.

What a perfect depiction of God's mercy and forgiveness when He witnesses our humble confession to Him. When we have this humility, His eyes and ears will be open to us. And that is a good time to pray, while He is attentive to us. Strike while the iron's hot...make hay while the sun shines...pray quick while the lines are open, before a subtle sin causes the connection to drop.

**Examples of Humility Preceding Answered Prayer.** In Dan. 10:12, God spoke to Daniel in a vision to give him an important message. The condition that enabled Daniel to hear God was the same condition that allowed Daniel to be heard...humility. Here is the part of God's message to Daniel that describes the reason for Daniel's connection with God:

Then he continued, "Do not be afraid, Daniel. Since the first day that you set your mind to gain understanding and to humble yourself before your God, your words were heard, and I have come in response to them.

We see in this passage the presence of two primary processes for our lives as praying believers: study (set your mind to gain understanding) and confession (humble yourself before your God). Because Daniel met these conditions, he could hear God say, "Your words were heard, and I have come in response to them." What a wonderful thing to have the assurance that God is hearing our prayers and is responding to them.

In 1 Ki. 3:5-13, Solomon is told by the Lord that he could ask for "whatever you want me to give you" (v. 5). Of course, God—in His omniscience and foreknowledge—knew exactly what Solomon was going to ask for. But God allowed Solomon's anticipated choice to play itself out. Solomon responded with humility to the opening given him by God, and said to Him, "But I am a little child and do not know how to carry out my duties" (v. 7). The duties involved leading the nation, yet Solomon did not ask for more power and more riches. He knew better.

This would have been a chance for all kinds of selfish motives to be manifested, but Solomon was humble...like a little child...and his request was thoughtful and submissive. He said the following in his request: "So give your servant a discerning heart to govern your people and to distinguish between right and wrong. For who is able to govern this great people of yours?" (v. 9) Solomon asked for wisdom...for perspicacity...for discernment.

Verses 10-13 show God's response to this request:

The Lord was pleased that Solomon had asked for this. So God said to him, "Since you have asked for this and not for long life or wealth for yourself, nor have asked for the death of your enemies but for discernment in administering justice, I will do what you have asked. I will give you a wise and discerning heart, so that there will never have been anyone like you, nor will there ever be. Moreover, I will give you what you have not asked for—both riches and honor—so that in your lifetime you will have no equal among kings.

Solomon understood God's ways, and was prepared to receive God's best, which was wisdom. When we do things God's way, by being humble...confessing, studying, praying, and submitting to Him, we get His very best. It is when our own fleshly dreams and desires get mixed in with our motives and plans that our prayers get muddled. God could have given Solomon everything without Solomon asking for anything. But God responded to Solomon's humility and his desire to seek God's will, and He gave him His best. When we are humble, our prayers will open us up to receive what God already wants to give us, and it will be...*the best*. God gave Solomon much more than he asked for.

*Bible Studies on Being Devoted to Prayer*

Prideful Prayer Gets No Credit from God. Jesus instructs us in Matt. 6:6, to avoid using prayer as a source of pride. He said this:

And when you pray, do not be like the hypocrites, for they love to pray standing in the synagogues and on the street corners to be seen by men. I tell you the truth, they have received their reward in full.

Their reward is to feel the (supposed) admiration of onlookers. That is all they'll get. They will not get answers for their prayers. Pride pays itself, but the prideful prayer gets no benefits from God. Pride is empty and spiritually powerless, because God turns His back on it.

Learn Humility. As we study and grow, we will see more clearly the greatness of God and the sinfulness of man. By acknowledging the One to whom we pray as the great and loving and gracious God, and by seeing ourselves as the small and petty creatures that we are, we will be setting ourselves up to receive God's perfect provision, and more grace than we ever asked for or even imagined.

## **Drawing Near to God in Prayer**

Longing to Be Close to God. Ps. 73:25-28 gives a moving tribute to God, and expresses a desire to be closer to Him, as follows:

Whom have I in heaven but you? And earth has nothing I desire besides you. My flesh and my heart may fail, but God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever. Those who are far from you will perish; you destroy all who are unfaithful to you. But as for me, it is good to be near God. I have made the Sovereign Lord my refuge; I will tell of all your deeds.

These are powerful words. God is the passion of my life, the strength for my mind, emotions, and will. He is my “portion”, my everything, forever. Those who fall away from Him will be disciplined, but I will make God my place of safety and comfort, because I am focused on Him. These are the words of God-consciousness, vertical vision, and singular commitment. This is the kind of focus that gets us closer to Him. And this is a hunger that God wants to feed.

Jesus told us that God’s blessings are extended to those who “hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled” (Matt. 5:6). The righteousness that will fill us is that which comes from God, not from ourselves. The blessing is not for those who fill themselves with their own goodness or plans; it is for those who want *God’s* righteousness. Those are the ones who will be filled. They don’t just want it; they’re famished for it, dehydrated without it. They *crave* God’s power and goodness within them. This is wanting God, and crying inside for a way to get closer to Him.

The psalmist described again his desire to get closer to God in Ps. 42:1-2, which says the following:

As the deer pants for streams of water, so my soul pants for you, O God. My soul thirsts for God, for the living God. When can I go and meet with God?

He doesn’t want to wait for heaven to meet with God. He wants it NOW! The survival instincts of a thirsty deer drive it to a compelling search for water...his life revolves around it. The believer who wants to be close to God, to drink the waters of His divine nature, will search for this encounter tirelessly. Nothing else will be more important.

**Drawing Near to God.** We draw near to God when we pray according to His truth. We see this in Ps. 145:18, which says, “The Lord is near to all who call on him, to all who call on him in truth.” We will get into this in more detail, shortly, but basically what this tells us is that a prayer based on Scripture will line up with God’s will, and anytime we are praying according to His will (because all conditions are met), *we are close to God*. His Word teaches us the truths that enable us to meet all necessary conditions for our prayers to be heard, which allows us to get close.

In previous studies, we have explored the temple within us. We discussed our access to the temple as a way of understanding how we get closer to God. We will conduct here a quick recap of these studies. For a more thorough study on the topic of the temple inside of us and our access to the Most Holy Place, please see the earlier study we did on *Maturity*. Look for the chapter titled, “God Within Us”, which is the second chapter in the book.

1 Cor. 3:16 tells us, “Don’t you know that you yourselves are God’s temple and that God’s Spirit lives in you?” God lives in a temple that has been constructed inside of us. At the heart of that temple is the Most Holy Place, a place that, according to Heb. 10:19, we can feel confident about entering, because of the sacrificial blood of Jesus Christ. But there are conditions for our going into this Most Holy Place where close contact with God takes place. Ps. 24:3b-4a asks and answers a pertinent question: “Who may stand in his holy place? He who has clean hands and a pure heart...” We can only stand in the Most Holy Place when we are “clean”, or have our *remembered* sins confessed.

By being clean, we qualify to enter the Most Holy Place. The process for this is described in Heb. 4:14-16, which tells us what we can do, and why, in the following:

Therefore, since we have a great high priest who has gone through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold firmly to the faith we profess. For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are—yet was without sin. Let us then approach the throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need.

Because Jesus Christ is our high priest, and because He was our sinless sacrifice, we are able to “approach” the throne of grace. The throne of grace is in the Most Holy Place, but we can’t go in without “clean hands”. And what is it that we are looking for when we “approach” the Most Holy Place? Mercy. Mercy is forgiveness. We get forgiveness by confessing our sins. Once we get forgiveness, then we qualify to experience the benefits of “grace to help us in our time of need.” In summary: With mercy, we enter the Most Holy Place, where we are *close to God*, and where we obtain His grace to meet our needs in a timely and appropriate way.

