

PRAYER

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Prayer - 1 - Pray Without Ceasing - Communication with God

All relationships are based on communication. The better we exchange thoughts and discuss feelings, the closer we become and the more valuable and satisfying the friendship. As parents we know how important it is to talk and listen to our children. It is this instruction and guidance that will help them the most as they learn to deal with the complexities of life. Yet of equal importance they must feel comfortable sharing their questions and needs with us so we understand how they feel and help them deal with their challenges.

All relationships are impacted by how we listen with concern and how we express our needs and concerns to others. The truest friendships are those where we feel comfortable sharing our hopes and fears and enjoy listening to theirs. When the barriers come down and we can freely and safely communicate it is a true and satisfying friendship. This is the relationship God wants to have with each of us.

But we have to be aware that the same difficulties we have listening and expressing our thoughts to our friends and family, will be the same ones we have with God. If we are shy and have difficulty opening up(an introvert), we will have similar issues in our prayers. If we enjoying talking and sharing with others(extrovert), then it will be easier to pray.

LISTENING TO GOD

The Scriptures are full of warnings about gaining and maintaining good communication skills with God. We must first learn how to listen to Him. A careful reading of God's discussion with Cain shows that Cain could not communicate with God(Gen 4:1-9). He refused to listen to what God said. Multitudes have followed Cain's example(Jude 11). You just can't tell some people anything. They see what they want to see and are not open to the feelings and desires of others. Because Israel would not listen to him, God was forced to end the relationship.

"But My people would not heed My voice, and Israel would have none of Me. 12 So I gave them over to their own stubborn heart, to walk in their own counsels. 13 Oh, that My people would listen to Me, that Israel would walk in My ways!" Ps 81:11-13

A selfish spouse, unruly children, and a lack reverence to God come from the same

problems. Inability to talk or to listen. Many passages in the NT(Mt. 7:21-23; Gal. 1:6-9; II Jn 9) as well as many of the examples in the OT(Cain, Nadab & Abihu, the children of Israel, Saul, Uzziah, etc.) reveal the tragedy that occurs when people refuse to develop the ability to properly listen.

There is little difference between the relationship with God and our fellow man when it comes to good communication. We must first learn to listen. Eve did not listen, Cain did not listen, Israel did not listen. The entire Bible is dedicated to teaching how to listen to God and properly interpret Scripture. When anyone refuses to listen to God, they forever close the door to a quality relationship with him.

TALKING TO GOD

Although our major emphasis is on listening, it is just as important to our welfare to talk to God. The relationship Abraham, Moses, Jesus and Paul had with God was based on two things. First, the faith they showed by how they listened and humbly submitted to God. Second, their ability to pray, offer petitions, thanksgiving, and praise. These are the two key ingredients to a close relationship with God. They are identical to a close marriage or a close friendship. We learn how to talk and we learn to listen. Failure in either will severely limit or even destroy our relationship with God.

Our spiritual growth and maturity are therefore based on how well we learn to hear and talk(pray). We must not underestimate the importance of either to our maturity as a Christian. All the faithful know God is vitally concerned with how we listen. It reveals the depth of our reverence, respect and faith in Him. But God makes it equally clear that we must learn how to talk with Him.

Pray without ceasing, 1Th 5:17

Continue earnestly in prayer, being vigilant in it with thanksgiving; Col 4:2

Praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, being watchful to this end with all perseverance and supplication for all the saints-- Eph 6:18

Rejoicing in hope, patient in tribulation, continuing steadfastly in prayer; Rom 12:12

The importance of prayer is not simply in making requests. Prayer is our only means to express our love, devotion, thanks, praise, repentance and confession. God

delights in our prayers for through prayer we draw near to God and give him the opportunity to intervene in our lives. Many things can only be received through prayer and in such cases, if “you do not ask,” “you do not have.”

*The sacrifice of the wicked is an abomination to Jehovah; But **the prayer of the upright is His delight.** Prov 15:8*

***Draw nigh to God, and He will draw nigh to you.** Cleanse your hands, you sinners; and purify your hearts, you doubleminded. Jas 4:8*

***Jehovah is nigh unto all them that call upon Him,** to all that call upon him in truth. 19 He will fulfil the desire of them that fear Him; He also will hear their cry and will save them. Ps 145:18-19*

*a devout man, and one that feared God with all his house, who gave much alms to the people, and **prayed to God always.** 3 He saw in a vision openly, as it were about the ninth hour of the day, an angel of God coming in unto him, and saying to him, Cornelius. 4 And he, fastening his eyes upon him, and being affrighted, said, What is it, Lord? And he said unto him, **Your prayers and your alms are gone up for a memorial before God.** Acts 10:2-4*

Who do we turn to when we need comfort or help? As children it was our parents and as adults it is our spouse and close friends. All God wants is that we make him our Father and closest friend. He wants to be our first thought when we have a need. He wants us to share our special moments with him. When something good happens He wants us to thank him. When something wonderful is seen He wants us to praise him. Cornelius' prayers went up for a memorial to God. Ours can too if we learn to “make our requests to God” and give him to “fruit of our lips giving thanks to His name.”

No relationship is changed into a friendship without learning to share. Our spouse, children and brethren know how much we are sharing with them. Why should God be any different? He has asked us to “cast all your care upon Him, for He cares for you” (1 Pet. 5:7). When we hurt someone we love, the quicker and more sincerely we apologize the less damage is done. God feels the same way.

Jesus was deeply concerned about our ability to do these things.

Then He spoke a parable to them, that men always ought to pray and not lose

heart...8...Nevertheless, when the Son of Man comes, will He really find faith on the earth? Lk 18:1,8

Clearly Jesus knew it would be difficult for His disciples to pray as they should. God offered powerful motivations so we would learn. “You do not have because you do not ask” (Jas 4:2). God is forced to withhold things we might otherwise have had, simply because we did not ask for them. Obvious examples are **forgiveness**(I Jn 1:7), **wisdom** (Jas 1:5) and **peace** (Phil 4:4-6). If we do not ask for these things, God will not grant them. For this reason alone we must learn how to pray without ceasing and continue steadfastly in it.

So we dare not underestimate how difficult it is to pray well enough to be considered by God as a true friend and one who trusts Him enough to bring all cares and concerns to Him. The time, effort, and openness of our prayers reveals our dependence, love and devotion to God just as much as how we revere His word. Both are important and need to be a priority in our life.

Ways to Improve Frequency and Depth of Prayer

Get up in the morning/evening and pray(a long talk) Ps 55:17; 88:13; Mk 1:35

Fervent prayers for forgiveness as often as we sin Mt 6:12

Praise Him for all the delightful things we experience. “Then sings my soul...”

Pray before each meal. I Tim 4:5

Pray for wisdom whenever in a difficult situation. Jas 1:5; Neh 2:4-5

When we feel anxious we cast all anxieties on the Lord Phil 4:6-7; 1Pet 5:7

Pray for deliverance from temptation when we feel we are being led there. Mt 6:13

Pray in response when He speaks to us in His creation: “This is my Father’s world...He speaks to me everywhere”

Supplications, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgivings for all men. I Tim 2:1-4

Supplications for all the saints Eph 6:18

These are the things that will develop commitment, sacrifice, effort, faith, introspection, humility, a thankful heart, and an organized life.

giving thanks always for all things to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, Eph 5:20

Prayer - 2 - Hallowed Be Your Name

When someone falls in love, they seek ways to express it. They send flowers or candy, select a special card, write a poem, or purchase a gift. The goal is to express as clearly as possible the admiration, respect, and devotion they feel. This is the natural affection God placed within our hearts so we can find true happiness.

