



Please Give Me Another Chance,

**LORD!**

Lorraine Peterson

**PLEASE GIVE ME  
ANOTHER CHANCE,  
LORD**

***The Secret*  
*of Prayer In*  
*a Teen's Life***

**Lorraine Peterson**

## **About the Author**

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*If God Loves Me, Why Can't I Get My Locker Open?*

*Falling Off Cloud Nine and Other High Places*

*Why Isn't God Giving Cash Prizes?*

*Real Characters in the Making*

*Dying of Embarrassment & Living to Tell About It*

*Anybody Can Be Cool ... But Awesome Takes Practice*

*How to Get a Life ... No strings Attached!*

*If You Really Trust Me, Why Can't I Stay Out Later?*

*Lord, I Haven't Talked to You Since the Last Crisis, But ...*

*If the Devil Made You Do It, You Blew It!*

*Radical Advice From the Ultimate Wise Guy*

*Please Give Me Another Chance, Lord*

*Trying to Get Toothpaste Back Into the Tube*

## PREFACE

The one thing teenagers in a dangerous, chaotic, and increasingly wicked world need most is something that is easily within their reach. And it is available to every young person regardless of family background, IQ, or economic status. It can change a victim into a victor, turn bitterness into love, and bring supernatural power to bear on crisis situations or daily routine. It can deliver from temptation and provide protection. It can unlock the doors to eternal life, give the courage to stand up for what is right, and send help to anyone who needs it. I'm talking about *prayer*.

E. M. Bounds said it best: “Prayer can do anything God can do”. It’s an incredible power available to everyone. Each young person has problems only God can solve, is hassled by people that only God can change, and carries scars that only God can heal. Most have friends in desperate situations that only prayer can improve.

This book is designed to show you how you can be a different person by learning to pray.

Learning to pray is like mastering a musical instrument. A lot of time, practice, and instruction is needed. Most people never get beyond the “scales” – whether it’s hurriedly reciting a list of “God Blesses”, placing “911 emergency calls” to heaven, or rattling off a shopping list of needs and wants. Aim-at-nothing-and-hit-it-every-time prayers aren’t very effective. Vague prayers and self-centered demands miss the point of prayer completely. This book tries to define prayer biblically, gives the reader an understanding of prayer, teaches spiritual warfare, and presents some practical suggestions on how to pray for others.

You Need to Learn to Pray Better Because:

1. ***Praying and sinning don’t go together.*** Praying means time in God's presence, in which a person appreciates God's holiness and learns to hate sin. A practiced prayer warrior knows how to come against Satan in the power of Jesus in such a way that the devil has to flee. As you use prayer to get to know Jesus better, you'll become more like Him.
2. ***A person who prays is never helpless.*** Sickness, psychological hang-ups, family problems, addictions, local governments, world leaders – and parents – all respond to God’s awesome power, which is moved through prayer. You can pray when

you're in physical danger, when you're super-discouraged, or when you're in an uncomfortable social situation. If a group of you gets together to pray for your school or your church, there's no telling what might happen. There's *nothing* you can't change, because you can always pray.

3. ***Once you start seeing some exciting answers to prayer, many dilemmas disappear.*** If you can pray to an all-powerful God, you don't have to concern yourself with questions like: Would I steal to keep from starving? Which of twelve people deserve the three spaces in the only life raft? Should I lie to make a person feel better? You can pray to the God who sent manna from heaven, and He can provide again. Ask God to rescue everybody - He did a pretty good job with Noah and his family. Your Lord can make your friend happy even if he knows the truth. You can obey unjust authority and pray that Almighty God will defend you. You can love your enemies and forgive horrendous things, because you can pray and receive the ability to love and forgive.
4. ***Prayer can make you what God wants you to be.*** Prayer makes ordinary people into spiritual giants. Patience, meekness, and humility are learned on your knees. Prayer also produces wisdom, courage, and great ideas. You'll never realize your full potential unless you become a person of much prayer. Throughout history God greatly used the men and women who really learned to pray. If you want to make your life count, prayer will be your priority. Prayer isn't for little old ladies. It's for young people who want to take on a challenge.

Of course, God deserves all the credit for this manuscript and I did a lot of praying as I was writing.

A special thanks goes to David Hazard, my talented and understanding editor, for his helpful suggestions and careful corrections. I appreciate the love and support of my sister, Lynn, my brother-in-law, Earl, and my nieces and nephews, Beth, Brett, Kaari, and Kirk. One thing amazes me – so many whose lives and writings contributed to this book are already in heaven. What a tribute to the lasting impression made by a life of prayer.

Books that helped me to write this one include: *Don't Just Stand There, Pray Something* by Ronald Dunn, *Why Pray?* by Douglas F. Kelly, *Prayer* by O. Hallesby, *And God Changed His Mind* by Brother Andrew, *A Treasury of Prayer* by E. M. Bounds, *The Best of E. M. Bounds: How to Pray* by R. A. Torrey, *Answers to Prayer* and *Principles of Prayer* by Charles G. Finney, *Touch the World Through Prayer* and *Mighty Prevailing Prayer* by Wesley L. Duwel, *The Ministry of Intercessory Prayer*,

*Waiting on God*, and *With Christ in the School of Prayer* by Andrew Murray, *Prayer Power Unlimited* by J. Oswald Saunders, *Touching the Heart of God* edited by Leonard E. LeSourd, and *What Happens When We Pray for Our Families* by Evelyn Christenson.

Lorraine Peterson

**CONTENTS**

<b>CHAPTER</b>	<b>TITLE</b>	<b>PAGE</b>
	Preface	<b>3</b>
<b>1</b>	The Difference Between Wimps and Winners	<b>7</b>
<b>2</b>	You're More Important Than You Think You Are	<b>16</b>
<b>3</b>	Praying With an Attitude	<b>23</b>
<b>4</b>	Pray Your Way Free	<b>36</b>
<b>5</b>	How to Graduate From I-Don't-Know-If-I-Can-Make-It-Through-Another-Day Living	<b>42</b>
<b>6</b>	Bless My Cat and All That	<b>51</b>
<b>7</b>	The Family that Prays Together Lives Somewhere Else	<b>59</b>
<b>8</b>	Figuring Out Friendships	<b>68</b>
<b>9</b>	The Church Nobody Prayed For	<b>76</b>
<b>10</b>	Is the World Falling Apart or What?	<b>87</b>
<b>11</b>	What If You've Asked God 1,487 Times and There's No Answer?	<b>94</b>
<b>12</b>	Maybe the World Could Use Some Revolutionaries	<b>101</b>
<b>13</b>	Weapons for Winning the War	<b>106</b>
<b>14</b>	Jesus to the Rescue	<b>119</b>

# CHAPTER 1

## The Difference Between Wimps and Winners





Justin wasn't sure he could hold out much longer. Although he was young enough that marriage was still out of the question, he and Cassandra were very deeply in love. He knew they should have established some clear guidelines to avoid sexual temptation months ago.

But it was easier – and more exiting – to take a few risks. For instance, he realized that as professing Christians they had no business viewing the movie they'd seen on Saturday night. Because of an accident causing an immense traffic jam, they were late and the family comedy they'd planned on was sold out. It was easier just to join another line than to come up with a different game-plan for the evening. And that night, like a few times before, they had almost gone too far. Besides, the pressure came from other angles as well. He was sure he was the only virgin in his gym class and even guys in his youth group bragged about “doing it”.

That was not his only problem. Against his mother's wishes he had taken a job at 7-Eleven. The hours were good and the pay was decent. But a couple weeks ago, early on a Saturday morning, two guys had started to stage a holdup. Fortunately, the appearance of a couple of passing policemen had caused the would-be robbers to flee on foot. But now Justin eyed almost every customer with suspicion. The fear of violence left him feeling tense all the time. But if he quit, he'd have to sell his car and admit his fear to his mom and to Cassandra. So far, he wasn't ready to do either.

Then there was home. Justin's father was drinking again, and family life was becoming unbearable. His brother had jointed the army just to escape and was now serving in a dangerous trouble spot thousands of miles from home. He felt it his dreaded duty to watch the ten o'clock news with his mom. The report was always bad and he was afraid that Barry would come home in a body bag ...

Justin – and every other teenager on the planet today – has only two choices: the uneasy coexistence with moral defeat, fear, personal problems, family problems, and world problems – or taking the offensive by *really* learning to pray. I'm not talking about hurried halfhearted conversations with God before diving into a pepperoni pizza or conking out for the night. I don't mean pity-party intellectual musing in which you ponder every problem and tack on an “amen”. What I have in mind is undergoing the rigorous training necessary to become an *effective prayer warrior* – someone whose petitions make a significant difference in his daily life. I'm referring to the kind of dedication required of an accomplished musician or a well-trained athlete in order to successfully use the weapon of prayer to change your world.

As a teenager you're on the front lines of the satanic drive to try to destroy the Christian faith. You don't need more statistics about suicide, drug deaths, and disease, and you may be tired of hearing how terrible the world is and how hard it is to be a Christian today. As if you didn't already know! My reason for bringing up the subject is to challenge you to adopt the radical lifestyle of total commitment to Christ and make the necessary sacrifices – it's the only way to discover how to effectively pray for yourself and others, and it's a do-or-die decision. I'm convinced that the only way you can possibly turn out to be happy, well-adjusted, totally sold-out-to-God individual is by learning to use prayer power.

I need to be honest with you. It won't be easy to find adults whose lives are free enough from materialism, trivial concerns, and just making it through the day, that they scheduled prayer as a priority – it may even be impossible where you live. The busyness, stress, and many demands of living have somehow trapped most Christian adults into thinking they have little or no time to pray. True prayer is a nearly forgotten art – and its absence is the reason for the mess we're in today.

But you don't have to be like everyone else. You can make an exciting difference. Teenagers have been a part of every revival in history. Here is just one example from Dick Eastman, a man whose prayer ministry has now touched tens of thousands:

It began in the late 1960s. I set up a retreat in the nearby Sierra Nevada Mountains for twenty-two teenagers in our church. None of us was experienced in prolonged prayer sessions, certainly not for an entire night. We were ready to give up after an hour. Then the youngest boy there, a thirteen-year-old, had a suggestion. "Why don't we start praying in a different way – like warriors?" Then, with tears in his eyes, he described how he saw himself and his friends as warring against the darkness of the booze-sex-drugs lifestyle of the hippie communes that had sprung up all across southern California. He asked us to stand with him all night to "fight the devil".

By three in the morning, a spirit of brokenness (an unselfishness, willingness to confess sin to God, and a desire to give God one's total life) had settled over our retreat house. The room was warmly lit by a glow from logs burning in a large fireplace, but also from a burning within the young people themselves. We all began to weep and cry out. One seventeen-year-old student lay on her face in the middle of the room weeping for the youth of California who were in trouble with drugs.

That was the beginning. Soon intercessory prayer retreats (times of praying exclusively for others) from our church began to flourish, until 175 young people were participating. Within a year the Jesus Movement began in many parts of California. At least 800,000 young people would find Christ in those same exciting days. (1)

(1) Dick Eastman, “*Love on its Knees*”, from Leonard E. LeSourd, *Touching the Heart of God* (Old Tappan, NJ: Chosen Books, Fleming H. Revell Company, 1990) pp. 135-136.

That thirteen-year-old boy is one of history’s greatest heroes. We need some people like him today. He didn’t know much about prayer and neither did his friends but they were willing to learn. Young people make particularly good prayer warriors because of their unwillingness to accept things as they are. Sometimes the keen, God-given insight that teenagers have for seeing through the hypocrisy and futile patterns that adults usually defend is misused – but it can also awaken you to the truth and impel you to do something to bring about change.



## A REVOLUTION

This book is aimed at starting a revolution – a prayer revolution – that I think is our only hope. I'm writing for teenagers because I think you just might listen. I'm going to try to give you some reasons to join this revolution.

### Sexual Attack

In generations past teenagers who chose sexual abstinence got a lot of help from social norms, adult instruction, and peer reinforcement. Today, you're basically on your own. Your staying chaste until marriage literally depends on your ability to learn to pray. Only supernatural help can rescue you with odds like this: “Nearly seven of ten girls and nearly nine of ten boys have had sex before the age of 20; and each year three million teens get a sexually transmitted disease”. (2)

(2) Ken Painter, “AIDs Surging Among Teens”, *USA Today*, April 13, 1992, p. D-1.

You'd have to be brain-dead not to notice that you move about in a sex-saturated society. Billboards, movie ads, TV commercials, reality shows, news reports, lunchroom conversation – nearly everything you see or hear will be sex, sex, sex. “Teenagers are exposed to an estimated 3,000 to 4,000 references to sexual activity on

television and in movies each year”. (3) “Michelle, a teenager, says, ‘Our families and teachers tell us to say no to sex – but often TV, movies, and commercials say yes to sex. It’s made so glamorous’ ”. (4)

(3) **Minority Dissent; Select Committee on Children, Youth, and Families, “A Decade of Denial: Tolerance and AIDs in America”, April 10, 1992.**

(4) *Parade Magazine*, August 21, 1989, p. 5.

You need divine intervention to help you stay pure. Only prayer will give you the power to turn off the TV or walk out of the room when the rented movie turns explicit. If you and your girlfriend or boyfriend are to stay out of the backseat of your car, a bedroom, a hotel room, or wherever, the channels of communication between you and God must remain unclogged.

The incessant bombardment of sexually provocative comments and visuals provides even more prayer projects. You need to pray for your own protection both from mind pollution and physical harm. As Philippians 4: 8 says, “Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable – if anything is excellent or praiseworthy –think about these things”. And to put that into practice, you must constantly fill your mind with God's Word and pray like crazy.

When pornography is so readily available, so legal, so media-approved, and so fashionable, it’s awfully easy to let your curiosity get the better of you. The devil has been especially successful in tempting shy and easily hurt teens with pornography. Getting some cheap thrills from pornography doesn’t require the risks of being rejected, being turned down for a date, or having to work hard on a close friendship. Because “adult” material is easily found on the internet, and the pornography industry grosses billions of dollars annually, you'll never be able to totally isolate yourself from this temptation. A great many Christians have been caught in this trap – maybe because “secret sin” seems more attractive than overt wrongdoing. If you have any weakness in this area you need to do some militant prayer every day before you leave home.

The widespread influence of pornography and the general contamination of a sex-crazed society brings with it the danger of sexual assault and rape. “A major high school in San Diego reported that twenty-six percent of its girls between ninth and twelfth grade had already been raped. In fact, the average age of a rape victim is between fifteen and twenty-four years old. The F.B.I. claims that one in six women will be raped or assaulted during her college years. One in four will be a victim of

attempted sexual assault or rape in her lifetime. ... They released a study done at Stanford University in 1995 where one out of three women has been raped; one out of every eight guys have been homosexually raped". (5)

(5) *Cross & Crescent*, Spring 1990, pp. 5-7.

Even the most cautious, right-living young person faces dangers in this area. It's imperative that you learn to pray daily for God's protection. If wholehearted believing prayer is your habit, it will come out automatically in a crisis. There are many true stories of God's protection in "911" situations. I'd like to share this real-life incident:

At 9:35 on a Sunday evening, I had gone into the living room to watch a Christian program on television. My husband, a family physician, was away on medical duties. Suddenly I was aware of something or someone behind me. As I turned, a man in a crouched position was silhouetted for a few seconds against the light. He grabbed me from behind and held a long dagger-type knife to my stomach. His head was covered with a hood, with slits cut for the eyes. As his arm went around my throat, he told me not to make a sound and in very vulgar terms made his intentions of rape known. He tied a towel very tightly around my head as a blindfold, so that I was unable to see anything. ...

Then he threw me down on the couch. As I prayed, I can't begin to describe the sudden presence of Jesus that came. It was so gentle and natural – I felt as if I were not even a part of what was going on. I heard myself telling the attacker, "I love you. You are a fine young man... I will do anything I can to help you, but I cannot be a part of this".

The words were not condemning, not panicky, excited, or emotional. Just gentle and flowing, like living water being poured out in words of love. But I didn't love this man. My body was horrified in shock, my mind was jelly. It was the Holy Spirit reaching out through me to this man, waging all-out spiritual warfare on my behalf.

The man became very angry, and he kept telling me to shut up.

"Please forgive me", I said, "but I can't stop talking". He became angrier as I consistently, but gently, resisted his action. The spiritual words continued to pour out.

He put a gun to my face, after hitting me on the head with it, and said, "I'm going to blow your head off".

I believed him. I felt that my death was very close, yet it seemed very normal and easy. I just thought, *You and me, Lord*. ... In my mind's eye, I reached up to Jesus to touch the hem of His garment and began praying out loud. When I did, it was as if this man had hit a brick wall. He stopped and said, "I'm leaving. Stay here ten minutes and don't move. ... How do I get out of this house?"

As soon as I could, I got up and ran to my neighbor's home. ... I was the tenth to be attacked, but the only one who was not raped. (6)

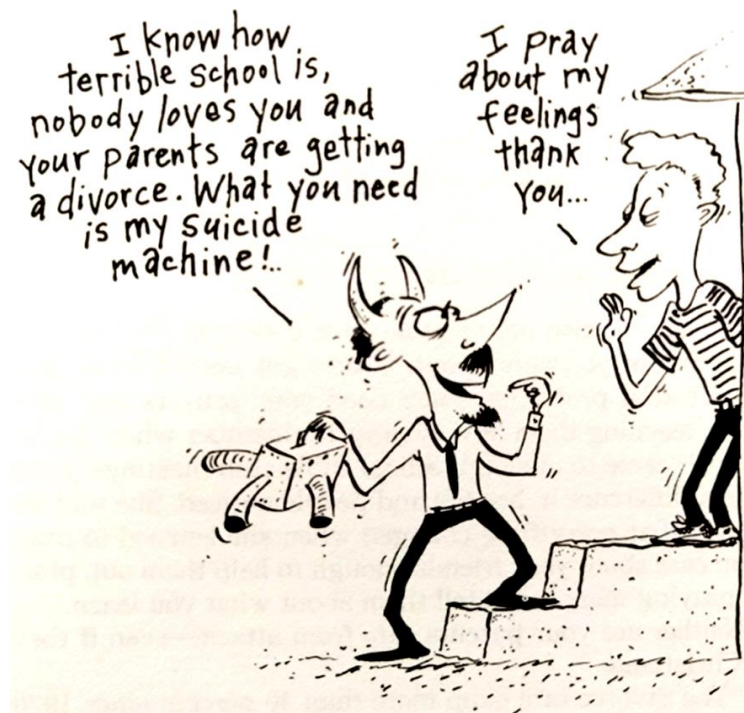
(6) Jean Ware, "Extra Power in a Crisis", in *Touching the Heart of God*, Leonard E. LeSourd, editor (Old Tappan, N.J.: Chosen Books, Fleming H. Revell Company, 1990) pp. 95-97.

It's interesting to note that the author of this article is a person who had joined an intercessory prayer ministry as a volunteer to pray for others. She is an individual whose vital daily connection with God has become so strong that prayer was the first thing that came to her mind in a crisis. Praying is like swimming, in that, if you didn't learn to pray under ordinary conditions. Your emergency petitions won't be very effective when you find yourself in "deep water".

### Violence

Another danger facing you has a young person is being in the wrong place at the wrong time when someone decides to pull the trigger. Prayer is your ever-present first line of defense. A few years ago in Guadalajara, Mexico, a friend was driving me home. Wanting to help what appeared to be a stranded motorist, he stopped the car and went over to offer assistance. This apparently frightened the man who seemed to be high on drugs and was obviously intoxicated. Before we could drive away, he came after us with a rifle. I began praying softly out loud. Soon my friend's kind words had completely calmed the would-be assailant. But to me the biggest miracle was that I never felt afraid – either during the incident or afterward. I went to bed as soon as I arrived home and fell asleep as though nothing had happened. I literally felt God's protective shield around me.

But prayer is just as important in fighting depression and discouragement that lead to self-inflicted violence and death.



There is a suicide epidemic going around. “About one million American teenagers attempted suicide during a recent twelve-month period and an estimated 276,000 sustained injuries serious enough to require medical treatment, according to a federal study released on September 19, 1991. Of those surveyed (11,631 students in grades nine – twelve across the country) 27.3 percent said they had thought seriously about attempting suicide at some point during the previous twelve months”. (7) A fascination with death and everything morbid is sweeping the country. There are certainly plenty of things happening that could make you depressed. If the devil whispers, “You might as well commit suicide and be done with it”, you need to have some prayer missiles on hand.

(7) “Study Shows a Million Teen Suicide Attempts”, *Los Angeles Times*, September 20, 1991, pp. A1, A26.

Taking the prayer offensive against monstrous problems from the beginning can keep you from sinking into hopelessness before it attacks you. Knowing that at the point at which Satan suggests suicide you can pull off a resist-the-devil-and-he-will-flee-from-you prayer, assures you that you can call his bluff and claim victory. But if you don't have some practice in spiritual warfare, the devil will make his list of “impossibilities” look so real that you'll just give up.



## ASSAULT ON FRIENDS AND FAMILY

Prayer will also help you face the concerns and needs of others whom you care about. You've got good friends who face dreadful problems. They need your prayers and your help in teaching them how to pray. I remember when "Crazy Candy" came to our high school Bible club meetings. Jesus made a difference in her life and people noticed. She told me one day that everything changed when she learned to pray. If you care about your friends enough to help them out, practice praying more – and tell them about what you learn.

Neither are your parents safe from attack – even if they are Christians.

"The divorce rate is up more than 40 percent since 1970 and more than 250 percent since 1940". (8) Somebody's got to pray for your parents and that somebody is *you*. And don't stop praying even if things seem to be going a lot better. Obviously, your prayers won't automatically guarantee that your parents will stay together or get back together, but it's the most important contribution you can make to that end. When your parents have problems, you need to be able to effectively pray for them – and yourself. God can heal your wounds, renew your courage, and fill you with hope – but only if you ask and receive and keep on asking and receiving.

(8) "*The Family in Crisis*", Plymouth Rock Foundation's Fact Sheet, number 60.

Life has a label on it: ***Handle With Prayer***. If we don't pay attention, the results are broken hearts, shattered dreams, and crushed hopes – pieces that, on your own, you can never put together again.

Today, life can make a wimp out of anyone. Only a skillful prayer warrior – who's in good condition because of obeying God's Word and daily practicing prayer – can be a consistent winner.



## CHAPTER 2

# You're More Important Than You Think You Are



Mr. Murphy's creative ideas made social studies class rather interesting. He had a special flair for forcing students to think through some of life's big issues.

Leanna found the unit on the future very thought-provoking. The finale was to be a two-day debate involving the whole class. Those who believed that the future was predetermined formed one side, while others would argue that people held the key to their own destiny. The first thing that flashed into Leanna's mind were the prophecies concerning the Second Coming of Christ, so she signed up on the side that would argue that the outcome of history was already sealed.

Unhappily, Leanna found herself with fatalists – whatever-will-be-will-be fanatics. They sidestepped moral responsibility because, according to them, the brain already has been programmed with predetermined behavior patterns. Others held to “reincarnation” and the “law of karma”, which would supposedly purge all evil and eventually bring all to the same state of nothingness. She wondered if she'd even be able to find one point on which she agreed with her teammates.

However, the humanists on the other side kept saying that man had only begun to explore unlimited horizons of power and ability. The godlike potential within each one was only beginning to emerge as evolution entered its final stage. No one was saying anything that made sense, and Leanna was worried that her participation grade would be a disaster.

But then something even more upsetting occurred. Christopher, the only other Christian in class, ended the debate by squaring off with her! He asked her if she ever prayed. When she answered “yes” he told her that she was inconsistent because prayer would do no good if God had already planned everything to go His way anyway.

“I pray”, he went on, “because prayer changes nations, atmospheres, institutions, and individuals. God gave me a free will to effect changes by praying to Him and asking Him to help me make choices that will direct my future”.

Leanna countered with, “Do you believe that the prophecies foretold in the Bible will come true, even if you pray against them?” Christopher had to say yes, and couldn't come up with a rebuttal.

When Leanna arrived home from school, she was almost crying. She thought it was terrible that the only two Christians in the class had ended up arguing with each other. But worse than that, she was thoroughly confused. Was it really true that God has everything planned, whether or not we pray?

The next day she heard a sermon on the radio based on James 4: 2-3: “You do not receive because you ask with wrong motives that you may spend what you get on your pleasures”. The preacher used a lot of biblical examples, and he declared that Christians miss out on an awful lot because they don’t pray.

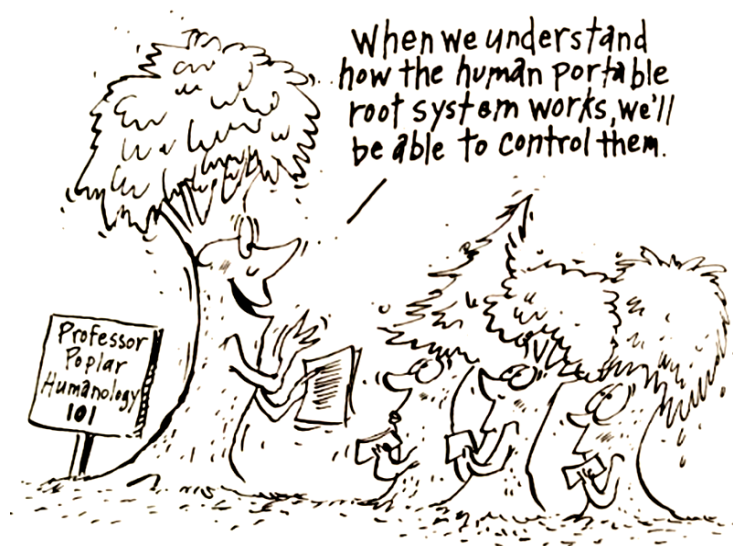
Whenever Leanna tried to pray, she wondered if it would do any good. Why should she tell God her problems when He already knew all about them? If He’d already made up His mind what He’d do, it was a waste of time to ask for His help. Finally, Leanna decided to take her dilemma to a college professor from her church, a man who was a very dedicated Christian.



## DOES PRAYER MAKE ANY DIFFERENCE?

After she’d explained her doubts and her questions in detail, Dr. Westfield smiled. “A lot of people wonder about this”, he assured her. “All through history people have become frustrated because God just doesn’t fit into our reasoning and our systems”.

