

Theology for Life

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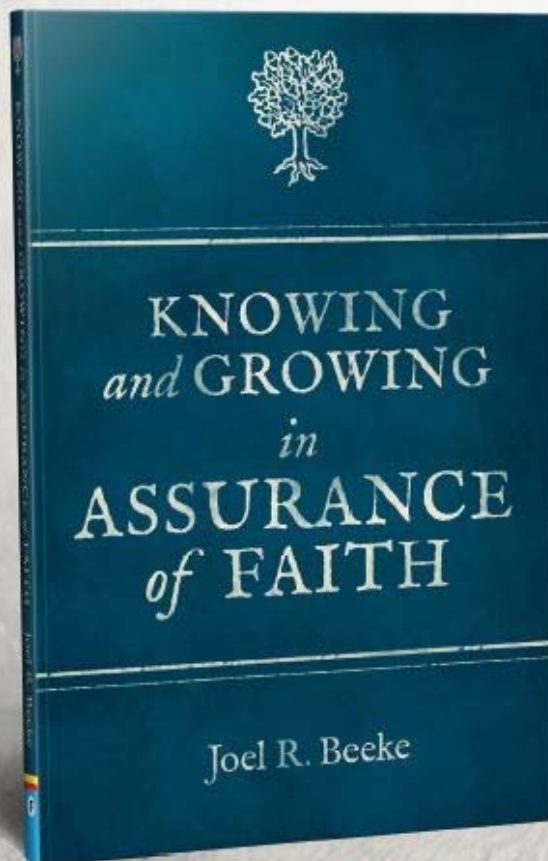


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ANDREAS KÖSTENBERGER

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Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary*

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Editor's Corner

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Few issues are as important to understand to the Christian life as the role of prayer and spiritual warfare in the Christian life. Some Christians, in my experience, treat prayer like a genie in a bottle. They think if they “pray” (or “rub the genie’s bottle”), then they will magically get all their wishes and needs met. What this approach to prayer fails to understand is how wonderful our access to prayer is, and the cost that was paid to give us such access in prayer to the Lord of Glory. Let’s briefly review this as you open up this Issue of *Theology for Life Magazine* on prayer and spiritual warfare and discover great truths.

In the Old Testament, access to God was restricted to one person—the High Priest who had to perform priestly sacrifices and wear priestly garb to enter into the Most Holy Place. Only once a year was this man consecrated beforehand and allowed access to the Holy of Holies before the face of God. When Christ lived a sinless life and died, He tore the veil that separated man from God on account of his sin. Now man—after the death of Christ—doesn’t have to wear priestly garments or perform priestly sacrifices before the Lord. Jesus fulfilled all of these sacrifices and satisfied the wrath of God in His death forever. He obliterated the need these requirements and now invites and even summons His beloved friends, redeemed through His blood, to come to His throne. And this is what is so amazing about Hebrews 2:17-18 and Hebrews 4:14-16: the summons of God to come boldly before the throne of His grace on account of Jesus.

As Christians, we have been united to Christ. We have what theologians call “union with Christ”, which is only possible because of the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus. Theologians also call union with Christ the center of the doctrine of salvation. Through union with Christ, Christians have communion with Christ. The twin truths of union and communion with Christ provide the doctrinal and theological foundation for how and why we are to come before the Lord in prayer. Like a train engine that continues on the tracks, taking its cargo wherever it may go, union and communion with Christ work as both the fuel and the engine of our prayer lives as Christians.

This is why we aren’t praying to a genie in a bottle. No, we aren’t even *just* making our requests known to God—although He invites us to do so. Instead, we need to understand that when we come to God in prayer, we are coming to One who wholly accepts us by His grace, through the Son, and continues to help us grow in Him, through the Holy Spirit. It is more than just our petitions and concerns that God wants. He made all of

this access possible through everything Christ did for us, so we could know God personally and intimately. We don't have a right, therefore, to treat the grace of God—and our access to God in prayer—as anything but precious.

That's kind of the point, isn't it? We must treat the grace of our access to God as something other than merely precious—it's a treasure. This is a struggle I know well, as does almost every Christian. We want to pray, but often we only lay our petitions before the throne of God's grace, or offer a short prayer for a friend, a colleague, etc., and the list goes on and on. Over time, we come to think of prayer as only what we get from God rather than a gracious, humble, and holy summons to know God personally and intimately.

In this Issue of *Theology for Life*, we are inviting you to expand your vision of God by discovering for yourselves the vast resources available to you through your union and communion with Christ. The summons of God to come to His throne is a gracious invitation from your Creator and your Lord. He lovingly longs for you to come and know Him intimately. He desires you to know that He goes before you to make war on your behalf. Even now, with His sufficient all-covering blood, He pleads before the Father for you and goes to battle for you. How great is the love of God, and the greatness of His grace truly knows no end.

I invite you to discover the wonder and riches of prayer available to you, as a born-again Christian. Your life may seemingly be going off the train tracks today, and life may seem to leave you feeling defeated, overwhelmed, and worse. By reading this Issue, I hope you'll be refreshed and encouraged. Most importantly, however, my prayer is you'll discover how your union with Christ fuels your communion with Christ. I know that once you discover the twin truths of union and communion with Christ, your prayer life and your walk with God will never be the same. Your love of Jesus will sink even deeper into the endless ocean of His sufficient, transforming, and preserving grace.

In Christ Alone,

Dave Jenkins
Executive Editor, *Theology for Life Magazine*

Passionate Prayers

By James Forbis



This particular season of ministry has been at times very difficult for me, and I've found that this is typically a result of not being focused on my prayer life. For me, praying in general has always seemed like a chore. I know that you do not want to hear that from a pastor or theologian, but it is true. Prayer has always bored me, not because I find talking to God—the Creator of Heaven and Earth—boring, but because I always bore myself with my own prayers. I find myself praying to God about the same old things over and over and over again, to no avail. I find myself very boring and believe that God must think me to be a very boring individual, be-

cause I have nothing creative or intelligent or otherwise different to talk to him about besides the same old petitions, requests, and pleas. Praying became a chore and a bother to me because I felt like I was bothering God, now I know that is borderline heterodox at best, but that is how I felt and I'm positive that it is a sentiment felt by many people at some point in time in their lives.

I tell you this though, my fellow Christians, God does not grow weary from hearing from you, and He most certainly does not get bored by what you are talking to Him about. While you may grow weary and feel inadequate in your prayer-life, the God of Heaven and Earth loves to hear from you. I discovered a way to pray, however, that has brought passion and meaning back to my prayer life. I have discovered a way to talk to God as I am talking to you all right now. I have discovered a way to enjoy my conversations with God and how to “liven them up”, if you will, in such a way that no longer bores me and makes me feel that a conversation is actually occurring.

You're probably saying to yourself, *“Wow! This is great! A new way to find joy in praying!”* Well I hate to tell you this, but it's not a *new way* to pray. In fact it's a way to pray that saints have been doing for centuries, if not for the past 2000 years. It's sadly only new to me because I never once considered doing it beforehand. For many of you it is probably going to be new too, and you're going to think,

“Why didn’t I think of this before?” What I am talking about is praying the Bible back to God, or simply this praying Scripture. I cannot begin to tell you how radically different my prayer life has become ever since I started practicing this spiritual discipline. I have found joy in praying. I have found that my prayers have more depth and meaning. I have found that, in praying Scripture back to God and using Scripture to influence my prayers, my prayers carry more weight and significance in my life. I have found that, while plumbing the depths of Scripture as I pray, the Word of God becomes more alive to me and resonates in a way like never before. In praying Scripture I find that I am conversing with God how the saints of old did. I find myself hearing from God and responding to God’s Word in a way that I never did beforehand.

Joni Eareckson Tada summarizes exactly how I feel about praying to God what He has already spoken to me in His written Word, by saying, “I have learned to season my prayers with the word of God. It’s a way of talking to God in his language speaking his dialect, using his vernacular, employing his *idios...* This is not a matter simply of divine vocabulary. It’s a matter of power. When we bring God’s word directly into our praying, we are bringing God’s power into our praying. Hebrews 4:12 declares, “For the word of God is living and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword.” God’s Word is living, and so it infuses our prayers with life and vitality. God’s word is also active, injecting energy and power into our prayer.”

“By seasoning my prayers with the vocabulary of God I find that praying for people, events, and things in my own life is more fulfilling than before.”

By seasoning my prayers with the vocabulary of God I find that praying for people, events, and things in my own life is more fulfilling than before. I find myself opening up to God in ways that I had never imagined before, because I’m allowing Scripture to pluck at my heart, cut deep within my soul, and give light to the issues and problems I’m facing on a daily basis. Conversing with God in this way only makes sense to me, and I am so very glad that I picked up a copy of Dr. Donald Whitney’s book, *Praying the Bible*, when I did, because in all honesty his book saved me from spiritual depression and ministry burnout. It was through his book that I “discovered” this way to pray; and it was his exhortation to pray through the Bible and allow the very words of God to influence my prayer life that revitalized my faith and conversations with God. The key things that I really gleaned from his book are as follows:

- 1. Pray with your Bible open.**
- 2. Pray while *reading* your Bible.**
- 3. Pray the Bible back to God.**
- 4. Pray for whatever comes to your mind when reading a chapter, verse-by-verse.**
- 5. Pray with urgency; don’t pray complacently, pray actively.**
- 6. Pray knowing that the God of Heaven and Earth literally can hear you.**
- 7. Pray to the Lord Jesus Christ.**
- 8. Pray to the Holy Spirit.**
- 9. Pray as if you’re standing face-to-face with God, having a conversation**

with Him.

10. Pray in such a way that expresses your theology of God, Christology, and your pneumatology, so that through your prayers, your love for God, Christ, and the Holy Spirit is deepened.

Don Whitney has this to say about praying the Bible: “If people will pray in this way, in the long run their prayers will be far more biblical than if they just make up their own prayers...the Spirit of God will use the Word of God to help the people of God pray increasingly according to the will of God.” I can attest to this that it is true. Not only has my faith and love for God deepened, but my faith has been strengthened and I’ve developed an urgency like never before to pray without ceasing. I love to pray now. I love to deepen my study of Scripture through prayer. I love that, through my own prayers, God is building me up in the most holy faith and giving me a passion for exhorting other people to pray in this way. It is a simple way to pray and a means by which you can experience the grace of God as if you are born again all over again. John Piper puts it this way, “Open the Bible, start reading it, and pause at every verse and turn it into a prayer.” It’s as simple as that.

Christian, if you were once like me, struggling through your prayer life and feeling bored with the idea of saying the same old things to God over and over again, then I encourage you to just open your Bible and start reading it, and then pray to God what you’ve just read. In doing so you will find that God will bless this reading, bless this time of prayer, and in no time you’ll find that you’ve spent the past hour or so talking to God without having said the same old things like you did before. Your prayers will be filled with passion and joy, and your heart will be filled with the love of God all the more if you just but pray to God what he has already said to you.

Elijah's Suicide Prayer and the Whisper of God

By Landon Coleman

The book of James gives remarkable insight into the prayer life of the great prophet Elijah.

James 5:17-18 says Elijah controlled the weather with his prayers. He prayed, and it did not rain. For three and half years not a drop fell from the sky. Elijah prayed again, and it rained. This New Testament insight about the power of Elijah's prayer life

makes 1st Kings 19:4 all the more shocking. In 1st Kings 19:4 Elijah prayed to God and asked him to take his life. It's a suicide prayer. The previous three verses indicate that Elijah prayed this prayer because Jezebel, the wife of King Ahab, had taken out a contract on Elijah's head. The Bible says Elijah was afraid and asked God to kill him (1st Kings 19:3).

How does this happen? How does a prayer-warrior like Elijah find himself running from the queen, hiding in the wilderness, praying for death? The back story found in 1st Kings 17-19 is both illuminating and perplexing. Illuminating because it explains the events that led up to Elijah's spiritual collapse. Perplexing because it describes events that should have bolstered Elijah's faith. The back story begins with Ahab.

We meet Ahab in 1st Kings 16:29-33. Twice we are told that Ahab was more wicked and rebellious than any king who came before him (1st Kings 16:30, 33). He married a Sidonian princess named



Jezebel who worshipped pagan gods (1st Kings 16:31). This resulted in Ahab bringing Baal worship and Asherah worship into the capital city of Samaria (1st Kings 16:31). To summarize, “Ahab did more to provoke the LORD, the God of Israel, to anger than all the kings of Israel who were before him” (1st Kings 16:33).

Enter Elijah. His name appears for the first time in 1st Kings 17:1 in contrast to Ahab. The rivalry between these men kicked off with Elijah telling Ahab that the LORD would not send rain on Israel until Elijah prayed for rain (1st Kings 17:1). You can imagine this did not sit well with wicked Ahab, so the LORD told Elijah to hit the road. Elijah camped out east of the Jordan River, and the LORD commanded a flock of ravens to provide his fugitive prophet with food (1st Kings 17:3-7). Note these two miracles. First, Elijah prayed and the rain stopped. Second, God provided safety and food for Elijah. Elijah was beginning to learn about the power of prayer and the provision of God.

The two stories that follow confirm the lessons God was teaching Elijah. First is the story about oil and flour. God sent Elijah to a foreign country where he met a destitute widow (1st Kings 17:8-10). This widow had reached a dead end in life, and she was literally preparing to die (1st Kings 17:12). Elijah told her that if she fed him first, she would not run out of oil or flour until the day God sent rain on the earth (1st Kings 17:14). The widow did what Elijah told her to do, and the newly formed trio of Elijah, the widow, and her son had oil and flour for three and a half years. Again, Elijah was learning about the power of prayer and the provision of God.

The second story in 1st Kings 17 is related to the first. It is a story about death. At some point in time the widow’s son died (1st Kings 17:17). The Bible says Elijah cried out to the LORD about the widow’s son (1st Kings 17:20). Three times he stretched himself out on top of the dead child, crying out to the LORD to bring the child back to life (1st Kings 17:21). The Bible says, “And the LORD listened to the voice of Elijah. And the life of the child came into him again and he revived.” (1st Kings 17:22)

First Elijah controlled the weather. Then he was fed by a flock of ravens. Then he saw the miracle of oil and flour. Then he saw the dead raised. Elijah was continuing to learn about the power of

<p>“Elijah challenged the 850 pagan prophets of Jezebel to see if their “gods” could send fire from Heaven.”</p>	<p>prayer and the provision of God. As great as these miracles were, they were nothing compared to the miracle of 1st Kings 18. After three and a half years with no rain the famine in Samaria was severe, and Ahab decided it was time to talk to Elijah (1st Kings 18:3-6). The LORD agreed, and he sent Elijah to visit with Ahab (1st Kings 18:1-2). Elijah challenged Ahab to a showdown, telling his nemesis to bring the 450 prophets of Baal along with the 400 prophets of Asherah to Mount Carmel (1st Kings 18:19-20).</p>
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The story that follows is nothing short of spectacular. Elijah challenged the 850 pagan prophets of Jezebel to see if their “gods” could send fire from Heaven (1st Kings 18:21-24). The Bible says these 850 prophets sang and danced from morning to noon, begging their gods to send fire (1st Kings 18:26). Not surprisingly, “There was no voice, and no one answered.” (1st Kings 18:26) About noon, Elijah began mocking his opponents. He told them to yell louder, suggesting that their god was on a journey or taking a nap or possibly even using the restroom (1st Kings 18:27). Don’t miss the humor in Elijah’s sarcasm, and don’t miss the courage with which he spoke. He is standing in front of 850 people who would love to see him dead, and he has the courage to mock them for their foolish idolatry. This is a

man who has learned from droughts and ravens and oil and flour and death. This is a man who knows about the power of prayer and the provision of God.

The 850 prophets continued with their pleas, dancing and raving and even cutting themselves with knives. Again, “There was no voice. No one answered; no one paid attention” (1st Kings 18:29). Finally Elijah took the stage. He drenched his offering in water, proving that what was about to happen was no conjuror’s trick (1st Kings 18:33-35). Elijah prayed to the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, asking him to show the people that he was the one true God (1st

“Maybe we just need to remember that Elijah was a man with a fickle nature like ours.”