God created us with two needs. First, to admire and love someone. Second, to be admired and loved by another. These are the most fundamental needs of our existence. When God created us He saw *“it is not good that man should be alone”* and He then created a woman (Gen. 2:18). We fulfill this primary need by marrying, having children, maintaining friendships, and *“loving our neighbor as our self.”* (Lev. 19:17-18) But the most important way to find fulfillment is in the fellowship we can have by loving and talking to God. *“You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your strength.”* (Deut. 6:5)

The very fabric of human existence is based upon these things. The order of religion, family, government, and work are cemented by the emotional need for acceptance, admiration and love. God created man with these needs to help us fulfill our destiny as His children. They help us feel a need to come to Him and to serve Him which leads to our eternal happiness and joy.

But the passage of time and the changing circumstances of life require our effort to maintain these emotions. We cannot expect a strong and active love for anyone or anything to be kept warm and vibrant without maintenance and effort. Love must be expressed, it must be nurtured and strengthened. Sacrifices must be made to prove it. If we want to keep the same intensity of our feelings, we must put forth the same intensity of effort.

Think about it. When we first fall in love, we spend vast amounts of time thinking about the person we love. We call them, spend time with them, think of ways to please and honor them. This is what leads to the intensity of these emotions. When these things stop, why should it surprise us if the emotions begin to fade? To keep a close relationship with our mate, children, parents, and God, we must express our love to them often and with fervency.

In this manner, therefore pray... Hallowed be your Name.

While preaching the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus taught us how to pray. Though

only a single word, the term *“hallowed”* captures everything spoken of above and more.

In this manner, therefore, pray: our Father in heaven, hallowed be Your name.
Mt 6:9

This word reveals the very heart of our admiration, devotion, and love to God. It means to sanctify, set apart and regard as holy. But what exactly does this mean? Are we inferring too much to say it is the expression of love, awe, respect and reverence? Clearly, how we hallow His name is of the highest importance.

O Jehovah, our Lord, how excellent is your name in all the earth, who have set your glory above the heavens! Ps 8:1

Before we can hallow we must love and respect. We must feel gratitude and appreciation to him as our Creator and Savior. These natural, wholesome, and fulfilling emotions are strengthened and deepened by expressing them, but they can't be expressed if they are not felt!

By beginning each prayer hallowing God's name, we fulfill the need to express what we feel, while at the time strengthening them.

Since God created us to love, respect and admire Him, doing so leads us to contentment and satisfaction. When we express the sacred and holy nature of His name, it leaves us feeling reverent and in awe of him. When we express how precious and special His name is, it leaves us feeling warm and close to Him. By hallowing God's name at the beginning of each prayer, we are accomplishing the same thing as telling our mate we love them. It keeps the relationship warm, vibrant, and growing. It keeps our prayers from becoming empty form, or a simple wish list.

Taking the time at the beginning of each prayer to hallow God's name offers us a very important way to express our devotion and love for Him on a daily basis. It counteracts the tendency to have our strong emotions fade with the passage of time. It helps us remember the compelling reasons why we made our commitment to Him.

The Scriptures are filled with examples of prayers that began by hallowing God's name, expressing love, devotion, or need.

God wanted us to know the close relationship Moses had with Him.

And it came to pass, when Moses entered the tabernacle, that the pillar of cloud descended and stood at the door of the tabernacle, and the Lord talked with Moses. 10 All the people saw the pillar of cloud standing at the tabernacle door... 11 So the Lord spoke to Moses face to face, as a man speaks to his friend.... Ex 33:9-11

Then He said, "Hear now My words: If there is a prophet among you, I, the Lord, make Myself known to him in a vision; I speak to him in a dream. 7 Not so with My servant Moses; He is faithful in all My house. 8 I speak with him face to face, Even plainly, and not in dark sayings; And he sees the form of the Lord. Num 12:6-8

As Moses asked to be allowed to enter the promised land, he also expressed his feelings of respect awe and admiration.

"O Lord GOD, You have begun to show Your servant Your greatness and Your mighty hand, for what god is there in heaven or on earth who can do anything like Your works and Your mighty deeds?" Deut 3:24

When Jeremiah was perplexed about something God had told him to do, he too did not simply speak to God, but first hallowed His name.

"Ah, Lord GOD! Behold, You have made the heavens and the earth by Your great power and outstretched arm. There is nothing too hard for You. 18 You show loving kindness to thousands, and repay the iniquity of the fathers into the bosom of their children after them— the Great, the Mighty God, whose name is the LORD of hosts. 19 You are great in counsel and mighty in work, for your eyes are open to all the ways of the sons of men, to give everyone according to his ways and according to the fruit of his doings." Jer 32:17-19

Though Daniel sought forgiveness, and made confession of sin, he still began the prayer hallowing God's name and expressing His love and awe.

And I prayed to the LORD my God, and made confession, and said, "O Lord, great and awesome God, who keeps His covenant and mercy with those who love Him, and with those who keep His commandments" Dan 9:4

David also took the time to sanctify, honor and praise the name of the LORD

Therefore David blessed the LORD before all the assembly; and David said: "Blessed are You, LORD God of Israel, our Father, forever and ever. 11 Yours,

O LORD, is the greatness, the power and the glory, the victory and the majesty; for all that is in heaven and in earth is Yours; yours is the kingdom, O LORD, and You are exalted as head over all. 12 Both riches and honor come from You, and You reign over all. In Your hand is power and might; in Your hand it is to make great and to give strength to all. 13 Now therefore, our God, we thank You and praise Your glorious name." 1 Chr 29:10-13

These are just a few of the many different ways in which the godly and righteous fulfilled the intent of Jesus' instruction that we hallow God's name in each prayer. When the apostles sought to replace Judas and later when they were persecuted they hallowed God's name in two different ways.

And they prayed, and said, Thou, Lord, who knows the hearts of all men, show of these two the one whom thou hast chosen, Acts 1:24

And they, when they heard it, lifted up their voice to God with one accord, and said, O Lord, you that did make the heaven and the earth and the sea, and all that in them is: Acts 4:24

We draw near to God and feel closer to Him when we speak of those attributes we are addressing in the prayer. In this way we express our love, devotion and praise.

Bless the LORD, O my soul; and all that is within me, bless His holy name! 2 Bless the LORD, O my soul, and forget not all His benefits: 3 Who forgives all your iniquities, who heals all your diseases, 4 Who redeems your life from destruction, who crowns you with loving kindness and tender mercies, 5 Who satisfies your mouth with good things, so that your youth is renewed like the eagle's. Ps 103:1-5

The more we remember and extol God for His mighty works the closer we will be to Him. It only takes a few moments at the beginning of each prayer, but taking that extra time to express love and devotion will leave a warmth and fervor that will be remembered throughout the day.

When I consider Your heavens, the work of Your fingers, the moon and the stars, which You have ordained, 4 What is man that You are mindful of him, and the son of man that You visit him? Ps 8:3-4

The heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament shows His handiwork. 2 Day unto day utters speech, and night unto night reveals

knowledge. Ps 19:1-2

These are the things that hallow our God to us and humble us keeping us pure and holy ourselves. In this way, we draw near to Him and feel close to Him. In this way we express our love, devotion and praise.

I will extol You, my God, O King; And I will bless Your name forever and ever. 2 Every day I will bless You, And I will praise Your name forever and ever. 3 Great is the Lord, and greatly to be praised; And His greatness is unsearchable. 4 One generation shall praise Your works to another, And shall declare Your mighty acts. 5 I will meditate on the glorious splendor of Your majesty, And on Your wondrous works. 6 Men shall speak of the might of Your awesome acts, And I will declare Your greatness. 7 They shall utter the memory of Your great goodness, And shall sing of Your righteousness. Ps 145:1-7

WELL THOUGHT OUT ADDRESSES TO GOD:

Deut 3:23-25	Moses' prayer for entrance into the promised land
1Sam 2:1-3	Hannah's prayer of thanksgiving
2 Sam 7:22-27	David's prayer
1Kings 8:23-24	Solomon's Prayer
II Chron 20:5-7	Jehoshaphat's prayer for help.
Ezra 9:5-15	Ezra's prayer of confession over the peoples sin.
Neh 1:4-6; 9:3-38	Nehemiah's grief at the news of Jerusalem's condition. Later prayer by the people.
Isaiah 25:1-2	Isaiah's praise to God for the blessings of His people.
Dan 9:3-19	Daniel's Prayer of Confession
Acts 1:24	The apostles prayer for a replacement for Judas.
Acts 4:24-25	Prayer for fortitude under persecution.

