



HOW TO PRAY 15 MINUTES A DAY

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Originally published in 1996 by Heart Publications as *How to Pray
30 Minutes a Day*

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*I am indebted to Ward Smith
for giving me his simple prayer outline
and to Elizabeth Blake
for transcribing and editing the original lessons.*

INTRODUCTION

The famous evangelist Dwight L. Moody once addressed a group of children. To gain their attention, he asked, “What is prayer?” One little boy confidently answered, “Prayer is an offering up of our desires unto God for things agreeable to His will, in the name of Christ, with confession of our sins and thankful acknowledgment of His mercies.”¹ Today, how many Christian adults, let alone children, could give such a comprehensive and accurate answer? Sadly, many of God’s children are painfully lacking in their understanding and practice of prayer. I want to help you grow in your prayer life.

The first time I received a simple prayer outline was during my college years at The Citadel in Charleston, South Carolina. As a new Christian I was hungry for truth. Like any other spiritual baby, I was struggling to learn how to take my first steps for the Lord. During that period, a Christian friend played an important role in my spiritual growth and taught me the foundational lessons of practical Christian living. One of those lessons was how to pray. He gave me a simple outline, using the word ACTS.

Adoration

Confession

Thanksgiving

Supplication

¹James R. Boyd, *The Westminster Shorter Catechism* (Philadelphia: Presbyterian Board of Publication, 1884), 238.

His acrostic was exactly what I needed to get beyond five-minute prayers and the struggle of knowing what to say to the Lord. For many years, I followed this prayer model.

In time, however, I found another word that seemed easier for the common student to follow—PRAY.

Praise

Repent

Ask

Yield

I hope these lessons on prayer will be as much a help to you as they have been to me and that you will join the company of Christ's disciples by earnestly asking, "Lord, teach us to pray."

Steve Pettit



CHAPTER I

PRAISE REPENT ASK YIELD

Praise is a commandment. Psalm 150:6 says, “Let every thing that hath breath praise the Lord. Praise ye the Lord.” Of all commandments in the Bible, the one most frequently mentioned is to praise the Lord. Psalm 100:4 commands us to “enter into his gates with thanksgiving, and into his courts with praise.” If you are not habitually praising God, you are living in disobedience.

Praise is also one of the ways you can offer sacrifices to God. In Old Testament days, the priesthood was comprised of males from Israel’s tribe of Levi. Their responsibilities revolved around the temple and its worship structure. While most of the men of Israel were busy farming the land, the Levites studied in preparation for their service in the temple of God. A considerable part of their education was learning how to make offerings to God. The first nine chapters of Leviticus deal with the various types of offerings: burnt, meal, peace, sin, and trespass.

When we leave the Old Testament and enter the New, everything changes. No longer is the priesthood restricted to the tribe of Levi. It is now given to all believers in Jesus Christ, both male and female. As priests, we have the right to come

into God's presence and the responsibility to offer sacrifices unto the Lord. But New Testament offerings are different from those in the Old Testament. When Christ cried out from the cross, "It is finished!" the entire system of blood sacrifices ended. Through His death, Christ paid the full payment for man's sin. The character of offerings is now spiritual. "Ye also, as lively stones, are built up a spiritual house, an holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God by Jesus Christ" (1 Pet. 2:5).

Three Spiritual Sacrifices

The New Testament lists three spiritual sacrifices. First is the **sacrifice of one's members**. "I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service" (Rom. 12:1). A proper offering to our merciful God is a dedicated body committed to living separated from the world and unselfishly for others.

Second is the **sacrifice of one's money**. "But I have all, and abound: I am full, having received of Epaphroditus the things which were sent from you, an odour of a sweet smell, a sacrifice acceptable, wellpleasing to God" (Phil. 4:18). When Paul's gospel ministry was supported financially through the sacrificial giving of God's people, such giving became a sacrifice unto the Lord.

Third is the **sacrifice of one's mouth**. "By him therefore let us offer the sacrifice of praise to God continually, that is, the fruit of our lips giving thanks to his name" (Heb. 13:15). Prayer is one of the means by which we offer this sacrifice unto God.

