



SPRING 2000

VOLUME 31

NUMBER 1

We're living proof:

God answers prayers

"Neither the one who plants nor the one who waters is anything;
but only God who gives the growth."



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loving the Lord your God, and serv-
ing him with
all your heart and all your soul--
then he will provide
the rain for your land in its season,
the early rain and the later rain, and
you will gather in your grain,
your wine, and your oil;
and he will provide
grass in your fields
for your livestock,
and you will eat your fill!"
-Deuteronomy 11:13-15

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ALL ABOUT INTEGRITY

*Integrity is a quarterly journal dedicated to stimulating personal and public thought, prayer, and discussion about living the Christian life. Its roots are in Restoration Movement Christianity, encompassing Churches of Christ, Churches of Christ/Christian Churches, and the Disciples of Christ, but Integrity strives for unity among **all** Christians. Published by a nonprofit corporation, Integrity is intended to be a ministry of reconciliation which utilizes the varied talents of a large community of believers. These believers, united in faith but divergent in opinions, seek to accurately reveal God to both the church and the world so that all may become one as He is one. Accordingly, it should not be assumed that the views expressed by individual authors necessarily represent the opinions of either the editors or of the Board as a whole.*

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Where prayer must start

Curtis D. McClane

From outward appearances he certainly did not look like a religious person. And who could imagine that he was engaging in prayer? He would not even look up into heaven—this is like not bowing your head when praying! He pounded his chest and cried out, “God, have mercy on me, a sinner.”

I wonder if this prayer was legitimate. I mean, Luke the gospel writer tells us two astounding things about this person: he was a tax collector and he stood at a distance from the temple. A despised traitor refusing to pray in God’s house. Certainly Luke would not have us to believe that prayers outside of the church building uttered by sinful people are to be recognized!

Take out your Bible and read the little story that Jesus tells about the Pharisee and the tax collector (Luke 18:9-14). In perfect Jesus-style, his little tale is directed toward a specific problem he detects in the hearts of religious people. What is the problem? Just this: “Some were confident of their own righteousness and looked down on everybody else.”

Luke shocks us by portraying a religious leader using prayer to his own egocentric ends. Two men went up to the temple to pray that day. One prayed to God and the other prayed to

himself! This was a self-congratulatory prayer in which the Pharisee was reminding God how lucky he was for him to be around. It was a recitation of what he was not and what he did. Self-centeredness and self-effort are at the heart of this odious prayer.

Notice that the IRS man is lumped into the same category as robbers, evildoers, and adulterers. Luke’s vision of the kingdom is filled with individuals coming from precisely these kinds of lifestyles and backgrounds. The Pharisee would have none of it! The temple cannot be defiled with the presence of such people. (“We don’t want those kinds of people in our church.”)

Luke’s idea of the kingdom of God is spelled out clearly in this story. His gospel narrative about the life and ministry of Jesus explodes the human confidence placed in one’s own sense of righteousness and superiority. For Luke, this is the critical juncture at which Jesus parts with many of his contemporaries.

After reading the story in Luke 18, which one do you think prayed a prayer that God was willing to listen to? Jesus concludes his story with this comment about the two: “The tax collector, rather than the other, went home justified before God.”

Being right with God is not based on who we think we are (or are not—not a robber, not an evil person, not an adulterer, not a legalist) or what we have done. Justification (don’t you just love Luke’s use of this big word!) i.e., being made right with God, does not depend on the check I write out and put in the collection plate on Sunday. My being right with God doesn’t depend on whether or not I am in the “right” kind of church on Sunday.

Jesus is so clear about where justification starts. Why have we made it so difficult? Jesus is so clear about the ground of our prayer life. Why have we made it so difficult?

“For everyone who exalts themselves will be humbled, and everyone who humbles themselves will be exalted.”

Prayer is conversation with God. It must be entered into with an attitude of humility. Prayer is no place to exalt ourselves. Prayer is no place to recount our good deeds before God. Prayer is no place to remind God of how much better we are than others.

Prayer is an attitude of the heart that begins with abject humility that recognizes that we are not worthy to be in God’s presence because of our own sinfulness. Justification is not somehow secured by the right words in prayer or the right formula. Justification is God bringing the divine blessing of his presence into our heart and life because we have opened it up with humility before him.

As you pick up this issue of *Integrity*, you will witness the

extraordinary place that prayer has come to occupy in the life of each writer. In our last board meeting, so many aspects of prayer were mentioned that it was agreed that a

PRAYER IS AN ATTITUDE OF THE HEART THAT BEGINS WITH ABJECT HUMILITY THAT RECOGNIZES THAT WE ARE NOT WORTHY TO BE IN GOD’S PRESENCE BECAUSE OF OUR OWN SINFULNESS.

future issue, the Lord willing, needs to be devoted to prayer.

It is our prayer that your conversation with God and closeness to the divine presence will be enriched by your reading and meditation upon the ideas presented in this issue.

God, have mercy on me, a sinner. This is the starting place for prayer!

Curtis D. McClane





Through you, dear readers, God has answered our prayers

Just in time for our issue on prayer, God has given us a concrete, living example of just how he *does* answer prayers. Through you, loyal readers, God has answered our prayers to keep this journal alive. This experience has become a “Real-Life Application,” if you will, all set to be written out and placed on page 6 of this “prayer issue” of *Integrity*.

We couldn't have arranged it better if we tried.

A true story

You all know from our last issue about our recent financial difficulties. After several years of steady growth and enough donations to consistently publish *Integrity*, we experienced this year an uncomfortable reminder of the early days of this journal, when each board meeting seemed to be spent in worry over how we would pay for the publication. In early 2000,

EACH OF US REALLY TRIED TO LAY DOWN AT THE ALTAR OUR OWN OPINIONS AND DESIRES.

after thirty years, we were again experiencing a financial shortfall. We were afraid we might have to stop publishing the journal. We weren't sure *what* to do. Should we sell

advertising? Should we try to make it a subscription-based publication? Should we try to get grants?

As a board, we deliberated and discussed our options. We had some strong differences of opinion. We knew that only 15% of our readers regularly support this ministry, but that many other people who read the journal are students and those on fixed incomes who can't *afford* to support us—much less pay for a subscription.

We talked for quite a while. Most of us had pretty definite—and different—opinions about how we might fix our financial problems. Then we stopped talking and *prayed* together. While praying, each of us really tried to lay down at the altar our own opinions and desires. (Although, of course, I think each of us knew *our* way was the best way. I know *I* did.)

We really tried to ask God what *he* wanted us to do. We also spent time praising him; we told him why we love him. We recounted to him the ways he has blessed us and the miracles he has done in our lives. We tried not to say, “This is our idea, God. Now, will you please bless it? After all, we're doing work for *you*.” Instead, we simply attempted to ask him what he wanted us to do.

After a period of prayer and then more discussion, we finally arrived at a consensus. In fact, by the end of the evening, we were noticeably more like-minded than we were before we prayed. After praying, we talked about how, in so many instances, where it seemed like there was nothing left, God provides—often in supernatural, surprising, and loving ways.

Then we decided that our course of action was to to rely completely on God. Rather than try to sell ads or charge subscriptions—something we've never had to do in the thirty years of this ministry—we decided to go back to our readers. We also agreed that we board members would split the cost of the next issue if we just didn't get any response.

We brainstormed some ideas for a letter to you. What Diane Kilmer said in her letter to you sums up our perspective: “We prefer to interpret your financial response or the lack of response as God's leading regarding whether or not to continue *Integrity's* ministry as a truth-exploring journal, speaking of our fellowship in knowing God, serving Christ, and being empowered by the Holy Spirit.”

Then we waited and prayed. And, through you, God blessed us!

And just in time to report the results of our prayers in our issue on prayer. Hmmm.

What God has done

God blessed us so richly, and we are so inspired by what we received when we asked for your emergency support. While we didn't get a million dollars, we did receive enough to allow us to put out the next couple of

issues. (The category description our treasurer, Jan Van Horn, used to describe this on the financial report was appropriate and true: She called it, “God's provision.”)

“... THIS GIFT IS FROM THE LORD. WE ARE MERELY FOLLOWING HIS DIRECTION.”

We are grateful and blessed by the money we received. However, the *way* God showed us his love through you was the best part. Listen to this:

From a church in Atlanta, GA: “We are honored to be able to make a contribution to this worthy effort . . . This gift is from the Lord. We are merely following his direction.”

From a new subscriber in Lodi, CA: “I just discovered *Integrity* through the Internet. I'll read the journal through that medium, but I've enclosed \$100 to help you with your expenses. God bless you.”

In delicate handwriting on a dainty lace card: “Wish it could be more, but I am on a fixed income and have many commitments.”

Scrawled across a torn piece of looseleaf paper folded around a check: “We want you to continue! We're sorry we've been negligent in our contributions.”

Let me share one more excerpt from one of the many letters we received:

“We hope your plea to *Integrity* readers has brought a round of support—both financial and spiritual. We very much enjoy the relationship

we have with you . . . Please accept this small contribution as a show of support from your friends at Main Office Mailers.”

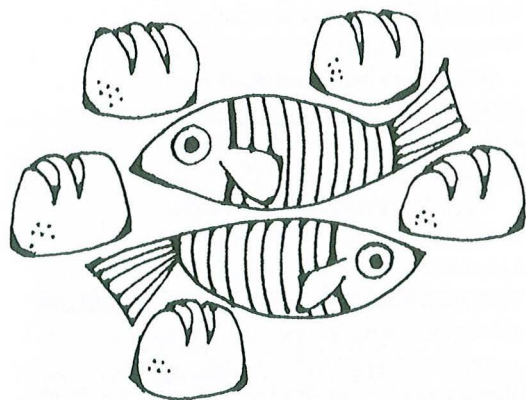
This last came from our *mailing service!* We're a very small account, and they really have nothing to gain by keeping us alive, but they sent along \$50. Isn't God good? He shows us that we can minister to people, no matter where we encounter them!

A revelation of his affection

Do you see what has happened? Through you—your financial response, but more, through your letters and your expressions of loving concern—God has given us a revelation of his affection for us. Through you, he has affirmed the ministry of *Integrity* one more time.

This is more precious to us than gold!

Here's what I learned from this: God provided just enough for our



“... SO ABRAHAM CALLED THAT PLACE THE LORD WILL PROVIDE. AND TO THIS DAY IT IS SAID, 'ON THE MOUNTAIN OF THE LORD IT WILL BE PROVIDED.'” -GEN. 22: 14

physical needs, *and* he provided us something much more important, something we didn't even really think to ask for: he provided an abundance of encouragement; he built us up; he gave us renewed enthusiasm to continue this ministry.