Kings 18:36-37). After Elijah prayed, the Bible says, “The fire of the LORD fell and consumed the burnt offering and the wood and the stones and the dust, and licked up the water that was in the trench.” (1st Kings 18:38) Again, Elijah experienced first-hand the power of prayer and the provision of God.

After executing the 850 prophets of Baal and Asherah, it was time for rain. Elijah climbed Mount Carmel, bowed down on the ground and prayed (1st Kings 18:42). In a matter of moments, a downpour came upon the land (1st Kings 18:45-46). Add this to Elijah’s life experience list. First the drought. Then the ravens. Then the oil and flour. Then the dead raised. Then the fire from heaven. Then the rain. In the most spectacular ways, Elijah had learned to trust in the power of prayer and the provision of God.

You would expect that at this point in his life, Elijah would be on the ultimate spiritual high. Then you turn to 1st Kings 19. In 1st Kings 19:3 we read that the bold, fearless, courageous prophet was afraid because Jezebel had promised to kill him (1st Kings 19:1-3). This makes no sense. He just faced down and slaughtered 850 false prophets, and now Elijah is scared of a death threat from Jezebel? I struggle to understand the rationale behind this fear. Maybe Elijah was tired after a marathon run to Jezreel (1st Kings 18:46). Maybe Elijah was frustrated by the fact that even after God sent fire from heaven the people did not repent (1st Kings 19:4). Maybe Elijah was despondent because he felt like he was the last man on earth who trusted the LORD (1st Kings 19:10). Maybe we just need to remember that Elijah was a man with a fickle nature like ours (James 5:17-18). Or maybe there is another explanation for Elijah’s fear.

In 1st Kings 19:4 Elijah prays this prayer, “It is enough; now, O LORD, take away my life, for I am no better than my fathers.” This is a bold thing to pray, especially when you know the power of prayer like Elijah knew the power of prayer. God could control the weather, multiply food, raise the dead, and send fire from heaven. Surely God could take Elijah’s life when he prayed for death. But instead of death, God sent an angel to feed Elijah, strengthening him for a 40 day journey to the mountain of God (1st Kings 19:5-8).

When Elijah arrived at the mountain of God, the LORD asked him a strange question. Having sent Elijah to the mountain, God asked Elijah, “What are you doing here, Elijah?” (1st Kings 19:9). The obvious answer was, “God, I am your servant, you sent me here, so I’m here.” Instead of the obvious answer, Elijah responded out of the frustration of his heart (19:10). He looked around and saw no results from his labor. No one repented. No one turned back to the LORD. And Elijah assumed he was the only follower of Yahweh.

God sent Elijah to stand on the mountain. God sent a powerful wind that broke the rocks apart. God sent a terrifying earthquake that shook the mountain. God sent a fire that threatened to consume the mountain. Strangely, the Bible says God was not in the wind or the earthquake or the fire (1st Kings 19:11-12). Instead, God was in the sound of a “low whisper” (1st Kings 19:12). For years I have been puzzled by this story. What was God trying to teach his discouraged prophet? And what about the unanswered question of why Elijah would be afraid of Jezebel and pray for death? I think the answer is obvious when you consider Elijah’s experiences with God up to this point. Elijah had the opportunity to experience some of the most amazing miracles recorded in the Bible. Not only that, but he also had the privilege of participating in these miracles through prayer. God used Elijah’s prayers to control the weather, multiply food, raise the dead, and send fire from heaven. Elijah had come to expect the miraculous and the spectacular when he prayed.

I think this explains Elijah’s fear of Jezebel, his prayer for death, and his experience on the mountain of God. We know Elijah was a man of prayer. It’s logical to assume that he prayed when Jezebel threatened to kill him. And I believe Elijah expected another spectacular miracle to come from the LORD. Maybe a lightning bolt would hit Jezebel? Maybe a lion would devour Jezebel? Instead, nothing happened and Elijah was forced to run for his life. Despondent, he begged for death and complained to God that he was alone in his faith (1st Kings 19:4, 10, 14). God responded with a strong wind and a powerful earthquake and a raging fire. All were spectacular and miraculous. None contained the presence of God. Instead, God was in the still small voice.

God was trying to teach Elijah that prayer does not put God at our command. And while God certainly hears our prayers, and while he can respond with the spectacular and miraculous, sometimes God chooses to answer with a low whisper. There would be no spectacular miracle delivering Elijah from the threats of Jezebel. Instead, a low voice called Elijah to continue his prophetic ministry (1st Kings 19:15-18).

May we pray with the boldness of Elijah. May we remember that God can and does respond in spectacular and miraculous ways. But may we never forget that our prayers never put God at our command. And as we wait for God, may we be satisfied with the spectacular, the miraculous, the mundane, the ordinary, and even the low whisper.

Rejoice, Pray, Give Thanks: A Way of Life in Christ

By Charles Handren



Near the end of his first letter to the church of Thessalonica, the Apostle Paul issued an exhortation that at once seems inviting and impossible. He writes, “Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you” (1st Thessalonians 5:16-18).

This exhortation seems inviting because it calls us into an ideal and fruitful way of life, and it is a fitting response to all that God accomplished for us and granted to us in Christ. However, it also seems impossible because the standard is so high and our tendencies are so contrary to it. Indeed, can you think of even one day in which you have literally rejoiced *always*, prayed *without ceasing*, and given thanks *in all circumstances*? Perhaps I’m blind to the grace of God operating in my life, but I can’t think of a day in which I’ve perfectly reached this standard in more than thirty years of walking with

Christ.

Yet, perceived impossibilities aside, this way of life is the will of God in Christ Jesus for His people. Therefore, in this article we will briefly consider (1) the meaning of the terms rejoice, pray, and give thanks; (2) the nature of what we're called to rejoice in, pray about, and give thanks for; (3) the high standard God has set for each of these activities; and (4) some practical ways we can make progress in this way of life for the glory of God, the nourishment of our souls, and the blessing of others.

Rejoice Always

Biblically speaking, to rejoice is to inwardly appreciate God for His person, words, and works, and to outwardly praise Him for the same. And since His eternal purposes and plans come to crescendo and fulfillment in Jesus Christ, we can say that to rejoice is to personally and corporately exalt God for the gospel. As Paul said to the Thessalonians, "And we also thank God constantly for this, that when you received the word of God [about Christ], which you heard from us, you accepted it not as the word of men but as what it really is, the word of God, which is at work in you believers" (1st Thessalonians 2:13). So, when he later exhorted them to "rejoice always", he was primarily encouraging them to exult in the gospel which they had received.

When our rejoicing is rooted in the gospel, it does not ebb and flow with the tides of our circumstances, rather, it persists and intensifies even in times of difficulty and persecution. This is why Paul and his companions gladly preached the gospel to the Thessalonians in the face of persecution, and the Thessalonians gladly received it in the midst of much affliction. "But though we [Paul's team] had already suffered and been shamefully treated at Philippi, as you know, we had boldness in our God to declare to you the gospel of God in the midst of much conflict" (1st Thessalonians 2:2). And, "you [Thessalonians] became imitators of us and of the Lord, for you received the word in much affliction, *with the joy of the Holy Spirit*, so that you became an example to all the believers in Macedonia and in Achaia" (1st Thessalonians 1:6-7, emphasis mine). Further, James applies this basic principle to all of life's struggles when he encourages his readers, "*Count it all joy*, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds, for you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness. And let steadfastness have its full effect, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing" (James 1:2-4, emphasis mine).

"This is the biblical vision of rejoicing: to personally and corporately appreciate and praise God for the gospel, no matter what the circumstances."

This is the biblical vision of rejoicing: to personally and corporately appreciate and praise God for the gospel, no matter our present circumstances. But having said that, the question remains, how can we "rejoice always", that is, "at all times"? Theoretically, we understand that our joy in Christ is not subject to the ebb and flow of circumstances, but realistically, we don't always respond well to challenging or negative things. So again, how can we possibly attain God's standard and "rejoice always"?

The primary answer is this: we will learn to rejoice in God as He completes His work in us. The more we progress in sanctification, the more we will grow in appreciation and praise for God. The more we gain eyes to see what He has accomplished for us and granted to us in Christ, the more we will gain mouths to express our affections to Him. The more we watch Him work in our lives, through a variety of circumstances, the more we will grow in the hope that "for those who love God all things

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

So, while we may never attain God’s standard here on the earth, we will keep moving in this direction by grace through faith, until the day we see Jesus face-to-face and rejoice in Him with the angels for all eternity! In light of this destiny, it is best for us to think less about the standard itself and more about the God, who has revealed His glory through Jesus Christ. For if we will focus on Him, we will indeed learn to rejoice always.

Pray Without Ceasing

The second part of Paul’s exhortation is to “pray without ceasing” (1st Thessalonians 5:17). To pray is to talk with God, and to intercede is to talk with God about others. We tend to take this privilege for granted, but we will never understand the lengths to which God went to make access into His presence possible for us, and to make our prayers and intercessions pleasing to Himself. Through the blood of Jesus and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, God the Father has made a way for us to come into His presence at anytime and from any place to talk about anything. As Paul wrote, “And he [Jesus] came and preached peace to you who were far off [Gentiles] and peace to those who were near [Jews]. For through him we both have access in one Spirit to the Father” (Ephesians 2:17-18).

Having opened up the way to His throne of grace, God not only invites, but encourages us to come to Him with all of our cares, concerns, and anxieties. “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” (1st Peter 5:6-7). And remember, “The Lord is at hand; do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus” (Philippians 4:5-7). God’s desire is that we would share all things with Him, who is able to do all things. Of course, it’s not that He’s unaware of the state of our hearts or the particulars of our lives, but it is that He wants us to enter deep into the joy of fellowship with Him by sharing all things with Him.

In order to make our prayers and intercessions most pleasing to Him and effective in the world, God counsels us to pray according to His will, as revealed in His Word. As Jesus said, “If you abide in me, and my words abide in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you. By this my Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit and so prove to be my disciples” (John 15:7-8). When our minds are saturated with the words of God and our hearts delight in the wisdom of God, we will learn to pray according to the will of God so that God is pleased to answer our prayers. But as we grow in bearing fruit through conversation with God, we rejoice more in the fellowship we have with Him than the answers He grants to us. In fact, for the believing soul, answers to prayer are simply confirmation that we have come to know God through Jesus Christ, and in this we greatly rejoice!

Now, one of the profound secrets of living a life of prayer and intercession is that, as we grow in it, we slowly transform into the image of Jesus. The author of Hebrews writes, “Consequently, he [Jesus] is able to save to the uttermost those who draw near to God through him, since he always lives to make intercession for them” (Hebrews 7:25). That is, Jesus saves and sanctifies His people through His intercessions for us, and He transforms us into His image by teaching us His way of life. And as we learn His way of life, we enter deep into His joy so that we have all the more reason to rejoice always and pray without ceasing.

But if this is the nature and purpose of prayer, how are we to “pray without ceasing”? As inviting as this exhortation is, it seems impossible. To be sure, if we envision prayer as an activity for which we must set aside all other things, then this call to prayer is impossible. After all, we must ready ourselves in the morning, we must work and play and interact with others during the day, and we must sleep at night. However, if we envision prayer as a conversational way of life with God, whereby we maintain and nourish our conscious communion with Him, then this call to prayer is both possible and inviting. For then it simply means that God wants us to talk to Him at all times, about all things.

By the grace of God in Christ, we can grow toward the day when this conversational way of life with God characterizes our lives. We can grow toward the day when we consciously commune with Him even in silence. We can grow toward the day when our fellowship with the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit is the main thing in everything we think, feel, say, or do. I am not saying that this way of life is easy to attain, for no matter how much we grow, we will always have more growing to do and more fleshliness to overcome. But I am saying that this way of life is possible by the power and grace of our Heavenly Intercessor, and I am saying that it is the destiny of all who know Him and enjoy fellowship with Him.

But as sensible as is this call to gratitude, the question remains, what does it mean to “give thanks *in all things*”?

In sum, the call to pray without ceasing is an invitation to enjoy unbroken fellowship with our heavenly Father, through Jesus Christ, by the power of the Holy Spirit. And it is an invitation to be transformed into the image of Him who saved us. So, again, let us think *less* about the standard itself and *more* about God Himself. For in turning our thoughts toward God, we will long to enjoy fellowship with Him all the days of our lives.

Give Thanks in All Circumstances

This leads us to the final part of Paul’s exhortation, namely, to “give thanks in all circumstances” (1st Thessalonians 5:18), which is probably better translated “give thanks in all things”. To give thanks means to offer up “good graces” to God, that is, to bless His name. It means to express gratitude to God for His person, words, and works. And as we learn to rejoice always in the gospel and commune with God through prayer, it is only fitting that we also learn to thank and bless the name of Him who has forgiven our sins, who has reconciled us to Himself through Christ, and who has begun the long but certain process of transforming us into His image. Indeed, since there is so much for which to be thankful to God, we should learn to give Him thanks “in all things.”

But as sensible as is this call to gratitude, the question remains, what does it mean to “give thanks *in all things*”? First, notice that Paul did not instruct us to give thanks *for* all things. Some things are inherently evil, and some circumstances, while under the sovereign control of God, are not in accordance with His perfect will. Therefore, we are not called to give thanks *for* all things in themselves, but we are called to give thanks to God *in* all things whatever the particulars of those things.

The reason for this is both simple and profound: we are called to give thanks *in* all things because we know that God is at work *in* all things. The cross of Christ is the greatest demonstration of the fact that God is able and willing to use even the greatest evil to bring about the greatest good. And since we are sure that God will exalt Himself and bless His people through good and evil, victory

and defeat, triumph and tragedy, we should learn the discipline and joy of rendering to Him the thanks that are always due His name.

This is the Will of God in Christ Jesus

With that, Paul concludes his three-part exhortation by teaching us that this way of life “is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you” (5:18). In other words, our heavenly Father not only commends these things to us, but He deeply desires them for us. And we can rest assured that this way of life will become our way of life as we grow in Christ, not because of what we have determined to do for God, but because of what He has purposed to do in us. The day is coming when we will be happily consumed with God: rejoicing in Him always, praying at all times, and giving thanks in all things as a natural part of our union with Him.

Since this is what our Father wants for our lives, let us fully cooperate with His work in us and build daily habits that nurture His desires. Specifically, let us spend some time every morning meditating on His Word, sharing our hearts with Him, and asking for grace from Him to rejoice, pray, and give thanks throughout the day. Then, by His grace and power, let us learn to appreciate Him, praise Him, call upon Him, intercede before Him, and give thanks to Him in and through everything we experience and endure. Finally, as we take our rest at night, let us express our gratitude to Him for His mercy and faithfulness to us. As the Psalmist wrote, “It is good to give thanks to the LORD, to sing praises to your name, O Most High; to declare your steadfast love in the morning, and your faithfulness by night” (Psalm 92:1-2).

Indeed, let us cooperate with God as He endeavors to bring about His will in our lives, for this will be a glory to Him, nourishment for our souls, and a blessing for everyone around us. And let us remember that our hope is in God’s faithfulness to us, not in our faithfulness to Him. For this reason, Paul closes his letter with this prayer and promise; I encourage you to read it prayerfully and carefully. “Now may the God of peace himself sanctify you completely, and may your whole spirit and soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. He who calls you is faithful; he will surely do it” (1st Thessalonians 5:23-24). Amen.

