

# PRAYER

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## *Preface*

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Before you begin your Bible study, if you are a believer in the Lord Jesus Christ, be sure you have named your sins privately to God the Father.

If we confess our [known] sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our [known] sins and to cleanse us from all [unknown, or forgotten sins] unrighteousness. (1 John 1:9)

You will then be in fellowship with God, filled with the Holy Spirit, and ready to learn Bible doctrine from the Word of God.

“God is spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in [the filling of the] spirit and [biblical] truth.” (John 4:24)

If you have never personally believed in the Lord Jesus Christ as your Savior, the issue is not naming your sins. The issue is faith alone in Christ alone.

“He who believes in the Son has eternal life; but he who does not obey [the command to believe in] the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God abides on him.” (John 3:36)

**T**HE WORD OF GOD is alive and powerful, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of the soul and the spirit, and of the joints and the marrow, and is a critic of thoughts and intents of the heart. (Heb. 4:12)

All Scripture is God-breathed, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness; that the man of God might be mature, thoroughly furnished unto all good works. (2 Tim. 3:16–17)

Study to show thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth. (2 Tim. 2:15)

## GOD'S COMMUNICATION SYSTEM

WHILE GOD COMMUNICATES with man through His Word, He has given believers in the Lord Jesus Christ a gracious means of communication with Himself—prayer. When the believer prays, he has a direct connection to the throne room of God. He has the opportunity and privilege to speak to God expressing his gratitude, interceding for others who are in need, and petitioning for his own personal needs. Prayer is the most potent weapon of the spiritual life and the believer must take full advantage of this unparalleled approach to God.

“It will also come to pass that before they call, I will answer; and while they are still speaking, I will hear.”  
(Isa. 65:24)<sup>1</sup>

From eternity past the omniscience of God knew and had an answer for every prayer that every believer would offer during his lifetime. God's omnipotence gives Him the absolute ability to hear and answer prayer, but His sovereignty, omniscience, righteousness,

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1. All Scriptures in this book are quoted from the New American Standard Bible (NASB). Bracketed commentary reflects amplification of the NASB translation taught in Bible class lectures (available on tape from R. B. Thieme, Jr., Bible Ministries, Houston, Texas).

justice, and love determine His answers. When the believer understands these attributes of divine essence,<sup>2</sup> his prayers will be effective and he will avoid prayers contrary to the will of God.

I love the Lord, because He hears  
My voice *and* my supplications.  
Because He has inclined His ear to me,  
Therefore I shall call *upon Him* as long as I live.  
(Ps. 116:1–2)

Two kinds of prayer are revealed in this Psalm: “hears My voice,” refers to everyday, routine prayers, and “supplications,” to special, more intense prayers for serious or adverse circumstances. “I shall call upon Him” implies a vocal request; however, it is not necessary to pray by speaking out loud. You can *think* a prayer as well as *speak* one.

Prayer demands faith, believing God’s Word, knowing that God will hear when the believer calls, and then relaxing while God answers the request. Prayer is an extension of the faith-rest drill, the basic technique for claiming the promises of God and mixing them with faith to generate tranquility of soul (Heb. 4:1–2).<sup>3</sup> The relationship between prayer and faith-rest is revealed in Bible promises.

“And all things you ask in prayer, believing [by faith], you shall receive.” (Matt. 21:22)

“Therefore I say to you, all things for which you pray and ask, believe that you have received them, and they shall be *granted* you.” (Mark 11:24)

“Believing” in these two verses is applying the first and second stages of the faith-rest drill: mixing the promises of God with faith and praying with confidence that God hears and answers prayer. Once the believer has made his request, he then turns the matter over to the

2. R. B. Thieme, Jr., *The Trinity* (Houston: R. B. Thieme, Jr., Bible Ministries, 1993). Hereafter, cross-references to my books will cite only author, title, date of publication (in the first reference), and page(s).

3. There are three stages of the faith-rest drill: 1) mixing the promises of God with faith to stabilize thinking; 2) gleaning from promises relevant doctrines or rationales to apply; 3) reaching doctrinal conclusions so that faith controls the soul. See Thieme, *The Faith-Rest Life* (1999).

Lord. The more hopeless the situation, the more the believer should respond with the faith-rest drill and the power of prayer.

Among Christians who are advancing in the spiritual life is an understandable desire to serve the Lord. They might say, "I am grateful for what the Lord Jesus Christ did for me in dying for my sins and providing eternal life through faith alone in Him. I want to be of service to the Lord." They may want to work in the church, to teach children, to serve on a committee, to evangelize. Yet in their aspirations, they frequently overlook prayer as an indispensable, full-time ministry in the service of the Lord and the Church.<sup>4</sup>

Unfortunately, prayer is often abused and misused. Some believers attempt to exploit the power of prayer to get their own way. Other believers use prayer only when they are in trouble. They promise God, "If you get me out of this jam, I will be a good Christian, give to the church, witness to a certain number of people a day."

However, prayer is not designed to bribe or manipulate God, or to get the believer out of trouble. The primary purpose of prayer is to ask according to God's will. In order to conform to His will, the believer must know what the will of God is.<sup>5</sup> The privilege of prayer is bestowed by God to fulfill His will and plan and to give the believer access to heaven while still living on earth. In prayer the believer expresses his helplessness, his humility, his recognition and orientation to God's grace, and his total dependence on Him.

### *To the Throne Room*

Let us therefore draw near with confidence to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and may find grace to help in time of need. (Heb. 4:16)

Because Jesus Christ, our great High Priest, "passed through the heavens" into the third heaven (Heb. 4:14; cf., 2 Cor. 12:2)<sup>6</sup> and is now seated in the presence of God the Father making intercession for

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4. This reference to the Church refers to the universal church, the Body of Christ, composed of all Church Age believers.

5. Thieme, *Divine Guidance*, (1999).

6. In Genesis 1:8 "heaven" refers to the earth's atmosphere, the first heaven. In other contexts, "heaven" may also refer to the universe, the second heaven, or the abode of God, the third heaven.

us, we can confidently approach the throne of grace in prayer. When we offer a prayer, the Father in heaven hears us *immediately*.

Have you ever speculated how far and fast prayer travels by considering the incredible distance to the throne room of God? The speed at which light travels is 186,000 miles a second; thus, one light year represents about six trillion miles. Using the speed of light and the earth's distance from the sun (about ninety-three million miles), we know that light from the sun reaches us in eight minutes. Light from the next closest star, Proxima Centauri, takes more than four years to reach earth. If at this moment Sirius, the Dog Star, should explode, it would be nearly nine years before we saw the explosion. The next closest galaxy of stars visible to the naked eye is Andromeda Nebula. The light we see from Andromeda Nebula left there about two million light years ago making the distance to Andromeda Nebula about twelve quadrillion miles. How far then is the throne room of God beyond Andromeda Nebula? Billions, perhaps trillions of light years away! Who knows? But however far it is, this is the distance our prayers travel, instantly.

When we pray, we are utilizing a divinely designed system that is faster than anything known to science. When we say, "Father," we reach the throne room of grace instantly and with no interference. This provision is something we do not earn or deserve, but is graciously provided by God.

## THE MANDATE TO PRAY

Prayer is part of every believer's spiritual life in every dispensation.<sup>7</sup> Both the Old and New Testaments record separate commands related to prayer. The Old Testament reveals that prayer was an integral part of the spiritual life of Israel (Ex. 33:13; Num 12:13; Deut. 4:7; 1 Sam. 7:5; 1 Kings 8:29–30; 2 Chron. 6:34–35; Ps. 5:2). A direct mandate for prayer is found in Jeremiah.

