

LIGHT + LIFE PUBLISHING

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Introduction

hat is prayer? How would you define it?

It's a broad topic, isn't it? It's like a dome over a football field, or a vast blanket of clouds covering a diverse landscape. To say the word prayer is to open the way to a broad conversation that could go in many directions. It's also the kind of word that can come loaded with numerous connotations.

I've used the words "pray, prayer, praying or prayed" to express how I've wished for certain things to occur, various difficulties to go away, provision to miraculously appear, or illness to be erased. I've attached "prayer" to deep yearnings within my soul, hoping to force something into being. I've thought if I winced, ground my teeth, and mustered my "faith" that I could use some sort of telepathy to produce a result. I've done a lot of wishful thinking that I've thought was prayer, but I've come to learn that wishful thinking is not true prayer. What changed my mind? Two things: A shift in perspective and a shift in practices of prayer.

The shift in perspective came when I heard the loving and convicting voice of God instruct me by saying, "Brett, you are a man who prays but you are not a man of prayer." I'm still amazed at the vast difference between those two descriptors. To be a man who prays is like shaking a little salt on my meatloaf at dinner, trying to overcome something bland that came from an inadequate recipe. To be a man of prayer however, is about substance. Substance is when the salt is mixed into the recipe prior to cooking. The salt is part of the developing product, not a garnish at the end.

I've learned that prayer must be woven into the very fabric of who I am. It must become part of my substance.

You are invited to experience new personal perspectives and new practices of prayer. You're encouraged to be absorbed by praying so that it becomes part of your very substance.

The journey to praying that follows will take both attention and intention. There's something counter-intuitive to the act of praying, because it causes us to pause many activities or rhythms of life to engage with the Living God. It's conversation with the Living God, yet can leave us wondering if our prayers are heard at all. It's sometimes yearning, yet not wishful thinking, often emotional, yet answers are not driven by mere emotion. It's extremely personal and intimate, yet as distant as the heavens are from the earth. Prayer is one of the great powers and mysteries of our faith in Christ Jesus.

Through this journey toward substantive prayer, I believe you will find more of Jesus, more of His heart, more of His mind, and more of His will.

He is waiting for us.



Chapter One

Snapshots and Being There

"Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us." (Ephesians 3:20)

"To move in prayer as though one were in one's element, to pray daily with a willing spirit, with joy, with gratitude and with adoration is something which is far beyond our human capacities and abilities. A miracle of God is necessary every day for this."

- O. Hallesby^t

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Bear Sand Dunes in northern Michigan. My wife was trying to encourage me, but I stubbornly resisted. After all, what can be so exciting about sand? My mind was made up. I said to her, "So help me, if this whole thing is like a child's sandbox with a pail and shovel, I am not going to be happy!"

When we arrived, I had to eat every one of my words. What I saw was mile after mile of mountainous sand dunes that grace the northwest coast of Michigan. At their height they soar over 400 feet above the coastline allowing you to see for miles out upon Lake Michigan. The beauty was awe inspiring, but you really had to be there to see it.

Is there a time when you showed someone some vacation photos and said, "This picture doesn't do it justice... you really had to be there"?

¹ Ole Hallesby, Prayer, (Minneapolis, MN, Augsburg Fortress, 1931, 1959, 1994)

Prayer is like that.

There's something about describing it that falls short of the experience. Perhaps, like me, we might need to be pulled into the limitless experiences of prayer, albeit unwillingly, to experience its beauty and realize its power.

There's something about encountering the palpable presence of God that leaves us wanting more. Nothing leads to His presence like prayer, and nothing leads you back to more prayer like His presence.

God is like that.

When do you pray? What occasions, events or happenings draw you into prayer?

How those questions are answered will shed some light on our understanding of prayer. When I was young and first came to faith in Jesus, I remember our church services. Every Sunday people would voice prayer requests for people who were sick, in trouble, facing difficulty, or other issues so personal that they were voiced as "unspoken requests." As the sharing ended we bowed our heads to pray. One of the leaders in our church would pray verbally as the rest of us listened. I must confess that my young mind often wandered and grew impatient at the length of the prayer. At the conclusion, we would all join in saying "amen."

Because of the way prayer was represented in our church (and how it wasn't), I drew some conclusions that I now know were incomplete:

• Prayer is always in response to trouble or illness.

Becoming A Person of Prayer

- Prayer only asks God to fix what is wrong, heal what is sick, and bring relief to what is hurting or lacking.
- Prayer is the Christian way to show concern.
- Prayer is mainly me speaking, and God listening.
- Prayer's results are left up to the will of God.

How has your understanding of prayer been shaped by your experiences in your church?

I had to behold the beauty of Sleeping Bear Sand Dunes to quiet my cynical sarcasm. Now, I would gladly take you there. It's a sight to behold!

If you'll allow me, I'd like to take you to prayer's equivalent to those towering mountains of sand. I can assure you there is beauty to behold and revelation to discover. Is there any resistance that must be dealt with? It's okay to enter in, even with some reluctance and resistance, but the invitation of Jesus to come into the Throne Room is too good to pass up. Acknowledge the tug-of-war between the natural and the supernatural for what it is and begin the journey.

Oswald Chambers put it this way: "Every time you venture out in the life of faith, you will find something in your common-sense circumstances that flatly contradicts your faith. Common sense is not faith, and faith is not common sense; they stand in relation of the natural and the spiritual. Can you trust Jesus where your common sense cannot trust Him?"²

² My Utmost For His Highest— Oswald Chambers, from https://utmost.org/classic/faith-classic/, October 30

Can you trust Jesus and join the journey, committing to give it your all even amid possible internal struggle?

Questions for Reflection:

- 1. Recall a memory where you sensed that a time of prayer was powerful and meaningful to you. Describe the moment. What was it about that time of prayer that caused you to leave feeling so fulfilled and blessed?
- 2. What kinds of things do you think God wants us to pray to Him about?
- 3. Is there ever a good reason not to pray?
- 4. Recall a time when you really needed prayer, and someone prayed for you. How did you feel as they prayed?
- 5. What are your honest feelings about prayer's actual effectiveness? How do your feelings inform and shape your prayers?
- 6. What are your unanswered questions about prayer?

Prayer Journal - Accept the Invitation.

Write a prayer, offering yourself to Jesus in trust, knowing that He's about to take you to places without all the details being offered in advance. There are no "rules" for this prayer, so all thoughts, emotions, concerns and questions are valid.

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Chapter Two

Pray First, Act Second Then Jesus told his disciples a parable to show them that they should always pray and not give up. (Luke 18:1)

"Our praying needs to be pressed and pursued with an energy that never tires, a persistency which will not be denied, and a courage that never fails." — E.M. Bounds³

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hen it came to fixing or building things, my dad was the kind of person that could somehow pull off a workable result with little or no assistance. But sometimes his lack of interest in following instructions would come back to bite him. Such was the case one night in my childhood home when he attempted to build a "some assembly required" armoire for my mom. When it was "finished" he realized there was one little panel of wood left. After some frustrating huffs and puffs, reading through the previously-ignored instructions, he realized the panel was to be put in place near the very beginning of the process. It was not a happy night in our house as dad dismantled the armoire and put it back together again.

There's an order to life that is more harmonious when we learn to pray first, and then act.

In Chapter One I recalled that my first church experiences taught me that prayer was *always in response to trouble or illness*. Praying in response to troubles is good, and it is right for us to do that. But *limiting* prayer to trouble is

³ E M Bounds, the Classic Collection on Prayer, Bounds/Chadwick, The Bridge Logos Foundation, 50

like driving without a GPS, cooking without a recipe, or assembling an armoire without the directions. There are benefits to maps, recipes and directions that will save us from wounded egos because we're lost, burn dinner or have to tear apart that armoire.

Think about your own practices and understanding of prayer. Is your prayer life more like "preventative medicine" or "damage control?"

Let's expand our view of prayer by looking into a parable Jesus told for that very purpose. He wanted to expand His disciples' understanding of prayer in order to change their actual praying, so He put it in story form.

Jesus said: "In a certain town there was a judge who neither feared God nor cared what people thought. And there was a widow in that town who kept coming to him with the plea, 'Grant me justice against my adversary.' For some time he refused. But finally he said to himself, 'Even though I don't fear God or care what people think, yet because this widow keeps bothering me, I will see that she gets justice, so that she won't eventually come and attack me!'" And the Lord said, "Listen to what the unjust judge says. And will not God bring about justice for his chosen ones, who cry out to him day and night? Will he keep putting them off? I tell you, he will see that they get justice, and quickly. However, when the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on the earth?" (Luke 18:2-8)

Put yourself in the place of the widow in Jesus' parable. Jesus didn't randomly select a widow for His object lesson; He was making a point. In first century Jewish culture, widows had very little voice and influential power. Their husbands would have had the influence and voice to bring justice in a swifter manner, but without them, widows were left with few options. So where does she go? To the one who

can bring justice on her behalf. She knows she'll get nowhere without the judge.

When we understand our lack of spiritual authority and voice apart from God, we will see ourselves in light of the widow and always pray. To pray first and act second is not just an encouragement, but a necessity for those who know that they cannot act without God's divine help.

You may not be a widow in your actual circumstances, but you can learn to pray like one. Persistent, continual prayer flows from those who know their desperate need, utter dependence on God, and understanding of God's power.

In the parable, God is portrayed by the *unjust judge*. In no way is Jesus suggesting His Father is unjust. No. Instead, He uses that unjust judge image to prove a point. Even sly and slippery politicians will bring justice to persistent widows. If that is true, then *how much more* will God bring justice!?

Can you recall a time when you prayed persistently for something, staying in it for the long haul? What happened as a result?

When we see ourselves as the *limited widow*, it's easy to see why we would pray. When prayer is the *only* thing you can do, then that is *exactly* what you do. But what about our tendencies toward self-sufficiency? Not only do we highly value self-sufficiency, but we may even *idolize* it.

Self-sufficiency feels no need for prayer as long as our strength and smarts hold up. How often do we simply charge off into our plans believing that everything is under control? Do we forget how little control we actually have over things in the world? There are two verses of scripture that come to mind that confront us right in the middle of our self-sufficiency.

For it is written: "I will destroy the wisdom of the wise; the intelligence of the intelligent I will frustrate." Where is the wise person? Where is the teacher of the law? Where is the philosopher of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world? (I Corinthians 1:19-20)

This passage reminds of God's unique and transcendent otherness. We're all given a measure of ability and intelligence. We should all engage that intelligence and share our abilities for the betterment of humankind. God tells us, however, that our intelligence is limited and a sober, humble view of ourselves tempers our tendencies toward pride. Praying first is the opening to sober judgment and humility, helping us realize that our "wisdom" is quite small in light of the Father's wisdom.

