

What You Should Know About Prayer



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"It is time to seek the Lord" -- Hosea 10:12

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Contents

Chapter 1: The Purpose Of Prayer_____	3
Chapter 2: The Kinds Of Prayer_____	7
Chapter 3: The Necessity Of Prayer _____	11
Chapter 4: The Conditions Of Prayer_____	17
Chapter 5: The Pattern Of Prayer_____	25
Chapter 6: Fasting_____	31
Chapter 7: Old Testament Examples Of Effective Praying____	37
Chapter 8: The Prayer Life Of Jesus_____	45
Chapter 9: The Apostles And the Early Church_____	49
Chapter 10: What We Should Pray For_____	53

Chapter 1

The Purpose Of Prayer

What is prayer?

Prayer is communication with God.

God is a Person. He communicates. In fact, God is *the* great communicator. He shows us His power and deity in the complexity and order of the creation (nature).

"For since the creation of the world God's invisible qualities--his eternal power and divine nature--have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that men are without excuse" (Romans 1:20 NIV).

God has spoken to us authoritatively in His word, The Bible. By His providential workings God makes clear to us that He is there. He communicates by His Spirit with those who know Him in a personal relationship with His Son Jesus Christ. Jesus said, "If anyone loves Me, he will keep my words; and My Father will love him, and We will come to him and make Our home with him" (John 14:23).

So then, prayer is not merely a psychological exercise to achieve emotional tranquility. Prayer is not a Christian substitute for Transcendental Meditation, Yoga, or any other form of eastern mysticism or new age "spirituality." Relaxation therapy is beneficial, but relaxation is not religion. Mental and emotional self-discipline is not spirituality.

Genuine prayer is real communication with the real, personal "*God who is there*."

Why pray?

What are the purposes of prayer? The answers are quite clear and logical.

First, relationship.

Prayer is the exercise and developing of the believer's personal relationship with God. Communication is essential to any personal relationship. It is essential in that it is the very *essence* of relationship. No communication--no relationship.

God created us in His image according to His likeness--as persons--so He could have an intimate personal relationship with us. That relationship is exercised and developed by communication--*prayer*. If we want to know God intimately, we must spend time with Him. He wants to be our Friend--and much more.

So then, how important prayer is to us shows how important our relationship with God is to us. How well we know God depends on the quality of our relationship with Him, and that depends on the quality of our communication with Him, that is, our prayer life.

Second, obligation.

God is worthy of worship, praise, adoration, devotion. That is because of who He *is*. The fact that God is who He is means that His Person, His happiness, His interests are supremely and infinitely valuable. This in itself imposes on us the highest moral obligation to love Him and be a source of joy, happiness, and pleasure to Him. God experiences this happiness in and from our relationship--our conscious communication--with Him.

Any relationship involves an investment of time and attention. Certainly the time and attention given to our relationship with God is our best possible investment, both in His highest happiness and also in ours.

God also deserves our thanksgiving and gratitude. That is because of what He *does*. "For in him we live and move and have our being" (Acts 17:28). We are nourished and sustained day-by-day and moment-by-moment by God's providences and provisions.

Third, partnership.

When parents have a child, the result is *relationship*. As the child grows, the parents and the child should grow in *fellowship*. When the child becomes an adult, parents who are in business often bring the grown child into *partnership*. These are all stages of *relationship*.

Now, God wants the full partnership of those who are in personal relationship with Him; and partnership means *participation*. This flows naturally out of common concern, common purpose, common commitment.

God is love, and the person who loves God is dwelling in God's love and God's love is dwelling in him/her (1 John 4:16). Therefore, a real Christian is living and working for the same things God is living and working for. God and the believer have the same goals and are pursuing them by the same means. They are aiming at the same end and using the same means to achieve it.

The true child of God is a friend of God. What kind of a friend would he or she be who is not concerned about the things that are of vital concern to you? A real Christian is vitally concerned about the things that are of utmost concern to God.

Also, God will not do without us the things that are of common concern to God and us. He could, but He won't. If He did, it would leave us out of the process. God would not have our participation, and our participation is essential to our relationship with Him. It is in our relationship with God that He builds the qualities of His character (love) in us. That requires our participation. God is love; if His love is to be *our* character also, we must join Him in loving. God has purposed that we lock into His heart, live in His love and live out His love in our daily living.

Also, the things that are of common concern to God and us we cannot do without Him. That total dependency on God drives us to prayer.

Fourth, purpose.

According to Romans 8:28 and 29, "All things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to His purpose. For whom He foreknew, He also predestinated to be conformed to the image of His Son" (Romans 8:28, 29).

Before God can accomplish something *with* us, He must do something *in* us. And what God wants to do *in* us is generally far more important than what He wants to do (and what we want Him to do) *for* us.

God wants to work in us--in our character, our attitudes, our personality, our behavior. Prayer gives God an opportunity to do that.

If we have been neglecting our personal relationship with God (our "devotional life"), and some need arises that causes us to cry out to God, God might not answer our prayers right on the spot. He "is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him" (Hebrews

11:6). God might use the occasion as an opportunity for us to "get down to business" with Him (and He with us), and that usually means spending some time in serious prayer. It is as though God were saying, "I want to answer your prayer, but first there are some very important things I want to do. Let's work on our relationship."

Chapter 2

The Kinds Of Prayer

For our purpose, we will classify the various kinds of prayer under four headings: worship, asking, intercession, and waiting on God.

Worship.

We begin with sincere, unselfish, God-centered worship through Jesus Christ by the Spirit. This includes praise, adoration, and gratitude. This is the proper way to approach God. By coming into God's presence with sincere worship we avoid rushing in and presenting Him with a "shopping list" of personal needs and desires. Worship is our response to who God is. Thanksgiving (gratitude) is our response to what God does and provides.

"Enter into His gates with thanksgiving, and into His courts with praise. Be thankful to Him, and bless His name" (Psalm 100:4).

"Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God" (Philippians 4:6).

God is worthy of total, eternal worship, and giving Him that worship is our highest obligation and supreme joy.

Asking.

Asking is both an act of dependency and a privilege of relationship. Jesus emphasized this by likening the relationship between our Heavenly Father and His children to the relationship between an earthly father and his children (Matthew 7:7-11).

Asking means petitioning God, making our requests known to Him, as we read in Philippians 4:6. Even though He already knows our needs and our requests (and knows them perfectly, far better than we do ourselves), it is important for us to express them. We need to participate in the process, to open up and pour out our deepest feelings and longings to God. That is part of our relationship--our bonding--to Him.

Little Melissa comes into the house crying, her knees all skinned up and bleeding.

Mamma takes her in her arms and says, "Tell mamma what happened." Mamma saw immediately what happened, but little Melissa needs to pour out the whole story. She needs the comfort and the assurance of the relationship. So it is with our relationship with God.

It needs to be made clear that asking God is not begging; we are God's children, not beggars. It is not whining. Even earthly parents do not want their children to whine. Also, it certainly is not manipulating God or bargaining with Him.

Remember, God is love, and love is expressed in giving because giving is love in action. Love seeks the highest good of its object. God wants to do good things for us. It is in this clear understanding of God that we approach Him in confidence with our requests.

Intercession.

Intercession is a deep level of earnest prayer that many Christians have never reached. Worship is pleasant. Asking is easy. Intercession is hard work.

Intercession is coming before God on behalf of another or others. It is selfless in that it asks nothing for the intercessor personally, only for the person or persons on whose behalf the intercession is being made. This makes real intercession the most noble form of asking. If the need is great, the intercession can be very urgent, even to the point of desperation. It is the earnest, fervent pouring out of the heart, the whole being, before God on behalf of the person or situation. In the case of interceding for sinners, it is assumed that sinners are under condemnation and if left to themselves will certainly be lost. They are under the penalty of the broken moral law and only the gracious intervention by the Spirit of God will bring them to repentance. It is exactly that gracious intervention by the Spirit that intercessory prayer pleads for. In any case, intercessory prayer urges God to intervene and prevent the otherwise certain outcome of a present course of action.

In intercessory prayer the believer comes before God in behalf of another or others who are in great need (spiritual or otherwise), or in behalf of a desperate situation. It is sometimes called "travailing" in prayer and "prevailing" in prayer. The intercessor is driven to God by love--and thank God that we *are* driven to Him.

Intercession is much more than "Now I lay me down to sleep," or what has been described as the brief "mattress mumbles" before we tumble into bed. It is the earnest,

fervent pouring out of the heart, the whole being, to God on behalf of the person or situation. It involves an earnestness that is commensurate with the importance and the urgency of the need. It is the praying of a person who truly cares and who “means business” with God. It is the kind of prayer that God takes seriously and that He answers.

It has been said that “God is determined to give us only what we are determined to have.”

The selflessness of intercessory prayer does not preclude us from praying earnestly for legitimate personal needs. There is a well-known story of a group of clergy who were standing on the sidewalk outside of a tall building discussing the proper position while praying: kneeling, sitting, or standing. Outside a second story window a window washer was standing on his scaffold, listening. At last he spoke up. “Gentlemen, I overheard your conversation regarding the proper position to assume while praying. One time I was fifteen stories high, hanging upside down with a rope wrapped around one leg. *That* was the best prayer I ever prayed.”

Waiting On God.

After we have seriously and earnestly laid out our requests before God (some call it “prevailing in prayer,” or “praying through”), we enter into a time of peaceful and restful “waiting on God.” It is an attitude of submission, trust, and openness before Him.

