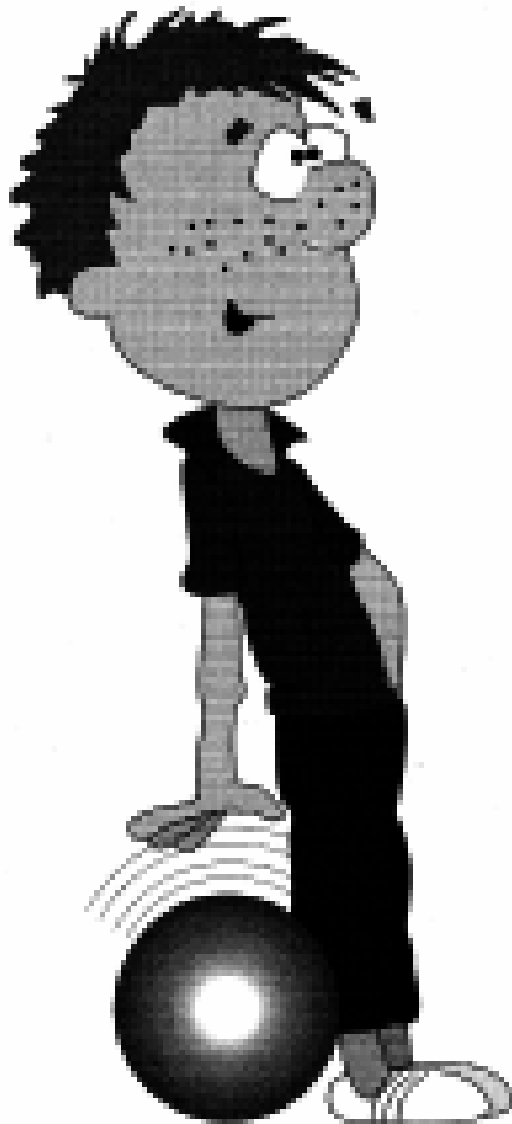


Simple Thoughts

on

Prayer



by Tom Bishop

# Simple Thoughts on Prayer

How desperately the church needs to be a praying church in these dangerous days. We are losing so many battles that we should be winning. So many believers are being hammered mercilessly by the enemy. We seem to be in retreat and on the defensive everywhere. This is not the pattern set forth in the New Testament. They were on the offensive and were turning the world right side up wherever they went. But then - they were a praying bunch of people. They had no organization on which to depend and no earthly bank account or line of credit to see them through the tough times. When they were opposed - they prayed. When they were imprisoned - they prayed. When they sent out Paul and Barnabas they prayed and kept on praying. When someone was sick - they prayed. Almost every chapter of the book of Acts records their prayer times and God's responses.

My goal in this book is to communicate some of the things the Lord has taught me about prayer. My hope is to keep the book as simple and practical as possible. The things I share are things I have successfully incorporated into my own prayer life and have helped build into the lives of others. However, any real effectiveness of this book will come as the precious Holy Spirit of Truth guides you into the truth. He will take my words and shape them to fit who you are and build them into your life.

The book is a collection of stories and examples that should be interesting to read. Because of the stories, the truths will stick in your mind much longer. As you learn, practice and see God working in response to your prayers, you will soon have your own stories and examples to share with those God has given you to disciple.

My prayer is that this book will stir you to more and better praying for the rest of your life. I also pray it helps speed your transformation into the likeness of our Lord Jesus Christ.

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# Simple Thoughts on Prayer

## Prayer Lessons From the News

I read an interesting account in a weekly news magazine about how we dealt with the SCUD missiles during the first war with Iraq. If you remember, at the start of the war, Iraq was firing SCUDs into Israel and Saudi Arabia. Now, militarily, the SCUD was useless. It only hit targets by accident and even then, did little damage. However, politically the SCUD was a tremendous weapon. Saddam Hussein knew if he could incite Israel into attacking Iraq, he could probably break apart the coalition of countries we had assembled against him. Every day, the news would carry reports of the numbers of SCUDs that hit Israel and elsewhere. We were doing our best to keep Israel out of the war and promised we would deal with the SCUDs.

Word went out to the Air Force, Navy and Army to "get the SCUDs." They designed almost all the missions we were flying to find and destroy SCUDs. In war, however, nothing ever seems to go as planned. That first week, Iraq (where it is usually sunny and clear), was blanketed with a thick layer of clouds. These effectively hid the SCUDs from all our reconnaissance efforts, but soon our military developed a plan. They loaded some men on a chopper and flew them into western Iraq where the SCUDs were. Their equipment consisted of a four-wheeler, an M-16, a radio and some meals ready to eat (MRE - If you have ever tasted some MRE, you realize they really are not ready to eat.) They did have one other piece of equipment that I will talk about later.

Their job was to drive around in the desert in the dark and listen for the sounds of generators running, indicating that the refueling of a SCUD was underway. It was quiet and still in the desert and the sound carried for long distances. When they heard activity, they would drive as close as possible with their four wheeler. Hiding behind a little cover, they would take out a special piece of equipment called a "laser designator." With this, they would aim a small red dot of light at the SCUD. The laser was of such low power it did no damage to the missile. The next step was to take their radio and make a call to someone upstairs.

Circling at 20,000 feet was an F-16, F-15, or an F-18 loaded with laser-guided bombs. The soldier on the ground would say something like, "This is Joe in Sector four, got one illuminated." The pilot would reply, "Hang on Joe, I'm on my way." As he kicked in the afterburner and headed for Joe's sector, a little black box on the plane began to scan the desert, looking for the little red laser dot of light. Soon it would have the bomb locked on target. The pilot would call, "Be ready to duck Joe. Got one headed your way." The laser-guided bomb would fly directly to the red spot and soon the SCUD would be shrapnel and flames. Joe would jump on his four-wheeler and take off looking for another SCUD.

As I read this story, I realized that Joe had no power to destroy the SCUD. All he could do was find it and point it out to the aircraft upstairs. Prayer is the same. We have no power compared with the devil. Our job is to find the problem and make a call to the real "Someone upstairs" through prayer. Our God has all power and authority and really has no trouble finding where the devil is working. However, by His own choice, He does not act until His people pray. That way, He puts us in the loop of everything He does for the kingdom.

Our typical reaction to problems is either to wait and moan about how bad things are, or to try to take on the devil in our own strength. Both strategies are losers. Pray first. Get God's direction and power. Then take the steps of action He gives and see Him in action. Nothing is more exciting than hearing from God and seeing Him in action in our behalf.

So, my thanks to the military for a smart SCUD elimination strategy and for a good lesson on prayer. Even much more, my thanks to our Lord Jesus Christ for giving us the awesome weapon

of prayer. Also, for being completely willing to use His full authority and power in response to the prayers He initiates in our spirit. Next, let's discuss our prayer lives.

### **Developing a Prayer Life**

We all know we need better, stronger prayer lives but usually just sit around waiting for that to happen. Let me suggest some ways to develop your prayer life. Note – just enjoy this section and don't take it too seriously.

**HUNTING** -- One way to develop your prayer life is to take up big game hunting. The Bible tells us that, "Where a man's treasure is, there will his heart be also (Matthew 6:21)." After you have bought the equipment, paid for a license and driven many miles to get to the hunting area, you have invested a lot of treasure and thus are pretty committed to the hunt and ready to pray fervently about it.



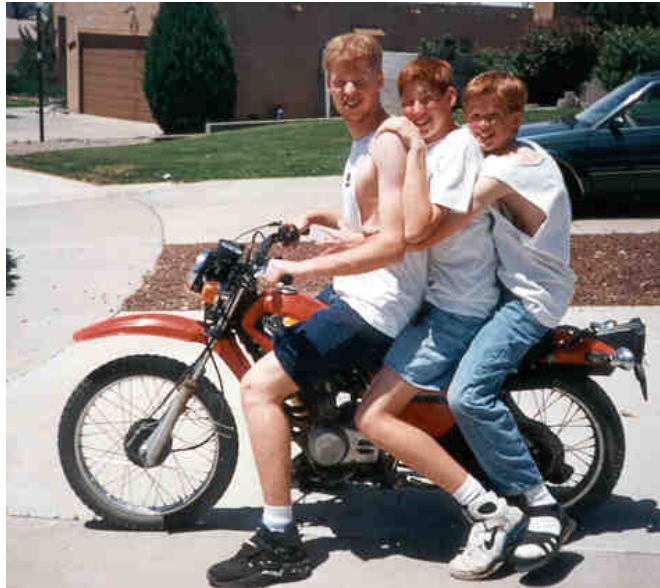
For months before the hunt you are praying that you will find a big "whatever," shoot it and eat well for months. You figure if you bring home the bacon, your wife will understand all the money you spent getting it. (Also, there is a small chance she will not retaliate with a hunting trip of her own to the local mall.)

The first day of the hunt you pray all day long. You pray you will see something big and can hit it. By the second morning, you pray that you can get out of the sleeping bag and be able to move. (The most obvious oxymoron I know of is "sleeping bag." I have never been able to really sleep in one.) The second day you range farther from camp. By now it does not have to be a "big" whatever, just a "whatever" of any size. By noon you have wandered miles from camp in pursuit of the winter food supply. By afternoon, you realize if you shoot something, you will never be able to drag it back to camp even if you knew for certain where camp was.

Now you cancel all your previous prayers and begin to pray that you do not see anything and that you can find your way back to camp. God usually grants the first part of this prayer and eventually, near dark, the second half comes true also. Prayers of thanksgiving erupt when you finally find the old dirt road that leads you back to camp in the dark. Although you go home empty-handed, you have gathered a wealth of experience and practice in prayer.

**KIDS** -- A second way to develop your prayer life is to have kids. There will be a never-ending number of things for which to pray. You will also find yourself praying a lot for the rapture to come quickly.

Some of you are thinking, "But I have kids and still do not pray much." Then try praying for godly, obedient, respectful kids who are nice to each other, eat what you cook and like it and take good care of their stuff. That should challenge your prayer life. All foolishness aside, let's talk about other ways to develop a prayer life.



**RELATIONSHIP** -- A strong prayer life flows out of an intimate relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ. If He seems distant or if there are things in our lives of which we know He disapproves, we will make little progress in prayer.

To develop intimacy with Jesus, we must begin to spend time in His Word, the Bible. As we read the Bible and become convicted of things in our lives like pride, fear, doubt, unbelief and immorality, we must repent of them. Repentance does not just mean we feel sorry about them. This is just the first step. Second Corinthians 7:10 tells us, "Godly sorrow leads to repentance." Repentance is changing the way you think about an activity. In military terms, we do an about face. As we repent, God gives us the grace or power to change. We cannot make the needed changes in our own strength.

**SURRENDER** -- Joined closely with repentance is surrender. This involves yielding our plans, goals, abilities, problems and all we are to Jesus. As we surrender control of our lives to Jesus, we can ask Him to fill us with the Holy Spirit ("Be filled with the Spirit" Ephesians 5:18). The Holy Spirit is the One who prompts real prayers within us and energizes us to pray them. Holy Spirit prompted prayers are the only prayers that get "yes" answers and observable results.

**SET TIME & PLACE** -- Having a time and a place set apart for prayer can greatly aid our prayer life. If we wait until we feel like praying or until we have plenty of free time, we will never pray, or we won't pray much until we get into trouble. Get a head start on the problems and maintain a regular, active prayer life. Have your prayer helps (like your Bible) near your prayer spot and readily available. If you are a morning person, go for prayer early. If nighttime works better, then make that your time. Don't schedule huge blocks of time when you first begin. Establish a consistent regular short time and then let it grow as necessary. This is going to be a lifetime activity. Don't be like some who got stirred about prayer, set the alarm for 4 AM, ran out of prayers in five minutes and ended up sleeping in their prayer place until their normal awakening time. Make sure your first efforts succeed and grow from there.

**PRAYER PARTNER** -- Another key to consistent praying is finding a prayer partner or

joining a prayer group. A prayer partner can help confirm that you are praying for the right things. A partner can bring fresh ideas and ways to pray that will strengthen your prayer life. In addition, being accountable to others will keep us at a difficult activity long after we would have given up on our own.

The Air Force stationed my brother Ras, and me together in Fort Worth, Texas for a couple of years. Every Saturday we made time available to go fishing. We always left early so we could get to the lake while the fish were still groggy and sleepy and easier to fool. Some Saturdays in Texas are not really fit for fishing. On those days,

I could easily have forgotten about going but I knew Ras was waiting for me. He probably felt the same way. Because we encouraged each other, we got in lots of extra fishing trips and we were able to keep the Texas fish population somewhat under control.

Jesus always sent the disciples out in groups of at least two and never alone, because of the difficulties and opposition they would encounter. Find a prayer partner. Join or start a prayer group. There are lots of groups already available if you look around. Moms in Touch groups pray for the schools. MOPS (Moms of Preschoolers) study together and pray for their children. Promise Keepers encourage men to team up in accountability groups. Many churches have discipleship groups or other prayer groups that are available. Ask the Lord to lead you to the right group.

Several years ago, two other dads joined me one morning a week to pray for our kids. We took the verse in Luke 2:52 that describes how Jesus grew in wisdom, stature, and favor with God and favor with man. We focused on one area per week. The first week we concentrated on praying for wisdom. We took one child at a time and all three of us prayed for wisdom for that child. Then we went to the next. We had nine kids between us and we could cover all nine in an hour. After four weeks, we were so excited about what God was doing that we decided to continue to meet. If we had extra time, we also prayed for our wives that they would survive us and the kids. The group continued for three years as different dads would move and others would join the group. Now, years later, we are all seeing the harvest of things for which we asked.

## **Prayer Is**

Prayer, in a simple definition, is someone talking to or listening to God, their Creator. It is simple enough that a child can do it. It is so complex that even the most mature Christian still has a lot to learn. Prayer is primarily for Christians. (Christians are those who have accepted God's free gift of salvation and have given their lives to Jesus Christ.) Jesus promised His followers in John 14, 15 and 16 that His Father would always hear and answer their prayers. The Father's answers are, "Yes," "No," and "Keep asking." The last one is for when we are close, but are not quite asking for what we really need. Also, God does not always deliver "Yes" answers immediately. Often He waits to deliver a bigger or better answer or sends an answer that comes just at the right time.