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7. A dispensation is a divinely appointed era of human history. The Bible identifies six sequential administrations, each having unique characteristics, as well as certain functions in common with the other dispensations. These consecutive eras reflect the unfolding of God's plan for mankind; they constitute the divine viewpoint and theological interpretation of history. See Thieme, *The Divine Outline of History: Dispensations and the Church* (1999).

“Then you will call upon Me and come and pray to Me, and I will listen to you.” (Jer. 29:12)

The Lord Jesus Christ Himself mandated prayer during the Dispensation of the Hypostatic Union.<sup>8</sup>

“Ask, and it shall be given to you; seek, and you shall find; knock, and it shall be opened to you.” (Matt. 7:7)

This verse reveals three facets of prayer for all believers: *Asking* is routine prayer; *seeking* is prayer with the concept of divine guidance; and *knocking* is intense prayer or supplications.

The Church Age mandate for a prayer life is found in 1 Thessalonians.

Pray without ceasing. (1 Thess. 5:17)

The present middle imperative from the verb προσεύχομαι (*proseuchomai*) means “to pray.” The gnomic present tense refers to a state which perpetually exists; prayer is perpetuated throughout the life of the believer. The dynamic middle voice indicates that the subject, the believer, acts for himself with reference to himself and others. The imperative mood commands every Church Age believer to pray. “Without ceasing” is not a command to pray constantly, but consistently. Therefore, this verse can be translated, “Make it a habit of prayer” which is a mandate for prevailing prayer.

The word “prevailing” means “frequent or common; widespread or predominate.” Prevailing prayer is frequent, consistent, daily, spontaneous prayer by which believers can uphold other believers before the throne of grace. Prevailing prayer is the powerful instrument provided by God to meet the needs, adversities, temptations, and dilemmas of life beyond the specific commands, exhortations, and doctrines that the believer learns from the Word of God. In many cases, the Bible does not specify a one-two-three answer to a situation in life. But when a circumstance exists which the Scripture does not specifically address, there is one thing God expects—prevailing prayer. The prevailing prayers of believers bring about developments that no one could dream would happen.

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8. The Dispensation of the Hypostatic Union is the period of history from the virgin birth of Jesus Christ to His death, burial, resurrection, ascension, and session at the right hand of the Father in heaven. *Ibid.*, 37–40.

For an army to be successful in battle, a barrage of artillery fire is necessary for support. History records unnecessary loss of life and lost battles caused by the lack of artillery to cover an army's advance. One great glaring weakness of the Church in the world today is the lack of a prevailing prayer barrage. The Church needs faithful prayer warriors to enlist in the Lord's artillery.

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

“If you abide in Me, and My words abide in you, ask whatever you wish, and it shall be done for you.”  
(John 15:7)

## BASIC PRINCIPLES OF PRAYER

In order to pray effectively, the believer must understand how to pray. God has ground rules, procedures that must be observed at all times.

### *Prayer Is for Believers Only*

For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus.  
(Gal. 3:26)

But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, *even* to those who believe in His name. (John 1:12)

Only members of the family of God through faith alone in Christ alone have the right to approach the throne of grace and say, “Heavenly Father.” With the exception of the prayer for salvation, in which an unbeliever acknowledges Jesus Christ as Savior and is “born again,”<sup>9</sup> a personal relationship with God must exist before prayer becomes a bona fide function.

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9. Born again refers to regeneration, the point in time when a person passes from spiritual death to spiritual life through faith alone in Christ alone (John 3:3). At that moment the Holy Spirit creates in that person a human spirit, the home for the imputation of eternal life.

## *Protocol for Prayer*

All prayer must be directed to the Father (Matt. 6:6, 9; Eph. 5:20), in the name of the Son (John 14:13–14), and in the power or filling of the Holy Spirit (Eph. 6:18).<sup>10</sup> Hebrews 7:25 tells us that Christ is praying for us at the right hand of the Father. Romans 8:26–27 informs us that the Holy Spirit makes intercession for us even when we do not know how to pray under certain circumstances or about a certain situation. Since Christ and the Holy Spirit both make intercession for us, we do not address our prayers to “Dear Jesus” or “O Holy Spirit.”

## *Length of Prayer*

Long prayers should be reserved for private prayers. Public prayers should be short, to the point, and avoid needless repetition. Do not try to impress people with the eloquence of your words. Pray succinctly for a specific matter and then move to the next issue.

“And when you pray, you are not to be as the hypocrites; for they love to stand and pray in the synagogues and on the street corners, in order to be seen by men. Truly I say to you, they have their reward in full. But you, when you pray, go into your inner room, and when you have shut your door, pray to your Father who is in secret, and your Father who sees in secret will repay you. And when you are praying, do not use meaningless repetition [empty babbling of words], as the Gentiles do, for they suppose that they will be heard for their many words.” (Matt. 6:5–7)

## *Sequence for Private Prayer*

### *REBOUND*

If we confess [ὁμολογέω, *homologeō*—name] our sins,  
He is faithful and righteous to forgive us [cancel] our sins

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10. The filling of the Holy Spirit is God’s provision of divine power to execute the spiritual life and serve the Lord (Eph. 5:18). The filling of the Spirit is an absolute status; the believer is either spiritual, His soul is controlled by the Spirit, or carnal, controlled by the sin nature.

and to cleanse [purify] us from all unrighteousness.  
(1 John 1:9)

The Greek word *homologeō*, translated “confess,” means “to name, cite, admit, acknowledge.” The verb was used primarily in a judicial context as “confess a crime in court, to make a legal statement.” First John 1:9 is no exception. The word means simply to acknowledge or name your sins to God the Father. This is rebound.<sup>11</sup>

Rebound is the first and most important consideration of private prayer.<sup>12</sup> Why? Because your prayer does not rise above the ceiling when you are carnal.

If I regard wickedness in my heart,  
The Lord will not hear. (Ps. 66:18)

“Wickedness” or carnality is a state of sin—out of fellowship with God and without the filling of the Holy Spirit. Rebound is God’s gracious provision to recover from carnality. When you confess your sins, you are forgiven of all wrongdoing, again filled with the Spirit, and restored to fellowship with God. You are now back on praying ground. The rebound prayer is the only prayer that God hears and answers when you are in a state of carnality. If you make rebound your first priority when you open your prayer, you will be heard and can fulfill the mandate to “pray without ceasing” (1 Thess. 5:17).

### THANKSGIVING

Devote yourselves to prayer, keeping alert in it with *an attitude of thanksgiving*. (Col. 4:2)

Thanksgiving is the part of your private prayer that constitutes worship motivated from your personal love for God (Eph. 5:20).<sup>13</sup> Thanksgiving is appreciation and gratitude for all that God has done in grace

11. The reference to Jesus as our advocate or defense attorney (1 John 2:1) demonstrates the judicial context of 1 John 1:9.

12. Thieme, *Rebound & Keep Moving!* (1993).

13. As the believer learns and applies Bible doctrine through the filling of the Holy Spirit, his knowledge of God increases. He responds with respect, admiration, devotion, and reverence to who God is and with appreciation for what He has done (Deut. 6:5; Matt. 22:37; 1 Pet. 1:8).

for you.<sup>14</sup> The more you love God and the more you appreciate Him, the greater is your “*attitude of thanksgiving.*”

In everything give thanks; for this is God’s will for you in Christ Jesus. (1 Thess. 5:18)

“In everything” includes being thankful for bad as well as good circumstances. “In everything” also means being thankful for spiritual as well as material things.

