



Lord, Teach Us to Pray

Various Authors from the *Tidings*

In 2023, the *Tidings* magazine ran a year-long series of articles attempting to take a fresh Scriptural look at prayer. Many helpful articles focused on prayer effectiveness and setting prayer as a priority.

However, this series attempted to take a more diagnostic look at prayer. How can we better understand the gracious opportunity for prayer in the life of a believer? How can we realize the opportunity for intimacy with our God? What can we do to make prayer a more powerful part of our personal and ecclesial lives?

Our sincere thanks to the brethren agreed to write these articles. We provide them all here in one place for your encouragement.

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UNDISCIPLINED DISCIPLINED PRAYER

By David Lloyd

DISCIPLINED is a word that could sound rigid, or worse, robotic and heartless. That can't be prayer! On the other hand, "undisciplined" sounds all over the place, and mostly not in a good place. That can't be prayer, either! This article suggests undisciplined disciplined prayer can be life changing. In fact, it has changed my life.

We get a good taste of disciplined prayer from other religious cultures. Some practices can be admired. The Muslim faith has five prayers daily, a ritual followed by approximately 1.5 billion people. Consult the Internet to find the time for prayer, as it changes with sunrise and sunset. Conversely, the Jewish culture has three prayer times in a day. The times are not as rigid, but overall, it's a rule, not a suggestion. Additionally, many Eastern

religions use a prayer mat to pray on. Sometimes the prayer mat must face a certain direction, such as Mecca for Muslims. It can also be a requirement to pray in a clean place.

Does this sound Biblical? Daniel is the example for three daily prayers (Dan 6:10). Let's learn from the words of Jesus and see the good in these prayer practices.

What Does Jesus Say?

As usual, Jesus is our best example. His elegant teaching on the how-tos of prayer is in Matthew 6. It is in answer to a direct question from the disciples in Luke 11:1. But we will explore all of Matthew 6 because Jesus is teaching more than the actual "Lord's Prayer." Something special shows up first.

Here is my rephrasing of the first verses in Matthew 6:5-8. Remember that in

Luke 11, the disciples asked Jesus to teach them how to pray, prompting the giving of the Lord's Prayer. But Jesus gives them a lot more than a model prayer. Here we go:

When you pray, here's how I want you to do it. Find a quiet personal sanctuary so you won't be in view of anyone. Simply be there with Him, you and Him alone. His rewards then come. The world is full of prayer advice about how to get something from God. Don't follow anyone else. God knows what is needed.

So, here's excellent advice for prayer from Jesus: Show up! That's it; show up. Be there with Him. In this passage, Jesus assumes the true believer will pray. There's never a good reason to not pray! I often hear that many feel inadequate in their prayer life, and it becomes infrequent. They get tons of advice about prayer and examples in the Bible. But they end up feeling they don't measure up. Jesus says, don't get squashed by what other people do! He just wants you to **show up** with whatever you have. His teaching is the antidote for prayer inadequacy. You are

in a quiet place, and nobody is looking! This is the disciplined part. **SHOW UP!** Come with whatever you have, brilliant or not, lively or sleepy, eloquent or bumbling.

Here is my personal experience with disciplined prayer. I pray at certain times, and they are quite regular. But there are no rules. This routine started when I was diagnosed with stage 4 cancer. Before cancer, I felt sleepy with God. From the wake-up call of my diagnosis, I began a morning and evening devotional practice. I now tell people that contracting cancer is the best thing that ever happened to me. Prayer is so important that I acutely feel a loss if something interrupts my alone time with God. It's nothing I am obligated to do, but I thrive on it. Strangely, though, I think if it were a rule I had to follow, as it is in the Muslim and Jewish traditions, it would ruin the whole experience for me. So, setting aside time to pray really can be helpful, but you need self-motivation to read a book or article like this and apply the principles in your life.

Also, there's the idea of a prayer place, on a mat or a quiet place. I like to call



it the sanctuary. Jesus says to find a closet. I know a brother who does use a closet! You see, I counsel men with addictions, and if someone is going to replace an addiction, it is best to replace it with a meaningful relationship with God and Jesus and with prayer as the center. For the disciplined part of this, I recommend these men find a place in their life to go when doing their devotional prayer. Other prayers are great in any setting, but this sanctuary is for your devotional—or disciplined—prayer time.

So, consider calling a separate place your sanctuary and using that space exclusively for prayer. It doesn't have to be elegant or lofty. Maybe you can sit on a few special pillows in a corner, or a chair devoted for this, on your knees anywhere, or in your car at lunchtime by yourself. I'm smiling because I've prayed in all these spots over the years. Be creative! God loves being alone with us.

So, Jesus teaches discipline, but not in a way anyone would have guessed. He's not giving us a formula. Rather, he's telling us just to show up and connect quietly.

The Undisciplined Way of Prayer

The undisciplined part comes next. Jesus tells us not to follow anyone else. It's **your** prayer to God!

If you are not rigid and yet able to pray, you will find disciplined prayer time undisciplined. It can change daily, and you can add and remove elements. I like what Jesus said; *"God knows what is needed."* With that, it takes listening, which means there is no guarantee how any single prayer moment will go.

My two points in this section are this: Be a good listener, and pray about things that resonate with you.

I can give examples. Lately, what resonates with me is I want to be kind. God's kindness comes up in all of Paul's letters. When I pray about being kind, it sends a little tingle up and down my spine. I say, if it resonates with you, pray that prayer! To add just a little color, consider the positive approach to asking for something you believe you already have. (Mark 11:24). So, affirm when you pray that "I am kind." These are called affirmations, and I include a bunch in my devotionals.

Since the programs and advice of others are not influencing us, you will have an ever-changing (hence undisciplined) program of devotional prayer. I have found that my devotionals go longer and longer. New thoughts, experiences, and awarenesses will breed new ideas, and if they resonate, it's got to go into your prayer!

After Jesus instructs us to not pray the way others tell us to, he follows with the Lord's Prayer. I believe he was preparing us for our own devotional prayers. The Lord's Prayer is a wonderful starting place for me. I pray it first every day in my devotions. Others, like my wife, prefer to end their devotionals with it. It fits anywhere! I also love the way Psalm 23 fits anywhere. Prayers like these are timeless. They can weave in and out of undisciplined prayer.

An undisciplined prayer can have so many more items. Besides the affirmations, the lyrics of hymns are a huge part of mine. They come and go. I'm amazed at how a hymn will pop into my head. I call this being a good

listener. So, if it moves you, add it in! I have a song that never grows old with me, and I love to say it with the tune in my head every day. As a good listener, I recommend being quiet. All sorts of things come when you are quiet. It is interesting to me that sometimes a thought of a person comes in the quiet parts of a devotional. Go with it!! That's your cue to pray for that person. A time of disciplined prayer can be quite undisciplined.

Now the Pitfalls

Jesus tells us the pitfalls to avoid in this same teaching in Matthew 6.

Disciplined prayer can easily become a vain repetition. The dark side of discipline is that it becomes all too familiar. I'm sure many of us have once forgotten whether we had done the prayer for the meal or not. That meal prayer can be so easily a vain repetition. It's just that we give it so often. How many ways can we thank God for the food?

The lesson at the beginning was to **show up**. We may give the appearance that we showed up, but maybe we didn't. We see ourselves praying, but we aren't engaged.

So, it's time to go undisciplined. Shake it up!

Jesus gives us the Lord's Prayer, but it can be an easy destination for disengaging ourselves. It is short and all too familiar.

I visit a brother in prison, and he carefully ponders each individual phrase of the Lord's Prayer. Each phrase is a devotional. That's his way of resonating. I have a technique I use with things that have a lot of elements

for my devotional prayers. I take just one part of something and make that the theme of the day. For example, Philippians 4:8 has the idea of thinking about things that are true, honest, just, pure, lovely, of good report, of virtue, and of praise. So that is my list, but it is just too many things to hit me with at once. So today, as I am writing this, the theme for today is to think of pure things. I like to turn this into an affirmation of "I think pure thoughts."

This technique works equally well with the Lord's Prayer. The next theme for me is "*Thy will be done*." I have been thinking about this. But these are my thoughts—you may have something entirely different that resonates with you. Remember, don't follow me or anyone else. But follow God. He knows what you need in prayer.

If you are quiet, it will come. No pressure.

Conclusion

I am thankful for the good examples other religions set and how they systematically prioritize prayer. Jesus' lovely teaching gives us a beautiful way to approach our Heavenly Father. So, we follow Jesus with discipline and undiscipline in going places unknown. God gives us what we need.

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WE DO NOT KNOW WHAT WE OUGHT TO PRAY FOR

By Darren Tappouras



WE would all like to know how to pray better.

It appears that very few of us are satisfied with our prayer life and our personal commitment to prayer.

I number among my friends, some of whom are considered prominent Bible students in our community, who teach at Bible Schools and Conferences, yet they sometimes confide in quiet conversation about their inadequacy when it comes to prayer.

In most books I have read on prayer, the authors, many of them spiritual giants, will also admit to this inadequacy and

take care to emphasize they are not experts, nor have they mastered the subject themselves.

“In speaking about prayer, I should not like you to think that I am posing as an expert.”¹

“It is because the writer is deeply conscious of the many problems which surround the subject of prayer.”²

“Personal conversations reveal that there is an almost universal dissatisfaction regarding one’s own prayers.”³

“One writes about prayer with a reluctance which springs from a sense of inadequacy.”⁴

Why is This?

I humbly propose a suggestion that may account for at least some of the inadequacy felt. I detect significant confusion about this subject, particularly concerning petitionary prayer,⁵ and its interaction with God’s providence.

I feel (speaking mainly for myself) we are confused about what to expect from prayer and what God offers through prayer. In our community, we receive many mixed messages regarding prayer. In some quarters, our language can reflect the theology of Calvinism, which posits that everything that happens is a result of a divine plan and that God is consciously and purposely involved in every event. In other parts of the community, it is held that God only interacts with us through His written Word and only uses external agents, such as angels or weather events, to bring about His will.

With such a range of different and inconsistent perspectives, it can be hard to formulate and confidently hold a consistent personal view. Also, our personal experience of prayers being answered or not being answered adds to the confusion.

Having been baptized for over 35 years, I have gone to God in sincere

and earnest prayer on many occasions and not had my prayer answered. If I am being honest, I would have to say that the majority of my most serious and heartfelt prayers have not been answered.

How many friends with cancer have I tearfully prayed for, who have lost the battle and died, sometimes leaving behind young families bereft and shattered? How many accident victims have I prayed for who have not recovered? How many friends who have left the faith have I prayed for who remain lost? How many faltering marriages have I asked God to intervene in, yet they ended in divorce nonetheless? The list could go on.

Trite and superficial answers such as “It was God’s will,” “We cannot understand God’s reasons,” or “God was teaching us all a lesson” were unsatisfying and, for me, only added to the confusion I felt.

An Unsatisfying Solution

Because of such experiences, some have taken a subjective-only approach the prayer.

They suggest prayer doesn’t really cause God to intervene, but it is still highly beneficial for us. When we come to God in prayer, we have our perspectives aligned with God’s. Our minds are recalibrated by the very action and words of our prayer, and we learn to trust in God and take comfort from the prayer experience.

I would have to say that the majority of my most serious and heartfelt prayers have not been answered.

Now, I strongly believe that prayer involves a very significant subjective power. However, the promises regarding prayer in the Scriptures appear far more effective and substantial than just these subjective benefits.

Bro. Dennis Gillett makes some very relevant observations regarding subjective-only prayer. He begins by saying: "What you think about prayer will decide whether you pray and how you pray" (Gillett, 2015). He goes on to say,

"There are those who affirm sincerely that the sole purpose of prayer is subjective—that is, its object is to change those who pray. Now whilst I have the deepest respect for those who sincerely hold this view of prayer, I am obliged to say that I think it to be utterly wrong, and in a sense a theory which is self-destructive."⁶

His own observation is that those who hold this view eventually find their motivation to pray diminished and often give up praying altogether; "The subjective value and effect of prayer arises out of a conviction that when men speak to God, He hears and answers their prayer."

God's Extravagant Prayer Promises

As much as we may respect the honesty and self-awareness of those who seek only personal benefits as a way of responding to the unanswered prayer phenomenon, we, too, find it to be an unsatisfactory interpretation of some particular and extravagant offers by God found in His word.

Prayer Guarantees

Throughout the New Testament, believers are given very specific promises relating to their prayers being answered. Some well-known ones include:

- "Whatever we ask we receive from him." (1 John 3:22).
- "And this is the confidence that we have toward him, that if we ask anything according to his will, he hears us. And if we know that he hears us in whatever we ask, we know that we have the requests that we have asked of him." (1 John 5:14-15).
- "Whatever you wish, and it will be done for you." (John 15:7).
- "Whatever you ask in my name, this I will do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son. If you ask me anything in my name, I will do it." (John 14:13-14).
- "Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives, and the one who seeks finds, and to the one who knocks it will be opened." (Matt 7:7-8, Luke 11:9).

Several related verses seem to indicate that because of our faith, we should be able to achieve amazing physical feats based on God's response to our prayers:

Truly, I say to you, whoever says to this mountain, "Be taken up and thrown into the sea," and does not doubt in his heart, but believes that what he says will come to pass, it will be done for him. Therefore, I tell you, whatever you ask in prayer, believe that you have received it, and it will be yours. (Mark 11:23-24, see Luke 17:6 and Matt 7:20).

The Usual Responses

How can we reconcile these conflicting realities?

On one hand, it appears that Scripture is obvious; God will answer our prayers. On the other hand, our life experiences contain many personal examples (sometimes quite painful) that demonstrate this is not always the case.

SUGGESTED SOLUTIONS:

The Answer Could be NO!

One attempt to resolve this contradiction is to say that God always answers our prayers as the verses state; it's just that His answer may be no!

The reality is that this solution cannot be forced upon the passages quoted. The “no” answer cannot really be inserted into the context, syntax, and grammar of the verses themselves. I will demonstrate with two examples, but they hold for all the passages in question.

For example, consider the text from Luke 11:9-11 below, and see if you can insert a “no” into the structure or if the context allows for a “no” to be implied in any way.

And I tell you, ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives, and the one who seeks finds, and to the one who knocks it will be opened. What father among you, if his son asks for a fish, will instead of a fish give him a serpent?

Also, consider this verse from John 14:13-14, and see if a “no” answer can be implied in the text.

Whatever you ask in my name, this

I will do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son. If you ask me anything in my name, I will do it.

This verse simply says, ask and I will do it—a “no” answer cannot be forced into the context. See also John 15:7, “*Whatever you wish, and it will be done for you.*” Note the far-reaching and unqualified word “*whatever*” used here. This prayer promise is clear and positive and does not appear to anticipate or allow a “no” answer. We can repeat the analysis on passages such as 1 John 5:15 and John 3:22. A “no” answer doesn’t appear to be a satisfactory or satisfying solution.