God showed himself to us in a lovely way and, as Diane said, our “empty bank account . . . is a welcome reminder that, all along, God has always been the Sustainer of this ministry through you.”

Thank you so much, dear brothers and sisters, for your affirming response.

We feel exultant and very, very humbled at God's provision for *Integrity* through you. We pledge to continue to ask for God's leading in how we may minister to you. May this issue of *Integrity*, focused on the subject of prayer and backed up with recent personal experience, inspire you to longer and more frequent communication with Jehovah Jaireh—our God who Provides. ✿

Noreen Bryant
Managing Editor

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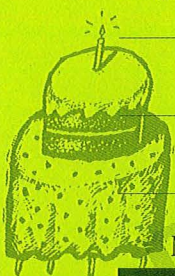


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Are you interested in receiving bulk subscriptions for your church or small group? If so, please list your phone number and someone will contact you. _____



A CLOSER LOOK

Prayer: Unleashing God's Power

Jim Warren

There was a time in my life when I found it difficult to pray. I knew that God was all-powerful, all knowing, that he controls the steps of humans, that he controls the nations, and that nothing is hidden from him. I also knew that that our hearts are evil and desperately corrupt.

Couple this with a personal history of praying for things and not getting an answer, or not the answer I wanted, and I began to take a fatalistic approach to prayer. God is going to do what he is going to do, he knows what I need, he knows what is best for me, so why should I spend time in prayer telling him what he already knows? Why should I try to persuade him to do what I want when he tells me that I do not even know what is best for me? God, you just do it all and I will take whatever you give me. Besides, I do not want the disappointment of asking you for specific things, getting my hopes built up, and then being disappointed because you choose to not answer or answer in a different way. What is the use of praying other than to praise you and thank you for my blessings? I did not mean to be irreverent, but this was really how I felt inside.

God prompted me to study prayer because he knew my feelings were troubling to me. The following is a

summary of that study which I am pleased to share. I hope it has the impact on you that it did on me.

God's Original Plan

God made people in his image and had originally given us total control over all the earth and everything that existed in it (Genesis 1:26-28, Psalm 8: 3-8).

Based on the definition of the Hebrew word *mashal* (ruler) from the majestic Psalm 8, God's design was that people were to be his managers, his representatives on earth, and that they would have total control and authority over all things on earth (Psalm 8:6).

God's original plan was to work through people and populate the world with their offspring. He told us to be fruitful and multiply (which is about the only command that we have kept). People were in charge of all of God's creation—he put all things under their feet. They were made a little lower than the heavenly beings and they had total authority over all the earth; they named the animals. In making people in his image it is thought that Adam and Eve even looked like God. God fellowshiped with Adam and Eve and they walked with him in the Garden. We have no idea how long this relationship existed before the fall. It is important

to realize the authority that God had given to people. In fact, they had so much authority that they even had the ability to give the earth away. When Satan entered the garden, he knew of Adam and Eve's authority and implemented his plan to steal the earth from them.

Satan steals control of the earth

Satan tempted Adam and Eve to eat of the tree of knowledge of good and evil. When they willfully chose to sin by eating of the tree, sin entered the world. Their sin separated them from God and they were naturally afraid to be in God's presence. Scripture tells us God is a holy God and he cannot tolerate the existence of sin in his presence. Satan of course knew this, which is the reason he caused Adam and Eve to disobey so that he could separate them from God and gain control. Adam and Eve were cast out of the Garden, but note God's description of them and why they had to be cast out:

"And the Lord God said, 'The man has now become like one of us, knowing good and evil. He must not be allowed to reach out his hand and take also from the tree of life and eat, and live forever'" (Gen. 3:22).

People are now more than just made in the image of God, they are

now described as being like God in that they also know good and evil. Given our propensity for evil, God now takes away our immortality by preventing us from eating of the tree of life. People must now face death, the ultimate separation from God. In fact, the word "death" means separation.

Their sin and subsequent separation from God meant sin would now have to be dealt with if God was to ever have direct fellowship with people again. Sin spread rampantly and Satan's actions have led everyone to sin and separate himself or herself from God. This is why the world now belongs to Satan. It is not that Satan owns the earth—it is God's creation—but he has influenced, controlled, and blinded its inhabitants, and has been responsible for separating all of us from God. Jesus acknowledges this control but denies its hold on him (John 12:31, John 14:30; John 16:11).

God's plan to restore fellowship

God has always desired to have fellowship with people, and even when people sinned and caused the separation, God immediately implemented a plan to restore humankind to himself. This would be no simple plan; it would require the death of his very own son to allow people and God to have direct fellowship again. God foretold this plan at the time when he cast Adam and Eve out of the Garden. He said that he would put enmity between the offspring of woman and Satan. Her offspring would crush Satan's head

and Satan would bruise his heel. We understand this to be the foretelling of Jesus. Our failure required that God send Jesus to the earth to be crucified and pay the debt for our sin. If God did not mete out the punishment for sin on himself (required by the justice character quality of God himself), he would ultimately have to destroy the entire human race, which was and is filled with sin.

While Jesus and the cross were God's plan to unite people so they can live together for eternity, we also see that God is implementing his restoration plan in this life on an individual basis.

"And we, who with unveiled faces all reflect the Lord's glory, are being transformed into his likeness with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit (2 Corinthians 3:18)."

The transformation

This transformation starts the instant we become Christians and continues until the day we die. We are still filled with sin, but the blood of Jesus atones and continues to atone for our sin. What does happen, however, is that during the transformation process we begin to take on the character qualities of Jesus Christ. People begin to see a little of Jesus in us because we begin to act and think like him. The Holy Spirit continues to provide the power for this transformation because seeing Jesus in another person is part of God's bigger plan to evangelize the world.

God works and communicates through prayer

After the fall and our separation, we must now communicate with God indirectly through prayer.

We know that people lost their

PEOPLE BEGIN TO SEE A LITTLE OF JESUS IN US BECAUSE WE BEGIN TO ACT AND THINK LIKE HIM.

immortality and direct access to God, but the real question is, how much of our original authority over the earth did we also lose? One possibility could be that we have lost all of this authority because we are now under the influence of Satan. However, when you study God's actions after the fall you continue to see that we still play a key role in implementing God's plan on earth. God continues to work through us!

God continues his relationship with people—first with the Patriarchs, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, etc. Later he deals with people through Moses the lawgiver, then he deals through Judges, then Kings, then Prophets, then Apostles, then Christians all the way to us today. One cannot help but notice that throughout the Bible, God is always looking for a person, a family, a race, a nation of people who will obey him and whom he can use to deal with the rest of the people on the earth. He wanted Israel in their day (Deuteronomy 4:5-8), and Christians in our day, to be a light to the world and to show the world the way to God. Adam and Eve were God's "representatives" in the Garden and Christians continue to be his "representatives" today. This is critical in understanding the role of people in unleashing God's power.

Did God change his mind about

WHILE JESUS AND THE CROSS WERE GOD'S PLAN TO UNITE PEOPLE SO THEY CAN LIVE TOGETHER FOR ETERNITY, WE ALSO SEE THAT GOD IS IMPLEMENTING HIS RESTORATION PLAN IN THIS LIFE ON AN INDIVIDUAL BASIS.

our authority when Adam sinned? No, God continued working through us in a way that would lead us to conclude that God continues to honor our authority on the earth. God made the earth as a place for us to inhabit and control—we were not an afterthought to take his place among the living creatures. We still are God's representatives on earth. We need to realize that we still have Adam's authority and use it to ask God to change reality on our earth. Our use of this authority in "asking" God to act is key to "releasing" God to act!

Living in enemy territory

Since Satan is the prince of this world we need to realize that Christians live in enemy territory, even though Jesus has sealed his fate. We are told that we are no longer part of this world, we have been redeemed, bought with a price, and that we will someday live with Christ in heaven. Satan does not like us in his territory because we are waging war against his kingdom. Satan wants to destroy the saints and we are warned that he

WE NEED TO REALIZE THAT WE STILL HAVE ADAM'S AUTHORITY AND USE IT TO ASK GOD TO CHANGE REALITY ON OUR EARTH.

is like a prowling lion seeking whom he may devour. We are also told that we do not contend against flesh and blood, but rather against spiritual powers in high places. Just as God established people with an authority over the earth, he established another authority structure pertaining to the spirit world. God has chosen not to

tell us a great deal about the spirit world, perhaps because we have an inability to understand it. But there is ample scriptural evidence to indicate that there is an immense spiritual battle taking place right up to this time and Christians are engaged in the warfare!

Satan tried to kill Jesus and now he is trying to destroy Christians and keep mankind from the truth (Rev. 12:17). He does this by distracting their attention, lying about the source of happiness, destroying individuals, families, and nations, distorting God's design for humanity in areas of sexuality, family, and a host of other lies and distortions. Jesus described Satan as a liar from the beginning and that there is no good in him.

Given our formidable enemy, God has not abandoned us in enemy territory. In waging this spiritual battle God describes us as his soldiers and tells us that he has equipped us with the necessary weapons to fight the battle. He also promises special protection for us so the enemy cannot overwhelm us (I Corinthians 10:13). Paul in Ephesians 6: 14-19 describes our battle gear.

Our main weapon: prayer

After grounding ourselves in truth, righteous living, and exercising our faith, our main battle weapon is what? Prayer!

Note that Jesus does not leave his disciples on earth in a defensive mode. Quite the contrary. We are told we are on an offensive mission in enemy territory. We are like the green berets parachuted behind the enemy lines. When Simon confessed that

Jesus was the Christ, Jesus acknowledged that God had revealed this truth to him, changed his name to Peter, and told him that upon this rock he would build his church, and the gates of hell would not prevail against it (Matthew 16:18). Some have thought this to mean that Satan would attack the church and our gates would protect us. But this is not the meaning at all. Just the opposite is true: what he is telling us is that the defenses of Satan's kingdom cannot withstand God's people who attack Satan's fortresses by praying and seeking to save the lost.

From the New Testament it is clear that God's plan utilizes Christians as the method for spreading the gospel. God could have placed an angel on every street corner; however, he instead chose to work through people. The great commission in Matthew 28:18-20 is addressed to people. People are to go into the entire world and make disciples; people are to baptize them in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. People are also to teach them to observe all of Christ's commands.

Christians have the responsibility, Christians are the plan, and when we carry out God's plan, Jesus says that he will be with us unto the ends of the earth. Christians need to understand their responsibilities (spreading the gospel and making disciples) as well as their special authority (ability to call on God's power) to wage this battle and carry out Jesus' orders.