In these times of waiting on God, His Spirit speaks to our hearts and minds. It might come in a Bible passage that the Holy Spirit brings to our minds, a sense of calm assurance, and/or a clarity of thinking that we did not have before as we view our life situations from the lofty height of God’s presence where believers “sit together in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus” (Ephesians 2:6)

By its very nature, this experience in prayer is not to be rushed. It is to be savored at the time and carried with us when we leave the place of prayer and to be enjoyed as a continual feast.

Now, all of these kinds of prayer take place in a personal relationship with God through His Son, Jesus Christ. Sin--disobedience--violates that relationship and breaks one’s fellowship with God, the Holy One. Sin shuts God out of the soul. “If I regard iniquity in my heart, the Lord will not hear” (Psalm 66:18).

If you are not in personal fellowship with God, and you really want to know Him, come to Jesus Christ. He will hear your prayer of honest repentance. Ask Jesus Christ to come into your heart and life as your Savior and Lord. Put your faith totally in Him. God will honor that faith and bring you into full fellowship with Himself.

Chapter 3

The Necessity Of Prayer

Prayer is essential. We must breathe to live physically. We must pray to live spiritually. Prayer is the breath of the Christian's spiritual life.

Again we look at Philippians 4:6, "Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God."

In *everything*. Every part of the believer's life is lived in obedience to Christ and His will. Jesus is Lord, and everything in our lives is under His lordship: our future, our plans, our decisions, our relationships, our finances, our emotions--*everything*. Because everything is under obedience to Him, we must know what His will is in everything. That means knowing and obeying His word in everything. It also means praying for understanding, wisdom, and His blessing in everything.

Prayer is imperative. It is not optional. It is a command of God.

Needs.

Prayer is a recognition of our dependence on God for the needs in our personal lives. The believer who does not pray is acting as though he or she can get along very well without God, His guidance, and His blessing. That is being presumptive at best, arrogant at worst.

Prayer puts us where God can help us. Prayer brings God into the situation, whatever it might be. Prayer not only changes things; it also changes us.

"You do not have because you do not ask" (James 4:2).

Also, prayer is a recognition of our dependence on God for the needs of others in particular and the needs of the world in general.

God is sovereign. He has eternal purposes that He will accomplish whether we pray or not. God created the world because He willed to do so, not because someone asked Him to do so. The same is true of the consummation of the age. There are certain events that "the Father has put in His own authority," Jesus said (Acts 1:7).

Nevertheless, what is accomplished within God's cosmic sovereign will and purposes He does by bringing believers into partnership with Himself. God knows the outcome, and He knows how much of that outcome involves the praying of His people or the lack of their praying. That is because in His wisdom the sovereign God has willed to put Himself into that relationship with His people. God is not working with robots. He created us in His image according to His likeness with the ability to make responsible moral choices, and God will not violate our moral nature. To do so would go against His own will.

In His wisdom the sovereign God has arranged that His will is to be accomplished through the prayers of His people. God will not do most of what needs to be done in this world without our participation, and that means unless we pray. If we do not pray, we will not get anything done, for Jesus said, "without Me you can do nothing" (John 15:5). For that reason God is always urging and moving us to prayer.

God uses three considerations to move us to prayer: concern out of love, dependence on Him, and confidence in Him. The lack of any of these three lessens our desire to pray.

In Isaiah 59:16 we read concerning the critical situation in the prophet's time, "He saw that there was no man, and wondered [was appalled--NIV] that there was no intercessor." God was appalled ("horrified") that there was no intercessor. No intercessor upheld the honor of God and met the necessary conditions of divine mercy. For that reason God had to let justice take its course; He had to do what the moral necessity of the situation required.

Later, in Isaiah 64:7, we read of the same desperate need: "There is no one who calls on Your name, who stirs himself up to take hold of You." Get hold of God! What a bold statement. It brings to mind the determination of Jacob when he wrestled all night with the angel. He declared, "I will not let You go unless You bless me!" (Genesis 32:26). That says to God: "We are in this together, all the way! I want what you want. I am locked into your heart. Your will *must* be done! I must have the answer!"

Such agreement with God honors Him and thus provides the condition for God to do what fully honors and glorifies Him.

So then, the only thing that will prevent a moral collapse and avoid bringing down the righteous judgment of God is *a praying Church!*

God's command to pray and our obligation to live in obedience to that command is repeated over and over in the Scriptures.

"Seek the LORD and His strength; seek His face evermore!" (1 Chronicles 16:11).

"It is time to seek the LORD, till He comes and rains righteousness on you" (Hosea 10:12).

"Arise, cry out in the night, as the watches of the night begin; pour out your heart like water in the presence of the Lord. Lift up your hands to him for the lives of your children" (Lamentations 2:19 NIV).

"Then Jesus told his disciples a parable to show them that they should always pray and not give up" (Luke 18:1 NIV).

"Watch and pray, lest you enter into temptation. The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak" (Matthew 26:41).

"Continuing steadfastly in prayer" (Romans 12:12). "Be faithful in prayer" (NIV).

"Pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests. With this in mind, be alert and keep on praying for all the saints" (Ephesians 6:18 NIV).

"Continue earnestly in prayer, being vigilant in it with thanksgiving" (Colossians 4:2).

"Pray without ceasing" (1 Thessalonians 5:17). Do not give up praying!

"Therefore I desire that the men pray everywhere, lifting up holy hands, without wrath and doubting" (1 Timothy 2:8).

"Now when He had taken the scroll, the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders fell down before the Lamb, each having a harp, and golden bowls full of incense, which are the prayers of the saints" (Revelation 5:8; also 8:3, 4).

The Last Days.

The Scriptures always attach a sense of urgency to what are called "the last days." In His discourse on His future return, Jesus included this command: "Take heed, watch

and pray; for you do not know when the time is" (Mark 13:33).

We find the same command of our Lord recorded in Luke 21:36: "Watch therefore, and pray always that you may be counted worthy [some manuscripts read "have strength"] to escape all things things that will come to pass, and to stand before the Son of Man" (Luke 21:36).

Peter presses the same theme. In 1 Peter 4:7 the apostle writes: "The end of all things is near. Therefore be clear-minded and self-controlled so that you can pray" (1 Peter 4:7 NIV).

In its broader definition, the "last days" have been with us for many centuries; nevertheless, its moment-by-moment imminence is always present with us. These timeless statements are as fresh, relevant, and urgent as if they had been spoken just yesterday. The signs are all around us and increasing; the "end of all things" is near; let us be diligent in prayer.

The Sin Of Prayerlessness.

When we think of all the good to be done through prayer in view of the promises of God to hear and answer, what a dereliction of the duty of love it is not to pray or to neglect praying. What good and blessing we are depriving others; what grace is withheld that God would otherwise gladly bestow--if and when we do not fulfill the moral obligation to pray.

God shares His love by working through loving people. He could do it without them, but that would not be wise; it would leave His people cold and uninterested. That is not the kind of people God is preparing for eternal fellowship with Himself.

It was in this context that the aged prophet Samuel said to Israel, "Be it far from me that I should sin against the L in ceasing to pray for you" (1 Samuel 12:23 KJV).

Consider 2 Chronicles 7:14, "If My people who are called by My name will humble themselves, and pray and seek My face, and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin and heal their land."

What if God's people do *not* humble themselves and pray and seek His face? The clear implication is that God will not do the things mentioned in that passage. The things that desperately need to be done will not happen without the earnest, soul-

searching prayers of God's people, who are called by His name. The land will *not* be healed.

The conclusion is clear: prayerless Christians are depriving the world, including their own personal world, of immeasurable good. What an offense against a loving God, who can do so much but in His wisdom cannot do without the heart-involvement of His praying Church!

Prayer Is Effective.

God *does* hear and answer prayer.

"The eyes of the LORD are on the righteous, and His ears are open to their cry" (Psalm 34:15).

The word of God says of the person who dwells in the secret place of the Most High, "He shall call upon Me, and I will answer him; I will be with him in trouble; I will deliver him and honor him. With long life I will satisfy him, and show him My salvation" (Psalm 91:15, 16).

God declares, "And it shall come to pass that before they call I will answer; and while they are still speaking, I will hear" (Isaiah 65:24).

Through the prophet Jeremiah God promises: "Call to Me, and I will answer you, and show you great and mighty things, which you do not know" (Jeremiah 33:3).

Jesus promised, "Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives, and he who seeks, finds, and to him who knocks, it will be opened. Or what man is there among you who, if his son asks for bread, will give him a stone? or if he asks for a fish, will he give him a serpent? If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father who is in heaven give good things to those who ask Him!" (Matthew 7:7-11).

How long do we ask? Until we receive. How long do we seek? Until we find. How long do we knock? Until it is opened to us.

James 5:16 affirms, "The prayer of a righteous man is powerful and effective" (NIV).

These are not idle, insincere statements. God is not playing some kind of cruel

game, teasing us, promising things that He does not really intend to do.

God does not lie!

When we do what God tells us to do, He will do what He said He will do.

God gives us His answer, on His terms, in His way. But He does answer. Someone has said (somewhat facetiously), "Sometimes He says 'yes'; sometimes He says no; sometimes He says wait; sometimes He says 'you've got to be kidding'." There is more truth in that than we might think.

When we realize that fulfilling the condition of faith and obedience puts us on "praying ground," we come to the sobering conclusion that real prayer is a most serious and awesome act. Even the lowliest believer is locked into the Source of all things! No wonder Jesus said that God's house shall be called the house of prayer (Matthew 21:13).

There can be no higher human function than to be in personal, intimate communion and communication with Almighty God, the Majesty On High!