According To His Will

Another attempt to answer this contradiction comes by focusing on some of these verses that align the answer of prayer with the will of God, as seen in 1 John 5:14-16, in “*according to His will.*”

This line of reasoning says that we can be confident that our prayers will only be answered if it is according to God’s will. The implication is that it may not have been God’s will (in His infinite wisdom) for a particular person to recover from a serious injury. Therefore, the prayers for their recovery were not answered.

We note several difficulties with this view. Firstly, 1 John 5:14 says that we can have “*confidence*” that our prayers will be answered. How is this possible, as we do not know whether our prayer is in accordance with His will?

This point of view also appears to be a convenient excuse. By way of illustration, imagine I am the manager of a company, and on several occasions

I made great pronouncements, both in person and in print, that if any employee wanted anything to help them in their role, I would give it to them. After repeating this offer many times, an employee finally comes to me and asks for a new calculator. I respond, “no!” The employee rightly reminds me of my generous pronouncement, and I respond that I will only give them their request if it is by my will, and it is not my will to give them a new calculator. My pronouncement seems hollow and unhelpful now. One could not have any confidence in my offers and certainly could not rely on them. Secondly, we may be reading something into the word “will” (Greek: *thelema*) that is not intended in this context. God’s will can be understood differently:

1. Purpose-will (or purposive will).

This is a deliberate choice by God to do or not do something. For example, in 1 Corinthians 1:1, “Paul, called by the will of God to be an apostle.”

You can see how in this verse, it is God’s deliberate will and therefore, He acted accordingly to call Paul an apostle.

We could

apply this usage by proposing an illustration in which we have two sisters who both have cancer. By relying on this usage, we could hypothetically say that it is God’s will for one (Sister A) to recover, and it is His will that the other (Sister B) will not. Therefore, prayer for Sister B will not be answered.

2. Precept-will (or preceptive will).

This is what God would desire to be or relates to His principles. For example, 1 Thessalonians 5:18—“*Give thanks in all circumstances for this is the will of God.*” It may also include God’s will in a particular dispensation—e.g., it is not God’s will that the Holy Spirit gift of tongues be available today.

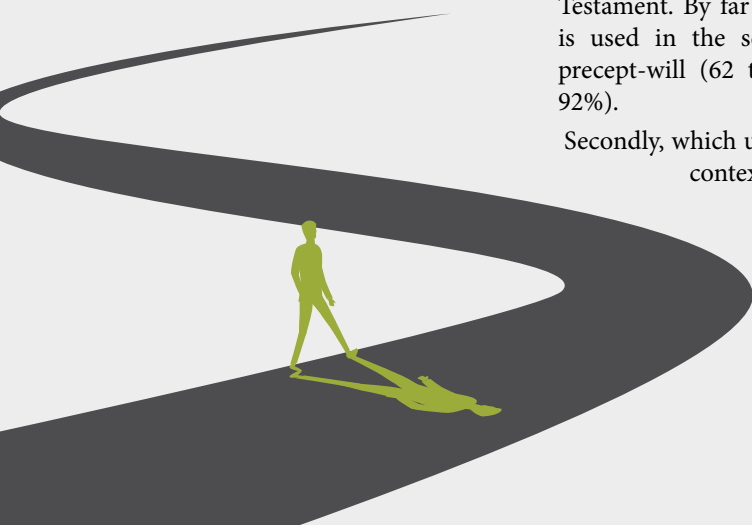
This usage would dictate that God will only answer a prayer that follows His principles and is compliant with his dispensational purpose.

So which usage of the word “will” best suits the prayer promises passages, such as 1 John 5:14-16?

Firstly, one tool to help us decide is to see the number of times the word is used in these two ways within the New Testament. By far and away, the word is used in the second sense—God’s precept-will (62 times out of 67, or 92%).

Secondly, which usage actually fits the context of 1 John 5:15-

16. The fact that we are to take “confidence” that our



prayers are answered would favor the precept-will usage. No one could have any confidence based on the purpose-will unless they knew the very mind of God.

We conclude that the qualifier “*will of God*” is not an individual plan that God has with a certain individual or specific circumstance but rather emphasizes the fact that God will not answer a prayer that goes against His principles (e.g., asking a brother to suffer because he has hurt us, asking God to override someone’s freewill, or asking God to do something not available to His people in this dispensation).

What Have We Covered?

1. All of us (even some leading Bible students) admit to finding prayer challenging.
2. This may be partly because of confusion and mixed messages about prayer in our community.
3. God has given us very generous and extravagant promises (guarantees) to answer our prayers.
4. Our personal prayer experience does not always reflect these guarantees.
5. These guarantees do not allow prayer to be answered by “no.”

6. These guarantees appear to qualify only because God will not compromise His principles in answering our prayers.

How do we make sense of all this? How do we reconcile God’s extravagant prayer guarantees with our experienced reality?

The answers to these questions guide us on a journey to unlock where and how God works in our lives. They may lead to a renewed and powerful motivation to soak our lives in prayer and confidence in God.

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¹ Gillett, Dennis, *Speaking to the Heart*, The Christadelphian Magazine and Publishing Association, 2015.

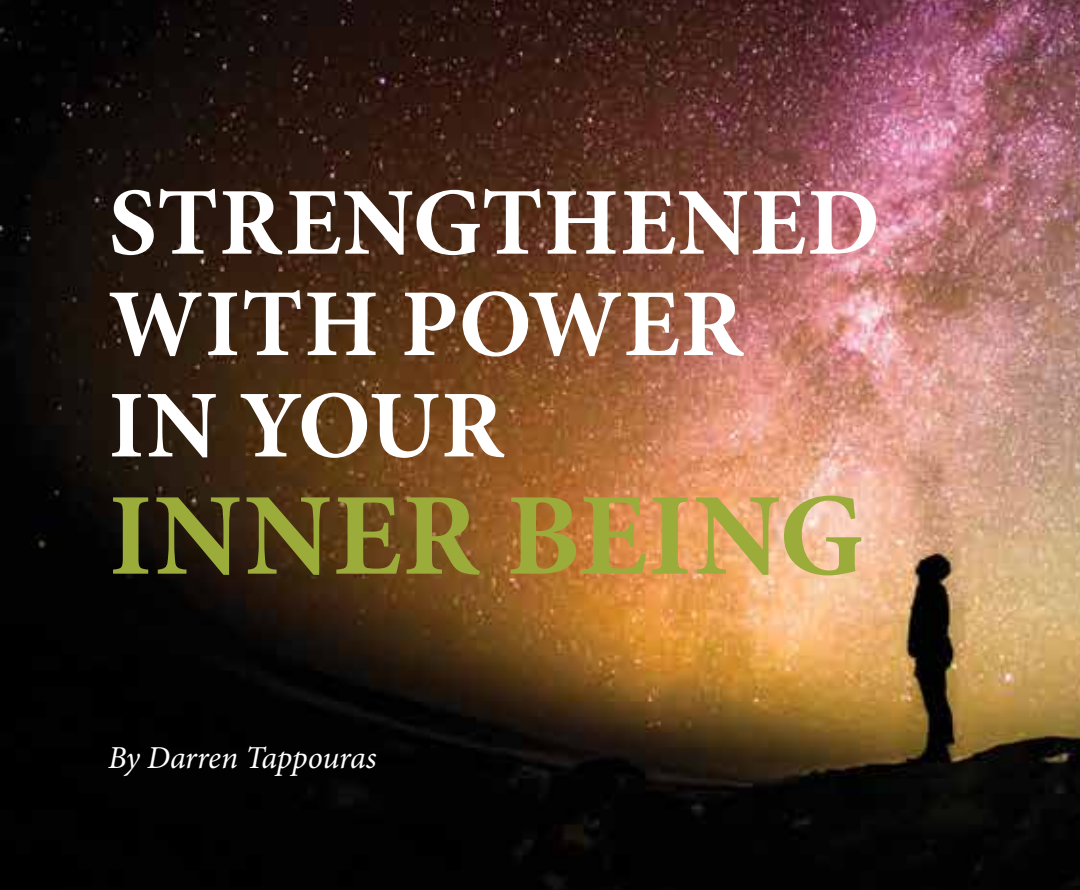
² Tennant, Cyril, *Prayer Studies in Practice*, The Christadelphian Magazine and Publishing Association 1971.

³ Whittaker, Harry, *Reformation*, Biblia, Warwick, UK, (1985).

⁴ Purkis, Melva, *Prayer Studies in Principle and Practice*, The Christadelphian Magazine and Publishing Association 1971.

⁵ Prayers that ask for a specific request from God.

⁶ Ibid, Gillett, Dennis, *Speaking to the Heart*.



STRENGTHENED WITH POWER IN YOUR INNER BEING

By Darren Tappouras

The Problem

There appears to be a discrepancy between the prayer guarantees promised by God in Scripture and our own lived-out prayer experiences.

Here are some amazingly generous and extravagant prayer guarantees:

- *“Whatever we ask we receive from him.” (1 John 3:22).¹*
- *“And this is the confidence that we have toward him, that if we ask anything according to his will, he hears us. And if we know that he hears us in whatever we ask, we know that we have the requests that we have asked of him.” (1 John 5:14-15).*

- *“Whatever you wish, and it will be done for you.” (John 15:7).*

Yet, despite the explicit assurance in these passages, we find our own experiences do not always reflect these guarantees.

How, Then Do We Reconcile These Realities?

Some people suggest the solution is that God will always answer our prayers. It's just that the answer may be “No!” This solution, however, does not conform to the context or syntax of the prayer guarantee passages and a “No” cannot be honestly or by exposition inserted into the passages.

If we agree that only positive answers and results can be read into these prayer guarantee passages, how do we reconcile their content with our own prayer experiences? Speaking for myself, the consideration of the prayer guarantees has transformed how I interact with God, read His word, and live in Christ.

Here I am going to do something a little unusual for a study series and provide the conclusion at the start of our investigation. I believe, if we have the conclusion in our minds, we can more effectively evaluate the very well-known passages we will unpack as we progress through the rest of the study.

The Solution

1. The prayer guarantees are real, beneficial, and powerful and can be relied upon in our life now.

2. The prayer guarantees need to be applied to the intended scope.
3. The scope of these guarantees is the “inner man” (or inner being).
4. God’s new covenant and new creation priorities are focused primarily on the Inner being.
5. The prayer guarantee scope includes spiritual insight and perception, courage, comfort, strength, peace, wisdom, understanding, endurance, and patience.

The Way Forward

Personal recalibration of this divine priority will help us to empower our prayer lives and has the potential to revolutionize our entire life focus on Christ.

Our prayer preoccupation can often

APPLYING THE PRAYER GUARANTEE

Application 1	Injury from Accident while Traveling	Prayer Guaranteed
External Request	<i>“Keep us physically safe as we travel.”</i>	Uncertain
Internal Request	<i>“Courage, strength and comfort to endure the trauma of an accident resulting from travel.”</i>	Yes

Application 2	Toxic, Destructive or Problematic People in our Lives	Prayer Guaranteed
External Request	<i>“Keep from problematic people in our lives.”</i>	Uncertain
Internal Request	<i>“Wisdom to deal with problematic people.”</i>	Yes
Internal Request	<i>“Courage to stand up to problematic person.”</i>	Yes

Application 3	Good Health and Recovery from Sickness	Prayer Guaranteed
External Request	<i>“Keep from sickness, or grant recovery.”</i>	Uncertain
Internal Request	<i>“Endurance to cope with the sickness.”</i>	Yes
Internal Request	<i>“Strength to be a faithful example in sickness.”</i>	Yes

be on the physical externals of life's circumstances—such things as health, employment, relationships, safety, finances, and projects. It appears life circumstances, however, are not covered by the prayer guarantees, and although prayed for, may not be responded to in the way we wish. Nevertheless, within our life experiences, God is still very much at work and involved.

The following Tables will help illustrate the conclusions reached. (Biblical substantiation later supplied.). Paul's famous prayer request for God to remove his physical circumstantial problem is illustrative here:

Three times I pleaded with the Lord about this [to remove his physical problem], that it should leave me. But he said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness." Therefore, I will boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may rest upon me. For the sake of Christ, then, I am content with weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions, and calamities. For when I am weak, then I am strong. (2 Cor 12:8-10 NIV).

Let's now consider the relevant Biblical evidence. We will present below some Biblical interpretative principles and related Biblical case studies that will help unpack this topic.

Interpretive Principle 1:

Physical examples and language which describe God's prayer response is actually used to illustrate internal transformational results.

Case Study: If you have faith as a mustard seed (Luke 17).

There are several verses where Christ appears to say that a believer can perform some incredible physical feat because of the power of prayer. These include plucking up a large tree by the roots and moving it into the sea (Luke 17:6), moving mountains (Matt 17:20), casting a mountain into the sea (Matt 21:21).

These physical results are presented as prayer request responses, "*it will happen, whatever you ask in prayer you will receive it.*" (Matt 21:21-22 NIV).

Now, even a surface reading will prompt us to consider the language more closely. These are undoubtedly exaggerated acts: moving mountains and ripping up large trees. Also, we have no Biblical example of any of these events ever being achieved literally or physically by the apostles.

The context of all these citations will give us the answer. Let's focus on the reference in Luke 17.

"There are several verses where Christ appears to say that a believer can perform some incredible physical feat because of the power of prayer."

Context

Jesus has just told his disciples to forgive a brother if he repents (v. 3), even if he sins against them seven times in one day (v. 4). This commandment prompts the disciple's response in the very next verse (v. 5) increase our faith.



Why this response? To forgive in such a manner went totally against their entire worldview. Their whole upbringing and cultural conditioning had molded their thinking in the opposite direction. The previous words of Jesus “*You have heard that it was said, eye for an eye*” (Matt 5:38) not only reflected their community’s norms but also their understanding of Scripture itself (Exod 21:24, Lev 24:20).

This revolutionary and counter-cultural teaching of Jesus had challenged them to their core, as it should us. The values and attitudes so deeply engrained in their thinking caused them to struggle to understand and perform what Jesus had said.

To transform their attitudes and thinking would take a miracle akin to a huge tree (with its Jewish cultural root system) being ripped up and thrown into the sea (v. 6).

We too have values, attitudes, prejudices, outlooks, and responses that reflect our cultural (including ecclesial), family and community conditioning that may need transformation. This metamorphosis is an internal miracle to which the prayer guarantee applies.

The takeout interpretive principle we want to illustrate here is that the physical descriptions of miraculously answered prayers refer to **internal** transformation.

Interpretive Principle 2:

Extravagant and generous answers to prayer in other New Testament passages focus on our inner being.

Case Study: Strengthened with power through his Spirit in your inner being (Ephesians 3:16-20)

Extravagant Guarantee:

Him who is able to do far more abundantly than all that we ask or think. (v. 20).

