

*Connecting
With
God*

the Power of Prayer

Joe Kupecz

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Preface

I was raised in a small town in Eastern Canada in the 1950s and '60s. Most people in the town were French-speaking Catholics, and there were only about 100 English-speaking Protestant residents. There was one small Protestant church in the town shared by two congregations of mainstream denominations. Those few who attended the church services did so mostly out of custom, rather than faith. As a young child, I felt a spiritual closeness to God, but no one else seemed to. My spiritual sense was not explained or fed by the leaders in church or my Sunday School teachers, so eventually the feeling grew cold. The confirmation classes I attended with several other children was done out of custom, and were totally devoid of any faith or spirituality. The day I was confirmed at the age of 12 was the last time I attended church for 26 years.

I went to High School in Quebec City, which at the time had an old and established English-speaking community. Most of those who belonged to a church were associated with the major mainstream churches. Very few of my fellow students attended church. I became an atheist at the age of 14.

I began a quest for knowledge through information. I read voraciously everything I could, from science to science fiction, believing that I could come to understand the world through knowledge. After High School I joined the Air Force and began a career as a pilot. I continued to feed on knowledge, and bought a very good encyclopedia set and a dictionary. As I read, if I came across a word or an idea I didn't know, I would look it up in the dictionary or encyclopedia. Through my studies of science, mathematics, history, and literature, I developed and honed my ability to think critically. As an officer in the Air Force, I was struck by the number of times I had seen my colleagues have a good idea dismissed because they did not present it well. I learned how to present a case clearly and logically both verbally and in writing.

I remained a committed atheist throughout my 20s and knew all the reasons for being an atheist, because I used them all in discussions with others. I was not the kind of obnoxious atheist who believed that I was smarter than religious people, because some of my colleagues were devout Christians and I could see that they were every bit as good people and as intelligent as the rest of us. I simply disagreed with their belief in God and religion.

Beginning in my early 30s, I became aware of a rather large elephant squatting in my living room with a silly grin on its face. I realized that the more I learned, the more unsure I became that my own worldview was correct. I turned a critical eye on my own beliefs and began to think them through logically and reasonably. I found I had to admit to myself that there was no real substance to my atheist belief, because it was not based on any tangible evidence at all. It was based solely on the desire not to believe in God. Once I acknowledged the possibility of God, I began to see evidence for God in many places that I had been looking, but always failing to see.

I had been suffering from severe depression all my life, but had learned coping skills to mask it from the world. I could not admit my depression to the Air Force medical doctors, because at that time depression was still looked upon as a mental illness, and I would have lost my flying category, and thus my career. My life had wound down to a low point and I had no one to confide in or discuss it with. I finally turned to God in prayer and asked Him to change my situation for the better and help me with my relationships with my peers. The effect was immediate. I was on my way to a three week course in the Air Force when I prayed this, and my connection with my course mates, some of whom I knew from previous postings, was excellent

for the first week. The second week went well too, but by the end of the third week my situation had run down to the low point it had been before. The person who had become closest to me on the course suddenly turned against me, much to the dismay of the other course members.

After I returned home from the course, I wondered about what had happened, and it suddenly struck me – prayer wears off! I learned to pray every day, and began a private conversation with God, receiving many answers to my questions. Some were difficult to accept, because they involved changing my character or forcing me out of my comfort zone, but others were very encouraging. My life began to improve.

All the while, I felt myself being drawn closer and closer to Jesus. After four years, I met an old Air Force friend on a business trip in 1987, who had become a Christian since the last time I had seen him. I had until that time told no one about my experiences with God, but I felt he would understand. After listening to me tell him for two hours about my experiences, he invited me to give my life to Christ, which I did without hesitation. No alter call, no great flash of insight, just a quiet and private commitment to follow Jesus.

I began to study the Bible on my own, and surprisingly it all made sense. It all conformed to the experiences that I had been having with God over the previous four years. I threw myself into learning the Bible with the same fervor with which I had studied everything else. It took me 15 months after I had committed my life to Christ to muster the courage to set foot inside a church. It took God many weeks of prompting to make me overcome all my protestations and go to the church He directed me to in Ottawa, where I had recently moved in 1988. It was a charismatic church, full of all kinds of enthusiastic Christians of all ages, all happy to be in church. It was so unlike the dull, dreary, spiritless churches of my childhood. I learned a lot about being Christian from that church in the one year I attended. After reading my first Christian book, which was on the power of praise, I began to develop the pattern of prayer that I speak of in this book.

I was then was prompted by God to leave that church, and after three months of being on my own, I was invited to attend another church in 1990. The new one was a conservative evangelical church with a very well developed adult Bible study programme. After attending a Bible class led by the senior pastor, he asked me to start leading Bible classes myself. I was shocked. Here I was, a Christian for less than three years, having read through the Bible only twice, being asked by a pastor with a doctorate of divinity to teach Bible studies. With much prayer and much more study, I began teaching, and have been doing so ever since.

I know the power of prayer, especially the power that comes through the worship of God in prayer. I have experienced the presence of God through prayer in a much more powerful way than any other devotional activity can bring. I have led a number of prayer groups in worshipping God through prayer in the way that I describe in this book, and the people present have always felt the calming and peaceful presence of God in the same way that I do. Some have felt the power of the Spirit flowing through them, as I do when I worship God. I cannot claim any credit for this, because the Holy Spirit was my teacher and guide, as He is for all those who are truly seeking God. It is my sincere desire that readers who follow the pattern of prayer I describe here will be as blessed by God as He has blessed me.

Joe Kupecz

Foreword

Is prayer your lifeboat, your cabin, or your rudder?

If our lives are to be given over to God through Jesus Christ, we must have a relationship with Him that directs our lives. Prayer is the means by which we communicate with God. It is not just a way of asking for things for ourselves or for others, but the way we build and maintain a healthy and intimate relationship with our Lord. Prayer is communication, and through prayer we not only speak to God, but we receive direction and encouragement from Him.

If we remember God and turn to Him only after all else has failed, after we have lost our jobs or our homes, or our lives and family are in ruins, then prayer is just our lifeboat, the last resort after all else has fallen apart. God may answer us in such circumstances, but most likely not to rescue us and put our lives back together the way they were before, as we might hope. In such cases, God would probably respond only to help us up from the ashes of our folly and teach us lessons from our mistakes.

If we live our lives according to our own ingenuity, we may be successful in much of what we do. But are we really doing God's will? How can we know if we are doing His will if we do not first seek His direction before making a decision? If we use prayer simply to bless the decisions we have already made, or we reserve prayer just to be with God in our quiet times after the day is done, prayer is just our cabin, that place we turn to after we have spent our day according to our own wisdom. In that case, we are not seeking God's direction, but merely cosy up to Him after doing our own will.

To be most effective, prayer must be the primary focus of our Christian lives. Through prayer, we seek God's direction before we act, and we base our plans on what we hear from God. It is a mistake to plan and act, and then ask God's blessing after the fact, because, in our limited human capacity, we may not consider all factors, and our plans may not conform to what God wants us to do in a certain situation. Prayer, then, must be the rudder of our ship, the thing that directs our course in life, that which steers our course. We pray first, and then change our course according to God's direction.

Obviously, the last option is the wisest choice. However, prayer does not come naturally to us, even to those who have been Christians for many years. Prayer is learned behaviour, and listening for God's answers to our prayers is even more difficult to learn. Through prayer we connect with God and nurture a relationship with Him. As we grow in this relationship, and grow in Christ Jesus, putting off our old worldly ways and conforming ourselves to the Way of Jesus, we learn first-hand the love and greatness of our God and the power of prayer. I sincerely hope that this book will be an effective guide to this end.

Section 1 – Introduction – Prayer, God, Jesus, and Our Christian Walk

This first section speaks of prayer and studying Scripture as being the two primary means to God's grace. Grace is a quality of God, along with His love and mercy, which He demonstrates to all He has created, and especially to humankind.

Grace is the unconditional blessing that God confers on all of creation, which nurtures, sustains, and satisfies all He has put into being. This is Common Grace. Jesus spoke of this grace in the Sermon on the Mount, when He said that God causes the sun to rise and the rain to fall on the righteous and the unrighteous alike (Mt. 5:43-45). In a dry land where they depended on the right conditions to grow their crops, both sun and rain were considered blessings from God.

By an extra measure of His grace, God has drawn certain human beings to Himself and has offered us the gift of salvation through His Son, Jesus Christ. Nothing that a person has done prior to hearing God's call earns this grace. It is conferred without merit on all who put their faith in Jesus. This is Saving, or Justifying, Grace.

But God's offer of grace does not stop with salvation. God encourages all believers to grow in Christ-likeness by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. Peter wrote, "...God's elect...who have been chosen according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, through the sanctifying work of the Spirit, for obedience to Jesus Christ and sprinkling by his blood." (1 Pet. 1:1-2)¹. In fact, this growth is necessary to prevent stagnation of faith. To attain this Sanctifying Grace, believers have to work hand in hand with God to grow to maturity by obedience to Christ's commands and teachings. This involves learning and doing God's will, for we were saved by grace in order to do the good works that God has prepared in advance for us to do. This is outlined in Ephesians 2:4-10.

There are several means available to the believer to increase this grace. Doing God's works and receiving the Sacraments are among them. But none brings believers closer to God and opens us up to an outpouring of His grace than prayer and studying God's word. This is why they are called the primary means to grace.

Building a meaningful relationship with God takes both faith and knowledge. Faith without knowledge is not truly faith - it is merely blind belief. Blind belief is dangerous because if we do not know for ourselves who God truly is, we leave ourselves open to being misled by all kinds of falsehoods. The Bible warns us that many will depart from sound doctrine and turn aside to myths, led astray by those who tell people what they want to hear, rather than what they should hear (2 Tim. 4:3-4). For that reason, we are warned not to believe everything we hear, but to test the spirits, because there are many false prophets in the world (1 Jn. 4:1). Jesus stated that true believers would worship God in spirit and in truth (Jn. 4:23-24). Jesus called Himself the way, the truth, and the life (Jn. 14:6). It must be emphasized that Jesus is not just truth, but THE truth. He is not just part of things that are true in the world, but He is THE truth. And the full and complete truth about God can be found only in the Bible, and the completeness of that truth is brought to us only through Jesus Christ and the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

Some Christians have reduced the practise of Christianity to lists of procedures, rituals, rules, and regulations. This is a response to a basic human urge to control our surroundings, and to control not only our own lives, but the lives of those around us. This makes the people who do these things feel more comfortable, but it is completely contrary to what Jesus came to teach us. Jesus came to replace the Old Covenant, with its laws and regulations, with the New

¹ All Bible quotes are from the *New International Version*, Zondervan Bible Publishers, unless otherwise noted.

Covenant of love and grace. He reserved His sternest admonitions for certain of the priests and Levites, Pharisees and teachers of the law, for following the letter of the Law of Moses, but ignoring its spirit. Paul said of such religious people of his day, "For I can testify about them that they are zealous for God, but their zeal is not based on knowledge." (Ro. 10:2). The true practise of Christianity has nothing to do with following prescribed rules and regulations, but with loving God and neighbour, and demonstrating God's grace by showing our love for our fellow human beings. This takes knowledge of what Jesus taught us in the four Gospels.

Especially in our times, people in our society, Christians included, want to hear good things, and want to feel good about themselves. The topic of sin and repentance has fallen out of favour, and many churches don't even mention them, because people don't want to be reminded about them. Many want God to be a warm fuzzy friend, they want the Father to be "daddy" and Jesus to be a buddy. Many preachers now tell people that to fear God is wrong, that we don't have to be afraid of God. They say He loves us the way we are, and that we don't have to do anything but believe in God's grace. This ignores the fact that "the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom, and knowledge of the Holy One is understanding." (Pro. 9:10).

Some preachers, in particular the flashy television personalities, offer exciting "worship" services with upbeat contemporary music, and some claim to be able to heal people or answer the prayers of their television viewers in exchange for the money sent in by their enthusiastic audiences. Many of them, however, are simply offering an exciting entertainment show to cater to those people who believe that if they associate themselves with a charismatic leader who commands a large following, they will somehow be closer to God. This stems from the love of celebrity worship that permeates our society.

Many want to be told that God desires to pour out material blessings on His faithful, so preachers tell them that it is their right to receive these blessings, and God will give them anything they ask for. The Health and Wealth Gospel has deceived millions, and has fed into our very materialistic culture in which people desire to accumulate possessions, rather than receive God's true blessings. This "Name it and Claim it" preaching caters to our childish desires for instant gratification, but has no basis in the Bible, in spite of what its preachers claim.

A growing movement away from established churches is found among those who have been hurt by the very rigid and dogmatic rules of the churches they grew up in, and they associate all established churches and all references to doctrine with their own bad experiences. These people have either left the faith or have gravitated to new churches or groups who have a similar disdain for orthodox Christian teaching. Others are rebelling against authority figures, and transform God into a Jesus who simply ratifies the kind of Christianity that they have created for themselves, that conforms to their rebellious spirits. They refuse to use the Bible as a guide to repentance and renewal of the spirit in submission to God, and use only those parts of the Bible that are easy to accept and conform to their desire for easy grace.

The word "doctrine", however, means "teaching", and is not associated in any way with man-made rules and regulations to be slavishly followed, as these people suppose. The purpose of the Bible is to teach us how to put off our worldly ways and conform ourselves to God's ways. This takes many years of hard work since we are constantly struggling against our sinful nature. There is no easy way to God, and we must accept the difficult parts of Jesus' teachings along with the easy ones.

Some people teach that the Bible is no longer relevant for today's society, because it was written for a different culture two or three thousand years ago. They say we are now more advanced and can leave out all the parts of the Bible that are no longer valid for our modern

culture and take only the parts that are. This philosophy is simply an attempt to justify living as the world does, ignoring sin and resting pridefully in the superiority of our own knowledge.

There are many different ways the world is trying to draw people away from God's Truth. Atheists, especially those who are professors at secular universities, ridicule religion and those who have faith in God, and state that science has made religion irrelevant. These people say very little that is truthful about Christianity, and use distortions of facts and fabrications to cast Christianity in bad light. They cater to people who already have a negative view of the Church, and strengthen people's erroneous beliefs about Christianity, knowing full well that most of their listeners will not bother to check up on what they are saying to see if it is true or not. They flatter such people by telling them that only atheists are intelligent, and that those who believe in religion are stupid. They employ ridicule and sarcasm to put down Christians and the Church, knowing that this scores points with an audience that is willing to believe anything but the truth about the Church, the Bible, or faith in God.

Another common worldview is that it is not necessary to believe in God or go to church, and that as long as the good things we do in life outweigh the bad, we will be accepted into heaven, if there is such a thing. This is a form of passive rebellion against God, a belief that they don't need God, but if there is a God who is truly good, then He must accept them on their own terms.

The worldly ways that attract people away from true faith and knowledge of God prevent people from having a deep, meaningful and personal relationship with God. Although these may seem superficially attractive and right, they are merely human ideas that attempt to create God in our own image. Some deny God altogether.

We cannot make God be who we want Him to be, or mold Him into a comfortable object with which we can live without changing our ways. God is God, He is who He is, and we must either accept Him as He is, or try to avoid Him. However, the only way to come into a right relationship with God is to surrender ourselves humbly to God and allow Him to confront us and change us into the people He wants us to be. This allows us to cast off our wrongful human ways and become better people. We then learn who God really is, and learn to worship Him in awesome reverence.

Paul wrote to the Colossian church, "For this reason, since the day we heard about you, we have not stopped praying for you and asking God to fill you with the knowledge of his will through all spiritual wisdom and understanding." (Col. 1:9). If we have no knowledge of the One True God, or if we have only a superficial knowledge of God based on what others have told us, it is easy to be taken in by the fine-sounding arguments of false teachers and non-believers. In order to be able to test the spirits, as the Bible tells us to do, we must know the God of the Bible, and we must know what He has commanded us to do in order to stay in His grace and avoid the pitfalls of the world.

Christianity is a very reasonable and rational faith based on the truth of God's word and communicating with God through prayer. The apostle Peter wrote, "But grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ." (2 Pet. 2:18). It is by using our reason and biblical knowledge, combined with our faith, that we can come to have a healthy fear of the Lord and a truth-based knowledge of the Holy one. This is how to connect with God on His terms.

Prayer is the most effective way to develop a relationship with God. This first section discusses what prayer is, gives some knowledge of who God is, and gives insight into what the Bible teaches about prayer.

Chapter 1 – The Necessity of Prayer

What makes a person a Christian?

What makes a person a Christian? Certainly believing in Jesus is an important factor, and attending church and trying to live a Christian life are signs of a Christian, but there has to be more. People speak of having a personal relationship with Jesus, or a relationship with God through Jesus, but how do they go about finding that relationship with someone they can't see? John Wesley, the father of the Methodist movement, stated that the two primary means to God's grace were prayer and searching the Scriptures. About these he said, "First, all who desire the grace of God are to wait for it in the way of prayer...Secondly, all who desire the grace of God are to wait for it in searching the Scriptures."² He was adamant that it is mostly through these means that God conveys His blessings on us.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer, the Christian theologian executed in 1945 in a Gestapo prison, wrote, "Since meditation on the Scriptures, prayer, and intercession are a service we owe and because the grace of God is found in this service, we should train ourselves to set apart a regular hour for it, as we do for every other service we perform."³

But being Christian entails more than just praying and reading the Bible. We must learn God's purpose for us and do it. The apostle Paul wrote, "Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will." (Ro. 12:2-3). A Christian, therefore, is a believer who seeks God's grace through prayer and searching the Scriptures, learns God's word and His will, and puts it into practice. In this way, a Christian builds a personal relationship with God through Jesus Christ.

What is Prayer?

Prayer is communication with God, in which we reach out to God and draw near to Him. It does not consist only of repeating a few learned verses to be recited at specific times, nor does it mean simply tossing up a basketful of "prayer requests" with a "here, God, take care of these for me" attitude. Effective prayer is any communication with God at any time, done with the understanding that God not only hears us, but desires to hear from us. We are God's children, and He loves us as sons and daughters, so it is only right that we should communicate with Him frequently, and in a personal way. More than that, God is our Creator. He is the Creator and Lord of the entire universe, and He deserves our complete attention. After all, our very lives depend on our relationship with God, so the more we communicate with Him, the stronger that relationship will be.

James Houston states, "We don't pray simply 'because it is there.' Instead, prayer is our response to God's interest in us and his love for us. To pray is to become aware that God's Spirit lives within us. Through prayer, we explore a deeper and more intimate relationship with God."⁴ Prayer is the primary means by which we draw close to God. All good works, all moral living, all study and knowledge of the Scripture, is fostered and brought to maturity by a well-developed

² John Wesley, "Sermon XVI. The means of Grace" *The Works of John Wesley, Third Ed.* Vol. V (Peabody, Mass. Hendrickson Publishers, 1981), 190, 192.

³ Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Life Together*, trans. John W. Doberstein (San Francisco, HarperCollins, 1954), 87.

⁴ James Houston, *The Transforming Power of Prayer*, (Colorado Springs, CO, NavPress, 1996), 44.

and focused life of worshipping and communing with God in prayer. Without prayer, we have little more than those in the world around us.

Seeking God's Kingdom

Jesus taught us that in order to receive God's blessings, we have to "seek first His kingdom and His righteousness" (Mt. 6:33). What Jesus meant when He commanded us to do this was to seek to learn God's ways, understand the spirit of the law, and to live in accordance with it. But where is this kingdom, and where do we look to find it? When asked by the Pharisees when the Kingdom of God will come, Jesus replied, "The kingdom of God does not come with your careful observation, nor will people say, 'Here it is,' or 'There it is,' because the kingdom of God is within you." (Lk. 17:20-21). The Kingdom is here within us and among us, and not in some far off place, or in heaven, where we can't reach it. But then during His trial before Pilate, Jesus said, "My kingdom is not of this world. If it were, my servants would fight to prevent my arrest by the Jews. But now my kingdom is from another place." (Jn. 18:36).

So although the kingdom of God is within us, it is not of this world. It is not just a concept or a system of morals that conforms to secular human notions of good and bad. It is among us, but it exists in a form that must be searched for in a very different way than the people of the world are used to searching. This is because it is a spiritual realm, one that exists when God's Spirit indwells our spirits and convicts us to conform to God's standard of righteousness.

It is actually the Church, the body of believers in Christ, who make up the kingdom of God in this world. The kingdom of God is established on Earth when believers truly love God with all their souls, hearts, minds, and strengths, and truly love their neighbours, that is, all the people of the world and not just a few select individuals, as themselves. It in no way involves trying to force non-Christians to conform to our own distorted sense of God's will. Christians advance God's kingdom on Earth when we love God and love people, and do for people what God would have us do.

Seeking God's kingdom means far more than obeying a few rules and regulations, trying to live a righteous life, or just attending church. When the rich young ruler told Jesus that he had obeyed all the commandments since childhood, Jesus told him that he was still lacking one thing (Lk. 18:18-25), which was to sever his unhealthy attachment to his worldly wealth. Seeking God's kingdom involves effort on our part, and includes coming to an understanding of God's will and God's ways. Note this passage from the Gospel of Mark:

"One of the teachers of the law came and heard them debating. Noticing that Jesus had given them a good answer, he asked him, "Of all the commandments, which is the most important?"

"The most important one," answered Jesus, "is this: 'Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one. Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.' The second is this: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.' There is no commandment greater than these."

"Well said, teacher," the man replied. "You are right in saying that God is one and there is no other but him. To love him with all your heart, with all your understanding and with all your strength, and to love your neighbor as yourself is more important than all burnt offerings and sacrifices."

When Jesus saw that he had answered wisely, he said to him, "You are not far from the kingdom of God." And from then on no one dared ask him any more questions." (Mk. 12:28-34)

Jesus told us that we must not only love God with all our hearts, or spirits, but also with all our minds. The teacher of the law responded wisely by saying we must not just love God with all our hearts, but with all our understanding as well. This means, then, that we must not just have an emotional connection with God, but must have knowledge and understanding of Him. The most important ways that we should seek His kingdom and His righteousness, therefore, is through direct communication with God in prayer, and through study of the Bible, which is God's revealed word for us.

Knowing God

God, as He actually is, is unknowable. He is vastly beyond our ability to understand in our human capacity to perceive things. However, we can know some things about God and have personal experiences with God in a limited human sense.

Consider this analogy. A man has a dog that he loves and takes care of as well as any master can. The dog in turn loves his master in his own canine fashion, wanting to be around his master, panting with his tongue hanging out and wagging his tail when his master pays attention to him, or curling up on the floor close to him when his master is preoccupied with something else. The dog knows that his master gets up every morning and goes away, leaving him at home, but he senses what time of day his master returns and is always at the door to greet him excitedly. But the dog has no concept of what his master does in his human world. He knows that other humans come to visit from time to time, but as far as the dog knows, these are just other members of the master's pack. Even if his master were to take him to work with him one day, he would be happy to be near him, but would have no idea what his master was doing with all those papers and objects, or what he was saying to the other humans around him. This is how it is with us and God. God is far beyond our intellectual abilities to grasp, but that does not prevent us from having a warm and personal relationship with him.

Knowing God as fully as we can takes two forms of knowledge - intellectual and spiritual. We can know about God intellectually, based on information that we have gained about God over the years. The concept of God that we form in our minds is based on this knowledge. The Bible is a unique collection of writings in that it is God's revelation of Himself to the world through a number of inspired writers. God is so completely beyond our comprehension that He had to reveal Himself to us in metaphorical terms, that is, using word pictures to describe Himself in ways we can understand that give us an idea of who He is and how He relates to us. Even if we were to put all these metaphorical terms together, we would still have an incomplete picture of God, because He is vastly beyond our ability to comprehend fully. In the Bible, however, we have all that we need to know to worship Him and to serve Him as fully as He desires.

There are many concepts about God found outside the Bible. The danger of these is they may or may not be accurate. Some are based on concepts found in other beliefs, which can sound similar to the God of the Bible, or they can be radically different. They can be based on misconceptions of God, on fertile human imagination, or on bona fide encounters with created spirits, which may appear as angels of light or darkness. The most enticing of these are those

which are very close to the God of the Bible, but we must bear in mind that they are not God's revelation, and they can give us an inaccurate picture of the one, true God. Paul warns us of this in the following passage:

"Brothers and sisters, my heart's desire and prayer to God for the Israelites is that they may be saved. For I can testify about them that they are zealous for God, but their zeal is not based on knowledge. Since they did not know the righteousness of God and sought to establish their own, they did not submit to God's righteousness. Christ is the culmination of the law so that there may be righteousness for everyone who believes." (Ro. 10:1-4)

Many Christians today seek to establish their own standards of righteousness based on legalistic misinterpretations of biblical teachings. Many also believe that if their government would only adopt Christian morality as the basis for our laws, then the nations would become righteous. However, not even Jesus or the Apostles believed that they could force government or the masses to be righteous against their will. Notice that in the quote above, Paul speaks of righteousness in Christ only for those who believe.

The Bible, therefore, is the only completely reliable source of information we have about God, but we must take into account all of what the Bible says about Him. To use only a few passages to form a concept of God is like peering into just a couple of windows to find out what a mansion is like. We must go in and explore in order to see as much as we possibly can. Accurate intellectual knowledge as it is found in the Bible is necessary to prevent us from being deceived and led astray by fine sounding but incorrect teaching.

Intellectual knowledge, however, is not enough. We also must know God spiritually. To do this we must come to know God in the biblical sense of knowing, that is, to have an intimate, personal relationship with Him. That is done mainly through prayer. Worshipping God in prayer and meditation is the surest way we can come to know God. When we truly desire to commune with God, His Holy Spirit moves our spirits closer to Him. In worship, we acknowledge that God is vast beyond our ability to conceive, and we come to Him in awe and wonder. We use human words to express our adoration of Him, expressing our gratitude for all He has done for us and our praise of who He is. In this way, we can experience His presence and His love for us, along with the peace and joy that this brings.

It takes this combination of accurate biblical knowledge of God and an intimate spiritual knowledge of God in order to connect fully with Him, to have communion with Him, to learn His will for us, and to serve Him and serve people as He desires.

The Worship of God

Dick Eastman and Jack Hayford state, "To worship God effectively we must have a proper view of Him - but such a view only comes to those who take time to study God's nature and character as revealed in His Word. Those who plunge deepest into God's Word rise highest in their praises of His glory."⁵ Notice they place the same emphasis on knowing the Bible in conjunction with prayer as John Wesley and Dietrich Bonhoeffer did, and they stress this point in a book on effective prayer. Searching the scripture and studying God as He has revealed

⁵ Dick Eastman and Jack Hayford, *Living and Praying in Jesus' Name*, (Wheaton, Ill., Tyndale House, 1988), 67.

Himself in the Bible is in itself a form of worship, because it shows that we genuinely desire to get to know Him. Notice, too, that the kind of prayer they are talking about here is worship, that is, thanksgiving and praise, which should be the most significant part of our prayer lives. Our prayer requests, for ourselves and others, although important, are not as important as worshipping our great and mighty loving God and Father in prayer.

God Speaks to Us

Charles Stanley tells us that there are four ways that God speaks to us.⁶ "The Lord's primary way of speaking to us today is through His Word." If we do not study His Holy Word, we miss most of what He has to say to us! This involves reading the Bible with the intention of learning and understanding what God is saying to us through His word. This means not simply reading a recommended passage each day, but studying the Bible to understand it. This can be done, in the words of a medieval Christian scholar, by those who have "faith that is seeking understanding".

"A second method God uses to speak to us today is through the Holy Spirit." If we tune our hearts to God, we will hear that still, small voice of the Holy Spirit speaking. If we do not take the time to listen quietly and prayerfully, we will miss His voice. This is not an audible voice, but one that comes to our hearts, like a thought, or a conviction of the truth of what God is saying to us.

"A third way God speaks to us is through other people." Sometimes a person will say something to us that, unbeknownst to that person (i.e., it does not have to be prefixed with 'God has given me a word for you'), will be a message that God wants us to take to heart. Most often, they are the people closest to us, at home or at work, whether or not they are Christian. We must remain constantly alert for the conviction of the Holy Spirit to be able to discern that it is a message from God.

"A fourth way God speaks to us is through circumstances." It can be a success or failure, an open door or a closed door, a joyful occasion or a tragedy. Whichever way He speaks, we should be alert to His call and believe that He does speak to us in these ways, but we should also be careful how we receive the message we suppose we have heard. It is possible to believe we have heard God speak to us when He has not, because we sometimes allow ourselves to be deceived by what we want to hear, rather than what God is actually telling us. Sometimes His silence speaks volumes. If God does not answer our prayers, He may be testing our faith, or trying to make us step back and reconsider our motives.

So prayer means not just speaking to God, but listening for the answers. God speaks to us in a variety of ways, and we should be alert to all of these ways, so that we will understand the answer when it comes. God doesn't answer all our prayers immediately, and sometimes He doesn't answer them in the way we intended, but He does answer them all. You may have the experience of praying for something and not receiving what you asked for, but this, believe it or not, is an answer to your prayer! Solomon wrote, "Many are the plans of a man's heart, but it is the Lord's purpose that prevails." (Pro. 19:21). When God does not give you what you pray for, He is saying to you, "That is not the best thing for you," or "I have heard you, but I have a better way," or "You must wait until the time is right."

⁶ The four quotes that follow are by Charles Stanley, from his book, *How to Listen to God*, (Milton Keynes, UK, Word Publishing, 1992), 13-18.

The better we know God, the more effective our prayers are likely to be, because we are more aware of God's ways and God's will. It takes faith and spiritual maturity to receive God's answers to our prayers, especially when His answers are not what we had hoped for.

The Power of the Word

When Paul commanded us in Ephesians 6 to put on the full armor of God, he spoke of truth, righteousness, readiness, faith, and salvation, all of which he compared to defensive armor, but he also said to take up the word of God, which is the sword of the Spirit. The Bible, then, is the only weapon he described in this list. All others are for defense. So it is with the Bible that we fight the battles for Christ.

When Jesus was tempted in the wilderness after His baptism (Mt. 4:1-11), He countered every one of Satan's ploys with a quote from the Bible. What a powerful way to pray when we are feeling Satan's temptations in our own lives!

Before the conquest of Canaan, God commanded Joshua, "Do not let this Book of the Law depart from your mouth; meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do everything written in it." (Jos. 1:8). This is the key to getting to know God; that is, not just to read the Bible, but to meditate on it, to think of what God is saying to us through it, and to seek to understand it. This meditating process is the kind of prayer that will allow us to understand God better and to become more effective Christians.

Understanding the Bible takes more than just reading it. Without God's help, the Bible is merely words that make little sense. It is the Holy Spirit who inspired the Bible to be written, and it is the Holy Spirit who will unlock the truth of it for us. The Bible tells us, "The man without the Spirit does not accept the things that come from the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him, and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually discerned." (1 Cor. 2:14). Jesus told us about the Spirit, "But the Counselor, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things..." (Jn. 14:26), and, "But when he, the Spirit of truth, comes, he will guide you into all truth." (Jn. 16:13).