God, by His own choice can hear and answer the prayers of non-Christians. He always hears their sincere prayers for salvation because He wants all men to be saved and come to the knowledge of the truth (1 Timothy 2:4). Since God's goodness leads people to repentance (Romans 2:4), He sometimes expresses this goodness by answering the prayers of lost people. An example is lost Cornelius (Acts 10:4) whose prayers were heard by God. Although God can and sometimes does answer the prayers of lost people, they are definitely on shaky ground because He has in no way obligated Himself to answer them.

The situation is totally different for a Christian. (Remember, Christians are those who have Jesus living in them.) God has very clearly obligated Himself to hear and answer a Christian's prayers. He does this because Christians have a very special relationship to God. Even more, our

prayers are a delight to God, not a bother. In Proverbs 15:8 He tells us, "...the prayer of the upright is His delight." He made us upright when we gave our lives to Jesus. Now we can bring Him delight when we pray. This is reason enough to pray even if we didn't have all our other problems.

Let me explain my statement about a Christian being upright. On the cross Jesus shed His blood to pay for every sin we would ever commit. When we gave our lives to Him, that payment was applied to our lives and we were brought into a right (righteous) relationship with God. Now the only thing that can hinder our prayer being answered is a lack of faith. Lack of faith is also called doubt and unbelief. The devil knows this so he and his many helpers go to great length to try and weaken or destroy our faith. They encourage us to sin through wrong choices and then keep detailed records of every mistake and wrong choice we make. When we start to pray, they show up with the records and we are reminded of how "unworthy" we are. However, God doesn't see a believer as unworthy because to Him we look as righteous as Jesus. But if we buy into those unworthy thoughts, poof, there goes our faith and our prayers turn into powerless words. When this happens to you, tell the devil he is a liar and those sins are paid for.

The devil also likes to bring up the past, especially some "big sin" that we did a long time ago. Just remind yourself and tell the devil that that person is dead and doesn't live here anymore. You are a new creation, with a new heart and a permanent Father/child relationship with God.

Another trick of the devil is to tell you that you are unimportant and that your prayers are too insignificant to bother God with. We hear believers confessing stuff like this all the time. Things like, "I'm just a sinner saved by grace." Well that is true but it is only a tiny part of our description. We are also children of God. The all powerful Lord Jesus Christ lives in us. We are Jesus' kings, priests and ambassadors on earth and our prayers have all the power of heaven behind them. Obviously the devil's group doesn't want you to believe this so they lie, and lie and lie. Step into the place of power and authority Jesus bought for you. Always remember that you don't deserve this place but Jesus does. A Christian's life is not about what we deserve but about what Jesus deserves. God, the Father, treats us like Jesus deserves, what a wonderful deal. God also answers our prayers like Jesus deserves. Now pray and don't be intimidated by the devil and his sin records ever again. Amen.

Now, let's look at our relationship to God and how it impacts our prayers:

One part of our relationship is as God's children. Jesus explained that just as earthly fathers responded to the requests of their children, how much more our Heavenly Father would respond by giving good gifts (Matthew 7:11). By answering the requests of His children, God is transforming us into the likeness of His Son, Jesus Christ. When we pray about our spiritual growth, we can remind God that we are His children and that by answering our prayer He will make us more like Him. This process of reminding ourselves that we are His children and that He wants to do good things for His children is a way to strengthen our faith. If we know we are asking God to do something that we already know He wants to do, we should have great confidence that we will get what we asked for. This confidence is faith. Remember also that God is plenty big enough to fix whatever needs fixing in you if you will cooperate.

When we teach about God hearing the prayers of His children, we usually do our "phone call" skit. We will have one lady wearing an apron and stirring with a wooden spoon in a bowl. Just then, the fake phone rings and on the other end is this salesperson (Marcia). It is one of those dreaded suppertime calls. Marcia blabs on about some wonderful product and the frustrated lady is

trying to interrupt and end the call. Finally, she gets off the phone and back to cooking. Just then the phone rings again. By now she is a little ticked. She answers, "**HELLO!!**" A sweet little voice on the other end says, "Mom."

All of a sudden Mom's voice changes and she is saying things like, "Hi Honey." After she listens to and talks to her child for a moment, we end the skit. We ask the audience, "Why the different response to the phone call?" The obvious reason was one caller was an unknown salesperson and the other was her child. When we pray to our Father, we never get the "salesperson" response. God is interested in everything we do. He wants to say "Yes" to the prayers of His kids. Are you calling Him regularly?

A second part of the relationship we have is as God's ambassadors on earth (2 Corinthians 5:20). He has given us the ministry of helping lost people be reconciled to God (2 Corinthians 5:18). This means we are the workers and He is the Boss. Revelation 1:5-6 also describes all believers as kings and priests. This is because the King of kings and the Great High Priest lives in us.



When I was in the Air Force, they would often send me to another base or some place to work for a short time. They called it temporary duty or TDY. For example, my boss would say, "Tom, there is a meeting next week at Wright Patterson AFB. Be there, and this is our position on the subject they will be discussing. As I started to make plans for the trip, I never checked my bank account to see if I could afford a plane ticket. I simply had my secretary prepare some travel orders. I took the orders to the Scheduled Airline Ticket Office (SATO) and told them to get me a round-trip ticket. Then I had a room reserved at my destination and I picked up a travel advance so there was enough money for the trip. The trip was not for my benefit, it was for the Air Force and they paid the way. I was just the worker doing my job.

When God gives us a kingdom assignment, who pays? Who provides the directions and resources? God does. Many of our prayers will be as workers asking Him to provide direction, protection, and resources for kingdom work. The Lord will always provide resources for work He initiates. The Air Force sometimes made me travel in a little less comfort than I would have chosen, like in an old C-47 Goony Bird. In the same way, God doesn't always send us first class, but He always provides enough if we carefully use the resources He gives. When we pray for resources, we remind God that we need these resources to get His work done. It strengthens our faith when we realize that God wants us to have the resources for the sake of His Son's kingdom.

If the resources are not there, don't go borrow the money or charge them on the credit card. Just realize that God did not initiate the project. I suspect that a lot of the stuff churches do is initiated by man instead of God and then they try to get God to support it. My generation has probably wasted more kingdom resources on programs and buildings that God did not initiate than any generation in the history of the church. This waste is probably a subject for a whole book but I will get back to the subject of prayer.

By His own choice, God waits until His children/workers pray before He takes action. So guess what happens if we don't pray. James 4:2 says, "You don't have because you don't ask." So don't expect anything good to happen until we pray. Even though God wants to take action, He

chooses to wait until we pray. So how should it work?

First, the Holy Spirit reveals the need and initiates the desire. Next, the Spirit gives us prayers to pray and we pray them. Finally, God takes action or directs us to take certain actions to accomplish His desired result. As we follow His directions, things work right, lives or situations are changed, the kingdom of God grows and we are blessed. But wait, there is more that happens. Best of all, one day in heaven the Father will reward us generously for our obedience in praying and allowing Him to build His kingdom through our prayers. Once we understand that nothing much good happens until we or someone prays, that should be all it takes to keep us praying all the time. This is the Lord's way of involving us and our prayers in everything He does. It is also His way of keeping us in close communication with Him. He wants us to be constantly talking to Him and listening to Him as He directs our lives.

### **Power Available Through Prayer**

I am trying to be very careful with my words in this section as I talk about prayer. I sometimes catch myself saying false statements like: "Prayer is powerful," or "Prayer changes things." The real truth is: "God is powerful," and "God changes things." Prayer is simply a powerless person asking an all-powerful God to do something. Prayer, all by itself, doesn't accomplish anything until God hears and responds in power. If you catch me talking about prayer accomplishing things elsewhere in the book, just refer to this paragraph to see what I really meant to say.

Having said all the above, let us talk about God's power available to believers through prayer. I have an example to help show the difference between tackling a situation without praying and tackling the same situation after you have prayed and received God's direction and intervention.

Picture with me a guy armed with only a pea shooter taking on a fully armed tank. Not a real good idea. Now, picture a second guy in an A-10 Warthog Aircraft armed with a gun firing 30 mm depleted uranium tank-killing rounds taking on the same tank. The first guy represents tackling the problems of life in our own strength without prayer. The second represents life after the prayer work is done and we are armed with God's power. Which do you choose? I know it sounds like an easy choice but all around you are Christians tackling huge problems in life without praying. Even worse, many churches face enormous problems in their communities and yet there is just the smallest trickle of prayer coming out of the whole church body. If you wonder why our country has such a mess in our schools, courts and businesses, it is because the body of Christ has been asleep at the switch when it comes to prayer. It is time to make prayer a priority both individually and corporately.

Let me say it another way. Would you rather be an overwhelming conqueror or be constantly defeated, falling short, missing opportunities and often being your own worst enemy? You are probably thinking, "You would have to be totally stupid to take the second choice." Well, in our lifetime, the church has lost virtually every battle she has fought. The nation's schools are filled with everything except Christianity. Abortion, drugs and gangs are destroying a whole generation of children. The birth rate is far outstripping the "New Birth" rate. Gambling, homosexuality and you name it are being approved and endorsed as good and healthy by our federal and state governments. How did all this happen?

I believe it is primarily because the typical local church and church member only give lip service to prayer. We have lost all these battles because we have not been serious in prayer. Isn't it time to throw away the "pea shooters" and do it God's way? The book of Acts is a description of the way things go when the church seriously prays. Look at our Lord's life. After He prayed He

healed multitudes, walked on water, choose disciples, and raised the dead. All heaven broke loose after His prayer times. Remember, everything Jesus did He did as a man filled with the Holy Spirit. Every miracle flowed out of the serious praying that He did. If Jesus had to pray to find out what the Father wanted and to release God's power, what makes us think we can coast through life without lots of serious prayer.

That is why the devil fights prayer so fiercely? He has felt the power released when God's people pray. He does everything he can to keep the church from praying. His best trick is to keep the church busy doing other stuff. How would you like to be part of an army that spent all of its time shining shoes and polishing helmets and never learned to load and fire a weapon? We, having never learned how to use the weapon of prayer, enter the battle unarmed and lose repeatedly. God did not raise up the church to be a loser. His plan is for the church to push down the very gates of hell (Matthew 16:18). The Lord's desire is for things to be on earth like they are in heaven (Matt 6:10). God's power is available to the individual, the local church and the entire Body of Christ when they get serious and pray and keep on praying. You have full responsibility for your own prayer life. As your private prayer life becomes what it should be, you will have a role in helping your local fellowship become more effective in prayer. Every part of our country needs more examples of praying individuals and praying churches from which to learn.

### **Asking -- The Most Important Part of Prayer**

There are many different aspects to prayer, but we must never forget that asking is the main part of prayer. We ask God to do what we cannot do. We ask God to supply what we do not have. We ask God to change the hearts and minds of people that we can't change.

Picture with me our "bubble gum" skit. Marcia is sitting at a little table with some pieces of bubble gum spread out before her. A little girl from the audience comes up and says, "Mrs. Bishop, that sure looks like yummy bubble gum." Marcia tells her how wonderful the gum tastes. The girl says, "I bet you could blow really big bubbles with that gum." Marcia then tells how great the gum is for blowing bubbles. Finally, as the girl eyes the gum she asks, "Mrs. Bishop, may I have a piece of gum." Marcia quickly hands her a piece and says, "I thought you would never ask."

We are often just like the little girl in the skit. We tell God how it would be nice if we had a certain thing or how wonderful it would be if this or that happened. Does God take action? Probably not, unless we are a baby believer who gets extra grace because we have not been taught about the need to ask. The Lord waits for us to ask in faith. If Jesus had to ask during His life on earth, what makes us think that hints and wishful thinking will get answers from God?

I think it is important to focus on asking because lots of books and sermons sometimes give us the impression that we don't need to ask. Sometimes they imply that we are not very spiritual if we are always asking God to do things. There are hints that if we just praise or just always give thanks, we will get everything else thrown in. While thanksgiving and praise are important, they will never replace the need to ask. In James 4:2, God tells us, "We do not have because we do not ask," (not "thank," not "praise.") Now, do not quit praising God and we all need to be more thankful, but if you want to have you must ask. I harp on this a bit because it is not unusual to hear public prayers where people say lots of nice things and yet they ask for nothing specific. I think those prayers, if kept at all, go into the "nice stuff" drawer that requires no further action on God's part.

In John Chapters 14-16, Jesus talks a lot about prayer. To set the scene, these chapters describe what occurred the evening before the crucifixion. It was a time of last-minute teaching and instruction before Jesus was physically taken out of His disciple's presence. You would think it

would be a time to concentrate on the most important things. I think Jesus did just that. If you will walk with me through these chapters, we will look at seven instructions about prayer and all relate to asking.

The first is John 14:13. Jesus said, "Whatever you ask in My name, I will do it, so that the Father may be glorified in the Son." "Whatever" covers everything and defines the scope of our asking. This means we can and should ask God about EVERYTHING.

The second is John 14:14. Jesus follows the first statement with this almost unbelievable promise that He will do anything we ask in His name. Again the scope is ANYTHING, but the focus is asking.

In John 15:7, Jesus again addresses asking. He said, "If you remain in Me and My words live in you, you shall ask whatever you desire and it shall be done for you." Out of our close relationship with Jesus flows prayers that ask for exactly what He wants to do.

John 15:16 talks about bearing fruit that will last. To get fruit that lasts, Jesus said that whatever we asked the Father in His name, the Father will give it to us. The Lord vitally connects asking in prayer to our bearing lasting fruit.