The Meaning of Praise

What is the meaning of the word *praise*? It has the idea of boasting. It refers to something that has captured your attention and become the topic of your conversation. One day, while traveling from one church to another, our evangelistic team stopped and had lunch in a shopping mall. I browsed in a bookstore with one of the team members. Finding the magazine *Archaeology*, I turned to the credits section. Scanning the list of names, I found the art director, Elinor J. Pettit. That's my mother! Under her name, I found another name, Addison F. Pettit. That's my brother! I was so excited that I showed the team member and the man working at the cash register (as if he really cared). That's what praise does. It boasts about something or someone who has captured your attention. You want to tell someone else. As Christians, we are commanded to boast about our God—who He is and what He has done.

What Praise Does for Believers

Praise Affects Focus

When you pray, how often does your mind wander? Do you have a problem with thinking about all the things you have to do instead of actually praying? Why do we struggle with focus? Basically, because we are self-centered. Praise causes us to focus our minds on God, not ourselves. I have a difficult time visiting Christian bookstores because so much written today is psychological rather than scriptural. Many books are centered on self instead of God. We need to be more concerned with knowing God than finding help for ourselves. If you are doctrinally sound, you will live right. Knowing God will take care of your problems. Praise gets my focus off myself and centers it on God.

Praise Affects Feelings

Have you ever wanted to feel close to God but didn't and wondered why? What is the source of your feelings? They come from your thoughts. Have you ever noticed that when you think about someone you love deeply, you feel affection? Conversely, have you noticed that when you think about someone who bothers you, you feel irritated? Where do your feelings come from? Your thoughts! The same is true regarding our feelings toward God. Psalm 22:3 says, "O thou that inhabitest the praises of Israel." In other words, God dwells with those who praise Him; He manifests His presence. If you want to sense the presence of God, you must begin your day by praising God.

Praise is one reason why I enjoy a good pastors' meeting. Many years ago, I attended a preachers' meeting with approximately 6,000 Baptist pastors. Eighty-four-year-old Howard Jewel came to sing. (As a young man, he sang in the famous Billy Sunday crusades.) When he began singing the hymn "Christ Returneth," the place erupted. Across the auditorium, I heard men shouting, "Praise God!" and "Glory! Hallelujah!" Preachers pulled handkerchiefs out of their pockets and waved them back and forth. It looked as though snow were falling. It was the most electrifying atmosphere I have ever experienced. Why? Because they were praising Jesus Christ.

Praise Affects Fruitfulness

Psalm 67:5-6 says, "Let the people praise thee, O God; let all the people praise thee. Then shall the earth yield her increase; and God, even our own God, shall bless us." A direct correlation exists between praise and God's blessing. The Scottish preacher Robert Murray M'Cheyne experienced great revivals during the 1800s. He said, "I am deeply persuaded that there will be no full, soul-filling, heart-ravishing, heart-satisfying outpouring of the Spirit of God till there be more praise and

thanksgiving to the Lord.”² Find people who know how to praise God, and you find people whom God is blessing.

How to Praise God

Hebrews 13:15 provides four descriptions of effective praise. “By him therefore let us offer the sacrifice of praise to God continually, that is, the fruit of our lips giving thanks to his name.”

Praise Is Sacrificial

“By him therefore let us offer the sacrifice of praise to God” (Heb. 13:15). During Bible days, sacrifices always cost something. God demanded the best. The sacrifice had to be an animal without spot or blemish. If the person making the sacrifice didn’t own an animal and had to purchase one, the animal was expensive indeed. As in Bible days, your sacrifice of praise to God will cost something too.

In today’s society, time is at a premium. People are busy and think they have no time to give; however, time is a price you must pay to praise God. I recommend you contribute five minutes each day to praise. God deserves it, and you need it. Most people work during the day because that’s when they have the most energy, so the best time may be the morning, when your mind is sharp and alert. Have you ever fallen asleep while you were praying? If so, don’t feel bad; you’re in good company. Peter, James, and John fell asleep in the Garden of Gethsemane, but keep in mind that you can’t give God your

²A. G. Stacy, *The Service of Song: A Treatise on Singing in Private Devotion, in the Family and in the School, and in the Worshipping Congregation* (St. Louis: Southwestern Book and Publishing Company, 1871), 127.

best when you are tired. You need to praise God sacrificially when you have the most strength.

