

# **PRAYER**

**According to  
the  
Old and New Testament**

**Conversation with God**

**by**

**Ed Mathews**

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Posted in the United States of America for everyone  
throughout the world who wants to talk to the  
sovereign Master of the universe.

Praise, honor, and glory to Him both now and always.

## DEDICATION

This book is devoted to those who pray. Their example is a guide. They show the way. They model the faith. They encourage a godly practice. I am eternally grateful for their commitment.

I hope this study will deepen the resolve of all who believe. There is a great need in our day to go beyond the mundane. The spirit of Sunday must anoint the rest of the week. This will happen when we live on our knees.

Paul wrote, *"God is able to make all grace abound to you, so that in all things, at all times, having all that you need, you will abound in every good work,"* II Corinthians 9:8. What a huge promise! Why are we hobbling along in a powerless existence? We do not have, because we do not ask God, James 4:2b.

Our Father does not fail. We do. Our spiritual impoverishment is our fault. The Lord has shown us how to pray. We have not followed His instructions. Nothing can take the place of prayer. It is our lifeline. Whether one lives in a palace or a shack, he should communicate with the Giver of *"every good and perfect gift,"* James 1:17.

To those who pray, keep praying. To those who do not pray, it is time to do so. *"Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God,"* Philippians 4:6. The best preparation for prayer is recognizing the need to pray.

Ed Mathews  
May 29, 2016

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## INTRODUCTION

Everyone has experienced the need to pray. For, when we reach our limit, we instinctively turn to a higher power. We pray because we must. The urge cannot be repressed. It is natural to the human condition. In the hour of superlative despair, even the doubter will beg.

Instruction in prayer, then, should be part of the curriculum of life. *“Lord, teach us to pray”* is a proper request, [Luke 11:1](#). Teach us because there is much to learn. It looks simple but it has its challenges. Teach us because the privilege is ours. It must not be misused. Teach us because the promises are waiting. They should not be neglected. Teach us to pray in Jesus name, to persevere in fullness of faith. Teach us to reject being refused. Teach us, Lord, because the foundation of prayer is the willingness to be taught.

Prayer starts with God. The Father seeks true worshippers, [John 4:23](#). He looks for eager, expectant followers. Apathetic, half-hearted believers do not honor His majesty. Yet the important truth here is not our search for God. It is His search for us, [Isaiah 65:1](#). He may respond *before* we call, [Isaiah 65:24](#). His down-reaching grace grasps our up-reaching desire. Things happen. This is more than emotional hype. It is a vital, enduring relationship with the Almighty.

Prayer is not about us. It is about God. It is not about formulas we should follow. It is about a celestial deity we should worship. The heart of prayer is belief in God. Without faith in Him, prayer will remain a knee jerk reaction to emergencies, a stale repetition of mindless ritual. The following material says little about the act of prayer. It focuses almost entirely on the attitude of prayer.

If a person is a Christian, he prays. Prayer is like breathing. It is absolutely necessary for life. A prayer-less person is a powerless person. God invites everyone everywhere to pray. He initiates the relationship. He waits for us to respond. He is disappointed when we fail to do so. He refuses to force Himself on us. However, if we respond, He opens the floodgates of heaven, the storehouses of blessing. The choice is ours.

### I. MISCONCEPTIONS ABOUT PRAYER

Prayer is communication with God. It involves both speaking and listening. God always remains God. Man always remains man. Genuine prayer is never an attempt to become God. It is never a means for acquiring personal gain. Rather prayer is an honest effort to discover the will of heaven. It is an aggressive probing of the Lord to know His thoughts, [Joshua 7:6-15](#). In spite of much praying, many people still misunderstand prayer.

### A. Personal Therapy.

Some folks believe prayer is a self-help technique. Instead of addressing another Person, they converse with themselves. Prayer becomes therapy. It releases tension. It voices inner thoughts. It reveals hidden ideas. There is no expectation of help from Someone above. These folks attempt to solve their own problems by talking to themselves, by thinking things through. In such cases, prayer becomes a form of meditation. The goal is to achieve self-identity, self-understanding, and self-fulfillment. Regardless of the good intentions, biblical prayer is not personal therapy.

### B. Magical Manipulation.

Others believe prayer is a primitive practice. It is a form of religious magic. To these people, it is an attempt to manipulate God. It is considered a means of twisting the arm of a reluctant deity to comply with the wishes of insistent men. Careful examination of Scripture reveals the poverty of such thinking. Prayer is not magical manipulation. It is an unpretentious appeal, a modest request to a loving Father.

### C. Social Equipping.

A third group views prayer as thoughts restricted to the needs of their fellow man. This inner monologue is supposed to move one to meet those needs. To these people, prayer is compassionate caring. It is sensitive concern. Prayer is the prelude to helping the less fortunate, to loving a neighbor. But, in this view, prayer is not intended to influence God. Instead, it changes those who pray. It leads to action. Such an understanding of prayer has major shortcomings. (1) It is atheistic. It denies the activity of God. It begins and ends with man. And (2) it is humanistic. It is completely confident in the ability of man. There is no room for God. There is no need for assistance from above. Humans are supposedly sufficient to take care of themselves. God is absent from the equation.

### D. Dutiful Obedience.

Finally, there are people who think prayer is an obligation. They approach prayer as a command to be obeyed. It is a rule to follow, an ordinance to keep, a regulation to fulfill. Under such circumstances, prayer becomes a heavy burden, a distasteful requirement. It reduces prayer to an irksome directive, an unwelcome order. It makes us reluctant to begin but delighted to finish. How unfortunate! Genuine prayer is a response to God, communication with heaven. It is evidence of an intimate relationship between God and man. It involves speaking and responding. It relishes the friendship. It believes influence flows in both directions.

## II. POSSIBILITIES OF PRAYER

True prayer believes *“nothing is impossible,”* Matthew 17:20. It expects great things to happen. It moves God to act. Armies are defeated. Drought is liquidated. The sick are healed. The prodigal returns home. Prayer accomplishes amazing things.

Prayer is not an untried theory. It is a proven fact. Prayer is a divine arrangement. It is designed to benefit man and further the interests of God. The record of answered prayer is beyond question. It encourages saints. It attracts sinners. Prayer is its own proof. It needs no support other than its accomplishment.

The possibilities of prayer are more than most people are willing to embrace. *“Whatever”* we ask in His name, He will do. *“Whatever”* means whatever. Prayer applies divine power to human limitation. Though we may not see how, God finds a way. Prayer requires two things: (1) The faith to ask and (2) the wisdom to expect. God (rather than man) determines the possibilities of prayer. He promises to give *“all things,”* to do *“anything,”* to supply *“whatsoever”* is needed. Dare we par down the magnitude of His promises! Dare we question His veracity! God cannot lie. He will do what He says. Count on it. *“He who promises is faithful,”* Hebrews 10:23.

There are no hopeless conditions, no impossible difficulties, and no incurable circumstances where the Almighty is involved. The possibilities of prayer are linked to the omnipotence of God. We can pray, believe, and receive. Or we can complain, doubt, and do without. Prayer is overcoming our reluctance to address God’s willingness. He encourages us to call on Him. He promises to answer. He vows to show us *“great and unsearchable things,”* Jeremiah 33:3. What is impossible for God? Nothing! Therefore, Jesus said, *“Everyone who asks receives; He who seeks finds; and to him who knocks, the door will be opened,”* Matthew 7:8. Does that not describe the possibilities of prayer?

### III. HISTORY OF PRAYER

There are several changes during biblical times in the practice of prayer. These developments assist in understanding this grand privilege.

#### A. Old Testament Developments.

Much can be learned from the prayers in the Old Testament. The practices of the patriarchs, the songs of Israel, and the words of the prophets are saturated with pertinent insights.

1. Patriarchs: Conversation with God. The distinctive element in the prayers of the patriarchs is their conversational style. The fathers of the faith exchanged thoughts, feelings, and opinions with God, Genesis 15:1-16. Their conversations were sprinkled with questions, requests, and rebuttals. Abraham reasoned with the Lord, Genesis 18:22-33. Jacob bargained with God, Genesis 28:20-22. They spoke to

Him face to face, “*as a man speaks to his friend*,” Exodus 33:7-11. Our challenge is to regain this intimacy, to be straightforward with the One who knows us better than we know ourselves.

2. Psalms: Prayer as Worship. Many of the songs of Israel are prayers, cf. Psalms 17, 86, 90, 102, and 142. They are expressions of close communion with Jehovah. They move back and forth between confession, trust, petition, and intercession. They display unwavering confidence in being answered, Psalm 3:4; 17:6; 65:2; 138:3. They often rehearse the acts of God in the history of Israel, Psalm 44:1-8; 66:5-12; 68:7-18; 77:11-20. Though the prayers in the Psalms occasionally ask for material blessings, they always reflect the importance of fellowship with God, Psalm 63:1-8. This is something worth remembering.

3. Prophets: Moral Behavior Demanded. The enduring contribution of the prophets to the discussion of prayer is their requirement of moral behavior. The follower of God must be righteous. Prayer must be more than mindless ritual, Isaiah 1:15-17; Hosea 6:6; Micah 6:6-8. Sin must be abandoned, Amos 4:4,5; 5:21-25. Thus, because we will meet our Maker, we must seek Him with all our being, Deuteronomy 4:29. Indeed, prayer must be a matter of the heart, Hosea 7:14.

#### B. Inter-Testament Understandings.

Between Malachi and Matthew, God seemed aloof. He appeared distant and unconcerned. The forefathers had sinned. Their sons were punished. Life seemed unfair. Existence was cruel. Heartache was the norm. Prayer was a struggle.

1. Voice of the Troubled. In the disaster of defeat, Israel felt forsaken. When she cried for help, God did not seem to listen, Lamentations 3:8. The people believed God had covered Himself in a cloud so that their prayers could not get through, Lamentations 3:44. Thus, in the words of Job, Israel “*spoke out in anguish, complained in the bitterness of their soul*,” Job 7:11. Prayer between the Old and New Testament was the tears of the troubled.

2. Worship in the Synagogue. In the absence of the temple, the synagogue became the house of worship. Villagers gathered weekly to offer prayer and read Scripture. They frequently asked for enlightenment. Prayer in the synagogue took the place of sacrifice in the temple. Their supplications were bathed in praise.

#### C. New Testament Interpretations.

The crux of all prayer is submission. We defer to God. Pray is not a matter of our will but His will, Mark 14:36b. This is the central message of the New Testament regarding prayer.

1. Teachings of Jesus. The Lord said prayer must not be for show. It should be a private exchange with God, Matthew 6:5-8. The one who prays must be single minded in his devotion, Matthew 6:24. He should refrain from worry, Matthew 6:28-34. He should not be self-righteousness, Luke 18:9-14. God responds to the humble. He answers those who pray in faith. He treats His followers like a loving Father, Luke 11:11-13.

2. Instructions of Paul. The apostle said prayer is based on the faithfulness of God, I Corinthians 1:9; I Thessalonians 5:24, and the power of Christ, Colossians 1:10-12; II Thessalonians 1:11. Prayer is effective because of the abundant grace of God, II Corinthians 9:8; Philippians 4:19. The Spirit helps those who pray, Romans 8:26,27. Therefore, to the God of all comfort, we can confidently pray for comfort, II Corinthians 1:3,4. And, to the God of boundless peace, we can pray for peace, II Thessalonians 3:16.