Later in the evening, Jesus returns to the subject of prayer. The fifth instruction is John 16:23. Jesus tells them they will no longer be able to run to Him with questions like they have for the last three years. They had asked things like, "Lord, we saw this guy casting out demons in Your name and we told him to stop - were we right?" Or Peter saying, "Lord, I told them we paid the temple tax - do we?" In every situation Jesus always had the answer, but soon He would be gone. Thus in this verse, He begins telling them that from now on answers would come in a different way. He said, "And in that day, you will ask nothing of Me. Indeed I tell you truly that as many things as you may ask the Father in My name, He will give you." To get questions answered and to get the things they needed, they were going to have to start asking the Father in Jesus' name.

He tells them in John 16:24 that He realizes this is new to them and that they have never prayed in His name before, but now that is the way they will get answers. He also pointed out that asking and fullness of joy were closely related. Jesus said, "Ask and you shall receive so that your joy may be full."

Finally, a seventh time in John 16:26 He said, "In that day you will ask in My name and I do not say I shall ask the Father for you." He was saying that He had done all the praying up to now and starting soon they would have to ask in His name if they wanted things from God.

Seven times in a space of about three hours, Jesus tells them to ask. Do you get the idea that Jesus thinks asking is the most important part of prayer? I do. Jesus follows this teaching with a detailed prayer for them and for us recorded in John 17. I will let you look it up, but you will see He is asking in verses 1, 5, 9, 11, 15, 17, 20, 21, and 24. If God the Son had to ask, how much more do we? In Luke 11:9-10, Jesus tells us to keep asking and we will keep receiving, to keep on seeking and we will keep on finding and to keep on knocking and things will continue to open for us. Asking, seeking and knocking are things we keep on doing all our lives unless we grow tired of receiving, finding and having things opened for us. He adds the promise that everyone who asks, will receive; that everyone who seeks will find; and that everyone who knocks will have things opened to them

Let me recap also some things from John 14-16 that we learned about asking. We ask for "whatever," "anything," "whatever we desire" and "as many things as you may ask." This tells us that nothing is too big or too small to ask about. There is nothing we do not have a right to address in prayer.

We ask the Father in Jesus' name. Now that is not just something to tack on the end of the

prayer. It is our legal right to pray. We get no response from God in our name or any other name except Jesus' name. God knows whether we belong to Jesus or not and knows whether we are coming based on our worth, or the worthiness of Jesus. If He sees we are expecting answers because we are worthy, the answer to our prayer is "No."

If we abide in Jesus and are in an intimate relationship with Him and His Word, then our desires are the same as Jesus' desires. Those are the desires God is eager to meet. Abiding involves time in God's Word and time in prayer. We also have to deal with sin in our lives.

God chose us to bear fruit that remains. Prayer is an integral part of bearing lasting fruit. No prayer, no lasting fruit. Little prayer, little lasting fruit. This is true of individuals and of churches. Look around. If there are few really changed lives and if the changes in people's lives don't seem to last, then there is probably very little real prayer going on in your church.

Joy and prayer are connected. Nothing is more exciting and joyful than seeing God do things in response to our prayers. Are you running low on joy? You cannot work it up, but you can get serious in prayer and God will faithfully see to it that joy springs up in you.

Finally, the focus is asking the Father in Jesus' name. Primarily our prayers are to be addressed to the Father. I do not think there is any problem at all praying to Jesus or to the Holy Spirit because there is no jealousy within the Godhead. However, the most proper way is to pray to the Father, in the name of Jesus, as prompted by the Holy Spirit. Please do not get legalistic about this and judge someone or get condemned if they or you address a prayer to Jesus. I think the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are far more interested in our praying and listening to them than they are in us getting the wording and format just right. To know the right things to ask, we have to listen as God speaks to us.

### **Talking to God and Listening to God**

When we do a prayer seminar, I often ask the group which is more important - talking to God or listening to God? At this point, Marcia interrupts me with a simple question and then keeps on talking and re-asking the question. Finally, when she runs down, I give her the answer to her question. Then I ask the group, "What was her problem, talking or listening?" Just as Marcia needed to stop and listen and give me a chance to speak, how much more we need to spend time listening to God. Listening is more important than talking.

We often show up at our prayer time with a shopping list of things we need or a list of things we want God to do. We rattle off our list and sign off in Jesus' name and we are gone for the day. However, the Lord always has things to say to us. He wants to direct our prayers so we pray for the right things. He wants to speak to us as we read His Word, the Bible. He also speaks to us by the Holy Spirit as we ask Him how to pray about something. Often, if we listen, He gives us areas to pray for that were not on our list.

To hear from the Lord through His Word, you need to be consistently reading it. Do not rely on a few verses from a daily devotional. Read the Word chapter-by-chapter, book-by-book. When something jumps out at you, underline and date it or write the verse in a notebook. This helps you remember what God said and when He said it to you. Review the notebook occasionally. Let what God said guide you as you pray.

Learning to hear from the Lord is a gradual process. I don't think many have the process totally figured out. Jeremiah didn't. In Jeremiah chapter 32:1-7, Jeremiah thinks he hears the Lord telling Him to buy a field. Sometime later his cousin comes by and tells him that Jeremiah has the right to buy the field. Jeremiah makes this interesting statement in 32:8, "Then I knew this was the word of the Lord." He was pretty sure at first, but when the Lord confirmed it he was very sure. The Lord is able to confirm His word to us and He usually does.

Sometimes, the Lord speaks very clearly as when He called Samuel in 1 Samuel 3. He told Samuel what He was going to do to Eli and his descendants. Later in 1 Samuel 16, Samuel struggled a bit as he waited for God to show him which son of Jesse to anoint as the next king of Israel. Samuel's idea of what a king of Israel should look like got in the way of his hearing God. This happens to us also. The more we want a certain answer, the easier it is for us to be deceived and think we hear God telling us what we want to hear. Some have suggested we try to get into neutral by thinking up an equal number of reasons why one answer is as good as the other. This is probably good advice but it is very difficult when romance, finance or health are involved. Seems like these issues come up a lot during the course of one's life.

When we think we have heard from God, it is usually good to wait for a time unless action is urgently needed. Sharing what we thought we heard with a strong Christian friend, who has time to listen, is a good precaution. I try to write down what I thought I heard and then wait and watch for a time. I also try to learn from my mistakes, and there have been enough of them,

As the Lord speaks, do what He says. As you see Him changing things, respond and make any changes or adjustments you need to make to cooperate with what He is doing. Nothing is more exciting than hearing from God and then seeing Him in action.

### **God Speaks**

The Lord likes to speak to us through His Word. He answers questions through His Word. He provides direction and guidance through His Word. Even if He speaks through our authorities, circumstances or in other ways, He usually confirms it through His Word. The more critical the decision the more ways He uses to confirm it. His Word is the safest way to hear from God.

Back in early 1977, Marcia and I were stationed in Los Angeles, California, at Rockwell International where I was working on the B-1 bomber. I had been in this assignment for almost five years and I was overdue for a move. Marcia and I had met and married in Fort Worth, Texas, over a year earlier. (The details of how that happened could become a book.) Before we ever got together, the Lord had told Marcia that she would leave Fort Worth but that He would bring her back. He reminded us of that promise on our first wedding anniversary so we were watching to see how He would work it out.

As we prayed about our new assignment, we prayed about going back to Fort Worth. However, I didn't have much hope since I knew there weren't Air Force jobs that fit my engineering degree there. One morning, during my quiet time, I was reading through Isaiah 43 and parts of verses 5 & 6 caught my attention. It seemed like the Lord was saying that these verses were related to my next assignment. I underlined the following in my New American Standard Bible: "...And gather you from the west. I will say to the north, 'Give them up,' and to the south, 'Do not hold them back.'" I dated them with 14 Feb. 77 and went on. Other than the part about the west, the verses really did not make much sense to me at the time.

In March, we got official Air Force orders to move to Edwards AFB. Marcia and I drove up to Edwards to sign up for base housing and see where we might be living. (Edwards AFB is out in the Mojave Desert so you either live on base or drive a long way from Palmdale or Lancaster.) As we looked at the base houses, they seemed completely dead, as if we would never live in one of them.

I talked to the head of a hydraulic lab where the Air Force was assigning me. He didn't seem very excited about my coming and I wasn't too excited by what I saw of the lab. Something (or Someone) inside kept saying, "You will never work here." The next day back in Los Angeles, I

told my boss, Lt. Col. Dick Peterson, that I didn't think I would be going to Edwards. I didn't have a clue where I would go but nothing inside felt like I was going to Edwards AFB.

The weeks zipped by and my orders required us to be at Edwards AFB by the end of June. On May 17, I got a call from Major Charlie Finnegan in Fort Worth. He worked in the Air Force Plant Representative Office at General Dynamics Corporation. He said I had been recommended for a new position they had. Was I interested? I told him I was very interested but I had orders to go to Edwards AFB. He said, "Send me a copy of your resume and see if you can get out of the orders." I quickly mailed a resume and then called personnel at Andrews AFB.

I talked to a Captain in assignments for a long time. I explained how desperately they needed me at General Dynamics. I told him the job at Edwards did not look very fulfilling. He basically said there was no way they were going to change my orders and that I was going to Edwards. He finished by saying, "I am not the actual person that does the mechanical engineering assignments. You can call and talk to her tomorrow if you want, but it probably won't do any good."

Marcia and I talked and prayed about these events that night and waited to see what would happen. The next morning, I was reminded about the verses from back in February and I looked them up in Isaiah 43 and now they made sense. We were to be gathered from the west (Los Angeles). The north (Edwards AFB) was going to be told to give us up. Edwards is about 100 miles due north of where we were. The south (Fort Worth) was going to be told not to hold us back. I began to think God was up to something. I added a second date of 18 May 77 to my Bible.

Armed with this "Word from God," I was ready to take on the assignments people. However, when I got to work I decided to wait just a bit before I called the assignment person to give God a little time to work on them. Finally, around 10:00 a.m. (I still hadn't gotten up the nerve to call) the phone rang and it was a Captain from Andrews AFB. She was the one responsible for mechanical engineering assignments. Because of time zones, it was already 1:00 p.m. in Maryland. She said, "I understand you want to go to General Dynamics in Fort Worth." She went on to say that she had checked with Edwards AFB and that they really weren't going to use me like she thought. She said, "I can change the assignment in the computer, if the people in Fort Worth tell me they want you." I was almost jumping up and down.

Before Major Finnegan received my resume in Fort Worth, I had to go to a design review at Simmonds Precision in Vergennes, Vermont. They were building the fuel system computer for the B-1. Sometime during the review, Major Finnegan called and said they wanted me at General Dynamics. God gave His Word and fulfilled it. I got to watch the whole thing unfold. It was a faith-building time for me.

The job turned out to be terrible. However, our three years in Fort Worth were great. We had lots of friends and support during the birth of our first two sons. We got to teach on prayer, lead retreats and do things at James Avenue Baptist Church that prepared us for future kingdom assignments. Best of all were the friendships we made and the ongoing prayer support we have received because of our time there.

I hope this gives you an idea of how God can speak. The way He speaks to you will be different because we are all unique and our God is a God of variety. As you pray about the events in your life, learn to watch and see how your Father speaks to you in the days ahead. Hearing from God is also essential if we are to pray in faith.

## **Faith**

The bottom line of praying and really of everything we do is faith. Hebrews 11:6 tells us, "Without faith it is impossible to please God. For he who comes to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of them that diligently seek Him." Prayers without faith are dead. The answer to a faithless prayer is "No," even though we may desperately need the answer and God may strongly want to answer, "Yes." In Romans 14:23 we see that whatever is not of faith is sin. God's answer to faithless/sinful prayers is "No."

I think this is why many of our prayers seem to just evaporate and never get answered. They are nice things, or sometimes not so nice, that we have dreamed up. James 4:3 tells us, "We ask and do not receive because we ask the wrong way, that we may waste it on our lusts." Real prayers, the ones that have faith behind them, come from the Holy Spirit. He knows what the Father wants and He knows our needs and the needs of others and He prompts us to pray. Often the prompting comes while we are reading God's Word because as Romans 10:17 tells us, "Faith comes by hearing and hearing by the Word of God." When the Holy Spirit stirs us to pray, He often gives us a verse to claim or a word upon which to base our prayer. That is why an open Bible and prayer go together.

Since faith comes from God, we will never have real faith for something God does not want. As we begin to pray for something or someone, we will find that our faith begins to get stronger and we can keep praying day after day as necessary. If it is not something God wants, we find the flesh soon tires of praying for it and gives up. We must be especially careful about persisting in asking for something that we know is not according to God's will. He may give it to us and send leanness to our souls (Psalm 106:13). This leanness is not a good diet plan; it is bad times that we will not like.

If you are praying for something and as far as you can tell it is within God's will, then do not worry about the leanness stuff. Luke 11:11-12 tells us the Father does not give snakes and stones, but gives good gifts, including the Holy Spirit, to those who ask.

I again recommend thinking through your needs and tying them to God's Word. This helps you come to a place of faith before you pray. Finally, when you sense a prayer starting way down inside somewhere, and it keeps growing stronger day by day, that is the Holy Spirit. Begin to pray it with all your heart. Do not quit until you get it. Hebrews 1:1 tells us faith is substance and evidence. Pray until you see substance and evidence. I am not talking about things that you really have to stretch to believe they are answers to your prayers. I am talking about specific substance and evidence that is as good or better than that for which you asked.

## **God's Names as Faith Builders**

When we talk about using God's names in our prayers, we do the following skit to help it stick. We dress three people to represent a policeman, a doctor and a minister. Then I pose a question to someone in the audience like, "You have just fallen off your bike and you think your arm is broken, which one of these three would you call?" A cooperative person will usually answer, "The doctor." I go on with a few more similar questions and the audience is always able to pick the right person to call. I ask, "How did you know which one to call?" The obvious answer is that they knew what doctors, policemen and ministers do.

Then I begin to tell them about God's names. He has over 350 names that He has recorded in the Bible. Each name gives us some information about Him. The names tell us what He likes to do or reveal something He specializes in doing. He is the God of All Comfort (II Corinthians 1:3). He likes to comfort hurting people. He is the Great Shepherd (Hebrews 13:20). He specializes in shepherding and caring for us, His sheep. He is the Way (John 14:6). He doesn't make a way, He is

the Way and we go with Him.