Heb. 10:22 cements this concept, saying, “Let us draw near to God with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled to cleanse us from a guilty conscience and having our bodies washed with pure water.” Basically, what this verse tells us is that we can get closer to God when we have confessed our sins and have built our faith up through study and training. We draw near to God because our consciences are clear, our hearts are pure, and our faith is strong. And that is where we find grace for living. As it says in Eph. 3:12, “In him and through faith in him we may approach God with freedom and confidence.” When we are “in Him”, we are in fellowship, and when we have faith, it is because we have learned about God in His Word. It is then that we may approach God with freedom and confidence.

The role of prayer is important in the process of drawing near to God. Prayer encapsulates all the techniques we have learned: confession, acknowledging God, expressing humility,

thanksgiving, intercession, supplication and forgiving others. When we satisfy these, we will be close to God.

**Praying When We Are Close to God.** Many good things come from prayers that are offered when we are close to God. When we are close to Him, prayer is both a means and a result. As a means, prayer gets us closer; as a result, the quality of our prayers improves as closeness occurs. In the following, we want to look at some of the good things that come with or from prayers that have been given from a position of closeness to God:

- Prayer expresses holiness and gets us closer to God. To describe this we will quote here a paragraph from *Maturity*, located in the last chapter, “Holiness”.

Prayer expresses holiness. Prayer is the way we breathe toward God, our avenue of expression toward Him. We adore Him through prayer, as we appeal to His grace to provide us with everything we need, to be everything He expects. Prayer is how we connect with God from our direction...our way of presenting our humanity to Him, the One who makes our finite selves holy and suitable for functioning as a member of His family. Prayer is always available, and is a rich relief and comfort to believers in a strange and hostile world. Prayer lifts us up toward God, and honors Him. Of all the ways we have learned to get closer to God, prayer is the most pervasive. Prayer is supposed to be with us and in us always, because it is our link with God.

- Prayer is an expression of love, fellowship, and communion, as well as faith and fear. This is a time of warmth and mutual attention, a time of rest and peace, and a time of sincere gratitude for being allowed to draw near to the Creator.
- Prayer shows and grows love. 2 Cor. 9:14 says, “And in their prayers for you their hearts will go out to you, because of the surpassing grace God has given you.”
- Prayer acknowledges God. If we are not right with God, and pray only as a matter of duty, or to satisfy a requirement to curry God’s favor, the outcome of our prayers will disappoint us. But if we are in fellowship and growing in Christ and in His Word—in short, when we are *close to Him*—we will see prayer as a time of “relationship”, a time to cast our cares on Him, and a time of communion.
- Prayers will happen automatically when God-consciousness is present. Again we offer a quote from *Maturity*, found in the chapter, “Products of Maturity”, where we see this: “Prayer is a natural response for us after we acknowledge God and are conscious of Him. When we focus on God, prayer will come.”
- Prayers are made effective by the indwelling Christ and his Word. Remember that the indwelling Christ can be “at home” in us when He controls us, or when we are in fellowship with Him. When Christ is directing us, and when we are operating according to His Word, then we will get what we ask for, because we are close to



Him. The source for this is John 15:7, which says, “If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be given you.”

The prayers that come when we are close to God please God and satisfy our place and purpose. It is a precious privilege to get close to God in the Most Holy Place, and to pray to Him there. How can we not be humble in such a special place? How can we not pour out our thanks for the grace that allows us to be near our God?

## The Prayer of Faith

**Prayer and Faith Are Connected.** Anyone who has ever been to Sunday School or attended church at all, has heard that the power of prayer is influenced by the degree of faith. This is true, as we shall see...but *much truer* than we realized. We will see the influence of faith on our prayers. We also want to make sure we understand how our faith is nurtured and fed. Finally, we want to explore the correlation between strong faith and surrender to God's will in prayer. These concepts are interwoven throughout this study on the "prayer of faith".

We have learned that faith grows, and prayers get more meaningful, when we understand God better. When we know Him better, we have a better insight into what He wants. As we study His Word and grow, we have a better sense of what pleases Him, so that our prayers can adjust themselves over time until they are in perfect alignment with His will.

If you want a stronger prayer life, you must have a greater awareness of what God wants and how He works. Then you will *ask for* the thing He already wants to give you, and you will know that it is exactly what is needed...and it is *perfect*. Such a view does not come automatically. It comes as a result of understanding Scripture and building faith.

But the work has just begun. As a born-again believer, you can't just *decide* to have strong faith in your Christian life. Strength in faith comes in a particular way. You can *believe* as long as you are in fellowship, even with a weaker faith, but that trust will immediately disappear when sin comes on the scene...and it will. The assertion of power by sinful natures not only destroys fellowship, but it also dissipates faith. If you have a strong scriptural foundation, you will recover quickly, and your faith will be strong again. But if you are at a point of weak faith, walking in the Spirit is harder to maintain. It is one thing to simply *confess and trust*; it is another to *confess and pray and study and trust*. The latter has lasting power, because faith is increasing in strength and effect. The former (confess and trust only) is ameliorative, but has no staying power. It is step one on a long journey to maturity. The size of one's faith depends on maturity, and a mature Christian walks as Christ did, with complete dependency on the Father.

We want to look more closely at the place of faith in our prayer life. To strengthen faith in order to strengthen prayer is crucial, because prayer is our life-line, the avenue for our connection with God. Prayer is the road; faith is the gate. We express our trust in Him and acknowledge His greatness alongside our insufficiency...through prayer. It is by God's power, and not the power of the flesh, that we live for and by God. God's power and grace flow when we find the wisdom and willingness to submit to Him.

**Super-Prayer.** Prayers can be nil, mediocre, strong, or super-strong. Super-strong prayer comes from super-strong faith, say, the size of a mustard seed. Under God's microscope, minuscule faith becomes gigantic, so a "little faith" can be strong...as long as it is not "too little". We see faith that is "too little" in Matt. 17:19-21, which tells about Jesus forcing a demon out of

a boy, after his disciples were unable to. They asked him why they could not do it and this is what He told them:

Because you have so little faith. I tell you the truth, if you have faith as small as a mustard seed, you can say to this mountain, “Move from here to there” and it will move. Nothing will be impossible for you. (Matt. 17:20-21)

The issue is clear: Get more faith and your prayers will get greater results. When your faith is strong enough, super-prayer will bring super outcomes. When your faith is weak, or “too little”, nothing will come of your prayers.

Is. 30:15 reminds us in the following how strong faith operates: “In repentance and rest is your salvation, in quietness and trust is your strength....” Deliverance comes through confession and faith-rest, providing a stable faith that is vibrant and strong. We are reminded of an earlier study on walking in the Spirit, where we said that confession restores fellowship, while faith maintains it. We see this here, even though it worked in Isaiah’s day with only an occasional and purposeful filling of the Spirit. Nonetheless, his faith was strengthened as a result of confession and faith-rest. Faith-rest is belief in God’s promises through all kinds of experiential training designed by God. The faith that grew from repentance and faith-rest was the larger faith that characterized his maturity.

In the Age of Grace, the outcome is similar, but the role of the Holy Spirit with believers has changed. He now indwells all believers, and controls them when they are in fellowship with Him. Fellowship is the result of honest confession, which cuts off the sinful nature and puts the Holy Spirit back in control. Faith then prompts surrender to the Spirit as we walk, which keeps the Spirit’s power operating in our hearts and lives. Strong faith sustains a strong walk in the power of God. And with strong faith comes strong prayer.

The Prayer of Faith. We have quoted James 1:5 in previous studies, citing the opportunity God gives us to ask for wisdom. And we have discussed the place of *believing* in order for us to get wisdom (see verse 6). Believing is the key component in receiving, and we want to investigate how to make sure we believe...to receive. Verses 6-8 says the following:

But when he asks, he must believe and not doubt, because he who doubts is like a wave of the sea, blown and tossed by the wind. That man should not think he will receive anything from the Lord; he is a double-minded man, unstable in all he does.