Praise Is Audible

Do you normally pray silently to God? Silent prayer is not wrong, but note that Bible praise always includes “the fruit of our lips” mentioned in Hebrews 13:15. Praising God aloud is not as easy as it may seem at first. When you pray aloud, you must concentrate on what you are saying. When you do not pray aloud, your mind has a tendency to wander. Has your mind ever drifted while your pastor was preaching? Who concentrates the most on what is being said during a sermon? The pastor does, because he is doing all the speaking. As he preaches, what he says impacts his thoughts. Consequently, he must concentrate to make sure his words make sense. That’s why preaching is such hard work. Prayer is also hard work because it takes effort. You must definitely and determinedly concentrate on what you are saying.

The mouth affects not only the mind but also the emotions. Have you ever noticed how a man preaches? He starts low and slow but soon climbs higher and catches fire. Why is it that a preacher can start talking and end shouting? Because the more he talks about what he’s thinking, the more involved his emotions become. You cannot separate your mouth from your heart. Praising God orally affects your emotions; therefore, praise should be audible, not silent.

Praise Is Intelligent

Praise is not ecstatic, uncontrolled emotion. It is intelligent, controlled communication—“giving thanks to his name” (Heb. 13:15). *Giving thanks* literally means *to confess openly*; hence, giving thanks is the result of thinking upon the character of God, His wonderful names, and His great works. The natural result of such meditation should be praise. As I comprehend

God's names, I confess my faith and offer praise to those names. I can praise Him in many different ways.

I recommend that you take any of Psalms (113–118 and 145–150 are particularly good for this exercise). As you read, turn your reading into a time of praise. For example, read Psalm 5:1—“Give ear to my words, O Lord, consider my meditation.” Stop and pray, *God, I want to think about You*. Then read on, “Hearken unto the voice of my cry, my King, and my God: for unto thee will I pray” (5:2). Start to praise: *Lord, I thank You, I praise You, that You can hear me when I pray. Lord, I praise You because, out of all the millions of people in the world who pray to You every day, Your ear is open to my cry, and You pay attention to me*. What a God we have! What a God we serve! Your whole concept of God begins to broaden.

Learn the names of God and what they mean within the context of scripture (see Appendix A). What is God's personal name? Jehovah—the God who is real. He reveals Himself through His Word. He is both righteous and the Redeemer. That's what His name means. Many compound names of Jehovah also have significant meanings. Learn them and confess them in your time of worship to God. Call on His specific name that correlates to your specific need. As you confess that name of God, you will sense both His presence and your dependence upon Him to work. Often when I am discouraged and my cup is empty, I praise God for who He is, and I say, *Jehovah-Shammah, the Lord our presence. Oh, Lord, I need Your presence. You are Jehovah-Shammah. You are my God. You are here. You will never leave me nor forsake me. Oh, Lord you are with me always, even unto the end of the world. Amen*. Before five minutes have passed, I sense the wonderful presence of the Lord.

Praise Is Continual

“Let us offer the sacrifice of praise to God continually” (Heb. 13:15). That means through all times—whether good or bad,

whether you are up or down. You should shout as loud Monday morning on the way to class as you do Sunday night after church. The best cure for the blues is praising God. When you praise God, you get your mind off yourself and back on the Lord. You must praise God! He commands it, He deserves it, and you need it. If we don't praise God, He is going to shame us by putting mouths on rocks, and they are going to shout (Luke 19:40). May the Lord stir your heart to praise God continually.

Suggestions for Praise

1. Choose one psalm as a starting point for praise. Almost any psalm will do, but Psalms 113–118 and 145–150 are specific psalms of praise. As you read, stop and praise God for the truth revealed about His character or names.
2. Think of correlating places in Scripture where these truths are unfolded. For example, Psalm 145:3 says, “Great is the Lord, and greatly to be praised; and his greatness is unsearchable.” God’s greatness is revealed in creation, in the protection of and provision for Israel, in the birth and life of Jesus Christ, and so forth. God’s greatness has no end! Praise the Lord!
3. Look for points of praise. As you read through your daily portion of Scripture, note how God reveals Himself. Observe how He reveals His character in the way He works. Mark that observation and make it a point of praise.
4. Study the names of God in their biblical contexts (e.g., Jehovah-Jireh is found in Genesis 22:14; Jehovah-Raphe in Exodus 15:26). Because God never changes, He reveals Himself in the same way.