When we see a name that fits our need, we can ask in faith for God to do things like His name implies. He has names that translate into healer, provider, righteousness, and peace. These are only a few of the many things He is in us and wants to do for us and for others. Take note when you see one of God's names during your Bible reading. If it fits a need that you or someone you know have, then use the name in your prayer.

Such a prayer might be worded like, "Father, Your name is "The Lord Our Provider" (Jehovah-Jireh (Gen 22:14)). My job just ended and I ask You to provide for my family and lead me quickly to the next job You have for me." I think you will find that tying God's names to your prayer needs will elevate your faith to new levels and deepen your prayer life. When you see a name for God, it tells you what God wants to do and allows you to line up your prayer with His desires. Remember, it is not a formula or a way to manipulate God but it is a way to strengthen your faith.

### **Being specific in our prayers.**

Often, when we are teaching on being specific in prayer, we use a skit to help the audience remember what we said. We call this skit the "hamburger skit." The scene is your typical fast-food hamburger place. One person comes in and says, "I'm really hungry, give me something to eat." The person at the counter asks, "What do you want?" The response is, "I told you, I want something to eat and I'm really thirsty, so give me something to drink too." This goes on for a while but the clerk can't help because the person never tells them what they want. Soon this person leaves disgusted and unfed.

A second person then comes in and hears, "May I take your order." This person responds with a list of specifics: burger, fries, drink and desert. The response is, "Coming right up." I then ask the group why one got what he wanted and the other did not. They don't have to be rocket scientists to figure out that being hungry, thirsty and urgent was not enough. They had to be specific. With this skit in mind, we are ready to look at how the Lord responds to vague prayers and how He responds to specific prayers.

In Luke 18:35-43, we read the story of the healing of a blind man. The story goes something like this: Jesus and His disciples (and probably several other followers) were walking from Jericho up to Jerusalem. I can see Jesus at the head of the group as they make their rather noisy way out of town. A blind man with his sharp hearing realizes something unusual is going on and asks those around him what is happening. They tell him Jesus is walking by.

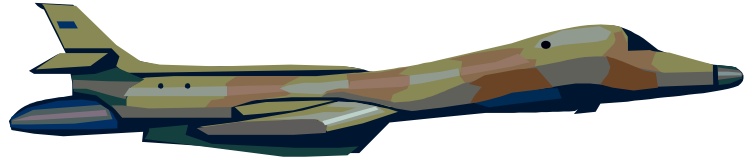
He has heard of the miracles Jesus has done and begins to yell, "Son of David, have mercy on me!" Those around him probably tell him to be quiet because they are listening to see if Jesus will say anything as He passes. He keeps on shouting, "Son of David, have mercy on me!" Those standing nearby say, "We told you to be quiet, now you're in trouble. He is motioning for you to be brought over to Him."

When the blind man gets to Jesus, He looks at him and asks the blind man what he wants. I think Peter probably had a fit. I can see him slap his forehead and say something like, "Come on, Jesus, can't You see he is blind as a bat? Anybody can tell he wants to see."

Jesus, undisturbed by Peter, looked at the man and said again, "What do you want from me?" The man said, "I want to see." It was at this point Jesus healed him and restored his sight. See, at first the man said, "Have mercy on me." Jesus could have had mercy by handing him some money or food or blessing him in some way. Nevertheless, that was not what the man really wanted or needed. Jesus questioned and waited until the man asked for exactly what he wanted and needed.

Many of our prayers are nebulous and unspecific. If God did give us something, we would have difficulty realizing it was an answer to prayer. I think God usually waits until we get desperate enough to be specific and spell out where, when, and how we want Him to move. We will probably never get the details exactly right as we present our needs, but we must try. We always leave God the option to answer bigger and better, which He usually does.

My own humorous lesson on being specific came when the Air Force stationed me in Los Angeles at the Rockwell International Plant. We were monitoring Rockwell's design



and construction of the B-1 bomber. I was assigned the fuel system. One day, my civilian counterpart, Lee, was visiting from our home office at Wright-Patterson AFB. Lee and I were talking with Maurey, the Rockwell engineer in charge of the B-1 fuel system development. We were in Maurey's little office, pouring over a drawing of a fuel line shutoff valve. With my ability to focus and concentrate intensely, I had learned all I cared to know about the valve in the first 15 seconds. As they looked and talked, I began to get sleepy. I began to pray, "Lord, wake me up." Nothing happened and I got sleepier and sleepier. Soon I was out of it and my head began to fall forward toward the desk. Just before I hit the desk, I caught myself and my head snapped back to attention. I knew both of them had probably noticed although neither (graciously) said anything. They just kept staring at the drawing. My face turned red and about a gallon of adrenalin was probably flowing through my veins. I was wide awake.

Just then the Lord seemed to speak. He said, "Well, I answered your prayer." I was a little ticked. I said in my mind, "No, You didn't. You let me fall asleep." He said, "Well, how could I wake you up if you were not asleep?" I said, "You knew I meant `don't let me fall asleep.'" He said, "Then tell me what you really want when you pray."

Now God is not a nitpicker. He just used this little, memorable episode to help me to be specific in my prayers and to help me learn to word my prayers as precisely as possible. What about your prayers? When you finish praying, do you have a clear idea of what you asked for so you can recognize it when God answers?

### **Keeping alert in prayer.**

Ever drift off to sleep while praying? Even more likely, ever start praying for someone or something and soon find you are daydreaming about how to fix the problem or about something else? (Now sometimes these daydreams can be God's way of giving you creative solutions so don't dismiss them entirely) Soon, all your time for prayer is over and most of it wasted. The devil fights prayer and loves to distract us when he can. However, sometimes we defeat ourselves by choosing the wrong timing or wrong position for prayer.

I can remember too many ways the Lord has dealt with me on this subject. At one point in Los Angeles while I was still single, I would kneel by my bed and pray before going to sleep. Usually, I mumbled some stuff, probably very close to "vain repetitions" and then crawled into bed. One night after dosing off several times during the prayer, I climbed into bed. I was about to drift off to sleep when the Lord seemed to speak to me. He said, "Tom, what was it again you were just asking me to do?" I thought, "Lord, if You don't remember what it was, we are in big trouble because I haven't got a clue." He went on to explain how such prayer times were meaningless and wasteful and that we needed to make some changes.

Then another time, after several days of sleepy prayers, the Lord came with a question. He

seemed to say, "Tom, what would happen if you were briefing the General and you fell asleep while you were talking to him?" I told Him I would never do that. He then gently and firmly reminded me that He was infinitely more important and deserving of respect and attention than any general I would ever brief. Wish I could say that discussion was a permanent fix. However, it did bring some changes and things got better.

Colossians 4:2 provides some help in the area of sleepiness. It says, "Devote yourself to prayer, keeping alert in it with a spirit of thanksgiving." (NAS) In other words, make your prayer times serious and mix in lots of thanksgiving to the Lord to help you stay awake.

Another help was the realization that I had trained my body over the years to go to sleep when I close my eyes. So now in prayer, I keep my eyes open a lot. I glance at His Word, write notes as I pray, or look around. The Word tells us Jesus lifted up His eyes to heaven in prayer (John 11:41, 17:1). Clearly, there is no requirement that prayer can only be done with head bowed and eyes closed.

Body position has a lot to do with sleepiness. Lying in bed is a disaster for prayer unless you are just saying a quick "good night" and thanking the Lord for the day. A favorite easy chair can also be dangerous if it is too comfortable.

Standing and walking around when you pray can help keep you alert. Timing is also important. We often get the impression from reading the journals of the great people of prayer that we have to get up at four or five a.m. if we are going to seriously pray. Depending on our internal clock, four-five a.m. could be the absolute worst time for some people. A night person should have their major prayer/study time at night. A morning person obviously should go for the early hours. My advice is, give Him your best time in prayer.

There is probably no way to completely eliminate daydreaming during prayer, but prayer lists or written prayers from God's Word can be an aid in keeping us on track. When you catch your thoughts drifting, just look at your list or book, find where you left off, and press on. Sometimes what we think are daydreams are really God's way of helping us think creatively about the need. Check out those daydreams and see if God is giving some instruction or direction that you need to follow. He may also be telling you what He is about to do.

A prayer partner can also be helpful both in staying awake and staying on track. However, a partner who prays really long prayers, covering many subjects one after another can be an unneeded sleeping pill. It is almost always better to take one subject at a time and pray back and forth many times. That way, each subject gets thoroughly covered and the back and forth prayers keep both partners alert. We need to stay alert and be persistent in our praying.

### **Persistence in prayer**

Take a moment and think about times when you had barely finished praying and God sent an answer. Those times are nice and very encouraging. The norm is, however, that you pray and pray and finally God puts the pieces in place. Then the answer comes. The Lord seems to like persistence. In His economy, He can answer bigger and better if we wrestle for a time in prayer for something. In addition, it often just takes time for Him to work in the lives and wills of the others involved.

In Luke 18, Jesus gave a clear story to prepare us to be persistent. The Word says the parable was to show it is necessary to keep on praying and not give up. The woman was seeking justice from a godless judge. For a time, he refused to do what she needed. She had no power or influence to make him do it. All she had was the determination to keep coming to the judge until he decided for her in the case. The Bible says it was because of her persistence that she got what she

wanted. There is another parable in Luke 11 that tells about a man needing bread. He had to knock and knock on the door of a friend until he got out of bed and gave him what he needed. These two stories are not included just to fill up space in the Bible. They are there because often we are going to have to be persistent to get prayer answers for ourselves and those around us.

Here is how persistence works. The Lord often sets a desire in our heart and gives us the grace to keep coming to Him in prayer though things outwardly are unchanged or get worse. Our persistence pleases and blesses Him. He works on our hearts during the process and greatly strengthens our faith. Luke 18:7-8 tells us God is not like the unjust judge but is patient and will avenge His people speedily. The word "speedily" means that when it is finally the right time, He will make things happen fast. Usually we see that the Holy Spirit started us praying well ahead of time and when the answer finally comes it is just right and comes at just the perfect time to accomplish the most in us or in others.

Are there things that you have prayed a lot about and that you feel certain the Lord wants to do and yet all your prayers to date have not seemed to have any effect? How do you know if you should keep on praying about it? The answer is to ask the Holy Spirit to check your motives and change your mind where necessary. If He makes no changes, then keep on praying. I like to give people this rule of thumb: Pray until you get it, or pray until God tells you He has answered your prayer and that you will get it. At this point, you can start thanking Him for the result that has come or is coming. Sometimes God will speak to your spirit and tell you, "No, you cannot have that." He may also tell you no through the unfolding of events. If He lets you know the answer is no, then you quit praying for that immediately and go on to something else. The Jews sometimes kept asking for something after God said "No." Psalm 106:15 tells us they got what they wanted but God sent leanness to their souls. You never want that.

Back in the early 1970s a couple of my buddies and I got this idea about praying for wives for each other. None of us were too anxious to find a wife but, you know, a little prayer never hurts. We invited a couple of young ladies in another state to join us in this great prayer quest.

I regularly prayed for the group on my way to work and did this for several months. One morning while driving to work the Lord seemed to speak to me. I can still remember where I was on Crenshaw Boulevard in Hawthorn, CA. The Lord seemed to say plainly that He was not getting this one young lady married and I was to quit asking Him. In other words, the answer to the prayer was "No." I immediately quit praying for her to get married and have never prayed that request again. As of this Christmas, thirty plus years later, she is still single. The point is, God can clearly tell you "No," but until He does, keep praying.

In another case, we were praying for an all-church retreat for Calvary Baptist Church in Gardena, California. I was praying with a group that the pastor had started. We met each Saturday morning. Our focus was revival in the church and spiritual awakening in the nation.

As the retreat approached, we were praying regularly, asking the Lord to work powerfully in the lives of those attending. One night as I was praying for the retreat, the Lord seemed to say, "You can quit asking and start thanking Me because I have heard the church's prayers and I will work powerfully at the retreat." I then gave thanks and went to bed. The next night, I started praying for the retreat again. The Holy Spirit quickly checked me and reminded me to give thanks. With my keen mind, it only took me a few more nights before I quit asking and started thanking the Lord for what He was going to do.

When we got to the retreat, nothing happened Friday night or all day Saturday. By Saturday night, I was beginning to question whether I had heard God or not. I shared my concern with my friend, Mark, and he assured me that God would do what He promised and that it was not up to me

to make things happen. I went off to our cabin and left the bringing of revival up to the Lord.

We had given each person at the retreat a little tract called, Not I But Christ, and asked them to read it before they went to sleep. While I was worrying, the Lord was using the tract and doing other things to work in the hearts of the people. For example, the pastor had asked the cabin leaders to help maintain a spiritual focus when their groups went back to the cabins. This was so people would not be distracted while reading the tract. One leader read the tract quickly and then, despite having been asked not to by the pastor, rounded up a group of his friends for a game of Hearts. He was only a few plays into the first hand when the Holy Spirit convicted him and he brought the game to a close.

The next morning, all heaven broke loose during our worship time. It started when a teenager named Debbie asked for prayer, saying she wanted the Lord to fill her with the Holy Spirit and to control her life. Next, the cabin leader confessed his disobedience. Soon, others were going to each other, asking forgiveness for things they had said or done and we experienced a very special time with the Lord. God kept His word. He always does. He also convinced me that He can let us know when our prayers are completed on a subject and we have the request for which we have asked.

I need to make a final point. There was some teaching a few years ago that said if you prayed a second time for something, that it meant you really did not believe the first time and that you canceled the faith of the first prayer. This is just not true. In the parable of the unjust judge (Luke 18:1-8) and the one about the man needing bread (Luke 11:5-8) the people just kept asking until they got what they needed. As long as the Holy Spirit keeps giving you prayers on a subject, keep at it. See the prayers building on each other. Think of them like regular, consistent investing until the Lord is ready for a big payoff.