When you don’t believe, what will you get? Zip! Praying without believing yields nothing. We should start praying from day one of our new faith in Christ, but—also from day one—we have to begin tending the garden of our faith, to make sure it grows and bears fruit.

Faith is a singular condition, but it encapsulates numerous other qualities and conditions that determine whether it is strong or weak. Strong faith means we are ready to pray. All conditions for praying have been met, and we will be praying the “prayer of faith”. The key advantage of the prayer of faith is that it matches God’s will. The prayer of faith will be answered in the

affirmative, not because God is a genie, but because the mature believer's prayer will be offered in alignment with God's plan and purpose. The "super-prayer" is the "prayer of faith".

**James and the Prayer of Faith.** James 5:14-16 is a doctrine-rich passage that gives a framework for our understanding of the prayer of faith. Here is what this passage says:

Is any one of you sick? He should call the elders of the church to pray over him and anoint him with oil in the name of the Lord. And the prayer offered in faith will make the sick person well; the Lord will raise him up. If he has sinned, he will be forgiven. Therefore confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous man is powerful and effective.

We want to review the basic structure of this passage, while we draw some key points from it. Here is what we see in these scriptures:

- If someone is sick, he should call the elders (leaders) together.
- These leaders should pray for the sick person.
- These same leaders should anoint the sick person with oil in the power of the Lord.
- The "prayer offered in faith" will deliver the sick person from illness. But what is the "prayer offered in faith", or the "prayer of faith" (as it is translated in the NET Bible)? What are the critical components of this prayer related to faith? Here is what we suggest:
  - Confession—faith in God's forgiveness.
  - Surrender—faith in God's power.
  - Submission—faith in God's wisdom.
- The assumption is that these elders are in fellowship and have achieved a degree of maturity. However, this may not be true of the sick person. If not, we see next what must happen for him to make things right.
- If the believer who is ill has committed sins, they will be forgiven if the prayer that is prayed for him (and by him) is the prayer of faith. The prayer of faith, remember, includes confession, as well as surrender and submission. Once again, the conditions for prayer must be met for it to be effective.
- The "forgiveness of sins" is the result of the prayer of faith, because the prayer of faith begins with confession. NOTE: Sins are not automatically forgiven, just because you recover from an illness. You must confess your sins for forgiveness.
- When sins are forgiven, fellowship with God is restored. But there is another dynamic at work that we need to remember, which is this: When our sins are forgiven, we will have fellowship with other believers who are also in fellowship. (1

John 1:7) However, if the sins of the sick person included offending a fellow believer or committing an act against someone, not only must that sin be confessed to God, but every effort must be made to restore the relationship with the person that has been offended or harmed. (See a discussion of Matt. 5:23-26, in a study titled, “Relationships Impact Prayer”, presented earlier in this series.)

NOTE: Confession of our sins to each other is not a call for sharing our sins with other believers. This is only a call for us to admit it when we have offended or harmed another believer. Go to that believer and admit the transgression to him.

Once fellowship is restored with God, we can pray the prayer of faith, so that healing will not be hampered by the presence of sin.

The results of the prayer of faith are significant, or—as the passage says—“The prayer of a righteous man is powerful and effective”.

Recapitulation: Healing takes place, subject to God’s will and plan, when righteousness exists on the part of the person (or people) praying. This assumes that all sins have been confessed to God. When righteousness prevails in the person (or people) offering the prayer, the sickness will be healed, IF that is God’s will. If the sickness was the result of divine discipline, the sickness will likely be removed when confession takes place. If the sickness is a method that God is using to get the believer in question to return to, or intensify, his Bible study, then that condition will have to be met before healing can take place. And—finally—if the sickness is part of God’s training program for the believer who may be in fellowship and studying faithfully, then the sickness may stay, to promote the believer’s growth through testing...and to bring glory to God.

All conditions of life are controlled by God. He can manipulate circumstances *as* He pleases, *when* He pleases. Our job is to grow to trust in His perfect wisdom, and to pray for grace to bear whatever conditions He brings to us. Paul prayed a prayer of faith to have a certain “thorn in the flesh” removed, but God chose not to remove it, as a way to keep Paul humble, because of all the heady revelations he was being given. God did not take it away, but He comforted Paul, saying, “My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness” (2 Cor. 12:9). If God does not remove an illness or uncomfortable circumstance in our lives, we can remember that his grace is sufficient for us, and we can thank Him for it.

**A Prayer of Faith.** Asa, king of Judah, prayed for help in battle, saying the following:

Lord, there is no one like you to help the powerless against the mighty [enemy]. Help us, O Lord our God, for we rely on you, and in your name we have come against this vast army. O Lord, you are our God; do not let man prevail against you.” (2 Chron. 14:11)

Asa prayed to his unique and living God, and stood before the battle in God’s name...stood in the power of God, a power he accessed by faith. He could say confidently, “We rely on you.” Verse 15 (2 Chron. 14) tells what God did, saying, “The Lord struck down the Cushites before Asa and Judah. The Cushites fled.” In the next chapter (chapter 15), we see the following in

verse 17b: “Asa’s heart was fully committed to the Lord all his life.” This is what we want said of us, that we were fully committed to the Lord all of our lives. There is no greater tribute. When we are fully committed, we will be able to pray the prayer of faith, as Asa did.

**Faith Precedes Prayer.** Heb. 11:5-6 gives us an example of an Old Testament believer whose faith was very strong, and shows us again the place of faith in our prayer lives today. This passage says the following:

By faith Enoch was taken from this life, so that he did not experience death; he could not be found, because God had taken him away. For before he was taken, he was commended as one who pleased God. And without faith it is impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to him must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who earnestly seek him.

Enoch avoided the experience of death because his faith was strong. God saw his extraordinary faith and gave him a comfortable ride to heaven, reminiscent of our anticipated rapture. Enoch had a mature faith that “pleased God”. Without mature faith, we cannot please God. When we “come to Him” we must come under the flag of faith. We must believe in Him (that He exists) and in what He does...and can do (i.e., rewards those who earnestly seek Him). Coming to God is approaching the throne of grace, where we get forgiveness and find grace to help us. It is “being clean” so we can enter the Most Holy Place. It is standing before God, Who is looking at us, and listening to us, because we are recognizing Who He is.

But without faith, there is no way to please Him. Our prayers are cut off and we are without resources to live in His holiness and righteousness. We can only wander, perhaps for forty years, wondering if we will ever get home. Without faith, the gate is closed, and we are stuck. To open the lines, we must pray the prayer of faith, beginning with confession, advancing to surrender, and ending in submission. When this prayer is on our lips, the rest of the prayer, including intercession, supplication, thanksgiving, and so on, can proceed with meaning and power.

Contrast the faith of Enoch with the intermittent and weak faith of an immature believer, who—like a toddler—can only go searching for the parent. A weak believer can only search for God, which He must do “earnestly” in order to find Him. Then he must take all the steps that lead to maturity...only then can he pray the prayer of faith. For a baby Christian to attempt to apply “believe and receive” without maturity is like an infant trying to participate in an Olympic race; he’s not ready! A new believer must start by studying God’s Word, believing what he learns, and asking for faith and wisdom. Eventually, he will see his faith start to build. Along the way, his faith will get strong, and he will learn to pray the prayer of faith.

**Believe and Receive.** Matt. 21:22 says, “If you believe, you will receive whatever you ask for in prayer.” NOTE: This promise is for mature believers...those who have developed strong faith. Immature believers cannot believe enough to make this work, though they subject themselves to many wishes, chants, trances, incantations, meditations, and even self-hypnosis. No believer can build faith through human, worldly, or fleshly systems or means. Faith can only

be built God's way...by studying, and by enduring His training. When Jesus said "believe", He was talking about the faith of mature believers. They are the only ones who can have this kind of faith and pray the prayer that goes with it.