Maybe trying to see human beings from the viewpoint of a tree could help us out a little. If trees could think they might spend hours trying to explain the ‘portable root system’ which enables men and women to move about so freely, the ‘sap hidden in winter clothes’ which permits us to be as active in winter as we are in summer, or the ‘invisible absorption capacity’ which allows ladies to receive enough moisture to survive even though they constantly carry umbrellas! The obvious problem would be that the trees live in such a limited dimension that the workings of homosapiens would be a complete mystery to them.



“Although we mortals hate to admit it”, Dr. Westfield continued, we can't get a handle on figuring out how an infinite God operates. I can't really understand how Jesus could be born of a virgin in Bethlehem, experience hunger, thirst, and fatigue and at the exact time be “the radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of his being, sustaining all things by his powerful word” (Hebrews 1: 3). How can God remember our sins no more (Isaiah 43: 25) and yet keep track of how many hairs I have on my head? I realize I make it a little easier for the Lord on that account”, Mr. Westfield mused, stroking his balding head. But I can't even count the hairs I have left and I'm terribly poor at forgetting sins committed against me. Our minds just don't work like God's. The Bible tells us of ‘the unchanging nature of his purpose’ (Hebrews 6: 17), and ‘the plan of him who works out everything in conformity with the purpose of his will’ (Ephesians 1: 11). It also records that God, after telling Moses to let Him alone so He could destroy the rebellious Israelites, ‘relented and did not bring on his people the disaster he had threatened’ (exodus 32: 14), because He listened to Moses’ prayer.

All these Bible facts leave us in the same position as a tree trying to figure out human beings. Because we are prisoners of time, space, human brain capacity, and people’s prejudices, we cannot fully understand how an infinite God operates. Yet, so often we insist on ‘rational’ explanations for the working of the Almighty.

Personally, I feel that making theology too consistent and trying too hard to stuff Him into a human mold has caused a lot of problems over the centuries. Our God just doesn't fit into human reasoning. Manmade religions are at a loss to interpret His actions. Reality will support neither fatalism (what will be will be) nor the idea that humans completely control their own destiny. Muslims believe that a man is just as safe in a war zone as he is home in bed, but more Muslims die in battle than while sleeping! Those who are waiting for scientific advances and educational achievements to produce heaven on earth must be at least a little discouraged by now!

“We may not understand it very well but His controlling the universe *and* giving us power in prayer is no problem for God. Someone has suggested that it's similar to God making and programming the universal computer with consequences for each entry, knowing what you'll choose before you make a decision but still giving you the right to choose. The One who made the computer has also established some unchangeable which are off-limits to human operators. The more we study the manual and get to know the Inventor, the more we learn about making right choices and praying to effect positive change”.

“Wow!” exclaimed Leanna, “That boggles my mind”.

“When you explained the reason for your appointment to see me”, Mr. Westfield continued in his professional manner, “I copied down a few quotations, which will give you an idea of how some others have attempted to resolve the questions you’ve raised. I better read them to you since I write in hieroglyphics”. The international missionary, Brother Andrew, offers this idea:

God's plans for us are not chiseled in concrete. Only His character and nature are unchanging. His decisions are not. ... He is always willing to listen to our side of the story, and even if He has plans to do something, He is open to changing those plans under the right conditions. (1)

(1) *And God Changed His Mind*, Brother Andrew (Tarrytown, NY: Fleming H. Revell Company, 1990) p. 15.

Douglas F. Kelly, in his book, *If God Already Knows, Why Pray?*, has these things to say:

We can keep the right perspective if we hold together in our minds these two tremendous biblical truths. The first is that God has an all-encompassing plan and is utterly sovereign (the big boss) over all. The other is that human prayer is really effective in the supernatural realm. (God) has arranged His plan in such a way that the prayers of the saints are one of the major means He uses to accomplish His final goal. ... The blessings of God in His promises have to be prayed into execution. (2)

(2) *If God Already Knows, Why Pray?* Douglas F. Kelly, Ph.D. (Brentwood, TN, Wolgemuth & Hyatt Publishers, Inc. 1989) pp. 61, 62, 149.

W. A. Pratney explains that our eternal God acts in history:

Life is not a movie. The future is not canned. The Ruler of history can set His own time. It is our solemn duty and privilege to step into the future with Him and by His power alter it forever for individuals, for nations, for the world – for the Kingdom and for the King. (3)

(3) *The Nature and Character of God*, W. A. Pratney (Minneapolis, MN, Bethany House Publishers, 1988) p. 211.

“No human could know in advance that Judas would betray Christ, and yet at the same time give him a real choice in the matter. But that doesn’t mean that God can't.

God most likely lives in a ‘super time’ realm, which enables Him to combine many abilities that are human impossibilities”, Mr. Westfield continued.

“Analogies always have flaws but I’d like to attempt one that might tie together the fact that God is sovereign – and that He also changes things in response to our prayers”.

“Let’s place a kindergarten teacher in her classroom with her students. She determines the curriculum but has *decided* to let them decorate the room and asks for suggestions. Brandon, whose father is really strict, doesn’t dare come up with any ideas because he’s afraid the instructor won’t take his advice. Bobbie enthusiastically asks, ‘Miss Barnett, can we have a jungle in our room?’ She smiles and answers, ‘Yes, I think we could.’ After a bit of coaxing Amber gets to bring her tiger cat for a day so that the ‘jungle’ can have real animals! However, when Tim pleads and pleads for a boa constrictor he’s turned down – but encouraged to present other ideas. Tanya gets to bring her aquarium, but Megan decides she will never talk to Miss Barnett again because she won’t buy a parrot for the ‘jungle’! And Sarah is granted permission to put up the paper flowers she plans to make”.



“God, like that teacher, has decided to give us personal freedom and prayer input into structuring some of His plans. Although praying that the sun will come up in the west or asking Him to suspend the law of gravity for ten minutes so you can play a practical joke may not get any action, God does allow prayer to shape events that affect us. Careful study of the Scriptures will give us a lot of do’s and don’ts for praying. But

there is quite a bit of open area – things about which we can pray until God answers our prayers or changes our prayers. There’s no danger in asking for the wrong thing as long as our hearts aren’t stubborn and determined to get our own way”.

“Some people are afraid to ask so they miss out on a whole bunch of things God would have granted. Others mistakenly assume that they, not God, are in charge of the universe and try to boss Him around in their prayers. If we avoid these two extremes, prayer will help us develop a closer and closer relationship with God and the answers to prayer will bless us and others”.

“God is like that kindergarten teacher; in that He delights in giving us a real part in carrying out His plans. And we do this through prayer. If I were young like you”, Dr. Westfield concluded, “learning how to pray would be my top priority. I didn’t become a Christian until age thirty-one, so I got a late start”.

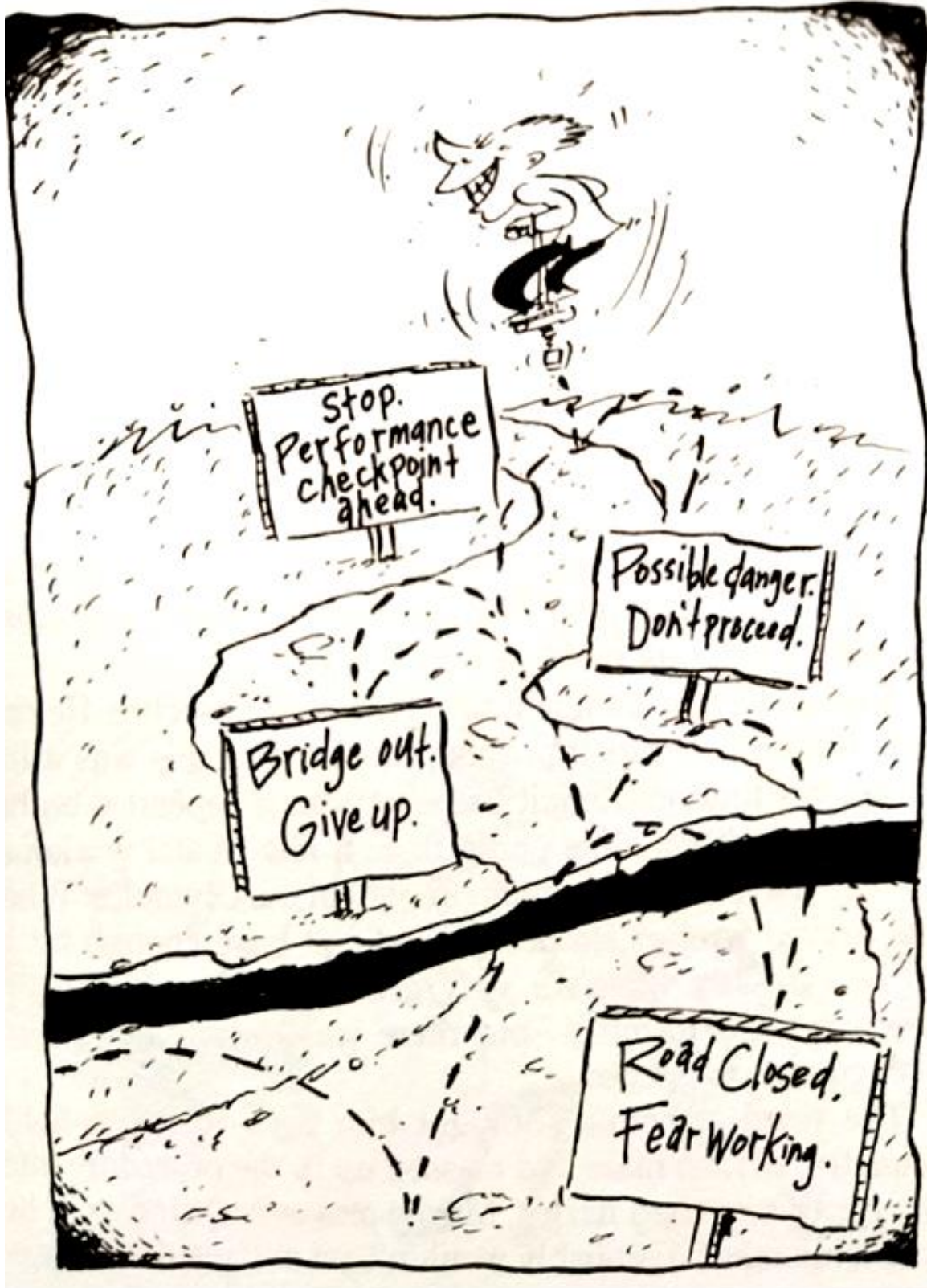
Leanna thanked Dr. Westfield. As she drove home, she kept thinking how awesome it was that an Almighty God should give teenagers like herself real input into the outcome of events through prayer. When she turned onto her street, she saw that her father was organizing the family to rake leaves and clean out the garage. Three-year-old Tony was gathering leaves in his toy wheelbarrow, delighting in his opportunity to “help”. Thirteen-year-old Mark was helping his father rake and bag leaves and he joined his mom and ten-year-old Rachel in sweeping the garage and rearranging the shelves. Tony spent most of his time playing with his fire engine and Rachel thought that moving all the bikes included taking a couple of long rides. Everyone felt useful, accepted, and important in completing a family project.

“God”, thought Leanna aloud, “is just like a wise father. He loves His children so much He wants a deep relationship with each of them. It certainly would be a lot more efficient for Him to do everything without our help, but He decided to include us in many of His plans in a real way. Because He decided to accomplish things through our prayers, we can get to know Him better and better. Baby Christians start out somewhat like Tony, but the more time we spend with God the more useful we become in His kingdom”. It was incredible, but God had a plan for her, a special job to do to further His kingdom, and the most important part of that work was to become accomplished in prayer.

“Wow”, Leanna said to herself, “I’m more important than I thought I was!”

## CHAPTER 3

# Praying With an Attitude





Mike's grandfather was still in the hospital, and he was fighting for his life. Mike couldn't imagine life without the fishing trips, the long talks with the man who was more understanding than his own parents – not to mention his fantastic sense of humor. All these were part of Grandpa Claussen and the godly example he provided.

The only thing Mike could do was pray. Although he had accepted Jesus as his Savior, his prayer life consisted of saying “grace” before family meals, breathing a quick “thank you” for the school lunch – with his eyes open so no one would notice – and his bedtime ritual of repeating the names on his God-please-bless list before adding a few personal requests.

But now he felt a deep responsibility to pray for Grandpa Claussen. Returning from the hospital, he decided to go to his room and spend fifteen minutes talking with the Lord.

“Dear God”, he began uncertainly. But a condemning inner voice interrupted, saying, *You blew up at your mother yesterday, so you're not good enough to pray.* Past teaching on the subject marched across his mind – *You have to pray according to God's will*, and, *Pray the prayer of faith*, and *Don't pray without getting right with God first.*

A sense of fear gripped him. He felt so insecure. He certainly didn't have much prayer practice, and this was a life and death situation. He felt like everything depended on his performance. It was like going from a few casual workouts in the gym to representing his country in the Olympics. What if he prayed wrong? He probably didn't have enough faith, and he certainly wasn't a very good Christian. If only he knew the right formula – but there wasn't time now for a crash course on prayer.

The word “formula” brought him back to fourth-hour chemistry. His lab mate had messed up in the procedure and their experiment had fizzled. Maybe prayer was similar. If he made a mistake, he probably wouldn't get any results. Or was prayer a little like working a candy machine? When the cafeteria installed a new one, he would have eaten a very healthy lunch if Jason hadn't showed him how to operate it. What if God had already decided what He was going to do anyway so prayer wouldn't do any good?

Mike wondered about the surefire answers to prayer that some men bragged about on TV. Were God's promises like scientific laws in which a certain cause always triggered the same effect? Was it just a matter of learning how to manipulate them? He didn't know. It would be easier if he could recite the same thing over and over and just

watch the clock. Following set patterns such as burning candles, going through rituals, chanting, or meditating on nothingness meant that people didn't have to face the reality he was encountering.

Inadvertently, his eye caught the clock. His time was almost up and he hadn't even said a word to God about Grandpa Claussen. But now he felt ashamed to face God – what would He think about him for using his “prayer time” to think about chemistry experiments. ... ?



Can you identify with Mike? Do you have doubts about the validity of prayer? Do you struggle with the fear that prayer is so complicated that you'll never learn the ropes? Does an accusing voice prevent you from pouring your heart out to God? Your brothers and sisters in Christ face the same battle. You're not alone. Don't let the lies published by the demonically owned and operated “Corporation for the Condemnation of Christians” keep you from praying. If you have a better understanding of what is going on, you'll stop blaming yourself for thoughts that originate with Satan, and you'll learn to use spiritual weapons to resist these attacks.



## PRAYING ISN'T EASY BECAUSE ...

1. *The devil has a well-developed strategy to keep you from praying.* I sometimes think Satan has an invisible spray can marked “fear” and he uses it to pollute the atmosphere every time a Christian is about to take an important step forward.



The unknown is scary, but God always asks us to step out in faith – and that means ignoring our feelings. The Bible tells us that Gideon was fearful before the big battle. I'm sure that Abraham trembled as he put his son Isaac on the altar, that David's knees were shaking as he ran out to meet Goliath, and that Daniel had big butterflies in his stomach as he opened his window to pray in defiance of the newly signed law. Fear does not disqualify us from serving God – as long as we don't give in to it.

Prayer brings us into the realm of the supernatural – into unknown territory where there are things we can never completely understand. Although we should never be afraid to talk with our loving heavenly Father who has told us again and again to pray to Him about everything, many people sometimes experience an unexplainable fear when they decide to spend time praying. If this happens to you, you need to realize that Satan is the source of fear, and take authority over it in Jesus' name.

Prayer is nothing to be afraid of. It's as natural and simple as breathing. God's willingness to become involved in human affairs is as real and accessible as the air all around us. Just as a mere willingness to breathe allows that air to enter our lungs, our desire to reach out for God's help initiates prayer. It's harder to hold your breath than to breathe, and it's more difficult to resist God and go it on your own than it is to pray!

“To pray is nothing more involved than to let Jesus into our needs”. . . . It’s “giving Jesus access to our needs and permitting Him to exercise His own power in dealing with them”. (1) Don’t let any spiritual panic attacks keep you from praying.

(1) *Prayer*, O. Hallesby (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Publishing House, 1959) pp. 12-13.

2. ***So often we lack confidence.*** Most people don’t realize what a big part the thoughts Satan shoots into our minds have to do with a low self-image. Why is it that almost everyone is constantly worried that others will think they are failures – even at the very things in which they excel? The Bible says that the devil accuses Christians day and night (Revelation 12: 10). He just loves to torture you with self-condemnation.

Since prayer is the thing, he hates more than anything else, Satan’s you-don’t-amount-to-anything-what-do-you-think-you’re-doing attacks go into high gear whenever you try to pray. It’s important that you don’t fall for his garbage bag of dirty tricks. After you’ve sinned and confessed it – or if you’re just bummed out – he’ll tell you that you’re not worthy to pray. (That’s no big deal because we’re ***all*** sinners and ***nobody deserves anything from God*** – least of all a personal interview with the Creator of the universe. However, Almighty God has commanded all of us to appear before His throne of grace. How dare we let Satan give us an excuse for not showing up?)

There’s also the worn-out video of your past sins along with a word from the sponsor, informing you that God’s mad at you and doesn’t want to talk to you. (But God isn’t like Aunt Matilda who gets offended every time you say something she doesn’t like!) If you have unconfessed sin, God is waiting to be “faithful and just and will forgive (you your) sins and purify (you) from all unrighteousness” (1 John 1: 9). If you’ve repented of the sin, God has already forgotten about it! When you feel awkward and out of it or you mess up big time or you say the wrong thing, God won’t yell at you. He’ll understand. He loves you more than anyone else. He has comfort, peace, forgiveness, answers to your petitions, and more that He *wants* you to have – if only you’re willing to open up communication with Him.

3. ***There are so many distractions.*** Why is it that when you close your eyes to pray, you suddenly remember that it’s your mother’s birthday and you haven’t bought her a present? Somehow your asking God to bless your pastor gets mixed up with ordering a birthday cake and trying to remember what kind of perfume your mom said she liked. How come your morning devotions are plagued with ideas for the

perfect English theme, thoughts of the guy or girl you have a crush on, and plans for the ski trip during Christmas vacation? Somehow confessing the sin of pride and buying a new ski cap come in on the same brain wave. You need to be aware that part of Satan's sabotage of the "telecommunication" between heaven and earth is interrupting the conversation with terrestrial trivia.

Wandering thoughts are a given, because *everyone* faces this problem. You just need to learn to "take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ" and go right on praying. Develop a combat mentality, a more-than-conqueror attitude, plus the determination that enjoys the challenge of an obstacle course. After all, praying isn't for wimps. It's important work in the kingdom of God, done by those who decide to be champions who experience great victories after overcoming a lot of opposition.

4. ***We get discouraged.*** The you-aren't-getting-any-answers-which-proves-God-isn't-listening-to-you-so-you-might-as-well-give-up line is a satanic standard. But the fact is that "the authorities, the powers of this dark world, the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms" (Ephesians 6: 12) where the first changes must occur in order for us to get results are invisible. A lot of things go on behind the scenes spiritually that we're usually completely unaware of. \* Just because we don't see results doesn't mean there aren't any!

\* To gain a clearer picture of how prayer affects what we can't see, I'd suggest you read *Under Siege* by Josh McDowell and Chuck Klein, published by Word Publishing.

George Mueller prayed for an unsaved friend for 50 years and the guy remained uninterested in the gospel. Shortly after Mueller's death, however, that man was converted. The Bible's parables on prayer stress this kind of persistence. We are told that we "should always pray and not give up" (Luke 18: 1). Two things should help us to do just that:

1. Keep your eyes on the God who asks you to pray and promises to respond and not on what seems to be happening;
2. Remember that prayer is entering another dimension – a realm where things don't always work the way they do on earth.

Instead of being frustrated, you should be thrilled – after all, the world's a disaster! Prayer offers an escape from a that's-life-and-there's-nothing-you-can-do-about-it existence. In other words, an escape from hopelessness!

5. *We're not good at handling unsolved mysteries.* In Sherlock Holmes stories, all the seemingly weird events finally have rational answers, and the clues fit together perfectly before the story ends. Sociologists and psychologists offer explanations for even the most bizarre or criminal behavior. God knows we need security and He created a predictable universe. He doesn't change the color of the sky and the trees every few minutes or pull pranks like allowing water to freeze at 50 degrees for a couple of weeks, nor does He punish us by taking away the sun until we promise to be good. Modern science is based on this rational universe.

But it doesn't follow that *everything* in either the physical or the spiritual world must be predictable and understandable on a human level. There are mysteries that our two-and-a-half-pound brains can't comprehend. Any honest Christian who carefully studies everything the Bible has to say on the subject will have to admit that prayer holds some element of mystery.



Did you hear about the guy who refused to eat until he *completely* understood his digestive system? Well, he died. Did you hear about the Christian who refused to pray until he totally understood how prayer worked? Well – he got weak and spiritually sick, at any rate. When we know that we need nourishment, we pig out. We know that prayer brings the benefits of spiritual nourishment. And at certain times the urge to pray hits us kind of like hunger pangs. Like eating, we need to pray on a regular basis.

You don't need to understand how prayer works in order to pray any more than a young man needs to figure out exactly how a woman's mind operates in order to marry

her. God's mind is not only different from ours, it's a zillion times greater. Even when we claim His promises and receive a great blessing, we still need to keep in mind that the Bible is made up of divinely inspired words, which our puny intelligence is incapable of completely analyzing.

More than anything else, prayer is a relationship. Part of any friendship – especially one between people of the opposite sex – is enjoying the surprises in the personality of the other. If we try to turn prayer into a mechanical technique, we miss the point. When we view God as merely running an answering service, we won't appreciate the times when He is silent. Or if we concentrate on ourselves, worrying if we are praying long enough, hard enough, or in the “right position”, then we are not focused on knowing, hearing, and loving God. Instead, we're preoccupied with our performance, and that can lead to the wrong belief that we have “failed” in prayer if the answer is delayed, or not what we wanted. Prayer is never unproductive, because time spent enjoying the presence of one you love is always worthwhile.

“No man can meet God without discovering that he cannot understand God fully”.  
 (2) The characteristic of God that gives us the most trouble is His unknowability. We can put up with an awful lot if only we know the reason for it, but God often gives us no explanation. The truth is, if He did, we couldn't understand it. We ask our questions. Why does God permit me to suffer like this? Why doesn't God do something to answer my prayer? How come God doesn't intervene to stop the war ... the famine ... or the way the gym teacher treats me?

(2) *Prayer*, O. Hallesby, p. 23.

At this point you can decide that if God doesn't fit into your mold, you'll have nothing to do with Him. Or you can persevere, getting to know Him better and better, believing that your heavenly Father knows best. As you surrender to Him and lean trustingly in the arms of One who is all-powerful, all-wise, everywhere present, and total love, the questions will matter less and less. At that point, you'll learn to enjoy the mystery of God's character, and how to praise Him like the apostle Paul, who wrote: “Oh, the depth of the riches of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable his judgments, and his paths beyond tracing out!” (Romans 11: 33).

6. *We show a fallen human nature tendency to want to be completely in control of our own destiny.* There's a nobody-is-going-to-tell-me-what-to-do, -I'll-get-what-I-want-you-just-wait-and-see streak in all of us. In its extreme form, this tendency

turns into an attempt to manipulate God and to assume some of His attributes. In our society this shows itself in two different ways of believing:

- (1). **Everything** operates according to scientific “laws” that never change and which man is capable of discovering.
- (2). Magic formulas can control the spiritual powers of the universe or the forces of nature that “determine destiny”.

One idea says that science and man’s ingenuity will solve all problems; gain enough knowledge to control all the forces of nature; tame human behavior; and form a new world order that will drastically improve life on earth. This is appealing to many rational people. Some go so far as to say that we’ll outgrow our need for God. Man – and woman – will run the universe.

On the other hand there is the magical mindset based on the belief that certain forces, spirits or untapped resources in humans can be manipulated and harnessed by using certain procedures; these include spells, formulas, or techniques – like positive thinking, positive speaking, rituals, magic charms, chanting, burning candles – and the list goes on.

Both approaches have tried to infiltrate biblical Christianity – especially in the area of prayer. From these philosophies we get the following distorted concepts about communicating with God.

**False:** Prayer is a way to get God to do whatever you want Him to so you, not God are in control.

**False:** The only purpose of prayer is to get a handout and it is to be resorted to only when medical measures, human ingenuity, and “ordinary means” fail – after all “God helps those who help themselves”.

**False:** Prayer is merely a 911 emergency hotline to heaven.

**False:** The spotlight is on the person who is praying because the results depend solely on his or her performance.

**False:** Everything depends upon your having the right kind of faith. Lack of immediate results prove that you don’t have your faith strokes down yet.

These unbiblical assumptions turn God into a vending machine, a butler, or a Santa Claus-in-the-sky. They transfer the importance and control from God to man. They can also make it look as if prayer is a scary endeavor that demands you do everything



exactly according to the recipe – and that formula varies from teaching to teaching. The person who prays is put under tremendous pressure. Since nobody will get 100-percent results, those who feel they can boss God around will sooner or later come to the conclusion that “prayer doesn’t work”.

If you expect God to be as predictable as a paper dispenser, you'll become disillusioned. You'll come to the wrong conclusion that you've done your part, but God didn't come through. If you think of Him as your “reliable robot”, you'll find Him hard to program.

But if you really want to form a relationship – with a loving heavenly Father who delights in listening to His children's requests and who grants all the things that are really in our best interest – then you're in for an exciting adventure of faith.



**7. *We're used to judging everything according to our feelings and our experiences.***

In the physical world we're always observing the results of our efforts. Following the recipe exactly, you can enjoy coming up with your famous chocolate fudge cake every time. You fix what's wrong with your bike or your car and you have transportation. You study hard enough and you'll memorized the Spanish verbs, the members of the President's cabinet, or the part of the human eye. What you put into the computer is what prints out.

Somehow, it's easy to expect prayer to be the same – even though you know that love, loyalty, and other factors in relationships can't be measured, or observed, and that relationships don't follow totally predictable patterns. Prayer is not a scientific

formula. It's not magic. It's not a performance, the purpose of which is to "impress" God.

Prayer is communication, in a growing relationship. It's a means of receiving what God wants to give us, both for our good and for His glory. It's getting to know a wonderful heavenly Father who is bigger than our feelings and our poor powers of observation. Just because you don't *sense* God's presence doesn't mean He isn't there! And the fact that God didn't answer the way you expected doesn't change the validity of prayer.