### **Intensity/Importunity**

While we approach the Father with the utmost respect, at the same time there is a place for intensity and insistence that is just a hair short of demanding what we need. In Luke 11:5-8, we read the story of the man who had company show up and he was out of bread. He went to his friend's house late at night and knocked and knocked (asked and asked) until his friend reluctantly got up and gave him what he needed. Jesus follows this parable with His instruction to keep on asking, seeking and knocking.

In Hebrews 4:16 we read that we are to come before the throne with boldness. In Hebrews 5:7 we read that Jesus prayed with strong crying and tears. Both verses suggest intensity. It is like the Father wants to see whether we are really serious or not. Somehow, intense prayers lead to more spiritual growth for us and seem to be used by God to release bigger breakthroughs for His kingdom.

Another example is Hannah in 1 Samuel 1. She was desperate for a child and God heard the prayers that flowed out of her desperation. Actually, God initiated the desperation in the first place because He would need the prophet Samuel in just a few years. So, do not be afraid to express to the Lord the intense desire you have. He gives the desire so you will press through to victory in prayer.

If the intensity goes away and there is no evidence of the prayer being answered, it was probably just the flesh and you can forget it. When God initiates the intensity, it goes on and on until we have prayed all He wants or needs at that time. It can come again day after day or can lift for a season and then return. Some would call the intensity a "prayer burden." The burden lifts after the work of prayer is done. The bottom line is, if you really want it and you do not see any

scriptural reason you should not have it, then go for it in prayer - heart and soul - until you get it.

### **Insights from the Gospels**

My friends sometimes accuse me of seeing prayer everywhere I look in the Bible. I think they are right. I think one of the best studies on prayer is to read the gospels and see what happened when people talked to Jesus. Prayer in its simplest definition is talking to and listening to the Lord. When someone came up to Jesus in the Bible and asked Him something -- that was a prayer transaction. You can study His response to proud Pharisees, lost humble sinners, the disciples or faithful followers. Even powerful rulers spoke to Him. We see how Jesus responded to children, youth and widows. We can even see Jesus respond to a prayer groups as the disciples came as a group or people from a crowd spoke to Him.

Reread the Gospels. Watch what the people ask for, notice their spiritual condition, check for pride, humility, etc. and then note how Jesus responds. Note what happens when He gets a vague request like, "Lord have mercy" in Matthew 9:27 and 15:22. This is an excellent way to see how the Lord, who never changes, will respond to your requests. It can change the way you pray.

### **Shotgun Praying**

Growing up in Kentucky, we often supplemented our meager food supply with ducks, rabbits and squirrels. When we went duck hunting, we would sneak up to the bank of the creek or up over the dam of a pond and hope there were ducks there. When we found ducks, one of their "lookouts" would spot us and all of them would explode into flight. Often the whole sky seemed full of ducks. I figured all I had to do was shoot into the mass of ducks with my shotgun and then pick up the spoils of war.



Well, it did not exactly work that way. I discovered there is a lot of open space between each duck and that is where my number six shotgun pellets usually went. Occasionally I would bag a duck, but not with the success my dad and others were experiencing. It dawned on me that you have to pick out a duck, get a lead on it and knock them down one at a time. I finally got good enough that were I ever attacked by a herd of hungry, biting ducks, I could defend myself.

For a long time, much of my praying was "shotgun praying." I would blast a few prayers off in one direction, and then shoot off a few for something else. Answers to my prayers were rare. Because few of the prayers were specific, I probably did not recognize answers when they did come. The Lord's answer to my prayer marksmanship problem was: be specific and stay focused. He encouraged me to know what I wanted and to ask specifically and in detail. After asking specifically, I could then watch for and see when God answered the prayers. So, if you are a little guilty of blasting prayer holes in the sky, I encourage you to change. Take time to pick your target and ask as specifically as possible for what you think needs to be done. Of course, we always leave room for God to do bigger and better than we asked. He likes to do that. I got excited as I started to more consistently hit my target when hunting. You will find that consistently seeing God answer your specific prayers will really stir up your prayer life. Now is the time to put away the random shotgun blasts and narrow our focus to what we really want.

### **Focused Prayers**

Those of us, who preach, teach or lead in some way, have felt the anointing that comes

from the Lord in response to the prayers believers have prayed for the meeting. Most of us have also felt how dead and dry it is when no one has been praying. However, many believers have never been the focus of the prayers of several others except maybe when they were sick.

Back in 1973, I was teaching a high school Sunday school class. Some in the class were really close to the Lord. Most were just coasting along, however, and were not too hot and were not too cold. That is a dangerous condition called being "lukewarm," and Jesus is not fond of it (Rev 3:16). I was praying for ways to help these teens become more excited about their relationship with Jesus. From somewhere, hopefully from the Lord, I got the idea that we would pick one teen a week and focus on them in prayer. I knew the serious believers in the class would help me with the praying.

Since I did not know how many weeks I could keep the teens focused on praying, I kept control of whom we picked each week. I wanted to make sure we prayed through the "lukewarm" teens if possible.

The response was great and most of the teens were praying. I would interview the "prayer teen" of the week and usually they really had sensed God's closeness and direction in their life. As we did this over the next year, it seemed to help many in the class come closer to the Lord.

Some denominations try to insure their missionaries are prayed for on their birthdays. Many times, missionaries would wait until after their birthdays to make crucial decisions because of the extra prayers being prayed for them on that day.

Some years later we did the same thing in an adult Sunday school class I was teaching. We would single out a family for prayer. Again, we would regularly get reports of how God had brought a breakthrough in some way that week. By now, I was trying to hear from the Lord who He wanted picked each week. Often, couples would ask to be picked because they were facing a crisis or opportunity of some kind.

I cannot remember many stories now. Anyone who is more than 40 and/or is a parent cannot remember like they used to, and I qualify for both. However, one story comes to mind. It involved fishing so maybe that is why it stuck in my memory.

This was the report the week after this family was the prayer focus. The husband heard me announce they were the prayer family, but did not think much about it. Later in the week, he and a couple of the men who worked for him in his furniture store decided to go fishing. They drove up in the Jemez Mountains northwest of Albuquerque to Fenton Lake. After an ok day of fishing, they decided to head home just before dark. My friend was trying to catch "just one more" so one of the men walked back around the lake to get the car.

Not being familiar with the car, he flooded the carburetor and then ran the battery down trying to start it. By the time he walked back to where the other two were waiting, it was dark. They began to look for other cars to help. No one was in sight. It was now dark and starting to get really cold. They began to walk back down the road to the ranger station.

When they got to the ranger station, it was dark and locked up. No one was there. By the side of the station they saw a pickup truck. My friend had the "brilliant idea" of taking the battery out of the truck, and back up to the car. After they got the car started, he reasoned, they would return the battery and explain to the ranger, if necessary, and head home.

Soon they found they could not open the hood without getting in the cab to pull the hood release. The cab was locked. My friend further had the "great idea" to break the glass in the small wing glass and unlock the door and then take the battery. They planned to leave a note explaining the broken glass and promising to pay to have it fixed. You have to remember they were numb with cold. They were at 8,000 feet, so they also must have been suffering from oxygen deprivation. Can

you imagine the red tape involved in trying to pay the US government for a broken window? Legal fees alone could run into the millions of dollars.

Anyhow, my friend told his buddy to take the big screwdriver they had with them and hit the glass and break it. The guy hit the glass and it did not break. He hit it again harder and it did not break. My friend, who is a big guy, took the screwdriver and swung for all he was worth, but no break. As he stood there in amazement, someone saw headlights coming over the hill. It was the ranger.

Soon they explained their predicament and the ranger hauled them back to the lake and helped jump-start the car and they headed home.

After he got warm and back to a more oxygen-rich atmosphere, my friend started to think through all the "what ifs" of the adventure. He could see himself on the way to jail for destroying government property. After letting him go through the whole scenario several times, the Lord gently reminded him that many people had been praying for him that week. As he shared with us Sunday morning, it was obvious that he felt the Lord had worked to protect him that week.

Another memorable example of focused prayer happened during an Experiencing God class Marcia and I were teaching. This young couple had tried for years to get pregnant without success. They had worked with the doctor to try the medical route but nothing came of that. The Lord prompted the class to make them one of our prayer focuses during the thirteen-week study. Soon she was pregnant and went on to deliver a healthy child. Since then another child has followed. Focused prayers allow God to work in powerful ways.

One quick caution, do not pick people for a prayer focus unless you are sure several people will really be praying for them. You do not want people to go through the week and sense nothing and see nothing because no one really prayed for them. I was blessed to have some intercessors in the class so I could be sure there would be some serious praying for the prayer person of the week. When you do have some praying people, it is a great way to help people see that God is real and that prayer works. It also helped those who usually prayed in generalities. By having one focus couple they knew more precisely what to pray for and could see when the prayers were answered

### **Grabbing Prayer Minutes**

We often look at our busy schedules and wonder where we can ever find time to pray more. Maybe we tried getting up early to pray and only found that we simply ended up sleeping in our "prayer spot" instead of in bed. Where can we find time and energy for serious prayer?

My friend Neil and I managed to find some minutes by car-pooling together. Neil worked at Morton Thiokol Corporation, 30 miles west of Brigham City, Utah. The Air Force stationed me there as engineering chief for the Air Force Plant Representative Office. One day it dawned on us that if we car-pooled together we could have two 30 minute blocks each day for prayer. (We did agree that the driver would pray with his eyes open.) This worked for about six months until they reassigned me to Albuquerque, NM.

Some friends of Marcia and mine were also wanting to pray together, but their families' schedules and the distance between their homes made it impossible to get together. They decided to pray together regularly over the phone. With free evening and weekend minutes, the cell phone makes even long distance prayer possible and affordable. They chose one of my books and prayed their way through it together over the phone. They found by 10:00 p.m. everyone else in the house was asleep and they could have uninterrupted prayer times.

Often, finding a quiet place at work to pray during part of the lunch hour is possible. Meeting a friend at a nearby church building for an hour during the week can also provide a quiet

place to pray without interruption.

Be creative and think of times and ways you can grab five minutes here and there to agree in prayer with a friend. Do not wait for big blocks of unscheduled time to come along. It might be a long wait. Pray for direction and make prayer times happen as the Lord leads. If you get right to praying with a friend, five or ten minutes can be a very effective prayer time.

One place you need to exercise discretion is in praying before a meal. Your hungry friends or kids might be in less than full agreement with your prayers if they get too long at this point. Now, after the meal, the kids might let you pray for a long time if it delayed their having to wash dishes.

Back during my single days when I was a bit more of a fanatic than I am now, my loving buddies would say, "Tom, lead us in a short prayer of thanksgiving before we eat." Other times they would pretend to be asleep if my prayer was a bit long. Wait until we get to heaven and I check out the heavenly tapes of those meals out of God's library and play them for everyone to see. Maybe then they will be sorry they picked on my fervent and somewhat long-winded prayers. Ha.

Marcia and I can often find a few minutes to pray together just before going to sleep. We try to pray about the events of the day or the things coming up the next day. If we get right to prayer, we get some good minutes of prayer together. We have an understanding that if one falls asleep, the other turns off the light.

We often found that our teenagers were more willing to pray in the quiet and still time just before they went to sleep. Whenever you find a teen ready to talk seriously about what God is doing or wanting to pray, go for it. Just be aware that those times often occur when you are dead tired and almost asleep yourself.

Your assignment - Get everyone who is willing - to pray with you as much as possible - during the very difficult years that are just ahead. A tremendous amount of prayer work is yet to be done. Your short but fervent prayers can help convince others that prayer need not be boring.

### **Keep Changing to Keep Fresh**

Most of the things we do become dull and routine after a time. This can also be true of our prayer times. I have found that switching to a new plan or approach helps to get me out of my prayer ruts. One year I used prayer lists as I worked my way through family, friends and work associates. Another year I used the model prayer from Matthew 6:9-13. I would start with praise and worship following the model of "hallowed be Thy name." Next, I would pray for things related to the kingdom. This would involve prayers for the spiritual needs of myself and others. The focus of these prayers would be that God's will would be done in my life and in the lives of others. Then I would spend some time praying for "daily bread." This covers provision for all the material and physical needs for my family and for those around my life. Protection comes next as we ask to be kept from temptation and delivered from the plans of the evil one. A companion verse is II Thessalonians 3:3. We are told the Lord is faithful to strengthen and protect us from the evil one (NAS). Praying this verse can greatly reduce the enemy's activity in our lives. After praying for protection we need to confess any known sins and receive the forgiveness that Jesus bought for us on the cross. This model prayer also strongly encourages us to forgive others. If you have ever prayed, "Forgive us our debts as we forgive others," you have no choice but to forgive. You have asked God to forgive you like you forgive others. When we refuse to forgive others, there is a cloud of guilt that hangs over us and we feel separated from God. Forgiving is not optional for a Christian. It is mandatory. Otherwise, unforgiveness adversely affects our prayer life, our health, and our relations with God and others. Finally, we close with praise as we acknowledge God is in control.

Praying this way can be a very effective switch from our routine. We can lengthen or shorten the time spent on each area depending on the time we have available for prayer. No matter how we approach prayer, it has to center around one thing which is –**Your kingdom come, Your will be done.** That is to be the main focus of our lives as long as we are on earth.

The way of praying that stayed fresh and new for the longest time was praying through God's Word by rewriting His Word into prayers. I have worked my way through some of my books of prayers several times both alone and with my wife.

Besides changing how we pray, we can change with whom we pray. A new prayer partner, a new prayer group or even adding new people to an existing group can bring freshness.

We can also vary the way the group prays. Many groups go around in a circle. Each person prays a long "cover the world" prayer and then it is the next person's turn. By taking one person or subject at a time and allowing all who wish to pray for it one or more times, we achieve freshness and greater power. This provides freshness because an idea or verse from one sparks a prayer for a different aspect from another. There is more power because we are agreeing together rather than snoozing while one prays forever for everyone and everything they know. There is power also because we stay with a subject long enough to come to a place of faith, believing God has heard and is answering the prayers of the group.

I am not saying dump your prayer partner or anything that is working well. I am encouraging you to not stay in something dead and dry. Your prayer time, whether alone or with others, is too important to waste.