This is no casual quest. The prize is possessed only by those who put the highest priority on it. It is reserved for the honest, earnest soul.

What God said to ancient Israel He says to us today in His inspired word: "'For I know the plans I have for you,' declares the Lord, 'plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future. Then you will call upon me and come and pray to me, and I will listen to you. You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart'" (Jeremiah 29:11-13 NIV).

So, let us "seek the Lord while He may be found; [and] call upon Him while He is near" (Isaiah 55:6 NASB).

Chapter 4

The Conditions Of Prayer

Some definite requirements are attached to this business of praying. These requirements are essential and mandatory. They are necessary conditions that surround the entire function of praying. We remember that 2 Chronicles 7:14 starts with an "if"--"If My people. . ."

As we noted at the very beginning, prayer is communication with God, and communication takes place in a relationship. So then, the conditions of praying are the conditions of the relationship itself. Jesus said, "If you abide in Me, and My words abide in you, you will ask what you desire, and it shall be done for you" (John 15:7).

Obedience.

The first condition is obedience. That is, the heart must be right, obedient with all the light a person has. We must live holy lives. Genuine faith is impossible as long as a person refuses to obey the Object of faith. One cannot believe the truth from the heart and at the same time resist it in practice. It is impossible to direct faith toward Christ while one's back is still against Him. The heart believes only when it turns to the truth--and Jesus Christ *is* the Truth (John 14:6).

We remember that Hosea 10:12 commands, "Sow for yourselves righteousness; reap in mercy; break up your fallow ground, for it is time to seek the Lord, till He comes and rains righteousness upon you."

Psalm 66:18 reads plainly, "If I regard iniquity in my heart, the LORD will not hear."

"One who turns away his ear from hearing the law, even his prayer shall be an abomination" (Proverbs 28:9).

Ancient Israel did a lot of merely routine praying, but their prayers went nowhere. Through the prophet Isaiah God said their selfishness was what blocked their prayers (Isaiah 58:1-9). The prophet continued, "Behold, the LORD'S hand is not shortened, that it cannot save; nor His ear heavy, that it cannot hear. But your iniquities have separated you from your God; and your sins have hidden His face from you, so that He will not hear" (Isaiah 59:1, 2. Also Micah 3:4; Zechariah 7:13).

In the New Testament, the apostle John reaffirmed this same condition. In 1 John 3:22 he writes: "And whatever we ask, we receive from Him, because we keep His commandments and do those things that are pleasing in His sight."

Right Motive.

Integral to obedience is a right motive. Obedience is real only when it comes from a right motive; otherwise it is no obedience at all, just an act.

Many years ago a lady stood up in church regularly and asked prayer for what was called "an unspoken request." Finally she confessed that her request was that her husband would die so she could marry another man. No wonder her "prayer request" was unspoken! With such a motive her prayer never rose higher than the ceiling of the church.

In James 4:3 we read, "You ask and do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives, so that you may spend it on your pleasures" (NASB).

Jesus said, "And when you pray, you shall not be like the hypocrites. For they love to pray standing in the synagogues and on the corners of the streets, that they may be seen by men. Assuredly, I say to you, they have their reward" (Matthew 6:5).

Right Attitude.

The meeting was going along with high energy. People were praying, shouting, singing, dancing, hands raised in worship and praise. Everyone was entering into the spiritual momentum--everyone that is except one man. For a while he merely watched what was happening with increasing displeasure. All at once he decided to display his attitude by mimicking what was going on. With a contemptuous flair that others could not miss, he joined in the shouting and dancing.

His attitude and antics were so obvious that some of the people began praying fervently, "Lord, kill him! Kill him, Lord!"

Fortunate for the man, God did not answer their fervent but misguided prayers. Their attitude reminds us of the time when a Samaritan village refused to receive Jesus. James and John asked Jesus if they should call down fire from heaven and consume them, as Elijah did on one occasion (2 Kings 1:10-12). Jesus whirled around and told

them that they did not know what kind of spirit they were of; "for the Son of Man did not come to destroy men's lives, but to save them" (Luke 9:52-57). Elijah's ministry was under the law. Grace and truth came through Jesus Christ (John 1:17).

Another illustration of the importance of a right attitude in prayer comes from my experience as a young pastor. A lady in the church was giving me the details of how someone had treated her unjustly. She summed up with fervor, "I prayed the judgment of God on him!" I replied, "Oh, please don't do that. Pray that God will save him."

In the book of Numbers in the Bible we read about a time when Moses "had it up to here" with the whining and complaining of the Israelites. His God-appointed responsibility was to lead them, and he felt completely overwhelmed. In his utter frustration Moses prayed, "If You treat me like this, please kill me here and now--if I have found favor in Your sight--and do not let me see my wretchedness!" (Numbers 11:15).

Did Moses really want God to answer that prayer? Perhaps not. That is the kind of prayer people pray when they are feeling sorry for themselves, or out of real depression.

We can be thankful that God does not answer all of our prayers. If He did, we would all be in big trouble.

We read the accounts of others who prayed rash prayers. When Jezebel was after him, the prophet Elijah sat down under a juniper tree and requested to die. "It is enough! Now, O Lord, take my life, for I am no better than my fathers!" (1 Kings 19:4). Elijah did not really mean that. If Elijah had really wanted to die, all he had to do was stay where he was and Jezebel would have had him killed.

In his misery Job prayed that God would destroy him (Job 6:8-10).

When the prophet Jonah saw that the people of Nineveh repented and God did not destroy them, it displeased him. He became so angry that he asked God to kill him (Jonah 4:3). He had been looking forward eagerly to God's judgment on that wicked, cruel city. It was about time they got theirs! Now God spared the city and Jonah was so disappointed and depressed over it that he actually asked God to take his life. What an attitude.

Reverence and Godly Fear.

I shall never forget hearing a young lady begin her prayer by blurting out, "Hey, God!" I shall never forget also the inner "jolt" I felt when I heard it. Yes, the prayer was very sincere; it was also very inappropriate in the way it started.

The apostle Peter writes, "And if you address as Father the One who impartially judges according to each man's work, conduct yourselves in fear during the time of your stay upon earth" (1 Peter 1:17 NASB).

Humility.

We remember that 2 Chronicles 7:14 says, "If my people. . . will humble themselves and pray. . ."

Humility is a companion of reverence and godly fear. Humility recognizes that we are mere mortals addressing The Most High in prayer. We can enjoy an intimate relationship with God through Jesus Christ and at the same time never lose the sense of awe at being in the presence of The Almighty. In fact, we must always keep that sense of awe in prayer. No matter how close we are to God, we must always be aware of the contrast between who He is and who we are.

Marriage And Family Relationships.

"Likewise you husbands, dwell with them with understanding, giving honor to the wife, as to the weaker vessel, and as being heirs together of the grace of life, that your prayers may not be hindered" (1 Peter 3:7).

Each husband is required to live with his wife "In an understanding way" (NASB). That means to communicate, to find out how that person who is living in that body thinks and feels, to stay connected, to be sensitive to her feelings, to know what gives her joy and makes her happy.

"That your prayers may not be hindered." If a husband's prayers are not being answered, one of the first things to check is how he is treating his wife.

The Will Of God.

"Now this is the confidence that we have in Him, that, if we ask anything according to

His will, He hears us. And if we know that He hears us, whatever we ask, we know that we have the petitions we have asked of Him" (1 John 5:14, 15).

Notice, this passage does not say, "If he hears us." It says, "If we know that he hears us."

How do we know that we are praying according to God's will and therefore that He hears us? First, are we praying according to the *conditions* of effective praying, the Biblical conditions that we have been talking about in this chapter? The will of God has to do first of all with *how* we pray--that is, that we are praying according to Biblical principles.

Whether or not the *thing* we are praying for is God's will can be determined by applying the following test.

1. Is it according to God's word? God's word is His will. If it is according to God's word, that meets the most basic criterion. If it is contrary to Biblical commands and/or principles, it cannot be God's will.
2. Will it glorify, honor, and please God? If not, it is not God's will.
3. Will it benefit anyone? That is, will it do someone some good, bless someone, help someone?
4. Will it benefit you without resulting in loss to others?
5. Is it reasonable? Is it meaningful or trivial? When I was in high school, I prayed that our football and basketball teams would beat the other schools in our league. I chuckle when I think about it. Did God really care if Coquille (Oregon) High School defeated Myrtle Point or vice versa? In fact, does God care who wins the Super Bowl or the World Series? What a deep theological question to ponder! Play the game; root for your side; and let the best team win.
6. Are you prioritizing it correctly? Will it work for your spiritual well-being and the spiritual well-being of your family? If you are praying for a better job or other career opportunity, and one opens up in a location where there is not a good evangelical church, and moving there would tear your family out of their spiritual support system, *forget it!* The promotion and the money is not worth endangering their souls and yours. God's will is always according to your spiritual welfare. 3 John 2 says, "I pray that you

may prosper in all things and be in health, just as your soul prospers." *That* is most important.

7. Does it fit in with and advance God's purpose in your life? Has God called you, gifted you, and established you in a life direction? Is the thing you are praying for or about consistent with the way God is directing and leading your life, or is it a digression that will divert you from it?

Faith.

"Therefore, brethren, having boldness to enter the Holiest by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way which He has consecrated for us, through the veil, that is, His flesh, and having a High Priest over the house of God, let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water" Hebrews 10:19-22. Our point here is in the invitation, "let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith."

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

God *is*. God is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him. These are absolutes. When you know that you are living in fellowship with Christ ("standing on praying ground"; "living where God answers prayer"), and you are confident that you are praying in harmony with the will of God, take your stand on God's word and do not waver!