3. Insights of Others. John emphasized maintaining an essential connection with Christ, John 15:5,6. Within that union, one is assured that his prayers will be answered, John 15:7; cf. I John 5:13-15. Such assurance is heightened in the recognition of Christ as our sympathetic intercessor, Hebrews 4:15,16; 7:26. Jesus lives to intercede. He is "on call" 24/7, Hebrews 7:25. We rely on Him who is "*the author and perfecter of our faith*," Hebrews 12:2. Prayer, then, is a "declaration of dependence" on the Lord.

# **PART I**

## **PRELIMINARY UNDERSTANDINGS**

## CHAPTER ONE

### VARIATIONS IN PRAYER

Prayer can have a variety of forms, an assortment of content. Prayer can be petition, entreaty, demand, confession, thanksgiving, recollection, praise, adoration, meditation, or intercession. Obviously the word “prayer” is a general term that covers a multitude of interests. In order to be more accurate, the next two chapters will examine prayer in its various expressions.

#### I. TERMS FOR PRAYER

In Scripture, prayer is directed “to” God, Genesis 20:17; I Samuel 12:19; Psalm 5:2; Jeremiah 29:7; Acts 1:24. It is offered “before” the Lord, I Kings 9:3; Nehemiah 1:4; Psalm 88:2; Acts 10:4. The petitioner is in the “presence” of the Almighty, I Kings 8:27,28. Prayer is a request, Philippians 4:6. It is a request for God to do something. Because prayer is frequently uttered in difficult times, it is a plea to resolve a problem, to fix a troubling situation.

##### A. Cry Out.

Prayer is voiced in desperate times. In agony, the petitioner “cries out,” Exodus 2:23; Judges 3:9; Job 24:12; Psalm 86:6; Ezekiel 9:8; Hebrews 5:7. The worshipper wants God to intervene, to bring relief. The afflictions vary. The need for God is the same. When prayer is a “cry” for help, distress is at hand. Suffering, anxiety, weakness, and urgency fill the horizon. Yet, if we “pray always,” if we “do not give up,” God will respond, Luke 18:1.

##### B. Draw Near.

Those who “cry out” to the Lord, “draw near” to Him. “It is good to be near God,” Psalm 73:28. In His presence, we find solace from the storms of life. For, when we “come near to God, He will come near to us,” James 4:8. Therefore, we should “seek the Lord while He may be found.” We should “call on Him while He is near,” Isaiah 55:6. However, our drawing near requires honest intentions. Prayer must be the sincere desire of a pure heart, Hebrews 10:22.

##### D. Call On.

Those who pray “call on” or “call to” the Lord, II Samuel 22:4; Psalm 4:1; 55:16;



Romans 10:12,14; II Timothy 2:22. During a storm, Jonah was commanded to “*call on the name of God*” in order to save the ship, Jonah 1:6. Naaman wanted Elisha to “*call on the name of the Lord*” in order to cure his leprosy, II Kings 5:11. Saul of Tarsus intended to arrest those who “*call on the name of Jesus*,” Acts 9:14,21. These passages contain two important truths. (1) The petitioner is unable to manage his situation. And (2) God is the Rescuer. When we call on the Lord, we are summoning the only true and living God to intervene in history. All other gods are worthless chunks of metal, wood, or stone, Psalms 115:1-7. We reach high when we bow low before Him who is able to save.

#### D. Seek.

The phrase “*seek the Lord*” carries two meanings in Scripture. It can suggest searching for God, Deuteronomy 4:29; II Chronicles 11:16; Jeremiah 29:13; Malachi 3:1; Acts 17:27; Hebrews 11:6. It can also suggest wanting an audience with a monarch, I Kings 10:24; Proverbs 29:26. So to “*seek the Lord*” means to seek an audience with God, to come before Him to get needed assistance. Or, to say it differently, “*to seek the Lord*” means to “*consult God*,” Exodus 18:15; Isaiah 31:1; Romans 10:20. It is reassuring to know that, if we search for Him, we will find Him, because He is not far from us, Acts 17:26,27. We will be strong in the Lord if we are not weak in prayer.

#### E. Ask.

Parents love their children. They give them gifts. Hence, we need not doubt the goodness of God. We can expect kindness from our heavenly Father. Since He is love, surely He will love us, Matthew 7:9-11. Blessed are those who experience the overwhelming abundance of His generosity.

The Lord encouraged us to ask. “*Ask*” means to beg, entreat, request or petition. It suggests the worshipper needs something he cannot himself supply, Daniel 6:11. Hannah asked for a child, I Samuel 1:17. Solomon asked for knowledge, II Chronicles 1:11. David asked to dwell in the house of the Lord, Psalms 27:4. We are urged to ask for wisdom, James 1:5.

If we ask God, if we hope in His goodness, we will not be disappointed, Romans 5:5. We must do the asking. God will do the giving. The promise is ours. The gift is His. Jesus said, “*You may ask Me anything in My name, and I will do it*,” John 14:14. He repeated this guarantee over and over, John 15:16; 16:23,24. Why did Jesus issue such assurances? He wanted “*to bring glory to the Father*,” John 14:13. That was the thrust of His life, John 17:4. It should be the goal of our existence, too, I Corinthians 10:31. Do our prayers bring Him glory? If not, the deficiency of our petitions may explain the silence of heaven.

Christ said, *“If you remain in Me and My words remain in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be given you,”* [John 15:7](#). Our requests will be answered if we remain in His word. When discrepancies arise between our asking and His answering, the lack of “remaining” may be the problem. We speak to God in our prayers. He speaks to us through His word. Prayer is not a lecture. It is a conversation. The presence of His word and the consciousness of our need should be so intertwined that it is difficult to say where the one leaves off and the other begins.

## II. INCIDENTALS IN PRAYER

Variations in prayer go beyond the words used to describe it. They include such things as individual and group prayer, planned and spontaneous prayer, as well as audible and silent prayer. This section of our study answers an important question: How did people in biblical times pray?

### A. Number Of Petitioners.

On some occasions, individuals prayed by themselves. Abraham did, [Genesis 18:22](#). Daniel did, too, [Daniel 6:10](#). Likewise, Jesus often prayed in solitude, [Mark 1:35](#). On other occasions, petitions were raised to heaven by a group of people, [I Kings 8:22](#); [II Chronicles 20:5](#); [Acts 4:24](#). Prayer is acceptable when offered by one or many. The number is incidental. So, then, what is important? Acceptable prayer must address the Lord. It is not an act to please men, [Matthew 6:5-7](#). Prayer must be a conscious conversation with God. Whether offered by one person or a group of people, God hears the petitions of those who rely on Him.

### B. Amount Of Preparation.

The Scripture contains examples of both planned and spontaneous prayer. Because prayer is often an informal talk with God, spontaneity is assumed, [Romans 8:15,16](#). The Lord wants us to address Him as a child speaks to his parent. Yet prayer can also be planned. Otherwise, the Lord’s Prayer is misleading [Matthew 6:9-13](#). To show proper respect, we should give sufficient forethought to our petition. If it is bathed in the word and anointed by the Spirit, our prayer—whether planned or spontaneous—will reach the throne of grace.

### C. Volume Of Voice.

The third incidental deals with audible and silent prayer. Here, again, to no one’s surprise, both are found in the Bible. For instance, Rebekah prayed in her *“heart,”* [Genesis 24:45](#). Hannah did, also, [I Samuel 1:13](#). Certainly, by far, audible prayer is more common. Still, whether a thought in our mind or a word on our lips, prayer is acceptable if it honors the One to whom it is addressed.

### III. MECHANICS OF PRAYER

The final section of this chapter looks at the mechanics of prayer. These incidentals refer to the postures, times, and places in which prayer can occur. Though mentioning certain customs that developed, the Bible does not prescribe any particular mechanics for prayer.

#### A. Postures In Prayer.

A large number of postures were assumed during prayer in biblical times. Occasionally people “stood,” I Chronicles 23:30; Luke 18:11. Frequently they “knelt,” Psalm 95:6; Luke 22:41. Sometimes they “laid prostrate on the ground,” Numbers 16:22; Mark 14:35. Any of these postures are appropriate when approaching the Almighty. All of them were assumed when people were in the presence of royalty, Exodus 9:10; II Samuel 9:6; Esther 8:3. Those who pray—like those who approach a superior—should be contrite, humble, and self-abasing.

One can pray while “sitting,” II Samuel 7:18, or “lying in bed,” I Samuel 3:2-10. The Bible mentions “spreading out,” Exodus 9:29; Ezra 9:5, or “lifting up” the hands, I Timothy 2:8, as well as “bowing the head” in worship, I Chronicles 29:20; Nehemiah 8:6. The Scriptures speak of the worshipper praying with his “eyes lifted up,” Psalm 121:1,2; John 17:1. Many postures are mentioned. None of them are required. All of them are appropriate as reverent gestures toward Him who dwells on high.

#### B. Times Of Prayer.

The need of the hour dictated the time of the prayer, Nehemiah 2:4. Petition routinely accompanied the morning and evening sacrifices in the temple, I Chronicles 23:30; cf. Psalm 5:3; 141:2. Later, three times a day was considered acceptable, Psalm 55:17; Daniel 6:10. Prayer can certainly be offered day and night, Psalm 88:1. Any time is a good time to seek the Lord.

#### C. Places For Prayer.

Prayer was offered in various places. The temple was designated “a house of prayer for all nations,” Isaiah 56:7. Hence, when prayer was made in other places, the petitioner faced Jerusalem, Daniel 6:10; cf. Psalm 5:7. The saints of yesteryear prayed at home, Daniel 6:10; Acts 1:13,14. They prayed on mountains, I Kings 18:36,37, in quiet rooms, Matthew 6:6, in olive groves, Luke 22:39-41, and on rooftops, Acts 10:9. The place was incidental. When we have nowhere else to go, it is best to fall on our knees where we are.

## CHAPTER TWO

### KINDS OF PRAYER

As we have observed, prayer is a broad term. It encompasses several specific kinds of communication with God. The various types of prayer are distinguished by their purpose and content. This chapter analyzes these different expressions. It also presents from Scripture examples of each kind of prayer.

#### I. PRAISE

The heart of worship is praise. It is acknowledging who God is and what He does. Praise involves admiration and affection. It is the foundation of our commitment.

##### A. Who Should Praise God?

The Bible encourages the faithful to “*praise the Lord*,” Psalm 30:4; 113:1-3; Isaiah 12:5,6; Revelation 19:5. It summons the nations to praise Him, too, Psalm 66:1-4; 67:3-5; Romans 15:11. It commands the creation to praise His name: whether angels, Psalm 89:5; 148:2, the sun, moon, and stars, Psalm 148:3, the seas, Psalm 148:7, the mountains and trees, Psalm 148:9, or the animals and birds, Psalm 148:10. “*Everything that has breath*” should praise the Lord, Psalm 150:6.

##### B. What Does Praise God Mean?

When we praise God, we “*thank*” Him, 1 Chronicles 16:4; Ezra 3:11, “*glorify*” (or honor) Him, Psalm 22:23, and “*exalt*” or “*extol*” (that is, lift up) Him, Psalm 107:32; 117:1. Out of the deep feelings of the heart, the mouth expresses its praise, Psalm 51:15. The lips proclaim His great deeds, Psalm 40:9,10, and sing about His wonderful accomplishments, Isaiah 42:10-12; Jeremiah 20:13.