Now listen, you who say, "Today or tomorrow we will go to this or that city, spend a year there, carry on business and make money." Why, you do not even know what will happen tomorrow. What is your life? You are a mist that appears for a little while and then vanishes. Instead, you ought to say, "If it is the Lord's will, we will live and do this or that." As it is, you boast in your arrogant schemes. All such boasting is evil. (James 4:13-16)

When we begin to declare our own destinies, as if we had full and ultimate control of our lives, we step over the line into the arena of pride. And yet, there's the reality that we *do* plan things in our lives every day, and they don't seem to be done in a prideful way. So where is the line? What is the tipping point between sound, humble judgement of ourselves, mixed with movement and planning, and pride? As always, the difference is rooted in our hearts. A pure

Becoming A Person of Prayer

heart is submitted to the will of God, understanding our frail, finite nature in light of I AM.

We've all had those unexpected turns in our lives where sudden and drastic changes have brought about significant change, whether it be location, occupation or situation. Praying first is one way to remember the finite and fragile nature of our lives in light of the eternal nature of God. Prayer keeps us framed in the context of "Your will be done."

Is self-sufficiency a sin? Are pride and arrogance sins? How can we protect ourselves from pride, arrogance and self-sufficiency?

Praying before acting demonstrates our dependence on God and humility regarding our own self-image and self-sufficiency. It also acknowledges God's desire to converse with us about all things, as well as our desire for God's thoughts and partnership in every activity of our lives.

Praying before acting will cause us to add new dimensions to our praying. We will learn a different posture built upon different words and themes. We will discover what it's like to pray *into* what is about to come, rather than pray *reactively* to what just happened, went wrong, or fell apart.

You're invited to learn to pray first.

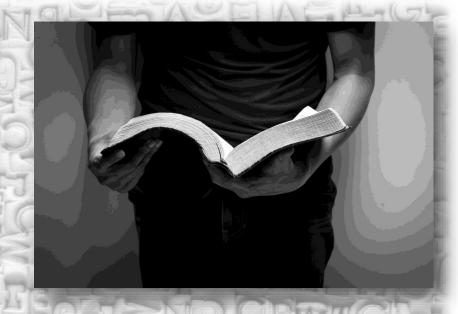
Questions for Reflection:

- 1. In what ways are you very self-sufficient? Do you like relying on others to get things done or do you prefer to do them yourself?
- 2. Do you like to admit that you need help or assistance?
- 3. Have you ever found yourself in a situation where you felt like the widow... helpless with no voice and no one to help you? How did you handle it?
- 4. How does God destroy the wisdom of the wise and the intelligence of the intelligent?
- 5. In what ways do you tend to take matters into your own hands without praying first?
- 6. Is there any evidence of pride or arrogance in your life as reflected in James 4:13-16? What can you do to guard your heart from those things?

Prayer Journal - Reprioritize three activities around prayer.

List three things that you do quite thoughtlessly without prayer. After each of the three, write a short prayer that could be said before engaging in those activities.

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Chapter Three

The Word is the Word

"For the word of God is alive and active. Sharper than any doubleedged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart." (Hebrews 4:12)

"The Word and prayer must always go together. Prayer without the Word is heat without light, and the Word without prayer is light without heat!" – Jim Cymbala⁴

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anguage is amazing in that it can communicate its own limitations and insufficiencies. Have you ever said that phrase, "There are no words"? I have. I've said it when I've been in the presence of a friend in great pain or difficulty. I've thought it as I've witnessed a horrific accident. And I've even said it while staring at crazy spectacles that are so unique and curious, they cause me to experience bewilderment.

Can you recall a time when you were left speechless? What were the circumstances that caused you to have no words? Describe that feeling.

So, what becomes of praying when there are no words? Isn't praying about words? When it comes to prayer, sometimes we are left speechless. It doesn't matter if the prayer is spoken or silent, words can be hard to come by in certain situations. No matter how good we might be at public speaking or how well versed we are in crafting words,

⁴ Jim Cymbala, Prayer and the Word, (from https://www.brooklyntabernacle.org/devotional/20181001/prayer-and-word)

we can come up empty when it comes to praying for difficult or impossible situations.

A man named Job was faced with great pain and difficulty. Job's story begins with a conversation between God and Satan⁵. Satan claims that if Job suffers affliction, he will renounce God and his faith. Satan afflicts Job under the watchful eye of God. Job lost his children and being covered in painful sores from the top of his head to the soles of his feet, he was in a great deal of personal and physical pain. Here's part of Job's story that's recorded in the Bible:

When Job's three friends, Eliphaz the Temanite, Bildad the Shuhite and Zophar the Naamathite, heard about all the troubles that had come upon him, they set out from their homes and met together by agreement to go and sympathize with him and comfort him. When they saw him from a distance, they could hardly recognize him; they began to weep aloud, and they tore their robes and sprinkled dust on their heads. Then they sat on the ground with him for seven days and seven nights. No one said a word to him, because they saw how great his suffering was. (Job 2:11-13)

Job's three friends had no words. No words of comfort, advice, prayer, or encouragement. No words.

Have you ever kept watch with a friend or loved one in deep trouble or illness? Were you left speechless? Why do you think Job's friends sat silently for seven days and nights?

When we have no words, the *Word* can provide words. We can go to Scripture. Here's one example of going to Scripture and praying based on the truth we find.

⁵ See Job 1:6-12. For more biblical understanding of the devil and his ways read John 8:44, Genesis 3:1-5, Revelation 12:9-12.

Becoming A Person of Prayer

Blessed is the one who does not walk in step with the wicked or stand in the way that sinners take or sit in the company of mockers, but whose delight is in the law of the LORD, and who meditates on his law day and night. That person is like a tree planted by streams of water, which yields its fruit in season and whose leaf does not wither— whatever they do prospers. (Psalm 1:1-3)

Lord God, I ask for Your blessing as I desire to walk in step with You. Help me not to take on the ways of people who are wicked or lost in your sight. I'm telling You honestly, in this moment, that I desire more than anything to delight in Your Word—Your law. Teach me what it means to meditate on it day and night. I want to be planted in You. Rooted in Your ways and thoughts, embedded in Your truth and grace. You have promised that I will bear fruit as I do that! Bring fruit through me in every season of my life. In that way, I pray that I learn true prosperity—which is living in alignment with You. In all of that I know You will bless me, Lord. Thank you for the truth of Your Word. Make its "life" be alive in me, for the glory of Jesus in this earth. Amen.

Because we have the gift of God's Word, we are never without words. In fact, our reliance on the Word of God to supply our prayers should be utilized far more than just those occasions when we're speechless. Because the Word of God is eternal, God-breathed, useful for all kinds of teaching and correction, true, powerful, living, active and sharp, we can and should rely on it as a divine encyclopedia for our prayers. (See 2 Timothy 3:16; Hebrews 4:12). But

how do we harvest the truth from God's Word and employ it in our praying?

The scriptures are a treasure chest of many forms of literature. From historical records to genealogy, stories to chronicles, prophecy to wisdom, singing to lament, ups and downs of God's people, the Bible tells the story of God and humankind from creation until the fulfilment of all things upon Christ's return. Amid such diverse writing, however, it's not that difficult to find words to pray. Here are five types of scriptures that easily can become prayers. As you look at each of these in light of the example above, think of how you can begin a prayer using God's Word.

- **Truth:** Scripture speaks authoritative truth in statement form. *Example: Colossians 1:15-23 "For in Him all things were created..."*
- **Promises:** God verbally commits to something for our benefit and keeps His word. *Example: Proverbs 3:5-6* "...He will make your paths straight."
- **Commands:** God's directives that His people are to obey. *Example: Luke 6:27-36 "...love your enemies, do good to them..."*
- **Praise/Worship:** God's people declaring the greatness, glory, holiness and majesty of God. *Example: Psalm 89:5-8 "You, LORD, are mighty, and Your faithfulness surrounds You."*
- **Encouragement:** God's words of comfort and loving support cause His people to rest in Him. *Example: 2 Corinthians 1:3* "The Father of compassion, and the God of all comfort..."

Becoming A Person of Prayer

Making the transition from scripture verse to prayer is simple, yet profoundly impactful.

In 2016 I was experiencing a time of deep discouragement. I needed healing that only God could provide. I had tried counseling and it didn't seem to help. This wave of darkness didn't just show up one day. It had deep roots in my past that left emotional and spiritual scars in my life. After living with it for years, I had resigned myself to bearing the weight of sorrow and condemnation, hoping to just make it through life day by day.

In the depths, God spoke to me one day and said, "Romans 8." I turned to Romans 8 and read the first verse: "Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus." (Romans 8:1)

This was the very first verse I would restate as a prayer for myself. Here's how I re-worded it: "I am in Christ Jesus and therefore I am not condemned. There is no condemnation for me because of Jesus. Lord Jesus, let that truth come into my life and erase the lie that I feel. Bring your light into my darkness."

I continued, verse by verse, converting most of the chapter into a prayer. It's a long story, but the Lord brought healing to me. The Word was the word for me when I had no words. Because it is alive and active, it did a work in my life that couldn't be accomplished any other way.

What is going on in your life right now that could use the power of prayer using God's Word?

We are never without words as long as we have the Bible. From its pages can emerge some of the most powerful prayers you will ever pray as you learn to take His divinely inspired text and verbalize it in prayer.

Questions for Reflection:

- 1. How familiar are you with the Bible? Can you see the powerful connection between the Word of God and an empowered prayer life?
- 2. Early in this chapter additional scriptures were referenced for the devil. Did you look them up? How can increasing our understanding inform our prayers?
- 3. What scripture verses have you memorized or can think of from memory? How could that verse be restated as a prayer?
- 4. Who or what are you praying for right now that you can begin to search the scriptures for?
- 5. Go back to the beginning of the chapter and reread Jim Cymbala's quote. Why do you think he chose to refer to prayer as *heat*, and the Word as *light*?
- 6. How is prayer alone like heat without light? How is the Word like light without heat when prayer is detached?

Prayer Journal - Pray from Scripture.

Using the verse below (James 1:2-4), write out a prayer for you, a loved one, a situation, or anything else that comes to mind for which you are burdened or concerned. This verse is so rich and robust that you could easily write more than one prayer.

"Consider it pure joy, my brothers and sisters, whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith produces perseverance. Let perseverance finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything." (James 1:2-4)

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Chapter Four

Real Unspoken Prayer "Listen and hear my voice; pay attention and hear what I say."
(Isaiah 28:23)

"As we grow in attentiveness, we'll start to notice God's work in us in the ordinary places of life. We realize that God may be speaking to us often, but we just aren't listening. Now as we pray with an attentive heart and mind, the presence, power and love of God appear in surprising places and times." - Matt Woodley⁶

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here are few things more frustrating than talking to someone who is not listening to what you have to say. Have you ever gone on and on to your spouse or a friend only to get near the end of your thoughts and have the other person say, "Huh?" You'd get better results talking to a brick wall!

Are we conversational "brick walls" to God? Do we listen? Do we know that He's speaking – *speaking to us?* When it comes to knowing and relating to God, are we good listeners?