If we take this seriously and seek to find words to express "how great thou art," our walk with God will be close and satisfying both to us and to him.

Prayer - 3 - Giving Thanks

Emotions that warm the heart and lift the spirit are a welcome breath of fresh air when they come unexpectedly into our lives. They are kindled in a hospital when, as hope fades, a heroic doctor saves the life of a loved one. It can be awakened in a cold dark parking lot when a complete stranger offers to jump a dead battery. It is stirred up in the home, church and workplace by small acts of kindness that make our lives easier or comfort us in times of distress. Large or small whenever someone brings something unexpected and pleasant into our lives we feel deep gratitude.

Gratitude is one of the most pleasant, ennobling, and unselfish of all our emotions. It is a mixture of warmth, joy, appreciation, and indebtedness that comes over us when someone does something in a time of importunity and need that relieves us of some terrible problem or difficulty.

Gratitude can transform a complete stranger into a friend or it can strengthen feelings of devotion and affection toward those we know and love. A kind word or deed has the ability to create the most wonderful feelings of loyalty, devotion and commitment. Under the influence of such emotions difficult tasks become a "debt of gratitude" and thus much easier to do.

Gratitude and thanksgiving are pure and uplifting emotions that will draw us near to God.

They play a powerful role in conversion and in remaining faithful.

They create the awe and respect that lead to a lifetime of service and sacrifice.

Gratitude can slowly change a heart through the passing of many years, or it can come in a rushing flood at a time of crisis. It is found in the heart of every faithful servant of the Lord as the emotion and energy behind our songs of praise and our prayers of thanksgiving. It is the will of our God that gratitude form the centerpiece of a healthy life of prayer

pray without ceasing, 18 in everything give thanks; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you. 1Th 5:17-18

God wants us to thank Him for every thing because it is the truth. Every good thing in our life is a gift from the hands of our loving and gracious Creator. Though we may have taken them for granted, we must wake up to this truth for as Jesus well said: "and you shall know the truth and the truth shall make you free." (Jn 8:32).

We are in God's debt for our mind, body, emotions and life. He created us and our

world. He is responsible for every joy we have ever known. When He created us in His image and gave us dominion over this creation, He created all our needs and every wonderful way to fulfil them. He created the physics and chemistry behind every tool, appliance and convenience we now possess. Technology is God's gift to man. No challenge or satisfaction we have ever known came without His power, foresight and wisdom. His only desire is that we be grateful. The sooner we learn this truth and begin thanking Him, the sooner the powerful emotion of gratitude will enter our heart with its warming and transforming power. It is for this reason that God seeks it so strongly. Not just for what it will do for Him, but more importantly, what it will do for us.

giving thanks always for all things to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, Eph 5:20

*And let the peace of God rule in your hearts, to which also you were called in one body; and **be thankful**.... And whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, **giving thanks to God the Father through Him.** Col 3:15,17*

*pray without ceasing, 18 **in everything give thanks**; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you. 1Th 5:17-18*

*Therefore by Him **let us continually offer the sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of our lips, giving thanks to His name.** Heb 13:15*

Each of these Scriptures offers the truth that will set us free. There is so much for which we ought to be thankful. God has done so much for us. From birth to the grave, He gives everything in both the spiritual and material realms. There is no blessing, joy or comfort that is not a gift from Him. It is not difficult to be continually grateful when we keep this truth clear in our hearts.

Bless the LORD, O my soul, and forget not all His benefits: 3 Who forgives all your iniquities, who heals all your diseases, 4 Who redeems your life from destruction, who crowns you with loving kindness and tender mercies, 5 Who satisfies your mouth with good things, so that your youth is renewed like the eagle's. Ps 103:1-5

The more we thank Him, the warmer our hearts become and the easier it becomes to be faithful and zealous. As we grow to appreciate His kind and loving generosity, the harder it will be for Satan to tempt us into murmuring about our lot in life, or into doubting His wisdom. All God seeks is that we understand the truth that He is the giver of ever good gift. It is He who fills our hearts with joy. When we truly feel

grateful for all that God has done and is doing for us everything God asks of us is a privilege and an honor. Gratitude changes any task into a debt of honor we gladly pay. Paul was so grateful for the grace(a favor granted to one undeserving) that he considered it an honor to make his sacrifices for God. *"His grace toward me was not in vain; but I labored more abundantly than they all, yet not I, but the grace of God which was with me."* (1Cor. 15:10).

Without God there is only darkness and death. Not one good thing we have ever experienced is without him. Truly, *"God is so good!"* for *"all to him I owe."*

Every good thing given(good thing bestowed - NAS) and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shifting shadow. (NAU) James 1:17

The Scriptures offer a sharp contrast between those who cultivate an attitude of gratitude and appreciation to God by recognizing Him as the true source of it all and those who allow themselves to take the blessings of life for granted, ascribing them to some other source.

For even though they knew God, they did not honor Him as God, or give thanks; but they became futile in their speculations, and their foolish heart was darkened. (NAS) Rom 1:21

This is one of the reasons we teach our children to say "please" and "thank you." "Please" reminds them they are asking a favor, and no matter how many times they receive it, they must not expect or demand it. "Thank you" reminds them that they are grateful for what was done. Still, over time, even these words can become empty forms. Anyone who takes the service and benefits given to them by others for granted will become proud and selfish. In exactly the same way all who become lazy in the way they give thanks to God will begin to take it for granted, become vain in their thinking and forget him.

The ungrateful will always grow further and further from God. A sense of self-sufficiency, will slowly destroy the truth that we are totally and completely dependant upon him. As the warmth of gratitude fades, the heart begins to darken and futile speculations begin. If we are self-sufficient, we don't need to submit to God. As a matter of fact, if we truly were self-sufficient we have no need for God at all. Hence our relationship with God is poisoned by ingratitude, and strengthened by gratitude. We are seeing this more and more in the world today. People who have so much ascribe it to their own ability(pride of life), or to "nature" (a new form of idolatry without a god). Either way, they feel no gratitude or indebtedness to God and thus give not thanks or any service.

Ingratitude must never be allowed to form! It is a lie of the worst kind. God has given us every good gift and we must keep our hearts filled with gratitude by continually thanking Him for all that He has done. David understood and should be imitated.

Therefore David blessed the Lord before all the assembly; and David said: Blessed are You, Lord God of Israel, our Father, forever and ever. 11 Yours, O Lord, is the greatness, The power and the glory, The victory and the majesty; For all that is in heaven and in earth is Yours; Yours is the kingdom, O Lord, And You are exalted as head over all. 12 Both riches and honor come from You, And You reign over all. In Your hand is power and might; In Your hand it is to make great And to give strength to all. 13 Now therefore, our God, We thank You And praise Your glorious name. 14 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. 1Chr 29:10-14

Seeking to comply with God's request to remember His gifts and feel grateful is the quickest and surest path to the warming emotions of love, devotion, praise and honor that bring zeal and fervor to our soul.

Things we Can do to Keep our Gratitude Warm and Genuine

When we find serenity and awe at the ocean, mountains, in a sunset or the scent and color of a beautiful flower, we must always share that moment with God by thanking him for it. It is all His and it is only right.

A few moments of praise and thanks at the end of each joy is one of the most enjoyable ways we have to fulfill the command to "give thanks always for all things to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ" and "in everything give thanks" which keeps gratitude alive.

As we enjoy our food, watch children and grandchildren grow, and enjoy the peace and prosperity of our nation, we grow to love, appreciate and become completely devoted to God. Every moment of blessing, joy, peace and contentment leads us to a closer relationship with him.