Scope and Application:

Inner being (v. 16)

Your hearts (v. 17)

Spiritual comprehension (v. 18)

Knowledge that surpasses human knowledge (v. 19)

Being filled with the fullness of God (v. 19)

The power at work within us (v. 20)

This passage is a prayer (v. 14-16). When reading through this prayer, you are struck by the priority and emphasis that is very much focused on the inner being. The extravagant offer of God doing *“abundantly more than we can ask or think”* (v. 20) once again applies to inner transformation. Also, the passage strongly implies that what is achieved is beyond the ability, intelligence, and mental powers of the recipient but is directly attributable to God’s response.

Case Study: If any of you lacks wisdom let him ask God. (Jas 1:5).

Extravagant Guarantee:

Ask God, who gives generously to all without reproach, and it will be given him. (v. 5).

The fact that it is *“given”* by God would strongly indicate it is not something solely achieved by one’s own mental abilities and cognitive skills. God is very much responsible and involved in this event.

Scope and Application:

This passage refers to a transformed outlook that experiences joy while in the middle of trial (v. 2) and the value and benefit of trial to enhance and develop patience and spiritual maturity (v. 4). These are no doubt supernatural and counter-intuitive perspectives.

This prayer is not for the trial to be removed or reduced, but for the inner being to be infused with a wisdom that transcends normal human reactions and responses.

God is described here as giving *“generously”* (Greek: bountifully and copiously with single-minded commitment). Note the emphatic *“It will be given him”* (v. 5) which again highlights God’s unwavering commitment to answer such prayers if asked in faith.

Interpretive Principle 3:

God’s promise to be with us can co-exist with, and empower us to transcend, the experience of negative external and physical life events.

There are many references to God being with us in our lives and never forsaking us. This reality can sometimes be confused with God removing or resolving adverse life circumstances. The following references will show that these two things, God’s care, and negative life events, can co-exist in the life of a believer.

“I will never leave you nor forsake you.” So, we can confidently say, “The Lord is my helper; I will not fear; what can man do to me?” (Heb 13:5-6)

Here we see a promise of divine help and concern co-existing with persecution. Note that the verse does not say do not fear what man **could have** done to me but rather, what man **can** do to me. The fact that God is with us does not stop men from **doing** things to us.

God’s promise makes us confident He is with us and cares for us even as we experience negative treatment from men. We may conclude that while God

may not step in and stop the physical or psychological abuse, He will help us by removing our fear and giving us courage, comfort, joy, and consolation even while experiencing such things.

“All things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose.” (Rom 8:28)

The fact God is working in our lives does not insulate us from negative experiences. This chapter contains other powerful assurances of divine help; *“if God is for us who can be against us”* (v. 31) and *“we are more than conquerors”* (v. 37). Yet, the chapter goes on to detail the life consequences God’s people will experience, including being killed (v. 36), death (v. 38), tribulation, persecution, famine, nakedness, famine or sword (v. 35).

It is in all these things (v. 37) that God is working in our lives, not by removing them from us but while we are experiencing them.

If God is helping and working for us, yet we are still experiencing these negative life experiences, the answer must be found within the inner realm—the inner being.

Not Just Theory

When I have discussed this subject with friends and family, some have been disappointed. The fact that God is focusing on the inner being may appear to be “not real” or “wishy-washy” compared to the physical and external focus we may desire from Him.

However, it is not our intention to reduce or limit prayer in any way. Just

because the prayer guarantee may not cover something does not mean we should not bring our petitions before God. Scripture is full of such prayers. Some were answered, and some were not.

The reality is, however, that although this focus may be on the internal and intangible, it is no less real and powerful. The transformational power that God is offering has the potential to change our lives, our emotions, our fears, and our priorities in a way that transcends human experience.

The experience of early believers can illustrate the genuine effects of such prayers. When they were thrown to the lions by the Roman empire to die a horrible and painful death, they displayed superhuman courage. Though they were not saved from the lions, God was with them and comforted them, none-the-less:

“The reasons the Christians could not be intimidated by the lions and even sang as they entered the arena was that Jesus’ counsel, “Fear not, for I am with you,” worked for them.”²

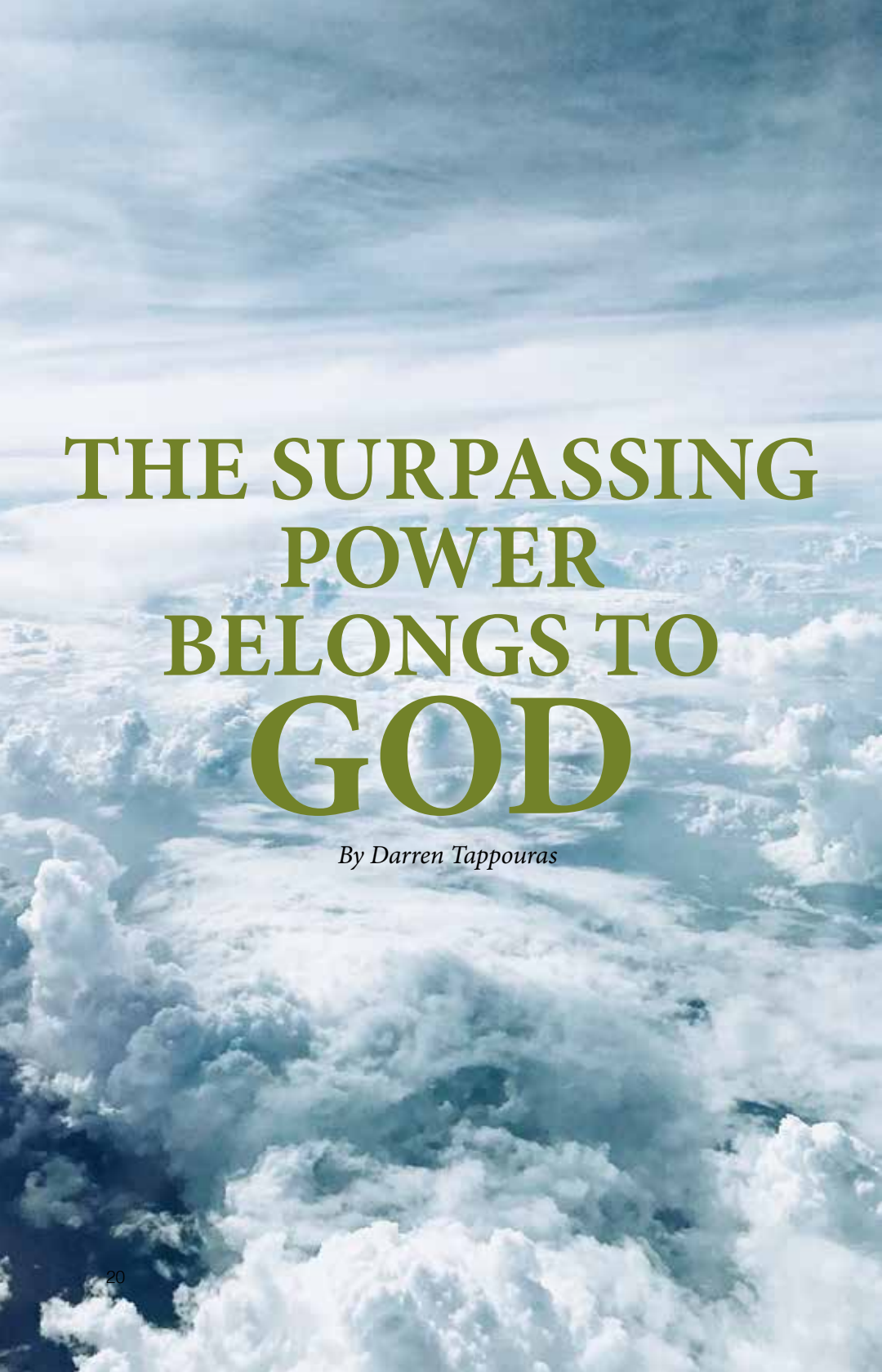
The power of prayer in our lives is just as real today as it was for them—Christ guarantees it.

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¹ All Scriptural citations are taken from the English Standard Version, unless otherwise noted.

² Smith, H. *The World’s Religions, Chapter 8: Christianity*, 1991, Harper Collins, New York City, NY





THE SURPASSING POWER BELONGS TO GOD

By Darren Tappouras

Our Life Now

Understanding prayer within God's purpose will have a lot to do with what we believe is happening in God's plan right "Now," today.

The Holding Pattern View

This is the idea many of us hold about our life today. I certainly absorbed this view in my early years in Christ, and it continued to shape my thinking for decades.

It goes like this—we have found the Truth, the pearl of great price, and we are now part of God's chosen people. God continues to work in the world's affairs to bring things to fruition, as predicted in prophecy, and which will ultimately usher in His Kingdom.

In the meantime, I "Now" wait. I live a good life, learn more about God from His word, and try to manifest the characteristics of God in my life. I work in God's service and patiently wait. "Now" is not important; it is transient, temporary, and will soon be replaced by the Kingdom.

How does petitionary prayer factor into this view? Well, God is there to help. He provides for us, and we can go to Him when things go wrong and ask for His help to resolve problems or assist us in life. Sometimes He helps, sometimes he doesn't—"according to His will." Regardless of His response, all the problems and issues will be resolved when Christ returns. For "Now," I hunker down and wait for the Kingdom. Petitionary prayer within this view could sound a bit mercenary. God can seem to be something of a genie, granting us a middle-class lifestyle and keeping us safe while we wait for the Kingdom to come.

The New Creation View

Although nothing about the above view is particularly wrong, it's just that I now believe there is far more happening in the "Now." "Now" is not a passive waiting period in which God's people hunker down or tread water.

The New Creation has already begun. It began with the resurrection of Jesus. God is working and active in the lives of His people and is right "Now," building something, creating something. The "Now" is a vital component of His purpose, and we are part of that. "Now" is a phase in God's plan as significant as the Millennium itself and without which the Millennium would not happen. The apostle Paul identifies the stages of God's activity in our lives:

Being confident of this very thing, that He who has begun a good work in you will complete it until the day of Jesus Christ" (Phil 1:6)—"for it is God who works in you both to will and to do for His good pleasure. (Phil 2:13 NKJV).

Prayer within this view is seen as something resembling cooperation with God, working with God as He works in us to make His New Creation. Once we identify where God is at work, we can align our prayers with His activities, and the lavish and extravagant prayer guarantees that are cataloged in previous articles make absolute sense. Of course, He will give us what we pray for—we are praying for help to achieve the exact same things He is also working on.

A lot of "New" began with the resurrection—we will consider the New Creation, the New Man (or New Being), and in later articles, the New

Covenant to highlight where God is at work “Now” and how this can integrate with our prayer life.

Has the New Creation Started Already?

Absolutely! Therefore, Jesus is called “*the Beginning of the creation of God.*” (Rev 3:14) and “*firstborn of all creation.*” (Col 1:15). It all started with him. But this was just the beginning; new creation continued, and others were added.

Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come. (2 Cor 5:17 ESV).

If we accept the consensus view that 2 Corinthians was written about AD 55, then it is without question that this new Creation began over 2000 years ago and centers around individuals. The Greek of this verse reads—If anyone is In Christ—New Creation!

Note the rhetorical flourish at the end of the verse, “*Behold, the new has come.*” Remember, this is written in AD 55; the “New” had come already. One can’t help but notice the connection with another rhetorical flourish “*Behold I*

make all things new.” (Rev 21:5). These two “New” pronouncements link the ongoing work of God in His New Creation, both in AD 55 and today, with its finale and consummation depicted in Revelation 21 and 22.

Paul illustrates New Creation as a divine priority in our lives in Galatians 6:15, where he declares that physical controversies such as circumcision count for nothing when compared to what God is doing in His “New Creation.”

Where Is New Creation Happening?

Looking around our world, we see very little evidence God is involved in a New Creation project, but this creative work is being carried out beneath the surface. “*For we are his workmanship [the thing that is made], created in Christ Jesus.*” (Eph 2:10).

The Greek word translated “created” in these passages, “*ktizo*,” is the same word used to describe God’s physical creation (Mark 13:19, 1 Cor 11:9, Rev 4:11).

*And have put on the new man who is renewed in knowledge according to the **image** of Him who **created** him.* (Col 3:10).

Looking around our world, we see very little evidence God is involved in a New Creation project, but this creative work is being carried out beneath the surface.

*And to put on the new self, **created** after the **likeness** of God in true righteousness and holiness.* (Eph 4:24 ESV).

Just as man in the original creation was made in the image and likeness of God (Gen 1:27), so too in the New Creation. The potential squandered in Eden because of sin is now being renewed and brought to life in a New Creation that is taking place “Now.”

What has this “all-surpassing” (Greek: “*huperbole*”) power achieved? Has it removed pain and suffering from the lives of its recipients? Well, yes and no.

As noted earlier in our series, God’s power does not remove the physical trials but allows us to transcend them in a non-material way. This passage goes on to say: (*See table below*)

The physical affliction in the last column was not removed, but the power of God

v. 8	Afflicted in every way	BUT	Not Crushed
	Perplexed	BUT	Not Driven to Despair
v. 9	Persecuted	BUT	Not Forsaken
	Struck down	BUT	Not Destroyed

Old Creation and New Creation

The New Testament sometimes uses concepts and terminology from the original physical creation and applies them to what God is doing in His New Creation. Such a case is 2 Corinthians 4:6-7 (ESV) :

*For God, who said, “Let light shine out of darkness,” has shone in our **hearts** to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ. But we have this treasure in jars of clay, to show that the surpassing power belongs to God and not to us.*

Notice the arena of operations here—“*our hearts*,” our inner being. This spiritual illumination is contained however in “*jars of clay*,” in which our flawed human body, made of the dust or mud of the earth (Physical Creation—Gen 2:7) has within it the “all-surpassing” (NIV) power of God so that anything achieved within it can only be attributable to God Himself.

ensured it did not overwhelm.

The Internal/External—Material/Non-Material paradox is taken up again. (2 Cor 4:16 NKJV).

*Therefore, we do not lose heart. Even though our **outward man** is perishing, yet the **inward man** is being renewed day by day.*

The two exist together, and maybe an inverse relationship can be read into this phrase. The “heart,” the Inner Being, is protected and renewed while at the same time, the physical body is perishing.

The next section further informs us about the arena of God’s operations.

As we look not to the things that are seen [physical and material] but to the things that are unseen [God’s work in the Inner Being]. For the things that are seen are transient, but the things that are unseen are eternal. (2 Cor 4:18 NKJV).

Both At the Same Time

In our earlier articles, we emphasized that God could still be working in our lives and providing us comfort, wisdom, and courage. At the same time, we may be experiencing negative life circumstances. This is further illustrated in a well-known passage that is often quoted in the context of God helping us in our lives: *"I can do all things through him who strengthens me."* (Phil 4:13 ESV).

Obviously, the *"all things"* referred to must be restricted and qualified in some way. For example, God will not strengthen me to run the four-minute mile at the Olympics. The context provides the scope of *"all things"* in a way that harmonizes with the schema presented in this series.

Paul here acknowledges that by God's strength, he can experience two things at the same time:

- Contentment (v. 11); and
- Trouble or distress (v. 14).