## ACTUALLY PRAYER IS ONLY A COMBINATION OF HELPLESSNESS AND FAITH

As long as we act like we don't need God, as long as we're unwilling to accept His solution to a problem, as long as we insist on slugging it out on our own – there can be no prayer. Prayer is opening the door to let Jesus come in to take control of our distress, our dilemma, or the dreadful circumstances that surround us. It is born out of helplessness. But helplessness alone doesn't make us pray. We begin with the simple faith to believe God is there, that He will listen, and that He can do something about our situation.

Sometimes the word "faith" scares us off because we're afraid we'll never be able to "believe and not doubt". (See Matthew 21: 21-22) After all, attacks of what-if-God-isn't-listening-maybe-nothing-will-happen-and-this-is-a-waste-of-time constantly bombard us. In Greek, the New Testament word translated "believe" carries with it these ideas: "being convinced of a certain truth; being certain of the truthfulness of God; confidence in a belief". On the other hand, the word "doubt" comes from a root word that means "to separate thoroughly, to withdraw from, to oppose and decide against" – which implies a *willful decision not to believe*. There are several words for doubt in Greek and the others mean to be perplexed or confused. The Scriptures that command us not to doubt when we pray use the Greek words that indicate a purposeful mental calculation to entertain disbelief.

Because of this I feel that O. Hallesby is perfectly justified in writing "You have more faith than you think you have. You have enough faith to pray; you have faith enough to believe you will be heard ... the essence of faith is to come to Jesus" (3) – and He said "Whoever comes to me I will never drive away" (John 6: 37).

(3) *Prayer*, O. Hallesby, pp. 28-29.

I'm convinced that one of the devil's key strategies to keep Christians from praying is to get them to "measure" their faith, or to come up with special techniques to *whomp up* a feeling of "faith". He can also get people to brag about their "faith". If people can get worn out trying to *produce* "faith", or by feeling that prayer is a complicated procedure they might never master, then they won't pray. But prayer is simply coming to God with your need. When the devil injects fear and doubt into your mind, he then accuses *you* of having doubts – so you don't dare pray! *It's a lie*. Don't fall for his you-can't-pray-until-you-feel-full-of-faith routine.

Prayer isn't complicated. It is reaching out to God in your helplessness. Prayer is simply believing that He will give you His wisdom and use His miraculous power to affect change in impossible situations.

We've spent some time trying to understand where some of our wrong ideas about prayer come from and finding out they are false. Now let's look at the facts.



## PRAYING WITH THE RIGHT ATTITUDE

- "There are some things (I'd say many things) God will do if we ask Him that He will not do if we do not ask Him". (4) "You do not have, because you do not ask God" (James 4: 2)
- "You don't have to understand everything about prayer to pray". (5)
- "Prayer is God's idea. He created it for people who are weakened by sin, fickle in their commitment, at times overwhelmed by doubt, often discouraged and bewildered". (6)
- "If it's big enough to worry about, it's big enough to pray about. Worry about nothing and pray about everything, says Paul". (7)
- "Prayer is set forth as the primary human factor in accomplishing God's will". (8)
- Prayer means that you are never helpless – you have a weapon that can effect changes in your own life, in your family, in your friends, in your church – and in world politics.

Start praying – and become the awesome force-for-good that God intended you to be! Praying with an attitude – the *right* one – will mean you're no longer a victim in a cruel and unfair world. It will give you the power to love enemies and other antisocial creatures. It will enable you to change situations in your home or on the other side of

the world, and it will give you a key for conquering bad habits and improving your personality!

So – don't just stand there, pray something!

- (4) *Don't Just Stand There, Pray Something*, Ronald, Dunn (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1992) p. 52.  
(5) *Ibid.* pp. 51-52. (6) *Ibid.* p. 30. (7) *Ibid.* p. 42. (8) *Ibid.* p. 43.

# CHAPTER 4

## Pray Your Way Free



Omar didn't really want to admit it to himself, but he was afraid to walk outside the door – even in daylight. Men were supposed to be brave, heroic, and shock-resistant. But ever since the night he saw his friend get shot, a terrible fear haunted him. What if he resembled some guy a gang wanted to get rid of? What if some weirdo decided to use him for target practice? What if ...?

His inner-city school had metal detectors, but that didn't stop the violence. Just the other day, a senior had brutally beaten his ex-girlfriend. Everybody was tense. Now teachers were hostile *and* boring. The kids were defiant and lazy. His only choice was to stick it out, or skip school and get blasted by his mother every day. He couldn't change anything.

Home was no picnic either.

His mom lived with her boyfriend and had no time for Omar – unless he did something she didn't like. Then he got the full treatment. His sister spent most of her time at their grandparent's home. That was fine for her because she was and always had been their favorite grandchild. But their grandfather couldn't stand Omar because he resembled the man, he had forbidden his daughter to marry. Omar hadn't seen his father in five years, and wasn't sure he wanted to. He hated it when people said he looked just like his dad. Both of his parents now had other children who were little and cute and easy to boss around.

Omar really didn't *belong* anywhere. Home was only the place where he had a bed and could rob the refrigerator or turn on the TV if he wanted to. He was tempted to join a gang. Maybe it would be like having a real family. But his older brother was in prison for a gang-related crime. "Anything is better than prison", his brother had said. "Whatever you do, stay clear of the police". Omar felt like a little rat caught in a maze. There seemed to be no way out.

Perhaps you live in a peaceful suburb, have a fairly close family, and go to a school that's not a war zone. Although your situation is very different from Omar's, you may still understand his feelings of helplessness. Maybe your own vicious cycle consists of desperately trying to prove yourself to your father, or an inability to fit in with other kids, or loneliness, or burnout from your attempt to excel in school. Or feeling tired out from trying to keep up with the "cool" crowd. Does life seem like one of those ridiculous rides at the carnival that makes you dizzy and a little sick – and you can't get off?



## THERE IS SOMETHING YOU CAN DO ...

The lack-of-power syndrome is common. Everybody complains about the government, but nobody seems to be able to change it. The world economy runs us like some uncontrollable monster. Whether it's stopping the AIDs epidemic, trying to quit smoking, breaking up with a boyfriend or girlfriend who's a bad influence, or putting an end to couch-potato apathy – the inability to take decisive action is hard to overcome.

Did you realize that there *is* a way – no matter how many strikes you have against you, no matter how untalented or how lacking in leadership – that you can make a big difference in the world? ***You can change history.*** You can connect with the power that transforms people, that revolutionizes circumstances, or that can make you into a new person. That power is prayer.

You can join overcomers anonymous! Sign up today. You can conquer discouragement and apathy, and begin to joint the ranks of others who are learning to overcome through prayer.

I don't know why God allows evil, but I think it's because He decided to give eternal life to ***winner***s. (A heaven filled with robots would be pretty boring.) And I'm not sure why He doesn't just shoot the devil dead and put a noose around every evil

influence – but my guess is that, in the same way that a butterfly’s struggle to emerge from the cocoon is essential for its healthy development, human character cannot be fully formed without the experience of resisting wrong. Suffering is a mystery, too. But there are enough living examples to prove that, when handled correctly, pain fosters spiritual growth.

I believe that God put within us the will to conquer, the ability to enjoy a hard fight that results in a “big win”, a spirit of competition, and a longing for triumph. This desire serves a lot of obvious purposes, from excelling in sports to plain survival. But I feel its main intent is to involve us in prayer. Instead of creating puppets, God decided not only to give us a free will, but to enlist us as His soldiers in spiritual warfare. The Lord chose to make the tremendous exhilaration of gaining a prayer victory over mindboggling obstacles a part of the human experience.

In spite of the fact that He has set limits – and some of these are so far beyond us that we’ll never figure them out – our prayers have real power. You can literally pray your way to freedom in any situation. NOTICE I DIDN’T SAY YOU CAN GET YOUR OWN WAY BY PRAYING. God might change you – not the circumstances – as He did in the case of Joni Eareckson Tada. The Lord didn’t liberate her from her wheelchair after a diving accident left her paralyzed – but He gave her the victorious attitude that enables her to help many other people.



## **THERE’S NO SITUATION THAT IS HOPELESS**

You are *never* hopeless or helpless. You can always pray. It’s always the right thing to do, and you never have to be afraid to pray. If your prayer is sincere and you're willing to let Him run the show His way, you can be sure that God will either answer your specific prayer, change you, or change your prayer. A very famous preacher named R. A. Torrey said this: “We should be careful about what we ask from God, but when without do begin to pray for a thing we should never give up praying for it until we get it, or until God makes it very clear and very definite to us that it is not His will to give it”. (1)

(1) *How to Pray*, R. A. Torrey (Chicago, Moody Press) p. 62.





## THE CHALLENGE OF PRAYER

One of the things that makes sports competition so exciting is that it's never possible to program yourself to bat 1.000, or complete a perfect dive every time, or return every hard serve. Practice doesn't make perfect – but it sure can help a lot! Prayer is a little like sports in the sense that you'll never have it “down pat”. God is too great to fit into any human system or understanding. But the more you pray and the better you get to know God, the greater your prayer results will be. Just keep on praying and keep on learning!

Sometimes God gives us exactly what we ask for instantly. The other day I was checking-out at the supermarket and realized I had bought more than I could carry home, because I was walking. I said, “Lord, I know I did something dumb, but I sure could use a ride”. Within thirty seconds, a friend I hadn't noticed in the store called my name – and was happy to drive me and my groceries the ten blocks to my apartment. That was an example of a very specific and instant answer to prayer.

Most of the time, the things we pray for will require great persistence and a long waiting period. When I prayed for a safe place to live, close to the church where I would be helping out a lot, it took almost a year and two moves before I had my request.

Sometimes God changes *us* – not the circumstances. When I started to teach high school, I encountered some rebels who tried to make my life miserable. My first prayers were SOS calls. I imagined that a couple students would move to other cities, two or three would drop out of school, and some would transfer to other classes. That didn't happen. Then I stumbled onto a secret. I started praying for each kid by name. I discovered that I couldn't genuinely dislike anyone for whom I kept praying. Instead of giving me classes filled with “good students”, God gave me love for the very kids who'd test my patience, disrupt the class, and even start fights. And they sensed the love. They even calmed down (a little), and I really enjoyed teaching them.

If God doesn't change our circumstances or change us, He changes our prayers. Have you ever prayed that a certain guy or girl would like you – only to discover a few weeks later that you're thankful you never got the answer you wanted? Mrs. Billy Graham is reported to have said that if God had answered every prayer, she'd have married the wrong guy seven times! God changes some of the prayers of those who take the trouble to really listen to Him.

“It came out all wrong, but you know what I meant”. Have you ever had to say that to explain something you said that came out weird? It’s comforting to know that God always understands the *desires* of our hearts. Sometimes God changes our prayer because we started out praying for the wrong thing – and that happens even to people who have a lot of experience in asking God for things! God sometimes answers a need that we stated in a clumsy way. God sees the underneath *intention* of our prayers, and often answers that heart-need.



For example, the mother of the man we know today as St. Augustine was concerned about her son’s ungodly lifestyle. She earnestly prayed that he would not go to Rome, the sin capital of that era. But Augustine moved to Rome – and there he had an encounter with Jesus Christ that drastically transformed his life. His mother’s prayers were answered in a very different way than she expected.

That’s how great God is!

I’ll say it again. You can pray your way free from any situation. It may take time and perseverance but it’s possible. Those who used to smuggle Bibles into the countries that were communist were surprised to find happy, joking Christians. Those people had prayed their way to liberty of spirit, even in the most oppressive environment. There are people who come from the worst backgrounds whose faces today reflect the love and joy of Jesus. They have prayed their way free. There are “heroes of the faith” who have forgiven terrible crimes committed against them, and they have no bitterness ... because of prayer.

Decide to be a winner, with a long string of prayer victories.

Remember, power is only a prayer away!

## CHAPTER 5

# How to Graduate From I-Don't-Know-If-I-Can Make-It- Through-Another-Day Living



Clark couldn't stand much more. His father had decided to remarry and forget his responsibilities to his first family, which left Clark as the man of the house. He had to try to cope with a mother who was deeply depressed, a sister whose boyfriend was on drugs, and a seventh-grade brother who was failing every subject. It was becoming harder and harder to get up in the morning. School was more boring than ever. Any robot could do his job at the discount store. There just wasn't anything to look forward to anymore. Clark went through the motions of being a good Christian, but it all seemed like a farce. He went to Bible study, tried to pray a little, and kept up with his church activities but his heart just wasn't in it.

*Nothing* was going right. He really couldn't concentrate when he sat down to study and his grades showed it. Because his shooting was off, the basketball coach had benched him. Kara didn't act as if she liked him anymore, so he wouldn't dare risk asking her out. To top it off, his grandmother had commented, "Clark, you walk and talk like an old man. When I was your age, I was full of energy and hope. I'll never understand this younger generation". There wasn't a word of encouragement on the horizon.

After a particularly hard day, he had to stay at his job after closing to sort out a mess in the stockroom. Totally exhausted, he hadn't planned on facing another family crisis when he got home. Opening the door, he found his sister screaming at their mom, who was crying hysterically. In the TV room his brother was nonchalantly viewing a pornographic movie on TV. With disgust, Clark realized that his mother was too involved in her own problems to even care what her children did. It was 3 a.m. by the time he finally crawled into bed. When he turned off the light, he could almost reach out and touch the inky blackness and sense a presence. It felt evil. For the first time in Clark's life, it was like a voice was whispering: "The only way out is suicide. You don't have anything to live for".

The problems you face may be a lot different, but the truth is that Satan's same sinister syndrome can easily attack you - unless you learn to use the mighty weapon of prayer to destroy the bombs the enemy will use to try to wreck your life. No born-again Christian needs to be a victim. We read in Hosea 4: 6: "My people are destroyed from lack of knowledge".



## VICTIM TO VICTOR

You and I live in a big bad world, and there are some things we need to know to keep from being so badly hurt that we are unable to make a comeback.



What I'm going to share with you could have transformed my teenage years. It can change things for you - no matter how difficult your situation. You don't have to be a fatalist who just sits back and lets life happen. You don't need to join the defeated Christians who complain that the devil is always picking on them, living in constant dread of what he will do next. The world's-getting-worse-by-the-minute-and-I-just-might-not-make-it mentality doesn't have to strike you. This chapter is designed to give you the information you need to join the in-all-things-we-are-more-than-conquerors-through-Him-who-loved-us gang.



## WISE UP

1. ***Avoid devil-guided guilt trips.*** Once upon a time, a good and handsome prince fell in love with Mary, a lowly servant girl. Shortly after he asked for her hand in marriage, he was sent by his father to lead the army in putting down a revolt in the most distant province of the empire. Nothing was heard of him for years. Meanwhile, his rival, a very wealthy and influential man, kept telling Mary she was

ridiculous to believe that the prince really planned to marry her. He even invented the lie that the prince had taken a wife from another royal family. But Mary's faith in her true love remained unshaken. And the prince did return to make her his princess. But the shunned rival never gave up. He constantly sent messages to Mary telling her she wasn't educated enough to be the wife of a prince, and that she should just escape and marry him – then she wouldn't be forced into a role she could never adequately fill. If she got angry, made a mistake, or said something "improper", the accusations would increase. When she was all ready to inform her husband of the situation, the rival mocked, "He won't listen to you. You're just a servant girl".

God allows Satan to assume a role somewhat like that rival. He is the "accuser of our brothers, who accuses them before our God day and night" (Revelation 12: 10). All the princess in our story really has to do is to say, "You're right. I'm not a princess because of anything I did to deserve it. The prince *chose* me – he's the one who has declared me worthy and you'll have to deal with him". Of course, she could also permit the accusations to rob her of the joy of her position as the much-loved wife of the prince.

When the devil lays a guilt trip on us, all we really have to do is to recognize that *all* of our righteousness comes from Jesus, and permit Him to handle Satan for us. But because this is very hard for us to put into practice, let's look a little closer at the problem by considering another example.

Just as you close your eyes to pray, you remember the sarcastic words you muttered under your breath when your mom wouldn't lend you her car. Next, scenes from the movie you never should have watched begin to march across your mind. Then a voice seems to whisper, "What are *you* doing trying to pray? God would never listen to someone like you".

That kind of thing happens not only to you, but to *all* Christians. Because the devil is afraid of your prayers, he loves to torture you and make fun of you and make you feel guilty.

Okay, so the devil is accusing you. Now what do you do? Here's where it gets tricky.

Satan seems to know that when we're attacked, our first instinct is to defend ourselves. But if we do try to defend ourselves, we fall into a trap. We have only three good options:

- If the sin we're reminded of is unconfessed, we can confess it then and there, receive God's forgiveness, *and go on praying with a clear conscience*.
- If the sin has already been confessed, make a Custer's Last Stand on 2 Corinthians 5: 21: "God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, *so that in him we might become the righteousness of God*" (italics mine) and go on praying with a clear conscience.

"Once we grasp the fact that we have been made righteous with the righteousness of Christ, then the devil cannot make us feel guilty any longer. Satan's main weapon will then be taken from him". (1) No past sin can keep you from being effective in prayer.

(1) *Spiritual Warfare*, Derek Prince (Springdale, PA, Whitaker House, 1987) p. 43.

- If it's a general accusation about your character or human weakness, answer something like this – "You've got it, Mr. Devil. I'm weak but God is my courage. On my own I'd fail, but Jesus is my strength. I'm not so smart, but the Lord is my wisdom. *And I'm going to pray and pray and pray. Not one of your attempts to make me feel guilty can stop me*".
2. *Don't listen to the devil's things-are-hopeless lie*. The devil is out to steal your hope. If he can make you give up, he's got you. Because you can always pray to an all-powerful God, no set of circumstances is impossible. A lot of people, though, get off-track because they don't pray *first* for wisdom.



## FOUR QUESTIONS TO ASK WHEN PRAYING ABOUT A TOUGH SITUATION

1. *Is this a consequence of my sin?* I once heard the true story of a supposedly Christian girl who was mad at God for letting her get pregnant when she was disobeying God by having sex with her boyfriend. We must take responsibility for our own actions. The Bible teaches us, "Be sure that your sin will find you out" (Numbers 32: 23).



Sometimes the connection between the problem and the sin is less obvious. God may not decide to bless your finances until you pay the store for the sweater you shoplifted. Your lack of respect for your parents may be hindering your spiritual growth.

If the problem was caused by your sin ask for forgiveness. Rededicate your life to God from now on. And ask God to guide you and make your life a blessing in the future. (God mightily used big-time sinners like David who returned to Him totally.)

2. ***Is this a result of my foolishness so there's a lesson you want me to learn?*** God is God and He can do whatever He wishes, but I've never heard of a case in which He instantly healed a beach bum of the sunburn that could have easily been avoided, or of His helping the kid who didn't study all semester ace the final. ***But even when you blew it,*** your next step is to pray. Ask God, "What do I do now?" Receive His wisdom for making the best of the situation. Determine that from now on you'll daily seek God's guidance and talk to Him and trusted Christians before making any big decisions.
3. ***Is this something you've allowed to get my attention on some issue?*** A reckless driver may have several accidents because the Lord may want him to be just as good a testimony behind the wheel as he is when he leads singing at youth group meetings. A cocky girl who uses her charm and good looks to manipulate others may have to face a few humiliating experiences. God often uses circumstances to



bring about desirable changes in our character and personality. A young girl I know is a very neat person and



a sincere Christian. I found myself thinking, "If only she could learn not to be so loud". Interestingly, she developed a problem with her vocal chords and her doctor told her she'd have to start talking more softly! She's learning and the result is very pleasing – and noticed by a certain young man who always enjoyed her company but now goes out of his way to spend extra time with her! God loves us so much He wants to maximize our potential – and that may take some unpleasant experiences. Even if the problem developed for another reason, it's always a good idea to pray, "Lord, what do you want me to learn from this?"

4. ***Lord, is this a direct satanic attack?*** Instead of freaking out in fear, you need to know the facts and to act on them.

- Satan has limited authority. "He cannot touch you without God's permission. God will not let him touch you unless it would open the possibility of spiritual growth, blessing, and eternal reward for you".
- Satan has limited knowledge and power. "He makes repeated mistakes. He has to depend on his demons to relay him information, and he has taught them to deceive. ... Satan does not have power or authority to make a promise".
- Satan is limited in presence. "Like all other created beings, he can never be more than one place at one time. ... He has to depend constantly on his demons".

- Satan’s doom is certain. He has been defeated on the cross and will spend eternity in hell. Someone has quipped, “If the devil reminds you of your past, remind him of his future!”
- “There is nothing on earth that Satan so fears as prayer”. (2) “Satan has been totally and forever defeated by Christ, but God has planned for you and me to enforce that victory by prayer”. (3) It’s a system that makes us dependent on the Lord every moment, designed to make us friends of God.

(2) The basic outline of this section, and most of the quotations, are taken from Wesley Duewel, *Mighty Prevailing Prayer* (Grand Rapids, MI: Francis Asbury Press, 1990) pp. 231-233.

(3) Ibid. p. 246.

The devil is kind of like a brilliant con man whose story I recently heard about. He practiced medicine without a license, swindled money, faked the qualifications for high-paying positions, and in general ran his own show – until he got caught. It’s through prayer that we call the devil’s bluff, kick him out, and retake the stuff he’s stolen. When the Enemy has manipulated circumstances so everything seems to be going wrong, has used people’s sin to inflict damage on you, has used past events such as your involvement in occult practices to harass you, or has succeeded in making you depressed, *you can pray your way free*.

So now: *Get right with God*. Confess your pride, hypocrisy, wrong motives, and sinful actions – even if your contribution to the problem is very small.

*Stand against Satan*. “The New English Bible translates James 4: 7, ‘Stand up to the devil and he will turn and run.’ The Greek literally says ‘oppose.’ This is a command. You do not defeat Satan by passively ‘looking to the Lord’”. (4) You don’t have to scream or use any formula, but you base your resistance on “the one who is in you is greater than the one who is in the world” (1 John 4: 4) and you refuse to budge. It’s kind of like saying,



Mr. Devil, you're not going to win this one. I won't give an inch and I won't get discouraged while I wait until I win because "in all things God works for the good of those who love him" (Romans 8: 28), and "This is the victory that has overcome the world, even our faith" (1 John 5: 4).

(4) Ibid. p. 242.

But the best defense is a good offence. Start each day with prayer. Ask for God's wisdom and guidance for each activity of your day. Request His help in dealing with difficult people and complicated situations. Pray about your social life, your study, your leisure-time activities, and your relationship with your parents. Don't wait for a problem to arise. Cover each part of your day with prayer.

You can live in victory and graduate from I-don't-know-if-I-can-make-it-through-another-day living!

# CHAPTER 6

## Bless My Cat and All That



Brandon sat in the auditorium with 2,000 young people. The singing had been tremendous and a nationally known speaker was challenging all of them. “I’m talking to a bunch of thieves”, he began. I doubt that you’re pickpockets or purse snatchers but your depriving yourselves of tons of good things. A man who lived a hundred years ago said this: ‘He who does not pray ... robs himself.’ (1) Who knows how many temptations you’ve given in to because you didn’t pray. You’ve missed out on solutions to problems, restored friendships, better study habits, and peace of mind, all because you didn’t pray. God has a lot of gifts all ready to give to those who ask Him.

“Jesus said, ‘Without me you can do nothing’ – that is nothing that will count in God’s kingdom. Yet Christian teens routinely go out on dates, choose their courses for the next year, decide what job to take, and spend their money, without even consulting the Lord. If you don’t pray about every detail of your life, don’t even pretend that you’re interested in doing God’s will”.



## **ARE YOU ROBBING YOURSELF?**

Brandon felt convicted. He hardly prayed at all. Basically, very shy, he had endlessly gone back and forth about asking Jillian to go out for pizza. She was the attractive redhead who had recently started attending their youth meetings. But he’d never thought about praying about his shyness. Then there was the big tennis match on Friday. If he could beat Kevin Kramer, he’d really go up the “ladder”. Should he be praying for a victory? Or maybe it would be better to pray that God would help him overcome his nervousness. The plant where his father had enjoyed a high-paying position had closed, and that meant Brandon needed to look for a good summer job to try to put away money for college. He worried but he didn’t pray. His stuttering was a constant embarrassment, but he had never once talked to God about it.

Sunday proved to be an every-minute-packed day, so Brandon resolved that he’d spend some time praying the next morning. But sitting down for ten whole minutes to talk to God proved to be a lot harder than Brandon had bargained for. So many different thoughts came rushing into his mind. Should he be praying for courage to ask Jillian out or asking God if it was His will for him to go out with her? Picturing himself receiving congratulations from everyone and seeing his picture in the paper for slaughtering Kevin Kramer, he suddenly felt uneasy about asking God to make him win the tennis match. Shouldn’t he be praying that he’d glorify God by the way he

played? It would be nice to have an angel tell him that he'd never stutter again – but what if he prayed to be instantly healed of his stuttering and nothing happened?

Brandon looked at his watch. He'd blown his prayer time again. And now he had to get going or he'd be late for school. He felt rather confused and a little discouraged. Why was it that Saturday night's fire could so easily be put out by Monday morning's reality?

That week, Brandon slipped back into the usual routine of tests to study for, tennis practice, worrying about making a good impression on Jillian, and thinking up excuses for not cleaning his room.

But Greg, their youth pastor, was the type of guy who lived and talked about total commitment. When he told the youth group that he planned an individual appointment with each one to talk about their prayer lives, Brandon nearly panicked. He decided he'd better listen to Pastor Greg's Bible-talk and see if he could pick up a few pointers. And that night Greg was at his best.

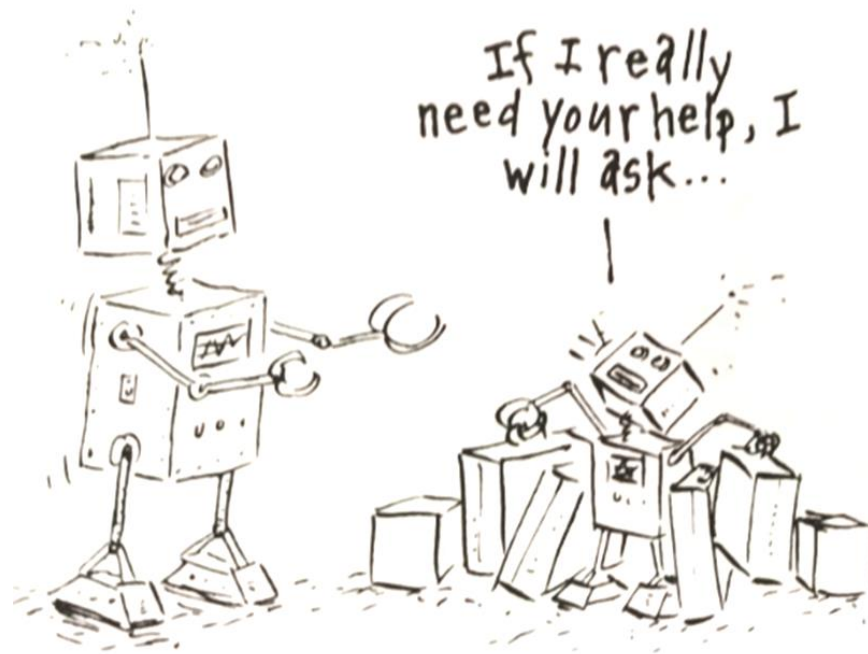
“Rico, the little robot”, he began, “thought he knew it all but he was badly mistaken”. On he went from there.

