

*Sword of the Spirit*

SERIES



making your prayer count

# Effective Prayer

Colin Dye

# *Effective Prayer*

The *Sword of the Spirit* series:

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## Introduction

Almost everybody prays to God when they have a tremendous need. No matter whether they are a Christian believer, an agnostic or an atheist, men, women and children ask for divine help when they are in severe difficulties.

For many people, prayer is a last resort. They pray only when they are desperate. They are not sure whom they are addressing or quite what to expect from their prayer. If their need continues, it is 'proof' that there is no God. If their need disappears, God is forgotten until the next emergency.

For Christians, it should be the exact opposite. Prayer should be as natural and instinctive as breathing. However, it should not be restricted merely to asking God to meet needs; it should also be an expression of an intimate relationship with God.

This book on prayer has three aims. Firstly, to help you discover and understand the biblical teaching about prayer. Secondly, to introduce you to an exciting life of prayer. And, thirdly, to encourage and equip you to pass your understanding and excitement about prayer on to others.

I am sure you do not need to be told that you should pray more! All Christians, everywhere, feel like this – whatever their spiritual maturity. I know several people who have helped large numbers of believers to pray more effectively, but none of them is entirely satisfied with the quality of their own prayer life.

Yet although we know that we should pray more, we may not be quite so sure *why* we should pray more, *how* we should pray or *what* we should pray. That is why this book aims to help you both to learn about prayer from the Bible *and* to pray following biblical principles.



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By the time of the events recorded in Luke 11, the disciples had been with Jesus for a considerable while. They had watched him at work. They themselves had preached, healed the sick and seen demons submit to them. From childhood, they had prayed in the Jewish synagogues and the temple. They had even been with Jesus when he prayed. Yet they still felt the need to ask, 'Teach us to pray'.

Their passion for Jesus and the example of his praying inspired the disciples to desire to learn to pray. They realised that – despite their years with Jesus and their ministerial experience – they were beginners at prayer who needed to learn from the Master, from Jesus.

Most of us have learnt to pray by listening to other people pray. This is why Christians in particular traditions or denominations often pray in a similar way. But if our personal and corporate Christian life is to be mature and Christ-like, we need to base every aspect of our lives on God's word rather than on human experience.

In 2 Timothy 3:16–17, Paul reminds us that 'All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work'.

This book is essentially for those believers who are prepared to set aside their own ideas about prayer and study God's word to discover God's biblical principles. In order to receive the most out of this book please read through each Bible reference. Before moving on to a new section, carefully think through the implications of what you have studied for yourself and for the people around you. Please allow God to speak to you as you study his word.

There is additional material available to facilitate your learning, which can be found in the *Sword of the Spirit Student's Handbook* and at the website [www.swordofthespirit.co.uk](http://www.swordofthespirit.co.uk). In these resources you can find *knowledge reviews*, *quizzes* and

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*exams*, which will help you test, retain and apply the knowledge you have learnt in this book.

You will also be able to use the *knowledge reviews* with small groups. You may wish to prayerfully select those parts that you think are most relevant for your group. This would mean that at some meetings you might use all the material whilst at others you might use only a small part. Please use your common sense and spiritual insight. Please feel free to photocopy these pages and distribute them to any group you are leading.

Establishing a lifestyle of scriptural prayer is a basic part of developing your relationship with God. It is my prayer that, as you study this book, you will experience a new quality in prayer which has deep consequences for you, for your family, and for those who may be in need around you.

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## Part One

# Prayer in the Old Testament

Throughout the Bible, the word 'prayer' is used to describe every type of communication from men and women to God. For example, Hannah's song, in 1 Samuel 2, is introduced as a prayer even though it is a thanksgiving. And Habakkuk 3 is described as a prayer although it is written as a psalm.

There are about eighty-five prayers in the Old Testament, and these include prayers of adoration, confession, praise, supplication and thanksgiving.

Any one prayer may be all thanksgiving, or all adoration, or all pleading. Or a prayer may include many different aspects of prayer. Please read Isaiah 63:7–64:12 and see how praise, thanksgiving, pleading, confession and supplication are blended together. Old Testament prayers may also include elements of prophetic revelation, declaration of faith, pronouncements of blessing or cursing, statements of warfare, rebuke and calls to repentance.

Most Old Testament prayers are concerned with physical needs and practical difficulties. Unlike the New Testament, few Old Testament prayers focus on spiritual and moral matters. However, the Old Testament takes three prayer principles very much for granted.

Although the Scriptures never explicitly state this, they always clearly imply that:

- ◆ God hears prayer
- ◆ God is moved by prayer
- ◆ God does not grant every request.

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### **Old Testament terms for praying**

The Old Testament uses six main Hebrew verbs to describe the different ways that men and women pray to God. The various translations of the Bible do not always translate these Hebrew verbs with the same words, so sometimes it is difficult to appreciate the variations in meaning.

*Qara* – to call

This is the oldest and simplest phrase for invocation or praying. Genesis 4:26 is the Bible's first mention of prayer, and it shows that people began praying by calling on the name of God: they appealed to God directly by using his sacred name. We can read about this in Genesis 12:8 & 21:33.

This means that there is a simplicity, directness and familiarity in the early prayers. We can see this in Genesis 15:2–8; 18:23–33 & 24:12–14.

God's people 'called on the name of the Lord' throughout the Old Testament. There are examples of this in 1 Samuel 12:17; 2 Samuel 22:4; 1 Kings 18:24; 2 Kings 5:11; Psalm 116:4,17; Isaiah 12:4; Jeremiah 33:3; Joel 2:32 & Zechariah 13:9.

God's people continued to call on God's name in the New Testament – for example, in Acts 2:21 & 9:14. And so, today, when we pray, we know that we must still pray 'in the name of Jesus'.

*Palal* – to pray

This is the most common Hebrew phrase for praying. However, it literally means 'to pray habitually' or 'to pray repeatedly'. When people promised to *palal* they were not promising to pray one prayer, they were promising to go on praying, to persevere. The word is used specifically to express 'to intercede' or, 'to ask on behalf of another', as in Genesis 20:7.

It is first used to describe Abraham's praying in Genesis 20:7, 17, and then to describe Moses' praying in Numbers 11:2. Deuteronomy 9:25–26 makes it clear that there is a persistence in biblical *palal* praying, as does 1 Samuel 1:10–12.

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God's people 'prayed' throughout the Old Testament. You can appreciate this in 1 Samuel 7:5; 1 Kings 8:28–54; 2 Kings 4:33; Ezra 10:1; Nehemiah 1:4–6; Isaiah 37:15; Daniel 9:4,20 & Jonah 2:1.

The New Testament continues with the same emphasis of needing to persist in prayer – for example, Luke 18:1–8 & 1 Thessalonians 5:17.

*Paga* – to approach in order to plead

The *Qal* form of this word in Hebrew means 'to meet, to encounter and to reach'. In the *Hiphil* form it can mean 'to cause to entreat' as in Jeremiah 15:11. This is the phrase for the strongest form of Old Testament pleading, and is often translated as 'intercede' or 'entreat'. It also can mean 'to approach with violence' or, as in Job 36:32, 'to make attack, to assault or to mark'.

The general idea we obtain from this Old Testament word is that intercession is a violent intervention, a strong form of pleading for and on behalf of another. We will look at this in detail in Part Four when we study intercession.

Prophets were the only people who interceded with God in the Old Testament, as only they had the necessary anointing with the Spirit which enabled them to approach God's face. We can read about the general relationship between prophets and intercession in Genesis 20:7 (*palal*); Exodus 32:11–14 (*chalah*); 1 Samuel 7:5 (*palal*); Jeremiah 7:16; 27:18 (*paga*) & Isaiah 59:16 (*paga*).

Isaiah 53:12 shows that intercession is central to the ministry of the Messiah – God's Suffering Servant. This is carried on in the New Testament where Hebrews 7:25 and Romans 8:34 describe the work of Christ as the eternal Intercessor for the saints.

*Shaal* – to ask, to ask for, to inquire

This is the word which the Old Testament uses to describe praying for matters like grace, deliverance, information and

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guidance. It is used as a word for prayer in Numbers 27:21 and in Judges 1:1, when the Israelites needed guidance for the war against the Canaanites.

God's people 'asked' God throughout the Old Testament. There are examples of this prayer activity in 1 Kings 3:5; Psalm 2:8; Isaiah 7:11–12 & Zechariah 10:1.

Again, this type of praying continues in the New Testament. In Luke 11:9 and John 14:13, Jesus makes it plain that God wants us to go on asking him for whatever we need.

*Chalah* – to beseech

This is an unusual phrase used for prayer to God, and it literally means 'to smooth God's face' or 'to make God's face pleasant or sweet'. It means 'to beseech, to pacify or to appease'. It carries the idea of inducing one to show favour in place of wrath and chastisement, but it is usually translated as 'beseech'. *Chalah* suggests talking sweetly and quietly to God – reasoning gently with him – as opposed to the noise and violence implied in *paga*.

Moses prayed like this, in Exodus 32:11, when it seemed that God was about to consume the people of Israel. This sort of praying is also described in 1 Kings 13:6; 2 Kings 13:4; Jeremiah 26:19 & Malachi 1:9.

The association between prayer and incense grew out of this type of praying. As people realised that God delighted in the prayers of his people, so incense – a sweet fragrance – was often offered to God by the priests along with the prayers. Psalm 141:2 shows that some prayer (*palal*) eventually came to be considered as incense. This association is repeated in Revelation 8:1–6.

*Zaaq* – to cry, to cry out, to call

The Old Testament uses this phrase to describe prayer which asks God to correct a wrong or free his people from some trouble. The word related to this in Arabic suggests 'sound as thunder'. The children of Israel often 'cried out' about their troubles – for example, Exodus 2:23; Judges 3:9, 15 & 6:6–7.

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This is a very common type of Old Testament praying and it seems to be essentially a loud and desperate form of prayer. We can read examples of it in 1 Samuel 7:9; Nehemiah 9:4; Psalm 107:13; Joel 1:14; & Micah 3:4.

In Romans 8:15 & Galatians 4:6, Paul suggests that it is the Spirit who prompts us to cry out to God in prayer.

### **Old Testament postures for praying**

Not only does the Old Testament use many different words to describe many types of praying, it also shows that people adopted different postures when they prayed. There was not one right way to pray.

#### **Standing**

People usually stood in the Old Testament to pray. You can see this in Genesis 18:22 and 1 Samuel 1:26. Mark 11:25 shows that Jesus assumed his followers would stand to pray.

#### **Kneeling**

Knees can show the relationship between people; for example, they may be bent in terror or homage to a superior. In the Old Testament, people knelt in prayer and worship to demonstrate both their fear of God and also his superiority. You can see this in Psalm 95:6; 1 Kings 8:54; Ezra 9:5 & Daniel 6:10. In Acts 9:40; 20:36 & 21:5, Paul and Peter knelt to pray at special times.

#### **Prostrating**

At times of great reverence in the Old Testament, people lay flat on their faces before God. You can see this in Numbers 16:45 & 1 Kings 18:42. Matthew 26:39 shows that Jesus prayed like this in his most urgent hour, in Gethsemane.

#### **Sitting**

2 Samuel 7:18 is the only biblical example of anyone sitting to pray. This was not the Jewish way. Today, many traditions and cultures still use different postures – God is more interested in our attitudes and our motives than our positions.



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### Raising hands

Psalm 63:4 describes hands being lifted to God in prayer – perhaps in a gesture of surrender to God. Exodus 9:29 and Isaiah 1:15 describe praying with hands spread out – with upturned palms – which suggests receiving from God. Paul instructs Timothy to pray like this in 1 Timothy 2:8.

## **Prayer in the Pentateuch**

The first five books of the Bible are often called ‘the Pentateuch’, though Jews usually call them ‘the Law’, or ‘the Torah’. Except for Deuteronomy 26:1–15, there is no *teaching* about prayer in the detailed rules and regulations which God gave to Israel through Moses. However, we can learn from the six types of prayers recorded in the Pentateuch.

### Conversations with God

Many of the prayers made are conversations between a human and God. These are not merely occasions when people draw near to God to speak, they are also times when God comes close to his people to reveal his purposes. There are examples of these conversations in Genesis 15:2–8; 18:23–33; 24:12–14 & Exodus 3:1–4:17.

### Important intercessions

Most of the prayers which are recorded in the Pentateuch are important intercessions. Abraham interceded for others in Genesis 17:18; 18:23–32 & 20:7. Moses interceded for Pharaoh to have relief from the plagues in Exodus 8:12; 9:33 & 10:18; and he frequently interceded for Israel whenever they murmured against God and rebelled – for example, Exodus 32:11–13.

### Personal requests

However, several private prayers are also recorded in the Pentateuch: Abraham prayed for a child (Genesis 15:2); Eliezer prayed for a successful journey (Genesis 24:12); Jacob prayed when he was frightened (Genesis 32:9–12); Moses

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prayed both when he was perplexed (Exodus 5:22), and when he was frustrated (Numbers 11:11–15).

### Family blessings

When a father blesses his son – as in Genesis 49:1–28 – it is essentially a prophetic vision of God's purpose for the person being blessed. But Deuteronomy 33 shows that it is also a form of prayer, as God is being asked to bring about what he has revealed.

### Oaths and vows

The Pentateuch describes several people making oaths and vows. Abraham made the first oath in Genesis 14:21–24, and it is plain that this is a form of prayer. Oaths like Jacob's, in Genesis 28:20–22, became quite common, and they are even used of God himself – as in Deuteronomy 32:40.

### Sacrificial prayer

Prayer was closely connected with sacrifice in the Pentateuch. We see this in Genesis 13:4; 26:25 & 28:18–22. The offering of a prayer in the context of making a sacrifice suggests complete abandonment to God and total submission to his will.

However, the fact that prayer is not mentioned in those parts of the Pentateuch which describe sacrificial ritual suggests that sacrifice without prayer was more usual.

## **Prayer in the kingdom books**

Following the Pentateuch, there are twelve books which record Israel's history – Joshua to Esther. These books describe all the important events in the developing story of Israel – from the Judges, through the Kings, to the nation's exile and return, and the rebuilding of Jerusalem.

The books tell a story which is packed with prayers, and we can see both leaders and ordinary people crying to God to help, guide, save and deliver them. However, we learn most about praying from these books by examining the prayers of the great men of that era.

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### Samuel

Jeremiah 15:1 suggests that Moses and Samuel are the two main intercessors in Jewish history. In 1 Samuel 7:5–12, Samuel twice intercedes with God over the nation, and in 1 Samuel 8 & 12, he intercedes about the people's request for a king. In 1 Samuel 12:23 he refers to his continuous pleading for the people, and expresses his understanding that this is part of his prophetic calling. And after Saul's rejection, in 1 Samuel 15:11, he prays all night.

### David

The story of David is littered with references to David 'inquiring of the Lord' – as in 2 Samuel 2:1; 5:19, 23. These references indicate the depth of David's prayer relationship with God and his dependence on God for guidance.

Most of David's recorded prayers are included in the Psalms, but 2 Samuel 7:18–29 contains a less formal, more personal prayer. 2 Samuel 12:16 graphically describes David's desperate prayers after God had punished him because of his sin. Psalm 51 – one of only five psalms to be entitled a prayer – was written by David at this time.

### Elijah

Both Elijah and Elisha were great intercessors. Elijah's prayers in 1 Kings 17:20 & 18:36–37 are without precedent in the Bible. The great test on Carmel is based on who hears prayer. It is Elijah's confidence in the Living God who hears and answers prayer which brings about such a dramatic moment.

### Ezra

Ezra 8:21–23 shows that Ezra depended on prayer for the safety of his expedition. His prayer in Ezra 9:5–15 must be one of the greatest of all biblical prayers. Here Ezra confesses sins which he has not personally committed but of which he considers himself guilty because he is part of the nation which has committed them.

This is a significant prayer, for it introduces the scriptural idea of representative confession.

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### Nehemiah

Constant prayer is typical of Nehemiah. There are examples of this in Nehemiah 2:4; 4:4; 5:19 & 6:9. Nehemiah's great prayer, in 1:4–11, is similar to Ezra's. He takes the sins of Israel on himself and confesses them as a whole. He does not stand apart from the people – he regards himself as involved in their guilt.

The twelve books from Joshua to Esther show us two further interesting aspects of prayer:

### Special places

These books contain prayers which suggest that there were special places for prayer. The ark of the covenant denoted the local presence of God and so was a place of prayer – as in 1 Samuel 1 & 2 Samuel 7.

Sacrifices were offered at 'high places', so prayer was made there too – as in 1 Samuel 7:5 & 1 Kings 3. And when the temple was dedicated, in 1 Kings 8, it was partly as a place of prayer.

### Fasting

These books introduce the practice of fasting – going without food – and praying. This is usually in the context of mourning and weeping and asking God for help.

Judges 20:26–27 is the first mention of fasting. There are further examples in 2 Samuel 12:21; 1 Kings 21:27; Ezra 8:23; Nehemiah 1:4 & Esther 4:3, 16.

## **Prayer in the Psalms**

The Hebrew word for psalm means 'song of praises'. Although only five psalms are specifically entitled 'a prayer', many people feel that all the psalms are prayers. Certainly there is a telling verse at the end of Psalm 72 which suggests that all previous psalms are prayers.

There are psalms of adoration, thanksgiving, petition, celebration, lamentation, meditation, penitence, warfare and

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worship. There are individual and corporate psalms, psalms which recount history, and psalms which plead for vengeance. The psalms express almost every possible human emotion – for example, hatred, repentance, piety, patriotism, wonder, trust, love and devotion.

It seems that there are ten different types of prayer in the Psalms. Here are a few examples of each type of prayer. Please read them and wonder at the creativity and honesty in prayer of the psalmists.

- ◆ Prayers which ask God for *blessing and protection* – 86, 102.
- ◆ Prayers of *praise and thanksgiving* – 47, 68, 104, 145–150.
- ◆ Prayers for *deliverance* – 38, 88.
- ◆ Prayers which *confess faith* in God as Creator, Lord, King, Judge, etc. – 33, 94, 97, 136, 145.
- ◆ Prayers of *repentance* and *pleas for forgiveness* – 6, 32, 38, 51, 102, 130, 143.
- ◆ Prayers of *intercession* – 21, 67, 89, 122.
- ◆ Prayers which *plead for vengeance* – 35, 59, 109.
- ◆ Prayers of *wisdom or instruction* – 37, 45, 49, 50, 78, 104–107.
- ◆ Prayers which *ask questions* – 16, 17, 49, 73, 94.
- ◆ Prayers which *praise God's word* – 1, 19, 119.

Taking the Psalms as a whole, they appear to suggest five general principles about prayer:

Pouring from the heart

The Psalms seem to regard prayer as the pouring out of everything in the heart. We can see this in 42:4; 62:8; 102 & 142:2. The Psalmist does not go before God in prayer with a fixed and orderly list of requests; instead he pours out his feelings and desires – whatever they are!

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### Blending of moods

It follows from this pouring out that prayer is a mixture of moods. The prayers in the Psalms pass from praise to complaint, from confession to depression, from devotion to revenge. There are examples of this in 57, 69 & 139.

### Corporate and personal

Some of the prayers – for example, 60, 79 & 80 – are corporate, and some of them are personal – including 23, 51 & 63. But while 44 is clearly corporate, ‘I’ and ‘me’ occur in verses 6 & 15. And while 102 appears at first to be personal, it soon becomes clear that it expresses the complaint and needs of the nation.

Somehow, almost every prayer in the Psalms is both personal and corporate. They express the Jewish understanding that ‘in prayer, a person should always unite himself with the community’.

### Material and spiritual

Although most of the prayers in the Psalms are concerned with material needs, spiritual requests thread through them as well. Until this point, most Old Testament prayer has been for physical concerns.

The Psalms introduce the whole dimension of spiritual needs as a prayer topic. Three spiritual concerns can be seen:

- ◆ Prayer for communion with God – as in 63
- ◆ Prayer for forgiveness – as in 51
- ◆ Prayer for knowledge of God’s will – as in 119.

### Extreme urgency

Throughout the Psalms there is a feeling that God must be made to hear. He needs to be wakened, urged, persuaded – as in 13:1–2; 28:1–2 & 44:23. But this is because the needs are often urgent, immediate and desperate – as in 70 – not because God is reluctant or deaf.

These prayers are different from Abraham’s and Moses’ dialogues with God – where they almost seem to converse as

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equals. Instead these prayers are more like urgent requests from children to their parents in times of great personal need.

### **Prayer in the prophetic books**

The last seventeen books of the Old Testament are called 'The Prophets'. These are the collected writings of some of Israel's prophets who lived over a very wide period of time. Some of them, like Jeremiah, ministered when the Jews were ruled by kings. Others, like Daniel, prophesied during their exile. And Zechariah and Haggai were active after the Jews had returned from exile to rebuild Jerusalem.

Prayer has a high profile in these books, especially in the books written after the Jews were expelled from Jerusalem and their temple was destroyed. Because of this:

- ◆ They were unable to offer God any sacrifices and had to worship him through prayer instead
- ◆ They felt abandoned by God and pressed him both to explain what had happened and to bless them again.

Daniel 6 illustrates how prayer was the distinctive mark of the Jews in exile. Daniel's enemies use prayer as the basis and opportunity for their attack.

This chapter contains the first mention of special times for prayer – although Psalm 55:17 may hint at them. The Jews used Genesis 19:27; 24:63; & 28:11 to justify their three hours of prayer. Acts 3:1 shows that these special times for prayer were still used in the early church.

All the prophets were intercessors – it was part of their prophetic calling. They were prophets because they had a special anointing of the Spirit, and this anointing gave them:

- ◆ The right of access to God in prayer
- ◆ The power to wrestle with God in intercessory prayer
- ◆ The ability to interpret God's word to the people
- ◆ The insight to appreciate the people's real needs.

