

CALVARY **BASICS** SERIES

EFFECTIVE PRAYER LIFE



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INTRODUCTION

Today, we are living in desperate times.

Yet, the Church is not desperate before God in prayer.

Jesus said to Peter, James, and John, "What? Could you not watch with me one hour?" (Matthew 26:40 NKJV). We say, "Shame on you, Peter! Shame on you, John! How terrible! Not watching with the Lord in prayer for even one hour!" But look out. Whenever you point a finger at someone else, there are three pointing back at you.

Prayer is the most important activity a born-again Christian can perform. It should head your

list of priorities, for certainly the world around us desperately needs prayer. Prayer will open the door for God to do a glorious work in these last days. Prayer will stem the tide of evil.

Effective Prayer Life

This collection of studies on prayer presents you with certain Scriptures, thoughts, and rules. When you put them into practice in your life, they will bring you into a new relationship with God, and help you to experience a more effective and dynamic prayer life in which to do battle against the evil forces in these last days. We wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against spirit powers and principalities, thus the weapons of our warfare cannot be carnal. Prayer is the most potent weapon that we possess in our spiritual arsenal and by it we can pull down the strongholds of the enemy. Does Satan have a stronghold on your city government? Does he have a stronghold on your husband or wife or children? Through this book you will learn how to break down these strongholds.

CHAPTER 1

WHAT IS PRAYER?

Prayer can be expressed in three basic forms: worship, petition, and intercession; with variations within each form.

Worship

The first basic form of prayer is worship. It is a spontaneous result from the conscious awareness of God. As I realize the greatness of God and

His nearness to me and His love for me, I naturally respond with deep, inner worship of Him.

One day I watched a little gnat flying around. I was amazed at how small it was, and yet so wonderfully designed. He was able to defy the laws of gravity, suspending himself in the air and then darting around rapidly. I thought, "God you are so wise in the design of even small forms of life."

Worshipping God for His creative genius is a form of prayer—that consciousness of who He is and what He has done inspires worship. When I recognize the wisdom and power of God, I stand in awe of Him. Thanksgiving and praise arise spontaneously as I become conscious of the goodness of God to me that I know I do not deserve.

Christians should engage in this form of communion and prayer constantly. We should become more conscious of Him as He speaks to us

through nature. We see His power in the storm and lightning. We smell His loveliness in a rose.

We see His design in a daisy. "In the rustling grass, I hear Him pass, He speaks to me everywhere." Sometimes we verbalize our worship;

often we don't. It's simply an overwhelming feeling within our hearts as God manifests Himself

to us in a thousand different ways. We just say, "Ohhh, God is so good!" We worship Him and commune with Him in the recognition of His love and grace.

Petition

The second form of prayer is petition, as I bring my personal needs before God and ask Him for the help that I need so desperately. Day by day I cry out to the Lord for His wisdom, guidance, strength, and provision. There are some

people who dismiss personal petition prayer as selfish. They say that it's wrong to pray for anything for yourself because you ought to be thinking more of others.

As part of my initiation into the Hi Y Club in

Jr. High I had to memorize this poem.
Lord, let me live from day to day,
In such a self-forgetting way,
That even when I kneel to pray,
My prayer will be for others. Help me in
all the things I do,
To ever be sincerely true,
To know that all I do for You,
Must needs be done for others.
Others, Lord, yes others,
Let this my motto be.
Help me to live for others,
That I might live for Thee

It is beautiful poetry that expresses truth. I should pray for others and be concerned with their needs.

Nevertheless, I must also be concerned in prayer with my own needs. Call it what you want, but I have certain definite needs that must be met before I can be of benefit to others. The Bible says, “The husbandman that laboureth must be first partaker of the fruits” (2 Timothy 2:6). In other words, you can’t give what you don’t have. Like measles, you can’t give ‘em unless you got ‘em.

Therefore, I must first be a partaker of God’s grace, love, strength, and power. Then, as I partake, I have something to share with others. One of Jesus’ disciples said, “Lord, teach us to pray, as John also taught his disciples.” Jesus then taught that model prayer: “Our Father which art in heaven, Hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done, as in heaven so in earth” (Luke 11:1–2). The first part of the prayer is addressed to God— worshipping God for what He is: “Hallowed be thy name.” Then comes the prayer for the kingdom of God: “Thy kingdom come.” We are to seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness. The very next petition is “Give us day by day our daily bread...and lead us not into temptation,

but deliver us from evil” (Luke 11:3–4). These are personal petitions for my own needs. I do have needs, and God wants me to bring those needs before Him. There’s nothing wrong with praying and asking God to supply my rent money or whatever else I might need.