In the last chapter we talked about times when we run out of words. We might want to speak but have nothing that seems right to say. We learned that we can go to God's Word in those situations. This chapter is different in that we intentionally lay down our need to speak so that we can listen to God.

⁶ Matt Woodley, The Folly of Prayer – Practicing the Presence and Absence of God, (Downers Grove, IL, InterVarsity Press), 139

Are you a good listener? What traits and practices of good listening have you learned? Do you think that any of those principles could apply to conversations with God?

Personally, I enjoy processing thoughts verbally. I like to "talk it out." I am also keenly aware of my tendency to be wordy. I joke with friends and tell them, "Anything that can be said in five words, I can say in 5,000." For those of us who are verbal processors, and feel the need to get things out so we can hear the sound of our own voice, silence before God can be a stretch. Stretching is good. Even I have learned to listen for God. Once you know His voice, you'll hunger for it. There's nothing like it.

Author Doug Newton taught me one of the most powerful lessons on listening for the voice of God. As I attended a Spiritual Formation class where he and his wife, Margie, were the instructors, I was introduced to a facet of prayer I hadn't known before. Doug began by pointing us to a very familiar passage of scripture.

"For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways," declares the LORD. "As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts." (Isaiah 55:8-9)

This verse paints a very clear picture of the *distance* between God and us – the great divide between His ways and thoughts, and ours. In fact, the distance is as great as the distance between heaven and earth.

If you look at that verse incorrectly, you'll likely let out a sigh, shrug your shoulders, and say, "What's the use? He's so grand and 'other.' How can we possibly know what He wants or understand how He operates?" This is where Doug and Margie brilliantly pointed out to our class how amazing God

is and why this chasm isn't a barrier to those who call on God in prayer. To see this at work, let's expand our view of this chapter from Isaiah by reading the first few verses.

"Come, all you who are thirsty, come to the waters; and you who have no money, come, buy and eat! Come, buy wine and milk without money and without cost. Why spend money on what is not bread, and your labor on what does not satisfy? Listen, listen to me, and eat what is good, and you will delight in the richest of fare. Give ear and come to me; listen, that you may live." (Isaiah 55:1-3a)

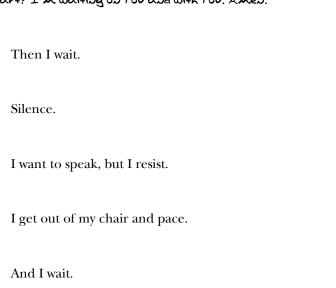
Perhaps a great way to characterize this scripture is to imagine God ringing a dinner bell on heaven's front porch. Dinner bells were designed to let the family know that a meal was ready, even when the kids may have wandered way off out on the family farm. "Come and get it!" is God's cry to us. Language of invitation is woven throughout the entire passage. Take a moment and list all the words you see that invite you into the conversation with God.

When we come before God with the explicit intent to listen, He will join us. As we come to seek Him, His words and His ways, He will respond. When we listen, He speaks. As we set aside our own thoughts, He'll reveal His. When we stop insisting on doing things our way, He'll show us His preferred way.

Can you describe what it would take to set aside your own thoughts, ways and words? Does that feel easy for you, difficult, or somewhere in between?

Morning is my time to listen for God. Our house is quiet and there are little to no distractions. Before I listen, I begin with a short prayer. I don't think God needs to hear it as much as I need to say it. I need the reminder that I am in desperate need of His direction, wisdom, comfort, insight, words, ways, thoughts – whatever the occasion may require. For instance, when I'm writing something like this lesson, I will usually come before God with this short prayer:

"Lord Jesus, I'm about to put things on paper that others will read one day. I come to You and admit every lack that would keep me from doing this in a way that honors You and is true to Who You are and what You desire. I need Your words and inspiration, Lord. Would You come to me this morning and give me words, thoughts and Your heart? I'm waiting on You and with You. Amen."



I have my pen and paper ready. I know the Lord and know how He speaks to me. He has this way of using a few words that surprise me by their impact, that flood into my thinking, that cause me to have a deep assurance that they are from His mouth.

I write them down and continue to wait for more.

At some point I have a calm, inner assurance that I've heard what I'm going to hear and I pray a prayer of thanks. Thanks always comes after I've heard the Lord speak. I mean, the One and true living God who is King of the entire universe just spoke into *my life*. Praise just comes naturally.

I've shared my personal experience with you, but you too are invited to listen for God, hear from God, and be changed by what He speaks. But how does this happen? If your praying has generally been unidirectional then you need to know how and where to begin. Perhaps you've questioned your ability to hear, wondering how to discern your thoughts from His thoughts. That's a valid and common concern. You may wonder exactly how *does* God speak?

Conversation with the Lord means we are talking about a nuanced relationship. Just as in human relationships where tone, posture, non-verbal cues and word choice can add layers to conversation, such is the case with God. The deeper the relationship, the more understanding we gain from His uniqueness. Depth in human relationships takes time, and so does depth of relationship with God. All that being said, here are some practical thoughts and ideas about cultivating and growing your personal ability to hear and know God's voice.

First, **know** *how* **God speaks.** In the scriptures, God has spoken audibly, through visions and dreams, prophets, and words of knowledge and wisdom. Second, **remember that God is** *omniscient* **(all-knowing).** There is nothing hidden from the sight of the Lord. (Hebrews 4:13) He also knows our thoughts as we think them. (Luke 11:17-18) Because of

⁷ See Jeremiah 1:4-10; Matthew 1:20; Daniel 8:1-14; Joel 2:28-29; Acts 2:16-18; 1 Corinthians 12:7-8

this, God can speak *into* our thinking and be spoken to *from* our thinking. How amazing that God can communicate with us in so many ways and so intimately! Look into the scriptures and observe accounts where God speaks. Observe the movement of the Holy Spirit in the book of Acts. Feed your own mind with the ways God has spoken and tell Him you are open to hearing from Him in the same ways.

Do you have any personal experiences with God that align with these principles? How would you describe them?

Third, **intentionally create** *space*. By this, I mean turn off the cell phone, television, radio, podcast and other things that can distract. The main benefit of creating space is for us so we can meditate on Him. We've changed our environment by removing those sounds and distractions common to us. Space and silence allow for a change of focus and perspective. For the follower of Jesus, meditation is about filling our minds with the things of God and giving our thoughts and minds to Him.

How often do you create spaces where your usual sources of sound and activity are silenced to allow room for the Lord to speak to you in prayer?

Fourth, **tune our ears, minds, thoughts, and awareness.** Spiritual *hearing* is not just audible but also spiritually experienced. At times the thoughts of God will enter our minds and we will have an awareness that the origin was not from us. We can speak aloud and often hear responses from God in our thoughts. God desires to be conversational with

us. Other times, we may be observing a situation or need, and the Lord will speak to us *about* what is taking place.

Have you ever known with assurance that God has spoken to You? Describe how and when that happened?

Real unspoken prayer happens when you intentionally come before God, having set aside your words, thoughts, and ways, and wait on Him. With open ears and hearts, you prepare to receive whatever it is that He might say. In a rare case you may hear Him with your *physical ears*, but you can count on hearing Him deep in your *mind and heart*. I can't tell you *what* God will speak, but I know God, and I can assure you He *will* speak.

Questions for Reflection:

- 1. What stood out to you most in this chapter and why?
- 2. What time constraints will you have to deal with to carve out time to listen to God?
- 3. How "noisy" is your life? Are you surrounded by a constant stream of media, cell phone, din in your work place, your car radio, etc.? Why are you drawn to those sources of sound?
- 4. Going back to Isaiah 55:8-9, what have you believed about God's ways and thoughts being higher than ours?
- 5. Now, having read Isaiah 55:1-3, what have you learned about God's desire to speak to you?
- 6. What things in your life can you bring before God, listening for His words?

Prayer Journal - Listen for God's Voice.

Find a quiet place and time. Write a short prayer similar to the one I gave you as an example, opening yourself up to God's voice. As you receive from Him, write down what He says. Find a friend or pastor to share it with. Write a prayer of thanks, realizing the magnitude of the reality that God has spoken to you.

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Chapter Five

Who Cares?

"When he saw the crowds, he had compassion on them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd." (Matthew 9:36)

"The Spirit of Christ dwelling in us makes us compassionate towards others. We pity their ignorance and their mistakes; we sympathize with them in their sorrows, and are ready, whenever we can, to extend to them a helping hand. This tender-heartedness is not a sign of weakness or of a compromising spirit; it is the part of a strong, true, Christian character." — Benjamin Titus Roberts⁸

3**4**&

Tt's nice to be nice to people. I like to hold doors open for people, smile at them and say, "Good morning" or "How are you?" Being nice is nice. Being nice makes me feel nice and hopefully makes the recipient feel nice as well. Niceness is nice, but it can be fleeting – it has a relatively short shelf-life. There are times and situations where something deeper and more lasting is needed and required beyond surface *niceness*.

As a pastor, I have sat with parents of adult children who suffered from the perils of substance abuse. If you've ever had, or currently have a loved one who deals with substance abuse of any kind, you are all too familiar with the grief, anxiety, worry, fear, anger, rage and disappointment that you feel. You've likely acted out, shouted out, cried, and tried anything and everything you can to help. Both the substance abuser and their families are in need of

⁸ Benjamin Titus Roberts, The Earnest Christian. More quotes from BT Roberts can be found on Facebook at https://www.facebook.com/bt.roberts.)

something deeper than surface *niceness*. I can hold the door open for someone who's in that kind of pain, but they will likely still cry as they pass through. Niceness only goes so far.

Imagine walking through a crowded shopping center, carrying a heavy weight of sadness or trouble, realizing that you seem invisible to everyone else around you. They're going about their business as usual, and you're feeling lost, hurt, and don't know how to get through the next moment.

Have you had a personal experience like that just described – feeling burdened and yet invisible to everyone around you? What would be most helpful to you in moments like those?

Compassion is the answer. Compassionate praying is one beautiful way we reflect Jesus in the world. Prayer rooted in godly compassion is how we share the depths of life with people regardless of our relationship to them or perceptions of them.

In the last chapter we explored intentionally laying down our need to speak in order to listen for the voice of God. I pray you had a powerful experience of hearing God's voice and an assurance of His presence. Seeking to be one who prays compassionately is quite similar. Through intentional prayer, we exchange our surface assumptions of people for God's deeper understanding. We exchange fear or prejudice that squelches our prayers and action for love and compassion that compels response.

Matthew 9:36 begins with, "When He saw the crowds, ..." And Matthew 14:14 says, "When Jesus landed and saw a large crowd, ..." Both verses continue by saying, "he had compassion." Compassion moved Jesus to action in each of

these two instances. Compassion is a gut-level impulse that results from seeing more than can be observed on the surface. For the follower of Jesus, that impulse is the result of the Holy Spirit prompting us from within. And praying is a natural response to seeing as Jesus sees – with compassion.