If we accept the gifts, but stop short of the praise and thanksgiving, we cheat God of our gratitude and we cheat ourselves out of the joy and warmth it brings. It is during these quiet moments of sincere praise that we learn true reverence, respect and awe of His Holy name.

We must accept our dependence on God for everything, so every good thing we

enjoy is not selfishly squandered by ingratitude.

We must see God as the loving Father to whom we bring joy and thanks..

Sing praise to the LORD, You saints of His, and give thanks at the remembrance of His holy name. Ps 30:4

Make a joyful shout to the LORD, all you lands! 2 Serve the LORD with gladness; come before His presence with singing. 3 Know that the LORD, He is God; it is He who has made us, and not we ourselves; we are His people and the sheep of His pasture. 4 Enter into His gates with Thanksgiving, and into His courts with praise. Be thankful to Him, and bless His name. 5 For the LORD is good; His mercy is everlasting, and His truth endures to all generations. Ps 100:1-5

Gratitude requires training and discipline. It requires the realization that every good thing in our lives that has been brought into being by others deserves to be viewed with gratitude. No one has to do such things. They are kind acts of generosity that should create feelings of appreciation, closeness and a sense of obligation to do the same. That is what generosity does. It will glue us to God if we cultivate it.

Beware that you do not forget the Lord your God by not keeping His commandments, His judgments, and His statutes which I command you today, 12 lest — when you have eaten and are full, and have built beautiful houses and dwell in them; 13 and when your herds and your flocks multiply, and your silver and your gold are multiplied, and all that you have is multiplied; 14 when your heart is lifted up, and you forget the Lord your God who brought you out of the land of Egypt, from the house of bondage; 15 who led you through that great and terrible wilderness, in which were fiery serpents and scorpions and thirsty land where there was no water; who brought water for you out of the flinty rock; 16 who fed you in the wilderness with manna, which your fathers did not know, that He might humble you and that He might test you, to do you good in the end — 17 then you say in your heart, 'My power and the might of my hand have gained me this wealth.' 18 And you shall remember the Lord your God, for it is He who gives you power to get wealth, that He may establish His covenant which He swore to your fathers, as it is this day. 19 Then it shall be, if you by any means forget the Lord your God, and follow other gods, and serve them and worship them, I testify against you this day that you shall surely perish. Deut 8:11-20

Prayer 4 - The Fervent Prayer of the Righteous

If someone asked us what God had done for us as a result of our prayers how would we respond? Could we tell them we are much wiser because we prayed for wisdom(Jas. 1:3-5)? Could we point out the journeys where God intervened and we got there safely? Did we have a successful operation that would have turned out otherwise if we had not prayed? Although we can speak in general terms about the power of prayer we verge on presumption if we start telling people how God has answered each prayer. Multitudes who never pray still have safe journeys while some faithful and godly saints fervently pray but have an unsuccessful operation.

Although we can't demonstrate the specifics of how prayer has changed the events and outcomes in our personal life, we have an unshaken confidence that it did. We know because God says it does: "*The effective, fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much*" (Jas. 5:16). Prayer makes all the difference in the world. If we are righteous and are praying fervently we have God's promise that it will avail much. The rest is up to us. If we believe this we strive to be righteous and pray fervently because we know it will change the outcome.

The most important thing we do to increase the power of our prayers is directly tied to our character. The efforts we put forth to be pure and holy, to be fair and just, and to always do the right thing have the most influence with God. To put it bluntly, God has no interest in prayers of the wicked. "*One who turns away his ear from hearing the law, even his prayer is an abomination.*" Only the "*prayer of the upright is His delight*" (Pr. 28:9; 15:8). When a great need arises, those who have led a consistent life of faithful and devoted service are poised to be heard. Jesus "*was heard because of His godly fear*" (Heb. 5:7). When our life is upright and God is delighted with us He is more willing to intervene even before we pray.

Effective and *accomplish* are both words of power. The first is the Greek word *energeo* - *energy*. The difficulty for the translators centered on who exerted this energy. Is it God's energy that made it effective or is it our energy(fervency) that made it effective? The illustration of Elijah led the translators of the KJV and NASB to see it as the urgency and fervency(energy) man puts into his prayers. Jesus said the same in the parables of the friend at midnight(Lk. 11:5-8), and the unrighteous judge(Lk. 18:1-8). He also did it in the garden(Lk. 22:41-44; Heb 5:7-8).

Thus the one praying must be fervent, putting forth both emotional and intellectual energy. It is not a casual prayer, it is a prayer of urgency, frequency and persistence. It is a prayer of one who has a great need(importunity), knowing God can do something, and wanting him to act! We then pray over and over and over

again.

Jesus manifested a fervent prayer in the garden of Gethsemane and on the top of a mountain.

And He was withdrawn from them about a stone's throw, and He knelt down and prayed, 42 saying, "Father, if it is Your will, take this cup away from Me; nevertheless not My will, but Yours, be done." 43 Then an angel appeared to Him from heaven, strengthening Him. 44 And being in agony, He prayed more earnestly. Then His sweat became like great drops of blood falling down to the ground. Luke 22:41-44

Now it came to pass in those days that He went out to the mountain to pray, and continued all night in prayer to God. 13 And when it was day, He called His disciples to Himself; and from them He chose twelve whom He also named apostles: Lk 6:12-13

The energy we put into our prayers manifests our faith and trust and is thus an important means to increase God's desire to answer us. We do not simply say our prayers. We energize them with emotion and need.

The emotionally charged prayer of a righteous and devout servant of God has great and mighty strength because it leads God who "*is able to do exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that works in us*" (Eph. 3:20) to act.

Solomon's prayer for wisdom(1Kings 3:9-14), Hezekiah plea for longer life(2Kings 20:1-6), and Nehemiah's request to go to Jerusalem(Neh. 1-2) reveal what prayer can do. James chose Elijah who "*was a man with a nature like ours.*" But all of those who prayed had a like nature as ours. What prayer did for them, under similar circumstances, it can do for us. God told Elijah there would be no rain except at his(Elijah's) word. At the end of three and a half years God told him his prayer would bring the rain.

Elijah was a man with a nature like ours, and he prayed earnestly that it might not rain; and it did not rain on the earth for three years and six months. 18 And he prayed again, and the sky poured rain, and the earth produced its fruit.

Elijah prayed that it would not rain and it did not rain! Later he prayed for rain and it rained!

And Elijah the Tishbite, of the inhabitants of Gilead, said to Ahab, As the LORD God of Israel lives, before whom I stand, there shall not be dew nor rain these years, except at my word. 2 Then the word of the LORD came to him, saying,

3 Get away from here and turn eastward, and hide by the Brook Cherith, which flows into the Jordan. 4 And it will be that you shall drink from the brook, and I have commanded the ravens to feed you there. IKing 17:1-4

And it came to pass after many days that the word of the LORD came to Elijah, in the third year, saying, Go, present yourself to Ahab, and I will send rain on the earth. 2 So Elijah went to present himself to Ahab; and there was a severe famine in Samaria. IKing 18:1-2

Then Elijah said to Ahab, Go up, eat and drink; for there is the sound of abundance of rain. 42 So Ahab went up to eat and drink. And Elijah went up to the top of Carmel; then he bowed down on the ground, and put his face between his knees, 43 and said to his servant, Go up now, look toward the sea. So he went up and looked, and said, There is nothing. And seven times he said, Go again. 44 Then it came to pass the seventh time, that he said, There is a cloud, as small as a man's hand, rising out of the sea! So he said, Go up, say to Ahab, 'Prepare your chariot, and go down before the rain stops you.' 45 Now it happened in the meantime that the sky became black with clouds and wind, and there was a heavy rain. So Ahab rode away and went to Jezreel. IK 18:41-45

Not all prayers are as fervent as his because not all requests are this dire. Yet no prayer can only be words spoken without faith or with little interest in it being answered.