##### C. Why Praise God?

The list of things for which we can praise God is almost endless. We can exalt Him for His strength, Psalm 59:16,17, His righteousness, Psalm 71:16, His goodness, Psalm 106:1, His love and faithfulness, Psalm 117:1,2, or His kindness, Isaiah 63:7. Worthy is He to receive glory, honor, and power, Revelation 4:11.

##### D. How Often Should God Be Praised?

The people of God are to “*continually*” praise Him, Hebrews 13:15. They are to

honor His name “*day after day*,” I Chronicles 16:23, namely, they are to praise the Lord “*every day*,” Psalm 145:2. This implies more than attendance at public worship. Believers praise God “*both now and forevermore*,” Psalm 113:2. Indeed, the saints are “*ever praising*” their sovereign God, Psalm 84:4. Why? He deserves it. We feel it. Our expressions of praise should be natural and spontaneous.

Praise is a statement of delight. It rejoices in who God is. It shows love for what He does. It honors the Almighty because He is worthy. Praise is the overflow of a grateful heart.

## II. THANKS

Gratitude is demonstrated in thanksgiving, Psalm 103:1-5. It is stimulated by the memory of His “*wonderful deeds*,” Psalm 75:1; cf. I Chronicles 16:8,9. These memories include worshipping with fellow saints, Psalm 42:4; 100:4. If we pause to ponder the past, thanksgiving will well up in our soul. Worry will melt. Peace will replace anxiety, Philippians 4:6,7.

### A. How Is Thanks Expressed?

There are several ways to show thanks. Sometimes we express appreciation in words, Psalm 9:1. At other times, we may thank God in song, Psalm 28:7; Jeremiah 30:19. Regardless of the vehicle used, an expression of thanks is more pleasing to God than animal sacrifice, Psalm 69:30,31.

### B. Who Should Offer Thanks?

The children of God were directed to give thanks, I Chronicles 16:34; Psalm 105:1; 106:1; 118:1; I Thessalonians 5:18. Israel longed to return from exile. If she was gathered from the nations, she promised to be thankful, Psalm 106:47. Indeed, she promised to give thanks “*forever*,” Psalm 79:11-13. Eventually God rescued her. Israel kept her word. The former exiles expressed a profound appreciation, Psalm 44:8; Psalm 107:8,21,31. We are also invited to give thanks, to give thanks always for everything, Colossians 2:6,7; 3:15,17; 4:2, including the blessings that come to us through Jesus Christ, I Corinthians 15:57; II Corinthians 2:14; 9:15. Thankfulness is preceded by thoughtfulness.

Thankfulness is the only appropriate response to the unfailing grace of God. We are prone to take His gifts for granted. We often treat them as if we deserve them. Such ingratitude is sin, Romans 1:21. It is the fountainhead of many other transgressions. The Lord is not pleased with such a cavalier attitude, a nonchalant disregard of reality. Actually, thanksgiving is an important exercise of faith. For, when we appreciate the kindness of God, we are more likely to obey the commands

of the Lord.

### III. PETITION

Prayer is most often a request. It is a petition for something needed. God invites us to ask, Psalm 2:8. He urges us to make our desires known, Luke 11:9,10. He welcomes our appeals. Prayer is our first response not our last resort. We do not approach Him as a groveling beggar. We address Him as our concerned parent.

God answers our prayers. His answer is a gift. We ask. He gives. We are recipients. Thus, we have no reason to boast, I Corinthians 4:7. The goal of prayer is not to get what we want (but to receive what God deems best). Our prayers must be broader than our happiness, comfort, or wellbeing. Our petitions should be couched in His will rather than our want.

It is impossible to list everything that a person might ask of God. The possibilities are nearly unlimited. For instance, the Scriptures mention prayers for choosing a wife, Genesis 24:12-14, having a child, I Samuel 1:27, and raising children, Judges 13:8. There are prayers for healing, II Kings 20:1-3, and for deliverance from an enemy, Psalm 7:1,2. There are prayers for the presence of God, Psalm 27:9; 38:21; 71:9, forgiveness of sin, Psalm 51:1,2; Luke 11:4, manifestation of His grace, Psalm 119:58, and instruction in righteousness, Psalm 119:18,26,27,33. There are prayers for daily bread, Matthew 6:11, and for rain, James 5:17,18. There are also prayers for joy, Psalm 86:4; 90:15. Many more things could be listed. However, these are sufficient to demonstrate our dependence on the Lord, our need to petition Him for the supply of things beyond our reach.

### IV. REPENTANCE

Genuine repentance has many facets. All phases of contrition must be exercised in order for penitence to be sincere. An honest acknowledgement must be followed by a deep sorrow. Real regret must issue into a plea for forgiveness. And forgiveness must lead to a solid resolve to live differently.

There are seven psalms that are "*prayers of repentance*," Psalm 6, 32, 38, 51, 102, 130, and 143. These psalms reflect all of the elements of genuine penitence. They help the reader gain a clear understanding of contrition. The truths they reveal are found elsewhere in the Old and New Testament.

#### A. Acknowledgement Of Sin.

The sinner must first recognize his error. He must accept responsibility for his misdeeds. He must admit that his present miseries can be the judgment of God for his past sins, Psalm 38:1-3. These miseries may be physical illness, Psalm 6:2, pangs

of guilt, Psalm 51:3,4; 130:3; 143:2, attacks of an enemy, Psalm 6:7-10; 38:12,16; 102:8; 143:3,9,11,12, or rejection of a friend, Psalm 38:11.

#### B. Sorrow For Sin.

The agony of acknowledgement should move to remorse over transgressions. Real regret leads to confession, II Samuel 12:13; 24:10; Psalm 38:18; Luke 15:17-20. An admission of sin can include things done or left undone. Whatever the error, failure weights on the heart. Only a confession of sin can relieve the burden, Psalm 32:3-5.

#### C. Plea For Mercy.

The sinner asks God for mercy, Psalm 51:1; Luke 18:13. He begs for forgiveness, Psalm 51:2,7,9,14; 130:3,4,7,8. No one can cleanse himself from sin, Proverbs 20:9. Only God through Jesus Christ and the washing of rebirth can wipe the slate clean, Titus 3:4-7. However, those who plea for forgiveness must be forgiving, Matthew 6:14,15. They must accept the mercy of God. It is the decision of the Lord to forgive. It is responsibility of the penitent to receive His forgiveness.

#### D. Resolve To Do Better.

Repentance is completed when the sinner resolves to be faithful. God hears his prayer, Psalm 6:9. It is a defining moment in the pilgrimage toward sainthood. Sins are "covered," Psalm 32:1,2. They are "removed," Psalm 103:12. They are forgotten, Isaiah 43:25. Transgressions are "put behind the back of God," Isaiah 38:17. They are trod "underfoot" and hurled into the sea, Micah 7:19. Sin is gone. Life is new. Hence, a sincere resolution to pursue righteousness should consume the energies of the forgiven, II Corinthians 7:10,11.

### V. INTERCESSION

The fifth kind of prayer is intercession. It is praying for others. Christians pray for government leaders, Psalm 72:15; I Timothy 2:1,2. The children of God "seek the welfare of the city" where they live, Jeremiah 29:7. They intercede for sinners, Amos 7:1-6; cf. Job 42:8. They also pray for the sick, Acts 28:7,8; James 5:14-16. Believers pray for those who request intercessory petitions, Jeremiah 42:1-4. They pray that fellow believers will be protected from evil, Matthew 6:13, will be united in faith, John 17:20,21. Christians intercede for one another, Ephesians 6:18. The possibilities are limitless. The point is obvious. Whatever our concerns, the Lord wants to hear them. And, while we are interceding for others, Christ intercedes for us, Romans 8:34.

### VI. MEDITATION

When a person “*meditates*” on God, he “*thinks*” about Him, Psalm 63:6. His attention is riveted on what the Lord has done. He remembers His kindness, Psalm 77:3. He meditates on His works, Psalm 77:12; 143:5. He thinks about His inspired word, Joshua 1:8. The people of God meditate on His message “*day and night,*” Psalm 1:2. They fill their minds with sacred thoughts “*all day long,*” Psalm 119:97.

The basic meaning of “*meditate*” is to rehearse. It is going over a matter in the mind, Psalm 119:15; Psalm 145:5. It is repeated again and again until it is etched on the memory. Thus, the message of God becomes part and parcel of His people. The apostle Paul urged believers to “*think about*” noble things, Philippians 4:8. Such is “*pleasing*” in the sight of God, Psalm 19:14; 104: 34.

## VII. COMPLAINT

Finally, there are prayers of complaint. These protests speak against what God has done, is doing, or will do. Abraham objected to the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah, Genesis 18:23-25. Moses protested the annihilation of Israel, Exodus 32:11-14. Job complained about the ill treatment of God, Job 9:20-22; 16:6-17; 21:4-15. These were honest grievances. Man does not always understand the way of heaven. The prayer of protest is a learning experience.

Jeremiah vented his negative feelings against the Lord, Jeremiah 15:18; 20:7. So did Habakkuk, Habakkuk 1:2-4; 1:12-2:1. Bitter protests are common in Scripture, Psalm 44:9,12-14,17-19; 89:38-45. Some folks see Jesus’ prayer in Gethsemane as a protest, an effort to change the mind of God, Luke 22:39-46. Likewise, they view the complaint of Paul regarding his “*thorn in the flesh*” the same way, II Corinthians 12:7-10. In the latter two cases, God rejected the petitions. He had something better in mind for the plaintiffs.

Prayer grows out of our personal relationship with God. It is a heartfelt sharing of our needs with Him who is able to save. The seven kinds of prayer capture the intimacy involved in this sacred activity. While there are no limits to the content of prayer, there is a quality of relationship required. God “*listens to the godly man who does His will,*” John 9:31. The ear of God is attuned to those who respect His word and follow His way. We may praise Him. We may complain to Him. But we should always include Him.



## **PART II**

### **NECESSARY PREREQUISITES**

## CHAPTER THREE

### ASSUMPTIONS OF PRAYER

Skeptics have no motivation to pray. For, they ask, “Why fling words into thin air?” They assume prayer is pointless. “Who is listening?” “Who hears?” To them, prayer is nothing more than making noise. Therefore, they believe, this book is a waste of time!

However, the prayers found in Scripture are rooted in another set of fundamental presuppositions. These suppositions have to do with God and man as well as with the relationship between God and man. Without an understanding of, trust in, and commitment to these assumptions, prayer makes little sense. However, if these presuppositions are accepted, prayer, as the Bible teaches, is the lifeline of Christian living. Or, one can say, prayer sustains the soul as breath gives life to the body.

#### I. GOD IS

The first presupposition assumes that God is. *“Whoever would draw near to God must believe that He exists,”* Hebrews 11:6a. No one should presume to speak to the Almighty if faith is absent. Without belief, prayer is a grand fraud, a useless pretense. Prayer requires that we believe that He is and *“that He rewards those who earnestly seek Him,”* Hebrews 11:6b.

Some people will argue that it is impossible to prove His existence. That is true. But, it is equally impossible to prove that He does not exist. Both His existence and His nonexistence, then, are a matter of faith. Hence, as a requirement for prayer, the presupposition of His existence must be allowed.