Intercession The third form of prayer, intercession, is the type of prayer that can be considered work. Worshipping God is not work—that’s glorious! It’s spontaneous, beautiful communion and fellowship with God. Petition isn’t too much work because I’m so interested in what I need that I can become involved in it very easily. But when I begin to intercede, then I must labor. Paul, in his closing remarks to the church at Colosse, makes mention of one of his fellow laborers, Epaphras. “Epaphras, who is one of you, a servant of Christ, saluteth you, always laboring fervently for you in prayers” (Colossians 4:12). Here prayer is described as work. Through intercessory prayer I reach out beyond myself and pray, not for my own needs, but for the needs of those around me. I pray for my family, friends, and neighbors who don’t yet know Jesus Christ. I pray for the needs of those

in the Body of Christ. I bring before God all the various needs of others that have come to my attention. It is during intercessory prayer that I become aware of what prayer actually is: a spiritual battle. The Battle There's a conflict taking place around us continually, a spiritual conflict. Invisible to our physical eyes is the spirit world which is divided into two categories: the forces of good and the forces of evil. These are in constant combat with one another and diametrically opposed to each other. When I enter into intercessory prayer I step right into the battle and begin to fight in this spiritual warfare. Paul the apostle said that "we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places" (Ephesians 6:12). Therefore, we're to put on the whole armor of God. Paul then goes on to list the armor of God that should clothe a Christian for battle.

For, the apostle said, the weapons of our warfare are not carnal, because we're not in a physical battle. If we were, then we'd have worldly weapons. But because we're in a spiritual battle, the weapons and armor of our warfare must be spiritual. Through them we pull down the strongholds of the enemy (2 Corinthians 10:4). Once you're fully equipped with all this spiritual armor of Ephesians 6, what are you to do? Just stand there? No! Get into the fight! How do you get into the fight?

"Praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit" (Ephesians 6:18). You've been girded for the battle—now go to it!

Battle Scenario

The scene of the spiritual conflict is right here on the earth. The purpose of the conflict is the control of the earth and the individual lives upon it. The earth rightfully belongs to Jesus Christ. He created it and gave it to man. But man forfeited it to Satan. Jesus came and purchased it back for Himself. He redeemed us and the world through His blood at Calvary. For a while as Jesus hung on the cross, Satan thought he was the victor. But on the third day Jesus rose again, triumphing over death, hell, the grave, and Satan. John tells us in 1 John 3:8 that Jesus was manifested to destroy the works of the devil. This He did through His death on the cross (Hebrews 2:14). He

conquered Satan's forces—spoiled the principalities and powers that were against us, nailed them to His cross, triumphed over them, and made an open display of His victory (Colossians 2:14,15). Though the world rightfully belongs to Jesus Christ now, Satan seeks to maintain control and power over it by force. Much as when God had rejected King Saul from reigning over Israel and had the prophet Samuel anoint David in his stead, Saul, by force, tried to hold on to that which was no longer rightfully his, and sought to drive David from the kingdom. So Satan seeks to hold on to that which is no longer rightfully his. Jesus Christ also has a method of winning the world, but not by force. Jesus seeks to draw men unto Himself and into His kingdom through love. Thus, the warfare continues in this world for the control of individual lives. Satan applies tremendous force and pressure to keep people in his camp. Jesus, wooing and drawing through gentle love, seeks to persuade men to submit their lives to Him. As you enter into intercessory prayer, you rush into the thick of the battle. It becomes work because you're engaged against the forces of darkness and hell. You're going against the enemy's strongholds with prayer. You witness the grip of power that Satan has on the lives of those around you. Through

prayer you can advance with the battering ram and demolish the strongholds the enemy has on those individual lives— freeing them from the power by which he holds them captive. This kind of prayer, the warfare praying in the Spirit, becomes real work. You begin to understand what Paul meant when he said that Epaphras was “laboring fervently” in prayer. It’s wonderful to realize that prayer is the deciding factor in this spiritual warfare. Satan is a very stubborn enemy and an obstinate fighter. He yields only what and when he must.

Therefore, your prayers must be very specific. Vague, general prayers like “God, save the world” won’t even dent the enemy. But when you bring an individual before the Lord, laying claim to that person for Jesus Christ, you begin to be specific in prayer, and Satan must yield.