It was true that Rico's batteries had a lifetime guarantee and that he could do many things, but he couldn't live up to the rules that Royal Robot had set up for the Society of Regular Robots. And interference from things like fear, frustration, overuse, and carelessness made him unable to function normally.

One day Rico's friend Ringo introduced him to Royal Robot, a giant many times their size, who was king of all robots. Rico was surprised to learn that Royal Robot had made the rules for the good of his subjects and that the king loved Rico as an individual. He was more than willing to give Rico royal power, so he could live a happier and more productive life while obeying the rules. He discovered that Royal Robot had a solar-power source that was unlimited. It blew Rico's mind to find out that Royal Robot knew *everything*. He could even predict the future. Later he learned that Royal Robot would give his solar-power and perfect advice to anyone who asked for it.

But Rico was so busy living his frustrated little life, he had no time to ask Royal Robot for much. Once he was afraid his batteries would stop working forever so he cried out to Royal Robot for assistance. But, as soon as he was better, he went back to doing his own thing.

But, **Ringo** was smart. He had a short appointment with Royal Robot almost every day. And Rico had to admit that Ringo was more contented and made fewer bad decisions than he did. But Rico was somewhat lazy. And setting up a time to meet with Royal Robot was a little too much like work and discipline – the “D” word! – so he never got around to it.



The person who really impressed Rico was Rolo Robot. Like Ringo, Rolo kept daily appointments with the Royal Robot – but there was a lot more to their relationship. Rolo stuck to his king like glue. Sure, he had to study, work, sleep, and interact with the other regular robots, so he couldn’t give Royal Robot all his conscious attention. But he never started doing anything without asking Royal Robot’s advice and receiving some extra solar-power to give his batteries a boost.

“Are you a Rico, a Ringo, or a Rolo?” Pastor Greg asked. “Do you consider God your 911 number? Or maybe you spend a little time with Him each day and then basically run your own life? Or do you live in God’s presence totally depending on Him for **everything** – something the Bible calls ‘waiting on God’?”

Brandon had to admit he was a Rico! Tuning-in again, he heard Pastor Greg say, I’d like to give you the practical tips that will enable you to live a Rolo Robot life.

“If you guys are going to stop robbing yourselves and get back to prayer, the first thing you have to learn is the right attitude”.

Pastor Greg went on to tell them what that right prayer-attitude involved.

***First, the world does not revolve around you! It revolved around Jesus, the Son of God.*** Prayer isn't having an I'm-going-to-get-my-own-way-no-matter-what tantrum. It isn't pleading, "Your will be changed, Lord". It's saying, "Your will be done". And we should be very thankful that God answers prayers only within the limits of His will. Can you imagine some hotshot causing a terrible blizzard in Brazil, giving his English teacher an instant migraine every time she gave a long assignment, and hitting a homerun every time he got up to bat, just because he prayed?

God's Word is our prayer manual. Its principles show us a lot of things we ***shouldn't*** pray for. The Bible explains that God cannot lie. Referring to Jesus coming in the clouds to take Christians to heaven, Matthew 24: 36 declares, "No one knows about that day or hour, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father". No matter how much you pray about it, the Lord will not reveal to you when He will return. Numbers 32: 23 tells us, "You may be sure that your sin will find you out". That rules out praying that premarital sex won't result in pregnancy, that you can shoplift without getting caught, or that no one will realize that you are lying. God's Word lays it on the line in Romans 12: 19: "Do not take revenge". This means that God won't listen when you pray, "Lord, help me to get even". Always direct your prayers to a Father who knows best, a God who runs His universe much better than you could.

***Second, prayer has to be real.*** It's amazing all the things we can think up to say in imaginary conversations. We always win those arguments and always make a perfect impression – because no one can react or disagree. But when you're face-to-face with your dad, reality sets in and the conversation goes a lot differently than you planned.

Once you truly come into the Lord's presence, His eyes penetrate your entire being, revealing every sin and hypocrisy. Wrongdoing and bad attitudes must be dealt with before the conversation can continue. You can talk for hours "to God" without letting Him be Lord of your life, and without being willing to obey His rules. So often this is only an imaginary conversation with a "god" we ourselves have created to always take our side. That "god" listens sympathetically to things like, "My cruel mother insists that I should clean my room *every* week and take out the garbage *every* day and that's not fair". Or "I can't live without Carl, so please make Janet move away to another country". Or "The fight I had with my sister was all her fault, so unless she apologizes, I won't talk to her". Real prayer is directed to the God of the Bible with the intention of getting *His* solution to the problem, not ours.



*Third, prayer isn't a bunch of techniques to be mastered. It's a relationship with God – interacting with a Father who is better than the kind of dad you always dreamed of having.* This ideal Father never once made a spur-of-the-moment promise that He hopes His kids will forget about. He's never too tired or too busy to listen. On the contrary, every promise is so well thought out that He delights in hearing His children remind Him of it. He enjoys giving gifts to those who ask Him. His Bible is full of



promises. We're encouraged to cash-in on every one of them.

But what if you don't know your Bible well enough to find very many promises? What about problems and issues in your life that aren't mentioned in Scripture? What kind of bike should you buy? Should you go out for track? What should you wear for the spring banquet? Where should you go to college? And then there are those prayers we all pray – "Lord, if you just give it to me, I promise to use it always for your glory".

Can we be trusted to evaluate our own motives? Jeremiah 17: 9-10 says we can't. "The heart is deceitful above all things and beyond cure. Who can understand it? I the Lord search the heart and examine the mind". We're not always capable of deciding if our prayers about deep personal concerns are unselfish and according to God's will. But you don't have to worry about any of these things because God has the solution.

It's our helplessness and total dependence on God our Father that makes our prayer relationship with Him so beautiful and exciting. Prayer was God's idea. Because His

thinking is so far beyond us, we'll never understand it completely. In John 14: 5, Jesus said, "I am the way and the truth and the life". He's the Way to God and the Way to prayer. Christianity isn't made up of rules and doctrine and history. It's a Person – Jesus Christ. As we share with Him everything that's on our minds, saying, "Lord, teach me to pray", we build that relationship on which real prayer rests – prayer that is constant communication with Jesus, the Way. Daily dependence on Jesus, the Truth. Vital contact with Jesus, the Life.

You share each desire with Jesus, get to know Him better, and allow Him to sort out your motives and change the prayers that are not His will because they're not the best for you. You talk to God as your Best Friend: "Lord, you know that I really want that guy / girl to like me but I know your will is best. Please show me". "God, it would be so great to be able to go on the ski trip. Please supply the money I'll need". "Lord, I really need some new clothes. I'm trusting you to give them to me". "Help me to study the right stuff and get a good grade on the science test".

You recognize that you don't have the strength in yourself to overcome temptation so you need to constantly send up SOS signals. You invite Jesus to share the tough experiences with you:

"God, that billboard is total mind pollution and I'm having a hard time thinking pure thoughts. Help!"

"Lord, the *A* I got on that hard biology test tempts me with pride. I give you the glory and thank you for creating me with a good set of brains".

"Jesus, listen to all the disrespectful things they're saying about our principal. I just thought of a put-down that's really funny. Keep me from using it to get a good laugh at his expense".

You ask the Lord for guidance continually: "God, tell me how to use my summer. I know You didn't appreciate all the time I spent playing video games last year". "Lord, I feel so awkward when I'm introduced to someone new. Please give me the words to say and make me feel at ease".

Remember that "serving the Lord" is doing what *He* tells us, not using our own plans. Keep praying, "Lord, show me how to teach my Sunday school class the way *You* want me to". "Dylan is such a pagan, and I really don't know how to witness to him. Give me your words".

You allow God to influence all your attitudes. “Lord, I feel stressed out and depressed. Give me your peace”. “God, I desperately need your love for Robbie – and a bunch of other hard-to-like humans I have to deal with”. “Jesus, supply me with the patience I need to wait in this long line, without dishonoring your name”. “God, help me to do this unfair assignment as a love gift to you”.

The biblical recommendation to “pray continually” (1 Thessalonians 5: 17) relates to this constant returning of your mind to Jesus. That is, when we don’t have to concentrate on a math test, or focus on winning a chess game, or think of how to answer a customer. An indispensable ingredient in a relationship is *time* – structured talks about specific topics, casual conversation, and just being together. Prayer includes all three.

Time with Jesus will change your desires and requests so they conform to God’s will. But if you choose not to pray, you’ll be robbing yourself of many specific things that prayer could give you. But most of all you’ll be robbing yourself of the most important and beautiful relationship you could ever develop – friendship with God.



**CHAPTER 7**  
**The Family That Prays  
Together Lives  
Somewhere Else**



Danae noticed a freshly baked cherry pie on the counter and smelled the roast beef dinner in the oven. That could mean only one thing: Grandma Brewer was coming for another visit. That always brought tension between her parents because Grandma monopolized the TV, delivered long take-it-from-someone-who's-lived-a-long-time lectures, followed with it's-tough-to-be-an-old-widow sob stories. Danae's mother was forced to give all her attention to her grandmother.

When her usually easygoing dad heard the news, he exploded. "Marilyn, your mother is *not* coming. She was just here for a month. And this week the World Series starts and I plan to watch every game. If your mother shows up, I'm going to my brother's place and I won't be back until she leaves".

"But mother's lonely and she needs us. How can you be so cruel?" responded Danae's mom.

Her father was angrier than she'd ever seen him. "If you were going to be such a 'Mamma's girl' all your life, you should have never gotten married. Your mother is the most inconsiderate woman I know. She comes in and just takes over. And it isn't good for our kids to have her boss them around all the time".

"But Henry", she pleaded desperately, "she's already on the plane. She can't go to a hotel".

"Well, I'm going to the bedroom to pack my suitcase", Danae's father yelled as he stormed up the stairs.

Her mom began to cry. Just then the phone rang. Danae answered it and was shocked to hear that her thirteen-year-old brother, Dale, had been picked up by the police. "Your brother and several other boys have been caught shoplifting", she was informed. "He'll be at the police station until your parents pick him up".

Temporarily, her parents forgot their fight and left in their minivan. Danae glanced at the clock. Oh great. She was due at play practice in twenty minutes! Turning off the oven, she quickly made a take-along roast beef sandwich, touched up her makeup, and started off for school.

By the time the ten o'clock news rolled around, five unhappy people were seated in front of the TV eating cherry pie and ice cream. Grandma was still bristling because she'd had to take a cab and wait outside for forty-five minutes. It was all very awkward because no one was willing to tell her the real reason why she'd been forgotten. Danae's father knew he couldn't leave home when Dale needed him so badly, and had

resigned himself to wait out “the ordeal”. Her mom felt a migraine coming on, and Danae wished she could trade her family for another one.

Have you ever felt that way? It’s possible that the problems Danae sees as major seem insignificant to you. Perhaps your father is an abusive alcoholic, or your mom has mental health problems, or your sister is a drug addict, or your grandmother is dying of cancer. Maybe your home is a place where there is so much turmoil that you stay away as much as possible. In any case, “Family problems” are always at the top of any list of young people’s concerns.



## **IF YOU “DON’T HAVE A PRAYER” FOR YOUR FAMILY – GET ONE!**

No matter how good or how difficult your family situation is you can make a positive difference by talking to God about your parents and brothers and sisters. Your prayers can remove the blindfolds and the chains placed by Satan, and give each family member the opportunity to choose what is right. And even if *all* of them refuse to obey God now, through your prayer God will supply you with the strength to live in victory in the middle of some incredibly chaotic circumstances.

Here are some things to pray for:

***Thank God for your family.*** Your genuine gratitude for your parents and all they do for you needs to be expressed in your prayers – and to your mom and dad directly. Thank God that your mom made spaghetti, that your dad took an interest in your biology report, that your mom bought you a sweater (even though it’s not what you’d have picked), that your parents paid the light bill, that they gave you a ride to church, that your mom cleaned up the mess you made, and that your dad was in a good mood all weekend. The Bible commands us to “Sing and make music in your heart to the Lord, always giving thanks to God the Father for everything”. If you practiced that around your house, a lot of things would change.

Even if your parents have done horrible things to you, learn to thank God just for the fact that they gave you life. Remember, God does have a spectacular plan for your life, and will use your family situation for His glory. I know a famous youth speaker whose divorced parents with their multiple marriages have made “though my father and mother forsake me, the Lord will receive me” one of his favorite verses (see Psalm 27: 101). When as a junior high kid he accepted Christ, he had to sleep in his mother’s

bar because his stepfather didn't even want him in the house! But what God has done for him *because* of his background has made his ministry very effective. Kids with problems listen to him because he's proof that what he says is true. Thank God now for how He'll use the tough things in your family situation to make you more effective for His kingdom.

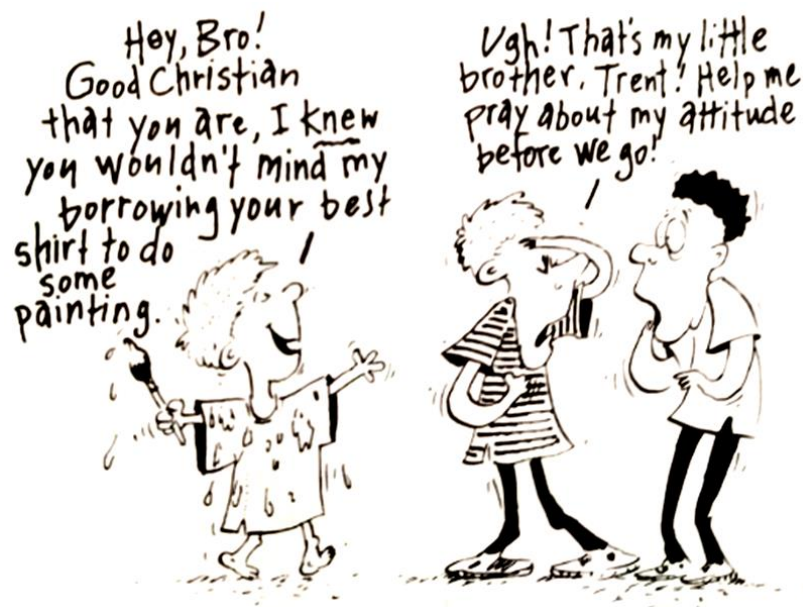
***Meet each need or crises with prayer.*** If your mom just found out that she had cancer, your dad got fired, your fifteen-year-old sister is pregnant, your home was leveled by a tornado, or you've tried everything and you still can't get along with your stepdad, then it's a let's-get-out-the-heavy-prayer-artillery-so-we-can-do-something-about-it situation.

First of all, you should pray about the problem personally. Next, enlist some trusted prayer warriors to help you bring the situation before God. Be open to letting God lead you to approach the family member who is hurting most to pray with him or her: "Dad, I'd like to pray with or for you about finding a new job". "Mom, let's pray about your next doctor's appointment". You're not likely to be turned down. Even non-Christians usually appreciate that someone cares enough to pray about their problems. If it's appropriate, take the initiative in getting your whole family together to pray about the situation.

It's good to know that our God is equipped to deal with even the most impossible messes, but don't save your prayers for a 911 thing. Prayer is meant to be as natural as breathing, and "used as directed" it brings "the God who sees when a sparrow falls and counts the hairs on your head" into action, even for those no-big-deal dilemmas. Pray when your mom heads for the mall in a huff, and you're afraid her overspending might cause your parents to fight again. Pray when your little brother gets on your nerves and when your dad criticizes your new haircut.

Pray when your brother wears your shirt without permission, and your mom doesn't have time to cook for a week. Pray when your sister loses your phone for days, and your dad gets on your case with his *when-I-was-a-boy* lectures. Pray when you get blamed for something you didn't do, and when your mom had a bad day and takes it out on you. Little things won't ruin your day *if* you learn to pray about them.

***Pray for family relationships.*** Living under the same roof always presents some unique challenges. The recipe for family unity requires a constant calling out to God for wisdom. "If any of you lacks wisdom, he should ask God, who gives generously to



all without finding fault, and it will be given him” (James 1: 5). This is a *promise*, and you'll need to put it into practice in order to get along with your family. Don't accept the myth that any normal teenager will be at odds with his or her parents. If you decide to *pray daily* for God to show you how to honor your father and your mother, your friends will be surprised by the lack of conflict in your family.

Here are some of the specifics you need to know. Proverbs 16: 1 states, “From the Lord comes the reply of the tongue” – if we *ask Him* before speaking! Your big mouth could use a little prayed-for wisdom, right? If you allow God to teach you His a-gentle-answer-turns-away-wrath method of talking to parents, a lot of conflict will be avoided. When your parents are unfair, pray for them and for your reaction. Keep asking God to give your parents wisdom – raising you isn't an easy job!

Pray for your parents' marriage, even if things appear to be going smoothly at the moment. Pray that they'll learn to love unconditionally and truly respect each other. If you live with a single parent, ask God to keep your mom or dad from any remarriage that is not God's will for your family. Because you know where your parents struggle and what faults they have, you're in a unique position to pray for them. Ask God to give them strength and to show them their blind spots. Most of all pray that your parents will obey God and put Him first in their lives.

Only the Lord knows how to help you get along with your brother or sister. It's time you asked *His* advice – and be willing to listen if He first starts showing you where *you* need to change. Ask God to show you how to be a blessing and a positive influence on your brothers and sisters.



***Pray for the salvation of family members.*** If you haven't already noticed, those in your family who don't know Jesus will be put-off by sermons, by windy explanations of Christian doctrine, and by hints that they should attend church with you. The ***hardest*** people to witness to are your own family members! But you can pray for them. Nobody can escape the effects of your prayer by leaving, changing the subject, or arguing. It's really better to spend a lot more time talking to God about your family than talking to your family about God.

***Pray when someone in your family deeply hurts you.*** Because they're the closest to us, our own relatives can hurt us more deeply than anyone else. Prayer is a most wonderful way of dealing with these wounds. When we are disillusioned, hurt, or even horrified at the words or actions of a family member, the greatest lesson we can learn is to ***keep our eyes on Jesus!*** He will never give us wrong advice. And He will never withhold all we need to cope with our family problems. (1) These prayer steps are designed to help you pray through family hurts.

(1) *What Happens When We Pray for Our Families*, Evelyn Christenson (USA Victor Books, 1992) p. 85.

### **Prayer No. 1 – “Lord, change me”.**

Probably no one is so spiritual they can be treated unjustly and immediately pass God's actions-and-attitude check! For that reason, we have to start by asking forgiveness for what *we* did or said or thought wrong. Verbal retaliation, bitterness, anger, and wishing something bad for the person who hurt you are a few of the things you may discover.

### **Prayer No. 2 – “Lord, help me forgive”.**

“I can't forgive that” are the words spoken not only by the abandoned kid, the child of an alcoholic, the incest victim, or the teenager who is always made to feel he can do nothing right – they also come from the person who has just been told she doesn't amount to anything, and the guy who's been grounded for a month for something his brother did. ***Forgiving doesn't come naturally.***

In most cases, real forgiveness is impossible using purely human resources. But as Christians we're commanded, “Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you” (Ephesians 4: 32). God is willing to give us forgiveness-power. Remember, you forgive with your ***will***, not with your emotions. Nobody can completely control his emotions, and it takes a while for your feelings to



catch up with your decision to forgive. When you experience vivid flashbacks of the pain that person caused you, pray something like this: “Lord, you know I've decided to forgive. Help me to *act* and *talk* and *think* like I've forgiven”.

### **Prayer No. 3 – “Lord, help me comfort those who hurt me”.**

When people cause us pain, we automatically want to retaliate – and we're all too good at thinking up subtle and “spiritually acceptable” ways of doing it! Joseph is a great example for us. It would have been so easy for him to get back at his brothers, but he didn't. And instead of letting them sweat it out, he comforted his brothers by *promising* not to get even with them. Pray that God will guide you in every word you say to the person who hurt you.

### **Prayer No. 4 – “Lord, enable me to pray for those who hurt me”.**

Jesus tells us, “Pray for those who mistreat you” (Luke 6: 28). Sometimes we have to start with, “Lord, I don't feel like praying for \_\_\_\_\_ (the person who hurt you). Give me your prayer for that person, and the strength to pray it”. Pray that the person will come to know Jesus. If the person is a Christian, pray that God will meet each need in such a way that the problem that caused the person to lash out against you will no longer exist.

### **Prayer No. 5 – “Lord, help me to love”.**

God tells us to love our enemies – and sometimes they're our relatives. You'll have to start by asking for the love that God gives us in order to pass it on to the person who wounded you. An exciting way to experience the miracle of God giving you love for a difficult person is to perform a “love-by-faith experiment”. Ask God for love to give to the person who hurt you – and for a way of expressing the love that you don't feel emotionally. Then step out in faith. Ask God to help you do something extra nice for that person, like buying a little gift, sending a special card, offering to do work so the person can rest – whatever God shows you to do. It's amazing how God will bless that going-the-extra-mile kind of love.

### **Prayer No. 6 – (If the person who hurt you is a Christian) “Lord, enable us to pray together”.**

If it seems right, set up a time to pray *with* the family member who hurt you.

### **Prayer No. 7 – “Lord, call others to pray for me – and us”.**

There are times when we're so shattered by what a family member said or did that, we can't even pray about it. The words just won't come. Then pray that God will cause others to pray for the situation.

### **Prayer No. 8 – “Lord, break the victim chain”. (2)**

Sometimes the resentment or the hurt isn't caused by a single action or some angry words – it's what the person *is* that affects you. Examples include a workaholic father who never has time for you, an emotionally ill mother who depends on you rather than providing security, or a chemically dependent, and therefore unreliable, parent. You feel like a victim – and if you check your family history, you'll discover *why* your mom or dad has problems. They're victims too – and it goes all the way back to Adam!

(2) The list of prayers to pray and some of the ideas are from Evelyn Christenson, *What Happens When We Pray for Our Families* (USA, Victor Books, 1992) pp. 70-85.

Prayer is the biggest factor in breaking this vicious cycle.

1. If you're a victim, get other Christians to pray for you.
2. Pray that God will give you the comfort, love, and courage to confront the problem.

3. Most important, pray for God's power to truly forgive the person who has hurt or is hurting you.

This is a prayer process that usually takes a lot of time. The deeper the hurt, the more time it will take. Often, emotional hurts need to be peeled off in layers. Each time a painful memory emerges, ask Jesus to heal the hurt and then *will* to forgive the person for that action. Keep on praying and forgiving – and thus become more and more free.

Whether your family is in complete chaos ... or just a little ragged around the edges ... prayer is the home improvement project you should undertake. Change your family through prayer.

If you don't have a prayer, your family will continue to struggle. When you pray, you *will* see change!

# CHAPTER 8

## Figuring Out Friendships



Mara went through the school lunch line like a robot, and automatically headed for the table where she and her friends gathered each noon. As she sat down, she breathed an eyes-open, “thanks, God, for the food”, – which did nothing to interrupt Winonna’s detailed account of her spending Saturday night at Eric’s house.

“When your mom called to check if you were at my place”, added Barb, “I told her you were in the shower”.

“Well, that wasn’t anything”, continued Winonna. “Eric’s folks came home from Dallas before they were expected. Eric wasn’t supposed to have any girls in the house, so I had to hide under the bed until Eric gave me the all-clear”.

DeNora told about the party she’d been to, and how everyone had gotten bombed. Michelle bragged about the designer blouse she’d shoplifted, and Jeannie reported that she’d won her big fight with her mother. Mara didn’t dare mention her weekend. The girls would have ridiculed anyone who attended youth group on Saturday night and went to church twice on Sunday.

When the bell rang, Mara and Winonna headed for Phys Ed. In the locker room Mara noticed tears in Winonna’s eyes. “What’s the matter?” she asked.

“I just realized that I’ve been forgetting to take my birth control pills”, she replied, “and I’m scared”.

Mara wanted to tell her that Jesus could change her lifestyle, but the words just wouldn’t come.

After her last class, Brent walked her to her locker and invited her to a Death Metal concert. He was a nice enough guy and a good student. Mara never dreamed he was into anything like that. She should have given him a firm word of testimony, but instead she politely thanked him and said she’d already made other plans. Since she had to go directly to the Dairy Queen where she worked, it was easy to escape without talking anymore ...

But the business-as-usual evening she had counted on to help her focus on something more positive than school – well, it just didn’t happen. As usual the place was full of loud teenagers – most of whom she knew. And then four squad cars drove up, and one of the guys was arrested as a suspect in a gang-related shooting!

When she got home, Mara called Jill, her best friend from church. She recounted the day’s experiences, but Jill’s only comment was, “That’s the real world. You’ve

lived a very sheltered life”. It was one more proof that, since Jill had started dating a guy who didn’t even believe in God, her ideas had changed radically. In fact, her account of their weekend would have easily made a script for a sleazy soap opera. Mara realized that the Jill she used to know was disappearing.

When she hung up, Mara felt like crying. She didn’t like being out-of-it all the time. But the worst part was feeling helpless to reach out to people she cared about. She wished it were all a world’s-gone-mad nightmare from which she could escape.

Have you ever felt like Mara – even a little? Has it ever occurred to you that you have the power to *do* something for your friendships, for the atmosphere of your school, and for your workplace? Prayer can literally change your world. Keep reading and you’ll get some information on how to apply prayer-power to the area of friendships.



## **YOUR FRIENDS NEED YOU**

You didn’t get to choose your parents, the color of your skin, your IQ, your natural talents, or the socio-economic group into which you were born. Yes, you can make decisions to do your best, to forgive, and to accept what you cannot change – and they are ingredients for success. There are other limitations you cannot remove. But when it comes to choosing friends, you have a great deal of freedom. Even if your parents are strict, you can basically hang out with the kids you want to be friends with.