Still doubters object to the reality of God. They do so because they have never seen, heard, or touched Him. This is not a surprise. Neither have I seen, heard, or touched Him. However, the lack of sensory perception proves nothing. For no one has ever seen, heard, or touched “forgiveness.” Nevertheless, it would be insane to argue that it does not exist, that it is not real.

The Bible does not try to prove the existence of God. It simply assumes that He is. It does so because God is the most reasonable explanation for all that exists—whether one is talking about the universe, life, or intelligence. *“God has made it plain.”* Those who deny His existence *“are without excuse,”* Romans 1:18-20. The Lord will not disappoint the faith He requires nor the prayer He encourages.

## II. GOD IS ALIVE

There is a huge difference between God and a god. An idol is dead. It does not breathe. It cannot move, [Jeremiah 10:3-5](#). Jehovah is alive. He walks. He talks. He makes things happen, [Jeremiah 10:12,13](#). Prayer is addressed to a living God, [I Samuel 17:26](#); [II Kings 19:4](#); [Jeremiah 10:10](#); [Matthew 16:16](#); [Acts 14:15](#); [II Corinthians 3:3](#); [6:16](#); [I Timothy 3:15](#); [Hebrews 10:31](#); [12:22](#); [Revelation 7:2](#). Prayer is a recognition that God is “alive,” [Revelation 1:18](#).

The phrase “living God” is stuffed with meaning. First, as already mentioned, it highlights the contrast between the only true God and all false gods, [I Thessalonians 1:9](#). Second, the “living God” attracts the believer, [Psalm 42:1,2](#). And, third, the phrase “living God” refers to the providence of the Lord—His care for those who put their trust in Him, [Isaiah 57:15](#); cf. [Matthew 10:28-31](#). This is the One to whom we should address our petitions. To do otherwise, is to perform empty ritual, to engage in meaningless ceremony.

## III. GOD IS A PERSON

God is “*the Most High*,” [Psalm 21:7](#); [92:1](#); [107:10,11](#). Since He is Most High, He cannot be lower than any part of creation. He is the ultimate Being of all beings. There is no one greater, no one stronger, or no one wiser than He. So it is written: “*God, the blessed and only Ruler, the King of kings, the Lord of lords, who alone is immortal and who lives in unapproachable light, whom no one has seen or can see,*” [I Timothy 6:15](#). The Lord is the sovereign deity of the universe.

The Most High God is a “person.” He is not a “thing.” He is not an “it.” He is not a “human.” Though He thinks, feels, and acts like a person, He is infinitely superior to all human beings. God is divine. He is a divine person. We were made in His “*likeness*,” [Genesis 1:26,27](#); [James 3:9](#). That “likeness” refers to His personhood. Consequently, we can have a personal relationship with Him. Such a relationship suggests communication. That communication is called prayer.

Because God is a person, He will react to our prayers as a person. This is basic in understanding His response to our requests. It is impossible to know how God will answer. Certainly His response will be consistent with who He is. He may honor our request. He may ignore our request. We cannot read His mind. Hence, no one is in a position to decide whether God is fair or unfair, whether He is right or wrong. He is not beholden to answer when we ask. He is independent of our prayers. He is a divine person free to respond as He sees fit. Prayer is not manipulating God. It is receiving what the “Most High” gives.

## IV. GOD CARES

Humans are constantly in need. We face problems every day, crises that we cannot solve on our own. We must find help. Fellow humans may assist us with our everyday needs. Only God can help with our eternal concerns. We are assured that He is “*mindful*” of us, that He “*cares*” for us, Psalm 8:3,4; 144:3. He invites us to rely on Him in our times of distress, Psalm 55:22; I Peter 5:7. There are plenty of reasons to pray. Regardless of the number of our needs, the Lord has more blessings to give than we have requests to make.

## V. GOD WORKS IN HIS WORLD

When a person prays, he is assuming that God will act. He expects God to do something. He believes the Lord causes things to happen. And, without a doubt, God does things for the benefit of the human race. His activity can be seen in three areas.

### A. God Works In Nature.

The Lord sustains His creation, Hebrews 1:3. He holds all things together, Colossians 1:17. Obviously, there are powerful forces at work in the universe. We call these forces the “laws of nature.” God is the Lawgiver. He directs the activities of the world, Job 37:10-13; Psalm 104:10,11,13-15,21,27,28; Matthew 5:44,45. Thus, we can honestly pray for rain. We can ask for food. God is in a position to supply these needs because He works in nature.

### B. God Works In Nations.

Rulers believe they are in control. Nations assume they exercise authority. Yet they walk on slippery ground, Daniel 11:36. God is in charge. He lifts up nations and He tears down nations, Jeremiah 18:7-10. No one can stop Him. All governments are subject to the Lord, Isaiah 10:5-13. In truth, they are “*nothing*” before God, Isaiah 40:17,22,23. They are merely His “*servants*,” Romans 13:1,4,6. Over and over the Bible affirms the absolute control of Jehovah. Hence, the saints are encouraged to pray for their rulers, I Timothy 2:1,2.

### C. God Works In People.

The Lord is active in the lives of people. He interacts with the great and the small, the significant and the insignificant. He was with Joseph when Joseph was both a slave and a ruler, cf. Genesis 39:1,2 and Genesis 45:4-7. Consequently, in the case of Joseph, what appeared like the mischief of thoughtless brothers was actually the grace of a loving God, Genesis 50:20. The Most High helped Ruth, Ruth 2:20. He also remembered the redeemed, Psalm 107:1-9. He rescued the prisoner, Psalm 107:10-16. He delivered the rebellious, Psalms 107:17-22. He saved those who were in danger, Psalm 107:23-32. God is good—good to those who do not

deserve His goodness. As a result, we can approach Him with bold confidence and full assurance, Hebrews 10:19-22. For, it is clear, God is active in His world.

## VI. GOD IS NEAR

God dwells in heaven. We live on earth, Ecclesiastes 5:2. The glory of God is “*above the heavens*” (or sky), Psalm 8:1. He looks down from “*heaven*” to observe the activities of men on earth, Psalm 14:2; 80:14; Lamentations 3:49,50. Though far above, He is also close by, Acts 17:27. God is “*near*,” Deuteronomy 4:7; Psalm 145:18; Isaiah 55:6,7; Philippians 4:5b. The Lord is near at hand. He is close enough to hear our petitions. He is close enough to answer our prayers. Indeed, He is nearer than near to all who seek Him.

## VII. GOD LISTENS

In prayer, the believer is faced with some of his greatest challenges. Will God hear? Will He answer? Do our prayers make any difference? Can we assume our prayers will move Him to do what He would not otherwise do? Or is the blessing of prayer simply the influence it has on us?

Jesus knew God heard Him, John 11:42. And, if God heard his Son, will He not hear us who pray in the name of His Son? That is the clue to answered prayer. God heard Jesus. He will hear those who speak to Him through Jesus. For “*through Him we have access to the Father by one Spirit*,” Ephesians 2:18. The Trinity is no longer an abstract speculation. Instead, the Trinity is a living manifestation of our fellowship with God. It clarifies how our prayers are heard in the throne room of heaven.

## VIII. GOD KNOWS

Why request help if God is helpless? Why ask Him if He does not answer? Why talk to Him if we are wiser than He? Our asking assumes the Lord knows what to do. It assumes He is able to provide what is needed. It assumes He can do things for us that we cannot do for ourselves.

The Lord is beyond understanding, Job 26:14. We cannot fathom the depths of His wisdom, the breadth of His knowledge, Ephesians 3:20,21. God knows everything, Romans 11:33,34. He knows what is best in every situation. He knows what we need before we ask, Matthew 6:8. Prayer is the anvil upon which our conversation with heaven is shaped. God does not need our instructions. He already knows.

## IX. GOD KNOWS BEST

The Lord knows us inside and out, Psalm 139:1-6; cf. Proverbs 15:3; I John 3:19,20. No one is “*hidden*” from God, Hebrews 4:13. If God knows our thoughts and deeds,

does He not know our needs? And, since He knows us so well, does He not know what is best for us? His awareness of our situation is reassuring. He knows what we should have. Hence, with confidence, the believer can say, "*I shall lack nothing,*" Psalm 23:1; Philippians 4:19. The Father knows best!

As humans, we are prone to take pride in our self-sufficiency. We strive to be self-reliant. But, after a moment of reflection, that looks silly. We are limited beings. Our existence is fragile. We are dependent on heaven. God has given us everything we have. He is the center around which our survival revolves, Acts 17:25. He "*satisfies the desires of every living thing,*" Psalm 145:16. Without Him, we are nothing. Is it correct, then, to assume that God is our only resource, that prayer is our only supply? Absolutely! And, because that is true, why are we not on our knees? Prayer is not optional.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### CHARACTERISTICS OF PRAYER

Prayer is an expression of desire. The longing remains silent until prayer gives it a voice. When a need is genuine, the craving of the soul will demand to be heard. A deep yearning leads to urgent prayer.

Our wishes precede, accompany, and follow prayer. Thus, in communicating with heaven, our wants are an important adjunct. Without desire, prayer is lifeless. It is a perfunctory performance, a bland recital of empty words.

A sense of need creates a craving. *“Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness,”* Matthew 5:6. *“Like newborn babies, crave pure spiritual milk,”* I Peter 2:2. An appetite for blessings from above kindles the fire of desire here below. Thus, the heart is impelled to pray.

Aspiration is to prayer what food is to the body. Without desire, prayer has no energy, no strength, and no vitality. Without a longing, prayer wanders through the barren landscape of memorized petitions. Passion is absent. The mind is dormant. The heart is elsewhere.

A person is not necessarily communicating with God because he goes through the motions. Or, to say it differently, prayer is more than bowing the head and mouthing some words. God has laid down several essential elements for acceptable supplication. They are the characteristics of biblical prayer. They guide our spiritual wishes to a beneficial destination.

#### I. ACCORDING TO HIS WILL

The first characteristic of acceptable prayer is submission. It is surrender to the will of God, Matthew 6:10b. His will has priority. Why? His wisdom transcends our greatest thoughts, Isaiah 55:8,9. His ways are beyond our deepest comprehension, Romans 11:33.

The phrase *“will of God”* has two meanings. First, it refers to His commands. For instance, Jesus said, *“Not everyone who says to Me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only he who does the will of My Father who is in heaven,”* Matthew 7:21; cf. Proverbs 28:9. Second, the *“will of God”* refers to His wishes. James suggested we ought to say, *“If it is the Lord’s will we will...do this or that,”* James 4:15. This refers to what God desires. In either case, the will of God must take priority. Hence, *“If we*

*ask anything according to His will, He hears us,"* I John 5:14.

The point is clear. Our prayers must not contradict His commands nor “go against the grain” of His wishes. Submission is key. Prayer is asking the Lord to do something. We must never presume to tell the Lord what to do. He calls the shots. We follow His will. As the widow prayed, *“Lord, You be the needle. I will be the thread. You go first. I will follow.”*

## II. IN JESUS NAME

We are not equal to God. We cannot march into His throne room with a list of demands. We need someone who knows Him to *“arbitrate between us,”* to lay one hand on God’s shoulder and the other hand on our shoulders, Job 9:32-35. Then we can make our requests with hope. *“My Father will give you whatever you ask in My name,”* Jesus promised, John 16:23. We use His name because our name has no clout in the hallowed halls of heaven, John 15:16.