The energy we put into our prayers can “accomplish” much! “Accomplish” describes things that are mighty, powerful, or strong. Like water held back by a dam that creates electricity by spinning the turbines, prayer is a mighty source of power, giving us strength and tapping into God’s mighty power.

The key to all fervent prayers is based on three things. First, God told Elijah to do it. Second, Elijah had God’s promise that it would happen. Third, it was only at Elijah’s word, or through Elijah’s prayers that it would happen.

This is exactly what God expects of us today and it is why Elijah “was a man with a nature like ours.” Just as Elijah was commanded to pray, so are we. Just as God gave Elijah a promise that His would answer his prayer, so do we. Just as Elijah had to manifest his faith and submission by praying for the things God asked him to pray for, so do we. When God has definitely said His will do something, then we are to bold and submissive by asking for them.

Now this is the confidence that we have in Him, that if we ask anything according to His will, He hears us. 15 And if we know that He hears us,

whatever we ask, we know that we have the petitions that we have asked of Him. 1 Jn 5:14-15

This is what Elijah had and it is what we have. The chart below offers some of the things God has promised and we can ask for with the same confidence as Elijah.

God's Conditional Promises Offered Through Prayer		
Verse	Condition	Promise
<u>Phil 4:6-7</u>	Pray with Thanksgiving Let your request be known	The Peace of God shall guard your heart
<u>1Jn 5:14-15</u>	Ask according to His will	He hears. We have our petition
<u>1 Jn 3:22</u>	Keep His commandments- do things pleasing in His sight	Whatever we ask we receive of Him.
<u>James 1:5</u>	If you lack Wisdom ask in faith and do not doubt	God Gives to all liberally
<u>Jas 5:16</u>	fervent prayer of righteous	Avails much
<u>Mt 7:7-11</u>	Ask, seek, knock	Given, find, opened
<u>1 Jn 1:8</u>	If we confess our sins	He is faithful and just to forgive and cleanse of all unrighteousness
<u>Mt 6:5-6</u>	Enter into closet with sincerity	God reward you openly
<u>John 15:7</u>	Abide in Jesus- let His words abide in you	It shall be done
<u>Eph 3:20-21</u>	Ask	Exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think

How many today really understand this? God’s promises only wait for man’s obedience. This is the only reason why any of God’s promises are not granted.

... Yet you do not have because you do not ask. 3 You ask and do not receive, because you ask amiss, that you may spend it on your pleasures. James 4:2(b)-3

Prayer 5 - Faith in The Promises of God

A thermometer is designed to take our temperature. When we feel sick, we often place it in our mouth to assess our health. If the temperature is 98.6 we take some aspirin and go on with our day. If it is 102 or above, we go back to bed or make a doctor appointment because we know we are sick. We base our behavior on what the gauge tells us. We do the same thing in our car with the gas gauge and speedometer. We are all accustomed to acting on information and modifying our behavior based on their assessments.

In exactly the same way, Scripture offers us a means to assess our spiritual health, vitality and faith. When James spoke of our works revealing our faith, he said “faith without works is dead.” (James 2:14-26). Thus by assessing our works we have a gauge to assess our faith. One of the most important of these “thermometers” to assess our faith and trust in God is prayer. Prayer is our only means of communicating with God. After we read God’s word and see what it says about us (either good or bad), we take that to our God and talk about it.

*Pray without ceasing, 1Th 5:17 continuing steadfastly in prayer; Rom 12:12
Continue earnestly in prayer, being **vigilant** in it with thanksgiving; Col 4:2
Praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, being **watchful** to this end with all perseverance and supplication for all the saints Eph 6:18*

“*Vigilant is sleeplessly alert*” and “*watchful*” is *strict attention*.” The time, zeal, and content of our prayers should be something we pay strict attention with sleepless vigilance. We watch over our prayers not like the gas gauge but like the speedometer. It must be always on our mind and we need to be making frequent adjustments. Prayer is too important to leave on autopilot or be allowed to move along at its own pace.

Everyone finds it difficult to pray from time to time. But the rapidity with which we recognize problems and take action is critical. When we joyfully thank God without ceasing and respectfully hallow His name we are healthy and strong. When we trust His promises and confidently make our supplications and truly “*pray without ceasing*,” we are mature and spiritual. But whenever we begin to drift we are in grave danger. Such attitudes can be fatal: “*although they knew God, they did not glorify Him as God, nor were thankful, but became futile in their thoughts, and their*

foolish hearts were darkened” (Rom 1:21).

There are many things we can lose if we are not vigilant and watchful. First, the things God only offers through prayer. Priceless blessings can be lost forever if we do not ask. Second, if we are asking for the wrong things or have the wrong motives for our requests, our prayers reveal terrible character flaws we must on the alert to resolve as quickly as possible. “... *you do not have because you do not ask. You ask and do not receive, because you ask amiss, that you may spend it on your pleasures*” (Jas. 4:2-3). Problems with prayer can be like low blood pressure in an accident victim, they indicate something life threatening.

Since prayer reflects gratitude and respect along with faith and devotion, by watching our prayers with ceaseless vigilance, we are like the air traffic controller scanning the skies. Since “*the effective, fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much*” (Jas. 5:16), true faith acts as Nehemiah who before responding to the king first “*prayed to the God of heaven*” (Neh. 2:4-5). Nehemiah trusted God to help him. Whether by natural (providence) means or supernatural (God’s direct intervention), there is nothing too hard for the Lord and nothing His won’t do to protect and bless His saints! Therefore there is nothing we should not bring to God: “*In nothing be anxious; but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God*” (Phil 4:6). He can “*do exceedingly, abundantly, above all we could ever ask or think*” (Eph 3:20).

In spite of our sins and weaknesses, God still loves us and wants to intervene in our lives. He wants to hear that we love him and respect him and hopes to see our trust. If we believe we will respond with zeal, excitement, and anticipation. Knowing the great and wonderful things prayer can accomplish it is very important to watch them! By keeping our eyes peeled, we will know immediately if our devotion, respect, gratitude or faith are beginning to falter.

Hence learning how to obey the commands to pray and develop a close relationship with God brings great reward. Though all of God’s promises are conditional, and often require great effort on our part, when we fulfill them properly, we are greatly rewarded.

Our faith in these promises determines our works. IF we ask for these things and fulfill the conditions, then we will receive them. IF we do not ask, or we do not fulfill the conditions then we will never receive them. This will in turn establish our own attitude toward prayer.

How DO we view prayer? Is it a important part of our life? Do we believe God answers our prayers? Do we pray without ceasing. Are we like Nehemiah who when facing a difficult time in his day asks for God's help before he makes a decision?

Therefore the king said to me, "Why is your face sad, since you are not sick? This is nothing but sorrow of heart." So I became dreadfully afraid, 3 and said to the king, "May the king live forever! Why should my face not be sad, when the city, the place of my fathers' tombs, lies waste, and its gates are burned with fire?" 4 Then the king said to me, "What do you request?" So I prayed to the God of heaven. 5 And I said to the king, "If it pleases the king, and if your servant has found favor in your sight, I ask that you send me to Judah, to the city of my fathers' tombs, that I may rebuild it." Neh 2:4-5

Nehemiah had great faith in God's power to help him through prayer. He overcame his fear and made the request! We can do the same when like the Eunuch we are given a question but are afraid about how to answer it. In all requests, God will either use natural or supernatural ways to fulfill it. God's supernatural power is revealed in the birth of Isaac and of Jesus. His providence is seen in Esther at the deliverance of the Jews. When we pray for a safe journey, God can use natural means using time and chance to work out our safety, or He can use His power to intervene in the journey and keep us safe. In other words, He can give us a flat tire instead of being struck head on by a drunk driver. When sliding toward a cliff, He can nudge us and keep us from falling.

But whether natural(providence) or supernatural(God's direct intervention and suspending of natural law), there is nothing too hard for the Lord! Every promise God has ever given, He has kept. He can always do exceedingly abundantly above all we could ever ask or think(Eph 3:20). Nothing is too hard!