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We will look at the prophets' general ministry of intercession in Part Four, but – beyond that special aspect of prayer – the prophetic books seem to contain four general aspects of prayer:

### Personal prayer

Although the prophets were primarily intercessors – which means praying for or on behalf of others – they did not neglect to pray for themselves. Jeremiah 17:14–18; 18:19–23 & 20:7–18 show the special difficulties and trials faced by the prophets and illustrate how they prayed for themselves when they had problems.

### Hearing God's word

It was in prayer (at least, in part) that the prophets heard God's word. God's promise to Jeremiah in 33:3 was a personal promise to him as a prophet which – since Pentecost – is relevant to all believers. However, Jeremiah 42:1–7 records that Jeremiah had to wait ten days in prayer before he heard God's word.

### Averting evil

The prophets often prayed to avert present or predicted evil. Amos 7:1–6 & Jeremiah 15:1–21 illustrate this aspect of prophetic praying. In these passages, the anointed prophets directed their prayers to God, begging him to intervene and avert the evil. They did not direct their prayers to the evil. We will study spiritual warfare in Part Seven.

### Fasting

Fasting became more closely connected with prayer. Isaiah 58:1–14 & Zechariah 7:1–7 contain corrective teaching, explaining to the people the sort of fasting which God requires.

It is easiest to understand the type of prayer which is typical of the prophetic books by reading three outstanding examples of the prophets' prayers. These great prayers illustrate the wrestling, prevailing, and prophetic prayer which God expects of those people who have been anointed with his Spirit.



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Isaiah 63:7–64:12

In this amazing prayer, the prophet seems almost to step forward and lead the worship of God's people in exile. This prayer contains a giant leap forward in the Old Testament understanding of God with its appeal both to the Fatherhood of God and to the Holy Spirit.

Isaiah 63:16 & 64:8 (together with 1 Chronicles 29:10) are the first recorded scriptural prayers to 'Our Father'; this is taken up by Jesus in his 'Lord's Prayer'. 63:10–11 is one of only two Old Testament references to the 'Holy' Spirit – the title which is adopted as the definitive name for God's Spirit throughout the New Testament.

Daniel 9:1–27

This is another corporate, or representative, confession, similar to the prayers of Ezra and Nehemiah. In his prayer and fasting, Daniel fully identifies with all God's people in their wickedness – even though he had not sinned personally. Because he was part of the one people, their sin was his sin. This type of prayer seems to be developed in the New Testament in passages like 1 John 5:16.

Jeremiah 14:1–15:21

This persistent intercession goes on wrestling and arguing with God to avert evil even when God has told the prophet to stop. Usually, God's announcement of judgement is an invitation to intercede for mercy; however, this story shows there is a point when God will not relent.

- ◆ An intercession – 14:2–9
- ◆ God's answer forbidding intercession – 14:10–12
- ◆ More pleading, despite the divine ban – 14:13
- ◆ More warnings from God – 14:14–16
- ◆ A wail from the prophet which ends in more intercession – 14:17–22
- ◆ God's answer of final condemnation – 15:1–9

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- ◆ Even more dialogue in prayer which continues to 15:21.

These prayers reveal the deeply intimate relationship which exists between God and the prophets. They superficially resemble the dialogue prayers used by Abraham and Moses. But there is more intensity, fasting has been added, and the prayer is characterised by wrestling, prevailing, agonising, and intense, often exhausting, intercession.

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## Part Two

# Prayer in the New Testament

If ever there was a person whom it might be thought did not need to pray, surely Jesus was that person. Yet the four Gospels make it clear that prayer was absolutely central to his life.

### **Jesus' earthly prayer life**

The Gospels record the following facts about Jesus and prayer. Through these passages we can grasp the extent of the prayer example which Jesus sets.

He prayed:

- ◆ Early in the morning – Mark 1:35
- ◆ Late in the evening – Luke 6:12
- ◆ At his baptism – Luke 3:21
- ◆ After much ministry – Mark 1:35, 6:46 & Luke 5:16
- ◆ For a night before selecting the twelve disciples – Luke 6:12
- ◆ Alone in the presence of his disciples – Luke 9:18
- ◆ At his transfiguration – Luke 9:28–29
- ◆ After the last supper – John 17
- ◆ In Gethsemane – Mark 14:32 & Luke 22:41
- ◆ For Peter – Luke 22:32
- ◆ For small children – Matthew 19:13–15
- ◆ At his crucifixion – Luke 23:34
- ◆ After his resurrection – Luke 24:30
- ◆ At his ascension – Luke 24:50
- ◆ After his ascension – John 14:16.

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Jesus also:

- ◆ Asked others to pray – Luke 22:40
- ◆ Urged the crowds to pray – Luke 21:36
- ◆ Taught people to pray – Matthew 6:5–18 & Luke 11:1–4
- ◆ Taught about prayer – Matthew 21:22; Mark 11:24–25; Luke 11:5–13; 18:1–14; John 14:13 & 16:23–28
- ◆ Was angry when people traded rather than prayed in the temple – Luke 19:45–46.

### Jesus' heavenly prayer life

The New Testament shows that after Jesus' ascension he is still a man of prayer – he is 'The Intercessor'.

Romans 8:34 states, 'It is Christ who died, and furthermore is also risen, who is even at the right hand of God, who also makes intercession for us'.

And Hebrews 7:25 declares, 'He is able to save to the uttermost those who come to God through him, since he ever lives to make intercession for them'.

These two verses reveal the eternal activity of the resurrected Christ. As I write this, as you study this, as we live, and on until we die, Christ continues to intercede for us and for all believers everywhere.

Christ prays in heaven

The verses show that Jesus Christ lives essentially in heaven, rather than in human hearts. If he lived primarily on earth in believers' hearts, he could not be at the Father's right hand interceding for them.

The scriptural principle is that we *receive* the Holy Spirit into our lives, and that we *believe* in God's Son who rules in the heavenlies – where he engages in this everlasting, agonising prayer with the Father.

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Christ prays for the saints

Romans 8:34 & Hebrews 7:25 present Christ as praying for the saints, for those who have come to God through him. This is an important prayer principle.

Some recent intercession in the Church has focused on praying for unbelievers – especially that they be saved. Whilst this is not wrong, the scriptural emphasis is on two other matters. Firstly, that believers are motivated and equipped to take the message of salvation to unbelievers and that the gospel is presented powerfully. Secondly, that obstacles which are blocking unbelievers from hearing or receiving the message of salvation be moved and that unbelievers are powerfully convicted of sin. We will examine this topic in Parts Six and Seven.

As we study the scriptural material on prayer, we should always watch out for the focus of the praying.

We should try to discover:

- ◆ Whom we are being asked to pray for
- ◆ Why we are being asked to pray for them
- ◆ What we are being told to pray for them.

### **Jesus' teaching on prayer**

Jesus taught much about prayer. In fact, he taught more about prayer than about any other topic except two – the kingdom of God and finance. By his teaching, Jesus expressed in words the truths that his life demonstrated.

Here are the ten basic prayer principles which Jesus taught to his close disciples. We can ask ourselves which of these we are following and which we are ignoring.

Jesus taught his disciples:

- ◆ To pray privately – Matthew 6:5–6
- ◆ To agree with other people in prayer – Matthew 18:19

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- ◆ To keep public prayers plain and short – Matthew 6:7–13
- ◆ To make specific requests which related to their immediate needs – Matthew 6:11 & Luke 11:3
- ◆ That effective prayer was related to the way they forgave others – Matthew 6:11 & Luke 11:3–4
- ◆ That effective prayer was related to the degree to which they obeyed his instructions and God's word – Matthew 7:21–27
- ◆ To go on praying, to persist with their requests, to persevere – Luke 11:5–13 & Luke 18:1–8
- ◆ To pray with a penitent attitude and not with an arrogant confidence – Luke 18:9–14
- ◆ To pray with faith – Matthew 21:18–22 & Luke 17:5–6
- ◆ To pray in his name – John 14:13–14; John 16:23–24, 26.

This last point is especially significant. As Jesus was approaching his death, he told his disciples that prayer was henceforth to be addressed to the Father in the name of the Son – such prayer was sure to be granted (John 16:23–24,26). This is the essential difference of Christian prayer: it is offered in the name of Christ.

### **Jesus' parable about prayer**

Jesus' clearest teaching on prayer is found in Luke 11:1–13 (see also Matthew 5:9–13). Luke records that the disciples, having watched and listened to Jesus praying, asked him to teach them to pray.

Jesus responded to their request with:

- ◆ A prayer to use
- ◆ A parable to understand
- ◆ Some principles to follow.

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The parable of the persistent friend, in verses 5–8, teaches much about prayer. In this story, Jesus – who lives for ever to intercede for his friends – reveals the necessary elements of perfect praying.

### An immediate need

In the parable, the man prayed because an urgent need arrived unexpectedly at a most inconvenient time. This suggests that we should start praying when God presents us with a need, or burden, which must be dealt with; then we should continue to make that request until it has been dealt with. This implies that God chooses both what we pray for and the time when we start praying.

### A necessary relationship

In the parable, prayer is the man's loving response to his friend's need. One man visited a friend who, in turn, called on another friend. This suggests that prayer is an expression of relationship, and that we should focus mainly on praying for the needs of our friends and people known to us. But the Holy Spirit will also enable us to love and identify with those whom we don't know personally.

Jesus seems to follow this principle. John 15:3–15 shows that believers are Jesus' friends; and Romans 8:34 & Hebrews 7:25 present Jesus as praying for 'us' – for those whom he has saved.

### Obvious love

In the parable, the man took his tired and hungry visitor into his home. He did not make the excuse of no food or the late hour. He gave up his night's sleep, the comfort of his bed and risked his popularity with a neighbouring friend to get some bread for his guest. Why? Surely it is because he loved the visitor.

Love – not mere habit or duty – should be one of the main motives behind prayer. True love gets us out of our beds and on to our knees.

### A helpless state

The man in the parable had no resources of his own with which to feed his friend. Great love can be utterly impotent.



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Parents may love their sick children, but still be unable to help them. The man was willing to feed his friend himself, but he had nothing to give him.

It is this helplessness which sent him out begging to someone whom he believed could meet the urgent need. This suggests that it is only those people who recognise and accept their own weakness who can receive the strength of God. It also suggests that we should ask God only to meet those needs which we ourselves lack the resources to meet. Sometimes we ask God to do things which we are perfectly capable of doing ourselves!

So Christ intercedes for those whom he has saved because there is nothing else he can do. He has laid down his life, shed his blood, risen from the dead, ascended to the Father and baptised his bride in the Holy Spirit. He can do only one more thing: ask his Father to intervene.

### The prayer of faith

The man in the parable was sure his friend would help. He was confident that his friend would not mind being woken at midnight. It was this confidence, this faith, which took him into the dark and the cold. It is this confident faith which makes prayer purposeful. There can be no point in praying if we think God is unlikely, unwilling or unable to meet the need.

After telling this parable, Jesus went on in Luke 11:13 to teach that God is poised, ready and eager to deliver good things, especially the Holy Spirit, to those who ask. Surely the astonishing promises of John 14:16 should lead to a confident faith which causes prayer to pour from our lips.

We can be certain that Jesus has absolute confidence in his Father's ability to hear and answer his prayer. Jesus knows that his intercession is not in vain. We can be equally sure that his prayers for us will also be answered.

### The vital boldness

There is a twist in the parable. The man's hopes were dashed. His friend would not help. This is the point of the parable.

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Prayer – especially petition and intercession – is surrounded by difficulties and God wants us to be bold.

The man had to be bold to wake his neighbour at midnight to borrow some bread. The Greek word *anaidei* in Luke 11:8 is translated as ‘boldness’ or ‘importunity’, but it literally means ‘shamelessness’, ‘cheek’ or ‘nerve’.

We need the boldness and determination to think, ‘I need this provision, and I will not be put off by anything until I have obtained it’. We need holy audacity – based on the strength of our relationship with God – to ask him with nerve and cheek.

The essential persistence

The application of the parable in verses 9–13 uses a Greek tense which is best understood as ‘keep on asking, keep on seeking, keep on knocking’. If the man persists in calling to his friend, he will get his bread. If he gives up, he will return home empty-handed.

So we should keep on praying boldly until we receive God’s answer – just as Jesus keeps on interceding for us. Nothing will make him stop.

The certain result

The parable has a happy ending. The man got the three loaves. It does not matter whether he obtained them because of his relationship, or because of his persistent boldness. What counts is the bread in his hands.

It is possible that Jesus is contrasting the rich friend of verse 8 with the heavenly Father of verse 13. This underlines the absolute certainty of a result in prayer. Disappointment is impossible with our friend the Father. He will give us good things. He will give us everything we need – the Holy Spirit. So too, Jesus’ heavenly requests will not be frustrated. His bride will be made ready for the wedding.

### **Jesus’ model intercession**

After the last supper, having taught the disciples about the Holy Spirit and prayer, Jesus prayed the ‘high priestly prayer’ which

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is recorded in John 17. This prayer is our clearest scriptural example of Christ's intercession. If Matthew 6:9–13 is our model prayer, then John 17 must be our model intercession.

John 17 is three prayers rather than one prayer:

- ◆ Verses 1–8 record Jesus praying for himself
- ◆ Verses 9–19 show Jesus praying for the eleven disciples
- ◆ Verses 20–26 are his intercession for us.

Five features are common to all three prayers:

- ◆ Each prayer begins with a precise statement showing for whom Jesus is praying – verses 1, 9 & 20
- ◆ Each prayer has glory as a main theme – verses 1–5, 10 & 22
- ◆ Each prayer is addressed to the Father – verses 5, 11 & 21
- ◆ Each prayer mentions the people given to Jesus by the Father – verses 2, 9 & 24
- ◆ Each prayer contains the theme of Jesus' proclamation about the Father – verses 6, 14 & 26.

Jesus' prayer for himself

In this section of his John 17 prayer, Jesus' great cry was that the Son would be glorified so that he could effectively glorify the Father. 'Glory' has been defined as 'a visible manifestation of majesty through acts of power'. If we follow this pattern, we will cry out for the Father to glorify the Son in us and John 16:13–14 indeed shows that this is one of the Holy Spirit's special functions.

Calvary and Easter morning were God's answer to Christ's request for glory. Suffering and transformation can be God's answer to our prayers.

Jesus had revealed the Father's name to the twelve disciples. In John's Gospel, with its emphasis on revealing Jesus as the divine Son of God, the name of God is an important theme. It seems that John understood this name to be *ego eimi* – the Greek equivalent of the name which God had revealed

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to Moses in Exodus 3:13–15. This means ‘I am who I am’, or perhaps, ‘I will be who I will be’.

In the Bible, God’s name is his active nature. This means that Jesus had revealed God’s name by revealing himself as God. There is a mystery here which will never be fully unveiled, not even when he comes again in glory – Revelation 19:12.

Today, Jesus is known by the name *Jesus*. He can also be identified by the names *The Word of God* and *The King of kings and the Lord of lords* – Revelation 19:13 & 16. But Revelation 19:12 shows that he has another name which is not yet known. Together with the three hundred other biblical names and titles of God, this is what we hint at when we pray ‘in the name of Jesus’.

Every time we pray in his ‘name’ we anticipate the end of this age. Deuteronomy 12:5; Psalm 9:7–10; Psalm 20:7; Psalm 22:22 & Isaiah 52:6 all look forward to that day when God’s name will be known. This suggests that the work of proclaiming and revealing God’s divine name and nature should be an important part of our prayers for each other and ourselves.

### Jesus’ prayer for the Eleven

This section of Jesus’ prayer in John 17 is an extension of his prayer for glorification. It is in the perseverance and witness of the disciples that the name of God will be glorified.

Opposition is a key theme of this prayer. The disciples are to be left *in* the world, but they do not belong *to* it. They are aliens and, therefore, will provoke trouble. Jesus has given them God’s word, so the world will react with inevitable hatred.

Verse 11 says, ‘Holy Father, keep through your name those whom you have given me’. The Good News Bible helpfully translates this as, ‘Keep them safe, by the power of your name, the name you gave me’.

It is interesting to see what Jesus does not pray in this situation. He does not pray for the world and he does not pray for the hostility to cease. Instead, his prayer in verses 11–15 is for the disciples’ safety.

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It is a common Old Testament idea that the name of God is both the place and the means of safety. Psalm 20; Psalm 91:14; Psalm 124 & Proverbs 18:10 all illustrate this.

Many believers today often pray for an easy option when God wants to reveal his depth of love in the face of adversity. Christ could not leave the world without facing the evil one. Neither can we. This suggests that we should pray for safety and strength, rather than for the ending of any opposition.

Jesus did pray positively for the Eleven. He asked that they be set apart – consecrated – for service, and set apart in the truth. Following on from John 15:26–27, this must be a setting apart in the Holy Spirit – the Spirit of truth – for service.

This suggests that we should plead for the believers for whom God has burdened us to pray – that they be consecrated in the Spirit for action. This is the most effective prayer for evangelism. Instead of just praying for people to be saved, we also pray for those who have been saved. We pray that they will serve God more and more by powerfully proclaiming his name to those who do not yet know him.

Jesus' prayer for us

In the last section of John 17, Christ offered two prayers for us.

Firstly, he prayed, that we should be one. The Trinity is the model for this unity. It is a unity which has its origin in divine, not human, action. It is a visible unity which will challenge the world about the deity of Christ.

Jesus challenged the world by his obvious oneness with the Father. We too will challenge the world when we are one with each other and with the Godhead.

Jesus also challenged the world by revealing God's glory in acts of power. We too will challenge the world when we do likewise. This suggests that signs and wonders are intertwined with unity. If we want signs and wonders perhaps we should be praying for oneness.

Secondly, Jesus prayed that we would be with him for ever. The Bridegroom is praying for the rapid arrival of his wedding day. Revelation 22:17 says that the Spirit and the bride are also crying, 'Come'. But is the bride really praying that today?

It is a New Testament promise that we will see and enjoy the glory of God after enduring the sufferings of this world. Christ is hastening this day by his constant prayers for his bride's perfection. He calls us to follow his example.

### **Jesus' model prayer**

Jesus' model prayer in Matthew 6:9–13 & Luke 11:2–4 is the most well-known and frequently used prayer in the world. However, most people miss the point of this prayer, for Jesus is giving a framework for all praying rather than a set prayer to be prayed over and over again.

Matthew 6:5–9 sets the scene for the model prayer. He does not want us to pray in the hypocritical manner he describes in verses 5–7. He does not want us to pray just to make an impression on others. He does not want us to pray publicly at enormous length. He also explains that we are approaching God who already knows all our needs and who, therefore, does not need to be educated about our circumstances.

Instead, Jesus tell us to pray 'in this manner'. The Lord's Prayer is his example prayer. He gives us a 'prayer skeleton' to flesh out. As we pray, we fill in the few specific details which are relevant to our situation.

### **Our Father**

The prayer is both personal and corporate. This is clearly a personal prayer which can be used privately – and yet it uses 'we' and 'our' throughout. It is another reminder of the Jewish principle that we should unite ourselves with each other whenever we pray. This phrase suggests that, when we pray, we should remind ourselves both about the relationship we have with God through faith in Christ *and* the fellowship we

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share with others. In prayer, we should tell God what his fatherhood means to us, and thank him for it.

In heaven

Our prayers should be governed by the realisation that God is on the throne and in total control. We can ask him to help us to become more aware of his greatness and presence.

Hallowed be your name

This phrase reminds us to pray as Jesus does in John 17 – to ask for God's glory and the holiness of his name to be recognised and experienced in specific ways. God is a good Father who delights to give us good things and he reveals different aspects of his nature through his varied names.

When we pray, it is helpful to address God by whichever of his names is most appropriate to our prayer – for example, Healer, Provider, Deliverer, Guide, Creator, Saviour, Shepherd and so on.

Your kingdom come

This helps us to remember to pray that God will establish his rule by extending his influence as people bow their knees to Jesus Christ, and as we submit increasingly to Christ's reign. Asking for his kingdom to come means asking God to rule – to have his way – in the situations and lives for which we are praying.

Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven

The coming of God's kingdom means that the conditions of heaven are revealed on earth. Of course, this will not take place fully until the kingdom comes in its final manifestation, but in the meantime we should pray for God's revealed will to be done in those specific situations on earth that concern us.

We can thank him that he wants his will to be done on earth, and we can have faith that this will happen as we pray.

Give us this day our daily bread

This shows us that we should pray for the physical needs of daily life. It is God's intention that all his children should receive

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what they need, but we must take whatever action is necessary to provide for ourselves.

Like the man in the parable, we pray for needs which we ourselves are helpless to meet. We will experience the truth of God's provision only through a combination of prayer and action.

And forgive us our debts

We need to pray for spiritual forgiveness from our heavenly Father *and* for financial forgiveness from merciless or unjust human creditors. As redeemed believers we already have judicial forgiveness, but we need daily cleansing to maintain our personal communion with God.

As with daily bread, forgiveness from debts is attained by a mixture of prayer and action. We should pray only for those needs which we cannot meet ourselves, or that God will enable us to meet the needs through the resources he has given us.

There is something rather wrong about asking God to meet needs when he has already answered the prayer by providing us with the resources which could meet the need and we have not taken action. Of course, if we have done what we can with what God has provided we can ask him to do even more.

As we forgive our debtors

Jesus makes it plain that our heavenly Father will withhold forgiveness from those who refuse to forgive others. This is emphasised in Matthew 6:14–15. Obviously he does not mean that we will be brought under God's judgement or condemnation. Rather he speaks of God's parental forgiveness being withheld until we learn to forgive others. He is speaking to us as sons and daughters who may displease our Father from time to time but, as our heavenly Father, he will discipline us in love.