The alternative to faith that is directed toward God is faith in oneself, or in the world, or in anyone in the world. Faith in self is disastrous, but it is almost irresistible, because of our abiding belief that we are something, when we are really nothing. Jer. 17:5-6 makes this very clear in the following:

This is what the Lord says: Cursed is the one who trusts in man, who depends on flesh for his strength and whose heart turns away from the Lord. He will be like a bush in the wastelands; he will not see prosperity when it comes. He will dwell in the parched places of the desert, in a salt land where no one lives.

Verse 7 gives us a better choice, saying, "Blessed is the man who trusts in the Lord, whose confidence is in him." But trusting in God is not a built-in response. It is the result of many choices along the way to believe God's Word, to confess, to pray, and to acknowledge God. When we trust God, we will be "like a tree planted by the water....It has no worries in a year of drought and never fails to bear fruit." (v. 8)

When we believe, or have faith that is built on truth and training, we will know that nothing is too hard for the Lord. In Jer. 32:27, Jeremiah affirmed this divine perspective of God's trustworthiness, quoting God's message to him, "I am the Lord, the God of all mankind. Is anything too hard for me?" We trust God because He can be trusted. And nothing is impossible for Him

**Final Example of a Prayer of Faith.** In the following, J. Hampton Keathley, III, gives us an example of a prayer prayed in faith, and its results:

In the final decades of the life of George McCluskey he became extremely burdened for his children and each day spent the hour from 11 to 12 praying for them. He prayed not only for them, but also for his grandchildren and great grandchildren, as yet unborn. He asked that they would come to the true God through His Son, and dedicate their lives to His service. Of the following four generations, every child has either become a minister or married a minister, with one exception. That exception is a name familiar to most of us today, Dr. James Dobson. Few will ever hear of George McCluskey, but because of him lives of future generations were undeniably blessed. (Endnote 6)

## **Praying According to God's Will**

**Thy Will Be Done.** In Matt. 6:10, Jesus committed His will to His Father, as He did continually as long as He was alive in the flesh. He instructed His disciples to do the same thing, giving them the model phrase, "Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven." These words hold the essence of the view-point that we should hold toward God and toward His involvement in our lives. When we commit our will to His, we will have reached the pinnacle of maturity, because we are saying to God, "I know that your plan is perfect, that your power is absolute, and that all outcomes belong to you." We are not giving God permission to be Himself; we are interjecting ourselves into His heavenly picture by submitting ourselves to Him. When we give it all to Him, we demonstrate the kind of faith that enables us to do incredible things by His power. Then we can pray the prayer of faith, and have the "full assurance of faith" and the "fullness of God" that Scripture describes.

Everything we have studied and are asked to do is enfolded within the concept of surrender. Confession, humility, fear, trust, occupation with Christ, God-consciousness, acknowledgement, and so on...all of these boil down to one thing: surrender. We surrender to allow God to conquer our minds and bodies. We become His vessels, His tools, His temple. We surrender by relinquishing our wills to him, and we relinquish because we trust, and we trust because we know God, and we know God because we have seen Him in His Word, and we see the truth in His Word because we believe what He says, and we learn what He says because His Holy Spirit teaches us, and the Holy Spirit teaches us because we are cleansed, so He can control us and instruct a willing pupil. It's all about surrender.

James 4:15-16 tells us that anything we do, say, or plan needs to be screened against God's will. If we make plans without an attitude of surrender to God's will, we are on our own, and we are playing games with our own reality. God's will is more real than our plans. This passage from James (4:15-16) gives us the correct view on this, saying, "Instead, you ought to say, 'If it is the Lord's will, we will live and do this or that'. As it is, you boast and brag. All such boasting is evil." Pride and self-dependency drive us to think and analyze and plan, believing that we are competent to solve our problems. But what this verse indicates is that all our scheming means nothing, if it does not match God's will. God must be at the center of all our plans. It is what *He* wants that counts.

**Searching for God's Will.** The unfolding of God's will is a process that has to be done in His way and in His time. The details of it will be revealed to believers who are prepared to know it...i.e., *mature Christians*. We must take whatever time it takes to learn about Him, so we can know what He wants. The first step is to *seek Him*. 1 Chron. 16:11 calls for us to do this: "Look for the Lord and his strength; seek his face always." Ps. 34:4-9 mandates this, as well, as we see in the following:

I sought the Lord, and he answered me; he delivered me from all my fears. Those who look to him are radiant; their faces are never covered with shame. This poor man called,



and the Lord heard him; he saved him out of all his troubles. The angel of the Lord encamps around those who fear him, and he delivers them. Taste and see that the Lord is good; blessed is the man who takes refuge in him. Fear the Lord, you his saints, for those who fear him lack nothing.

All the techniques we have examined lead to God. In this passage, we are *seeking* for God. We *seek* in order to *know* in order to *trust* in order to *surrender*. These are mile markers on the road to maturity. When we get to the place of “surrender”, we will “lack nothing”. This is the process for knowing and surrendering to God’s will. When we know His will, and surrender to it, we will want what He wants, and our prayers will be aligned to match His will.

In Matt. 6:33, we see the same command. We are instructed what we should do FIRST. This verse says, “But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.” Spiritual concerns come first. Spiritual needs are the most important...before physical or psychological or any other kinds of needs. By seeking spiritual things first, the other things will be supplied. But first things first. Here’s the beginning of knowing God’s will: knowing what His priorities are. And we see clearly in this verse that He is concerned with *spiritual* conditions and needs *first*. So if we are to seek His will in our lives, and pray according to His will, we must give priority to spiritual matters and affairs as He does. Seek His *kingdom* (the ultimate expression of His will) and His *righteousness*...not our passions or our own self-expression. God is the One we seek, as we saw in Ps. 34:4 above, “I sought the Lord.”

Luke 11:9-10 also tells us to search. This passage says the following:

So I say to you: Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives; he who seeks finds; and to him who knocks, the door will be opened.

Most of the time when we read this verse, we skip the “asking” part in verse 9 and get onto the “receiving” part in verse 10. We want a short cut...the provision without the proviso...the pay without the work. (Work, here, as you know quite well, is the work of faith.) The idea we want to understand is that we define our own values by declaring what we are seeking. If we value God, we will seek Him. If other things are more important, our attention will be drawn away from God. In Luke 11:9-10 above, we see where our priorities need to be placed. We are to do the following:

Ask—keep asking to have our needs met

Seek—search for God’s will

Knock—ask God and wait, and repeat, and repeat

So what will happen when we truly seek God’s will? It is as though all *asking* and *seeking* is to be concentrated on God’s will, not on our needs, or even on the needs of others. Searching for God’s will, then, is our *main* reason for praying. We are looking to establish close contact with Him through maturity, so we can comprehend His will, and find the grace and power to fulfill it. What a mouthful we just said. By seeking God’s will first, we fulfill our purpose in prayer,

and we will see our prayers metamorphose into powerful spiritual encounters with God. As our “asking” and “seeking” and “knocking” leads us to *understand* His will more completely, then these same processes become in themselves *tools for mining the riches* of God’s sovereign will and grace. And the main vein for these riches is found in His Word.