Eastman and Hayward go on to say, "We cannot live the Word, apply the Word, pray the Word, know the Word, or even spread the Word if we do not first read the Word. And our capacity to apply the Word effectively will be equal to our willingness to wait long enough in the Word for the Holy Spirit to come and enlighten our minds in its promises."⁷

So we must start with prayer, and ask the Father that the Holy Spirit guide us into the truth of the Word and teach us its meaning. There is a suggested prayer at the end of this chapter to pray before reading the Bible. I have personally used this prayer from the beginning of my study of the Bible, and the truth of the passage jumps off the page with startling revelation. We should not expect that we will suddenly understand the Bible entirely the first time we read it. It takes time, even years, as the Spirit reveals truths to us through the Bible as we seek to grow and to put into practice what He teaches us.

Learning the truth will enhance our prayers, and our prayers will in turn help us to see even greater truth, which will then help us to pray more effectively.

The Inspiration of the Holy Spirit

⁷ Ibid., 142.

Just as the Holy Spirit will guide us into the truth of the Scriptures, He will guide us in our prayers as well. Wesley Duewel writes, "The Holy Spirit is so integral to the divine plan for this age that He ceaselessly joins God the Son in His Holy intercession. He also is responsible for involving you and enabling you to be a partner in God's strategy of intercession. He longs for you to rise above your weakness and become mighty in God for prayer."⁸

We must open our hearts to God and submit our wills to His will, and thus allow ourselves to be led by the Spirit. God will not do this for us unless we are willing. We naturally resist God due to our human nature. Humbling ourselves before God and worshiping Him in prayer opens our hearts to be filled with the Holy Spirit more than any other spiritual discipline. The Spirit will guide our hearts and our prayers far more effectively than we can ourselves. This is what is meant by praying in the Spirit.

Resistance to Prayer

Every Christian will encounter strong resistance to developing and continuing a personal growth in Christ. There are two sources of this resistance, one from within us and one from without. The first and greater source is the one within us. There are five factors working within us that keep us from growing closer to God.

First, our own human nature will try to prevent us from putting forth the effort required to advance on our Christian walk. We all share in the original sin of disobedience, and it is only natural for us to continue to disobey God's call. We have the tendency to want to do things our own way, and naturally resist doing them another way, especially if someone else tells us we have to do them a certain way. That is why it is so important to make the personal decision to do God's will, and not follow our own will. We must change our attitudes from rebelling against God to striving to work for God. This rebelling does not have to be actively directed against God. Simply not doing what we know we should be doing is a form of passive rebellion.

Second, we must beware of complacency, that human tendency to be satisfied with "good enough", rather than always striving to learn and to grow. It is this sense of adequacy, the belief that any small amount of effort is good enough, that prevents us from striving to do our best for God, and to allow God to bring out the best from within us. In John's Revelation, Jesus admonished the church in Laodicea that they were lukewarm, and He was about to spit them out of His mouth (Rev. 3:14-18). Once, when asked if only a few were going to be saved, Jesus responded by telling the people to make every effort to enter through the narrow door. He described some complacent people who would come to Him on the Day of Judgment and plead that He had eaten with them and taught them, but He would not recognize them because of their lukewarm attitudes (Lk. 13:22-30).

Third, we all work hard at our daily jobs, and apart from our work we want to relax. In our leisure activities, we prefer immediate and tangible gratification. To put additional effort into something intangible that may not yield obvious or immediate results is difficult. We have to realize that God is the most important thing in our lives. It is not good enough just to have God in the background, and to go to church on Sundays. We must devote a significant amount of time alone with God in prayer.

Fourth, we have to fight the "too busy" syndrome, the excuse that we are so busy with our daily lives that we can't find time to pray or read the Bible. We must take a good look at our "busy-ness" and ask ourselves if what we are doing is so important that we can afford to neglect

⁸ Wesley L. Duewel, *Mighty Prevailing Prayer*, (Grand Rapids, MI, Zondervan, 1990), 14.

God. Making time to be with God requires a conscious effort on our part, but in the scheme of all eternity, what is more important? Wesley Duewel states, "Whatever gets you too busy for prayer time, whatever distracts you from holy prevailing, whatever robs you of hunger for God, for souls, and for time for prayer warfare is a hindrance to God and His kingdom. You cannot afford it."⁹

Lastly, there are psychological blocks that can hamper us as well. We may have a wrong attitude toward God, based on some negative experiences in our past with church or with people, and be reluctant to approach Him on an intimate level. In this case, talking out our fears with a Christian counselor or a trusted Christian friend can help. This is touched on again in Chapter 10, under Personal Baggage - A Wounded Spirit.

The second source of resistance, the external source, that tries to prevent us from getting close to God, comes from Satan. Satan does not have to harass those who are not searching for God, because they are already his. He puts his efforts into hampering those who are seeking God. Jesus told us that Satan is a liar and the father of lies (Jn. 8:44), and will work on us in a thousand different ways to try to dissuade us from coming close to God. He can't make us do anything against our will, but he will heighten and intensify whatever feelings we already have to avoid doing God's will. His most effective tools against us are those five factors within us discussed above. He can play on them and lead us to believe that they are legitimate excuses for not praying.

Satan is to be taken seriously but he is not to be feared either. James advised us, "Resist the devil, and he will flee from you." (Jas. 4:7). Just as Jesus resisted the devil in the wilderness, and did so by using scripture to counter his arguments, so we too can resist the devil by making use of the Sword of the Spirit. We can also resist him by doing what we know is right, in spite of how we feel at the time. Learning to worship God through prayer takes effort on our part, but as we resist all the temptations to put it off or neglect it, it will become easier and easier as the devil flees from us.

Our Desire for Prayer

It is not necessary to wait until you feel like praying, or are in the mood to pray. Praying is something you should do even if you are not in the mood or feeling right with God. Richard Foster says:

"We will never have pure enough motives, or be good enough, or know enough in order to pray rightly. We must simply set all these things aside and begin praying... We do not pretend to be more holy, more pure, or more saintly than we actually are. We do not try to conceal our conflicting and contradictory motives from God – or ourselves. And in this posture we pour out our heart to God who is greater than our heart and who knows all things."¹⁰

Indeed, to go aside and pray *in spite* of how we feel can show a better attitude toward God than waiting until we are in the right frame of mind. It shows that we are willing to overcome any barriers to be with God. Jesus told this parable to teach about attitudes. "There

⁹ Ibid., 22.

¹⁰ Richard J. Foster, *Prayer*, (San Francisco, Harper Collins, 1992), 8, 10.

was a man who had two sons. He went to the first and said, 'Son, go and work today in the vineyard.' 'I will not,' he answered, but later he changed his mind and went. Then the father went to the other son and said the same thing. He answered, 'I will, sir,' but he did not go. Which of the two did what his father wanted?" (Mt. 21:28-31). What we say or how we feel will be overridden by our actions. Doing is more important than saying we will do. So praying, even if we do not feel like it, honours God.

Our Concept of God

When praying, it is very useful to turn our hearts and our thoughts upward to God. Imagine a vast Spirit, beyond all comprehension, existing not only within, but outside of the universe. God exists apart from the universe, and the universe exists within God. Imagine such a vast Spirit taking a personal interest in each one of us, loving us and wanting to hear what we have to say. Then talk to Him, as though He were higher than the stars, but right here with us. That is where God is. Our concept of God can be greatly enhanced by searching for God in the Bible, by finding all the clues that will help us to build an accurate idea of who God is and what He has done for us. That is the topic of the next chapter.

Conclusion

Prayer, then, is much more than offering up a few requests, or asking God's blessings on our house or our meals. Prayer is communicating with God, getting to know Him, and letting Him know that you genuinely desire to do His will.

Prayer is also communion with God, building an intimate and personal bond with our Creator. It is through prayer that you invite God to come into your life, to come into your whole being: body, mind, and spirit. This does not come naturally, and each person must learn how to do so in a personal way, but some instruction and guidance can enhance your prayer life. That is the aim of the rest of this book.

Expectations of a life of prayer.

1. Expect that it will take a personal commitment.
2. Expect that it will take effort on your part.
3. Expect that you will encounter resistance, and find every reason not to pray.
4. Expect that you will be convicted of areas in your life that you will want to change.
5. Expect that you will draw much closer to God in your personal relationship with Him.
6. Expect that you will learn to love yourself as God loves you.
7. Expect that you will learn to love others as yourself, and as God loves them.
8. Expect that you will begin to grow toward Christ-like maturity.

Expect that when you make the commitment, you put forth the effort, you overcome the resistance, and you change those things in your life that need to be changed, you will become a different person, a better person, a more loving person, and your spiritual life will be significantly and radically changed for the better.

"God's blessings are equally available for appropriation by our faith and obedience. Growth in grace results not by divine fiat [pronouncement] but by personal appropriation. God's provision of grace are available for all but are not equally hungered for or taken possession by all...Choose to give priority to developing the fruit of the Spirit. Choose to develop your prayer life. You must choose if you would make growth your priority."¹¹
Wesley L. Duewel

Prayer

Father in Heaven, I commit to honouring You by a life of daily Bible reading and prayer. I promise You that I will make every effort to do so, no matter what difficulties I encounter. Please deliver me from the resistance that the evil one will put in my path. By the power of Your Holy Spirit, please convict me of those areas of my life that You would have me change, and help me to change them. Father, I give You my heart. Please mold me and shape me into the image and likeness that You intend me to be. I pray in Jesus' name, Amen.

Prayer to pray before reading the Bible

Father in Heaven, I thank You for the gift of Your Holy Word. Please bless for me this reading, that my spirit will be edified, my faith strengthened, my wisdom deepened, and my knowledge increased. Father, I ask, through Your Holy Spirit, please guide me into the truth of this scripture and teach me its meaning. I ask in Jesus' name, Amen.

¹¹ Wesley L. Duewel, *More God, More Power*, (Grand Rapids, MI, Zondervan, 2000), 91.

Chapter 2 - Who is God?

Nature of God

In order to worship God effectively and to pray and serve as Christians the way God wants us to, we must understand as much as we can about who God is. To do that, it helps to understand what He is. There is a distinct difference between God and this universe we live in. There is God, and then there is the created order. We are told that "in the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth" (Gen. 1:1). God has always been and will be forever. He is from everlasting to everlasting. The material and spiritual universe – that is, the stars and the earth and all that is in them, including angels and human beings – was created at one time by God. There was a time when the universe did not exist, and there will be a time when the universe will cease to exist, but God has no beginning and has no end. He is an infinite being beyond time and space.

We must also be clear about the natural and the supernatural. The natural world is the universe around us in which we live, that we can see, touch, and measure. The supernatural world exists in the spiritual realm, in what the Bible calls the heavenlies, or the heavenly realms. We exist in the natural realm that we can see and feel, but we have a spirit which also exists in the spiritual realm, or in biblical terms, the lower heaven, that which we cannot see, but can sometimes sense around us. Angels and spirits, both good and bad, also exist in the spiritual realms. All but God, all natural and supernatural things, are of the created order. Only God is not created.

Jesus told us that God is spirit (Jn. 4:24). That is, God does not exist in the physical sense, having a body like ours. God lives in unapproachable light, and no person has ever seen or can see Him (1Tim. 6:16). Indeed, no one can ever see Him and live to tell about it (Ex. 33:20). Jesus had a physical body exactly like ours when He lived here on earth during His earthly ministry. He also had a physical body when he appeared from time to time in bodily form to certain people in the Old Testament (e.g. to Abraham, Gen. 18; to Gideon, Jdg. 6; or to Samson's parents, Jdg. 13). But He is also fully God, like the Father, and exists in spirit just as the Father does (Jn. 1:1-2). The Holy Spirit is also God, existing in spirit form, and although He lives among us here on earth, and indwells all believers (Jn. 14:26, 15:26; Eph. 1:13; 1 Cor. 3:16, 6:19), He, like the Father, does not have a physical body. The Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit are all fully God, all three being of the same substance, or essence. Created beings, including supernatural ones, are of a different substance or essence. Even our human spirits, although we are created in the image and likeness of God (Gen. 1:26-27), are of a different essence than God's.

So there are two forms of existence. There is God, and there is the created order, and there is a vast difference between the two. Although we were created in the image and likeness of God, we will never be God, or even be gods, because we are of the created order. Although our physical bodies will one day pass away, we will continue to exist in spiritual form (1 Cor. 15:42-54). The faithful in Christ will be raised and glorified in spiritual bodies and go to live with God forever to serve God and the Lamb in the New Jerusalem (Rev. 22:1-5). We will have the image and likeness of God that we were originally created in, and we will have the likeness of Christ (Ro. 8:29). We will be without sin or blemish, but just the same, we will not be like God in substance.

The Use of Figures of Speech in the Bible

The Bible makes much use of figures of speech, or indirect ways of expressing things. Figures of speech were widely used and understood in ancient times. These figures of speech are often used to describe in human terms concepts that are too difficult for us to understand. Two of the most common figures of speech used in the Bible are metaphors and similes. A metaphor is a comparison of two things without using the words "like" or "as". For instance, using the word "Father" to describe God is a metaphor, because God is spirit and has no gender. It describes God's relationship to us, as a loving elder person, and one having authority over us.

A simile is a comparison that uses the words "like" or "as". Jesus told several parables beginning with the phrase, "The kingdom of God is like this...". Each parable was different, but attempted to give us an idea of what the kingdom of God is. We then must use our reason and imagination to piece together a concept of the kingdom, using other references from the Bible about the kingdom, to try to understand a concept of something that we humans can't, in our limited human capacity, grasp completely.

Metaphors and similes are not to be taken literally, because they don't tell us exactly what the thing they are describing is like, but they are to be taken as truthfully representing what they are referring to. They use human imagery to describe God's truth. For instance, some people in this day and age do not like authority figures, so they reject the idea of God the Father being an authority figure. They either ignore the Father and turn to Jesus, who is more comfortable to believe in, or they deny that a father figure is an authority figure, and try to turn God into just a warm, loving friend. This imposes a modern attitude on a biblical metaphor, which distorts the purpose of the figure of speech. We must understand what the original meaning was in the days it was written and understand what it is telling us in the original sense.

Most references to God in the Bible are metaphorical, so we must look to their meanings in historical terms in order to grasp the nature of God. We must accept the fact that the Bible as it was written is truthful, and not try to change the meanings to conform to our present-day cultural concepts. We must also realize that each figure of speech goes only so far in describing what it does, and is not to be overanalyzed. We must put together all the concepts described by these figures of speech in order to be able to grasp the whole truth, rather than relying only on one or two. This is because each one tells us only part of the truth, so we must look at them all to discover the whole truth.

For example, Exodus 17:8-16 describes the Amalekites attacking the Israelites after they had passed through the Red Sea. Moses sent Joshua with some men of Israel to fight the Amalekites. After Joshua had defeated their attackers, Moses erected an altar at that location and called it *Yahweh Nissi* – God is my Banner. I have heard some Christians claim that this refers the banner of God's love over His people. This is a modern misconception born of sentimentality about God's love.

To understand what the metaphor really means, we must know that historically, the din of battle made it impossible for leaders to be heard by their troops. Military commanders would orient their troops in battle by having a standard bearer follow them holding up the army banner, and the soldiers would keep their eyes fixed on the banner and follow it wherever their commander went. They would fight any enemy that came close to their banner. Moses was referring not to God's love for the Israelites when he named the altar, but to the war banner that the Israelites followed into battle to defeat their enemy. This metaphor teaches us that we are

soldiers in the army of God, and that we must keep our eyes fixed on God and follow Him wherever He leads us for the advancement of His kingdom on Earth.

The Persons of God

God exists in three persons; the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Although the three are God, they are distinct from each other as three personae¹². This does not mean that they are three people, like three human beings. They are not three Gods (which is called Tritheism, which denies the unity of the Trinity), but one God in three personae, each different in their functions within the Trinity, but all unified in their nature and purpose. A water molecule consists of one oxygen atom and two hydrogen atoms. Each atom alone has its own properties, but united, they form water. Remove one atom and we no longer have water. God requires all three personae together to be God.

It is impossible for us, in our limited human understanding, to fathom the full nature of the Trinity. As one pastor stated in a sermon on the nature of the Trinity, "We are too stupid to understand the Trinity." We can only study the concept of the Trinity, and to try to understand it within our ability.

The word Trinity does not appear in the Bible. It comes from the Latin term *Trinitas*, which was coined probably by Tertullian of Carthage (ca. 160-220 CE) to give a single word to the concept of God in three Persons that we see throughout the New Testament and in the works of the second generation theologians called the Apostolic Fathers, and other Christian writers.

Over the centuries, there has been much discussion and controversy about the nature of God and their three personae, and the relationship between them. In orthodox Christianity, we speak of the Holy Trinity, which describes the nature of the oneness of God, but the distinctness of the three Personae. Other early attempts to describe the Trinity were the Apostle's Creed and the Nicene Creed, which also describe the three Persons of God. Although these early attempts to describe God are helpful, they can also be misleading in that they do not give us a full picture of the biblical teachings about God. The Bible tells us much more about God. However, even though the word Trinity may not be an explicitly biblical term, the concept of the Trinity is supported throughout the Bible.

There is no single place in the Bible that explains in definitive terms exactly who God is or describes the Trinity as such, so it is necessary to search the Bible to learn who the three persons of God are, and what their relationship is to each other. For this reason, we have to look for the passages that describe God and the relationships of the three personae, and come to an understanding of them in this way.

In some recent Christian writings, authors have been guilty of two errors in trying to portray God. One is anthropomorphism, or portraying the three personae of God in human form. Such descriptions make popular fiction, but are inaccurate and distort the true nature of God. The other is personification, or attributing human characteristics and emotions to God. This reduces God to the human level and distorts the infinite nature of God.

The Relationship between the Father and Jesus

¹² Personae – singular persona, meaning an aspect of character. In terms of the Trinity, the three personae of God refers to the three aspects of God; Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

The Father and the Son. The relationship between the Father and Jesus is described throughout the Bible metaphorically as a father/son relationship. To understand the significance of this, we must understand what this meant in the context of biblical cultures, for the relationship between fathers and sons was considerably different in those times than it is today, especially in today's Western society.

The modern father/son relationship is not nearly as structured as it was then. Peter Trutza writes, "The Hebrew children owed their parents the utmost respect and reverence coupled with the most scrupulous obedience...The strict rules established by the patriarchal father continued to have restrictive effects upon the decisions of his children even after they reached legal age...".¹³ In biblical times, the father worked all his life to build up an inheritance to pass on to his sons when he died. The inheritance was for them, but they could not take possession of it until the father died.

We see something of this relationship in Jesus' parable of the Lost Son (Lk. 15:11-32). The older son became angry that his father had welcomed the younger son home. "The older brother became angry and refused to go in. So his father went out and pleaded with him. But he answered his father, 'Look! All these years I've been slaving for you and never disobeyed your orders. Yet you never gave me even a young goat so I could celebrate with my friends.'" The father consoled him by saying, "My son, you are always with me, and everything I have is yours." Everything the father owned was for the son, but none of it would come into the son's possession until the father died.

Jesus always referred to God as His Father, and said of Him, "If you loved me, you would be glad that I am going to the Father, **for the Father is greater than I.**" (Jn. 14:28). Jesus acknowledged that the Father is greater than He is, in keeping with the view held in biblical times of the relationship between fathers and sons. Jesus told us, "For I did not speak of my own accord, but the Father who sent me commanded me what to say and how to say it. I know that his command leads to eternal life. So whatever I say is just what the Father has told me to say." (Jn. 12: 49-50).

Jesus also said, "These words you hear are not my own; they belong to the Father who sent me." (Jn. 14:24). Once again, this speaks to God the Father as the head, with Jesus being obedient to His Father, speaking not on His own, but passing on to us only what the Father instructed Him to say. But the father/son metaphor goes only as far as to describe the relationship between God and Jesus, for the Father will never die. He will never pass away, leaving His inheritance to Jesus.

The term "inheritance" is another metaphor, putting into human terms a concept which the people of the day would understand, but is not to be taken literally. Although what Jesus will eventually receive from the Father is spoken of in the Bible as an "inheritance", and we will be joint heirs with Jesus in this inheritance (Ro. 8:17), the Father will still exist and reign supreme in the kingdom of God. Just what this "inheritance" will be we have no way of knowing, but we can be certain that it will be something far beyond anything we can ask or imagine (Eph. 3:20).

The Only True God. When he prayed to the Father for Himself at the end of the Last Supper, Jesus said this of the Father, "Now this is eternal life: that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent." (Jn. 17:3). Here, in calling His Father the only true God, Jesus was not denying that He Himself was also God, but was recognizing the fact that His

¹³ Peter Trutza, "Father", *The Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible*, Vol. 2, (Grand Rapids, MI, Zondervan, 1975, 1976), 504.

Father is greater than He is. This is supported in the epistles, in which both Paul and Peter acknowledge the Father as "the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ" (2 Cor. 1:3, 11:31; Gal. 1:3; Eph. 1:3; 1 Pet. 1:3). They are saying that God is not only the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, but is also the God of our Lord Jesus Christ. Paul wrote, "...yet for us there is but one God, the Father, from whom all things came and for whom we live; and there is but one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom all things came and through whom we live." (1 Cor. 8:6). This reflects what Jesus said of the Father being "the only true God", and also states that Jesus is the agent through whom the Father works.

In many places in the epistles, the Father and the Son are referred to as "God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ". This recognizes the fact that the two are separate as personae, and that the Father is the head, the only true God. Paul stated this very clearly, saying, "...the head of every man is Christ,...and the head of Christ is God." (1 Cor. 11:3). Jesus also made this concept clear when He told Mary Magdalene the day of His resurrection, "I am returning to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God." (Jn. 20:17).

The Father and I are One. Jesus said that "the Father and I are One" (Jn. 10:30). What Jesus meant is that He and His Father are of one accord. There is no difference in their minds, their intentions, and their purpose. There is no disagreement whatsoever between them. Jesus does not plead for our salvation on our behalf before a stern and judgmental God who would otherwise do something else with our future. Whatever Jesus is, so is the Father. Whatever the Father is, so is Jesus.

Jesus said, "My food is to do the will of him who sent me and to finish his work." (Jn. 4:34). The writer of Hebrews stated that "The Son is the radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of his being." (Heb. 1:2), and Paul wrote, "...Christ, who is the image of God." (2 Cor. 4:4).

Jesus also said, "Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father" (Jn. 14:9). That tells us that Jesus is so like the Father in all respects that although He is not the Father, He is the exact representation, the image, of God. There is no difference between them with respect to their wills and their purpose for the salvation of humankind. This is because they are one as God, but on different levels of authority as personae within the Trinity.

Seated at the Right Hand of the Father. The Bible makes frequent reference to Jesus sitting at the right hand of the Father in heaven. This metaphorical image comes from the times when a king was absolute ruler of his kingdom. When the king was holding court, he would sit on his throne and only his most trusted nobles would be allowed to stand in his presence. All others would have to kneel, or even prostrate themselves before him, if they were allowed into his presence at all. When the king was sitting on his throne, only one person would ever be allowed to sit in his presence. This was his son and heir, or most trusted official, who would sit at his right hand on a smaller throne, and all people in the kingdom would pay homage to the son or official as well as the king. This is the origin of our expression, "right-hand man".

This demonstrates that in all of heaven and Earth, only Jesus holds such a special relationship to the Father. No other heavenly being holds such a high position in relationship with the Father as does Jesus. The concept of them sitting on actual thrones, of course, is only a metaphor and is not to be taken literally, since they are spirit. However, it describes once again an important concept of the relationship between God and Jesus.

The God of the Old Testament. When the Old Testament writers referred to God, they were speaking about God the Father. Moses, speaking to Israel on God's behalf, said, "Hear, O Israel: The Lord your God, the Lord is one." (Deut. 6:4). Our concept of God as being one and only one God comes from this passage in Deuteronomy. As we saw above, Jesus called His Father "the only true God", and Paul said, "...there is but one God, the Father...", both of which support the concept of the Father being the one God of the Old Testament.

One of Jesus' statements to the Jewish leaders of His day reflected this when He said to them, "My Father, whom you claim as your God, is the one who glorifies me." (Jn. 8:54). Peter, speaking to the crowd in Jerusalem said, "The God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, the God of our fathers, has glorified his servant Jesus." (Ac. 3:13). Peter also said to the Sanhedrin, "The God of our fathers raised Jesus from the dead..." (Ac. 5:30). All of these statements show us that God the Father is the God of the Old Testament.

Jesus appeared in the Old Testament from time to time as the Angel of the Lord (e.g. Ex. 3:2, 14:19; Jdg. 2:1-4, 6:11-22, 13:3-21). There are many references in the Old Testament to an angel of the Lord, referring to an actual angel, which is a created being, a messenger to the people of God, but these specific cases listed above speak about Jesus, rather than an angel. This is suggested by the fact that the Angel of the Lord, or Jesus, did not object when the people He visited offered their worship and sacrifices, whereas mere angels refused worship (e.g. Rev. 19:10, 22:9).

Jesus was also spoken of in many passages in the Old Testament as the Messiah. The messianic passages were well known to the Jews, but they did not speak of the Messiah as the Son of God, but as the son of David (that is, a descendant of David). However, David, speaking of the Messiah, said, "The Lord says to my Lord: 'Sit at my right hand until I make your enemies a footstool for your feet'." (Ps. 110:1). In Hebrew, the two words for Lord here are different. It says, "*Yahweh* says to *Adonai*...". The Jews recognized this as God speaking to the Messiah. Both terms are translated as Lord in English, but *Yahweh* means "He who is", or "He who is truly present"¹⁴, which was the name by which God revealed Himself to Moses at the Burning Bush (Ex. 3:15). The Hebrews used it only to refer to God, whereas *Adonai* could be used to address any man of royal blood, as in "my lord", or as a term of respect, like "sir". In David's psalm, clearly *Yahweh* was greater than *Adonai*, because He had the power to put all things under the other's feet. The passage should therefore be properly translated into English as, "He Who Is says to my Lord..."

Isaiah portrayed the Messiah as the suffering servant of God, rather than as God Himself (e.g. Isa. 49:3, 50:10, esp. 52:13-53:12). The servant relationship of Jesus to His Father is also reflected in the New Testament. In Acts 4:24-30, we see Peter and John praying to the Father, calling Him "Sovereign Lord", and referring to Jesus as "your holy servant Jesus".

The reason the Old Testament writers spoke of the Father as the only God and Jesus as the Angel of the Lord, the servant of God, or the Messiah, was because God had not yet revealed to them the full nature of Himself and His Messiah, or Angel of the Lord, as being Father and Son. That Jesus is God's Son is hinted at in a few passages in the Old Testament, but it is not made clear. The Messiah as God and the Son of God would be clearly revealed only later by Jesus during His earthly ministry. In Hebrews we read, "In the past God spoke to our forefathers through the prophets at many times and in various ways, but in these last days he has spoken to

¹⁴ H. B. Kuhn, "God, Names of", *The Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible*, Vol. 2, (Grand Rapids, MI, Zondervan, 1975, 1976), 766.

us by his Son..." (Heb. 1:1). It is this full revelation of the Father's plan of the salvation of humankind through Jesus the Son of God that is the essence of Christianity.

Their Role in Creation. The Father is the Creator of heaven and earth (Gen. 1:1; Ps. 33:9, 148:5; Isa. 45:9-12), and Jesus is the one through whom all things were created, the craftsman who put God's plan into place (Pro. 8:22-31; Jn. 1:3; 1 Cor. 8:6; Heb. 1:1-2). We see this close relationship in all that they do; the Father is the author, Jesus is the one through whom He acts.

Their Role in Our Salvation. The plan of salvation of mankind is the Father's. Jesus said, "For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life." (Jn. 3:16). This tells us that God the Father so loved all the people of the world in spite of our sinful and rebellious nature that He devised a plan to save us from ourselves by sending His only Son to be a substitute for the punishment that only we deserve. It is by believing in the work that Jesus did for us that we are reconciled to the Father.

Jesus also told us, "All that the Father gives me will come to me, and whoever comes to me I will never drive away. For I have come down from heaven not to do my will but to do the will of him who sent me.... No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him, and I will raise him up at the last day." (Jn. 6:37-38, 44).

The Father did not send Jesus into the world to act on His own. The Father continues to play the primary role in our salvation, identifying whom He wants, and motivating us through the Holy Spirit to hear and respond to the Gospel message to give our lives to Jesus. In this, Jesus is the Father's agent, doing not His own will, but His Father's.

Paul wrote, "...giving thanks to the Father, who has qualified you to share in the inheritance of the saints in the kingdom of light. For he has rescued us from the dominion of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of the Son he loves, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins." (Col. 1:11-14). Jude stated that the Father is our saviour in the following passage: "...to the only God our Savior be glory, majesty, power and authority, through Jesus Christ our Lord..." (Jude 25). Jesus was also called our Saviour in many places in the New Testament (e.g. Eph 5:23; Tit. 1:4, 3:6; 2 Pet. 1:11, 2:20). All these passages speak to the Father being the author of our salvation, and Jesus being the agent through whom He saves us.

The Father and Jesus at the End of the Age

Some say that the Father was greater than Jesus only when Christ was here on Earth, but after the resurrection He became equal to, or even co-equal with the Father. This is not stated anywhere in Scripture. Jesus never taught, nor is it said anywhere else in the Bible, that Jesus' status in relationship to His Father was going to change after His resurrection. Indeed, as we have seen, an inductive study of their relationship in the Bible demonstrates that the Father is truly the head of Christ for all time. The Apostle Paul, speaking about the end of the age, said that when Jesus has finally conquered all His enemies, He will hand everything over to His Father (names in brackets are added for clarity in the following passage):

"Then the end will come, when he [Jesus] hands over the kingdom to God the Father after he [Jesus] has destroyed all dominion, authority and power. For he [Jesus] must reign until he [the Father] has put all his enemies under his feet. The last enemy to be destroyed is death. For he [the Father] "has put

everything under his feet." Now when it says that "everything" has been put under him, it is clear that this does not include God [the Father] himself, who put everything under Christ. When he has done this, then the Son himself will be made subject to him [the Father] who put everything under him, so that God [the Father] may be all in all." (1 Cor. 15:24-28)

When we have been glorified and are present in the New Jerusalem, we will indeed see Jesus, the Son of God, sitting at the right hand of the Father, but the Father will be all in all, the head of Christ, and we will be joint heirs with Jesus (Ro. 8:17) in the Father's kingdom. Whatever this will look like, whatever this means, whatever our tasks will be in the glorious kingdom, we can be assured that it will be wonderful beyond our present ability to grasp or imagine.