Again, we notice God's strength in Paul's life does not remove the "Trouble" but provides the wisdom to experience the "Contentment" that enables him to prosper. A careful reading of the context defines *"all things"*: *"I know how to be brought low, and I know how to abound. In any and every circumstance, I have learned the secret of facing plenty and hunger, abundance and need."* (Phil 4:12 ESV).

We notice God's strength in Paul's life does not remove the "Trouble" but provides the wisdom to experience the "Contentment" that enables him to prosper.

Paul can endure *"any and every"* of life's circumstances (*"all things"*), not by having them removed or solved but by God's strength and wisdom in his life. In fact, strength from God is particularly seen when things are going wrong in Paul's life. Remember his request to God in II Corinthians 12:8-9 to remove the negative physical issue in his life

and remember God's response, *"My strength [spiritual] is made perfect in weakness [physical]."*

Prayer—Cooperation With God

I trust this brief overview highlighting God's area of operations ("Inner Being") in the "Now" of our lives helps us to see where and why prayer works in conjunction with God's priorities.

The references to God actively working in our Inner Being are too numerous, too profound, too intense, and too essential to ignore or casually read over. Any model of prayer or of God's interaction with His people that do not include and hold these facts in the very forefront will be lacking in explanatory power.

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WHY DOES GOD ENCOURAGE US TO



By Dev Ramcharan

Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, give thanks in all circumstances, for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you. (1 Thess 5:16-18 ESV).

WITHOUT a doubt, our relationship with God is the most important one in our lives. And yet, we all know that it waxes and wanes, affected by the vicissitudes of circumstance, health, and mood. That tendency toward inconstancy is not in Him; it is only in us. Sometimes we use Him like an ATM machine, drawing on Him only in times of need when crises consume us. But God is not a machine that satisfies our periodic or immediate needs. God is alive and feeling, and He expects us to invest

all of who we are in our relationship with Him. We realize we often neglect this greatest of relationships, failing to devote the time we need to keep it healthy, growing, and deepening in love and understanding. As I reflect on my own relationship with the Father, who has saved me from hopelessness, it occurs to me that the quality of my prayers reflects the tone and depth of all of my relationships. There is much work to do.

We all know that comfortable rut we fall into, the repetitive conversations

that keep us engaged in a kind of warm and safe dialogue free of the dangerous turbulence of utterly open and transparent conversation. God speaks to us frankly in His Word, sharing Himself, His hopes for His people, His pleas for their obedience and loyalty, His hurt when they reject Him, His deepest intentions and plans, and His desire to save us from sin and death. And most importantly, He tells us about a vast and deep love that moved Him to sacrifice His beloved son so we might have hope. God has invested so much in His relationship with us. His Word provides one half of a conversation, and we supply the other half through prayer. If my daily conversations with God are perfunctory, repetitive, superficial, and spoken or thought in a way that keeps Him at a “safe” distance from my wounds and my brokenness, then do I really love Him with all my heart, soul, and mind (Matt 22:37)? Do I trust Him (Prov 3:5-6)?

God encourages us through Paul to *“Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you.”* (1 Thess 5:16-18). To paraphrase: “Talk to me; talk to me a lot, not only when things are good or when you’re

in terror and can’t find a way out of trouble. I want you to share with me all the time.” That is what the passage is saying to us. He wants to know us, and He wants us to know Him and to see ourselves more clearly. We all have an abiding need for connection. God made us connect to Him and each other. Often, we wish those closest to us knew us better and that we knew them better too. But vulnerability is hard in this superficial world of Facebook fake glamor and idealized self-promotion. Conversations that require the most vulnerable transparency between two people can alter the direction of a relationship and a life with a fiery, transformative power. But fire scorches, and these conversations involve courage and honest frankness that our culture avoids. If one starts with a decision to disclose, there is always the risk of rejection, scorn or mockery. Will this person I care about or love continue to love me if they see and hear all my towering babel of inconsistencies, weaknesses, frailties, and heart-rending sorrows? Will they still stand by me? Will they want me?

Job pours himself out to his friends, crying out with shocking public grief and disappointment, mingled with



As he speaks, we know we are pigmies beside him, for this is a godly and righteous giant of a man. He does not trundle out trite and well-worn phrases of the variety we can relate to in our public and private prayers.

stubbornly held strands of hope that keep him tethered to an Almighty God he cannot understand. The person he has known and believed in all his life looks like He has abandoned him, and Job risks slipping into the encroaching darkness of despair as he contemplates the losses he has sustained and the grief that is drowning him. Uncomprehending friends exacerbate this grief with genuine initial efforts but then descend into the bitterest acrimony and condemnation. Job's anguished vulnerability and naked disclosure of what is in his heart surely move us to the core. Prayer is not poetry; it is not always pretty. Sometimes prayer is ugly, awkward, halting, and sometimes jumbled and inarticulate, but God considers our situation and condition and gives us compassionate help in that process (Rom 8:26-28).

Job's passionate and exhausted outpourings (his prayers) are dangerous conversations that culminate in God speaking out of a tempest that directly reflects the surging emotional waters in Job's heart. As he speaks, we know we are pigmies beside him, for this is a godly and righteous giant of a man. He does not trundle out trite and well-worn phrases of the variety we can relate to in our public and private prayers. He cries out in agony;

he shrieks; he argues; he pleads; he is truly, wholly, and only himself without masks, shorn of subterfuge and any kind of pretense, utterly vulnerable and diseased, a brave and broken man. He, as good as accuses the LORD of not knowing what He is doing in bringing such horror into his life unjustly (in his mind). God does not strike him dead for impertinence. He knows the pain and turmoil this man is in. He stretches him to the breaking point and brings him closer to Him. Job's prayers are vivid and intense. God encourages us to cry out to Him, to connect with Him in honest and heartfelt prayer (Psa 34:6; 61:2; Lam 2:18).

In the end, Job does not get answers to his questions. He humbles himself before God, accepts His actions, and recognizes the enormity of his ignorance. God is not always easily understood, but His actions are to be accepted with humility and, in the end, in quietness. In compassion and with loving pity, God nurtures Job back to an even greater stage of maturity and strength. And what does God say to his friends? "*My servant Job shall **pray** for you, for I will **accept his prayer** not to deal with you according to your folly.*" (Job 42:8-9). Job is transformed through the experience of bereavement, loss, prayer and contemplation of the words and works of El Shaddai. We

sit in shocked wonder as we read this book and realize that God talks to each of us in our own storms. Sometimes it takes a storm to turn and burnish a human heart. It may take a wilderness wandering to change us. It may require a shuddering, sweaty, bloody night-time garden wailing to the Father, without eloquence, polish, or refinement of expression, to put us into His hands, to trust Him completely. And this kind of prayer makes us better people than the people around us.

Job prayed for his friends, and a key part of our prayer life must be a concern for and lifting up of prayer for others. Continuously doing this deepens our relationships with those we pray for and strengthens families and ecclesias. (Eph 6:18).

We are encouraged to pray for guidance. None of this life in the Truth is natural or easy for us. We stray so easily and often off the path we should be on. Thus, the Psalmist writes, *“Show me the right path, O LORD; point out the road for me to follow.”* (Psa 25:4, NLT). Our only hope for remaining in the faith and healthy in it is through the work of God in our lives, so we need to constantly pray for Him to guide us. We bring our wounds and shame to the Father and continually pray for the forgiveness of our sin, an enduring need in the days of our flesh (Psa 51, 32).

We pray for God’s Kingdom, *“Let your kingdom come!”* (Matt. 6:9-13) to keep that hope alive in our hearts. We pray for the preaching and the preachers of God’s Truth so the Gospel message may be heard among us and in the world in this age suffused with darkness.

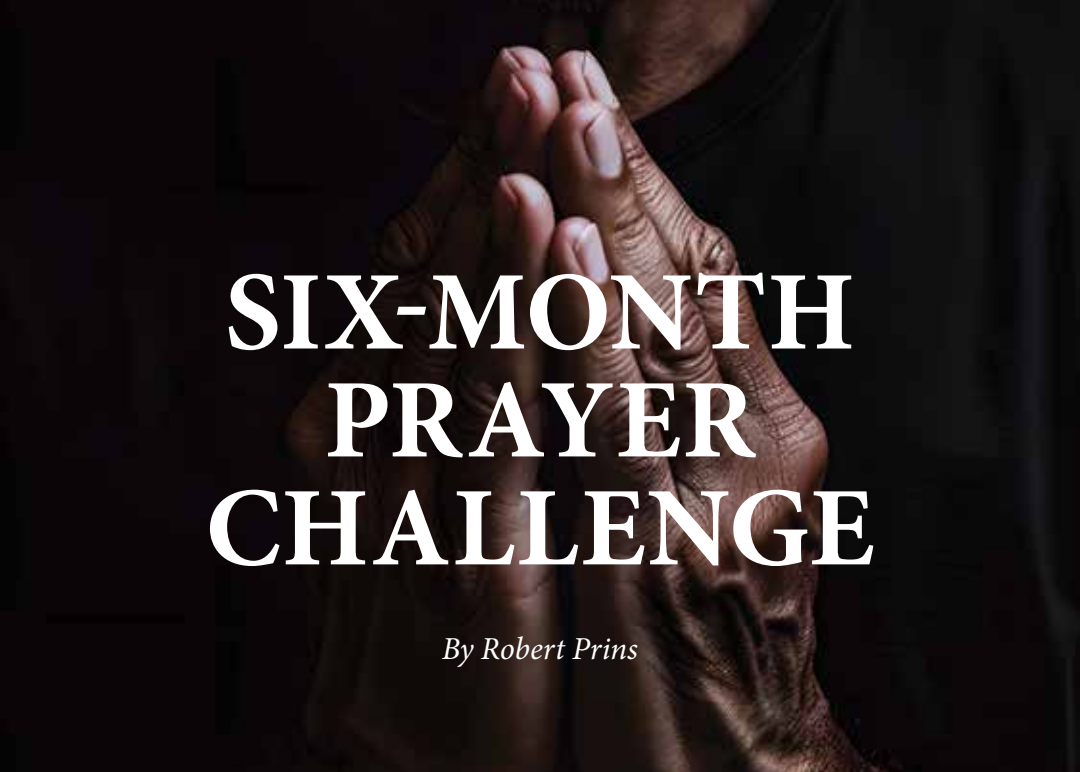
Paul writes to the Ephesians:

In all circumstances, take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming darts of the evil one; and take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the spirit, which is the Word of God, praying at all times in the spirit, with all prayer and supplication for all the saints, and also for me, that Words may be given to me in opening my mouth boldly to proclaim the mystery of the gospel... that I may declare it boldly, as I ought to speak. (Eph 6:16-20).

God encourages us to make prayer a living, daily, continuous conversation with Him. That conversation is greater than any other we could ever have, and it changes us, readying us for life to come. As in all things, we become better at it with practice, and in time we find ourselves praying all through the day. And in times of trouble, through prayer, we come to grips with situations and recognize who we are and who God is. In Job and our lives, we see that prayer is the anvil on which God hammers out an enlarged faith in his struggling children.

May we all become men and women of prayer, and may that have a transformative power for our community.

*Dev Ramcharan,
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SIX-MONTH PRAYER CHALLENGE

By Robert Prins

SOMEONE asked me how I would describe my ecclesia. I had to think for a moment before I came up with the right word. “Invigorating,” I said.

It wasn’t always like that. In fact, about nine years ago, our ecclesia was anything but invigorating. Problem after problem tumbled around us. Health, mental health, and relationships were some of the urgent problems we faced. But that left us little time and energy to deal with other important issues like morale, direction, and spiritual growth. Our ecclesial population was growing older. Our Sunday School and youth group were shrinking. After a normal Sunday morning meeting, the ecclesial hall would clear out relatively quickly. We had been to the meeting. We had done our duty. Life, enthusiasm, and vibrancy were missing. Praise was mediocre, and love was sluggish.

As an ecclesia, we had tried all sorts of things to improve the situation, but nothing seemed to work. We held special social events, planned potentially exciting Bible classes, and tried to grow through preaching, but nothing seemed to pick up the mood for any sustainable length of time. Most of us had run out of energy.

Furthermore, with five ecclesias in Auckland, if visitors turned up in the city, they would usually choose to visit one of the other ecclesias instead of ours. If people from around the country relocated to Auckland, our ecclesia at Pakuranga was not usually considered an option when deciding where to go. We felt isolated and alone. The only way to enjoy the fellowship of others was to get out and visit them.

My wife, Sis. Sharon and I discussed the state of our ecclesia a lot. What

could we do? How do we pick up energy when we are feeling tired out ourselves? Should we jump the sinking ship or stay to the bitter end?

Then one day, Sharon read a story of someone who had been challenged to pray for a specific country every day for six months to see what God could do with fervent and faithful prayer. The story was amazing. God used the man to become the answer to his own prayers. The country he once knew nothing about was drastically changed for good through his enthusiasm, work, and advice.

“We should do that for our ecclesia,” Sharon said to me. So that was the beginning of our first Six-Month Prayer Challenge.

It started out small, as Sharon, I, and our four children began praying. Then we thought we should invite the ecclesia to pray as well—after all, the more prayers, the better. So we set out the Six-Month Prayer Challenge to our ecclesia. After announcing and explaining what we would do, around twenty of about sixty in our

ecclesia said they would commit to praying for our ecclesia every day. Our prayer was for direction, a change in spirit, spiritual growth, and growth in number. These prayers would often be offered at our meetings, Bible classes, and devotional evenings, as well as in our private homes.

There was no bolt of lightning or tongues of fire to answer our prayer. That would have been nice, but we had to be patient. But less than three months after we started praying, I noticed the first answer to our prayers. It was an attitude change. It was only slight, but it was definitely there. People stayed longer after the meeting, and there seemed to be more of a desire to be there and to meet with each other.

We kept praying. That attitude change was the only answer to prayer we saw in the six months we prayed. Admittedly, it seemed a bit disappointing, but we resolved to wait for the LORD to see how He would answer our prayer. Little did we know, but while we were praying, God was at work preparing people to be answers to our prayers.