Strategies

We have all seen war as it happens

on the evening news. Imagine trying to fight a war if the soldiers on the ground had no control over the air force. What would happen if the air force just decided to bomb indiscriminately with no regard for the ground troops? They could first of all risk harming their own ground troops or they could bomb locations that

THE DEFENSES OF SATAN'S KINGDOM CANNOT WITHSTAND GOD'S PEOPLE WHO ATTACK SATAN'S FORTRESSES BY PRAYING AND SEEKING TO SAVE THE LOST.

have no military value, or the ground troops could become involved in a conflict with the enemy and have no way of calling for help. While the air force may be the most powerful, the ground soldier has the most authority relative to what is happening on the battlefield and winning the war.

Now from a spiritual perspective, we are the ground troops and God is the air force. While God is infinitely more intelligent and capable than any air force, one can see from this analogy why God would give man the authority to unleash his power and resources as we fight the spiritual battles in Satan's territory. If you look at scripture in its entirety, you see God looking for and using people to implement his redemption plan. Implementing God's plan involves praying to him to unleash his power and resources to win the battle. Victory never comes through our strength; it is always God's power that has been channeled through people. God loves to drop the heavy bombs,

but he won't do it unless we give him the authority to do so.

Weak ground troops?

Note that God does not like to have his ground troops too strong. He prefers to keep them weak because then they know who really provides the victory. Remember how God instructed Gideon to prepare for his battle in Judges 7. Remember how God sent support to Hezekiah's troops when they faced the Assyrians in Isaiah 37:36. In fact, God loves to have his people in situations where they can see no way out and then he steps in and gives them the victory. God says his strength is made perfect in our weakness. God wants to ensure that he gets all the glory for his power and resources, and not the ground troops who call for his support. But this does not distract from nor minimize the ground soldier's authority and ability to call for his support.

God's soldiers calling for his support

Scripture repeatedly reports that God desires people to pray for his intervention. The stories of Ahab and

God's will is carried out. God has a will to reconcile humankind unto himself, but we can release his power in our lives and churches to make it a reality in our communities.

Jesus tells us to pray

We live in Satan's world, and Jesus was keenly aware of this. In the Lord's Prayer, Jesus tells us to pray "that things would be done on earth as they are in heaven." Why would Jesus tell us to pray for God's will to be accomplished on earth? Isn't God's will sovereign? Isn't he always in charge? But why would Jesus tell us to pray for something that we know is God's will already? The reason is that God has chosen to work through humankind. Just as he has chosen to spread the gospel person to person, God has chosen to unleash his power through the authority and requests of people. Our natural desire is to do Satan's will. God tells us to pray instead that his will be accomplished on earth as it is in heaven. God wants us to pray so that he can release his power.

In another account Jesus tells us to pray and "ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field (Matthew 9:38)." Isn't it God's will for us to be redeemed? God is all-powerful, all-knowing, sovereign, the ruler over all the earth (even though it is Satan's territory). Why would Jesus tell us to pray that God would send more resources to reach people, the very purpose for Christians being on this earth, if there were not some connection between our prayers and the unleashing of God's resources?

Paul agrees

Paul also seemed to understand this same principle when he told the Thessalonians to pray for the spread of the gospel.

"Finally, brothers and sisters, pray for us that the message of the Lord may spread rapidly and be honored, just as it was with you. (2 Thessalonians 3:1)." ."

Why does Paul tell us to spend time praying for something that we know is God's will already? Doesn't God want the message to spread rapidly and his name to be honored? The answer, of course, is yes, but Paul also understands that our praying for these things unleashes God's power to make it happen.

Daniel knew the power of prayer

In the Old Testament, Daniel had been reading the book of Jeremiah and discovered that Jeremiah had foretold the length of time Israel would be in captivity, 70 years. The time was coming to an end, so you would think that Daniel would rejoice over the imminent return to Jerusalem. However, Daniel had a different response:

"So I turned to the Lord God and pleaded with him in prayer and petition, in fasting, and in sackcloth and ashes (Daniel 9:3)." ."

Daniel's response was to immediately begin earnest prayer because he knew the power of prayer to unleash God's resources. God had been close to Daniel throughout his lifetime and given him wisdom and knowledge from his youth. Daniel's prayer life was also very impressive in

that he was noted to pray to God three times a day—and was even thrown into the lions' den because of his

PAUL ALSO UNDERSTANDS THAT OUR PRAYING FOR THESE THINGS UNLEASHES GOD'S POWER TO MAKE THEM HAPPEN.

prayer life. Not only did he solve the dreams of kings, but God also gave Daniel prophetic visions of what he was going to do in the future that stretched from his day to the end of time. In fact, Daniel was so well-known in heaven that his prayers were answered immediately:

... While I was still in prayer, Gabriel [the archangel], the man I had seen in the earlier vision, came to me in swift flight about the time of the evening sacrifice. He instructed me and said to me, "Daniel, I have now come to give you insight and understanding. As soon as you began to pray, an answer was given, which I have come to tell you, for you are highly esteemed. Therefore, consider the message and understand the vision. (Daniel 9: 21-23)

Based on Daniel's life, one would have to conclude that Daniel understood something about prayer.

So Daniel's immediate response to the good news he read about in Jeremiah concerning the captivity coming to an end was not a time for jubilation for Daniel, but rather an intense call to prayer. Daniel knew that his prayers would release God's power to bring the captivity to an end.

GOD LOVES TO HAVE HIS PEOPLE IN SITUATIONS WHERE THEY CAN SEE NO WAY OUT AND THEN HE STEPS IN AND GIVES THEM THE VICTORY.

Elijah (1 Kings 18), Ezekiel and Israel (Ezekiel 33:11; 22:30-31) and Abraham and Sodom all reveal his intention. While God has the overarching will, it is clear that people have the ability to impact how

Daniel's prayers were obviously successful when King Artaxerxes later sent Nehemiah back to Jerusalem with money and authority to rebuild the walls and the temple. The King even sent back all of the gold items that had been taken from the temple.

"GOD DOES NOTHING ON THE EARTH SAVE IN ANSWER TO BELIEVING PRAYER. . ."

Persisting in prayer

Daniel and other Bible characters give us several examples of our need to persist in prayer. If we take the attitude that prayer is really not necessary because God is all-knowing and all-powerful, then we allow our prayer life to dwindle to a wish list of blessings and an occasional thank you and praise. But if we understand what John Wesley meant when he said, "God does nothing on the earth save in answer to believing prayer," we'll lose a little sleep over that. We will change our lifestyle for that. We will turn off the TV and even miss a meal or two because we understand our role and authority in God's plan for the earth.

The spiritual battle

Even though we may be physically blind to the spirit battlefield (Dan. 10:12-13, Eph. 6:12), Jesus, who knows and sees clearly into the spirit world, gives us several commands about prayer as a weapon to win this battle. Jesus and the New Testament authors do these things for us:

- give us the Lord's prayer as a model
- tell us to be persistent by the parables of the widow and

friend at midnight

- tell us that God knows how to give good gifts
- tell us to ask in faith
- tell us to ask in Jesus's name
- tell us to pray for God to send harvesters
- tell us to pray constantly
- tell us to pray about all things
- tell us to pray for our elders
- tell us to pray for our government officials
- tell us to pray for the sick
- tell us to ask in faith
- tell us to pray for one another
- tell us to pray that our sins may be forgiven
- tell us to pray that the gospel may be spread.

In addition, we are given numerous examples of people who prayed for these things and shown how God answered their prayers.

Conclusions

People were originally given authority over the earth and we still maintain that authority in asking for and receiving God's help. Just as it makes sense for the ground troops to have authority over the air force, God gives Christians a similar authority in asking for his resources. But if the soldiers never call for the air force, they don't benefit from the available air power. If Christians do not pray and call for God's help, they do not benefit from his power. God is still looking for soldiers who will allow him to display his power through them. He is still looking for Christians to stand in the gap, and he still is looking for Christians to wage war against the enemy.

God answers prayers

One of the ways God answers our prayers and releases his power is through the sending of his Holy Spirit into our lives to change us, but also into the changing of our life situations. The Holy Spirit not only convicts people of their sin when we present the gospel message, but he goes before us and prepares their hearts, arranges circumstances, and gives the church a whole arsenal of spiritual gifts that can be used to equip saints for the ministry and bring people to spiritual maturity. While it is beyond the scope of this work, a thorough study of the Holy Spirit will reveal how God often answers our prayers through the power of the Holy Spirit. But if we don't ask Jesus to send the Holy Spirit into our lives, we cut ourselves off from this power source.

A stumbling block

A major stumbling block in accepting the truth concerning prayer is that we tend to evaluate the power of prayer based on our own personal experience. If this is our criteria and we have been asking for the wrong things, then it is no wonder that we have a low opinion concerning the power of prayer. Perhaps the problem is not with God's plan, but with us directly.

What causes fights and quarrels among you? Don't they come from your desires that battle within you? You want something but don't get it. You kill and covet, but you cannot have

Jim Warren is an elder at the Troy, Michigan, Church of Christ. He frequently leads Bible classes. These days, he can most often be found dashing off to Nashville, TN, so that he can dandle his one and only grandson (so far) on his knee.

what you want. You quarrel and fight. You do not have, because you do not ask God. When you ask, you do not receive; because you ask with wrong motives, that you may spend what you get on your pleasures. (James 4:1-3)".

James is saying, the problem is not that help is not available, it is because we are so carnal and selfish that we do not ask for and obtain help to accomplish God's mission. Instead we

IF CHRISTIANS DO NOT PRAY AND CALL FOR GOD'S HELP, THEY DO NOT BENEFIT FROM HIS POWER.

ask for God's help to be used for our own pleasure. Oh, that we could begin to pray that God would change our hearts so we would ask for the things that *he* wants. If we did, God could truly demonstrate the power of prayer for our lives today.

If you really knew that your earnest prayer could change you, your church, your community, your marriage, your children, your job, and empower you for spiritual battle and growth, would you give more time to prayer? Don't just talk about prayer or study prayer, *pray!* If you are having trouble praying, realize that this is the single activity that Satan fears the most. He can deal with us, but he cannot resist the power of God. So pray, pray, and pray some more—and watch God work miracles. ✿



The prayer of a broken heart

Dan Corp

Most Christians desire to grow in prayer. They read books and listen to sermons in order to learn more about the discipline of prayer. Obviously the Bible has served as the primary source for information on prayer for many generations. Perhaps no section has been as helpful as the Book of Psalms.