Forgiving others is not always easy to do – we need God's help to do it. But it must be done or we ourselves will not receive God's mercy.



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And do not lead us into temptation

This phrase shows that we should ask God to keep us from falling into sin and to help us overcome the trials of our lives.

But deliver us from the evil one

When most people recite the Lord's Prayer, they use a translation called 'The Great Bible' which is even older than the Authorised Version. It unhelpfully refers to 'evil' rather than 'the evil one'.

We are all involved in a spiritual struggle, and we all need to pray that God will rescue us from the attacks of the enemy.

For yours is the kingdom, the power and the glory for ever. Amen. Jesus' model prayer ends in a phrase taken from 1 Chronicles 29:11–12 which is packed with praise and triumph. So we can end our praying by thanking God for his power – and for his victory in the specific situations we have prayed about.

### **New Testament words for prayer**

Having seen Jesus' teaching and example of prayer, we can now look at a few New Testament words for prayer.

The variety of expressions used to describe 'prayer' in the New Testament is a demonstration of the richness of prayer in the life of the early church. As one commentator remarked, 'prayer was the breath of the early church's life'.

We will of course explore the New Testament understanding of prayer throughout this book, and we will look specifically at Paul's prayers in Part Six. However, 1 Timothy 2:1 gives us an example of some of the types of prayer in the New Testament and it will be helpful to look at these briefly:

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

This verse can be broken down into four sections:

*Deesis* – requests

The Greek word *deesis* carries the idea of asking out of a sense of need. Here the need is uppermost, and we come

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before God because we are burdened. In intercession we must identify with the need, even to the point of feeling it ourselves. Our prayers should come out of that identification and sense of need.

*Deesis* is used 19 times in the New Testament, and though it can be translated simply as 'prayer', it often has the more specific meaning of 'petition', as in Philippians 4:6. *Deomai* which means 'ask' or 'seek' denotes the powerful prayer of the righteous person in James 5:16.

This reminds us that prayer is also a request for our needs and the needs of others.

*Proseuche* – prayers

The Greek word *proseuche* implies 'to ask in dependence on God for his provision'. We must focus on God's ability to meet and provide for that need.

*Proseuche* is used 37 times in the New Testament and is the most general term for 'prayer' and making petition to God, either for the petitioner or for others. The verb *proseuchomai* covers every aspect of invocation, including request, entreaty, vow or consecration. It was used in ancient Greek as a technical term for invoking a deity.

*Enteuxis* – intercession

As we shall see in Part Four, the Greek word *enteuxis* (verb *entugchano*) is a technical term for approaching a king with a petition. It also carries with it the idea of representing someone, of praying on someone's behalf.

*Eucharistia* – thanksgiving

In *eucharistia* prayer, we offer thanks to God for the answers to requests. We should thank God both before and after we have received. Thanksgiving does not influence God's willingness to bless but rather it makes us more able to receive.

We can see in the four sections of 1 Timothy 2:1 a progression in prayer:

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- ◆ You start by having a sense of the need
- ◆ The Holy Spirit then shows you God's ability to meet that need
- ◆ You then intercede and pray for that particular need to be met
- ◆ Finally, you enter a time of thanksgiving as you sense of a release that the answer has been given.

Other New Testament words for prayer

The New Testament also uses another term for prayer, *aiteo*, which means to 'ask', 'petition' or 'demand'. This is the word used in I John 3:22 which promises that obedient believers can receive from God whatever they ask.

*Hiketeria* is used only once in the New Testament in Hebrews 5:7 and means 'supplication'.

Also, the Greek word *epikaleo* occurs frequently in contexts of calling on God or his name in prayer, as in Acts 2:21.

## Part Three

### The Spirit and prayer

When we read about the praying of men like Moses, Elijah, Ezra, Daniel and Jesus, most of us wonder how we can ever pray like them. We want to pray more. We want to pray more effectively. We want to know God better. But we cannot imagine how it will happen.

Whenever we ask the question 'How?', the biblical answer is always the same. 'The Holy Spirit. He will come upon you.' Nowhere is this more true than with prayer.

#### **The Spirit of prayer**

We noted in Part One that the prophets were the intercessors of the Old Testament, and we stated that this was because they had the necessary anointing of the Spirit.

The Old Testament does not explicitly state that the only people who could intercede were those who had received the Spirit. The only people it records interceding are prophets – and, of course, prophets were the largest group of people in the Old Testament who received the Spirit.

#### Zechariah 12:10

This is the passage which most explicitly links the Spirit and prayer: 'And I will pour on the house of David and on the inhabitants of Jerusalem the Spirit of grace and supplication'. (Many versions of the Bible translate this as 'the Spirit of mercy and prayer'.)

In promising that a day will come when God's Spirit will be poured out, Zechariah is repeating a common scriptural promise – of which Joel 2:28 is the best known example. However, in describing God's Spirit as 'the Spirit of prayer', Zechariah is foreshadowing, or introducing, a truth which is seen plainly in the New Testament.

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John 14:13–17

In this account of the last supper, Jesus reveals the potential in prayer and the Holy Spirit as parallel and inseparable.

Jesus makes his greatest prayer promise in verses 13–14. It is in this clear prayer context that he promises the disciples will have *allos parakletos* – another Helper – who will be with them for ever, the Spirit of truth.

The Greek words *allos parakletos* mean that:

- ◆ The Spirit is *exactly the same* as Jesus
- ◆ The Spirit is *called alongside* us to assist us by calling from beside us.

Some versions of the Bible translate *parakletos* as ‘Helper’ or ‘Comforter’, but these words do not make his ‘calling’ function clear. However, a few modern versions now helpfully translate *parakletos* as ‘Advocate’, an English word from the Latin *advocatus* which means ‘one called to another to take his part’ or ‘one who works and argues in support of another’s cause’. This communicates the idea that the Spirit is sent from God both to help us speak and to speak for us.

The New Testament stresses that the Spirit draws attention to Jesus by helping us to speak prophetically and evangelistically. However, many passages also reveal his prayer function: he is the Spirit of prayer who both helps us to pray and prays for us. We can see this in Romans 8:15, 26–27; Ephesians 2:18; 6:18 & Jude 1:20.

### **He makes us cry ‘Abba, Father’**

In Galatians 4:5–6; Ephesians 1:5 & Romans 8:15, the New Testament teaches that Jesus died to redeem us and to adopt us into the family of God. Because we have become the Father’s sons and daughters, God has sent his Spirit into our lives – and it is the Spirit who enables us to call ‘Abba, Father’.

Paul implies that the Spirit enters our lives as God’s adoption gift, and that he helps us to call God by the intimate family name which Jesus used.

In the Aramaic language, *Abba* is the first word of Jesus' model prayer in Matthew 6. This means that we can truly live and pray that model prayer only with the Spirit's help. We cannot get beyond the first word of the Lord's Prayer without his assistance!

### **He comes through prayer**

The Spirit is God's gift to us, and he comes to us so that we can know the presence of Jesus and can reveal Jesus' presence to the world. (This is dealt with fully in *Sword of the Spirit* volume two, *Knowing the Spirit*.)

For now, please remember that Jesus made his promise in Luke 11:13 – about the Father giving the Holy Spirit to those who ask him – in the immediate context of his teaching about prayer. In Luke 11, verse 13 is the climax – the conclusion – to Jesus' model prayer, to his prayer parable and to his teaching about persistence.

This association between the coming of the Spirit and prayer is stressed by Luke in his two books, Luke & Acts:

- ◆ Jesus was praying at his baptism when the Spirit came upon him – Luke 3:21–22
- ◆ As the disciples prayed, the Spirit fell on them – Acts 1:14 & 2:1–4
- ◆ After his Damascus experience, Saul spent three days praying and fasting; then the Spirit filled him – Acts 9:9–18
- ◆ It was when Cornelius prayed – and because he offered God prayers – that the Spirit was poured out on him – Acts 10:30–44.

### **He helps us to pray**

Please remember that the Old Testament word for intercession – *paga* – means 'to approach to plead'. We have suggested that Old Testament prophets could intercede with

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God because only they had the anointing of the Spirit which gave them the right of access to the Father's face.

### Access to the Father

Ephesians 2:18 shows that it is the Spirit who provides us with the access to the Father we need. It is the death of Christ which made reconciliation *possible* between God and humanity, but it is the Spirit who enables us to *grasp* the possibility.

This is why Ephesians 2:18 describes our access to the Father as 'through Christ by the Spirit'.

- ◆ Without Jesus, it is impossible for us to draw near to the Father.
- ◆ Without the Spirit, we are like all other people – calling out to the Creator from a very great distance with no guarantee that he will respond to our requests.
- ◆ With the Spirit, we are like the prophets of old – able to come close to God and speak privately with the Father in a face-to-face conversation.

### Strength to speak

Micah 3:8 shows that the Spirit provides us with God's power to speak. The New Testament develops this with its emphasis on the power of the Spirit – especially on his empowering of believers' speech. Acts 2:4 & 1 Corinthians 2:4–5 illustrate this.

This aspect of the Spirit's power is to make our witnessing and our praying more effective. Romans 8:26–27 shows that he particularly helps us when we feel too weak to pray.

This means that he gives us:

- ◆ The strength to resist natural and demonic temptations not to pray
- ◆ The energy to get down onto our knees and start praying
- ◆ The power to persist in prayer until we receive God's answer.

Words to say

Romans 8:26–27 is a critical passage about the Spirit and prayer. He knows that there are times when we do not know what to pray. He knows when we are not certain of God's will for a situation and cannot pray with clarity. And he helps us. He grasps the situation both *with* us and *for* us.

He provides us with the words to say. This works in the same way as all Spirit-inspired speech. We provide the mind and lips. He provides the words. All gifts of the Spirit – all prophesying, all evangelising, all praying – follow the same pattern.

We come in weakness and ignorance and allow the Spirit to speak through us. This is not automatic!

Sometimes, the Holy Spirit draws a memory from our subconscious – a song we have sung, a Bible passage we have read, a prayer we have heard – and prompts us to use this in prayer.

At other times, he urges us to use our natural thought processes and pray extemporarily. Occasionally, he so works in us that we are moved to pray without words, with deep groans – as if we are travelling to bring something to birth which we cannot understand.

Normally, the Spirit provides us with the main themes and thoughts and we fill in the details.

### **He prays for us**

Romans 8:26–27 shows that the Spirit does not only help us to pray, he also prays *for* us – on our behalf. This means that a divine intercessor is resident within us who both teaches us to pray and who also prays for us, from alongside us.

*Entugchano*

Romans 8:27 uses the Greek word – *entugchano* – to describe the way that the Spirit intercedes for us. This is exactly the same word used in Hebrews 7:25 to describe Jesus' heavenly intercession for the saints. This rare word underlines the truth



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that the Spirit is the same as Jesus – they do the same work for the same group of people.

*Entugchano* does not mean that the Spirit – or the Son – begs a reluctant Father to give what he does not want to give. *Entugchano* literally means ‘to fill in with’ carrying the sense of ‘to be around’. It means ‘to intercede for’ or ‘to plead the cause of someone’.

In heaven, Christ is ‘around’ God on our behalf. His presence is proof that we are accepted. He speaks up for us. He asks for what we need whenever we need it. He is in the right place all the time to put in a word for us whenever it is appropriate.

It is the same with the Spirit. Whenever we struggle on earth, God’s Spirit is ‘around’ us on our behalf. When we agonise in prayer, he is there to speak up for us. We never have to approach God on our own. The Spirit comes with us to act as our Advocate. He expresses our innermost needs, sometimes with groanings too deep for words. He makes sure our prayers line up perfectly with God’s will and guarantees that the Father always hears our deepest requests.

### **He speaks to us**

In John 14:26, Jesus promised that the Holy Spirit would teach us and remind us of all that Jesus had taught. In John 16:13, Jesus states that the Spirit will lead us into complete truth and tell us about things which are to come. Through these verses, Jesus makes it clear that the Spirit will speak to us. As we pray, he quietly communicates with us.

This is exactly what happened in the Old Testament. Time and again, the prophets show that they heard God speaking to them. ‘The word of the Lord came to’ is the phrase which is used most frequently in the Old Testament – for example, Jeremiah 1:11; 18:1, 5; Ezekiel 3:16, Jonah 1:1; Zechariah 1:1 & 7. Jeremiah 27:18 shows that hearing God’s word was an integral part of intercession for prophets.

### Circumstances

God closes one door and opens another. We need to be sensitive to his leading and follow through the doors which he opens. See Acts 16:10.

### Other Christians

We need to allow our inner convictions to be tested by other Christians. If our thoughts really have come from God, other people who are open to the Spirit will confirm his leading. See Acts 6:1–6; 13:1–3 & 21:11–12.

### God's Word

The Spirit speaks to us either as we read the Scriptures or when he prompts us to remember passages that we have read before. Ephesians 6:17 describes this activity of the Spirit in a prayer warfare context. Colossians 3:16 describes God's word dwelling 'richly' in us for 'all wisdom'. This means that the Spirit speaks to us through our wide and deep understanding of God's Word, not through the random selection of an isolated verse.

### Praying

We need to learn to recognise the particular way that he slips his directive thoughts into our minds so that we are ready to act on them. Many people find it helpful to carry on praying about a situation until they reach the point where they have a deep inner peace about God's will. This is not an intellectual certainty coming from the natural mind but a practical confidence arising out of genuine witness of the Holy Spirit which allows us to act with joyful assurance.

### **He gives us a new language**

1 Corinthians 12:10 shows that the Spirit helps us to pray by giving us the gift of tongues. We will look at this in more detail in Part Nine.

For now, we need to appreciate that the primary purpose of tongues is to help us pray to God at a different level than our conscious mind.

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1 Corinthians 14:14 suggests that we do not use our minds when we pray in tongues to God, but rather that we pray with our spirits. Some people are uncomfortable with tongues because they are over-concerned with conscious levels of understanding. However, when we pray in tongues, the Spirit seems to affect and use the subconscious thoughts and feelings of our spirits.

The gift of tongues can be used in every area of prayer – in thanksgiving, confession, petition, adoration, supplication, intercession, warfare, praise, etc. However, there seem to be six areas where praying in tongues is especially helpful:

### Worship

Praying in tongues helps us to express our love for Jesus in a different way from natural language. We struggle in human relationships to find more creative and meaningful ways of saying 'I love you'. Praying in tongues helps us to express our love for God when we cannot put our feelings into words.

### Intercession

The gift of tongues is useful when we do not know what to pray. We are often asked, or feel prompted, to pray for people yet have no idea what to pray. When we pray in tongues, the Spirit intercedes through us according to the mind of God.

### Breakthrough

The gift of tongues helps us to break through in prayer – especially in warfare prayer. When God's reply is slow in coming – and our faith is low – we can pray with our spirit. God's faith is never low, and our spirits are more in tune with his faith than our minds are.

In seemingly impossible situations, when opposition is great or circumstances are grim, our prayers can easily become statements of doubt. These are times when tongues are most helpful, for prayer with the Spirit is full of God's faith. It is full of the Spirit's confidence that God will answer the prayer and overcome the enemy or difficulty.

### Lamentation

Many of us have a problem lamenting to God. How can we pour out our anguish over events like an earthquake, a plane crash, a terrorist bomb, an epidemic, a murder? How do we share in God's agony? Prayer in tongues can be a meaningful lamentation about the unspeakable horrors of a world which is reaping the results of sin.

### Thanksgiving

How can our own natural language adequately express our gratitude at the healing or conversion of a close friend? 'Thank you' does not feel enough. A prayer in tongues could be more appropriate. We know that we have expressed our gratitude from the depth of our beings.

### Preparation

1 Corinthians 14:4 shows that prayer in tongues builds us up – it strengthens our spirits. It is the experience of many that regular, frequent, consistent praying in tongues has played a significant part in transforming them from people with an ineffective witness into people whose witness brings lasting results. Perhaps prayer in tongues, like fasting, is a spiritual version of press-ups!

## **Prayer in the Spirit**

Jude 1:20 & Ephesians 6:18 describe believers as 'praying in the Spirit'. All true prayer is offered in the Spirit, but Ephesians 6:18 implies that there is an aspect of prayer in the Spirit which is special warfare prayer. We will look at this in detail in Part Seven.

Ephesians 6:10–17 describes the armour of God. Ephesians 6:18 describes the activity we engage in when we are equipped with the armour. Prayer in the Spirit is our contact point with the army of evil. It is the battlefield.

In Isaiah 59:15–19, the Lord was so appalled that there was no one to intercede about the evil that he personally decided

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to intervene. But notice how God first equipped himself, and then appreciate the promises made in verses 19–21!

Many of us will have experienced lengthy times of prayer when the Spirit has led the group of which we are part to pray with unusual intensity, authority, confidence and perseverance. Or we might have experienced a free and intensive time of prayer when the Spirit was allowed to direct the prayers, and when time almost seemed to stand still. These are the sorts of prayer which merit the label 'prayer in the Spirit'.

## Part Four

# Intercession

The common understanding of intercession is simple: it is prayer to God for someone other than yourself. However, this can suggest that intercession is like any other prayer, the only difference being that it is prayer for *others* – with ‘others’ as the distinguishing feature. But this dilutes its strength, for intercession is a strong and unique type of prayer.

The English word ‘intercession’ is derived from the Latin *intercedo* which means ‘to come between’. The principle of intercession is that we stand between God and another person – representing them and pleading their cause. This is similar to the role of an advocate or mediator.

Biblical advocates knew the culture and temperament of both the person they were representing and the ruler they were addressing, and they came alongside both parties. They did not need to worm or manipulate their way into the king’s presence, for they were already known to him.

The same is true of us. We approach God in intercession because of our intimate relationship with him. As we stand boldly before him, we ask him about the needs and concerns of other people.

### **Old Testament intercession**

Exodus 32:30–34:35 shows us outstanding examples of biblical intercession. Please read it carefully and grasp the following points, which are typical of biblical intercession:

- ◆ Moses was involved in a face to face confrontation with God on behalf of others
- ◆ He pleaded for the glory of God to be seen

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- ◆ He was given a task to perform and a message to proclaim
- ◆ He had to persist in his intercession
- ◆ He called on the name of God
- ◆ There was an enormous personal cost
- ◆ He was transformed as a by-product of his intercession.

### *Paga*

*Paga* is the Hebrew word which is usually translated 'intercession'. It is difficult to translate precisely, but carries the meanings of 'standing between or before' and 'approaching with violence'. *Paga* has several Old Testament uses other than intercessory prayer, and these help us to understand intercession.

#### The boundary

*Paga* is used in Joshua 19:11, 22, 26, 27, 34 as the word to describe a boundary between tribes. The tribe could go to the *paga* and no further. Most tribal struggles were attempts to break the boundary or to push it back.

This suggests that intercession is praying at the front line, and that it involves pushing back the boundary until we reach the limit of what we can do in prayer.

In Genesis 18:16–33, when Abraham had finished interceding, the matter was closed. He returned home to await the verdict. He had reached his spiritual boundary.

#### Violence

*Paga* is also used in Judges 8:21; 15:12; 1 Samuel 22:17–18; 2 Samuel 1:15; 1 Kings 2:25, 29, 31, 32, 34, 46 to describe a violent meeting – some of which ended in death.

This is the same word which describes our meeting with God in prayer. It shows that intercession is not a cosy, quiet activity – it is a costly and often spiritually violent intervention.

In Jeremiah 7:16, *paga* is contrasted with other forms of prayer. Jeremiah was told not to *palal* – habitually pray – for the people. Then, he was instructed not to *rinnah* – cry loudly – for them. Next, he was told not to *tephillah* – bring supplication or sing praises – about them. Finally, as the end of the matter, Jeremiah was commanded not to *paga* for them. He must not wrestle violently with God on their behalf.

Jeremiah 7:16 can also be seen as a revelation of how prayer usually progresses from lower, more general levels of prayer to higher, more intensive and effective intercession. It involves habitually bringing needs to God, leads to times of intense crying out to God, develops as supplication mixed with praise and thanksgiving, and climaxes in violent intervention in the realm of the Spirit.

### Begging

*Paga* is used to describe the strongest Old Testament form of asking. It is often translated as 'entreat'. It means begging for something which is desperately wanted. In Genesis 23:8, Abraham asked the sons of Heth to *paga* for a cave. And in Ruth 1:16, Ruth told Naomi not to *paga* her to turn back.

### Prophets

Prophets were people of prayer and were the intercessors of the Old Testament, and – by their anointing with the Spirit – they had the right of access to God's face which was essential for this work.

- ◆ Genesis 20:7, the first reference to a prophet, reveals this link
- ◆ Jeremiah 27:18 presents intercession as part of the true service of a prophet
- ◆ Exodus 18:19 records Jethro's suggestion that Moses should make intercession his priority
- ◆ Numbers 27:5 shows that Moses implemented this advice



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- ◆ Isaiah 59:16 implies that God was saddened by the absence of prophets to intercede with him
- ◆ Joel 2:28–29 promises that one day all God's people will prophesy – and thus all will be able to intercede.

The Old Testament prophets needed to receive either the word of the Lord or the Spirit of the Lord before they could prophesy. They dared not initiate a prophetic message. This also applied to intercession.

Jeremiah 27:18 shows that the prophets who had received the word of the Lord were the ones who should have been interceding. This suggests that we should not choose the object or occasion of our intercession. We should intercede only when God commands, and only about those matters that he reveals to us by his word or by his Spirit.

### **New Testament intercession**

The Greek word *enteuxis* is usually translated as 'intercession' in the New Testament. In everyday use, it described a petition to a king about another person, and was absorbed into the Church to describe the Old Testament idea of *paga* praying.