The Pakuranga CHRISTADELPHIANS SIX MONTH PRAYER CHALLENGE

13 November 2022 to May 28 2023

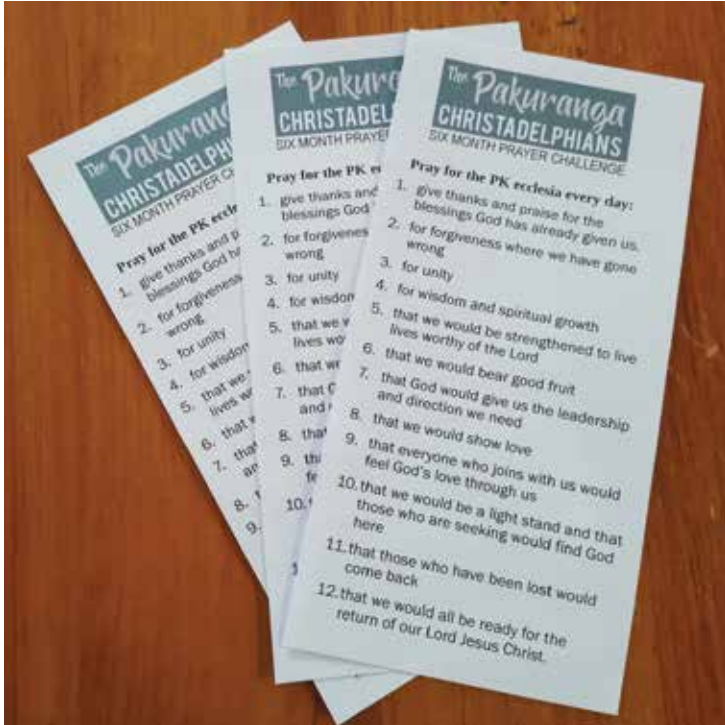
10 March 2023

Congratulations Pakuranga!

We are Four months into our Six Month Prayer Challenge.

Today, that means we have been praying for 119 of 182 days. There are only 63 days left!

Our aim is to have as many people pray for our ecclesia every day in a row for six months. We have done this before and God blessed us with miracle after miracle, resulting in the vibrant ecclesia we have meeting at Pakuranga now. Let's keep praying!



We prayed every day for six months. Many of us carried on praying after that. Then a year after we had started to pray, the miracles began. We had heard rumors that a family was moving to Auckland, but we knew they wouldn't come to Pakuranga. We could all think of so many better places for them to go. Then they turned up one Sunday morning—a lovely surprise—and announced they had come to stay! We were blown away!

Over the following two or three months, we received an influx of five or more families and a good number of young people whose hearts God had prepared to come and join our ecclesia

at Pakuranga. What an incredible boost we all had from them! New enthusiasm, a hall full of children, a growing youth group. And the people kept coming. During a recent exhortation, I asked for a show of hands from everyone who was not at Pakuranga for our first prayer challenge. Well over half of the ecclesia raised their hands. God is good!

Since that first prayer challenge, the Pakuranga ecclesia has developed in amazing ways with a dynamic mix of people from different backgrounds, yet working together as the various parts of the body of Christ. From vibrant worship to an ecclesially sponsored

mission trip for our senior Sunday School class, from spontaneous themed exhortations spanning weeks or months to great fellowship, teaching, music, activities, prayers, and a fantastic online presence, we have been very blessed.

None of this was by our own strength or effort. It was the gift of God to a faithful group of believers who prayed together. All the credit goes to God, who chose to listen to our prayers and answer them in a way that exceeded our wildest dreams.

God did the same thing for Ezra as he and a large group of Jews were about to leave their captivity and travel back to the Promised Land.

There, by the Ahava Canal, I [Ezra] proclaimed a fast, so that we might humble ourselves before our God and ask him for a safe journey for us and our children, with all our possessions. I was ashamed to ask the king for soldiers and horsemen to protect us from enemies on the road, because we had told the king, "The gracious hand of our God is on everyone who looks to him, but his great anger is against all who forsake him." So we fasted and petitioned our God about this, and he answered our prayer.... On the twelfth day of the first month we set out from the Ahava Canal to go to Jerusalem. The hand of our God was on us, and he protected us from enemies and bandits along the way. (Ezra 8:21–23, 31 NIV).

God answered their prayers. He is a God who doesn't change. He still answers prayer today.

Then COVID-19 came. With COVID came the blessings of meeting together online, a daily readings group that is still going strong after three years, online Bible Schools, an ecclesial Feast of Tabernacles, and new programs that have reached out to thousands of people around the world. But with COVID-19, there was also a loss. Names without faces online gradually disappeared—and now we miss them at our face-to-face meetings. There has been waning enthusiasm, some Bible classes were canceled for various reasons, and people are generally feeling tired again.

We still have an awesome ecclesia, but now we need a boost to keep us from falling. What better way to do it than to turn to God in prayer once again?

And so we have begun our second Six-Month Prayer Challenge. This time we have twelve aspects that we are focusing our prayer on. There are many more potential prayer topics for an ecclesia to pray about, but these are the ones we have chosen. Many of them come from Colossians 1:9-11. We have been praying:

1. Thanks and praise for the blessings God has already given us.
2. For forgiveness where we have gone wrong.
3. For unity.
4. For wisdom and spiritual growth.
5. That we would be strengthened to live lives worthy of the LORD.
6. That we would bear good fruit.
7. That God would give us the leadership and direction we need.
8. That we would show love.

9. That everyone who joins us would feel God's love through us.
10. That we would be a light stand and that those who are seeking would find God's love through us.
11. That those who are lost will come back.
12. That we would all be ready for the return of our Lord Jesus Christ.

All these points have been made into a bookmark for our ecclesial members to place in their Bibles or on fridges to remind them to pray and what to pray for. We have also had a monthly Prayer Challenge newsletter to keep us encouraged and updated. And each week, posters around the hall continue to motivate us to pray and tell us how far through the prayer challenge we have come.

At the time of writing, we are over four months into another Six-Month Prayer Challenge. And yes, we have already seen the results! Whole families have been joining in our prayer challenge, with children as young as three praying for blessings on their ecclesia and Sunday School. Small groups within Pakuranga have gathered to pray for people they love who have been gone for some time. Visitors to our meetings have taken this idea back to their own ecclesias throughout New Zealand and around the world. We have had a string of really good exhortations; people we haven't seen in years have been contacted and encouraged and have even come along. And there is a spirit of unity in our prayers that has boosted our enthusiasm and motivation.

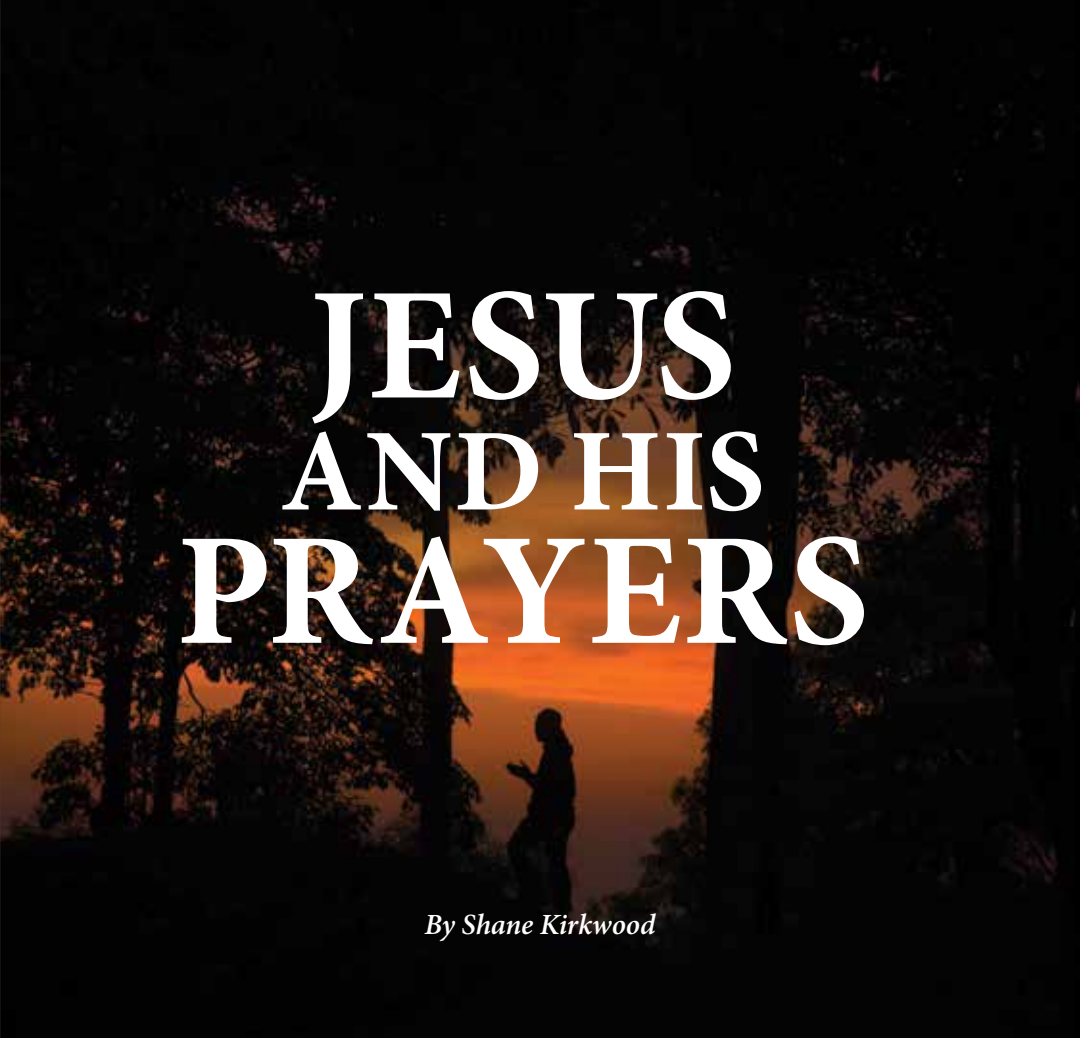
We don't know how God might answer our prayers this time. Maybe He will answer them in some miraculous way like He did last time. Perhaps there will be some pain first in pruning before the new growth springs forth. Maybe He has some plans that we haven't even dreamed about yet. But whatever the answer, we know God hears the fervent prayers of righteous people and that when two or three are gathered together, agreeing about anything they ask for, it will be done for them by our Father in heaven.

We don't have the answers about what is best for our ecclesia. God knows. That's why we ask. That's why we are involved in the Six-Month Prayer Challenge. We are praying and trusting God for the answers. Our aim is to trust Him because He knows best.

How would you describe your ecclesia? Invigorating? Is there room for improvement? Prayer doesn't have to be done alone. Praying together can be so much more effective. Why not join us in a Six-Month Prayer Challenge for your ecclesia? Who knows what might happen? What if our prayers went viral, and our whole community started praying? What could God do then? Even our imaginations might be too limited to comprehend the power of God responding when his people pray. Pray, brethren, pray!

*Robert Prins,
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JESUS AND HIS PRAYERS

By Shane Kirkwood

IN Mark 1, we see the eager crowd had waited until sundown at the end of the Sabbath, and now they were at the door of the house, desperately seeking healing for themselves or a loved one. We are told, “*and he healed many.*” (v. 34).¹ But what of the others? For there were more; there would always be more! What to do?

Jesus took it to his Father! In Mark 1:35, we read, “*It was dark, it was desolate.*” Just what Jesus needed. The challenges of the previous day had

depleted him. For a man with the compassion of our Lord, it was difficult not to heal them all, but there seemed to be competing priorities. Without the gospel message, people would remain lost, so he communed with his Father. The psalmist writes about our Lord,

*I rise before dawn and cry for help;
I hope in Your words. My eyes are
awake before the watches of the
night, that I may meditate on Your
promise. (Psa 119:147-148).*

Jesus resolved this dilemma, as is seen in his response to his disciples in Mark 1:37-38,

And they found him and said to him. "Everyone is looking for you," and he said to them, "Let us go on to the next towns, that I may preach there also, for that is why I came out."

While the events of Mark 1 find no direct parallel in our lives, we often struggle over what to prioritize in our service to God. We can ask challenging questions that are difficult to balance and resolve, such as "How do I help?" and "Who do I help first?" Our Lord knows we are trying to serve. Sometimes we don't know how best to do it. The example he gave us is the necessity of repeatedly seeking his Father in prayer.

We read in Luke 5:16, "*He would withdraw to desolate places and pray.*" In John 6:15, the apostle records that Jesus perceived "*that they were about to come and take him by force to make him king, Jesus withdrew again to the mountain to be by himself.*"

On these occasions, our Lord not only spoke with his Father about everything, but he also listened as his Father spoke to him. In John 15:15, we read, "*For all that I have heard from my Father I have made known to you.*"

Such precious time spent alone praying and listening to his Father was at the very core of his life, and he wants our life to be the same. We are further exhorted

in Luke 18:1 that disciples should pray and not lose heart.

Jesus never asks of us anything he didn't practice himself. He was constant in his prayers, the depth of which is revealed to us in the stark and confronting words of Hebrews 5:7,

In the days of his flesh, Jesus offered up prayers and supplications, with loud cries and tears, to Him who was able to save him from death, and he was heard because of his reverence.

Have you been
exhausted, wrung out,
and tearful? If so, you
have shared in some
small way fellowship
with Jesus' sufferings in
heartfelt prayer.

Here, the prayer life of our savior is laid bare. This aspect is the key to his life! This verse concerns him who healed the sick, stilled storms, and raised the dead! He had the spirit without limit, bringing the intensity of challenge and temptation to a level

we may have never faced. Such was the burden he carried. Loud crying and tears were sometimes the only way he could express his feelings.

Perhaps you've also been here? Have you been exhausted, wrung out, and tearful? If so, you have shared in some small way fellowship with his sufferings in heartfelt prayer. You abandoned yourself to the Father who **wants** us to come to Him.

Humble yourselves, therefore, under the mighty hand of God so that at the proper time He may exalt you, casting all your anxieties on Him, because He cares for you. (1 Pet 5:6-7).

This attitude was our Lord's **daily** experience.

Many of the Psalms are also a window into the soul of our Savior.

Save me, O God! For the waters have come up to my neck. I sink in deep mire, where there is no foothold; I have come into deep waters, and the flood sweeps over me. I am weary with my crying out; my throat is parched. My eyes grow dim with waiting for my God. (Psa 69:1-3).

In Psalms 42:5-11, we are further instructed,

Why are you cast down, O my soul, and why are you in turmoil within me? Hope in God; for I shall again praise Him, my salvation and my God. My soul is cast down within me; therefore I remember you from the land of Jordan and of Hermon, from Mount Mizar. Deep calls to deep at the roar of your waterfalls; all your breakers and your waves have gone over me. By day the Lord commands his steadfast love, and at night His song is with me, a prayer to the God of my life. I say to God, my rock: "Why have you forgotten me? Why do I go mourning because of the oppression of the enemy?" As with a deadly wound in my bones, my adversaries taunt me, while they say to me all the day long, "Where is your God?" Why are you cast down, O my soul, and why are you in turmoil within me? Hope in God; for I shall again praise him, my salvation and my God.

These are just two Psalms that find a link with this verse in Hebrews 5, as Jesus constantly battled the enemy within and without.

I am saddened that I can spend so little time in prayer and deep contemplation of my Savior, who gave himself in every way for my salvation.

Isaiah tells us our Lord was a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief.