The prayer for the sanctification of food before a meal is a way of expressing thanksgiving for God’s logistical grace in providing your complete provision of basic life support in this world. The food may contain harmful contaminants, but offering this special prayer is a protection from those effects.

For everything created by God is good, and nothing is to be rejected, if it is received with gratitude; for it is sanctified by means of the word of God and prayer. (1Tim. 4:4-5)

### INTERCESSION

Intercessory prayer is praying for others. This aspect of prayer is a ministry of Christian service in which you provide a barrage of support for those in need.

With all prayer and petition pray at all times in the [power of the] Spirit, and with this in view, be on the alert with all perseverance and petition for all the saints, and *pray* on my behalf, that utterance may be given to me in the opening of my mouth, to make known with boldness the mystery of the gospel. (Eph. 6:18-19)

To intercede for others, you should have a list to remind yourself of all those in need of prayer.

Prayer for others falls into two categories: believers and unbelievers. When you pray for *unbelievers*, it is primarily for their

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14. Grace is God’s free gift of unmerited favor to the undeserving human race. Grace is all that God is free to do for mankind on the basis of the saving work of Jesus Christ on the cross. Mankind through his own work can never accomplish or achieve the notice or favor of God.

salvation (Rom. 10:1). Although you cannot ask God to abrogate the volition of unbelievers, you can ask Him to bring some circumstance into their lives that will direct their attention to Christ. You can ask that they will hear the Gospel so that they might find Christ as Savior. You can pray for a personal opening to witness to someone with whom you are in contact.<sup>15</sup> On the cross Jesus Christ provided the greatest example of intercession for unbelievers in all of human history.

“Father, forgive them; for they do not know what they are doing.” (Luke 23:34)

Regarding *believers*, there are several categories for which you can pray. Pray for those who have certain spiritual gifts of communication—pastors, evangelists, missionaries (Acts 12:5). Comparatively few believers actually possess these communication gifts, but all believers are in full-time Christian service and can share in these ministries through prevailing prayer.<sup>16</sup> Pray for those in positions of authority in the church. Pray for those who work in the church. Pray for those who are ill. Pray for missions. Pray for loved ones and friends (Acts 21:5). Pray for those in the military, the police, and the fire department.

You also are mandated to pray for those who despitefully use you, for those who seek to do you harm and hurt, whether they be believers or unbelievers.

Bless those who curse you, pray for those who mistreat you. (Luke 6:28, cf., Matt. 5:44)

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15. Thieme, *Witnessing* (1992).

16. Since every believer is a priest, an ambassador for Christ, and indwelt by the Holy Spirit, every believer is in full-time Christian service. There are four categories of Christian service: 1) Christian service related to a spiritual gift; 2) Christian service related to the royal priesthood, which includes prayer, giving, and the execution of the plan of God; 3) Christian service related to your royal ambassadorship, which includes evangelism, witnessing, administration in the local church, functioning in a Christian service organization; and 4) Christian service related to the laws of divine establishment, which includes military service, law enforcement, government.

This prayer can be accomplished only from a mental attitude of impersonal love.<sup>17</sup> Instead of retaliation and revenge, you place the matter in the Lord's hands.

You also are mandated to pray for the nation and its leadership. Moses made some of the greatest intercessory prayers in history for the reversionistic nation of Israel (Ex. 32:11–13; Num 14:13–19). Such intercessory prayer is part of the deliverance of the client nation which has fallen into reversionism.<sup>18</sup>

And My people [client nation] who are called by My name humble themselves and pray, and seek My face and turn from their wicked ways [reversionism], then I will hear from heaven, will forgive their sin, and will heal their land. (2 Chron. 7:14)

There is no hope for a client nation unless believers use the power of prevailing prayer.

### PETITION

Petition is praying for your own needs. This is listed last, though it is not necessarily the least important. We all have personal needs or problems of one kind or another. In such cases, "Let us therefore draw near with confidence to the throne of grace" (Heb. 4:16a).

Petitions address those particular circumstances for which there is no direct statement or solution from Scripture. If provision for your own needs or solutions to your problems are found in the Word of

17. Impersonal love is an unconditional regard for the entire human race that depends on the integrity of the subject rather than the merit of the object. Impersonal love does not require intimacy, friendship, attractiveness, or even acquaintance with the object of love. See Thieme, *Christian Integrity* (2002), 140–44.

18. A client nation is a national entity in which a certain number of mature believers have formed a pivot sufficient to sustain the nation and through which Jesus Christ controls history and God furthers His plan for mankind (Ex. 19:6). God specifically protects this representative nation so believers can fulfill the divine mandates of evangelism, custodianship and communication of Bible doctrine, providing a haven for the Jews, and sending missionaries abroad. See Thieme, *Freedom Through Military Victory* (2003), 16–19.

Reversionism is a way of life the believer chooses when he turns away from God's plan, will, and purpose for his life and returns to a former belief, a former viewpoint, a former *modus operandi*. The reversionist does not lose his salvation, but by his own volition involves himself in sin and evil and suffers the consequences of self-induced misery and divine punishment (Eph. 4:17b–18). See Thieme, *Reversionism* (2000), 1–2, 13–14.

God, do not petition for those things. For example, we are filled with the Spirit automatically when we rebound. Therefore, do not pray a meaningless prayer by saying, "Fill me with the Spirit."

As you learn Bible doctrine and advance to maturity in the spiritual life, you will understand both the constraints and the fantastic opportunities of your prayer life. In spiritual maturity, you will reduce the number of your personal petitions while expanding your capacity for intercessory prayer.

## WHY PRAYER IS NOT HEARD

There are a number of reasons why prayer is not heard. Each of these reasons is a result of carnality and failure in the spiritual life.

### *Lack of Faith*

Failure to have faith will prevent prayer from being heard. Mental attitude sins of fear and worry neutralize faith and the function of the faith-rest drill.

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

Once you commit a problem to God in prayer, you must trust that God will provide deliverance.

### *Wrong Motives*

Prayer is not heard when the believer makes a request from false motivation. When he yearns for the "pleasures" and details of life contradictory to God's plan, he is falsely motivated.

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

## *Lack of Compassion*

Apathy and cruelty toward the desperate conditions of the human race also will hinder answers to prayer. Only the believer's application of impersonal love within the framework of his spiritual life can prevent such enmity.

He who shuts his ear to the cry of the poor  
Will also cry himself and not be answered. (Prov. 21:13)

## *Lack of Domestic Tranquillity*

The least known of all reasons for unanswered prayer is discord in marriage.

You husbands likewise, live with *your wives* in an understanding way, as with a weaker vessel, since she is a woman; and grant her honor as a fellow heir of the grace of life, so that your prayers may not be hindered.  
(1 Pet. 3:7)

The husband is commanded to live with his wife in an "understanding way" gleaned from the wisdom of doctrine. When the husband fails in his leadership responsibilities and his wife reacts, the subsequent antagonism and mental attitude sins destroy the prayer lives of both.

## *Pride or Self-Righteousness*

Pride, or arrogance, was Satan's original sin (Isa. 14:12-14; Ezek. 28:14-17) and is the root mental attitude sin that creates a portfolio of evil in the soul of the believer.<sup>19</sup> Arrogance is the main cause of failure not only in prayer, but in the spiritual life in general (James 4:6).