The Father's Knowledge and the Son's

Does Jesus the Son know everything the Father knows? Some would say yes, because both are God and they are one. However, the Bible gives us clues that it is otherwise. Jesus told us that not even He knows the day or the hour when the final judgment will come upon the world, but only the Father (Mt. 24:36). This is also suggested in Revelation, in which John states that it is the revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave Him to show His servants (Rev. 1:1). This can be taken to imply that even after being seated at the Father's right hand, there are some things which the Father still has not yet revealed to Jesus. These passages indicate in yet another way that the Father is the Head, and Jesus, although fully God, is dependent on Him.

The Third Person of the Trinity

The Holy Spirit. The third person of God is the Holy Spirit. He appears in the Old Testament as the Spirit of the Lord, the Spirit of God, or simply the Spirit. Throughout the Old Testament narrative, He came upon certain people from time to time to empower them to do God's will. The Old Testament writers did not speak of Him as God, but as the Spirit of God, more as a power than an entity. It was prophesied that the Spirit would come upon the Messiah (Isa. 11:1-2), which was fulfilled when Jesus was baptized by John the Baptist (Mt. 3:16-17; Mk. 1:9-11; Lk. 3:21-22; Jn. 1:32-34).

The Holy Spirit is described in the New Testament as being much more a Person of God in His own right than He is in the Old Testament. The Spirit was on John the Baptist from birth (Lk. 1:15), and came upon Jesus at His baptism by John at the start of His ministry. The Spirit does not just come upon certain people today, and only for a time, as He did in the Old Testament. Now, the Holy Spirit indwells all Christian believers. Paul said, "Having believed, you were marked in him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit, who is a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance until the redemption of those who are God's possession—to the praise of his glory." (Eph. 1:13-14; 1 Co. 3:16, 6:19; see also Jn. 14:26, 15:26).

Jesus said, "And **I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Counselor** to be with you forever - the Spirit of truth." (Jn. 14:16-17). He added, "**But the Counselor, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name...**" (Jn. 14:26), and later, "When the Counselor comes, whom I will send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth **who goes out from the Father**, he will testify about me." (Jn. 15:26). After His resurrection, Jesus asked the Father to send the Holy Spirit in His name to be our Counselor on Jesus' behalf. The Spirit, therefore, is

the presence of God who is constantly with us, and living within all who have confessed faith in Jesus.

The Father and the Spirit. Just as Jesus is dependent on the Father, the Spirit is also the agent of the Father. Jesus told us, "But when he, the Spirit of truth, comes, he will guide you into all truth. He will not speak on his own; he will speak only what he hears, and he will tell you what is yet to come." (Jn. 16:13). The Spirit speaks into our hearts only what He hears from the Father. Just as the Father and Jesus are one, so is the Holy Spirit one with the Father and with the Son. So the Father is the Head, and Jesus and the Spirit are the ones through whom and by whom He acts.

The Spirit as a Distinct Person. The Spirit is not just the power of God, but a distinct persona of the Trinity in and of Himself. He has the authority to act on our behalf, as we see in the receiving of our spiritual gifts (charismata). Paul said, "There are different kinds of gifts, but the same Spirit...All these are the work of one and the same Spirit, and he gives them to each one, **just as he determines.**" (1 Cor. 12:4,11). The Spirit, therefore, even though He is dependent on the Father, can work with us of His own determination, because He acts entirely according to the Father's will.

The Spirit also helps us in our trials, when we are so troubled that we do not know how to pray or what to ask God for. "In the same way, the Spirit helps us in our weakness. We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groans that words cannot express." (Ro. 8:26). The Spirit takes our inward troubles and transmits them to the Father in ways that we could not do for ourselves.

The Trinity - Father, Son, and Holy Spirit

The Holy Trinity. Jesus commissioned us to make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit (Mt. 28:19). This makes a clear distinction between the Persons of the Trinity, but joins them together in intent and purpose for the salvation of humankind. All that they do is done for one and the same purpose.

Their Roles in Creation. We have seen that the Father created all things, and that Jesus was the craftsman through whom all things were made. We see the Holy Spirit involved as well in the creation of the world. When the Father spoke all things into existence, we are told, "...the Spirit of God was hovering over the waters." (Gen. 1:2). In other words, the Father planned creation, Jesus executed the plan, and the Spirit was the power by which the plan came together.

Their Roles in our Salvation. The Father is the author of our salvation and Jesus is the one through whom He saves us. The Holy Spirit is also integrally involved in this. Paul said:

"But when the kindness and love of God our Savior appeared, he saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy. He saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit, whom he poured out on us generously through Jesus Christ our Savior, so that, having been justified by his grace, we might become heirs having the hope of eternal life." (Tit. 3:4-7).

This tells us that God our Saviour, the Father, saved us through Jesus Christ our Saviour by the work of the Holy Spirit in us (see also 1 Pet. 1:2). The Father motivates the unbeliever toward Jesus by grace through the Holy Spirit and gives him over to Jesus (Jn. 6:44). The person is convicted by the Holy Spirit to put his faith in Jesus and is saved.

Their Work in Us. Jesus told us, "All that belongs to the Father is mine. That is why I said the Spirit will take from what is mine and make it known to you." (Jn. 16:15). As we saw above, just as in biblical times, a father built up an inheritance for his sons, so all that the Father has belongs to Jesus. The Spirit makes that known to us by convicting us in our hearts of the truth of God. Paul wrote, "For through [Jesus] we have access to the Father by one Spirit." (Eph. 2:18). It is by the power of the Spirit that we can approach our Heavenly Father, through the redeeming work of Jesus. Paul also said:

"...those who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God. For you did not receive a spirit that makes you a slave again to fear, but you received the Spirit of sonship. And by him we cry, "*Abba*, Father." The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God's children. Now if we are children, then we are heirs—heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ, if indeed we share in his sufferings in order that we may also share in his glory." (Ro. 8:14-17).

It is by the Spirit that we can pray effectively and honour the Father, and it is by the Spirit that we know that we are indeed children of God, heirs of the Father's inheritance and joint heirs with Jesus in this inheritance. The Spirit awakens us to the glory of God and the hope to which the Father has called us through Jesus Christ. It is by the Spirit that we feel the love of God and the presence of God.

The Nature of the Three. In their interlinking roles, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit demonstrate their relationship in all things. None of the three can exist without the other two. The existence of the Father inevitably brings forth the other two, and the other two cannot exist without the Father. Jesus was brought forth as the first of God's works (Pro. 8:22), He is the firstborn over all creation (Col. 1:15), the one who was born of God (1Jn. 5:18). The Spirit goes out from the Father (Jn. 15:26). This is how all three coexist inseparably, and are one in purpose.

An Egyptian hermit of the Third Century described the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit as being like the sun that we see and feel. The Father is like the sun, Jesus is like the light that emanates from the sun, and the Spirit is like the warmth we feel from the sun. The sun cannot exist without giving off light and heat, nor can the light or heat exist without the sun.

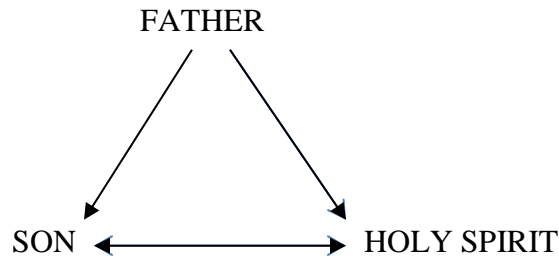
Life as we know it cannot exist without the sun. We cannot look at the sun with the naked eye without going blind. We do not actually see the sun, but we see the light coming from it. We can see clearly and completely only during the day by the light of the sun. We stumble around in the darkness at night because we cannot see, except by artificial light. Even with artificial light we cannot see as clearly and completely as during the day. We can feel the warmth of the sun, but we cannot see this warmth.

In the same way, life as we know it cannot exist without God. God lives in unapproachable light (1 Tim. 6:16), and no one can see the Father and live (Ex. 33:20), but we cannot truly live without Him. We were created by Him to worship and to have fellowship with Him, and one day we will be in His presence.

Jesus could be seen when He appeared on Earth, and we know the truth about God only because Jesus has shown us the Father (Jn. 14:8-9). We live in the light of God only through Jesus (Jn. 8:12). People can invent other forms of spiritual enlightenment in other religions or philosophies, but like artificial light, none are as truly enlightening as Jesus (Jn. 1:4-5, 3:19-21).

The Spirit can be sensed and felt, but cannot be seen. And yet it is by the Spirit that we come to understand our sinful nature and are convicted to turn to God through the atoning work that Jesus has done for us. We also grow in Christ by the work of the Holy Spirit. It is important to understand the three Persons of God in order to worship the Trinity in spirit and in truth and pray effectively to our Father in Jesus' name, by the inspiration of the Spirit.

The relationship of the Trinity can be understood a little better from the following diagram:



As we have seen from the preceding Bible references, the Son and the Holy Spirit are dependent on the Father, and the Son and the Holy Spirit interact with each other. This describes the way in which their roles in all things are inextricably linked.

The Fear of the Lord

To have a healthy relationship with God, we must understand what the fear of the Lord means. "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom, and knowledge of the Holy One is understanding." (Pro. 9:10). We read above in the quote from Romans 8 that we do not have a spirit of fear but of sonship. We are told in Hebrews 4:16 that we can approach God's throne of grace with confidence. The Bible, however, speaks much about the fear of the Lord in a positive way. In this sense, to fear the Lord means to have an awesome respect for His majesty and greatness, and to live in obedience to His will.

Since the fall of humankind from grace was the result of our disobedience to God, the world lives in a state of rebellion against Him. We come to fear the Lord when we become aware of the brokenness of our sinful nature and the majesty of God's righteousness. Once we learn to fear the Lord, He in His grace through the Holy Spirit turns our fear into joy. John Newton, in his majestic hymn *Amazing Grace*, wrote, "T'was grace that taught my heart to fear, and grace my fears relieved". To come to the understanding that the fear the Lord is the beginning of wisdom takes humbleness, not human wisdom.

The truly wise are those who humble themselves before God and put their faith in Jesus Christ. The more we seek to know God, the more we will understand our relationship with Him, and we will come to a greater understanding of God's grace and love for us. This can be done best through prayer and meditation and careful study of God's word.

The most effective way to show our fear of the Lord is to worship Him in spirit and in truth, in quiet reverence through prayer, as we feel His presence and drink in His love and His grace. In this way we are also filled with the true joy of God's presence.

Conclusion

This chapter gives us an insight into the nature of the three Persons of God based on what the Bible shows us. It is by no means complete. As you read the Scriptures, keep watch for other passages that give us insight into who God is. Write out brief references to each passage and keep the list handy in your Bible so you can look at it from time to time and come to know God better.

Such insight as this gives us what is necessary to prevent us from being misled by the great number of errors and misconceptions about God that we often hear in the world around us. There are those who place such importance on Jesus that they ascribe to Jesus what the Father has done for us. In this way, they eclipse the Father with Jesus, pushing the Father into the background. This low view of the Father is dishonouring to God.

There are those who distort the image of Jesus, pretending that He is not God but only human, or a divine being but only a demigod, not of the same substance as the Father. Others say the Father is a very large human figure, living on a planet close to the Earth and sending his angels to us on beams of light. Some say that God is not three persons but only one, appearing to us alternately as the Father, the Son, or the Holy Spirit.

Different concepts of God, of Jesus, or of the Holy Spirit are popularized through fiction or other writings, but the only true images of God can be found in the Bible. This is why it is necessary for each one of us to know what the Bible says, to avoid being led astray by inaccurate or false concepts popularized by those who do not truly understand God, or are purposefully trying to draw us away from God.

Prayer

The following prayer is paraphrased from Paul's prayers for the Ephesians (Eph. 1:17-19).

Father in Heaven, I ask that You give me a spirit of wisdom and revelation and of knowledge and understanding of You, so that I may know you better. I pray that the eyes of my heart may be enlightened in order that I may know the hope to which You have called me, the riches of Your glorious inheritance in the saints, and Your incomparably great power for us who believe. I pray in Jesus' name, Amen.

Chapter 3 - Learning to Pray from Jesus

Jesus' Example

Jesus taught us a number of things about prayer. First of all, He provided an example to follow. The gospels tell us that He prayed frequently... "But Jesus often withdrew to lonely places and prayed." (Lk. 5:16). The writer of Hebrews states, "During the days of Jesus' life on earth, he offered up prayers and petitions with loud cries and tears to the one who could save him from death, and he was heard because of his reverent submission." (Heb. 5:7)

What did Jesus pray for? We are not told; however, Jesus said that He could do nothing on His own, but only that which He saw His Father doing (Jn. 5:19). We can infer from this that Jesus was asking the Father for direction and praying for the people.

Think of it! Even Jesus, who was both fully human and fully God, had to pray to the Father, and He was heard, not because He was God's son, but because of His reverent submission! How much more so should we submit to God in awesome reverence. This means approaching God with a sense of awe at His greatness, revering Him as someone who is infinitely powerful and all-knowing, and surrendering our wills to His.

Teachings on Prayer

Jesus also taught His disciples about prayer. Therefore, He not only gave us the model to follow in prayer, but by our faith in Him, He will teach us to pray through His Holy Spirit as we open our hearts to Him. Wesley Duewel states, "Be available to pray as He guides and empowers. In holy partnership of intercession with Christ and the Holy Spirit, the prayer warrior is seeking to intercede constantly according to the mind of the Spirit."¹⁵

An important insight about prayer is seen in the story of the Samaritan woman at Jacob's Well.

" 'Sir,' the woman said, 'I can see that you are a prophet. Our fathers worshiped on this mountain, but you Jews claim that the place where we must worship is in Jerusalem.' Jesus declared, 'Believe me, woman, a time is coming when you will worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem. You Samaritans worship what you do not know; we worship what we do know, for salvation is from the Jews. Yet a time is coming and has now come when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for they are the kind of worshipers the Father seeks. God is spirit, and his worshipers must worship in spirit and in truth.' " (Jn. 4:19-24)

From this passage, we learn some important facts about worshiping God. The Samaritans thought they were worshiping God, but did not know the God they thought they worshiped. The Jews worshiped the God they knew, but in a different way than Jesus had come to show the world. They worshiped through sacrifices offered up from time to time on their behalf by their priests in Jerusalem according to the Law of Moses. Because of Jesus, true believers would worship God in a very different manner. There are people today who, like the Samaritans, want to worship, but do not know who they are worshiping. There are others who, in a similar way to

¹⁵ Wesley L. Duewel, *Mighty Prevailing Prayer*, 18.

the Jews, try to worship God by rituals and liturgical prayers. Not that rituals or liturgical prayers are necessarily wrong, but Jesus clearly states here that true worshipers will worship in spirit and in truth. Jesus tells us that the Father is actually looking for those who will do this. The key to good prayer, therefore, is in the attitude of the heart.

To worship God in spirit means pouring out our adoration of God from our own spirits, as we are inspired by the Holy Spirit. Since we are seeking to form a personal relationship with God, this is best done in quiet and in private, so that there is nothing to distract us from forming an intimate personal bond with our Creator.

To worship God in truth means to worship God as He truly is, and not just some idea of God we have thought of ourselves. Because the Bible is the only God-inspired writing that exists, it is the only reliable source of truth about God. Other people may tell us about God, or help us to understand difficult aspects about God, but unless their information is completely truthful according to the Bible, they are offering only a distortion of God, however close it may be to the truth. The only way we can really know for ourselves what is true is to study the Scriptures ourselves to determine whether what they tell us is true or not.

Many excellent resources written by Bible scholars are readily available to help us understand the Bible. We must be careful, however, to confirm the qualifications of the writer or writers of the sources. Just because a book is written by a Christian and sold in a Christian bookstore does not mean it is a good resource. If we are unsure of the usefulness of a source, it is a good idea to check with someone who is in a good position to know whether it is good or not. This does not mean that we can neglect our own study of the Bible, because the one certain way we can tell if what the person says is true is by comparing his teaching with what the Bible teaches.

Luke wrote in the book of Acts:

"As soon as it was night, the believers sent Paul and Silas away to Berea. On arriving there, they went to the Jewish synagogue. Now the Berean Jews were of more noble character than those in Thessalonica, for they received the message with great eagerness and examined the Scriptures every day to see if what Paul said was true. As a result, many of them believed, as did also a number of prominent Greek women and many Greek men." (AC. 17:10-12)

Here were a group of people, hearing the Gospel for the first time from Paul, who was the greatest evangelist of his time. They didn't dismiss his words offhand like others had, nor did they accept the message without checking up. They searched the Scriptures themselves, and found that Paul's message was true.

Worshiping God in Prayer

God is spirit, and therefore, worshiping God is an act of the spirit, done through prayer. Andrew Murray wrote about this principle:

"Among Christians, one still finds three classes of worshippers. Some in their ignorance hardly know what they're asking for. They pray earnestly, but receive little. There are others having more correct knowledge who try to pray with all their minds and hearts. They often pray most earnestly and yet

do not attain the full blessedness of worship in spirit and in truth. It is into the third class that we must ask our Lord Jesus to take us. He must teach us how to worship in spirit and truth. This alone is spiritual worship; this makes us the kinds of worshippers the Father seeks. In prayer, everything will depend on our understanding and practicing worship in spirit and truth."¹⁶

Worshiping God in spirit and in truth involves humbling ourselves before the Lord, showing our gratitude for all He has done for us, and expressing our adoration for Him and sense of awe at His greatness. This involves a correct view of who God is and who we are in God. It takes an understanding of why we are on this earth, how we came to be separated from God, and what God has done to reconcile us to Him.

When we have a proper view of this, we can begin to understand God's grace, and we can truly worship Him as He deserves. God is looking for those who will worship Him in Spirit and in truth. When we do so, we draw much closer to God and He to us, so we can enjoy His presence in a manner we cannot do in any other way. This worship of God in confession, thanksgiving, and praise are the topics of Section 2 of this book.

The Fear of God

In the introduction to this section, it was emphasized that "the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom, and knowledge of the Holy One is understanding." (Pro. 9:10). Jesus taught us about the fear of God a number of times. In speaking to His disciples He said:

"Do not be afraid of those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather, be afraid of the One who can destroy both soul and body in hell. Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? Yet not one of them will fall to the ground apart from the will of your Father. And even the very hairs of your head are all numbered. So don't be afraid; you are worth more than many sparrows. Whoever acknowledges me before men, I will also acknowledge him before my Father in heaven. But whoever disowns me before men, I will disown him before my Father in heaven." (Mt. 10:28-33)

Jesus was sending His disciples out into the world on their own to preach the gospel. He warned them that they would suffer persecution as a result, and to be on guard against people. But in the quote above, He told them not to be afraid of anything that people could do to them, but to fear God instead.

In this passage, Jesus assured them that God cares for them more than any other creatures, so not to be afraid. This sounds contradictory, but Jesus explains the reason for this. We are to honour God and speak boldly about Jesus to the world. We may be persecuted for it, and some may even be killed, but no matter what, God will love us and care for us. But if we are too timid to speak about Jesus because we are afraid of what people will think or say or do to us, we disobey the Great Commission and we deny Jesus who commanded us to follow Him. If we do so, God will disown us and we will follow others to destruction.

The fear of God, then, means fearing what will happen to us if we ignore Jesus' commands and teachings and try to live in comfort and safety. Jesus stated, "The man who loves

¹⁶ Andrew Murray, *With Christ in the School of Prayer*, (Springdale, PA, Whitaker House, 1981), 17.

his life will lose it, while the man who hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life. Whoever serves me must follow me; and where I am, my servant also will be. My Father will honor the one who serves me." (Jn.12:25-26).

Jesus' use of the term "hate" is a hyperbole, or purposeful exaggeration. He was not telling us to despise ourselves, but to put ourselves second to the will of God and the work He would have us do for the advancement of His kingdom.

Following Jesus as He commanded us takes effort on our part, and involves discomfort and risks. But if we trust in God and boldly obey Him, if we honour Him and serve Him diligently, we have nothing to fear.

Our Desire to Do God's Will

So what is the first step in learning how to worship God in the way He wants us to worship Him? First, we must be determined to do it. Jesus once said, "If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples. Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free." (Jn. 8:31-32). Notice that we must first decide to do God's will, to obey Jesus' commands and teaching, and then we will know the truth. This is opposite to worldly logic, which states that we must first learn the truth, and then we will know what is right. With God, however, we must commit ourselves to Him first, and then God will honour our commitment by revealing His truth to us.

God has called us by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, but He will not make us act against our will. It is up to us to answer that call, and make a commitment to Him through Jesus Christ. But that is only the beginning. We must then further commit to doing God's will in our daily lives, and a large part of that will is to worship Him on a continual basis.

Our actions are more important than our intentions. When we decide to do God's will, He will again inspire us through the Holy Spirit how to go about doing it. This leads to an upward spiral of acting on our part, and being further inspired by God on His part to lead us higher still.

Being Alone With God

Jesus taught us that our prayers should primarily be said in private. He used to go off frequently to pray by Himself, as we see in Luke 5:16, "But Jesus often withdrew to lonely places and prayed." Jesus said, "But when you pray, go into your room, close the door and pray to your Father, who is unseen. Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you." (Mt 6:6).

Praying in groups is good, but our own worship of God and our prayer requests should be mostly an intimate time just between ourselves and God. We should find a time and a place where we can be free from distractions and interruptions. It should be a comfortable place, where we can relax and enjoy the experience. This will make prayer a positive time, and will ensure that you will be more likely not only to keep up with it, but want more of it. We will also be much more able to feel God's presence, and hear Him when He speaks to us. Andrew Murray said, "The first thing the Lord teaches His disciples is that they must have a secret place for prayer. Everyone must have a solitary spot where he can be alone with God."¹⁷

¹⁷ Ibid., 23.

As stated in Chapter 1, God does speak to us, but listening for His voice is not a natural thing, because it is not a loud or audible voice. It is most commonly described as the "still, small voice", which speaks to us, not in words, but as softly as thoughts or impressions. It is true that some people have heard God speak to them audibly, such as Samuel as a child (1 Sam. 3), or Saul on the road to Damascus (Ac. 9), but most often God is heard as a gentle whisper, as happened with Elijah at Mount Horeb (1 Ki. 19:11-18).

It takes quietness and experience to distinguish this "voice" from the roar of our own thoughts and the static of the world around us, or the harsh coercion of Satan. Being in private allows us to meditate on God's greatness, and the things He is teaching us through His Word. Just as the Holy Spirit will reveal the truth of the Bible to us, the Spirit will also guide our prayers. Rather than just repeat what somebody else has taught us to say, we should rely on the Holy Spirit to guide our prayers.

The Form of Prayer

Jesus taught us the Lord's Prayer as an example of how we should pray. Just as the Lord's Prayer begins, "Our Father, who art in heaven...", we should address our prayers to our Father in Heaven. We hear some people addressing their prayers to Jesus, but Jesus told us not to ask Him, but to ask the Father in His name. He said, "In that day [after He was to be raised from the dead] you will no longer ask me anything. I tell you the truth, my Father will give you whatever you ask in my name...In that day you will ask in my name. I am not saying that I will ask the Father on your behalf. No, the Father himself loves you because you have loved me and have believed that I came from God." (Jn. 16:23, 26-27). In saying this, Jesus meant that we are to pray to the Father in Jesus' name.

The next part of the Lord's Prayer glorifies the Father – Hallowed be Your Name – and requests that His kingdom come and His will be done on earth. In the same way, we should start our prayer time by worshiping God. Chapters 5 to 7 speak of worshiping God in prayer. Then, after worshiping God, the Lord's Prayer turns to personal petitions for ourselves and others. When we pray, whatever we ask for we should also pray that His will be done, not ours. Whatever we request must be with the understanding that God may override our request and do something differently, because He knows better. Even Jesus, when praying in the Garden of Gethsemane the night of His betrayal, asked three times that this cup be removed from Him, but then added, "Yet not as I will, but as you will." (Mt. 26:39-44).

Jesus set an example for the pattern of our petitions and intercession, as well. During the Last Supper, Jesus offered three prayers; one for Himself, one for His disciples, and the third for all believers (Jn. 17).

In the same way, it is useful for us to pray for ourselves first, our immediate families next, then our friends and close relatives, and then for others. Notice this pattern is a series of expanding circles, starting with ourselves, and then radiating outward to those closest to us, and then those further away. This is not a selfish or self-centred approach to prayer. What it does is establish ourselves as a solid base, justified before God, from which we can reach out and assist others. Just as a tree can grow large branches only if its trunk is strong, so can we hold up other people and situations only if we ourselves are first strong in the Lord.

Boldness and Persistence in Prayer

Jesus taught us that we should ask for what we need in prayer, and we should be bold and persist in asking. Luke wrote:

"Then (Jesus) said to them, "Suppose one of you has a friend, and he goes to him at midnight and says, 'Friend, lend me three loaves of bread, because a friend of mine on a journey has come to me, and I have nothing to set before him.' Then the one inside answers, 'Don't bother me. The door is already locked, and my children are with me in bed. I can't get up and give you anything.' I tell you, though he will not get up and give him the bread because he is his friend, yet because of the man's boldness he will get up and give him as much as he needs. So I say to you: Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives; he who seeks finds; and to him who knocks, the door will be opened." (Lk. 11:5-10)

Here Jesus commanded us to be bold in our prayers. Notice too that the friend first refused even to get up and open the door, but with the man's persistent boldness, he finally did. We do not have to be timid in our requests. We must certainly be respectful before God, but there is no reason for us to be fearful or timid when praying to our great and loving God.

Notice that in this Scripture passage Jesus equated persistence with asking, seeking, and knocking. It is important that we understand what he means by this. To ask is to ask for what we need in prayer. To seek is to seek God's kingdom and His righteousness. To knock is to strive to know God's will for us.

The corollary to this is equally important to understand. First, if we do not ask we will not receive. James admonished his readers, "You do not have because you do not ask God." (Jas. 4:2). When the kingdom of Judah was being threatened by the forces of Aram and Samaria, the Lord sent the prophet Isaiah to tell King Ahaz not to be afraid, but to ask for a sign of God's will, but Ahaz was afraid to ask. "Again the LORD spoke to Ahaz, 'Ask the LORD your God for a sign, whether in the deepest depths or in the highest heights.' But Ahaz said, 'I will not ask; I will not put the LORD to the test.' Then Isaiah said, 'Hear now, you house of David! Is it not enough to try the patience of men? Will you try the patience of my God also?' " (Isa. 7:10-13). Failing to ask for what God knows we need can actually test His patience. God knows what we need and is willing to give in abundance, but we must ask. And we know that we can ask with boldness and with confidence, because God wants us to ask.

Secondly, if we do not seek, we will not find. The Psalmist said:

"The LORD looks down from heaven
on the sons of men
to see if there are any who understand,
any who seek God.
All have turned aside,
they have together become corrupt;
there is no one who does good,
not even one." (Ps. 14:2-3)

Seeking God through studying the Scriptures, meditating on them, and worshiping God in prayer shows that we desire to know more about God, that our hearts are in submission to Him, and that we have placed God as our highest priority. God will bless our search for understanding by revealing His truth to us. Failing to seek Him in a personal way, as the psalmist tells us, will blind us to the truth and leave us vulnerable to being misled by all manner of false teachings and false religions.

Thirdly, if we do not knock, the door will not be opened for us. In addressing a group of listeners who were asking who would be saved, Jesus advised, "Strive to enter through the narrow door; for many, I tell you, will seek to enter and will not be able." (Lk. 13:24, NASB¹⁸). Those who want to go to heaven, but do not put forth the effort to knock on the door with persistence, striving to know God's will, will not enter. There are those who believe that we can't enter God's kingdom by our own striving, that it is all up to God. Others believe that we do not have to strive, that it is a free gift from God. But if it were not possible to enter the kingdom by striving, or if it were not necessary to strive in order to enter, then Jesus' statement here would be meaningless, and Jesus did not make any meaningless statements.

Instead, striving to enter through the narrow door is an important command that must be obeyed. Remember, this does not apply to non-believers who are seeking salvation. As stated in the Introduction to Section 1, our initial salvation is a free gift from God by His saving grace through our belief in Jesus. Jesus here is talking about those who already believe and are striving for sanctification.

Paul advised the faithful Christians in Philippi, "Therefore, my dear friends, as you have always obeyed - not only in my presence, but now much more in my absence – **continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling**, for it is God who works in you to will and to act according to his good purpose." (Php. 2:12-13). Even though Paul recognized the fact that the Philippians were already faithful believers and that God was working in them, he also knew that it is necessary for us to strive continuously to work with God for our eternal salvation.

The marvelous truth is that it is not difficult to ask, it is not hard to seek, and it is not beyond anybody's ability to knock. Anyone who sincerely desires to do so can do it! Jesus said, "For everyone who asks receives; he who seeks finds; and to him who knocks, the door will be opened." (Mt. 7:8). And the more simply you do so, the better! Jesus said, "I tell you the truth, unless you change and become like little children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven. Therefore, whoever humbles himself like this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven." (Mt. 18:3-4).

This does not mean that we don't have to learn anything or strive to grow in maturity. What Jesus meant is that even the most mature Christians must submit themselves to God in humbleness and reverent submission, trusting with childlike faith that He will direct our lives according to His will. Entering the kingdom of God requires effort on our part, but if we approach God with faith and a humble and loving heart, it will be much easier.

Some years ago, a misconception was made popular in certain Christian circles that when you pray for something, you should ask once and only once, because asking again for the same thing showed that you didn't have the faith to receive it. This is contrary to Jesus' own teachings. In addition to the parable discussed above about the man asking his friend for the loaves of bread, He gave us this parable which is an even stronger message on persistence.

¹⁸ NASB, *New American Standard Bible*.

"Then Jesus told his disciples a parable to show them that they should always pray and not give up. He said: "In a certain town there was a judge who neither feared God nor cared about men. And there was a widow in that town who kept coming to him with the plea, 'Grant me justice against my adversary.' For some time he refused. But finally he said to himself, 'Even though I don't fear God or care about men, yet because this widow keeps bothering me, I will see that she gets justice, so that she won't eventually wear me out with her coming!' " And the Lord said, "Listen to what the unjust judge says. And will not God bring about justice for his chosen ones, who cry out to him day and night? Will he keep putting them off? I tell you, he will see that they get justice, and quickly. However, when the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on the earth?" (Lk. 18:1-8)

This parable doesn't say that we should keep asking for different things. The widow kept asking for the same thing, to be granted justice against her adversary. We, too, must keep praying for what we need, and keep praying until we receive an answer. One slogan of the Promise Keepers is P.U.S.H. - Pray Until Something Happens. The last line of Jesus' parable above, "...will He find faith on the earth?", means, will He find those on earth who had the faith to keep on praying and never give up, even in the face of seemingly unanswered prayers.