## **Praying Ground**

The old timers -- anyone older than me -- used to talk about being on praying ground. They were not referring to a special place of prayer, but to a heart condition. There are things we do that weaken our faith and make us doubt that God is listening to our prayers. Before I talk about heart condition, let us look at the subject of God hearing our prayers.

I believe the Father always hears and answers the prayers of a believer. The Holy Spirit, who lives in us, presents our prayer to the Father and the Father responds. God's eyes are on the righteous and He listens to their prayers (1 Peter 3:12). Believers are righteous because of what Jesus has done. Jesus paid for our sins, past, present and future on the cross and forgiveness became ours when we believed. Jesus became to us righteousness (1 Corinthians 1:30), so we come to the Father dressed in His righteousness.

However, if we have unconfessed sin, bitterness or unforgiveness in our lives, the devil uses this information to accuse us and make us feel unworthy and guilty and thus greatly weakens our faith. The Holy Spirit focuses more on calling us to repent than in getting us into prayer battles. Sometimes the Lord allows problems that cause us to want to pray, but when we do pray the prayers seem dry and empty because we keep remembering our sin for which we have not repented. Thus our prayers dry up and God seems a million miles away. He has not really left because Jesus said He would be with us to the end (Matthew 28:20). God tells us through Paul that nothing can separate us from His love (Romans 8:38-39). He is just putting a little pressure on us to encourage us to repent. If His gentle nudges do not bring repentance, He turns up the heat. So, God by His own choice does always hear the prayers of believers. However, He does not give "Yes" answers to faithless prayers. Thus, sin does not stop God hearing our prayers - it just empties them of faith and keeps us from receiving what we need.

So, how do we get back to faith-filled prayers? The answer is to deal with sins. We confess

and turn from any sins we know of in our lives. Then we ask the Holy Spirit to show us any sins we have overlooked and we repent (change our mind). Once this is completed, we are "on praying ground."

If God is still silent, it is simply because He often delays answers so He can answer bigger and better. Our job is to keep on praying until God answers the prayer or tells us to stop and go on to other subjects. One way we know to stop one subject and go on to other things is when prayers stop flowing from within and we have to "work them up." Although we go on to other things, we keep watching and expecting God to answer all the prayers we have prayed to Him. Sometimes the answer comes months or years later. The birth of John the Baptist, years after Zechariah and Elizabeth prayed, is an example of this (Luke 1:13). They probably thought God had forgotten all their prayers for a child. By delaying the answer, God not only gave them the child they wanted, but they became the parents of the greatest of the Old Testament type prophets.

If you have some urgent needs - and who does not - it is essential that you get on and stay on "praying ground." Even if things seem peaceful at present, you never know when a crisis will appear out of the blue that requires fervent prayer and you want to always be ready to pray.

Another expression that fits here is "being prayed up." This means don't wait until there is trouble or a crisis to pray. Be regular and consistent in your praying. This will prevent many crises and will ensure God is involved in those that do come. Also, we should be very embarrassed if we only talk to God when we are in trouble.

### **Strong Words vs. Wimpy Words**

With the prayer books and through our seminars, we like to encourage people to use strong words in their prayers. By strong words, I am talking about using strong action verbs as we ask God to take action. Read Psalm 51 and you will see David using strong verbs like "blot out," "wash me," "hide," "create in me." He was in trouble with God after the Bathsheba affair and in genuine repentance he wanted to be restored.

In the New Testament, Paul uses strong words like "...cause you to increase and abound in love..." as he prayed for the Thessalonians (1 Thessalonians 3:12). My written prayers came out the same way with words like "cause me, see to it, stop me, and don't let me".

To get the point across and make it stick in our seminars, we have two plastic bags. One is a Hefty brand trash bag filled with cardboard bricks borrowed from the children's department at church. On each brick I have a "strong" verb. On flimsy pieces of paper in the other small, wimpy bag I have a collection of what I call "wimpy" words. After I wave the bags around for a time and get the audience saying "hefty, hefty, hefty" and "wimpy, wimpy, wimpy" - I go through the words and explain why we should or should not use them.

First, pretend you have seen the two bags and are chanting "hefty, hefty, hefty" and "wimpy, wimpy, wimpy" with everyone else. Second, don't get upset with me as I point out "wimpy" words. I am telling you this in advance because many of the wimpy words may be some of your favorite prayer words. They are not necessarily wrong. They are just - well - wimpy. You can pray better and more specifically with strong action words.

Two wimpy words are "may" and "let." They are wimpy because they ask permission, but do not ask God to take any action. If I prayed, "God, may I be a better Christian?" He would answer "Yes," but I have not asked Him to do anything. Suppose I prayed, "May I get control of my tongue?" He would probably say He would be very glad for me to get control of my tongue. However, He would not do anything because I did not ask Him to take action, just to allow me to do something. If we are to see any changes in us, it will be because God does it in us and not because we get permission to try harder.

Another word that we use a lot in a wimpy manner is "help". Now we can use it as a hefty word like Peter did. He was sinking after a few steps on the water and his quick prayer was "Help, Lord!" He got a quick and needed answer. I have used the simple "Help, Lord!" prayer a few times in desperation and the Lord has come to my rescue.

Most of the time when we use the word help, however, we use it like, "Help us to have a good meeting" or "Help the speaker as he speaks." We could better pray, "See to it that Your will is done in our meeting." For the leader we would pray, "Anoint our leader" or "Speak through our leader." I guess my biggest problem with "help" is that it implies that we can do most of the job, but we need the Lord to give us a little boost occasionally. The truth is that we cannot do anything but be available for Him to work through us. He did not come into our lives to help occasionally. He came in to take over as Lord. It also implies the Lord is outside us somewhere when actually He lives in us. Watch your use of "help" and see how often you and others say it. Then begin to substitute strong verbs like --"make sure I" or "cause me to"—as a replacement for help me.

My final and most disliked wimpy phrase is "be with." We use it in almost every other sentence we pray. It gives the idea that sometimes God is with us and sometimes He is not. Now we know from Matthew 28:20 that Jesus, through the Holy Spirit, is constantly with a believer, even to the end of the world. So, if we are a believer He is with us and if we are not a believer, He is not with us. When we pray, "Be with our pastor" we are probably confusing lost people or new believers who wonder if sometime God is with the pastor and sometimes He is not.

Now I know that what we are really trying to say are things like: anoint our pastor as he speaks, guide him as he leads the service, see to it that he speaks only what You want him to say. Since these are things we mean or should mean - they are what we should say in our prayers. Try for a total elimination of "be with" in your prayers

That is more than enough about what not to do. Let us talk about the hefty or strong words we can use. One of my favorites is "cause." It asks God to spring into action and do what is necessary to achieve the results He wants. Another action verb is "make." It is used in Psalms 39:4, 51:6, 90:15, 119:27 & 35, and other places as people ask God to take strong action in their lives or the lives of others. I like to ask God to "make sure" or "see to it." If my wife were to tell me one of the boys had an assignment that needed to be completed and asked me to "see to it" or "make sure" it got completed, she would be asking me to take whatever action was necessary to ensure the work got done. God is so much more able to take the necessary action to "make sure" or "see to it" when we ask Him.

When we are praying for character development in us or in others, we can use words like "work in us" or "build into us." The Lord can then work on our thoughts and attitudes to change us into whom He wants us to be.

Another good word is "keep." Used in one way we ask the Lord to do what is necessary to ensure we continue doing something we should such as, "Keep us faithfully studying Your Word." We can also use the negative aspect to ask Him to keep us from things we should avoid. We might pray, "Keep our children from ever being involved in a 'get-rich-quick' scheme". Similar negative words would be "stop us" or "don't let us."

Finally, words like convince, show, fill, ensure, teach and prompt can round out our prayer time. You can continue to add to the list as you notice good words during your Bible study times or as the Holy Spirit gives you stronger ways of expressing your needs. Expect it to take some time as you gradually replace the wimpy words with hefty words. Listen to what you pray and enlist the help of your spouse and kids. Otherwise, you will use a few temporary hefty words and then revert

to the old, comfortable, meaningless wimpy words.

### **Prayer Traps**

When possible, the devil tries to keep us from praying at all. If he is unsuccessful in stopping us completely, the devil is willing to let us pray some if we just pray "stuff." In other words, he does not care if we just say prayers that are faithless, meaningless or not specific enough to be answered.

The Air Force Academy had a special team that used to come around to different organizations to help us learn to write better. They would spend the first morning looking through letters and memos contained in our file folders. Then in the afternoon, they would use our own letters to point out all the standard mistakes everyone makes in their writing. It was a very effective technique. Unfortunately, some of my letters were usually in their "bad example" pile

A part of me would like to tape record many of the public prayers of any given church and then go back through them to show people what they are really praying. That probably borders on not being loving and kind, however, so I have never done it. I do have many of the prayers recorded in my mind, so I will use them to discuss some things we should not pray.

For example, often our prayers are simply a restatement of a problem or a summary of current events. We tell the Father more than enough details about a situation or the condition of the world, but we seem to forget to ask Him to do anything about the problems. He ends up taking no action because we did not ask for anything. We end up discouraged and disappointed because we prayed yet things kept getting worse.

At other times we fill our public prayers with phrases that we have picked up from others. We say things like, "bless those who are not with us." Well, no matter how big our group, there are about six billion people around the world who are not "with us". Who do we really want God to bless? We also say, "bless all the missionaries." Does that mean only Christian missionaries or anyone who calls themselves missionaries? Someone might say, "well, can't God sort out who to bless and who not to bless?" Sure He can and probably does for children and new believers. For those who have known Him for some time He expects more precise prayers. Besides, what do we mean by "bless?" Is it a pat on the back or a gift of five million dollars or what? I know –we hope that God will sort it out. In Ephesians 1:3, God tells us He has already blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenlies in Christ. It would be better to pray that He cause a specific person or specific group of people to receive the blessings that are already prepared for them. So please be careful with your generic, unspecific blessings.

Be careful with phrases like, "lead, guide and direct us." While the words individually are good action words, they can easily become "vain repetition" if we run them together and just say them without thinking.

Another "faith killer" phrase we use is "if it be Thy will." What we are saying is that we want something but have not got a clue whether God wants us to have it or not. It is very hard to pray in faith unless we know what God wants. We need to go to His Word and see how He feels about the request before we pray it. From God's word you can usually obtain a good idea what He wants to do. If you are still not sure, pray for what you think would be best and then say "Lord, this is what I think is needed but if You have better plans then that is what I want really want." The Lord is much more ready to answer in big wonderful ways if we will just ask. His favorite answer is "Yes" and that is how He wants to respond to our prayers if we will pray and believe He is hearing and answering.

Another thing to watch in our public prayers is how we are speaking. If we fill our prayers

with big words, dramatic pauses, with very precise enunciation and articulation - then we are probably praying more to the audience than to God. It is far easier than we think to fall into the trap of saying stuff for the people instead of earnestly crying out to God for action.

I pick on bad public prayers because for one, they waste time and are useless unless they are prayers God can answer with a "Yes." Second, they make people think something might happen, but it does not because they asked nothing in faith. Even worse, every public prayer is a teaching on prayer. Young, impressionable Christians are listening to older and supposedly mature Christians and they think, "This is the way we are supposed to pray." They then grow up praying the same kind of stuff and passing it on from generation to generation.

Another trap to avoid is using a prayer just to open or close a service or to provide a cover for the choir to get in position or for someone to rearrange the props. We are talking to the Lord during prayer and it should be the most reverent time in a service.

There have even been a few recorded instances - hopefully no one we know - of a pastor or evangelist asking the people to bow their heads and close their eyes for prayer and then he goes on preaching disguising it as a prayer. Prayer is really too important and too priceless to belittle it in any way.

Remember, it cost the precious blood of our Lord Jesus Christ to buy us this priceless privilege of prayer. We need to make our public prayers as meaningful, precise and Biblically accurate as possible. This is what I have tried to do in my prayer books.

### **My journey into praying God's word**

Back in the fall of 1988, I developed some muscle soreness that felt like the flu. I waited for it to go away but it did not. I went to the doctor and he ran many blood tests and could not find out what was wrong. I knew something was happening. I had tried to do a pushup and discovered there was no strength left in my arms. My legs and back muscles were in the same shape. My blood work showed a low white cell count so the doctor thought it might be leukemia. He scheduled me to go to Wilford Hall Air Force Hospital in San Antonio, Texas. They were to do a bone marrow biopsy to see if I was making enough white cells. It was to be a short stay at the hospital.

After I got there, it took a week of talking to all the different specialists at Wilford Hall before they were ready for the biopsy. The test showed my bone marrow was working well and that I did not have leukemia. The search then started for other causes of the muscle weakness.

They would awaken me each morning at 5:00 a.m. to draw blood. They would then weigh me. I guess they wanted to see if they missed any of the blood that they were supposed to drain. Nothing showed up in the tests so they decided to do a muscle biopsy on a strand from the deltoids in my shoulder. That also proved inconclusive. After four weeks, they dismissed me and basically said to go home and see if the disease got worse. Maybe then they could determine what it was.

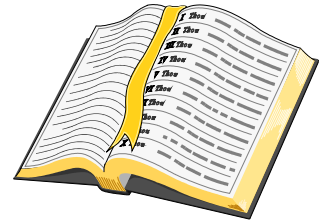
I went home and the disease did get worse. I put myself under the care of a friend who was in the flight surgeon group at Kirtland AFB. He prescribed a regime of Prednisone and exercise.

I began lifting one-half pound weights to rebuild the muscles in my body. I would spend all morning exercising one muscle group at a time to try to build it up. I also spent lots of time exercising in the pool, on the treadmill and the exercise bike.

During this time, I spent lots of time on the sofa and in the easy chair. Somehow, during this recovery time, the Lord started me writing Scripture into prayer. I would look at a verse, see something God wanted in me, my family, the church or the country and I would write a prayer asking Him to do it. If I saw something He did not want, the prayer would be that He keep me, my

wife, my family and anyone I could influence from doing that. After I read and wrote the verse into a prayer or prayers, I would pray them back to God.