*Enteuxis* is a slightly gentler word than *paga*. *Enteuxis* – or words related to it such as the verb *entugchano* – occurs eight times in the New Testament:

Hebrews 7:25 & Romans 8:34 describe the work of Christ as the eternal Intercessor for the saints – in fulfilment of Isaiah 53:12. We looked at these passages in Part Two.

Romans 8:26–27 shows the work of the Holy Spirit in intercession as the partial fulfilment of Zechariah 12:10. We examined this passage in Part Three.

Acts 25:24 uses *entugchano* in its everyday meaning. Festus stated that the whole Jewish community interceded with him, 'loudly protesting'. Intercession is not necessarily a quiet, private or orderly activity! The Jews were all simultaneously

interceding with Festus for the death of Paul. This returns to the Old Testament link between intercession and violence. There is no need for people always to pray neatly one after the other in a regulated fashion. God hears all our prayers even when we pray at the same time!

1 Timothy 4:5 reinforces the Old Testament link between the word of God and intercession. The food was sanctified by God's word and by *enteuxis* prayer. Some Christians assume that they have a general responsibility to pray for the whole world. This is not so. We need to restrict ourselves in intercession to those matters which God has specially entrusted to us. We do not have a general duty of intercession. We have only a particular duty to pray about those matters which God presents to us.

The result of the intercession in 1 Timothy 4:5 was total transformation. Food which had been deemed unacceptable became holy – set apart for God. The consecration of the saints should be one aim of intercession. We should engage in intercession to bring about the setting apart of God's people for useful service.

In 1 Timothy 2:1 Paul speaks of four types of prayer: supplications (*deesis*), prayers (*proseuche*), intercessions (*enteuxis*) and thanksgivings (*eucharistia*). We examined this passage in Part Two.

Romans 11:2 refers to Elijah's intercession in 1 Kings 19:10–18 – which was a complaint about the behaviour of Israel. Elijah hoped for some action as the result of his praying, but instead he received a revelation: God was not going to do anything. Instead, Elijah had to do something.

God often replies in ways we do not expect. We intercede with God to do something, and he replies with a command for us to do something. This means that we must listen whilst interceding and be ready to receive our instructions from God. Often, these instructions will involve a challenging and costly call to change.

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### **Intercession today**

Intercession is the natural expression of a life filled to overflowing with the love of God. In John 13:34–35, Jesus taught that we should love one another in the same way as he had loved us. Today, he expresses his love for us by interceding for us. Therefore, if we are to love in his way, intercession must be a priority in our lives.

An expression of love

Intercession and love are inseparable. This means that the level of our intercession is *one* measure of our loving. We all discover a fresh zeal to pray, and new depths in prayer, whenever our children are ill or in trouble. Why? Because we love them.

Matthew 7:12; Luke 10:25–28 & 1 John 4:7–21 demand that we love our brothers and sisters. Intercession is frequently the best and most useful way of expressing this love. There is a natural limit on the number of people we can help practically, but there is no limit on the number of people that we can help prayerfully.

This intercession of love has a side-effect. As we pray for others to be changed, we are changed ourselves. The scriptural principle, 'those who forgive others themselves receive forgiveness' applies in intercession. As we pour our lives in heavenly love and holy intercession, so we are cleansed, purified and renewed.

The discipline of intercession brings an inevitable control upon our tongue. As we intercede for God to bless others – to fill them with the knowledge of his love, to deliver them from imprisoning circumstances – so these thoughts become our natural attitudes and wishes for others.

There is nothing that makes us love someone like praying for them. Once we start to intercede for a person, it is hard to be other than at peace with them. In intercession, we begin to allow God to cement his love between us, not by worldly

compatibility, but by the mutual communication of spiritual blessings in prayer.

### An identification in need

In Western Europe, we are taught to rely upon our intellects. The mind and factual knowledge have become so elevated in our value system that we can find it hard to involve ourselves emotionally with people and identify with them in their needs. But we cannot have genuine intercession without a real identification – which develops from true love. In fact, the effectiveness of our intercession depends upon the strength of our identification.

#### Identify with the need

True spiritual identification is not something which comes from our emotions or soul – it comes from the Holy Spirit. Identification means getting involved in other people's problems, and most of us usually react against this. We do not want to feel other people's burdens, but we have to put these natural human feelings to death.

As we do this, we are co-operating with God. Our spirit, soul and body are submitting to him, and our intercessions are available for the Holy Spirit to use. Once we submit to the Spirit in this way we start to identify supernaturally and to take on the feelings associated with the situation for which we are praying.

#### Identify with the people in need

Intercession focuses on other people. As we actively think about them and identify with their needs, we begin to take on their pain and their burden. As we learn to pray, so our identification grows and deepens – and often the Holy Spirit will place a burden on us which causes us to 'travail'.

#### Be sensitive to the intercessory burden

Once we feel a deep identification with the need, we must hold on to it and pray for the burden. We may not understand the need with our minds, but – as we identify

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with the people who are in need – we often feel the need in our spirits and emotions.

### Persevere

From the initial prompting to intercede, we can take a moment – or many months – to reach the point of effective intercession. As we grow spiritually, intercession can begin to flow more easily. But there are always challenges, for intercession is wrapped in spiritual warfare.

Intercessory prayer involves persistence – praying through until there is a release or a witness in the Spirit that the thing is ‘accomplished’. There is often a great agonizing in the Spirit until breakthrough comes. An intercessory concern is rarely fully resolved in five minutes, and we must be prepared to persevere – sometimes for many years. We should continue to pray about the matter until we feel a ‘release’ and the burden lift – this is often coupled with a sense of joy and a feeling of praise and thanksgiving.

When we carry prayer to these levels, there is often a resistance from the enemy. We may have a sense of heaviness when we start to pray, and spiritual warfare may be needed before the breakthrough comes. We will look at this in Part Seven.

### A heavenly location

Please remember that all intercession takes place in the ‘heavenlies’. If we are to intercede we must enter into the heavenly realm.

We know that Jesus now lives in heaven making intercession for us. His time on earth was – in part – a preparation for his heavenly ministry of intercession. However, Ephesians 2:6 shows that we already share his heavenly location – which means we can pray with an understanding that our place is at the right hand of the Father.

In the book of Job, Job really needed someone to stand between him and God and plead his case in the

heavenlies. Yet his friends did not intercede or stand with him when he was suffering; instead they accused him of sin and were judgemental. In his loneliness, Job longed for an advocate or mediator to intercede with God for his cause. Job had plenty of accusers, but he needed an intercessor.

There are many around us today who are in Job's position. They have no one to plead their cause with God and are dependent on the Church to intercede on their behalf. True intercessors are sensitive to these 'Job' situations where there is no representative.

### **Stages in intercession**

There is always so much to pray about, and often we do not know where to begin. We need God's instructions. We need to hear from God what he wants us to pray about. Having some identification with the needs of the world is not enough. We also need to have a sense of God calling us to pray about a particular issue at a specific time. The revelation of God's agenda for us is indeed the starting place for prayer.

Wait for an understanding of God's will

We do not need a complete revelation before we begin to pray, for the Spirit will guide and advise us as we pray. But we do need a general sense of God's will to give us direction in our praying. Prayer is not us presenting our own ideas to God, rather it is us aligning ourselves to his will and purposes.

Daniel 9:1–20 shows how Daniel received God's revelation before praying. He understood from Jeremiah 25:11–12 & 29:10 that the captivity would last for seventy years, and he knew that the time for freedom was near. He did not sit back and wait for it to happen but, knowing the will of God, he turned to intercession – an intercession which involved both personal and representative confession.

1 Kings 17:1–18:46 & James 5:17–18 reveal the link between intercession and prophecy. Elijah's many prophetic declarations to Ahab had to be supported by prayer. This was

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made both before he spoke to Ahab – giving him the assurance to speak – and after he had spoken – making sure that his words were supported by prevailing prayer. Elijah worked with God through intercession and prophecy. He received the revelation, then prayed it into reality – from the invisible to the visible realm.

All prophetic messages are not automatically fulfilled. We have a responsibility to pray until they are fulfilled. Sometimes a prophecy can be prevented from being fulfilled through prayer and repentance.

In Jonah 3:1–10, the true word of judgement did not come to pass because the people repented and sought God. However, a century later, the book of Nahum reports that God did destroy the people of Nineveh when they reverted to wickedness.

### Pray the Word of God

The Bible is our prayerbook. It reveals God's will, so our prayers must be in line with its revelation. The Holy Spirit will often 'quicken' a verse or a passage from the Bible to us, giving direction to our prayers. This is probably what Paul means in Ephesians 6:17: the Spirit brings to our attention a passage of Scripture which is God's word for a situation we are facing. We are then called to pray that Scripture into the situation until it conforms to the reality of the Word of God.

When we pray the Scriptures, we need to be careful that we do not take a verse out of context or use human reasoning unaided by the Holy Spirit.

Praying the Word of God is not simply coming before God with a need and then finding an 'appropriate' verse about that need. It is God who gives us particular verses to use on specific occasions. We need to keep on asking him for an understanding of his will – and to keep on waiting until it comes. The Spirit sometimes highlights a particular verse when we are reading the Bible, at other times he prompts us suddenly to recall a verse we may have read many years ago.

Once we have a scripture verse or passage which we are sure is God's will, we should not deviate from it. These God-given prayer scriptures are particularly important for churches, when all the members can unite in praying along the same lines for specific situations.

Use the revelation gifts of the Spirit

All the 'revelation gifts' of the Spirit operate in intercession. These gifts are invaluable tools that the Holy Spirit gives us to help us come into line – and stay in line – with his direction in intercession.

- ◆ Praying in tongues is useful when we do not understand clearly how to pray. Sometimes we receive new revelation whilst praying in tongues, and have a greater understanding of the situation when we return to praying with our minds.
- ◆ The interpretation of tongues is given to help us understand what we are praying when we pray in tongues.
- ◆ Prophecy is given for revelation and direction in prayer.
- ◆ The discerning of spirits is given to help us grasp how the Holy Spirit is leading us in intercession, as well as understanding how the devil is working in a situation we are praying about.
- ◆ The word of knowledge is given to provide specific information by revelation concerning the situation we are praying for.
- ◆ The word of wisdom is given to show how to proceed in intercession and how to use any revelation. We need to ask whether God has given us information for prayer or for sharing. We need God's permission to share his revelation.

As well as being sensitive to 'the revelation gifts' of the Spirit, intercessors should be open to 'the power gifts' of faith,



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working of miracles and gifts of healing. God often enables intercessors to be instruments of his supernatural and miraculous intervention in the situations they are praying about.

### **Common features of intercession**

#### Loud prayers

We have seen that the natural *enteuxis* of Acts 25:24 involved a great deal of noise. Often when we are led by the Spirit we experience great crescendos of prayer. Yet we are never heard by God *because* we pray loudly or in any other way. We are heard by God only because of the condition of our hearts and our faith in Jesus Christ.

However, we must not use this as an excuse to justify human timidity or cultural inhibitions. Some people do not pray loudly because they are afraid. But other people shout frequently in prayer because they have a fleshly motivation or a cultural habit. This is an area where we all need to examine our hearts, for it is our inner motive which counts.

#### Silent prayers

Nehemiah 2:4–5 is an example of silent intercession. We can pray and call upon God at any time, even when it is inappropriate to pray out loud. We have access to God whether our prayer is audible or silent.

#### Praise, worship and thanksgiving

Praise and worship are both powerful and effective at the time of prayer. We need to ensure that we thank and praise God for what he is doing after every time of prayer.

#### Travailing in prayer

Christ's death accomplished many things for believers which are brought to birth – that is, brought into the physical realm – through intercessory prayer. Through his life, death and resurrection, Jesus brought forth the spiritual realities of the new creation: he rescued humanity from Satan's grip; he appeased God's wrath and delivered humanity from sin,

sickness and death; he provided for mental, emotional and physical wholeness; he gave an example of the ideal way for all people to live and die; and he gave birth to a new creation which could reproduce the divine nature. But the experiential benefit and enjoyment of many of these things often depend on prevailing and travailing in prayer.

In Romans 8:22–23, Paul writes about creation groaning or travailing with birth pangs. There is a deep longing throughout all creation for the new creation which is to come.

Those who have the first-fruits of the Spirit have a taste of the new creation, and so we groan in prayer – as if we were giving birth – for the adoption and redemption of our bodies.

This hints at Exodus 2:23–25 when the slaves of Israel groaned to God about their plight: they reminded God of the difference between his covenant promises and their current experience.

We know what we have experienced in and through the Spirit. We know what Christ's death accomplished and what God has promised. And so we agonise in prayer for these things to come about – to be realised in our lives and in the lives of people around us in the Church.

We cannot force this type of intercession. It is deeper than prayers in our own language. It is deeper even than interceding in tongues. In travail, the Holy Spirit takes over completely. All we can do is yield to his groanings within. It is a powerful way of praying.

### Prayer and fasting

We will examine this in Part Nine, but it is important to note that fasting is an aid to prayer. It is a means of empowering our prayers. Mark 9:29 shows that there are some situations which will just not yield without prolonged prayer and fasting. Some have suggested that, because the phrase 'and fasting' is not included in all the early manuscripts covering Mark 9:29, fasting is not an important part of Jesus' teaching on prayer. However,

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even if we conceded that this phrase is a later interpolation, it does accurately reflect the practice of the very early church and can therefore be seen as implied here. Indeed, Acts 10:30; 13:2–3; 14:23 & 1 Corinthians 7:5 all show that prayer with fasting was a vital part of the life of the early church.

The result

Manifestation is the fruit of intercession. We pray to get a result. We aim for a one hundred per cent answered prayer. We need to keep on praying until we feel a release in our spirits. If God is calling us to persist in prayer, we must not stop too early!

If we have heard from God, and have prayed the matter through, we should look for the results of our prayers. We need to measure our praying realistically and expect to see an outcome. However, intercessors may not always see all the fruit themselves. Prayer is a ministry of ‘sowing’ rather than ‘reaping’. Most of us will have to wait until heaven before we see the full fruit of our prayers.

However, our intercessions will often be answered in a way we can see – as in Mark 9:28–29 & 1 Kings 18:41–46.

### **Interceding with others**

It is important for us to pray with others, so that the Church’s corporate strength and power is released. This also ensures that we keep ourselves in check – maintaining a right focus and direction rather than going off on a tangent.

The law of agreement

In Matthew 18:18–20, Jesus draws on the principle in Deuteronomy 19:15 that a matter is established by two or three witnesses: this is also followed in 2 Corinthians 13:1.

The prayer of agreement is a coming together in mind and heart concerning God’s will in a situation. When we pray together – in agreement with the will of God – he multiplies the effectiveness of our prayer.

Matthew 18:18 uses an unusual ‘future perfect passive

participle' which is best translated as 'whatever you bind on earth shall have been bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall have been loosed in heaven'.

This means that we can only pray into being on earth what has already been purposed and agreed within the Godhead in heaven. This is the prayer of agreement. First, we discover the things which are planned and accomplished in the purposes of God, and then we pray them to be done 'on earth as they are in heaven', just as Jesus instructed to do in Matthew 6:10.

### The ministry of helps

Intercession is a supportive ministry which upholds the hands of leaders – much as Aaron and Hur helped Moses in Exodus 17:12.

As intercessors we have a particular responsibility to uphold our leaders before God and to pray and wage war for them. When we pray for our leaders, we should support them in their tasks. For example, when Aaron and Hur held up Moses' arms, they supported his calling and authority.

While leaders must be given strong prayer support, they must be careful not to shirk their own calling and responsibility in prayer. A leader must be a person of prayer and take the lead in prayer. Leaders need to know that they cannot delegate prayer. They must set an example in prayer.

We must ensure that we handle carefully any revelation or insight that the Spirit gives us. Unfortunately, many church splits have come about because 'splinter' prayer groups – who may initially have met to pray for the leaders – have ended up mishandling the revelation God gave them. They have not understood their servant calling, and have usurped the leaders' authority by bringing them directive words and exercising manipulative tactics.

We need to ensure that – throughout our entire intercessory life – we support and serve those in leadership over us.

### The whole body

Acts 12:5–7 illustrates the power that there is in the body of

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Christ. When the body comes together to pray, the power which flows out of the unity is multiplied.

Intercession is not a calling or a gift for a few but a basic requirement for the whole body. Although the prophets were the special intercessors of the Old Testament, it is wrong to assume that there are special intercessors today.

Since Pentecost, all believers have been called to intercede. There is no mention anywhere in the New Testament of a special gift or ministry of prayer – it is for everybody! If we are part of the body of Christ, we are called to be an intercessor.

## Part Five

# Thanksgiving

Christian prayer should never be just the recitation of a series of requests. Our God may be a good Father who delights to give his children good gifts, but the Bible also teaches that prayers should include thanks to God for his generous provision.

For example, Philippians 4:6 states that prayer should be made 'with thanksgiving'. Ephesians 5:19–20 also shows that corporate worship should be offered in the context of 'giving thanks always for all things to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ'.

### *Yadah*

The main Hebrew verb for 'to thank' is *yadah* – which literally means 'to stretch out the hand'. *Yadah* carries the twin ideas of close contact and words linked to action. In English, thanks is the spoken element of *yadah* and giving is the activity.

Today, when we thank a person, we often say 'Thank You' and we also stretch out our hand to give them a small gift as a token of our gratitude. This is true *yadah* thanks.

Here are a selection of Old Testament verses which describe people giving thanks to God. In these verses, we can begin to see how, when and why God's people thanked God: 2 Samuel 22:50; 1 Chronicles 16:4–41; 2 Chronicles 31:2; Psalm 6:5; 18:49; 30:4; 30:12; 35:18; 75:1; 79:13; 92:1; 97:12; 105:1; 106:1; 106:47; 119:62; 136:1–3 & 140:13.

### *Towdah*

Although *yadah* is used in Nehemiah 11:17 & 12:46, *towdah* is the most common Hebrew noun for thanksgiving. Like *yadah*, it implies speech and activity, however *towdah* also adds a formal element. We can *yadah*

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God anywhere, but *towdah* is offered to God in the context of organised public worship.

We can read about Old Testament thanksgivings in Leviticus 7:12; Nehemiah 12:27–40; Psalm 26:7; 50:14; 69:30; 95:2; 100:4; 147:7; Isaiah 51:3 & Jeremiah 30:19.

### *Eucharisteo*

In the New Testament, the verb *eucharisteo* and the noun *eucharistia* are the common Greek words for 'to thank' and 'thanksgiving'. These words are made up of *eu* which means 'good' and *charizomai* which is rendered 'give freely'.

The Greek word *charis* is the root of *eucharisteo*, and *charis* is usually translated as 'grace'. So New Testament 'thanks' and 'thanksgiving' involves good and gracious gifts which are given freely.

This is underlined by 2 Corinthians 4:15, which shows that grace causes thanksgiving, which – in turn – causes God to be glorified, and by 2 Corinthians 9:11–12, which points out that giving causes thanksgiving.

In fact, *charis* is itself the Greek word for thanks in Romans 6:17; 1 Corinthians 15:57; 2 Corinthians 2:14; 8:16; 9:15; 1 Timothy 1:12; 2 Timothy 1:3 & 1 Peter 2:19. This must suggest that 'thanksgiving' should be central in those people and congregations which claim to be *charismatic*.

A few New Testament examples of prayers of thanks are set in the context of prayers before meals or at the 'last supper'. This is why a prayer of thanks for food is usually called a 'grace' (*charis*), and why – in many Christian traditions – the service of holy communion is called 'the Eucharist' (the thanksgiving).

- ◆ Prayers of thanks for food are referred to in Matthew 15:36; Mark 8:6; John 6:11, 23 & Romans 14:6.
- ◆ Prayers of thanks at the last supper are found in Matthew 26:27; Mark 14:23; Luke 22:17–19 & 1 Corinthians 11:24.

- ◆ General thanksgivings to God are mentioned in Luke 17:16; John 11:41; Acts 24:3; 27:35; 28:15; Romans 1:8; 7:25; 16:4; 1 Corinthians 1:4; 14:18; 2 Corinthians 4:15; 9:11–12; Ephesians 1:16; 5:20; Philippians 1:3; Colossians 1:3; 1 Thessalonians 1:2; 2:13; 3:9; 5:18; 2 Thessalonians 1:3; 2:13; 1 Timothy 2:1; 4:3–4; Revelation 4:9 & 7:12.

### Thanksgiving and praise

Passages like 1 Chronicles 23:30; 25:3; 29:13; Ezra 3:11; Nehemiah 12:24, 46 & Psalm 100:4 make plain the close association between praise and thanksgiving.

Thanksgiving is primarily a prayer, directed to God, which thanks him for what he has done. Praise is essentially a commendation or extolling about God which is either directed to other people or is embraced by other people when directed to God.

Thanksgivings give God thanks for something that he has done. Praises glorify, commend or extol God's activities and attributes. When we thank God, we speak personally to him – we shake his hand with gratitude. But other people are usually involved when we praise God; either we tell them how wonderful he is, or they listen and agree when we tell God how wonderful he is.

The order in Psalm 100:4 is clear. We come individually to his gates with our thanksgivings, but then we enter together into his courts with our praise. In our lives, therefore, there must be thanks *and* praise.

In the Old Testament, there are three main Hebrew words which are usually translated as 'praise':

*Halal* is connected with making a loud noise, a cry of joy, a cheer or a shout. It is a widely used word – these are just a small selection of verses where it occurs: 1 Chronicles 16:4; 23:5; 2 Chronicles 5:13; 20:19; Ezra 3:11; Nehemiah 5:13; Psalm 22:22; 35:18; 69:30, 34; 74:21; 84:4; 107:32; 145:2; 146:2; 148:5; 149:3; Isaiah 62:9; 64:11 & Joel 2:26.