5. In prayer, use Bible words and phrases, such as “Hallelujah,” “Glory,” “Praise the Lord,” “Thou art worthy,” and so forth.



CHAPTER 2

PRAISE **REPENT** **ASK** **YIELD**

Of the seven local churches to whom the apostle John wrote in the book of Revelation, five he condemned and called to repentance because they had committed sins that grieved God and quenched the Holy Spirit. Interestingly, the two churches commended by the Lord were either persecuted or poor—descriptions that are certainly not distinguishing characteristics of most American churches today.

What is the real struggle among God’s people today? I believe it’s our failure to deal thoroughly with sin. The fundamental problem is not lack of evangelism (though we need more of that), but lack of holy living. Christians need spiritual revival, which is always preceded by repentance. David wrote in Psalm 51:9–10, “Hide thy face from my sins, and blot out all mine iniquities. Create in me a clean heart, O God; and renew a right spirit within me.” Neglect of confession leads to broken fellowship with God, eventual chastisement, and the possibility of a ruined testimony or a loss of one’s life. If bills are not paid immediately, the interest may kill you! Don’t let your sin account go unconfessed. How do we confess sin?

Forgive as Often as You Want to Be Forgiven

“Forgive us our debts,” Jesus said, “as we forgive our debtors” (Matt. 6:12). You cannot harbor a grudge, anger, or bitterness toward someone and expect God to forgive you. For Him to do so would be inconsistent with His character. “For if ye forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you: but if ye forgive not men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses” (Matt. 6:14–15). Whom do you need to forgive? *Well, nobody’s done anything to me, most people think.* Generally, people are thinking only of a *big* sin. Are big sins the only kind we should confess to God? Have you recently confessed the sin of murder? Or bank robbery? What kind of sins do you confess? Wrong thoughts, selfish motives, neglected responsibilities, corrupt speech, and relationship conflicts. Have you ever been irritated with someone who neglected his responsibilities? Have you ever heard someone complain about you? Have you ever judged another person as being selfish? Relationships are rarely hurt by big things, but by little things that add up over time. Ephesians 4:26 commands, “Be ye angry, and sin not: let not the sun go down upon your wrath.” If you go to bed mad, you’ll wake up mad. Never let an unforgiving spirit get a foothold in your life. Deal with the problem today. Forgive as often as you want to be forgiven.

Confess Your Sins Specifically to God

Confession means to say the same thing about your sin that God says about it. We are often too general with our confession. Have you been guilty of praying, “Dear God, forgive me of all my sins”? Sometimes I wonder if God thinks, *Which ones are you talking about?* When I was a kid growing up in South Carolina, I didn’t know all the snakes in that state, but I could

identify three kinds. I knew what a water moccasin, copperhead, and rattlesnake looked like. Why? Because they are poisonous, and their bite is deadly. In the same vein, we need to identify our sins because “the wages of sin is death” (Rom. 6:23). Ignorance is no excuse! God has given us His Word. Do you know how many sins are listed in the New Testament? In seminary I had a project to discover all the named sins in the New Testament and found at least 120 specific sins. (Appendix B gives a short list of the various sins.) The knowledge of our sin should precede the biblical confession of our sin.

Clear Your Conscience

Do you realize that when you confess your sin to God, you are not finished with repentance? Paul testified, “And herein do I exercise myself, to have always a conscience void of offence toward God, and toward men” (Acts 24:16). Paul had a habit of maintaining right relationships with men, even if the habit involved the humbling experience of making things right. Jesus explained in Matthew 5:23–24, “Therefore if thou bring thy gift to the altar, and there rememberest that thy brother hath ought against thee; leave there thy gift before the altar, and go thy way; first be reconciled to thy brother, and then come and offer thy gift.” Reconciliation is the renewal of a broken friendship. Love demands a clear conscience. “Now the end of the commandment is charity out of a pure heart, and of a good conscience, and of faith unfeigned” (1 Tim. 1:5). If a true biblical offense exists between believers, the conflict must be resolved. “Thou shalt not hate thy brother in thine heart: thou shalt in any wise rebuke thy neighbor, and not suffer sin upon him. Thou shalt not avenge, nor bear any grudge against the children of thy people, but thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself: I am the Lord” (Lev. 19:17–18).