The Importance of Faith

We sometimes hear the term "blind faith", and many people, even some Christians, believe that religious faith must be blind – meaning we must accept without question things for which we have no evidence. However, if our belief is blind, then it is not faith at all, but merely blind belief. The writer of Hebrews said, "Now faith is being sure of what we hope for, and certain of what we do not see." (Heb. 11:1). We cannot be sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see unless we know for certain what we are putting our faith in.

True faith, in the Christian sense, comes to us through a process of awakening our spirits to the reality of God. We must have a genuine spiritual experience of God that can come to us best by ourselves in quiet prayer and meditation, speaking to God in prayer and experiencing His presence. We must also have an accurate knowledge of God that can come only through careful study of the Bible. We must then process our experience and knowledge using logic and reason to come to an understanding of God. Solomon, in the book of Proverbs, said:

"My son, if you accept my words and store up my commands within you, turning your ear to wisdom and applying your heart to understanding, and if you call out for insight and cry aloud for understanding, if you look for it as for silver and search for it as for hidden treasure, then you will understand the fear of the Lord and find the knowledge of God." (Pro. 2:1-6)

A Medieval scholar wrote that God could be found only by those who have "faith that is seeking understanding". Faith, then, cannot possibly be blind, for spiritual blindness produces no understanding. If we truly seek God, then He will reward our faith by leading us into a growing understanding of Him and His ways, and our faith will grow.

Learning how to ask God according to His will and not ours is part of the process of growing in faith. We may not want to ask because of our pride, because we want to appear confident and self-sufficient. We may not ask out of false humility, believing that we are not worthy to receive from the Lord. We may be reluctant to ask out of false fear, because we do not trust God at His word that He loves us. We were separated from God due to our original sin. To ask God for what we need is to admit that we need Him and want Him in our lives. It recognizes the fact that we cannot save ourselves, and that we cannot truly live without Him.

We must also be careful to weigh our motives when we ask for something. James told his readers, "When you ask, you do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives, that you may spend what you get on your pleasures." (Jas. 4:3).

This does not mean that we should never ask for anything that benefits us alone. Receiving a benefit that we need, or even that we desire, is not necessarily selfish. God is not a magic genie who grants our wishes, but He does not hesitate to bless us with answers to our requests, so long as we are genuinely seeking His will and striving to live as Jesus commanded us. To pray in this way takes faith on our part.

It is impossible to overemphasize the importance of faith in prayer. Jesus said, "Have faith in God. I tell you the truth, if anyone says to this mountain, 'Go, throw yourself into the sea,' and does not doubt in his heart but believes that what he says will happen, it will be done for him. Therefore I tell you, whatever you ask for in prayer, believe that you have received it, and it will be yours." (Mk. 11:22-24).

The corollary to this is that if we ask, but do not believe that we will receive, it is very likely that we will not receive. But if we do not immediately receive what we prayed for, it does not necessarily mean that we lacked faith! Faith means believing in what we do not see, so we must train ourselves to continue believing even if we do not see immediate results. Notice how Jesus said to believe you have received it (already), and it will be yours (in the future).

Forgiveness

One of Jesus' most important teachings was His emphasis on forgiveness. He taught us that we must forgive to be forgiven. In the Lord's prayer He said, "And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors." (Mt. 6:12, NASB). We get a greater impact of its meaning if we turn the sentence around to read, "As we have forgiven our debtors, forgive us our debts."

Jesus stressed forgiveness immediately after two of His most important teachings on prayer, which shows us that unforgiveness in our own lives can be a significant block to our prayers. Following the Lord's Prayer, He taught us, "For if you forgive others for their transgressions, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive others, then your Father will not forgive your transgressions." (Mt. 6:14-15, NASB). The fact that this is the only part of the Lord's Prayer that He gave an additional teaching on stresses how critically important forgiveness is.

Also, just after His teaching on faith that we saw from Mark 11:22-24, Jesus commanded us, "And when you stand praying, if you hold anything against anyone, forgive him, so that your Father in heaven may forgive you your sins." (Mk. 11:25). Forgiveness can be a very difficult thing, especially when we have been very grievously hurt by someone.

It can take some time to forgive others, but if we go to God in prayer, He will certainly give us the strength to forgive. It may also be necessary to seek counseling or the help of other Christians to assist us in forgiving those who have hurt us, but it is a necessary step in our

Christian growth. Forgiving other who have hurt us and done us wrong is a very important step in our spiritual and emotional healing. We will look more at forgiveness in Chapter 5.

Ending our Prayers with Finality and Assurance

We saw above that we should address our prayers to our Father in Heaven, as Jesus taught us. He taught us that after His resurrection, "In that day you will no longer ask me anything. I tell you the truth, my Father will give you whatever you ask in my name." (Jn. 16:23). For this reason, we should end each prayer request with, "In Jesus' name, Amen."

Praying "in Jesus' name" shows that we identify with Jesus and desire to do His work. The word, Amen, is a Hebrew word meaning "so be it", or "let it be so." Although the Bible does not record Jesus using the word, "Amen", it is a vital part of our prayer. It closes our prayer with finality and confidence. Martin Luther wrote, "Finally, mark this, that you must always speak the Amen firmly. Never doubt that God in His mercy will surely hear you and say 'yes' to your prayers...Do not leave your prayer without having said or thought, 'Very well, God has heard my prayer; this I know with certainty and truth.' That is what Amen means."¹⁹

It is in closing our prayers with this assurance, that we have the authority to approach the Father with our requests, that He hears us and will grant our requests, that we demonstrate the faith that Jesus spoke about. This kind of faith is so necessary for our prevailing in prayer.

Prayer

Father in heaven, I want to learn how to pray as Jesus prayed. Please inspire me through Your Holy Spirit to know how to pray, and what to pray for. Please keep me from distractions, and negative attitudes of my heart that may try to hold me back from praying effectively. Help me to want to pray, to need to pray, and teach me to trust that You hear me and are answering my prayers. I ask in Jesus' name, Amen.

¹⁹ Martin Luther, *A Simple Way to Pray*, trans. Carl J. Schindler, *Luther's Works*, Vol. 43, Devotional Writings II, ed. G. Wienke, (Philadelphia, Fortress Press, 1968), 198.

Chapter 4 - Where We Are In Our Christian Walk

Different Levels of Christian Experience

Not all Christians are at the same level in their Christian walk. A person who has just made a confession of faith is not at the same place in their knowledge of prayer as someone who has been accustomed to years of heartfelt prayer. It is very helpful for us to know exactly at what stage we are in our Christian walk. That does not necessarily depend on the number of years we have been Christian. Some grow more quickly than others. It is not clear why some mature more quickly than others, but it certainly does depend to a degree on the person's desire to know God. It will be helpful to find out where we are with God in order to help us know where our prayer focus should be. Just as an aspiring athlete would be disappointed if he were to try out for a team that is beyond his league and his level of training, so should we not try to take on any kind of prayer ministry beyond our level of spiritual growth. Christians must start with basic prayers and work up as the Spirit leads them.

The most important thing to remember is that God loves you where you are, and accepts you even though you might be just starting at a basic level. In fact, God answers the prayers of new Christians as well as more mature believers, and sometimes in very noticeable ways, in order to increase their faith. He will not make you work beyond your ability, and will encourage you to learn all the lessons He has for you where you are now before requiring you to move on. God knows far better than we do where we are with Him, and can plan our progression much better than we can.

We should avoid the temptation to run too fast, and we should never be intimidated or envious if we see others who are more advanced in their walk than we are. In fact, a mark of a Christian who is more mature than we are is the person's willingness to accept us where we are and to encourage us just as God would. They will never look down on us or discourage us, but will help us in our walk. By the same token, we should accept them for where they are, and not be jealous or envious of them, but strive to grow as they have.

When we first start to pray, we are the centre of our prayers. This is a necessary beginning, because we need to learn how to pray for ourselves before we can pray effectively for others. As we grow in experience and maturity, the Holy Spirit will lead our prayers outward in ever-expanding circles to include more and more people and situations. God does not expect us to be able to do everything immediately, and He wants us to learn as much as we can about His relationship with us personally. This is why He motivates us to begin our prayers for ourselves, and only gradually to direct our prayers toward others. Richard Foster writes:

"In the beginning we are indeed the subject and center of our prayers. But in God's time and in God's way a Copernican revolution takes place in our heart. Slowly, almost imperceptibly, there is a shift in our center of gravity. We pass from thinking of God as part of our life to the realization that we are part of his life. Wondrously and mysteriously God moves from the periphery of our prayer experience to the center. A conversion of the heart takes place, a transformation of the spirit."²⁰

Growth in Experience

²⁰ Richard J. Foster, *Prayer*, (San Francisco, Harper Collins, 1992), 15.

As we begin to learn to pray, we focus our prayers on ourselves. God wants us to be participators in His mighty work, and He teaches us this by starting with ourselves. Through prayer, and in our daily lives, He shows us our strengths and our inadequacies, He shows us His love and His displeasure, and He shows us how He would change our hearts. In learning to focus on ourselves in our prayers of petition, we come to an intimate understanding of ourselves, of our sinfulness, and of how the Lord is attempting to mold and shape us into His image. By yielding ourselves to Him in this way, we become more malleable, more pliable, and less resistant to His will. And, best of all, in learning more about ourselves, we become far more able to help others in their struggles.

As we strive to know ourselves in God, we find ourselves becoming genuinely concerned for others, and begin to pray for them. We can never stop praying for ourselves, because neglecting our own spiritual growth is every bit as bad as neglecting our bodies and our minds. Rather than shifting our prayers away from ourselves to others, we simply start to add others to our list. We start with people close to us. The Holy Spirit prompts us to pray for our immediate family, and then as we grow, we add more people and situations to our list. The Holy Spirit will prompt us who to pray for and what to pray for.

We should be very careful, however, not to start taking everyone else's problems on ourselves, because we cannot handle them all. We must pray for the needs of others, give them over to God, and then let Him work according to His will. We cannot dictate to God how He is going to accomplish anything. We must trust in Him and have the faith to believe that He will work all things out to His end, in His good time, and in the best way possible. We may remain at this level for a number of years before moving to the next. But that is good. Our place in the kingdom of Heaven does not depend on the level we have achieved, or on the amount of work we have done, but on how well we have done the work that God has called us to do. There will be many surprises on the Day of Judgment. Jesus said, "But many who are first will be last, and many who are last will be first." (Mt. 19:30).

When we are ready, God will prompt us through the Holy Spirit to expand our prayers again. Many of us will work behind the scenes, encouraging and praying for others and holding up many people and situations in prayer. Others may act as mentors, helping other Christians in their growth, or be more directly involved in evangelism, teaching, and leading. We expand our prayers to a broader spectrum of situations, to include the growth of the church and for the nation, or other things, as the Spirit prompts us. Achieving this level brings with it an awesome responsibility. Jesus taught, "From everyone who has been given much, much will be demanded; and from the one who has been entrusted with much, much more will be asked." (Lk. 12:48).

God never asks us to do anything that we are not capable of doing. He gives us the necessary gifts and talents, so we are not working on our own strength. When we are seeking God's grace in an active life of prayer and Bible study, God is working in us and through us, loving us and blessing us. When we are close to God, we will know that He loves us, no matter what our strengths or weaknesses. Remember that in the parables of the talents (Mt. 25:14-30) and the minas (Lk. 19:12-27), each servant who served his master diligently, whether he earned two or five or ten more than he was given, was welcomed with the same praise, "Well done my good and faithful servant." That is how God will welcome each one of us who learns and does His will.

Conclusion

The purpose of this chapter is to help you to discover where you are in your walk with God to help focus your prayer life. It is not good to try to go too far too fast, because we will end up working on our own strength and become easily discouraged. It is better to stay where we are for the time and let God set our pace of development. Identify where you are in your spiritual walk and direct your prayers accordingly.

During the first year I attended church, I had a basic personal devotional time that I would follow each morning before going to work. As I prayed, I could see myself in my inward eye walking on a narrow footpath up the side of a hill. I was surrounded by a cloud, such that I could see the ground clearly for only about 12 feet (4 metres) around me. I was walking at a comfortable pace, and all seemed right in my journey.

After a few months, I got caught up in the enthusiasm for "doing things for the Lord", as was being encouraged at the church I was attending. As soon as I began this, the image I saw during my devotional time of myself walking up the footpath changed. The circle of ground I could see in the cloud moved back so that I could see only about two feet of the path in front of me. It gave me an anxious feeling, as though I might stumble over something on the ground that emerged out of the cloud as I walked.

After about a week of this distressing vision, I asked God what was wrong. I had been seeing clearly before, just a comfortable distance enough that I had been walking confidently, but now I was constantly afraid I was going to stumble. God told me that I was trying to walk too fast. He told me to slow down and walk at the speed I had been before, which was the speed that He wanted me to walk. He told me to let Him be my guide and not try to do too much on my own strength.

I obeyed, and from the next day forward, I no longer saw the vision of myself walking through the cloud in my prayer time. God had given me that vision to teach me not to try to go too fast in my Christian growth or to do "Christian" things just for the sake of doing them. From then on, He has been my Shepherd, and I have followed Him.

Prayer Partners

One thing that can greatly help us in our spiritual growth, and therefore our prayer life, is meeting on a regular basis with a prayer partner. The person should be close to the same level in their spiritual walk, except for very new Christians, who should choose a person with more experience in faith to guide them as a mentor. The purpose of the meetings is to discuss your spiritual lives, discoveries, joys, struggles, ideas, insights, fears and concerns, and to pray with each other about any areas you feel led by the Spirit. You should ask each other about what you are learning about God, about Christian life, about your spiritual walk, about the Bible, and about prayer, and hold each other accountable for praying, studying the Bible, and growing in Christ. This experience, if you do so diligently and regularly, can be an invaluable asset to your spiritual growth.

Prayer

Father in Heaven, I give you my heart. Please help me to understand who I am in your eyes, and teach me to pray by the inspiration of your Holy Spirit. Help me to know who and

what to pray for, and how to pray. Help me to grow in Christ Jesus, that I may truly be conformed to the image and likeness in which you created me. I pray in Jesus' name, Amen.

Section 2 – Introduction – Worshipping God in Prayer

Section 2 contains the essence of this book, which is connecting with God through the prayers of confession, thanksgiving, and praise. This is worship.

True Christianity is not simply a religion. A religion is a system of beliefs in the supernatural, things that go beyond the natural world, with writings, buildings, rituals, prayer, methods of meditation and communicating with the supernatural, and customs and beliefs that are supposed to guide its adherents' daily lives. In this respect, many Christians are simply religious in their approach to Christianity.

True Christianity, however, goes far beyond this. In Chapter 1, we saw that a Christian is a believer who seeks and receives God's grace through prayer and by searching the Scriptures, who learns God's word and His will, and puts it into practice. In this way, we build up a personal relationship with God through Jesus Christ. Section 1 dealt with the knowledge of prayer and of God. This factual knowledge is necessary for having a true relationship with God, for we must know who the God we worship really is, and what prayer really is, so that we can communicate with the One, True God.

To have a deep, personal relationship with God, however, takes much more than knowledge. A non-believer can have knowledge of God from studying the Bible, but cannot have a relationship with Him. To have a relationship with God, we must experience God. The only way to achieve this is to communicate with God in a profound spiritual way in prayer. The surest way to find such a relationship is to worship Him in spirit and in truth.

Humanity is separated from God due to our sin. God has provided the path back to Him through the work of His Son Jesus, whom He sent to save us by dying on the cross. Salvation is available to anyone who desires it, but in order to receive it, we must come humbly back to God, ask His forgiveness, and put our faith in Jesus (Jn. 3:16). We read in the Bible, "God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble." (Jas. 4:6). This does not mean that we must be meek and humble toward people, even though we must love them as ourselves. It means we must be humble and submissive toward God. James says, "Humble yourselves before the Lord, and He will lift you up." (Jas. 4:1).

Our humbleness describes our entire relationship with God, because although He loves us, He wants us to have a right relationship with Him. That requires humility on our part in order to constantly recognize His supremacy over creation and His infinite wisdom and power. Jesus' parable of the Prodigal Son expresses this concept perfectly. The son did not return to his father's house saying, "Hey, Dad, I'm home. I'll just leave my stuff in my room and raid the refrigerator, and then we can discuss my allowance." He came back in a state of great humility, admitting that he had sinned greatly and was not worthy even to be called a son. Because of his repentant attitude, his father came running and welcomed him home, accepting his son's humble confession (Lk. 15:11-24).

It is in this spirit of humility that we must approach God, recognizing the fact that it is only through God's grace and love for us that we can approach Him at all. In that spirit, God accepts us and loves us with a love greater than we can imagine. In worshipping God in this state of humility, in spirit and in truth, we can experience His great love and feel His closeness.

The greatest commandment in the Bible is to love God with all our heart, soul, mind, and strength (Mk. 12:30). Our greatest expression of our love for God is in worship. Hand in hand with this commandment is to love our neighbour as ourselves (Lk. 12:31). Our neighbours are

every person in the world, regardless of who they are, and regardless of whether they are our friends or our enemies, believers or non-believers.

Jesus commanded us to love our enemies and pray for those who persecute us (Mat. 5:44). As we draw near to God and worship Him, we begin to understand how God loves the world, that is, all the people of the world (Jn. 3:16). When we truly love God, we see people how God sees them and loves them in spite of what they are doing. The fruit of loving God is loving people, whether they are believers or not. We cannot truly love God without loving people (1 Jn. 2:9-11). However, we cannot just love people, and say we love God. We must love God first, and then we will truly love people as a consequence.

The modern tendency to view God as only a God of love and grace stems from our desire for unconditional acceptance and freedom from accountability. But God is also the Creator and Sustainer of the universe, a God of justice and of judgment, a God of wrath, a God who is to be feared as well as honoured, a God who not only loves the world, but is both saddened and angered at the hardness of our hearts. He is a God who loves us in spite of who we are, not because of who we are. If that does not keep us humble before Him, nothing will. God has given us the freedom to accept Him as He is, or to reject Him. But one thing we cannot do is transform Him into the image we want Him to be.

God is loving yet disciplinary in His relationship to us. Solomon wrote, "My son, do not despise the Lord's discipline and do not resent his rebuke, because the Lord disciplines those he loves, as a father the son he delights in." (Pro. 3:11-12). The writer of Hebrews stated:

"Endure hardship as discipline; God is treating you as his children. For what children are not disciplined by their father? If you are not disciplined—and everyone undergoes discipline—then you are not legitimate, not true sons and daughters at all. Moreover, we have all had human fathers who disciplined us and we respected them for it. How much more should we submit to the Father of spirits and live! They disciplined us for a little while as they thought best; but God disciplines us for our good, in order that we may share in his holiness. No discipline seems pleasant at the time, but painful. Later on, however, it produces a harvest of righteousness and peace for those who have been trained by it." (Heb. 12:7-11)

I have received the Lord's discipline on many occasions. I call this discipline my spiritual slap upside the head. God disciplined me frequently during the first few years I was a Christian, but over the years I have received fewer and fewer slaps. My attitude toward God and toward people has improved greatly and I have striven to learn the lessons the Lord has been teaching me. This echoes the last sentence in the quote above. I would not want God to stop disciplining me when I stray from the path, because this would mean He is leaving me to my own devices. God allows us to bring failure on ourselves in our pride, to teach us valuable lessons. How much better is it to humbly seek God's guidance than to learn from our failures.

It is in this spirit of humility that we must worship our God. When we accept God as He is and realize where we sit in relationship to Him, God responds by connecting with us and allowing us to experience His profound love. As we draw near to God, He draws near to us (Jas. 4:8), and we experience His presence through the Holy Spirit. We then feel the profound, unspeakable joy that only a relationship with God can bring. This joy comes not from receiving

something from God, but by surrendering our hearts to Him. We then know with absolute certainty that God loves us, and there is no better feeling in the world.

There are three emotions that people strive for to make themselves feel good. These are fun, happiness, and joy. Fun is a short-lived emotion. We can achieve it genuinely, such as playing games with our children or participating in enjoyable activities with our family and friends. Some search for the false emotion of fun by getting drunk and carousing with their friends, or dancing and singing at a rock concert. Many people strive for fun by trying to create the feeling, but this is only artificial fun. Genuine fun cannot be created, and it can only be enjoyed for the moment. Fun is also subjective. What is fun for some is not fun for others.

Happiness has as its root word hap, meaning chance or luck. Many people strive for happiness, and the United States constitution guarantees its citizens, among other things, the right to the pursuit of happiness. But happiness, like fun, depends on one's circumstances, and is relative. What makes one person happy does not make the next person happy. Also, a person can be happy for a while, and then become unhappy when circumstances change. Many people strive hard for the goal that they believe will make them happy, but once they achieve it, they find they are no happier that they were before. They always want more, but never get it.

Joy, on the other hand, is an emotion that comes from within our spirits. It does not come from the situations we are in and cannot be created artificially. It can only be a genuine emotion, such as the joy we feel when we are close to the one we love. For the Christian, unlike fun and happiness, joy can be a permanent experience. This permanent joy can be experienced only through a close and intimate relationship with the One who loves us wholly and completely, who will never leave us or forsake us, the one who loves us so much that He was willing to sacrifice His Son to reconcile us to Him.

Joy in God is a genuine emotion. It is impossible to have a true relationship with God without emotion, and most of all, without the emotion of joy. This can be entered into only in the spirit of humility and the genuine desire to be close to God. The surest way to achieve this is through the worship of God, in which we express our humility, our gratitude, and our adoration of God in prayer. In doing so, we will feel the supreme joy of being loved by the One who loves us more than all we can ask or imagine, and who fills us with the Holy Spirit. This joy comes from loving God and being loved by God.

As we grow in Christ and in spirit, as we mature in our sanctification, this feeling of joy will grow and become a constant in our lives. It will not depend on our circumstances. We will be able to experience this joy no matter whether we are happy or sad, in peace or in turmoil. This is because the joy that the Lord brings us is genuine and permanent, not forced or contrived. God does not give us this joy, but we feel this joy by being in Him, and He in us. It is not the result of our having pleased Him in some way, or performed to an acceptable standard. God is in us always through the Holy Spirit, but we must allow ourselves to be in God through our adoration of Him. This requires a genuine desire on our part to be in Him, and to express our love for Him through worship in spirit and in truth.

In order to achieve this, we must return to Him, as the prodigal child, in humility and in awe, and express our heartfelt desire to be a part of Him. We let it flow from our hearts as purely as our love for those we love truly. It does not come from a sense of duty or from the idea that it is our right to receive God's blessings for believing in Jesus. It must be true love, expressed from our hearts, a genuine desire to be with the only One who loves us wholly and completely. Worship of our God is a passionate plea to experience the fullness of God, the joy of being with Him always, in spirit and in truth.

Chapter 5 - The Worship of Confession and Repentance

Original Sin and Worldly Sins

All human beings are sinful by nature. We share in the original sin of Adam and Eve (Ro. 5:12-14), and we all, like prodigal children, have walked away from God. This original sin is vanity, that pride by which we were tempted by Satan to believe that we could be like God, knowing good and evil and yet remaining sinless. David wrote, "Surely I was sinful at birth, Sinful from the time my mother conceived me." (Ps. 51:5).

In our immaturity, we could not escape the enticement of sin, and were dragged down into its trap. In becoming sinful by nature, we are now vulnerable to all temptations, for we lack God's ability to resist sinful desires. James wrote:

"When tempted, no one should say, "God is tempting me." For God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does he tempt anyone; but each one is tempted when, by his own evil desire, he is dragged away and enticed. Then, after desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, gives birth to death." (Jas. 1:13-15)

Sinfulness is in the attitude of our hearts, and therefore we are responsible for our sins. It is by giving in to our own sinful nature and sinful desires that we sin. The desire to be like God was the cause of our original sin. The desire for the things of this world and our inability to live at peace with our neighbours is the cause of our worldly sins. The greatness of our original sin against God far outweighs any of the sins we may have committed in this lifetime.

To have a perspective of the magnitude of our sin against God, we must understand that there is nothing that humankind can do to make up for it. We are completely unable to pay the great price for our own redemption. Instead, God had to send His only Son, Jesus, to save us. And this could not be accomplished by teaching us some nice philosophy on how to live well and get along with others. Jesus, who was innocent, had to take upon himself all the guilt for our sins, allow himself to be punished, and die an agonizing death on our behalf. There was no other way. God could not simply erase our sin by some divine pronouncement, but had to transfer our guilt to an innocent person, a perfect person, and not just a human being. Only the Son of God Himself could accomplish such a thing.

In order to be saved from sin, to be forgiven, we must believe in the atoning work of Jesus. John Piper says, "We must believe in Jesus and receive Him and turn from our sin and obey Him and humble ourselves like little children and love Him more than we love our family, our possessions, or our own life. This is what it means to be converted to Christ."²¹

We must be forever mindful of the fact that we turned away from God and were born in sin with a rebellious nature against Him. It is only by admitting our sinful nature and by turning back to God in humble repentance through Jesus Christ that we can receive His forgiveness.

It is true that upon our initial confession of faith in Jesus, the sins of our past were completely forgiven. Paul told us, "But now a righteousness from God, apart from law, has been made known, to which the Law and the Prophets testify. This righteousness from God comes through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe. There is no difference, for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus." (Ro. 3:21-24). It does not matter how bad or how good our lives were

²¹ John Piper, *Desiring God*, (Colorado Springs, CO, Multnomah Books, 2003), 69.

before we became Christians, once we are justified with Jesus Christ, we are all forgiven, and are all equal in God's eyes.

That is the Good News, the Gospel message. We are forgiven completely, not by anything we have done to earn it, but by a free gift from God which we receive by our faith in the atoning work of Jesus on the cross. Even as we strive to live according to God's righteousness we will still fall far short of His ideal, but Jesus always makes up the difference for us by His righteousness. This is called imputed righteousness, by which God sees us as righteous by virtue of Jesus' righteousness.

Our Struggle Against Sin

Unfortunately, justification with Jesus does not erase our sinful nature or remove worldly temptations from around us. We are still human, and must wrestle constantly against our sinful human nature and the pull of the world. We are not immune to sin. Nobody described this dichotomy between the righteousness given to us by God and the sinfulness of our human nature better than the Apostle Paul:

"We know that the law is spiritual; but I am unspiritual, sold as a slave to sin. I do not understand what I do. For what I want to do I do not do, but what I hate I do. And if I do what I do not want to do, I agree that the law is good. As it is, it is no longer I myself who do it, but it is sin living in me. I know that nothing good lives in me, that is, in my sinful nature. For I have the desire to do what is good, but I cannot carry it out. For what I do is not the good I want to do; no, the evil I do not want to do – this I keep on doing. Now if I do what I do not want to do, it is no longer I who do it, but it is sin living in me that does it. So I find this law at work: When I want to do good, evil is right there with me. For in my inner being I delight in God's law; but I see another law at work in the members of my body, waging war against the law of my mind and making me a prisoner of the law of sin at work within my members." (Ro. 7:14-23)

No matter how much we want to do what is good and right in God's eyes, we find ourselves under the constant pull of our inborn sinfulness. As Paul said, "So then, I myself in my mind am a slave to God's law, but in the sinful nature a slave to the law of sin." (Ro. 7:25). It takes a conscious effort to keep from sinning. We must be ever on our guard, watching against the temptation to revert to our old nature controlled by sin, and striving to live in obedience to God's law; that is, the commands and teachings of Christ. Paul also stated:

"In the same way, count yourselves dead to sin but alive to God in Christ Jesus. Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body so that you obey its evil desires. Do not offer the parts of your body to sin, as instruments of wickedness, but rather offer yourselves to God, as those who have been brought from death to life; and offer the parts of your body to him as instruments of righteousness. For sin shall not be your master, because you are not under law, but under grace." (Ro. 6:11-14)

Bear in mind that Paul was speaking to Christians, not unbelievers. He was aware of the fact that unwary Christians can easily lapse back into their sinful ways if they are not constantly on guard. We must not be deceived by the false thinking that because we were once forgiven, it is impossible for us to sin.

God's first instruction concerning sin occurs at the beginning of the Bible, when Cain was angry that God had accepted Abel's sacrifice and not his. God saw his anger and said to Cain, "Why are you angry? Why is your face downcast? If you do what is right, will you not be accepted? But if you do not do what is right, sin is crouching at your door; it desires to have you, but you must master it." (Gen. 4:6-7). So we have no excuse for our sins. God expects us to strive as much as is in our power to master sin in our lives.

Paul wrote, "So, if you think you are standing firm, be careful that you don't fall! No temptation has seized you except what is common to man. And God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, he will also provide a way out so that you can stand up under it." (1 Cor. 10:12-13). But God also recognizes that it is humanly impossible to stay completely away from sin, and it is for this reason that He has given us the path back to Him through Jesus Christ. Paul said, "What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death? Thanks be to God—through Jesus Christ our Lord!" (Ro. 7:24-25)

Confession and Repentance

So we strive as much as is humanly possible not to sin. But what do we do when we do happen to sin? We confess our sins to God and ask His forgiveness, and then we must be confident that He has forgiven us once again. The Apostle John told us, "If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness. If we claim we have not sinned, we make him out to be a liar and his word has no place in our lives." (1 Jn. 1:8-10). We cannot claim to be without sin because we are Christians, no matter how hard we try to avoid sin. But we know that if we confess our sins and repent of them, we are forgiven.

To confess means to admit that we have done wrong. The Greek word for confession literally means "to say the same thing." The implication is that we are admitting to the sin that God already knows about, and in so doing, are "coming clean" with Him. We cannot hide our sins from God. If we try to, our lives will be adversely affected, and our walk with God will not be close. God in His wisdom will allow us to continue in our error until we come to our senses and return to Him in repentance. He does this because He has given us free will, the freedom to choose between Him and our own way. David wrote,

"Blessed is he whose transgressions are forgiven, whose sins are covered.
Blessed is the man whose sin the LORD does not count against him and in
whose spirit is no deceit.
When I kept silent, my bones wasted away through my groaning all day long.
For day and night your hand was heavy upon me; my strength was sapped as
in the heat of summer.
Then I acknowledged my sin to you and did not cover up my iniquity.
I said, "I will confess my transgressions to the LORD"— and you forgave the
guilt of my sin." (Ps. 32:1-5)

God wants us to confess our sins to Him, so that He can forgive us. If in our stubborn pride we refuse to confess our sins, He will not, and even cannot, forgive us. If, in pride, deceitfulness, or fearfulness, we try to hide our sins, hoping God will not notice, we deceive ourselves, for God already knows everything about us, including our sins.

To repent means to resolve, as much as it is humanly possible, to keep from committing that sin again. The Greek word for repentance means "a change of mind." In this sense, we come to see our sinful ways as God sees them, and begin to hate our sins as much as He hates them. We no longer desire to live in our sinful ways, but desire to change and follow God's ways. Confession and repentance, therefore, means to acknowledge before God that what we did or the way we were going was wrong, and that we no longer desire to do that thing or go that way.