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The expression *hallelujah* – ‘praise the Lord’ – occurs at the beginning of Psalms 106; 111–113; 135; 146–149; and at the end of Psalms 104–106; 113; 115–117; 135 & 146–150.

*Yadah* literally means ‘to throw’ (as in Lamentations 3:53) but it is translated as praise when bodily movements and gestures – like clapping, dancing, raising arms – are used to glorify God. It is frequently used to describe the way God’s people praise him, for example, in Genesis 29:35; 2 Chronicles 7:3; 20:21–22; Psalms 7:17; 28:7; 45:17; 54:6; 67:3; 86:12; 99:3; 108:3; 111:1; 138:1; 142:7; Isaiah 12:4; 25:1; 38:19 & Jeremiah 33:11.

*Zamar* signifies singing and playing music. It is used in the titles of 57 psalms to specify a song which is sung to the musical accompaniment of a stringed instrument. It is also used throughout the Psalms to describe sung praise – for example: 7:17; 18:49; 27:6; 47:6; 57:7; 61:8; 75:9; 98:4; 104:33; 108:1,3; 135:3 & 147:7. The verb *zamar* is used four times outside of the Psalms – in Judges 5:3; 2 Samuel 22:50; 1 Chronicles 16:9 & Isaiah 12:5.

There are three main Greek words which are commonly translated as ‘praise’ in the New Testament:

*Aineo* means ‘to mention with honour’ or ‘to vow’. In ancient Greek the noun *ainos* could also mean ‘to narrate a story’. It is used for speaking praises about God in Luke 2:13, 20; 19:37; Acts 2:47; 3:8–9; Romans 15:11 & Revelation 19:5.

*Epaineo* (and the noun form *epainos*) is a stronger form of *aineo* and means ‘to commend’. It describes the praise of God in 1 Corinthians 11:2,17,22; Ephesians 1:6,12,14; Philippians 1:11 & 1 Peter 1:7.

*Humneo* means ‘to sing the praise of something or someone’. The English word hymn is derived from this and literally means a sung praise. *Humneo* is used in Acts 16:25 & Hebrews 2:12. It is also used in Matthew 26:30 & Mark 14:26 at the Last Supper to describe the singing of Psalms 113–118, which the Jews referred to as ‘the Hallel Psalms’.

### General biblical ideas

Here are six general biblical ideas about praise:

- ◆ God takes pleasure in his works of creation, and all creation – including the angels – expresses its joy in praise – see Genesis 1; Psalm 104:31; Proverbs 8:30–31; Job 38: 4–7 & Revelation 4:6–11
- ◆ Humanity was created to rejoice in God's works, and we fulfil this by accepting God's gifts – see Psalm 40:14–16; Ecclesiastes 8:15; 9:7; 11:9 & Philippians 4:4, 8
- ◆ The coming of the kingdom of God is marked by the restoration of joy and praise – see Isaiah 9:2; Psalm 96:11–13 & Luke 2:13–14
- ◆ God is praised for both redemption and creation. Even in heaven, the eternal praise of God's people extols both these gifts – see Exodus 15:1–21; Psalm 24; 136; Revelation 4:11 & 5:9–10
- ◆ Praise is a duty, and should not depend on feelings or circumstances – see Deuteronomy 12:7; 16:11–12 & Job 1:21
- ◆ Although personal praise is mentioned, corporate praise is given a much greater emphasis. Most descriptions of praise and pleas for praise are corporate – see Psalm 22:25; 34:3; 35:18 & 149:1.

### Thanksgiving and sacrifice

Although Jeremiah 17:26; 33:11 & Hebrews 13:15 refer to a sacrifice of praise, thanksgiving is identified as a sacrifice far more frequently. This may suggest that praise comes naturally to believers but thanksgiving is more demanding.

Here are some passages which show the biblical association between thanksgiving and sacrifice. They show that sacrifice was a key way of expressing thanksgiving: Leviticus 7:12–15;

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22:29; 2 Chronicles 29:31; 33:16; Psalm 107:22; 116:17; Amos 4:5 & Jonah 2:9.

Sacrifices were gifts given directly to God. In the Old Testament, whenever people turned to God, they worshipped him with sacrifices.

The Jews offered sacrifices personally and nationally, privately and publicly, regularly and as special needs arose. Numbers 28–29 gives a full list of the daily, weekly, monthly and annual public sacrifices, and Exodus 12 shows how the Passover was celebrated within families.

Sacrifices were offered as thanks to God on many different occasions. The Bible provides examples rather than an exhaustive list, but it is clear that thanksgiving was a vital element in these examples:

- ◆ Numbers 6:13–20 – at the release of a man from a vow
- ◆ Leviticus 12 – after a woman had given birth
- ◆ Leviticus 14 – when a leper had been healed
- ◆ Leviticus 8 & Numbers 8 – at the ordination of priests and Levites
- ◆ 1 Kings 1:9–12 – at royal coronations
- ◆ 1 Kings 8:1–13 – at the dedication of holy buildings.

Only the best would ever do for God. Exodus 10:24–26 makes it clear that sacrifices had to deplete the worshipper's personal resources – there had to be a real element of self-denial for the sacrifice to have any meaning. It also shows that, because the worshippers wanted to please God, they allowed him to direct their sacrifices.

The Jews could not offer God anything which had been unlawfully obtained or anything which was blemished. Both poor and rich alike had to offer God the best that they had. They could not hold back the best for themselves and offer God their leftovers as a 'thank you'.

Leviticus 1–7 outlines the five principle Jewish sacrifices:

- ◆ The holocaust, or wholly-burnt offering
- ◆ The oblation, or cereal offering
- ◆ The communion, or peace offering
- ◆ The sin offering
- ◆ The reparation, or guilt offering.

Two of these sacrifices were particularly used in thanksgiving – the *holocaust* and the *communion* sacrifice. Both of these helped Jewish people to express their feelings of being creatures who belonged to God – to their maker.

The holocaust or burnt offering

In the ‘wholly-burned’ holocaust, every part of the sacrifice (except the skin) was burnt as a gift to God: everything was offered to him. This represented the dedication by the worshipper – and the acceptance by God – of everything that the worshipper had and was.

1 Chronicles 29:13–14 expresses this idea:

*Now therefore, our God, we thank you and praise your glorious name. But who am I, and who are my people, that we should be able to offer so willingly as this? For all things come from you, and of your own we have given you.*

The communion

In the communion offering, part of the sacrifice was burnt as a gift to God, and the remainder was eaten by the priests and the people. This ‘eating together’ underlined the vital relationship between the people as creatures and their Creator.

Some leaders think that this ‘foreshadows’ the ‘communion’ service of the Church. We have seen that ‘thanksgiving’ is a key element of the Last Supper, and this has been taken up by those parts of the Church which identify the ‘communion service’ as ‘the Eucharist’. As this service is a thanksgiving for Christ’s sacrificial death and the promise of his coming, perhaps thanksgiving should feature more clearly in it.

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The link between thanksgiving and sacrifice is vital. When God's people wanted to thank their Creator and Redeemer, they did not merely thank him with their mouths – they also thanked him by offering him the best that they had. This is why the Scriptures teach *thanksgiving* rather than *thankspeaking*. We have much to learn from this.

### **Thanksgiving and giving**

The Jews gave in three ways – through sacrifices, tithes and freewill offerings. All their gifts were given to God, and thanksgiving was the essential motive behind all of them.

#### Tithes

The Jews gave their tithes to God (one tenth of their annual income) and these provided for the religious leaders and for the poor. Tithes were given willingly. Two years out of three, the people travelled to Jerusalem and presented their tithe – with thanksgiving – to the Levites. The gift of their tithe was a means of expressing thanks to God for his material provision through the harvest and for his spiritual care through the priestly and Levitical ministries.

In the third year, the tithe was not taken to Jerusalem. It was stored locally and used to provide for the poor and any strangers in the area. The biblical teaching about tithes is found in Leviticus 27:30–32; Numbers 18:21–32; Deuteronomy 14:29 & Malachi 3:2–12.

#### Sacrifices and freewill offerings

From the remaining nine-tenths of their income, the Jews offered sacrifices and freewill offerings to God. Some types of sacrifices expressed thanks for God's goodness and other types pleaded for God's forgiveness. Whenever the people wanted to thank God, they did so through spoken words of prayer and the gift of a holocaust or communion sacrifice.

Freewill offerings were used for particular projects: they were special, occasional *thankofferings* which the people gave

as an expression of their gratitude for God's goodness.

Exodus 25:1–4 records God's instructions for collecting the materials needed to build the tabernacle; and Exodus 35:1–29 & 36:2–7 describe the details of the offering:

- ◆ It was voluntary – 35:5
- ◆ It was specific – 35:9
- ◆ It was purposeful – 35:11–19
- ◆ It was divinely motivated – 35:21–22
- ◆ It stopped when enough had been given – 36:3–7.

The passage makes it clear that the people gave willingly, generously, and enthusiastically, as their hearts and spirits were stirred.

A similar attitude is seen in 1 Chronicles 28–29, when David asked the people to give for the first temple; and also in Ezra 1:2–6; 2:68–69; 3:5; 7:16 & Nehemiah 7:70–72 when thankofferings were made for the second temple.

1 Chronicles 29 is one of the greatest of all biblical passages about thanksgiving, and shows the clear scriptural association between prayer, praise, thanksgiving, sacrifice and giving.

Some people might ask what possible connection exists between a collection for a building and prayer. But the biblical examples of thankofferings were collected for places of prayer, and the motive behind all the examples was gratitude for all God had done – for individuals, for families and for the nation. Spoken thanks was not enough, the arm had to be stretched out with a gift as well.

Prayer is not always a mere quiet recital of words. Prayer can involve wrestling with God, sweating and agonising before him. It can entail persistence – going on and on and on. It can mean fasting – consuming no food to show genuine sincerity and to create more time for prayer. And it can include giving – sacrificial thanksgiving which reveals the depth of our gratitude in a supremely practical way.

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### **Thanksgiving and Paul**

Thanksgiving plays a very important part in Paul's thinking and writing. It has been said that Paul mentions the subject of thanksgiving in his letters more often (line for line) than any other Greek author, Christian or pagan. Indeed, Paul's letters record many examples of him offering God thanks and also of him instructing his readers to offer God thanks.

Paul's prayers of thanksgiving

Obviously these prayers are not an exhaustive list of Paul's thanksgiving; however, it is instructive that one topic occurs almost as often as all the others added together. Paul thanked God:

For fellow believers

Many of Paul's letters begin with him thanking God for the faith of the people to whom he is writing. For example, Romans 1:8; 1 Corinthians 1:4; Philippians 1:3; Colossians 1:3; 1 Thessalonians 1:2; 2 Thessalonians 1:3 & Philemon 4. This expression of thanks by Paul is not an empty formula, as its absence at the beginning of Galatians seems to be deliberate.

Paul also thanks God for fellow believers in 2 Corinthians 8:16; Ephesians 1:16; 1 Thessalonians 2:13; 3:9 & 2 Timothy 1:3.

In many of these thanksgivings, Paul uses words like 'always' and 'without ceasing' which draw attention to the importance he gives to thanking God publicly for fellow believers and leaders – many of whom were not known to him personally. It is important to note that this persistence and urgency is absent in the examples of his other thanksgivings.

For food

As throughout the rest of the Bible, Paul emphasizes the importance of thanking God for food: Romans 14:6; 1 Corinthians 10:30; 11:24 & 1 Timothy 4:3–4.

For Jesus  
Romans 7:25 & 2 Corinthians 9:15

For his ministry  
1 Corinthians 1:14 & 1 Timothy 1:12

For victory  
1 Corinthians 15:57 & 2 Corinthians 2:14

For spiritual gifts  
1 Corinthians 14:16–18

Paul's instructions about thanksgiving

Paul constantly urged his readers – and prayed for them – to make thanksgiving a continuous activity – both in word and deed.

It is impossible to read these verses without concluding that thanksgiving should feature very highly in our private and public prayers – see Ephesians 5:4, 20; Philippians 4:6; Colossians 1:12; 2:7; 3:15–17; 4:2; 1 Thessalonians 5:18 & 1 Timothy 2:1.

Paul expects us to 'always give thanks for all things'. He makes it clear that it is God's will for us to give thanks in everything. He shows that our requests in prayer should be surrounded with thanks. According to Paul, thanksgiving should be one of the key characteristics of committed Christian believers.



## *Effective Prayer*

## Part Six

### Paul's prayers

The newly-converted Saul is introduced to us, in Acts 9:11, as a man at prayer. And throughout Acts and his letters we can see that prayer was the bedrock of his extraordinary ministry.

Several times in the Scriptures, Paul suggested that his readers should live in the way he lived: 1 Corinthians 11:1; Galatians 4:12; Philippians 3:17; 4:9; 1 Thessalonians 1:6 & 2 Thessalonians 3:7–9. Those believers who are serious about prayer will pay special attention to this mighty man of prayer and learn from both his teaching and his praying.

#### **Paul's teaching**

In 1 Timothy 2:1–4, Paul advised that the practice of prayer in Christian meetings should include supplications, prayers, intercessions and thanksgivings. These should be offered for all men, especially secular and political authorities.

#### Prayer for authorities

When Paul asks us to pray *for* people in authority, he uses the Greek word *huper*, which means 'on behalf of', rather than *peri*, which means 'about'. *Huper* is the word used throughout the New Testament to show that 'Jesus died *for* us' – for example, in John 10:11 & 1 Timothy 2:6.

This means not only that we should pray *about* those in authority – give thanks about them, make requests about them, and so on – but that we should also pray *on their behalf* – in their stead. We do this as priests, pleading with God on behalf of the world, in the same way as Christ – the great High Priest – prays *huper* us in Hebrews 7:25 and the Spirit intercedes *huper* us in Romans 8:26–27.

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### Prayer for God to 'save'

There is no scriptural record of Paul praying specifically for Gentile unbelievers 'to be saved'. Of course, he wanted them all to be saved and prayed in a way which he hoped would hasten their salvation. But instead of praying 'God save X', he prayed that the obstacles which were preventing X's salvation should be removed, and that the believers who should be passing on the gospel message to X would be equipped, energised and motivated to witness effectively to X.

In Romans 10:1, Paul describes that his dearest wish and prayer to God was *hyper* the Jews – 'that they may be saved'. This verse does not state that the *content* of Paul's praying was 'Dear God, please save the Jews'. Instead it reports that the *aim* of Paul's praying was that the Jews 'may be saved'. Romans 10:1 does not support, 'Dear God, please save my husband' type prayers.

If we long for our friends and relatives to be saved and ache for the people in our area to be converted, we will wrestle in prayer to bring about their salvation. Like Paul, we will spend long hours praying 'so that they may be saved'.

However, we should want to find the best and most effective way of praying to bring about their salvation. We will not want to pray in an ineffective manner. Paul's prayers and teaching suggest that praying for the obstacles blocking salvation to be removed – and praying for believers to be empowered and motivated – is a very effective way of praying for the salvation of unbelievers. We will examine 'obstacle removing prayer' in Part Seven.

### Prayer for peace

In 1 Timothy 2:1–4, Paul taught that our prayers for the government should be 'that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and reverence'.

Peace is crucial for the effective proclamation of the gospel. Any form of war is an obstacle to evangelism. This means we should pray for peace so that God's work may not be

disrupted, and that we may continue with the task of witnessing to those who do not believe.

Pray with perseverance

Paul repeated Jesus' teaching of the need for perseverance in prayer: Romans 12:12; Ephesians 6:18; Colossians 4:2 & 1 Thessalonians 5:17 all emphasise the need to press on in prayer.

Pray for priorities

Paul stressed that our prayers should be for priorities rather than luxuries. Ephesians 6:18 & Philippians 4:6–7 show that we should ask and pray for whatever we need – whether material or spiritual. This echoes Matthew 6:25–34.

### **Paul's prayer requests**

In addition to Paul's general requests for prayer in passages like 1 Thessalonians 5:25, the Bible records seven detailed prayer requests. Four themes run through these requests for prayer.

Rescue

Six times, Paul asked for prayer that he would be kept safe in, or would be rescued from, a situation which was preventing the proclamation of the gospel.

Like Christ, Paul did not ask for the hostilities to cease but for safety as he walked away from the difficulty. This means that, in our prayers, we should not ask for an easy life. Instead, we should try to discover what God is doing and wants to do in the person through their circumstances. We should concentrate on God's work in the person, rather than be side-tracked by the surrounding events.

Paul asked:

- ◆ To be rescued from evil men – 2 Thessalonians 3:1–2
- ◆ To be rescued from unbelievers – Romans 15:31
- ◆ To be rescued from a deadly peril – 2 Corinthians 1:9–11

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- ◆ To be kept safe in prison – Philippians 1:19–20
- ◆ To be released from prison as a special favour – Philemon 22
- ◆ That a closed door be opened – Colossians 4:3.

In all these verses, Paul's prayer request was made in order to enable him to witness more effectively.

### Acceptance

In 2 Thessalonians 3:1–2, Paul requested prayer that the message he spoke would be well received by unbelievers. And in Romans 15:30–32 he asked for prayer that his message would prove acceptable to the Jerusalem believers.

### Boldness

In both Ephesians 6:19–20 & Colossians 4:3–4, Paul asked for prayer for fearless boldness. He wanted to speak the good news as it should be spoken.

He knew his normal state was 'fear and trembling' and that boldness did not come naturally to him. If Paul needed people's prayers for boldness, how much more should this feature in our prayers today?

### Travel

Paul requested prayer, in Romans 15:22–32, for the opportunity to travel to Rome. He asked this so that he could take a blessing from Christ to the believers in Rome.

### Prayer for evangelism

These four themes in Paul's prayer requests suggest much about prayer for evangelism which is relevant today. If our passion is the biblical passion for evangelism, how can we best pray for our unbelieving friends and family?

Like Paul, we know that it is God's will for all our friends to be saved. We do not need to persuade a reluctant God to save them. Instead, if we follow Paul's example, we will pray:

- ◆ That we are rescued from the imprisoning circumstances which are preventing our witness

## *Paul's prayers*

- ◆ That we are filled with boldness to speak God's word
- ◆ That we are enabled to spend time with our unsaved friend
- ◆ That the words we speak will be empowered by the Spirit and heard and accepted by our friend
- ◆ That the Spirit will convict our friend of their sin and need.

If we have a burden for a particular unsaved person, an effective and biblical way of praying for their salvation is to:

- ◆ Listen to God to establish precisely how he wants us to take the message of salvation to the person on our heart
- ◆ Pray specifically and persistently for God to remove the obstacles, to equip the saint he has chosen to speak to the unsaved person, and to empower their words with his grace and favour.

Of course, God always honours our sincere motives when we pray 'Please save my friend'. Such prayers are never a waste of time – but they can be a little bit lazy! God wants us to press on in prayer, seriously to seek his will for a situation and then to pray it into being.

### **Paul's prayers**

Romans 1:9; Ephesians 1:16; 1 Thessalonians 1:2 & Philemon 4 show that Paul's prayers were full of requests for the believers with whom he had had contact.

However, Paul's letters also contain nine prayers which teach much about the content of prayer. Eight themes run through these prayers.

Knowledge

His most frequent prayer was that believers be filled with whatever knowledge Paul understood them to need.

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He prayed that they would know:

- ◆ Jesus better by receiving the Spirit of wisdom and revelation – Ephesians 1:17
- ◆ The hope to which they had been called by receiving enlightenment – Ephesians 1:18
- ◆ The riches of Christ's inheritance – Ephesians 1:18
- ◆ The vastness of Christ's love – Ephesians 3:18
- ◆ The will of God by receiving wisdom and understanding – Colossians 1:9
- ◆ Growth in the knowledge of God – Colossians 1:10
- ◆ The righteousness which comes from God and be able to distinguish it from their own righteousness – Romans 10:1–4
- ◆ Every good thing that was available to them in Christ – Philemon 6
- ◆ Even greater knowledge so that they could discern what was best – Philippians 1:9–10.

Paul used the Greek word *epignosis* in all but two of these passages. This means a full, experiential knowledge. He prayed for them to experience these things in as full a manner as possible.

Ephesians 3:18 is one exception. Here Paul used *ginosko* which signifies a grasp of the concept rather than of the detail. The vast love of God cannot be known fully, even though it can be enjoyed and appreciated.

The other exception is Ephesians 1:18a, where Paul used the Greek word *eido* to stress that the hope is a present understanding of a future reality. The hope will come to pass, but it cannot be known fully and completely at the present time.

All this suggests that, before we begin to pray for a person, we should ask God what knowledge the believer needs most. We should then wait for God's answer before starting to pray for them.

Paul was always specific in his prayers for knowledge. They varied with different needs. Our prayers should develop into this real prayer struggle for the believers we know – that they will know, fully and completely, all they need to know to help them in their evangelism.

### Strength

Paul prayed in Ephesians 3:16 that his readers might be made strong with power through the Spirit. This was so that – eventually – they would be made strong enough for Christ to dwell in their hearts, and it was linked with being filled with the utter fullness of God.

He prayed in Colossians 1:11 that we would be made powerful with the power of God's might for endurance and patience. When a believer is in danger of giving up, we should not pray that things will become easier for them. Instead, we should pray that the Spirit will make them powerful and resolute to press on.

Paul prayed in 1 Thessalonians 3:13 that our hearts would be made firm so we might be blameless and holy at the second coming of Christ.

### Love

In Ephesians 3:17, Paul prayed that God's love might be our root and foundation. And, in Philippians 1:9 & 1 Thessalonians 3:12, he begged that God's love might flow out to us over and above our present experience, and overflow to others.