"There they cry out, but He does not answer  
Because of the pride of evil men.  
Surely God will not listen to an empty cry,  
Nor will the Almighty regard it." (Job 35:12-13)

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19. Thieme, *Reversionism*, 156-60.

The believer who assumes his activities and priorities take precedence over spending time before the throne of grace has reached the height of self-centered arrogance.<sup>20</sup>

### *Failure to Comply with Divine Will*

The effectiveness of prayer is directly related to the believer's cognizance of God's will and plan.

And this is the confidence which we have before Him, that, if we ask anything according to His will, He hears us. (1 John 5:14)

Since the immature believer does not have a complete understanding of God's will, he may not always pray in conformity to God's will. The more the believer advances, the more he learns of the plan of God, the more productive his prayer life will be.

### *Lack of Obedience*

Ineffective prayer is directly connected with failure to obey the mandates of Bible doctrine.

And whatever we ask we receive from Him, because we keep His commandments and do the things that are pleasing in His sight. (1 John 3:22)

When the believer fails to subject himself to the will of God, his prayers are not answered.

### *Lack of the Filling of the Spirit*

Regardless if a believer is reverent, fervent, moral, or sincere, if he is not filled with the Holy Spirit and fails to rebound from carnality, he is without the enabling power of God the Holy Spirit and his prayers will not be heard. This is why confession always must precede prayer.

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20. Ibid., 127-29.

With all prayer and petition pray at all times in the [power of the] Spirit. (Eph. 6:18a)

## GIDEON AND THE SIGN OF THE FLEECE

During the period of the Judges in the 12<sup>th</sup> century B.C., the Lord used the Midianites to discipline the children of Israel because they had done evil in His sight (Judg. 6:1). Every year for seven years, the Midianites would invade Israel at harvest time. They would burn, pillage, and drive the people close to starvation.

For it was when Israel had sown, that the Midianites . . . would camp against them and destroy the produce of the earth . . . and leave no sustenance in Israel . . . and they came into the land to devastate it. So Israel was brought very low, and the sons of Israel cried [prayed] to the Lord. (Judg. 6:3–6)

The Lord heard their cries and commissioned Gideon to be His instrument of deliverance from the Midianite tyranny.

Then the angel of the Lord came and sat under the oak that was in Ophrah, which belonged to Joash the Abiezrite as his son Gideon was beating out wheat in the wine press in order to save *it* from the Midianites. (Judg. 6:11)

The “angel of the Lord” is the revealed member of the Godhead, Jesus Christ (John 1:18).<sup>21</sup> He approached Gideon who was hiding in a wine press threshing wheat in order to survive. The fact that Gideon was forced into hiding in a hole in the ground, even though he had access to a real threshing floor (v. 37), represents the pathetic plight in which Israel found itself.

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21. When Gideon addressed the angel as “my Lord” in verse 13, he used the personal name of God, *Yahweh*. Therefore, the angel that appeared to Gideon was God Himself. Since the revealed member of the Trinity is always the second Person, *Yahweh* in this case is Jesus Christ appearing in a theophany to Gideon. See Thieme, *Old Sin Nature vs. Holy Spirit* (2000), 31.

While Gideon's clandestine threshing does not present the picture of a hero, nevertheless Jesus Christ speaks to Gideon in verse 12 as if he were a hero: "The Lord is with you, O valiant warrior." This is a promise of hope to Gideon in these terrible circumstances. Yet at this moment, Gideon is not a man of courage and ignores God's promise. Later, faith in God's promise will make him a man of courage.

Then Gideon said to him, "O my lord, if the Lord is with us, why then has all this happened to us? And where are all His miracles which our fathers told us about, saying, 'Did not the Lord bring us up from Egypt?' But now the Lord has abandoned us and given us into the hand of Midian." (Judg. 6:13)

Gideon missed the point entirely. He insulted the Lord with clichés we hear even today: "How could God let this happen? Why does God not help us?" Gideon had conveniently overlooked Israel's involvement with evil because he was thinking with human viewpoint.<sup>22</sup>

And the Lord looked at him and said, "Go in this your strength and deliver Israel from the hand of Midian. Have I not sent you?" (Judg. 6:14)

Then to further substantiate the fact that he was thinking with human viewpoint and not listening to God's promise, Gideon said,

"O Lord, how shall I deliver Israel? Behold, my family is the least in Manasseh, and I am the youngest in my father's house." (Judg. 6:15b)

Gideon did not need to denigrate himself. The Lord knew Manasseh was one of the most insignificant tribes and Gideon was the least in a poor family. These humble circumstances did not mean that the Lord could not use him. Although Gideon is not the kind of heroic and privileged person that man would select as a leader, the Lord uses the helpless, hopeless, and useless.

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22. Human viewpoint is any human or satanic system of thinking, values, or problem solving and is contrary and opposed to divine viewpoint, values, and problem solving as revealed in the Bible.

But the Lord said to him, “Surely I will be with you, and you shall defeat Midian as one man.” (Judg. 6:16)

Twice Gideon had received a promise from the Lord and twice he refused to believe the promise for his faith was weak and he wanted reassurance.

So Gideon said to Him, “If now I have found favor in Thy sight, then show me a sign that it is Thou who speakest with me.” (Judg. 6:17)

Of course Gideon *had* found grace in God’s sight. How many times does God have to make a promise to prove He means it? Once! Yet Gideon insisted on a sign from God to verify His promise. So Gideon devised a test for God with a “fleece of wool.”

“Behold, I will put a fleece of wool on the threshing floor. If there is dew on the fleece only, and it is dry on all the ground, then I will know that Thou wilt deliver Israel through me, as Thou hast spoken.” (Judg. 6:37)

Then Gideon said to God, “Do not let Thine anger burn against me that I may speak once more; please let me make a test once more with the fleece, let it now be dry only on the fleece, and let there be dew on all the ground.” (Judg. 6:39)

Believers are frequently guilty of putting out the fleece to God: “If You want me to do this, God, then You do that. If You want me to do that, then You do this. Lord, if You really mean what You say, then prove it to me!” Believers want God to give them exactly what they want, when they want it, as if God were supposed to ‘dance to their tune.’ This is *not* the correct approach to prayer. However, God is always gracious. In this case, He tolerated Gideon’s unbelief by obliging his request. But do not test God and ‘put out the fleece’ in your own prayer. God answers prayer in His own perfect time and in His own way; and sometimes, God’s answer is not at all what you expect.

## THE POWER OF PRAYER

The power of prayer increases as the believer advances to maturity in the spiritual life. Elijah illustrates the legitimacy and effectiveness of prayer that is offered by the mature believer.

In 1 Kings 17:1, Elijah prophesied a great drought in Israel. Then, after three years the Lord promised rain (1 Kings 18:1). Elijah's faith in God's promise of rain was so sure that in verse 41, Elijah told Ahab, the king of Israel, "There is the sound of the roar of a *heavy* shower" although at that point, there was no physical sign of rain.

In verse 42, Elijah went to the top of Mount Carmel and "crouched down on the earth and put his face between his knees" in prayer. At the same time, he had his servant look toward the Mediterranean Sea for any sign of rain. The servant observed, "There is nothing." But "he [Elijah] said, 'Go back' seven times" (v. 43*b*). Elijah kept his servant running up and down the hill gathering reports until finally,

[The servant] said, "Behold, a cloud as small as a man's hand is coming up from the sea." (1 Kings 18:44*b*)

At this point Elijah sent the servant to tell King Ahab to leave the mountain quickly before the rain prevented the king's descent.