Praying with George Mueller's Faith and Joseph's Results

By Rick Hanna



You are reading a theological journal. You are, no doubt, then familiar with the story of George Mueller; a story that is equal parts wonder at the amazing faith of a man with a heart for orphans and an amazing God who provided in response to his faith. It also can bring a response that, once you are past marveling at his faith and God's provision, you are left wondering what is wrong with your prayer life. The story of George Mueller is not as much a comfort to the wife who just lost her husband to cancer, or the 55 year-old who just lost his job because he did not agree to work Sundays, or the 17 year old pastor's kid who is now homeless and jobless just because his dad held firm to the Bible's teaching. Did these folks have less faith than George Mueller? Were they worse pray-ers than him? It has been a sticky wicket in the teaching on prayer: what do we do with prayer that can be prayed with George Mueller's faith, but produces Joseph's results? It is not just answering the question of unanswered prayer that is the focus of this article, but rather seeing God's hand in the yes and no that is given in reply to our prayers. One can pray with equal faith, but get different results because the providence of God is at work for the best of God's people. To examine this further, we will examine a few episodes in Joseph's life and draw out a few key thoughts related to prayer.

Joseph in the Pit and Prayer

From the beginning, Joseph enjoyed a privileged position as his father's favorite. He was the first son of Jacob's beloved Rachel. Things were good for Joseph. Things were so good for Joseph that God saw fit to give him special messages through his dreams, that he would enjoy a level of prominence that would cause the others around him to show their due respect. God was going to do great things with Joseph. Perhaps in some way, this emboldened Joseph enough to think that dad's favor of him was appropriate and would be understood by his brothers. Why else would he have shared this information with them? Yet, his brothers, evidently missing the message God had for them in the dream, took matters into their own hands and rose up against Joseph. With his life barely spared, Jo-

seph was sold off into slavery. Rather than having others bow before him, he would spend many years in service to a palace official, and ultimately end up in the dungeon pit, convicted of a crime he did not commit. We might ask the question, “How can a good God allow this to happen?” It is a question that perhaps some might ask when they read news of a young missionary family, one step away from the field, tragically killed in a car accident on the way to their last agency meeting. Why did that happen? We want answers now, but there are none. At least not right now. Don’t rush ahead to Genesis 50, but linger with Joseph in Genesis 37. The answers are not coming for 10, 15, maybe even 25 years. Many people ask the question, “Can you still trust a God that works on that time table?” Asking this question and our answer to it reveals where we are in our walk of faith. Perhaps you don’t ask that question, but you likely know who is. What do you say to them? They may have George Mueller faith, but they have received Joseph results.

Genesis 39 gives us the narrative account of one of the worst mistrials ever. Joseph has done nothing but bring honor and success to Potiphar’s house and certainly did nothing wrong, often fleeing the invitations to enjoy a little fun on the side, no matter how wrong it could have been. In other words, Joseph was a faithful worker and honored God through what he did. This, of course, landed him in jail, the victim of false accusation and a lawyer-less justice. While in the dungeon, he experiences favor with God again, things go well and he is put in charge again. He also makes the acquaintance of a couple of Pharaoh’s servants who have become cellmates. As he interprets the dreams of these two servants in Genesis 40, we get a little clue into what has been going on in Joseph’s mind. His remark to the cupbearer ends up being a pointless petition, because he forgets Joseph (vs. 23). What it reveals, though, is a Joseph that is struggling to understand why God has not answered and how he might help the process along. But his plan fails in one sense, as he is forgotten, but when the time is right, God will bring this to the mind of the cupbearer.

Two years after the seemingly pointless petition, the time is right and Joseph is delivered from prison. Through God’s grace, Joseph is able to interpret Pharaoh’s dream and go from last to first faster than any sports team ever. It is the end of a long process in Joseph’s life and brings to fruition the dreams that God gave Joseph many years earlier. What is important to remember is that it did take many years for Joseph to get to this point. For us, it is a turn of the page, for Joseph, it was an arduous process filled with some doubt, some answers, some setbacks, and much patience needed.

Principles on Prayer

So what are some principles we can take from this as we seek to pray with George Mueller faith but often with Joseph results? Here are a few: *Pray with a long-term view, not only a short-term view.* There is nothing wrong with asking God to act now. Certainly the Psalm writers were not shy in asking God “How long, O Lord?” With that, though, there is the need to remember that God’s timing is always best and prayer can be a time that helps to re-focus on the long-term view of God’s plan.

“But for Joseph, who was living it, the story did *not* look so amazing until the end.”

Pray with a firm faith in the sovereignty and providence of God. The story of Joseph is an amazing picture of God’s providence, using the choices and actions of people to accomplish His grand plan. But for Joseph, who was living it, the story did *not* look so amazing until the end. It was only at the end that he could look back and see God’s work clearly. Until then, it was only by faith, with the doubts that naturally come, that

Joseph could see God's providence at work.

Keep praying even when it seems like God has forgotten you. Joseph honored God with his life. He was a person of integrity and hard work. He was a person of honor in all his dealings. Yet, it ended him up in slavery and then in prison. These are the kinds of things that cause followers of Jesus to wonder where God is. It is at those times that faith in God is put to the test. Many people will say, "I prayed and God did not ..." and then they stop praying. We must keep praying especially during those times. Paul writes in 2nd Corinthians about a number of things that were happening against him and the ministry team, but that these things happened so that they would not rely on themselves but on God. Our faith in God will be strengthened by praying through those times when it seems God is not there. The truth is God is there and He has not forgotten us.

Pray with George Mueller's faith even if you are seeing only Joseph results. God will bring about His work in you through the pain, through the prayer, and through the results, both good and bad.

How I Started Praying the Bible

By Don Whitney

It was the 1st of March, 1985. I remember where I was sitting when it happened. I was Pastor of a church in the western suburbs of Chicago. A guest preacher was speaking on a series of meetings at our church. He was teaching on the prayers of the Apostle Paul found in his New Testament letters, and encouraging us to pray these inspired prayers as our own. Then, at one point, he held up his Bible and said, “Folks, when you pray, use the prayer book.” In that



moment I suddenly realized *the entire Bible is a prayer book. We can pray not only the prayers of Paul in Ephesians, we can pray everything in the Book of Ephesians.* So, I started praying each day through one of the passages in my daily Bible reading. Soon I was reading in the Psalms and found it easy to make the words of the Psalmist my own prayers. For example, I read, “How precious is your steadfast love, O God!” (Psalms 36:7), and spoke King David’s exact words as my own prayer, immediately adding other thoughts prompted by David’s exclamation. After I’d said all that came to mind from verse 7, I read verse 8: “They feast on the abundance of your house, and you give them to drink of the river of your delights.”

“Yes, Lord!” I prayed, “Let me feast on the abundance of your house; let me drink of the river of your delights. Feed my soul with your goodness. Satisfy my thirsty heart with your delights. Let me be immersed in the vast, deep, incomparable river of knowing you.” I simply spoke to the Lord those things prompted verse-by-verse in my reading of the Psalm. If a verse didn’t suggest anything to pray, I would go to the next verse. On and on through the Psalm, praying as prompted by the things I

read, I continued until I ran out of time. I discovered that praying the Bible helped me stay focused and minimized the tendency of my mind to wander. I stopped saying the same old things about the same old things when I prayed. And yet, I found that I still prayed about the things I wanted to pray for each day, but I stopped using the tired, repetitive phrases I typically used.

“So, March 1st, 1985, was a day that forever changed my life...”

Using this approach also gave me a much greater sense of conversing with God. Instead of the usual me-centered monologue that I hoped the Lord would hear, I read what He said in the Bible, then spoke to Him in response. When I finished, I turned to the words of God again, after which I spoke with Him about what He had just said in Scripture. Throughout my time in prayer I kept alternating between God speaking in His Word and my speaking to Him in response—just like a real conversation. I read what He said in the Bible, then spoke to Him in response.

Eventually I discovered that what I’d stumbled upon was in fact an ancient Christian practice. Jesus prayed Psalms on the cross (Matthew 27:46 and Luke 23:46). Followers of Jesus in the Book of Acts (4:23-26) prayed psalms. And many prayerful people since Bible times (such as George Müller) practiced praying the Bible. Regrettably, I’d never been taught this simple, satisfying method of taking the words of Scripture and turning them into prayer.

So, March 1st, 1985, was a day that forever changed my life, and changed virtually every day of my life since. And now, having prayed the Bible almost daily for thirty years, I can testify that there is nothing in all my devotional life that more quickly and consistently kindles my consistently cold heart like praying the Bible. It is gratifying to be able to share with you something that has been so meaningful to me for so long. I hope you will find the practice of praying the Bible equally meaningful and helpful in your own prayer life.

Persistent Prayer to a Loving Father

By Jason Helopoulos



Persistent prayer proves hard for many Christians. We may labor on our knees for years as we pray for our unbelieving child, an empty womb, our spouse to be converted, the friend battling cancer, depression to no longer have a hold, a sin to lose its grip, or the gift of just one good friend. We pray and continue to pray, ever fighting the temptation to give up. The temptation

comes because nothing *seems* to happen. If we are honest, many times we wonder if our Father in Heaven cares. We bow our heads, utter our prayers, plead with the Father, and it seems to rise no higher than the ceiling. How desperate such times can seem and how distant our Heavenly Father appears to be.

Christ, the Good Shepherd, knows His sheep and this struggle. Luke tells us in chapter 18, verse 1, that Jesus “told them a parable to the effect that they ought always to pray and not lose heart.” Jesus lends His agreement to Luke’s interpretation as He concludes the parable of the unrighteous judge by saying, “Hear what the unrighteous judge says. And will not God give justice to his elect, who cry to him day and night?” Be relentless, Jesus is saying. Keep praying. Don’t give up. Don’t lose heart. If an unrighteous judge will respond to the pleadings of a widow and grant justice, how much more our Heavenly Father?

Jesus is comparing the unrighteous judge to God the Father. But it’s more than a comparison, it is a contrast. A popular method of argument in Jewish tradition was an argument from the lesser to the greater. Jesus is in effect asking, “If someone so unrighteous and uncaring will grant justice after persistent pleading, if someone so low and so vile would respond, how much more God your Father?”

Dear Christian, we have a Father who is just and who cares for us. A Father who doesn’t keep the people under His care at arm’s length. No, He invites us in. Even more, He draws us in, listens, responds, and cares for His children. One of the great benefits of being in Christ is that we are able to

draw near to God the Father in prayer time and time again.

Have you watched children interact with their father on Sunday mornings at church? Inevitably, some child will be found sitting on his or her father's lap. It is quite natural. The father might sit down after one of the hymns, their son or daughter crawls over the pew, maybe over their brother or sister poking them in the eye, and promptly sits on their father's lap. They draw near. They know this lap is reserved for them. A stranger has no right to that lap. How odd it would be to see another child in the congregation climb onto a foreign father's lap. But a son or a daughter can approach with boldness to sit in the lap of their loving father. It speaks of intimacy and belonging. Christians possess intimacy, enjoy that sense of belonging, possess unfettered access, and exercise this very privilege as children of their Heavenly Father.

Let us remind ourselves readily that we live in communion with a Father who loves to draw near to us in love, and loves for us to draw near to Him in love. Our pleadings, whispers, and cries in prayer never fall on deaf ears. In fact, they are received in love.

Many of us struggle to maintain persistence in prayer because we tend to think of the Father as harsh, hard, and severe. His love seems fleeting and His apparent lack of response to our prayers seems to confirm this suspicion. But don't we know that He is the fountain of love? His love is always directed towards us.

I have never heard someone say, "I know God the Father loves me, but the Son of God, Christ, I am not so sure about?" No one says that. And no one says something similar about the Spirit. But that many tend to doubt the Father's love is a reality that hampers prayer. Such a view of God the Father echoes the old lie told by the Devil to Adam and Eve in the garden—a lie meant to cause confusion, harden our hearts, and lead us to think that the Father is severe and delights in keeping things from us rather than giving all good gifts to us.

The Christian engaged in persistent prayer fights this temptation. We know the Father loves to give good gifts to His children. He gave us the gift of all gifts. Christ did not secure the love of the Father for us by dying on the cross. The Father's love for us sent Christ to the cross. His love was antecedent. It was the cause. The Father's love did not become ours by virtue of Christ's death; Christ's death became ours by virtue of the Father's love. "For in this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins" (1st John 1:9). "For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son" (John 3:16). As John Owen said, Christ, the Son, is but the stream flowing from the fountain of love, God the Father. The Father is like the sun that shines in the sky and Christ the beams that radiate from that sun. We know the sun by the beams, but it is the sun that is the fountain.

The Father loves you, dear child of God, and one of the chief ways that we enjoy His love is by coming to Him in prayer. He not only loved us, but continues to lavish His love upon us. That is what Fathers do with their children. They don't just love them for a moment; they keep on loving them—at least any good father does. And He is not just a good father, but the *best* of Fathers. He doesn't turn a deaf ear to our cries. He is moved with compassion and mercy. And Jesus is saying, "Don't you know that when you pray when you plead, it is to such a loving and caring Father?" What a privilege we enjoy in prayer. Keep praying and do not lose heart. Our prayers do not fall on deaf ears or an uncaring heart. Rather, they are heard by our Father, who loves us as His dear children.

Five Benefits of Praying the Psalms

By Don Whitney



I'm sure such folks are out there, but I've not personally met any Christian who hasn't struggled with saying the same old things about the same old things in prayer. Before long, such repetitive prayer is boring. And when prayer is boring, it's hard to pray—at least with any joy and fervency. Note that the problem is not that we pray about the same old things. Actually, that's normal, because our lives tend to consist pretty much of the same old things from one day to the next. Thankfully, the big things in life (our family, our church, our job, etc.) don't change

dramatically very often. Instead the problem is that we say the same old things about the same old things. And prayers without variety eventually become words without meaning. The result of such praying is that we tend to feel like failures in prayer. We assume that, despite our devotion to Christ, love for God, and desire for a meaningful prayer life, we must be second-rate Christians, because our minds wander so much in prayer.

The Method May Be the Problem

No, the problem may not be you; rather it may be your method. I believe that the simple, permanent, biblical solution to this almost universal problem is to stop making up your own prayers most of the time (because that results in repetitious prayer) and to pray the Bible instead. Praying the

Bible means talking to God about what comes to mind as you read the Bible. Usually you might read the passage first, then go back and pray through what you just read. So, for instance, if today you turned to Psalm 23 in your devotional reading, after completing it you would come back to verse 1 and pray about what occurs to you as you read “The Lord is my shepherd.” You might thank the Lord for being your Shepherd, ask Him to shepherd you in a decision that’s before you, entreat Him to cause your children to love Him as their shepherd too, and pray anything else that comes to mind as you consider verse 1. Then when nothing else in those words prompts prayer, you continue by doing the same with the next line, “I shall not want.” Thus, you would go through the chapter, line-by-line, until you ran out of time.

Prayer Transformed

By praying in this way, you discover that you never again say the same old things about the same old things. While you can pray through any part of the Bible, some books and chapters are much easier to pray through than others. Overall, I believe the Book of Psalms is the best place in Scripture from which to pray Scripture. In part that’s because the Psalms are the only book of the Bible inspired by God for the expressed purpose of being reflected to God. God inspired them as songs for use in the worship of Himself. The Psalms also work so well in prayer because there’s a psalm for every sigh of the soul. You’ll never go through anything in life in which the root emotion is not found in one or more of the Psalms. Thus, the Psalms put into expression that which is looking for expression in our hearts.