"But let him ask in faith, with no doubting, for he who doubts is like a wave of the sea driven and tossed by the wind" (James 1:6).

Jesus said, "Assuredly, I say to you, if you have faith and do not doubt, you will not only do what was done to the fig tree, but also if you say to this mountain, 'Be removed and be cast into the sea,' it will be done. And all things whatever you ask in prayer, believing, you will receive" (Matthew 21:21, 22).

Jesus is not telling us to go out and start throwing mountains around. Those mountains are where they are supposed to be, and throwing one into the sea would cause a tsunami that would result in a lot of destruction and loss of life. What the Lord was emphasizing was that *faith in God has unlimited possibilities*. So, believe God and move that mountain in your life.

Jesus said also, "Whatever things you ask when you pray, believe that you receive them, and you will have them" (Mark 11:24). Notice that Christ coupled absolute faith with forgiveness toward others. He continued, "And when you stand praying, if you have anything against anyone, forgive him, that your Father in heaven may also forgive you your trespasses" (Verse 25).

Yes, forgiving others is a condition of being forgiven, and therefore also a condition of successful praying.

Persistence.

Luke records Jesus' parable of the persistent widow (sometimes called the parable of the unjust judge).

"There was in a certain city a judge who did not fear God nor regard man. Now there was a widow in that city; and she came to him, saying, 'Avenge me of my adversary.' And he would not for a while; but afterward he said within himself, 'Though I do not fear God nor regard man, yet because this widow troubles me I will avenge her, lest by her continual coming she weary me.' Then the Lord said, "Hear what the unjust judge said. And shall not God avenge His own elect who cry out day and night to Him, though He bears long with them? I tell you that He will avenge them speedily. Nevertheless, when the Son of Man comes, will He really find faith on the earth?" (Luke 18:1-8).

First, we must understand that God is the absolute opposite of this unjust judge. This is not a comparison, but a contrast. The point is that if even a corrupt judge will give a widow justice because she keeps pestering him, how much more will our Heavenly Father, the righteous Judge, aid those who put their full trust in Him and will demonstrate that trust by persistent, prevailing prayer.

The persistence involved here is not to overcome any reluctance in God, for there is none. God is willing and eager to answer our pleas. The persistence on our part is to "stay the course" in prayer and thus give God the opportunity to work out some of the things that need to be accomplished in us and perhaps in others before God can wisely grant the petition.

God always gives us His answer, His way, in His time.

Chapter 5

The Pattern Of Prayer

Our praying should be direct, intelligent and meaningful. It should have the spontaneity of personal dialogue. Still, we are taught in The Scriptures that certain principles are to guide our praying. That is, there are Biblical patterns for praying. Sometimes these patterns prescribe the words we should use.

Jesus gave us a pattern of priorities for our praying in what is called "The Lord's Prayer."

**"Our Father in heaven,
Hallowed be Your name.
Your kingdom come.
Your will be done
On earth as it is in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread.
And forgive us our debts,
As we forgive our debtors.
And do not lead us into temptation,
But deliver us from the evil one.
For Yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen"**
(Matthew 6:9-13).

These are not just words. As has been said, they form a pattern of priorities. They give us a framework to guide us in our praying for the various needs and issues that they embody and that flow out from them. Nevertheless, praying the actual words from time to time will help keep our praying "on course."

When.

Although believers are instructed to keep our minds on God (Isaiah 26:3) and to develop the disciplines of continuing prayer (Colossians 4:2), The Scriptures teach the necessity of setting aside definite times regularly for private and uninterrupted communion with God.

The Psalmist David said, "Evening, and morning, and at noon I will pray, and cry

aloud; and He shall hear my voice" (Psalm 55:17).

The prophet Daniel prayed specifically three times a day (Daniel 6:10).

In the New Testament the apostles Peter and John went up to the temple to pray at "the ninth hour" Jewish time, that is, 3:00 o'clock in the afternoon our time (Acts 3:1). In that day the Jewish custom was to pray three times a day: the third hour, the sixth hour, and the ninth hour.

We all make business and personal appointments. We make appointments because we take the occasion, the reason, and the person or persons involved seriously. The time is an investment of value. The purpose is specific and we place importance on it. Why not make (and keep) appointments with God?

Daily family devotions provide a prime opportunity for structured prayer. It involves the whole family. It teaches the children to pray. If it takes place early in the day, it sends the members of the family out into their world spiritually fortified.

One might choose to use a daily devotional guide. Several good ones are available. Whatever the format, be sure it includes a passage from the Bible and an opportunity for each member of the family to pray aloud (my children used to pray for the dogs and cats in the neighborhood!), concluded by a prayer by the head of the household. Think of the spiritual "boost" that children take with them when they go out knowing, *"my dad/my mom prayed for me today."*

If morning is not a practical time for family devotions, choose another time, such as the end of dinner and everyone is still seated around the dinner table.

Another opportunity for prayer with the family is at bedtime. Instead of just reminding your children to "say your prayers," kneel down with them individually or as a group and pray together.

The best time to pray is early in the morning. This is especially important for private, personal communion with God. All is quiet. The rest of the family are still asleep. The phone is not ringing (you hope). The demands of the day have not yet begun.

The psalmist David said to God, "My voice You shall hear in the morning, O LORD; in the morning I will direct it to You, and I will look up" (Psalm 5:3). "O God, You are my God; early will I seek You" (Psalm 63:1).

The prophet Isaiah said to God, "With my soul I have desired You in the night, yes, with my spirit within me I will seek You early" (Isaiah 26:9).

Mark 1:35 records concerning Jesus: "Now in the morning, having risen a long while before daylight, He went out and departed to a solitary place; and there He prayed."

How.

Jesus instructed us not to use "vain repetitions" when we pray (Matthew 6:7). "Prayers" that are no more than words repeated over and over with little or no thinking involved are meaningless. Also, some praying is compulsive--verbal patterns that are oft-repeated because they are familiar and emotionally comforting. The person praying does not expect God to answer the prayer. Even if God did answer the prayer, the person would be reluctant to stop the repetitive petition. He or she would lose the comfort of praying that prayer and would have to find something else to say.

So then, how shall we pray? We have considered the "when." Now we look at the "how."

We must keep in mind Who He is to Whom we are praying. Prayer is communication with Almighty God. We are addressing our Heavenly Father through Jesus Christ, His Son. *Relationship is first; request is second.*

God is not a "vending machine." We do not put in several "quarters-worth" of prayer, and out comes an answer. We do not "walk up to the counter" and put in our order. We are to come to God with thanks, worship, and adoration. That is the attitude we are to be in when we approach Him.

We are urged to praise the Lord. "I will bless the LORD at all times; His praise shall continually be in my mouth" (Psalm 34:1). "Enter into His gates with thanksgiving, and into His courts with praise. Be thankful to Him and bless His name" (Psalm 100:4). Good things happen when we worship and praise the Lord. God is pleased and we are blessed.

Sometimes even amusing things can happen. On one occasion some believers were in a praise service in a second story room above a bank. The police station was right across the street. The police looked up and saw all these people with their hands raised in worship. Alarmed, the police called the bank and asked if everything was OK.

The bank personnel assured them that nothing unusual was happening; but that did not satisfy the police. What if the "robbers" were holding everybody at gunpoint! They had to make sure. So they asked the bank officials to walk out of the bank and stand outside on the sidewalk. When the nervous police officers and the puzzled bank officials learned what was going on, everybody had a good laugh--and the worshipers kept right on praising the Lord.

The early church was a praising church. In Luke 24:52 and 53 we read, "And they worshiped Him, and returned to Jerusalem with great joy, and were continually in the temple, praising and blessing God."

Acts Chapter 16 records that Paul and his co-worker, Silas, obeyed the vision that God had given him of a man from Macedonia asking them to come into Macedonia to help them. By traveling from Troas to Macedonia they crossed over from Asia into Europe. When they came to Philippi, their preaching landed them in jail. Their backs were beaten and they were locked into stocks.

In this miserable condition Paul and Silas could have complained bitterly. They could have doubted the genuineness of their call. They could have questioned or even blamed God. They could have turned on each other. Silas could have looked over at Paul and sneered, "You and your 'vision'. It must have been that pizza you ate. Look where it landed us! You sure missed God this time, Paul."

There was none of that. Instead, "At midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the prisoners were listening to them" (Romans 16:25).

People who pray and praise God in everything cannot be defeated!

"Therefore by him [Jesus] let us offer the sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of our lips giving thanks to His name" (Hebrews 13:15).

Agreement.

Jesus said, "If two of you shall agree on earth concerning anything that they ask, it will be done for them of my Father in heaven" (Matthew 18:19).

The word translated "agree" is *sumphonesosin*. It is the future tense of *sumphoneo*, "sound together." From it we get the word symphony. It means to be in complete accord, to harmonize.

There is power in agreement, both in prayer and in action. We are told of a contest that was held in the eastern part of the United States to determine the strongest draft horse in the area. One horse pulled 869 pounds, coming in second. The winning horse pulled 932 pounds. Their individual efforts totaled 1,801 pounds! Then they teamed the two horses together to find out what they could pull jointly. To everyone's amazement, the two horses together pulled 2,405 pounds, 604 pounds more than the total of their individual efforts! The point is clear.

When I was in high school band, occasionally our band director would take us out to practice marching. At one point the street crossed an old wooden bridge of questionable load capacity. To be on the safe side, when we came to that bridge the band director told us to break our cadence and to walk across at our own pace. He knew that if the entire band marched over the bridge, the downward thrust of each lockstep would be increased. Again, agreement increases power.