So it came about . . . that the sky grew black with clouds and wind, and there was a heavy shower. (1 Kings 18:45*a*)

When compared with Gideon's skepticism, Elijah's faith is a tremendous contrast. The Lord gave Gideon a promise twice and in his immaturity and unbelief, he still asked for signs. On the other hand, when Elijah was told only once that the drought was to be ended, his faith was strong and his obedience immediate. Because he trusted absolutely in God's guarantee, Elijah was able to pray with maximum effectiveness.

To receive answers to problems, the mature believer always goes to the Lord in prayer. No matter how many times King David failed, he always returned to the power of prayer and implored the Lord to deliver him from his folly (Ps. 116:1-6). In every case God heard his prayer and provided solutions. God does the same for every believer who spends time before the throne of grace.

### *The Necessity of Prevailing Prayer*

Acts, chapter 12 is an example of the power of prevailing prayer by an assembly of believers.

Now about that time Herod the king laid hands on some who belonged to the church, in order to mistreat them. (Acts 12:1)

King Herod Agrippa I, grandson of Herod the Great, was an intimate friend of the Roman emperor Caligula. For his loyalty to Caligula, Herod was awarded rulership over the Jews of Palestine in A.D. 37. Herod was very fond of the Jews and went to great lengths to curry their favor. One of his favorite strategies was to “mistreat” Christians by either killing or imprisoning them. Since this persecution seemed to gratify the Jews, Herod vigorously pursued his oppression of Christians in Palestine.

And he had James the brother of John put to death with a sword. And when he saw that it pleased the Jews, he proceeded to arrest Peter also. Now it was during the days of Unleavened Bread. (Acts 12:2–3)

Herod had James, the brother of John, decapitated. James was an apostle and a dearly loved leader whom the Jerusalem church believed they could not do without. He also had an outstanding evangelistic ministry to the Jews. Why, then, did God permit James to die?

The death of James was designed to benefit the emerging church in Jerusalem. God needed to shock the church into realizing the necessity of prevailing prayer. Only the death of James could rouse these believers to their responsibility to pray. God could have delivered James just as He would deliver Peter, if this had been best for the church. But God’s plan was to ensure the church understood the power and necessity of prevailing prayer.

God always knows what He is doing (John 13:7). Often we cannot understand tragedies, but in this case we can see the obvious results. First, through the death of James the Jerusalem church became aware of its responsibilities as well as its privilege in the matter of prayer. Also during his persecution, James was provided unusual opportunities to witness.

Peter’s imprisonment followed immediately after the martyrdom of James.

And when he [Herod] had seized him [Peter], he put him in prison, delivering him to four squads of soldiers to

guard him, intending after the Passover to bring him out before the people. (Acts 12:4)

Killing prisoners during the feast days was contrary to Jewish *modus operandi*. Since Herod was scrupulous in observing their practices, he delayed Peter's execution until after the Passover. However, Herod employed maximum security to make certain that Peter could not escape. He had Peter placed on a twenty-four-hour guard. He was secured by sixteen Roman soldiers, four each watch. He was chained to a bench in a cell between two of the soldiers, while just outside the cell were two more soldiers.

So Peter was kept in the prison, but prayer for him was being made fervently by the church to God. (Acts 12:5)

Since the death of James had awakened the church to the necessity and power of prayer, they were now prevailing in prayer for Peter. They had gathered at the home of John Mark's mother, Mary, and were praying for his deliverance from certain execution. When James was in prison, the church slept and no one prayed, but now they were all wide awake and on their knees in the early hours of the morning, sending forth the kind of prevailing prayer barrage every servant of the Lord needs.

And on the very night when Herod was about to bring him forward, Peter was sleeping between two soldiers, bound with two chains; and guards in front of the door were watching over the prison. (Acts 12:6)

The Bible contains both humor and irony. Here is Peter, who slept through the prayer meeting in the garden of Gethsemane when he was supposed to be watching and praying with Jesus (Matt. 26:36-43), asleep again! But this was the right time for him to sleep. There was no pacing the floor or hysteria. Peter realized he could not break his chains or overpower the guards. He understood that from the human perspective he could do nothing to escape the executioner. His only recourse was to turn this hopeless situation over to the Lord. Therefore, Peter used the faith-rest technique and went to sleep.

And behold, an angel of the Lord suddenly appeared, and a light shone in the cell; and he struck Peter's side and roused him, saying, "Get up quickly." And his chains fell

off his hands. And the angel said to him, "Gird yourself and put on your sandals." And he did so. And he said to him, "Wrap your cloak around you and follow me." (Acts 12:7-8)

God broke the chains; He took care of the guards; He opened the iron gate; but Peter was told to put on his own clothes. God takes care of every need and problem beyond our power, but He does not disregard normal activities or human volition. It was up to Peter to follow instructions and put on his clothes. Some believers think of the Lord as a valet to 'dress' them, or a genie who grants all their wishes, but this is a misapplication of prayer, the faith-rest technique, and Bible doctrine.

And he [Peter] went out and continued to follow, and he did not know that what was being done by the angel was real, but thought he was seeing a vision. And when they had passed the first and second guard, they came to the iron gate that leads into the city, which opened for them by itself; and they went out and went along one street; and immediately the angel departed from him. (Acts 12:9-10)

Peter did as he was told but because he was half asleep, he thought that his experience was a dream. He was outside the prison before he realized he was free. Peter was delivered by a miracle because "prayer for him was being made fervently by the church of God" (Acts 12:5*b*). What brought the angel, broke the shackles, and allowed Peter to pass through the gate and into the street? The power of prevailing prayer and the grace of God!

And when Peter . . . went to the house . . . where many were gathered together and were praying . . . he knocked at the door of the gate, a servant-girl . . . came to answer . . . she recognized Peter's voice . . . ran in and announced that Peter was standing in front of the gate. And they said to her, "You are out of your mind!" But she kept insisting that it was so. And they kept saying, "It is his angel." (Acts 12:11-15)

The prayer meeting was still in progress when Peter arrived at the door. These believers had prayed most of the night for the deliverance

of Peter, yet when he knocked at the gate, they refused to believe he was free.

But Peter continued knocking; and when they had opened *the door*, they saw him and were amazed. (Acts 12:16)

God does not answer prayer because anyone earns or deserves an answer. Prayer is not answered because of who or what we are. Prayer is answered because of *who and what God is* and His grace. Often, as in this case, prayer is answered *despite* unbelief.

The deliverance of Peter was not the end of that prayer meeting. The gathering was like the ever-widening ripples in a pool into which a rock is dropped. The repercussions were so tremendous that the world was evangelized in that generation.

The believers in Jerusalem who prayed so effectively for the release of Peter were highly motivated to pray because of their desire for the preservation of the great apostle. They provide a fantastic example of the efficacy of prevailing prayer. Prayer is the powerhouse of the spiritual life—a fantastic grace provision from God. How tragic when believers today do not utilize prevailing prayer to His glory.

## THE MOTIVE BEHIND THE PETITION

Everyone has a motive to pray. Behind every petition is a desire. Although the desire may not always be obvious from the petition, it certainly exists.

In the fifth chapter of Mark which does not deal with prayer per se, the distinction between petition and desire is revealed.

And they came to the other side of the sea, into the country of the Gerasenes. And when He [Jesus] had come out of the boat, immediately a man from the tombs with an unclean spirit met Him. (Mark 5:1–2)

Gerasa was the mountainous, rugged, central coastline of the eastern shore of the Sea of Galilee. As Jesus disembarked, He was met by a man “with an unclean spirit”—a demon-possessed individual.<sup>23</sup>

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23. Thieme, *Satan and Demonism* (1996), 47–51.