I felt I was really praying in faith because I was asking God to do things His Word told me He wanted. It was a very exciting time and I looked forward to my next prayer time. Soon I had written and prayed my way through many books of the Bible.



I began to share the written prayers with friends and they, too, were excited and blessed. Then one day the Lord seemed to say, "Put the prayers in a book and start with prayers for kids." I, (being not so full of faith and the Holy Spirit) immediately told Him I did not know how to write a book. Patiently, the Lord explained that I had already typed the prayers on the computer and that our friend Tim had access to a laser printer and could print them. He reminded me that Donna in my Sunday School class was a printer and could help with that aspect. In other words, He shot holes in all my objections.

### **Our first book**

There was nothing else to do but to put together a book of prayers. The first book contained prayers from Proverbs and the first fifty Psalms. We called the book, Praying Down the Path of Your Child's Life. We feel that by the time you pray through Proverbs, you will have covered every area of your child's life. The prayers from Psalms are there to keep you somewhat sane as you try to stay one step ahead of the children. We printed 1,000 copies and then wondered how we would ever sell that many. Then I began to assemble a second book of prayers from the Prophets of the Old Testament.

About that time, Evelyn Christensen was coming to speak at the JOY women's ministry program at our church. Marcia was heading the program so she asked if we could put our little books of prayers out at the same time they were selling Evelyn's books. They graciously allowed us to sell books and that weekend about 300 books went out into Albuquerque and other parts of New Mexico.

Next, the Lord introduced us to the New Mexico Christian Home Educators and began to get books into their hands. The way it happened was "on this wise," (as Luke would say). Marcia was having a garage sale and along with our other stuff we put out a few books. Just as we were about to close down for the day, this lady came by and saw the book and bought one. We did not think much about it until this lady, Marina, called and asked for more books and then invited us to their Saturday homeschoolers meeting. Through Marina, we got into the big state homeschooler conference and again the Lord scattered 300 books around the state. Now, years later, we have probably sold more through the help of Christian homeschoolers than any other route.

Marina did not stop there. She got books into the hands of everyone she knew including her mom, Georgia, who ran the intercessory prayer effort for Channel 11, a local Christian TV station. Soon Marcia and I were on the TV talking about praying God's Word and I was teaching a series on prayer.

In the spring of 1995, I was doing a prayer workshop at the New Mexico Christian Home Educators state conference. A lady from southeast New Mexico told me this story. She had heard me in 1994 tell how the deacons of Hoffmantown Church met in the spring of 1991 and prayed through the prayers from Proverbs. I had mentioned that we were praying those prayers for every young person the Lord would send to our church.

She had a burden for her young nephew and had been praying for him to come to know the

Lord. When she heard the nephew and his parents were moving to Albuquerque, she began to ask the Lord to send him to Hoffmantown. She told the Lord there were prayers "laid up" there for the youth and that she wanted her nephew to benefit from them. Not long afterward, she heard that the nephew had indeed begun attending Hoffmantown, had joined the youth group and had accepted the Lord Jesus Christ as his Savior. Joy and excitement flooded her countenance as she described how the Lord had heard and answered her specific prayers.

### **Prayers from the Prophets book**

The second book called Prayers for Revival and Spiritual Awakening From the Prophets is my favorite. Israel had turned away from God and He was using the prophets to call them to repent and return. Many of the verses from the Prophets made excellent prayers for our nation. I have prayed through them many times for myself, my family and for everyone who uses the books of prayers. I think the Lord is raising an army of "nobodies" in these last days for a final harvest before He returns. I have prayed a lot for that army and believe that the prayer books will have a part in raising the army and equipping them.

Back in 1989, before the prayer books were printed, I was sharing some of the written prayers with friends. One precious lady was really hungry to know God deeply and to grow in her relationship with Him. She also was engaged in a fierce battle with depression and fear. As she worked her way through the prayers, she came across one from Jeremiah 15:11. At that time it read, "Set me free for purposes of good." She immediately grabbed onto it and began to use it as a foundation for her prayers for deliverance from depression and fear.

Since that time, the Lord has made tremendous progress in her life. She has grown tremendously in prayer and has taught classes that have helped other women into some of the security and peace she has experienced. There are still some battles, but God is doing an ongoing work of setting her free for purposes of good.

In the fall of 1995, I felt prompted to send a note and a set of the prayers for spiritual awakening to the Herald of His Coming. This is a small monthly newspaper published by Gospel Revivals, Inc., P.O. Box 886, Newton, Kansas 67114. The focus of the paper is prayer and revival and more than 150,000 copies go all over the world every month. They were excited about the prayers and graciously included a small article about my books in their October edition. This brought calls from across the United States and some from Canada, England and Australia. It was very exciting to meet intercessors from around the world and to get the prayers into their hands.

### **Prayers from the Psalms book**

A guy named Ron came home from a business trip to find that his wife of a few months had left him. Her parting note said, "My God does not know your God." This devastated Ron and the stress began to take its toll on his health. One of our pastors gave Ron a copy of Prayers from Psalms for Troubled Times and he began to pray through them. A couple of weeks later, Ron had chest pains that felt like a heart attack. A friend drove him to the VA hospital here. While waiting to be admitted, Ron said he wished he had brought his Prayers from Psalms book. His friend just happened to have a stack of the prayers from Psalms in her car. She was planning to take the books to the support group she was leading. Quickly she ran to the car and got a book for him. Soon, they wheeled Ron into urgent care with His arms folded over a copy of Prayers from Psalms for Troubled Times. When Ron woke up the next morning in the Urgent Care ward with an IV in his arm, he decided to pray quietly some prayers. However, he was still very groggy from the medication they had given him. Instead of praying quietly, he was praying quite loud. Soon a nurse

came to check on him and asked what he was doing. He explained how he was praying from God's Word. She asked him to get her a copy of the prayers. Next, his doctor came to check on Ron and before she left, she also had asked for a copy of the prayers.

By the next day Ron had recovered enough to be up and around. He had not had a heart attack, but they were medicating him through an IV for stress. He took his IV pole and began to visit others on the floor. Ron is very outgoing and easily began to relate to different patients. He would pray near each room and if he felt prompted would go into the room and talk to and offer to pray for the patient in the room.

One man was there in a coma and his wife and kids were terribly frightened. Ron, by now, had some copies of the Psalms prayers. He prayed for them from the Psalms and then gave them a copy. They began to use the book in "around the clock" prayers prayed out loud in the dad's room. When they started, he was curled up in the fetal position and seemed to be in agony. By the next day, he straightened out, relaxed and seemed at peace.

One guy that Ron prayed with each day had terrible eyesight. When he heard that they were dismissing Ron, he made Ron promise to get him some prayers in huge print. I printed some prayers in huge letters. Ron even blew it up bigger on a copier so the guy could read and pray his own prayers.

Another day, Ron noticed the door to Intensive Care was open so he took his IV pole and walked in. A lady was there with her husband and Ron offered to pray. Ron picked a Psalm and prayed it and the lady asked him to pray it again. As he finished, a nurse came into the room with tears in her eyes. "What are you reading?" she asked. Although Ron thought he was only praying with the wife and her husband, in intensive care there is an open microphone from the patient's room to the front desk. The nurse could hear his prayers. The nurse and the husband and wife were moved to tears. As a result, Ron gave each of them a book.

Ron's roommate in the hospital was a very foul-mouthed guy. He constantly belittled and yelled at the nurses and was a harsh, hardened man. He was one reason Ron spent so much time out of the room visiting others. On the day they dismissed Ron, he was saying goodbye to his roommate. The man surprised Ron by asking, "What is your favorite part of the Bible?" Ron said that the Psalms had been really meaningful lately. The man said his favorite part was where Jesus washed the feet of his "buddies." Then he looked at Ron with tears in his eyes and said, "That is what you have been doing for all of us this week." It was about the last response Ron would have expected from the guy. Ron got all choked up and had to escape to the restroom.

As he was checking out of the hospital, Ron heard someone paging him over the intercom. He went to the nurses' station and the hospital chaplain was there. The chaplain wanted to see who this guy was who was passing out yellow books all over the ward. He looked at the prayers and then told Ron that he had really made his job easy the past week. The chaplain said Ron had taken care of the problems on that floor that week and thanked Ron for his help.

Later, Ron went back to the hospital to deliver some books he had promised. After he handed out all the promised books, Ron had one copy left. Another foul-mouthed guy was nearby in the ward. He had hassled and cursed Ron every time he saw him. Ron said, "I almost hated the guy." For some reason, as he left, Ron handed the guy the last book. Ron said, "Here, you can have this if you want it. At least you can use the blank side of the page to write on." With that, Ron left quickly.

Months later, just before Easter, Ron got a call at home from this foul-mouthed, raunchy guy. He said, "Ron, I have almost memorized the yellow book" (meaning the Prayers from Psalms for Troubled Times). He continued, "Ron, I am out for the weekend and wondered if you could take me to church?" Isn't it amazing what God's Word can do in the hearts of people? Ron said he

would not volunteer to go through the hospital experience again, but it was one of the most meaningful times of his life. As Ron shared these stories with our Experiencing God class and at other times, we were blessed and excited about having a part in ministering to so many hurting people.

### **Survival Prayers book**

Several people began to ask for a book of prayers done topically. They said that when problems came they needed prayers that fit the subject at hand. Also, a publishing company that had seriously looked at publishing the children's book said if the prayers were done topically, they might consider publishing it. This provided the incentive to put together a book with prayers for many different topics. Marcia and I brainstormed and tried to come up with areas that needed prayers. It was much more difficult finding verses to address subjects than it was to just write my way through a book of the Bible.

When I finally finished the book, the publisher did not want it. However, the book was a hit with those who were using our other books. I covered topics like protection, direction, provision, guidance, marriages, jobs, the lost, and healing. A final section called 911 Emergency Prayers is for when one does not know what else to pray. I called the book Survival Praying. One friend loved the book so much that she gave copies to every hurting person she fond.

### **Prayers for Men book**

One of my books contains prayers from Luke. It was the first one that contained comments along with the prayers. This was the format we had developed for a local Christian radio station. The book was complete and ready to print when I went to Promise Keepers in 1994. Several of us went to the pastors/leadership week in Boulder, Colorado. We then stayed for the huge men's rally over the weekend. Somewhere during the week the Lord impressed on me that I needed to gear a book toward men to help them pray.

Many men have a hard time praying. When Marcia and I do a prayer conference, we sometimes do some practice sessions. She takes the women and divides them into groups and soon they are praying vigorously. I take the men, explain carefully what we are doing and turn them loose to pray. Silence! Finally, one guy will quote one of his memorized prayers and maybe another one or two will join in. Now I realize there are many godly, praying men but there are mega-many (if that is a word) non-praying men.

In thinking about it, I came up with the following (not necessarily Biblical) reasons why women have an easier time of prayer than men. Women, for the most part, love details. They can look at an issue from all sides and have millions of thoughts about it. They have discovered that God will listen to as many details as they want to tell Him, so they tell Him all of them.

*(Marcia's note: "Seek God in detail to receive the maximum!")*

Men, on the other hand, are very goal-oriented. You know, shoot this issue once in prayer and go on to the next one. This is one reason it is hard for husbands and wives to pray together. The husband either is about four issues ahead of the wife or goes to sleep while she is beating the first one to death.

Women are also much more open than men. In 30 minutes my wife and any other lady can share most of their life history with each other, even if they have never met each other before. Men are much more secretive. Most of the things they know, they do not even dare tell anyone for fear they will feel contradicted or condemned. It is hard to pray very much about something without sharing what you think about it, so men keep quiet.

Back to my main point - that men have a hard time in prayer. When men are talking to God, they are talking to Someone who knows all about them. It is really hard to impress God with who you are, how important your job is, how great your golf score, fishing success or anything else is. This really limits what men can talk to God about. Also, when you are talking to God you are talking to someone you cannot boss around. I mean, if you cannot brag on yourself and cannot give orders, what is left to say? I usually hear "Amen" from the women and groans from the men when I say this. Slowly, however, we men are learning to come to God in humility, brokenness, and openness and cry out to Him to change us and our wives and our kids into who He wants us to be. In First Timothy 2:8, Paul points out the desire of God for men to pray when he says, "I want the men to pray everywhere, lifting up holy hands, without wrath and doubting." Paul, prompted by the Holy Spirit, is simply expressing God's desire that men take the lead in prayer. The kingdom of God has been severely limited because the men have mostly left the praying to the women

My goal with these prayers from Luke is to help men pray better. The title, Building on Your Most Holy Faith, came from pastor Danny. It is based on Jude 20 that suggests we are to build on the faith given to us at salvation. It is imperative that men get into the battle in prayer.

### **Confessing truth from Scripture**

The Powerful Praying by Confessing God's Truth book is different from the rest. It contains truths from God's Word to confess in prayer. We hear so much negative stuff about ourselves from the world and from each other. It is time we started saying what is true, whether it looks like it is true or not. I had already underlined most of the truths in my Bible. I concentrated on the New Testament and just took things the Bible says are true about us and rewrote them into a confession. My favorite way to use the book is to walk around the house when I am alone and confess them out loud to God. The devil's bunch can listen if they choose to stay around. It strengthens our faith when we speak the truth and God takes these confessions from His Word and works them into our lives. In other words, He makes the things that were always true about us begin to be manifested as true because we are finally believing the truth. As long as we refuse to believe the truth, the devil can hide the manifestation of the truth and make it seem like it is not true. You have to believe it is true before you see the evidence that it is true. That is what faith is all about. Remember, God said it and that settles it. However, if I do not believe what God said, then I am not experiencing or benefiting from that truth. I hope this book will help people see, confess and believe the truth.

We always caution those who use our books that praying God's word is not a program or formula to use to manipulate God. Using prayers from God's word helps us see what He wants to do and then we line up our prayers with His will. My goal with all the books is to help people pray exactly what God wants them to pray.