Some might remember what happened years ago at a Hyatt Regency hotel. A large number of people were jumping up and down on a "walkway" of some sort, evidently keeping time to the beat of music. Suddenly the structure collapsed, with tragic results. Combined action greatly increased the force of the downward thrust on the structure. (As an aside, that is why I become concerned whenever I see a balcony full of people jumping up and down together. Not the best kind of "agreement").

In Acts 1:14 we read that Jesus' disciples "all continued with one accord in prayer and supplication." The Amplified Version reads, "All of these with their minds in full agreement devoted themselves steadfastly to prayer." The Greek word translated "one accord" and "steadfastly" is *homothumadon*. It means with united purpose and passion.

We find the same word in Acts 2:46, where it says that the early disciples continued "daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house." It appears again in Acts 4:24, "They raised their voice to God with one accord." When the disciples prayed with one united purpose and passion, "the place was shaken." They were all filled with the Holy Spirit and spoke God's word with boldness (verse 31).

In Jesus' Name.

"In Jesus' Name" is not a magic formula, or a phrase that we ritualistically tack on to the end of a prayer. Asking in Jesus' name means that we are asking in full compliance

with all the conditions of prayer; asking in agreement with the perfect unity of the will of the Father and of the Son; asking in the authority of Christ Himself--the authority that He has before the Father in His finished work, His victory, and His exalted position as our High Priest and Mediator.

Thus, asking the Father in Jesus' name is just the same as though Jesus Himself presented the request. If we saw Jesus turn to the Father and ask something of the Father, we would have absolute confidence that the Father would grant the request. There would be no doubt in our mind. So when we ask the Father in Jesus' name, it is just as though Jesus Himself turned to the Father and asked the Father to do it. That should cancel every doubt.

"Whatever you ask in My name, that I will do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son. If you ask anything in My name, I will do it" (John 14:13, 14).

"You did not choose Me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit, and that your fruit should remain, that whatever you ask the Father in My name He may give you" (John 15:16).

"Most assuredly, I say to you, whatever you ask the Father in My name He will give you. Until now you have asked nothing in My name. Ask, and you will receive, that your joy may be full" (John 16:23, 24).

Jesus meant exactly what He said to His disciples during those intimate moments just before His crucifixion, and the Holy Spirit through John (who was there) allows us to share fully in what our Lord said to them *and to us*.

Jesus Christ is the truth. We can rely on what He said with absolute confidence.

Chapter 6

Fasting

Fasting is temporarily abstaining from food, completely or partially. People fast for a variety of reasons. Some fast for health benefits: to lose weight and/or to allow the body to cleanse itself. Some fast to reinforce the discipline of an ascetic lifestyle. Like the Pharisees, some fast to enhance their personal and public religious image (Matthew 6:16 - 18; Luke 18:12). Jesus said that such superficial "piety" earns only temporary, earthly rewards.

When food is scarce, many people fast out of necessity. In times of great distress, people can become so preoccupied by the events of the moment that they lose all thought and desire for food.

Of course, these are outside of the biblical purpose and practice of fasting.

In the discipleship life of believers in Jesus Christ, fasting is not a ritual. It is an adjunct to prayer. It is a devotional act done to God, not to others or even for self. It might have some of the other benefits of fasting, but these are incidental. Christian fasting is temporarily setting food aside so one can focus entirely--spirit, soul, *and* body on God. It subordinates physical hunger for food to spiritual hunger for God.

In the Old Testament people fasted usually on at least one of three occasions: (1) when threatened, (2) in mourning, (3) in repentance. Fasting also became a mere ritual that was practiced on special days; then it had no spiritual power or moral force, was not accompanied by repentance, and did not prevent people from continuing their sinful practices.

Isaiah 58:3 - 7 is a classic passage on hypocritical fasting:

"'Why have we fasted,' they say, 'and You have not seen? Why have we afflicted our souls, and You take no notice?' In fact, in the day of your fast you find pleasure, and exploit all your laborers. Indeed you fast for strife and debate, and to strike with the fist of wickedness. You will not fast as you do this day, to make your voice heard on high. Is it a fast that I have chosen, a day for a man to afflict his soul? Is it to bow down his head like a bulrush, and to spread out sackcloth and ashes? Would you call this a fast, and an acceptable day to the LORD? Is not this the fast that I have chosen: to loose the bonds of wickedness, to undo the heavy burdens, to let the oppressed go free, and that you

break every yoke? Is it not to share your bread with the hungry, and that you bring to your house the poor who are cast out; when you see the naked, that you cover him, and not hide yourself from your own flesh?"

In this passage God speaks through the prophet to expose the hypocrisy of the people's ritualistic fasting and to urge them to genuine repentance and human compassion and justice.

Acts 23:12 - 14 records an example of wrong fasting when some men fasted in their determination to murder the apostle Paul!

Here are some Bible examples of fasting:

Samuel called the people together at Mizpeh for a time of repentance and fasting (1 Samuel 7:5, 6);

King David "humbled his soul with fasting" (Psalm 35:13 KJV). He fasted for his gravely ill child (2 Samuel 12:21 – 23);

Through the prophet Joel, God called the people to turn to Him with fasting and genuine repentance (Joel 1:14; 2:12 - 15);

King Ahab humbled himself and fasted (1 Kings 21:27);

King Jehoshaphat proclaimed a fast in repentance throughout Judah (2 Chronicles 20:3);

During the reign of King Jehoiakim, "they proclaimed a fast before the LORD to all the people in Jerusalem" and to those who came to Jerusalem from the surrounding areas (Jeremiah 36:9);

Queen Esther fasted and asked her maids to do likewise before she went to the king with her urgent request (Esther 4:16);

When the prophet Daniel read the prophecy of Jeremiah and realized that the seventy-year captivity of Judah was about over, he set himself to prayer and fasting (Daniel 9:3);

Ezra the scribe proclaimed a fast at the river Ahava (Ezra 8:21 – 23);

Nehemiah fasted and prayed when he learned that the wall of Jerusalem was broken down (Nehemiah 1:4);

Nehemiah 9:1, 2 records a general fast accompanied by confession of sin;

The prophetess Anna "served God with fastings and prayers night and day" (Luke 2:37);

Cornelius the Roman centurion was fasting and praying when an angel instructed him to send for Peter (Acts 10:30);

Immediately after his conversion, Saul (Paul) neither ate nor drank for three days (Acts 19:9);

As the prophets and teachers in the church at Antioch "ministered to the Lord and fasted," the Holy Spirit told them to set apart Barnabas and Saul to the work God had called them to do (Acts 13:2, 3);

When Paul and his team revisited the churches, he ordained elders in each city and prayed and fasted with the believers (Acts 14:23);

Paul wrote that he had experienced frequent fastings (2 Corinthians 6:5 and 11:27). It is probable that at least some of his fasting came through necessity.

Jesus established a new order, the New Covenant. When the disciples of John the Baptist asked Jesus why His disciples did not fast, Jesus replied, "Can the friends of the bridegroom fast while the bridegroom is with them. As long as they have the bridegroom with them, they cannot fast. But the days will come when the bridegroom will be taken from them, and then they will fast in those days" (Mark 2:19, 20).

Jesus did not abolish fasting but reformed it according to new covenant principles. He expected His disciples to fast after His ascension. He did not set specific times. He was concerned about *how* people fast, not when. He said, "When you fast" and do not try to show it in your face (Matthew 6:16).

Jesus said that certain kinds of demons are not exorcized but by prayer and fasting (Mark 9:29). The words "and fasting" are omitted by some of the Alexandrian and other texts and therefore by most modern versions. "Fasting" is omitted also in 1 Corinthians

7:5. In both cases it is in the majority text, especially in Mark 9:29.

In the passage in Acts 13, mentioned earlier, we notice that ministering to the Lord and fasting were twin components of their on-going prayer life, individual and corporate. It was in this devotional communion with God that the Holy Spirit directed them to commission Barnabas and Saul to their apostolic ministry (verse 2). The elders fasted again before they laid hands on them in the actual commissioning service (verse 3).

So fasting is a biblically-based adjunct to the prayer life of believers. What, then, are the purposes of fasting in relation to prayer?

Fasting emphasizes the intensity of one's desire toward God and the earnestness of the prayer. It expresses wholeheartedness in prayer. When we take seriously what God takes seriously, we pray prayers that God takes seriously. Fasting says to God, "I am serious about this. It means more to me than food, and my desire toward You is greater than my present desire for food." It demonstrates an earnestness that is commensurate with the need.

Fasting focuses the whole person--spirit, soul and body--on the prayer, both to Whom we are praying and for what we are praying. It also puts us into an attitude before God where we can listen as well as ask.

Fasting adds discipline to our praying. Fasting "afflicts the soul" (Ezra 8:21; Psalm 35:13; 69:10).

In What You Should Know About Yourself, I wrote about the interaction of the soul and the body. This interaction is the basis for fasting. Fasting disciplines the body and also the soul.

In our self-indulgent, self-pleasing culture, many people are literally psychosomatically "addicted" to food. We seek emotional comfort in food and some develop an emotional "bond" with the refrigerator. It is easy to feed our souls on food instead of on God. We have developed fleshly rather than spiritual appetites. The discipline of fasting is a biblical "tool" to break that addiction and establish a right, healthy "soul-appetite." As has been pointed out, fasting "afflicts the soul." Just as in vigorous physical exercise and other forms of personal discipline, "no pain, no gain."