“Lord, my friend, John, is bound by the power of Satan. His life is being ruined and twisted. I come against that work of Satan in the name of Jesus Christ and in the victory of the cross of Jesus Christ. I ask you, Father, to free him from this power of Satan that’s holding him today. Loose him now, that he may know the love of Jesus Christ. Lord, let your Spirit speak to his heart and bring an end to the work of Satan that’s binding him, and blinding him.” We thus recover them from the snare of

the devil that is holding them as captives. Realize that Satan is persistent. Even after you begin to see a bit of victory, you must continue in prayer to hold the ground that you've gained. The minute you win ground, Satan will turn right around and counterattack to regain it. Your prayers must be persistent. The ground we have taken from the enemy through prayer, must be held by prayer. Many times we make a serious mistake when we begin seeing signs of victory in the life of one for whom we have been interceding. Maybe they have gone forward to receive Christ and have started to read their Bibles, so we quit praying for them. Often the seed has not had a chance to take root yet and the enemy comes to take away the seed. We need to continue to pray long after we begin to see initial signs of victory. The beautiful truth is that Satan has already been defeated. As we go into battle the outcome has already been determined. Jesus triumphed over Satan and, thus, Satan must yield when we come against him in the power and in the authority of Jesus Christ. Lay claim to the victory in Jesus Christ—and life after life will be set free as you come against the strongholds of Satan and tear them down with this powerful weapon of prayer! God has made prayer available to the weakest of His children. It's something

that every Christian can exercise, regardless of his spiritual state. You don't have to be a spiritual giant to get into spiritual warfare. And you don't have to be afraid of the enemy as you enter in, because he's already been defeated. Satan knows that prayer spells his defeat. He'll fight you more to keep you from prayer than any other thing you do. Sometimes, he even encourages you to other specific activities because he knows how fruitless they are. You'll be amazed at the disturbances that come your way when you kneel down and start praying. The telephone will ring. Or someone will be at the front door. Or you'll suddenly remember something you've been wanting to do. When I pray I usually take a notepad with me so I can jot down those thoughts of the forgotten things that need attention. Otherwise I'm tempted to get up and do them immediately. Satan will do anything to get you away from prayer. Intercessory prayer is a real labor. It's a real conflict in the battle against Satan. It's the deciding factor, and that's why Satan fights it so hard. Suppose that someone attacked you on a dark street and started wrestling with you. If he were to pull a knife, the whole battle would suddenly be centered on one thing—control of the knife. All of a sudden, you'd forget about punching him in the nose. You'd be grabbing for his wrist

and trying to knock that knife out of his hand for you realize that it is the deciding factor in this battle. Satan knows that prayer brings you victory and spells his defeat. He knows it's the deciding factor in this spiritual warfare. That's why he concentrates all his efforts against prayer. He'll do all he can to upset your prayer time, and keep you from praying.

Persistence

If the answers to your prayers don't come immediately, don't give up! Paul speaks of Epaphras "laboring fervently" in prayer for the Colossians (Colossians 4:12). I don't believe that Epaphras said, "O Lord, bless the Church in Colosse, in Jesus' name. Amen." Rather, he waited upon God, diligently sought after God for the welfare and the benefit of that church, and continued the practice of prayer day after day. James 5:16 speaks of effective fervent prayer availing much. Many times we give up a little bit too soon. Whenever Satan begins losing his grip he makes a last, desperate lunge. This is when we all too often become tired and give up, quitting just short of victory. In his book, *How to Win Friends and Influence People*, Mr. Carnigie tells of a Mr. Darby, a wealthy insurance broker from the East, who was caught up with gold fever and headed out to Colorado. He did

some prospecting and discovered a very rich vein of gold in the Rockies. He returned to the East and convinced all his friends to invest their money in a mining venture. They formed a corporation, bought a great deal of equipment, and mined this very wealthy vein of gold ore in Colorado. About the time that the corporation paid off all its debts, the vein of gold ran out. The investors kept digging until they ran themselves into debt again. Finally one day, a discouraged Mr. Darby ordered an end to the digging. He closed the mine, went into Denver, and sold the mine and equipment to a junk dealer for a few hundred dollars. Mr. Darby headed back home. The junk dealer hired a geologist to study the mine and the area. The geologist came back with a report: "If you'll dig three feet past the point where Mr. Darby quit, you'll find that same vein of gold." The junk dealer became the wealthiest mine owner in the state of Colorado. Just three more feet! I wonder how many times we, too, stop three feet short of victory. Claim the Promises There are many fantastic promises given to us about prayer through Jesus Christ. Verily I say unto you, Whatsoever ye shall bind on earth shall be bound in heaven; and whatsoever ye shall loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven....if

two of you shall agree on earth as touching any thing that they shall ask, it shall be done for them of my Father which is in heaven. —Matthew 18:18–19 The number in prayer: any two of you. The place of prayer: on earth. The scope of prayer: any thing. “It shall be done for them of my Father which is in heaven.” That is a broad and glorious promise! Jesus also promised: Have faith in God. For verily I say unto you, That whosoever shall say unto this mountain, Be thou removed, and be thou cast into the sea; and shall not doubt in his heart, but shall believe that those things which he saith shall come to pass; he shall have whatsoever he saith. Therefore I say unto you, What things soever ye desire, when ye pray, believe that ye receive them, and ye shall have them. —Mark 11:22–24 What a fantastic promise! Also, Jesus said, And whatsoever ye shall ask in my name, that will I do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son. If ye shall ask any thing in my name, I will do it. —John 14:13–14 Any thing!