And he had his dwelling among the tombs. And no one was able to bind him anymore, even with a chain; because he had often been bound with shackles and chains, and the chains had been torn apart by him, and the shackles broken in pieces, and no one was strong enough to subdue him. And constantly night and day, among the tombs and in the mountains, he was crying out and gashing himself with stones. (Mark 5:3-5)

These three verses reveal manifestations of the man's demon possession. He habitually lived among the tombs, the caves used as burial grounds. Obviously, a person had to be deranged to live among corpses. He had abnormal strength, was violent, unrestrainable, and self-mutilating.

And seeing Jesus from a distance, he ran up and bowed down before Him; and crying out with a loud voice, he said, "What do I have to do with You, Jesus, Son of the Most High God? I implore You by God, do not torment me!" For He had been saying to him, "Come out of the man, you unclean spirit!" And He was asking him, "What is your name?" And he said to Him, "My name is Legion; for we are many." (Mark 5:6-9)

The "loud voice" of the man is actually the voice of the demons who controlled his vocal cords. Jesus was having a dialogue with these demons and when He questioned them, they identified themselves as "Legion." This was not the actual name, but an indication that a multitude of demons indwelt the man.

Verse 11 points out that there was a large herd of swine on the mountainside. While pork was verboten to the Jews (Lev. 11:7-8), the gentile farmers on the east side of the Sea of Galilee raised swine.

And *the demons* entreated Him, saying, "Send us into the swine so that we may enter them." (Mark 5:12)

The demons made a request, but what was the desire behind the request? Since demons are spirit beings without bodies, they desire to permanently indwell corporeal creatures. The Lord answered their entreaty by permitting them to enter the swine. However, all the swine immediately plunged from a cliff into the sea and drowned.

Consequently, the demons had to seek other shelter. In this case the request or petition was answered, but the ultimate desire was not.

What happened to the man who had been demon possessed? Verse 15 tells us that he was now clothed and in his right mind.

And as He [Jesus] was getting into the boat, the man who had been demon-possessed was entreating Him that he might accompany Him. And He did not let him, but He said to him, "Go home to your people and report to them what great things the Lord has done for you, and *how* He had mercy on you." And he went away and began to proclaim in Decapolis what great things Jesus had done for him; and everyone marveled. (Mark 5:18–20)

The man petitioned to go with Jesus because he was now a believer in Christ and his desire was to serve. However, Jesus refused the man's petition but answered his desire. The man wanted to serve the Lord and he did, proclaiming the Gospel throughout the Decapolis, a district in the northeastern part of Galilee that encompassed ten cities.

Two principles should be reemphasized: First, the request of the demons received an affirmative answer, but their desire for a permanent shelter was denied. Second, the petition of the demon-possessed man was denied, but, his desire to serve the Lord was affirmed. Although this example is not prayer, it clearly distinguishes between petition and desire.

## CATEGORIES OF PRAYER

The incident with the Gerasene demoniac demonstrates that God views both the petition and the desire behind the petition separately and answers each part either affirmatively or negatively. There are four combinations of ways that God can answer the petition and the desire.

### *#1: Petition Affirmative—Desire Negative*

Numbers 11 records a petition of the children of Israel as they wandered in the desert. The Lord had supplied them with a perfect food, manna, but they grew tired of it and requested meat. So the Lord answered their request.

Now there went forth a wind from the Lord, and it brought quail from the sea, and let *them* fall beside the camp, about a day's journey on this side and a day's journey on the other side, all around the camp, and about two cubits *deep* [36 inches] on the surface of the ground. And the people spent all day and all night and all the next day, and gathered the quail (he who gathered least gathered ten homers [about 960 gallons]) and they spread *them* out for themselves all around the camp. While the meat was still between their teeth, before it was chewed, the anger of the Lord was kindled against the people, and the Lord struck the people with a very severe plague. (Num. 11:31–33)

So He gave them their request,  
But sent a wasting disease among them. (Ps. 106:15)

God sent more quail than anyone had ever seen, but the Jews' desire for culinary satisfaction was denied. As a result of eating the quail, many became ill and some died. Their desire was denied because they had rejected God's grace in the provision of manna.

At a later time in the history of Israel, the Jews asked Samuel to appoint for them a human king.

Then all the elders of Israel gathered together and came to Samuel at Ramah; and they said to him, "Behold, you have grown old, and your sons do not walk in your ways. Now appoint a king for us to judge us like all the nations." (1 Sam. 8:4–5)

Up until this time, invisible God had personally ruled Israel. But the Jews rejected God's theocracy. They did not want to be different from the other nations of the earth. They desired a ruler who was visible—taller, stronger, and more handsome than all the kings of the surrounding nations.

But the thing was displeasing in the sight of Samuel when they said, "Give us a king to judge us." And Samuel prayed to the Lord. And the Lord said to Samuel, "Listen to the voice of the people in regard to all that they say to you, for they have not rejected you, but they have rejected Me from being king over them." (1 Sam. 8:6–7)

The Lord answered Israel's petition and Saul became king. But Saul's leadership fell far short of their expectations. Israel was beset with strife and civil war. The petition for a king was answered, but the desire to have a magnificent human ruler was not because it violated the plan of God for Israel.

Many times a believer will ask for something that he thinks will bring him happiness. The petition may appear to be legitimate, but the motive behind the petition is self-gratification. While the Lord may answer the petition, the answer does not meet the desire. God does this to teach the bullheaded believer that his happiness depends on making the plan of God the first priority in his life.

## *#2: Petition Negative—Desire Affirmative*

And Abraham said to God, "Oh that Ishmael might live before Thee!" (Gen. 17:18)

Abraham petitioned that Ishmael, his son by Hagar, Sarah's maid-servant, might be his heir. The desire behind his petition was that God's covenant promise of an heir might be fulfilled (Gen. 15:4; 17:6, 16; cf., 12:2).

But God said, "No, but Sarah your wife shall bear you a son, and you shall call his name Isaac; and I will establish My covenant with him for an everlasting covenant for his descendants after him." (Gen. 17:19)

Abraham's petition was not answered. Ishmael was not to be in the line of Israel, even though he was a son from Abraham's loins. The desire behind the petition for an heir was answered by the birth of Isaac.

In a second example, the Lord advised Abraham that He was about to destroy Sodom and Gomorrah. Sodom was the home of Abraham's nephew Lot. Abraham was very concerned and did not want Lot and his family to perish with the city. Consequently, he began a petition to the Lord.

And Abraham came near and said, "Wilt Thou indeed sweep away the righteous with the wicked? Suppose there are fifty righteous within the city; wilt Thou indeed

sweep *it* away and not spare the place for the sake of the fifty righteous who are in it?" (Gen. 18:23–24)

The word "righteous" indicates a believer. This is not necessarily a person who is "good," but one who has the righteousness of God credited to him by faith alone in the Savior (Gen. 15:6; cf., Rom. 4:3). Since Jesus Christ voluntarily became "sin on our behalf, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him" (2 Cor. 5:21*b*), the justice of God is able to impute His righteousness to the believer at the moment of salvation.<sup>24</sup>

In answer to Abraham's plea of Genesis 18:23–25, the Lord said,

"If I find in Sodom fifty [believers] righteous within the city, then I will spare the whole place on their account."  
(Gen. 18:26)

Then in Genesis 18:27 and following, Abraham begins to bargain with God for the fate of Sodom. "Lord, would you save Sodom for forty-five?" And the Lord said, "Yes, I'll do it for forty-five." Abraham continued to negotiate, "Lord, will you do it for forty? Suppose there are only thirty believers. Will you save Sodom for thirty believers?" The Lord answered again, "Yes, for thirty."