God's Promises are Conditional!

God has always tied His promises to man's faith, attitude and conduct. Therefore whenever God's promises are not being fulfilled in our personal life, we must look to ourselves and not blame God or doubt the promises. This is the real meaning of

Humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord, and He will lift you up. James 4:10
Therefore humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you in due time, 1 Pet 5:6

When a promised blessing is withheld, it is never a sign of God's weakness and it is never because God doesn't keep His promises. We must always be humble enough to look first at ourselves and if there are any doubts they must always be directed toward ourselves. When the thermometer reads 102° do we blame the thermometer or ourselves? When our prayers are not answered do we blame God's promises or ourselves? They are really the same question. When the Jews were in poverty or sickness, God revealed it wasn't any inability on His part.

Behold, the LORD'S hand is not shortened, that it cannot save; nor His ear heavy, that it cannot hear. 2 But your iniquities have separated you from your God; and your sins have hidden His face from you, so that He will not hear. Isa 59:1-2

This is the truth all must face when a promise of God has not yet been granted. Since God's promises are conditional, doesn't it make more sense to look at ourselves and not God if we have not yet been blessed? Too many times, God has been blamed when it was the sin, stubbornness or ignorance of others.

Will a man rob God? Yet you have robbed Me! But you say, In what way have we robbed You? In tithes and offerings. 9 You are cursed with a curse, for you have robbed Me, even this whole nation. 10 Bring all the tithes into the storehouse, that there may be food in My house, and try Me now in this, says the LORD of hosts, "If I will not open for you the windows of heaven and pour out for you such blessing that there will not be room enough to receive it. Mal 3:8-12

So also Haggai 1:2-13 and 2:15-19 God's promised prosperity was tied to obedience and they were in rebellion. He would not give the promise until they complied with the conditions. "It is impossible for God to lie" and "nothing is too hard for the Lord," but they would not be blessed until they obeyed. When God received the whole tithe, He would "pour out for you such a blessing that there will not be room enough to receive it!"

How many today really understand this? God's promises only wait for man's obedience. That is the only reason why any of God's promises are not granted.

. . . Yet you do not have because you do not ask. 3 You ask and do not receive, because you ask amiss, that you may spend it on your pleasures. James 4:2-3

Prayer 6 - "If it be thy will"

"This is the confidence which we have before Him, that, if we ask anything according to His will... we know that we have the requests which we have asked from Him" (1Jn. 5:14-15). When confessing sin(1Jn. 1:9), asking for wisdom(Jas. 1:5), our daily bread, or leading us away from temptation(Mt. 6:11-13) God has revealed His will and we **know** we will receive them. In these requests, "he who doubts is like a wave of the sea driven and tossed by the wind... a double-minded man, unstable in all his ways" (Jas. 1:6-8).

But what about the things we ask when we do not know if it is "according to His will?" Should we have the same confidence and assurance then? When we don't know God's will are we a "double-minded man" if we wonder whether God will grant it? God often had different plans than His servants and did not always grant their prayers. As Moses pleaded to enter the promised land "the LORD said to me: Enough of that! Speak no more to Me of this matter. Go up to the top of Pisgah, and ... behold it with your eyes, for you shall not cross over this Jordan" (Deut. 3:23-27). Clearly God would have been angry if such a prayer had been with boldness. As David prayed and fasted for the life of his child, God did not relent(2Sam. 8:16-23). Jeremiah prayed for Israel's deliverance but God said "do not pray for this people, nor lift up a cry or prayer for them, nor make intercession to Me; for I will not hear you" (Jer. 7:16).

In the garden of Gethsemane, Jesus pleaded with God to remove a cup He knew He had to drink. "Father, if it is Your will, take this cup away from Me; nevertheless not My will, but Yours, be done" (Lk. 22:41-44). This is the pattern when we pray for the unknown. Clearly there is a completely different attitude if we don't know God's will.

When Abraham asked God to spare Sodom, he humbly pleaded with him to spare Sodom if he found 50, 45, 40, 30, 20, and finally 10. God patiently heard his prayers and granted each request, but still it was not to be, for there was only one, Lot himself, for even his wife and daughters had been defiled by Sodom(Gen. 18:23-33).

When praying for our will when we don't know His, we must keep in mind that "My thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are your ways My ways" (Isa. 55:8-9), and "I am God, and there is none like Me, Declaring the end from the beginning, and from ancient times things that are not yet done, saying, 'My counsel shall stand, and I will do all My pleasure'" (Isa. 46:9-10).

As Esther pondered Mordecai's warning "who knows whether you have come to the kingdom for such a time as this" (Esth. 4:14), what was her conclusion? She asked all the Jews to fast to move God to act, but was it lack of faith when she said "if I perish I perish?" How could it be when God had not revealed to her what He would

do? She was only being humble and did not wish to be presumptuous. As Job begged God to deliver him, it looked like God was doing nothing, but we know better. Obviously the righteous Joseph must have begged God to rescue him from the Ishmaelites, Potiphar and Egyptian prison. But it was not God's will for He had a different plan. While Joseph's prayers for freedom seemed unheard, "God meant it for good, in order to bring it about as it is this day, to save many people alive" (Gen. 50:19-20).

With all these variables how can we feel boldness when asking for things God has not revealed? Such a prayer may not be in our best interest. It may not fit God's plan for our life. What if granting my prayer harms another? If a farmer prays for rain to save his crops and a contractor prays for sun to pour cement what will be the outcome?

How can we have confidence and boldness when "we do not know what we should pray for as we ought" (Rom. 8:26)? Any request God has not promised to answer should be brought with humility and simple trusting faith that God will only give what is best. Praying as Jesus did in the garden is the best example of making requests for things God has not revealed. We can pray for America, "that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and reverence" (1 Tim. 2:1-4), all the while understanding that like Abraham's prayer or Jeremiah's prayer, we may not receive what we ask. When Israel fell to Assyria, Judah to Babylon, and Jerusalem to Rome, people were praying for deliverance. But at those times it was not God's will.

As those before us, many prayers will appear to go unanswered. Some things we seek and desire will never happen. Far from leading us into doubt or instability we realize God knows better than we do. Actually if we preface each request with "nevertheless not my will but yours be done," we can still know we will receive what we have asked. He promised He will hear every prayer and consider every request. He tells us His power is exceeding abundant above all that we ask or think. With God nothing is impossible and His hand is never too short. But we must have the humility to preface our requests with "if it be thy will," fully desiring that if it is not, we do not want it.

God is sovereign ruler over His creation. His love, mercy and compassion bring about the best possible outcomes and no matter what we might see in a single snapshot, like Joseph, it is often only at the end we will find God had a much better life planned for us than we did.

We must never lose sight of the several truths:

"For My thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are your ways My ways," says the LORD. 9 "For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are My ways higher than your ways, and My thoughts than your thoughts. Isa 55:8-9

Remember the former things of old, for I am God, and there is no other; I am

God, and there is none like Me, 10 Declaring the end from the beginning, and from ancient times things that are not yet done, saying, 'My counsel shall stand, and I will do all My pleasure,' Isa 46:9-10

O LORD, You have searched me and known me. 2 You know my sitting down and my rising up; you understand my thought afar off. 3 You comprehend my path and my lying down, and are acquainted with all my ways. 4 For there is not a word on my tongue, but behold, O LORD, You know it altogether. . . . 16 Your eyes saw my substance, being yet unformed. And in Your book they all were written, the days fashioned for me, when as yet there were none of them. Ps 139:1-4, 16

God knows the outcome and plans for our lives. Sometimes what we pray for will not fit in with His plan.

Joseph's prayers for deliverance were not answered because he needed to pass through all the trials to get to the end God had planned for him.

Joseph said to them, "Do not be afraid, for am I in the place of God? 20 "But as for you, you meant evil against me; but God meant it for good, in order to bring it about as it is this day, to save many people alive. Gen 50:19-20

Job's prayers and intercessions for safety for himself and his children were not answered because God had a need and only Job could fulfill it.