Here's the rule for clearing your conscience: **Your confession should be only as broad as your transgression.** If your sin is a private wicked thought, confess that thought to God only. Aren't you glad you don't have to confess all your evil thoughts? If such were the case, that's all we'd be doing!

One day, a friend came to me (he and I worked together in the same ministry). "Steve, I need to talk to you," he said. "I need to ask you to forgive me. "

Surprised, I said, "For what?"

"I can't tell you that!" he responded quickly.

"Well, I forgive you," I said, "but, please, my curiosity is stirred up. Please tell me what it is!"

He then elaborated: "Well, I've been working with you for a year, and when you first came, I really thought you were a jerk. I've come to the conclusion that you're really not, so I want you to forgive me for those bad thoughts."

Do you understand why my friend's confession was unnecessary? It didn't edify, because I didn't know about his sin. He didn't need to confess it to me. If this type of confession were the common practice in most churches, it would actually tear down believers instead of building them up. Never confess to others the private sins of your mind.

If you have committed a personal sin between you and another Christian, you need to go to that person and confess it. Maybe you reacted negatively, said the wrong thing, or neglected your responsibility. For example, once I spoke some careless words to a friend about someone else. Afterwards, I thought about what I had said and realized my words were not motivated by love. I went to my friend and said, "What I said about that person was wrong. Will you forgive me?" I didn't need to confess my careless words to the world, but I did need to go to

my friend. Probably close to 90 percent of the sins you must confess are because of something you said; however, some sins are on a larger scale.

While I was conducting evangelistic meetings some years ago, a woman got saved. Three weeks later, she was discovered to have embezzled \$50,000 from the Walmart where she worked. Her picture was plastered on the front page of the city newspaper.

When she was arrested, her lawyer said, "Plead 'not guilty.'"

She stared at her lawyer and said, "But I am guilty."

Her honest response angered the lawyer! "You plead 'not guilty,' " he demanded. Again, this new Christian declared, "But that's lying. I *am* guilty." In court, she admitted her guilt, went to prison, and later earned the title of model prisoner. What a glorious testimony for Christ! After nine months, she was released on good behavior. She became one of her church's most faithful members. "You cannot believe how the Lord has used that experience to be a testimony of what Christ has done in my life," she told me. If she had kept her secret and pled "not guilty," she would have reaped spiritual damage and ruined the testimony of the church. She had to confess her sin.

Man determines big sins by their immediate consequences. God, however, does not view sin that way. Whether you steal \$1 or \$50,000, you are a thief. You need to confess your sins and clear your conscience. Then you can be free to serve the Lord.

Suggestions for Repenting

1. Study the variety of sins found in the New Testament. Take one sin a week and ask God to help you identify that sin in your life.

2. Become accountable to a friend or prayer partner.
3. Meet weekly for prayer and fellowship. Share the way God is working on your life in the area of repentance.
4. Make a list of those you've offended and take proper steps to clear your conscience.
5. Go to them as soon as possible. If you can't see them face-to-face, call them on the phone. Writing an email is acceptable but should be your last choice.
6. Tell them that God has convicted your heart of a specific sin. Name the sin to them; then ask if they would please forgive you.
7. Do it quickly! Avoid a long, drawn out apology (though a long apology is better than none).



CHAPTER 3

PRAISE **REPENT** **ASK** **YIELD**

Learning to play the guitar can be a lot of fun. One of the first things you learn is how to finger three chords—G, C, and D. These are fundamental chords. After learning these chords, you can experience hours of music enjoyment. Are you struggling with prayer because you’ve never learned the basics of making requests to God? Matthew 21:22 establishes the three foundational chords of prayer.

Chord #1—Pray with Desire

“And all things, whatsoever ye shall ask in prayer” (Matt. 21:22). The word *ask* means to crave or desire something. You’re asking for something, which presupposes a desire. Never underestimate the importance of your desires when you pray. “Therefore I say unto you, What things soever ye desire, when ye pray, believe that ye receive them, and ye shall have them” (Mark 11:24). “And this is the confidence that we have in him, that, if we ask any thing according to his will, he heareth us: and if we know that he hear us, whatsoever we ask, we know that we have the petitions that we desired of

him” (1 John 5:14–15). “Delight thyself also in the Lord; and he shall give thee the desires of thine heart” (Ps. 37:4).