Five Benefits

Christian, here’s how you’ll benefit from praying the Psalms:

- 1. You’ll pray more biblically-faithful prayers.** The Bible will guide your prayers, helping you to speak to God with words that have come from the mind and heart of God. This also means you’ll be praying more in accordance with the will of God. Can you have any greater assurance that you are praying the will of God than when you are praying the Word of God?
- 2. You’ll be freed from the boredom of saying the same about the same old things in prayer.** One way this will happen is that the psalm will prompt you to pray about things you normally wouldn’t think to pray. You’ll find yourself praying about people and situations that you’d never think to put on a prayer list. Another way is that even though you also continue to pray about the same things, (family, church, job, etc.), you’ll pray about them in new ways. Instead of saying, “Lord, please bless my family,” the text will guide you to pray things such as, “Lord, please be a shield around my family today” if you are praying through Psalm 3:3, for example.
- 3. You’ll pray more God-centered prayers.** When you use a God-focused guide like the Psalms to prompt your prayers, you’ll pray less-selfishly and with more attention to the ways, the will, and the attributes of God. Prayer becomes less about what you want God to do for you (though that is always a part of biblical praying) and more about the concerns of God and His kingdom.
- 4. You’ll enjoy more focus in prayer.** When you say the same old things in prayer every day, it’s easy for your mind to wander. You find yourself praying auto-pilot prayer—repeating words without thinking about either them or the God to whom you offer them. But when you pray the Bible your mind has a place to focus. And when your thoughts do wander, you have a place to return to: the next verse.
- 5. You’ll find that prayer becomes more like a real conversation with a real person.** Isn’t that what prayer should be? Prayer is talking with a Person, the Person of God Him-

self. Prayer is not a monologue spoken in the direction of God. Yet somehow, many people assume that, when they meet with the Lord, He should remain silent and they should do all the talking. When we pray the psalms, however, our monologue to God becomes a conversation with God.

I'm not alluding to the perception of some spiritual impression or hearing an inner voice, imagining God saying things to us—away with that sort of mysticism. Instead, I'm referring to the Bible as the means by which God participates in the conversation, for the Bible is God speaking. God speaks in the Bible, and you respond to that in prayer. That's why people who try this often report, "The pressure was off. I didn't have to think about what to say next, and the whole experience just kind of flowed." Want to experience these benefits for yourself? How about right now? Pick a Psalm, read what God says there, and talk with Him about it.

Three Keys to a Better Prayer Life

By Dave Jenkins



By the kindness of God's grace, I've been a Christian since I was five years old. Over the years my family has endured many difficult situations, such as my parents' divorce, my brother's divorce and separation from his son, my father's hospitalization for dementia, etc. Like you, I am very familiar with the fact that suffering comes on in full-blast and seemingly doesn't relent. Through the trials of life and my walk with God, I've been sustained over and over again by the rich streams

of godly teaching on prayer, and on the sure footing of a healthy prayer life. In this article, I want to share how prayer has played an immense role in my own spiritual growth and how you can have a healthy prayer life through praying consistently, viewing prayer in relation to quality over quantity, and having a prayer list.

Consistency

In 1st Thessalonians 5:17 we are told to “pray without ceasing”. Many people take this verse to mean they must pray literally unceasingly. While that is a nice idea, it isn't quite possible to pray without stopping—ever. What Paul has in mind here is prayer as a regular habit, whereby His people take hold of God, and His promises in all of life. The apostle could say this because he has given the example in his letters to fellow believers (1st Thessalonians 3:10; 2nd Thessalonians 1:11; Ephesians 1:16; 3:14).

Praying with consistency means having a time (or perhaps several times) during your day in which you take time to pray. I find that my best praying is done on a prayer walk. I also pray when I

first get up every morning, simply thanking the Lord for another day to know and serve Him. Throughout the day I stop and pray as I write or work on a message, as the Holy Spirit leads. In order to develop healthy prayer habits in your own life, you first need to realize when it is best for you to pray, and then devote that time to prayer. Often we tend to follow the prayer patterns of others and never develop our own. Use the principle of praying consistency to develop your own prayer habits. Paul's point in 1st Thessalonians 5:17 is that you have a regular habit of praying. I encourage you to think and then write out a plan for how you can pray consistently.

Quality over Quantity

One of the greatest prayer killers is that we think we have to pray for a certain amount of time. You may say, "I've spent 5-10 minutes in prayer and tomorrow I'm going to spend 15-30 minutes." There is nothing wrong with an increasing desire to pray. Luther was known to have spent at least two hours in prayer every day. There is nothing wrong with increasing one's time in prayer. Where the *quantity* of time in prayer becomes an issue is when we use it to make others feel guilty for not spending time in prayer, or when we compare our lesser times in prayer to those of other believers (or even ourselves in condemnation when we don't meet our own goals).

In my experience people often feel guilty for their lack of prayer. They think, "I'm not a super-saint because I don't pray [fill in amount of time]." This view, however, is the wrong one. Nowhere in the Bible do we see Jesus or the apostles assigning themselves, or others, a certain amount of time to pray. If you look at Jesus' praying or Paul's prayers in his epistles to the churches, you'll see that they emphasize *quality* over *quantity*. We don't know how long Jesus prayed to the Father. We don't know how long the Apostles prayed, only that they prayed about three times a day.

Rather than focusing on the quantity of your prayer time, focus on the *quality*. Spend quality time with the Lord, not only giving Him your requests, but praying the Word back to Him, and thus claiming His promises. This will help bolster your prayer life and confidence, which in turn will increase your assurance and faith.

Prayer List

Throughout my Christian life I've had a variety of prayer lists. Sometimes these prayer lists have become cumbersome to me and I've abandoned them entirely. Typically these lists include prayer requests from/for friends, family, and others. You can develop highly structured lists or just have them loosely gathered together by name and request-type like I do.

Prayer lists can be a helpful tool in the Christian's prayer journey. Prayer lists are one way we can pray regularly and consistently; I have friends who also use prayer journals. Whatever tool you use, make sure it doesn't take the place of supremacy in your prayer life. We have summons to boldly come before God because of the finished work of Christ (Hebrews 4:16). Let us then come with joy and gladness to the Lord, not out of duty.

A Final Thought

I know well how hard it can be to develop a prayer life. I've been a Christian nearly my entire life and heard nearly every sort of teaching on prayer. I've found that praying honestly and authentically to the Lord is the best way to pray. When I pray, I want to lay out my heart, my struggles, issues, and circumstances before the Lord.

The principles I've discussed here in this article have helped me to develop a healthy prayer life, but everyone is different. By praying consistently and valuing quality over quantity, you'll find that your prayer life will not only grow, but continue to blossom. I encourage you to boldly go before His throne in order to develop a healthy prayer life that consistently is nurtured by His grace.

Prayer: A Precious Remedy Against the Flesh's Devices

By Jason M. Garwood



Evagrius of Pontus once wrote, “If your soul grows weak, pray. As it is written, pray in fear and trembling, earnestly and watchfully. We ought to pray like that, especially because our unseen and wicked enemies are vehemently trying to hinder us.”^[1] The reality is, sin wages war against the believer. Though Christians are no long under the *dominion* of sin, it still inflicts harm upon God’s people (Romans 7:13-25; Colossians 1:13). Sin isn’t a principle solely *outside* of us, it’s an ungodly force that comes from *inside* of us. The Bible calls this the “flesh.”

The word “*flesh*” in Scripture has a variety of meanings. For example, it (*flesh*) can refer to the physical tissue of a human (Genesis 2:21) while other times it refers to ancestry (Romans 1:3). For the purposes of this article, the term “flesh” refers to that part of our being that is the seat of sin and re-

bellion against God. Jesus said to His disciples, “Watch and pray that you may not enter into temptation. The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh [*sarx*] is weak” (Mark. 14:38). The flesh is hostile to God (Romans 8:7), and “no help at all” for giving life (John 6:63). It bears fruit for death (Romans 7:5), and we mustn’t give it any provision (Romans 13:14). The “flesh” is also worldly (1st John 2:16), and instead of sowing to the flesh, we ought to sow to the Spirit (Galatians 6:8). What an interesting thought that is—sowing to the Spirit. How does one do such a thing? Aside from all of the general components of “walking in the Spirit”, a crucial thing indeed, one of the most precious remedies God has given His people to combat the onslaught of the flesh’s sinful devices that war within us is *prayer*.

Prayer is a *soul-realignment* type of activity. With the flesh waging war against us, the soul gets out of whack. Prayer adjusts the soul, cultivating within God’s people a desire for more of God and His holiness, majesty, and presence in their lives. Think of prayer as the Spirit’s prompting in the souls of men whereby God’s glory can be accessed, enjoyed, contemplated, and experienced. It is no mere coincidence that Christ *prays* for His people to behold His Glory. “Father, I desire that they also, whom you have given me, may be with me where I am, *to see my glory* that you have given me because you loved me before the foundation of the world” (John 17:24; emphasis mine).

To behold the glory of Christ is to commune with God, and to commune with God is to be earnest in prayer (1st Thessalonians 5:17). Is there a greater aim in life than to commune with the Triune God? Is there any greater desire than to take our knowledge of Him and to know, taste, and see that the Lord is good in all of life? The answer is overwhelmingly, “No!” There simply is no greater aim in life and no greater joy than tasting, seeing, and knowing Christ in all of life.

“God’s people pray to God the Father because it is His will that His people seek Him.”

The goal of prayer is the glory of God and the enjoyment of His personhood. The Spirit intercedes for God’s people in their weakness (Romans 8:26). In addition to this, Jesus—the High Priest mediating for His people—lives to make intercession for them (Hebrews 7:25). Prayer isn’t some magical “catch-all”, it’s a powerful remedy to fight against the flesh, and enjoy communion with the Godhead. In prayer, all persons of the Trinity are active in this communion which results in the Christian’s affections being stirred up and their confidence in Him increased. As John Bunyan wrote, “Prayer is a sincere, sensible, affectionate pouring out of the heart or soul to God, through Christ, in the strength and assistance of the Holy Spirit, for such things as God hath promised, or according to the Word, for the good of the church, with submission, in faith, to the will of God.” [\[ii\]](#)

God’s people pray to God the Father because it is His will that His people seek Him (Matthew 6:9-10). Such prayer is mediated through the Son, who serves as High Priest over His people. God’s people are to pray by the power of the Spirit who is carving their souls into the image of His Son. A sure and precious remedy against the onslaught of the flesh is a deep, intimate, and robust prayer life. So be bold, o’ child of God, He awaits to commune with you! So “...let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need” (Hebrews 4:16).

References:

- [\[i\]](#) *The Sayings of the Fathers*, ed. Owen Chadwick (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1958), 141–42.
[\[ii\]](#) John Bunyan, *A Discourse Touching Prayer*, vol. 1 (Bellingham, WA: Logos Bible Software, 2006), 623.

The Importance of Prayer to Theology

By David Dunham



It is extremely easy to make the discipline of doing theology all about us.

We can rob God of His glory in theological study by doing it in such a way that it ignores actual interaction with Him. Kelly Kaptic reminds us that God is not merely an object of study, but the Lord that we worship (*A Little Book for New Theologians*, 64). To keep this right perspective it is important, then, that we see prayer as a necessary part of our theological study. Prayer is a forgotten essential of theological study.

It's important that we understand what prayer is. Prayer is communion with God, but we

ought to see at as more than just a literal folding of the hands and bowing of the head. Kaptic speaks of it as a way of living. He writes:

We are concerned not only to have a few minutes a day set apart for God, but also to have a constant communion with him (1st Thessalonians 5:17; cf. John 15:1-17). Whether eating, drinking, laughing or working, all that we do is done before the face of God. This is what undergirded the Reformation slogan Coram Deo—living before God in all areas of life. This especially applies to our theological studies. Here we are on holy ground, and thus our attitude must be an attitude of prayer. If we are to be faithful, we must always be aware of his presence. (67)

We are doing theology as worship, in humility, before God, in His very presence. We are not merely studying Him, we are communing with Him. That ought to change everything about our theological work.

Anyone can pick up the Bible and read, or study its grammar. Anyone can open a systematic theology textbook and pour over its pages and reflect on its philosophical arguments. Anyone might hypothesize on the nature of God, the hypostatic union of Christ, the atoning work of His cross. But only a true believer, one who worships the living God, can truly perform theology. Theology is not about acquiring knowledge, or attempting to solve divine mysteries. Rather, theology is about knowing God which requires that we approach Him with humility, respect, and faith. Theology directs us to commune with God.

It is important, too, that we do our theology as a dialogue with God. We are not coming to conclusions on our own. As we study God's Word, we are to ask the Holy Spirit to enlighten our minds, to give us wisdom to discern truth, to give us eyes to see truth, and to grant our hearts to receive it. If theology doesn't affect our lives it is not usually because of intellectual failures, but rather a result of heart refusals. Vern Poythress keenly writes:

Our deepest difficulties cannot be resolved merely on a narrowly intellectual plane. Our deepest difficulty is sin, rebellion against God. We have desires in our hearts that resist the Bible's views and what God has to say. We want to be our own master. (Inerrancy and Worldview, 16)

This means we need to do theology as part of our conversation with God. We must prayerfully seek the truth if we are to find the truth. Certainly this means staying grounded in the Word of God, but even in reading the Scriptures we are seeking divine aid to understand them (Ephesians 1:16-17; Colossians 1:9). We pray through our theology because we need God to help us understand. We pray because theology requires us to be in dialogue with God. It is only in that place that we can really begin to grasp theological thoughts. As Anselm of Canterbury wrote, "A theological thought can breathe only in the atmosphere of dialogue with God" (*Proslogion*).

Theology done without prayer is a great way to turn what should be an act of worship into a cold academic discipline. It is a great way to make theology "something we discuss rather than something that moves us" (Kaptic, 64). At one level we could say that anyone can be a theologian. I had a college professor who was a "theologian", but who believed nothing of what he taught. It was more interesting philosophy than truth. On another level, however, we must say that only the true believer in worship to God can be a theologian, for only the man or woman who is moved by the things of God understands them. As we engage in theology we are to do it in communion with God, for His glory and for our good. Such theological work requires that we be in prayer. Without prayer our theology will be all about us, which robs God of glory due His name. Without prayer theology will never achieve its ultimate purpose, to draw us closer in communion with God. Prayer is a necessary part of our theological work.

The Grace of God in Prayer

By Dave Jenkins



Many Christians struggle a great deal with prayer. Whether it's struggling with feelings of guilt or shame, the struggle is often not to make time to pray, but *why* pray. In Hebrews 4:16 the author of Hebrews tells his readers, "Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need" (Hebrews 4:16). Hebrews 4:14-16, as has been noted by many biblical scholars, serves as the end for the first major section of the book and serves as a bridge into the next major section. Hebrews 4:16 provides the answer to why Christians are to persevere is the High Priestly ministry of the Lord Jesus Christ. His ministry reconciles God's people to God and opens Heaven's chest of grace, which makes possible the great resource of prayer.

To approach the throne of God in prayer on the basis of Christ's High-Priestly ministry is to come to His propitiating sacrifice and present intercession. The language used here in Hebrews 4:16 is striking and clear. By telling God's people to come before His throne, the author reminds God's people that it is the place where blood has been offered for His people—the mercy seat where God calls sinners to meet with Him. God's people are also reminded that it is to a King that they are to come.

Spurgeon and Coming before the Grace of God

In a great sermon on this text, Charles Spurgeon worked out some of the implica-

tions on how Christians are to approach God in prayer. The first is that Christians must come in lowly reverence. If Christians show great respect in the courts of earthly majesty—in the White House, for example, or Buckingham Palace—then surely God’s people will come with even greater reverence before the throne of Heaven. There is no place for pride or vanity here, and if God’s people could see what really is before them spiritually they would tremble at its awesome majesty. Spurgeon writes, “His throne is a great white throne, unspotted, and clear as crystal. Familiarity there may be, but let it

not be unhallowed. Boldness there should be, but let it not be impertinent.”[i]

“God requires His people to persevere in faith through the trials of the Christian life.”

Secondly, Christians should come to God in prayer with great joy. The favor that has been extended to us is so high a privilege that it should inspire great joy and thankfulness. Instead of judgment, Christians find themselves in a position as favored children—invited to bring their entire request to the King of Heaven.

Finally, Christians should come to God with confidence.

Christians come knowing that they will be favorably received, knowing that they can speak freely, and knowing

that this is a throne of grace. This is only possible, because of the High Priest, who has gone ahead securing access for His people by His blood.