A Correct View of Our Sins

In spite of God's willingness to forgive us when we sincerely confess our sins to Him, we should not treat our sins lightly, and expect easy grace in return for not putting forth much effort to avoid sin in our lives. Jerry Bridges states

"We are often drawn away from obedience by the abuse of grace. Jude speaks of certain men 'who change the grace of our God into a license for immorality' (Jude 4). We abuse grace when we think we can sin and then receive forgiveness by claiming 1 John 1:9. We abuse grace when, after sinning, we dwell on the compassion and mercy of God to the exclusion of His holiness and hatred of sin."²²

We must strive with all our effort to avoid sin, and when we have failed after all efforts to resist, we should approach God with humble and contrite hearts to confess and to receive His grace, however undeserving we may be.

Avoiding Sin

How do we go about avoiding sin? We have seen that the root cause of sin is desire. We cannot keep ourselves free from temptation, but we can learn not to desire the temptation. It is not sinful to be tempted, since temptation comes from outside of us. We sin when we give in to our desire for the object of our temptation. This may take radical action on our part, as Jesus commanded us:

"If your hand or your foot causes you to sin cut it off and throw it away. It is better for you to enter life maimed or crippled than to have two hands or two feet and be thrown into eternal fire. And if your eye causes you to sin, gouge it out and throw it away. It is better for you to enter life with one eye than to have two eyes and be thrown into the fire of hell." (Mt. 18:8-9)

²² Jerry Bridges, *The Pursuit of Holiness*, (Colorado Springs, CO, NavPress, 1978), 68.

In other words, sometimes we must get rid of the source of our temptation. We must avoid it completely, in order to be able to overcome a particular sin. This may not be possible on our own strength, but by the grace of God and with His help we can learn to submit our own wills, which are flawed, to Jesus' will, which is perfect. By nurturing this submissive desire to do God's will, we can turn our desires from worldly things to Godly things. We will look more on how to strive to eliminate sin from our lives in Chapter 8.

The Purpose of Confession

The purpose of confession and repentance is not so that we feel bad about ourselves, but so that we will feel cleansed and forgiven. Satan, who is also called the "accuser of our brethren" (Rev. 12:10, KJV²³), stands ready to point out our unworthiness to God. In the Old Testament we read, "Then he showed me Joshua the high priest standing before the Angel of the Lord, and Satan standing at his right side to accuse him." (Zech. 3:1). If we confess our sins, Satan has nothing to say against us and must remain silent. J.M. Houston writes, "It is in the confession of sin that we discover new dimensions of self and self-love that need to be dealt with."²⁴

Dietrich Bonhoeffer said, "You can hide nothing from God. The mask you wear before men will do you no good before Him. He wants to see you as you are, He wants to be gracious to you. You do not have to go on lying to yourself and your brothers, as if you were without sin; you can dare to be a sinner. Thank God for that; He loves the sinner but hates sin."²⁵

Richard J. Foster states that sin in our lives hinders our prayers. He observes, "I mean that our sin, by its very nature, separates us from God, rupturing the intimate fellowship and dulling our spiritual sensitivities. We become nearsighted and develop thickened eardrums, if you will. The result is an inability to discern the heart of God and an asking that is askew. We ask wrongly... Therefore our prayers are hindered."²⁶

Andrew Murray said, "By His Holy Spirit, He has access to our hearts and teaches us to pray by showing us the sin that hinders the prayer, or by giving us the assurance that we please God."²⁷

When we stop confessing our sins, we begin to take God's grace for granted, and our hearts drift away from Him. For this reason, we should begin our daily prayer time with confession and repentance. This involves surrendering our will to His will once again, just as we did that first time when we asked Christ to take over our lives.

Beginning our devotional time with the worship of confession and repentance has biblical precedence in the Old Testament. On the Day of Atonement, when the High Priest was to offer the sacrifices for the sins of the Israelites, he was first required to offer a bull for his own sin offering before he could make atonement for anyone else (Lev. 16:1-17). David prayed:

"You do not delight in sacrifice, or I would bring it; you do not take pleasure in burnt offerings. The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken spirit

²³ KJV, *King James Version*.

²⁴ J.M. Houston, "A Guide to Devotional Reading", *Crux*, Vol. XXII, No. 3, (Vancouver, BC, Regent College, Sept 1986), 9.

²⁵ Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Life Together*, 111.

²⁶ Richard J. Foster, *Prayer*, 183, 184.

²⁷ Andrew Murray, *With Christ in the School of Prayer*, 13.

and a contrite heart, O God, you will not despise... Then there will be righteous sacrifices, whole burnt offerings to delight you..." (Ps. 51:16-17, 19).

God spoke through the prophet Isaiah, "This is the one I esteem: he who is humble and contrite in spirit, and trembles at my word." (Isa. 66:2). The liturgy of Holy Communion starts out with the General Confession, to ensure that all believers present have confessed their sins and are forgiven. Beginning our devotional time with confession and repentance, then, puts us right before God and makes sure that there is nothing to block our prayers.

Martin Luther advised his readers to begin prayer with something like this, "O Heavenly Father, dear God, I am a poor unworthy sinner. I do not deserve to raise my eyes or hands toward thee or to pray. But because thou hast commanded us all to pray and hast promised to hear us and through thy dear Son Jesus Christ hast taught us both how and what to pray, I come to thee in obedience to thy word, trusting in thy gracious promise."²⁸

Forgiveness

We have seen in Chapter 3 that Jesus taught us the importance of forgiveness in our prayers. The reason for this is that being unforgiving toward someone is to harbour bitterness in our hearts toward that person. This is a sin against that person and a sin against God, and therefore can be a serious block to our prayers. The fact that Jesus stressed forgiveness many times, and twice in direct relationship to teachings on prayer (Mt. 6:12, 14-15; Mk. 11:25), shows that forgiveness is extremely important.

In Chapter 3, it was said that forgiveness may not be an easy thing for some people, especially if they have been hurt very deeply. But it is still necessary. Foster says, "Forgiveness does not mean that we will cease to hurt. The wounds are deep, and we may hurt for a very long time. Just because we continue to experience emotional pain does not mean that we have failed to forgive."²⁹ It does not mean that we will, or must, forget the hurt, either. "Forgive and forget" is a silly phrase that trivializes the hurts that we human beings inflict on one another, and disregards the very real pain that we experience at the hands of others. Foster goes on to say, "Forgiveness does not mean that we will forget...No, we remember, but in forgiving we no longer use the memory against others."³⁰

Forgiving does not erase the thing that the other person did to us, nor does it always mean that things will be 100% right between us again, but it will certainly be far better than it was before we forgave them. We forgive more for our own sakes than for the sake of those who hurt us. It has been said that unforgiveness is the poison we drink hoping it will hurt the other person. Forgiveness releases us from the constant burden and pain of remembering the things others have done to us. It is one of the most important steps to take in our spiritual and emotional healing.

In our daily confessions, we must remember that we ourselves have hurt others, either intentionally or unintentionally. When we consider those who hurt us, therefore, we must remember that we have done the same to others. Our daily sins often include our trespasses against others, at least in thought, if not in word or in deed, and thus we sin against God. That puts us at the same level in God's eyes as those who have hurt us. We must, then, confess our

²⁸ Martin Luther, *A Simple Way to Pray*, 194.

²⁹ Foster, *Prayer*, 187.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 187.

own sins while forgiving before God those who have trespassed against us. And we must do this seriously in our hearts, because God knows what is in our hearts, and knows if we are sincere or not.

We must forgive, therefore, just as though the people were standing in front of us and asking our forgiveness. It cannot always be possible to forgive the person directly, so we must forgive them before God. Jesus taught us to say in the Lord's Prayer, "Forgive us our trespasses, *as we forgive those who trespass against us.*" It is useful, when we are praying the Lord's Prayer, from time to time to turn this sentence around and say, "As I have forgiven others who have trespassed against me, please forgive me my trespasses." This drives home the point of having to forgive others in order to be forgiven.

Conclusion

Confession and repentance are the two most important ways that we can come to God with a humble and contrite heart. It demonstrates to God that we are aware of our sorry human state, and that it is only by His grace that we are able to come to Him at all. It shows us that we are aware that He owes us nothing, and that it is impossible for us ever to repay the debt that we owe Him. It acknowledges that it is only because of His grace that He called us from out of the world to be set apart for Him, and shows our gratitude for His mercy. It is in this way that He will be ready to pour out His love for us in the manner that He wants so much to do. When we do so, we know that we will be worthy in His eyes to receive His love.

Prayer

Father in Heaven, I come humbly before you to confess that I am a sinful person of sinful nature. I have sinned against You and against Jesus, and against my fellow human beings, in thought and word and deed, by what I have said and done and thought, and by what I have left unsaid and undone. Please forgive me my sins against You and against my fellow human beings.

I forgive from my heart all those who have sinned against me, Father. Please do not hold their sins against them on my account, for they are but sinners such as I am. Please forgive me my sins against them. Have mercy on us, for we are sinners.

I ask in Jesus' name, Amen.

Examples of Confession from the Psalms

The following are examples of confession from the Bible: Psalms 32, 38, 39, 41, 51, 27, and 25. Read each one and see how the authors cry out to God, not just to repent of their sins, but to express their profound faith in God's mercy.

Chapter 6 - The Worship of Thanksgiving

Gratitude to God

After having humbled ourselves before God through confession and repentance, we now enter into a time of adoration of God. The second part of our worship is thanksgiving, in which we thank God for all the wonderful things that He has done and is doing in our lives. This is the inward-looking part of adoration, in which we show our gratitude to God, and acknowledge that all the spiritual and material blessings that we have seen are due entirely to His grace and mercy. God owes us nothing, and we owe God everything, so it is fitting that we show our gratitude in the prayer of thanksgiving.

We must remember to thank God for the material things that we have, but these things are not permanent, and will pass away. It is far more important to thank the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit for the spiritual things they have blessed us with. As we saw in Chapter 2, each Person of the Trinity has a distinct role to play in our salvation and in our lives, so we thank each one separately for the things each has done for us. The following gives examples, but is by no means a complete list, of what They have done for us.

Thanking the Father

He Has Given Us Our Salvation. We all share in the original sin of disobedience, we are each the prodigal child who walked away from God to try to do things our own way. It is only by the Father's grace that He chose to call us by the conviction of the Holy Spirit to come back to Him through Jesus Christ. God so loved us that He came seeking us and found us, reached down and drew us up out of the mire, and caused His light to shine on us (Ps. 40:2; Isa. 9:2; Jn. 1:4). We must thank Him for calling us while we were still in darkness (1 Pet. 2:9), and for opening our eyes to the truth of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. "For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord." (Eph. 5:8).

He has given us over to Jesus. It is impossible that we came to God or came to know Christ on our own initiative or by our own understanding. Our salvation was not due to an intellectual decision on our part, but due entirely to God the Father, who, by His grace, gave us over to Jesus. Jesus said, "No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him, and I will raise him up at the last day." (Jn. 6:44). It is by the Father's love that we have come to know Jesus, to know God, and to receive salvation for eternity.

Two things that come out of this fact are that in the immediate future, our sins are forgiven, and for eternity, our names are written in the book of life. "I write to you, dear children, because your sins have been forgiven on account of his name." (1 Jn. 2:12). "...rejoice that your names are written in heaven." (Lk. 10:20).

He Has Given Us His Holy Spirit. As we saw in Chapter 2, Jesus asked the Father, and the Father sent His Holy Spirit to dwell in the hearts of all believers. The Spirit of God does many things for us, and without Him, we could not be saved or know God's truth. We must be grateful to the Father for this gift, and for all the things the Spirit does for us.

He Has Provided For Our Healing. One of the most important spiritual blessings we have from the Father is healing through the work of Jesus. This healing is of the whole person; spirit, mind, and body. God tells us directly, in the Old Testament, that He is the God who heals us, "If you listen carefully to the voice of the LORD your God and do what is right in his eyes, if

you pay attention to his commands and keep all his decrees, I will not bring on you any of the diseases I brought on the Egyptians, for I am the LORD, who heals you." (Ex. 15:26). This applies to every aspect of our healing.

This does not mean that we are completely healed already, but that we have access to His healing. We must work with God through prayer and faith to receive His healing. It may take a lifetime to receive it all, but we must thank Him for this wonderful blessing. Notice, also, that it is not a free gift, but a conditional promise. It requires us to strive, as much as is humanly possible, to be obedient to His commands and teachings. For Christians, this does not mean being obedient to the Law of Moses, as it did for the Israelites, but obeying Jesus' commands and teachings, as laid out in the four gospels. That is one of the reasons why study of Scripture is so important. We must learn Jesus' commands and teachings and put them into practice.

Being obedient to Jesus goes far beyond the Old Testament commandments. Every statement Jesus made that contained a verb in the imperative mood, such as "First go and be reconciled to your brother" (Mt. 5:24), or "Do not judge, or you too will be judged" (Mt. 7:1) are commands which we must obey if we truly love Jesus (see Jn. 14:15, 21, and 23). His commands go contrary to the instincts of our sinful nature, and if we truly want to be healed in spirit and to grow in Christ-likeness, we must not only hear His words, but put them into practice (Mt. 7:24) in order to conform our wills to God's will. Every command He gave us instructs us how to love God with all our heart, soul, mind, and strength, and how to love our neighbour as ourselves.³¹

He Provides For Our Daily Needs. God provides for our physical needs, as well. We have already looked at the following passage briefly in Chapter 1. "Do not worry then, saying, 'What will we eat?' or 'What will we drink?' or 'What will we wear for clothing?' For the Gentiles eagerly seek all these things; for your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things. But seek first His kingdom and His righteousness, and all these things will be added to you." (Mt. 6:31-33, NASB). Jesus did not mean this to be a complete list of what we will receive, but was giving examples of what we can receive, provided we are seeking God. When we are truly seeking, God will give us many other blessings as well. But we must not fall into the trap of believing it is our right to receive them or expect them as our rightful dues for being Christian. We must seek His kingdom and His righteousness, strive to enter through the narrow door, and be humbly thankful for these blessings.

He Answers Our Prayers. We saw in Chapter 3 that Jesus commanded us to ask the Father in His name. He said, "In that day you will no longer ask me anything. I tell you the truth, my Father will give you whatever you ask in my name. Until now you have not asked for anything in my name. Ask and you will receive, and your joy will be complete." (Jn. 16:23-24). He also told us, "Which of you, if his son asks for bread, will give him a stone? Or if he asks for a fish, will give him a snake? If you, then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give good gifts to those who ask him!" (Mt. 7:9-11), and in another place, said, "If you then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!" (Lk. 11:13).

It is our Father who answers our prayers, and gives us what we ask for. He does this because He loves us as His children, and we must be thankful for that.

³¹ For a good portrayal of obedience to Jesus' commands and teachings, read: John Piper, *What Jesus Demands from the World*, Wheaton, IL. Crossway Books, 2006.

Thanking Jesus

He Died For Our Sins. Jesus died on the cross to save us from our sins. Paul preached, "For what I received I passed on to you as of first importance: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures..." (1 Cor. 15:3). This atonement for our sins by His own death at the hands of man is one of the great mysteries that Christians have struggled with over the centuries. This boggles human wisdom, and seems foolishness to worldly reasoning, but is the greatest truth we can learn in understanding our salvation. If there is one thing alone that we must be eternally thankful for, it is the forgiveness of our sin brought about by Jesus' crucifixion.

He Has Healed Us. Jesus did not die just to save us from our sins, but to restore us to the original image and likeness of God by healing us. By His suffering and death on the cross, Jesus has taken upon Himself all our sins, sorrows, and sicknesses, as Isaiah prophesied 700 years before the coming of Christ. "Surely he took up our infirmities and carried our sorrows, yet we considered him stricken by God, smitten by him, and afflicted. But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was upon him, and by his wounds we are healed." (Isa. 53:4-5).

There is spiritual healing, "He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, so that we might die to sins and live for righteousness; by his wounds you have been healed." (1 Pet. 2:24). There is mental and emotional healing "Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls." (Mt. 11:28-29). "Humble yourselves, therefore, under God's mighty hand, that he may lift you up in due time. Cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you." (1Pet. 5:7). And there is physical healing, "[Jesus] drove out the spirits with a word and healed all the sick. This was to fulfill what was spoken through the prophet Isaiah: 'He took up our infirmities and carried our diseases.'" (Mt. 8:16-17).

This does not suggest that we are immediately healed when we become Christian. Rather, such healing is made available to us, and we must appropriate it by living and walking in obedience to Jesus' commands and teachings. We must allow ourselves to be healed by surrendering to God's will and humbly asking to be healed by His grace. It is important to realize that we must ask for healing and then have the faith that God will heal us.

He Is Our Intercessor. Jesus is our great intercessor before our Father. John wrote, "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 Jn. 2:1). This does not mean that Jesus has to plead on our behalf before a stern and skeptical God. Our redemption is the Father's plan, for He loves us. Jesus intercedes for us in our human weakness when we fail from time to time. Although Jesus is fully God, He was also fully human, and while He was on this Earth, was subject to all the same temptations common to humanity (Heb. 3:14-16), so He understands our failings.

He Is Our Shepherd. Jesus said, "I am the good shepherd; I know my sheep and my sheep know me—just as the Father knows me and I know the Father—and I lay down my life for the sheep." (Jn. 10:14-15). Jesus continues to guide us in His paths of righteousness, and walks with us through this valley of the shadow of death. He restores our souls, and grants us rest from the burdens of our worldly existence.

He Is Our Teacher. Jesus left us with all His commands and teachings in the four gospels, which we must not simply agree with, but must learn and strive to put into practice, as Jesus told us. He taught us, "Whoever has my commands and obeys them, he is the one who

loves me. He who loves me will be loved by my Father, and I too will love him and show myself to him...If anyone loves me, he will obey my teaching. My Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him." (Jn. 14:21, 23). "Therefore everyone who hears these words of mine and puts them into practice is like a wise man who built his house on the rock. The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house; yet it did not fall, because it had its foundation on the rock." (Mt. 7:24-25).

Jesus' commands and teachings have nothing to do with the cultural rules and standards of behavior the Church imposed on its adherents in generations past. There are over 100 of Jesus' commands in the Gospels, and not surprisingly, about half of them teach us how to love God with all our heart, soul, mind, and strength, and the other half teach us how to love our neighbour as ourselves. They are the key to our spiritual growth and maturity.

It is by learning the commands and teachings of Jesus and putting them into practice that we grow in Christ and we participate with God in advancing His kingdom on Earth. By making them our guide for our lives, we can withstand all the storms and troubles this life can throw at us. Therefore, we thank Him for having taught us the true Way of Holiness.

Thanking the Holy Spirit

He Convicts Us Of Our Sins. The Holy Spirit convicts us of our sins, so that we may confess and repent of them. Jesus taught, "Unless I go away, the Counselor will not come to you; but if I go, I will send him to you. When he comes, he will convict the world of guilt in regard to sin and righteousness and judgment..." (Jn. 16:7-8). It is through the work of the Holy Spirit that we first became aware of our sinfulness, were convicted of our sins, and were convinced of the gospel message of Christ. Without this work of the Holy Spirit, we would never become aware of our sinful nature, and thus not be aware of our need for a Savior. It is because of this conviction of our sins by the Holy Spirit that we came to put our faith in Jesus.

He Is Our Counselor, Our Comforter, and Our Helper. Jesus refers to the Spirit by using the Greek word *parakletos* (Jn. 14:16), which is translated in various versions of the Bible as Counselor (NIV), Comforter (KJV), or Helper (NASB). It can also mean intercessor, or consoler. It is through the Holy Spirit that the Father guides us and comforts us in all situations.

He Is Our Teacher and Guide Into All Truth. It is the Spirit within us who teaches us the things of God and opens our eyes to reveal God's truth to us. Jesus said, "But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name, He will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all that I said to you." (Jn. 14:26, NASB). "But when he, the Spirit of truth, comes, he will guide you into all truth." (Jn. 16:13). Without the Spirit, we cannot know the truth. Paul said, "We have not received the spirit of the world but the Spirit who is from God, that we may understand what God has freely given us...The man without the Spirit does not accept the things that come from the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him, and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually discerned." (1 Co. 2:12, 14). It is only through the inspiration of the Holy Spirit that we can learn and understand the things of God.

He Gives Us Words To Speak. When we are truly striving to do God's will, the Holy Spirit will give us the words to speak. Jesus taught, "Whenever you are arrested and brought to trial, do not worry beforehand about what to say. Just say whatever is given you at the time, for it is not you speaking, but the Holy Spirit." (Mk. 13:11). The deacon Stephen had this experience: "These men began to argue with Stephen, but they could not stand up against his wisdom or the Spirit by whom he spoke." (Ac. 6:9-10). This does not mean that all Christians speak the truth

all the time through the Spirit. The Spirit will give us words to speak only when we have been striving to seek God's kingdom and His righteousness, and only when we need words beyond our own reasoning.

He Intercedes On Our Behalf. Paul wrote, "In the same way, the Spirit helps us in our weakness. We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groans that words cannot express. And he who searches our hearts knows the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints in accordance with God's will." (Ro. 8:26-27).

God expects us to come to Him in prayer and to work with Him to become mature in our faith. But there are times when we become so overwhelmed by our troubles that we can only groan inwardly. When we are struggling in prayer, but find ourselves at a loss as to how to pray, the Holy Spirit intercedes for us before the Father with groans our own words cannot express.

Conclusion

This chapter does not by any means offer a complete list of all that we can thank God for, but simply provides examples of the kinds of spiritual blessings for which we should be eternally grateful. You may, in your own devotional time, be inspired to give thanks for other things, or in your Bible studies, see more things in the scripture that you could include in your thanksgiving.

Synopsis

These are some of the things that we can thank God for:

God the Father:

- His grace, His mercy, and His Love
- Lifting us up out of the darkness into His light
- Washing us clean with Jesus' blood
- Forgiving our sins
- Healing us in spirit, body, and mind
- Restoring our souls
- Giving us over to Jesus that our sins are forgiven, that we are healed, that we have rest for our souls, and our names are written in the book of life
- Sending His Holy Spirit to dwell within us, to convict us of our sins and bring us to repentance, to counsel us, comfort us, and help us, to teach us all things and guide us into all truth, and to be the seal of our promised inheritance in Christ Jesus
- The wonderful blessings He is showering down upon us
- Hearing our righteous prayers and answering them

Jesus:

- Loving us and holding us in His love
- Teaching us the Way of Holiness
- Showing us the Father
- Dying on the cross to save us from eternal death
- Taking up our sins and trespasses, our iniquities and transgressions
- Taking up our infirmities and diseases, our weaknesses and pains
- Taking up our anxieties and fears, our troubles and sorrows
- For healing us by His stripes (wounds)
- Being our intercessor before our Father in Heaven

- For asking our Father to send His Holy Spirit to us
- Being our good shepherd

The Holy Spirit

- Loving us and dwelling within us
- Counselling us, comforting us, and helping us
- Strengthening us and protecting us
- Convicting us of our sins and bringing us to repentance
- Teaching us all things and guiding us into all truth
- Being the power of God within us
- Giving us our good gifts of the Spirit and talents
- Giving us words to speak and write
- Being the seal of our promised inheritance in Christ

Prayer

Start off your prayer time with the prayer of repentance from last week. Then pray prayers of thanksgiving to the Father, to Jesus, and to the Holy Spirit. If you find it helpful, choose one or two of the items from each of the lists above, and pray them from memory. Add others from time to time until you have expanded your list of thanksgiving.

Examples of Thanksgiving from the Psalms

The following are examples of thanksgiving from the Bible: Psalms 136, 118, 107, 105, 100, 75, and 30. Read each one and see how the authors thank God not so much for material things, but for spiritual blessings.

Chapter 7 - The Worship of Praise

The Order of Praise

The third part of our worship of God is praise. Some people, such as John Maxwell and Bill Hybels, reverse praise and thanksgiving. Some advocate the order adoration (praise), confession, thanksgiving, and supplication because it fits into the handy acronym ACTS. But Bill Hybels confesses that after he has done expressing thanks, he's ready to go back into praise. He writes, "By the time I've gone through each category [of thanksgiving], I'm ready to go back to adoration [praise] for all God has done for me."³² This is probably because praise should properly come after thanksgiving, not before. Just as we saw in Chapter 4 the first stage of our prayers was the inward looking stage of our development in prayers for ourselves, after which we start to look outward to pray for others, our worship should start inward, with thanksgiving, and then move outward, to praise.

Praise is the outward looking part of our worship. Richard Foster states: "To the extent we can draw a line of demarcation, praise lies on a higher plane than thanksgiving. In his classical work entitled simply *Prayer*, Ole Hallesby observes, 'When I give thanks, my thoughts still circle about myself to some extent. But in praise my soul ascends to self-forgetting adoration, seeing and praising only the majesty and power of God, His grace and redemption.'"³³

Terry Law compares thanksgiving to the Jews of old entering through the gates of the temple into the outer court, and praise as the priests entering into the temple itself. He writes, "Thanksgiving relates to what God has done. As we come to the outer court of the temple preparing to come into the Holy of Holies, we begin with a recounting of what the Lord has done... We move then into the holy place where we offer up praise."³⁴

Worship is an orderly communication with God that can be compared with building a house. Confession is like digging the hole for the foundation. Thanksgiving is like making the foundation, upon which the house, which is praise, can stand. Just as we do not build a house and then prepare its foundation, we should follow the orderly steps of worship as well. Confession cleanses our spirits and makes us right before God. Thanksgiving expresses our gratitude for what He has done for us. Praise expresses in a powerful way our acknowledgement of the greatness of God.

John Maxwell states, "Thank God by recognizing what He has done. Praise God by recognizing who He is."³⁵ Richard Foster writes, "There are two sides to the prayer of adoration: thanksgiving and praise. The usual distinction between these two experiences is this: in thanksgiving we give glory to God for *what he has done for us*; in praise we give glory to God for *who he is in himself*."³⁶

To find out how to praise God best, we must search the Bible for images of God. As was quoted from Eastman and Hayford in Chapter 1, "To worship God effectively we must have a

³² Bill Hybels, *Too Busy Not to Pray*, (Downers Grove, IL, InterVarsity Press, 1988), 57.

³³ Richard J. Foster, *Prayer*, 84.

³⁴ Terry Law, *The Power of Praise and Worship*, (Tulsa, OK, Victory House, 1985), 140.

³⁵ John Maxwell, *One Hour with God*, (San Diego, CA, INJOY, Inc., 1994).

³⁶ Richard J. Foster, *Prayer*, 83.

proper view of Him - but such a view only comes to those who take time to study God's nature and character as revealed in His Word. Those who plunge deepest into God's Word rise highest in their praises of His glory."

The Effect of Praise

Wesley Duewel explains how praise sets us up for prevailing in our prayers of petition and intercession.

"What does praise have to do with prevailing prayer? Praise both prepares for prevailing prayer and is itself a holy means of prevailing during our prayer.

1. *Praise focuses our hearts on God.* Praise lifts up our hearts to God in adoration, worship, and love. The most important part of prevailing prayer is that it is made to God. To pray worthily, we must be supremely conscious of God. The problem or need about which we pray may seem overwhelming, but we must see God infinitely greater than our problem, able to meet all our need. Praise focuses our whole being on God."³⁷

And that is not all. Duewel continues, "*Praise begets and increases faith.* The more you praise God, the more you become God-conscious and absorbed in His greatness, wisdom, faithfulness, and love...Faith comes through God's Word and through praise. Faith grows as you praise the Lord."³⁸

Praise brings us profoundly closer to God than any other form of prayer or any other activity that we may engage in for God. Worship, and especially the worship of praise, elevates our consciousness of God.

Also, as Wesley Duewel points out above, praise paves the way for our prayers for ourselves and for others. This is why it is good to worship God in confession, thanksgiving, and praise first in our devotional time before offering up our prayer requests. Worship in prayer blasts through the darkness and connects us with God more profoundly than any other thing we can do. It leaves nothing in the way to hinder our prayers.

Further, worshipping out loud causes Satan and his demons to flee at the sound of these words. They cannot stand to be around when we worship this way.

Praising the Father

God the Father gives us tremendous images of Himself in the Bible, and mostly in the Old Testament. He reveals Himself to us by giving us an idea of who He is through a number of names found in the Bible, each of which describes something of Himself. In praising God, we can use these names as verbal icons, or word pictures, which help us conceive an image of God which can help us worship Him. The reason God gives us so many verbal images is that He is so great and complex that no one name or description can accurately describe who God is. Even when we put all the names and descriptions of God together, the image of God in our minds and hearts that these give us falls far short of reality. This kind of praise is our declaration of how great God is and how humble we are. It reaffirms our faith and binds us to God.

³⁷ Wesley Duewel, *Mighty Prevailing Prayer*, 167.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 168.

The Names of God. The very first name of God in the Bible is found in the first verse of Genesis, which is the Hebrew *Elohim*, **God, the Creator** of heaven and earth and all that is in them. God is the creator and the owner of all that exists, and no created being has any claim to any part of that creation, other than that which God allows. The name *Elohim* occurs 33 times in the first 34 verses of the Bible, and over 2000 times in the Old Testament.

In Genesis 14, we see Him as *El Elyon*, **God Most High**, the God of Melchizedek, the priest-king of Salem whom Abraham honoured by giving him a tithe of his plunder from battle. Melchizedek was honoured above most other figures in the Old Testament. The Messiah was to be a priest forever in the order of Melchizedek (Ps. 110), which was fulfilled in Jesus (Heb. 5:6, 6:20). Melchizedek, then, worshipped the only true God, God Most High.

In Genesis 17, when God made His covenant of circumcision with Abram, and changed his name to Abraham, He revealed His name as *El Shaddai*, which is normally translated as **God Almighty**. It comes from the Hebrew word *sadu*, which means "mountain". *El Shaddai* is also taken to mean the **God who sustains, nourishes, and satisfies** all He has created, although some scholars take this as a mistranslation.

When Abraham was in Bersheeba, in Genesis 21, he called upon the Lord using the name *El Olam*, **the Eternal God**. This recognizes the fact that God has always existed, and will exist forever. In Revelation, the Father calls Himself **the Alpha and the Omega**, who is, and who was, and who is to come (Rev. 1:8). This is in keeping with the name, **Ancient of Days**, (Dan. 7:9, 13, 22) spoken of by Daniel in his apocalyptic vision of the battle between the Messiah and the forces of evil (Dan. 7). Here, the Father, the Ancient of Days, gave Jesus, the Son of Man, authority and power over all the Earth.