Within the psalms, we learn about praise, thanksgiving, confession, and petition. Much has been written on those elements of prayer, and we are certainly grateful for these contributions. Yet there is an element of prayer that we find in the psalms that has not received the same attention: Lament. If one were to organize the psalms by type, there would be more psalms of lament than any other kind, yet we talk very little about lament. We are much more comfortable with celebration and thanksgiving than we are with lament. The lament, however, has great value for the church of today.

What is lament?

First, we should try to understand this thing called lament. Simply put, lament is a prayer of disorientation, abandonment, distress, pain and suffering. It is the language of a

believer in pain. It is the cry of the man of God who does not understand. It is the anguished woman of faith who pours out her anger to a God who seems so distant. It is a prayer that makes the present-day listener uncomfortable. The words of lament appear harsh to our modern ears. They rub us the wrong way, so we try to find a way to soften them. The psalmist must be using the poetic language of exaggeration to make a point, we reason. We read the words of lament and walk away asking: "How can we question God? Who are we to challenge his wisdom?" It just sounds so unspiritual.

It makes us uncomfortable

In large part, this discomfort comes from the idea that the language of lament is the language of unbelief. As we look deeper, however, it becomes clear that lament is the cry of faith. These cries flow from a heart that believes in God. The lament comes forth when the events of the present appear incongruous with that faith. It is the language of believers who are living with the tensions of the "in between times." We know that a day of deliverance and salvation is coming. There will be a time when

pain and death are no longer with us, but we do not live in that day! We live in a world of sin, pain, death and suffering. In this world of pain, we proclaim that God loves us, protects us and cares for us. We sing songs of praise that declare our God can do anything. Yet there are times that he does not seem very loving or active. This apparent inactivity of God creates conflict in our hearts. We hold tightly to certain beliefs about God, but what we are experiencing does not line up with those beliefs. So lament is the cry of faith that says "Lord, I want to believe, I want to trust you, but things don't make much sense right now."

Psalm 13: A model of lament

One way to better understand the heart of lament is to look at an example. Psalm 13 is a powerful lament. While the exact setting of this psalm is not known, it is obviously a time of pain and confusion for the writer. Such a setting is one with which all believers can identify.

The Psalmist opens his lament by expressing feelings of pain and loneliness (vs. 1-2). As you read his words, allow yourself to feel his pain. Notice that he holds nothing back as he cries out to the Lord:

*How long, O Lord? Will you forget me forever?
How long will you hide your face from me?
How long must I wrestle with my thoughts
And every day have sorrow in*

*my heart?
How long will my enemy triumph over me?*

The Psalmist feels alone and abandoned. Listen again to his question: "How long, how long, how long, how long?" He is hurting. There is nothing here to indicate that the pain is deserved, but it is real. In his pain he calls out to God, wanting to know how long God will let this go on.

LAMENT TEACHES THAT IT IS ALL RIGHT TO BE OPEN AND HONEST WITH GOD.

You can feel his pain, can't you? Have you ever felt that way? Have you ever wondered if God had forgotten you? Have you ever felt that somehow you got lost in the shuffle? Intellectually you know it is not true. Cognitively you know he is there and that he cares. Yet you feel very alone. That is the cry of this psalm. In his cry, he provides a model of faith. When you feel alone and abandoned, when you think God has let you down, follow the lead of the psalmist. Instead of bottling up your pain and confusion, take it to God. Lament teaches that it is all right to be open and honest with God. You can share your struggles, your questions, your anger, and your pain. The psalmist invites us to weep and wail. He encourages us to cry out to God: "This isn't right. I can't believe you let this happen! How long will you allow me to suffer and hurt? Where is your love? Where is your sense of fairness?"

Not only does the psalmist teach us to open our hearts to God, he also teaches us to seek God's help to understand what is happening (3-4).

*Look on me and answer, O Lord my God.
Give light to my eyes, or I will sleep in death;
My enemy will say, "I have overcome him,"
And my foes will rejoice when I fall.*

Seeking

It is not enough to vocalize our hurt and pain. The psalmist teaches

CRY OUT TO GOD IN YOUR PAIN AND ASK HIM TO HELP YOU SEE WITH GREATER CLARITY.

us to seek understanding. The lament is not simply the cry of the confused, it is the song of the searcher. This is the prayer of one who seeks to understand, to find God hand in the present situation. So cry out to God in your pain and ask him to help you see with greater clarity.

Choosing to trust

Finally, this lament challenges us to choose to believe (vs. 5-6):

*But I will trust in your unfailing love;
My heart rejoices in your salvation
I will sing to the Lord,
for he has been good to me.*

In the midst of the pain and loneliness, the psalmist makes a choice. He could stay in despair and hopelessness, but he chooses to trust

God. He calls upon the unfailing love of Yahweh to uphold and support him during this difficult time. How is such a change in tone possible? There are two important things happening in the heart of the writer.

First, the psalmist readjusts his vision. Instead of focusing on the pain and loneliness, he fixes his gaze upon God. For this psalmist, the circumstances have not changed, but his vision has. As you wrestle with your questions and the uncertainties of the current situation, look to God. The more you focus on the pain, the more you will hurt. The more attention you give to the clouds, the darker the skies will appear. Shift your focus and look to God.

Second, while not stated in the text, the language used by the psalmist indicates that he is reflecting on God's track record. He speaks of God's unfailing love and the fact that God "has been good to me." As we become overwhelmed with confusion, anger, and feelings of abandonment, we would do well to stop and think of God's track record. Remember the times he has delivered you in the past. You may not understand your current situation, and you may not be able to see his hand in what you are experiencing at the moment, so look to the past. Call to your mind those times of strength, the signs of his love and presence. If the fog around you is so dark that you cannot even see those, then take a step farther back and journey to the cross. At the cross we see the sign of God's love that stands for all time. When it appears he has left you, remember the cross. He would not give so much on the

cross just to leave you now!

As you recall his love, as you remember his goodness, you can choose to believe. Even if you still do not understand or see, you too can sing to the Lord, for he has been good.

A personal journey

I have not always realized the value of lament. In fact, it has been a recent discovery, brought about by a specific event: the death of my 34-year-old brother-in-law. His death followed a five year struggle with a brain tumor. After three surgeries, countless tests, and partial paralysis, Vince died in February of last year. As I dealt with that event, I learned to cry out to God in my pain, anger and confusion. In short, I learned what it meant to lament.

I would like to share with you a personal lament that grew out of the sickness and death of my brother-in-law. I read it at his funeral, in hopes of encouraging those who were wrestling with the pain and questions of his sickness and death. It is with that same desire that I share it with you. While the names may not be meaningful to you, I pray that you will identify with the heart of this lament. It is my prayer that it will minister to others in times of crisis.

A personal lament

Father, I am confused. I am hurting. I am not able to comprehend what has happened here. It is not fair that Vince, one so young, with so much potential in your kingdom, be taken from us so soon. I hate what

EVEN THOUGH I WANT ANSWERS, I KNOW THAT I COULD NOT COMPREHEND THEM IF THEY WERE GIVEN. YET I ASK YOU TO GIVE ME SOMETHING. PLEASE GIVE ME SOMETHING.

happened to his body — I am angry that you let this happen. We prayed for healing, but you remained silent. We sought a cure, but none was provided. Why did you not act? Why did you not provide for this, your child?

Father, help me understand. Even as I ask, I know that understanding is not what I need. Even though I want answers, I know that I could not comprehend them if they were given. Yet I ask you to give me something. Please give me *something*.

As I ask, I find you have answered. I seek and you provide. No, you have not provided answers to all my questions. I have received no explanations for this pain. Instead, you are giving something of much greater value. You are giving yourself to me. Now I see things more clearly. I am still confused, still hurting, but I see something previously hidden.

I see now how you have taken this pain and brought good. How you have touched so many. How Vince's life, struggle, and death have brought hope, encouragement, courage, and meaning to hundreds of people. Not only did we change through this, but so did he. Lord, I hate what was happening to his body . . . but I love what was happening to his spirit. As his body grew weaker, his faith grew stronger. As his body failed him you upheld him.

So, Father, now I come to you ... trusting you. Do I like it? No! Do I understand it? No! Do I trust you? Yes. You have moved. You have answered our prayers. You have given the ultimate healing to Vince, you have taken this sick, defective body and given him one that will never fail. You have kept your promise. I believe you hear me now. I trust that you will take care of Sandy, Matt, and Samantha—that you will not forget them nor will you ever leave them alone.

I trust that your comfort will fall over us and be with us. That day by day, you will ease our pain. I trust that as we face the challenge ahead, you will give us the same courage and

strength that you provided for Vince. And I believe that you are victorious. That you will bring us home. That one day we will see Vince again.

In the meantime, calm our fears, ease our pain, and comfort our anxious hearts. Help us to know that you are there . . . that you are here . . . that you will never let us go!

*I trust in your unfailing love
My heart rejoices in you
I will sing to you
For you have been so good to me.*

(Ps. 13)

Amen. ✿

Dan Corp and his wife, Carolyn, minister to the Port Huron, Michigan, Church of Christ. They have two girls, 5 and 2. Dan is also an adjunct instructor at Rochester College.



BENDING THE TWIG: CHRISTIAN PARENTING ISSUES

Teaching Manners

Laquita and Elton Higgs

Rudeness, coarseness, and open expressions of hostility have become too frequent in our society. Some time ago, I observed an adult having a temper tantrum in an airport. It was quite a scene, as the well-dressed man angrily flung papers, his coat, and his briefcase about. He may have

had good reason to be upset, but his marked incivility was shocking—and probably he was wanting to shock. The trouble with using the shock tactic is that one must keep going to lower levels to shock, so that becomes a dead end. A better course is to use the oil of courtesy to smooth social relationships, even with difficult airline clerks.

“Your manners are always under examination,” wrote Ralph Waldo Emerson. I certainly formed my opinion of that man in the airport, and it was all negative. A friend was telling us about some students in her college class whose behavior was disruptive. As she got to know them better, she concluded that those students were well-meaning, but had just never been taught the rudiments of polite conduct. Their lack of social skills will put them at a distinct disadvantage as they go out as teachers into the work world—they will be a poor model for their students and will reflect poorly upon the college which trained them—so the college is instituting a mandatory course which will include instruction in basic good manners. How sad for a child to grow up without that instruction, and yet it happens.

We Christian parents should be concerned to teach our children good habits, whether it's brushing teeth, praying regularly, or learning to be courteous. Forming habits doesn't happen overnight, but takes persistence and determination. I often feel like a parrot as I keep reminding our five-year-old to say “please” and “thank you.” Yes, social niceties can be artificial. In fact, Rachel often lacks sincerity when using those polite words. Yet, we continue to insist that she do it, and occasionally we are rewarded by hearing genuine expressions of politeness.