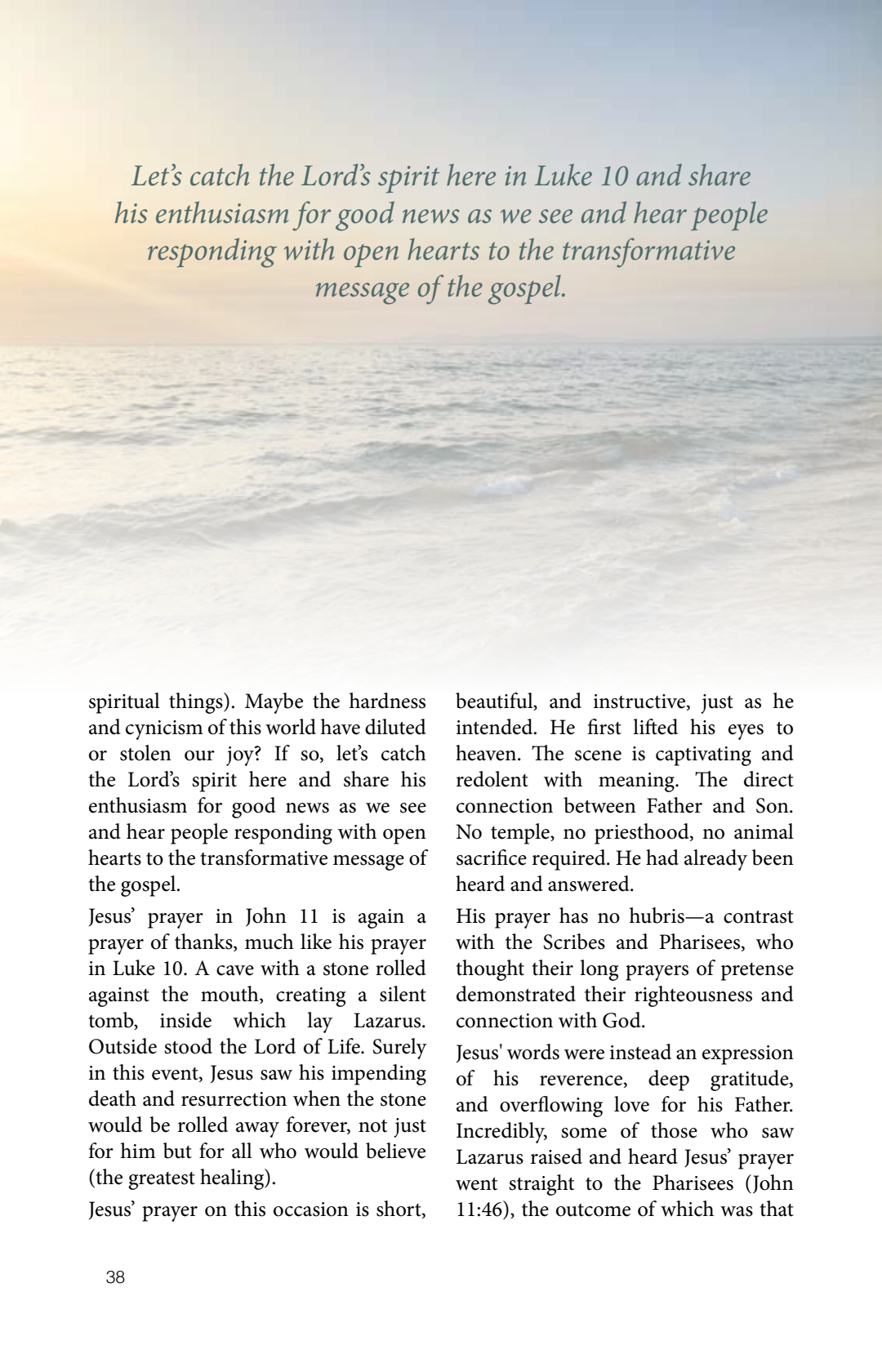
He was despised and rejected by men, a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief; and as one from whom men hide their faces he was despised, and we esteemed him not. (Isa 53:3).

There were, however, times of joy and rejoicing for him. Luke 10:21-22 records his prayer of joy at the return of his disciples and their response to his teachings.

In that same hour he rejoiced in the Holy Spirit and said, "I thank you, Father. Lord of heaven and earth, that You have hidden these things from the wise and understanding and revealed them to the little children; yes, Father, for such was Your gracious will. All things have been handed over to me by my Father and no one knows who the son is except the Father, or who the Father is except the son and anyone to whom the son chooses to reveal Him.

He is thankful, joyful, and exuberant in this spontaneous public prayer.

If we had been there, perhaps we would have considered Jesus' response an overreaction (as some of us in certain cultures are wont to do when we think somebody gets too excited about



Let's catch the Lord's spirit here in Luke 10 and share his enthusiasm for good news as we see and hear people responding with open hearts to the transformative message of the gospel.

spiritual things). Maybe the hardness and cynicism of this world have diluted or stolen our joy? If so, let's catch the Lord's spirit here and share his enthusiasm for good news as we see and hear people responding with open hearts to the transformative message of the gospel.

Jesus' prayer in John 11 is again a prayer of thanks, much like his prayer in Luke 10. A cave with a stone rolled against the mouth, creating a silent tomb, inside which lay Lazarus. Outside stood the Lord of Life. Surely in this event, Jesus saw his impending death and resurrection when the stone would be rolled away forever, not just for him but for all who would believe (the greatest healing).

Jesus' prayer on this occasion is short,

beautiful, and instructive, just as he intended. He first lifted his eyes to heaven. The scene is captivating and redolent with meaning. The direct connection between Father and Son. No temple, no priesthood, no animal sacrifice required. He had already been heard and answered.

His prayer has no hubris—a contrast with the Scribes and Pharisees, who thought their long prayers of pretense demonstrated their righteousness and connection with God.

Jesus' words were instead an expression of his reverence, deep gratitude, and overflowing love for his Father. Incredibly, some of those who saw Lazarus raised and heard Jesus' prayer went straight to the Pharisees (John 11:46), the outcome of which was that

the council made plans to put Jesus to death (v. 53).

Amazingly, they thought their power was greater than that of a man who could speak directly to God in praise and raise the dead! We are blessed to have immediate access to God through the same man who cried out, “*Lazarus, come forth!*”

We need no temple or priesthood. Through Jesus Christ, our mediator, our reverent heartfelt prayers of thanks are always heard.

Hebrews 5:7 is written about our Lord’s prayers and experiences in Gethsemane. Having left his disciples with instructions to watch and pray (surely an exhortation to us all!), he goes a stone’s throw away. The disciples slept, and so the Lord is again alone in prayer. This time though, he had **wanted** their companionship, which witnesses to his humanity and need. He was looking for comfort but found none. We are told in Psalm 69:20 that they slept while he battled with his will. “*My Father.*” This address is intimate and personal but also so intense. Dare we intrude? And yet we must, from a distance, if we are to learn.

Jesus had told parables about counting the cost. Yes, he had counted the cost before he started, and here it was now confronting him. Looming over him was death, even death on a cross.

So, Jesus fell on his face—the natural position of surrender. Yet spiritually, when surrendering to God, it becomes a position of strength. The strength to

let go, to submit, to give your life to the will of One greater. “*Nevertheless, not as I will but as you will.*” We can often ask for another way, but can we embrace “*nevertheless*”? For therein lies the true cost of discipleship.

Would his Father give them both another way? For surely the cost to his Father was enormous. No, there was no other way. God so loved. Let that sit with us.

Jesus did it—went beyond for our sake, as Hebrews 2:15 says, “*and deliver all those who through fear of death were subject to life long slavery.*”

Our prayer is for his return. How long, O Lord?

As we wait in this world of turmoil, trouble, and impatience, may our prayer life reflect his. May we find quiet places to commune with our Father and his Son—thereby learning to be more reverent, thankful, and joyous. For our Father’s grand purpose is in His creation and in the lives of people who are being transformed by His Word and the sacrifice of His Son. Our progress may seem slow and our footsteps faltering, but great comfort comes from knowing the King is on our side.

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Sutherland Ecclesia, NSW

1. All Scriptural citations are taken from the *English Standard Version*, unless specifically noted.

THE APOSTLE PAUL: PRAYING ON BEHALF OF OTHERS

By Shawn Moynihan

WHEN one reads the Apostle Paul's letters, one is struck by how often he prays for others. He is devoted to praying on others' behalf. Paul is also firmly convinced that he needs others to pray for him. At least eight times, Paul asks others to pray for him (Rom 15:30-32; 2 Cor 1:10-11; Eph 6:18-20; Phil 1:19; Col 4:2-4; 1 Thess 5:25; 2 Thess 3:1-2; Phm 1:22). Paul's teaching about prayer is based on the fundamental principle that praying for others is important and purposeful, for both the one praying and the one being prayed for:

First of all, then, I urge that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgivings be made for all people, for kings and all who are in high positions, that we may lead a peaceful and quiet life, godly and dignified in every way. This is good, and it is pleasing in the sight of God our Savior, who desires all people to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth.
(1 Tim 2:1-4 ESV).

To pray on behalf of others is to do a good thing that pleases God, impacting both the one praying and the one being prayed for.

Paul's exhortation to Timothy packs a lot of teaching into a few sentences. Praying for others is foundational. "First" is the Greek *proton*, denoting temporal, or conceptual primacy. We are to pray for all people, even people who are clearly not in the household of faith (e.g., the many secular rulers with whom Paul and the early ecclesia interacted). Our prayers for others are built on the premise that our will is aligned with God's in an important

way; namely, we have the shared desire for others to come to the knowledge of gospel truth, to repent, to be baptized, and to be saved through God's grace. Bro. Cyril Tennant comments on this important facet, stating that there is a "much deeper significance to praying for others—it is a reflection of our own understanding regarding salvation."¹ In praying for others, we acknowledge God's mercy towards us and ask that others' have the same blessing:

The Lord is not slack concerning His promise, as some count slackness, but is longsuffering toward us, not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance.
(2 Pet 3:9).²

Prayer Actions

In his exhortation to Timothy, Paul lists specific prayer actions that we must engage in on behalf of others: supplications (*deésis*), prayers (*proseuché*), intercessions (*enteuxis*), and giving of thanks (*eucharistia*). Although *deésis* can refer to the general practice of prayer (e.g., 2 Tim 1:3), it seems to be used often in the context of asking for something specific. For example, Paul states that the supplications of others helped keep him safe (2 Cor 1:9-11; Phil 1:19) and in Ephesians 6:18-20, Paul uses the word to refer to requests that he preach the gospel boldly. James also uses the word to describe a specific request to God on others' behalf:

Confess your trespasses to one another, and pray for one another, that you may be healed. The effective, fervent prayer [deésis] of a righteous man avails much. (Jas 5:16).

As James asserts, in some cases where the need is not evident, our specific requests to God for others requires a relationship of mutual trust so that the need is made manifest.

As I reflect on making supplication for others, I am moved to ask, “Do I know my brothers and sisters well enough to make supplication for them?” James is not only teaching about the power of prayer on behalf of others; he is teaching about the power of prayer that is founded on honest and genuine relationships between believers.

Intercession

The word translated “*intercessions*” in 1 Timothy 2 is a rare one, used only one other time: “*For every creature of God is good, and nothing is to be refused if it is received with thanksgiving; for it is sanctified by the word of God and prayer [enteuxis].*” (1 Tim 4:4-5). In the context of prayer, the verb form of the word (*entugchanó*) is used to describe Elijah’s prayers to God against Israel (Rom 11:2) and to describe Christ’s current work (Rom 8:27, 34; Heb 7:25).

In praying on behalf of others, we acknowledge that our prayers of intercession pale in comparison to Christ’s work on our behalf. Paul acknowledges this in the context of his teaching regarding praying for others:

Therefore I exhort first of all that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks be made for all men...For there

is one God and one Mediator between God and men, the Man Christ Jesus. (1 Tim 2:1-5).

Clause 14 of the BASF states that Jesus:

Is a priest over his own house only, and does not intercede for the world, or for professors who are abandoned to disobedience...he makes intercession for his erring brethren, if they confess and forsake their sins (Luke 24:51; Ephesians 1:20; Acts 5:31; 1 Timothy 2:5; Hebrews 8:1; Acts 15:14; 13:39; Hebrews 4:14, 15; John

17:9; Hebrews 10:26; 1 John 2:1; Proverbs 28:13).

Unlike us, Christ has the power of God, and unlike us, his will is completely aligned with God’s (Rom 8:27). Unlike us, he has a unique place of power from which to intercede (Rom 8:34). Unlike us, Christ’s intercession is continual (Heb 7:25).

Given that we can add nothing to the effectiveness of Jesus’ intercession, why does Paul exhort us that intercessions be made on others’ behalf? Paul was acutely aware of Christ’s efficacy as an intercessor, yet he repeatedly asked for others to pray for him. James tells us that our prayers for others are impactful: “*The active prayer of a righteous person has great power.*” (James 5:16 Mounce).

Paul knew that praying for others makes us focus on their needs, not ours, helping to develop a Christ-like mind in us. Individually and collectively, we are

strengthened by praying for each other. Bro. Alfred Nicholls wrote,

The important thing is... that the intercession should be made, if not in public then by each of us in private... The ministry of prayer is something in which all can engage and many can testify to the strength, courage and increased faith that comes from the knowledge that others, individually or collectively, remember them 'without ceasing' in their prayers.³

Peter seems to have this in mind in 1 Peter 3, where he quotes Psalm 34 (*"His ears are open to their prayers"*) to describe prayer as a tangible action stemming from the exhortation to *"be like-minded, be sympathetic, love one another, be compassionate and humble."* (v. 8 NIV).

Giving Thanks for Others

When it comes to praying on behalf of our brothers and sisters in Christ, where do we start? Paul's starting point was to be thankful for his family in Christ. For Paul, giving thanks in this way was something that he "owed" (Greek *opheilō*):

We are bound [opheilō] to thank God always for you, brethren. (2 Thess 1: 3).

But we are bound [opheilō] to give thanks to God always for you, brethren beloved by the Lord, because God from the beginning chose you for salvation through sanctification by the Spirit and belief in the truth, to which He called you by our gospel, for the obtaining of the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ. (2 Thess 2:13-14).

Paul recognized that we were indebted to each other because we needed each other. Every member of the Body is valued and valuable. We are blessed to have brothers and sisters who can help build up our faith and we give thanks to God for this blessing.

Paul was thankful for the experiences that he shared with brothers and sisters. To the ecclesia at Philippi, Paul wrote:

I thank my God upon every remembrance of you, always in every prayer of mine making request for you all with joy, for your fellowship in the gospel from the first day until now." (Phil 1:3-5).

Similarly, Paul told the ecclesia at Thessalonica:

We give thanks to God always for you all, making mention of you in our prayers, remembering without ceasing your work of faith, labor of love, and patience of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ in the sight of our God and Father, knowing, beloved brethren, your election by God. (1 Thess 1:2-4).

This kind of thanksgiving prayer is easy to give for those I know well, because it is grounded in common experiences and shaped by shared memories.