When you are going about your day, what do you "see" as you observe people? What kind of assumptions do you draw from what you see on the surface? What emotions or responses emerge from those assumptions?

Put yourself in the following parable-like story:

Imagine standing next to a large pond with a small pebble in your hand. You toss the pebble out into the center of the pond and *plop*. It impacts the water and immediately begins to send small ripples. The ripples don't go very far and seem to ebb quickly. Within moments the water has settled and returned to a smooth surface.

Wanting to make bigger ripples, you search for a larger stone. This time you pick up a rock about the size of a baseball. Rather than lobbing it out into the pond you exert a bit more force as you throw it. *Splash*. This time the rock impacts the water with far greater force causing deeper and more lasting ripples.

Observing the noticeable increase, you look for an even bigger rock. The sheer weight of the bowling ball-sized boulder you find taxes your arm muscles as you lift it. You carry it to the edge of the pond and with a heave you launch it out into the water. *Ka-splat!* The laws of displacement and force cause the water to flee from the boulder so much so that the impact and ripples affect the whole pond, shore-to-

shore, edge-to-edge. The whole surface is stirred and takes a long while before it completely settles back to calm.

What is the meaning of the parable?

The size of the rock is the size of your compassion. The greater the compassion, the greater the felt experience of its *weight*. Did you know that the meaning behind the biblical word "glory" actually means *weight* or *heavy*? This kind of weight is a gut-level weight. The weight is what Jesus experienced when He *saw* the crowds.

Tossing the rock is *prayer*, and prayer changes as compassion increases. Also observe that the desire to release yourself of the "rock" quickens as the weight increases.

The ripples are the impact of the prayer. With great compassion comes passionate prayer. And with passionate prayer comes great impact.

What is the "size" and "weight" of your compassion? How do you think an increase of compassion within you will affect the prayers that come out of you?

There's something counterintuitive about the weight of godly compassion compared to the weight of worldly burdens. Compassion doesn't carry the doom-and-gloom that worldly troubles do. The reason for this is that we, as believers in Jesus and followers of His ways, wrap everything in a living hope. Prayer that comes from compassion involves weight, but greater still is the hope in which it is enveloped.

Here are three prayers that will lead you to greater compassion-based praying:

The prayer of insight: "Lord Jesus, please give me a measure of Your vision to see people in the way You saw the crowds."

The prayer of willingness: "Lord Jesus, I'm willing to go further with you into compassion. I'm also willing to be challenged to give up all fear and prejudice that has kept me from compassion."

The prayer of impact: "Lord Jesus, use me to make Your ripples in the lives of people. Use me to bring comfort, peace, joy, and hope to the burdened. It doesn't matter to me if I know them personally or not. Just use me."

Who cares? Christians care enough to bear the weight of our fellow sojourners in humanity, so we can make big ripples of peace and hope through compassion-based praying.

Questions for Reflection:

- 1. Look back on the three prayers at the end of the chapter and ask yourself, "Am I ready and willing to pray these prayers?"
- 2. Focus your attention inward. To what degree does compassion impact your praying?
- 3. Is there a particular person or people group for whom you find it most difficult to have compassion? Who is it (are they) and why is it so difficult for you what is your reasoning?
- 4. Describe what you think are the benefits to praying for someone who seems unworthy of our compassionate prayers.
- 5. What is at stake if we don't pray compassionately for all people, regardless of the ways they offend us or the offenses they've committed?
- 6. Considering your own sphere of influence, where is compassion needed most right now?

Prayer Journal – Getting Real Before God About Compassion.

Journal a prayer that speaks to the Lord about your current level of compassion and how that manifests in your prayer life. Then pray for your own next step. If this lesson has moved you with compassion for a person/place/condition/situation, then pray for that. Prayerfully, passionately release the weight and ask for the impact God will bring.

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Chapter Six

The Prayer
That Carries

"Greater love has no one than this: to lay down one's life for one's friends." (John 15:13)

"Prayer breaks all bars, dissolves all chains, opens all prisons and widens all straits by which God's saints have been holden."

- E.M. Bounds9

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have a friend who has used his vocal singing talents to entertain people for many, many years. Like many artists, he's experienced the struggle of doing what he loves with the day-to-day concern of making financial ends meet.

It was Christmas time and his schedule was fully booked. In a feast-or-famine world, this was a good thing due to bills that had been stacking up. He needed the performances, but then laryngitis struck. What might be an inconvenience to some people was crippling to him at a critical time, both seasonally and financially.

At times my friend would enlist the talent of others to assist with group performances. When one of those friends heard how he took a hit with laryngitis, he offered to do the job. The friend decided to learn the music, set up the gear, sing the performance, tear down and bring everything back to his sick friend, along with the check *in his friend's name*, and took none of it for himself. He did it solely out of love and concern for his sick friend in need.

⁹ Edward McKendree Bounds, Prayer and Praying Men, (as found on http://www.ccel.org/ccel/bounds/prayingmen.html), VI

Intercessory prayer is like singing someone else's performance when they have laryngitis. In prayer, we take up the cause of someone in need and actively participate in bringing them before the Father in the Name of Jesus. In doing so, we become involved more intimately. Intercessory prayer goes beyond acquaintance and gets into the details.

When have you been the recipient of extravagant generosity that you could not repay? Can you recall how you felt? Some people find it hard to receive such generosity. Why do you think this is so?

The Bible tells the story of a crippled man who received healing from Jesus. Here's part of the account:

A few days later, when Jesus again entered Capernaum, the people heard that he had come home. They gathered in such large numbers that there was no room left, not even outside the door, and he preached the word to them. Some men came, bringing to him a paralyzed man, carried by four of them. Since they could not get him to Jesus because of the crowd, they made an opening in the roof above Jesus by digging through it and then lowered the mat the man was lying on. (Mark 2:1-4)

If you know the story you might notice that I chose to stop short of Jesus' healing miracle. That's intentional. You may also notice that I've left out the tense conversation between Jesus and the teachers of the Law because He forgave the man's sins. That's intentional too. Honestly, our fascination is always drawn to the healing miracle, but let's focus on the miracle that came before the miracle. What miracle am I referring to? The miracle performed by some men.

If we're not careful, we'll read quickly and thoughtlessly over this miracle right in the middle of the story: "Some men came, bringing to him a paralyzed man, carried by four of them." This is a miracle of love, devotion, inconvenience, risk, and compassion. Observe these highlights:

The biblical account refers to the ones who carried the crippled man as **some men.** They remain nameless to us today. They receive no honorable mention at the end of the story. But they are heroes, nonetheless, by anyone's account. These unnamed men acted. The story simply says they **came**. Their actions were not random, but rather intentionally planned because of love and compassion.

Beyond their anonymous intentionality, we see that the unnamed men carried a **paralyzed man.** When someone is paralyzed, they can't get to Jesus on their own. They need *legs* to get to Him. The men helped someone with the greatest need and least opportunity. There were no carts or donkeys involved in his transportation. Instead, they **carried** him. They bore the physical weight, not just the emotional weight.

The crowd was a clear obstacle in their way. These determined helpers of the paralytic paid no attention to the wall of people that could keep them from getting their friend in the presence of Jesus, so they made an opening in the roof. They risked reprimand for destruction of property to see to it their friend made his way before Jesus. They carried him up to the roof and busted a hole through it! This was a gutsy move, took extra effort, added to the physicality of their task, and would have deterred most people. The scene comes to a climax as they lowered their friend on the mat. Their persistence continued until the result came. They didn't stop or turn away... they found a way. And where did the ropes come from? They were either prepared, tenacious or both.

When have you observed an act of love like this?

This is the miracle of intercessory prayer that *carries*. The "some men" are a vivid picture of what intercessors do.

Intercessors are nameless heroes whose passion for the need erases the desire to get the credit for the result. They pray on purpose, not randomly, based on love and compassion. From their view, whoever or whatever is being prayed for *must* get before Jesus. They focus on the paralyzed - those who don't know Jesus, can't get to Jesus, are unable, unaware, or unbelieving.

Intercessors focus on what Jesus can do, not on what the person can't do. Intercessors are carriers. The weight doesn't matter, nor the distance or the obstacles. They pray in and they pray until the goal has been reached. Crowds, naysayers, discouragement and any number of other distractions do not keep intercessors from praying.

Intercessors are rooftop pray-ers, who pray from above, seated with Christ in the heavenly realms (Ephesians 2:6). They change their perspective from one of limited help, crying out from earth toward heaven, to one of unlimited power, being seated with Christ in the heavenly realms and praying from heaven toward earth. They pray for the power of heaven to come to earth and intervene. They are active participants with Jesus in creating an open heaven – a channel whereby God's power flows freely and the veil that keeps us from seeing and experiencing God more intimately is pulled back.

Intercessors never stop until they've received the assurance in prayer that they've touched Jesus as "the mat is lowered." Intercessors are not content with distant

communication, they must bring needs into the very presence of Jesus – the Throne Room.

You're invited to be an intercessor. Jesus invites you to carry someone's mat on His behalf.

The voice-crippling affliction of my musician friend was generously helped through a "mat carrier." But in his story, getting involved required special skills. Do intercessors require special skills? This is where the object lesson and the biblical account of the paralytic part ways. You see, intercessory prayer is about willingness, not skill; compassion, not qualifications. To be an intercessor is to be a *someone – anyone*. Anyone can be an intercessor, and everyone who says they follow Jesus *should* be an intercessor.

You don't have to wait to begin. Perhaps one day a story will be told of a person in desperate need who received their miracle from Jesus. The story will include a small detail that says something like this: "...then this person prayed for them...". And that "person" is you. God is glorified, the paralytic walks, and you humbly praise God for the honor to be that someone who carried the mat into the presence of Jesus.

Questions for Reflection:

Think of one person, one social issue, and one group/ organization that could use an intercessor. They can be anyone or anything. List them here:

Person:	
Social Issue:	
Group/Organization:	

What areas of "paralysis" are they experiencing? What is keeping them from Jesus, and what do you yearn for Jesus to do for them? List those requests here:

How to pray for the person:

How to pray for the Social Issue:

How to pray for the Group/Organization:

How can you use what you learned in Chapter 2, "Pray First, Act Second," to keep prayer as the priority for each of these needs?

How can you use what you learned in Chapter 3, "The Word is the Word," to seek the scriptures for words to pray for these needs?

How can you use what you learned in Chapter 4, "Real Unspoken Prayer," to listen for the heart and mind of God on behalf of each of these needs?

How can you use what you learned in Chapter 5, "Who Cares?," to deepen your compassion for those represented by each of these needs and pray from a new depth of compassion?

Can you see the beauty of the journey we are on? Can you see how prayer is an endless exploration of power and possibility that affects both us and the ones we pray for?