Because peer pressure has such a great influence on you, deciding whom your friends will be is one of the most important decisions of your teenage years. ***It’s something you need to pray about a lot.***

1. ***Ask God for good Christian friends – and don’t give up until that prayer is answered.*** Someone has said that you shouldn’t pray anything unless you’re willing to be used in the answering of that prayer. It may take time and effort to find a good Christian friend. If that person doesn’t live close to you, attend your school or your church, getting together won’t be easy. Remember that solid Christian friendship is worth the investment in time and energy.
2. ***Decide that non-Christians won’t be your intimate friends.*** “Blessed is the man who does not walk in the counsel of the wicked or stand in the way of sinners or sit in the seat of mockers” (Psalm 1: 1). The Bible teaches us that taking advice from non-Christians or spending a lot of time listening to them make fun of

everyone isn't right. (Obviously, everyone will have casual friends who aren't Christians.) If you have really close friends who aren't Christians, ask God how He wants you to make them into casual friends. (God is *very* smart and He can show you how to do it in a way that won't cause hard feelings.) Also ask God if there's a friendship that is such a bad influence that He wants you to end it immediately. Be willing to obey.

3. *If you have trouble making friends, keep praying that God will help you overcome shyness; learn to be the unselfish, giving person whom others would choose as a friend; and give you the right words to say.*
4. *Ask God whom you should hang around with at school, church, and work.*
5. *Don't make plans or decide what you'll do on Saturday – or any day – without praying about it.* Just oozing into whatever happens to be going on gets a lot of good kids into trouble. Put some prayer and planning into your social life. You'll like the results.

What should you do when some guy or girl you like becomes the “big zing”?

A. Call your friend to report that you have a crush on the “big zing”?



B. Set a trap for the “big zing” so you can at least engage him or her in conversation and try to make a fabulous impression?



C. *Pray! If young people would learn to pray first and pray a lot before doing anything else, so many dating problems could be avoided.* Here are things to pray for:

- Pray for the “big zing”. Ask God to bless him or her and pray for God's will for that person.
- Pray for God's will in your life. Get to the place where you can honestly tell God that you don't even want to go out with the “big zing” if it's not His will. Ask the Lord for His wisdom and His will every time you're going to see or talk to the person.
- Pray for God's will for your future: Every day pray for God's strength and wisdom so you can remain chaste until marriage. And ask God to keep you from falling for some guy or girl if dating that person would not bring you closer to God.



## **YOUR WORLD NEEDS BIG-TIME PRAYER**

Pray for your school, your principal, your teachers, and your fellow students. Better yet, get a group of fellow Christian students together to pray for your school. Pray for the atheist social studies teacher. Pray that the sex-education program will be changed. Pray that you'll be able to get a Bible study club started. Pray that the kid whose locker is next to yours will learn how to form a sentence without using profanity. Decide to change your workplace as well. Pray for the crabby boss, the customers, the cashier who never says “hi” to you, and the ability to mop the floor well enough the first time.

The people you know are passing through some heavy-duty problems, and the majority of them don't know Jesus personally. **IT'S EASY TO FORGET THAT THE BEST WAY TO HELP ANYONE IS TO PRAY. AND THE MOST IMPORTANT THING YOU CAN PRAY IS THAT THEY'LL ACCEPT JESUS AS SAVIOR.**

Andrew Murray writes this about George Mueller, the great man of prayer who received everything needed to support thousands of orphans through prayer: “Mr. Mueller stated that he believed the Lord had given him more than 30,000 souls in answer to prayer”. (1) Mueller attributed his success in praying for the salvation of others to these five things:

1. ***Don't doubt that it's the Lord's will to save them.*** “God our Savior ... wants all men to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth” (1 Timothy 2: 3-4). I like

the way Ronald Dunn describes what prayer for an unsaved person does. A person without Jesus is in “the trap of the devil, who has taken them captive to do his will” (2 Timothy 2: 26). A person like this is often so deceived that he or she doesn’t even want to escape. “In praying for a lost person”, said Mueller, “we are not forcing the person’s will – we are freeing his will from Satan. ... Before any person can be saved, the blinding and binding of the devil must be overcome”. (2)

2. ***Plead for their salvation in the name of Jesus and on His merits alone.*** “You may ask me for anything in my name, and I will do it” (John 14: 14).
3. ***Always firmly believe in the willingness of God to hear your prayer.*** “Therefore, I tell you, whatever you ask for in prayer, believe that you have received it, and it will be yours” (Mark 11: 24).
4. ***Have no unconfessed conscious sin.*** “If I had cherished sin in my heart, the Lord would not have listened” (Psalm 66: 18).
5. ***Persevere in prayer.*** “I have persevered in believing prayer for more than 52 years for some”, declared Mueller, “and shall continue until the answer comes”. (3)

(1) *The Believer’s Prayer Life*, Andrew Murray (Minneapolis, MN; 1983) p. 107.

(2) *Don’t Just Stand There, Pray Something*, Ronald Dunn (Nashville, TN; 1992) p. 121.

(3) *The Believer’s Prayer Life*, Andrew Murray (Minneapolis, MN; 1983) pp. 107-108.

We like instant results, and we miss out on a lot of answers to prayer because we give up before the answer comes. George Mueller’s life proved he knew what he was talking about. We would do well to learn from him.

Pray about the problems your friends have. Pray that Debbie’s parents will stop fighting, that Mandy’s brother will get off drugs, that Matt’s broken leg will heal correctly and quickly, and that Derek’s study habits will improve. Pray that Sarah will break up with her non-Christian boyfriend, that Cinda will stop criticizing the pastor, that Craig will start coming to Bible study, and that Kent will quit trying to live a double life. Pray *with* your friends when they’re facing tough situations. I have yet to have any person in serious difficulties turn me down when I ask, “Is it okay if I pray with you about this problem?” (I’ve never suggested it when the starving kid has just arrived at McDonalds with a carload of his friends – a little common sense is advised!)

Making your best friend into a prayer partner, or forming a small group of friends to pray for each other once or twice a week is a dynamite idea. If you can’t meet at

somebody's house, find a corner in a park, or use a vacant room after school. Telephone prayer meetings work out very well, too. Nothing can do more to deepen a friendship than praying together. (The unity you feel in prayer is so real that dating couples need to exercise extreme caution to avoid sexual temptation immediately afterward. Inviting other people to join you, praying by phone, and prayer breakfasts are some possibilities for dealing with this reality.)

You will enjoy a smoother relationship when you talk to God together. And you and your friends will start to see exciting answers to your prayers. When Chuck's dad accepts Christ, or Carla gets an A on a chemistry test, you may just want to throw a party!



## PRAY FOR THOSE IRRITATING PEOPLE, TOO

Part of praying for the people who surround us is praying for those who give us *problems*. If we can look past the present pain, we can catch some of the excitement in this kind of prayer.

Through prayer you can receive the emotional resources to love an enemy, to forgive an unfair teacher, or to go the extra *hundred* miles in restoring a relationship. Even though you'll experience the hurt, the sense of rejection, and the sadness that unthinking or bad-intentioned people cause, through prayer you can take advantage of the healing God offers.



I like what Wesley Duewel says about praying for a difficult person.

1. Focus on God, thanking Him for the plan God has for his or her life.
  2. Thank God for the person. Don't tell God how bad the person is. Ask God to frustrate Satan's plan for the person and strengthen every good personality trait.
- (4)

(4) *Mighty Prevailing Prayer*, Wesley L. Duewel (Grand Rapids, MI; 1990) p. 229.

Friendship can be fantastic. But sometimes friends can be the source of pain. Job, for example, found his friends putting him down when he most needed their support.

Try praying for your friends. Ask God for wisdom in *choosing* friends, and for the ability to be a good friend. Ask for the wisdom necessary to avoid the pitfalls of friendship. Get God's help in forming good friendships.

A good Christian friend is one of life's greatest treasures. A friend who prays for you is invaluable. You can be that friend for someone else, and I can assure you that God wants to provide friends like that for you.

# CHAPTER 9 The Church Nobody Prayed For



Terry was still in a state of shock. She didn't want to believe it. Pastor Joe had always run such a fantastic program for the young people. Their meetings had variety and spark. Ski retreats, picnics in the mountains, and annual volleyball tournament, days at the beach, the Scripture memorization contest. All this had made her Christian friends from other churches envious. Besides, Pastor Joe had always been so caring and so giving. He had a way of making each young person feel special. Easygoing and approachable, he gave wise advice to the many kids who shared their problems with him. But now ...

According to several people in the congregation, there was indisputable evidence that Pastor Joe – a married man with two children – was having an affair with a coed from the college and career group. The senior pastor was defending Pastor Joe, but a sizable part of the congregation was demanding his resignation.

The church was dividing into two sides – those who supported Pastor Joe and those who wanted him to leave. Terry could feel the tension in the air every time she entered the building. A lot of parents wouldn't allow their kids to attend youth group, and the atmosphere was heavy. She thought she should show up because she was almost positive that Pastor Joe was innocent and she felt sorry for him. But doubts plagued her and she didn't get anything out of the meetings. Sunday mornings were tense, and after the service hardly anyone talked. There seemed to be no end to the rumors that somehow got passed around.

Then the town newspaper decided to print the story. Now Terry felt like she was labeled a hypocrite by everyone at school, just because she happened to attend the particular church she did. She felt embarrassed. She had also invited Julie to the youth group several times and thought she was about to accept Christ – but what could Terry say now?

Terry was confused and disillusioned. How could she discover the truth? Had the youth pastor who had taught her so much about the Bible *really* fallen into sin – and then denied it? Or had the mother of the boy sent home from the last retreat for breaking the rules *made up* the whole thing, just to get revenge? Were the reports of those who'd claimed to have seen the two together all fake?

Even worse, there were things she knew to be fact. Three families, including the Bakers, had left the church without any hard evidence that the allegations were true. Brittany Baker had been her best friend, but Terry's refusal to condemn Pastor Joe until she was sure of the facts strained their relationship. They talked a little at school,

but things just weren't the same anymore. Two of her mom's friends had stopped speaking to each other because of their difference of opinion on the issue. Everyone heard about the church business meeting that lasted until midnight where many harsh and angry words were exchanged. The constitution required a seventy percent affirmative vote for important decisions, but the congregation was split right down the middle. So, there was no way of immediately resolving the situation.

Then things got even worse. Because Terry's father had been on the committee that recommended calling Pastor Joe, he was accused of not checking his references closely enough. His ulcer flared up again. Terry's fourteen-year-old brother, Tim, refused to go to church anymore, and her parents agreed that until things changed it wouldn't be wise to force the issue.

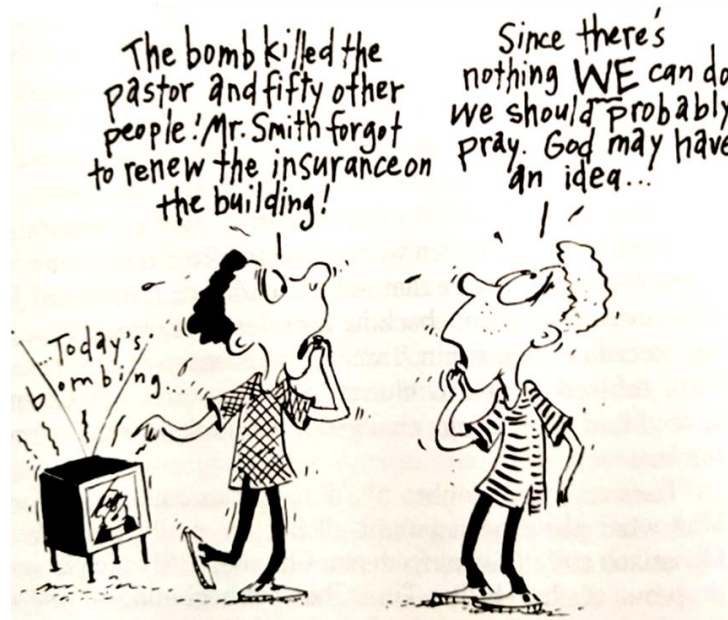
Terry faced doubts she'd never encountered before. Was what she'd been taught all her life really true? Were Christians any different from non-Christians? Should she just drop out of church like Tim? She was beginning to understand what people meant when they talked of "losing their faith". But what could she do?



## A PRAYER PROJECT FOR RADICAL CHRISTIANS

There *is* something Terry can do. She can pray, and she can get others to pray with her. Prayer will get results. Because behind every church fight and disagreement among God's people lurks the devil. First, he attempts to get Christians to sin. Then he tries to persuade others to react wrongly to that sin – spreading gossip, using it to justify their own inappropriate behavior, refusing to forgive, or defending wrongdoing. Creating conflict among Christians seems to be a top priority with the devil. But with enough heavy-duty, heartfelt prayer, things will change.

The problem is this: Part of the demonic strategy is to get people so upset, so shocked, and so mixed-up that they feel they can't pray. It's necessary to call the devil's bluff, claim the promises of Scripture, and pray and *pray* and *pray*. But don't wait for some bombshell to explode before you pray for your church.



We say, "An ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure". But we probably don't realize how effective prayer is in wrecking the devil's plans and keeping him at a distance. (If we did, we'd pray more!) I once heard a pastor put it this way: "Some will say, 'We prayed and look what happened.' Just imagine how things would be if we hadn't prayed". E. M. Bounds explains, "Prayer blesses all things, brings all things, believes all things, and prevents all things". (1)

(1) *A Treasury of Prayer*, E. M. Bounds, compiled and condensed by Leonard Ravenhill (Minneapolis, MN; 1989) p. 188.

What kind of contribution do you make to your church? Usually the people who show up a lot, give some money, and participate in a couple of special activities are considered "good church members". My guess is that by that measurement you're a great asset to your church. But if your value to your congregation was gauged by how much you *prayed* for your church; how would you rate?

It's true that prayerlessness is a sin. But it doesn't do any good to feel bad, grit your teeth, try harder, fail and then feel even more guilty. One of the root reasons for not praying is that we need "a deeper conviction that God must and will do all". (2) Jesus is the vine and we are the branches. When branches disconnect from the vine to bustle busily about "in the work of the Lord", nothing of eternal value is accomplished. It's prayer that shows us what God wants us to do and gives us the spiritual resources to do it well.

(2) *Waiting on God*, Andrew Murray (Springdale, PA; 1981) p. 80.



The cool thing is that we can also direct God's guidance to other branches by our prayers. Leaders *must* have the prayers of others to make wise decisions and to withstand the pressure of heavy responsibility. When tragedy or emotionally devastating experiences make prayer nearly impossible for one “branch”, the others can send emergency aid by means of prayer. Every church is meant to operate like that. Those who pray most contribute untold power and health to the body of Christ. The incredibly important thing you can do for your church is pray.



## YES, I BELIEVE THAT ... BUT ...

We may even believe in prayer, but it's so easy to assume our ideas are so good we don't need to check with God. What arrogance – to decide that we're so smart we don't need to ask for God's wisdom! How foolish – to think that your excellent planning and well-presented program will do more for people than our prayers! There is a misplaced faith in *self* and it causes us to assume that what we can do for people is more important than what God can do for people through our prayers.

God taught me a beautiful lesson on this subject. When a guy in the high school Bible club I worked with joined the army and left home without even graduating, I felt very concerned for his spiritual welfare. Because *I* couldn't do a thing, I really prayed for him and got anybody else I could find to pray also. It was amazing. Every place he went, there was a fine Christian chaplain who took a very special interest in him, and his faith got stronger. (I should have spent that much time praying for those who were still in the Bible club!)

Andrew Murray says it this way: “If we will only believe in God and His faithfulness, intercession (praying for others) will become to us the very first thing we take refuge in when we seek a blessing for others. It will be the very last thing for which we cannot find time. Also, it will become a thing of joy and hope”. (3)

(3) *The Ministry of Intercessory Prayer*, Andrew Murray (Minneapolis, MN; 1981) p. 33.

Here's what to do:

***Pray for your pastor and other spiritual leaders.*** Someone has quipped, “If you don't like your pastor, change him by praying for him”. Instead of criticizing his weaknesses, use them as a basis for your prayers. I heard the testimony of a man who, along with two other people, transformed their church by praying. Their pastor even

started preaching biblical doctrine! Your pastor has an *extremely* difficult job. Being a minister is the most stressful occupation there is. Your spiritual leaders need your prayer support.

***Pray for:***

- God's wisdom in leading your church.
- God's protection for their health, finances, and families.
- A strong devotional life with a proper balance between prayer and Bible study.
- Special situations or needs.

***Pray for spiritual unity among the people of your church.*** The Bible tells us that “as iron sharpens iron, so one man sharpens another” (Proverbs 27: 17). Things like having to explain an idea more clearly, having to answer a friend’s objections, or having to listen to someone who disagrees with us – these oppositions force us to think more clearly. Proverbs 18: 17 adds, “The first to present his case seems right, till another comes forward and questions him”. People will never think totally alike but they can learn to work together in harmony and love in spite of some differences. For example, someone has observed that young people are the engine of the church and older people are the brakes. Obviously, both are necessary and once there is a good balance, the church can move ahead safely at the right pace.

When Jesus prayed for “those who will believe in me through their (the apostles’) message”, which includes us today, He was mainly asking for this: “That all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you” (John 17: 20-21). Praying for unity among God's people is biblical. We pray that Ed will recover, that we’ll raise enough money for the building program, and that we’ll have a good attendance at the concert, and these are all valid petitions. But we forget to pray for unity, which is probably the most critical prayer request for any church.

***Pray:***

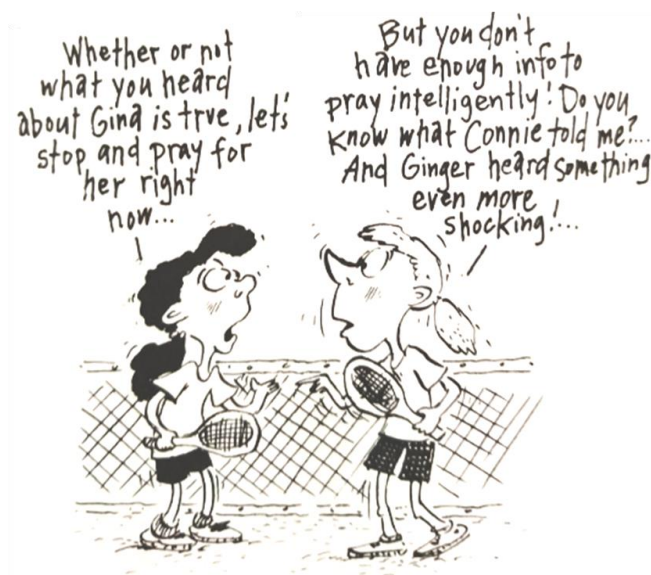
- That any rumors, gossip, or slander will be stopped and that the truth will come to light.
- That God will replace a spirit of criticism with a spirit of thankfulness.
- That if there is some person whose only intention is to cause trouble it will become apparent, so that appropriate action can be taken.
- That people will stand for issues on which there can be no compromise such as correct biblical doctrine.

***Pray for a spirit of evangelism, and caring for other people.*** Start with yourself. Make a list of the people you can influence for Christ – friends, teachers, neighbors, people at work, or team members. Pray for them regularly. Ask God to help you think of ways you can show these people that you care about them as individuals. Pray for opportunities to share Christ with these people personally, and to invite them to your church. Pray that God will help you to have the courage to leave your comfortable clique, so you can be friendly with new people and help those with problems. This kind of praying will change your lifestyle, make you less self-centered, and give you some new faith adventures. Once the let's-win-others-for-Jesus-and-make-new-people-feel-wanted-and-cared-for-in-our-church virus has infected you, you're ready to spread it to others.

***Pray:***

- That those in your church will reach out to the lost people around them.
- That others will invite new people to church.
- That people at your church will sacrifice in order to welcome new people and help those in need.

***Pray for your youth group.*** Are your meetings boring and repetitive? Pray. Do the same kids always do all the work? Pray (and don't complain)! Are kids losing interest? Pray. Are there some kids who live double lives, but the youth pastor considers them to be spiritual giants? Pray. Is your youth leader out of it? Pray. Is he irresponsible and trying too much to act just like a teenager? Pray.



“Did you hear that Tina had an abortion?” shouldn’t be followed by, “Seeing her and Rick together made me think that something like that was bound to happen”. Decide to say nothing and to pray for her.

If someone says, “Bob’s father is accused of stealing from his boss”, a good response would be, “Whether or not this is true, he needs our prayers. Let’s stop to pray for him right now”. Instead of the what’s-our-youth-group-coming-to discussions, you could suggest an impromptu prayer meeting. Pray that the kids who have lost interest will start coming again. Pray for some creative ideas and for the kind of Bible teaching that will really ground you in the Word of God. Don’t share the prayer requests in such a way that they could make the gossip column. In delicate cases, just ask prayer for something general. Don’t disguise the spreading of a rumor or confidential information as a prayer request. Pouring your heart out to God about the problems in your youth group, completely confident that He will work out *His* solutions, is time well spent.

***Pick out a few people in your congregation – leaders and non-leaders – and pray specifically for them.*** Ask God to show you who to pray for. New converts especially need your prayers. Use the prayers of the apostle Paul as models of what to pray for. (See Philippians 1: 3-6, 2 Thessalonians 3: 1-3, Ephesians 1: 17-19, Ephesians 3: 14-19, Philippians 1: 9-11, and Colossians 1: 9-12.) Based on these passages, here are some of the things you should pray to build up other Christians:

1. Thank God for these people.
2. Pray that they will continue to follow Jesus and grow in their Christian lives.
3. Pray for their protection against deceitful people with bad intentions.
4. Pray for a bigger capacity to love – guided by God's wisdom and an ability to judge right and wrong.
5. Pray that they might understand how wonderful the hope we have in Christ really is.
6. Pray that they realize that the same power that raised Jesus from the dead works for us.
7. Pray for the inner strength that comes from the Holy Spirit.
8. Pray that nothing keeps them from receiving all of God's love and His ability to fill all the emptiness they feel.
9. Pray that they may know what God's will is.
10. Pray that their lives might be pleasing to God.



## EXPECT RESULTS

You can expect the results of this kind of praying to be better than any Lord-bless-all-the-people-in-my-church petitions. By the way, while you're at it, pray these things for yourself. It will be a welcome change from the letter-to-Santa format.

*Pray for the missionaries your church supports.*

- *Pray for their physical and emotional protection.* Lack of sanitation, unstable governments, exposure to great poverty, and the constant stress of dealing with people whose language and culture are different can be overwhelming.
- *Pray that they take the time to receive fresh resources from God through personal Bible study and prayer each day.* Because they are overworked and must constantly teach and give of themselves to others, their being in a position to receive from God is very important.



- *Pray for the Lord's wisdom to deal with the very complicated situations that invariably arise.*
- *Pray for the people with whom they work and for the special prayer requests they give you.*

If your church is in the middle of a crisis like that of Terry's congregation, it desperately needs prayer heroes who are willing to take on a tough fight. It's one of the hardest kinds of praying, because you're so emotionally involved. Sometimes it means talking to God about Christians who seem like traitors to the faith and whose sinful

actions directly affect you. Be one of those unsung prayer heroes who helps save your church, or takes the decisive action called for. These guidelines may be helpful.

1. ***Ask God to bring the truth to light.*** Realize that your own wounded emotions may prevent you from seeing things as they really are. Decide not to act until you've prayed enough to calm down. Ask God to expose all falsehood and to make the facts plain to all. Keep on praying for wisdom and God's guidance for each action you take.
2. ***Pray for problem people.*** Remember that your criticism, your shared critique of the situation, or your trying to straighten a few people out can do more harm than good. But your resolution to pray for them, believing that God is working regardless of what you see will bring about changes. Andrew Murray gives some powerful advice: "Set yourself to wait on God (pray with expectancy until the answer comes) on behalf His erring children. Instead of a tone of judgment or condemnation, of despondency or despair, realize your calling to wait upon God. If others fail in doing it, give yourself doubly to it. The deeper the darkness, the greater the need for approaching the only Deliverer". (4)

(4) *Waiting on God*, Andrew Murray (Springdale, PA; 1981) p. 76.

3. ***(In very unusual circumstances): Ask God if the spirit of compromise, the unscriptural doctrine, or the lack of obedience to God is so entrenched that you should worship elsewhere.*** If you live at home, you're under your parents' authority. If they insist that you go to church with them, God will bless you for obeying and honoring your father and mother. If you're not getting the spiritual nourishment you need from your church, ask God to lead you to a Bible study or youth activity that will meet that need. Keep praying that God will change the minds of your parents or change your church.

It's extremely dangerous to join the "church tramps" who have no loyalty to any local body of believers, or who find a new place to worship every time they discover something they don't particularly like. But there are churches whose teaching is so contrary to the Bible that you need to leave for the sake of your spiritual health. Only a lot of prayer can give you God's guidance in a situation like that.

4. ***Ask God if you're the person He's chosen to organize a small group of dedicated people to get together on a regular basis to pray for your church.*** When you get a green light, ask God to show you who to invite to your house, or to another home,

once or twice a week. Instead of discussing problems, it would be a good idea to start off by praising God (even if you have to sing along with a tape) and go right into prayer. Talking about how terrible things are will rob your faith and may even degenerate into gossip. Concentrating on the power and purpose of God equips you to pray expecting an answer.

If you'll take seriously the challenge to pray for your church, from heaven's point of view you'll be one of the most important people in your congregation.

You *can* keep your church from going the way of the churches nobody prayed for!

# CHAPTER 10

## Is the World Falling Apart or What?





It had been a close call, and Brock still felt shaky reliving his nightmare. He'd heard of carjacking's in the news but didn't expect anything like that in Kansas.

He'd been coming home at 11:30 on a Saturday night, when he stopped for a red light at a deserted intersection. Four guys with guns emerged from the shadows shouting, "Get out of the car or we'll shoot you!" They fired into the air a couple of times, and their leader barked, "If you get out now, you won't get hurt".

Brock obeyed, and watched them speed away in the used car his grandparents had recently given him.

Shaken and angry, he jogged down the road. His phone was still in the car. When he finally got to a restaurant where he could call the police, nobody seemed to care. "This makes four", said the officer, "or is it five? Lots of break-ins to investigate, too. Unless they just dump your car somewhere, this could take a while".

It was Monday morning, and the police had found nothing yet. Waiting for the school bus was such a drag – especially after six weeks of having wheels. If depression was an illness, Brock had a serious case.