When God called Moses at the burning bush, he revealed His name to be YHWH (Ex. 3:14), which in the past was incorrectly written in English as Jehovah. This name was considered so sacred by the ancient Hebrews that they were not even allowed to pronounce it, and spelled it without vowels as YHWH. Scholars now know that the name is more correctly written Yahweh, and sounds like the Hebrew for "I Am". The meaning of the name, however, means more properly, "He who is", or "He who is truly present". God was literally saying to Moses, "I Am Who I Am", but the concept that it puts across is that He is **the Self-existing God**, the God who exists independently of the physical universe that we can see and touch. Actually, the sacred name YHWH occurs frequently in the opening chapters of Genesis, often combined with the name *Elohim*. YHWH was used by the Hebrews as the proper name for the God of Israel.

The name Yahweh is joined with other names in several places in the Bible to describe God. In Genesis 22, when God provided a ram as a substitute sacrifice for Isaac, Abraham called the holy place *Yahweh-Jireh*, **the Lord Will Provide**. The Father provides us with everything we need to live, as was seen in the Sermon on the Mount (Mt. 6:25-34), and through His Holy Spirit He provides us with the gifts and abilities we need to do His will. He provides us with the means to do all the things that we would not be able to accomplish on our own strength.

In the last chapter we saw that in Exodus 15 God called Himself **the God Who Heals**, or *Yahweh-Raphah*. This applies to our whole being; spirit, mind and body. This does not mean that He always heals us from all things instantly on our demand. God heals us according to His will and in His timing.

When God helped the Israelites in the defeat of the Amalekites in Exodus 17, Moses erected an altar to *Yahweh-Nissi*, **the Lord is my Banner**, referring to the war banners that the Hebrew troops followed in battle. As troops of old used to keep their eyes on their unit banner

and go wherever their commander led the banner bearer, we keep our eyes fixed on God and go where He leads us to do battle against the kingdom of darkness.

In Leviticus 20, the Lord warned Moses that the Israelites must consecrate themselves and keep His statutes and practice them, for He is *Yahweh-m'Kaddesh*, **the Lord Who Sanctifies** them, or keeps them holy. In the same way, we cannot be righteous in ourselves, but God imputes righteousness on us by washing us with Jesus' blood

Jesus calls the Father *Abba* (Mk. 14:36), which is an Aramaic word that is a more familiar term than the formal "Father", but it is not the equivalent of our term, "daddy", which has been popularized recently. The Jews of Jesus' day were very respectful to their fathers, and even a familiar term would be one of respect. We see in Romans 8:15 and in Galatians 4:6 that the early churches used this name commonly when praying to God, saying "Abba, Father". We cannot be casual, familiar, or flippant in approaching God. We may hear some who start their prayers, "Hey, Dad...", believing that this is the concept of the name *Abba*. However, this irreverent approach to God does not convey the reverent attitude toward God that we should have.

There are many other names in the Bible that can be used to praise God. In understanding what these names mean, we can better understand God's nature and character, and can praise Him more effectively.

Praising Jesus

The Names of Jesus. Jesus has many names in the Bible as well. From John 1:1-2, we see that **He is the Word, He is God, and He is with God, He was with God in the Beginning.** John's prophesy in Revelation tells us that Jesus' name is **the Word of God** (Rev. 19:13). The Greek word for Word in these passages is *logos*, which does not mean just "word", but has the much broader meaning of divine wisdom, logic, and reason. To say that He was with God in the beginning tells us that He is not created but begotten of the Father. Jesus was brought forth as the first of God's works (Pro. 8:22), He is the firstborn over all creation (Col. 1:15), the one who was born of God (1Jn. 5:18). He is God in substance, and He is eternal in nature, just as the Father is. When replying to a group of people who were challenging His teaching, Jesus told them, "Before Abraham was born, I am." (Jn. 8:58). This speaks of His eternal nature, identifying Him with the Father, who revealed Himself to Moses as *Yahweh* - I am who I am. (Ex. 3:14).

In John 2, John the Baptist called Him **the Lamb of God**, who has taken away the sins of the world. This refers to the Passover Lamb, which the Jews sacrificed every year in a great feast for the atonement for sins. The Passover Lamb was the foreshadowing of Jesus, whom God sacrificed for our sins and the sins of the whole world (1 Jn. 2:2).

In Heaven, Jesus is honoured as **the Lamb Who Was Slain** (Rev. 5:6, 12), in recognition of this sacrifice that has already been made. No other sacrifice is necessary, no other acts of penance are needed by us to atone for our sins, because Jesus gave Himself as the full and final sacrifice, once and for all, on our behalf. All we have to do is appropriate this salvation by confessing our sins and believing in and humbly accepting the finished work of Jesus.

In Matthew 16, Peter declared that Jesus is **the Christ (or Messiah), the Son of the Living God.** The entire Old Testament points to the Messiah who was to come, and Jesus is that Messiah. This is what Jesus meant when He said, "Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them." (Mt. 5:17). The Law

was the Torah, the five books of Moses, and the Prophets were all the rest of the Jewish holy books. Christians call the "Law and the Prophets" the Old Testament. Jesus is the fulfillment of the entire purpose of the Old Testament, which speaks from beginning to end of the coming Messiah, the Savior of the World.

The last chapter of the Old Testament gives us the name **the Sun of Righteousness** (Mal. 4:2), and in the last chapter of the New Testament, Jesus calls Himself **the Bright and Morning Star** (Rev. 22:16). Both of these terms are poetic metaphors for the Messiah, who, though He is not God the Father Himself, is God the Son, the dawning of righteousness for all humankind on a dark and sinful world.

In John 14, Jesus called Himself **the Way, the Truth, and the Life**. The Way refers to the Way of Holiness (Isa. 35:8), the way prepared by God for His righteous followers. The Truth refers to the truth of God. When Jesus prayed for His disciples, He asked the Father, "Sanctify them by the truth; your word is truth." (Jn. 17:17). The Life refers to the eternal life that the Father has given us through Jesus (Jn. 3:16). Jesus is the Way of Holiness, He is the Truth of God, and He is Eternal Life for all those who put their faith in Him.

Jesus referred to Himself frequently **as the Son of Man**, which identified Him with the messianic passage in Daniel in which we see God the Father (the Ancient of Days) giving authority, glory, and sovereign power to the Son of Man over "all peoples, nations, and men of every language" (Dan. 7:13-14. See also Mt. 24:30; Mk. 13:26; Lk. 21:27). Jesus identified with this passage again when He said, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me." (Mt. 28:18). In keeping with this, in Revelation we read that Jesus had a name written on Him that is **King of kings and Lord of lords** (Rev. 19:16), showing His supreme authority over all kings, peoples, nations, and men of every language, given to Him by His Father.

Jesus said that He is **the Good Shepherd** (Jn. 10:11). The Old Testament has several references to God being a shepherd for His people (eg. Ps. 23; Ps. 28:9; Isa. 40:11). This is poetic metaphor describing God being dedicated to His people as a shepherd in biblical times was dedicated and attentive to his flock. A shepherd would care for and protect his sheep against all threats, and would stand between them and harm's way to defend them. This analogy would have been very obvious to the Jewish audience of the day. Jesus used many pastoral references to describe Himself, since it was a way of life all the people would have been familiar with.

Isaiah prophesied in Isaiah 9 that the Messiah would be called **Wonderful, Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace**.

Wonderful. The Hebrew word *pele'* is a noun translated as "wonderful", and almost always refers to the miraculous works of God. When Jesus revealed Himself to Samson's parents (Jdg. 13:18), and they asked His name, He replied using a closely related word, which means "wonderful", or "beyond comprehension". We see this concept in John's vision in which he sees Jesus as a rider on a horse, and on Him is a name only He can understand (Rev. 19:12). The Apostle Paul quotes an early Christian hymn, which tells us that the Father has given Jesus "the name that is above all names" (Php. 2:9). Names have power, and this name gives Jesus power beyond our comprehension.

Counselor. Jesus was sent as our counselor as well as our savior. All His commands and teachings are Godly counsel, meant to guide us in the way of holiness. After His resurrection, He asked the Father to send us another Counselor, the Holy Spirit, to be our constant guide, and to reveal God's truth to us.

Mighty God. This speaks to the deity of Christ, the fact that He is both fully human and fully God.

Everlasting (or Eternal) Father. This does not mean that Jesus is the same as the Father, since we saw in Chapter 2 that the Father is the head of Christ (1 Cor. 11:3). "Everlasting" speaks to the eternal nature of Jesus, who is not created, but exists for eternity with the Father. "Father", which has the meaning in Hebrew of "ancestor", speaks to Jesus' position in the line of David, who was one of the "fathers" of Israel, just as Abraham was regarded as the father of Israel (see Jn. 8:39, Lk. 16:24). The Messiah was to be of the line of David, and thus was to be a "father" to future generations of Israel.

Prince of Peace. Jesus is the Son of the God of Peace (Heb. 13:20), and therefore He is the Prince of Peace.

In Revelation, we read that Jesus is **the Amen, the Faithful and True Witness, the Ruler of God's Creation** (Rev. 3:14), and that He is **Faithful and True** (Rev. 19:11). This gives us absolute assurance that Jesus is never changing (Heb. 13:8), that He is faithful, and that He will never waiver from His purpose for our salvation until He has put all enemies under His feet (1 Cor. 15:24-28, see Ps. 110:1).

Jesus is the Truth that comes from God. Jesus said, "If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples. Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free." (Jn. 8:31-32). Note that we first have to hold to His teaching, that is, to demonstrate our faith in the strength of His teachings. Then the Holy Spirit will guide us into his truth, and that truth will mean freedom from bondage to the lies and deceptions of the world and of Satan.

Jeremiah prophesied that the Messiah would be called **Lord Our Righteousness** (Jer. 23:6), so Jesus is the righteousness that comes from God. Paul wrote, "But now a righteousness from God, apart from the Law, to which the Law and the Prophets testify. This righteousness from God comes through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe." (Ro. 3:21-22). The moment we put our faith in Jesus, God imputed (or declared) Jesus' righteousness into us to make up for our lack of righteousness. This imputed righteousness will sustain us through all trials when we put our unwavering faith in God.

There are many other names for Jesus as well. Knowing these names and using them in our praise-worship impresses into our hearts the greatness, the majesty, and the supernatural qualities of our Lord and Savior.

Praising the Holy Spirit

Although the Bible records many instances of the faithful praising the Father and Jesus, in no place does it record anyone praising the Holy Spirit. This does not mean that we should not praise the Spirit, for neither does the Bible prohibit praising Him. The Spirit is a distinct Person of the Trinity and is fully God, who lives in each believer and works with us to help us grow in spirit.

In John 14:15, we see that the Spirit is **our Counsellor, our Comforter, and our Helper**. The Father, and Jesus are enthroned in Heaven, but they live in our hearts through the Holy Spirit. He is **our Teacher** (Jn. 14:26) and **our Guide into all truth** (Jn. 16:13). He is **the One who intercedes on our behalf with groans our words cannot express** (Ro. 8:26). The Spirit is **the One who convicts us of our sins** (Jn. 16:8) in order that we can confess our sins, repent of them, and receive God's forgiveness. He is **the Giver of our gifts of the Spirit** (1 Co.

12:4-11). He is also **the Seal of our promised inheritance in Christ** (Eph. 1:13-14). These are examples of the nature of the Spirit that we can use to help us praise Him.

The Value of Worship Music

Worship music should be made an important part of our lives. By listening to worshipful music, especially those songs that have a deep spiritual impact on us, we fill our hearts with something that brings us closer to God. Songs and music have a particular place in our hearts that the spoken word does not. A song or piece of music can echo through our heads in a way that transcends mere words. If the song is a worshipful one, then it brings us closer to God at a time when we might be busy at our work or another activity. One of the most significant benefits of steeping ourselves in such music is that in times of need, the Holy Spirit will cause us to recall a certain song that seems to keep repeating itself in our hearts, as if in answer to our cries. God can, sometimes, speak to us through the words of a song that the Spirit puts into our hearts. To have a song of praise going through our heads when we are occupied with something else is just as worshipful as stopping to offer up a word of praise. But simply singing or listening to worship music is by no means a substitute for a proper devotional time between ourselves and God, done in the quiet of our special place of prayer.

Many Christians incorrectly equate worship with music and singing. Some churches call their music ministry their "Worship Ministry", and call their singers and musicians their "Worship Team". Songs and music are not worship. That is not to say that they cannot be worshipful. They can be powerful aids to worship, but they are not worship in and of themselves. Worship comes from the heart of the believer, and can be silent or expressed in words. The words can be spoken in prayer or they can be sung to music. But true worship is in the attitude of the heart, not in the words or in the music. True worship must come from our own hearts and our own mouths.

Exuberant singing to a dynamic Christian band may give us a good feeling, but secular people get a "high" from listening to their favorite rock bands as well. We must not mistake the feeling we get from expressive music and singing for the presence of God. The true presence of God that we feel should be the same, whether we are listening to a Christian band, praying with a group of believers, or sitting by ourselves in the quiet of our personal prayer time.

The Importance of Praise

Praise is the highest form of worship. Throughout the Bible, we read of no other form of worship that is higher. In John's description of his vision of heaven, we read:

"Then I heard every creature in heaven and on earth and under the earth and on the sea, and all that is in them, singing:

"To him who sits on the throne and to the Lamb
be praise and honor and glory and power,
for ever and ever!"

The four living creatures said, "Amen," and the elders fell down and worshiped." (Rev. 5:13-14)

Praise is given to God by the greatest creatures in heaven. God deserves our humble worship through confession, thanksgiving and praise as well. Peter wrote:

"As you come to him, the living Stone—rejected by men but chosen by God and precious to him—you also, like living stones, are being built into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood, offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ... But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light."
(1 Pet. 2:4-5, 9)

The worship of God is the sacrifice that Christians offer up to God. Just as the sacrifices of the ancient Jews were offered on the altar as an aroma "good and pleasing to God", so are our sacrifices of confession, thanksgiving, and praise a Christian aroma "good and pleasing to God."

Conclusion

The prayers of worship – confession, thanksgiving, and praise – are by far the greatest means we have available to bring us closer to God. It is in humbling ourselves in this manner and pouring our hearts out to Him that He will in turn confer upon us the greatest expression of His grace by filling us with His Holy Spirit, and we will experience His presence. By coming close to God in worshipful prayer, our faith is increased, because we come to know His grace and His mercy, and to know Him for who He is, and we feel the power of the Holy Spirit within us. This form of worship also has the effect of pushing back our spiritual enemy and rendering him ineffective to hamper us.

James wrote, "Submit yourselves, then, to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. Come near to God and He will come near to you...Humble yourselves to the Lord, and he will lift you up." (Jas. 4:7-8, 10). God has proven His love for us, and now we must demonstrate our love for Him by drawing closer to Him in worship. When we do so, God will in turn draw near to us, so that we can feel His presence in a powerful way. By making this the most significant part of our devotional time each day, we will be assured that our hearts will be filled with the Holy Spirit. We will also know the true joy that comes from God, not a feeling of fun or happiness, but an overwhelming joy that permeates every nerve and fibre of our being.

We receive this filling of the Holy Spirit, not because we deserve it for saying a few trite prayers, but because we have truly repented of our sinful selves and come to God in humble obedience, and then have glorified His holy character in thanksgiving and praise. Jesus told the Samaritan woman at Jacob's well, "Yet a time is coming and has now come when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for they are the kind of worshipers the Father seeks. God is spirit, and his worshipers must worship in spirit and in truth." (Jn. 4:23-24, NASB). It is in confession, thanksgiving, and praise that we best worship our Father in spirit and in truth.

Synopsis

These are some of the things we can praise God for. Just as in the chapter on thanksgiving, this is not an exhaustive list, but only a sampling of what you will find in the Bible:

God the Father:

- *El Elyon*, God Most High
- The One True Living God
- *Elohim*, the Creator of Heaven and Earth and all that is in them
- *El Shaddai*, God Almighty, nurturer, sustainer, and satisfier of all He has created
- *El Olam*, the Eternal God, the Alpha and the Omega, who was, is now, and evermore shall be
- *Yahweh*, the Self-existing God, the great God of Moses and the Israelites
- *Yahweh-Jireh*, the God Who Provides for our every need
- *Yahweh-Raphah*, the God Who Heals us
- *Yahweh-Nissi*, God is our Banner
- *Yahweh-m'Kaddesh*, the God Who Sanctifies us
- *Abba*, Our loving Father

Jesus:

- God, the Son of the Living God
- King of kings, and Lord of lords
- Wonderful, Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace
- The Sun of Righteousness, the Bright and Morning Star
- The Way, the Truth, and the Life
- The Messiah, The Christ
- The Holy One of God
- The Lamb of God
- The Lamb Who was Slain
- The Son of Man
- Our Good Shepherd

The Holy Spirit

- Our Counsellor, our Comforter, our Helper
- Our Strengthenener and our Protector
- The One who intercedes on our behalf with groans our words cannot express
- The One who convicts us in our hearts of our sins and trespasses and brings us to repentance before our Father
- Our Teacher and our Guide into all truth
- The power of God within us, around us, and among us
- The Giver of our gifts of the Spirit
- The seal of our promised inheritance in Christ

Prayer

Start off your prayer time with your prayers of confession and thanksgiving. Then offer prayers of praise to the Father and to Jesus. As you did with thanksgiving, perhaps choose one or two of the items listed above for each of the Father, Jesus, and the Holy Spirit and pray them from memory. Then add more items from time to time.

Examples of Praise from the Psalms

The following are examples of praise from the Bible: Psalms 9, 34, 106, 112, 116-117, 135, and 138. Read each one and see how the authors praise God.

Section 3 – Introduction – Petition and Intercession, and Factors Affecting our Prayers

Section 3 takes a look at prayers of petition and intercession and various factors that can affect our prayers. Worshipping God brings us close to God and allows us to experience His presence and to feel His love for us. Petition and intercession are the methods by which we take that knowledge and experience and apply them in practical ways to pray for ourselves and others.

Petition means praying for ourselves, and intercession means praying for other people and situations. A great lesson to learn about prayers of petition and intercession is to keep them simple, direct, and to the point. Many words will not make our prayers more effective, so we should spend a moment beforehand thinking of just what the situation is and planning how most effectively to pray for it. In this moment of reflection, be open to the guidance of the Holy Spirit, who will guide our thoughts and our understanding to help us pray more deeply.

As we saw in Chapter 4, we will not all jump into petition and intercession at a deep spiritual level. As in any activity, we have to go through a learning process. But rest assured, God gives us grace for where we are in our walk with Him and will answer the simple prayers of new Christians just as readily as those of mature Christians. In fact, many new Christians find their prayers answered in more direct and evident ways than those who have been Christians for a long time. This is because new Christians tend to pray with the simple faith that is submissive to God, and God answers their prayers quickly to increase their faith. God expects more of mature Christians, and wants them to pray at a greater level that reflects their faith, knowledge, and experience.

There is nothing wrong with having a standard prayer which you pray every day for yourself or for others, as long as the prayer is inspired through the Holy Spirit. Repetition of prayers does not show a lack of imagination or lack of faith. Jesus gave us what we call the Lord's Prayer, which we repeat frequently. As a matter of fact, the line in the Lord's Prayer, "give us this day our daily bread", indicates that He intended us to pray this prayer every day. Closing our daily prayer time with the Lord's Prayer is a very good way to end our devotional time.

Chapter 8 - Petition - Prayer for Ourselves

The Importance of Praying for Ourselves

As we saw in Chapter 3, as Jesus taught us, when we have finished our worship of God, we should then offer up our prayer requests for ourselves. This kind of prayer is called petition, which means asking humbly but boldly for ourselves. Richard Foster asserts, "Petitionary Prayer remains primary throughout our lives because we are forever dependant on God...Petition, then is not a lower form of prayer. It is our staple diet. In a childlike expression of our faith we bring our daily needs and desires to our heavenly Father."³⁹

The Gospels record even Jesus petitioning for Himself on several occasions. If the Son of God must pray to the Father on His own behalf, how much more must we weak and frail human beings do so.

I was once discussing this in a class of adults, and one lady said that she never prayed for herself, because that was selfish. She said we should pray for others and not ourselves. Her misconception was not only contrary to the teachings of the Bible, but may have also have been false humility on her part.

Not praying for ourselves may be also the result of low self-esteem and a low sense of self-worth based on our childhood experiences of having our spirits crushed by our parents and teachers, the very people who should have been building us up. This leaves us thinking we are unworthy to ask anything for ourselves. But if God has thought us worthy of becoming His children through our confession of faith in Jesus, then we are truly worthy to ask God for our own selves, because He loves us and wants us to ask.

We cannot neglect our own health, whether it be physical, mental, or spiritual, and we appropriate healing from God by asking for ourselves in prayer.

Why We Must Pray for Ourselves

Jesus did not tell us that we should be cautious in our requests. On several occasions He commanded us on no uncertain terms, "ASK!", and assured us that everyone who asks, receives (Mt. 7:8). As we saw in Chapter 3, He also instructed us in Luke 11:5-10 and Luke 18:1-8 to ask with persistence. We should not be timid in our requests, or wonder how God will feel about our personal requests.

God longs to pour out His blessings on the world, but will not do so unless we ask. We in our disobedience walked away from God, and in essence, told Him that we wanted to do things our own way. For this reason, He, in His perfect love, will not interfere with our lives unless we request it. But He yearns to be involved in our lives, if only we would ask! Just as Jesus required blind Bartimaeus to ask for his sight, even though Jesus know what he wanted, so God requires us to ask Him for what we need.

Wesley Duewel writes, "It is always God's basic will to bless. We do not persuade God to be merciful – He is already merciful. We do not need to persuade Him in manifest love – His very nature guarantees that He will always love to the limits of what is best. We only ask God to manifest what He so infinitely already is."⁴⁰

³⁹ Richard J. Foster, *Prayer*, 179-180.

⁴⁰ Wesley Duewel, *Mighty Prevailing Prayer*, 83.

Richard Foster states, "God delights in our asking. He is pleased with our asking. His heart is warmed by our asking."⁴¹ And God will grant us any reasonable request. Jesus said, "If you, then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give good gifts to those who ask Him?" (Mt. 7:11).

God requires us to ask Him for His blessings in part to help us gain the confidence to come to Him with our requests. He is teaching us to trust Him, and wants us to approach Him with boldness. Boldness does not mean cockiness or arrogance, but the assurance that God has given us permission to ask, and wants us to ask.

Using Our Faith

One thing that we do not have to pray for is faith. God has already given each of us the full measure of faith that He intends us to have (Ro. 12:3). What He wants us to do is exercise that faith by using the faith that we have. Once, the disciples asked Jesus to increase their faith, but He gave them no formula for doing so. "The apostles said to the Lord, 'Increase our faith!' He replied, 'If you have faith as small as a mustard seed, you can say to this mulberry tree, 'Be uprooted and planted in the sea,' and it will obey you.' " (Lk. 17:5-6). If anyone needed increased faith, it was the Apostles, who would soon be required to do great works for God. But Jesus did not give them faith – He told them simply to use the faith they already had.

We are to use our faith until it is strong, and then, because it is strong, we will use it powerfully.

We saw in the last chapter that we can grow in our faith by worshipping God, especially through praise. We can also increase our faith by searching the scriptures and seeking to understand more about God and His ways. But the surest way to grow in faith is to use our faith and trust in God to answer our prayers. This can be demonstrated by our bold "Amen" at the end of our prayers.

Being Specific in Prayer

God wants to hear our prayers, but He wants us to pray in specific detail. A heartfelt cry for mercy will bring the Lord to respond with the warmth of His love, but He will not act upon this alone to solve the problem that led to our plea. For this we must be specific. Blind Bartimaeus begged for mercy, but when Jesus summoned him to His side, He asked, "What do you want me to do for you?" (Mk. 10:46-52). Think of it! The Son of God, who knows the hearts of all men (Jn. 2:24), already knew what he wanted. But He wanted Bartimaeus to tell Him that he wanted his sight.

In the same way, God wants us to be equally specific in our petitions. Our prayers must be like a surgeon's scalpel, not like an arrow shot randomly into the air. There is a very good reason for this. We are not God's pets, kept to be passive and cute for His pleasure. God is training us to be soldiers in the advancement of His kingdom. He wants us to become participators in His mighty works. He wants us to learn as much as possible about ourselves, about how the world functions, how we relate to Him and to others, and what His will is for us.

God starts with our own selves. He shows us our strengths and our inadequacies, He shows us His love and His displeasure, and He shows us how He would change our hearts. In learning to focus on detail in our prayers of petition, we come to a much better understanding of

⁴¹ Richard J. Foster, *Prayer*, 179.

who we are and how God works within us. It also leads us to a better understanding of exactly what the real source of our weakness or our difficulty is, so we can work with God to change it for the better.

Speaking about Jesus' question to Bartimaeus, "What do you want me to do for you?", Andrew Murray wrote:

"There are still petitioners to whom the Lord puts the same question who cannot get the aid they need until they answer that question. Our prayers must be a distinct expression of a definite need, not a vague appeal to His mercy or an indefinite cry for blessing. It isn't that His loving heart does not understand or is not ready to hear our cry. Rather, Jesus desires such definite prayer for our own sakes because it teaches us to know our needs better."⁴²

John Maxwell writes about being specific:

"Specific prayer has power. Remember, Jesus says that you will be given whatever you ask for in His name (John 16:23-24). So take a look at some examples of how you can pray more effectively:

<i>Instead of praying...</i>	<i>Pray this...</i>
God, save this country.	Save my neighbor, Bobby, by bringing him to Christ.
God, help me to do well in school.	Help me to study well and make an A on this next test.
God, bless my pastor.	Anoint my pastor to preach salvation this Sunday.
God, teach people to love each other.	Help me to love my wife and make her feel loved.
God, be with us.	Teach me your will in this area and help me to obey you.

Being specific in prayer has another benefit. When God gives us an answer, we know it."⁴³

Prayers for our Sanctification

Petitioning for ourselves involves far more than asking God to help us through our daily situations. It is vital to our sanctification, which is our growth in Christ. Anthony Hoekema writes, "Christians are not simply to sit back and wait for the time when they will be totally like Christ; they must be constantly and energetically active in the struggle to overcome evil with good. Continuing purification implies continuing sanctification."⁴⁴

Our primary goal as Christians should be to grow to the fullness of our Lord Jesus Christ, to allow ourselves to be transformed into the image and likeness of God that our Father

⁴² Andrew Murray, *With Christ in the School of Prayer*, 74.

⁴³ John Maxwell, *Partners in Prayer*, (Nashville, TN, Thomas Nelson, Inc., 1996), 20-21.

⁴⁴ Anthony A. Hoekema, "The Reformed Perspective", *Five Views on Sanctification*, Stanley Gundry, series ed., (Grand Rapids. Zondervan, 1987), 76.

originally intended. This will not happen overnight. It will take time, even many years. But our aim should be as Paul says, to get the prize (1 Cor. 9:24), with the intent that "...the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ." (Eph. 4:12-13). Our prayers for ourselves, therefore, should focus mainly on our spiritual growth.

This growth is the ongoing process of sanctification that we must work at throughout our lives. It is true that it is God who sanctifies us through Jesus by the work of the Holy Spirit in our hearts, but we share in the responsibility. Hoekema states:

"It is most important for us to realize that sanctification is not something we do by ourselves, with our own efforts and in our own strength. Sanctification is not a human activity but a divine gift. The Bible, however, also describes sanctification as a process that involves our responsible participation... Though it is God who brings about our inner transformation, we must yield our hearts, minds, and wills to the Holy Spirit, who is remaking us."⁴⁵

The only way that we can yield our hearts, minds, and wills to God is through heartfelt prayer, in which we confess the sins that the Holy Spirit is convicting us of and strive to understand the root of these sins so that we can overcome them by the grace of God. This effort to put off our old selves and put on the new is a lifetime journey, for we must always struggle against the pull of our sinful nature and the enticements of this world.

The Struggle to Overcome Sin

One thing we struggle with constantly is our battle with the sin in our lives, caused by our sinful nature. Eliminating this sin is a very important step in our spiritual growth, because it is God's will that we overcome our sin.

The very thing that caused us to put our faith in Jesus to begin with was the conviction by the Holy Spirit of our sinful nature. That brought us to repentance, and our confession of faith in Jesus gave us forgiveness for our sins of the past, but it did not remove all sinfulness from us.

The church today tends to minimize its emphasis on sin. There is little teaching on it, in part because people do not like to hear about it. But denial does not make the problem of sin any the less important. Donald Leggett states, "A realistic view of sin is the divine prerequisite for the acceptance of grace. It promotes a clearer and more intense appreciation of divine forgiveness. Low views of God breed high views of self. Low views of sin breed low views of grace."⁴⁶

Just as sin separates us from God, working with Him to eliminate sin in our lives brings us closer to Him. The struggle against sin is a vital part of the process of sanctification. Commenting on Paul's instructions on sin in Romans 8:13, Hoekema writes, "Paul's readers have definitely broken with sin as the realm in which they live. Since they can do so only through the strength of the Spirit, this struggle against sin must be understood as an aspect of their sanctification."⁴⁷

⁴⁵ Ibid., 70.

⁴⁶ Donald Leggett, *Loving God and Disturbing Men*, (Grand Rapids, MI, Baker Book House, 1990), 24.

⁴⁷ Anthony Hoekema, "The Reformed Perspective", *Five Views on Sanctification*, 76

Despite the fact that we are forgiven for our past lives and are justified with Christ, we continue to sin from time to time. Rather than simply confessing our sins from day to day, however, we should strive to eliminate sin from our lives. Our Father is a very patient parent, and He will not demand any more from us than we can bear. Upon our conversion, we became aware of many parts of our sinful nature immediately, which we had no difficulty turning our backs on. We stopped doing many things that were obviously wrong.

But the things that we gave up so quickly at the start of our Christian walk were those that we found easy to put aside. There are still many things in our character that God has yet to deal with. He does not demand that we stop all sinning immediately, but deals with each sin in its own time. This is not at all to say that He finds some sin acceptable. He hates every sin with a powerful loathing, but He loves us far more than He hates our sin.

As we strive to conform to His image, God will reveal to us another sin from time to time that we have been living with, and struggling with, and He will say, "OK, now it is time to deal with this one." There are two factors that will determine when He will do this. The first is our Christian maturity, and the second is our willingness to allow God to help us expunge that sin from our lives. Each of us has our own set of stubborn sins that seem to hang on no matter how hard we try to stop ourselves from committing them.

As we mature, God will see that we are ready to deal with the more stubborn ones. But we must show that we are willing! As stated in Chapter 5, this involves surrendering our wills to God's will and demonstrating that we are willing to let go of that particular sin. Jesus was referring to this when He taught us in the Sermon on the Mount, "If your right eye causes you to sin, gouge it out and throw it away. It is better for you to lose one part of your body than for your whole body to be thrown into hell. And if your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away. It is better for you to lose one part of your body than for your whole body to go into hell." (Mt. 5:29-30).

Many people fail to overcome a particular sin because subconsciously they are unwilling to let it go. It may not just be a pleasurable sin, but a stronghold that we have built around ourselves, such as unforgiveness, to protect ourselves from the hurts of life. Sins can be prisons that we choose to live inside. We must be willing to let them go to overcome them.