**Provisions That Come with God’s Will.** We have seen a hint of it in the verses we just saw, but we want to draw it out now and see what it means to us. “It” is God’s care. We have established that His first concern is for our *spiritual* well-being, but we have seen also that there is a provision promised for our daily needs *in this world*, when our priorities match His. We see this in the passages above, but also in others. Matt. 6:8 tells us that God already knows what we need. Our job is to find out *what He knows* so we can see *what we need*. Or, we can wander around in the endless desert of our own wants and wishes. Even if we see our wants and wishes as being somehow “connected” with God, *He is the one Who determines what is important for us and He knows what we really need!*

God’s values are paramount. Ps 34:10 tells us this: “The lions may grow weak and hungry, but those who seek the Lord lack no good thing.” The “good thing” is determined by God’s values, and our job is to see and adopt His view of “good”. Good is *defined* by Him. And we can trust Him that His good is good. Ps. 84:11 repeats this idea, saying, “For the Lord God is a sun and shield; the Lord bestows favor and honor; no good thing does he withhold from those whose walk is blameless.” The mature believer, walking in the Spirit, will receive these “good things”. That is why Phil. 4:19 says, “And my God will meet all your needs according to his glorious riches in Christ Jesus.” The needs he meets are those satisfied by Christ’s riches. Silver and gold? No. Worth much more than that.

Rom. 8:32 says, “He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all—how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things?” He will graciously give us *all things*. Spiritual things? Yes. Other things? Yes. All things...and He knows what we need. Just keep in mind that spiritual needs are the most important. When those are met and we are walking in His strength, the other needs will be met, almost miraculously...okay, miraculously!

It just never seems to end. Assurances of God’s provision seem to be everywhere in His Word. Ps. 107:8-9 conveys this, saying, “Let them give thanks to the Lord for his unfailing love and his wonderful deeds for men, for he satisfies the thirsty and fills the hungry with good things.” Good things again, God’s good things, that will satisfy thirst and hunger in every sense of the Word.

**Asking According to God’s Will.** 1 Jn. 5:14-15 tells us what happens when we approach God in the right way. This passage says the following:

This is the confidence we have in approaching God: that if we ask anything according to his will, he hears us. And if we know that he hears us—whatever we ask—we know that we have what we asked of him.

Once again, our tendency is to jump to the provision and ignore the proviso. The stated condition is sometimes overlooked, and that is this: “ask anything according to his will.” There

are conditions for getting what we ask for. They must match His will. So why don't we just pray, "Okay, Father, I pray that your will be done", and stop? This prayer isn't bad, but God wants us to cast our care on Him...and He wants us to *hear ourselves asking* for things from Him, so we can see where we need to improve. To see where our prayers do not match His will, we must hear them ourselves as we pray them. As we master the doctrines in His Word, we will see the errors in our prayers, and *correct* them. By the time we reach maturity, we will know the will of God, will know what to ask for, and can be sure that we will get what we ask, because what we pray for is exactly what God wants to give.

The will of God will be known through maturity ONLY. We cannot know God's will by guessing or wishing. We know God's will by getting closer to Him. And things that come from God in *one way* cannot be obtained in *another way*. One believer in Samaria found this out when he tried to buy the apostolic gift of laying on of hands to impart the Holy Spirit. Acts 8:18-23 describes this situation. He offered money for the gift and Peter rebuked him, saying, "You have no part or share in this ministry, because your heart is not right before God. Repent of this wickedness and pray to the Lord" (verses 21-22a). This misguided believer wanted the power of God without paying the price, or, as it were, by paying the wrong price. He wanted the infusion of a gift through purchasing power, and not by the will of God. Provision without proviso. The gift was in *his* will, but not in God's. Better not get too crafty in trying to generate ways to serve God. Fleshly attempts at spiritual service will only get you in trouble. Much better to do it God's way.

Another instance of *provision vs. proviso* is seen in Ps. 37:4, which says, "Delight yourself in the Lord and he will give you the desires of your heart." When we delight ourselves in God, we check off all the items on the "Checklist for Maturity", so that the desires of our heart match His will, and we pray accordingly...and we get what we pray for. Proviso: delight in the Lord; provision: the desires of the heart. Delight precedes getting the desires. We get our desires only when they are wrapped up in our delight in the Lord.

Look at Luke 18:38-41, which takes this still further. Jesus healed a blind man on the road to Jericho. In verse 41, Jesus had asked the man, "What do you want me to do for you?" He had answered, "Lord, I want to see." Jesus healed him and that was that. God was glorified and Jesus' ministry was validated. But there is a meaning in this passage not showing on the surface. Look back at verses 38-39. This man prayed for mercy in both these verses. No healing took place at that time, and resistance was all around. He had prayed...twice...and nothing had happened. Notice this, however: These were not the prayers Jesus was looking for. Jesus finally asked him to pray the right prayer, saying, "What do you want...?" And he finally prayed it, "I want to see." The key point here is that we will not pray the right prayer until we are *closer to God*, and then we will know what to pray.

Prayers have to be honed and polished. As we mature, and know God's Word, and understand His will for us, our prayers will be shaped to correspond with His plan and purpose. Until then, our prayers may miss the mark. Sometimes, delays in answers to our prayers may be the result of our not yet praying the right prayer. The delay may itself be an indication of God's

will...that he does not want to do what we are asking. As we pray and repeatedly return to His Word, our prayers will finally be the right ones...the ones He wants us to pray...the ones He wants to honor with an affirmative answer.

**Examples of Prayers Offered According to God's Will.** We will see here two examples of prayers that were given with an understanding of God's will. The following examples show the effectiveness of the prayers of a mature believer:

- 1 Ki. 8:25-26 tells us about Solomon praying that God would keep His promise to keep a king on the throne of Israel. Solomon knew this was God's will, because God had promised it. Solomon knew his prayer would be approved. God answered with a "yes", as all those concerned knew He would, and the prayer was honored.
- In 2 Ki. 19:14-37, we are told of God's response to a prayer based on His will. King Hezekiah had received threatening propaganda from an enemy that Hezekiah's "god" would not be sufficient to prevent the destruction of Judah. Hezekiah prayed intently in the temple that God would protect Judah from pagan attackers. Verse 19 shows this: "Now, O Lord our God, deliver us from his hand, so that all kingdoms on earth may know that you alone, O Lord, are God." This prayer includes acknowledgement of God's sovereignty. Hezekiah also knew God's will. How do we know? Because of God's answer, which confirmed that His will matched Hezekiah's prayer. Verse 25 says, "Have you not heard? Long ago I [God] ordained it. In days of old I planned it; now I have brought it to pass." God told Hezekiah, "He [king of Assyria] will not enter this city or shoot an arrow here." That night, 185,000 of the enemy were killed while they slept in their beds. You see, when a prayer matches God's will, the results can be astounding.

**Does God's Will Change Because of Prayer?** Remember that we are dealing with God. When things happen, or when we ask for changes or outcomes in our lives, it is not as though we suddenly think of something He hasn't thought of and call it to His attention. He never says, "Oh, yes, I didn't think of that." Or, "Now, that's a surprise!" He knows what will happen before it happens, and what is more, *He plans it that way*. Keep in mind that He has also given us free choice, so He has *already* planned around what He knows we will choose, do, think, or pray...ever. So will our prayers *really* change God's mind? No. Our understanding of His plan, or our observation of His plan unfolding, may represent a change from our perspective, but God's "mind" did not actually change. In the swirl of eternal events and God's infinite Being, He has decided on the sequence, content, and outcome of everything that happens throughout time and eternity.

Some events in the Bible make it seem that God changes His feelings or thoughts due to the attitude or conduct of people. His *planning* in eternity past was influenced by His future view of our choices, but what we see from God's engagement in our lives today is not a real-time decision-making process, but a series of manifestations of His plan. That plan was in place long

before time and space came into being. His actions now are in the execution of His plan. We may see these as changes in people, in directions, or in earthly or worldly conditions, but these were planned long ago. We do not serve a fickle and time-bound deity; we worship the ultimate Creator and Planner of all that has been, or is, or will ever be...Who does not change.

Heb. 13:8 says, "Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever." Ps. 102:27 adds, "But you remain the same, and your years will never end." He is the only and ultimate God. He is in control of everything, and His eternal plan is underway.