Christianity and courtesy

As soon as a toddler begins to talk, he or she can begin learning to say

“please” and “thank you.” You may think it is of small consequence, or that it is something that can wait until later. Not so. Courtesy begins to move a child out of his self-centered world. You are teaching your child important social skills, but you are also laying a foundation for many Christian virtues. This was impressed

YOU ARE TEACHING YOUR CHILD IMPORTANT SOCIAL SKILLS, BUT YOU ARE ALSO LAYING A FOUNDATION FOR MANY CHRISTIAN VIRTUES.

upon me at a recent wedding when I heard our minister read to the beautifully-dressed bride and groom about what is truly proper dress. Paul's letter to the Colossians describes the proper garments for God's people: “compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, patience. Be forbearing with one another, and forgiving . . . To crown all, there must be love” (3:12-14, NEB). I was struck with how many of those qualities begin with good manners. For example, using the word “please” promotes patience; it signifies humility since we are acknowledging that we need someone else to help us; it shows respect for another's effort and time and, therefore, shows kindness and gentleness. Saying “I'm sorry” is a first step toward forgiveness.

Jesus himself taught the importance of being thankful. I know of one mother who insists that her son not only say “thank you” for a gift, but that he must call the giver by name. It's a small thing, but it is teaching that little boy a big lesson—that each

person has value, which is the beginning of love and compassion. You teach more than you know when you teach a child that, as Sandi Patti sings, "In matters of manners, manners really matter, no matter

AT THE SAME TIME WE WANT TO TEACH HER TO HONOR US AS HER PARENTS. NOT FOR OUR OWN EGO, BUT BECAUSE IT IS THE FIFTH COMMANDMENT.

where you go or what you do" (CD, The Friendship Company, "Open for Business," Word, Inc.). That also includes good manners within the family.

Courtesy is more than just the right words—polite words can be spoken unkindly. Elton and I insist that Rachel use a respectful tone of voice and manner when speaking to us. We hope that she will always feel free to tell us anything, even when she is angry with us, but at the same time we want to teach her to honor us as her parents. Not for our own ego, but because it is the fifth commandment. That will also help her to respect others and God himself.

Keep persisting in teaching those manners. You are helping your children to wear the garment that will make them beautiful enough to meet their Lord someday.

Different learners

Other matters: For parents of "bright children who learn differently," Kristine Davidson of Trenton, Michigan, tells us about the Learning/Language Differences Prayer Network. "The student who learns differently usually comes to our attention

because of his poor academic performance in the classroom, usually between the first and fourth grade" (Welcome Bulletin #4). Having a learning disabled child can be very frustrating for the parents, for in trying to do what is best for the child, they too frequently meet a lack of understanding and even opposition from educators. The prayer network has been set up by the well-qualified Dr. John Blanchard, who directs the non-profit Wayside Language Center, 12721 N.E. 101st Place, Kirkland, WA 98033 (telephone: 425-822-2772), from which parents can receive counsel and referral to sources of help. By e-mail (<JBlanchard2@compuserve.com>), you can join the network of praying parents; you will be assigned a prayer partner and receive a monthly prayer bulletin. There's no better way to help your child than to pray and to get support and prayers from others who understand.

Books and other parenting tools

It has been around for awhile, but *The Blessing* by Gary Smalley and John Trent (Pocket Books, 1990, \$6.99) continues to be a good reminder to parents of how important it is to affirm our children. The authors discuss the blessing which was given to children in Bible times and suggest that we, too, need to give our children words of encouragement, love and acceptance, to let them know that they are of great worth. A part of the biblical blessing was a meaningful touch and picturing a special future for the person being

blessed. Smalley and Trent show how these can have many positive effects on a child, and they warn of the negative consequences resulting from a lack of such affirmation. The parents need to demonstrate that they are actively committed to the welfare of the child and will do all in their power to make the blessing come true. Such commitment might result in doing without two incomes so that one parent can stay home with the children, or disciplining a child when it would be easier to skip it, or taking the time to listen carefully and getting to know that child. Most of all, children must hear us commit them to the Lord. The book concludes with suggestions for having a special family time of blessing for children.

And now a review by Elton on a good children's CD-ROM disk. *The Play and Learn Children's Bible*, on a CD-ROM compatible with both PC's and Macs (put together by story teller V. Gilbert Beers, illustrator Carol Boerke, and musician Ellen Elwell; Chariot Media, 1996), is an entertaining variety of Bible stories, activities, and songs with which Rachel and I have spent many good hours together. Rachel is now able (at five years old) to use the CD-ROM on her own (with a little "bail-out" help once in a while). It is divided into four basic units: (1) 50 Bible Stories, ranging from Genesis to the Book of Acts, which are the foundation of the program; (2) the Values section, moral applications based on the Bible


Stories; (3) the Game Room, in which there are a Coloring Book (consisting of several pictures also based on the Bible Stories), puzzles and mazes, and alphabet and number exercises; and finally, (4) the Music Box, which has at least a dozen children's songs and choruses, mostly religious but with some secular tunes as well.

SOME ARE A BIT ZANY, BUT THAT NEVER SEEMS TO BOTHER RACHEL.

The basic component, the Bible Stories, has good texts, with simultaneous audio narration and words on the screen so that the child can improve reading skills while enjoying the stories. Each illustrative picture has a few spots that can be clicked on to produce some activity by a character or an animal in the picture (such as someone making a face, or a whale spouting), and the same is true of some of the coloring pictures. The only reservation I have is that the actions usually don't have any relevance to the story, and some are a bit zany, but that never seems to bother Rachel. All in all, this interactive CD-ROM is a good educational tool, both for gaining biblical knowledge and for developing cognitive skills. It is well worth the \$20 or so that it costs in most catalogs and stores.

Send your suggestions to us at 9 Adams Lane, Dearborn, MI 48120, or at <Ehiggs@umich.edu>. ❀

Professors Laquita and Elton Higgs teach English at the University of Michigan and are longtime members of the Integrity board. They are about to take daughter Rachel on her first trip to England this summer.



Integrity is
Thirty Years Old—
Time to Celebrate!


Join us to to celebrate God's faithfulness!
After thirty years of the ministry of *Integrity*, we're inviting our
friends and readers to join us in Troy, Michigan,
for a special birthday celebration.

Friday evening, September 1, 2000
All day Saturday, September 2, 2000
Sunday morning, September 3, 2000

Troy Church of Christ
800 Trombley
Troy, Michigan
(248) 689-4277

We are excited to meet you,
and we hope you can join us for this special weekend of fellowship,
learning, and, best of all, a time of worship together.

**If you plan to attend all or just part
of the festivities, please return
the bright green RSVP card
in this issue and return it by
August 1, 2000.**



**Hotel space is available. Please contact Curtis
McClane at (248) 689-4277 for details.**

SCHEDULE OF EVENTS



Friday evening, 9/1/00
7:30 pm

Enjoy meeting the *Integrity* staff, fellow readers
and writers, and listen to Dr. Joseph Jones,
former *Integrity* editor, open our weekend with
words of remembrance and wisdom. A light
reception will follow.

Saturday morning, 9/2/00
9:00 am - 12:00 noon

Join us for a continental breakfast, followed by
speakers Hoy Ledbetter and Leroy Garrett.

Saturday afternoon, 9/2/00
12:00 noon - 6:00 pm

Lunch is on your own—share it with old or new
friends you've encountered so far this weekend.
This will be followed by an optional outing to the
Troy Historical Museum (a hidden treasure). You
may also choose to spend the afternoon resting
or visit with friends.

Saturday evening, 9/2/00
6:00 pm - 9:00 pm

Outdoor barbecue on the grounds of the Troy
Church of Christ, followed by a very special
worship time, and speaker Diane Kilmer.

Sunday morning, 9/3/00
9:30 am - 1:00 pm

Join us for Sunday School, worship time with
special guest speaker Leroy Garrett, and then be
our special guest as we wrap up the weekend
with a good old-fashioned potluck dinner.

SPEAKERS

Joseph F. Jones

Dr. Joseph F. Jones has ministered to the
Troy Church of Christ in Troy, Michigan, for
over 31 years. He holds doctorates in higher
education and pastoral counseling. He has
worked and written for *Integrity* journal
since its earliest years and served as the
president of the board for more than 11
years.

LeRoy Garrett

LeRoy Garrett holds a Ph.D. in the
Philosophy of Religion from Harvard
University. He was the editor and publisher
of *Restoration Review* for several decades
and has written, among other things, *The
Stone-Campbell Movement*. He and his
wife, Ouida, send out an occasional
newsletter called *Once More with Love*, and
they still travel widely to speaking
engagements.

Diane G. H. Kilmer

Diane Kilmer co-edited *Integrity* with her
husband, Bruce, for eleven years. She is a
certified Spiritual Director, frequent
speaker, and a freelance writer. She
continues to write frequently for *Integrity*
and to serve as an active Board member.
She lives and worships in Mount Pleasant,
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Hoy Ledbetter

Hoy Ledbetter is the founding Editor-in-Chief
of *Integrity*, serving in that capacity for 15
years, 1969-1984. He was educated at
Freed-Hardeman University, the University of
Michigan-Flint, and Wayne State University.
Since leaving Michigan, he has worked with
churches in Georgia, including the cities of
Atlanta, Albany, and now Rome.



Praying in the Spirit

Diane G. H. Kilmer

In 1995 my young friend Toby, a high school student and member of my church, was off on an adventure to Africa for three weeks, and I had offered to pray for him while he was gone. Toby was one of two American high school students selected by World Vision, the Christian international hunger relief organization, to visit World Vision projects in Ethiopia and Kenya. Before Toby left, he gave me a short list of concerns and hopes he had regarding the trip, and I intended to pray for his list every day he was gone.

One day while Toby was on his trip, I was sitting in my bedroom, quietly offering out loud each item on Toby's list to the Lord in prayer. Suddenly a sentence came into my head, strong and clear, "Toby is hurting." I stopped speaking in mid-sentence, reflexively raised my head up (as if that would help me hear better,) and asked, "Toby is hurting? Is that you, Lord?"

My chest suddenly contracted in fear for him, but immediately the scripture in II Timothy 1:7 came to my mind: "For God did not give us a spirit of fear," which quickly countered my anxiety. My mind reasoned: if this information about Toby is from God, then I will pray for

Toby about this. But if it's my own imagination or coming from the Deceiver, I will give it all to God in prayer anyway, since it is he who can bring this all to good.

So I began to pray for a hurting Toby. I wondered if he was hurting physically or in his spirit, and the idea came to my mind to pray for him in this way: that God help him to not be afraid to know, but not be overwhelmed by the knowledge. I wrote this down in my prayer journal beside me, then prayed it. Each day from then on I added this request to Toby's prayer list.