Then he said, "Oh may the Lord not be angry, and I shall speak only this once; suppose ten are found there?" And He said, "I will not destroy *it* on account of the ten."  
(Gen. 18:32)

Abraham kept pleading with God until the number was reduced to ten. He stopped at ten because he knew that the family of Lot consisted of Lot, his wife, his three married daughters and their husbands, and his two unmarried daughters. But Abraham had not calculated properly for there were only three "righteous" souls in Lot's family.

Four of Lot's family escaped Sodom before its destruction, but only three survived. As it turns out, even Lot's wife was not a believer (Gen. 19:26). Abraham's petition to spare Sodom was not answered. However, his desire behind the petition to spare the righteous—Lot and two of his daughters—from the destruction was answered.

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24. The imputation of divine righteousness to everyone who believes in Jesus Christ is called "justification." See Thieme, *The Integrity of God* (1998), 74–81.

### #3: *Petition Affirmative—Desire Affirmative*

We have already examined one extraordinary example of Elijah's faith in prayer. Now, in 1 Kings 18, Elijah will use prayer to display the power of the one, true God and to prove the futility of idol worship. Once again, Elijah is on Mount Carmel, but this time he is issuing an ultimatum to the people of Israel.

And Elijah came near to all the people and said, "How long *will* you hesitate between two opinions? If the Lord is God, follow Him; but if Baal, follow him." But the people did not answer him a word. (1 Kings 18:21)

The children of Israel had degenerated to worshipping Baal, the Canaanite fertility god. Elijah was to demonstrate in a dramatic way to unfaithful Israel that Baal was a false god. He challenged the prophets of Baal to build an altar and cut a bullock in pieces and lay it on the wood. However, he told them not to light a fire under the altar. Then, Elijah made his proposal to the prophets of Baal

"Then you call on the name of your god, and I will call on the name of the Lord, and the God who answers by fire, He is God." And all the people answered and said, "That is a good idea." (1 Kings 18:24)

All morning the prophets called on Baal saying, "O Baal, hear us," but there was no response. At noontime Elijah began taunting them: "Shout louder! Your god must be taking a trip. Maybe he is deep in thought, or in conversation with other gods, or in a deep sleep and needs to be awakened. Perhaps he is in pursuit of some female god!" So the prophets of Baal shouted louder, but still nothing happened. Their futile entreaties continued until the time for the evening sacrifice.

At this point, Elijah called the people to him. Then he repaired the altar of the Lord which was in ruins, dug a trench around it, and prepared a sacrifice. Three times he had four barrels of water poured over the sacrifice until the trench and the altar were saturated. Then Elijah offered his petition: "Father, send fire!" The desire behind his petition was that God might be recognized as the only true God.

“Answer me, O Lord, answer me, that this people may know that Thou, O Lord, art God, and *that* Thou hast turned their heart back again.” Then the fire of the Lord fell, and consumed the burnt offering and the wood and the stones and the dust, and licked up the water that was in the trench. And when all the people saw it, they fell on their faces; and they said, “The Lord, He is God; the Lord, He is God.” (1 Kings 18:37–39)

God was glorified that day. Both the petition for fire and the desire behind the petition—to show the power of God and the futility of idol worship—were answered affirmatively.

Samson’s prayer in the temple of Dagon is another example of petition affirmative—desire affirmative. Following his betrayal by Delilah, he was imprisoned and blinded by the Philistines. During one of their pagan ceremonies “they made him stand between the pillars” (Judg. 16:25*b*).

Then Samson called to the Lord and said, “O Lord God, please remember me and please strengthen me just this time, O God, that I may at once be avenged of the Philistines for my two eyes.” (Judg. 16:28)

While standing in the temple between the pillars, Samson asked for the return of his strength so that he might avenge the Philistines for his blindness. Both his petition for strength and his desire for revenge were answered affirmatively.

And Samson grasped the two middle pillars on which the house rested, and braced himself against them, the one with his right hand and the other with his left. And Samson said, “Let me die with the Philistines!” And he bent with all his might so that the house fell on the lords and all the people who were in it. So the dead whom he killed at his death were more than those whom he killed in his life. (Judg. 16:29–30)

Samson’s desire for revenge was approved not because God ever sanctions believers taking revenge, but because God used Samson as the instrument of His own “vengeance” against the degeneracy of the Philistines (Deut. 32:35*a*, 41; Rom. 12:19).

Although not a prayer, a third example of both the petition and the desire being answered affirmatively is the request of the dying thief who was crucified with Jesus. He was without hope, a criminal who had been justly condemned. Yet as he looked at Jesus on the cross, he recognized Him as the Messiah who would rule as the King of kings and Lord of lords.<sup>25</sup> At that moment the thief was born again into the eternal kingdom of God.

And he was saying, “Jesus, remember me when You come in Your kingdom!” (Luke 23:42)

The thief demonstrated his faith alone in Christ alone by his petition to be part of Christ’s kingdom when he said, “Remember me.” His desire behind the petition was to spend eternity in the presence of the Lord.

And He said to him, “Truly I say to you, today you shall be with Me in Paradise.” (Luke 23:43)

Jesus acknowledged the regenerate thief by assuring him of his eternal salvation. Both his petition and desire were answered affirmatively.

A final example of petition affirmative—desire affirmative is the prayer of Jesus for Lazarus who had just died. Jesus went with the sisters of Lazarus, Mary and Martha, to his tomb, a cave, where he had been buried.

Jesus said, “Remove the stone.” Martha, the sister of the deceased, said to Him, “Lord, by this time there will be a stench, for he has been *dead* four days.” Jesus said to her, “Did I not say to you, if you believe, you will see the glory of God?” And so they removed the stone. And Jesus raised His eyes, and said, “Father, I thank Thee that Thou hearest Me. And I knew that Thou hearest Me always; but because of the people standing around I said it, that they may believe that Thou didst send Me.” (John 11:39–42)

Jesus thanked God the Father for hearing His petition, the content of which is unrecorded in the Scripture. Apparently, he asked for the

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25. Thieme, *King of Kings and Lord of Lords* (1974).

resuscitation of Lazarus whom He loved (John 11:35–36).<sup>26</sup> The desire behind Jesus' petition was that those who witnessed this event might believe that He was indeed sent by the Father and believe on Him for salvation (John 3:16). Jesus' prayer of thanksgiving preceded the visible answer to the petition.

And when He had said these things, He cried out with a loud voice, "Lazarus, come forth." He who had died came forth, bound hand and foot with wrappings; and his face was wrapped around with a cloth. Jesus said to them, "Unbind him, and let him go." Many therefore of the Jews, who had come to Mary and beheld what He had done, believed in Him. (John 11:43–45)

Lazarus was resuscitated and those who witnessed this miracle became believers in Jesus Christ.

The greatest of all prayers in the Word of God is the Lord's prayer for believers recorded in John 17. Throughout this chapter, there are a number of examples of both petition and desire being answered affirmatively. This is the ideal, perfect prayer—the true "Lord's prayer" for the Church Age.