In Ex. 32:9-10 we see a situation in which God seemed to have changed His mind. Actually, what happened is that God foreknew *choices and conditions* that would exist at the time that a particular prayer was to be prayed in this situation, and planned for conditions to change in response to it. Here is what we see in this passage:

"I have seen these people," the Lord said to Moses, "and they are a stiff-necked people. Now leave me alone so that my anger may burn against them and that I may destroy them..." But Moses sought the favor of the Lord his God. "O Lord," he said, "why should your anger burn against your people, whom you brought out of Egypt with great power and a mighty hand...? Turn from you fierce anger; relent and do not bring disaster on your people..." Then the Lord relented and did not bring on his people the disaster he had threatened.

It *seems* that God was telling Moses to get out of His way, because He was angry and wanted to get at the stiff-necked Israelites. Moses' prayer seemed, on the surface, to have calmed God down, influencing Him not to give them a spanking. But notice the "change" that actually took place. The change was not in God's mind, or in His plan, but in the *statement of threat* that He had issued to get the Israelites turned around. He withdrew the threat, and the "disaster" did not take place. He did not change His mind...it was in His plan all along to issue the threat, and then later to remove it.

Later, of course, when Moses went down the mountain and discovered the awful things Aaron and the people were doing, God responded with other forms of discipline. But our point here is that God does not change His mind. His will is constant throughout eternity. He simply plays out His plan. The "disaster" he had threatened did not take place, because He had planned around Moses' enormous faith and scheduled an event for honoring that faith by planning a relinquishment of the announced "disaster". We are always "at choice", but events and outcomes always reflect God's plan; they are NOT the result of an ongoing interactive process between God and people that can culminate in multiple outcomes or possibilities. He anticipated each choice in eternity past, and scheduled each event on that basis. Still, and this is where we LIVE...we must CHOOSE!

**Why Should We Pray?** So why pray? Because *praying makes us a part of God's plan* in a way that enables us to access His power to fulfill His purposes. Prayer conveys submission to His will and His plan, and honors Him as the Planner, and the Overseer of the Plan. God plans to honor our faith and to have the events of our lives constantly evolve and unfold for our good and His glory.

That's the plan we must follow. Otherwise, we will be operating outside the plan, and we will not play any good part in what is happening. Better get with the plan.

We read in James 4:2 the following: "You do not have because you do not ask." We should remember that "asking" has conditions, such as praying in the Spirit, praying with understanding, and praying in faith. "Not asking" in this verse can either be "not praying"...or just asking *improperly*, which has the same effect as not asking. In other words, when you don't get what you think you need, you may be not be asking at all; or you may be asking in a wrong way, or in a wrong condition, or for the wrong thing. And you get nothing. If you ask properly, in fellowship, with advancing maturity, and according to His will, you will get what you ask for, not because God did not know you needed what you asked for before you asked Him, but because He *always knew you needed it, and He always knew you would have the credentials to pray in faith on that occasion and at that time...*and He always planned to give what you asked for. Ask...*really* ask...with faith and in submission...and you will receive. You *receive* or *don't receive* based on God's eternal plan, which is based on His immutable character. *You*, in particular, receive or don't receive because you are in, or out of, the plan. If you are "in the plan", your prayers will be right, and you will get what you ask for.

**Conclusion.** Praying according to God's will is a condition for having our prayers answered. When we pray in submission to Him, we are relinquishing the outcome of our lives, and the events in them, to Him. We are acknowledging that the best thing that can *be* or *become* in our lives is the thing or outcome that He wants. Everything else is illusory and insubstantial. We must want what He wants. He wants us to want what He wants. All of our outlooks and prospects will be determined and valued by the degree to which our will corresponds with His. This is why we study. This is why we acknowledge and pray. We want His will to overlay ours, so that we can surrender every part of our hearts and minds and bodies to Him. When we can do that, we will be standing before Him in the Most Holy Place, and look up to see our Father smiling down at us.

## Waiting in Faith

**Praying and Waiting...and Standing Still.** Part of prayer is waiting. We ask and we seek and we knock...and then we wait. Waiting-time is not a time of impatience; it is a time of growth, when we believe in things we do not see. God is working to bring about His will in the world and in our lives, and if our posture is one of faith, we will benefit greatly from what He is doing. But the benefit may not be a Mercedes Benz. This is not the kind of benefit that God most wants to give. He wants to provide us with everything we need to *accomplish His will*, and to *complete our mission* for Him. If we pursue other things, things that God does not want us to have, we will miss what He offers and our walk will slow to a crawl.

Waiting that is attached to faith is waiting that perceives life as God sees it, and maintains aspirations and hopes that match God's view-point, will, and plan. When we wait in faith, we know that God will supply our needs by the perfect standard of His plan, and that our waiting is actually surrendering, not only to the plan, but to God's timing in the plan. Is. 40:31 says, "But those who wait for the Lord's help [supplies for their needs] find renewed strength; they rise up as if they had eagles' wings, they run without growing weary, they walk without getting tired." (NET Bible) How interesting it is that we actually gain strength while we are waiting. It's like getting the benefit of a two-hour workout while we are seated, waiting on a bus. By waiting, we get stronger. Why? Because our faith is tested while we wait, and that makes our faith grow. Waiting is essential as the plan is unfolding in God's time, but the plan probably includes having us wait simply because it helps us build our faith.

One of the first things we do while we wait is to "stand still". Ps. 46:10a says, "Be still and know that I am God." While we are still, we are in the process of "knowing" that God is God, and that we are nothing without Him. Sometimes we see things happening while we stand still, and at other times we see nothing; but at all times, we trust that God is at work. Many times, standing still is an expression of faith and God-dependency, allowing God time to work in His own way, and—of course—His way is always best. Ex. 14:13-14 frames this for us very well, as follows:

Moses answered the people, "Do not be afraid. Stand firm and you will see the deliverance the Lord will bring you today. The Egyptians you see today you will never see again. The Lord will fight for you; you need only to be still."

While we wait, and while we are still, we can continue our praying without ceasing, our routines of confession and study, and our holding on to the faith that we have built, knowing that if we continue to grow, faith will get even stronger. As we are growing, we are doing the things Satan hates the most...submitting, surrendering, and trusting, as we keep our eyes on God. These weaken the devil, and make us stronger to resist him, so we can walk with confidence as we walk by faith.

**Meditation.** While we are "waiting", or at any time we have the opportunity to get away for a moment...or a weekend...we should meditate on God and His Word. Meditation on the Word

is a time when we let God's truth soak in, reminiscent of a time when we luxuriate in a therapeutic bath.

Ps. 1:2 expresses the psalmist's view of meditation, saying, "But his delight is in the law of the Lord, and on his law he meditates day and night." Meditation on the Word is a form of God-consciousness, but in words that come from the Scripture. It is always calming, as well as strengthening. It is especially comforting to contemplate and repeat the promises from the Word during times of meditation.

Ps. 119:99 tells us that meditation on the Word can actually increase our understanding of the concepts and messages in it. This psalm says, "I have more insight than all my teachers, for I meditate on your statutes."

Meditation, or contemplation of God and Scripture in a quiet place (they do exist), is healing, relaxing, and re-invigorating. Heart rate, breathing patterns, muscle tension, and mental pressures can all be improved from such a practice. That's not why we do it, however, because our greatest concerns are spiritual. The primary gain to be derived from meditating on Scripture is that it provides a time of quiet feeding and "digesting" of the knowledge we get from the Word. Meditation helps us process knowledge into our soul. This is a time when knowledge becomes understanding, so that the precepts of the Word will strengthen us for application of God's techniques and principles. As we can see, meditation is good for us all the way around.