The words *“in Jesus name”* are not a magic formula. They are not an empty phrase tacked on to the end of a prayer. Jesus was going away, John 14:1,2. He addressed the apprehension of His disciples. In His absence, He said, they would be able to do what He had done, John 14:12. They only needed to *“ask in His name,”* John 14:13. The Lord, who is now seated at the right hand of God, will hear their petitions and relay them to the Father, Romans 8:34; Hebrews 7:25.

We, too, need not live in fretful anxiety. For, if we pray *“in His name,”* He will faithfully *“speak”* to God, I John 2:1. Christ *“lives to intercede.”* He is our mediator, our go between, I Timothy 2:5. Our faith need not fail, cf. Luke 22:32. Prayer *“in His name”* will ensure the delivery of our petition, John 16:24b.

## III. IN FAITH

It is contradictory to pray and expect no reply. The Scripture encourages us to *“draw near to God with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith,”* Hebrews 10:22. The Lord vowed to answer our petitions. He keeps His word. *“Therefore, whatever you ask for in prayer, believe that you have received it, and it will be yours,”* Mark 11:24. It is imperative to pray expecting a response, Psalms 5:3.

We often plead for the unthinkable. We ask the Lord to take nothing and make something out of it. We need not hesitate. The Bible says, *“All things are possible with God,”* Mark 10:27b. How great, then, is the power of prayer that is bathed in believing. Prayer plus faith is effective because it is focused on the One who has *“all authority in heaven and on earth,”* Matthew 28:18. Faith waits for the Lord to answer. It does not become disheartened because He delays. Instead, it takes God at His word. It lets the Father answer when He thinks the time is right. Faith dispels



anxiety. “(God) *will keep in perfect peace him whose mind is steadfast because he trusts in (God),*” [Isaiah 26:3](#). We cannot have future blessings until the future comes. In withholding His answer, the Lord is attempting to strengthen our resolve. The prayer of faith is patient, [Hebrews 6:12](#). We lie to God when we pray if we do not rely on God after we pray.

Jesus promised to respond. “*Ask and it will be given to you,*” [Matthew 7:7a](#). We often try to put limits on what He said. Jesus put none. He also promised, “*Seek and you will find,*” [Matthew 7:7b](#). Are there conditions to these words? No! Are we to take them at face value? Yes! “*Knock and the door will be opened,*” He added, [Matthew 7:7c](#). “*The hands of God will fulfill what the mouth of God promised,*” [II Chronicles 6:4](#). There are no ifs, ands, or buts about it.

The Lord revealed the secret to believing prayer. He said, “*Have faith in God,*” [Mark 11:22](#). Faith in Him comes first. Then a trust that God will respond comes next. The Lord said, if a person “*does not doubt in his heart but believes what he says will happen, it will be done for him,*” [Mark 11:23](#). The ability to believe in a promise depends entirely on faith in the Promiser. Faith hears His assurance. Faith sees what He has done in the past. Faith feels His presence. Faith knows He will answer. Faith is certain He will act. The anchor between immediate acquisition and delayed appropriation is patient anticipation.

#### IV. FERVENT

When we pray, we should be eager, enthusiastic, and zealous. A half-hearted attitude is unacceptable. It nauseates God, [Revelation 3:15,16](#). How dare we honor Him with our lips when our hearts are far from Him? [Matthew 15:8](#). “Lip service” is no more than empty hypocrisy. The Lord wants us to be completely committed. He expects us to be fervent in prayer.

The word “fervent” expresses the idea of “strength” or “power.” It signifies the ability to do something. In [Matthew 5:13](#), the salt had literally lost its fervor. It lost its “*saltiness,*” (or, its ability to flavor, create thirst, or preserve). Hence, it was “*no longer good for anything.*” In [Acts 19:20](#), the word of God grew in “*power.*” It was effective. In [Galatians 5:6](#), circumcision has no “*value.*” Only Christ has the ability to save. Therefore, in a similar vain, the apostle Paul could do everything through Christ who gave him “*strength,*” [II Corinthians 12:9](#). So, it logically follows, then, that fervent prayer is “*powerful,*” [James 5:16](#).

Prayer without fervor is weak. It is cold and drab. Our petitions should be warmed by the fire of the Holy Spirit, [I Thessalonians 5:19a](#). We must not offer feeble or anemic prayer. Fervency is the throb of a pleading soul. It is a compelling force centered on God. A fervent pray exudes energy and conviction. It has strength and power. Only fervent prayer is able to move mountains.

## V. WITHOUT CEASING

Jesus said we *“should always pray and not give up,”* [Luke 18:1](#). Persistent prayer is not a slavish performance but an enduring passion. It is not a desire half wanted but a need fully expected. Those who pray *“always”* are tenacious, urgent, and firm. It is an expression of faith in a God who responds. Prayer is an assertion of sonship that links the finite to the infinite. It is communication with heaven that neither relaxes nor ceases until it is heard. Seven days without prayer makes one weak.

The Christian prays *“continually,”* [1 Thessalonians 5:17](#). He prays *“on all occasions,”* [Ephesians 6:18](#). The believer should *“devote”* himself to prayer, [Colossians 4:2](#). He should be *“faithful in prayer,”* [Romans 12:12c](#). The Lord hears those who pray with conviction. We should be committed to prayer like blind Bartimaeus, who, when told to be quiet, begged *“all the more,”* [Mark 10:48](#); cf. [Luke 11:5-8](#).

The goal of prayer is to be heard. That will happen if we camp on the footstool of God. To pray *“always”* does not require us to neglect the ordinary duties of life. Rather, it suggests that, once the mundane tasks are done, the believer returns to God as surely as Christ returned to heaven. Those who relegate prayer to the backwaters of their devotion are offering their leftovers to the Lord. Prayer must be a constant, central, persistent part of our spiritual life in the same way breathing is to our physical existence.

## VI. WITH HUMILITY

No one is worthy, on his own merit, to enter the throne room of heaven. Yet God invites us to come. In prayer, we accept His offer. But, in doing so, we must *“not make requests of Him because we are righteous but because of His great mercy,”* [Daniel 9:18b](#). That is the point of the parable regarding the Pharisee and the tax collector praying in the temple courtyard, [Luke 18:9-13](#). The bottom line is inescapable. *“Everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted,”* [Luke 9:14](#); cf. [Psalm 138:6](#); [1 Peter 5:6](#). Humble prayer changes things—especially the one who prays.

Humility is the DNA of modesty. It does not seek publicity. It is not ambitious to occupy high places. It is retiring and self-abasing. It prefers obscurity. It stays out of the limelight. The humble defer to the Lord. They give Him first place. Happy are those who recognize themselves for who they really are. Nowhere is that more obvious than in a prayer closet. There the believer confesses his sin, admits his helplessness, and acknowledges his need for grace. Prayer is not acceptable unless it is saturated with humility. A condescending attitude is natural when a person looks at God. Once they recognize Him for who He is, they avoid applause. They run from pride. They wish to remain anonymous. If there is any praise, they want the

Almighty to receive it.

## VII. IN THE HOLY SPIRIT

When Jesus went back to heaven, the Holy Spirit came to earth, John 16:7. The Spirit was given after Christ was "*glorified*," John 7:37-39. Something new occurred. Something different happened. The Spirit was sent "*into our hearts*," Galatians 4:6. He brought new life. He provided a closer relationship with the heavenly Father. The Spirit literally helps us pray, Romans 8:26. He "*intercedes for the saints in accordance with the will of God*," Romans 8:27. Thus, in order to pray as we ought, we should "*pray in the Spirit*," Ephesians 6:18. For through Him we "*have access to the Father*," Ephesians 2:18. It is urgent, then, that the Holy Spirit is our partner in prayer, Jude 20b.

## VIII. WITH A FORGIVING ATTITUDE

"*No one is righteous before God*," Psalm 143:2; cf. Proverbs 20:9; Romans 3:10-12,23; I John 1:8. The Lord expects us to forgive others if we want to be forgiven, Matthew 6:14,15; Mark 11:25. We are to "*forgive others, as God in Christ forgave*" us, Ephesians 4:32b. Though a tall order, it is an unbending requirement of prayer.

Effective prayer depends on good relationships with our fellowman. Love of God and love of neighbor cannot be separated, I John 4:20,21. A person who hates his brother will not be heard in heaven. Reconciliation with our enemies must precede our approach to God, Matthew 5:23,24. Forgiveness is the road to answered prayer, Colossians 3:13. If I am distant from other humans, I cannot be close to God. Though I may shout in prayer, if I do not have love, I merely make noise, I Corinthians 13:1.

## IX. IN UNITY

"*How good and pleasant it is when brothers live together in unity*," Psalm 133:1. It enhances their prayer life. For "*if two of you on earth agree about anything you ask for, it will be done for you by My Father in heaven*," Matthew 18:19. Corporate prayer requires corporate unity. The Lord is present among those who abide in harmony, Matthew 18:20. As prayers are hindered in the home when love is absent, I Peter 3:7, so prayers are hindered in the Church when the congregation is divided, I Corinthians 1:10.

## X. ACCOMPANIED BY RIGHTEOUS LIVING

The Bible mentions a final characteristic of acceptable prayer. Our petitions must be accompanied by righteous living. The prophet Isaiah said God would "*not listen*" even though Israel "*offered many prayers*," Isaiah 1:15. His people were shocked.

They went to the temple. They gave offerings. They acted like good folks. But it was all a pretense, a charade. Jesus called such people "*hypocrites*," [Matthew 23:25-28](#). If our piety is a performance for men, God will close His ears to our supplications, [Matthew 6:1](#). The Lord looks for a "*contrite heart*," [Psalm 51:16,17](#). Prayer is not an "*act of worship*." It is not a show of religion. It is easy to see through such mockery, [Titus 1:16](#). Prayer must be an earnest expression of devotion, a genuine communication with heaven. There may be more acknowledgement of God in some profanity than in some prayer (especially when the former is sincere and the latter is superficial).

The list of characteristics of acceptable prayer is long. For some, it is discouragingly long. Why bother praying? Will any of my prayers pass muster? And, if some do, will they make any difference? Can human prayer change the divine mind?

- . After Israel made the golden calf, God was determined to "*destroy*" His people, [Exodus 32:9,10](#). Moses intervened. He "*sought the favor of the Lord*," [Exodus 32:11,12](#). God responded. He "*relented*." He "*did not bring on His people the disaster He had threatened*," [Exodus 32:14](#). Prayer changed the mind of the Lord.

- . God allowed a young boy to die, [I Kings 17:17,20](#). His mother was heartbroken, [I Kings 17:18](#). Elijah asked God to "*return*" life to the child, [I Kings 18:21](#). The Lord heard the prophet. Life was restored to the lad, [I Kings 18:22](#). Obviously, then, "*the prayer of a righteous man is powerful and effective*," [James 5:16b](#).

Prayer changes things. It can change the mind of God. It did in the past. It can do so in the present. The faithful believe. They can do more on their knees than they can on their feet. God will hear. He will answer. Why, then, is heaven so often silent? Could it be that our petitions lack one or more characteristics of acceptable prayer?