Another promise: “If ye abide in me, and my words abide in you, ye shall ask what ye will, and it shall be done unto you” (John 15:7). Also, “Whatsoever ye shall ask the Father in my name, he will give it [to] you. Hitherto have ye asked nothing in my name: ask [the Greek is intensive— ‘please ask’], and ye shall receive, that your

joy may be full” (John 16:23–24). Here the Lord is begging you to ask Him anything and He said He will do it. These are extremely broad promises to prayer. But to whom were the promises made? Jesus wasn’t talking here to the multitudes. In every case Jesus was talking to His disciples. Who qualifies as a disciple? Jesus said, “If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me” (Matthew 16:24). A person who has denied himself, taken up the cross, and is following Jesus Christ can take these promises and lay claim to them. Anything he asks, desires, or wishes will be done. But, by the very virtue of the fact that a disciple has denied himself, he is not seeking the things that would glorify his flesh. The very fact that he’s taken up his cross, he’s not seeking his own glory, but reckoning himself to be dead with Christ. He is now identified only in the things that God wants: committing himself, his ambitions, and his life totally to Jesus Christ. The true thrust of prayer is always, “Nevertheless, not what I will, but Thy will be done.” Only by denying yourself, taking up your cross, and following Jesus Christ do you receive access to the powerful promises of God regarding your prayers.

When the Answer Is No

The Lord may not give us what we ask when He has a higher purpose in mind for our lives. Moses prayed that God would allow him to go into the Promised Land. God said, “No, Moses. For the sake of the people you can’t go into the land. You misrepresented Me before those people. Now they must learn the lesson of obedience.” Moses, that mighty spiritual giant who communed face to face with God, wasn’t allowed to go into the Promised Land (Numbers 20:7–12). Throughout the centuries since then, parents have told their children the story of Moses, the man of God, who was used by God to deliver the children of Israel from Egypt and bring them to their own land. They tell of Moses who went up into the mountain and received the law of God in the midst of the fire and rolling thunder; whose face shone so that he had to cover himself with a veil; who stretched forth the rod and the Red Sea parted. Then with whispered tones they would say to their children, “But Moses could not go into the land because he disobeyed God.” In order to teach the future generations of the nation of Israel the lesson of the importance of complete obedience, God did not answer Moses’ prayer. I think of Paul’s thorn in the flesh. He said, “I besought the Lord thrice that it might depart

from me.” But God didn’t deliver him. Why? God had given Paul an abundance of revelations, and that thorn in the flesh was necessary to keep him humbled. “There was given to me a thorn in the flesh, the messenger of Satan to buffet me, lest I should be exalted above measure.” Paul said, “Most gladly therefore will I rather glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me” (2 Corinthians 12:7–10). Actually, Paul learned to rejoice over that rotten thorn, because he experienced the mighty power of God as a result of the infirmity. Consider the prayer of Jesus that wasn’t answered. Though He prayed three times— “Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me” (Matthew 26:39)—He drank the cup. Why? Because God wanted to bring salvation to each one of us. It should be noted that Jesus, though offering His prayer to the Father, added what is so important to every prayer: “Nevertheless not my will, but thine, be done” (Luke 22:42). That is the key to obedience and prayer. “Lord, here’s what I want. Here’s my desire. Nevertheless, not my will, but Thy will be done.” You can’t improve on that! For the real purpose of prayer is never to get my will done, but His.