The idea of meditation as a helper in processing scriptures...so they can be applied...is described in Josh. 1:8, which says the following:

Do not let this Book of the Law depart from your mouth; meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do everything written in it. Then you will be prosperous and successful.

Meditate on it, so you can apply it. And when God's techniques and principles are applied in our daily lives, we will have His power, be in His plan, and find His grace, so that we can accomplish His mission. We will be prosperous and successful in achieving His *divine* purposes, but we can rest assured that all our physical, psychological, medical, and financial needs will also be met...in a way that matches His perfect will.

A natural aspect of meditation is prayer. When we are meditating on God, how can we not be praying...and praising and acknowledging and thanking Him? Prayer is a primary means to, and a consequence of, meditation. When we pray as part of meditation, we give undistracted acknowledgement to the greatness and goodness of God, Who is unfurling the plan which He formed within wrinkles of time and infinity in eternity past, and which He is now executing with perfection. Meditation and prayer keeps us in the flow of that plan.

God is in Control. God has complete power and absolute control. Sometimes we look at the world, our nation, the church, and even our own lives, and what we see is chaos. This seeming disarray is all part of the plan that God has built around humanity. Full protection and provision go to those who are in the middle of His plan...who are submitting to what He wants.



Ps. 33:10-18 gives a good statement of God's control of His creation, describing it this way:

The Lord foils the plans of the nations; he thwarts the purposes of the peoples. But the plans of the Lord stand firm forever [never changing], the purposes of his heart through all generations. Blessed is the nation whose God is the Lord, the people he chose for his inheritance. From heaven the Lord looks down and sees all mankind; from his dwelling place he watches all who live on earth—he who forms the hearts of all, who considers everything they do. No king is saved by the size of his army; no warrior escapes by his great strength. A horse is a vain hope for deliverance; despite all its great strength it cannot save. But the eyes of the Lord are on those who fear him, on those whose hope is in his unfailing love....

God made it; God controls it. He controls individuals and nations and the earth, touching lives and shifting kingdoms with the power of His fingertips. His plan is operating, and the operation is completely His. We come to Him, not as self-sufficient, self-justified, self-made entities, but as His creation, allowed to participate in His redemption through His Son, and to live in His plan through His Holy Spirit. Our primary job is to do what verses 20-21 suggest (still in Ps. 33): “We wait in hope for the Lord; he is our help and our shield. In him our hearts rejoice, for we trust in his holy name.” We wait in hope because we trust in His plan, which is one-hundred percent reliable.

A passage that corresponds with this is Ps. 37:4-7a, which says this:

Delight yourself in the Lord and he will give you the desires of your heart. Commit your way to the Lord; trust in him and he will do this: He will make your righteousness shine like the dawn, the justice of your cause like the noonday sun. Be still before the Lord and wait patiently for him....

We see it again here: Be still and wait. This is waiting in faith. And the benefit is that we will be productive, because God is in control, and because we are submitting to Him.

**Reverent Submission.** Heb. 5:7 tells of Jesus' submission to His Father, as follows:

During the days of Jesus' life on earth, he offered up prayers and petitions with loud cries and tears to the one who could save him from death, and he was heard because of his reverent submission.

Jesus Himself practiced reverent submission. That is submitting without question. When we believe God, embrace the truth of His Word, and surrender to the power we know He has, we will be submitting to His will and participating in His plan, just as Jesus did.

**Waiting and Trusting.** In 2 Chron. 20:12, we see Jehoshaphat praying for victory in battle, appealing to the Lord, “O our God, will you not judge them? For we have no power to face this vast army that is attacking us. We do not know what to do, but our eyes are upon you.” This is a perfect picture of God-consciousness and faith: “Our eyes are upon you.” Even when we do not know what to do—when our eyes are focused on Him and we are occupied with Him—He

delivers. Verse 15 demonstrates how God promises, and then provides, deliverance from all conditions that would prevent our participation in His plan. This verse says the following:

He said, "Listen, King Jehoshaphat and all who live in Judah and Jerusalem! This is what the Lord says to you: 'Do not be afraid or discouraged because of this vast army. For the battle is not yours, but God's.'"

God's plan. God's protection. God's provision. When we are in the middle of these, we cannot be discouraged...ever. We can stand before God and know that the battle belongs to Him. Verse 17 gives us even more certainty for this, saying the following:

You will not have to fight this battle. Take up your positions; stand firm [stand still] and see the deliverance the Lord will give you, O Judah and Jerusalem. Do not be afraid; do not be discouraged. Go out to face them tomorrow, and the Lord will be with you.

God will be with us, if we are with Him. If we draw near to Him, He will draw near to us. If we are in fellowship, studying, praying, and trusting, God will be a whisper away, and He will hear us and give us what we need.

**Waiting in Faith.** The Lord has planned to provide for and watch over us, and He is fighting our battles. We can wait, and we can trust...as we pray. We can be still and let Him be the God He is. Then we will fulfill Ps. 130:5, which says, "I wait for the Lord, my soul waits, and in his word I put my hope."

## **Worship**

**Learning About God Changes our Perspective.** Our bodies are in the world, and our minds function in worldly environments. Input from the world greatly outweighs input from the spiritual world, because the world engages our senses all the time. This makes us tend to believe the things we see, more than the things we don't see. This is why our minds must be transformed by renewal...or retraining. That is what Scripture does. It disintegrates worldly view-point and replaces it with divine view-point. It's no wonder so few ever find the pathway to serious study and faith and maturity. Even in churches and among Christians, worldly practices and "fleshy" pre-occupations dominate, and Bible study is too-often a Tuesday-night affair for selected groups.

If we settle into God's Word, however, and start to mature, and see our lives in context with God's plan, and begin to understand that God is more real than what our senses perceive, we will begin to understand our place, and God's pre-eminence, in the universe. The realization of the reality of God, and the offer He makes for us to be in touch with Him and participate in His plan, is awe-inspiring. We can only be thankful, and bend a knee to Him.

When we see Him in His Word, we will follow Eph. 5:20, which says, "...always giving thanks to God the Father for everything in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ." We thank Him because we acknowledge Him in His hugeness and greatness, an awareness that causes us to praise Him in our hearts. Verses 20-21 (still in Eph. 5), says we will "speak to one another with psalms, hymns and spiritual songs. Sing and make music in your heart to the Lord." Expressions of our reverence for God in collective settings through songs and music are standard parts of worship services everywhere, and lift our spirits and our voices as we praise God with joyful intonations.

**Praising God.** Because we see God, we will want to praise and honor Him in our daily lives. We do this in prayer and in our testimony concerning Him. Heb. 13:15 says, "Through Jesus, therefore, let us continually offer to God a sacrifice of praise—the fruit of lips that confess his name." We praise Him by giving thanks to Him, acknowledging Him, and praying to Him. This is done "through Jesus", our defender and guard, Who gives us access to the Father when we are "in Him", or in fellowship and controlled by His Spirit.

With fellowship and knowledge about God, we will move to the deepest level of connection with God, where we will praise Him and worship Him.

**Worship in Spirit and in Truth.** John 4:23-24 tells us how we should worship God, in the following:

Yet a time is coming and has now come when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for they are the kind of worshipers the Father seeks. God is spirit, and his worshipers must worship in spirit and in truth.

Worship, the highest form of God-consciousness and fear of the Lord, is to be done a certain way, and God is looking for worshipers that worship as He prescribes. This applies to both individual and collective worship. First of all, they must conduct worship “in spirit”, which means to be in fellowship...or filled with the Holy Spirit through confession of sins. Secondly, they must worship “in truth”, connecting our worship with our understanding of Scripture, and attaching worship itself to the focal point and core of all Christian practices, which is the Word of God. Worship done without confession or focus on the Word is not worship...it is an activity of the flesh, and NOT the kind of worship that God wants.