It is important in fasting to avoid the extremes of "too little" and "too much." It is unwise to follow fasting fads. Exercise biblically-informed common sense. One should never go

on an extended fast without competent medical advice.

"Forty days" is not a magic number. A forty day fast is mentioned only four times in the Bible: Moses (twice) at the giving of the Law (Deuteronomy 9:9, 10, 18); Elijah (1 Kings 19:8), and Jesus (Matthew 4:2). Two of these fasts (Moses and Jesus) took place at the beginning of a major dispensation (order, arrangement) in God's dealings with man.

It is reasonable to assume that these forty day fasts were sustained only by special divine, supernatural means. Moses not only abstained from food during his forty day fast but also drank no water. *And he did it for two consecutive, back-to-back forty day periods!* It is a physical impossibility to survive anywhere near forty days without water, to say nothing of food; therefore, this must have been a unique event and certainly not an example for anyone to even try to follow.

It is important to emphasize that fasting does not coerce God into granting our petition; neither does it merit anything from God. Fasting is not bargaining with God. In fact, fasting adds a sacrifice to our praying. It is a "free-will offering" that is given sincerely. We do not place our faith in our fasting "but in the living God, who gives us richly all things to enjoy" (1 Timothy 6:17).

Chapter 7

Old Testament Examples Of Effective Praying

God has always heard and answered the prayers of people who are in a covenant relationship with Himself and who sincerely seek Him. The conditions of the covenant and therefore of the "prayer relationship" differed according to the covenant that was in place at the time.

God made a covenant with Noah, and the conditions of that covenant governed God's dealings with man at that time. This was followed in order by the Abrahamic Covenant, the Mosaic Covenant, the Davidic Covenant, and finally by the New Covenant in Jesus Christ. The New Covenant embodies the fullness of God's covenant relationship with His people, His promises to His people, and His provisions for His people.

Abraham.

The outstanding example of Abraham's praying was his intercession for Sodom (Genesis 18:23 - 33). Sodom and Gomorrah did not have the light that the cities had where Jesus did most of His mighty works. Jesus said that if they had, they would have repented in sackcloth and ashes (see Matthew 11:20 - 24). Nevertheless, Sodom and Gomorrah sinned perversely against the moral law, the law of nature, as it was established and revealed in their mind and conscience. We know what Sodom's defining sin was and it is sophistry to argue from Ezekiel 16:49, 50 that it was only pride, idleness, and inhospitality. Their moral depravity included all that, of course, but the sin that caused them to forfeit their privilege to exist any longer in orderly society and that brought down the righteous judgment of God upon them was the sexual perversions that are synonymous with the name of their city ("abominations," vs. 50)

Although Abraham was in full agreement with the righteousness and justice of God, he shared also in the other qualities of God's character, specifically mercy.

Neither God nor Abraham wanted to inflict judgment on Sodom and Gomorrah. It was the fact that their sins had become intolerable that made forbearance no longer a virtue. The higher good and well-being of society demanded justice, and even the presence of "righteous Lot" did not overrule the greater and immediate demand for "societal surgery." The honor of God and the credibility of the moral law and God's

moral authority were at stake, Lot or no Lot.

Still, righteous Lot was there in Sodom, and that was a personal as well as an ethical concern to Abraham as he understood the situation from his perspective.

"Would You also destroy the righteous with the wicked?" Abraham asked. "Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?" (Genesis 18:21, 25). Abraham was addressing the issue of consistency in God's dealings with all of mankind. Would God deviate from His universal principles and engage in "selective enforcement" of the moral law in the case of Sodom? Abraham had a valid point as he understood it and he was pressing it for all it was worth.

The principle of such intercessory prayer is not that it changes God (which it does not), or that it changes the situation on the ground (which in this case it did not). Such a prayer coming from Abraham, the "friend of God" (2 Chronicles 20:7; James 2:23), *changed the spiritual and moral dynamics, and that changed conditions within God's moral governance.*

God's honor and integrity were at stake. Judgment (justice) would uphold both. But God could answer such a prayer from Abraham and still uphold His honor and integrity--*up to a point.* God's honor and integrity would be upheld by answering a prayer from Abraham to spare the entire city if only ten righteous people lived there--*but no fewer.*

Nevertheless, God gave Abraham the fullest possible answer under the moral requirements of the situation by rescuing Lot, Lot's wife, and his two daughters.

We will examine this principle of intercessory prayer when we come to Moses.

Abraham also prayed for Abimelech, and God spared Abimelech's life and granted fertility to his wife and maidservants (Genesis 20:7, 17).

Moses.

Moses is no doubt the greatest Old Testament example of effective intercessory prayer. Four times during the plagues in Egypt Moses prayed and the plagues stopped (Exodus, chapters 8, 9, 10).

When the Israelites came to Marah, they found the water undrinkable. Moses "cried to the Lord." God provided a miracle and the waters were "made sweet" (Exodus 15:23

- 25).

On two occasions the survival of the young nation of Israel was at stake, as their sin was so grievous, given the amount of moral light they were sinning against, that God's honor and the integrity of His moral authority demanded their destruction. One crisis situation involved the worship of the golden calf (Exodus 32:9 - 14, 30 - 35; also Deuteronomy 9:18 - 25).

The people had seen God's glory first-hand, His miracles, the display of His holy presence, the awesome drama at Sinai. They knew who they were. They knew that God had chosen them, had protected them from the death angel, had parted the Red Sea for them. In the face of and in spite of such a visible, dramatic, revelation of the God of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob (and now Moses), they eagerly plunged into a cesspool of moral corruption and fabricated a "god" to their liking that would "sanction" their behavior!

The same attitude prevails among many people today. If they refuse to follow the reasonableness of the universal moral law and God's universal moral governance, they merely "create" a "god" that will permit them to do what they want to do, and then cite their religious/spiritual fiction as the authority that permits their lifestyle.

At the incident of the golden calf, and also later at the return of the twelve spies (Numbers 14:11 - 21), we witness the highest and most wonderful principles of intercessory prayer in operation.

As was the case of Sodom and Gomorrah, the moral depravity of the people was so total that continued Divine forbearance and mercy would no longer be a virtue. The moral necessity was total judgment; otherwise, God's honor would be violated with impunity and His willingness and ability to maintain moral order would be called into serious question. In His love--His commitment to the highest good of His creation--God could not permit either.

So how did Moses's intercessory prayers affect all that? Did they change God? No; God's character never changes. Was Moses more merciful and compassionate than God? No; every moral virtue that was only finite in Moses is infinite in God.

Again, as in the case of Abraham, *Moses's prayers changed the moral and governmental dynamics.*

Moses was desperate for God to spare the nation, and God is "not willing that any should perish" (2 Peter 3:9).

So what happened? First, Moses appealed to God on the consideration of His honor and reputation (after all, it was God's honor that was at stake here). If God destroyed the nation (even though their rebellion merited their destruction), the surrounding nations would hear about it and interpret God's action as an admission that He failed His promises and is too weak to sustain His people, or that He is a cruel god that delivers people and then capriciously destroys them.

Of course, God knew all that better than Moses did; still, God saw the bigger picture, and the bigger picture called for justice and judgment for the sake of the higher good.

On each of the two occasions, Moses's prayer did the one and only thing that would make it morally wise and possible for God to spare the nation. Moses prayed a prayer so noble, so selfless, so focused on God's honor and glory, that God could answer such a prayer and still uphold His honor and the integrity of moral law and moral order. *It was an honorable thing for God to answer such a noble prayer!*

What an intercessor Moses was!

Moses's prayer life also included:

- an intimate, personal request to see God's glory (Exodus 33:11 - 18);
- an effective prayer for God to quench the devastating fire at Taberah (Numbers 11:1 - 3);
- intercession on behalf of Miriam for her healing of leprosy (Numbers 12:10 - 15);
- prayer for the healing of those who had been bitten by poisonous snakes (Numbers 21:5 - 9).

Samuel.

In the history of Israel, the time came when the rule of the judges was coming to a close and the kingdom was about to be established. At this important transition, God raised up a specially called and prepared man by the name of Samuel. Samuel was

both the last of the judges and the first of a new order of prophets.

The burden of such an awesome spiritual and administrative leadership responsibility made Samuel aware of his total dependence on God. Samuel met the challenge by living close to God. Samuel had to be--and was--a man of prayer.

At Mizpeh, Samuel prayed and the Philistines were defeated (1 Samuel 7:3 - 12). On one occasion Samuel prayed for God to chastise the people to demonstrate His (and Samuel's) displeasure at their stubborn determination to have a king before God's time for them to have one (1 Samuel 12:12 - 18).

Samuel knew that his role changed as soon as Saul was established as king. Samuel continued his spiritual oversight of the nation as a prophet of God. He also acted on God's behalf in the affairs of the nation, including having direct influence over King Saul, and also anointing David to succeed Saul. In spite of this diminished role, Samuel never felt relieved of his obligation and his inner drive to pray for the people. He declared emphatically, "Be it far from me that I should sin against the Lord in ceasing to pray for you" (1 Samuel 12:23).

David.

We have a fuller record of the prayer life of David than of any other Old Testament person. The Psalms are soaked in his prayers.

David's prayers are very deep, personal, and devotional. They include prayers for deliverance, protection, justice, mercy, and purity. About forty times throughout The Psalms he prays repeatedly: "I cried to the Lord"; and, "hear my cry."

We sense the deep agony of David's soul in his great penitential psalm: "Have mercy upon me, O God, according to Your lovingkindness; according to the multitude of Your tender mercies, blot out my transgressions. Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin" (Psalm 51:1, 2).