Ineffective Prayers

Many prayers are ineffective, they seemingly, produce nothing. They go up and yet they bring nothing down. God does answer prayer. That's the inspiration behind all prayer; for if God never answered prayer, no one would be praying anymore. But why have so many prayers been offered without achieving any results? Certain things can actually hinder your prayers from being effective. First of all, if you harbor sin within your life your prayers are hindered. Isaiah declared, The LORD's hand is not shortened, that it cannot save; neither his ear heavy, that it cannot hear: but your iniquities have separated between you and your God. —Isaiah 59:1–2 So many times when my prayers aren't answered I want to blame God. In reality, the fault is mine. There's sin at my door. David said that if I regard iniquity in my heart, the Lord does not hear me when I pray (Psalm 66:18). Sin, as Isaiah said, breaks your connection with God. It's like cutting the telephone cord. You may dial the number all you want. You may speak in eloquent and very persuasive terms. Yet, you've cut the cord. The message is simply going into the ground and not getting anywhere. At that point prayer becomes deceptive. Many people say, "I know I'm not living as I should be, but I still pray." But

their prayers are of no value. Their relationship with God has been severed because of the sin within their lives. Their sins have separated them from their God. Another cause for ineffective prayers is an unforgiving spirit. Jesus taught so much about forgiveness. When He gave us the model prayer He emphasized one point at the end. If you won't forgive men their trespasses, neither will your Father in heaven forgive you your trespasses (Matthew 6:15). It's important to forgive, for you cannot come to God harboring a grudge against a brother without hindering your own prayers to God. Ineffective prayers can also be a result of selfish motivation. James said, "Ye have not, because ye ask not" (James 4:2). It's true that in many cases you just haven't prayed. Many times a person will pour out their horrible tale of woe to me. I'll ask, "Have you prayed?" "Well, no." But that's where you start! You have not because you ask not. Then James went on to say, "Ye ask, and receive not..."—here comes the rub—"because ye ask amiss, that ye may consume it upon your lusts" (James 4:3). Behind so many prayers are selfish desires. When I was in high school I prayed that God would give me a beautiful little '36 customized Ford. Oh, how I lusted after that car! I told God all the good things I'd do for Him— all the kids I would pick up for

Sunday school—if He'd just give me that car. How could He miss? I didn't get it, and I know why. God could see that in the back of my mind I was cruising around and getting the attention of all those good-looking girls on campus. God knew that a customized '36 Ford would have puffed me up with pride. So He gave me a Model A. So many of our prayers are self-centered. As I mentioned earlier, there are needs that I have and God wants to supply them. I should pray for them, but I must be careful lest all my prayers have only self as the underlying motive.

Helpful Hints

Here are a few rules for prayer that I have found to be effective. First of all, make the will of God your prayer. How? Discover the will of God through the Word of God. God has declared to you His will, purpose, and plan in the Bible. Give place to the Scriptures in your prayers. Too many times prayer is only a monologue—and you're doing all the talking. But that isn't communion. Communion is a dialogue, talking and listening while God speaks to you in His Word. Tell God your needs and the needs of others around you. Express to Him what you see, what you feel, and what you desire. Then turn to the

Word, and God will speak to you. He'll minister to you and show you His will and plan for your life.

Then come again to Him: "Well, Lord, here it is in Your Word. I can see this is what You desire so I claim it in the name of Jesus Christ." Listen and learn to hear the voice of God as He speaks to you by His Spirit. In Genesis 32 when Jacob heard that his brother Esau, who had vowed to kill him, was coming to meet him with four hundred men, he feared for his life. He was driven to pray and as he prayed he reminded God of His promise. He said, "O God of my father Abraham... the Lord which saidst unto me, Return unto thy country and to thy kindred, and I will deal well with thee" (Genesis 32:9). Jacob was praying on the basis of God's word to him. Prayer is to be addressed to the Father, in the authority of the name of Jesus.

Actually, you have no right to an audience with God on your own. There's no way you can earn such a privilege. The only way you can have an audience with the Father is through Jesus Christ. Jesus said, "I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me" (John 14:6). Ask the Father for your needs, but ask Him in the name of Jesus Christ. It's through Jesus Christ that you have the right to come, that you have a hearing, and are received. When you knock, use the name of Jesus. If I

knock on His door and say, “Father, it’s Chuck here, wanting to talk to you.” He is apt to respond, “Who’s Chuck, what right do you have to knock on My door?” But if when I knock I say, “Father, this is Chuck and I come in the name of Jesus.” The response will be, “Come on in Chuck, good to hear from you.”

Use Your Weapons

More victories are wrought through prayer than any other means. It’s shocking that, though God has given us such a powerful weapon, we are defeated again and again— The problem is, though we possess the weapon we seldom use it. As Christians, we’re so often trying to defend our weapons. For instance, when people argue against the Bible, we begin to defend it. The Bible is a great weapon, a sharp two-edged sword. Don’t defend it, use it! If you’re in a duel, you don’t say: “You had better watch out, this sword has the sharpest steel in town. It’s been honed to a super-fine edge.” You don’t defend your sword. You use your sword! Likewise, we’re always talking about our weapon of prayer. Don’t talk about prayer. Pray.

Use the weapons that God has given you and triumph over the enemy!