Prayer Journal – Take Up Someone's Cause. Write an intercessory prayer for one or more of the needs you liste																			
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Chapter Seven

First Love and Prayer "Yet I hold this against you: You have forsaken your first love." (Revelation 2:4)

"Shouldn't it be easy to love a God so wonderful? When we love God because we feel we should love Him, instead of genuinely loving out of our true selves, we have forgotten who God really is."

- Francis Chan10

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hen I met and fell in love with my wife, Barb, no one had to tell me to call her or visit her. In fact, it was staying away that was the issue. I wanted to be with her always, so much so that in 2013 we were married, and our joy is complete and yet growing deeper as we travel life together. Now that we're married, we are one. Communication and conversation are implied in any love relationship.

So it is with prayer. Look at Paul's instruction: "Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God" (Philippians 4:6). A first read might lead us to hear the verse with a tone of insistence to perform a required duty. Duty can motivate us to do a host of things, but love draws us into action through a compulsion all its own. When you love someone you are naturally, irresistibly, instinctively drawn to them.

¹⁰ Francis Chan, Crazy Love, (David C. Cook, Colorado Springs, CO), 29

Love is typically bundled with a desire to be present with the object of our love. Therefore, it could be said that our love for God *should* be so instinctive and irresistible that we simply can't stay away. We *should* join the psalmist saying, "When can I go and meet with God?" (Psalm 42:2b). But that's not always the case. Perhaps you're one of many who would define their relationship with God using the popular social media status, "It's complicated." Is that you? If so, you're not alone.

As a pastor, I've spoken to many people who have a hard time loving and being loved. When abuse, messy relationships, dysfunction, or shame have been woven into and throughout one's *human relationships*, their experiences are easily transferred to their *relationship with God*.

I have some personal experience with this. I was not close to my father and he was not close to me. Like oil and water, we had no common interests, and I felt little to no emotional support from him. I had to learn on my own the hard way. It absolutely made my relationship status with God feel like, "It's complicated." I had no difficulty calling Him *Father*, but had immense difficulty calling Him *Abba*, which is often translated "Dad" or "Daddy." I had a father that demanded respect, but not a daddy that nurtured and cared. This was a huge stumbling block to me in my prayer life.

What's your experience? No matter what dysfunctional earthly experiences you have had, none of them define God or His character. His ways and attributes are set and unchanging, (Malachi 3:6) His love is knitted into His very being, (1 John 4:8) and His mercies are new every single morning, (Lamentations 3:22-23) He is slow to anger and abounding in love. (Psalm 103:8)

Although communication and devotion are inextricably linked to love, our clouded view of love can hinder our praying, even when we're willing and desirous. If this is you, then please lay down any burdens of expectation you feel regarding prayer, as if God is somehow angry with you if you don't pray every so often or for a specific length of time. It's not a contest. Toxic earthly relationships may operate on unhealthy expectations, but not God. Focus on His love and the rest will come.

Pause and ponder your own earthly relationships and see if you can draw some connections to your praying.

True love and true prayer are deeply experienced as we heal from our earthly experiences of relational pain.

Peter, one of the first of Jesus's disciples, made a mess of his relationship with Jesus in a way that would cause most good church folk to gasp today. He denied knowing or even being associated with Jesus not once but three times.

Now Peter was sitting out in the courtyard, and a servant girl came to him. "You also were with Jesus of Galilee," she said. But he denied it before them all. "I don't know what you're talking about," he said. Then he went out to the gateway, where another servant girl saw him and said to the people there, "This fellow was with Jesus of Nazareth." He denied it again, with an oath: "I don't know the man!" After a little while, those standing there went up to Peter and said, "Surely you are one of them; your accent gives you away." Then he began to call down curses, and he swore to them, "I don't know the man!" Immediately a rooster crowed. Then Peter remembered the word Jesus had spoken: "Before the rooster crows, you will disown me three times." And he went outside and wept bitterly. (Matthew 26:69-75)

Consider the magnitude of this colossal blunder! How can one undo such a sin? Think of the uproar that would come from the Christian community today if a well-known and well-respected pastor, or any Christian for that matter, denied knowing Jesus when faced with the possibility of persecution. No doubt the social media world would explode with outrage and launch all kinds of condemning attacks.

Have you ever betrayed someone's trust? Did you come together only to be scolded, as if no amount of apology could mend the situation? If ever anger and disappointment could arguably be fully justified, Jesus would be well within His rights to give Peter a large piece of His mind. Jesus could have pointed out to Peter all the times He helped him, saved him, encouraged him and empowered him. Jesus rightfully could have been thoroughly disgusted. He could have, but He wasn't. No. Love called for a different response. Jesus called out to Peter, and as they sat together one morning after Jesus' resurrection, He called forth the love question.

When they had finished eating, Jesus said to Simon Peter, "Simon son of John, do you love me more than these?" "Yes, Lord," he said, "you know that I love you." Jesus said, "Feed my lambs." Again Jesus said, "Simon son of John, do you love me?" He answered, "Yes, Lord, you know that I love you." Jesus said, "Take care of my sheep." The third time he said to him, "Simon son of John, do you love me?" Peter was hurt because Jesus asked him the third time, "Do you love me?" He said, "Lord, you know all things; you know that I love you." Jesus said, "Feed my sheep." (John 21:15-17)

Peter and Jesus had a face-to-face exchange, for the purpose of setting things right in their relationship and bringing the guilt to an end. Love does that. When we have messed up, Jesus desires the same kind of conversations with us in prayer. Prayer is a conversation motivated and compelled by love, even when we feel unworthy of love.

Have you ever found yourself in the place of Peter, committing a spiritual blunder even as you say you follow Jesus? Did you face any repercussions from others? What did that feel like?

Put yourself in Peter's shoes for the moment. How would it feel to be confronted with the "love question?"

Our view of love may be skewed, but it can be realigned with God's love. We might have been harmed by false love, but we can be healed by true love. We may have been pushed away by dysfunctional love, but God will draw us into prayer through holy love.

Prayer is more fully known when birthed from love for God.

So, we will journal a prayer of love. It's not a prayer to supply our many needs, heal our sickness, or calm our circumstantial storms. Set those things aside for now and let this prayer be focused solely on your love for God, and verbally express that love. Let Jesus address any difficulties you may have with His love.

"Whether we think of, or speak to God, whether we act or suffer for him, all is prayer, when we have no other object than his love, and the desire of pleasing him." – John Wesley¹¹

 $^{{\}it 11 John Wesley, A Plain Account of Christian Perfection, (https://churchleaders.com/pastors/free-resources-pastors/158998-free-ebook-a-plain-account-of-christian-perfection-by-john-wesley.html)}$

Questions for Reflection:

- 1. Is expressing your love for God in prayer something that comes easy for you? Why or why not?
- 2. Describe what it means to love God with your whole heart? How have you experienced this kind of love for God?
- 3. Describe what it means to love God with your whole mind? How have you experienced this kind of love for God?
- 4. Describe what it means to love God with all your strength? How have you experienced this kind of love for God?
- 5. How can fractured human relationships taint our view of *perfect love* from God?
- 6. How does broken trust affect our ability to give and receive love?

Prayer Journal - The Love Prayer.

In the space below, write a prayer declaring your love to God the Father, Jesus His Son, and the Holy Spirit. In addition, prayerfully express your need to receive His love. Though it may feel contrary to prayers expressing love, feel free to express your personal roadblocks to expressing love or receiving expressions of love. Discuss with God the realities of your history that have caused you difficulty in expressing love. Tell God how your trust has been broken by those who should have loved you. He can handle the details of your past and love you to a better future.

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Chapter Eight

War and Peace "We cannot fight Satan's power with rational, theoretical truth. You can fight error and ignorance with truth/knowledge. But you have to fight power with power." — Charles Kraft¹²

"When you enter a house, first say, 'Peace to this house.'"
(Luke 10:5)

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onsider these words of Jesus: "Do not suppose that I have come to bring peace to the earth. I did not come to bring peace, but a sword." (Matthew 10:34) Wait a minute. Jesus is the Prince of Peace, isn't He? What could He possibly mean? Certainly, He came to bring peace, didn't He?

How do you define peace? What does it take to bring peace to a place where there seems to be no peace? How do we deal with the root causes that stir conflict on the surface?

I once perceived peace as *conflict management*. If you can just get the trouble, evil, conflict, argument, pride, arrogance and other chaos to be quiet for a while, you will experience peace. But *shalom*, the Hebrew word for peace, is so much more. Shalom eliminates the chaos by binding the authority from which it comes. Where there is shalom, evil has no authority. Where there is shalom, there is wholeness, oneness, rest, and harmony.

¹² Charles H. Kraft. The Evangelical's Guide to Spiritual Warfare, (Baker Publishing Group, Grand Rapids, MI), 114

When it comes to understanding peace, what we hear and what Jesus means are two different things. Often, we have put war and peace in separate boxes. To us, there is no peace where there is war, and there is no war where there is peace. Jesus uses peace as an act of war. When Jesus told His disciples to say, "Peace to this house" (Luke 10:5), He was instructing them in how to engage in an act of spiritual warfare. Spiritual because it fights against evil spirits and their working, and warfare, because it is forceful and authoritative like a sword. When Jesus tells us to breathe peace into a house, He's asking us to engage in a powerful act of subversive spiritual warfare that consecrates (sets apart) the space. In order to fully understand this, we need to dig deeper into two linked concepts: spiritual authority and the nature of verbally speaking the words of God.

Imagine for a moment speaking to a thunderstorm, demanding that it be silent, and it obeys you! Spiritual authority is demonstrated by Jesus in that very way in this story from Mark's gospel.

Leaving the crowd behind, they took him along, just as he was, in the boat. There were also other boats with him. A furious squall came up, and the waves broke over the boat, so that it was nearly swamped. Jesus was in the stern, sleeping on a cushion. The disciples woke him and said to him, "Teacher, don't you care if we drown?" He got up, rebuked the wind and said to the waves, "Quiet! Be still!" Then the wind died down and it was completely calm. He said to his disciples, "Why are you so afraid? Do you still have no faith?" They were terrified and asked each other, "Who is this? Even the wind and the waves obey him!" (Mark 4:36-41)

Let's pause to dissect what is happening here. Jesus gets up from His sleep, assesses the situation, and speaks. When He does – with only three simple words – the wind and waves obey His voice. What is the agent of causation? Is it the right words? If we say "Quiet! Be still!" in the exact same way Jesus did, will we get the same result? No. What about tone? Is Jesus' indignance the key? If we are more indignant will we see similar results? No. The key is authority. Authority needs no tricks, tones, or magic words. Those who are authorized are obeyed. Understanding verbal, spiritual authority is not just about exerted power that controls; it's about creative power that transforms. To understand creative power, we need to look at our Creator in action.