The nominal Christian, the one who professes to be Christian but who has no real faith, will live with his sins and even deny that he has a problem with sin. The immature Christian will simply "cast everything on Jesus", and then wonder why some sins hang on. God puts a great deal of the burden on us to work with Him on this. We have heard what He told Cain: "But if you do not do what is right, sin is crouching at your door; it desires to have you, but you must master it." (Gen. 4:7).

If we are not willing to master our sins and let them go, there is nothing God can do to remove it against our will.

Therefore, in addition to already having confessed the sins we have recently committed, which we do in our worship of confession, in our prayer of petition we must ask God to convict us of our ongoing sins and bring us to repentance. This allows God to work with our sins as He knows we can bear, and deal with each one in turn. As God convicts us of the sin He wants us to work on, we must then confess it back to Him and work with Him to remove it from our hearts. Eventually, we will come to hate that sin as much as God does, and our own hatred of the sin is the very brand that sears it from our souls.

Turning away from our sins necessarily involves a change of character within us. God can show us the way, and assist us by His grace, but that final resolve to change must come from within us ourselves.

Holiness and Our Christian Walk

To be holy means to be set apart, reserved for God. Holiness is synonymous with sanctification. We must allow God to lead us, through the Holy Spirit, in the lifelong journey of sanctification. Each one of us became holy the moment we confessed our faith in Jesus Christ as our Lord and Saviour, but then we must strive to grow in holiness.

How can we, in our human imperfection, become more Christ-like, the way God wants us to be? One of the primary goals of our Christian walk is to grow in Christ Jesus. This involves a lifetime process of surrendering our own wills to God's will. When Jesus was asked what we must do to do the work God requires, He answered that the work of God is to believe in the One He has sent; that is, Jesus (Jn. 6: 28-29).

To believe in Jesus does not mean simply to believe that He exists. To believe in Jesus, means to be His disciples. It means to believe that everything He taught us is true, and vitally important for our growth in Him. We must hold to His teachings (Jn. 8: 31), and obey His commands (Jn. 14: 15, 21, 23).

Paul exhorted us to aim for perfection (2 Cor. 13:11). This does not mean trying to appear perfect in our observance of religious rules and regulations. That is legalism. Aiming for perfection means striving on a daily basis to put our Christianity into practice by obeying all of Jesus' commands and teachings.

As Paul stressed to the Ephesians (Eph. 4: 22-24) and to the Colossians (Col. 3:9-10), we are to put off our old, worldly selves and put on our new, Christ-like selves. This entails two things – striving to avoid sin, and striving to grow in our faith and deeds. This does not advocate what some people call "works righteousness", in which people believe they must win favor with God by doing "righteous" works. It simply recognizes the reality of our lives in which God will not force us to do anything we are not willing to do, but on the other hand, that we were saved in order to do good works, as Paul informed us in Ephesians 2:8-10. The Spirit inspires us to do these good works because we are saved, not in order to be saved.

According to this passage, to have been made holy by God, to have been set aside for His purpose, means to have been called upon to do those good works that God prepared in advance for us to do. This is what is meant by bearing good fruit, which is a common metaphor in the Bible. Jesus warned us that any branch in the vine that does not bear fruit will be cut off and thrown into the fire (Jn. 15:2, 6).

In the end we will be judged for what we have done (Mt. 16:24-27, Ro. 2:5-8), not simply for having believed in Jesus. We demonstrate our love for God and our love for people by what we do for others (Mt. 25:31-46). As Christians, we are constantly to strive for the perfection of Jesus, being mindful that we can never achieve it in this lifetime, but at the same time, we are to rest secure in the knowledge that we are already justified, saved from sin.

Prayers for Growth

For the reasons stated above, our prayers of petition concentrate primarily on our spiritual growth. There are many aspects of our walk with God that we can pray for. A few of these are outlined below.

In Spirit and in Truth. Since we must worship God in spirit and in truth, we can ask that He help us to grow in spirit and in truth. This is best done through heartfelt prayer in conjunction with studying the Bible and reading good, meaningful books on Christian living.

In Wisdom and in Knowledge. Two qualities that we see from the Bible that we can pray for and receive are wisdom and knowledge. When God promised Solomon anything he desired at the beginning of his reign, Solomon replied, "Give me wisdom and knowledge, that I may lead this people, for who is able to govern this great people of yours?" (2 Chr. 1:10). Because of his unselfish request, God granted him these in great abundance, and gave him much more. James exhorted, "If any of you lacks wisdom, he should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to him." (Jas 1:5).

The first nine chapters of Proverbs is a strong appeal to find wisdom and knowledge. Proverbs 2:6 states, "For the Lord gives wisdom, and from his mouth come knowledge and understanding." Praying for these, then, in conjunction with careful study of the Bible, will greatly help our spiritual growth.

In Service. We can also ask God to help us grow in service. We know that to serve God is to serve our fellow human beings. Just as Jesus "did not come to be served, but to serve," (Mt. 20:28), so are we to follow His example and serve others. As freely as we receive blessings from God, we are to freely bless others in turn by using our gifts and talents and our time and effort for the common good. As we grow in Christ, we will find the ministry that God has equipped us for by giving us gifts of the Spirit and talents. Then in love, we will use these gifts and talents, not for our own exaltation, but for humbly serving as God wants us to serve. God saved us by His grace to do works of service (Eph. 3:8-10). It is these righteous deeds (acts) that clothe us for our place at the wedding banquet of the Lamb (Rev. 19: 8).

In Love. Love is a vital aspect of our Christian experience. It is very important that we understand what love is. There are several words in Greek that are translated in the Bible as love, but for the Christian, the most important of these is *agape*. *Agape* is that kind of love that Jesus commanded all Christians to have for each other (Jn. 15: 12-17). It is the unconditional kind of love that we have not only for those who love us, but we have also for our enemies, and those who persecute us (Mt. 5:43-48). It is love that we demonstrate, not because we like someone, but because we know they are human, just as we are. God loves them just as He loves us, not because we are likeable, but often in spite of ourselves. So we too must love all people unconditionally as God loves us all.

Showing love comes more easily to some than to others. But even if we can love easily, we must come to understand love as God loves, and wants us to love. It does not come naturally to any human being to love the unlovable, to love our enemies as ourselves, to pray for those who persecute us, or to speak well of those who have hurt us. Christians must learn to do this, and can do it only by striving to understand God's will and His ways.

We can find out a great deal about God's standard of love in the Bible, but putting that love into practice with a sincere heart can be a very difficult task. We can ask God, however, to help us grow in love, and come to love our neighbours truly as ourselves.

Also, it is one thing to love our neighbour, but we must show it! We should also ask, therefore, that God help us to show our love for our fellow human beings. If we could reflect in our hearts but a tiny portion of God's perfect light, we could brighten the world around us.

We can pray that we not only love and show our love, but that we shine with His radiance. In all my years of suffering from depression, I found it very difficult to show my love for people, as much as I longed to be able to do. Since I have been praying this prayer, God brightens my facial expressions, and I find that people I meet, friends or total strangers, are very bright and cheerful with me in return.

One way we can do this is to learn to see the good in people rather than the bad. It does not take an especially perceptive person to see other people's weaknesses, especially when we don't like them, but it takes a person who is really willing to love as God loves to focus on peoples' good points, and to emphasize those, rather than their faults. To see a person's faults takes a certain amount of discernment. To emphasize those and to overlook their good points takes a critical spirit, which is not of God. To speak well of those we don't like takes the love of God in our hearts.

Asking for Direction

God will guide us through life if we are faithful and obedient, but it certainly doesn't hurt to ask for specific direction. We can ask that He protect us from harm, and that He open doors for us and clear the paths so that we may walk the roads that He has prepared for us. We should also ask that He close any doors before us that He would not have us go through. This is especially important when we are facing any major decision in our lives, such as a change of jobs or career, or a move to another place. For this we must learn to accept the signs from God, and tell the difference between His prompting, our own desires, and Satan's tempting.

When considering a major change, too, sometimes what looks attractive to us may not be what is best for us, or may not be the direction God wants us to go. When we pray about such things in faith, we can move with confidence if we feel convicted that it is God's will for us, but we must also learn that a closed door can be just as much a sign from God as an open one. We must learn to lift up our situations to God and ask for His guidance before we make critical decisions, not make the decisions based on our own desires and then ask God to bless them.

When we are truly striving to know and to do His will, when we are earnestly seeking His kingdom and His righteousness, we can rest assured that He will guide us exactly as He knows is best. This prayer covers not just our work, but our spiritual lives as well. God has us walk many roads for our spiritual growth and guidance, because He puts us in situations every day from which we can learn valuable lessons.

Persistence

The kinds of prayers mentioned above are requests that we can pray for every day. If we do so faithfully, there are so many problems and situations that we will not have to pray for, because these prayers for our spiritual growth will prevent many problems from happening. It is not wrong or unimaginative to pray the same requests every day. In fact, to change our prayer requests every day, or to be random in our prayers, shows a lack of focus and discernment of our ongoing needs.

The prayer at the end of Chapter 2 is a powerful prayer that can lead us closer to God. To pray that prayer every day can be a tremendous help in our spiritual growth. We can also simply speak with God about our spiritual needs and how He would have us grow.

God spoke to Israel through the Prophet Isaiah, saying, "Come, let us reason together." (Isa. 1:18). This may not be the exact context Isaiah was writing about, but God is very willing to hear our questions and concerns and give us answers. God is a loving Father, and wants to have us close to Him. He wants us to persist in our striving for spiritual maturity, which draws us closer to Him.

Situational Needs

From our spiritual growth, we can turn our focus to our worldly needs. Individual situations at home and at work can be brought to the Lord in prayer, as the Spirit prompts. If we are having difficulty with a situation, asking the Lord to guide us in handling the situation will help us to discern the solution. God may not drop the solution in our laps, but He will help us find the right one. Remember, God wants us to be participators with Him, and to learn how to work with Him, not just to be an overly dependent child who expects Him to make everything right.

We will never grow to the point where we no longer need to turn to God in prayer, but as we grow, we will be able to discern more and more the difference between what we must turn to God for, and what God expects us to do. For instance, if we know that someone holds something against us, or we hold something against someone else, we know that it is God's will that we go and be reconciled with that person. We know this because Jesus commanded us to do so (Mt. 5:23-24). We should pray in advance of going to that person that God be with us in that situation and help us to be reconciled, but in the end, we must get up and go to that person and be reconciled.

I have first-hand experience in this, and trust me, this works. God has helped me be reconciled with others on several occasions in which I had to pray and then act. Prayer paved the way to the solution, and then my actions, based on faith in God to resolve the situation, brought about the result.

One form of prayer that I find very effective is what I call "bullet prayers". These are short, precise prayers that we fire up to God when we do not have the time to withdraw to a quiet place to pray. I have said these on many occasions, such as hurrying to a meeting in which I had to make a presentation, or to defuse a tense situation among the people I was with. We don't have to say anything out loud, but simply direct a quick, silent prayer to God from our hearts.

Also, persistence is vital in our prayers for situational needs. We must always keep on praying and never give up until we have an answer from God.

Being Precise in Prayer

Whatever we are praying for, there is another thing that will greatly enhance our prayers. We saw above that God wants us to be specific in the detail of our prayers. He also wants us to be precise. John Maxwell writes, "The second attitude to adopt toward prayer is to be direct and specific with God...It's not the number of words you say or how eloquent you are that counts with God. As we speak, it is the sincerity of our words that matters to God. What is in our hearts gives our voices credibility."⁴⁸

A short, precise prayer that is to the point is far more effective than a very lengthy one that rambles aimlessly. Jesus instructed us, "And when you pray, do not keep babbling on like

⁴⁸ John Maxwell, *Partners in Prayer*, 19.

pagans, for they think they will be heard for their many words." (Mt. 6:7). Meditating on the problem for some time, while asking for God's guidance through the Holy Spirit, will greatly assist us in understanding the situation and in being precise.

Precision in prayer demonstrates that we have sought to understand the problem and have been able to discern the nature of the situation, that we have thought it through, and are making a specific request to God. This should in no way be confused with dictating to God how He is going to solve it for us, but rather, it demonstrates that we have sought to understand God's will and are requesting His assistance in accordance with His will. A lengthy, random, prayer shows that the person is not sure of what to ask for and is hoping that some of the words will get close to the target.

Reading the prayers in the Bible gives us an excellent idea of short, precise, effective prayers. Most of them take less than one minute to read, and some only a few seconds. Witness Jesus' prayer concerning the most crucial event of His entire life, "My Father, if it is possible, may this cup be taken from me. Yet not as I will, but as you will." (Mt. 26:39). Read Solomon's brief and concise prayer for himself after God had told him to ask for whatever he wanted, and God's response to his unselfish request (2 Chr. 1:7-12).

Conclusion

There are no needs too trivial, nor any problems too great, that we cannot turn to God for assistance. The need may be as simple as finding a lost object, or helping an evening get-together with friends go smoothly. It can be trouble with a family member or with a co-worker. It can be for discernment in a planned course of action, or direction for a major decision. It can be for relief from worry, or healing for a physical ailment. God hears all prayers, and works all things out for the best. Prayers of petition, especially for our spiritual growth, must be a major part of our daily devotional time. Prayers for individual situations can be offered up at any time, and are often most effective immediately before the event, such as just before a major meeting.

Prayers for a troublesome situation, for a worry or anxiety, or for a physical ailment, should be said as soon as the situation arises. "A prayer in time saves nine" is an appropriate paraphrase of a common saying. Then, as was stated in Chapter 3, no matter what the request is for, big or small, we must remember to say our Amen with finality and confidence. Faith is indispensable in receiving answers to our prayers. As Jesus commanded us, "Have faith in God. I tell you the truth, if anyone says to this mountain, 'Go, throw yourself into the sea,' and does not doubt in his heart but believes that what he says will happen, it will be done for him. Therefore I tell you, whatever you ask for in prayer, believe that you have received it, and it will be yours." (Mk. 11:22-24).

Prayer

Continue beginning your devotional time with the prayers of repentance, thanksgiving, and praise as suggested in the previous chapters. Then offer up your prayers of petition, first for your spiritual growth, and then for your long-term and short-term needs. You may use the suggestions in this chapter for what to pray for in your spiritual growth, but also rely on the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. The prayer at the end of Chapter 2 can be very helpful.

Chapter 9 - Intercession - Prayer for Other People and Situations

"If we truly love people, we will desire for them far more than it is within our power to give them, and this will lead to prayer. Intercession is a way of loving others...Intercessory Prayer is priestly ministry, and one of the most challenging teachings in the New Testament is the universal priesthood of all Christians...it is a sacred obligation - and a precious privilege - of all who take up the yoke of Christ."⁴⁹ Richard J. Foster

Our Prayers Expand Outwards

After we have prayed for ourselves, we can turn our thoughts to other people and situations. As we saw in Chapter 3, we should start, as with Jesus' example, with those closest to us, and then expand outwards. The members of our immediate family are our primary concern, and then our other relatives, our friends and acquaintances, and so on. Once again, we should be selective, concise, and to the point. We should also ask God to help us discern what to pray for.

For married people and those with children, their first concern is for their spouse and for their children. Prayers for their protection from harm, for their spiritual growth, and for guidance in life are very appropriate. The head of a household has a particular God-appointed duty toward the family and the household. To include the household itself in prayer, whether it be a house or apartment, or other living accommodation, is important. Prayers for the family in general and for the household, that love, peace, and harmony prevail, are of great help. Also, prayers for the concerns of each individual can be offered as the need arises.

Single persons are concerned with parents and siblings, or other close relatives. If we do not live in the same home or the same community, it will be important to stay in touch with them. The more contact with them that we maintain, the better we will be able to discern what their needs are. The guidance of the Spirit will be important. A single person is head of his or her own household, and responsible for those who might be visiting or living there. Prayers for the household are appropriate.

As we expand outward in our prayers of intercession as the Spirit leads us, we will include other relatives, friends, acquaintances, co-workers, fellow students, and the like. We must be discerning in our prayers, and not attempt to include everyone we know, but those who we feel need our prayers. Prayers for spiritual growth are appropriate for anyone, but for worldly needs, we must be careful that we pray for genuine needs and avoid the temptation to try to fix everyone else's problems for them. We should not take on too much, and thus weaken our prayers by spreading them too thin. It is better to have a few, powerful, well-directed prayers than a lot of superficial, aimless ones.

Occasionally, we may feel obligated to pray for someone, but do not know what to pray. As with anything else, the Holy Spirit should be our guide in these matters. A wise decision to make, if we should still be at a loss of what to pray on someone's behalf even after seeking God's guidance, is not to pray on our own strength. Unless we are sure of what to pray for, we must have the faith to believe that God has not given us words to pray at that time. If God has not given us the words, it may be an indication that He desires something that He has chosen not to reveal to us. It is better not to pray than to pray something on our own strength that is not according to His will. We must avoid the mistake of praying simply for the sake of praying.

⁴⁹ Richard J. Foster, *Prayer*, 191.

Being Specific

It is important, too, just as in our petitions for ourselves, that we be specific in our prayers for others. Wesley Duewel states, "Beware of praying so generally that you do not remember what you have prayed. Beware of being so unspecific that you would not be able to recognize it if your prayers were answered. All needs are specific needs... You will never know all about a particular need, but the more you know, the more effectively you can prevail."⁵⁰

How often do we hear someone praying at a prayer meeting, "Lord, I hold up So-and-so to you, who is having problems. We do not know the situation, but You know, so please help him." This kind of prayer is not likely to be effective, because it does not address a specific need. If God were to respond to such a prayer, it would only be to ask, as Jesus asked Bartimaeus, "What do you want Me to do?" (Mk. 10:51). It is better not to pray than to offer up such an empty prayer. We should try, without prying into matters that are not our concern, to get as much detail as we can before praying for a person or a situation.

Being Precise

When we are praying for other believers, we must bear in mind that they will probably be praying for themselves as well. We must be careful what we pray for, then, that we do not include prayers that might conflict with what they are praying for, or that might in fact hamper the direction that God is leading them. Prayer for guidance for them in their concerns and in their spiritual growth, then, is probably the most appropriate. If they have asked for any specific prayers, then it is best to check with them from time to time to see if the situation is changing. Praying with them would be very effective in most cases. We should allow them to tell us what exactly they need so that our prayers will be in accordance with theirs.

We must avoid the "do gooder" temptation of praying for someone else about something that we feel is best for them, or praying for them when they have not specifically requested prayer for a situation. If they have shared a thought with us, we should not take it as an invitation to help them out by praying for them unless we are certain it is necessary. We have to use a great deal of discernment when we pray for someone who is in a difficult situation. Very often God will engineer a difficult event for a person in order to teach them a particular lesson. Asking God to remove the situation or make it better might be asking God to take away the very lesson He wants the person to learn.

Praying for Non-believers

Praying for non-believers is difficult, especially if the person is a close relative or friend. We can do ourselves a great deal of emotional and spiritual harm by imposing on ourselves the responsibility for their salvation. We have to remember that it is God who saves, not us. He knows who is going to come to Him, and when. We can only sow the seed, we cannot make it grow. Jesus says, "This is what the kingdom of God is like. A man scatters seed on the ground. Night and day, whether he sleeps or gets up, the seed sprouts and grows, though he does not know how. All by itself the soil produces grain - first the stalk, then the head, then the full kernel in the head." (Mk. 4:26-28).

⁵⁰ Wesley Duewel, *Mighty Prevailing Prayer*, 257.

Sowing the seed does not always have to be outright evangelism, it can sometimes be very subtle, like providing a witness of good Christian behavior. This means simply doing what is right and avoiding what is wrong ourselves without browbeating the person about what we feel they should or should not be doing. When we pray for someone's salvation, we must tell ourselves that it may take years of prayer before we see even the slightest result.

Persistence and perseverance pays off, but discouragement is Satan's tool. Therefore, when we pray for an unbeliever, we should keep praying and not give up, but leave the way of the person's salvation and the time it takes to God.

Another thing we have to take into account when praying for an unbeliever is that God knows best what situation will bring the person to repentance. If, in loving people and wanting to see their lives go well, we keep praying that their difficult circumstances be removed and their lives be made easy, we may be wishing away the very thing that God knows will bring them to Him.

Many Christians had to be down and out as unbelievers before they turned to the Lord for help. We cannot decide these things for God. In these circumstances, "Not my will, but Thy will be done" has to be the bottom line of our prayers. Of course we want the best for others, especially if the person is a close relative. But God's best sometimes has to start with a difficult situation. If after all we have done, the person does not accept the Lord, we must never fall into Satan's trap of blaming ourselves, or even worse, blaming God for the failure. A true test of our faith is to keep on worshipping God even when our prayers do not seem to be answered.

Praying for Our Church

A critically important thing to pray for on a daily basis is our church. When we pray for the corporate body, we have to pray for its corporate sins and its corporate growth. We must include ourselves in all aspects of our prayers for our church. The prophet Daniel, who was highly esteemed by the Lord (Dan. 10:11), when he prayed for Israel in Daniel 9:4-19, began by confessing the corporate sins of the nation in which he included himself. There are several other examples of this concept of corporate responsibility in the Bible.

We should pray that the congregation grow in spirit and in truth, that we as a Body of Christ be convicted of our sins and brought to repentance, and that we grow closer in unity. The unity that we envisage should not be our own views of what is best, but true unity such as Jesus prayed for in the Garden of Gethsemane two thousand years ago (Jn. 17:20-26).

Praying that the Holy Spirit move among the congregation and stir our hearts to service for Christ is very important. In praying for the spiritual growth of the congregation and for the influence of the Holy Spirit, it is necessary to be thinking about our brothers and sisters in Christ wherever they are throughout the week. The true meaning of the word "church" is the body of believers, not a building. We must not think of church as being just one hour on Sunday mornings in a particular building, but as involving the entire lives of the members of the Body, twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week.

There is no room whatsoever to work our own version of church politics into our prayers. We have to bear in mind that it is God's house, not ours, and He will have the church overseen the way He knows is best for the entire body, and not just our own personal preference. Any person can criticize. It does not show a particular discernment, but a critical heart, "for out of the heart the mouth speaks." (Mt. 12:34). It takes a heart filled with love to pray positively, regardless of how the mind feels.

Praying for Our Pastors

We must pray for our pastors, and learn to hate the temptation to criticize them in any way, for that is Satan's tool. Our pastors are human, and subject to all the trials that everyone else experiences, and, more than that, they are special targets of Satan's warfare. Not supporting them in prayer, and to participate in or to ignore criticism directed against them, is to fail in our duties toward our pastors.

If we know others who are engaging in gossip or criticism, we should confess this sin and pray against the spirits of these kinds of disunity, because these are two of Satan's primary ways to divide and disrupt the Body of Christ. We should never join in or ignore such behavior, because to participate in it is to join in the sin, and to ignore it is to allow it to continue. Few people who criticize our pastors need a stern rebuke. I have found it more effective to offer a gentle reminder that gossiping or complaining to others about a pastor is inappropriate, and that if they have a genuine concern, they should speak to the pastor directly. Another method I have found effective is to hear the person out, acknowledge their concern, and then say something positive about the pastor.

Rather than praying that the Sunday services be conducted the way we would like them to be, we should pray that the services be good and pleasing to God, however that may be. If we do not particularly care for the way the service is conducted, we would do very well to look inward to our own critical spirit, rather than assuming that there is something wrong with what the pastors or worship leaders are doing.

Praying for Our Country

Another very important thing to pray for is our country. We can pray for other countries that are not as well off, but we must never neglect our own. Wesley Duewel states, "We are responsible to pray for all leaders, specially the leaders of our government and other nations... Not to include these topics in your private or public praying is a sin of disobedience."⁵¹ One great weapon that works wonders for Satan is our very bad habit of criticizing our political leaders. Even if we do not agree with their methods, or suspect some less than honest dealings in the political world, the worst thing we can do is to speak ill of our leaders. Is it not far more Christ-like to pray for them than to speak out against them, even when the government in power may not be the one we voted for?

When God sent the people of Judah into exile in Babylon, He told them to settle down and rebuild their lives there. And He advised them, "Also, seek the peace and prosperity of the city to which I have carried you into exile. Pray to the Lord for it, because if it prospers, you too will prosper." (Jer. 29:7). Here was God telling them to pray for the very nation that had destroyed theirs, and for the city whose name would become a metaphor for sin and corruption. How much more should we pray for our own nation of which we are free citizens, and which we, in part, have helped to shape?

In the Bible we see, "Then Jesus said to the crowds and to his disciples: 'The teachers of the law and the Pharisees sit in Moses' seat. So you must obey them and do everything they tell you. But do not do what they do, for they do not practice what they preach.' " (Mt. 23:1-3). In

⁵¹ Ibid., 30.

Jesus' day, these leaders had political as well as religious authority, and Jesus told his disciples that they must obey them, even when they were wrong.

Paul commanded all Christians, "Everyone must submit himself to the governing authorities, for there is no authority except that which God has established. The authorities that exist have been established by God. Consequently, he who rebels against the authority is rebelling against what God has instituted, and those who do so will bring judgment on themselves." (Ro. 13:1-2).

He commanded Timothy, "I urge, then, first of all, that requests, prayers, intercession and thanksgiving be made for everyone—for kings and all those in authority, that we may live peaceful and quiet lives in all godliness and holiness. This is good, and pleases God our Savior..." (1 Tim. 2:1-3). In Paul's day, the rulers and authorities were pagan dictators with the power of life and death over the people, ruthless and caring little for the needs and concerns of the common people, and yet Paul instructed the Church to submit to them and to pray for them.

How much more should we strive, then, to put these principles into practice in our own country, in which God has blessed us with such freedom, and which is, compared with Israel and Rome in Jesus' and Paul's day, relatively free of violence and corruption. During elections, we have the freedom to vote for the candidate of our choice, as God moves us and our conscience leads us. But even as we cast our ballot, we should pray, "Not my will, but Yours be done." Once the elections are over, we are obligated to pray for the party and the politicians in power, even if they are not the ones we ourselves chose. To criticize our politicians is to criticize God for putting them in power!

Prayer Burdens

Many Christians have experienced what is called a prayer burden. This is a sudden feeling that we must pray for someone, but we do not know what the situation is. However, the feeling is so strong that the person receiving the burden simply begins to pray, and the Holy Spirit guides the person's words in prayer. They pray until they feel that the burden has been lifted from them, and that God will now take the situation from there. Burdens such as these can last sometimes for many hours, but often the person praying is not aware of how much time has passed. Only later will the person find out what was happening to the one they felt compelled to pray for, but often it involves a life or death situation.

This in no way contradicts the advice to be specific in prayer. This is a special situations that happens only rarely to certain individuals by the conviction of the Holy Spirit.

Corporate Prayer

All of the above applies to your individual daily prayer time. When we worship God in song or when we pray as a corporate body during a church service, we must truly pray. We must turn our hearts to God and pray sincerely, and not just mouth some words because everyone else is doing it. Sometimes, God will lead us to join a prayer group, or we will be a member of a small group ministry which includes a prayer time as part of the venue. This is very effective and a very necessary part of our Christian life. When we pray in groups, we do not add to the strength of our prayers, we multiply it. Wesley Duewel asserts about group prayer, "*Spiritual power is multiplied... Love and unity are intensified, purified, and made more blessed. Faith for*

God's answer is strengthened. All who unite in prayer begin to sense God's power coming upon them and anointing their praying in a new way."⁵²

Think "Big Picture". For this reason, when we are praying in a group, we must think of the bigger picture. Larger groups call for larger and broader prayer concerns. It is traditional in some prayer groups to bring the same kinds of prayer requests to the group as we would pray for in our private prayer time. We still hear people asking for prayer for this person or that person, but the prayer requests are often just benevolent, not for critical needs. The reason this is done is because "that's the way we've always done it," and demonstrates that the people involved really do not understand group prayer.

A group should meet to pray for a specific need or purpose, and not simply out of habit or tradition. Then, the need should be greater than what we would normally pray for in our private prayer time. A group that meets to pray for the church should pray for the spiritual growth of the church as a whole, and other bigger picture concerns, not for Aunt Nellie's bunions and Charlie's hernia and Fred's niece who is having difficulty in school. Any Christian can pray privately for such concerns. This is not to say that groups should not pray for individuals. But they should pray for those in difficult situations, such as life-or-death circumstances, and not just small annoyances.

Agreement in Prayer. One very important part of praying in groups is that when praying for a particular thing, everyone in the group must be in agreement with the focus of the prayer. In other words, everyone must be of one accord. Rather than having each person pray as they see fit, the group should first discuss the situation and agree on how to pray. Jesus instructs us, "Again, I tell you that if two of you on earth agree about anything you ask for, it will be done for you by my Father in heaven. For where two or three come together in my name, there am I with them." (Mt. 18:19-20).

The corollary to this is that if there is any disagreement among the members of the group as to how to pray for a situation, it will seriously detract from the effectiveness of the prayer. For this reason, before praying for a situation, it should be discussed, the prayer focus defined, and all present should give their sincere assent to that focus. Any disagreement, even if it is not spoken but held silently in someone's heart, can disrupt the prayer.

Satan will definitely try to foment disunity and disagreement to disrupt our prayers, so we must always be on the alert to stop it before it defeats us. One way to ensure that all are of one accord is to call a group prayer session only if we have felt a burden to do so, and to invite those who have felt the burden also. It is better to have six gathered in agreement than to have sixty with disagreement.

Spiritual Attacks. One very good indication that the burden for a group prayer session is of God's will is if we experience spiritual attacks that attempt to disrupt our personal lives or prevent the group from gathering and praying effectively. A general prayer group that gathers without much focus and offers up only bland, half-hearted prayers, or who pray according to their own understanding rather than God's will, will not experience much difficulty.

A prayer group that is little more than a gossip group is Satan's tool, and he will not bother them, for they are already doing his will, not God's. Satan does not bother too much with those who are not a menace to him, but will launch a concerted attack against those who pose a threat to his schemes. A wise idea, therefore, when the group has gathered for prayer, is to have the leader guide the group in confession, thanksgiving, and praise, just as I have recommended for our daily devotional time, before actually raising up any prayer requests. This is very

⁵² Ibid., 132.

effective in dispelling any spiritual attacks. Wesley Duewel writes, "Praise beats back the powers of darkness, scatters the demon opponents, and frustrates Satan's strategies."⁵³

When we encounter such attacks, we must be especially on guard not to give in to the disruptions to our personal prayer life, or to the distractions that will entice us not to go to the prayer group. No matter what Satan throws at us, we must stand firm and do what we know is right. Peter warned us, "Be self-controlled and alert. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour. Resist him, standing firm in the faith, because you know that your brothers throughout the world are undergoing the same kind of sufferings." (1 Pet. 5:8-9).