A few days after Toby arrived home from his trip, we got together to talk about his adventure. I had asked him if he would bring along the prayer journal he had told me he planned to keep while in Africa. During that time of sharing around the dinner table, I mentioned to Toby that something unusual had occurred while I was praying for him on July 25. I told him that I thought the Lord had actually told me that he was hurting somehow. I read to him the prayer words that had come to my mind, then asked if he would check his journal to see what was happening to him at that time. Toby turned the pages of his journal to that date's entry, and suddenly looked stunned. The page

was empty.

"I know exactly what happened that day," Toby said. "I was so overwhelmed in my room that night that I couldn't even pray, much less write in my journal." Then Toby described what had occurred.

What happened that day

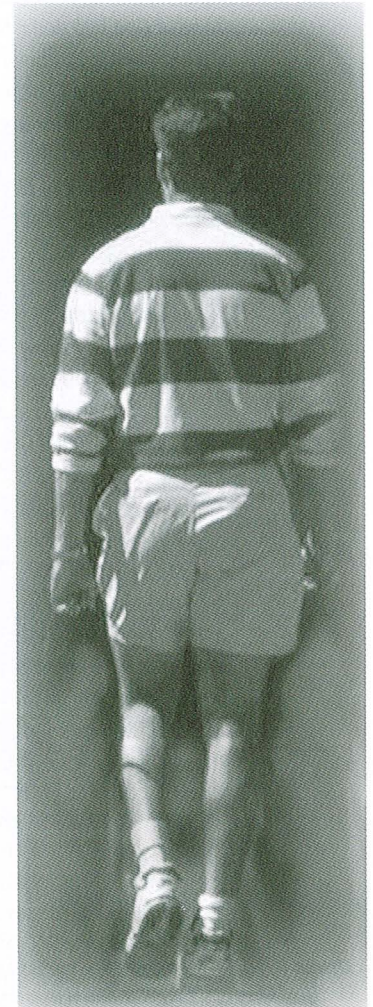
After several days of orientation and travel, July 25 was the day that the World Vision group and CNN crew actually arrived at the first project on their trip—the Antsokia Valley Food Distribution Center in Ethiopia. Toby spent the day on the grounds of the Center surrounded by hundreds of smiling, chattering Ethiopian children. He described to me how impressed he was by the joy of these children, who had little or no material possessions. He'd brought a soccer ball along with him and kicked it around with the kids; taught them thumb-wrestling; and generally enjoyed their company. One 11-year-old Ethiopian boy spoke English, and cheerfully served as Toby's self-appointed translator the entire day.

That evening, as Toby was preparing to leave and the other travelers were already climbing into the van to go back to the World Vision compound, Toby noticed that the boy translator was no longer smiling. Instead, the boy's eyes took a long look at Toby's t-shirt, traveled down to his own ragged covering, then moved back up to meet Toby's eyes. Quietly, hesitantly, the boy asked Toby if he could have the shirt Toby was wearing.

Toby didn't know what to say or what to do, he told me. He was

certain the shirt the boy was wearing was the only one he owned. Should Toby go shirtless for the rest of the day until he got back to his well-stocked luggage? In the confusion and time pressure of the moment, he simply raised his hands palms up in a gesture of helplessness, feeling very awkward as he turned and walked to the waiting van.

By the time Toby got back to his room that night all he could do was lie on his cot and cry. He said that he felt he had betrayed and disappointed his Savior, as well as the child, and he felt overwhelmed with regret over his response to the boy's request. There was no way he could change that moment in time. Toby was grief-stricken, and that



night he could not pray. The next morning he was somehow able to get up and continue the travel plans, despite his sorrow. After Toby had described to me that sad day in July,

PAYING ATTENTION LIKE THIS TO THE SPIRIT OF GOD LIVING WITHIN ME TAKES PRACTICE, I'VE FOUND, AND SOME DAYS I'M MORE FOCUSED THAN OTHERS

we sat quietly, our prayer journals laid open on the table as silent witnesses to what God had done. Now I knew for sure that it had been the Spirit's voice interrupting my petitions. I had heard of this connecting work of the Spirit, had actually been on the recipient's end of it. But for me it was the first time God had spoken an actual sentence to me while I was interceding in prayer for another. I could only conclude that Jesus desired for me to pray with up-to-date understanding; the Spirit had heard me praying, and had made a way for me to be involved in God's own specific concerns for Toby. These thoughts were humbling for me; at the same time I felt "included" and useful. I also felt joy.

Toby was speechless. His expression of wide-eyed wonder spoke what he could not yet put into words. Recently he told me that that incident five years ago was the first time he had ever experienced first

hand how God uses his people to work for one another through prayer.

"I was in Africa; you were here [in Mt. Pleasant, Michigan]. Yet God's Spirit brought us together as a team," he said. Consequently, Toby said, he takes requesting prayer from others more seriously, especially when he is faced with special circumstances or decisions. Asking for prayer support is now neither an option, nor an afterthought.

As for me, my prayer life has never been the same. Although I still present informal prayer lists to God at times, my prayer time with God also includes silence for listening and space for interaction. Sometimes, but not always, the Spirit will give me a one-word or brief-phrase insight as to how to pray about a given concern. Paying attention like this to the Spirit of God living within me takes practice, I've found, and some days I'm more focused than others—which is probably why the apostle Paul wrote encouraging words regarding this important way of serving God and each other:

Pray in the Spirit at all times in every prayer and supplication. To that end keep alert and always persevere in supplication for all the saints [Eph. 6:18]. ✿

Diane G. H. Kilmer co-edited *Integrity* with her husband, Bruce, for over ten years. She is a certified Spiritual Director and a freelance writer. The Kilmers live in Mount Pleasant, Michigan.



BOOK REVIEW

Fresh Wind, Fresh Fire

Reviewed by Bruce Bryant

Fresh Wind, Fresh Fire

Jim Cymbala

(1997, Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, 188 pages, 0-310-21188-3)

Carol and I had frankly admitted to each other that unless God broke through, the Brooklyn Tabernacle was doomed. We couldn't finesse it along. We couldn't organize and market and program our way out. The embarrassing truth was that sometimes even I didn't want to show up for a service—that's how bad it was.

We had to have a visitation of the Holy Spirit or bust.

"Lord, I have no idea how to be a successful pastor," I prayed softly out there on the water. "I haven't been trained. All I know is that Carol and I are working in the middle of New York City, with people dying on every side, overdosing from heroin, consumed by materialism, and all the rest. If the gospel is so powerful . . ."

I couldn't finish the sentence. Tears choked me. Fortunately, the others on the boat were too far away to notice as they studied their lines in the blue-green water.

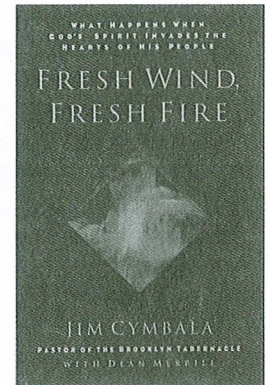
Then quietly but forcefully, in words heard not with my ear but

deep within my spirit, I sensed God speaking:

If you and your wife will lead my people to pray and call upon my name, you will never lack for something fresh to preach. I will supply all the money that's needed, both for the church and for your family, and you will never have a building large enough to contain the crowds I will send in response.

(pp 24-25)

A gifted basketball player with no formal theological training, Jim Cymbala intended to pursue a career as a basketball coach, but as you'll discover early in *Fresh Wind, Fresh Fire*, God had other plans for him. Through his father-in-law, God led him to Brooklyn, New York, to pastor the small and desperate Brooklyn Tabernacle.



Grappling with the myriad problems of city life and never far from bankruptcy, this congregation grew very slowly but, while successfully facing several challenges, never seemed to really get off the ground. Poverty, urban decay, and hopelessness

GOD EXPANDED THE CHURCH FAR BEYOND ANYONE'S EXPECTATIONS, BOTH NUMERICALLY AND SPIRITUALLY,

exerted pressures both inside and outside the church walls. In the midst of these dreary circumstances, Cymbala developed a debilitating cough, so his father-in-law treated him to a fishing trip in the Gulf of Mexico as therapy. Looking out over the sea, but still intensely aware of the problems at home, Cymbala spoke the

MY POWER IS
MADE PERFECT
in weakness
II CORINTHIANS 12:9

preceding prayer and received the response that followed.

Throughout *Fresh Wind, Fresh Fire*, Cymbala chronicles the path of the Brooklyn Tabernacle as God followed through on the promise He made out on the water. The church did learn to pray and call on His name, in their Sunday worship services, and in weekly Tuesday night prayer meetings. God expanded the church far beyond anyone's expecta-

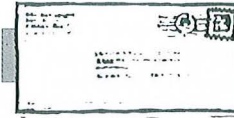
tions, both numerically and spiritually, leading thousands of lost urban souls to it, working miracles in their midst, and literally fulfilling his promise that they'd never have a building large enough.

A recurring theme in *Fresh Wind, Fresh Fire* is the futility of trying to execute human-devised programs to try to replace the work of the Holy Spirit. Cymbala stresses the need to simply let God do the leading, and to genuinely and honestly follow the examples and commandments in the Bible to accomplish His will. Interspersed among the many teachings are examples of human lives freed from the bondage and the destructive power of sin. These include drug addicts, demoniacs, prostitutes, transvestites, and even

Cymbala's own daughter, who had succumbed to the temptations surrounding her and strayed from her family and from God.

I've discussed this awe-inspiring book with many brothers and sisters, and to a person, every one has said something along the lines of, "That's what I want for our church. Why can't we do that?" Why, indeed? In this short book (under 200 pages), Cymbala reaches far beyond the Brooklyn Tabernacle to remind Christians everywhere of our basic need to call to him. ❁

Bruce Bryant is Integrity's web editor. He is also an automotive engineer. He and his family worship at the Heritage Church of Christ in Clawson, Michigan.



Praying your way through a church split

Elton Higgs

Recently Elton Higgs, a member of *Integrity's* Board of Directors, received a letter from his niece concerning a situation developing in her congregation that threatens to split them. Although the issue in her case concerns the validity and use of so-called "charismatic gifts," such tensions can be and have been experienced elsewhere in regard to other matters of faith and practice, and Elton's reply can be seen as applicable to a broad range of topics of disagreement. The emphasis on prayer in his reply has obvious relevance to this issue of *Integrity*: Elton has edited his niece's question and his reply so that it can be shared with our readers.