Indeed we count them blessed who endure. You have heard of the perseverance of Job and seen the end intended by the Lord— that the Lord is very compassionate and merciful. Jas 5:11

There is so much we don't know when we pray. We don't know:

- ▲ if what we ask for is really in our best interests.
- ▲ it will bring about the plans God has to use us in His eternal purpose.
- ▲ if the answer we seek might harm someone praying for exactly the opposite.

This entire article and all these examples are cited to bring us to one conclusion.

Now this is the confidence that we have in Him, that if we ask anything according to His will, He hears us. 15 And if we know that He hears us, whatever we ask, we know that we have the petitions that we have asked of Him. 1 Jn 5:14-15

Each day we pray for things for which we know God's will and other things in which we do not know God's will. When we pray for wisdom(Jas 1:5), peace(Phil 4:6-7); forgiveness of sins(1Jn 1:8), forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors, lead us not into temptation (Mt 6:12-13) we already know God's will. We know that God will do exactly what He said so we pray with confidence and boldness.

But when we are praying for things in which we do not know what God's will is, we

have to pray with a different mind set and attitude. It is not doubt or lack of faith. It is trust and submission.

When I hear people pray and then tell others they know God will hear and answer that prayer, I cringe in my heart, because such a statement is actually not of faith. When God has not told us and we do not know, we are being presumptuous when we tell others something we cannot possibly know.

We can pray for America, but we do not know what God's will is.

Therefore I exhort first of all that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks be made for all men, 2 for kings and all who are in authority, that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and reverence. 3 For this is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Savior, 4 who desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth. 1 Tim 2:1-4

Yet Paul knew "that in the last days grievous times shall come." In spite of such prayers, Peter knew his own death was imminent and would be violent. Many others in the first century and even after have made this prayer only to find that it was not God's will and the answer was no. Lot may have prayed this prayer and Abraham certainly did, but God had already decreed the end. When Israel fell to Assyria, When Judah fell to Babylon, and when Jerusalem fell to Rome people were praying this prayer. But it was not God's will.

We can pray for the life of our loved ones when they are sick, but sooner or later everyone dies so our prayers for the life of those we love cannot always be granted.

Prayer for the unknown is best left in God's hands.

The secret things belong to the LORD our God, but those things which are revealed belong to us and to our children forever, that we may do all the words of this law. Deut 29:29

Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments and His ways past finding out! 34 "For who has known the mind of the Lord? Or who has become His counselor?" 35 "Or who has first given to Him and it shall be repaid to him?" 36 For of Him and through Him and to Him are all things, to whom be glory forever. Amen. Rom 11:33-36

God is sovereign ruler over His creation. His love, mercy and compassion bring about the best possible outcomes and no matter what we might see in a single snapshot, it is not until the very end that we find out all that God had in mind.

My brethren, take the prophets, who spoke in the name of the Lord, as an example of suffering and patience. 11 Indeed we count them blessed who endure. You have heard of the perseverance of Job and seen the end intended by the Lord— that the Lord is very compassionate and merciful. Jas 5:10-11

Prayer 7 - True Faith that Prayer will Avail Much

There are few stories in the Scriptures that make me laugh. They are all too serious and important. But there is one paradox in the Bible that always brings a little chuckle. Not because it has any real humor, but it is such a contradiction that it leaves one bemused.

The church in Jerusalem had seen great things. Many had seen the miracles of Jesus (over 500 witnessed His resurrection— 1Cor 15:6). Many were present on the day of Pentecost, had seen or heard about the healing of the lame man, the shaking of the building during Peter's prayer (Acts 4:31). Some had received the laying of the apostles hands and received the Holy Spirit (Acts 8:18). Saul of Tarsus had seen the Lord and stopped his persecution of the church (Acts 9:31). Jairus had been healed and Dorcas had been raised (Acts 9:33; 36-40). Yet after Herod killed James and prepared to kill Peter, the church revealed a great contradiction in their faith. The church was fervently praying for Peter's release.

Now about that time Herod the king stretched out his hand to harass some from the church. 2 Then he killed James the brother of John with the sword. 3 And because he saw that it pleased the Jews, he proceeded further to seize Peter also. Now it was during the Days of Unleavened Bread. 4 So when he had apprehended him, he put him in prison, and delivered him to four squads of soldiers to keep him, intending to bring him before the people after Passover. 5 Peter was therefore kept in prison, but constant prayer was offered to God for him by the church. Acts 12:1-5

God sent an angel and Peter was released from prison by supernatural means. God suspended natural laws and Peter was freed. After his release he came to the place where they were praying to speak with them:

So, when he had considered this, he came to the house of Mary, the mother of John whose surname was Mark, where many were gathered together praying. 13 And as Peter knocked at the door of the gate, a girl named Rhoda came to answer. 14 When she recognized Peter's voice, because of her gladness she did not open the gate, but ran in and announced that Peter stood before the gate. 15 But they said to her, "You are beside yourself!" Yet she kept insisting that it was so. So they said, "It is his angel." 15 But they said to her, "You are beside yourself!" Yet she kept insisting that it was so. So they said, "It is his angel." 16 Now Peter continued knocking; and when they opened

the door and saw him, they were astonished. Acts 12:12-16

This was an amazing situation. They were in the house praying for Peter's deliverance. When he came to the door and knocked, a young woman recognized his voice and burst into the room where they were praying and breathlessly announced Peter was at the door. Instead of praising God their prayers had been answered, they accused her of being "beside herself" or "out of her mind!" Then, when they finally saw Peter they were "astonished!" How can this be? In the age of miraculous intervention, they are astonished that God would answer their prayer.

It is important for us to analyze this contradiction. We all know God answers prayer and yet we too are often amazed and incredulous when our prayer is actually answered, or even worse we give up when it doesn't.

It reminds us of Jesus' lament in one of His parables.

Then He spoke a parable to them, that men always ought to pray and not lose heart, 2 saying: "There was in a certain city a judge who did not fear God nor regard man. 3 "Now there was a widow in that city; and she came to him, saying, 'Get justice for me from my adversary.' 4 "And he would not for a while; but afterward he said within himself, 'Though I do not fear God nor regard man, 5 'yet because this widow troubles me I will avenge her, lest by her continual coming she weary me.'" 6 Then the Lord said, "Hear what the unjust judge said. 7 "And shall God not avenge His own elect who cry out day and night to Him, though He bears long with them? 8 "I tell you that He will avenge them speedily. Nevertheless, when the Son of Man comes, will He really find faith on the earth?" Luke 18:1-8

There is an innate skepticism in the hearts of all disciples regarding prayer. Some of it is because all answered prayer is based upon God's will. The church did not know God's will regarding Peter. James had already been killed and Peter had been warned by the Lord that he would suffer a violent death (Jn. 21:18-19). Perhaps their expectation of Peter's death overruled their faith and trust in the power of prayer to deliver him. Yet they are not the only ones. How many of us have prayed for something for a long period of time, became convinced it was not God's will and therefore stopped praying?

This sometimes eats like gangrene through our prayer life and as a result prayer can become a hollow exercise. We may still be convinced prayer brings forgiveness and that God is pleased when we thank Him for our food. But like the church in the

first century there is can still be a skepticism when we ask for the things God has not revealed.

This is a truth we must consider and investigate. The hardest prayers are those intercessions and supplications for ourselves and others. We have to be vigilant and watchful here. It is very easy to pray for the lost, the sick, the weak, etc. with no real expectation that it will make any difference. We pray because we are told to pray, but would be just as amazed as the church in Jerusalem if were to actually be answered.

It is a natural part of humility and submission that our expectations of God's intervention are mediated by "if it be thy will." It is normal that we would feel great awe and amazement when God does act in our behalf. But He does so act and He does want to help us.