God is the Creator of heaven and earth. How did He create it? He *spoke it into existence*. From the moment that God's voice broke through the silence of an empty, formless world (Genesis 1:2), all of creation began to appear at His command. "And God said, 'Let there be light,' and there was light." (Genesis 1:3)

God *said*. He spoke. He spoke aloud. He spoke aloud with authority that creates. Jesus, who was present and active in creation (John 1:1-3) speaks to the waves and they obey. When Jesus said, "Quiet!" the Greek word used is *siopaho*, which means an *involuntary stillness*. They became still, but that causation was involuntary. In other words, *the sea and the storm had no choice but to obey*. Why? Verbal authority that *created* the sea *caused* the sea to obey. Verbal authority recreates, setting right what has broken, restoring it to a state of oneness.

God's authority is enacted through His speaking. Jesus said, "Lazarus, come out!" and the dead body of Lazarus was raised to life. (John 11:43) Jesus commanded demons to leave a person with one word: "Go!" (Matthew 8:32) These

¹³ See Strong's Greek Dictionary, Definition of G4623

words are Jesus' "swords" that bring peace. They push back the forces of evil that work to stir chaos in our world.

Therefore, praying for peace is a verbal, authoritative act of spiritual warfare, but not as we know war.

The weapons we fight with are not the weapons of the world. On the contrary, they have divine power to demolish strongholds. (2 Corinthians 10:4)

There are key words in that verse that have a certain strength to them. Fight, weapons, divine power, and demolish. Those are words that imply strength. To fight is to assume an active posture of opposition against an enemy. The enemy of Jesus and His church is the devil and his evil ways. The fight requires weapons, and for the followers of Jesus, the greatest weapon we can have is spiritual authority that defeats our enemy. All this fighting and weaponry are endowed with Divine power, not our exertion. Power from on high means our strength, indignation, elevated vocal tone, and striving become immaterial. And finally, we – yes, you and I - can demolish strongholds with verbal, spiritual authority. Strongholds are enemy camps from where he launches attacks. Our verbal speaking, in partnership with Christ's authority, blast holes in the walls of the enemy's fortress and he retreats.

But there's even more.

The act of *consecration* is to set something apart exclusively for a singular use and purpose, and is an act of peace. When we consecrate ourselves to the Lord, it means that we are set apart to be all and only His. One of the many acts of worship the people of Israel engaged in that signified their consecration to the Lord was burning incense.

Imagine coming home after a long day of work and your house is filled with a wonderful culinary aroma. Immediately your mind makes connections... First, I love that smell. Second, someone has gone to a lot of trouble to cook something to generate that smell. Third, I receive this scent as an act of love for me – someone I love has cooked for me which makes me feel especially loved by that person. The smell is a symbol of many acts of love and devotion.

Incense is to God as the aroma of our favorite meal, cooked by our closest loved one, is to us. It's a sign of love and love is a sign of single-heartedness. To burn incense to God begins in the heart before the burner is lit.

When the priests burned incense to God in the Most Holy Place at the heart of the Temple, the incense permeated the space. Incense is like that: it fills a place so completely that you can't get away from it. The sensations and imagery of a scent that permeates is an act of consecration. The act and the aroma are only an outward indication of what started in the heart. Just like devotion leads someone to cook a favorite meal for the object of their affection, the devotion of God's people led them to burn incense to Him, a pleasing aroma that would rise to His throne. As incense fills a space, every other competing aroma is driven out.

"May my prayer be set before you like incense; may the lifting up of my hands be like the evening sacrifice." (Psalm 141:2)

The psalmist is asking that his prayers be like the incense that was burned in the Most Holy Place at the Temple of God. This is perfectly in line with another passage of scripture that describes prayers as incense:

And when he had taken it, the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders fell down before the Lamb. Each one had a harp and they were holding golden bowls full of incense, which are the prayers of God's people. (Revelation 5:8)

Our prayers are acts of setting ourselves apart entirely for God. Our hands, raised in submission to God, are a demonstration of self-sacrifice before God. (Romans 12:1) Prayers and the lifting of our hands are acts of devotion that have no expiration date. They permeate and fill a space, consecrating it to God. Prayers are mysteriously beautiful acts that have many facets and allow us to partner with God in the establishment of His Kingdom here on earth.

Speaking peace, praying peace, and peacemaking are all acts of subversive spiritual warfare that, through single-hearted devotion, drive out every spirit that would not confess Jesus as Lord and Savior. Speaking peace in the name of Jesus is an act of spiritual war, driving out and destroying the authority that establishes chaos, consecrating the space just like an incense burner permeates with a specific aroma.

War and peace. Prayer and incense. Love and devotion. Shalom.

Questions for Reflection

- 1. What is the difference between curing a disease and medicating a symptom of the disease? How do you approach peace: as a *cure* or *medication*?
- 2. Place yourself in the story of Luke 10 at verse 5. You're in a home of someone and you ask to pray a prayer of peace over their home. How might your prayer become a cure for any spiritual sickness in the house?
- 3. Read Hebrews 4:12 and Matthew 10:34. What connections and conclusions can you discern from the metaphorical use of the word "sword?"
- 4. How do prayers for peace become swords of spiritual warfare?
- 5. Why is our love and devotion for God so important in overcoming spiritual darkness?
- 6. Jesus said, "Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God." (Matthew 5:9) In light of this teaching, what does it mean to be a peacemaker?

War and Peace

Prayer Journal – Becoming A True Peacemaker.

Read Mark 4:36-41. Go to Jesus in prayer asking Him to become a peacemaker. Bring specific work or family situations to Him in prayer and ask Him for the authority to destroy the enemy that establishes chaos in those situations. Ask for discernment to see where the enemy is at work causing chaos. Ask Jesus how you can follow His example and use "peace" as a word of rebuke that comes with power and authority.

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Chapter Nine

When I am Weak, Then I am Strong And when He had come into the house, His disciples asked Him privately, "Why could we not cast it out?" So He said to them, "This kind can come out by nothing but prayer and fasting."

(Mark 9:28-29 NKJV)

"Do what Jesus told His disciples to do when He addressed the problem – pray and fast (not just for a specific problem, but for a lifestyle anointing.)" - Bill Johnson¹⁴

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eople value strength, independence, ability, self-sufficiency and productivity. When it comes to ministry, however, does God value those things? Does God place the same value on human strength and ability that we do? No.

Human weakness is of no consequence or concern to God. In fact, God has made a habit throughout the scriptures of using the weak ones, those aware of their shortcomings, the sinner, the least, the outcast and the unnoticed, to accomplish His work. If human weakness were going to impede the work of God, nothing of significance would ever get done.

In fact, when we are feeling strong while engaged in ministry, confidence can become arrogance which has a way of interfering with God's work. The Apostle Paul had this experience. He had seen great things and experienced great miracles. He had also known great pain and persecution.

¹⁴ Bill Johnson, Is It Always God's Will to Heal Someone? (http://bjm.org/qa/is-it-always-gods-will-to-heal-someone/)

Knowing his own tendencies toward pride and arrogance, he said this:

Therefore, in order to keep me from becoming conceited, I was given a thorn in my flesh, a messenger of Satan, to torment me. Three times I pleaded with the Lord to take it away from me. But he said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness." Therefore I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ's power may rest on me. That is why, for Christ's sake, I delight in weaknesses, in insults, in hardships, in persecutions, in difficulties. For when I am weak, then I am strong. (2 Corinthians 12:7b-10)

How might you become conceited in your service to Christ? What great ministry moments or accomplishments could lure you into arrogance?

In Paul's case, the Lord Himself humbled him with a *thorn*. But what about us? How do we ensure that our tendencies toward pride stay in check? One way is fasting and prayer.

Fasting is the intentional abstinence from food. While there are many medical reasons to fast, for the followers of Jesus, fasting is a practice whereby we gain spiritual acuity and strength. When applied spiritually, fasting is a paradox, because it is a decision to become *weak* in one sense, opening the way to be *empowered* by Christ. Fasting is a physical *depletion* (*emptying*) that causes a spiritual *repletion* (*filling*). As you decrease, the power of God within you increases. Paul understood this principle. He recognized that if Christ would manifest Himself powerfully in his ministry, then physical weakness was of great benefit to him. We, however, have largely forgotten the blessing of the

spiritual practice of fasting. We have lost sight of the power and mysterious paradox of fasting for power.

Do you fast for spiritual reasons? What have those reasons been? If you have never fasted in combination with prayer, why?

In Mark's gospel Jesus encounters a situation where He specifically prescribes prayer and fasting as the remedy for the disciples, amid a failed attempt to minister to a boy.

Here's the story:

Then one of the crowd answered and said, "Teacher, I brought You my son, who has a mute spirit. And wherever it seizes him, it throws him down; he foams at the mouth, gnashes his teeth, and becomes rigid. So I spoke to Your disciples, that they should cast it out, but they could not." He answered him and said, "O faithless generation, how long shall I be with you? How long shall I bear with you? Bring him to Me." Then they brought him to Him. And when he saw Him, immediately the spirit convulsed him, and he fell on the ground and wallowed, foaming at the mouth. So He asked his father, "How long has this been happening to him?" And he said, "From childhood. And often he has thrown him both into the fire and into the water to destroy him. But if You can do anything, have compassion on us and help us." Jesus said to him, "If you can allpossible things aretobelieves." Immediately the father of the child cried out and said with tears, "Lord, I believe; help my unbelief!" When Jesus saw that the people came running together, He rebuked the unclean spirit, saying to it, "Deaf and dumb spirit, I command you, come out of him and enter him no more!" Then the spirit cried out, convulsed him greatly, and came out of him. And he became as one dead, so that many said, "He is dead." But Jesus took him by the hand and lifted him up, and he arose. And

when He had come into the house, His disciples asked Him privately, "Why could we not cast it out?" So He said to them, "This kind can come out by nothing but prayer and fasting." (Mark 9:17-29 NKIV)

At the time this story occurs, the disciples had previously driven out demons. In fact, Mark specifically records that Jesus sent them with "authority to drive out demons" (3:15). Of course the disciples would ask Jesus what went wrong. They had driven out demons, but on this particular day they could not. What was wrong? The answer is linked to prayer and fasting.

Having brought up the topic of driving out demons, what is your first response? Fear, worry, skepticism or perhaps disbelief? What do you think causes those feelings?

According to Jesus, prayer along with fasting was the disciple's gateway to the power and authority needed to drive out an evil spirit. If it was true for them, then it is true for us.

There's not enough time in this short chapter to introduce you to every nuance of spiritual warfare. However, allow me to point you in the direction of an exceptional resource: *The Evangelical's Guide to Spiritual Warfare: Scriptural Insights and Practical Instruction on Facing the Enemy* by Charles H. Kraft. Kraft's work contains truthful, clear, biblically-rooted, solid insights into the reality of the spiritual powers of darkness and our clear and compelling call of Jesus to compassionately help others be free from their working. Kraft also addresses numerous questions and concerns regarding the reality of evil spirit.