Praying with Desire Is a Sign of Life

If you visit your local cemetery, you’ll find that the folks there are the most contented people in town. They never complain about the weather. They never experience hunger or gripe about the food. They are as contented as can be, yet dead as a doornail. From the moment you were born until the day you die, your life is motivated by a variety of desires. When someone is saved, he or she experiences new, spiritual desires motivated by a desire to please God and fulfill His will. God does not answer the self-centered prayer. “Ye ask, and receive not, because ye ask amiss, that ye may consume it upon your lusts” (James 4:3). But if your desire is in the will of God, do not hesitate to ask Him. Make a prayer list that expresses your heart’s desires.

Praying with Desire Is a Sign of Trust in the Father’s Love

God is not an evil taskmaster who abuses His children. He is a loving Father who wants the best for them. “If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children,” Jesus said, “how much more shall your Father which is in heaven give good things to them that ask him?” (Matt. 7:11). Even sinful fathers are generous to their children who ask for something good. If you were a father and your son asked, “Dad, may I have the leftover broccoli?” would you deny his request? Typically, broccoli is not what children want. They are more likely to ask for something less nutritious, such as candy or potato chips. A father may deny his children what is not best for them, but that doesn’t mean he denies good things. “For the Lord God is a sun and shield: the Lord will give grace and glory: no good thing will he withhold from them that walk uprightly” (Ps. 84:11). If your desires are good, godly, and

pleasing to the Lord, be assured that God will hear your plea. Jesus instructed, “Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you. For every one that asketh receiveth; and he that seeketh findeth; and to him that knocketh it shall be opened. If a son shall ask bread of any of you that is a father, will he give him a stone? or if he ask a fish, will he for a fish give him a serpent? Or if he shall ask an egg, will he offer him a scorpion?” (Luke 11:9–12). Expect your Father to give you good things!

Praying with Desire Is Proof of God’s Leadership in Your Life

If you think your prayers begin with you, you’re incorrect. Your prayers actually begin with God. Do you ever have problems? Nothing motivates us to pray more than problems. If we believe God is sovereign, that He rules over the affairs of our life, we must believe that God permits problems. What do your problems create? The desire for help. When you go to God with your burdens, they are never new to Him. He not only knows about your problems but also permits them. Ultimately, the desire originates with God. As we communicate our request to God (the request He already knows), He answers our prayer according to His plan. What should be our response? We should offer Him praise for the answered prayer. Imagine prayer as a cycle. God creates the desires, we cry out to God in prayer, He sustains us and fulfills His will in answered prayer, and we return with sacrifices of praise and thanksgiving. He is the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end. That’s why in Romans 11:36 Paul declares, “For of him, and through him, and to him, are all things: to whom be glory for ever. Amen.” Never forget that when you pray with a burdened heart, you actually pray in the leadership of God. Pray according to your desires.

Chord #2—Pray in Faith

“And all things, whatsoever ye shall ask in prayer, believing” (Matt. 21:22). Prayer is disqualified when faith is absent. “But without faith it is impossible to please him” (Heb. 11:6). James 1:6–7 exhorts, “But let him ask in faith, nothing wavering. For he that wavereth is like a wave of the sea driven with the wind and tossed. For let not that man think that he shall receive any thing of the Lord.” The Apostle Paul reminds us that “whatsoever is not of faith is sin” (Rom. 14:23). Where then do we get the faith to believe that God will answer our prayers? Look at the prayer of Elijah when he asked God to withhold rain from the nation of Israel for three-and-a-half years (1 Kings 17–18). The result was more sunshine than they had experienced in years. Not a cloud was in the sky! At the end of the drought, Elijah prayed again, and rain fell on the parched earth.

The Source of Praying Faith

Where did Elijah get his great faith? Suppose you tried his prayer. If you had Elijah’s faith, do you believe God would stop the rain in your home state? The question is an important one. Some have the impression that if they have enough faith, they can get almost anything they want. If you don’t get your miracle or healing, they claim you lack faith. Many believe God’s people live in defeat because of their unanswered prayers and supposed lack of faith. But is unbelief really the problem? We have many flawed ideas about faith and answered prayer.