God's love is *agape*. It is God's deep, constant and practical love. We need to pray for this in today's Church, that *agape* may abound and overflow. It is this which will challenge the world.

### Pure and blameless

In Philippians 1:10, Paul prayed that his readers would become 'pure and blameless' *before men*. He wanted God to make them *eilikrines* and *aproskopos* – that is, pure and untainted by the world, not giving anybody offence or a reason for stumbling.



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In 1 Thessalonians 3:13 he prayed that they might be ‘pure and blameless’ *before God*. This time he prayed for them to be *amemptos* and *hagiosune* – to be blameless before God and holy in their conduct.

He asked in Colossians 1:10 that their lives might give pleasure to God. Paul wanted them not merely to keep God’s commands, but also to anticipate his wishes.

And he prayed for their ‘perfection’ in 2 Corinthians 13:9. This is *katartisis* which means ‘completeness of character’ not *teleios* which means ‘fully accomplished’. The difference between these words shows that this is a realistic prayer for us to be ready or fit for evangelistic action. It is not a prayer for our absolute maturity or total perfection.

### Worthy

Paul wanted his readers to live in such a way that they would reflect God’s character and thoughts. So, in Colossians 1:10, he prayed that they would live worthily towards the Lord, and in 2 Thessalonians 1:11 he prayed for them to live worthy of God’s calling.

### Righteousness

In Philippians 1:11, Paul prayed that we would be filled with the fruit of righteousness which comes through Jesus. In Romans 10:2–3, he prayed that we would know the righteousness which comes from God.

### Results

Paul prayed that his readers might bear fruit in good works – as in Colossians 1:10; and in Philemon 6 he asked God that they be would be *energes* – that is powerfully active and effective – in sharing their faith.

### Glory

In 2 Thessalonians 1:11–12, Paul prayed that the name of our Lord Jesus may be glorified in us – and us in him. He uses a Greek construction which stresses the present possibility of this experience, and underlines it by using the same construction in

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verse 10 to stress the future certainty of Christ's glorification in his bride.

These prayers of Paul were not polite words – they were dynamic requests which he knew God would answer! When we follow his example in our praying, and depend on the Spirit in the same way, we can share his certainty and assurance. Our prayers will be answered.

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## Part Seven

### Spiritual warfare

Spiritual warfare involves the whole of our Christian lives. It includes living a holy life, preaching the gospel and praying. Some leaders reject the view that spiritual warfare brings us into conflict with demonic powers. They say that addressing spirits directly is not a form of prayer and that this is outside the bounds of scriptural teaching.

However, every form of prayer is an act of spiritual warfare. Whenever we pray and seek God's will on earth, we find ourselves in opposition to the enemy.

Ephesians 6:10–18 is the foundation passage for spiritual warfare. It describes the Church at war. It is about 'us', not 'me', and offers a picture of an army standing and fighting in hand-to-hand combat. Therefore, we should expect to confront spiritual forces and to engage them directly. This is surely what Paul meant by 'wrestling against principalities and powers'.

The image is of a company of soldiers in one-to-one confrontation in prayer against demonic forces. Prayer is the point of this passage. We need to wear the armour of God so that we can be ready to engage the enemy when we pray. 1 John 3:8 shows this is God's will.

#### **The reality of spiritual warfare**

Daniel 10:12–13 contains some unusual glimpses of the operation of the spiritual realm and how it is influenced by our prayers. Daniel, through prayer and fasting, sought understanding concerning a vision. God sent a powerful angel to meet with him and explain the vision, yet this angel met opposition from the 'prince' of Persia. As Daniel continued to pray, the archangel Michael was sent to help and God's message got through.

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The passage shows that:

- ◆ Demonic beings (here called princes) do exist, and try to oppose the work of God
- ◆ These demonic princes are associated with particular territorial and temporal areas
- ◆ There is a link between heavenly and earthly activity. What happened in the heavens affected the situation on earth, and Daniel – through his prayers – affected what was happening in the heavens
- ◆ By his persistent prayers, Daniel achieved a spiritual breakthrough – even though he personally saw nothing of the battle.

Although it cannot be denied that Daniel's praying was spiritual warfare, some leaders use the fact that Daniel did not himself address the demonic powers and principalities to deny the need for conscious, active and aggressive spiritual warfare. They say there is not need for personal, direct confrontation of demonic forces in prayer.

Those who argue like this point out that, in Zechariah 3:1–5, the angel of the Lord said, 'The Lord rebuke you', not 'I rebuke you'. It is the same in Jude 9. However, when Jesus was confronted by the devil in Luke 4:1–13 & Matthew 16:22–23 he did not converse and reason with Satan – he commanded him. And, in Matthew 12:22–29, he taught that spiritual warfare characterised the coming of the kingdom of God.

Of course, we will probably never be called to confront Satan himself, personally, as Jesus did. Our struggle is with his representatives: principalities and powers and other demonic forces.

The Daniel and Zechariah passages are before the cross. They did not share our benefits of the victory at Calvary. There, Jesus disarmed every power and principality and was raised far above them in the heavenly places. We have been

raised with Christ and carry his delegated power and authority. Ephesians 1:15–2:7 makes this plain.

We do not have power to rebuke spiritual beings. But Jesus does – and we receive that same authority from him. As his representatives on earth we can say, ‘In the name of Jesus, I rebuke you.’

There is a need for balance. Satan may tempt us to ‘prove it’ and to step out of the will of God to confront the devil’s forces in our own strength. If we ‘go it alone’ we will quickly discover the reality of warfare which is written about in 1 Peter 5:8.

### **Personal spiritual warfare**

Only four Old Testament characters are recorded as having been personally confronted by Satan. With each one, Satan used a different weapon, attacked different aspects of the individual’s life, came in a different disguise, and with a different objective. A study of these four spiritual battles gives an overall picture of the way the enemy’s forces seek to attack us today.

#### **Eve**

In Genesis 3 Satan appeared to Eve as the deceiver, deceiving her as to the nature of true human happiness. Revelation 12:9 calls him ‘the great dragon, the primeval serpent, known as the devil or Satan, who has deceived all the world’.

He attacked Eve’s mind, using the weapon of lies, with the aim of making her ignorant of God’s will. He brought confusion by suggesting Eve should doubt God’s goodness: ‘Did God really say you were not to eat from any of the trees in the garden?’ This was a lie. God had not prohibited the eating of fruit from every tree, only one.

Satan also attempted to provoke Eve into questioning God’s word: ‘Did God really say...?’ Satan began by getting Eve to question God’s word because he knew that there is

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only a small step from doubting God's word to being ignorant of God's holiness.

Finally, Satan lied again: 'God knows, in fact, that on the day you eat it your eyes will be opened and you will be like gods, knowing good and evil'. He was trying to smother her knowledge of God's will.

### Job

Job chapter 1 shows that, this time, the devil came in the guise of a destroyer, using the weapon of suffering to attack Job's body with the aim of making him question God's will and pitying himself – instead of glorying in his sonship.

Satan did not employ the weapon of suffering as an end in itself, but as a means to make Job question God's will. After seven days of silence, chapter three records Job's 'Whys?' The false assumption of Job's friends was that the justice of God must always and automatically reward virtue with the twin blessings of wealth and health, and that, therefore, suffering can only be a consequence of sin.

### David

The third biblical encounter with Satan is recorded in 1 Chronicles 21. Here, Satan donned the disguise of a despotic ruler to attack David. He wielded the weapon of pride, with the aim of causing the king to exercise authority independently of God's will.

Satan incited David to take a census of the Israelites without any word from God. Despite Joab's initial opposition, this was carried out.

### Joshua

The High Priest Joshua was the fourth Old Testament character who had to wrestle with Satan. In Zechariah 3, the defamer attacked Joshua's conscience with self-condemnation in order to lead him into a wrong sense of guilt at falling short of God's will. He did this by tempting the priest to think that he was disqualified from service because of his dirty clothes –

when Joshua should have been relying on his God-given justification.

The attack came at a critical time in Jewish history; after forty years in Babylonian exile the Jews had begun to return to Jerusalem. Joshua's grandfather, Seraiah, was High Priest at the time of the capture of Jerusalem and had been executed at Riblah by Nebuchadnezzar in 2 Kings 25:18–21. His father, Jehozadak, had been carried captive to Babylon, and as Joshua is not mentioned in 1 Chronicles 6:15 it is reasonable to conclude that he was born in exile.

It must have been suggested that Joshua was not fit to be High Priest because he was a slave, born in exile, and so defiled, hence the dirty clothes – and Satan seized upon this when he came to make his attack. Wonderfully, God's grace came to Joshua and he was given the gift of clean clothes to wear.

### **Old Testament warfare**

The Old Testament was written as a record of God's dealings with his people which would serve as a warning and an example to us. There are many instances of Israel fighting against God's enemies. Our battle today is spiritual – not against flesh and blood – but the Old Testament examples of physical battles demonstrate spiritual principles which help us in our kind of warfare.

Each battle was fought with a unique strategy: there was no set battle plan. Exodus 17:9 shows that God has specific directions for each battle. We need to ensure that we receive our instructions for spiritual warfare from God, and do not move unless he directs us. However, there are distinct principles of warfare which we need to know.

Victory depends on the right use of God's authority  
In Exodus 17:9, Moses held the rod of God as a symbol of his authority. The rod represented his calling, but Moses had to lay it down before he could take it up properly.



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The following passages speak of our authority in Christ:

- ◆ Luke 10:16–20
- ◆ Matthew 28:18–20
- ◆ Matthew 16:19.

Victory depends upon unity

Moses, Aaron, Hur and Joshua were working together as a team to hold up Moses' arms and the rod of God. There was no fighting over who would hold the rod – there was no division or competition, and this unity made the difference between victory and defeat. When they held up Moses' arms they won; when Moses' arms fell, there was defeat.

Passages like Psalm 133:1–3; Matthew 18:18–20; John 17:20–26 & Philippians 1:27 illustrate the importance of unity in warfare.

Victory depends on breakthrough

A breakthrough is 'an act or point of breaking through an obstruction or defensive line; it is an important advance in knowledge or achievement'. The account of David's battle against the Philistines in 1 Chronicles 14:8–17 shows that God is the God of the breakthrough. It is helpful to look at the passage in detail.

Verse 8: The Philistines attacked David because of his anointing and authority. David's response to hearing of the imminent attack was to go into the stronghold. Nahum 1:7 & Psalm 18:2 show that we need to be in our stronghold – the Lord – in times of warfare.

Verse 10: David inquired of the Lord. It is crucial at all times to be led by the Holy Spirit, but especially in spiritual warfare.

Verse 11: David defeated the Philistines at Baal Perazim but acknowledged that it was God who had broken through. It is clear that it was a partnership.

Verse 12: The Philistines abandoned their idols. Here was the real issue: the battle was spiritual.

Verse 13: The enemy regrouped and attacked again. Notice the persistence of the enemy. But they over-reached themselves.

Verses 14–15: There was a change of strategy. This time David had to wait for God to act on Israel's behalf.

Verse 16: David drove the enemy back. The victory was complete!

Hebrews 4:14 describes the greatest breakthrough of all time. We need to take hold of the breakthroughs that have already been achieved for us by Jesus. We need to speak out the faith that we have, and firmly hold on to each promise from God – especially Ephesians 3:20 – and go on professing them in prayer until we have a breakthrough.

### Victory

Exodus 17:15–16 can be read in two ways. First, as 'hands lifted up to the throne of God' implying prayer, or as 'hands lifted up against the throne' implying rebellion. Both readings help us to understand its meaning fully.

God acts both when there is rebellion against him *and* when we intercede, executing God's written judgements. God rarely intervenes directly. He uses us, the Church, to carry out his will.

The reason that we are involved in warfare is to see victory. John 12:31 shows that Jesus came to drive Satan out, and this took place at the cross. Jesus has already won decisively. The battle between him and Satan to determine the outcome of the universe is over. Jesus has triumphed. Colossians 2:15 & Hebrews 2:14–15 show that Satan's kingdom has been declared illegitimate and illegal, and he has been totally defeated along with all his demons.

This is an important scriptural principle, and it is contrary to some 'spiritual warfare' practice that seems to suggest we are in a position of weakness rather than that of enjoying the already completed victory of Christ, in the matter of spiritual warfare.

Jesus Christ's headship and absolute victory over Satan is

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accomplished and totally guaranteed. (We examine this in detail in *Sword of the Spirit* volume five, *Glory in the Church*.) But this headship is given to us, the Church, so that we can walk in the victory of Christ and administer it on his behalf. In the present, we are in 'training for reigning' and in the future kingdom of God, we will live and reign with Christ forever.

Now Satan has been defeated but not yet annihilated or finally judged; he has been rendered powerless and inoperative. This has happened: Satan has been stripped of his power and driven for ever out of his place in the heavens. He is:

- ◆ Defeated – Matthew 12:28–29
- ◆ Destroyed – Hebrews 2:14–15
- ◆ Driven out – John 12:31
- ◆ Disarmed – Colossians 2:15.

This victory has been effective for 2,000 years. We need to realise this and come to prayer with an attitude of accomplished victory, not struggle or defeat. From that position, we can successfully administer the triumphant victory of Christ in the world, according to his divine will and plan.

### **Spiritual armour**

Ephesians 6:11–17 is the classic description of the equipment given to us to use for spiritual warfare. Paul was imprisoned in Rome and probably chained to a Roman soldier when he wrote Ephesians. His description of our spiritual armour is based on that of a Roman soldier – who was equipped for hand-to-hand combat.

The armour of God represents truths about our lifestyle, and putting it on is not a set of symbolic actions to be mimed. The Greek word used means that we put it on only once, not every day – though we must walk in it every day.

#### **Belt of truth**

The belt kept the Roman tunic tight and the soldier free from entanglement, therefore enabling him to engage the enemy.

The belt thus suggests a military attitude, 'I'm ready to fight'.

The word used for truth, *aletheia*, means 'truth, in contrast to error'. What we disbelieve is as important as what we believe. The enemy would try and deceive us by leading us to believe lies. We must watch over our mind, filling it constantly with the Word of God.

### Breastplate of righteousness

The breastplate was made either of metal moulded to fit the soldier's neck and torso, or linen covered with protective strips of animal horn. It gave protection to the vital organs, neck and torso. The back had little protection, ensuring that no soldier would ever turn and run!

We need to check our hearts and ensure that they are right. We need to do this in a positive attitude of growth and desiring to be right with God and with others.

We need to know that we have perfect righteousness before God in Christ Jesus so we can come to him in faith, but we must also walk correctly in confession and repentance. We have a right to wear the armour, but we must wear it right!

### Shoes of the gospel of peace

The soldier's shoes were thick-soled, hobnailed boots which were strapped up to the knees. They provided stability and protection on rough terrain.

Our strength, stability, protection and sure-footedness all lie in the gospel of peace. It brings reconciliation with God and does not rely on human means of warfare. We teach reconciliation and not revenge because Jesus is the Prince of Peace.

### Shield of faith

Roman soldiers used two kinds of shield. One was a small, round shield to fend off blows whilst fighting with a sword or spear. The other was a heavy, thick plank of wood covered with leather treated with oil to extinguish the burning pitch on the tips of enemy arrows.

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These larger shields provided full protection for the soldier in battle. We need protection from the fiery arrows of Satan's seducing temptations. It is faith that provides this full protection – faith in the promises of God.

One way the soldiers would protect themselves was by standing together and boxing themselves in with their shields. When we close in together and put up defensive barriers against the enemy, there is increased protection. We must watch over each other. Every instruction in Ephesians 6 is to the corporate body not to individual believers.

### Helmet of salvation

Roman helmets were made either of strong leather covered with metal, or cast metal, strong enough to withstand blows from a heavy broadsword which could penetrate an unprotected skull. Satan's 'broadsword' is doubt and discouragement. God gives us the protection of hope, encouragement and perseverance.

### Sword of the Spirit

Roman soldiers carried two types of sword. The first was a large broadsword which required both hands to wield it, and the second was a short sword or dagger for hand-to-hand combat. Ephesians 6 refers to the smaller short sword. We have a spiritually effective sword given to us by the Holy Spirit. Hebrews 4:12–13 shows that it is a powerful and precise weapon in the hands of the believer.

### The true purpose of the armour

Ephesians 6:18 shows that the purpose of the armour was to equip the soldier for combat. And prayer is the combat. Prayer is not another piece of the armour, or else the analogy has broken down. Neither is prayer a development of the sword of the Spirit. Prayer enables us to use the armour. Prayer is the battlefield. The Good News Bible comes closest to the original with 'Do all this in prayer'.

In Isaiah 59:15–19, the Lord was so appalled that there was

no one to intercede that he personally decided to intervene. But note what he first equipped himself with!

### **Warfare praying**

In earlier sections, we suggested that effective praying for the unsaved consists of two main elements: firstly that the human messengers be equipped; and, secondly, that the obstacles preventing their salvation be removed. This second part is warfare praying.

Jesus took the common Jewish phrase 'to move a mountain' and vested it with new power and application. In Jewish writings a great teacher, one who explained satisfactorily difficulties in Scripture, was described as a mountain-mover.

This phrase is based in Isaiah 40:1–5, where the prophet was told to prepare the way of the Lord. Among other things, Isaiah had to knock down the mountains of difficulty which were obstructing the wide revelation of the glory of God. 'Mountain-moving' is hinted at in Isaiah 2:11–16 and its counterpart of 'uprooting' is suggested in Lamentations 3:65–66. The idea also appears in Zechariah 4:7.

In olden days, when an Eastern monarch wanted to travel to distant parts of his kingdom, he would send a party of men, some six months to a year in advance, to prepare the way. These men would make good the bridges, repair the roads, uproot trees and generally do everything they could to facilitate the easy journeying and arrival of the monarch.

John the Baptist was the preparer of the way of the Lord, but so also were the seventy-two in Luke 10. They went ahead of Christ in pairs to all the towns and places he was to visit. Jesus took up the idea of mountain-moving and developed it in three parallel passages: Matthew 7:20; Mark 11:22–24 & Luke 17:5–6.

God's faith

A right understanding of Mark 11:22 is crucial. Most translations

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suggest that Jesus said 'Have faith in God'. But 'have faith of God' or 'have God's faith' is the literal translation of the Greek. We could even say, 'Have faith in God's faith'.

God's faith is absolute. He is totally self-confident. He knows that he can achieve whatever he wants to do. Mountain-moving is not a problem to the Creator of heaven and earth. When we have a speck of God's faith in us warfare praying becomes straightforward. Jesus promises us that we can learn trust in God's faith. That way we can have the same confidence that God has in his word.

Matthew 17:20 & Luke 17:5–6 show that we do not need much faith to move mountains, just the genuine article. It is quality, not quantity, that counts. On its own, our faith can achieve nothing – it is God who moves the mountains. Our faith merely engages us with the great power of God.

Paul promised, in 1 Corinthians 12:9, that the Holy Spirit would give the gift of God's faith to some people. Paul then went on to urge his readers to be zealous for, or to desire earnestly, the higher. Faith is high on the list.

There are five stages in warfare praying:

Knowing God's will

This praying is futile without the absolute certainty of the knowledge of God's will. Time must be spent listening to the Father. We must receive his identification of the mountains of difficulty which are the obstacles preventing God's glory from being seen, and from the person being saved.

We need to ask the Father what are the circumstances, factors and attitudes which prevent the work of God from developing and growing in a person. Each of the passages mentioned above suggests a particular type of obstacle for removal.

Mark implies that personal relationships, especially where unforgiveness exists, can be one barrier.

Matthew hints that difficulty in casting out demons may

require this type of intercession.

Luke, if taken with other passages about the fig/mulberry trees, suggests that those trees which look good but have no fruit are ripe candidates for uprooting. Fruitless, hypocritical Christians are often the greatest obstacle to people becoming Christians.

#### Authoritative order

The verses do not say 'Whoever prays to me', but 'Whoever speaks to the mountain'. This prayer is addressed to the obstacle, not the Father. It is violent, Old Testament *paga* intercession and is characterised by such 'faith commands' as 'be taken up', 'be cast into the sea', 'move hence' and 'be rooted up'.

This is only strange to some because of their lack of experience in the apostolic practice of uttering authoritative commands in ministry. Christians in the early church, and an increasing number today, spoke directly to eyes, limbs, storms, demons, fevers and dead bodies 'in the name of Jesus' and commanded them to be changed. We often cry 'Do something', but God whispers back, 'No, you do it'. This is the secret of the healing of Naaman, the miraculous catches of fish, the parting of the Red Sea and the temple tax paid by Peter.

This executive authority, which Christ gave to the seventy-two in Luke 10:1–16, is ours to use today. This means in practice that, if the obstacle preventing Steve's conversion is revealed in prayer as a cynical workmate, it could be right to intercede as follows: 'In the name of Jesus, I remove this obstacle preventing Steve from hearing the gospel.'

#### Receiving God's faith

Home produced faith is insufficient for this sort of prayer. God-given confidence that this will happen is needed. When the Holy Spirit gives his gifts of God's faith, we are to accept the event as already being done.

To believe is not to have a faint hope that something could, or might, take place, for example, 'I believe (but I am not really



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sure) James will come today.' To believe is to know for certain that it will happen: 'I believe (he has promised me – and there he is walking towards me) James will come today.'

### **Sustained speaking**

The Greek tense used means that we are to go on saying to the obstacle, 'Get up and throw yourself in the sea'. It is not a one-off command. Perseverance, as with all prayer, is required.

### **Visible result**

The construction of the phrases 'it will be done', 'it will move', and 'it will obey', emphasises the certainty of fulfilment. Luke uses a Greek tense which refers to a time prior to the command, for example, 'it would have obeyed' and this underlines the fact that there is to be a visible result to this warfare prayer.