## **PART III**

### **SUPPLEMENTARY INSTRUCTIONS**

## CHAPTER FIVE

### ANSWERS TO PRAYER

Prayer, by itself, is not proof that God is listening. Our petitions may simply be a performance, a routine habit. But, when our prayers receive answers, we have a clear confirmation that God is paying attention. We have an unequivocal demonstration that the Lord is responding.

Answered prayer justifies faith in praying. It is the power of God at work in His world. Answered prayer confronts the skeptic with solid evidence. It challenges the doubter to rethink his conclusions. It rescues the saint from the charge of fanaticism. Answered prayer is a steppingstone to greater faith.

Fools smirk at answered prayer. They grin because they do not expect God to reply. They think prayer is a personal pep talk. Little do they realize! God promises to answer the petitions of His people. He is ready and willing to grant our requests. Blessings from above are often responses to supplications from below. Prayer waits in hope. Hope is not disappointed. God answers when we call.

Prayer is not an end in itself. It is not something done to make us look good. Prayer is a means to an end. It is something we do that brings us something in return. Otherwise prayer has no value. It looks for an answer (though it is not addressing heaven for selfish reasons). We seek a reply because we cannot navigate life on our own. Prayer is our communication with God. An answer is His communication with us. We can expect three responses.

#### I. YES

Certainly the Lord wants to hear our requests. But He wants our petitions to be an expression of definite need. He desires a specific appeal. Thus, Jesus asked the blind man, "*What do you want?*" Mark 10:51. When precise prayers are offered, precise answers can be expected. Clear-cut requests clarify our thinking. They focus our desires.

#### A. God Gives What We Ask.

The Lord knows what we need before we ask Him, Matthew 6:8. Often He does not answer our requests until we ask, James 4:2. Indeed, sometimes we must ask repeatedly, Luke 18:1-5. But, when the time is right, God replies "*quickly*," Luke 18:7,8. The Lord gives us what we ask, Psalm 30:2; John 16:23; I John 5:14,15.

God gave Hannah a son, I Samuel 1:20. He supplied Solomon with wisdom, I Kings 3:10-12. He blessed Elijah with rain, I Kings 18:41-45. He healed Hezekiah of illness, II Kings 20:1-5a. He released Peter from prison, Acts 12:6-17. Answered prayer is not hocus pocus. It is not an overheated imagination. It is real. We receive because we ask.

#### B. God Gives Us Something Better.

David asked God to spare his sick child. His prayer was answered in an unexpected way. The child died! God gave David another son. The Lord loved Solomon, II Samuel 12:24,25. The prayer of David was answered. The king received something unexpected, something different than he had requested. The Lord gives a better blessing for each one He takes away.

Paul assured the Ephesians that God *“is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine,”* Ephesians 3:20. The apostle begged God to remove his *“thorn in the flesh,”* II Corinthians 12:7,8. The Lord gave him something better—the *“power of Christ”* to endure it, II Corinthians 12:9. Saints soon learn that they do not always receive what they ask for. Often they get more. God knows how to give better gifts, James 1:17a. He specializes in happy surprises.

## II. NO

Sometimes the Lord does not give what is requested. Moses asked to go over the Jordan River to see the Promised Land, Deuteronomy 3:23-25. God refused. Instead, He said, *“Do not speak to Me anymore about the matter,”* Deuteronomy 3:26. Moses was forbidden to go, Deuteronomy 3:27. God answered. His response was “no!” Likewise, king Saul asked God if he should attack the Philistines. But *“God did not answer,”* I Samuel 14:37. The silence of heaven is a common experience, Psalms 10:1. It is an unnerving ordeal. The doors of heaven appear to be closed. *“No prayer can get through,”* Lamentations 3:44. The Lord seems to be uninterested. He shuts His ears. He turns His back. He appears to take a nap, Psalms 44:23,24. Why? Why do we receive “no” for an answer?

#### A. Because Our Prayers Are Selfish.

The Lord promises to answer. *“Ask and it will be given to you,”* Matthew 7:7a. And, He added. *“Everyone who asks receives,”* Matthew 7:8a. He wants to respond even when He does not respond. Why? There is something amiss in our life. He hears our prayers, Psalms 66:19; cf. Psalms 34:17,18. He wants to help. He fully intends to answer. Yet, when we ask, we do not receive. Sin shuts the door. Our motives are distorted. We want to spend what we get on ourselves, James 4:3. The problem is with us not with God.

### B. Because Our Prayers Are Limited.

God rejected the request of His Son. In Gethsemane, Jesus asked the Father to remove Calvary from His agenda, Matthew 26:39. It was a legitimate petition. But God said, “No!” The Father sacrificed His Son. His death was necessary for us to have eternal life, Romans 5:6-8. If the Lord had granted the request of Jesus, where would we be? Because God said “no,” we now have redemption. It required a terrible price. God rejected Jesus’ prayer because it was too small. God allowed His tragic death in order to gain a bigger blessing. The Lord let it happen for the greater good. And, since He rejected the prayer of Jesus, should we be disturbed when He rejects a prayer of ours? If our petition is limited, the Lord may refuse to answer it for the sake of the many. He will say “no” to us so that He can say “yes” to others!

### C. Because Our Prayers Are Not His Will.

No one has the broad view of things like God does. We have tunnel vision. He sees everything—past, present, and future—at the same glance. Therefore, His thoughts are far superior to our thoughts. His decisions are much better than our decisions. His will is always preferable to our will. Like Jesus, then, we should say to God, “*Your will be done,*” Matthew 26:42c; cf. Acts 18:21a; I Peter 3:17. It is imperative that every prayer is subordinate to “the will of God.” When our petitions submit to His will, we can confidently believe that “*He hears us,*” I John 5:14.

Many of us wonder if we ask “*according to His will.*” Our doubt diminishes our assurance. The Lord does not wish for us to be left wondering. Confusion about answers to prayer leads to abandoning prayer. God wants us to petition Him with confidence, I John 3:21,22.

We can know the will of God. It is in His word. If we study His word, the Spirit will guide us. The Spirit reveals the mind of God. Hence, we can know His mind. We can understand His will, I Corinthians 2:10b-12. Whenever we ask—within the limits of His word—we can confidently look forward to an answer.

## II. WAIT

Effective prayer comes from righteous lips. God listens to us when we keep His commands. He rewards us “*according to our righteousness,*” Psalm 18:20; 119:153. Those who follow the path of God know that He will respond to them, Psalm 17:6.

Still we frequently pray without success. We plead but the Lord is quiet. We ask but He does not seem to reply. How can this be? Perhaps, we are impatient. We pray for fruit. If it is in the springtime, we must wait. The tree has to blossom. The fruit must grow. The harvest needs to ripen. We want an answer before it is time. God wants us to continue in prayer throughout the summer. We will taste the results



of our supplication in the fall. Patience first. Rewards later. Discipline now. Maturity in due time. Prayers today. Answers tomorrow.

#### A. God Delays Answering Our Prayers.

It is common for us to expect a quick reply. If the Lord does not respond within the framework of our expectations, we assume He is not going to answer. This can lead to doubt concerning His acknowledgement of our prayers. And, should our request eventually be fulfilled, we may think the answer was mere chance, good luck or happenstance. We fail to give the Lord credit. This reasoning is risky. It can damage our faith. It can destroy our prayer life. It can weaken our relationship with heaven.

Our schedule is not the timetable of God. The Lord promised Abraham a son. He waited twenty-five years before fulfilling His word. The Lord vowed to give Abraham an inheritance of land. The Almighty waited nearly five centuries before giving the Promised Land to the descendants of Abraham. God promised to send a Messiah to save His people. He waited thousands of years to fulfill His vow. Obviously God is not in a hurry!

There are likely many reasons why the Lord delays some of His answers. It might be to increase the intensity of our requests. It might be to deepen our gratitude for blessings already received. It might be to enhance the desire to commune with heaven. It might be to teach patience, to adjust our attitude toward prayer, to refocus our priorities, or to clarify our understanding of life. Whatever the reason, God is in control. He knows best in every situation. Our place, then, is to trust Him, pray expecting a reply, and let the Lord decide when and how to respond.

#### B. We Are Unaware That He Has Answered.

Our frustration over unanswered prayer may be due to our lack of knowing He has already replied. *“For God does speak—now one way, now another—though man may not perceive it,”* [Job 33:14](#). We expect God to answer in a certain way. He may choose to reply in another way. We look to the right while He is working on our left. Our expectations can act like blinders. We are unable to see that He has already responded.

God may choose to answer in a burning bush. He may speak in a whisper. He may respond in a storm. But, thankfully, He answers. He answers in ways that we cannot anticipate. We limit ourselves to a few narrow possibilities. God may use a kaleidoscope of diverse alternatives. He replies but we can be unaware of His reply. God does not cater to our every desire. It would not be in our best interest for Him to do so. Therefore, when we ask for temporal things, He may give us spiritual things. When we ask Him to remove pain, He may offer us strength to endure it.

When we ask for success, He when give us failure in order for us to learn to rely on Him. When we ask for benefits for ourselves, He may give us opportunities to serve others. When we ask for the easy way, He may send us greater challenges to exercise our commitment.

When God gives us blessings that are different from our requests, it is evident His value system is different from ours. He is trying to lead us to better choices, to higher achievements, and to greater joy. No wonder Jesus taught His disciples to pray (though He never told them how to preach)!

## CHAPTER SIX

### EXAMPLES OF PRAYER

There are many prayers in the Bible. Each one offers important insights into the nature of acceptable communication with God. A study of prayer is incomplete without an examination of these petitions. That is the rationale for this concluding chapter. Out of more than three hundred prayers in Scripture, we will look at ten.

#### I. ABRAHAM PLEADS FOR SODOM, Genesis 18:22-33.

The aged patriarch is visited by angels (though Abraham did not realize at the time that they were messengers from God), Hebrews 13:2. The Lord tells Abraham that Sodom and Gomorrah were doomed, Genesis 18:16,17. This troubled Abraham because his nephew, Lot, had moved there, Genesis 13:12. Consequently, Abraham prays for Sodom, Genesis 18:23.

##### A. Object Of His Plea.

Certainly Abraham wanted to rescue Lot. But, it appears, he also pled for all the inhabitants of the city, Genesis 18:24. The possibilities of such a massive destruction leaves Abraham appalled, Genesis 18:25.

##### B. Spirit Of His Intercession.

Abraham was bold. He mentions his concern several times, Genesis 18:27. His prayers demonstrate deep humility, unprecedented freedom, and earnest entreaty. A similar attitude should animate our supplications, Hebrews 4:16. Though confident, we should remain contrite in the presence of the Almighty, Genesis 32:10; II Samuel 7:28; Luke 7:6b. Abraham continued to beg for Sodom, Genesis 18:29-32.

##### C. Logic Of His Petition.

The patriarch bases his plea on the righteousness of God. The Lord will surely “*do right*,” he said, Genesis 18:25. Earlier God had spared the Amorites because they did not yet deserve to die, Genesis 15:16. Will He not do the same for Sodom? The logic of Abraham was clear, precise, and convincing. But would God see it that way?

##### D. Success Of His Prayer.

Abraham got all he asked for. He did not petition for the unconditional redemption

of the wicked city. God agreed to his final request, Genesis 18:32. What would have happened if Abraham had continued dickering with God? Perhaps, it is presumptuous to entertain such a thought. Abraham was heard. The bargaining had reached its limit. The Lord was left in control, allowed to answer as He saw fit.