The closer the relationship, the easier it is to be thankful for the other members of One Body. Paul's close relationship with Timothy was expressed in prayers of thanksgiving:

I thank God, whom I serve with a pure conscience, as my forefathers did, as without ceasing I remember you in my prayers night and day, greatly desiring to see you, being mindful of your tears, that I may

be filled with joy, when I call to remembrance the genuine faith that is in you, which dwelt first in your grandmother Lois and your mother Eunice, and I am persuaded is in you also. (2 Tim 1:3-5).

One of the great blessings of a life as a part of the One Body is a collection of deep and rich personal relationships, some new and some of which span decades and generations. Like Paul, I give thanks to God for my brothers and sisters, as well as their parents and grandparents. I also give thanks that I know them, their tears, their joys, their struggles, their victories, and their needs.

Always and Without Ceasing

If being thankful was the first thing that Paul thought of when he was praying for others, then it seems that it was also the second, third, and fourth thing. Paul asserts in several places that he is “always,” “without ceasing,” offering prayers of thanksgiving to God for other members of the Body:

*First, I thank my God through Jesus Christ for you all... **without ceasing** I make mention of you always in my prayers.”* (Rom 1: 8-9).

*I thank my God **always** concerning you for the grace of God which was given to you by Christ Jesus.* (1 Cor 1:4).

*Therefore I also, after I heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love for all the saints, **do not cease** to give thanks for you, making mention of you in my prayers.* (Eph 1:15-16).

We give thanks to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ,


*praying **always** for you, since we heard of your faith in Christ Jesus and of your love for all the saints.* (Col 1: 3-4).

*I thank my God, making mention of you **always** in my prayers.* (Phm 1: 4).

Paul exhorts us to “always keep on praying for all the Lord’s people.” (Eph 6:19 NIV). By his words and his actions, Paul is teaching us that praying for each other begins with thanksgiving.

Thanksgiving Changes the Way We View Each Other

How would our ecclesias be different if we made thanksgiving for each other the consistent starting point when we prayed for our brothers and sisters in Christ? How would the worldwide Body be different? I have tried this in my own prayer life, and it changed me, especially in contentious matters. My prayers on behalf of others used to focus on differences. Frequently my prayers devolved into a variation of me asking God to help other members of the Body see things my way. Building on the metaphor of the One Body in 1 Corinthians 12:12-27, I was essentially asking God to make the “hand” be like the “eye.” When my prayers changed to simply being thankful to God for the members of the Body, who were different from me, and trusting God’s wisdom in arranging the Body in keeping with His purpose, then my attitude towards my brothers was positively transformed. It made me understand, and be thankful for the truth of Paul’s statement: “God arranged the members in the body, each one of them, as he chose.” (1 Cor 12:18 ESV).

A woman with light brown hair tied back, wearing a pink and white plaid shirt, stands in a field of yellow wildflowers. She is looking down and to the right with a contemplative expression. The background is a soft-focus field of similar flowers under warm, golden light.

*How would our ecclesias
be different if we made
thanksgiving for each other the
consistent starting point when
we prayed for our brothers and
sisters in Christ?*

Again, Paul's example is powerful. In 1 Timothy 2:1-4, Paul is teaching us to pray for others who are actively seeking our harm. His teaching regarding prayers on behalf of "*kings and all who are in high positions*" had special resonance for Paul. He likely wrote 1 Timothy following his first imprisonment at Rome; therefore, he was praying for the very people who had jailed him and who would ultimately sentence him to death. Paul takes this same prayerful approach to Jewish rulers who persistently sought to kill him: "*Brethren, my heart's desire and prayer to God for Israel is that they may be saved.*" (Rom 10:1). Both the Jewish and Gentile authorities caused Paul great harm and anguish; however, he prayed that they might be saved. In praying for his enemies, Paul recognized that he was once the beneficiary of Stephen's prayer for him to be forgiven. (Acts 7:57-60).

In 2 Thessalonians 2:13-14, Paul states that he is "*bound*" to always give thanks for the members at Thessalonica "*because God from the beginning chose you for salvation.*" Paul recognized that he didn't choose the members of the One Body—God did. Therefore, Paul gave thanks for those at Thessalonica, even though these were the some of the very same people who earlier leveled a series of slanderous accusations (see Paul's response in 1 Thessalonians 2).⁴ I have found it very challenging to pray on behalf of those other members of the Body who, through words and actions, expressed "I have no need of you." Yet Paul shows me how to enact Jesus' admonition to "*pray for anyone who mistreats you.*" (Matt 5:44 CEV).

In seeking a restored relationship, a crucial step is praying for those with whom there is conflict: "*So the Lord restored what Job had lost after he prayed for his friends.*" (Job 42:10 NET).

Prayer as a Joint Struggle

Paul teaches us that if we pray for others, then we are joining them in their struggle. Paul tells the ecclesia at Rome:

*Brothers and sisters, I urge you, through our Lord Jesus Christ and through the love of the Spirit, to **join me in my struggles** in your prayers to God for me.* (Rom 15:30 CEB).

Paul commends Epaphras for this:

*Epaphras, who is one of you, a servant of Christ Jesus, greets you, **always struggling on your behalf in his prayers**, that you may stand mature and fully assured in all the will of God.* (Col 4:12 ESV).

The Greek word *agon*, which had powerful semantic associations in the Greco-Roman world (i.e., a public contest, such as an athletic event, where the struggle was both noble and beautiful), is the root for these descriptions of prayer on others' behalf.

A cognate of this Greek word also describes Jesus praying through his most demanding struggle, "*And being in agony [agónia], He prayed more earnestly.*" (Luke 22:44). It is interesting to note that Jesus asked Peter, James, and John to "*watch and pray*" about their temptation while he too was praying. Rather than supporting Jesus, the three fell asleep and an angel was sent to strengthen Jesus (Luke 22:43).

Sometimes, it is easy to grow weary and not support others. It is easy to feel like we are mere spectators in the struggles faced by our brothers and sisters. It is similarly easy to feel that we are alone in our own struggles. However, Paul teaches us that we are not spectators. By praying for others who struggle, we are in the fight with them. Neither are we alone in the arena when our brothers and sisters pray on our behalf.

When We Pray for Others, What Do We Say?

In some cases, it is clear what to pray for. Deliverance from illness, injury, and dangerous circumstances are axiomatic things for which to pray. Paul invites others to pray for him in these circumstances. He asks the ecclesia at Rome to pray for his deliverance from the Judaizers in Jerusalem (Rom 15:31). Paul states that the prayers of the Corinthian brothers and sisters aided his deliverance from death: “*who delivered us from so great a death, and does deliver us; in whom we trust that He will still deliver us, you also helping together in prayer for us.*” (2 Cor 1:10-11). Paul commends the Philippian ecclesia for their prayers on his behalf, addressing the circumstances of his imprisonment: “*For I know that this will turn out for my deliverance through your prayer.*” (Phil 1:19). Similarly, Paul invites the believers at Thessalonica to pray for his deliverance: “*Finally, brethren, pray for us... that we may be delivered from unreasonable and wicked men.*” (2 Thess 3:1-2).

As it was for Paul in the first century, so it is for us in the twenty-first century. We know what to pray for when brothers and sisters are physically

sick or injured. We know what to pray for when they are persecuted and in danger. We know what to pray for when there are tragedies and natural disasters. We know what to pray for when others’ challenges are visible.

However, many challenges are not visible. Spiritual, mental, and emotional struggles are not always apparent. Relationship challenges are not always observable. Even areas of apparent strength can be real challenges for us. Paul humbly revealed some of his challenges and asked others to pray for him.

We think of Paul as a gifted and fearless proclaimer of the gospel. However, this is the very thing that he asked his brothers and sisters in Ephesus to pray for:

*Pray also for me, that whenever I speak, words may be given me so **that I will fearlessly make known the mystery of the gospel**, for which I am an ambassador in chains. Pray that I may **declare it fearlessly**, as I should.* (Eph 6:19-20 NIV).

Similarly, he implored the believers in Colossae:

*And pray for us, too, that God may open a door for our message, so that we may proclaim the mystery of Christ, for which I am in chains. Pray **that I may proclaim it clearly**, as I should.* (Col 4:3-4 NIV).

Paul trusted his relationships with other members of Christ’s Body; therefore, he disclosed some of the challenges he was facing and asked others to pray for him.

Paul’s critics highlight the very things that he humbly asked others to pray for

on his behalf. In 2 Corinthians 10:10, he quotes his critics: “*For his letters, they say, ‘are weighty and powerful, but his bodily presence is weak, and his speech contemptible.’*” Paul is accused of being timid in person, but he asks for prayers to fearlessly declare his message. He is accused of being a poor oral communicator, yet Paul asks for prayers that he be clear in his communication of the gospel. This is a powerful lesson for all of us. Perhaps the best way to respond when others criticize us (fairly or unfairly) is to ask for their help through prayer.

Being Bold on Behalf of Others

Perhaps the best summary of Paul’s prayers on behalf of others is found in Ephesians, where his two longest prayers are recorded (Eph 1:16-21; Eph 3:14-21). Boldness in prayer was on Paul’s mind. His digression that interrupts his prayer in chapter 3 is punctuated by “*Christ Jesus our Lord, in whom we have boldness and access with confidence through faith in Him.*” (v. 11-12).

In the first chapter, Paul asks that God help believers to fully appreciate the greatness of His plans for them and the “*exceeding greatness of His power toward us who believe, according to the working of His mighty power.*” (Eph 1:19). Essentially, Paul prays that the believers at Ephesus can understand

something that strains the limit of human comprehension. Paul asks that:

The God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give to you the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of Him, the eyes of your understanding being enlightened; that you may know what is the hope of His calling, what are the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints, and what is the exceeding greatness of His power toward us who believe, according to the working of His mighty power. (Eph 1:17-19).

Paul trusted his relationships with other members of Christ’s Body; therefore, he disclosed some of the challenges he was facing and asked others to pray for him.

God’s blessings to us are so profound that we can only understand them when He enables “*the eyes of... understanding being enlightened.*”

Paul’s prayer in Ephesians 3 is similarly bold. Here, Paul uses the concept of the family (*patria*) following the Father’s (*pater*) example to contextualize his prayer. On behalf of the Ephesians, he petitions the Father to:

- Strengthen with might through His Spirit in the inner man.
- Have Christ dwell in hearts through faith.
- Root and ground in love.
- Enable collective comprehension of the four dimensions of Christ’s love.
- Fill with His fullness.

Paul asks that God help the believers at Ephesus move beyond simple intellectual knowledge of God and Jesus. Paul asks that the believers' characters be like God and Jesus. Bro. John Carter explains the intent of Paul's prayer in this way:

The very climax of the prayer is that the saints may be filled with the fullness of God. It is a bold and amazing thing that is here desired. The words, few and simple, easily slipped over in the reading of the chapter, express the highest possible aim of mortal man. All that God is, they must try to be. The Son of God was manifested to make it possible... When a man receives of the grace and truth that came by Jesus, and of which he was "full," he is justified. But he must go on to perfection.⁵

Paul's example shows us that we can "go big" when praying for others. We can pray that others manifest God's character, that the members of God's family demonstrate the attributes of the Father.

Final Words

Paul prayed that others might be saved. That was his purpose in his near constant prayers on others' behalf and in his frequent requests that others pray for him. We, too, pray that God will save the other members of the One Body and ask for their prayers. Our prayers for others are purposeful, effective, and transformative, especially when use thanksgiving as the starting point. We will give Paul the final word:

Now may the God of peace Himself sanctify you completely; and may your whole spirit, soul, and body be preserved blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. He who calls you is faithful, who also will do it. Brethren, pray for us. (1 Thess 5:23-25).

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1. Tennant, Cyril, *The Prayers of Paul*, *The Christadelphian*, Jan 2007.

2 All Scriptural citations are taken from the New King James Version, unless specifically noted.

3 Nicholls, Alfred, *The Christadelphian*, April 1979.

4 William Barclay notes that "Beneath the surface of this passage run the slanders which Paul's opponents at Thessalonica attached to him." (*William Barclay's Daily Study Bible*: 1 Thessalonians).

5 Carter, John, *The Letter to the Ephesians*, The Christadelphian Publishing Association, 1944.

A man stands in a forest, his back to the camera, looking towards a bright light source (the sun) that is partially obscured by a large tree trunk. Sunbeams (crepuscular rays) stream through the trees, creating a warm, golden atmosphere. The ground is covered in fallen leaves.

ABBA, FATHER

By Duncan Kenzie

THE The phrase “*Abba, Father*” is unique and familiar to us. But what does it mean? And how is it used in Scripture? And how can our understanding of the phrase enrich our prayer life?

It occurs only three times in Scripture, once by Jesus (Mark 14:36) in the Garden of Gethsemane, and twice by Paul (Rom 8:15, Gal 4:6). It’s a strange expression because it is a combination of two languages—Aramaic (*Abba*) and Greek (Father = *pater*). Moreover, it’s a pleonasm—a phrase with built-in redundancy (the opposite of an oxymoron). This circumstance occurs because the word “*Abba*” itself means Father. So it sounds like Jesus is saying, “Father, Father.” (Pleonasms are rife in the Psalms. See Psalm 18:20-24 for example. Repetition is a rhetorical device used to reinforce a message. We often hear repetition in music and poetry. So it’s not surprising we find it in the Psalms, many of which we know were sung, and all of which are poetic).

Let’s look at how Scripture uses the expression “*Abba, Father*.” All three passages have some common elements:

1. They reference personal prayer.
2. They involve the Spirit of God.
3. They contrast freedom from sin to slavery to sin.
4. The concept of being God’s Son, or sons and daughters, is integral to the context.

Galatians 4:3-7 reads,

In the same way we also, when we were children, were enslaved to the elementary principles of the world. But when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons. And because you are sons, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, “Abba! Father!” So you are no longer a slave, but a son, and if a son, then an heir through God. (Gal 4:3-7).¹

Like much of Galatians, this section contrasts being a slave to the law with freedom in Christ. Paul writes that God “*sent forth*” his Son to redeem those under the law. Redemption involves setting someone free and, in this case, being adopted by God as his sons and daughters (restoring to one’s original family). See also Ephesians 1:3-6.

The reference to personal prayer is more oblique in Galatians 4 than in Romans 8 and Mark 14, but I think it is implicitly in the phrase, “*God has sent the spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, ‘Abba! Father!’*” The spirit of His Son is equivalent to the phrase “*the spirit of Christ*” in Romans 8:9 and 1 Peter 1:11 and to “*Christ in you*” (Col 1:27, Rom 8:10). It is the spirit of obedience to God’s will that sets us free from a life enslaved to sin. When we pray earnestly and sincerely for God to work for his good pleasure with us, our hearts are crying out. It’s not a ritual, rote prayer, but one that may spring from a deep struggle with

our weaknesses to ask God to help us rise above them and follow our Master.

Romans 8 elaborates on these themes:

For if you live according to the flesh you will die, but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live. For all who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God. For you did not receive the spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received the Spirit of adoption as sons, by whom we cry, "Abba! Father!" The Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, then heirs--heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, provided we suffer with him in order that we may also be glorified with him. (Rom 8:13-17).