**Getting Worship Right.** Phil. 3:3 says, “For it is we who are the circumcision, we who worship by the Spirit of God, who glory in Christ Jesus, and who put no confidence in the flesh....” True worship is done by the grace and power of the Holy Spirit, which operates through our faith in Jesus Christ, rather than through our own devices or programs that operate in human power.

Worship, in the Greek, means “service”. That’s why we call “worship” a “worship service”. Service, we recall, can only be done by the Holy Spirit, or else our “works” would be the condition that satisfies God, which we *know* is not true. Service is not “works”, but a fulfillment of all the commands we have received that operate by the power of the Holy Spirit. That is why the verse above says, “...worship by the Spirit of God”. Worship, then, like all the things we are required to do, can only be done by the Holy Spirit, *in us*. We cannot do it by ourselves.

When we worship, fear of the Lord prompts us to operate in a mental and spiritual framework of God-consciousness. Fear of the Lord, or reverence and awe, prepare us for service, and service is the product of fear. The “fear” of an immature believer is not developed, and his worship will only be an imitation or a facsimile. With maturity, however, worship becomes a profound encounter with God in which we almost “sense” God’s presence and know that He is with us. This is when we realize that we are in the Most Holy Place. Only in the Most Holy Place will we know true worship. This is where we worship “in spirit and in truth”. Prayer will be here, of course, but the holiness will be almost palpable, perhaps making it hard for us to form words.

This is the place where everything slows down, where time and space are warped, because God is standing right there in front of us. This is the place where the finite is greeted by the infinite, and where a prayer inaudibly whispered seems the only plausible response.

## Summary

**Descriptions of Prayer.** In this series, we saw prayer framed and described from Scripture, and learned many details about its operation. We have learned that we are supposed to pray without ceasing, interjecting scheduled prayers as we are able. We found that prayers should be given for other believers, and for many other things and conditions specified in the Bible. We learned the importance of maintaining peaceful relations, so we can pray without distractions. And we have learned that prayer is possible because Jesus Christ gives us access to the Father, and that the Holy Spirit prays with us and for us. Jesus gave us a format for prayer, and exemplified our approach to prayer in His own life.

**Prescriptions for Prayer.** The series then shifted gears. We graduated from “description” to “prescription”. After we passed the topic of “the format for prayer”, we moved into studies that specified conditions for effective prayer. The framework for prayer had been *described*; now the conditions and requirements for prayer were about to be *prescribed*.

One of the first conditions we saw for prayer is that we must have all sins confessed, so we can be filled with the Spirit, and can pray “in the Spirit”. We learned that prayers rendered by a believer not controlled by the Spirit, or “out of fellowship” *will not be heard*. Then we saw that we should walk as Jesus walked, which means that we are to live in dependency on the Father, as He did. Our prayers will reflect this trust in God. We saw also that we are to pray *in Jesus’ name*, which means that we pray while He controls us and while our prayers can be generated in His authority.

Other things came forward as we continued to probe the Word regarding prescriptions for prayer. We learned, for example, that preparation in the Word, accomplished by consistent and prayerful study, are essential for effective prayer. We saw that maturity, or the strengthening of our faith, comes primarily from feeding steadily on the Word, and with maturity comes meaningful and fruitful prayer. On the subject of study, we saw also that refusal to study will prevent our prayers from being heard and answered. For Him to hear us, we have to hear Him first. Another condition for getting God’s ear is that we have to be *humble*. Humility gets God’s attention, whereas pride gets nothing. We saw examples of these in Scripture.

**Inscription of Prayer-Principles.** We saw prayer “described”; we saw conditions for prayer “prescribed”; now we see principles of prayer “inscribed”. One definition of “inscribe” is to have a message written on the heart or mind. This word depicts what we have done with the things we have learned. These things were inscribed on our hearts...and one thing we can say about them is that they were unexpected and profound. The first “inscription” dealt with *drawing near to God* in prayer. When we pray “in truth” (as in Ps. 145:18), which means praying with understanding of Scripture; and when our hearts are clean (as in Ps. 24:4a), meaning all known sins have been confessed...we are able to enter the Most Holy Place, where we have a direct audience with God. That is where we are able to pray the “prayer of faith”. This kind of prayer comes only with preparation and maturity, and reflects an attitude of submission to God’s will.

Only when we mature can we exercise the kind of faith that allows God to give us what we ask for.

A second inscription had to do with praying according to God's will. We are to search for His will by studying and by praying that He will show us His will. When we study and pray consistently, an amazing thing happens: our prayers adapt to match God's will. Maturity is again a key factor, as we learn to *ask* for the specific thing God *already wants to give us*. He has promised that what He gives the mature believer will meet his needs, but we learned that the greatest and most important needs are *spiritual* in nature. When we focus on spiritual issues and things, all other needs will be met, as well, according to His will. It's all about *learning* God's will, and wanting what He wants.

A final inscription had to do with God's plan. He controls everything, and has planned every single event in time and eternity. He intersperses His control and manipulation of occurrences around our choices, not as real-time *responses* to our free-will decisions, but as part of a grand plan that He designed in eternity past to work around us, as the integrity of His will remains intact. We *choose* in real time, but the plan working around our choices was put together before the universe was formed. Our job is to *choose His plan*, and to let Him "work it" in our lives. Proper praying makes us part of that plan.

**Waiting and Worship.** When God's Word is inscribed in our hearts, we will faithfully wait for Him, because we trust Him. This prompts in us a *reverent submission* to His will and plan. Then we can join Him in the Most Holy Place, where we can worship Him and praise Him for all time...and for all eternity.

## Endnotes

1. *Desert Pathways: A Book of Poems*, p. 14. This is a book of poetry, by Venetia Taylor. Self-published, Irving, TX, 2011. This book is available for free download at [www.biblestudiesforchristiangrowth.com](http://www.biblestudiesforchristiangrowth.com).
2. *ABC's for Christian Growth: Laying the Foundation*, by J. Hampton Keathley, III, pp. 294-295. Biblical Studies Press, 1996-2002. This book is available at [www.bible.org](http://www.bible.org).
3. *Bible Doctrine: Essential Teachings of the Christian Faith*, by Wayne Grudem, P. 160. Zondervan, Grand Rapids, Michigan, 1999.
4. *Bible Doctrine: Essential Teachings of the Christian Faith*, pp. 160-161.
5. "Faith Under Fire", an article by J. Hampton Keathley, III, pp. 36-37. Biblical Studies Press, 1997. This article is available at [www.bible.org](http://www.bible.org).
6. *ABC's for Christian Growth: Laying the Foundation*, p. 56.

## *About the Author*

William D. Gibbs, III, spent 25 years in public service as an educator and curriculum designer. He served as teacher, principal, superintendent, and curriculum developer in the public school systems of Texas. He has now taken his skills in the area of learning-program development and is channeling them into the service of the Lord Jesus Christ. Much of his career in education was spent developing programs for at-risk students. This book is designed for at-risk Christians (or new ones). The same way that he built systems for filling in gaps and establishing solid foundations for student learning, he has built on the foundation of the Word to provide understandable lessons that facilitate Christian living and accelerate the growth and effectiveness of believers.

Gibbs began an intensive study of the Word in 2010, and initiated a practice at that time of recording his findings in writing. He has written ten books since then...and has now condensed them into a survey course: *Bible Basics for Living: Essential Foundations*. This course and the books which form the foundation for it, of which this is one, are the culmination of his experiences in life, his professional career, and—more recently—his studies in the Word. He has been surprised to discover what the Bible REALLY says about living, and is sure that you will be surprised, as well, when you work through his studies.

It must be said that the central player and point in this “work” is not the author, but God. If—and only if—God is in this writing, it will be helpful and beneficial to believers who read it, and God will be glorified by its dissemination.

---