Summoned Before the Throne

Many Christians struggle with prayer. They tremble as if the light from God’s throne exposed them in a naked shame, when in fact it reveals the radiant robes that have been draped around them, the righteousness of Christ given to all who trust in Him. The key to prayer—to praying often, to praying openly, to praying boldly and freely and with gladness of heart—is to know that one is clothed in the righteousness of Jesus Christ, invited to His own saving ministry, purchased by His precious blood, and anticipated by His sympathetic intercession. This is the secret to lively and happy prayer.

It is to the throne of God which people come—it is a throne of *grace*. This means that when God’s people come, their sins are covered by the blood of Jesus Christ, along with any faults are looked upon with compassion. Stumbling prayers are not criticized, but are received with kindness. Moreover, Jesus’ priestly ministry secures the Holy Spirit’s help. The Apostle Paul writes in Romans 8:26, “Likewise the Spirit helps us in our weakness. For we do not know what to pray for as we ought, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words.” God’s Spirit helps God’s people to pray, and He graciously interprets His people’s prayers in the heart of the Father.

Furthermore, because it is a throne of grace to which God’s people come, God is ready to grant the requests of His people. He is glad to provide for needs, to give strength to persevere through trials to His people. He says, “My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.” The writer continues saying, “Therefore I will boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may rest upon me.” (2nd Corinthians 12:9). One commentator explains, “Man needs mercy for past failure, and grace for present and future work. Mercy is to be ‘taken’ as it is extended to man in his weakness; grace is to be ‘sought’ by man according to his necessity.” [ii]

God requires His people to persevere in faith through the trials of the Christian life. He gives His people a great reason to press on the saving work of the great High Priest, Jesus Christ, who is able to save His people to the uttermost. He has gone ahead of His people to open the doors and unlock the treasures of God’s mercy and grace. Prayer is a great resource God gives His people, one that must not be neglected if one is to grow strong in the faith and persevere through difficulties. Prayer

brings one to a throne of power and authority, but also a throne of grace, to all who are in Christ. Therefore, let God's people draw near to God with reverence, with joy, with great expectation, and especially with confidence that belongs to sons and daughters of the King of Heaven and Earth.

Spurgeon provides us a fitting conclusion about the difference God's grace makes for God's people:

“I could not say to you, “Pray,” not even to you saints, unless it were a throne of grace, much less I could talk of prayer to you sinners; but now I will say this to every sinner here, though he should think himself to be the worst sinner that every lived, cry unto the lord and seek him while he may be found. A throne of grace is a place fitted for you: go to your knees, by simple faith go to your Savior, for he, he it is who is the throne of grace.” [iii]

The challenge to approach God's throne of grace is a call to persistent; confident prayer based on Jesus' own experience of suffering and trials, and His subsequent ability to empathize with our weakness. Mercy focuses on the assurance that past transgressions have been dealt with, and grace points to the inner strengthening to endure test. Both come through the heavenly High Priest, Jesus Christ, who was Himself tested, and is generously given 'for timely assistance'. In other words, the divine help comes at the appropriate time, not least when believers pass through periods of test (Hebrews 2:18). Since God is the one who gives the help (Psalm 9:9), we may be assured that He is aware of the right time when this help is needed.

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[ii] B.F. Westcott, *The Epistle To The Hebrews* (London: Macmillan, 1903), 109.

[iii] Charles Haddon Spurgeon, "The Throne of Grace," in *The Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit*, 63 vols. (Pasadena, Tex.: Pilgrim Publications, 1975), 860).

The Importance of Prayer in Counseling

By David Dunham



I couldn't believe how long she talked and how long my mentor sat listening to her. He seemed to have a bottomless supply of patience. It was my first time in a real-life counseling observation and I quickly learned how vital patience is to being a good counselor. It has been this realization that has often most troubled me as a counselor, because I know myself to be incredibly impatient. It has been this realization that has often driven me to prayer, because I can't make myself be patient. Prayer is one of the most vital tools in the Biblical counse-

lor's belt.

Frustration seems to be a regular occurrence in ministry. Pastoral care brings much joy, but anyone with even a minimal experience in ministry knows that it is often accompanied by a fist-clenching challenge. For every restored brother, there are several hard-hearted individuals who refuse to change. It's easy, then, as a counselor to find oneself becoming jaded, critical, and judgmental. If we are not careful every counselee who fails to make progress will quickly will become subject to our disdain. We may even become quick to discount their difficulties, to assume their apathy, or to judge them as "wasting our time". The particular temptation I've described is very real for every counselor in nearly every case. The importance of prayer, then, cannot be overstated.

First and foremost, prayer serves to remind me that I am dependent upon God. Biblical counseling is not primarily about my role in helping others; it is about my being a servant of the Holy Spirit. It is the Spirit of God who is the Chief counselor; I am a tool in His hands. As such no counseling scenario is dependent upon my skill or knowledge. I am dependent upon the Spirit of God to work in the hearts of those I seek to help. I am dependent upon His convicting them, opening their eyes, and drawing them. I can certainly be a hindrance to the process of change, so it's important that I be skilled and knowledgeable, but change does not depend ultimately on me. I must pray. When my patience runs thin, when I am tempted to wash my hands of a difficult case, I remind myself that God is still at work. That I can trust Him to see a case through to His desired end. I pray for my counselee, then, but I also pray for myself. For example, I might pray, "Lord, help me to serve You well. To trust You with these people and their needs. To trust You with this difficult situation. Help me to be patient as I wait for You to reveal Your handiwork." My prayers focus my heart on serving God as I try to serve my friends in counseling.

"I need to seek His grace in helping me avoid impatience. This is a real temptation and all Christians are to fight temptation by praying that God will deliver them from evil."

Second, prayer reminds me that I need God's grace. As a counselor I am imperfect. My counselees are not the only ones in need of grace. In submitting to God in prayer, I am reminding myself that I need God to help me improve as a counselor. Perhaps a counseling case has gone poorly because of my own failures. Perhaps my impatience has resulted in rushing a case, in discouraging a counselee, in becoming too critical and judgmental. I need to seek God's forgiveness and grace to help me improve as a counselor. I need to seek His grace in helping me to avoid impatience. This is a real temptation and all Christians are to fight temptation by praying that God will deliver them from evil (Matthew 6:13).

God's grace helps His people to avoid impatience by reminding them that all Christian growth is a work of gradual progress. All Christians are in transition from one degree of glory to another (2nd Corinthians 3:18). Growth, then, requires patience, encouragement, challenge, and time. We cannot rush the process. So, as God gives me grace in my own growth, I am to give grace to those I seek to help. I pray for grace because I know I need it. I pray for grace because it helps me to demonstrate it.

Finally, prayer helps me to love others well. Loving others is exceedingly difficult. Other people, like we ourselves, can be trying, selfish, petty, and annoying. Biblical counseling, however, is to be marked by love. To be an effective counselor I have to genuinely care for those I serve. When I am tempted to give up, to abandon a case, I turn God in prayer. Praying for those I counsel often turns my heart towards them in sympathy. As I pray God gives me fresh concern for them, fresh

understanding of their challenges, and fresh alarm for the destruction they are heading towards. Intercession on their behalf draws my heart closer to their need. Impatience with them will cause my heart to be far from them, viewing them as an impediment to my own success, happiness, or comfort, but praying for them reverses this trend. So I pray, “God be merciful to my friend. Break their heart for sin; convince them of Your wisdom and truth. Do not let them wander far from You. Give them strength to say *no* to unrighteousness. Bless them with hope in sorrow.” I pray for their sake, but in praying I find I learn to love them more earnestly.

Counseling is hard work. Paul tells us that each scenario requires a case-specific response. He writes to the Thessalonians:

“And we urge you, brothers, admonish the idle, encourage the faint-hearted, help the weak, be patient with them all.” (1st Thessalonians 5:14)

The idle are to be admonished, the fainthearted encouraged, and the weak helped. Each case requires a response sensitive to the individual and their need. But every person, Paul says, needs patience. Change is hard and temptation is strong. Burdens are heavy and sorrow is enduring. Counselors are desperately in need of God’s grace in order to be of help their counselees. So, we pray and in praying we find the patience we need.

The Practice of Corporate Prayer

By Chris Poblete



Below is a list of the 7 ways we, as Christians, should be engaging in corporate prayer. Each type of prayer includes examples from scripture.

1. The Prayer of Adoration

- Jeremiah 10:6-7, "There is none like you, O LORD; you are great, and your name is great in might. Who would not fear you, O King of the nations? For this is your due; for among all

the wise ones of the nations and in all their kingdoms there is none like you."

- Psalm 145:10-11, "All your works shall give thanks to you, O LORD, and all your saints shall bless you! They shall speak of the glory of your kingdom and tell of your power."

2. The Prayer of Confession

- Daniel 9:5, "we have sinned and done wrong and acted wickedly and rebelled, turning aside from your commandments and rules."
- Isaiah 64:6, "We have all become like one who is unclean, and all our righteous deeds are like a polluted garment. We all fade like a leaf, and our iniquities, like the wind, take us away."

3. The Prayer of Supplication

- Psalm 67:1, "May God be gracious to us and bless us and make his face to shine upon us, Selah."
- Psalm 85:7, "Show us your steadfast love, O LORD, and grant us your salvation."

4. The Prayer of Intercession

- Psalm 67:3, "Let the peoples praise you, O God; let all the peoples praise you!"
- Psalm 7:9, "Oh, let the evil of the wicked come to an end, and may you establish the righteous— you who test the minds and hearts, O righteous God!"

5. The Prayer of Thanksgiving

- 2nd Corinthians 9:15, "Thanks be to God for his inexpressible gift!"
- Ephesians 1:3, "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places."

6. The Prayer of Dedication

- Isaiah 26:13, "O LORD our God, other lords besides you have ruled over us, but your name alone we bring to remembrance."
- Isaiah 63:19, "We have become like those over whom you have never ruled, like those who are not called by your name."

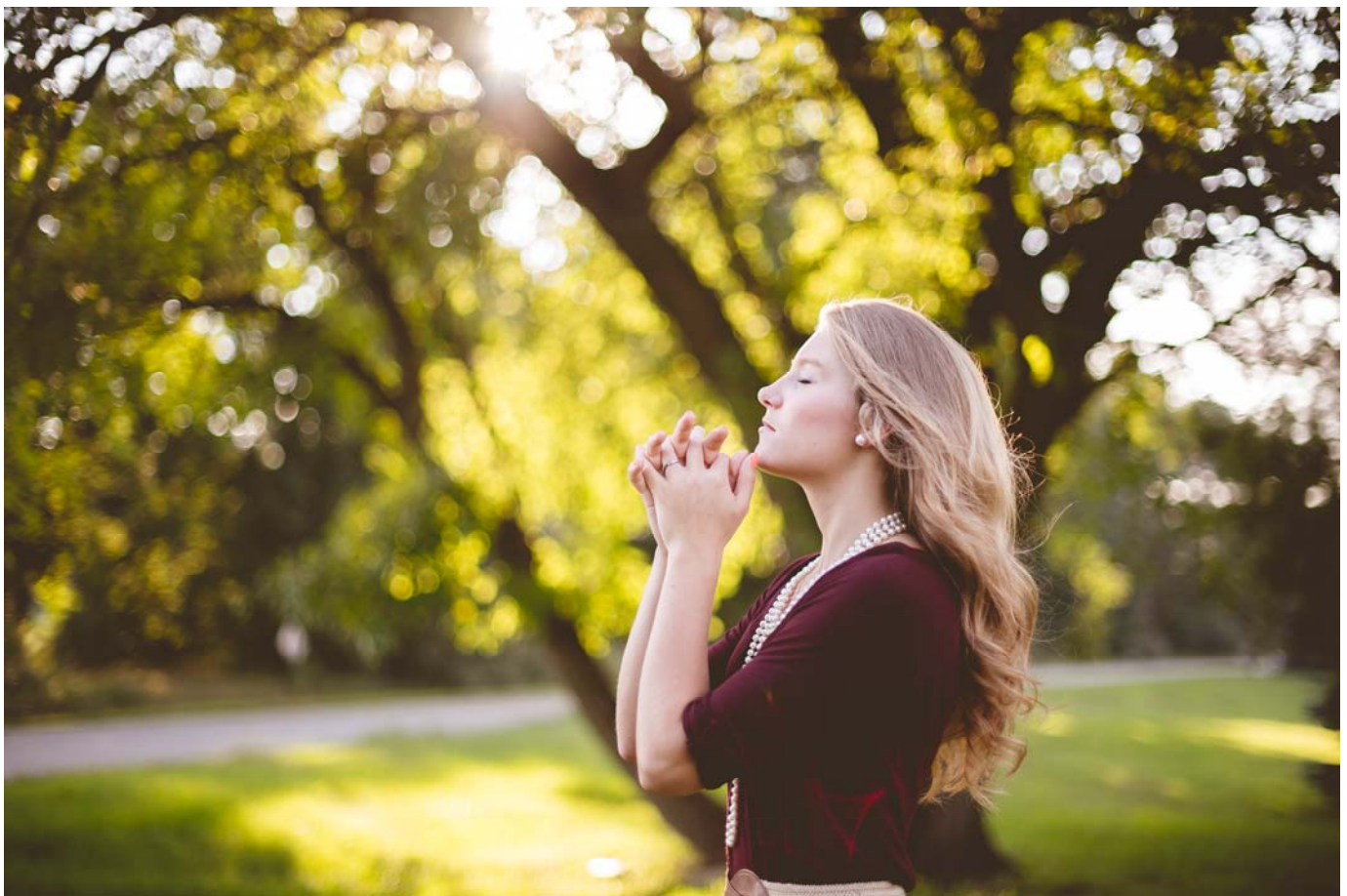
7. The Prayer of Doxology

- Philippians 4:20, "To our God and Father be glory forever and ever. Amen."
- Revelation 7:10, "and crying out with a loud voice, 'Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb!'"

As church leaders and members, let us strive to remember these types of prayer and incorporate them into our regular corporate worship.

The Practice of Private Prayer

By Chris Poblete



Prayer is an important part of the Christian's life. 1st Thessalonians 5:17 encourages Christians to pray without ceasing. How can we know what words to pray? Scripture gives us seven examples, which can also be viewed as a step-by-step single prayer as well.

1. Adoration

- Psalm 18:2 – The LORD is my rock and my fortress and my deliverer, my God, my rock, in whom I take refuge, my shield, and the horn of my salvation, my stronghold.
- Psalm 62:2 – He only is my rock and my salvation, my fortress; I shall not be greatly shaken.

2. Confession

- Psalm 51:3 – For I know my transgressions, and my sin is ever before me.
- Romans 7:24 – Wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death?

3. Supplication

- Psalm 25:4-5 – Make me to know your ways, O LORD; teach me your paths. Lead me in your truth and teach me, for you are the God of my salvation; for you I wait all the day long.
- Psalm 39:4 – “O LORD, make me know my end and what is the measure of my days; let me know how fleeting I am!”

4. Intercession

- Isaiah 64:1 – Oh that you would rend the heavens and come down, that the mountains might quake at your presence
- Ephesians 6:24 – Grace be with all who love our Lord Jesus Christ with love incorruptible.

5. Thanksgiving

- Psalm 40:5 – You have multiplied, O LORD my God, your wondrous deeds and your thoughts toward us; none can compare with you! I will proclaim and tell of them, yet they are more than can be told.
- Psalm 116:12 – What shall I render to the LORD for all his benefits to me?

6. Dedication

- Psalm 116:9 – I will walk before the LORD in the land of the living.
- Psalm 116:16 – O LORD, I am your servant; I am your servant, the son of your maidservant. You have loosed my bonds.

7. Doxology

- 1st Timothy 1:17 – To the King of ages, immortal, invisible, the only God, be honor and glory forever and ever. Amen.
- Romans 16:27 – to the only wise God be glory forevermore through Jesus Christ! Amen.

As we wrap up our daily prayers, let us continue to pour forth our prayers to the Lord, always praising and thanking Him for His grace and mercy.