Again, we find the same four elements in this passage that we found in Galatians 4: prayer, the Spirit of God, contrast to slavery, and becoming children of God by adoption. In this passage, Paul also compares the "*spirit of slavery*" with the "*spirit of adoption*," demonstrating that the use of the word "*spirit*" here is primarily analogous with what we might call "mindset."

Note Paul writes that a "*spirit of slavery*" leads to fear. If we regard our relation to God as being a slave compared to a child of God, then we may tend to regard God with fear. Respect and reverence (as one would hopefully have for a worthy human father) are distinct from anxiety and are entirely appropriate for us to express to our heavenly Father. But a child who fears his father cannot truly trust him and cannot be truly honest with him. A child of God who has some understanding of God's

perfect love for them will recognize that "*perfect love casts out fear*" (1 John 4:18) and will be able to express their innermost thoughts to God, drawing near to the throne of grace with reverent confidence, to receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need (Heb 10:16,19-22).

Furthermore, Paul wrote to Timothy, "*God gave us a spirit not of fear but of power and love and self-control.*" (2 Tim 1:7). Thayer's Greek lexicon translates the word for "*fear*" here as timidity, fearfulness, and cowardice. God expects us to "*fear not, be of good courage*" in our struggle against sin. Anything else is cowardice.

In contrast, by the spirit of adoption, we cry, "*Abba! Father!*" In other words, because of our relationship with God, we can approach God in prayer and use this title following Jesus' instructions on how to pray: "*Our Father.*" Prayer to God, like our relationship with him, is not transactional. It is not "Please God, answer my prayers, and I will do this for you." (See Exodus 24:3 for this kind of thinking). It is more "I thank you, God, for being my Father. And as such, I place my complete trust in Your care. I offer up my love, concerns, desires, and hopes, knowing that you, in your wisdom and love, will answer me according to my needs."

Likewise the Spirit helps us in our weakness. For we do not know what to pray for as we ought, with groanings too deep for words. And he who searches hearts knows what is the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints according to the will of God. (Rom 8:26-27).

There's a lot to unpack in this passage, but I think the essence is that there is a special intimacy with God when we pray with completely unfettered, open hearts and minds. From my own experience, it takes serious discipline and focus to pray with clear intention and without becoming distracted. I'm guessing that for most of us, there are often moments when we cannot find the words we want, or we have an inner conflict regarding the purpose of our prayer. We then find ourselves surrendering to God's care and presence, trusting He knows our needs even before we ask and that if we ask in inadequate ways, His grace is sufficient to compensate for our deficiencies.

This thought brings us to Mark 14:36. *"Abba, Father, all things are possible for you. Remove this cup from me. Yet not what I will, but what you will."* The context is Jesus' struggle with his human nature in the garden of Gethsemane. Again, the four common elements are present: Jesus is the Son of God, and his redemption is tied to his trusting obedience to his Father. He is engaged in earnest prayer, so serious that Luke wrote, *"And being in agony he prayed more earnestly; and his sweat became like great drops of blood falling down to the ground."* (Luke 22:44). And, further in Mark 14, we see a reference to the spirit, or mindset, of Christ: *"Watch and pray that you may not enter into temptation. The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak."* (Mark 14:38).

Jesus is the great example of how to pray with deep reverence, trust, focus, and

intention. He is also a great example of how prayer can be challenging when we struggle to reconcile our desires with God's desires. The very fact Jesus said, *"Nevertheless not my will, but thine, be done"* (Luke 22:42 KJV) is a powerful witness to the plight of the human condition: we struggle to conform to God's way.

But why did Jesus use the phrase *"Abba, Father"*? You will likely have heard that *"Abba"* means *"Daddy."* With this translation, Jesus says, *"Daddy, Father."* The usual exposition is that Jesus was praying to God like a little child. This idea is charming with pleasant connotations for all of us. Perhaps we, too, can approach God our Father in prayer like a little child. But is it accurate? Several scholars propose alternative understandings. Murray Harris (1939-), a New Testament scholar who studied under F. F. Bruce, wrote this:

It is true that in the Jewish Talmud and other Jewish documents, we find statements such as "When a child experiences the taste of wheat (i.e., when it is weaned), it learns to say 'abbā and 'immā' (Berakot 40a in the Babylonian Talmud) (= our "dada" and "mama").

However, even if the term *abba* began as a childish babbling sound (and this is far from clear), at the time of Jesus, it was a regular adult word meaning "Father" or "my Father" (as terms of address) or "the Father" or "my Father" (as terms of reference).

That is, *abba* was not a childish term of the nursery comparable to "Daddy." It was a polite and serious term, yet also colloquial

and familiar, regularly used by adult sons and daughters when addressing their father. Ideas of simplicity, intimacy, security and affection attach to this household word of childlike trust and obedience. So to bring out the sense of warm and trusting intimacy that belongs to the word, we could appropriately paraphrase it as “dear father.”

If Paul had wanted to convey the sense of “Daddy,” he could have used a Greek word he undoubtedly would have known—*papas* or *pappas* which means “papa” or “daddy,” a child’s word for “father.”²

The key part here is that “Abba was a polite and serious term, regularly used by adult sons and daughters when addressing their fathers.” The term may be “childlike,” but not “childish.”

And consider this excerpt from a blog post by Chad Harrington:

Washing my hands in [a restroom in Tel Aviv airport], I overheard an exchange between a Jewish father and his son.... they both knew English and Hebrew. The father said to his son (in English), “When I ask you to do something, I want you to call me Abba.”

Hearing this, I was surprised by three things:

1. He was speaking in English and Hebrew in the same breath.
2. That he was using an everyday experience for child training (Good for him!).
3. The real meaning of Abba is not what I had been taught.

Most people think Abba means “Daddy,” but that’s not quite right. “Daddy” doesn’t have the impact of Abba. It’s personal, which is part of the meaning, but that’s not the whole story. Abba doesn’t mean “Daddy.” Abba doesn’t mean “Dad.” Abba means “Father, I will obey you.”³

This understanding provides a beautiful texture to the story of the Garden of Gethsemane. Jesus wasn’t just addressing God affectionately. He was using a term that, despite the intense personal spiritual struggle he was experiencing, reminded him of his complete, trusting, and courageous commitment to his Father: “*Abba, Father,*” or “Father, I will obey you.”

Can we find that same courage, trust, and commitment to say “*Abba, Father*” in our prayer life, with a sincere desire to obey him?

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¹ All Scriptural citations are taken from the English Standard Version unless specifically noted.

² Excerpt from thegospelcoalition.org/blogs/justin-taylor/why-abba-does-not-mean-daddy/.

³ Excerpt from himpublications.com/blog/meaning-abba/.



THE FELLOWSHIP OF PRAYER

By Dave Jennings



IN the early 2010s, Sis. Mary Kay and I participated in a wonderful Bible class in Southern Orange County, CA. The class was comprised of brothers and sisters from several ecclesias in the general area. After a few years, we prayerfully concluded we had sufficient resources to lead public seminars in the area. The reception to the advertisements was highly encouraging, and we were greatly blessed with students. It was common to have as many as 70 attendees, with follow-on classes drawing a dozen or more. By the grace of God, two lovely sisters were baptized from this effort.

One of the students in the class, John, invited us to his community church to speak to his pastor about delivering the Learn to Read the Bible Effectively seminar for his congregation. This development brought us great joy, as his church had over 500 members. What happens if we take the seminar to a group of that size? The prospects were exciting.

The only time we could meet with the pastor was on a Wednesday night when his congregation held its monthly prayer meeting. I went, hopeful that this might be a watershed event in our preaching. I found the meeting itself very curious. The congregation broke into groups of about a dozen, spoke about specific prayer needs, then joined hands and prayed, with each person contributing to the prayer if they chose. Special prayers were also offered at the front of the room for those who wished their prayer needs to be kept confidential. In that case, an elder of the church prayed with the one or two people who had the prayer request.

When the meeting was ending, John asked me to come to the front to meet the pastor. He was an engaging man, probably about ten years younger than me. He asked about the seminar and what its intentions were. Then he asked me what my biggest concern was about the seminar. I paused momentarily, then said we get large groups to come, but few stay through the entire educational process. He shared he had a similar experience and reminded me that the Lord Jesus drew large crowds, but in the end, most fell away, too.

Here's the part I will never forget. With only me and him at the side of the room, he asked if I would like him to pray for me and our seminars. Together, we stood facing each other, heads bowed and hands on each other's shoulders, praying to God for the success of the outreach. To be honest, I felt a bit uncomfortable at first. It was different, maybe even a little too intimate. But as I thought about it while driving home that evening, I realized that this was exactly what we needed to do more often in our ecclesias. I learned an important lesson that evening.

By the way, the seminar was never an option with John's church. But the experience was most profitable.

Christadelphians and Prayer

Harry Whittaker had strong opinions in his book, *Reformation*, about Christadelphians and prayer. He stated that if we were honest, we would have to admit that we aren't a "praying" community. Maybe you feel his opinion was extreme? However, if someone asked you to describe our community to a new friend, you might

select our commitment to Bible study or our lay clergy. But prayer might not be one of our top defining features.

Baptist minister Charles Spurgeon wrote, “A prayerful church is a powerful church.” No doubt this is true. When we read about the core activities of the first-century church, prayer was always mentioned (Acts 1:14, 2:42, 12:12). Paul reached out to ecclesias and individuals to “*help together by prayer for us.*” (2 Cor 1:11). He appealed to the Roman Ecclesia to “*strive together with me in your prayers.*” (Rom 15:30). Praying along with Paul was seen as entering into the actual work, not a side activity. The Apostle concluded his last visit to Ephesus with an emotional “*kneeling down*” and praying with them all. When the ecclesia prayed together over their deep concern for Peter and John, who were in prison, the “*place was shaken,*” and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit. (Acts 4:31)

In our formal method of worship on Sundays, each prayer has a targeted purpose. We pray in thanks over the bread or wine. We pray for God to bless our memorial service. We petition God’s comfort for the sick and needy. It is rare when we organize prayer outside of our routine. I have observed that many feel uncomfortable with prayers where hands are held or done outside of the normal worship service. It is so rare that it seems like a novelty when it does happen.

Yet, in Scripture, we have many examples of prayers made with groups of people for unique situations. Imagine the impact for the disciples of listening to Jesus pray to his

Father the words of John 17. Or try to picture what it was like when Solomon gathered all of Israel to pray and dedicate the temple. These were unforgettable moments. Such prayers united believers in fellowship, fusing them in purpose and spirit.

I remember several Truth Corps experiences over the years where we completed the day’s work in a “prayer circle.” After discussing the day’s events, the joy, and the disappointments, we would hold hands and take turns contributing to the prayer. These prayers brought a certain dedication to our work and helped us to feel closer and more connected to our God.

Fellowship of Prayer

On an individual level, we are truly seeking an unbroken fellowship with our Lord Jesus. We want to have him involved in all aspects of our lives. We want his guidance on our big decisions, but we also know there is no issue too small for our prayers. A mistake I have made is thinking that I mainly needed to pray for the big things I couldn’t control or had little idea of how to address. It seemed disingenuous to pray for guidance on things that I already felt I had the answers to!

But then I was re-reading *A Life of Jesus* by Melva Purkis. Specifically, his comments about the fish catch, recorded in Luke 5, struck me. Peter was happy to accept the Lord as his spiritual leader and rabbi. No man had spoken words like him. But when Jesus instructed him to let down the nets after a terribly frustrating night where they caught no fish, I suppose the experienced fisherman must have

doubted this carpenter could tell Peter much about his trade. Let's let Bro. Purkis summarize the learning here:

Peter was willing to acknowledge the leadership of his new master in spiritual paths, but surely Jesus had nothing to teach him in his daily tasks. Ah, Peter, how wrong you are! How wrong is every disciple who fails to acknowledge Jesus as the Master of every walk of life and every place of experience. Unless our surrender is complete, we shall toil all night and catch nothing.¹

We are invited to include our God in all areas of our lives. When we are around a conference table at work, and we hear inappropriate language, we can pray to God that he will guard our lips and strengthen us not to participate or even laugh. We can take it to the LORD when we feel anxiety over a jury summons. When we are struggling with raising our children, we ask the LORD to give us peace of mind and grant us wisdom.

Prayer as Witness

Have you noticed how often, after a major tragedy, people gather together for a vigil to pray? Often these are televised events where the grieved family receives support from the community. Obviously, this has a comforting effect on the family, which has been swallowed up with sorrow.

I wonder if we might consider public prayer as a way to petition God on an issue and as outreach in the

community. In the US in 2020, there were public outcries over blatant social justice violations, such as with George Floyd, who died in police custody in Minneapolis. As a community, we debated our role when we see such injustice. Should we join in the protests? Should we refrain? Was it appropriate for us to do nothing? Some brothers and sisters felt conflicted that they were not speaking out against injustice.

What if we saw such troubling events as an opportunity to publicly demonstrate how we take our concerns to God in prayer? What if we announced that

we would be meeting at the local City Hall to lead prayers for a stricken family? Or to offer a prayer for those abused as well as the police? Currently, the world around us is deeply concerned about the war in Israel and the potential for an expanded military event. Should we advertise in the local paper that we will be meeting at a public

park to unite in prayer for the peace of Israel and the Palestinian people?

Turning to God in prayer and inviting others to join us demonstrates to the public something different from our doctrine-oriented seminars and outreach programs. Since we truly believe praying to our God is the most important activity, it models turning to our God for intervention and comfort. It also encourages the public and our children to rely on our God for all matters—those within our control and those outside.

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Summary of Prayer Series

This article concludes our year-long review of some aspects of prayer. Bro. David Lloyd encouraged us to use an informal way of spending time with our God regularly. Bro. Darren Tappouras challenged us to understand what issues we can have complete confidence that God guarantees He will answer. Prayer is real and powerful, and God is at work in our lives today. The focus of God's activities in our lives is in the arena of the "inner being," which we review daily. Bro. Dev Ramcharan exhorted us that prayer has great value to the believer, bringing real benefits to those who regularly make it part of their life. Bro. Robert Prins described the six-month prayer challenge as a useful effort by ecclesias wishing to raise their spiritual dedication and reliance on God. Bro. Shane Kirkwood examined the prayer life of Jesus Christ and the powerful lessons we can

learn from his example. Bro. Shawn Moynihan discussed the tangible benefits of praying for others and how it strengthens fellowship and changes our view of each other. Finally, Bro. Duncan Kenzie looked at the intimacy of our relationship with God and how we are encouraged to approach Him as our loving Father.

We do hope you have enjoyed this series. Prayer life is an effective measure of our spiritual life. May we all draw closer to our Heavenly Father, thanking our Lord Jesus Christ, who has enabled us to "*draw near with a full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience, and our bodies washed with pure water.*" (Heb 10:22).

Dave Jennings

¹ Purkis, Melva, *A Life of Jesus*, The Christadelphian, 404 Shaftmoor Lane, Hall Green, Birmingham, UK, 1964.