When we know God's will, receive God's faith, and continue in speaking out an authoritative order, there can be no doubt about the outcome: the highest mountain, the most deeply rooted tree and the most immovable obstacle will all have to go. The way will be made level for the glory of God to be seen.

## **The battleground of the mind**

All that we have said about the role of prayer in spiritual warfare is part of the greater and prior battle for the mind. In 2 Corinthians 10:4–6, Paul reveals the true nature of spiritual warfare. It is to bring every thought or belief held in the mind into captivity to the obedience of Christ.

It is blatantly clear that we are rational beings and that our ideas have consequences. Every spiritual battle with the devil has to do with our thinking because our thinking influences our choosing, which ultimately affects our actions and our feelings. Therefore Satan always attacks our minds. He spawns false ideas whether in the area of science, philosophy, politics or religion.

Ultimately, the greatest attack comes in the form of deception concerning the being, nature and integrity of God

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himself. Read again the forms of spiritual battle outlined above that Eve, Job, David and Joshua the High Priest faced. You will quickly notice that each of these battles were against the spirit of lies and deception.

Therefore, the ultimate weapon of warfare for the believer is the truth of God and his word which is the only thing that deals with the 'the liar and father of lies', Satan.

As you mix prayer with understanding and proclamation of the truth, this will give you a sharp sense of perception of the truth and discernment of deception. You will be able to bring down the strongholds that Satan holds over the mind – both in yourself and others.

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## Part Eight

### Fasting

In Part Four we saw that intercession is related in the Scriptures to prophecy, and in Part Five we noted the association between thanksgiving and sacrifice. In this section, we will examine the close biblical link between prayer and fasting.

The Hebrew words for 'to fast' and 'a fast' are *tsuwm* and *tsowm*, and they mean going without food and drink. The Hebrew phrase *anah nephesh* also refers to fasting, but it literally means – and is usually translated as – 'to afflict the soul'.

*Tsuwm* and *tsowm* are used in Judges 20:26; 1 Samuel 7:6; Ezra 8:23; Esther 4:16; Isaiah 58:3–6; Jeremiah 14:12; Joel 2:15 – and in many other places too.

*Anah nephesh* is used in Leviticus 16:29,31; 23:27,29,32; Numbers 29:7; Psalm 35:13 & Isaiah 58:3–10.

The Greek verb *nesteuo* literally means 'not to eat' and is always translated as 'to fast'. *Nesteuo* and *nesteia*, 'a fast', are used – for example – in Matthew 6:16–18; Luke 18:12; Acts 13:2–3 & 27:9.

#### **Fasting in the Old Testament**

Under the Old Testament law, there was only one compulsory fast which took place every year on the Day of Atonement. We can read about this in Leviticus 16:29–34 & 23:27–32.

Zechariah 8:19 shows that, after the Jews returned from exile, four other compulsory fasts were observed as well. Esther 9:31 can also be interpreted as implying the establishment of another regular fast.

There were also occasional voluntary fasts. Sometimes these were individual, as in 2 Samuel 12:22. At other times

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they were corporate, as in Judges 20:26 & Joel 1:14.

In the Old Testament, adding fasting to prayer:

- ◆ Expressed grief – 1 Samuel 31:13; 2 Samuel 1:12; 3:35; Nehemiah 1:4; Esther 4:3 & Psalm 35:13–14
- ◆ Expressed penitence – 1 Samuel 7:6; 1 Kings 21:27; Nehemiah 9:1–2; Daniel 9:3–4 & Jonah 3:5–8
- ◆ Expressed humility – Ezra 8:21 & Psalm 69:10
- ◆ Pleaded for help and guidance – Exodus 34:28; Deuteronomy 9:9; 2 Samuel 12:16–23; 2 Chronicles 20:3–4 & Ezra 8:21–23
- ◆ Could be on behalf of others – Ezra 10:6 & Esther 4:15–17.

As time went by, Isaiah 58:3–4 shows that some Jews came to think that fasting automatically gained them a hearing from God. But Isaiah 58:5–12 & Jeremiah 14:11–12 report how the prophets declared that fasting was useless without a godly lifestyle. Fasting is not a type of hunger strike to get what we want out of God!

Some Old Testament fasting was for wrong reasons and was an abomination in the eyes of the Lord. But there are, however, outstanding examples in the Old Testament when nations, cities and individuals turned to the Lord in fasting and God honoured them.

In 2 Chronicles 20:3, Jehoshaphat proclaimed a fast in Judah and the Lord brought a mighty deliverance. The people prepared themselves by fasting, which also involved real repentance and turning to God in intercession, and then through praise they obtained a victory.

Jonah 3:5 shows how the Ninevites repented and fasted in response to Jonah's prophecy of judgement. When God saw this, he saved the city in his mercy.

Although fasting is a God-appointed way of coming before him in prayer in certain circumstances, 2 Samuel 12:15–18 shows that it is not a formula for getting prayer answered.

## **Fasting in the New Testament**

The death and resurrection of Jesus Christ totally fulfilled the Old Testament Day of Atonement. This means that there is now no legal reason for fasting.

Colossians 2:13–23 implies that any actions for legal, ritualistic or ceremonial purposes are now unnecessary because Jesus has fulfilled the whole law. Hence ritual fasting has been abolished, for it calls into question the finished work of Christ now that we live by grace.

This does not mean that we must not fast. It means that we do not have to fast either to be righteous or as a legalistic duty. Jesus does not condemn fasting in Matthew 5–7, rather he condemns fasting with wrong motives. In fact he instructs his followers how to fast.

Jesus expected his followers to fast  
Even though we have no record of Jesus ordering his disciples to fast, his words in Matthew 6:16–18 must mean that he expected his followers would fast.

Furthermore, Luke 5:35 shows that Jesus knew his followers would fast – and seems to endorse this discipline. It would be strange for Jesus to speak like this if fasting were not part of the continuing discipline of Christian living.

In Luke 5:35 (and Mark 2:20 & Matthew 9:15), Jesus spoke about the time when he would no longer be with his disciples – and said that this would be a time for fasting.

As Jesus is now no longer physically present among us, this must be the time during which it is appropriate for his followers to fast in order to see God's purposes fulfilled.

Jesus' fast in the wilderness

Luke 4:1–14 describes Jesus' long forty day fast – which seems to recall and fulfil Moses' and Elijah's fasts in Exodus 34:28 & 1 Kings 19:8.

Jesus was doing two things in the wilderness:

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- ◆ He was preparing for ministry
- ◆ He was fighting the devil.

If fasting was an important part of both these tasks for Jesus, how much more do we need to learn the value and power of fasting today!

Before Jesus' fast in the wilderness, Luke describes him as 'full of the Spirit'. After the fast, Luke reports that Jesus is 'full of the power of the Spirit'. This is an important example to us.

The Spirit drove Jesus into the wilderness where there was no food. There he fasted – and this was a Spirit-directed action, not a legalistic duty. It meant that, when Jesus met Satan, he was completely empowered and prepared by the Spirit and able to overcome Satan.

Fasting in the early church

The early church, as seen in Acts, appears to have valued fasting, for it had an important place in its life and practice. Few decisions concerning either the leadership or the direction of the Church were made without prayer and fasting. For example, they fasted:

- ◆ When they chose missionaries – Acts 13:2–3
- ◆ When they appointed elders – Acts 14:23
- ◆ As part of their ministry – 2 Corinthians 6:5 & 11:27.

Following on from this, it seems that fasting should have a voluntary place in our private and corporate lives. Both as individuals and as churches, we must rediscover the purpose of fasting and restore it to its rightful place in our lives.

### **What fasting is not**

Fasting is not for asceticism

Asceticism, or rigorous and unnatural self-denial, is an unbiblical practice. It harms the body and dishonours the Lord who created the body to be the temple of the Holy Spirit.

Ascetic ideas came into the Church in part through erroneous Greek philosophy and some forms of Gnosticism that looked upon the body as sinful and therefore a hindrance to the life of the Spirit. This led to excessive fasting, incessant vigils and other forms of physical self-abuse. Colossians 2:23 offers the biblical position.

At best the tendency for excessive fasting is misplaced zeal; at worst, it can be demonic. Asceticism is frequently found in pagan religions, among cults and in occult practices. We need proper nourishment and sleep in order to be strong and healthy for Jesus.

These passages offer relevant biblical insights: Leviticus 19:28; Deuteronomy 14:1 & 1 Kings 18:28.

Fasting is not for self-mortification

Fasting has no value as a means of dealing with the pull towards sin in our lives – in the flesh. It does not make us holy. The flesh is dealt with only in the power of the Spirit as we put to death those deeds of the flesh which are associated with old, non-Christian ways of living.

In fact, this kind of fasting indulges the flesh, which delights in showy and external forms of so-called ‘spirituality’.

When Jesus taught people how to fast, he said that it should be done in secret. However, although fasting does not deal with the flesh, it is not wrong to fast over some aspect of sin in our lives. But it is the repentance and consecration which comes by the Spirit that changes us – not fasting in itself.

Fasting is not a form of self-merit

It is foolish to think that by fasting, or any other act, we win God’s favour, receive his grace, or force him to bless us or answer our prayers. God’s grace is freely given. He answers our prayers only through Jesus Christ and because of his finished work on the cross.

Fasting is not a means of self-aggrandisement

The Pharisees had an ostentatious approach to fasting – as they



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did to every religious practice. They drew attention to their twice-weekly fasting in quite a forceful way. They were spiritual show-offs. But Jesus condemned this, in Matthew 6:16–18, and spoke of the rewards of fasting coming only to those whose motives were right.

### **What fasting is**

Fasting can be good for health reasons, particularly in the West where the average person consumes far too much food.

Fasting can also benefit others. If every believer in Britain went without one meal a week, and contributed the money saved (about £2) to world missions, it would double Britain's annual missionary giving.

But the principal reasons for fasting are spiritual. Fasting is all about seeking God. It is primarily a ministry which is directed towards the Lord. There are three main spiritual reasons for fasting:

An expression of sorrow for sin

2 Samuel 1:11–12 shows how fasting is an expression of grief and mourning. Fasting can be a natural reaction, but it can also go beyond that and become a way of coming before God and expressing our deep concern and sorrow over a range of things – as in Nehemiah 1:4.

Nehemiah was devastated over the state of the nation. The walls of Jerusalem were broken down and God's heritage was in ruins. So Nehemiah fasted before the Lord and mourned. Fasting in this way is legitimate and we can experience the blessing of Matthew 5:4.

We can react in the same way over any serious situation – to do with the nation, the state of the Church, or some personal matter that confronts us.

In the Bible, fasting of this kind is often linked with mourning for sin and humbling oneself before God and his mercy. Fasting is not 'doing penance' for sin, but it does come out of a personal understanding of the seriousness of sin.

An expression of seriousness with God  
Throughout the Bible, fasting is linked to prayer. It is not enough merely to fast. The whole purpose of fasting is to create more time to pray and to show a seriousness of purpose in prayer.

When we fast, we say to God, 'Lord, this situation, that has brought me to my knees before you, is of more concern to me than my normal bodily needs of food and nourishment'.

Fasting is powerful because we come to God at a deeper level of seriousness. It is this determination that God honours, and in fasting it takes on a new dimension. Isaiah 58 talks of spiritual, and not merely physical or social, bonds being broken through fasting by the power of the Holy Spirit.

This greater manifestation of spiritual power can also be seen when we take time to pray and fast for our ministries. After a period of prayer and fasting there is usually a greater power and anointing – especially with spiritual gifts – which can result in new personal breakthroughs.

A blessing

Jesus promised that the Father would reward sincere and single-minded seeking after him. Matthew 6:18 shows that this includes fasting in God's way.

There is something powerful about fasting which, if done with a pure heart and the right motives, brings us closer to God. James 4:10 & Isaiah 40:31 illustrate this principle.

### **When to fast**

In one sense, we do not decide when to fast, God does. The call to fast comes as a deep God-given desire to seek the Lord in prayer *and* fasting. Sometimes the prompting to fast will come suddenly by the Spirit, but normally it comes as a response to a situation or need. But when the Spirit prompts us, we know that the time to fast has come.

Those who commit themselves to fast as a regular discipline

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on certain days or at regular intervals need to make sure that they really are being directed by the Lord. Otherwise the fasting will become nothing more than an external ritualistic practice.

### **How to fast**

Here are some practical points to consider:

- ◆ Begin with short fasts lasting one to three days. Long fasts can be dangerous and need to be approached with caution. Remember the whole point is to seek God and not just to go without food. Rigorous fasting can distract us from Christ – so we must be sure that it is the Spirit we hear and not our enthusiasm.
- ◆ Never go without water on a fast. The human body can survive several weeks without food but only a few days without water.
- ◆ Headaches can occur in the early stages of a fast and are due to caffeine and carbohydrate withdrawal. These can be minimised by gradually decreasing our intake in the days before a fast.
- ◆ Partial fasting – going without certain meals or types of food – can be just as effective as total fasts. This is the fasting in Daniel 1. Partial fasts are especially useful for those who have a heavy work schedule and find a complete fast difficult.
- ◆ Remember, food is God's gift. Times of feasting can be as spiritual as times of fasting. We must ensure that our fasting does not lead to nutritional imbalance.

## Part Nine

### Tongues

Throughout this book, we have concentrated on the many different forms of prayer. All of these involve speaking to the Father, through the Son, in the Spirit – in a language which is known to us.

However, speaking in tongues – the Greek word is *glossolalia* – is prayer to the Father, through the Son, in the Spirit in a language which we neither know nor have learnt.

#### **What is the gift of tongues?**

A miracle

Speaking in tongues occurs when we pray to God in a language that we have never learnt, and that must be a miracle! Speaking in tongues is a supernatural phenomenon – it is the Holy Spirit providing us with words we cannot understand so that we may speak more effectively to the Father.

Important

Some leaders accuse Pentecostals of making far too much of tongues. They suggest that the gift of tongues is a minor irrelevancy, a Corinthian aberration tucked away in a half-verse here and there. Others have argued that the phenomenon of tongues ceased with the apostolic age and should not be desired or practiced today. However, related to this debate, there are five important passages of Scripture which need to be examined and read most carefully: Mark 16:15–20; Acts 2:1–13; Acts 10:44–48; Acts 19:1–7 & 1 Corinthians 11:2–14:40. These suggest that we should believe in the contemporary manifestation of tongues and encourage those who have the gift to practice it.

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### A language

Tongues are a language given by the Holy Spirit – who then enables the believer to enunciate words. It is not just sounds. Sounds may precede words, as in all language development, but language, with proper syntax, quickly follows.

### A sign

In Mark 16:17, Jesus said that tongues would be one of the five signs which would accompany those preaching the gospel.

This means that tongues have a place in bringing unbelievers to faith in Christ. Paul emphasised this in 1 Corinthians 14:22, and it was seen at Pentecost when the praise and mystery of the tongues were part of the challenge to the crowd.

### Evidence

In Acts 10:44–48, tongues are accepted as the evidence that Cornelius' household had received the Holy Spirit. The person who has not been filled with the Holy Spirit by Jesus will not speak in tongues. Prayer in tongues is reserved for those who have been filled with the Spirit.

### A gift from God

1 Corinthians 14:5 teaches that speaking in tongues is a gift which is available to all believers to enhance their prayers and worship. It also shows that it is a gift given to the Church to build it up in worship and challenge unbelievers.

From the way this gift is received and developed we can see that tongues are a product of divine and human co-operation. On our side, we cannot invent a language; and God, on his side, does not impose a language against our will. We provide the vocal chords, breath, tongue, palate, teeth and lips; the Holy Spirit supplies the words. We move our speech-making mechanism and – as the Spirit suggests the words – we speak them out. Volume, speed, starting and stopping – these are all under our control.

### New and other

The gift is described as 'new' tongues in Mark 16:17 and as 'other' tongues in Acts 2:4. In Greek, this is *kainos* and *heteros*,

which means it is new, not in the sense of never having been heard before, but new to us, different from the language we are accustomed to using.

Angelic

A particular tongue may not necessarily be a known human language. 1 Corinthians 13:1 suggests the possibility that it might be an angelic language.

Fire

Acts 2:3 describes 'tongues of fire'. In the Old Testament, fire fell upon the altar of the newly built temple to ignite the offering – thus demonstrating its acceptance by God. Tongues are given to believers today to equip us for ministry and ignite us for action.

This gift has been a trigger releasing many people into supernatural devotion and service, and is often a conscious experience of assurance.

Prayer without ceasing

In John 4:14, Jesus indicated that the living water he was to give – which we understand to be the Spirit – would continually well up inside believers. This alludes to Psalm 36:9 & Isaiah 58:11.

Is it too much to suggest that the gift of tongues is one facet of this fountain bubbling up inside, offering light and praise to Jesus? Praying audibly in tongues would then merely be the adjustment in volume to allow the inner, everlasting bubbling to be heard.

### **Common misunderstandings**

It is not a message from God

Many make much of 'messages in tongues' but 1 Corinthians 14:2 is unambiguous: tongues are God-ward in direction, not human-ward. Speaking in tongues is a mode of prayer, not a means of communication. When we use the gift, we address God. This means that any explanation or interpretation of tongues will be in the form of prayer or praise. It will be us speaking to God, not God speaking to us.

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This is not to say that an interpretation of tongues may not be used by God to convey a message. For example, the phrase, 'Oh promise-keeping God, we praise your holy name', might be the very word to aid someone struggling with an unfulfilled promise. However, the interpretation would, properly speaking, have been a prayer of praise to a promise-keeping God, not a message from God to remind us that he keeps his word.

It is not a linguistic ability

The gift of tongues was not, and is not, a shortcut to communication in missionary work. Tongues were not necessarily languages of the people to whom the disciples were preaching. The crowds on the day of Pentecost heard the disciples praising God in their own languages, but when Peter preached he used his native tongue.

It is not a psychological abnormality

Speaking in tongues is not an ejaculation from the subconscious. It is not a result of suggestion, nor linked to schizophrenia, catalepsy or hysteria. In fact, the lack of excitement in tongues means that it can be a disappointment to those seeking a spiritual thrill instead of an aid to deeper prayer.

It is not a miracle of hearing

Some suggest that the miracle of tongues does not take place in the mouth of the speaker, but in the ear of the hearer. That would be a remarkable miracle, but the Bible never suggests this. In fact the opposite is true, for such a miracle would make the gift of interpretation unnecessary.

It is not a restricted gift

Some, who correctly suggest that the 'Do all?' questions of 1 Corinthians 12:29–30 presume the answer 'No', go on incorrectly to assume that this means tongues are not for all, but only a few.

But 1 Corinthians 12:27–30 refers to the structure of ministry in the Church. It emphasises the plurality of ministry by listing nine different categories of ministry. Paul's implied 'No' is a reply

to these two questions: 'Should all believers bring public prayers in tongues during the public worship of the church?' And, 'Should all apostles, prophets and teachers – and so on – also have a public ministry in miracles, healing, tongues – and so on?'

Paul's 'No' does not suggest that only a restricted number of believers will be able to pray privately in tongues. It seems to me that 1 Corinthians 14:5 shows that it is possible for all to pray in tongues. This echoes Mark 16:17.

It is not an involuntary act

Some still maintain that speaking in tongues is 'ecstatic' – that we cannot control the gift, that we pray in tongues only when God 'makes' us. But we have complete control over the phenomenon. This is why tongues can be suppressed.

We can adjust the volume and vary the speed. Most people can pray in tongues without making an audible noise. The words are formed in the usual way, with the tongue moving rapidly, but the lips are not opened, thus preventing the sound from being heard. Unfortunately, some people 'mutter in tongues' and it is this which conveys the impression that tongues is involuntary.

### **The upbuilding of the church**

1 Corinthians 11–15 contains detailed teaching about the public worship of a local church. These chapters stress the centrality of holy communion, the place of women, the primacy of love and the need for spiritual gifts – including praying in tongues – to be exercised in the worship services of a local church.

The key verb of chapter 14 is *oikodomeo*. This is usually translated as 'to edify', but is better rendered 'to build'. We can understand this more fully by the phrase 'to build together in order to build up'. If we desire the upbuilding of the Church we must pay special attention to 1 Corinthians 14. The following principles about the use of the gift of tongues in public worship are taken from this chapter.



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- ◆ The believer who brings a public prayer in tongues during a meeting is built up.
- ◆ It is desirable and possible for all to use this gift in public.
- ◆ An interpretation is not a translation. The Greek verb *diemeneuo* means 'to explain fully'. This is used in Luke 24:27 to describe Christ's explaining of the Scriptures. The word 'interpretation' creates the impression that a tongue is translatable, but the interpretation is the Spirit-imparted 'gist' of a tongue.
- ◆ Prayer in tongues followed by the interpretation builds together and builds up the local church.
- ◆ The interpretation should be focused upon, as this is the element which builds up the local church.
- ◆ Prayer in tongues should not be brought during worship without an interpretation.
- ◆ Those who have received the gift of tongues should pray for the gift of interpretation.
- ◆ We should not be unbalanced and pray only with the mind – or only in tongues. There should be the four-fold balance in public worship of prayer with the mind and prayer in tongues, singing praise with the mind and singing praise in tongues.
- ◆ We choose whether to pray in tongues or in our natural language.
- ◆ Prayer in tongues can be an expression of thanksgiving.
- ◆ Prayer in tongues is a sign for unbelievers.
- ◆ Our motive for praying in tongues should be to benefit the Church, not to draw attention to ourselves.
- ◆ The gift of tongues must not be suppressed.
- ◆ A prayer in tongues should be spoken *euschemonos* (1 Corinthians 14:40). In most versions of the Bible this is translated as 'decently', but it can be better

understood by ‘gracefully’. A tongue should not be ‘gabbled’, but delivered slowly and beautifully so that all can hear.