A Book Review:

The Work of the Holy Spirit in Prayer

By Brian Hedges



THE WORK OF THE SPIRIT

John Owen

In the double interests of going deeper in some of my favorite theologians and trying to strengthen my own prayer life, I've recently been reading John Owen's work titled, *The Work of the Holy Spirit in Prayer*. This 116 page treatise is actually the seventh out of nine "books" in Owen's *magnum opus*, *Pneumatologia: A Discourse Concerning the Holy Spirit*. Because it is situated within the larger framework of Owen's pneumatology, it has a fairly narrow focus as far as prayer is concerned.

It is nothing close to an exhaustive treatment of prayer in general (although everything by Owen feels exhaustive—and sometimes *exhausting*—in comparison with most contemporary writing), but rather a study of the Holy Spirit's particular role in prayer. I'd like to write a more thorough summary of the book, but that's going to take more time than I presently have. So, in the interests of sharing at least some of what I've been learning from Owen, here's a shorter article on just one part of Owen's book.

In chapter six, having already discussed the matter of prayer, Owen takes up the role of the Spirit in the manner of prayer and outlines four specific things the Spirit does in helping us to pray as we should. And, in typical Owenian (and Puritan) fashion, there are also a few sub-points along the way! In what follows, I've paraphrased Owen, except when direct quotes are used. All the quotes are from volume 4 of Owen's Works.

The Spirit Works on Our Wills and Affections

The Holy Spirit not only enables us to pray, He also gives us affections suited to the things we pray about. "And in this work of the Spirit lies the fountain of that inexpressible fervency and delight, of those enlarged labourings of mind and desires, which are in the prayers of believers, especially when they are under the power of more than ordinary influences from him." (pg. 288) Owen's main Scriptural support for this comes from Romans 8:26-27, where Paul writes about the Spirit's intercession for us with groanings that cannot be uttered. Owen understands this to be "nothing but his working in us and acting by us that frame of heart and those fervent, labouring de-

sires, which are so expressed, and these with such depth of intension and labouring of mind as cannot be uttered." (pg. 288). I'm not sure this is the only thing meant by the Spirit's intercession, but surely Owen's general point stands.

The Spirit works in the soul an "inward labouring of heart and spirit," that is, a "holy, supernatural desire and endeavor" (pg. 288). This point seems somewhat coextensive with the first. And, in fact, Owen's following exposition is primarily focused on distinguishing the intercessory work of the Spirit in Romans 8:26-27 from the intercessory work of Christ in Romans 8:34. Owen here intends to describe the Spirit's work in giving us earnestness in prayer, whereas the first point had more to do with the affections themselves. Think of point #1 as having to do with the *kind* of affections we need, and point #2 with their *degree*.

The Spirit gives the believer "a delight in God as the object of prayer" (pg. 290). Owen now has in mind a very specific and necessary kind of affection, which he further characterizes as a "a filial, holy delight in God...such as children have in their parents in their most affection addresses unto them" (pg. 291). "Filial", by the way, is an obscure word that means "befitting a son or daughter". This is what Paul means when he says that the Spirit causes us to cry out "Abba, Father." This kind of delight is important, according to Owen, because "without it ordinarily the duty of prayer is not accepted with God, and is a barren, burdensome task unto them by whom it is performed" (pg. 290-291). Owen then discusses three things included in this delight.

"A sight or prospect of God as on a throne of grace."

Owen further clarifies that this prospect is by "spiritual illumination" or faith, and that it the throne of grace is the holy place which we enter into with boldness through the blood of Jesus (see Hebrews 10:19). "God, therefore, on a throne of grace is God as in a readiness through Jesus Christ to dispense grace and mercy to suppliant sinners." This is Owen at his gospel-centered best. He is showing us how the Triune persons of the Godhead work together in relation to prayer. The Spirit gives us access to the Father through the Son. See Ephesians 2:18. In Owen's words, "it is the work of the Spirit, who alone, in and through Christ, revealeth God unto us, and enableth us to discern him in a due manner...All the acquaintance which we have with God, in a way of grace, is from the revelation made in us by his Spirit" (pg. 292).

"Unto this delight is required a sense of God's relation unto us as a Father."

There is "nothing more essential" to the duty of prayer than this: that "we address ourselves unto God under the notion of a Father; that is, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, and in him our Father also. Without this we cannot have that holy delight in this duty which is required in us, and the want whereof ordinarily ruins our designs in it." In other words, without the faith-fueled delight of a child in God as our Father, prayer is ruined. But the only way to get this kind of child-like delight in the Father is from the Holy Spirit.

This Delight is Also Characterized by Boldness

This boldness includes both (a) "freedom of speech" (2 Corinthians 3:17) and (b) "confidence of acceptance".

- "Freedom of speech" is the ability of the heart to "express all its concerns unto God as a child unto its father."
- And by "confidence of acceptance" Owen means not the assurance that we'll get every single thing we ask for, but rather the "holy persuasion that God is well pleased" with our prayers and accepts us when we come to his throne.

The Spirit keeps believers focused on Jesus Christ "as the only way and means of acceptance with

God.” The Spirit of God is “the Spirit of the Son”. He has been sent to glorify Christ in our hearts. And it is because of his work in our hearts that we call out to God as Father. “And hereof believers have a refreshing experience in themselves; nor doth any thing leave a better savour or relish in their souls than when they have had their hearts and minds kept close, in the exercise of faith, on Christ the mediator in their prayers” (pg. 296).

The Wrap-up

So, how does the Spirit work in our prayers? He inclines our wills and stirs our affections towards God. He gives us earnestness in seeking God. He gives us delight in God as our Father and boldness to approach his throne of grace. He keeps us focused on Christ as the sole means of approaching God. Therefore, if you want a diagnostic tool for your prayer life, try asking these questions:

- Am I relying on the Spirit to incline my heart to God?
- Am I trusting in the Spirit to make me earnest in prayer?
- Am I approaching God's gracious throne with the free and delightful boldness of an accepted child?
- Am I trusting in Christ alone to give me access to God?

If you cannot answer “yes” to the above questions, perhaps now is your perfect moment to start applying the lessons in this article, and trusting in Jesus.

Seven Ways to Pray for Persecuted Christians

By Chris Poblete



When members of the Body of Christ suffer, the whole Body suffers together (1st Corinthians 12:26). Even if we are geographically removed from those being persecuted, we can still draw near to them spiritually. Hebrews 13:3 exhorts, “Remember the prisoners, as though in prison with them, and those who are ill-treated, since you yourselves also are in the body.”

The Apostle Paul himself was well acquainted with suffering and persecution. In fact, many of his pastoral letters were written while he was behind prison bars. Since Paul was a man acquainted with grief and persecution, we can learn how to pray for the persecuted by looking at his life, ministry, and pastoral letters. Here are 7 ways we can pray for our persecuted brothers and sisters, taken from the ministry of Paul.

First, pray that they would see the grace of Christ as all-sufficient, magnifying God’s power in their weakness. 2nd Corinthians 12:9 says, “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.”

Second, pray that they would treasure Jesus more than life itself. Philippians 1:21 states, "For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain." And in Acts 20:24, Paul explains, "But I do not account my life of any value nor as precious to myself, if only I may finish my course and the ministry that I received from the Lord Jesus."

Third, pray that their unshakable joy in Christ would be a witness to their persecutors. In Acts 16:25 we can see an example of this: "About midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the prisoners were listening to them." Philippians 1:27-28 also exhorts believers, "Only let your manner of life be worthy of the gospel of Christ, so that whether I come and see you or am absent, I may hear of you that you are standing firm in one spirit, with one mind striving side by side for the faith of the gospel, and not frightened in anything by your opponents. This is a clear sign to them of their destruction, but of your salvation, and that from God."

Fourth, pray that their future glory would overshadow their present afflictions. Romans 8:18 reminds us, "For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us."

Fifth, pray that they would trust in God's wisdom, strength, and deliverance—not their own. 2nd Corinthians 1:7-9 exalts: "Our hope for you is unshaken, for we know that as you share in our sufferings, you will also share in our comfort. For we do not want you to be unaware, brothers, of the affliction we experienced in Asia. For we were so utterly burdened beyond our strength that we despaired of life itself. Indeed, we felt that we had received the sentence of death. But that was to make us rely not on ourselves but on God who raises the dead."

Sixth, pray that God would give them the right words to say as fearless ambassadors for Christ. In Ephesians 6:19-20, Paul asks his fellow Christians to pray for him, saying, "and also [pray] for me, that words may be given to me in opening my mouth boldly to proclaim the mystery of the gospel, for which I am an ambassador in chains, that I may declare it boldly, as I ought to speak." Also remember Colossians 4:2-4: "Continue steadfastly in prayer, being watchful in it with thanksgiving. At the same time, pray also for us, that God may open to us a door for the word, to declare the mystery of Christ, on account of which I am in prison—that I may make it clear, which is how I ought to speak."

Finally, pray that God would protect and deliver them to safety, according to His good and perfect will. Romans 15:30-31 encourages, "I appeal to you, brothers, by our Lord Jesus Christ and by the love of the Spirit, to strive together with me in your prayers to God on my behalf, that I may be delivered from the unbelievers in Judea, and that my service for Jerusalem may be acceptable to the saints." Philemon 1:22, "At the same time, prepare a guest room for me, for I am hoping that through your prayers I will be graciously given to you."

Spiritual Warfare in the Realm of Assurance

By Jason Helopoulos



Over the years, a dozen or so individuals have entered my pastoral study for counsel due to struggling with assurance of their salvation—they are not quite sure whether they are saved. Week in and week out they attend Sunday services. They read the Scriptures, they pray with their spouse, they seek to avoid sin, they strive for righteousness, but they doubt whether they are in the saving grip of Christ.

I try to help them sort through this struggle. And it is no small struggle. It keeps men and women awake at night. Fear and melancholy easily set in. Every warning regarding the fires of hell brings soul-terrifying thoughts and every promise of Heaven stirs apprehension. It is true spiritual warfare.

For many, this struggle with assurance is not due to being outside of Christ, rather it is evidence of their being in Christ. Contrary to popular belief, struggle is often one of the greatest signs of Christian salvation. Too many think the Christian life is a

life absent of doubt, struggle, and fight. Yet, the Scriptures paint a different picture. Paul says to Timothy, "Fight the good fight of the faith. Take hold of the eternal life to which you were called and about which made a good confession in the presence of many witnesses" (1st Timothy 6:12). The Christian life is seldom one of ease. It is compared to a marathon race (Hebrews 12), a fight (1st Timothy 6), and warfare (Ephesians 6). It involves struggle (Colossians 1:29), suffering (Philippians 1:29), striving (Philippians 1:27), and discipline (1st Corinthians 9:27). Why? Because we have true adversaries.

Satan, sin, the world, and the flesh continue to assault. Doubt creeps in, sin stirs, and struggle persists. Many doubt their salvation because of this ongoing fight. The adversaries are real and they know it. The man or woman sits before me with tears in their eyes as they describe the fact that they are not what they think they should be in Christ. Their thoughts are not as pure, their actions not as holy, their desires not as sanctified as they would expect. If this is the case, they are in good company! Even the Apostle Paul was not what he desired to be (Romans 7:15; Philippians 3:12). John asserts that even though his readers are not what they shall be, they are God's children now, "Beloved, we are God's children now, and what we will be has not yet appeared: but we know that when he appears we shall be like him, because we shall see him as he is" (1st John 3:2).

Often struggle, rather than being a sign of unbelief, is the greatest sign of *true* belief. The reality is that only individuals engaged in the fight are those who find themselves on the other side of the battle lines from these adversaries.

And one of the great schemes of our adversary is attacking the assurance of believers. He sows a seed of doubt and a lack of assurance leads to the conclusion that they aren't saved. Yet, this is a fatal error. The fatal error of equating assurance with salvation. As the Westminster Confession helpfully states, "This infallible assurance does not so belong to the essence of faith, but that a true believer may wait long, and conflict with many difficulties, before he be partaker of it" (WCF 18:3). Believers will possess differing degrees of assurance. Some will have a great measure of assurance from the day of their conversion and others will struggle for years with a modicum of assurance. And still others may live for some time without any assurance!

Surely, we must seek to discern whether we are actually in the faith

(Matthew 7:21-23), but our salvation is not based upon our assurance (or *feelings* of assurance). Rather, we are kept in His hand (John 10:27-29). Our salvation does not rest upon our fleeting thoughts or internal assurance, but rather upon Him—His covenant love, His knowing, His keeping. It is secured in Him. He is the Good Shepherd who guards and keep His sheep. He knows His own and His own know Him. His steadfast love is our hope. "Fight the good fight of the faith," Paul says. And in the midst of that fight, when your adversary whispers lies that your lack of assurance is evidence of a lack of faith, remind him (and yourself) that your salvation is not determined by your fleeting thoughts, but by Jesus' steadfast love. In this you can stand secure.

"Our salvation does not rest upon our fleeting thoughts or internal assurance, but rather upon Him— His constant love, His knowing, His keeping."

Spiritual Warfare and the Power of Scripture

By Dave Jenkins



In Matthew 4, Jesus is confronted by Satan in the desert. In this story, we learn how Jesus used Scripture in spiritual warfare against Satan. Today, I want us to look at Matthew 4:1-11. This temptation is an attempt by Satan to subvert God's plan for human redemption by causing Jesus to fall into sin and disobedience, and thus disqualify Him as the sinless Savior.

Matthew 4:1 says that "Jesus was led up by the Spirit." The Holy Spirit guided Jesus in His earthly life, providing a pattern for His followers to be empowered and led by the Holy Spirit (Galatians 5:16-18). The Greek word for tempted (*perirazo*) can also mean test. While God never tempts anyone to do evil (James 1:13), He does use circumstances of all types to test a person's character (Hebrews 11:17). *Diablos* (Greek, meaning *slander*, or *accuser*) is here preceded by the definite

article to indicate the *one who tempts*. Although the devil intended to thwart God's plan and purposes, the Father uses this evil intention for the good purpose of strengthening Jesus in His messianic role.

Jesus fasted "forty days and forty nights" according to Matthew 4:2. Jesus' experience of 40 days of fasting in the wilderness corresponds to Israel's experience of 40 years of testing in the wilderness (Deuteronomy 8:2-3), as well as Noah's experience of the flood of Earth. Jesus endured His testing victoriously and obediently. Moses also fasted and prayed for 40 days and nights on two occasions (Exodus 24:18, 24:28). Fasting was a means of focusing intently on prayer. Forty days is also about the longest a human can fast without permanent bodily harm.

Matthew 4:3 says, "If you are the Son of God..." Jesus was and is the Son of God, but He refused to be tricked by the devil into using His divine prerogatives to make the trial any easier for Himself. Jesus obeyed as a man; as the representative for all who believe, so as to fulfill all righteousness (Matthew 3:15) on behalf of His people. In Matthew 4:4, Jesus said: "It is written..." Jesus responds to each temptation by quoting from Deuteronomy, linking His experience to Israel's in the desert. In Deuteronomy 8:2, Moses reminds the Israelites of God's testing through hunger and His miraculous provision of manna.

The holy city is Jerusalem and the pinnacle of the temple is the southeast corner of the temple area, the top of which was some 300 feet above the floor of the Kidron Valley (Josephus, Jewish Antiquities 15.411-412). The devil's use of Matthew 4:6-7, a quotation from Psalm 91 is a blatant misuse of Scripture, and is used by Satan in an effort to manipulate Jesus. Such a spectacular display as jumping from this great height unharmed would have gained Him an enthusiastic following, but it wouldn't have followed the Father's messianic and redemptive plan of suffering and proclaiming the Kingdom of Heaven.

Satan tells Jesus in Matthew 4:9 to "fall down and worship me." The devil offers a shortcut to Jesus' future reign in God's kingdom—a shortcut that side-steps Jesus' redemptive work on the Cross and comes at the cost of exchanging the love of the Father for the worship of Satan. Satan's words, "all these I will give you" is a lie.