There is much to learn from this scenario. (1) God is willing to listen to human reason (especially when our logic is soaked in submission). (2) It is permissible to approach heaven in prayer on the same matter with revised requests. And (3) we should plead for the welfare of others (even when the others are wicked), Exodus 34:6,7; Nehemiah 9:17; Psalm 103:8-10.

## II. MOSES INTERCEDES FOR ISRAEL, Exodus 32:11-14.

While Moses was receiving the Ten Commandments on Mt. Sinai, the Israelites made an idol god, Exodus 32:1. Aaron, the brother of Moses, was the ringleader in constructing the golden calf, Exodus 32:2-4. He organized a festival to worship the false god. The worship service ended in a sexual orgy, Exodus 32:5,6. God was outraged, Exodus 32:7,8. He was ready to destroy His people, Exodus 32:9,10.

### A. Passion Of His Prayer.

Moses squares his shoulders. He prays with conviction. No whining. No timidity. No feeble apology. No stammering. No uncertainty. He acts like a shepherd who watches out for his sheep, Hebrews 13:17. Moses confronts God with strong words, with demanding statements. Like Jacob, Moses is determined not to release God until the Lord blesses him, Genesis 32:26.

### B. Selflessness Of His Plea.

God wanted to destroy Israel. Then the Almighty would create a new nation from the descendants of Moses. Quite an ego builder! But, without hesitation, Moses declined, Exodus 32:13. God had promised that honor to the forefathers of Israel. Moses believed the Lord should keep His promise to them. Though many people might be tempted by such an offer, Moses did not give it a second thought.

### C. Reasonableness Of His Argument.

Moses stood toe to toe with God. His analysis of the situation won the day. (1) God had made a covenant with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. How could He go back on His word? Hebrews 6:13. And (2) the destruction of Israel would allow room for the pagans to gloat, to ridicule God for failing, Exodus 32:11,12. If He begins a good work, will He not carry it to completion? Philippians 1:6. What kind of God would He be if He could not successfully lead Israel to the Promised Land?

The Lord “*relented*,” [Exodus 32:14](#). The prayer of Moses prevailed. God spared the people. It was certainly a close call. In reality, it was a temporary reprieve. Eventually, because of their propensity to sin, Israel would confront the wrath of God, [Exodus 32:33,34](#).

### III. DAVID GIVES THANKS, [II Samuel 7:18-29](#).

King David wanted to build a house (or temple) for God, [II Samuel 7:1,2](#). The Lord declined the gesture, [II Samuel 7:5-7](#). However, God proposed to build a house (or dynasty) for David, [II Samuel 7:11b,12](#). The promise is unparalleled in history. David is overwhelmed. The love of heaven stirred deep feelings in the heart of this powerful monarch.

#### A. Created Wonder.

David sought the presence of God, [II Samuel 7:18a](#). He “*sat*” before the Lord in silence, [II Samuel 7:20](#). Amazed. Dumfounded. Awed. What can a person do but wonder at the grandeur of grace? God had done marvelous things in the past, [II Samuel 7:18b](#). Now He promised to do even greater things in the future, [II Samuel 7:19](#). What effect does the gift of Christ, the tenderness of His mercy, the greatness of His patience, or the promise of eternal life have on us? Do they create wonder? Do they cause us to seek His presence? Do they take our breath away?

#### B. Deepened Humility.

David did not deserve this promise. It was based entirely on the “*will of God*,” [II Samuel 7:21](#). No wonder David was humbled! A taste of divine grace is unique in the human experience, [I Corinthians 15:10](#); [I John 3:1](#). Where, then, is there room for boasting? [Romans 3:27](#).

#### C. Provoked Praise.

David broke out in adoration, [II Samuel 7:22](#). The Lord demonstrated His unsurpassed greatness. Indeed, He is the only God. There is none other. He is the God of gods, the King of kings, and the Lord of lords. There is no God like Him, [Exodus 15:11](#); [I Samuel 2:2](#); [I Kings 8:23](#); [I Chronicles 17:20](#); [Psalm 35:10](#); [71:19](#); [86:8](#); [Isaiah 46:9](#); [Jeremiah 10:6](#); [Micah 7:18](#).

#### D. Aroused Gratitude.

An undeserved gift might cause one to brag. David focused on God. He hid behind the glow of divine goodness, [II Samuel 7:23,24](#). The love that embraces us embraces others, too. I am just one in a large multitude of the redeemed, [Revelation 5:9,10](#).

#### E. Increased Commitment.

David surrendered his heart afresh to the grand plan of God, II Samuel 7:25,26. The future of David was the promise of the Almighty. The future of every believer should be the plans of heaven, II Corinthians 5:14,15. With this frame of mind, every yoke is easy, every burden is light, Matthew 11:28-30.

#### F. Nurtured Dependence.

David submits to the grace of God, II Samuel 7:27-29. Only the blessing of the Lord could preserve the dynasty. Like David, we must depend on heaven. We cannot pass through the pearly gates without His help.

One of the great consolations of our faith is that God knows us, II Samuel 7:20. And, in spite of that knowledge, God loves us. He knows our unexpressed thoughts, our secret motives. He knows the paths we take. He knows but He still cares. David felt it. Do we?

### IV. SOLOMON DEDICATES THE TEMPLE, I Kings 8:22-53.

When the temple was finished, Solomon assembled Israel to dedicate the building, I Kings 7:51-8:1. He "*spread out his hands toward heaven*" and prayed, I Kings 8:22. His prayer was both a praise and a petition.

#### A. Layman Participated.

It is worth noticing that a layman led the worship. While priests alone were ordained to burn incense, II Chronicles 26:18, the laity could officiate in prayer, II Chronicles 14:11; 20:5; 30:18-20. Scripture clearly shows that public prayer was not restricted to the clergy.

#### B. Pattern Followed.

The king began with the words "*praise be to the Lord*," I Kings 8:15. He ended his supplication with the same expression: "*Praise be to the Lord*," I Kings 8:54-56. Paul followed a similar pattern. Prayer was the bookends of his letters, Philippians 1:3,4; 4:6. It is the order of most worship services to this day.

#### C. Parishioners Remembered.

Solomon focused on the needs of his audience. There were no empty platitudes, no pretentious claims. The king asked God to keep His promise, I Kings 8:25,26. He begged Jehovah to hear the prayers of His people, I Kings 8:27-40. He wanted the Lord to be merciful when Israel went astray, I Kings 8:46-51.

A festive day was packed with solemn ceremony. It was a sobering occasion. God was faithful. Would Israel be faithful? Solomon pulled back the curtain of history. He predicted that Israel would sin against God, I Kings 8:31,33,37,44. It was only a matter of time. *“For there is no one who does not sin,”* he said, I Kings 8:46; cf. Psalm 130:3; 143:2; Proverbs 20:9; Romans 3:9. Consequently, mixed in all the celebration, there was the confession of human frailty. God alone could save them. There is no hope without the mercy of heaven. *“Praise be to the Lord!”* I Kings 8:56.

#### V. JEHOSHAPHAT REQUESTS DELIVERANCE, II Chronicles 20:5-12.

Jerusalem was threatened. A powerful army was coming to decimate the city of David. King Jehoshaphat turned to the Lord for assistance, II Chronicles 20:1-4. He offered an eloquent plea for help.

##### A. God Acknowledged.

Jehoshaphat starts by mentioning the sovereignty of God, II Chronicles 20:6. He is the God of heaven and earth, Daniel 4:35. He is the God to whom all nations owe allegiance, I Chronicles 29:11; Psalm 103:19; 135:5,6; Daniel 4:17. No one can resist His majesty.

##### B. Petition Stated.

The Almighty gave Israel the Promised Land. He drove out the pagans who lived there. The land belonged to the people of God, II Chronicles 20:7. Surely, then, God will save them, II Chronicles 20:8,9. The enemy had forgotten that Israel did not attack them during the conquest, II Chronicles 20:10. Why were they attacking Israel? II Chronicles 20:11. The people of God were vulnerable. Will not the Lord step in and deliver them? II Chronicles 20:12. Jehoshaphat hoped so.

##### C. Answer Received.

God said, *“Do not be afraid or discouraged,”* II Chronicles 20:15. Why? The battle belongs to the Lord, Exodus 14:13,14; I Samuel 17:45-47. Still the people had to do their part. They were to march against the enemy. They were to demonstrate their faith in heaven. Those who trusted God saw the *“deliverance of the Lord,”* II Chronicles 20:16,17. God was with them, Deuteronomy 20:4; Nehemiah 4:20; Matthew 28:20b.

The Lord is our refuge in times of trouble. He rescues the perishing. The battle belongs to Him. Our assignment is to stand. And, if we stand, we will see the salvation of God, Ephesians 6:13-18.

#### VI. HEZEKIAH REGAINS HIS HEALTH, Isaiah 38:9-20.

The king “*became ill.*” He was “*at the point of death.*” Hezekiah was “*to put his house in order,*” [Isaiah 38:1](#). His days were numbered. The king “*wept bitterly.*” He begged God to remember the good he had done, [Isaiah 38:3](#); cf. [II Kings 18:3-6](#). God “*saw his tears*” and gave him “*fifteen more years,*” [Isaiah 38:4,5](#). When we ask for mercy, God responds with grace.

#### A. Uncertainty Of Death.

Hezekiah was disturbed. He faced the sunset of his existence at the noontime of his life, [Isaiah 38:10](#). The final call came too soon. Was life on earth for Hezekiah over? [Isaiah 38:11](#). He had a lot of uncertainties about his journey to the other side. He had never been there. He would not return. It was a one-way trip, [Isaiah 38:12,13](#). Hezekiah was deeply “*troubled,*” [Isaiah 38:14](#).

#### B. Joy Of Health.

God answered the prayer of Hezekiah. He healed the king. What more could Hezekiah request, [Isaiah 38:15,16](#)? He suffered the anguish of illness so that he could rejoice in the bliss of health, [Isaiah 38:17](#). He learned the true meaning of trust. “*Wait for the Lord,*” the psalmist wrote, “*be strong, take heart, and wait for the Lord,*” [Psalm 27:14](#). God “*saved*” Hezekiah, [Isaiah 38:20a](#). The Lord can heal us, too. If not, why do we pray for health?

This passage has many lessons. (1) Our life is in the hands of God. He determines the length of our days. (2) The Lord encourages us to ask for healing. He heard Hezekiah. He will also hear us. And, (3) when healing comes, we should “*walk humbly*” the rest of our days, [Isaiah 38:15](#); cf. [Psalm 119:67](#).

### VII. DANIEL ASKS FOR MERCY, [Daniel 9:3-19](#).

The prophet knew the exile of Israel was about to end, [Daniel 9:1,2](#). He wanted God to renew His love toward His people, to send them back to Palestine. Daniel confessed the sin that had caused the captivity, [Daniel 9:5,11b-14](#). Israel deserved her punishment. Now, the prophet assumed, it was time for Him to show His kindness.

#### A. Prayer For Pardon.

Daniel admitted that God was righteous and merciful, [Daniel 9:7,9](#). Though His people had ignored Him, Israel must turn to the very One they had offended. Help can be found nowhere else. Daniel asked God to abandon His anger, [Daniel 9:16](#).