The prospect of another week at his school made him feel even worse. Having transferred there from a Christian academy, he was no longer capable of being shocked. The predictable profanity, the continuous putdowns, aimed at right behavior, the constant cheating, and the conversations centering around sex and drugs and alcohol – all of it together was sickening. The newspapers were reporting on a horrendous scandal at city hall. Rumor had it that the mayor would be forced to resign. National politics seemed so corrupt that he could see why some people lost all respect for authority. Whatever had happened to the strong democratic country he read about in his history books? Where were the people who were willing to serve their country at personal sacrifice, people to whom integrity was more important than money, fame, or position?

The international scene only produced one wretched crisis after another. And he was tired of hearing from Christians that he was living in the end-times, and that the world was destined to become even worse. Sure, he knew he was saved and Jesus would come back again someday. But until then he still had to take chemistry tests and be graded on a curve, which the crib-sheet-crowd made impossible. He had to live in a society in which anyone could become the victim of violent crime, and be branded as a Neanderthal for holding Christians views. He figured that all he could do was hold out until Jesus returned, and he sure hoped that He would ... and soon.



## BREAKING THE SO-WHAT SYNDROME

Brock, like some many well-meaning Christians, is experientially ignorant of what prayer can do. He can quip that “prayer changes things”, recite a couple or three Bible verses affirming that God answers when we call to Him, and even be made to feel guilty for not praying more. But Brock still hasn’t caught the vision of the almost limitless possibilities of prayer.

Maybe the reason you don’t pray very much is because to you, like Brock, it seems like a futile effort. Maybe you’ve never been part of a prayer project that ended in a miracle. I can only tell you that your views would change forever if you learned how to become a true prayer warrior.

To those who *really* believe that a miracle-working God answers prayer, the change inside begins with the dawning of a new hope. We don’t have to endlessly discuss whether or not we’d steal food for a starving baby. Our God who provides has not changed. When the riot breaks out, the massive hurricane hits, or the country goes to war, we know that death for us would be the beginning of eternal life. And in *this* life the God we pray to can do *anything*.

Yes, God can judge a nation’s sin by sending hard times. And yes, the end-time prophecies of Scripture will come true. But prayer provides the “ark of safety” that God's people need to ride out the floods. Throughout history God has created islands of peace in the midst of chaos in answer to prayer. The situation in Egypt before the Hebrews’ exodus was horrendous. The occult was the state religion, and the stubborn and vindictive pharaoh was worshiped as a god. But Moses and others prayed. Not only were all the Israelites rescued, but “many other people went up with them” – those who chose to follow the living God rather than the religious system they had been taught.

And there are other biblical examples. In the times of the judges, “when everyone did as he saw fit” there was terrible moral decay and incredible pessimism. There wasn’t one God-fearing man with the courage to do something to try to rid the people of their enemies. But Deborah prayed and received God's prophetic word. God honored her prayer and used her to lead His people to victory. Elisha faced the fact that because the king of Israel didn’t follow God, the Syrians were trying to take over the country. Elisha was a hated and hunted man. But he prayed. God blinded the entire Syrian army, and caused the king of Israel to obey his orders to throw a big banquet for them.

The enemies never returned. It was God's plan to destroy the wicked Babylonians – and this eventually happened. But Daniel, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego prayed their way into important positions and out of dangers like fiery furnaces and lions' dens. Because of their influence and their prayers, even proud King Nebuchadnezzar exclaimed, "Praise be to the God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego".

Whenever God's people pray, there will be pockets of light in the darkness. Our prayers have no geographical limits and we can pray for religious freedom as far away as China, and as near as our own downtown.

God probably understood that we wouldn't know where to start on such a big project so He gave us a command through the apostle Paul: "I urge, then, *first of all* (italics mine) that requests, prayers, intercession and thanksgiving be made for everyone – for kings and all those in authority, that we live peaceful and quiet lives in all godliness and holiness" (1 Timothy 2: 1-2). Notice that our living in tranquility depends on our prayers. Many feel they are too busy to pray for those in authority, and so we all suffer. But you can make a difference. You can pray. Here are some suggestions.



## **A GREAT PLACE TO START**

1. ***Pray for your principal and your teachers.*** Pray that they will make wise and just decisions. Respect them. And pray that God will bring about a change from the attitude of rebellion on your campus to an atmosphere of respect for authority. Pray for safety, for a way to get all the Christian kids together for Bible study and prayer, and for well-taught classes. Pray against any parts of the curriculum that tear down Christian values. Prayer can change a school. I've seen it happen.



2. ***Pray for your boss, and the company you work for.*** Everywhere Joseph went he brought blessing. When he worked for Potiphar, his house prospered. He did a great job of managing the jail where he was unjustly sent, and eventually he helped the pharaoh survive a terrible famine. His prayer and his life left a tremendous influence. You can do the same. Pray for the “big-wheels” as well as your fellow employees. Ask God to make you a hard worker, one who doesn’t cheat your boss by sloughing-off on the job. Pray that you'll be a good example “working for the Lord, not for men”.
3. ***Pray for local government officials.*** Get the names of the people on your school board and pray for them specifically. Their decisions affect you! Pray for the superintendent of schools. Pray for your mayor, the members of the city council, other local leaders, and your governor and state legislators.

Right now, policemen and judges *especially* need your prayers. It’s very possible that God will lead you to pray for two or three of these people very specifically. If you'd like to live in a better part of town or in a safer neighborhood, prayer and actions motivated by prayer can bring this about without your having to move!

4. ***Pray for the leaders of your country.*** When Paul urged people to pray “for kings and all those in authority”, neurotic Nero, the Christian-killer, was on the throne of the Roman Empire. Whether or not you agree with your President, you are to pray for him. Pray that God will cause him to come under the influence of wise and godly men and that he will make decisions that are good for the country. Pray for

your Senators, your Congressmen, and for people in appointed positions, such as members of the Cabinet and the Supreme Court.

Most of all, pray that Christians will take God up on His promise: “If my people who are called by my name, will humble themselves and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven and will forgive their sin and will heal their land” (2 Chronicles 7: 14). Your prayers can help change your country.

5. ***Pray for the world leaders that God puts on your heart.*** Most likely you can't go traveling around the world – but you can pray for a Christian radio station for Muslims, for the salvation of warring tribesmen in Africa, and for a youth outreach in Moscow.

Lloyd Ogilvie gives this “recipe for intercession”:

- ***Listen carefully.*** (Just as God has assigned different ministries to people, He also divides up the prayer projects among His children. There are a million things you could pray for, but as you wait before Him, you'll sense that certain needs are the ones *you* should pray for most.)
- ***Ask boldly.***
- ***Trust completely.***
- ***Know that the answer is part of the tapestry of God's great plan.***

Years ago, a man in Britain put these prayer rules into practice. He prayed faithfully for the mission stations in China supported by his denomination. After his death, his diary revealed that each time he zeroed-in on a certain mission station by praying for revival in that place, God specifically answered. I bet his reward in heaven will be as great as that of any frontline missionary!

At most, you can only give money to a few worthy causes. But by your prayers you can have a part in evangelizing Los Angeles gang members, helping translate the Bible into a new language, or discipling new Christians in Brazil. Youth With a Mission can send you a great missionary prayer calendar. (Look them up online.)

Sometimes God will give someone a “prayer burden” for a certain country. In that case it’s fun to find out up-to-date information about that nation so your prayers can be right on target. Instead of letting world news get you down, you can pick out some things you feel God wants you to pray for and make a difference halfway around the world.

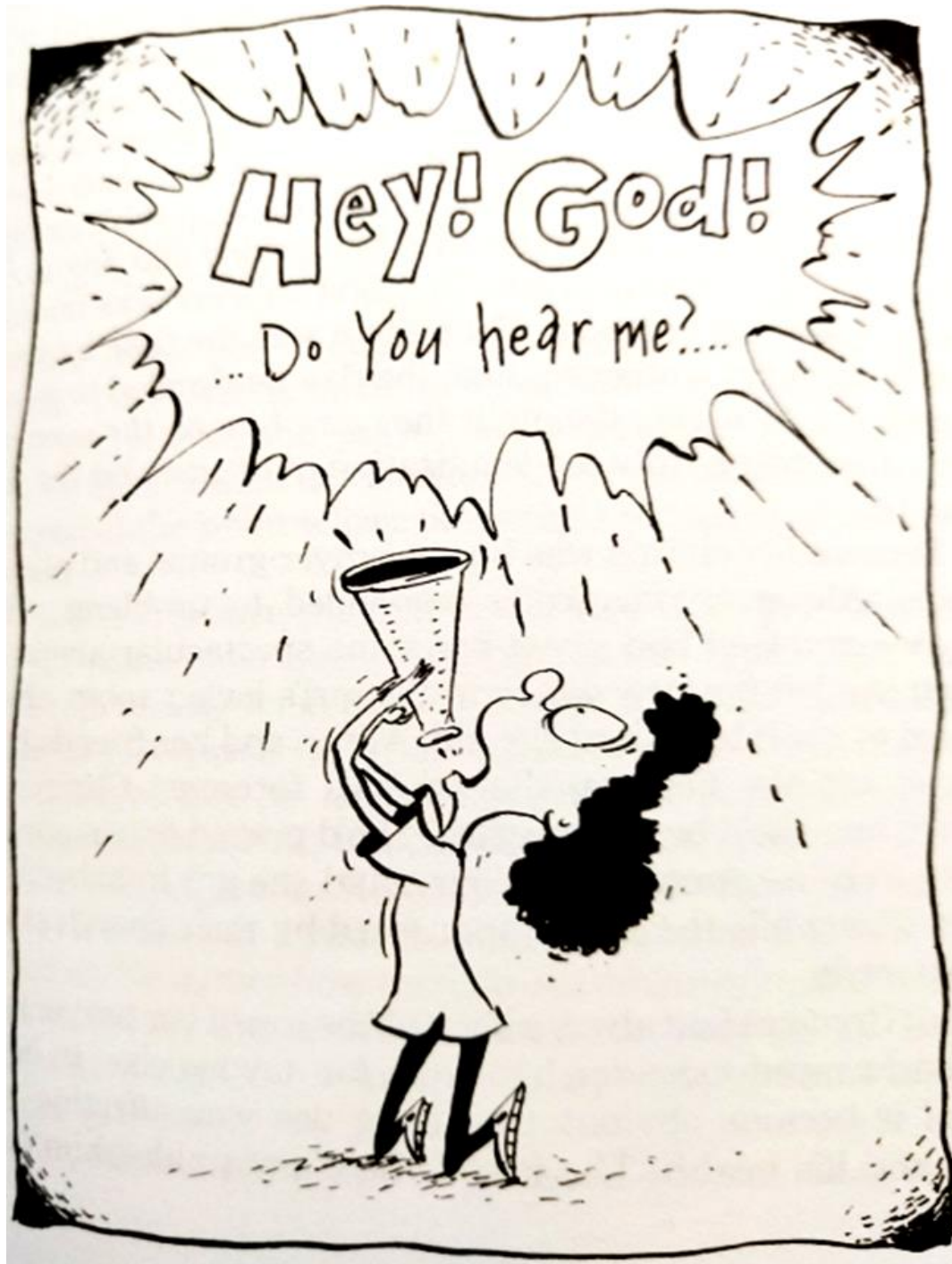
When there was a terrible series of gas explosions in Guadalajara, Mexico a lot of us prayed for that situation – especially that the tragedy would open the hearts of people there to the gospel. That time I got to see the results first-hand. A friend of mine from that city came to my apartment for a meal. She was still very shaken by the events, which to her resembles what she had been taught about the end of the world. Though she had been very resistant to the idea of accepting Jesus as her personal Savior, now she was very interested. When she prayed to receive Christ, it was exciting to be part of something I'd prayed for.

It's time you started breaking the so-what syndrome. You can change some things in this falling-apart world by "taking a stand" on your knees and asking God for His intervention. And once you start seeing some answers, you'll be hooked on prayer. Andrew Murray once declared that most people "don't know that God rules the world by the prayers of His saints". (1) But you're in on the secret so you can help change the world.

(1) *What Happens When We Pray for Our Families*, Evelyn Christenson (USA, Victor Books, 1992) p. 22

## CHAPTER 11

# What If You've Asked God 1487 Times and There's No Answer?



Alison looked at the generous bowl of chocolate fudge ice cream she had just scooped up. If she was ever justified in breaking her diet, it was today. But even eating didn't interest her that much. Her parents had said goodnight and disappeared into their bedroom. It was nearly midnight, but she knew that sleep was impossible.

The morning paper had carried the news. Her older brother had been arrested in connection with a drug deal and was in jail awaiting trial. What would her friends at school, their neighbors, her father's business associates, and the people at church think? What if Brendan was actually guilty and had to spend years behind bars? What had happened to Brendan? He had enjoyed all the advantages Alison had – fine Christian parents, good Sunday school training, Bible camps every summer, and a lot more. Yet his actions had provoked a long string of family crises. The first shocker was finding marijuana in his bedroom. Then there was the time he stole money from his mother's purse, the day he decided to move in with his girlfriend, the night they saw him on the evening news attending a rally for legalization of drugs, and the list went on.

Because her church was big on prayer groups and prayer chains, Alison automatically responded to problems with prayer – and God had given her some spectacular answers. When she left her new watch in the girl's locker room, she'd prayed to get it back, and she did. Alison and her friends had prayed for Ms. Ferrara, the school's foremost Christian-basher, and she'd been converted. She'd prayed for an opportunity to be a summer missionary, and she got to babysit in Costa Rica while the couple sponsored by their church studied Spanish.

But Brendan had always been at the top of her prayer list. She had prayed more for him than for anyone else. In high school it became obvious that drug use was affecting his mind and his health. The friends he chose guided him into more and more trouble, and he never graduated. Once he left home, he kept changing jobs and addresses. Alison's father suspected he stole to support his habit. Whenever she got more bad news, Alison had always prayed. She'd called the prayer chain and had gotten all of her friends to pray. She had been determined to bombard the gates of heaven until the victory was won.

But this time was different. It seemed as if all faith and hope were gone. Alison didn't even feel like praying. God seemed a million miles away. The more she prayed the worse things got. Giving up seemed like the only logical choice. ...



Sitting in her room, she looked into the empty bowl in her lap. The ice cream was gone but she had been too preoccupied to even enjoy it. The bottom had just dropped out. She'd told others, "No matter what, God is still in control". Now she didn't know if she believed that herself.



## CEMENT WALLS, DEAD ENDS, AND DENSE FOG

Just when you thought you learned something about prayer, has it ever seemed that God suddenly became silent? Have you prayed and prayed about an important situation, only to have things deteriorate into apparent hopelessness? Are you at the point where the actions of God make no sense to you?

I'd like to assure you that lots of very fine Christians have felt the same way. Even "spiritual giant" types have faced I-can't-go-on-any-longer crises. Maybe it's Satan's strategy to make us *feel* hopeless. When we can't *sense* God's presence and it *seems* like He isn't answering our prayers, the devil will launch an all-out attack. God *is* in control, and He *will* answer our prayers in His way and in His time. But our enemy is a master at trying to make us *feel* that God has abandoned us. No matter how terrible our circumstances, we don't have to fall for the devil's lie. But be on your guard. He has centuries of experience in deceiving people into thinking it's time to give up.

Yes, sin can put a barrier between you and God, but it's wrong to always assume, as Job's friends did, that your failures are the reason why things are apparently going wrong. God himself had declared Job a righteous man, but he felt that the Lord wouldn't answer him. Elijah had a big prayer winning-streak going, but Queen Jezebel's threat on his life so upset him that he didn't even pray for protection. He just assumed God wouldn't answer.

Maybe you've never felt unable to pray in faith knowing that God will come through for you. Let me forewarn you: you will probably experience this some time in your life, and more than once!

If you remember the following points, you'll be able to ride the where-is-God-in-this-situation rapids. And you'll be able to return to the gently flowing stream of seeing God work in response to your prayers.



## PAY ATTENTION TO “WHITE-WATER” WARNINGS

1. ***God is greater than your feelings.*** When your radio is dead, nothing has happened to the sound waves. The problem is your radio’s ability to receive them. If God seems far away and apparently your prayers don’t reach beyond the ceiling, God and His eternal principles remain the same. It’s your connection that needs readjusting.
2. ***All of God's ways are beyond human understanding.*** Prayer was God's idea and we shouldn’t expect to have it all figured out. I don’t understand how electricity works and why sometimes the lights go out. But, I don’t intend to let that keep me from enjoying my TV and my toaster! I know God will do great things in answer to my prayer, and that’s enough to make me want to pray.
3. ***Our confidence must be in God alone.*** J. Oswald Sanders, author of ***Prayer Power Unlimited***, asks this question: “Is our faith in ***prayer***, or in ***God?***” We often make our own problems by allowing pride to tell us we have prayer down pat. When there’s a tornado instead of the sunny skies you prayed for the day of the picnic, somebody’s sure to say, “See, it doesn’t do any good to pray”. That’s putting confidence in the ***prayer***, rather than in ***God***. We might have to do more to learn about prayer, but that shouldn’t shake our faith in an all-powerful and totally loving God.

“Weakness and inadequacy in the art of prayer is not surprising to God. He never intended that prayer should be left to our own unaided faculties”. (1) God is like a doting Father, interested in helping His children learn how to pray. The rule of gradual growth applies in the spiritual realm as well as in the physical. Just as a father loves his kids of different ages equally, God gives as much attention to the prayers of beginners as He does to those of advanced prayer warriors. With confidence you can say, “Lord, I don’t even know how to pray in this situation. Help me”. There are times in which we just sink into His arms in wordless trust. After all, our confidence is in God – not in our ability to pray to Him.

(1) *Prayer Power Unlimited*, J. Oswald Sanders (Chicago, IL: Moody Press, 1984) p. 80.

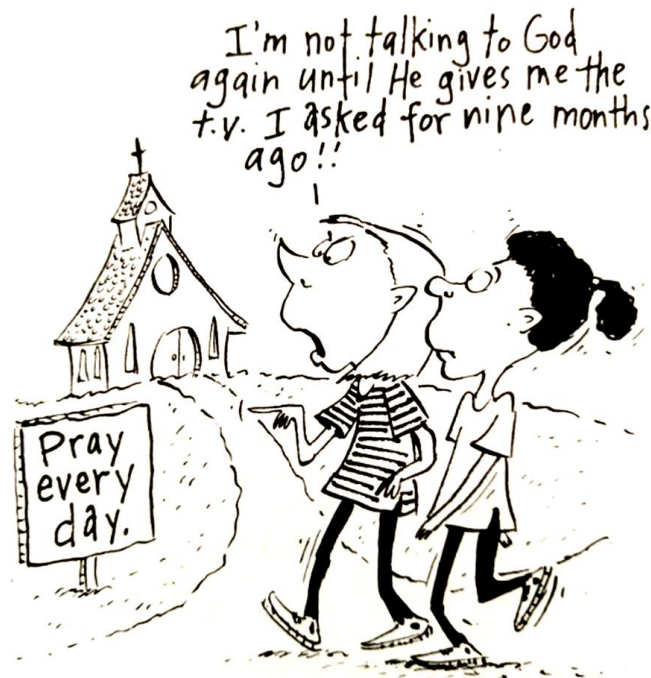
4. ***Jesus placed great emphasis on persistence in prayer.*** Both of the illustrations He used to explain prayer tell us to *continue* asking God until the answer comes. The man in the first story who had nothing to feed his midnight visitor didn’t receive a very encouraging response when he first asked his friend for food. But he didn’t

give up easily and he finally got what he needed. Jesus added, “So I say to you: Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you” (Luke 11: 9).

Then there is the parable of the widow who kept pestering the insensitive judge until he gave her a fair shake. It’s a story Jesus used to explain that God will give justice to those who cry to Him day and night. There are no quick and easy prayer formulas. To assume that mentioning a need once in prayer is like filling out an order form, and that we’ll soon get whatever we prayed for in the heavenly mail, isn’t scriptural. We miss out on a lot of God’s blessings because we don’t persist in prayer. On the other hand, we must be sensitive to the lack of peace in our praying, which often indicates that we’re not praying according to God’s will. Staging a temper tantrum or using manipulation to get our own way has nothing to do with real prayer.

It’s right to keep asking until

- You receive what you're praying for.



- You get the complete assurance you'll receive what you've prayed for (which could happen the first time you pray, but that's unusual.)
- God says "no".
- God changes the prayer.

5. *God often makes us wait for prayer answers because it's a necessary part of Christian character formation.* "Prayer", says Richard Trench, "is not overcoming

God's reluctance; it is laying hold of God's willingness". (2) If a four-year-old asks his dad for a bicycle, the father is very willing to give it – as soon as the kid is old enough to ride it. Children whose parents are so indulgent and so free with money that they never have to wait for anything they want become spoiled brats. Learning to wait with the right attitude produces patience and self-control in both the physical and spiritual realm.

6. ***God knows every facet of the situation and the hearts of all the people involved so that He can time things perfectly.*** The delays that cause us distress and discouragement are necessary to tie all the loose ends together for God's complete answer. I recently heard the testimony of the author of a very important Christian book. An unbelievable series of events impeded his progress on the manuscript. But the long wait enabled him to get ahold of key information that made the book much more effective. You hear this kind of thing all the time, because “God is never too early or too late”.

God has to wait until we're ready to receive what He wants to give. Before God can send a hundred kids to your youth group, He may want to be sure that you and the others are mature enough to handle the responsibility. So many people can't be trusted with much material blessing until they learn to use the money, they have in a manner that pleases God. Only the Lord knows if the success you long for would bring you closer to Him or cause you to drift further away.

Andrew Murray explains that the necessity of persistence in prayer is a mystery, but that some tough situations seem to require that great quantities of prayer be stored up. Then like a mighty raging river at flood stage, the combined force of all those prayers breaks the dam of resistance. And this timing coincides to make it a special blessing for all the people involved. It's exciting to be part of one of those long-awaited answers to prayer.

7. ***Jesus sometimes gives us more of himself instead of the answer we prayed for.*** E. M. Bounds once said, “Christ is all. We are complete in Him. He is the answer to every need”. Sometimes instead of removing the pressure, He gives us supernatural ability to stand up under it, saying to us as He said to Paul, “My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness” (2 Corinthians 12: 9). Because the character of Jesus rubs off on us as we spend time with Him, I believe that God uses the time we wait for our prayers to be answered to make us more like Him. We learn so much by just hanging on to Jesus and receiving from Him the strength to

go on until the answer comes. Person after person will tell you, “It was during that terrible trial that Jesus became more real to me”.

### 8. *Things often get worse on the way to better.*

Once you start to pray you often put into motion a whole chain of important events. Because God affirmed that He had heard their cries, we can assume that some Israelites were praying to be freed from slavery. But the first thing that happened after Moses spoke with Pharaoh was that these poor people had to work even harder and their foremen were beaten. However, the plagues were pretty exciting and must have occasioned a few days off from work. But once they escaped, they were in a far worse situation – trapped on all sides with the strongest army in the world behind them. Yet all this happened so there could be the miraculous crossing of the Red Sea and freedom from their fear of Egypt forever! Remember that the Bible tells us that our real fight is with the “principalities and powers” of Satan's kingdom. Our prayers can be demolishing these invisible forces even though what we see is worse than ever.



The devil will mouth-off with, “Things were a lot better before you prayed”. Learn not to fall for that lie. Decide to fight – and win. Don’t let the worse-on-the-way-to-better circumstances fool you. So, what if you’ve asked God 1487 times and there’s no answer? On number 1488 you might see the Red Sea open, and discover that God's timing was totally perfect!

Learn to pray through cement walls, dead ends, and dense fog. You'll be thrilled with the results.

## CHAPTER 12

# Maybe the World Could Use Some Revolutionaries



A long time ago there was a severe drought in the kingdom of a very rich and powerful monarch. Because of the lack of rain, all the crops failed. The king, in his great wisdom, had planned ahead for just such an emergency. His storehouses were full of such things as rice, wheat, corn, dried fish, and smoked meats. The trees in his vast orchards were still bearing fruit. It was his will to distribute the reserve supplies to needy people.

He could have ordered his big powerful army to deliver large quantities of goods to every area of the kingdom immediately, but he decided against it. Since he didn't know how long the drought would last, he didn't want any supplies wasted. Besides, bandits roamed the countryside and it was to their advantage to steal the food or obtain it deceitfully and sell it at high prices. So instead of calling out the National Guard, he asked loyal subjects to enlist in the "royal volunteers". Although the older folks frowned on this "newfangled" idea, many young people signed up. They were sent to check out the needs in different areas, and then come to the king personally with their requests. Often the king would test the earnestness and sincerity of a request by making his servants wait. He'd send his eyes-and-ears-of-the-king force to find out how each servant used the supplies he was issued. If he knew the fruit would spoil before it arrived or that a request was unnecessarily large, he'd just say no. Some of his servants didn't understand why he didn't immediately give them everything they asked for.

But no one could fail to notice the great love the king had for his servants and for the people. He'd often invite his loyal servants to eat with him. Demonstrating his great love for them, He'd teach them how to express that love when bringing food personally to the hungry people. He'd often say to his servants, "The only arms I can put around my people are yours, the only smile I can give them is yours, and the only way I can give them food with a personal touch is through you". He shared with them his vision of a kingdom in which people all cooperated and loved one another. He taught them how to bring this vision to the people.

Getting to know the king and his will better, the servants learned how to ask for the right things. And more and more they got *yes* answers. As the drought continued, some people began to run completely out of money. Now they needed things like soap, shoes, and school supplies as well. So, there were new petitions to make. Bandits became a bigger problem. It was necessary to always wear the emblem of the king and ask for a military escort to insure safe delivery of each article. Sometimes it was necessary to fight the bandits in order to get the food and other necessities to the people.

The work was hard and learning to make right requests cost a lot of time and effort, but it was very rewarding. Grateful people awaited the supplies. Many lives were saved. The king's servants became his intimate friends. They transmitted his peace, his caring concern, his character, and his ideas wherever they went.

They began to think and act like the king. People recognized them as his ambassadors. Even the bandits gave them a grudging respect. Their deep compassion for the people and willingness to sacrifice for them came from spending time in the presence of the king. Soon even the older people noticed the new atmosphere of love and cooperation in the kingdom. And some of the over-thirty generation began joining the "king's volunteers".