#### *#4: Petition Negative—Desire Negative*

And because of the surpassing greatness of the revelations, for this reason, to keep me [Paul] from exalting myself, there was given me a thorn in the flesh, a messenger of Satan to buffet me—to keep me from exalting myself! Concerning this I entreated the Lord three times that it might depart from me. (2 Cor. 12:7–8)

Whatever this "thorn in the flesh" was, it made the Apostle Paul miserable. His suffering was so intense that he did not just pray once, but three times he asked the Lord to remove the thorn. Paul's desire was to get relief from the suffering. But each time he prayed, he

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26. Resuscitation is the temporary restoration to life of a physically dead person whose mortal body eventually dies again (1 Kings 17:17–22; Acts 14:19–20; 20:9–10). In contrast, resurrection gives the believer his resurrection body so that never again will he die (1 Cor. 15:54).

received a negative answer to both his petition and his desire. The Lord told him that he must live with his “thorn in the flesh.”

Why did the Lord not answer Paul’s desire to have relief from his torment? God had another purpose; the thorn was to teach Paul grace orientation.

And He has said to me, “My grace is sufficient for you, for power is perfected in weakness.” (2 Cor. 12:9a)

God’s grace sustains us whether we are in extreme adversity or at the height of prosperity. The grace of God gives us inner happiness, stability, and peace no matter what our circumstances. Therefore, even though Paul continued to suffer from the thorn, he could say that God’s grace was sufficient.

God’s grace reaches us even in our weakest moments. As Paul was being hammered by the “thorn in the flesh” and very weak, he prayed, “Lord, take it away.” The Lord answered negatively, but He did give Paul the strength to carry him through the difficulty. What the Lord does not remove, He intends for us to bear within the framework of our spiritual life.

Most gladly, therefore, I will rather boast about my weaknesses, that the power of Christ may dwell in me. Therefore I am well content with weaknesses, with insults, with distresses, with persecutions, with difficulties, for Christ’s sake; for when I am weak, then I am strong. (2 Cor. 12:9b–10)

Sometimes it seems that God does not answer our prayers when in reality, He does. In answering our prayers, God often imposes His impeccable judgment over our misguided petitions and desires. The result is that He gives us a negative answer to the petition and the desire, but in His grace He provides what is best for us.

## THE PRAYER WARRIOR

An incident in the life of one of the great prayer warriors of all time provides a fitting close to this study of prayer. In the 19th century Hudson Taylor, who founded the China Inland Mission, was sailing to

China. In an area infested with pirates his four-masted ship was becalmed, dead in the water, drifting with the ocean currents.

On the horizon a pirate ship was sighted rapidly approaching. Because it had a bank of oars, the absence of wind did not affect the pirate ship's progress.

At this moment the captain of Dr. Taylor's ship, a profane man who had frequently ridiculed Dr. Taylor about his faith, called him to the bridge. When Dr. Taylor saw the pirate ship, he instantly understood that they were in a serious predicament. His ship had no way to defend itself and was at the mercy of the cutthroat buccaneers.

The captain was desperate. "All right, preacher man," he sneered, "let's see you pray us out of this one." Hudson Taylor replied, "I will be glad to! Just hoist every bit of sail you have on board right now!"

The captain was incredulous. In his own unsanctified vernacular he shouted, "In the middle of this calm you want me to hoist the canvas? The crew will think I'm crazy! I won't do it!"

"All right then, I won't pray. You see, I believe God answers prayer and I'm going to pray for wind. But I'm not going to pray for wind until you hoist every inch of canvas aboard this ship."

By this time, the pirates were almost upon them. So in resignation, the captain sent all hands aloft and the sails were unfurled. When all the canvas was up, Hudson Taylor knelt down and prayed asking God to send a wind. By the time the "amen" was out of his mouth there was a puff, then a breeze, and the ship began to move. The pirates were left behind and Hudson Taylor went on to an extraordinary and extensive ministry in China. This prayer warrior knew well how to use his weapon.

God does not usually answer prayer in such a miraculous way. Many times His answers occur during the normal course of life and may even go unnoticed by the believer. Sometimes God answers prayer in unexpected ways. But a believer filled with the Holy Spirit should never doubt that whenever and wherever he bows his head in prayer, he is heard and the power of God is made available to him.

Call to Me, and I will answer you, and I will tell you  
great and mighty things, which you do not know. (Jer.  
33:3)

## *Appendix*

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# CATEGORICAL DOCTRINE OF PRAYER

- I. The approach to prayer
  - A. Addressed to the Father (Matt. 6:9; Eph. 3:14; 5:20)
  - B. In the name of the Son (John 14:13–14; 16:23–24)
  - C. In the power of the Spirit (Eph. 6:18)
- II. Three categories of prayer directed to God the Father
  - A. From the source of the Son (Heb. 7:25)
  - B. From the source of the Holy Spirit (Rom. 8:26–27)
  - C. From the source of the believer-priest (Heb. 4:16)
- III. The agenda for private prayer
  - A. Confession (1 John 1:9)
  - B. Thanksgiving (Eph. 5:20; 1 Thess. 5:18)
  - C. Intercession (Eph. 6:18)
  - D. Petition (Heb. 4:16)
- IV. Prayer is an application of the faith-rest drill (Matt. 18:19; 21:22; Mark 11:24).

- V. Eight principles of prayer
  - A. Prayer is the most effective when the believer learns Bible doctrine and advances to spiritual maturity (John 15:7).
  - B. Prayer is an application of the faith-rest drill (John 15:7).
  - C. Prayer demands cognizance of the will of God, therefore the necessity of maximum knowledge of Bible doctrine (1 John 5:14).
  - D. Prayer must be offered in status of the filling of the Spirit (Eph. 6:18).
  - E. When the believer is carnal, prayer is ineffective (Ps. 66:18).
  - F. Prayer must comply with the principle of grace (Heb. 4:16).
  - G. Prayer is part of the divine decree (Jer. 33:3).
  - H. Prayer is related to personal love toward God (Ps. 116:1–2).
- VI. Nine reasons why prayer is not answered (Note: all are connected with carnality)
  - A. Not filled with the Spirit (Eph. 6:18)
  - B. No faith-rest function (Matt. 21:22)
  - C. Mental attitude carnality (Ps. 66:18)
  - D. Lust-type selfishness (James 4:2–4)
  - E. Lack of obedience (1 John 3:22)
  - F. Noncompliance with specific and known will of God (1 John 5:14)
  - G. Pride as a basic mental attitude sin (Job 35:12–13)
  - H. Lack of compassion or grace orientation (Prov. 21:13)
  - I. Lack of domestic tranquillity (1 Pet. 3:7)
- VII. Principle of grace in prayer (Heb. 4:16)
  - A. Prayer is a privilege and extension of grace; hence, it is impossible to approach God in prayer on the basis of human good or human merit.
  - B. The believer approaches God in prayer on the basis of our High Priest, Jesus Christ, and His merits.
  - C. The Father is propitiated by the work of Christ, therefore we must approach from a position of fellowship.
  - D. God does not answer prayers because a person is fervent, moral, sincere, religious, or self-effacing.
  - E. God answers prayer because of who and what He is.
- VIII. The categories of petition in prayer
  - A. Positive—Negative: Petition answered; desire not answered (1 Sam. 8:5–9, 19–20)

- B. Negative—Positive: Petition not answered; desire answered  
(Gen. 17:18–21; 18:23–33; 2 Cor. 12:7–10)
- C. Positive—Positive: Petition answered; desire answered  
(Judges 16:28; 1 Kings 18:36–39; Luke 23:42–43; John  
11:41–45)
- D. Negative—Negative: Neither petition nor desire answered  
(2 Cor. 12:7–8)

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## NOTES

## NOTES