Theresa's question, with a paraphrased sentence in brackets:
 "We have been praying for over 3 years for the power of God to come into our body, where we see marriages restored, addictions being broken, deliverances, healings, etc. . . . [But some people have been touched by God's power in ways that make others uncomfortable.] What do you think will be the eventual outcome? With such extremes, Church of Christ conservatives and charismatics both in one congregation, how can this work? This is a very deep concern for me. I love my church body very much."

Dear Theresa,

This is a situation which only God and His Spirit can resolve, of course, and that means submission of all concerned, first of all together to God, and then to each other. Reread Eph. 5:18-21. Verse 19 is, of course, one of the "old chestnuts" of the Church

of Christ to support non-instrumental music in the church services, but the whole context of this passage emphasizes living in the Spirit and being alert to the kind of relationships brought about by focusing on God, in humility, praise, and thanksgiving, rather than insisting on individual "rights." People who are drunk on the Spirit of God (in contrast to those who are drunk on alcohol) do not focus on their own righteousness and spiritual superiority, but rather (as in v. 21) they "submit to one another," because their experience of the Spirit creates the security that enables them to submit without the fear that their submission will be taken advantage of. Taking this view of the whole chapter does a lot to explain the admonition to wives to submit to their husbands; this submission is not because all husbands are worthy to be submitted to, but because submission through the Spirit to another human being (especially one who is also a

child of God) is always an outgrowth of first submitting to God, and having the security of knowing that God is going to manifest His power in the “weakness” of our submission to one another. It can’t be overemphasized that, in the spiritual realm, the strong person is the one who is willing to step out in faith on the principle that the power of God is most gloriously manifested in servanthood. So the spiritually mature are precisely those who are least insistent on defining themselves that way, whose trust in God and love for their brothers and sisters enable them to rest securely in the servant mode, without fear that somehow this isn’t aggressive enough to accomplish God’s purposes. (It need hardly be said that this godly mindset is incompatible with self-righteously setting up non-discussable and non-negotiable positions.)

IN OTHER WORDS, WHEN CONFLICTS BETWEEN US SEEM UNRESOLVABLE, IT’S TIME TO QUIT TALKING TO EACH OTHER AND START TALKING TOGETHER TO GOD.

How does this work?

Well, you say, that all sounds good, but how does it work out practically in our situation? I won’t presume to prescribe specifically what you or other people ought to do, but here are some principles of action that might be helpful to consider. First of all, it is essential that all the congregation (and any subsets of the

congregation that are in obvious conflict) be brought together in prayer, humbling themselves in common before God (being on their knees is a good physical expression of it) and asking Him to reveal what course ought to be taken that will best glorify Him and serve the whole Body of Christ. If people focus together on God, it’s a lot harder to focus on each other and thereby lapse into being indignant about each other’s faults. If we lay ourselves open before God together, really believing that any comparisons or contrasts between ourselves fade into insignificance in light of our common insufficiency before Him, then we can become quiet enough to hear what He has to say to us. In other words, when conflicts between us seem unresolvable, it’s time to quit talking to each other and start talking together to God.

What the elders have to do

Secondly, if your elders are truly God’s leaders, then this is the time for the congregation to rely on them in a special way to be discerners of and spokespersons for the will of God. There will have to be a special unity among these leaders, coupled with divine wisdom and a clear exempling of the spirit of servanthood in Christ. (A person who has observed a lot of church strife and is a consultant on church growth has made the significant comment that he has never seen a church split unless the elders are split first.) They should pray by themselves, with other spiritual leaders, and with the whole

congregation; and the prayer of the whole congregation should be that God will speak especially through the appointed leaders.

Avoiding “winners” and “losers”

Thirdly, even after all of this, and after there develops a kind of congregational consensus on what God’s will is for the whole body, great attention has to be paid to avoiding any sense of there being “winners” and “losers.” That’s what causes splits. Some people may be uncomfortable enough with changes that are taking place that they need to go somewhere else to worship. But if the identity of factions has been melted down by love for God and for each other, even these departures, though they may cause sadness and are not necessary, can take place without a loss of fellowship, and without judgmental feelings about each other that make the separation spiritual as well as physical.

What this all means

I would sum up by emphasizing that the problems in your congregation, according to your account, can be construed as an answer to long-standing prayers that the Holy Spirit manifest himself in power in the body of which you are a part. The answer to such a prayer does not come without a radical shift in people’s perception of what it means to serve God. For some, it will mean that they have to accept the Spirit’s introduc-

tion of elements that they are not comfortable with (after all, being filled with the Spirit is likened to

IF THE IDENTITY OF FACTIONS HAS BEEN MELTED DOWN BY LOVE FOR GOD AND FOR EACH OTHER, EVEN THESE DEPARTURES, THOUGH THEY MAY CAUSE SADNESS AND ARE NOT NECESSARY, CAN TAKE PLACE WITHOUT A LOSS OF FELLOWSHIP, AND WITHOUT JUDGMENTAL FEELINGS ABOUT EACH OTHER THAT MAKE THE SEPARATION SPIRITUAL AS WELL AS PHYSICAL.

drunkenness); for others, it will mean that they have to accept that God is much more compassionate toward the problems of the “stick-in-the-muds” than they are. What is in common between these two kinds of adjustment is the necessary acceptance of God’s being more concerned with the Body’s becoming like Christ than He is with preserving anybody’s comfort zone. All of us together need to be open to being made gloriously “uncomfortable” and dependent on God, so that He can move us together toward what He knows can be accomplished through weak people made strong—and made one—through His power.

May God turn your weaknesses, individually and together, into His strength.

Your loving uncle and brother in Christ,

Elton ❁

Elton Higgs is an elder at the Trenton, Michigan, Church of Christ.



The practice of unceasing prayer

Nancy McClane

I have felt God prompting me to share a testimony of my own spiritual awakening and deeper understanding of what it means to pray without ceasing. When I try in my own finite way to understand what I am to God, how He blessed me with every spiritual blessing, how He chose me, and in love adopted me in Christ to be totally forgiven of every sin, I realize God wants me in a way that demands my constant, unceasing, intimate focus on him. He wants my close, honest communication with him to continue throughout every day and in every circumstance.

Before I came to realize how much He loved me and wanted me to walk close to him and communicate with him unceasingly, I lived my life for the most part by my own reason and in my own strength with such futile efforts at spiritual growth that I was without dynamic power and awesome blessings. Now I see that after my conversion to Christ even though my spiritual growth has been a tremendous blessing to my life I had never let myself be completely surrendered to him.

I was a blood-bought Christian, sealed with the Spirit of promise but I was still very needy and blind. We are all needy people and until we acknowledge on a deeper level that

we are much too impotent and unwise to live the Christian life in our own strength we are setting ourselves up for ineffective lives of failure.

Spiritual Alzheimer's

God cannot do great things in our lives until we are broken and die to our own self-effort. I couldn't see my own situation at this time. I truly thought I was doing my best to live as God wanted me to, but in reality I was trying to have it both ways. I was following Christ on my own terms being aware of him only at certain times and being surrendered to him only when I experienced deep need. I never really gave him total possession of my heart, mind and soul. I was exhibiting a terrible case of spiritual Alzheimer's disease brought on by my own lack of response to him. I was living in a daze of spiritual dementia. I knew God and yet I didn't. I was in Christ yet unable to enjoy all of his spiritual blessings.

That's when God loved me enough to take action. He brought about an awareness of him so wonderful and so real that it has led to my spiritual awakening.

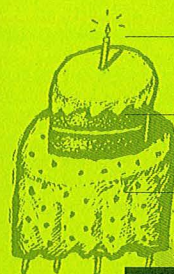
Sometimes God has to make the first move when we get ourselves so off course.

God ordained suffering as an opportunity for our growth in so

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many vital areas of faith. We cannot know what trust means unless we live through experiences in which the Lord is all we have to hold on to. Then can we realize how a life totally surrendered to him in adoration obedience, and ceaseless prayer can subdue every fear and bring about victorious peace and joy.

What happened to me

My experience started after God stepped in and brought about a series of life changes that at the time seemed totally normal to me. My family moved to a different, very affluent urban area. My daughter left for Harding University and my aging mother needed to move and get settled in a new living arrangement.

I was getting ready for bed one night and out of the blue I had a severe panic attack (with symptoms of rapid heart rate, dizziness, perspiring, etc.). I have always seen myself as a strong, positive Christian, so this seemed to be an unexplained attack of spiritual warfare and the fear of the panic itself brought on a situation of spiraling fear, which opened me up to Satan's biggest weapons. In one night, my normal fears went from slight anxiety and agitation over the future events to fright, dread, and panic so irrational and out of proportion to the actual danger, that it began to interfere with my normal life.

What followed was a trial so severe and a time of suffering so painful that I couldn't fix it any way I tried. Everything I counted on to make my life happy and comfortable was taken from me. My health, my peaceful sleep, the enjoyment I used to have in

life's simple pleasures, were totally gone. Fear had control of me and worst of all, when I turned to my faith for deliverance, God seemed to be gone. Satan had me right where he wanted me, but God's timing is so perfect.

Often God's ways of working in our lives cannot be perceived or appreciated until the suffering, brokenness, and surrender are

MY HEART KNEW GOD WAS STILL THERE, LOVING ME, BUT I COULDN'T SEE HOW HE WAS GOING TO USE THIS AWFUL EXPERIENCE FOR GOOD IN MY LIFE.

behind us and we have time to process the dynamic spiritual changes we have experienced. Actually, my heart knew God was still there, loving me, but I couldn't see how he was going to use this awful experience for good in my life.

There are no words for the dark emotions I experienced during this time of unspeakable fear. I constantly cried out to God during this time of testing. "Save me!" "Help me!" "Where are you, Lord?" Although my faith in him and his power to deliver me never wavered, my emotions were totally controlled by fear and that is a place of terrible torment.

My journey out of this nightmare began with the loving of a dear friend who had been through this same suffering. I asked for prayers from the church as well as from every Christian friend and acquaintance I could think of. I was very open about my "anxiety" and I listened to much advice and read many books. Then I got down on my knees before God

and confessed that I couldn't solve any of this on my own. The power of God's love and the prayers of my brothers and sisters in Christ began to mend my hurting soul.

God uses suffering

It was at this time and because of this suffering in my life that I began a journey that God has used to totally transform my spiritual health. God performed a work in my heart that has been totally miraculous. I wish I

I KNOW WE CAN HAVE VICTORY OVER SIN IN OUR LIVES THROUGH THE POWER OF GOD'S SPIRIT IN US!

had time to share all the insights and joyful discoveries about God's love that I have come to know. They are the richest treasures I have ever experienced in my life. My prayer is that everyone can find this treasure.