## A NEW REVOLUTION

God has some things in common with the king of our story. Although He has plenty of power to make the world run smoothly without our prayers, He chooses to involve us in His work. "While He reserves the sovereign right to work independently, His normal plan is to work in cooperation with and through the prayer and obedience of His own". (1)

(1) *Mighty Prevailing Prayer*, Wesley L. Duewel (Grand Rapids, MI; Francis Asbury Press, 1990) p. 12

Have you ever wondered; "Why on earth do we have to pray? If God knows everything and has all power, why doesn't He automatically heal my mother without my mentioning it to Him? Why doesn't He just tell me what I should do after graduation without my having to ask? Why doesn't He just save my cousin so I don't have to bother praying for him?" you're not alone. I'm quite sure that comments like these caused Charles Spurgeon to say, "Whether we like it or not, asking is the rule of the kingdom". (2)

(2) *Ibid.*, p. 12.

But God has reasons for using prayer. Some are undoubtedly beyond our human comprehension, but one is fairly easy to understand. He wants to be our Father. What kind of a parent-child relationship would exist between a child who was told by his dad, "Don't ever ask for anything – I'll always give you what you should have"? Just as a child learns to know the heart of a father by *asking* him for things, praying helps us form an intimate relationship with God.



It's totally amazing that God has included us in His plans. Do you remember how important you felt as a little kid when your father said he needed your help? God really says to us, "I have decided in many cases not to act unless you get to know my will and then pray for that thing in faith". The result of this, God's wonderful plan, is that we learn to share His desires, His sorrows, His joys, and His purposes. God, I feel, allows us to partake in some really tough prayer battles in order to cement our closeness with Him. Just as men who stick together in the most intense fighting form an unbelievable unity, we really learn to cling to God through tough prayer warfare.

Often, we can't get excited about talking to God because we confuse "pretend praying" with the real thing. The ritual of nonchalantly repeating "God bless Mom and Dad and Jennifer and Bill" (followed by your shopping list) to which you attach "amen" – well, it's not the same as getting through to the heart of God. Rattling off a table grace or even the Lord's Prayer isn't seriously communicating with your Creator. Temper-tantrum demands, in which you try to boss God around, don't rise above the ceiling. Remember that true prayer involves God.



In the analogy that opened this chapter, if the servants of the king had made requests that didn't really help the people, they would have been denied. Demands for chocolate bars or money to bribe the bandits would have gone unheeded. Effective prayer, just like the requests made by those, "royal volunteers", revolves around the King's will for His kingdom and our getting to know Him better and better.

Real praying isn't for wimps. It's not what little old ladies do when they're forced to retire, or the activity of a Christian who seems to have no special talents. Prayer is

what changes people, removes impossible obstacles, and really gets things done. Real prayer is hard work. It takes discipline, sacrifice, and courage. It is something you learn only by practice. The more you pray with a sincere heart, a deep desire, and a will totally surrendered to God, the better you'll become at it. But you'll never have it all figured out. There will be times when no answer comes and you don't have a clue about what God is doing. Like I said, praying isn't for wimps.



## A LIFE THAT COUNTS

If you want your life to count for God, if you want to help people *and* if you want to bring others to heaven with you, *learn to pray*. If you'd like to be able to influence situations you see on the TV news, if you wish you could change your father, and if you'd give anything to overcome your shyness or fear, *learn to pray*. Prayer is the greatest power on the face of the earth. Prayer is instant and constant protection in an increasingly dangerous world. Prayer makes ordinary people – even misfits and rejects – into mighty men and women of God. **THE MOST IMPORTANT THING YOU COULD DO IN LIFE IS REALLY LEARN TO PRAY.** Don't miss out on God's miracles.

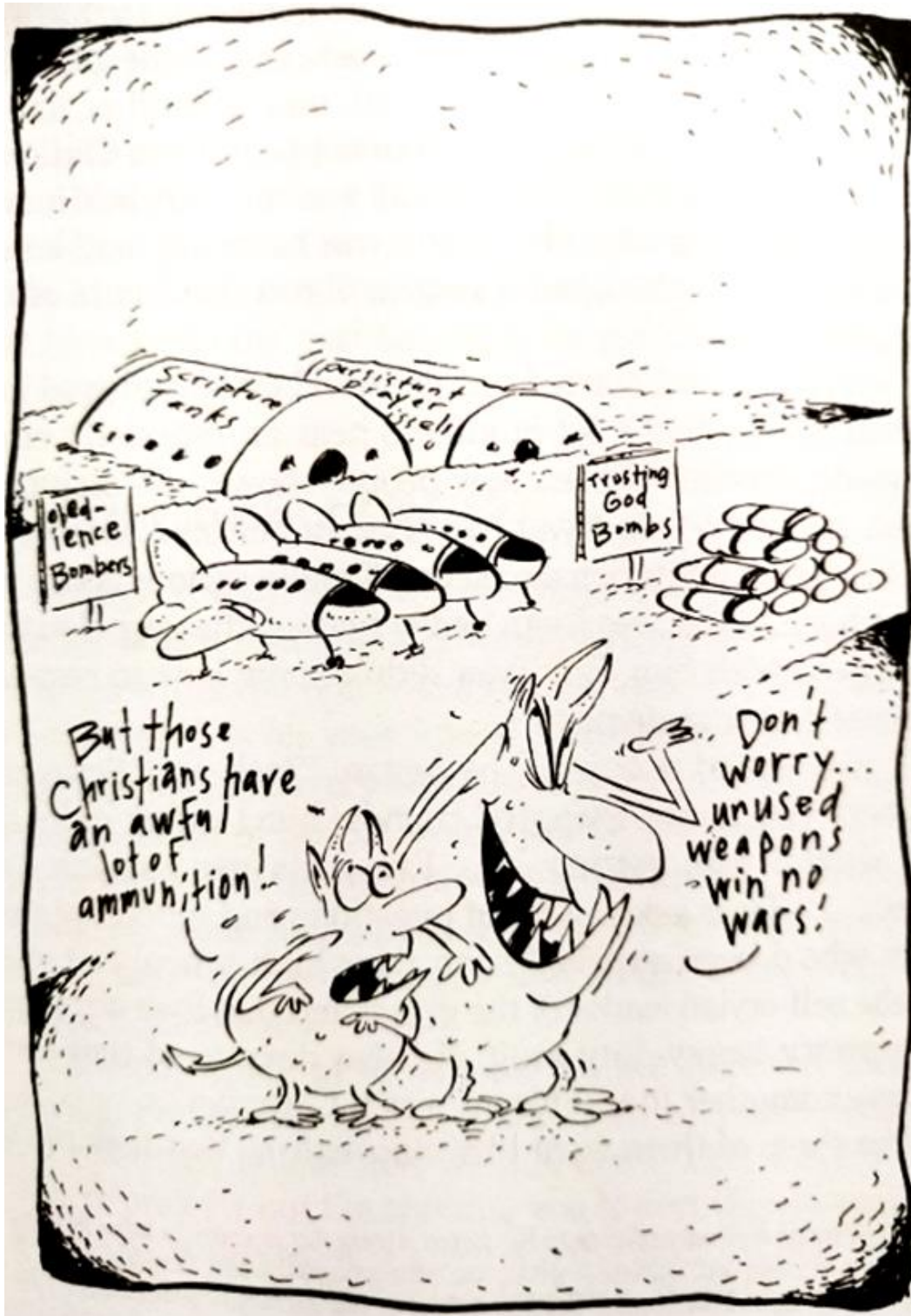
Truly learning to pray is kind of like practicing for the Olympics. It's not merely reading or reciting some learned prayers. It isn't just going through your standard "Bless everyone – amen" routine before zonking out each night. It involves constantly studying God's Word and talking with Him so that you know what He wants to do. It means lining your life up with His standards. It requires time and energy you'll have to take from other activities which in themselves may be perfectly good. It takes grit and guts, because the devil is scared-to-death of people who pray. And he'll do everything possible to keep you from it. The retired pastor who prays a lot doesn't have much time left and his health may prevent him from being totally effective. But a teenager who is sold-out to Jesus and determined to pray and pray and pray will wreck Satan's plans for years to come.

You can help change the world through prayer. How about joining the revolution? Guns or civil disobedience or strikes or organized resistance aren't necessary. The early Christians turned the Roman Empire upside down, Martin Luther started a reformation, and John Wesley made a difference in England by using prayer power.

Come on! Help start a new kind of revolution. Your world is waiting!

# CHAPTER 13

## Weapons for Winning The War



Tyler was president of the student-led Bible club at their school. With the help of his friend Ryan, they met two mornings a week in Room 208 before school for prayer, and on Tuesday nights at the YMCA across the park from their east coast high school. Getting the room at school had been a big hassle. He had to show the principle a copy of the Equal Access Act (1), get Christian kids to write letters, and invite other believing students to go with him to meet with the principle. Things were going well – there was a respectable attendance at the meetings. Going well, that is, until now.

(1) For laws regarding Student Access laws at schools, look up Liberty Counsel online.

Tyler had heard a lot about Satan’s opposition to Christian work and the necessity of spiritual warfare, but he’d never expected anything like this. Now it was midnight, and he sat on the edge of his bed just trying to digest the events of the last few hours....

Everything had started out great. They had prayed and planned and invited a lot of kids to hear an especially effective youth speaker. Eleven new people showed up including Garret, a loner whom Ryan had tried to befriend. Garret responded to the invitation and seemed really serious about following Jesus. Tyler and Ryan had explained the gospel to him and prayed with him. But Tyler didn’t know how to respond to Garret’s next statement.

“I just joined a coven”, he began. “Jack and Brian are members you know. I wanted friends, but I didn’t quite realize what I was getting into. I’ve gotta get out, but I’m scared...” Tyler asked a lot of questions and found out that a guy who’d been expelled from their high school last year was the self-styled leader of the group and that they were into some pretty heavy-duty stuff. He also discovered that Garret’s grandmother in California was a Christian.

The three of them went to a quiet café so that they could talk more and it was late by the time they left. Having parked on the street in front of his house, Tyler began to walk up to the door. Suddenly, he was confronted by two angry looking guys. “Stop messing around with Garret”, one guy demanded. “He’s one of us now. If he leaves our group, you’ll pay too. And if you don’t want any unusual accidents, I’d suggest you stop this Bible club”.

Then he and his partner disappeared.

It was too late to wake up his parents or to call Ryan to talk things over. He was tired and he was tempted to dismiss it as unreal and just go to sleep – it was the kind of

thing that seemed possible only in novels and bad dreams. But that guy *had* threatened him. Tomorrow he'd have to face that threat.

Tyler knew he'd have to pray like he'd never prayed before. He wished he had listened more carefully when Pastor Evans had preached his sermon, "How to Pray When You're in the Lions' Den and the Angel Hasn't Arrived Yet". But he'd just have to do the best he could. He got down on his knees and began to pray.



## **FIGHT THE FIGHT TO WIN**

Though it may be much less dramatic, you'll face problems for which militant, aggressive prayer is needed. There are times when you don't dare give an inch, and the only way to go forward is on your knees! Emergencies will arise, requiring you to use every weapon of spiritual warfare at your disposal. A lot of people would say that the teaching you'll find in the rest of this chapter is too advanced for teenagers. *I disagree.* Satan has especially targeted you and your generation, and you need to know how to use every weapon in the spiritual arsenal.

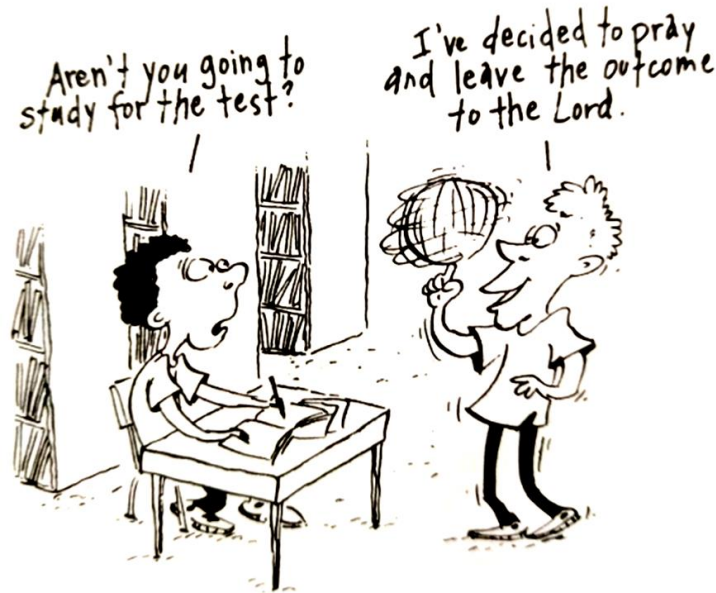
Different kinds of situations require different kinds of praying. Sometimes we're dealing with so much confusion and emotional fallout that we just cry, "Lord, I don't know what to pray for but I'm trusting you to sort this all out". The thing that is needed is a quiet resting faith. When we have our hearts set on some human goal, we have to pray, "Lord, show me your will". We'll have to be willing to do what God wants and keep praying long enough so we can be sure we're not confusing God's instructions with our own desires. Only then can we pray in faith. R. A. Torrey explained that "if you expect God to do what you ask of Him; you must be willing to do what He asks of you". Prayer is not a magic means of getting your own way. But there are times when we clearly know what God's will is and it's obvious that the opposition to the Lord's plan is from the devil. Then it's time for prayer warfare.



## **PRAYER BATTLE STRATEGIES**

1. *Focus in on only a few – at the most three or four – objects of prayer.* Armies put all their strength into winning the battle at hand, because that opens the way for other victories. Avoid the God-bless-everybody prayer that is so general you'll never know whether God answered or not.

2. ***Be a private in the army of General Jesus.*** We love being the star of the show and easily forget the words of Jesus, “Without me you can do nothing”. It’s necessary to avoid two extremes. (a) Quickly doing everything we can think of to remedy the situation ***before*** praying and without getting instructions from God before acting. (b) Assuming that “leaving it in God’s hands” means that He’ll not ask us to do a thing.



“I can do everything through him who gives me strength” (Philippians 4: 13) applies after we’ve prayed long enough to be sure that we’re carrying out divine orders.

3. ***Be prepared to pay a price for victory.*** Whatever-will-be-will-be fatalism isn’t part of the Christian worldview. God gave us prayer power that can change the real world – within the limits and the principles of God’s overall plan. We have a habit of covering up our indifference, laziness, and apathy by saying, “It must be God’s will”. Charles Finney said something amazing; “While the will of God is not known, to submit, without prayer, is tempting God”. (2) The truth is that your prayers can help determine whether or not missionaries get to stay in Algeria, or whether there’s enough money to open a Christian teen center, or the prolife candidate becomes mayor. But real prayer is hard work. It’s commitment – (God may ask you to do something difficult to help you answer your own prayer.) It’s living the kind of sold-out-to-Jesus life that true prayer demands. It’s never giving up until the answer comes.

(2) Charles G. Finney, compiled and edited by Louis Gifford Parkhurst, Jr., *Principles of Prayer* (Minneapolis, MN; Bethany House Publishers, 1980) p. 24.

As a history major, I've never read about a battle in which some troops started storming an important hill, and then take off to have a swim in the nearby lake! In spite of the fact that wars have been fought for some very ridiculous reasons, every soldier knows that once you engage the enemy, you're in the fight to the end. We leave prayer battles to watch TV, to go out for pizza, to talk on the phone, to play games on the internet, or just to pop some zits! We pray about something once or twice and then forget about it. But we can come honestly to Jesus, telling Him that we're willing to be prayer warriors – even if it costs us a lot.

4. ***Talk to God with intensity and deep desire.*** You're probably as turned off as I am when someone fakes some Garden-of-Gethsemane groans during public prayer but lets the dust gather on his Bible at home. R. A. Torrey puts it this way; “The earnestness that we work up in the energy of the flesh is a repulsive thing. The earnestness wrought in us by the Holy Spirit is pleasing to God”. (3) God wants us to take as much interest in His work as we do in our own. You know the difference in asking your parents for something you'd like to have and pleading for the thing you just can't live without. God wants us to be able to pray with this kind of deep concern for lost souls, the local church, and the problems of others. Some people call this a “prayer burden”.

(3) *How to Pray*, R. A. Torrey (Chicago, IL: Moody Press) p. 34.

People with a consuming passion for unselfish prayer have changed history. David Brainerd, a missionary to the Indians in Colonial times, had this kind of “prayer burden” for the salvation of Native Americans. It caused him to pray for them by the hour, risk his health and his life to bring them the gospel, and to weep with overwhelming love for them. And there were marvelous conversions as a result of his prayers. Charles Finney experienced such intensity in his prayer for revival in America that he described it as agony. And according to J. Oswald Smith, there were 200,000 church members in the United States when Finney started his ministry and three million before he died! Heartrending pleas and groanings were byproducts of his dynamic praying. Joining God so intimately in the intense battle against evil brings about a close companionship with Him that puts within the prayer warrior the humility necessary to receive His blessings. Hudson Taylor and those who prayed with him literally opened the interior of China to the gospel.

These guys weren't born prayer warriors. They all learned to pray. They allowed God to show them the big concerns on His heart and permitted these to become their

deepest desires as well. In this, as in everything else, we ask God for what we don't have. You may pray like this; "Lord, as you know, I'm pretty self-centered and sacrificial prayer for others isn't my style, but I want it to be. Please help me". Ask Him in which area He wants you to be a never-give-up prayer warrior who helps turn the thing around. Tell Him you're willing to join the big battle! Understand that you, as an individual soldier, may not get to understand your part in getting the pornographic program off TV, or getting Bibles into China, or seeing street kids converted. Once you get involved in important work for God's kingdom, the I'm-not-sure-what-your-will-is-Lord-but-I-want-your-help prayers about winning the game on Friday night, finding the twenty-dollar bill you lost, and making a smashing impression will become less important. Participation in what God is doing in the world today through fervent and persistent prayer is the greatest thing you can ever do with your life.

5. ***Never give up praying until you get God's answer.*** Alaskan wolves successfully hunt and kill moose – animals much larger than the wolf, and stronger because they are armed with awesome antlers. The wolves separate their intended victim from the herd and proceed to “hound” him. Finally, the animal is worn down to the point where he just lays down and gives up. Then the wolves come in for the kill. The devil tries to use the same kind of relentless bluffing to defeat us Christians. And it works – *unless* we know how to take our stand on the victory already won by Jesus on the cross, and how to pray and pray and pray until the answer comes.

The only two illustrations Jesus gave about prayer emphasized the need to ***be persistent***. As we've seen, when a man received a visitor who arrived late, only his shameless insistence enabled him to find something for a midnight snack. A widow received justice because she wouldn't take *no* for an answer. Jesus told us to adopt the attitude of these two people when we pray. The way you pray reveals what you think of God. Do you believe He wants to answer your prayer?

6. ***Our prayers enforce the victory Jesus already won at the cross.*** In some ways we're God's “police people” here on earth. By our prayers we can make sure God's will gets done in a certain situation. The reason a cop can arrest a man who's holding up a bank clerk is because it's against the law to steal. The same man in uniform would have a terrible time trying to stop a bunch of teenagers from eating the hamburgers they just ordered at McDonalds, because everyone around would know he has no right to do so. Whenever our battle is on the side of enforcing God's plans and defeating evil, we can be sure of victory if we keep praying. (God has a way of giving you a red light if you're earnestly praying for the wrong thing.)



Remember that when you pray, you're making the rights that Jesus won for us on the cross become real in your life and the lives of other people.

We must learn to “live by faith, not by sight”. Whatever *appears* to be happening, the facts are;

- ***Jesus triumphed over Satan and his demons on the cross.*** “And having disarmed the powers and authorities (of the devil), he (Jesus) made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them by the cross” (Colossians 2: 14). “He (Jesus) too shared in their humanity so that by his death he might destroy him who holds the power of death – that is, the devil” (Hebrews 2: 14).
- ***The devil and his demons are already doomed, and they know it.*** “You believe that God is one; you do well. So do the demons believe, and shudder” (James 2: 19, AMP).
- ***The strength Jesus gives us will win the victory if we don't give up.*** “Resist the devil, and he will flee from you” (James 4: 7). This wouldn't be a command, if it weren't possible to do it!
- ***We have so much power in Jesus that we not only can defend ourselves against Satan but go on the offensive.*** “Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us”. (Ephesians 3: 20).

There are three special weapons you can use to enforce the victory of Jesus on the cross:

***The scriptures.*** Wesley Duewel advises; “Use Scripture in your praying. Use it militantly”. Brother Andrew describes how Corrie ten Boom did just that. Some of my most precious memories of Corrie ten Boom are of the many times we prayed together. Corrie was a passionate intercessor, and her urgency and excitement were quite infectious. ... Many times in the midst of these lively prayer sessions of ours, she would quote God's own Word back to him to remind Him of His promises. She would have made a great lawyer. When she grew especially impassioned, she would grab her Bible and thumb through the pages rapidly until she found the exact passage, she could use to prove her case. Then she would lift her Bible into the air, point to the verse and say triumphantly, “Here, Lord – read it yourself”. (4) You can pray the Bible like that.

(4) *And God Changed His Mind*, Brother Andrew (Tarrytown, NY: Fleming H. Revell Company, 1990) pp. 88-89.

There are other times when you, like Jesus during his 40-day temptation, will do well to quote or read Scripture to the devil. You need to attack your enemy with “And God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear” (1 Corinthians 10: 13). He will try to make you think you have no choice but to fall for his lie. When fear or depression knocks on the door of your room, turn on the light, stand up, and begin reading the Bible out loud. Claim each promise of Scripture as you start to pray your way free.

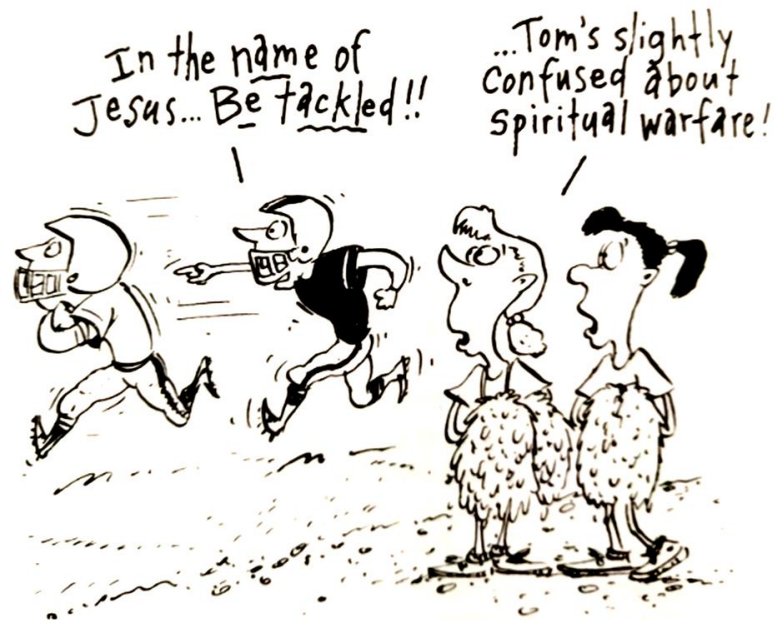
***The blood of Jesus.*** As part of your standing on the victory Jesus already won for you on the cross, you can appeal to God on the basis of the blood of Jesus. It doesn't matter if you've had a bad day or if you feel especially weak and vulnerable. You can always overcome Satan by the blood of the Lamb. (See Revelation 12: 11). It is the blood of Jesus that has taken away your sins and protects from the darts of the devil. If you become proud and feel you can come to God with a petition because you've been on your best behavior lately, the enemy will see his opening and smash you. But as you remind both God and the devil that only the shed blood of Jesus makes possible your authority in prayer, expect your prayers to be answered.

***The name of Jesus.*** A name represents all that the person to whom it belongs is, and all he has done. Obviously, you can't use the name of another person to ask for something that that person would not approve of. But once you get your petitions lined up with God's will, the name of Jesus is a powerful weapon. “All power in heaven and earth is behind that name. Every demon from hell knows the authority of that name. The apostles and the early church again and again proved the power of Jesus' name. Across the world today, Satan is being driven back and forced to release his captives through the use of the name of Jesus. You are authorized to use His name. Take the authority God has given you”. (5)

(5) *Touch the World Through Prayer*, Wesley L. Duewel (Grand Rapids, MI; Zondervan Publishing House, 1986) pp. 133-134.

Most of the time we pray in the name of Jesus, but there are times we can command in the name of Jesus. This isn't a magic formula you can use to perform a few stunts. Forget the in-the-name-of-Jesus-I-command-my-car-to-start (even though I forgot to put gas in the tank), in-the-name-of-Jesus-I-demand-a-higher-salary (without working any harder), and in-the-name-of-Jesus-I-declare-that-I'll-get-an-A-in-English (without studying much) ego trips. You can only use the name of Jesus to enforce God's will.

The apostles used what is sometimes called “the command of faith”. Whether the name of Jesus occurs in the sentence or is understood and not verbalized, it’s demanding that something be done *in the name of Jesus*. Peter commanded the lame



man, “In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, walk” (Acts 3: 6). He told the paralyzed Aeneas, “Jesus Christ heals you. Get up and take care of your mat” (Acts 9: 34). Paul declared to Elymas the sorcerer, “Now the hand of the Lord is against you. You are going to be blind”. (Acts 13: 11).

Only a truly born-again Christian who has no willfully hidden sin in his or her life can give commands in Jesus’ name. “It is a very deliberate exercise of Christ’s own authority and name in a situation where His glory is at stake, where His kingdom is being threatened, or where Christ calls you to demonstrate His power, to prove He is the living God”. (6)

(6) Ibid., p. 114.

I remember hearing the testimony of a college guy who was a very new convert. Going for a walk in a forest adjacent to his college campus, he suddenly realized that two drug dealers had arranged to meet there to complete a deal. He yelled, “In the name of Jesus, you stop it!” Instantly, one of the men took off in terror. Usually we confront situations with prayer. The “command of faith” is an additional weapon to be used in emergencies and when you go on the offensive to invade Satan’s territory.

You will probably need it most often to command the devil to beat it when he's giving you a tough temptation, to command the devil to leave a certain area, to command a criminal to stop or go, to command the devil to stop opposing God's will, and to command Satan to stop harassing you or someone else. (7)

(7) *Ibid.*, pp. 114, 115.

7. ***Fasting can make prayer more effective.*** “Fasting helps to express, to deepen, and to confirm the resolution that we are ready to sacrifice anything to attain that which we seek in the kingdom of God”. So said Andrew Murray. Fasting – or anything else that takes away from ease and comfort – isn't very popular today. Yet, Jesus gave us instructions for “when you fast” (Matthew 6: 16). We are told in Acts 13: 1 that the church people at Antioch “were worshiping the Lord and fasting”. We're told that Paul and Barnabas appointed leaders in each church they visited “with prayer and fasting” (Acts 14: 23).