Becoming A Person of Prayer

Overcoming the powers of darkness is directly linked to the combination of prayer and fasting. When we submit ourselves to prayer combined with fasting, something powerful happens to us that only God can do. Jesus knew this first hand. He didn't simply command His disciples to do something He had never done or was exempt from due to His status as Son of the Father. He had experienced His own self-emptying to be filled with power from on high. In Matthew 4, Jesus is led by the Holy Spirit into the wilderness for 40 days of fasting and prayer. At the end of His wilderness experience, He has an encounter with the devil that reveals the answer to the "why" question. Why do we fast? What possible benefit can there be to denying ourselves food? What is the link to the power?

Then Jesus was led by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. After fasting forty days and forty nights, he was hungry. The tempter came to him and said, "If you are the Son of God, tell these stones to become bread." Jesus answered, "It is written: 'Man shall not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God.'" Then the devil took him to the holy city and had him stand on the highest point of the temple. "If you are the Son of God," he said, "throw yourself down. For it is written: "He will command his angels concerning you, and they will lift you up in their hands, so that you will not strike your foot against a stone." Jesus answered him, "It is also written: 'Do not put the Lord your God to the test.'" Again, the devil took him to a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their splendor. "All this I will give you," he said, "if you will bow down and worship me." Jesus said to him, "Away from me, Satan! For it is written: 'Worship the Lord your God, and serve him only.'" Then the devil left him, and angels came and attended him. (Matthew 4:1-11)

In verse four Jesus says, "It is written." *Where* is it written? Follow me to Deuteronomy 8:3.

So He humbled you, allowed you to hunger, and fed you with manna which you did not know nor did your fathers know, that He might make you know that man shall not live by bread alone; but man lives by every word that proceeds from the mouth of the LORD. (Deuteronomy 8:3 NKJV)

So here's Jesus, in the wilderness, in a face-to-face combat situation with the devil. The devil knows He's hungry and tempts Him to turn stones into bread. How does Jesus respond? With a story about His ancestors, and how God had to teach them that His words were so very important to them that even physical food was less important. God removed the Israelites' regular food so they'd learn a higher and deeper lesson. The lesson was this: God's words are our sustenance, even more than physical food.

Verse four, therefore, contains the answer to the "why" question: *Man shall not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God.*" (emphasis mine) Words. Not just any normal words however. These are God's words. Words that come with power and authority. Remember this important principle from the previous chapter?

Understanding verbal, spiritual authority is not just about *exerted* power that *controls*; it's about *creative* power that *transforms*.

Fasting proves that we live more fully on the Word of God than we do from a full stomach, and prayer – communing with the Lord in conversation – is where we *feast on His Word*. Fasting in the natural, therefore, is designed to be a feasting in the supernatural.

Becoming A Person of Prayer

Back to the disciples' question following their inability to drive out a demon: "Why could we not cast it out?" In that moment, Jesus, gives them an answer based on His own experience with fasting and prayer that caused the devil to flee. He learned the same lesson as His ancestors, that He lived not only by food, but by every word that comes from the mouth of His Father. With this experience backing His words, Jesus tells the disciples that "this kind can come out by nothing but prayer and fasting."

You and I do not live by bread alone. We live by every Word that comes from the mouth of God. (Deuteronomy 8:3) When our mouths are closed to the rhythms of regular eating, we learn to listen for the feast of God's Word in prayer. When we are weak, then we are strong.

Questions for Reflection:

- 1. When is the last time you fasted for spiritual purposes? Why did you fast, and what was the outcome?
- 2. Have you ever experienced power from God during a fast? Describe that experience?
- 3. Have you never fasted before? Can you describe why you have not?
- 4. Look up Deuteronomy 8:3. Read it out loud, then describe all the actions God did to and for the Israelites, and what He was trying to teach them.
- 5. Now look up Matthew 4:3-4. Read it out loud. What connections are there between Deuteronomy 8:3 and Matthew 4:4? Why do you think Jesus chose that scripture to quote to the devil?
- 6. Knowing what you now know about fasting, why do you think it, along with prayer, is necessary preparation for casting out "this kind" of demon as Jesus said in Mark 9:29?

Prayer Journal – Intentionally Fast and Pray.

Choose a day to fast on purpose so that you may spend time with the Lord in prayer. Have your Bible and a journal with you as well. Through your day of fasting, prayer and scripture reading, journal any thoughts, insights, words from the Lord, or revelation you receive. Be sure to thank Him and tell Him you desire to learn what it means to be strong in weakness.

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Chapter Ten

Repent

"Who may ascend the mountain of the LORD? Who may stand in his holy place? The one who has clean hands and a pure heart, who does not trust in an idol or swear by a false god. They will receive blessing from the LORD and vindication from God their Savior.

Such is the generation of those who seek him, who seek your face,

God of Jacob." (Psalm 24:3-6)

"The wonderful news is that our Lord is a God of mercy, and He responds to repentance." - Billy Graham

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epentance produces a humbling of the human heart, allowing God's grace to be experienced with truth and clarity. He is without sin, and we have sinned. He is holy, and we have committed unholy acts. He is loving, and we have hated. For every sinful act there awaits grace, but the channel through which graces flows most freely is *repentance*.

Repentance is different from its cousins: guilt, fear, shame, regret, and sorrow.

- Guilt is the feeling of condemnation for something sinful we've done, something good we have not done, or some harm to which we've contributed.
- Fear is the feeling of pending doom due to any number of real or imagined circumstances.
- Shame declares a person is worthless.
- Regret is the lingering condemnation of something you should have done but cannot fix.

 Sorrow is the weight of sadness that can become more than anyone can bear.

Have you ever experienced any of these feelings? Are you experiencing them now? What happened that caused these emotional and spiritual burdens? How long have you suffered with these feelings?

Repentance is the gateway to lasting freedom from sin and speaks truthfully about what has happened. It "comes clean" regarding sin. Repentance is a humble posture before a holy and loving Father and is preceded with a determination to never repeat what has happened. It follows an experience of loathing the sin that was committed. Repentance is a gift because it helps us to de-burden the negative feelings and condemnation produced by sin.

Can you see the contrast? Sorrow is a burden of sadness, but repentance unloads the burden, so we can return to joy. Regret lingers over us, but repentance dissolves regret's cloud. Shame declares us to be worthless, but repentance recognizes our deep worth and restores our dignity. Fear produces pending doom, but repentance thrives in the atmosphere of healing. Guilt may condemn us, but repentance removes all condemnation.

When it comes to sin, we've all experienced the *feelings*, but all too often we've not prayed through to the *freedom*.

Is your life a story of freedom, having passed through the gate of repentance, or is it a story of worry, wondering if God will forgive you?

Remember, if you want to be clean, you must come clean.

Questions for Reflection:

- 1. The precursor to repentance is conviction. Have you ever been convicted by the Holy Spirit? How did you respond?
- 2. Read 2 Corinthians 7:8-11. In verse 10 Paul mentions "godly sorrow." How would you describe godly sorrow?
- 3. How is godly sorrow different than guilt?
- 4. Do you think it is possible to repent without a revelation of wrongs committed? Why or why not?
- 5. What happens to us when we don't repent? Who is ultimately hurt and why?
- 6. How should we handle others when we see that they've committed wrongs and not yet repented?

Repent

Prayer Journal – Search Me. Spend time with Psalm 139. Allow the goodness of God to burst into the chambers of your soul where guilt, shame, fear, regret and sorrow currently reside. Sense His closeness and desire to cleanse you. Pray. Write out your prayers. Repent. Be free. You have searched me, LORD, and you know me. You know when I sit and when I rise; you perceive my thoughts from afar. . You discern my going out and my lying down; you are familiar with all my ways. Before a word is on my tongue you, LORD, know it completely. You hem me in behind and before, and you lay your hand upon me. Such knowledge is too wonderful for me, too lofty for me to attain. Where can I go from your Spirit? Where can I flee from your presence? If I go up to the heavens, you are there; if I make my bed in the depths, you are there. If I rise on the wings of the dawn,

if I settle on the far side of the sea, even there your hand will

guide me, your right hand will hold me fast.

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Chapter Eleven

When
Nothing is
Really
Something

"I am the vine; you are the branches. If you remain in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing." (John 15:5)

"The Christian often tries to forget his weakness; God wants us to remember it, to feel it deeply. The Christian wants to conquer his weakness and to be freed from it; God wants us to rest and even rejoice in it." – Andrew Murray¹⁵

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ave you ever used a knife for a flat-head screwdriver? A knife is my personal go-to when there's no actual tools around. It's not the most effective tool I've ever used, and I might have bent a few tips trying to tighten a screw. Knives are a cheap substitute for the real deal. If you want the job done right, then get a screwdriver. But then again, the knife *did* turn the screw, didn't it? Well, it worked for the screw in my light switch plate and that's hardly a task requiring real strength. The torque required to drive in a three-inch wood screw requires an *actual screwdriver*.

Perhaps many of our spiritual "accomplishments" today are best described as butter knives turning switch plate screws. Something is happening, but it can hardly be compared to real power.

¹⁵ Andrew Murray, Abide in Christ: The Joy of Being In God's Presence, (London)

When have you substituted an object for a tool? Did it work? How effective was it? Did you spend more time than the task should have taken to get the job done?

In John 15:5 Jesus says this: "Apart from me you can do nothing." But wait, don't we do a lot of things? Aren't we busier Christians than in any other age of human history? What about all our good works and philanthropy? Doesn't that count for something?

Before we seek to answer that question, consider this for a moment. There are many worldly organizations that do an abundance of good works. In fact, it could be argued that many of them do more, give away more, and do their tasks with a greater level of passion than the people of God. Yet, they neither know Jesus, nor ascribe any "credit" to Him in the process. So, if the world, even though they don't know Jesus, can accomplish many good and honorable things, then what does Jesus mean when He says that apart from Him we can do *nothing*?

What acts of kindness, good deeds, and charity do you see happening around the world from groups and organizations that do not profess or confess Christ? In your opinion, how do their acts compare to that of the church?

When Jesus said, "Apart from me you can do *nothing*," I've wondered, "What's the *nothing* that we can't do without Jesus?" The nothing is actually represented by *something*, isn't it? The reverse of the statement would read something like, "With me you can do mighty and great fruit-producing things that are utterly impossible without me!" So, what are the *somethings* that Jesus is talking about?

Becoming A Person of Prayer

Jesus is not silent on this subject. One grave error we often make in our understanding of scripture is that we hear it in small sound bites. We compartmentalize those nuggets as true unto themselves without considering that they are true in the greater scope of everything else that the Bible says. Jesus says we can't do anything apart from him, but we are not left in the dark as to what the nothing is. Listen to this seemingly absurd claim of Jesus:

Very truly I tell you, whoever believes in me will do the works I have been doing, and they will do even greater things than these, because I am going to the Father. And I will do whatever you ask in my name, so that the Father may be glorified in the Son. You may ask me for anything in my name, and I will do it. (John 14:12-14)

Isn't is utterly absurd to think that mere mortals could do the works Jesus did? And if that weren't absurd enough, is it not even more shocking to think that we, as mere humans, could do something *greater* than what Jesus did? Like most shocking statements, this quote from Jesus draws out a few questions.