Matthew 4:11 records that the "devil left him". Jesus resisted the devil by standing firm on God's Word, setting an example for His followers. Angels came and were ministering to Him and their ministering included much needed physical sustenance. All of Heaven knew the significance of Jesus' initial victory in this cosmic battle.

What We Can Learn from Matthew 4:1-11

The main lesson we learn from this passage is Jesus' use of Scripture in battling Satan. As noted above, Jesus quotes from Deuteronomy in order to fight against Satan. The believer must study to show him or herself approved as a workman, not ashamed, able to handle and interpret the Word of God with precision and great care. Jesus quotes Scripture and says "it is written" four times. How do you fight against sin and temptation? Do you quote Scripture related to your specific temptation and struggle against sin? Or do you rely on yourself? Jesus gives His disciples an example of One who fought against sin and Satan by quoting Scripture.

After quoting Scripture four times, Matthew 4:11 says that "the devil left him". James 4:7 and 1st Peter 5:8 are instructive for believers because they teach the importance of humility and submission to God. The believer who rests in the finished work of Christ will be able to fight against sin and temptation, and make much of Him in and through their lives. The only way that the believer in Christ can ward off Satan's accusations and attacks is to go back to who they already are in Him. This means that, as the believer grows in Christ, they increasingly grow in the knowledge of who they already are in Him—adopted, redeemed, sanctified (not yet glorified), which grants them the ability to

stand (not perfectly) in the grace of God.

Knowing a lot of the Bible and being able to recite Scripture verses from memory are very good tools in the believers' battle against sin, Satan, and the world. These tools, however, are often treated as ultimate in spiritual warfare, when in fact they are not. The message that contains the power of

"Jesus' engagement with Satan in the wilderness and His use of Scripture is instructive to believers on many fronts."

God to save and sanctify is the Gospel, which means only the Gospel, and not a tool, is ultimate. The Gospel calls believers away from self and to Christ in order to put off the flesh and to put on the Lord Jesus Christ.

This teaching has huge implications on our daily lives as believers. It highlights the various ways in which we often fail to appropriate the truth of who we are in Him (adopted, justified, and positionally sanctified) by exposing the fact that we are prone to embrace our sinful habits instead of putting our sin to death, and

putting on the Lord Jesus Christ. The believer's identity in Christ ought to motivate them to not only put sin to death, but also to appropriate His life into all of our being.

The identification of the believer with Christ in His death and resurrection frees him/her from hypocrisy so the believer can be who he/she really is in Christ. The failure then to appropriate who we are in Christ exposes our attitude towards sin, which in turn demonstrates our apathy towards it. Jesus was tempted in every way, and yet never sinned, which means that as His followers we ought to look to, meditate upon, and run to the cross daily.

Jesus' use of Scripture in spiritual warfare demonstrates that Satan is no match against the Word of God. The Word of God testifies to the truth about who Jesus is and what He has done in His death, burial, and resurrection. Christians ought to take what they know about Scripture and appropriate that knowledge daily into their lives, as they fight against Satan, sin, and the world. Believers ought to do battle every day, and every moment against sin, the flesh, and the world, which means they need to daily preach the Truth about who Jesus is and what He has done to themselves. The believer needs to do this (preach the Gospel to themselves) so they will be able to resist sin when tempted and stand in the grace of God.

Final Thoughts

Jesus' engagement with Satan in the wilderness and His use of Scripture is instructive to believers on many fronts. First, Jesus teaches believers that they can only overcome by appropriating the truth of who they already are in Him. Second, Jesus teaches the supremacy and sufficiency of His Word by speaking that Truth of His Word in confronting Satan. Thirdly, Jesus' use of Scripture calls believers to use the Word of God in order to expose the inconsistencies and errors of Satan and his followers by pointing them to Jesus. Fourthly, Jesus use of Scripture is instructive to His people, because He alone grants His people the gift of His righteousness in order that the Holy Spirit may illuminate His Word to them individually as they read and study it, and corporately in the context of the local Church as believers gather to hear the Word of God preached. Finally, Jesus demonstrates in the desert that only the Word of God provides the fount from which the believer can draw from in order to put sin to death and put on the Lord Jesus in all of life.

Spiritual Warfare and the In-Breaking Kingdom

By Jason M. Garwood

“Then a demon-oppressed man who was blind and mute was brought to him, and he healed him, so that the man spoke and saw. And all the people were amazed, and said, “Can this be the Son of David?” But when the Pharisees heard it, they said, “It is only by Beelzebul, the prince of demons, that this man casts out demons.” Knowing their thoughts, he said to them, “Every king-



dom divided against itself is laid waste, and no city or house divided against itself will stand. And if Satan casts out Satan, he is divided against himself. How then will his kingdom stand? And if I cast out demons by Beelzebul, by whom do your sons cast them out? Therefore they will be your judges. But if it is by the Spirit of God that I cast out demons, then the kingdom of God has come upon you. Or how can someone enter a strong man's house and plunder his goods, unless he first binds the strong man? Then indeed he may plunder his house. Whoever is not with me is against me, and whoever does not gather with me scatters. Therefore I tell you, every sin and blasphemy will be forgiven people, but the

blasphemy against the Spirit will not be forgiven. And whoever speaks a word against the Son of Man will be forgiven, but whoever speaks against the Holy Spirit will not be forgiven, either in this age or in the age to come.”

Spiritual warfare is something that either Christians spend too much time thinking about, or not enough time thinking about. There tends to be extremes when it comes to this topic: Satan has way too much power, or we simply don't believe he has any. Both extremes must be avoided in order to think soberly about evil. To do this, we must also understand Satan vis-a-vis Christ, our Savior.

Proper Context

Spiritual warfare must be put in its proper context. Lest we give *too* much authority to Satan and his minions, we have to keep in mind Matthew 12:22-32. Here our Lord confronts the Kingdom of

“We mustn't go too far, either, pretending that Satan is God's equal opposite, and that God is somehow handicapped in history, struggling to keep Satan in check.”

darkness by clarifying what it means for Jesus to cast out demons. Simply put, Jesus cannot be on Satan's team, and if He was, Satan's tactics would be self-defeating. You don't win wars by shooting your own platoon. Jesus, in giving the *reductio ad absurdum*, (a form of argument that attempts to demonstrate to disprove a statement showing how it leads to an absurd conclusion) demonstrates the fallacy of assuming such a preposterous thing.

For Jesus, the opposite is true. He's not here to help Satan, *he's here to destroy him*. And how do we know

Jesus is here to do battle with the ancient serpent? The gospel of the Kingdom of God! Jesus makes it plain that if it is by the Spirit of God that He casts out demons, *then* you know the Kingdom of God has come! If this Kingdom is going to come, that means the Satan's little kingdom must be destroyed. Jesus came to tie Satan up and take His stuff, not the least, of course, is *people*.

Instead of repenting and trusting Christ, they blaspheme the Holy Spirit by attributing Jesus' Spirit-empowered-works to the deceiver. This sin cannot be forgiven, not because God is unwilling, but because the sinner is unwilling. His heart is polluted with toxic darkness. He cannot come to God because he will not come to God.

The Kingdom of God

All this is to say, the in-breaking Kingdom of God in the gospel message lays waste to the kingdom of darkness. Jesus is the conquering warrior King who rides in history destroying His enemies and establishing His Kingdom. We ought to think soberly about spiritual warfare. It matters that we take seriously the evils of our society: abortion, rape, murder, crime, theft, government over-reach, false doctrine, idolatry, and so on. We have to work hard to get a grasp on not only the depths of man's depravity, but the pure wickedness of Satan himself.

We mustn't go too far, either, pretending that Satan is God's equal opposite, and that God somehow is handicapped in history, struggling to keep Satan in check. Remember the words of Jesus: “I have overcome the world” (John 16:33). Earlier Jesus proclaimed, “Now is the judgment of this world; now will the ruler of this world be cast out” (12:31). The gospel of the Kingdom of God has *effect*, and it just so happens that Satan is on the losing side of this battle. Jesus brought the Kingdom to its head when He died in our place, for our sins, and walked out of the grave with *true* authority. Satan is on a leash and is a puppet in the hands of our Sovereign Lord.

So, take heart, friend, when trials come your way. Turn your eyes to the Son who rides to conquer and to conquer some more. Place your faith in the One who does battle on your behalf. Fall to your knees and ask the King for favor—and it just so happens, that He will grant it. You need not worry much, the King has arrived, and His grace is not in short supply.

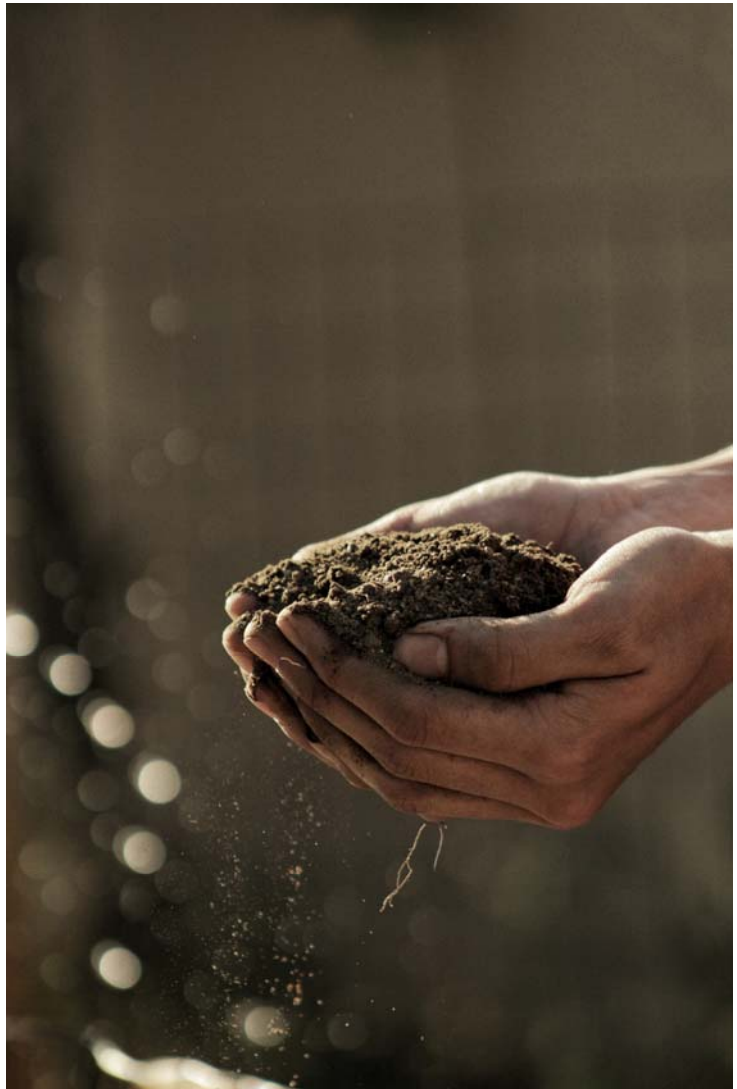
Spiritual Warfare and Our Spiritual Growth

By Dave Jenkins

Spiritual warfare is vitally important in the world of spiritual growth.

With the increase of new age thinking, atheism, Satanism, and a growing interest in the occult worldwide, the need for Christians to understand what spiritual warfare is has never been greater. Moreover, spiritual warfare is becoming an increasingly confusing topic to study as Christians have a variety of views on the topic, some of which are biblical, but most of which are not.

The classic view of spiritual warfare is defined by repentance, faith, and obedience. The classic mode of warfare— evangelism, discipleship, and personal growth—follows the pattern of Jesus facing Satan in the desert. The textbooks for spiritual warfare in this mode have been Proverbs, the way Jesus addressed moral evil, and the teaching of the New Testament epistles. Puritan pastoral theologians wrote frequently and with great depth on spiritual warfare. As they wrote about Scripture, the devil, and human nature, they were alert to the incredible evil and deceptive strategies of Satan. At the same time they made a heart-searching analysis of the human condition. The Puritans were not demythologized moderns; they lived in a spirit-filled world and were well aware of spiritual warfare. They saw the combat, snares, deceptions and schemes of Satan. Books in print from Puritans after over three hundred years include Thomas Brook's *Precious Remedies against Satan's Devices*, John Bun-



yan's [*Pilgrim's Progress*](#) and [*Holy War*](#), and William Gurnall's [*The Christian in Complete Armor*](#).

Ephesians 6:10-20 gives the best explanation of the classic mode of spiritual warfare: reliance on the power and protection of God, embracing the Word of God, specific obedience, fervent and focused prayer, and the aid of fellow believers. Spiritual warfare against the power of evil is a matter of consistently and repeatedly turning from darkness to the Light in the midst of assailing darkness. Christians fight spiritual warfare by repentance, faith, and obedience. Recognizing the powerful influence of Satan and sin within the human heart, classic-mode pastoral theologians call for biblical sanctification.

Ephesians 6:10-18 gives the best instruction in the New Testament on spiritual warfare. Ephesians 6:10-20 describes the whole armor of God. In this section, Paul concludes his exhortations with instructions for all Christians. His imagery is a sustained portrayal of the Christian life as spiritual warfare using the Lord's resources. Paul opens this section in Ephesians 6:10-13 by introducing the armor of God and focusing on the strength it gives. Ephesians 6:10 the word *be strong* (ἐνδυναμοῦσθε - *endynamousthe*) emphasizes that the Christian cannot stand against supernatural human powers, but must rely on the strength of the Lord's own might (Ephesians 1:19), which the Lord supplies through prayer (6:18). The Greek word for the phrase "whole armor" (πανοπλία - *panoplia*) refers to the complete equipment of a fully armed soldier—consisting of both shields and weapons like those described in verses 16

"Ephesians 6:12 gives a list of spiritual rulers, authorities, and cosmic powers, and gives a sobering glimpse into the devil's allies..."

-17. Paul's description here draws primarily on Old Testament allusions, yet the terms used also overlap well with Roman weaponry (especially the terms for the large, door-shaped shield and the short stabbing sword). Visible portraits of such weaponry can be found on numerous military reliefs throughout the Roman Empire. The word *schemes* (μεθοδείας - *methodeias*) in Ephesians 6:11 exposes the diabolical origin of the deceitful schemes of those teaching false doctrine (1st John 2:18, 22; 4:3; 2nd John 7).

Ephesians 6:12 gives a list of spiritual rulers, authorities, and cosmic powers, and gives a sobering glimpse into the devil's allies—the spiritual forces of evil who are powerful in their exercise of cosmic powers over this present darkness. Scripture makes it clear that the enemy host is no match for the Lord who has "disarmed the rulers and authorities and put them to open shame, by triumphing over them in him" (Colossians 2:15; Ephesians 1:19-21).

The "*therefore*" in Ephesians 6:13, means the Christian's enemies are superhuman spiritual forces. Mere human resources will not work, which is why one must take up the whole armor of God. The divine armor and the sword of the Spirit belong to the Lord Himself and to His Messiah (Isaiah 11:4-5; 59:17) and are made available for believers. Along with the *stand* in Ephesians 6:11, believers are to withstand the enemy and to stand firm. Later in verse 13, Paul portrays Christians as soldiers in a battle line holding fast against the enemy's charge. Paul (in Ephesians 6:16) identifies this whole age as evil days ("evil day"), yet the outbreak of the Satanic onslaught against Christ's people ebbs and flows throughout this era until the final day when the Lord of Hosts will return in power and great glory (Luke 21:27) to rend the heavens and rescue His people forever.

Ephesians 6:1-17 actually teaches the Christian what it means to stand firm. Paul reiterates the charge to stand in the face of dreaded spiritual enemies because the Lord has not left his people

defenseless. They have the complete armor of God from head to foot, which consists of the belt, breastplate, shoes, shield, helmet, and sword. These are metaphors for the spiritual resources given to them in Christ, namely, the truth, righteousness, gospel, faith, salvation, and the Word of God.