Have you not known? Have you not heard? The everlasting God, the LORD, the Creator of the ends of the earth, neither faints nor is weary. His understanding is unsearchable. 29 He gives power to the weak, and to those who have no might He increases strength. 30 Even the youths shall faint and be weary, and the young men shall utterly fall, 31 But those who wait on the LORD shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings like eagles, they shall run and not be weary, they shall walk and not faint. Isa 40:28-31

Now to Him who is able to do exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that works in us, 21 to Him be glory in the church by Christ Jesus to all generations, forever and ever. Amen. Eph 3:20-21

So once again we walk between the extremes. No one has the right to expect that God will answer every prayer we make. Yet at the same time we must guard against "losing heart." Some and possibly many of our requests will never be answered. We may grow accustomed to praying with no real expectations and then like the church in Jerusalem feel amazed when God acts.

Yet God wants us to pray and trust him. If our prayers go unanswered, we can evaluate what we are praying for or be more fervent in our confessions of sin. We can even accept that God is simply saying no. BUT WE DON'T LOSE CONFIDENCE OR LOSE HEART! Faith, humility and importunity are the answer.

"Nevertheless, when the Son of Man comes, will He really find faith on the earth?"

Prayer 8 The Prayers of Jesus & Paul

This is the final lesson on the subject of prayer. We have sought to see prayer as a command, an honor, a blessing and a privilege. But at some time or another it is easy to see it as a burden taking time and effort along with strength and fortitude.

Sometimes, when we are busy, we may pray only because it is a command. Other times when great happiness blossoms or deep sorrow invades, prayer becomes a privilege we enjoy and relish as we lean on, praise and honor God. In our youth or in busy times of stressful activity, prayer can become a burden that takes all our effort to continue.

Is it wrong to see our commitment to prayer wax and wane? It should be obvious that in time of severe trial and need, prayer waxes in importance. While in times when busy, prosperous and blessed our needs seem less so our prayers become less fervent. It should not be this way, but throughout the Scriptures we see it happen. We must always be on guard(vigilant) to keep this from happening for as Jesus said, we must always pray, and not lose heart(Lk. 18:1).

Regardless of our emotional and mental state, prayer is one of our great links to our communion with God.

The LORD is near to all who call upon Him, to all who call upon Him in truth. 19 He will fulfill the desire of those who fear Him; he also will hear their cry and save them. 20 The LORD preserves all who love Him, but all the wicked He will destroy. Ps 145:18-20

The prayer of the upright is His delight. Pr 15:8 God delights to hear his children offering up petitions of faith to him.

Regardless of what is the state of our life, We are warned to keep a careful watch on the quality of our prayers.

Continue earnestly in prayer, being vigilant in it with thanksgiving; Col 4:2

The Prayers of Jesus

It is doubtful that anyone has been busier than Jesus was while He was in the midst of His ministry. Between His miracles, sermons, private teaching of the apostles, and journeys from place to place, it must have been a rigorous and exhausting schedule. He was God's Son and clearly stronger and more knowledgeable than we and He was always praying.

Now in the morning, having risen a long while before daylight, He went out and departed to a solitary place; and there He prayed. 36 And Simon and those who were with Him searched for Him. Mark 1:35-36

When all the people were baptized, it came to pass that Jesus also was baptized; and while He prayed, the heaven was opened. 22 And the Holy Spirit descended in bodily form like a dove upon Him, and a voice came from heaven which said, "You are My beloved Son; in You I am well pleased." Luke 3:21-22

However, the report went around concerning Him all the more; and great multitudes came together to hear, and to be healed by Him of their infirmities. 16 So He Himself often withdrew into the wilderness and prayed. Lk 5:15-16

In the morning a great while before day He went out and departed in a solitary place and there prayed. Mk 1:35

He withdrew himself into the wilderness, and prayed. Lk 5:5-16

Now it came to pass in those days that He went out to the mountain to pray, and continued all night in prayer to God. Lk 6:12

And it happened, as He was alone praying, that His disciples joined Him, and He asked them, saying, "Who do the crowds say that I am?" Lk 9:18

Now it came to pass, about eight days after these sayings, that He took Peter, John, and James and went up on the mountain to pray. 29 And as He prayed, the appearance of His face was altered, and His robe became white and glistening. 30 And behold, two men talked with Him, who were Moses and Elijah, 31 who appeared in glory and spoke of His decease which He was about to accomplish at Jerusalem. Lk 9:28-31

Now it came to pass, as He was praying in a certain place, when He ceased, that one of His disciples said to Him, "Lord, teach us to pray, as John also taught his disciples." Lk 11:1

And when He had sent them away, He departed to the mountain to pray. 47 Now when evening came, the boat was in the middle of the sea; and He was alone on the land. Mark 6:46-47

As He also says in another place: "You are a priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek"; 7 who, in the days of His flesh, when He had offered up prayers and supplications, with vehement cries and tears to Him who was able to save Him from death, and was heard because of His godly fear, 8 though He was a Son, yet

He learned obedience by the things which He suffered. Heb 5:6-8

He prayed upon the mountain,
He prayed for you and me,
He prayed in humble dwellings
He prayed beside the sea.
He prayed in early morning,
Prayed with all His might,
He prayed at noonday and at dusk,
He prayed all thro' the night.
He prayed for those who scorned Him,
For those who killed Him, too,

He prayed, Father forgive them:
They know not what they do."
He prayed when He was lonely,
He prayed when He was sad,
He prayed when He was weary,
He prayed when He was glad.
He prayed for those in sorrow,
He prayed for those in sin,
He prayed for those in trouble
That they might come to Him.

-author unknown

Paul as an Example of Prayer

In nearly every one of Paul's epistles there are indications of his great faith and use of prayer. When he spoke of his prayers he used "always," "every," and "unceasing" to express their quality and frequency. A brief look at these references is very instructive and leads us to a good understanding of how he fulfilled his own commands.

Romans 1:8-10 unceasing, always: Make mention and request

I Cor. 1:4 Always: For the grace of God which was given you.

Eph. 1:16-19 cease not: God may give you a spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of him. That your hearts may be enlightened to:
1. The hope of your calling
2. The riches of God's inheritance in the saints
3. The greatness of His power to us who believe.

Phil 1:4 always in every: For your fellowship
Phil. 1:9 That your love may abound more and more.
That ye may approve the things which are excellent.
That ye may be sincere and void of offense.

Col. 1:3 Praying always for you

Col. 1:9-12 do not cease That ye may be filled with the knowledge of His will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding.
To walk worthy of the Lord.

Bearing fruit in every good work.
Increasing in the knowledge of God.
Strengthened with power.

I Thess. 1:2 give thanks always Making mention of you in our prayers.

Philemon 4 thanks always. Make mention of you in my prayers.

He never asked us to do anything that he was not doing himself. It is not the duty or obligation, but the benefits of prayer that are so important. Not what we get in answered prayer, but what we gain in fellowship for God.

Pray without ceasing, 1Th 5:17 continuing steadfastly in prayer; Rom 12:12

Continue earnestly in prayer, being vigilant in it with thanksgiving; Col 4:2

Praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, being watchful to this end with all perseverance and supplication for all the saints-- Eph 6:18

Prayer requires:

great spiritual and mental effort.
a great deal of time and faith.
introspection.
keeping ones life clean at all times
humility.
a thankful heart.
an organized life.
unselfish concern for the needs of others.
a communion with our God.

Prayer offers in return:

special gifts from God.
a close and living relationship with God.
wisdom and spiritual growth.
A home in heaven.

In Prayer we walk with God.

In Prayer we thank God

In Prayer we confess our sins

Prayer is faith in action.

God has given us a rich sample of how we are to pray, with commands and multiple examples he shows us all that prayer can be. We are now the ones who can take this information and by faith use it to God's honor and glory, or we can shrink back and lose heart. If we trust in the Lord with all our heart, we will find prayer to be the glue that binds us to God and the means by which we draw near to him and talk with him about all that is in our life.

As Joshua said long ago... "Choose you this day whom you will serve..."