First, how do we define belief? Belief is all encompassing. It's not mere mental ascent, nor is it the mere *recitation of facts*. For *believers*, Jesus is all-in-all, first, primary, Lord of their life.

How deep is your belief?

Secondly, we ask, "What are the works Jesus does?" It should be obvious. Jesus authenticates Himself as Messiah, not only with words, but with power. He heals sick people, cleanses lepers, causes the blind to see, the deaf to hear, and the lame to walk. He forgives sin and welcomes those who

come to Him as little children. He speaks, and the dead are raised. These are the works of Jesus. According to John, Jesus did so many more of these kinds of things that the world indeed could not contain the volumes of books needed to record them. (John 21:25)

What other works of Jesus can you recall?

This begs our third question: "What comes to mind when you hear 'greater things?'" What could be greater than what Jesus did? How is that possible? Can we even imagine what could be done that Jesus has not already done? Paul said it this way: "Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us." (Ephesians 3:20) When His power is at work within us, all things are possible. We can't imagine what these things can be, but we don't have to. When the power of God is at work within us, then God will release miracles through our voice and hands. Jesus' words came true in the lives of the disciples after His ascension to heaven. Peter's shadow was healing people as he walked to the temple. (Acts 5:15) Cloths that had touched Paul's body were taken to the sick and they were healed. (Acts 19:12) Philip was transported by the Holy Spirit after ministering to the Ethiopian eunuch. (Acts 8:39)

Can you imagine yourself participating with the power of God to see works like these accomplished for the glory of Jesus?

Fourth and finally, what does it mean when Jesus instructs us to "ask in my Name"? We who have been in church for any amount of time know how prayers are said...

Becoming A Person of Prayer

they really don't count unless you finish them with, "In the Name of Jesus we pray. Amen." (Slight sarcasm intended.) That approach to asking "In Jesus' Name" is an oversimplification of what is meant here. Jesus is suggesting an *abiding in* that opens the channel to power, not a mere *invoking* that is likened to a magic word, releasing the genie from its lamp. When we abide in Jesus, even the way we say His name will change. Could it be that "in" means "abide in?" Could it be that we have been declaring the name of Jesus without abiding in the presence of Jesus? Could this be the missing link? Maybe it means more than we have thought.

How "in" is in? How might doing things in the name of Jesus involve something more than saying His name before the closing amen of our prayers?

Apart from Jesus, we can truly, honestly do nothing.

Today we desperately need praying people who connect the dots and see the whole picture Jesus intends. We were designed to be ambassadors of the establishment of Christ's Kingdom on earth. Not only devoted to the Master, but so closely abiding in Him that we intimately understand His ways. Armed with that depth of relationship, we become channels of His power, and it is His power at work within us that allows for the release of restorative miracles through our voice and hands as we minister in the Name of Jesus. And Jesus, for Whom nothing is impossible, will graciously allow us to partner with Him in even greater miracles than He performed, so that all glory and honor will be pointed back to Him, the King above every king and the Lord over all lords.

Questions for Reflection:

- 1. What does it mean to you to be a *branch* connected to the *True Vine*, Jesus?
- 2. What do you receive from Jesus that you cannot obtain on your own?
- 3. How disconnected from a vine can a branch be before losing its life?
- 4. How much of your personal ministry have you done in your own strength?
- 5. Does abiding in Jesus demand stillness? Are we only connected to Jesus in stillness and silence? What about when we're doing ministry tasks?
- 6. Describe the fruit of abiding in Jesus. What is it and how do you know you're producing it?

Prayer Journal - Quality Time With Jesus.

Set aside one hour to abide in Jesus. Abiding is the practice of being present with Jesus as He is present with you. Abiding should be a two-way conversation. Listen for His voice and engage your own. Talk with Him about His promises that much fruit would flow from your life as the result of abiding. Use the space below to journal what comes from your conversation as you abide in His presence.

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Chapter Twelve

Is Our Spirit Willing?

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"Watch and pray so that you will not fall into temptation. The spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak." (Mark 14:38)

"Either not to pray, or to pray from selfish motives, shuts us out of a great amount of Divine helpfulness which otherwise would be ours." $-F.B. Meyer^{16}$

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s we conclude our journey in praying, we do so understanding that it is also a beginning. Knowing what we now know of prayer, traveling to the places that can't be described in snapshots but only through experience, we have insight that opens the doors to new depths with God. We will end with one of the scriptures that began our exploration: "God is able to do immeasurably more that all we ask or imagine." (Ephesians 3:20) Yes, He is able, but how does that happen? Because of "His power that is at work within us" (Ephesians 3:20). And how do we receive such power? We pray. And to pray requires a willing spirit: one that will enter into the Throne Room of God in prayer and one that will press in on behalf of others through intercession.

A willing spirit is the catalyst that causes the pursuit of prayer. However, the flesh-our will, weaknesses, frailties, faults and infirmities-gets in the way of our praying.

¹⁶ F.B. Meyer, The Directory of the Devout Life, (Morgan & Scott, 1904, London, England), 179

The disciples of Jesus struggled with the duality of a willing spirit and weak flesh when it came to praying for Jesus at one of the most critical points in his life. Jesus was in the Garden of Gethsemane praying "Thy will be done" just before His arrest. At the same time, His disciples were napping when they should have been praying. Twice Jesus returned to find them asleep, yet Jesus doesn't scold them. He speaks a truthful statement of what occurs in the duality of the human existence when drawn to spiritual things like prayer: "The spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak." (Matthew 26:41)

We will have weak flesh when it comes to prayer. We will doze off when an important request calls us to our knees. We will promise someone that we will pray, and then forget to actually pray. These things will happen over the most trivial and most important matters needing prayer. Our flesh will fail us. That is undeniable, but our weak flesh does not have to decide the power of our prayer life. A willing spirit is the key.

Consider adding the reality of a willing spirit to every waypoint of our journey in prayer. Consider our eleven stops along the way and declaring our desire to come before God with the willing spirit. Here's what those eleven prayers might sound like.

Chapter One: Snapshots and Being There

Lord, I bring you a willing spirit to explore every depth of prayer. Take me to spiritual places I could not know without you.

Chapter Two: Pray First, Act Second

Lord, I bring you a willing spirit to pray before I ever act on my own thoughts or desires. My flesh may want to wander, but my spirit says, "Pray!"

Chapter Three: The Word is the Word

Lord, I bring you a willing spirit to search the scriptures for truth, promises, power and praise to fuel and inform my praying. My spirit is willing to have your words continually in my mouth and on my lips.

Chapter Four: Real Unspoken Prayer

Lord, I bring you a willing spirit to spend time listening for the sound of your voice. My spirit hungers for your words more than my own.

Chapter Five: Who Cares?

Lord, I bring you a willing spirit, asking for the one-and-same compassionate heart you have. I'm willing and confess my weakness.

Chapter Six: The Prayer that Carries

Lord, I bring you a willing spirit to be an intercessor. I will carry others in prayer even as the four men carried the paralytic on the mat.

Chapter Seven: First Love and Prayer

Lord, I bring you a willing spirit to love you deeply. I am willing to abide in your presence to simply love you and be loved by you.

Chapter Eight: War and Peace

Lord, I bring you a willing spirit to go to war against your enemy, the devil, by destroying his authority that establishes chaos. I am willing to command him to flee in your name and through your power.

Chapter Nine: When I Am Weak, Then I Am Strong

Lord, I bring you a willing spirit to fast and pray. My flesh will fight my spirit, but I am willing. I will hunger for physical food, but I hunger more the power of your words.

Chapter Ten: Repent

Lord, I bring you a willing spirit that will be open to your correction and conviction. It is good for me to repent when I have wronged you, determining to never repeat my offenses and sin.

Chapter Eleven: When Nothing is Really Something

Lord, I bring you a willing spirit that my life will bear much fruit for your glory and your kingdom. I'm willing to be used, willing to abide, willing to pray, willing to be a conduit of your miracles.

Are you willing to pray these prayers? Why or why not?

Prayer begins with a willing spirit.

Prayer is not limited by weak flesh.

Questions for Reflection:

- 1. Describe what it means to have a willing spirit even though you have weak flesh?
- 2. Talk about a time when your weak flesh affected your praying in the negative? How did you feel about that time?
- 3. Are you ever tempted to just give up on praying because of your flesh? How do you fight that temptation?
- 4. What trips you up from praying the most? Is it a temptation, activity, or distraction? Do you talk to the Lord about what keeps you from praying?
- 5. What personal desires, dreams and yearnings do you have that compete with prayer? Do they win out over prayer? Why do you think this is and what can you do about it?
- 6. Do you experience guilt when your weak flesh gets in the way of your praying? Why are guilt-driven prayers ineffective?

Is Our Spirit Willing?

Prayer Journal - Declaration of Willingness. Use this final prayer journal space to declare your willingness to pursue God with all your heart. Make it personal because God knows you personally. Make it honest because He knows you intimately. Make it a commitment because He is Lord of All.

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Conclusion

ogether, we've taken a journey to new depths in prayer.

Have your experiences given you new insight? Are you moving further down the path from being a person who prays, to being a person of prayer?

There really is something amazing about abiding in Jesus, learning that without Him we can do nothing of true value to His Kingdom. It's a gift beyond description to experience the conviction and cleansing of His Holy Spirit, to know that He has spoken and that we've actually heard from Him. It's nearly indescribable to articulate the feeling of knowing that we are talking to the Living God of the whole universe, the One who spoke all things into existence.

Prayer causes us to run out of adjectives.

Such a gift is not meant to be kept to oneself. How can you pass the gift of "going there" on to a friend? I want to encourage you to share the journey with another. Take this book and partner with another person to disciple them in prayer. Journeys are meant to be shared. I've shared mine with you and the Lord has shared His with us. Now it is time to share yours with another.

My prayer for you is that you will know Jesus deeply and intimately; that you would pursue Him with an undivided heart and experience great joy in His presence. I pray that you know what it is like to touch heaven in your praying and know that heaven has touched you. I ask the Lord that He would grant you the joy of seeing answers to your prayer become reality. And I pray that you will become a person of prayer, not through compulsion, guilt, or prodding, but drawn by love and devotion.

In the Name of Jesus and for H is glory I pray. Amen.

Penned in May, 2019 Brett Heintzman, Director of Communications for the FMC-USA

About the Author

Brett Heintzman is an ordained elder in the Free Methodist Church—USA and currently serves as Director of Communications for the denomination.

His ministry experience includes leading worship,



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Brett has worked with local churches to bring healing through prayer, and is a speaker, teacher and evangelist.

Brett lives in Indianapolis, Indiana with his wife Barb.