Some of David's inspired utterances were prophetic and messianic. How appropriate it was for God to express the future sufferings and yearnings of the coming Messiah through the great passionate soul of David!

Solomon.

In 1 Kings 3:5 - 9 we read the noble prayer of King Solomon, David's son. It was noble because the new king did not ask for long life, riches, or the lives of his enemies. Instead, he asked for *wisdom*. God commended Solomon for his unselfish request and gave him riches along with the wisdom he requested.

Solomon's great prayer was at the dedication of the temple. It is recorded both in 1 Kings 22 and 2 Chronicles 6, along with God's response.

Elijah.

The prophet Elijah was one of the great examples of effective, intercessory prayer. He prayed for the widow's son, and God restored him to life (1 Kings 17:20 - 22). He prayed at Mt. Carmel, and God answered by fire (1 Kings 18:36 - 38). He prayed for rain to end the drought, and God sent rain in abundance (1 Kings 18:41 - 46. Also James 5:16 - 18).

Elisha.

Elisha followed Elijah as God's prophet, and also followed his predecessor's example. Elisha prayed for the Shunamite's son, and God raised him up from the dead (2 Kings 4:32 - 37). He prayed for God to open the eyes of his servant to see the angelic host surrounding them (2 Kings 6:17, 18).

Hezekiah.

King Hezekiah prayed earnestly for God to deliver Jerusalem and Judah from the invading Assyrian army, and God heard and answered miraculously (2 Kings 19:15 - 37; Isaiah 37:15 - 38).

Isaiah.

The prophet Isaiah prayed that the shadow would go back on the stairway of Ahaz, and it went back ten degrees (2 Kings 20:11). God did not have to put the earth in temporary retrograde motion to accomplish this. God has no problem moving shadows.

Daniel.

Prayer was one of the outstanding features of the life of Daniel. He kept up his daily prayer life even though it got him thrown into the lion's den (Daniel 6:10 - 23), When

Daniel calculated from the prophecy of Jeremiah that the seventy-year captivity was coming to a close, he gave himself to earnest "prayer and supplications, with fasting, sackcloth, and ashes" (Daniel 9:1 - 19). Daniel 10:12 and 13 gives the details of the three-week delay in getting through with the answer to Daniel's prayer for understanding of the prophetic visions.

In every age and dispensation, the essence of true religion is a personal relationship with God nourished, developed, and maintained by prayer.

Chapter 8

The Prayer Life Of Jesus

Scripture quotations in this chapter are from the New International Version

In the pre-dawn darkness a lone figure moves silently through the streets, past the edge of town and out into a solitary place. The people are still asleep, including His disciples. But not for long. Soon Peter and his companions will be up and tracking Him down with their intrusive message: "Everyone is looking for you!" (Mark 1:37).

But now He must pray. At this moment the need for prayer is greater than the need for sleep. Jesus feels the urgency to be alone with the Father. He cannot face the demands of the coming day without that energizing communion!

Prayer--deep, extended, lingering time in the presence of God--was a vital necessity to Jesus. At times, when the crowds were the largest and the demands of ministry were the greatest, He would withdraw to lonely places and pray (Luke 15:15, 16).

Jesus' purpose in going up into what would become known as the Mount Of Transfiguration was to pray (Luke 9:28, 29). The gospels mention other times when Jesus prayed (Matthew 11:25; Luke 3:21; 9:18; 11:1).

Jesus is our example in all things, including a life of prayer. If a well-established, consistent, on-going life of prayer was a vital necessity to the Son Of Man, it most certainly is to us sons and daughters of men. Jesus Christ had to live in prayer, and so do we.

Jesus' praying was not always serene. At times He prayed "with loud cries and tears" (Hebrews 5:7). Yes, Jesus knew the depth of intercessory prayer, an intense spiritual labor that many Christians have never experienced or even thought of.

We hear Him in the Garden of Gethsemane. "Father, if you are willing, take this cup from me; yet not my will, but yours be done" (Luke 22:42). Total intercession was coupled with total submission. It was during that experience He said to His disciples, "Get up and pray so that you will not fall into temptation" (verse 46).

Prayer was essential to Jesus because He knew it is effective. At the tomb of Lazarus He affirmed to the Father, "Father, I thank you that you have heard me. I knew

that you always hear me, but I said this for the benefit of the people standing here, that they may believe that you sent me" (John 11:41, 42).

At the time of His arrest, Jesus assured sword-wielding Peter, "Do you think I cannot call on my Father, and he will at once put at my disposal more than twelve legions of angels?" (Matthew 26:53).

Jesus continued His intercessory praying even while on the cross. "Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing" (Luke 23:24). After all, had not the prophet foretold that the Messiah would make intercession for the transgressors? (Isaiah 53:12).

Jesus did not shrink from the prayer of questioning: "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" (Matthew 27:46). Nevertheless, this prayer was followed by one of quiet resignation: "Father, into your hands I commit my spirit" (Luke 23:46).

Much of Jesus' praying focuses on His disciples--including us. His great "high-priestly" prayer is recorded in John 17. There He prayed that the Father would keep us through His own name (verse 11); that He would keep us from evil and the evil one (verse 15); that He would sanctify us through the truth, His word (verse 17). He also prayed that we all will be one (verse 21), and that we will be with Him forever and behold His glory (verse 24).

Our Lord assured Peter: "Satan has asked to sift you as wheat. But I have prayed for you, Simon, that your faith may not fail" (Luke 22:31, 32). And Peter's faith did not fail! Yes, he denied his Lord; yes, he cursed and swore. But Peter did not abandon his faith. Bitter tears flowed--tears of humiliation and repentance. He returned to his Savior and was restored. *Jesus had prayed for him.* That made the difference.

Jesus Christ is alive. He is in Heaven at the right hand of the Father, and He is praying for us!

So, Christian, take heart. Perhaps you have "blown it." You thought you were strong, but you failed your Lord--failed miserably. Satan is telling you to do what Judas Iscariot did--give it all up and abandon yourself to despair and destruction.

But you are not Judas Iscariot! Jesus is at the right hand of the Father and He is praying for you! Trust Him; *your faith will not fail.* So bring those bitter tears to Jesus. He restored Peter, and He will restore you. "Therefore he is able to save completely

those who come to God through him, because he always lives to intercede for them" (Hebrews 7:25).

Our confidence as believers is not built on ourselves but on our Savior. He is able to keep us from sinning. But if we do sin, He is ready and able to restore us if we will come to Him. "My dear children, I write this to you so that you will not sin. But if anybody does sin, we have one who speaks to the Father in our defense--Jesus Christ, the Righteous One" (1 John 2:1).

For this reason we should not be quick to write people off. Instead, we should seek to restore them and encourage them. Their faith will not fail. Jesus is praying for them.

"Who will bring any charge against those whom God has chosen? It is God who justifies. Who is he that condemns? Christ Jesus, who died--more than that, who was raised to life--is at the right hand of God and is also interceding for us" (Romans 8:33, 34).

Just before His crucifixion our Lord promised, "I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Counselor to be with you forever--the Spirit of truth" (John 14:16, 17).

Notice, Jesus said, "I *will* ask." One of His first acts as our risen, ascended High Priest was to ask the Father to send the Holy Spirit. And that is exactly what the Father did! It happened on the Day of Pentecost, fifty days after Christ's passion.

The baptism in the Holy Spirit is God's provision for dynamic, victorious Christian living, given to us in answer to the specific request of Jesus Christ. Have you received this precious gift? "The promise is for you and your children" (Acts 2:39).

Chapter 9

The Apostles And The Early Church

As we saw in the previous chapter, by precept and by example Jesus taught His disciples (and us) to pray and also *how* to pray.

The Church was born in a prayer meeting. Acts 1:12 - 14 records that when the disciples returned from the Mount of Olives to Jerusalem following the ascension of Christ, they went into an upper room and gathered together (about a hundred and twenty strong) and committed themselves to prayer. They were there for several days until the Holy Spirit descended upon them from Heaven.

Prayer continued to be the vital life-breath of the Church. Prayer was one of the four features of the individual and corporate spiritual existence of the believers. "And they continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in prayers" (Acts 2:42).

On one occasion, when the apostles had been imprisoned for preaching about Christ, the Church at Jerusalem gave themselves to prayer. They did not ask for either protection or permission from the authorities. Instead, they prayed for boldness and miracles. When they had prayed, the building was shaken by the power of God and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and spoke God's word with boldness (Acts 4:23 - 31).

The essential needs of the believers were met by a spontaneous outpouring of love and resources from the rest of the community of believers. People sold possessions and brought the proceeds to the apostles to be distributed to the needy among them. Meals were prepared and served to the widows. Of course, this resulted in a crisis of priorities for the apostles themselves.

To resolve this crisis and to keep everything operating properly, the apostles created the function of the deacon. The people nominated seven deacons and the apostles appointed them, praying over them. By doing this the apostles were able to give themselves to their higher priority (Acts 6:4).

Peter.

Prayer was vital to the life and ministry of the apostle Peter. He knelt down and prayed before he raised Dorcas from the dead (Acts 9:40).

In Joppa, Peter was on the housetop praying about noon when he received the vision of the sheet-like object containing all kinds of animals. It was then that the Spirit told him that three men had arrived and were wanting to see him, and that he was to go with the men to Cornelius's house to present the gospel to him and his household (Acts 10:9).

The unceasing prayers of the church were an important part of Peter's deliverance from prison and certain death (Acts 12:5 and 12).

Paul.