#### B. Blessing Of Forgiveness.



The prophet hoped the Lord would view the desolation of Jerusalem, Daniel 9:18. Maybe, then, God would forgive His people. And, if He granted them forgiveness, help could be sought for the calamities that resulted from their rebellion. This is the divine way of dealing with the fallout of sin: confession, pardon, and renewal (in that order), Leviticus 26:40-45.

The supplication of Daniel is instructive on several levels. (1) Our petitions are based on the goodness of God rather than the righteousness of man, Daniel 9:18b. (2) The Lord is honored more by forgiveness (which destroys sin) than by anger (which punishes it), Daniel 9:19. And (3) confession is a necessary condition of forgiveness, I John 1:9.

#### VIII. EZRA DEALS WITH DIFFICULTY, Ezra 9:5-15.

The exiles had returned to Jerusalem. They were allowed to go home, Ezra 1:1-4. They even received assistance from their pagan neighbors for the journey, Ezra 8:35,36. The future looked bright. Yet, within days of their arrival in Palestine, things took a turn for the worst. Ezra learned that many men—including some religious leaders—had married foreign women, Ezra 9:1,2. Ezra was “*appalled*,” Ezra 9:3.

##### A. Unbelievable Shame.

Ezra had come to the holy city to teach the laws of God to those who did not know them, Ezra 7:25. His assignment was complicated from the beginning. For some time, the people had neglected the will of God. Their hearts were hard. They openly disobeyed. Their privilege became their disgrace. Ezra was ashamed, Ezra 9:5,6.

##### B. Incredible Folly.

The perpetrators were caught “red handed.” There was no room for denial. They surely knew better. Did they not remember the humiliation of the exile? Ezra 9:7. How could they forget? How could they blatantly defy God, again? It was contrary to common sense. The Lord had given Israel a second chance, Ezra 9:8,9. Israel responded by showing “*contempt for the riches of His kindness*,” Romans 2:4.

##### C. Inexcusable Guilt.

Ezra was aghast, Ezra 9:10. The Lord had been clear. He told His people what He wanted them to do, Ezra 9:11,12. The Jews deserved a stiffer penalty, Ezra 9:13. God had been merciful. Yet they sinned once more, Ezra 9:14. Israel was guilty. It was impossible for them to stand before God, Ezra 9:15.

This is a remarkable description of true repentance. (1) All sin is an offence “*against*

God," Genesis 39:9; I Samuel 12:23; Psalm 51:4. (2) The faithful believe the Lord is fair, Zephaniah 3:5. They believe everyone is held accountable, Romans 3:19. Finally, like Ezra, (3) the people confessed their sins and prayed for forgiveness, Ezra 10:1. A healthy prayer life is the surest remedy for an unhealthy wild life.

#### IX. JESUS PLEADS FOR UNITY, John 17:20-23.

The Lord prayed for us "*who believe through the message*" of the first century disciples, John 17:20. The followers of Christ are many yet they must remain one. In spite of differences in race, temperament, and culture, there is only "*one Lord, one faith, and one baptism*," Ephesians 4:3-6.

##### A. Based On Heaven.

This unity must reflect the union of the Father and the Son, John 17:21a. What kind of union is that? It is a unity of mind and heart, of character and purpose. The Father and Son are not at odds with one another. They have the same goal. They follow the same plan. They speak the same things. We are to be one like they are one, John 17:11c.

##### B. Practiced On Earth.

Our faith in Jesus allows Christ to dwell in us. Since the Father is already in the Son, when Christ comes to dwell in us, the Father comes, too, John 17:23a. Thus, we experience the love of God. His love is in us because Jesus is in us, John 17:26. His love mellows our hearts so that we can love one another. This love is the foundation of our getting along. It is the basis of our unity, John 17:22.

##### C. Aids In Evangelism.

The world will take note of our oneness. It will be attracted by our brotherly kindness, John 17:23. People are convinced that God loves them when they see His followers love each other, John 13:34,35; Romans 12:10; I Thessalonians 4:9; I Peter 1:22; I John 3:14; 4:20. When the world says, "*See how they love one another*," evangelism will be able to reach those who feel the warmth of our love.

Christian unity is important. It was the burden of Jesus' prayer. We must not neglect it. How can we claim to be His when we fail to act like Him? "*How good and pleasant it is when brothers live together in unity*," Psalm 133:1. "*Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called sons of God*," Matthew 5:9.

#### X. PAUL PRAYS FOR SPIRITUAL GROWTH, Ephesians 3:14-21.

Because of the cross, we have a new relationship with God. This connection gives us

confidence to approach Him through Christ, Ephesians 3:12. So, “*for this reason,*” Paul knelt before the Father, Ephesians 3:14. His prayer is one of the most fervent petitions found in Scripture.

#### A. A Request For Spiritual Strength.

The apostle wanted the Ephesians to be strengthened with power, Ephesians 3:16. Such empowerment is a gift from above, Philippians 4:19. It provides spiritual strength. It helps us resist temptation, endure affliction, and defeat the devil. When one hopes in the Lord, he will neither “*grow weary nor become faint,*” Isaiah 40:31.

#### B. A Gift Of Divine Indwelling.

The believer is a temple in which Christ can dwell, Ephesians 3:17a; cf. I Corinthians 3:16; I John 4:16. And, “*if Christ is in us,*” we are a new creation, Romans 8:9,10; II Corinthians 5:17; Galatians 2:20. Paul prayed that this new life would take root in the marrow of our soul. This will happen when a love for all that is Christian is firmly established in us, Ephesians 3:17b.

#### C. The Power For Comprehending The Truth.

The gift of the Lord dwelling in us aids in our understanding the dimensions of His immeasurable love, Ephesians 3:18,19. Paul wants us to know His love so that we can comprehend the “*fulness of God,*” I John 4:8. Since God is love, only the keen eye of love can see His majesty that is hidden from human reason.

Paul was not timid in prayer. We must not be either. We should ask for comprehension of the blessings we have already received. Surely there is more spiritual growth ahead. Surely we have not reached perfection. The prayer of Paul ought to be the prayer of every believer.

The ten prayers briefly discussed above are representative of many other prayers found throughout the Bible. The small sampling of inspired petitions show that prayers differ in style and content because each is rooted in a particular historical situation. Yet, since their circumstances are often like our circumstances, we can learn much from these supplications. God promises to hear our faintest cry. He vows to answer our smallest request. And, owing to the keeping of His word, we can look forward to blessings beyond our noblest thoughts, kindnesses that transcend our profoundest dreams.

## CONCLUSION

Prayer changes things. The truth of that statement is found everywhere in the pages of Scripture. It is etched in the archives of history. The plans of God were modified. The lives of men and women were transformed. The fingerprints of prayer appear in every twist and turn of time.

The ruler of Egypt believed in prayer, Exodus 8:8,28. When they sinned, Israel asked for prayer, Numbers 21:7; I Samuel 12:19; II Kings 19:4. King Jeroboam requested intercession, I Kings 13:6. So did Zedekiah, Jeremiah 37:3. In the waning days of Judah, the few remaining survivors asked Jeremiah to pray for them, Jeremiah 42:1-3.

There have always been saints who know how to pray. There have always been believers who communicate with heaven. When their troubles are longstanding, they get on their knees. They are never too busy to petition the Lord. They *“conquer kingdoms, administer justice, and gain what is promised.”* They *“quench the fury of the flames and escape the edge of the sword.”* They *“become powerful in battle and rout foreign armies,”* Hebrews 11:33,34.

The impossible becomes possible. God hears His people. Prayer opens the storehouse of heaven. The Lord responds to their supplications. Their petitions bring the infinite wealth from above to bear on the finite poverty here below. The privilege of talking to God is the key to the blessings of God. Indeed, prayer changes things!

### I. PRAYER HAS NO EQUAL

In our time, it appears that people do not rely very much on prayer. This is not a praying generation. It is an age of science. It is an era riveted to the internet. It is a period focused on material things. The unseen is neglected. The spiritual is ignored. The greatest of all forces in the universe is left untapped.

Prayer has no equal. It has no rival. It stands alone as the greatest force available to humankind. In order to be operative, it must be active. We cannot rely on the prayers of the past. Our supplications must be our supplications. They must be current and continuous. They should be voiced at all times under all conditions.

Few have any idea how powerful prayer is. Fewer still have experienced that power. The Church seems unaware of the infinite energy of God. It is sad that the Christian community rarely has a prayer meeting. Prayer is an unstoppable force. We seldom use it. We do everything else save the thing God wants us to do.

Holy living is crowned with prayer. A righteous life is based on prayer. They fit together like a hand in a glove. They are two peas in the same pod. They mutually act and react. Neither can survive alone. The absence of the one leads to the absence of the other. We are in danger of substituting Church work for closet time.

Prayer is not the enemy of work. It does not paralyze activity. To the contrary, prayer stimulates action. Prayer motivates effort. A prayer closet is not a rest stop. It is a battlefield. It is a place of heroic struggle. It supplies the saint with strength. When we fail to pray, disaster looms. Defeat is inevitable. The limits of prayer are the boundaries of divine omnipotence. He who prays much will work much. And, conversely, he who prays little will work little in the vineyard of the Lord.

## II. PRAYER HAS GREAT PROMISE

The possibilities of prayer go hand in hand with the promises of God. Prayer opens the door for His promises to descend. Prayer removes the hindrances that hold back the fulfillment of His intentions. Prayer secures the object for which the promises were made. Prayer is the highway God uses to send His response. *“And what more shall I say? I do not have time to tell about Gideon, Barak, Samson, Jephthah, David, Samuel, and the prophets,”* Hebrews 11:32. Those who have done mighty things have been mighty in prayer. They understand the possibilities of communication with God. They make the most of their opportunities to do so.

Prayer puts God to work. It obligates the Lord to answer. It allows Him to do things that He would not do in the absence of prayer. Prayer is like an electric switch. When the switch is engaged, things happen that would not otherwise occur.

If prayer puts God to work, then, it logically follows the absence of prayer can keep God from working. And, if God does not work, man is left to the mercy of fate, to the whims of circumstance. Upon nothing else are the purposes of God so dependent. Hence, Isaiah said, *“You who call on the Lord, give yourselves no rest,”* Isaiah 62:6. In other words, keep praying! Keep God busy! For prayer puts the work of God in the hands of God. It is faith leaning on the Father to keep His word. This, then, is why the Lord loves prayer. It is the reason He highly esteems those who pray.

The formula of heaven is rather simple. God promises. Man prays. God responds, Jeremiah 29:12,13; cf. Psalms 50:15; Isaiah 58:9a; Jeremiah 33:3. Prayer is smack dab in the middle of this equation. It is the valve that turns on the flow of celestial blessings. Prayer is an invitation for God to intervene in human affairs. It is the conduit of every *“good and perfect gift,”* James 1:17.

In spite of the possibility of numbing repetition, I state again: God wants, God asks, God begs, God commands us to pray. Surely, by now, that is obvious. He expects His children to daily lay their requests on the altar. The idea is too vital to keep silent,

too urgent to stay idle, too essential to be tamed. We must feel the flame of the Spirit anew. The fires of prayer are low. In some cases, only ashes remain.

No subject is more important. No obedience more necessary. No action more pressing. No encouragement more needed. There is nothing more indispensable than getting on our knees. Why wait? Let us pray.

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