Unceasing prayer means victory

One of the greatest lessons I have learned through all of this testing is how unceasing prayer and focus on God can give me victory in spiritual warfare. I used to see myself as defeated in spiritual battles. I was like a disoriented victim, down on my knees taking blow after blow with no power to defeat the attacker. Satan knew all of my weakest areas—evil pride and envy, not to mention all of the others!

Now the time I take to prepare for spiritual battle is bathed in humble, submissive prayer and focuses on God's victory for me through Jesus Christ. This gives me vision of tremendous power and strength. I see myself as a strong warrior totally protected by every vital piece of spiritual armor I need to fight through the battles on to victory. I know we can have victory over sin in our lives through the power of God's spirit in us! The victory is the Lord's. Our hope is secure!

Because of my suffering I have come to understand my place in God's heart and in turn I want to give every bit of my heart, mind, and soul to him. When I wake up in the middle of the night I no longer lie awake paralyzed in fear; instead, I start to pray and a warm, golden peace wraps me in God's presence. During the day I praise God and talk to him like my dearest friend. I tell him every little concern. I worry about nothing. I pray about everything. I want him to find a lovely place to dwell in my heart forever. Time spent with him is the purest, richest time on earth. I want my whole life to be in constant communion with him and everything I do to be for him.

If I keep this kind of love God has put in my heart I will never fear again. Perhaps next time God won't have to take such severe steps to teach me that turning to him with a commitment to unceasing prayer can conquer other demons in my life as well. ❀

Nancy McClane is a member of the Integrity Board, and an artist and teacher. She and her husband, Curtis, minister to the Troy Church of Christ in Troy, Michigan.



COMMUNION MEDITATION

After the children of Israel had sinned grievously against God by building and worshipping the golden calf at the very foot of Mount Sinai, the Lord told Moses that He would no longer be in the midst of the people as they continued their journey to the Promised Land, lest the righteous Presence of God destroy them in their sinfulness (Ex. 33:3).

Herein we see a paradox: our need for the Presence of God is canceled out, as it were, by the danger of having it. However, Moses entreated God, "If your Presence does not go with us, do not send us up from here" (Ex. 33:15). Even though the broken covenant was reestablished by Moses's second encounter with God to receive and convey the tables of the Law, the people were not able to bear even the reflected Glory of God as it shone from Moses's face after he had been up on the mountain (Ex. 34:29-35).

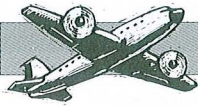
Later, after the tabernacle had been created, the High Priest was permitted to enter once a year into the Most Holy Place, where the ark of the covenant was kept, to make atonement with blood for the sins of the people (Lev. 16, Heb. 9). But he was to enter the Most Holy Place with great caution and reverence, symbolically shielded by the smoke of the incense, because it was there that

the ark of the covenant and its cover, known as the Mercy Seat, formed the locus of God's Presence with Israel.

It was only with the sacrifice of Jesus that God's people as a whole were enabled to experience the Presence of God without being destroyed by it. The book of Hebrews tells us that Jesus "entered the Most Holy Place once for all . . . now to appear for us in God's Presence" (Heb. 9:12, 24). Consequently, we who have been redeemed by Christ "can approach the throne of grace with confidence" (Heb. 5:16) and stand by the Son's protection in the Presence of God.

When Jesus instituted the Lord's Supper, he foreshadowed his death, by which the veil in the Temple between the Holy Place and the Most Holy Place was torn in two, opening the way for all of us to stand—with reverence, but without fear—in the Presence of God, along with the resurrected and glorified Jesus himself. And in partaking of the bread and wine together, we are celebrating being in the Presence of God, with Jesus in our midst uniting us around his sacrifice that ratified the New Covenant. We are, individually and as a body, the temple of the Holy Spirit. As we ingest these physical elements, may we be awed and humbled by the tremendous privilege and honor bestowed on us as Jesus is renewed as Immanuel, "God with us." ❀

The author of our regular meditations on the Lord's Supper, Elton Higgs, is a board member of Integrity and an elder at the Trenton, Michigan Church of Christ.



The awesome power of prayer: ours for the asking

Aline Edson

The power of prayer: it is mind-boggling to think that you can open up God's omnipotence simply by asking. All of his love and mercy and grace and wisdom sprinkled everywhere—just by asking. Our prayer opens the door that was never locked and turns loose all of heaven's resources to minister to the needs of lost and weary, sad and undone, hopeless and hapless folks like us.

The little planet Earth that holds our part of God's creation is but a pin point in the universe—and he created the whole universe. His power, wisdom and presence surround us even as the universe surrounds us. He chose to give us the gift of free will, and because of that, our little corner of creation is considerably messed up. But because we are his creation, our link to him can be broken only by ourselves. We can pick up the prayer phone and call at will and request bounty from him, but most of the time when he attempts to reach us, he gets a busy signal. For eons now we have wandered away; by our own choice, the connection is broken. But the line is still in place even if just one calls—it's never out of order on heaven's end. And what awesome power can be called into play when we choose to be

in touch with our mighty Creator! We can call on him one at a time, or we can make a conference call: either way we become partners with him in forgiving and blessing and calling people back to him. And if just one answers, it will have been worth it, for on no less an authority than our Lord, one soul is worth the whole world. What an unbelievable privilege to join with God in prayer to bless our world.

The very power that created us can be unleashed for our good just for the asking. Surely the Force that created us is able to care for us abundantly if we but ask. There is a behind-the-scenes power movement at work stronger than anything we can see—more real than our world.

"Behold, the Lord's hand is not shortened so that it cannot save; neither his ear heavy that he cannot hear: but your iniquities have separated between you and your God." Isaiah 59:1 But the power is still there—it waits for us to tap into it. The Dynamo that operates the universe dwarfs our little world, and we would do well to maintain that perspective.

A wonderful way to deal with enemies is to sneak up behind them and hit them over the head with a heavy load of prayer: pray for their

families, their welfare, their happiness, their eternal soul's salvation with all the sincerity of your heart. It'll give a lot of satisfaction because they can't fight back, and you can go on your way grinning because you had the last word. After all, you went over their heads.

Think about this: no one is so lost that God doesn't know where he or she is and what he or she is doing. He can call everyone of us by name and read our hearts all at once. How do I know that? Well, he even knows when a sparrow falls, and the Lord himself said we are worth more than many sparrows, and he's not willing to lose any of us.

Aline Edson, who has completed full careers in both teaching and civil service and raised four children, lives in Kerrville, Texas. She is a member of the Sydney Baker Church of Christ.

Every true prayer has its background and its foreground. The foreground of prayer is the intense, immediate desire for a certain blessing which seems to be absolutely necessary for the soul to have; the background of prayer is the quiet, earnest desire that the will of God, whatever it may be, should be done.

What a picture is the perfect prayer of Jesus in Gethsemane! In front burns the strong desire to escape death and to live; but behind there stands, calm and strong, the craving of the whole life for doing the will of God. Leave out the foreground, let there be no expression of the will of him who prays, and there is left a pure submission which is almost fatalism. Leave out the background, let there be no acceptance of the will of God, and the prayer is only the expression of self-will, a petulant claiming of the uncorrected choice of him who prays. Only when the two are there together, the special desire resting on the universal submission, the universal submission opening into the special desire, is the picture perfect and the prayer complete.

-Phillips Brooks, quoted in *Christian Quotation of the Day*, www.gospelcom.net/cqod

WE CAN PICK UP THE PRAYER PHONE AND CALL AT WILL AND REQUEST BOUNTY FROM HIM, BUT MOST OF THE TIME WHEN HE ATTEMPTS TO REACH US, HE GETS A BUSY SIGNAL.

So the whole thing is heavily weighted in our favor—all we have to do is ask. We can invite all the power and presence of God into our lives by prayer! What a remarkable gift! We can tune into God's grace and forgiveness and beg to be guided into partnership with Him in blessing the whole world. It is an almost wholly-untapped heavenly resource. Christian, don't forget to pray! ✿



RECOMMENDED READING

Books on prayer

These books were selected by Henrietta Palmer, an Integrity board member who administers a 100-woman Bible study. The focus of this past year's study was on prayer; here are some of the books the group used.

Arthur, Kay. LORD, TEACH ME TO PRAY IN 28 DAYS (Eugene, OR, Harvest House Publishers, 1982).

Bounds, E.M. THE COMPLETE WORKS OF E.M. BOUNDS ON PRAYER (Grand Rapids, MI, Baker Books, Compiled in 1990).

Brother Lawrence. THE PRACTICE OF THE PRESENCE OF GOD (New Kensington, PA, Whitaker House, 1982).

Chambers, Oswald. PRAYER, A HOLY OCCUPATION (Grand Rapids, MI, Discovery House Publishers, Edited by Harry Verploegh, 1992).

Christenson, Evelyn. WHAT GOD DOES WHEN WOMEN PRAY (Dallas, TX. Word Publishing, 1999).

WHAT HAPPENS WHEN GOD ANSWERS PRAYER (Wheaton, IL. Victor Books, 1979).

WHAT HAPPENS WHEN WOMEN PRAY (Wheaton, IL, Victor Books, 1975).

Copeland, Germaine. PRAYERS THAT AVAIL MUCH (Tulsa, OK. Harrison House, Inc. Commemorative Gift Edition, 1997).

Cymbala, Jim. FRESH WIND, FRESH FIRE (Grand Rapids, MI, Zondervan Publishing House, 1997).

Foster, Richard J. PRAYER: FINDING THE HEART'S TRUE HOME (NY, NY, Harper Collins Publisher, 1992).

Hallesby, O. PRAYER (Minneapolis, MN, Augsburg Publishing House, 1931, 1959).

Hodge, Charles B. Jr. PRAYER - THE VOICE OF FAITH (Searcy, AK. Resource Publications, 1996).

Hybels, Bill. TOO BUSY NOT TO PRAY (Downers Grove, IL, InterVarsity Press, 1988).

Jeremiah, David. PRAYER — THE GREAT ADVENTURE (Sisters, OR, Multnomah Publishers, Inc. 1997).

Murray, Andrew. WITH CHRIST IN THE SCHOOL OF PRAYER (Springdale, PA, Whitaker House, 1981).

Sheets, Dutch. INTERCESSORY PRAYER (Ventura, CA, Regal Books, Division of Gospel Light, 1996).

Tirabassi, Becky. LET PRAYER CHANGE YOUR LIFE (Nashville, TN, Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1990, 1992).

Torrey, R.A. THE POWER OF PRAYER AND THE PRAYER OF POWER (Grand Rapids, MI, Zondervan Publishing House, 1924).



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