Where did Elijah get the faith to believe God? His faith came from the Bible! “So then faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God” (Rom. 10:17). Answered prayer is established by God’s promises. Elijah had every reason to believe God would hear him. Why? When the children of Israel conquered the land of Canaan, God made a covenant with them. If they obeyed, He said He would bless them; if they disobeyed, He said He would curse them. Part of the curse was a drought.

“And thy heaven that is over thy head shall be brass, and the earth that is under thee shall be iron. The Lord shall make the rain of thy land powder and dust: from heaven shall it come down upon thee, until thou be destroyed” (Deut. 28:23–24). In other words, the spigot of heaven would be turned off if the Israelites worshipped idols.

When Elijah asked God to stop the rain, his faith was standing on the promise of God’s Word. His confidence was not in his own faith, but in what God said He would do. God has made many, many promises for the benefit of His people. If you claim those promises, based on your need and in surrender to God’s will, you will see God do great and mighty things.

Consider the testimony of George Mueller. In the 1800s, he ran an orphanage in Bristol, England. His ministry was supported financially by the generous gifts of God’s people, but Mueller never solicited for funds publicly. He simply prayed, and God met every need. He was so successful in prayer because He knew God intimately and lived by faith. During his lifetime, he read through the Bible more than one hundred times—mostly on his knees in a spirit of prayer.

The Need to Argue with God

How then do we pray in faith? By learning how to argue with God—not as a child argues with a parent, but as a lawyer argues with the judge in a courtroom. What does the lawyer do? He presents his case and gives oral arguments why the judge should rule in his favor. In the same manner, we should pray in faith. Abraham argued with God about the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah (Gen. 18).

“God, if there be found fifty righteous people, will You destroy it?”

“No, I won’t destroy it.”

“All right, what about forty-five? How about forty, Lord?”

Abraham sounded like an auctioneer. “What about thirty-five? Or thirty?”

Charles Haddon Spurgeon, perhaps the most quoted preacher in church history, once preached a sermon about effective prayer. His major point was that Christians need to learn how to argue with God. Spurgeon explained the need for argument: “When a man searches for arguments for a thing it is because he attaches importance to that which he is seeking. . . . The man who uses one argument with God will get more force in using the next, and will use the next with still greater power, and the next with more force still. The best prayers I have ever heard in our prayer meetings have been those which have been fullest of argument, because they feel that they really need mercy.”³ His text was Job chapter 23:3–4: “Oh that I knew where I might find him! that I might come even to his [God’s] seat! I would order my cause before him, and fill my mouth with arguments.” Verse 7 says, “There the righteous might dispute with him.”

God wants us to earnestly present our case. He wants us to vigorously present biblical reasons why He should decide in our favor. Why do we need to pray this way? Certainly not because God needs to be convinced. He knows our needs even before we communicate them.

Have you ever gone to one of your parents with a request? When they said no, did you ever act like a lawyer, pleading your case with oral arguments? If you pled for something good, would your parent not have given it to you? Is God any different? “If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts

³Charles H. Spurgeon, *The Complete Works of Charles Spurgeon* (Harrington, DE: Delmarva Publications, 2013), vol.12., no. 700.

unto your children, how much more shall your Father which is in heaven give good things to them that ask him?” (Matt. 7:11). Plead as a child and depend totally on your Father’s goodness.

Ways to Plead with God

If you pray for a long period, claiming scriptural promises, you will become convinced that God will answer your prayer. You will come to believe that God will do exactly what He said He would do. What are some arguments you can use to plead with God?

God’s Promises

God’s promises are a good place to start. Spurgeon said that the promises of God are like writing a check against the bank of heaven. We can never overspend with this debit card. We need to draw on the riches of our unlimited account.

God’s Great Names

We can also plead God’s great names, for they represent His attributes and character (see Appendix A). The more we get to know our Lord through His Word, the more we can ask with confidence.

God’s Past Workings

Another basis of argument before God is to remember His past workings. The motivation to pray for revival is rooted in an awareness of how God has worked in the past. Historical revivals touch our hearts to pray, “Lord, do it again!”

God’s Power in Jesus’ Name

Our final argument is the name of Jesus Christ. God loves to hear us say His Son’s name at His throne of grace.