Fasting is not something you do to showoff how spiritual you are. It is not a good work to impress God and make Him feel sorry for us so we'll get what we want. It shouldn't become some legalistic routine. ***Reasons for fasting include the following:***

- It's one discipline that's designed to place the spiritual above the physical. The apostle Paul said this; “Therefore I do not run like a man running aimlessly. I do not fight like a man beating the air. No, I beat my body and make it my slave” (1 Corinthians 9: 26-27). The word translated “beat” here really means using the necessary means to ensure compliance or submission. One definition given is to “subdue one's passions”. We're used to letting our bodies dictate so many of our actions. Fasting is one way of showing your body who's boss!
- It's a love gift to Jesus, indicating that you're willing to deny the physical in order to place your thoughts more completely on God, and to increase the intensity with which you pray for something in His kingdom.
- It shows that you wish to humble yourself before God. The discomfort and weakness caused by fasting reminds us that we're dependent on God for ***everything*** – especially the answer to prayer we're looking for.
- It's a step to take after seeking God's direction and sensing that He wants you to use fasting and prayer as a means of confronting a difficult situation.
- It's your response to a call – for example, the request of your pastor that church members spend a certain day in fasting and prayer for the church.

***When you fast:***

- Start out by skipping a single meal (and the snacks on either side of it) and using the time in prayer that you would have spent eating. (If you have a specific health problem, you can choose a partial fast.)
  - Do it with as much secrecy as possible.
  - Leave the results with God. (It might look as if nothing happened. I remember fasting and praying over making a big decision. Immediately things got worse. But the added problems were exactly what I needed to clarify things so I could make the correct decisions.)
8. ***Try praising God!*** When King Jehosaphat went out to meet his enemies in battle, he sent the choir first! Their praises to the Lord so changed the atmosphere that the enemy armies started attacking each other! The Israelites had nothing to do but clean up all the valuable stuff the fleeing armies left behind. “Praise cuts the devil down to size and helps you recognize the falsity and hollowness of his bluster”. (8)

(8) *Ibid.*, p. 140.



Praise God for all His wonderful qualities; His power (He *can* handle your problem), His love (He *does* understand how you feel), His faithfulness (He won't leave you), and His wisdom (He will show you what to do.) Praise God that He is Sovereign – always in control. If He asks you to build an ark, it really will rain! If you're facing Goliath, it's because He'll help you aim your prayer missile and achieve the victory. If you encounter an army of opposition, He's already planned a Red-Sea-like grand opening, so you can escape. Impossibilities are the stages for God's miracles.

But you'll forget all this in the middle of a tough situation – unless you learn to praise God when you don't feel the least bit like doing so.



## WHAT NOW?

This chapter has introduced you to the heavy artillery of the Christian arsenal. Some of these concepts may be new to you. It would be very instructive for you to do Bible studies on the topics you don't know a lot about – for example; fasting; the significance of blood, and particularly the blood of Jesus; or “the command of faith” as used in the book of Acts. Learn everything you can about how to skillfully employ the Christian ammunition. **UNUSED WEAPONS WIN NO WARS!** It's what the soldiers do with the weapons that determine their effectiveness. “Victory depends on the warrior spirit”. (9)

(9) *Mighty Prevailing Prayer*, Wesley L. Duwel (Grand Rapids, MI: Francis Asbury Press, 1990) p. 241.

How about determining to “fight for the right”, with the mighty weapons God has given you? Once you realize how powerful prayer really is, you'll want to use its might to keep people from believing the devil's lies, to win people to Jesus, and to effect positive change. ***Onward, Christian soldiers!***

# CHAPTER 14

## Jesus to the Rescue





Phil had attended the “Power-Plus Weekend” sponsored by three local churches. Not even bothering to read the brochure, he had decided to go at the last minute only because two of his friends had signed up, he didn’t have to work, and he had nothing special planned. He figured it would be just like the other youth retreats – a couple of talks, a discussion group – lots of volleyball, organized games, and free time.

He was in for a surprise.

Two whole days were packed with sermons and seminars on prayer including *four* half-hour slots of silence for spending time alone with God. Over and over they emphasized that a powerless person can learn how to pray in order to make changes, not only in his or her personal life but in school, work, the nation, and even the world. “Real prayer”, affirmed one seminar leader, “isn’t just an SOS call when we get into trouble, saying thank you for spectacular successes, or reciting some ‘God blesses’”.

All this was pretty new to Phil, but he left convinced that he should learn how to pray on a deeper level and that not taking the time to converse with God left him weak and open to sin. The words of one speaker stuck in his mind. “Just think, the Creator of the universe has expressed His desire to meet with you personally. Imagine turning Him down all the time because you're too busy watching TV, playing video games, talking on the phone, or hanging around the mall”.

If Phil was totally honest, he didn’t particularly *feel* like praying. But his guilty conscience kept after him. He realized that he was missing out on something big. He made himself sit down and close his eyes a few times, but he couldn’t concentrate on conversing with God. His mind was full of sports and girls and homework, and the resentment he had against his father ... not to mention feelings of guilt about the pornography collecting on his hard drive.

Week after week, there were testimonies at youth group of kids who were experiencing greater and greater answers as they spent time praying. Finally, Phil couldn’t stand it any longer. He made an appointment to see his youth pastor.

After listening to his description of the situation, Pastor Mark read from the Bible; “Surely the arm of the Lord is not too short to save, nor his ear too dull to hear. But your iniquities have separated you from your God; your sins have hidden his face from you, so that he will not hear” (Isaiah 59: 1-2). Then he explained; “If I swipe your wallet, I won’t be interested in talking to you – until I confess and make it right. When you sit down to talk to God, does your conscience remind you of something that clouds your contact with Him?”

Phil had to tell the truth. He told Pastor Mark about the porn, and about the resentment he had against his workaholic father for never taking time to listen or to come to his games or to take him fishing.

Pastor Mark said that if he was really serious about becoming a prayer warrior, he should go home and destroy all the porn off his computer, get it out of his house, and then return. Phil decided to follow his advice. Luckily, no one was at the house and he was able to delete all the rubbish from his hard drive and clean out the history, and his closet. When he returned, Pastor Mark smiled, “I’m glad you took this step of obedience. Don’t you want to decide right now to forgive your father?” Phil did, and they prayed together. He felt like a big weight had been lifted from his shoulders.

Next Pastor Mark asked another question. “How did you receive salvation from sin – by your own efforts, or by trusting in Jesus?”

“By trusting in Jesus”, replied Phil.

“Well, then, how do you think you’ll get what it takes to pray with power”, Pastor Mark pressed, “by your own efforts or by trusting in Jesus?”

Phil got the point.

“What I’m going to say now is very important”, Pastor Mark emphasized. When people receive Jesus and are saved by grace, we never assume that they know all they need to know about the Christian life. It’s the beginning of a new life, which they must *learn* how to live.

Philippians 2: 12 instructs us, ‘continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling.’ Although the assurance of going to heaven is not something we can ever earn or deserve, we have a definite part in cooperating with God so that what He has put *inside* us will show up on the *outside*.

It’s something like a God-given talent in music or athletics. You can’t produce such ability by pure effort. It’s a gift. But no singer or athlete becomes really great without practice, hard work, and learning certain rules. The most coordinated man on earth can’t go in and pitch in the majors if he’s never played baseball before. When Jesus puts new life in us, we must read His Word, fellowship with other Christians, obey His commandments, pray, and learn to let Him live His life through us. Then what He’s worked on the inside will shine through to the world.

The desire to pray, like salvation, is a gift which we can ask God for and receive from Him. Learning to pray has nothing to do with condemning yourself for not praying, determining to grit your teeth and try harder, pumping yourself up, and deciding to pray for ten minutes straight if it kills you. It's humbly coming to God saying, 'I feel empty and don't have any particular desire to pray. Help me.' God will answer. Sometimes He'll guide you to confess a sin that keeps you from connecting with Him, or insist that you line your life up with His Word so your prayers won't be hypocritical. If your life is in praying order, He'll make you want to pray and direct you in confronting the hindrances the devil has placed in your way.

Step one in learning to pray is asking God to put that desire in your heart and to help you. 'Lord, teach me to pray' is a very biblical petition. There is Scripture you can claim; 'I can do everything through him who gives me strength – (even pray more)' (Philippians 4: 13, personalized). 'We are more than conquerors – (of straying thoughts and the terrible busyness that robs our prayer time) – through him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us – (even give *me* a spirit of prayer) – to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, for ever and ever' (Ephesians 3: 20-21, personalized).

"But step one must be followed by *step two*. You provide the molds into which God can pour His answers. If you petition, 'Lord, make me want to pray,' and then never even stop for a moment to say hello to God, don't expect an answer. When you ask, 'God, show me how to pray,' it's only logical that you should be reading books on the subject and talking to those who are prayer people".

Pastor Mark glanced at his watch. "I have a meeting in ten minutes", he announced. "But you can come back another time and I'll give you some practical suggestions".

As Phil drove home, he started to sing. The feeling of condemnation and hopelessness was gone. He wanted to learn all he could about being an effective prayer warrior. He knew it would be a struggle but he now felt confident that God would give him all that he lacked.

I'd like to clue you in on some of the things that Pastor Mark would tell Phil. If you never forget to actively depend on Jesus for everything you do, there are a lot of ideas that can help you pray better. I promise not to mention mile-long prayer lists, prayer stools, kneeling pads, or how to decorate your "prayer closet"!



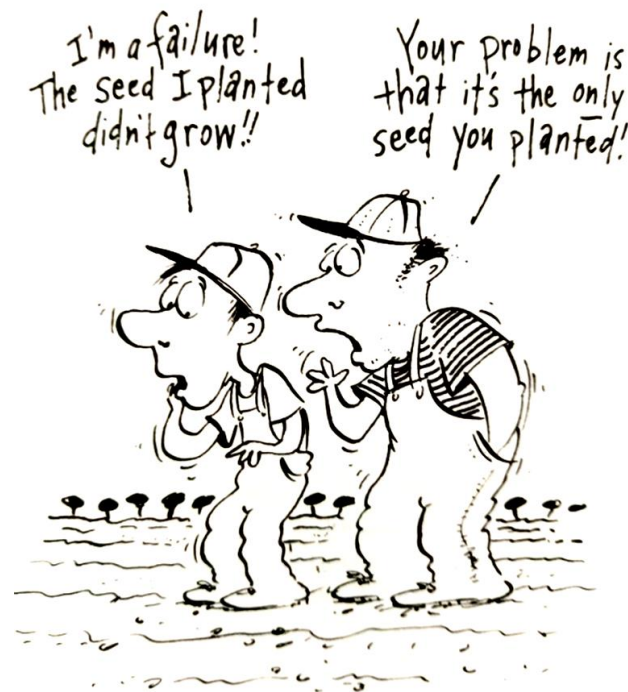
First of all, it's important to understand that you can't just pull something out of your imagination, like a purple Martian, and then “pray it into existence”. As Andrew Murray observed, “Prayer is simply the breathing of the Spirit in us; power in prayer comes from the power of the Spirit in us as we wait on and trust Him”. (1) The wisdom to pray correctly, the strength to pray militantly, the perseverance to pray constantly, and the discernment to pray according to God's will – all these things come from the Lord. I once heard a pastor put it this way; “God is looking for people who will pray His prayers back to Him, so He can act”. This is where the big mystery comes in. Why did God decide that He generally wouldn't act unless one of His children prayed? I don't know, but it's awesome that He wanted to make us that important!

(1) *The Ministry of Intercessory Prayer*, Andrew Murray (Minneapolis, MN; Bethany House Publishers, 1981) pp. 74-75.

Maybe the illustration of the seed can help us here. God made seeds to carry life. Even the seeds found in King Tut's tomb, dormant for over 3000 years, had life in them – and once they were planted produced a harvest! Although some seeds grow on their own, the majority of seeds need human help to contribute something to the world. Time and effort are needed to plant and cultivate these seeds. Often fertilizer, irrigation, or pesticides help the growth of plants. The seeds in King Tut's tomb could have stayed there 50,000 years without ever sprouting.

Prayer warriors are the human instruments God uses to make sure His will gets carried out on earth. People are entrusted with “prayer seeds”, which are planted when we first ask for a request in line with God's will. Usually they are watered and cultivated and fertilized through never-give-up prayers, united prayers, and waiting-in-faith kinds of attitudes, until the petition is granted.

Every farmer knows that some of the seeds he plants are “dead seeds”, even though at first they look just like all the others. He doesn't concentrate on these, deciding he must be a terrible farmer because some seeds never come up. He merely plants extra seed so that there will be a good harvest even though some seeds don't grow.



The problem a lot of Christians have is that they concentrate all their prayer energy on one “dead seed”, and then want to give up on prayer. If you do a lot of praying, that will never happen to you. (The majority of “dead seed” prayers center around things like; “Lord, make Calvin or Cora Cool fall in love with me”, or “God, cause Clyde to disappear so I don't have to deal with him anymore”, or “Make me the most popular kid at school”.) Sometimes, however, it's a lot trickier. But if what you're asking isn't God's plan, you'll sooner or later discover the lack of peace or desire you have in praying for it – if you're really tuned-in to God. As you study God's Word more and get closer to Him, the prayers that come from selfishness and imagination will be fewer and fewer. Through prayer practice, learn how to be a good “prayer-seed gardener”, so that your prayers are effective in the real world.

Prayer really boils down to two things;

- Desire to be in constant contact with God, combined with a willingness to do His will;
- Making the practical changes necessary to be a productive “prayer seed gardener”.

The rest of the chapter will concentrate on the second issue.

1. *Stop making excuses and be honest with God.*

Lord, I really want to talk to You,

It's just that I have too much to do.

My problem is that she called and talked forever,

And I couldn't be rude to Sue.

Lord, I really want to talk to you,

It's just that I have so much to do.

My teachers gave a lot of homework,

And next week my term paper's due.

Lord, I really want to talk to you,

It's just that I have so much to do.

I'll try to squeeze you in at eight,

When my favorite program's through.

Lord, I really want to talk to you,

It's just that I have so much to do.

If I don't work the extra hours,

I can't wear something that's new.

Lord, I really want to talk to you,

It's just that I have so much to do.

You can't really expect me to get up early,  
When my friends and I stayed up and talked till two.

Lord, I really want to talk to you,  
It's just that I have so much to do.  
I'd tell you that I'm too tired now,  
But I figured you already knew.

Lord, I really want to talk to you,  
It's just that I have so much to do.  
I have more important things on my mind,  
Like dates and friends to mention but a few.

Lord, I really want to talk to you,  
It's just that I have so much to do.  
You're still Number One in my life though;  
We can catch up somewhere beyond the blue!

2. ***Select a time and place for a daily prayer appointment with God.*** While you may not be able to rise before dawn and go to the mountains for hours of prayer like Jesus did, you can imitate His intentions; Find a quiet place and specifically make an appointment to meet with God. Usually that time should be before you start each day. R. A. Torrey says this; “The first thing we do each day should be to go alone with God and face the duties, the temptations, and the service of that day, and get strength from God for it all. We should get victory before the hour of trial, temptation, or service comes. The secret place of prayer is the place to fight our battles and gain our victories”. (2)

(2) *How to Pray*, R. A. Torrey (Chicago, IL: Moody Press) p. 88.

Each new situation will challenge your determination, your discipline, and your creativity. But if it is a priority, there is a way to set aside that time with God.

When I worked at a Bible camp, I had to report to the kitchen at 6 a.m. But we got a long break in the afternoon. I met God at a secluded place by the lake as soon as I was free – and those times were great. As a member of an eleven-person summer missions team living in a three-tiny-rooms-and-a-bath-apartment, I escaped to the junk-filled porch each morning.



Don't excuse your reluctance to establish a specific prayer appointment with the but-I-talk-to-God-a-lot-of-times-every-day excuse. It's not the same. Imagine the boyfriend who shouted an "I love you" to his girlfriend in between innings of his baseball games every night with friends. Picture your father looking up momentarily from his newspaper to inform the family, "We're moving to Arizona in June". Somehow important conversations require time.

Give God the time He deserves. Most people need to start with a five-or-ten-minute-a-day prayer appointment and work up from there.

3. ***Forget your feelings and stick to Bible promises.*** If you wait until you feel like praying, you may engage in mostly crisis conversations. You need to base your prayer life on Bible commands. "Pray continually" (1 Thessalonians 5: 17). "And pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests ... keep on praying for all the saints" (Ephesians 6: 18). "I urge you, then, first of all, that requests, prayers, intercession, and thanksgiving be made for everyone" (1 Timothy 2: 1).



“The power to believe a promise depends entirely on our faith in the promiser”. (3) Reading the Bible will remind you of God's faithfulness and assure you that it's safe to put your trust in Him. When you *feel* like you have no faith to pray, the answer is always the same; “Faith comes from hearing the message, and the message is heard through the word of Christ” (Romans 10: 17) – and the words of Christ are recorded in the Bible for your convenience. Charles Finney, whose revival messages changed America in the last century, gave this advice about how to be able to pray in faith; “Search the scriptures to see where you can get a general or a specific promise or prophecy on which you can plant your feet”. (4)

(3) *With Christ in the School of Prayer*, Andrew Murray (Old Tappan, NJ: Fleming H. Revell Company, 1965) p. 66

(4) *Principles of Prayer*, Charles G. Finney, compiled and edited by Louis Gifford Parkhurst, Jr., (Minneapolis, MN; Bethany House Publishers, 1980) p. 55.

It works like this. Matthew 24: 14 tells us; “And this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in the whole world as a testimony to all nations and then the end will come”. Based on this, you can boldly petition that the missionaries your church is sending to bring the message of Jesus to unreached people will get the necessary finances, receive government permits, and learn the language. “Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus” (Philippians 4: 6-7) is a wonderful promise. It means that if you're worried about your sick dog, your lost English theme, or the possibility of World War III, you pray both for the situation and your attitude toward it. Pray with thanksgiving and expect peace – even in the roughest of seas. (It might not come right away, but keep praying.) “But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well” (Matthew 6: 33) is a guarantee to claim when you're praying about food, clothing, and shelter types of needs that Jesus discussed before giving this assurance. But remember it only goes into effect if you keep your part of the bargain.

Prayer, without Bible study, involves great risk. Weirdness, instability, and even false doctrine can be the result of attempts to communicate with God while bypassing Scripture. Because you won't always have a Bible handy, it's important to memorize as many promises as possible, so you can base your prayers on them wherever you are. Another good idea is to use a Bible passage as a prayer for another person. For example, 2 Timothy 1: 7 *personalized* makes a wonderful prayer for fearful Frankie; “Dear Lord, you didn't give Frank ‘a spirit of timidity, but a spirit of power, of love,

and of self-discipline.’ Give him your perfect love, which casts out all fear. Help him to realize that the power of Jesus within him is greater than the power of the devil”.

4. ***Extra stress should mean extra prayer.*** Like Jesus, we should prepare ourselves for each big decision, crisis, or change with prayer. Jesus prayed before choosing His twelve disciples (Luke 6: 12-13), before explaining to them that He would die (Luke 9: 18), and before facing the cross (Matthew 26: 36-46). After a great success like the feeding of the 5000, the next glimpse of the life of Jesus finds Him praying (Luke 9: 18). If we take vacations from prayer when things are going well or after some great victory, we’ll pay a big price. It’s prayer that keeps us from taking the credit ourselves.

Prayer is the God-designed way for us to receive supernatural resources when we’re having trouble coping or the pressure isn’t letting up. Getting before God day after day to spend time in ***His*** presence, pouring out our hearts and receiving His love, His comfort, and His solutions enables God to do miracles. Charles Finney made it a practice to stop everything and to spend a day or two in prayer and fasting whenever he felt burned out or discouraged. His life is proof of the value of this therapy.

There are those who think that today’s teenagers have neither the dedication nor the discipline to spend long periods of time with God. I disagree. Having caught the vision of the power of prayer, I think young people can *lead* the Christian world in putting prayer in the priority position it deserves!

5. ***Include variety in your prayer projects.*** Although it’s true that we should pray about every aspect of our personal lives, if we stop at that we get bogged down in self-centeredness. Our compassion should cause us to pray for the salvation of our non-Christian friends, the problems of others, countries torn by war, and the relative in the hospital. Praying for others can actually help you. A friend of mine once explained how he used praying for believers in Afghanistan as a weapon whenever the devil invited him to a pity-party. It’s a great idea. Try using your faraway prayer project in that way. Your prayer topics may include the following:

- Political leaders
- World situations or a specific country
- World evangelism (missionaries, national Christians, or evangelistic organizations)
- The salvation of several non-Christians
- More Christians willing to do God's work

- Your youth group, your church, and your pastor(s)
- Your school and your workplace



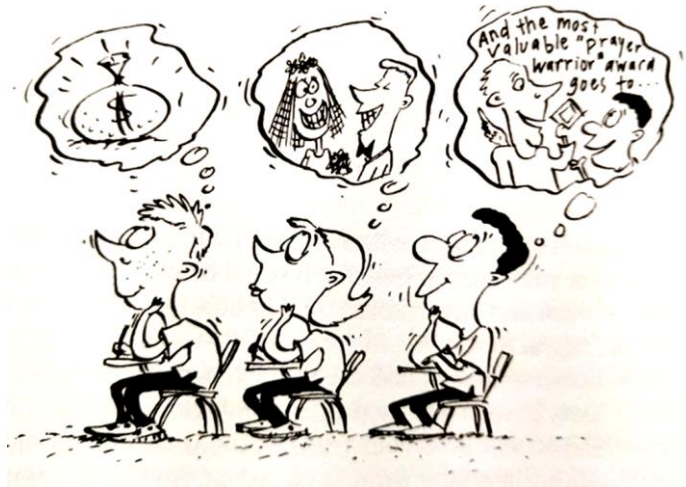
As you spend time with Him, God will put certain prayer topics on your heart. Some days you'll concentrate on one or two of them and other times you'll be able to cover all of them.

#### 6. *Helpful hints.*

- Learn to make good use of the five minute wasted time slots in each day by praying for others. As you wait for the school bus, your prayers could be protecting Chinese Christians from persecution. You could skip the football game commercials and pray a little extra for the youth retreat.
- It's a great idea to begin and end a prayer time with praise – you can either say it or sing it. Concentrating on God's attributes and what He has done builds faith for the petitions you will make and enables you to leave things in the hands of the God you prayed to.
- Do some listening, so you sense what God wants you to pray about and how He wants you to pray.
- As you pray, always be willing to step out on any action or obedience God may require of you.
- Keep paper and pencil handy. The devil loves to interrupt your prayer concentration with reminders, "You forgot to call Marty". "Today you have to return the movie". "This change in the second paragraph of your English theme

would make it better”. Simply jot it down, and go on praying. Other times, God will show you something fantastic and you'll want to write it down.

7. **Set your goals high.** So many young people set out to achieve a happy marriage, financial success, or a reputation for excellence in sports, music, art, or some other area in which they have special talent. But very few determine to become great prayer warriors.



## FINALLY!

The goal of this book has been to show you that your prayers *can* do more than your work – because “prayer can do anything that God can do”. (5) No handicap, economic downturn, rejection from your peers, or circumstantial fluke can hinder your prayer ministry. Prayer can go where you cannot. Prayer can break through impossibilities and demonstrate to non-Christians the power of God. Prayer is as all-encompassing as the will of God.

(5) *A Treasury of Prayer*, E. M. Bounds, compiled by Leonard Ravenhill (Minneapolis, MN: Bethany House Publishers, 1989) p. 83

If you determine to keep a ten-minute prayer appointment with God each day, you'll be able to say you're “doing better than most Christians”. But I want to challenge you to a radical all-out commitment. Because the world keeps lowering the standard (for example, in things like athletic training rules and penalties for breaking them, requirements for high school graduation, or job performance expectations) we tend to assume that God does the same. Just because comfort-zone addiction, doing only what we feel like, and “anything goes” is in, we forget that Jesus hasn't changed His

requirements; “If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me” (Luke 9: 23). Yes, it is a learning process. Yes, you will try and fail. ***But do try!***

Part of going all-out for Jesus is entering prayer basic-training, becoming a seasoned prayer soldier, and maintaining and improving your conditioning all your life.

**YOU LEARN TO PRAY BY PRAYING.** Practice, pain, and perseverance are required. There is a price to be paid for becoming a prayer warrior.

**TIME.** Gradually you can work your way from praying for five minutes at a time, to fifteen, and even half an hour and longer. Samuel Chadwick emphasized; “To pray as God would have us pray is the greatest achievement on earth. Such a life cost. It takes time”. (6) Alexander Whyte said it this way; “Prayer worth calling prayer – prayer that God will call true prayer and will treat as true prayer – takes far more time by the clock than one man in a thousand thinks”. (7) You'll have to sacrifice things you like to do and go to bed early in order to find that time.

(6) *Mighty Prevailing Prayer*, Wesley L. Duwel (Grand Rapids, MI: Francis Asbury Press, 1990) p. 158.

(7) *Ibid.*

**SOLITUDE.** Most teenagers are uncomfortable with silence (so are adults) and can hardly function unless they're with their friends, talking on the phone, or have a radio on, a computer on, or TV blaring in the background. There's a high price tag on learning to spend quiet time alone with God but the results are more than worth it. (Some people can pray with Christian music as a background.)

**ENERGY.** Real prayer is hard work. Your body would rather do most anything than pray. It's tough to concentrate. Show Jesus you love Him by praying with as much enthusiasm and fervor as you play baseball or shop for the perfect outfit.

**DETERMINATION.** Stick with it. Hang in there. Never give up. Try, and if you don't succeed, try and try again. Go for it – even when you don't feel like it, even when you're tired, even when the words seem to hit the ceiling and bounce back at you, and even when you go camping with your friends. (The best Christian who ever lived didn't get emotionally excited about prayer all the time either. Don't expect a thrill-a-minute!)

Jesus' goal for your life and mine is “to bring us into such dependence upon himself that we shall not be able one single moment to live without Him”. (8) But “you cannot

give yourself the healthy, heavenly life that loves to pray”. (9) Come to Jesus and ask Him to help you. Instead of letting these suggestions depress you or becoming infected with I-can-do-it-I’ll-go-for-it enthusiasm (which is sure to fizzle out), decide you’ll constantly come to the Lord asking for help.

“Lord, teach me to pray” is a lifelong petition. Get hooked on prayer. It’s a high that reaches heaven!

(8) *With Christ in the School of Prayer*, Andrew Murray (Old Tappan, NJ: Fleming H. Revell Company, 1965) p. 66

(9) *Ibid.*