### **How to Pray God's Word Back to Him**

This was a difficult section to write because there are so many different ways to pray God's Word. The basic approach is to look at a verse and see what the Lord wants and then ask Him to do it in us, our spouse, our children and in everyone we can influence. As I learned to pray scripture, I read a verse and tried to see what God wanted to build into my life and then I asked Him to do that. When I saw things He wanted to clean out of my life, I asked Him to cleanse me and keep me from doing them. If the verse related to the church or the country, then I prayed along those lines.

Here are some guidelines as you pray from the Bible or pray prayers from our books. Read the verse you will be praying or read the prayer I have written so you have an idea of what God wants, then put it in your own words as you pray it to the Lord. Pray it for yourself, spouse and

children. Expand it to fit any specific needs.

Some verses may be covered very quickly, while other verses may take the whole prayer time as you expand them. As the Holy Spirit reminds you of other verses that tie into what you are praying, pray them too. Mark the ones that really come alive and come back to them often. Skip any that seem really dead to you. If you are using one of our books, mark your progress through the book with a paper clip. Start the next day where you left off the day before. Work your way through a book so you can pray through everything covered by the book.

Most people work their way through several verses during the course of their prayer time. One lady used only one verse each day but thoroughly prayed it for everyone on her prayer list. She later reported that she would often get letters telling how God had done what she had prayed. Often, God took action right after she had prayed the verse. This really increased her faith and encouraged her to keep on praying.

When two or more pray through a book together, they simply take one or two verses at a time and take turns praying back and forth. Before the second person starts their verse, they should agree and perhaps expand on what the first prayed. Agreeing together in prayer is extremely powerful and somehow allows God to do even more than He does for one praying alone. Working through a book together keeps prayer times from growing stale and repetitious as they pray new things from God's Word.

Our prayer books can be used very effectively during congregational prayer times. By explaining what God wants and then praying in agreement with His Word, the congregation can agree together and believe together. The prayers have been used to pray for congregations and at National Day of Prayer rallies. I used them for two years to provide a prayer verse of the day over Christian radio. One Sunday school class used a verse each Sunday as they prayed for their children.

The books are tools that help people tie their prayers more closely to God's Word. They also help people start praying for things they had not thought of before. Should someone get sleepy or distracted while praying, the written prayers help them get back on track. Most of all, prayers from God's word help us pray in faith because we are praying for things we already know God wants.

### **Going on the Offensive**

Prayers can be roughly divided into two types: defensive and offensive. Defensive praying is where the devil has broken or damaged something and we are praying for it to be fixed. Offensive praying is where we are on the attack. Offensive prayers ask God to destroy the works of the devil and cut off His attacks and spring his traps before they get to us. Jesus came to destroy the works of the devil (1 John 3:8). The offensive prayers of His people constitute the primary weapon He uses to devastate the devil's works.



ever became necessary.

When I first entered the Air Force, I was assigned to Strategic Air Command (SAC) Headquarters. SAC had two missions. The first was to be so powerful and effective that no country in its right mind would ever attack us or attack our allies. However, if some country was dumb enough to start a war, SAC's second mission would be activated. This mission would not focus on fighter planes, soldiers or any of the defensive stuff. Instead, SAC would immediately go on the offensive and head for the heart of that nation to destroy its ability to wage war. SAC, with its bombers and missiles, was always ready to do that if it

I feel the devil has been keeping the church on the defensive for years. By the time we get one person fixed, he has broken two others. For example, Hoffmantown church has a wonderful prayer room. It is manned around the clock with intercessors. As you go through the cipher lock door into the room, you are immediately confronted with hundreds of prayer requests. There is the urgent board, the phone request log, notebooks with requests and rolodex cards full of requests. When you look at the different requests you see that virtually all of the requests call for defensive prayers.

I feel these defensive prayer requests represent 90% to 95% of the things for which the average church is praying. While these type requests are valid and important, there has to be a place for some offensive prayers that shut down some of the things the devil is trying to do. How do we do that? We do it by asking the Lord to cut off the enemies' work. We identify strongholds and pray for the Lord to tear them down. We ask the Lord to cut off funds flowing into the devil's treasury and to shift them to the kingdom. I cannot even begin to give a comprehensive list of things to pray. However, if we will pray through scripture, we will be guided into the right prayers. God has spelled out what He does not like. If He doesn't like it, we can pray against it and ask Him to cut it off. For example, in Isaiah 5:20-24, God says not to call good evil or call evil good. Our media does this all the time. We can use this verse to pray for changes in the media and for God to expose false stories. As we pray in agreement with God's Word, He can do whatever is necessary to make changes. Also, we can pray ahead in our children's lives before drugs, gangs and godless teachers come and stand against them. We can have prayers on "lay away" for when needed. Again, these are only two of many ways to go on the offensive.

One day as I was praying through some prayers written from God's Word, the Lord seemed to speak. He said, "Tom, do you realize how powerful My Word is?" I kept quiet and listened. He said, "Any one verse of My Word is more powerful than all the nuclear bombs stored at Kirtland AFB." The mountains on Kirtland AFB have storage areas dug into them and at one time contained one of the largest stockpiles of nuclear weapons in the United States. I was reminded of Revelation 21:1 which reads, "I saw a new heaven and a new earth. The first heaven and the first earth were passed away and there was no more sea." This verse, when God accomplishes it, will totally obliterate everything we can see or touch and will bring about a new heaven and a new earth. Sounds like real power to me. I came away from this time with a new sense of the offensive power available to those who believe God's Word and tie their prayers closely to it.

### **Battle Prayers**

Since the words above were first written, I have completed a book called Battle Prayers. It takes the verses from the Psalms that ask the Lord to fight back in our behalf and turns them into prayers. I wish every believing family had a copy and used it. I think God would use these prayers to cut off many of the attacks that come against our families and our churches. I have spent a lot of time praying these battle prayers for my family, my friends and for the Lord's church. Even if you don't have a copy of the Battle Prayers book, turn to Psalm 35 in your Bible and ask God to "contend with those who contend with you and to fight with those who fight against you". The Lord had David write those words because they express exactly what God wants to do for your family. Pray through the rest of the Psalm, it is powerful. There are many other places in the Psalms where the Lord expresses His desire to fight back for His church.

## **No Retirement**

God really does not have a retirement plan for His people. We do kingdom work from the time we are "born again" until we get our work on earth completed and it is "check-out time." Even in heaven we will be working and reigning with the Lord.

I think in many ways the church pushes the elderly into early retirement and wastes much of their lives. We usually either entertain them or ignore them. Our senior years should be the most effective prayer years and the most spiritually productive years of our lives. While the seniors may have less mobility and physical energy, they have time to pray. They also should have a greater depth of spiritual maturity and a strong faith from years of walking with the Lord. The elderly should be the most powerful group of intercessors and prayer warriors in the church. My hope is that I can help call and equip our older believers for the tremendous work of prayer. I also hope I can enlist some of them to pray for us as we write and teach on prayer.

## **Where Are the Praying Churches**

Remember the little nursery rhyme - Where, O where, is my little dog gone, where, O where, can he be? We could ask the same question about the "praying church". Rare indeed are the churches that have a serious and sustained focus on prayer. God works in response to the faith-filled prayers of His people. If you are concerned that not much good is happening and that a lot of bad is happening, check the prayer temperature of your church. Ask questions like:

Who are the intercessors?

How many intercessory prayer groups are there?

Where and when do they meet?

What kind of ongoing prayer training does the church have?

Be prepared for vague and mumbled answers.

As you read the book of Acts, you see the church meeting as small groups in homes for prayer. (For the first 300 years of church history almost all their meetings were in homes) They prayed while waiting for the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, Acts 1:14. They prayed before replacing Judas, Acts 1:24. The early church was constantly studying, fellowshiping and praying, Acts 2:42. They prayed when persecution came and the house they were in was shaken, Acts 4:31. Their leaders gave themselves to prayer and the ministry of the Word, Acts 6:4. They prayed and laid hands on deacons who soon became spiritual leaders in the church, Acts 6:6. The Lord sent Ananias to Saul (Paul) who was praying, Acts 9:11. Peter prayed and God restored Dorcas to life, Acts 9:40. Cornelius was praying continually and his prayers were heard even though he was still lost, Acts 10:2,4,30-31. Peter was praying around lunchtime and saw a vision, Acts 10:9. The church prayed fervently and God supernaturally released Peter from prison, Acts 12:5,12. The believers in Antioch fasted, prayed and laid hands on Barnabas and Paul and turned them loose on the world, Acts 13:3. Paul and the church prayed and fasted and established elders in the churches, Acts 14:23. Paul and the believers of Tyre went outside the city and the men, women and children knelt on the shore and prayed, Acts 21:5. Paul tells the mob at Jerusalem that he was praying in the temple when the Lord spoke to him and gave him instructions, Acts 22:17. Acts concludes with Paul praying and laying hands on the father of Publius and God healing him, Acts 28:8.

See it? Throughout the book of Acts the early church focused on prayer. That is why they shook up the whole pagan world. The same privilege is available to believers today. They also met in small groups where everyone participated and functioned in their gifting. No "pew warmers" among that bunch, they all did the work of the ministry. Seems like the Lord is moving many back to a simpler, smaller, relationship based way of being the church together.

In 1 Timothy 2:1, Paul advises Timothy to focus on prayer "first of all." In other words, give prayer priority over singing, over preaching, over everything. Do not relegate it to late night hours or to "prayer breakfasts" which are 95% breakfast and 5% prayer. Make prayer a priority. When I see prayer given prime time on Sunday morning in a church, I will begin to believe that church is really making prayer a priority.

In Colossians 4:2, the Holy Spirit through Paul says, "Devote yourselves to prayer, keeping alert in it with thanksgiving." If we devote ourselves to something or someone, we give priority time abundant time and focused attention. In other words, give your best time and attention to prayer.

## **HEALING & HEALTH**

Only a small percentage of those prayed for in most churches are healed. This is sad. God has promised so much more than we are seeing. Jesus paid for healing through the merciless beatings He endured on the way to the cross. So why is there so little obvious, supernatural healing? I think a major reason is because we have not taken the authority we have been given and commanded healing to come to the body of the sick person in the name of Jesus.

When Jesus sent out the twelve and the seventy, He told them to: (Matthew 10:8, Luke 10:1-9)

Heal the sick,  
Raise the dead,  
Cleanse the lepers,  
Cast out demons.

He did not say, "Go find a sick person and then pray and ask the Father to heal them." Instead, He simply told them to go heal people and left the procedure up to them. Obviously, He had modeled the process for them over and over. Probably each team did it a little differently but they all had great success and came back very excited.

However, the church today is usually asking God to heal people instead of commanding healing in Jesus name like He instructed us to do. So how do we get closer to the New Testament pattern? First reread the stories of healings in the gospels and Acts until you are convinced that the Lord wants to heal people. Note that Jesus never told anyone they were too sinful and backslidden to be healed. He just healed them knowing that God's goodness would lead them to repentance (Romans 2:4). He never said "Sorry, I can't heal you because God is using this sickness to teach you something." It is true that the Lord can use sickness to draw us closer to Him. That is because He uses everything and works it for good for believers but that doesn't mean sickness is His first choice. I think He would rather do a supernatural healing to draw us, and those around us, closer. But, if we will not believe Him for healing, then we are left with the slow, expensive and often unsuccessful route the world uses. A better route would be to pray until we have a sense of what God wants and then command it to be done.

Until the Lord shows you otherwise, immediately think of sickness in a believer as an attack against the Lord's kingdom. Ask the Lord to fight back against this attacker. For example, cancer cells are defying the Lord's rules of orderly cell growth and deserve to die. Curse them and command them to die and command the body to stop feeding them. Command an ongoing attack until they are all destroyed. Treat toxins, viruses, harmful bacteria and poisons the same way. Resist anything that tries to prematurely remove members of the kingdom before all their work is complete.

God's character, as demonstrated by Jesus, is to heal so always start praying for that. His name, Jehovah-Rophe, The Lord our Healer, tells us He is interested in healing. Whether we get

healed or delivered or not, the cross settles the issue that He loves us deeply and always desires the best for us. So pray hard and trust Him to do what is best.

So how do we proceed:

Ask the Father if there is any reason you should not go to a person and command their body to be made well.

Ask God to stir up your faith and to protect your faith from the things you might see or hear as you go.

Ask the sick person if there are spiritual roots like fear, unforgiveness, self-hatred or bitterness that need to be dealt with. If there are, ask them to repent and/or forgive first.

Place your hand on the person, with their permission, and command:

The body to come into order.

Bones to be knit together as needed.

Muscles, tendons or ligaments to come into a healthy, normal condition.

Cancer cells to die and instruct the body to not feed them and to remove them.

The immune system to be strengthened and to operate correctly as God designed.

That there be no premature death. They are to live and not die and complete the kingdom work God has for them.

Whatever else the Holy Spirit gives you.

As you start to approach healing this way, I believe you will see more success than you did previously.

If you are the one who is sick, it is harder to believe for yourself because of the distraction of pain. Ask the Father to give you some faith-filled people to pray with you. Look for people who really believe that healing is for today and ask them to come and anoint you and pray for you. I am also willing to pray for you if you want to call me at 505-828-1701 and I will pray with you over the phone.

Jesus taught us to pray for God's will to be done on earth as in heaven. He allows no cancer, sickness or disease there. That is what He wants in your situation - "On earth like it is in heaven" Let this encourage you to pray big.

## Summary

Congratulations. You have survived all my stories and examples. Several of us have prayed that the Holy Spirit would speak to you as you read and thought about what I wrote. Hopefully, you will put into practice the things that impressed you. When possible, teach others what you have learned. This really locks it into your life plus it blesses others. Finally, pray much. Pray much alone and pray much with others. Be ready when called on to pray publicly. Gather people to pray. Start or join a prayer group. Help set the church to praying. In heaven, you will never regret the time and energy you spent in this eternally significant work of prayer.

Father, please use the information from this book to greatly strengthen the prayer life of the one reading this. Make them into a very effective man or woman of prayer and do significant things in Your kingdom through them.

In Jesus name,

Amen

Tom and Marcia Bishop

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Praying Down the Path of Your Grandchild's Life

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