Some people think that an interpretation makes the preceding tongue redundant. ‘Why the tongue?’ they say. ‘Why not just the interpretation?’ There are two answers.

Firstly, though the two gifts do make a complete unit, each element has a unique function. The tongue is a sign to unbelievers in that it is an obvious supernatural manifestation; the explanation builds up the Church. Taken together, they glorify God.

Secondly, the gifts are presented in the context of ‘body’ teaching. Each gift requires another to be complete. This underlines the point that nobody is omniscient. The interpretation needs a tongue, and the tongue needs an interpretation. Together they make a whole.

### **Tongues in evangelism**

Mark 16:16–17 lists five signs which demonstrate to unbelievers the truth of the proclaimed word and reveal an insight into the power and glory of the living God. Speaking in tongues is one of these signs which are given for use in serious evangelism.

1 Corinthians 14:22 makes it clear that tongues are a ‘sign for unbelievers’. Here Paul reveals that tongues are a part of Christian worship which particularly challenges unbelievers.

Some leaders reserve prayer in tongues for believers’ meetings. They think that praying in tongues will put the unbelievers off, and they base this on the idea that the reference in 1 Corinthians 14:21 to Isaiah 28:11–12 shows that tongues are a sign ‘against’ unbelievers.

But the fact that the Samaritans would not listen to God does not mean that God does not speak to them. All the Mark 16 signs can be – and often are – rejected by those who observe them, but this is no reason for not using them in evangelism.

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Christians who have been exposed to false teaching about the gift often profess to having been offended by the use of tongues – even quiet, graceful, orderly, worshipful ones! However, the right use of tongues and interpretations often intrigues and amazes unbelievers.

The use of tongues in evangelism is essentially that of a sign. It demonstrates that a supernatural God has broken through; it drives back the evil one; it enables vital guidance to be received. For the world's sake, this use of tongues must be rediscovered.

### **The use of tongues**

The gift of tongues can be used in every area of prayer – in thanksgiving, confession, petition, adoration, supplication, intercession, praise and so on. However, there appear to be six areas where, if we are living in the Spirit, tongues will naturally be used – either personally, when we are praying on our own, or corporately, when we are together.

#### **Worship**

When we are worshipping, the gift of tongues helps us to express our love for Jesus in a better way than mere human language. We struggle in human relationships to find a more creative and meaningful way of saying 'I love you'. In our divine relationship, the gift of tongues does this more beautifully, more aptly, than human artistry can ever attain.

#### **Intercession**

The gift of tongues is especially valuable in intercession when we do not know what to pray. Romans 8:26 promises that the Spirit helps us in our weakness. We are often asked to pray for a person and have no idea of their needs. This is a time when praying in tongues is most helpful. The Spirit will intercede through us, according to the mind of God.

#### **Breakthrough**

The gift of tongues helps in the achievement of spiritual

breakthroughs. We looked at 'warfare praying' in Part Seven, and tongues can be used in this 'warring' way.

Replies to prayer are often slow in coming, either due to demonic opposition or because God is pressing patience and perseverance into our lives. When our faith is low because of the delay, we should pray in tongues. God's faith is never low, and it is our spirits which are in tune with this sort of faith.

In impossible situations, when opposition is great or circumstances are grim, our prayers can easily become statements of doubt. These are the moments when the gift of tongues is so helpful. Prayer in tongues is full of God's faith. It is full of his self-confidence.

### Lamentation

The gift can be used to articulate sadness. Many of us have a problem lamenting to God. How can we pour out our anguish over events like Dunblane, Rwanda, an earthquake, a plane crash, a terrorist atrocity such as 9/11 in New York and 7/7 in London? How do we share in God's agony? Prayer in tongues can be a meaningful lamentation about the unspeakable horrors of a world which is reaping the results of human sin and divine judgement.

### Thanksgiving

How can English express adequate gratitude at the conversion of a wayward child or the healing of a close friend? 'Thank you' appears beggarly. Prayer in tongues is much better. We know then that we have said 'thank you' properly. The gift of tongues has a special place in thanksgiving.

### Preparation

The gift of tongues builds us up. It is the experience of many that regular, frequent, consistent praying in tongues has played a significant part in transforming them from people with an ineffective witness into people whose witness brings lasting results.

Prayer in tongues is recommended when we know a specific conversation or meeting will take place and are unsure

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how to proceed. This gift is for those times when we are uncertain of God's will. We should pray in tongues, focused on the person whom we will meet.

It does appear that we can focus, or direct, our praying in tongues. The praying is with our spirit, and the directing is with our mind. We can picture the individual in our 'mind's eye', then begin to pray in tongues for them. It is the experience of many that this discipline, in conjunction with prayer in their own language and fasting, brings results that are not otherwise seen.

### **Corporate tongues**

Some critics of tongues consider that congregational singing or praying in tongues is forbidden by 1 Corinthians 14:23. However, this verse deals more with a large number of people all offering different prayers in tongues one after each other, rather than with them all praying or singing the same prayer at the same time in their heavenly languages.

In 1 Corinthians 14, Paul suggests that there should be only a few consecutive tongues, and that the tongues should be interpreted or explained in some way. He does not comment on corporate tongues.

Many congregations move on from singing a particular song in their own language to singing in tongues. When this happens, they are expressing the theme of the song or hymn in their heavenly languages.

Some people suggest that the Hebrew word *selah* – which appears frequently in the Psalms – represents a congregational pause to allow the musicians to play 'theme music' relevant to the Psalm. Perhaps singing in tongues – singing with the spirit – is the *selah* in a meeting.

When people sing or pray in tongues together, there is a God-given unity to the praising or praying. When two hundred people sing in tongues, there are not two hundred different songs all needing a separate interpretation – that would be

chaos. Instead, one song is being sung in two hundred different ways – and that is beautiful.

It is the same when a congregation prays together in tongues. There is only one prayer being prayed in a variety of ways and languages.

### **Starting to pray in tongues**

Prayer in tongues is only for those believers who have been filled with the Holy Spirit. Those who desire to receive this gift must surely believe there is such a thing as praying in tongues. It might be helpful to ask a friend to give a demonstration of praying in tongues – especially if we are worried about the issue of losing control.

We also need to believe that speaking in tongues is for us. Some people have the notion that, 'If God wants me to speak in tongues, he'll make sure I do'. God does unexpectedly give this gift to a few who do not ask, but normally those who receive are those who have kept on asking.

We should ask the Holy Spirit to give us this gift and we should receive it by faith. Faith is not persuading ourselves about the truth of tongues. Faith is letting the truth about tongues persuade us.

What I am going to suggest may appear somewhat mechanical, but we have to start somewhere. Both the Holy Spirit and us have a part in praying with tongues. Acts 2:4 states, 'They began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance'. The Holy Spirit does not provide lips or breath as his part of the package. They are our responsibility. We need to stop speaking in our natural language – for nobody can speak in two languages at the same time – to take a breath and trust the Lord, and then to form our lips into a word.

We then begin to speak that word, trusting the Spirit to give the following words. Some people start immediately with a complete language. Others stay at an elemental stage for several weeks. Many agonise for months, persistently asking,

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seeking and knocking, before they pray in tongues. Patience, perseverance and obedience are the keys to faith and maturity.

As soon as we receive this gift, doubts start to come our way. The evil one sows disbelief in a frantic attempt to silence the prayers flowing from our lips.

He has great success with two lies. Firstly, 'You are making it up'. Everybody who has prayed in tongues has heard this lie, yet few people possess the ability to create a new language. The gift of tongues is for most their first experience of hearing God speak through them. It is always more natural and 'everyday' than they expected.

The second doubt will be, 'It is not a language, it is gibberish'. All have suffered the agony of this lie. The truth is that most foreign languages sound gibberish to those who do not understand them!

The best advice is to seek reassurance from a tongue-praying leader. He or she should guide you from the first faltering sounds to complete maturity in your God-given language of prayer.

## Part Ten

### Towards effective prayer

Prayer is the measure of our spiritual state. When we do not have a desire or passion to pray there is something wrong with our spiritual lives. Every believer has a responsibility to cultivate a lifestyle of prayer as part of the development of their relationship with God.

Prayer is not burdensome when it flows out of relationship with God. A desire to pray comes only out of the passion for Jesus which the Holy Spirit inspires within us. It is only as we pray with the Holy Spirit's help that we can truly learn to pray effectively – in all the areas of prayer which we have examined in this book.

#### **What is effective prayer?**

James 5:13–18 is an important passage about effective praying. It tells us that our prayers can achieve as much as Elijah's.

We can all become as effective in prayer as Elijah if we learn to move with the Holy Spirit. However, we do need to take our eyes off ourselves and others and look to God alone.

Elijah was no different from us. But many of us wrongly make something special of 'prayer warriors'. We reserve the achievements and demands of prayer for a 'special' group of Christians – and miss the truth that effective praying is for all believers. It is vital we grasp that effective praying does not depend on our ability or expertise but on God's power behind our prayers. Never forget that prayer changes nothing. It is God who changes everything *through* prayer.

God is raising up intercessors who will respond to the call for a lifestyle of prayer. Through our prayers God can change the destiny of nations and open or close the heavens according to his word. Ezekiel 22:30 shows that it needs only one praying



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man or woman for God to turn a situation round.

James 5:16 is an important verse – yet nearly every version of the Bible translates it differently. It contains four important Greek words. Three of them are unambiguous, one of them is harder to translate.

It is plain that:

- ◆ The person who is praying is *dikaio*s – righteous, just, without prejudice or partiality
- ◆ The prayer is *deesis* – beseeching, supplicating, entreating, arising from a deeply felt need or want
- ◆ The prayer is described as *ischuo* – strong, robust, prevailing against enemies, capable of producing results.

Then there is the fourth word – *energeo*. This means ‘to put power out’, ‘to operate effectively in’, or ‘to work in’. The difficulty is that it is not clear whether James 5:16 means one, some, or all of these things:

- ◆ The person is praying energetically because of God’s work in them
- ◆ Through the person’s prayers, God is working energetically in the need that is being prayed for
- ◆ Through the person’s prayers, God is energetically at work in the person
- ◆ God is working on the person’s prayers, making them energetic.

At its simplest, the verse can be literally translated as ‘the supplication of a righteous person is strong in its inworking’. We can amplify this to ‘beseeching prayer, made by a righteous person, arising out of a felt need, and as a result of the working of God, has great power to overcome enemies, to produce results and to work God’s will into them’.

It is hard to resist the conclusion that James 5:16 suggests an effect is produced in the praying person through their prayers

which brings them into line with the will of God – as in the case of Elijah.

This important verse contains four principles of effective prayer:

### A felt need

In Part Two we met the two main Greek words for prayer. *Proseuche*, which means to ask in dependence on God for his provision, and *deesis*, which means to ask out of a deep inner sense of need.

*Proseuche* is the most common word used for prayer in the New Testament, and it emphasises the reason why we pray – we are dependent upon God and in prayer we are looking to him.

However, in James 5:16 the word used is *deesis*. This highlights the need that is moving us to pray. By this choice of word the Holy Spirit is revealing the important principle that effective prayer rises out of a deep sense of need.

Effective prayer is not praying down a long list of requests, it is praying for the few needs which God has placed by his Spirit deep inside us.

We all know how to pray when we need to! A woman whose child is involved in a serious accident does not need any urging to pray or any teaching on prayer – she prays with her whole being. She is fully identified with the needs of her child.

If we allow him, the Holy Spirit can help us to feel another person's needs as personally and as strongly as our own. God identifies deeply with people's needs, and he is looking for believers who are prepared to think and feel in this way.

### A righteous person

Proverbs 15:29 teaches that righteousness is a vital principle of prayer, for we cannot live defectively and pray effectively. Prayer flows from the heart of the righteous, but Psalm 66:18 & Isaiah 59:1–2 show that sin blocks our prayers.

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However, we must not be condemned or feel that we have to wait until we have reached perfection before we can pray effectively. God does not require sinless perfection, but hearts that do not hold on to or cherish sin.

We need to silence the enemy who says that we are not worthy to pray by reminding him, and ourselves, that the blood of Jesus has cleansed us from our sin. Jesus is our righteousness and it is by his grace and forgiveness, not our performance, that we pray to God.

The work of God

Although we are saved by the work of God alone – there is nothing we can do to make us saved – once we are saved we work out our salvation in partnership with God. We see this partnership in prayer.

Some people recognise God's power, knowledge, love and wisdom and think that there is no need for us to pray. Others see the scriptural emphasis on prayer and think that their prayers can change the world. Both groups are mistaken, for God has chosen to work through prayer.

Prayer is meant to be an action. It is not enough to believe in prayer as a principle or a theory. We must actually pray. But prayer is the effective operation of God himself. When we pray we are being caught up in the activity of the Holy Spirit.

There are two main Greek words for God's power at work: *Dunamis*, which means 'inherent might' or 'potential power', and *energeia*, which means 'active power in operation'.

*Dunamis* is power not yet released. Like dynamite, once detonated, the latent power is activated and becomes *energeia* – power in operation. Prayer is the effective operation of God. It is his *energeia* at work. Our prayers can never be powerful, rather it is that the all-powerful God works through our prayers. This is why it is better to speak about effective praying than powerful praying.

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It also explains why the devil hates prayer so much, and works so hard to prevent it. When we pray, we release the omnipotent God to work in the situation – and in us.

Effective prayer is God's power in operation. We can only experience his power through prayer when we pray. As powerful as God is, if we do not pray, his power is not released.

And effective prayer is both the result of and results in the working of God. True prayer is always 'in the Spirit' – it comes from the operation of God. It is not just that God is ready or waiting to work when we pray, but he is actually at work prompting us to prayer, at work in our prayers, and at work in us through our prayers.

Ultimately, this holy divine and human partnership is a mystery, but it is the key to effective praying.

Capable of results

James 5:16 shows us that true prayer affects change. It makes a difference. The reality that God works strongly through the prayers of his people should motivate us in our prayers.

The Greek word *ischuo* is used to signify robust health, overcoming enemies, effective force, great strength, achieving results, and so on.

Prayer is not just a conversation with God, it is also a confrontation with God against an enemy. Prayer has consequences. God gets results through the prayers of righteous believers. We see God work strongly, bringing health, overcoming enemies, and changing events – when we pray.

### **Unanswered prayer**

Some people are concerned with what they call 'unanswered prayer'. They think that God hears their requests and makes no response. However, it seems to me that while there may be prayers which God does not hear, all the prayers that he hears are answered – though not, perhaps, in the way that we want!

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Isaiah 59:1–2 shows that God does not always hear the prayers of those who are separated from him by sin. God does sometimes graciously hear a sinner's prayer – as in Luke 18:9–14. But there is no scriptural promise to hear and answer the prayers of a person who is not 'in Christ'.

1 John 3:21–22 suggests that a believer's sin will mean that they are unable to approach God confidently. And James 4:2–3 shows that right motives are important in prayer.

The story of Paul's 'thorn' in 2 Corinthians 12:7–10 is significant. Three times, Paul prayed for the thorn to be removed – and God did not remove it. But Paul's prayer was not unanswered. 2 Corinthians 12:9 makes it clear that God spoke to Paul. God's answer was a reminder about the all-sufficiency of God's grace. God loves us and knows what is best for us – this means that his answer will often differ from our request. But it will be an answer.

The wonderful promises of 1 John 5:14 and John 15:7 have been misunderstood by some who consider prayer to be some sort of spiritual slot machine. We must appreciate that these promises are conditional. They are for those who are abiding in Christ and making requests according to God's will.

Of course, this does not mean adding 'if it be thy will' to the end of every prayer. Luke 22:39–45 tells the story of the supreme moment of temptation in the life of Jesus. The issue to be decided was whose will would be implemented, the Son's or the Father's?

The first half of verse 42 suggests that Jesus, confronted with the cup of God's wrath against humanity (with which he had totally identified himself) earnestly longed not to have to endure the cross. At that moment, Jesus was tempted with the human desire for forgiveness without the cross and for grace without righteous judgement.

The prayer in the second part of verse 42 must be the climax of the entire Bible, perhaps the most important moment in history. In his humanity, Jesus was tempted to look for an

answer outside of God's plan. But he resisted the temptation and submitted to God's will: 'Nevertheless, let your will be done, not mine.'

None of us will ever face a prayer struggle like Gethsemane, but we are all called to submit ourselves to the Father's will – and we do this in prayer. This submission may mean that 'our will' is not done, but never let it be suggested that our prayers have not been answered.

### **Six aspects of effective praying**

We know that prayer flows from our relationship with God. This is why it is impossible to reduce prayer to a set of rules or a formula. But we can draw out some basic principles to help develop our prayer relationship with God. Remember, these are pointers, not rules.

God wants us to ask

James 4:2 & John 16:24 show the importance of asking God. This is the prayer of petition, or supplicatory prayer. We must ask him. So often we try to work out everything in our own minds and rely on our human ability. We must ask our heavenly Father instead.

Some people are slow to ask God because they have a false picture of God. They see him as a grudging figure who is rather distant. How false! He desires to give us good things and exhorts us to ask him.

One of the saddest ideas some have about true Christianity is the notion that God is not friendly or favourably disposed towards people. The truth is that we can come to Jesus Christ directly. He intercedes for us and lovingly represents us before our heavenly Father.

Imagine all the things that God is ready to give us, and think what could happen if we would only ask him. Where would we be? Who would we be? What would we be? If we found our children stealing fifty pence from us we would be hurt,

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because we know that they only have to ask and we would give it to them. How much more so in our relationship with our heavenly Father?

Ask with boldness

We have seen that there is a wealth of teaching on prayer in Luke 11:1–13. The man who woke his neighbour at midnight to borrow some bread got it because of his boldness. This is stressed in Hebrews 4:16.

The Greek word *anaideia* in Luke 11:8 is translated as ‘boldness’ or ‘persistence’, but it literally means ‘shamelessness’, ‘cheek’ or ‘nerve’.

We need the boldness and determination to think, ‘I need this provision, and I will not be put off by anything until I have obtained it’.

We need holy audacity – based on the strength of our relationship with God, the confident knowledge of his will and the assurance that we are welcomed into his presence – to ask him with nerve and cheek.

We need the audacity to ask God for big things – as in Psalm 2:8. We should not be intimidated or limited by the suggestions of the enemy in how often we approach God’s throne, or what we ask when we get there.

Ask according to his will

When we pray we should not express our rights or point of view. We need to identify the will of God, and pray that into operation. If we are not praying God’s will in a situation, we are praying our own will. James 4:3 shows that this is why many prayers seem to be unanswered.

Prayer according to the will of God involves not just the requests, but also the motives. We can ask for the right thing with the wrong motives.

Prayer is not trying to persuade God to do our will, but making sure that we align ourselves with his will. This does not mean tagging ‘if it be your will Lord’ at the end of a list of selfish requests!

Some people teach that we should expect the answers 'Yes', 'No', or 'Wait' to our prayers. Such teaching may have been born out of a struggle to identify the will of God in a situation. But the reason we don't know God's will is often simply our laziness.

1 John 5:14–15 shows that God's answer is always 'Yes!' to requests which are made according to his will – and this should be the goal of *all* our prayers. We should aim to know God and his will so well that we can ask and be confident of a positive answer every time.

Praying in the name of Jesus is not a magical formula but a recognition that our authority in prayer is being exercised in alignment with the will of the Father. And John 14:13–14 shows what happens when we pray like this! When we pray with the authority of Jesus it is as if Jesus is praying.

Romans 8:26–27 teaches that the Holy Spirit intercedes for us according to the will of God. If we do not know what the will of God is in a situation, we can pray in tongues and the Holy Spirit will pray his will through us.

Ask in faith

James 5:15 identifies the prayer of faith. One prayer of faith achieves more than many years of prayer without it. Sadly, our faith is generally rather poor.

We cannot expect to receive unless we believe, and Jesus taught us, in Mark 11:24, to believe that we have received when we pray. This is the prayer of faith. James 1:6–8 helps us to understand what this means in practice.

There are two major questions about believing God:

- ◆ Is he able?
- ◆ Is he willing?

In Mark 9:14–29, Jesus' ability was brought into question because the disciples had been unable to heal a young boy with a mute spirit. But there is never anything wrong with God's power – only with our unbelief.



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Mark 1:40–45 deals with God’s willingness to bless. Many people who are struggling with hurt and disappointment blame God as unwilling. Like the leper, they say: ‘You could help me if only you were willing.’ But Jesus’ response in Mark 1:41 settles the matter.

This is our challenge today. We must believe him and, by our prayers of faith, demonstrate that he is both willing and able to answer in time of need.

Ask with persistence

We have seen that there are different types of prayer and each has its own particular principles. The prayer of persistence is a clear example. Unlike the prayer of faith, this is offered repeatedly until the breakthrough is experienced.

It is vitally important, as in the parable in Luke 18:1–8, not to give up when our prayers seem to go unanswered. We must press on, for the Judge who is willing and good will surely answer our cause.

In Revelation 5:8 & 8:4, the prayers of the saints rise up like incense before God. This is an encouragement to keep praying, for our prayer might be the last prayer required before the bowls are full and the promise of Hosea 10:12 is obtained.

Pray with variety

Throughout this book we have seen many different aspects of prayer and many different ways of praying. It is not a uniform or monotonous activity. In our regular Bible reading, we will do well to look out for the various examples of prayers we have examined. We need to check that our prayer lives reflect a similar wide range of praying.

We need to check that we are not ignoring loud or silent prayers, intercession or thanksgiving, warfare or praise, confession or asking, tongues or supplication.

It is too easy to become stuck in a prayer rut, always using the same words and styles. We need to broaden our prayers and become more creative in our prayer lives. Who knows what God will do through our praying!