When Saul of Tarsus (Paul) met the risen, glorified Savior on the road to Damascus, he began his new life in Christ by three days of earnest prayer. The angel who appeared to Ananias said to him about Saul, "Behold, he is praying" (Acts 9:11). Paul established a deep, solid connection with Christ at the very beginning and maintained and even deepened it throughout his life and ministry.

When Paul and Silas were thrown into prison at Philippi for preaching Jesus Christ (Acts 16), they could have felt sorry for themselves, complained, doubted their call and even doubted God Himself. But in spite of their circumstances, including physical discomfort and pain, they chose to do the right thing, the thing that was contrary to their physical surroundings and their natural feelings. They chose to pray and sing.

Look at what happened! "Suddenly there was a great earthquake, so that the foundations of the prison were shaken; and immediately all the doors were opened and every one's chains were loosed" (Acts 16:26).

On the island of Malta, where Paul and those who were with him had been shipwrecked, the governor's father lay ill with a fever and dysentery. Paul went in, prayed, laid his hands on him, and healed him (Acts 28:8).

The early church was a Spirit-filled church. By the Holy Spirit they spoke in tongues and prayed in tongues (languages they neither learned nor understood themselves). Praying in the Spirit was an integral part of Paul's prayer life. In his first epistle to the church at Corinth he wrote: "I will pray with the Spirit, and I will pray with the understanding also. I will sing with the Spirit and I will sing with the understanding also"

(1 Corinthians 14:15).

The outstanding feature of Paul's prayer life and ministry was his unceasing, steadfast prayers for the churches. This is emphasized over and over in his letters.

"Without ceasing I make mention of you always in my prayers" (Romans 1:9).

"I thank my God upon every remembrance of you, always in every prayer of mine making request for you all with joy" (Philippians 1:3, 4).

"We give thanks to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, praying always for you" (Colossians 1:3).

"We give thanks to God always for you all, making mention of you in our prayers" (1 Thessalonians 1:2).

"Night and day praying exceedingly that we may see your face" (1 Thessalonians 3:10).

Paul's great prayers for the Church are inscripturated for us in the Bible by the Holy Spirit to express the vital and eternal purpose of God for us as individual believers and for the Church as a whole in every age. We find these powerful prayers in: Ephesians 1:16-18; 3:14-19; Philippians 1:9-11; Colossians 1:9-12; 2 Thessalonians 1:11, 12. (Note: These prayers, along with our Lord's High Priestly prayer in John 17, are the subject of my book, Praying For Your Potential).

Join these prayers to the great high-priestly prayer of our Lord Jesus Christ, recorded in John 17, and the magnitude of the challenge, the potential, and the destiny of believers is beyond human imagination!

In Acts 20:36; 21:5; and 22:17 we find other occasions where it is mentioned that Paul prayed. In addition to these we have statements in Paul's letters to individuals about his earnest and diligent prayers for them (Philemon 4; 2 Timothy 4:16). In Romans 10:1 Paul tells of his earnest desire and prayer for Israel's salvation. Paul also requested the churches to pray for him and his ministry.

Epaphras.

Prayer was an on-going spiritual exercise of others in the early Church. Paul writes

to the church at Colossae regarding one of their leaders: "Epaphras, who is one of you, a servant of Christ, greets you, always laboring fervently for you in prayers, that you may stand perfect and complete in all the will of God" (Colossians 4:12).

Again, we read not only about the person who prayed but also of the substance and intent of his praying. Even though Epaphras was many miles from his home church, he realized the necessity of praying for them and continued to do so faithfully.

James.

The late third and early fourth century church historian, Eusebius, quotes an even earlier church historian, Hegesippus, as saying that when James (the half-brother of our Lord) was martyred, they discovered that his knees were calloused "like camels' knees" from kneeling on them so long in prayer. Although this account cannot be verified, it is reasonable to assume that a factual basis for it existed.

Earnest, sustained, prevailing prayer is just as important and necessary today as it was in the early Church. *If we want what they had, we must pray as they did!*

God is calling us to be a praying people, a praying Church.

Chapter 10

What We Should Pray For

The Bible tells us many things we are to pray for. The outstanding example is what is called The Lord's Prayer (Matthew 6:9-13; Luke 11:2-4). In this prayer Jesus lays out a pattern of priorities.

Our first concern in prayer should not be for our own needs and concerns. Instead, our first priority is the honor and glory of God ("Hallowed be Your name"), the establishment and advancement of His kingdom ("Your kingdom come"), and the accomplishment of His will ("Your will be done on earth as it is in Heaven"). After that we pray: "give us"; "forgive us"; "lead us"; "deliver us."

Wisdom.

We have already considered King Solomon's noble prayer for wisdom (1 Kings 3:5-13).

James writes: "If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all liberally and without reproach, and it will be given to him" (James 1:5). He goes on to say that we must pray in faith, "nothing wavering (doubting)."

This is important. We need wisdom desperately and have a difficult time holding on to it when God does give it to us. So to all who ask in "unwavering" faith He gives it liberally because we need a fresh supply daily!

Peace.

Paul deposited the word of God to Timothy on this subject in 1 Timothy 2:1, 2. "Therefore I exhort first of all that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks be made for all men, for kings and all who are in authority, that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and reverence."

The psalmist wrote, "Pray for the peace of Jerusalem" (Psalm 122:6).

Enemies.

Referring to those who opposed him, the psalmist David said, "But as for me, when they were sick, my clothing was sackcloth; I humbled my soul with fasting; and my prayer would return to my own heart" (Psalm 35:13).

Our Lord instructs us, "Love your enemies, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who spitefully use you and persecute you" (Matthew 5:44). Jesus exemplified this attitude of love when on the cross He prayed, "Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they do" (Luke 23:34).

Stephen was one of the first deacons. He became an evangelist and an early martyr for Christ. As he was being stoned to death, he graciously followed his Lord's example by praying for those who were murdering him: "Lord, do not charge them with this sin" (Acts 7:60).

In affliction, trouble, and for healing.

Again, here is the word of the Lord through James: "Is anyone among you suffering? Let him pray. Is anyone cheerful? Let him sing psalms. Is anyone among you sick? Let him call for the elders of the church, and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord. And the prayer of faith will save the sick, and the Lord will raise him up. And if he has committed sins, he shall be forgiven" (James 5:13-15).

For one another.

The foregoing passage in James further instructs us to pray for one another (verse 16).

We remind ourselves of the statement of the prophet Samuel: "Be it far from me that I should sin against the LORD in ceasing to pray for you" (1 Samuel 12:23). That same obligation is even greater for believers today.

If we had "comforters" who harassed us in our times of suffering as much as Job had in *his* affliction, we might have a hard time praying for them (except to ask God to get them out of our face!). However, Job prayed for his "friends," and we read that "The LORD restored Job's losses when he prayed for his friends" (Job 42:10).

We have already considered how Paul prayed for the churches, and how that is embodied in the Scriptures as God's will for all believers and guides us in praying for one another. We find more of Paul's prayers for the churches and for individual

believers in: 2 Corinthians 13:7; Galatians 4:19; Philippians 1:3; 1 Thessalonians 1:2; 2 Timothy 1:3; Philemon 4-6.

Paul not only prayed *for* the churches but also asked prayer *from* the churches. Paul knew something that many modern Christians seem to have forgotten: thriving, successful, effective Christian living and ministry are possible only when we are praying for one another.

We find examples of Paul's pleas for prayer in: Romans 15:30; 1 Corinthians 1:11; Philippians 1:17; Colossians 4:2-4; 1 Thessalonians 5:25; 2 Thessalonians 3:1, 2; Philemon 22.

We see the request of the writer of the Epistle To The Hebrews (perhaps Paul) in Hebrews 13:18 "Pray for us; for we are confident that we have a good conscience, in all things willing to live honorably."

For The Holy Spirit.

Jesus said, "If you, then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask Him!" (Luke 11:13).

The Holy Spirit helps Spirit-filled believers to pray according to the will of God. Romans 8:26 and 27 read: "Likewise the Spirit also helps in our weaknesses. For we do not know what we should pray for as we ought, but the Spirit Himself makes intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered. Now He who searches the hearts knows what the mind of the Spirit is, because He makes intercession for the saints according to the will of God."

In a related subject we go to 1 Corinthians 14:13, where we read that the person who speaks out publicly in tongues is to pray that he may interpret.

We are to pray that the Lord of the harvest will thrust out laborers into His harvest (Matthew 9:38).

We are to pray for the salvation of souls. An example of this is Paul's prayer for Israel "that they may be saved" (Romans 10:1).

All things.

The potential of prayer is unlimited. Jesus gave us these carte blanche promises:

"Assuredly I say to you, if you have faith and do not doubt, you will not only do what was done to the fig tree, but also if you say to this mountain, 'Be removed and be cast into the sea,' it will be done. And all things, whatever you ask in prayer, believing, you will receive" (Matthew 21:21, 22).

"And whatever you ask in My name, that I will do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son. If you ask anything in My name, I will do it" (John 14:13, 14).

"If you abide in Me, and My words abide in you, you will ask what you desire, and it shall be done for you" (John 15:7).

"Ask, and you will receive, that your joy may be full" (John 16:24).

The apostle John, who was present when Jesus spoke those amazing words, assures us by the Spirit, "Now this is the confidence that we have in Him, that if we ask anything according to His will, He hears us. And if we know that He hears us, whatever we ask, we know that we have the petitions that we have asked of Him" (1 John 5:14, 15).

The apostle Paul, who knew first-hand the effective power of "the prayer of faith," urges us: "Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God; and the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus" (Philippians 4:6, 7).

Let us pray . . .