In Ephesians 6:14, Paul—with the rousing order, “stand”—urges the Ephesians to withstand the enemy (vv.11, 13), and not give in to fear. Paul exhorts his readers to always be ready to proclaim the Gospel in Ephesians 6:15. And in Ephesians 6:17, the flaming darts are burning arrows designed to destroy wooden shields and other defenses but the shield of faith is able to extinguish the devil’s attacks. The spiritual nature of the church’s resource is nowhere more plain than in its reliance upon God’s Word, which is the only offensive weapon mentioned in this list of spiritual armor. The Word of God is to be wielded like a sharp two-edged sword, in the mighty power of God’s Holy Spirit (Hebrews 4:12).

Paul (in Ephesians 6:18-20) is teaching about being constant in prayer. This section offers instruction on prayer (the main weapon in spiritual warfare) and explains when, how and for whom to pray. The weapons for warfare are spiritual because they are rooted in prayer, which is the Christ’s most powerful resource. Prayer is to permeate believers’ lives as a universal practice, as seen by the use of “all” four times in this verse: at all times, with all prayer, with all perseverance, and for all the saints. Prayer in the Spirit is a form of worship (John 4:23-24) enabled by the Spirit of God, who intercedes *on behalf of the person praying*.

The general character of the believer’s prayer life is described in the following way in Ephesians 6:18. First “all prayer and supplication” focus on the variety; second “always” focuses on the frequency (Romans 12:12; Philippians 4:6; 1st Thessalonians 5:17); “in the Spirit” focuses on submission, as we line up with the will of God (Rom. 8:26-27), “being watchful” focuses on the manner (Matthew 26:41; Mark 13:33); “all perseverance” focuses on the persistence (Luke 11:9; 18:7-8), and “all saints” focuses on the objects (1st Samuel 12:23).

Understanding the Role Spiritual Warfare Plays in Spiritual Growth Is Vital

As technology continues to increase, along with the growing interest in atheism, Satanism, and every other -ism, the Christian needs to learn that he/she lives in a world that is not only rapidly changing, but one in where they are in a war for the souls of mankind. The reality of this war has already been described in the previous section when we examined Ephesians 6:10-18. The reality is that many Christians rely too much on themselves and not enough on the grace of God. Paul clearly calls believers in Ephesians 6:10-18 to stand firm, not in their own effort or ability, but in the grace of God. As our culture becomes less identified as Christian and more identified with secular philosophy, the believer will need to learn the importance of the role of spiritual warfare in spiritual growth.

The only way to fight against Satan, his minions, and sin is through the classic mode of spiritual warfare. In a culture that rejects truth and has abandoned its moral foundation, there is even more reason today than ever, for Christians to stand firm in the grace of God. The Christian is engaged in a war because of the identity they have in Christ. Satan despises, rejects, and counters every single action God the Father, Son, and the Holy Spirit take to redeem man from sin. The truth, then, is that while the Christian is engaged in a war, the Lord has not left His children without tools to fight against Satan, his minions, and sin. The tools Jesus has given

“The truth, then, is that while the Christian is engaged in a war, the Lord has not left His children without tools to fight against Satan, his minions, and sin.”

the Christian are His Word, the Holy Spirit, the Church, brothers and sisters in Christ, and the ability to come to boldly before God in prayer.

Ultimately One's View of Sanctification Will Affect One's View of Spiritual Warfare

The reality of the war for the souls of mankind is real, and so is the tools the Lord has given His children. When the believer stands firm in the grace of God, because of the work of Jesus on the Cross—no weapon formed against them will prosper. Satan is a defeated foe because of Christ. Jesus has disarmed the forces of Satan through His death, burial, and resurrection (Colossians 1). The Gospel is good news because as Christians engage a sinful world, Christ is with them. Christians are not attacked as if they are on an island rather they are attacked because of one's identity with their Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. The believer can then rest in the fact that as they rest and stand firm in the grace of God, that the Lord will guard, and protect them. True effectiveness for Jesus and His glory rests in reliance upon the grace of God in all things.

Pastoral Ministry and Four Strategies for Spiritual Warfare

By Nick Batzig



Pastoral ministry is unrelenting spiritual warfare.

There was a time in Protestant history when an emphasis on spiritual warfare in the Christian life and in pastoral ministry was standard fare. Such works as Richard Gilpin's *Daemonologia Sacra*, Thomas Brooks' *Precious Remedies Against Satan's Devices*, William Gurnall's *The Christian in Complete Armor*, and John Bunyan's *The Pilgrim's Progress* reveal that the Puritans were no strangers to deep study on, long meditation upon, and conversation about Satan, demons, and spiritual warfare. The depth of insight they articulated in their writings shows how prevalent

this subject was in the thinking of so many of our Reformed forefathers. Many of the Puritans were objects of great opposition—religious and political—and were, therefore, more tuned into the experiential nature of spiritual warfare.

Sadly, with few exceptions, the reformed Church in our day has largely dismissed this massively important element of the Christian life. An abuse of the subject of spiritual warfare in Charismatic and Pentecostal circles has fueled an overreaction to speaking about spiritual warfare in the Reformed church. Cessationists are particularly vulnerable to this danger. As such, we need to be careful to distinguish between the cessation of the revelatory gifts of the apostolic age and the ongoing spiritual warfare in which we are constantly engaged. We must not allow ourselves to fall into a functional supernatural cessationism—namely, a functional belief that nothing supernatural occurs in the Christian life.

Without reservation, we must accept the idea that the church of our Lord Jesus is the object of the most virulent and unrelenting attacks of the evil one (Revelation 12:13). The Apostle Peter explained that church members are to always “be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour” (1st Peter 5:8). The worst thing that the

church can do is let her guard down. Both ministers and congregants alike must recognize that this is the case. In the context of the church being called to forgive a repentant and returning brother and to receive him again into the fellowship, the Apostle Paul wrote, “Lest Satan should take advantage of us...for we are not ignorant of his devices” (2nd Corinthians 2:11). The Church is called, not only to acknowledge the reality of satanic attacks, but to be skillful in understanding the devices of the evil one.

Of all people, pastors should give themselves to a careful study of and meditation upon this subject. Faithful gospel ministers are, by virtue of their office and calling, the most susceptible to the attacks of the evil one in the congregation. We see this in Jesus’ statement to Simon Peter, “Simon, Simon, Satan has asked for you...” The “you” is plural indicating that it was all of the disciples for whom Satan had asked to sift like wheat. The Apostle Paul was extremely sensitive to the attacks of the evil one. He told the church in Thessalonica, “We wanted to come to you—even I, Paul, time and again—but Satan hindered us” (1st Thessalonians 2:18). And, he told Timothy, “The Lord stood with me and strengthened me, so that the message might be preached fully through me, and that all the Gentiles might hear. Also I was delivered out of the mouth of the lion” (2nd Timothy 4:17). Paul was keyed in to the spiritual warfare in which he was constantly engaged.

“Of course, seasoned saints are susceptible to attack as well...”

Though there are hundreds of ways by which Satan seeks to carry out his malice against ministers of the gospel, consider the following strategies:

1. Satan Tempts Ministers to Pride. In the list of qualifications for elders in the church, the Apostle Paul says that the man desiring the office cannot be “a novice (*i.e.* a new convert), lest being puffed up with pride he fall into the *same* condemnation as the devil” (1st Timothy 3:6). This is a perennial danger for ministers. Satan loves to prey on gifted ministers. A novice—a new convert—is more susceptible because he has not had a time of trial and maturation. He has not faced the challenges of pastoral ministry long enough to learn the grace of humility.

Of course, seasoned saints are susceptible to this attack as well. Age and experience is not necessarily commensurate with wisdom and humility. The more influence a man gains—and the more people listen to him week in and week out—the more likely he will be to becoming the object of this attack. Pride is always ready to well up within the heart of man. The Lord had given the Apostle Paul so much in the way of gifts and graces that he was conscious of the fact that he actually needed a thorn in his side—a messenger of Satan—to buffet him lest he be exalted above measure (2nd Corinthians 12:7). Ministers must guard their hearts and minds against this common attack of the evil one.

2. Satan Tempts Ministers to Discouragement. Our enemy has a thousand different ways of doing this. Of course, one of the foremost is to use setbacks, schisms and discontentment in the congregation to tempt ministers to discouragement. Often, ministers succumb to this particular attack without being conscious of the fact that supernatural forces are at work against him in the church.

When the Apostle Paul said to the church in Thessalonica that “Satan hindered” him from coming to them, he was explaining that setbacks in ministry are often spiritual attacks of the evil

one. Satan is always tempting ministers to think that they are ineffective because of the setbacks that they face. The Lord never promised that a man who was called, gifted and equipped for ministry would have a lifelong “successful” (by human standards) ministry. Too many ministers forget that while they are seeking to exalt the crucified Lord in their preaching and teaching, the one whom our Lord conquered on the cross is constantly putting obstacles in the life of the congregation or minister to tempt him to discouragement. A discouraged minister is a spiritually paralyzed minister. The Apostle Paul often felt these discouragements (2nd Corinthians 2:13; 2nd Timothy 4:16) but pressed through them, knowing that the Lord stood with him (2nd Timothy 4:17).

Satan only needs to work through one individual or family in the church to bring schism and discontentment in order to tempt the minister to discouragement. Satan filled the hearts of Ananias and Sapphira (Acts 5:3) to lie to the Holy Spirit about how much of the proceeds of their land they were giving to the Lord and the Church. The Lord struck them dead lest this great act of hypocrisy permeate the entire body and cause much harm to the purity and sincerity of the Church in the world. It only took one of Jesus’ disciples to betray Him (Matthew 26:14-15). Satan had filled the mind and heart of Judas to sell out the Savior (John 13:27) for a measly thirty pieces of silver. When an individual or family in a church is being used by Satan to stir up discontentment among members, this is a spiritual attack of the evil one against the ministry of the gospel. It is his goal to discourage the ministry. Ministers must watch and pray against such satanic attacks as would seek to set back the work of ministry through divisive and discontented people in the church. Like good shepherds, they must also be willing to get the rod and staff out to protect the church and the ministry as a whole.

3. Satan Tempts Ministers to Fear. The persecuting malice of Satan is one of the foremost ways that he attacks ministers of the gospel. We see the fear that Simon Peter felt when he was outside of the High Priest’s house (Luke 22:54-62). We see how much we hate persecution in our flesh from the fact that the even opinion of a little slave girl (22:56) proved to be a potent attack against Peter’s confession of faith in Jesus. This is also seen in the Apostle Paul’s admonition to Timothy, who seems to struggle with the fear of man (2nd Timothy 1:7-8). The Apostle constantly charged his son in the faith to be vigilant in fighting against the spiritual hosts of wickedness who were tempting him to succumb to this fear. One of the things he does to help him fight against Satan is to remind him of the divine calling by which Timothy had been set apart for the ministry of the gospel (1st Timothy 1:18; 2nd Timothy 2:1-7).

4. Satan Tempts Ministers to Stray from the Gospel. When Peter responded to

Jesus’ prediction about His forthcoming death, he said, “Far be it from you Lord; this will never happen to You.” This desire to avoid the offense of the cross was met by Jesus’, “Get behind me Satan.” Satan was tempting Peter to move away from the cross—to embrace an easier path and a less offensive message than the message of Christ crucified for the forgiveness of sin. Satan tempts ministers to preach an easier, more positive, and more “practical” message. Ministers must brace themselves with the same commitment as that of the Apostle Paul who said, “God forbid that I should boast, except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ,” and “I determined not to know anything among

“Satan tempts ministers to preach an easier, more positive, and more “practical” message.”

you except Jesus Christ and Him crucified,” and “We do not preach ourselves, but Christ Jesus—the Lord.” Faithful ministers must make war against the evil one by staying the course with the message of the cross.

What congregations and ministers need more than almost anything else today is a robust understanding of spiritual warfare. We need to be attune to our own weaknesses and sinful proclivities; we need to be skillful in recognizing our enemies’ devices; and, we need to be watchful and prayerful against them. We have the promise of the Lord Jesus that He is building His church and that “the gates” (*i.e.* the place of strategy and planning) of Hell will not prevail against it. May God gives us grace to meditate on these things and to guard our hearts, minds and congregations against the attacks of the evil one!



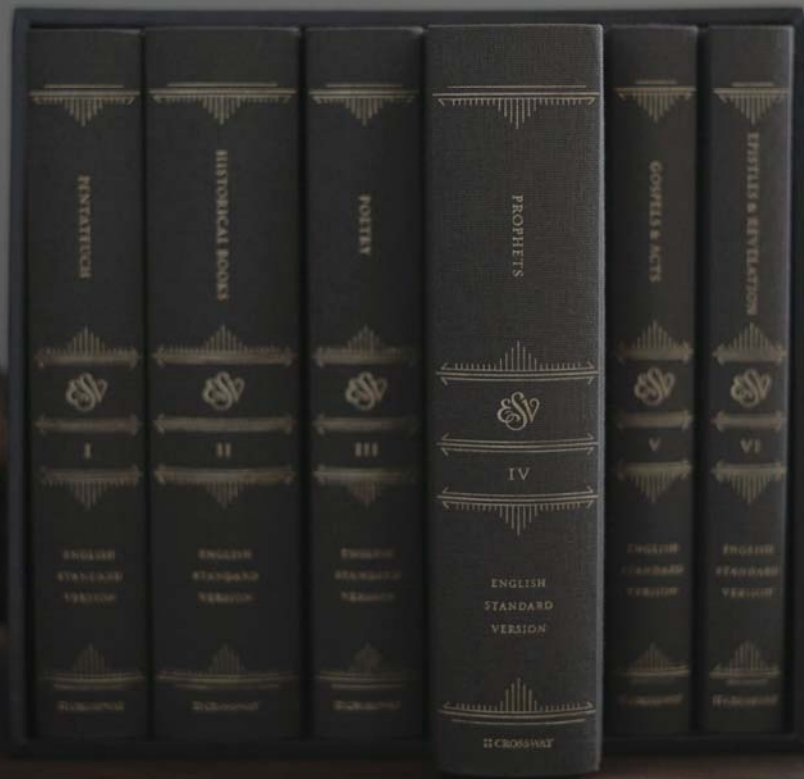
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Recommended Books on Prayer and Spiritual Warfare

This season at Servants of Grace, we've been taking a look at prayer and spiritual warfare. In our day, many Christians struggle with their prayer lives and even more struggle with the reality of spiritual warfare. With this issue of *Theology for Life*, we hope that readers grew in their understanding of prayer and spiritual warfare. If you've found this subject interesting and want to study the issue further, please check out the recommended reading list below. These books are at the top of this genre in both excellence and readability.

- *Prayer* by Tim Keller—this book by Tim Keller combines biblical teaching, a deep dive into the Reformers views on prayer and how to improve our prayer lives. I highly recommend this book.
- *Praying Backwards* by Bryan Chapell—this book will help readers to pray in Jesus name and trust the power of the Holy Spirit.
- *The Prayer of the Lord* by R.C. Sproul— Sproul walks his readers through the Lord's Prayer and calls his readers to adopt the Lord's or Disciples prayer as their model.
- *A Praying Life* by Paul Miller—this book will help Christians understand the primacy of prayer in the Christian life. It will equip Christian readers to commit themselves to pray knowing that God is willing and able to hear and answer their prayers.
- *A Call to Prayer* by J.C. Ryle—this book will help readers understand the importance of private prayer, along with the blessings of prayer and the grave dangers of prayerlessness.
- *The Valley Vision*—a great collection of Puritan prayers.
- *A Call to Spiritual Reformation* by Dr. D.A. Carson
- *Hunger for God* by John Piper
- *Power Encounters: Reclaiming Spiritual Warfare* by David Powlison

In Christ Alone,
Dave Jenkins
Executive Editor, *Theology for Life Magazine*

Men's and Women's Devotional Bibles for Making and Growing Disciples of Christ

Find encouragement in the life-giving
Word of God along with sound devotional content
aimed at challenging hearts, enlightening minds, and
transforming lives into the image of Christ.



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