It is very helpful for the group to spend a bit of time relating and comparing experiences to reassure and support one another. Very often, members of the group will find that they have all had similar experiences. Some years ago, I was involved in a group that met on a weekly basis to pray for our church. We found that if one had experienced spiritual oppression during the week, the other had too. If one had felt a particular burden for the church, so had the others. In such circumstances, we should rejoice and praise God, for we know that Satan is worried.

Different Kinds of Prayer Ministries. Just as we each have our own areas of calling, interests, passions, talents, experience, aptitudes, and spiritual gifts for serving the kingdom, we each will find that we are led into a certain area for prayer. Some will be led to participate in large prayer groups, others will find small groups more to their conviction, and some may pray individually. Some people will discover that they can be effective as part of a prayer chain, in which one person calls the next until everyone in the chain is notified about a prayer request. They then each pray by themselves but are all lifting up the same prayer concern.

Some groups will feel convicted to pray for one set concerns, and another group will feel burdened to pray for a different ones. It is a very important part of our service for the Church that we try to identify our best venue for intercessory prayer, that is, over and above our personal devotional time of intercession, and to seek out others who pray well in the same manner and are convicted with the same burden.

Sincerity of Motive. Joining others in prayer is a very effective ministry, and one that can do wonders for the kingdom of God. But we must not do so just to be the member of a group or to "bless" ourselves. Prayer groups should not meet just out of tradition because that is the way it has "always" been done in the church. Sincerity of heart is all-important when it comes to prayer ministry. We must genuinely desire to see God's will be done, and not just try to force our own will upon the situation. Wesley Duewel says:

"Desire has a tremendous motivating power in prevailing prayer. The deeper you desire to see God's answers, the deeper you hunger to see God at work, the more urgent your heart-cry to see Christ triumph, the more powerfully the Holy Spirit can pray through you... Heaven wants sincerity, not beautiful, polite words. Heaven wants depth of soul, not lukewarm mouthings... Desire makes your prayer very personal. It makes it your very heart-cry. Furthermore, it not only motivates your prayer, it helps you envisage the answer and thus increases your faith. The half-hearted Christian is of little value to God or man."⁵⁴

⁵³ Ibid., 169.

⁵⁴ Ibid., 67, 69.

Prayer of the Week

By now, you should have a well-established devotional time of confession, thanksgiving, praise, and petition. Add to this prayers of intercession for those you feel convicted to pray for as we have covered in this chapter.

Chapter 10 - Factors Affecting Prayer

This final chapter in the book will address certain factors that can affect prayer. There are many things that can come between us and effective prayer, so discussing our prayer life with someone of greater experience can be helpful in understanding any problems that we may encounter, or to encourage us in the direction we are going.

Commitment

We saw in Chapter 1 that learning to pray consistently takes personal commitment. God, through the Holy Spirit, can give us the conviction to pray. He can give us the wisdom and knowledge to pray well, and He can inspire us on what to pray for. But the motivation for continuing to pray must come from within ourselves. Jesus spoke a stern warning to those who would want to become His disciples (please note that in the passage below, Jesus used the word "hate" as a hyperbole, or purposeful exaggeration; He was not in any way suggesting that we repudiate ourselves or our families):

"Large crowds were traveling with Jesus, and turning to them he said: "If anyone comes to me and does not hate his father and mother, his wife and children, his brothers and sisters—yes, even his own life—he cannot be my disciple. And anyone who does not carry his cross and follow me cannot be my disciple.

"Suppose one of you wants to build a tower. Will he not first sit down and estimate the cost to see if he has enough money to complete it? For if he lays the foundation and is not able to finish it, everyone who sees it will ridicule him, saying, 'This fellow began to build and was not able to finish.'

"Or suppose a king is about to go to war against another king. Will he not first sit down and consider whether he is able with ten thousand men to oppose the one coming against him with twenty thousand? If he is not able, he will send a delegation while the other is still a long way off and will ask for terms of peace. In the same way, any of you who does not give up everything he has cannot be my disciple.

"Salt is good, but if it loses its saltiness, how can it be made salty again? It is fit neither for the soil nor for the manure pile; it is thrown out.

'He who has ears to hear, let him hear.' " (Lk. 14:25-35)

To make a commitment to follow Jesus is a serious undertaking. What He warns us against in these parables is making a commitment to follow Jesus and to serve Him, and then not following through with it. We must put our commitment to God's kingdom first in our lives. The greatest setback for the kingdom of God is not Satan, who is already defeated, but uncommitted, complacent Christians, whose initial commitment was half-hearted, and who are failing to persevere.

Those who would follow Jesus must take up His cross daily and follow Him (Lk. 9:23). What better way, more fulfilling way, more effective way is there to do so than to commit to a meaningful daily devotional time of worship of God in confession, thanksgiving, and praise, and in offering up righteous, unselfish prayers of petition and intercession, and studying the Bible?

Nothing else brings us closer to God, fills us with the Holy Spirit, and puts us in synchrony with God's true will.

But we will have a battle of wills to contend with. As was said in Chapter 1, we will find every excuse to put it off. Most of this will come from within us. Satan, who is powerless to make us do anything against our will, cannot cause us to avoid praying, but he will certainly play on all our weaknesses to try to make us decide not to pray. Firm resolve will overcome all excuses.

The commitment to follow Jesus in a life of prayer in good times and in bad will be greatly rewarded. One of the greatest authorities on prayer, the sixteenth-century Spanish mystic, Teresa of Avila, wrote, "It is to be carefully noted – and I say this because I know it from experience – that the soul which begins to walk along this path of resolute prayer, regardless of joy or affliction, in spite of great tenderness or a lack of consolation, this soul has traveled a great part of the way. However much it may stumble, it should not be afraid that it will turn back."⁵⁵

Perseverance in our commitment to God, in good times and bad, is a vital part of our walk with Christ. God will be pleased with our resolve and give us the strength to continue.

Personal Baggage

A Wounded Spirit. We have all been hurt in the past by many people, and especially by those close to us; family, close relatives, friends, teachers, or others in authority over us. This has the effect of making us guarded and defensive, unwilling to expose our true selves to the world for fear of being hurt again. Some people combat this woundedness with aggression, which they mistake for self-confidence, in order not to give anyone the opportunity to get close enough to hurt them. Others may become withdrawn and fearful of social interaction. These reactions have a serious negative effect on their ability to communicate with God as well.

We tend to project onto God the same tendencies we imagine from people around us. Our woundedness can make us unwilling to trust God and to be open and honest with Him, and unable to follow the leading of the Spirit to guide our prayers. Trusting completely in God to hear and answer our prayers is key to praying effectively in the Spirit. To resolve this, we must take stock of our past and unravel the tangle of hurts we have suffered, and allow God to show us His unfathomable and unconditional love.

We can also ask Him to help us to forgive others for what they have done to us, and learn to love God and love people with our whole hearts. This may take help from trusted people around us, or even professional counselling.

An Independent Spirit. The human spirit is torn between the need for social contact and the desire for freedom. This leads to an unconscious tendency to follow the lead of society around us, but at the same time to try to live the illusion of being independent. We desire to be included in our social peer groups, but we loathe being told what to do. This can cause us to rebel against the established social norms as we perceive them, and to seek to appear different, all the while trying to feel accepted by our peers.

Unwittingly, what we perceive as our own will is very heavily influenced by the ways of the world around us, which can be very much against the way God wants us to go. This can have the result of deepening our already deeply rooted rebelliousness against God, which is Original Sin, and to desire to do things our own way, not the way God wants us to do them. This may

⁵⁵ St. Teresa of Avila, *A Life of Prayer*, ed. Dr. James M. Houston, (Minneapolis, MN, Bethany House Publishers, 1998), 80.

cause us to try to skew our prayers to suit our own wants, telling God what He should do rather than striving to be conformed to God's will. In this case, we should be honest with ourselves and admit that we are attempting to control God. We must be aware that God is infinitely greater than we are and humble ourselves before Him.

Anti-Intellectualism. Some people crave knowledge, force-feeding themselves on information of all kinds. At the other end of the spectrum, there are those who abhor knowledge and do not want to learn anything beyond what they already know. Willingly limiting our sphere of knowledge to what we already understand can seriously limit our prayer life as well. Such people tend to set up very close boundaries around themselves, live by a firm set of rules, have a limited world view, and seek others who share the same concepts. Such a fundamentalist point of view has the effect of blinding them to reality and causing them to strive to make the world conform to their ways. This attitude gives them a distorted view of God as being a God of rules and strict order, rather than a God of love and grace. Remember, Jesus spent His time with tax collectors and sinners, not the self-righteous.

In order to pray effectively, we must have as broad a world view as possible, trying to understand why things are the way they are and how this all fits into God's plan. To achieve this, we must seek information and try to understand the world from many points of view, and not just our own limited focus. We must listen to others and hear what they are actually saying. We must strive to learn other peoples' points of view and not to process everything through our own filters. When we do this, we are better able to see people the way God sees us all, and this enables us to love our neighbours as ourselves. When we have a better understanding of the world around us, we have a greater understanding of God's grace and will, and our prayers are more likely to conform to the will of God.

Social Sins

There are several lists of sins found in the Bible (e.g. Gal. 5:19-21, Col. 3:5-8, Jas. 3:14-16). These can be broken down into three categories; moral sins, religious sins, and social sins. Moral sins include things such as adultery, assault, and murder. Religious sins include things such as idolatry or witchcraft. Social sins, however, are given greater attention in the New Testament than the other two. These include things such as hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions, gossip, and envy. The reason they are given this attention is probably because they are the hardest sins for Christians to avoid.

Sexual immorality and idolatry are great sins, but when committed, they do not affect the Church nearly as much as social sins. They receive more attention than social sins, because when committed, they are more obvious and shocking than social sins. On the other hand, social sins are constant problems which erode the very fabric of our churches. Like a cancer, they eat away at everything Christians are supposed to embrace. We are supposed to love one another and be as one. Social sins cause disunity and divide churches.⁵⁶

Social sins are so harmful to churches because they are insidious; that is, we can engage in them without realizing it until divisions have been created. Even then, we each feel that we are right and the people we are opposing are wrong. Rather than going and being reconciled to our brother or sister, we find it altogether too easy to avoid the problem and allow the situation to fester.

⁵⁶ For a comprehensive commentary on social sins, read Dr. Ed Murphy, *The Handbook for Spiritual Warfare*, (Nashville, TN, Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1992, 1996, 2003), Chapter 23.

That, unfortunately, is one of the hardest parts of our human nature to overcome. This gives Satan a foothold to stir the problem up and create further division and disunity. We must resist his work by confessing our sins, going and being reconciled to anyone who holds anything against us or whom we hold anything against (Mt. 5:23-26), and striving to live at peace with our brothers and sisters in Christ and our neighbours. The reason this is so important is that unconfessed sin is a serious block to our prayers and a serious block both to our personal growth and the spiritual health of our churches.

Spiritual Emptiness

We all from time to time will feel spiritually empty. This is a normal part of being human. We will go through periods in which we will feel that God is distant, but the reality is that we are the ones who are distant, not God. We should ensure that we have not caused or contributed to this by allowing ourselves to become overtired or run down, or by being disobedient to God through sin, or by letting our devotional time slide or become routine. The solution to these times is to renew our efforts in our devotional time in spite of how we feel, and the feeling of emptiness will quickly pass. If we leave off our devotions, our time of spiritual emptiness will be prolonged.

We may experience times when God will purposely remove our ability to sense His presence. These times can be accompanied by feelings of anxiety, as though the floor were suddenly pulled out from under us. This phenomenon is recorded in the Bible concerning one of the kings of Judah. "It was Hezekiah who blocked the upper outlet of the Gihon spring and channeled the water down to the west side of the City of David. He succeeded in everything he undertook. But when envoys were sent by the rulers of Babylon to ask him about the miraculous sign that had occurred in the land, God left him to test him and to know everything that was in his heart." (2 Chr. 32:30-31).

God may use these times as a way of testing our resolve. The true test of our faith is our ability to continue to worship God in thanksgiving and praise even when it seems to us that God is no longer there. C.S. Lewis wrote a fictional account, *The Screwtape Letters*, which is a series of letters from a senior demon, Screwtape, to his nephew, Wormwood, about how to battle the "Enemy", who is God. Screwtape writes, "Do not be deceived, Wormwood. Our cause is never more in danger than when a human, no longer desiring, but still intending, to do our Enemy's will, looks round upon a universe from which every trace of Him seems to have vanished, and asks why he has been forsaken, and still obeys."⁵⁷

No matter how empty we feel, no matter how distant God seems to be, fulfilling our commitment to God by continuing our devotional time in spite of how we feel is the key to weathering this kind of storm in our lives.

Spiritual Dryness

Similar to spiritual emptiness is spiritual dryness. This is described in several different terms, such as aridity, the desert experience, the spiritual wasteland, or the dark night of the soul. It is marked by a spiritual despondency, as though the joy has gone out of our walk with God and our spiritual energy has drained out of us. This is generally more prolonged than emptiness, and can be caused by a number of factors. It can be caused by similar factors to emptiness, so we

⁵⁷ C.S. Lewis, *The Screwtape Letters*, (New York, Macmillan, Collier Books, 1982), 39.

must make sure that we have not induced it ourselves. If after taking stock of ourselves, we find that we have caused or aggravated the situation, we should confess this before God and resolve to stop what we were doing to cause it.

These times, however, can be a gift from God. When God sees that we are striving to know Him and to be obedient to His will, and have a well established devotional time, He will lead us in a time of spiritual discovery. He does this sometimes, not by showing us good times or blessing us greatly as we might think He should do, but by placing us in a spiritual desert, or wasteland, for a period of time. This "reverse psychology" can have a profoundly positive effect on us if we respond correctly.

We should not let ourselves be dismayed or despondent, doubt our salvation, or question God's love. We should pay close attention to all that the Lord has to show us during these times, because they can be the times of our greatest spiritual growth. Teresa of Avila stated, "It is... very strange that...we find that we are not ashamed...to complain of periods of aridity. Never allow this to happen to you, my sisters. Instead, embrace the cross, which your Spouse has borne on His shoulders, and realize that this cross is also yours to carry."⁵⁸

The reason that God brings us through such experiences is to get our attention, to show us that life in Christ is not always good or pleasant, and to teach us to depend entirely on Him. Teresa wrote, "I believe it is for our good that His Majesty leads us in this way so that we may perfectly understand how worthless we really are. For the graces which He gives to us afterwards are of a great dignity. He wills us to know by experience our own worthlessness so that what happened to Lucifer will not happen to us."⁵⁹ She advised her readers, "Let him resolve, then, whatever his aridity and sense of lack of devotion may be, that he will never let himself sink utterly under his cross. The day will come when he will receive all his petitions in one great answer, and all of his wages in one great reward."⁶⁰ She said of her own experience, "For it is certain in one hour, during which the Lord gave me to taste His sweetness, all the anxieties which I had to bear when persevering in prayer seemed afterward to me to be ever perfectly rewarded."⁶¹

When faced with these God-ordained desert experiences, then, we should persevere in our devotional time, and keep our hearts attuned to His instruction. These can be among the greatest spiritual experiences of our lives, however distressing they are at the time. If we stand firm in our faith, and I speak from personal experience here, we will come out of the experience far stronger than we were before.

Such a time may possibly be caused by clinical depression. If that is the case, we should seek professional help. Depression is not always caused by unconfessed sin in our lives, as some misguided Christians believe. True depression is not a mental disorder but a medical condition brought on by a biochemical imbalance in the brain. It is beyond the patient's control, and can best be dealt with through professional help. We can develop personal coping mechanisms to deal with depression, and try to live our lives in spite of it, but depression is an illness that no one should have to live with in silence. If we find ourselves suffering from depression, we should pray for healing and seek professional help for it, the same as with any illness.⁶²

⁵⁸ St. Teresa of Avila, *A Life of Prayer*, 132.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 79.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 64.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 78.

⁶² For an excellent Christian perspective on depression, read: David B. Biebel and Harold G. Koenig, *New Light on Depression*, (Grand Rapid, MI, Zondervan, 2004).

Depression cannot block us from a true and meaningful relationship with God. As I described in the preface to this book, it was severe depression that was in part responsible for my turning to seek God, and my relationship with Him grew in spite of this depression. I wrote the first draft of the manuscript of this book several years before being officially diagnosed with clinical depression. A simple regimen of a mild anti-depressant solved the problem.

Spiritual Attack

From time to time, we may experience a concerted spiritual attack, in which we actually sense the presence of a hostile spiritual force. This is not out of the ordinary, and it is absolutely nothing to be afraid of, because "You, dear children, are from God and have overcome them, because the one who is in you is greater than the one who is in the world." (1 Jn. 4:4). Just as Satan had to ask God permission to afflict Job, and could do nothing more to him than God allowed (Job 1:6-2:8), neither can Satan do anything to us unless God allows it. We, as children of God, will not be tested beyond what we can bear, and will always be given a way out so we can withstand (1 Cor. 10:13). If God does not allow it, Satan can do nothing.

Luke told us that Satan had asked to "sift Peter like wheat", but Jesus had intervened on his behalf that his faith would not fail (Lk. 22:31-32). Shortly afterward, Peter denied Jesus three times, but still he remained faithful to the Lord and went on to become the leader of the new Christian church in Jerusalem.

The greatest defense we have against Satan is to resist him (Jas. 4:7) with the armor of God (Eph 6:14-17), and he will flee from us. The reason God allows such things is to teach us spiritual warfare. He wants us to be active participants in the advancement of His kingdom, not passive onlookers.

Some Christian circles teach their adherents to ridicule Satan, but that is childish, prideful, contrary to Scripture, and asking for trouble. Peter warned, "Bold and arrogant, these men are not afraid to slander celestial beings; yet even angels, although they are stronger and more powerful, do not bring slanderous accusations against such beings in the presence of the Lord. But these men blaspheme in matters they do not understand." (2 Peter 2:10-12). Jude gave us a similar warning (Jude 8-10).

We must be wary of what is meant by spiritual warfare. Much of what is taught in Christian circles is incorrect and misleading, and tends to come from two extremes - either to deny that is necessary, or to take an excessive interest in Satan and his evil spirits. The most powerful weapon against the powers of evil is to strive to live a life transformed to the likeness of Christ, to be obedient to God's will and the commands and teachings of Christ, and to have a meaningful daily devotional time. To truly love God and love our neighbour as ourselves helps Jesus tear down Satan's strongholds, which depend on strife and division among people.⁶³

In the event that we sense an evil presence, but it is not threatening, simply praising God will cause it to flee. A concerted attack that feels particularly oppressive will respond satisfactorily to the stern command, "In the name of Jesus, I command you, get away!" Such things are certainly allowed to happen to us to teach us not to be afraid, and to trust in God.

Beware of getting too deep into such things. Some fledgling Christians are fascinated with deliverance ministries, and believe, in their enthusiasm, that they are actually called by God

⁶³ A very good basic perspective on spiritual warfare is given by; Neil T. Anderson and Timothy M. Warner, *The Beginners Guide to Spiritual Warfare*, (Ventura, CA, Regal Books, 2000). For a more advanced study of spiritual warfare, read, Dr. Ed Murphy, *The Handbook for Spiritual Warfare*.

into this service. Spiritual warfare is very serious business, and God would no more put a young Christian into deliverance ministry than an army would send a child with a cap gun into a battle zone.

Deliverance ministry is for mature Christians who have been specifically called and empowered to do so, and then have trained under experts in the field. The best advice for us average worshipers is, "if you don't know where you are going, don't go there." As Bruce Wilkinson states, "By far our most important strategy for defeating the roaring lion is to stay out of the arena."⁶⁴

Praying in the Spirit

Paul commanded us, "And pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests." (Eph. 6:18). Some charismatic groups claim that this means praying in tongues, but praying in the Spirit is not the same thing as speaking in ecstatic utterances. Praying in the Spirit means praying by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, openly and honestly before God, without selfish motives, desiring that His will be done. We should always allow the Spirit to guide our prayers and prompt us on what to pray for. In this regard, Paul's command here is related to this teaching, "In the same way, the Spirit helps us in our weakness. We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groans that words cannot express. And he who searches our hearts knows the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints in accordance with God's will." (Ro. 8:26-27). Worshipping God daily in confession, thanksgiving, and praise will bring us closer to God than any other form of prayer, and fill us with the Holy Spirit. Thus we will be able to pray in the Spirit.

We can pray in the Spirit at any time and in any place we happen to be. Offering up a quick prayer from time to time or singing spiritual songs to ourselves during the day is a good way to stay in tune with God. This is what Paul was referring to when he said, "Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom, and as you sing psalms, hymns and spiritual songs with gratitude in your hearts to God." (Col. 3:16). This is what it means to be continuously filled with the Holy Spirit.

Praying in Tongues

Speaking in tongues is a bona fide spiritual gift (*charisma*) (1 Cor. 12:10, 28, 13:1, et al.) that gives the person the ability to spontaneously speak in a human language previously unknown to the individual, or to speak in a non-human language that cannot be understood by anyone except through supernatural interpretation. When people speak about praying in tongues, they normally mean praying in a non-human language in the second sense mentioned above. This refers to special heavenly languages inspired by the Spirit for worship. Speaking in tongues was highly overrated and abused by the Corinthian church, such that Paul gave instructions to them limiting its use (1 Cor. 14:1-28). It is still largely misunderstood, forbidden in some Christian groups, and in other circles, much overused.

According to biblical directives, private use of tongues is edifying to the individual (1 Cor. 14:4) but public use of tongues must be limited, and there must be someone present to interpret (1 Cor. 14:27, 28). Every Christian has at least one spiritual gift, or *charisma* (1 Pet. 4:10, 1 Cor. 7:7), but no single gift is given to everyone (1 Cor. 12:29-30), therefore not all

⁶⁴ Bruce Wilkinson, *The Prayer of Jabez*, (Sisters, OR, Multnomah Publishers, 2000), 63.

Christians have the gift of tongues. If we find ourselves blessed with this gift, it is wise to follow the teachings in the Bible and limit our use of it to private prayer, unless we are certain there is someone present who can truly interpret it.

Both the gift of tongues and the gift of interpretation of tongues can be counterfeit by the wrong spirits, so it is prudent not to play with them. The gifts of the Spirit, or *charismata*, are given as the Spirit sees fit, and not as we desire, so any overly exuberant desire on our part to have or display any of the showy gifts, such as this one, could lead to our being deceived.

Fasting

Although fasting is not uniquely a Christian practice, Christian fasting means abstaining from food and drink for a period of time for spiritual purposes. We may choose to skip a meal or even a number of meals as we feel led, in order to enhance our intercessory prayers and devotional time. Fasting can greatly increase the power of our prayers, provided we do so with the right motives. Andrew Murray wrote, "Fasting helps to express, to deepen, and to confirm the resolution that we are ready to sacrifice anything, even ourselves, to attain the Kingdom of God."⁶⁵

Arthur Wallis defines fasting as this, "Fasting, then, is a divine corrective to the pride of the human heart. It is a discipline of the body with a tendency to humble the soul."⁶⁶ According to John Wesley, fasting was one of the five instituted means to God's grace.⁶⁷ He urged Methodists to fast every Wednesday and Friday.

We must avoid fasting for its own sake. Wallis warns, "It needs to be stressed that fasting, whether regular or occasional, is a matter between the individual and God. The lessons of history would teach us to resist any tendency to allow regular fasting by the individual to become a church custom. One short step and the church custom has become a church rule to which the faithful are obliged to bow..."⁶⁸ He stresses, "Fasting, like prayer, must be God-initiated and God-ordained if it is to be effective. Prevailing prayer begins with God; He places upon us a burden by the Spirit, and we respond to that burden. Prayer that originates with God always returns to God. So it is with fasting."⁶⁹

Fasting increases the power of God within us. Bill Bright writes, "Fasting is also a primary means of restoration. By humbling our souls, fasting releases the Holy Spirit to do His special work of revival in us...Fasting reduces the power of the self so that the Holy Spirit can do a more intense work within us."⁷⁰

Fasting should not be attempted by anyone with a medical problem that could be aggravated by the fast, and while fasting, we must always drink plenty of water. Prolonged fasting, that is, for more than a day, should not be attempted by anyone who is not accustomed to short-term fasting. It is best to start by missing only one meal, and then by going without breakfast and lunch. We can prepare for fasting by reading authoritative books on the subject.

Some advocate different kinds of fasting involving abstinence from certain kinds of choice food or drink, or perhaps abstaining from activities not related to eating, but there is less

⁶⁵ Andrew Murray, *With Christ in the School of Prayer*, 101.

⁶⁶ Arthur Wallis, *God's Chosen Fast*, (Fort Washington, Penn. Christian Literature Crusade, 1999), 45.

⁶⁷ John Wesley, "Minutes of Several Conversations" *The Works of John Wesley, Third Ed.* Vol. VIII (Peabody, Mass. Hendrickson Publishers, 1981), 323.

⁶⁸ Arthur Wallis, *God's Chosen Fast*, 34.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 41.

⁷⁰ Bill Bright, "Releasing God's Power Through Fasting", from John Maxwell, *Partners in Prayer*, 127.

basis in Christian history or tradition for these. Fasting, in and of itself, does nothing, but only enhances our devotions and prayers. We must not make fasting just a routine or do it only because others are doing it. We should feel genuinely convicted to fast for a specific purpose and for a specific period of time. Jesus commanded us to do our fasting in secret, so that our Father will reward what is done in secret (Mt. 6:16-18), but this does not prevent us from entering into a fasting covenant with a prayer partner or prayer group if we feel so led.

Conclusion

Nothing will connect us with God more quickly and more assuredly than worshiping God in confession, thanksgiving, and praise. By drawing near to God in this way, He will draw near to us, and we will grow in Spirit and in truth.

This study on prayer has set the stage for a comprehensive and orderly daily devotional time. Growth in our Christian lives depends entirely on our willingness to give up our own self-interests and strive to live according to God's will. In order to do this, we must connect with God in a meaningful way through prayer every day. Firm commitment and perseverance are the keys to success in the future. Meeting regularly with a spiritual friend or mentor will be invaluable in helping us grow and mature. Prayer, combined with systematic study of the Bible, will bring us closer to God and prepare us for service in His kingdom. Without these, we have little more than the non-believers around us.

Parting Thought

"The great need of our world, our nation, and our churches is people who know how to prevail in prayer. Moments of pious wishes blandly expressed to God once or twice a day will bring little change on earth or among people. Kind thoughts expressed to Him in five or six sentences, after reading a paragraph or two of mildly religious sentiments once a day from some devotional writing, will not bring the kingdom of God to earth or shake the gates of hell and repel the attacks of evil on our culture and our civilization."⁷¹

Wesley Duewel

Final Prayer

Our Father in Heaven, I rejoice in the wonderful blessings that You are showering down upon us every day. I commit myself to a life of prayer, with the intention of drawing closer to You, of getting to know Your will for me, and of doing Your will as You have called me to do. I praise You, for You are our great and mighty God, our wonderful, loving Father. I pray in Jesus' holy name, Amen.

⁷¹ Wesley L. Duewel, *Mighty Prevailing Prayer*, 20.

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Book Synopsis

Connecting With God - the Power of Prayer

The book is an instruction on the necessity and the effectiveness of prayer. It is designed for committed Christians who already have a foundation in their faith and who wish to grow in their understanding of God and of prayer. It comes mainly from the author's personal experience and is supported by many quotes from the Bible and from many well-known authors on the subject of prayer.

The book is divided into three sections with a total of 10 chapters. Each section has an introduction which speaks to the purpose of the section. The chapters explain in detail the topics of discussion and are designed to draw the reader into a greater understanding of how prayer affects our personal relationship with God. Each chapter ends with a prayer that seals the meaning of the chapter.

Section 1 – Prayer, God, Jesus, and our Christian Walk consists of four chapters as follows:

Chapter 1 - The Necessity of Prayer discusses what it means to be a Christian and defines what prayer is. It emphasizes the necessity of prayer to communicate with and build a relationship with God. Prayer is not just a means of offering up prayer requests, but is the means by which we strengthen our relationship with God and grow spiritually.

Chapter 2 - Who is God? gives an overview of who God is as we can learn from the Bible. Since there are many misconceptions about the nature of God, this chapter describes in detail the nature of the Trinity and the three personae of God. This chapter weighs heavily on the biblical descriptions of God as He has revealed Himself to us in the Bible, and how the three personae of the Trinity are united in purpose for the salvation of humankind.

Chapter 3 - Learning to Pray from Jesus outlines Jesus' teachings on prayer as found in the Gospels. Jesus taught us much about prayer and gave us examples of effective prayer that may surprise some Christians. It describes how we should spend time in our personal devotional prayers, as well as praying in church and in group ministries.

Chapter 4 - Where We Are in our Christian Walk gives some insight into how where we are in our growth in Christ should shape our prayer focus. New Christians should spend a good deal of time nurturing a personal relationship with God and praying for themselves in order to learn the power of God and the loving relationship that He wants to develop with us.

Section 2 – Worshipping God in Prayer consists of three chapters, which contain the main message of the book:

Chapter 5 - The Worship of Confession and Repentance talks about what confession and repentance are and why they are necessary to strengthen our relationship with God. It points out that a humble heart toward God is vital to having a right relationship with Him. The chapter speaks of sin, how it hampers our lives, and how we can work with God to overcome the sin in our lives.

Chapter 6 - The Worship of Thanksgiving outlines the focus of our prayers of thanksgiving, and how this is an important part of our worship of God. We thank God in prayer primarily for the spiritual blessings He has conferred on us and express our gratitude to Him for all that He has done for us. The chapter details what things we can thank the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit for.

Chapter 7 - The Worship of Praise speaks of Praise as being the highest form of worship and prayer. Praise lifts our prayers to a crescendo of the expression of our love for the Trinity, draws us close to God, and results in a profound infilling of the Holy Spirit. In praise we worship the majesty of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, with the effect that we draw close to God and our faith increases greatly.

Section 3 – Petition and Intercession, and Factors Affecting Prayer, consisting of three chapters, gives basic insight into what it is we should be praying for, and many of the factors that can affect our prayer lives.

Chapter 8 – Petition – Prayers for Ourselves emphasizes the necessity of praying for ourselves. It is difficult to hold others up in prayer if we ourselves are not first strong in the Lord. It emphasizes that our petitions should be primarily for our own spiritual growth and for God's direction in life, rather than material things.

Chapter 9 – Intercession – Prayers for Other People and Situations suggests how we should go about praying for others and what to pray for. It advises that we should try as much as possible to pray for insight into God's will as to what other people and situations really need, rather than our own ideas about the results we might want to see.

Chapter 10 – Factors Affecting Prayer informs the reader of a variety of factors that may cause our prayers to be weakened or ineffective, and gives positive advice on how to overcome these situations. The chapter ends with a parting thought and a final prayer that is a commitment to a life of prayer, to drawing closer to God and learning His will for us.