Let me ask you a question. Do you think that when you come to our heavenly Father and plead the death, sufferings, and merits of His Son on the cross, He will not listen? If you pray

in Jesus' name, will He refuse to hear your prayers? No, my friend. You can believe that God will hear and answer your prayer if you pray in the name of Jesus Christ and for His glory. Before God, plead the sufferings and death of Jesus Christ.

Chord #3—Pray with Patience

“And all things, whatsoever ye shall ask in prayer, believing, ye shall receive” (Matt. 21:22). The word *shall* means something that will happen in the future. In other words, something hasn't happened yet, but it will. When you pray with patience, you must learn to wait on God's timing. Have you noticed that God answers your prayers by the NOT Method (Nick of Time)? Sometimes, God waits until the last moment to come through, but He is never late; however, He is not bound to man's timetable. When Elijah prayed for God to send the rain again, he asked *seven* times before God answered. Be persistent in prayer! Don't quit when the answer seems delayed; God works according to *His* timetable.

You also have to wait on God's method. Though God's work is always supernatural, it isn't always spectacular. If you're looking for lightning bolts, visions, and dreams, you're setting yourself up for disappointment. Just because you pray for money doesn't mean it has to arrive anonymously in the mail. God may use natural means to accomplish His will and answer your prayer. He may stretch out the dollar bill you've got in your pocket. Spiritual people don't need to see spectacular things, because they see God's hand in everything. Nothing is by coincidence! “Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and cometh down from the Father of lights, with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning” (James 1:17).

Suggestions for Asking

1. Make a daily prayer list that reflects the burdens and concerns of your heart. The list should include family members, your church and pastor, ministry opportunities and needs, close friends, unsaved friends, relatives, neighbors, future decisions, and so forth.
2. Make a weekly prayer list that helps you pray specifically for people and needs each day. Here's a sample list:

Sunday	Spiritual growth of people in your church
Monday	Missionaries
Tuesday	Teachers
Wednesday	Coworkers or classmates
Thursday	Specific requests people give you
Friday	Friends
Saturday	Unbelieving sinners
3. Make a list of scriptural promises you can use when you pray. Remember, you must place your faith in the Word of God.



CHAPTER 4

PRAISE REPENT ASK YIELD

So much of prayer is pursuing the will of God. If God has a purpose, He must have a plan. That truth should be foremost in our minds, so when we pray, we're not trying to get our will done in heaven but God's will done on earth. Jesus said to pray in the following way: "Hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven" (Matt. 6:9–10). We need to direct our prayers toward God's will. "And this is the confidence that we have in him, that, if we ask any thing according to his will, he heareth us" (1 John 5:14). Jesus declared, "Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find" (Matt. 7:7). God expects us to pursue Him, and He reveals His will to those who are looking for it. Consequently, a great deal of prayer is yielding to God's sovereign plan for our lives. We must be willing to yield at least two areas of our lives to God through prayer.

We Yield to God When We Don't Know What to Do

A seventeen-year-old young man is about to graduate from high school. What will he do next year? His decision will affect

the direction of his entire life. He must pursue and seek God's direction and will. A few years later, the same fellow wants to get married. Next to getting saved, marriage is the most important decision of your life. You'll live with Jesus for eternity, but you'll live with your spouse for the rest of your life. So what must he do? He seeks God's direction to find His will in marriage. We have to yield to God to find out what to do. This truth is particularly true when we face struggles and burdens. We have a desperate need for relief, yet we can't just give up and quit.

When my wife, Terry, gave birth to our third child, Stephen, we had set aside three weeks in our schedule. Our plans were simple. He would be born the first week, and Terry would have two weeks to recuperate before resuming travel. Things did not happen the way we planned. By the beginning of the third week, still no baby! That coming Sunday, we had to leave for our next scheduled meeting. Terry went into the hospital on Tuesday, labor was induced, and Stephen was born. She left the hospital on Thursday. On Saturday, we left Saginaw, Michigan, and arrived in Denver, Colorado, the following Thursday. On Sunday, we began our first meeting of the fall season. Terry sang during every service and ran a children's program with about a hundred kids every night. During the daytime, she homeschooled our oldest daughter, Rebecca, who was in the first grade. On top of that, our trailer had only one bedroom. Our two daughters slept on the couch, and Stephen slept in a little port-a-crib. We had no washer or dryer, and so Terry went to the laundromat to wash clothes. The pressure was intense.

What do you do when you face pressures? Some people run from their problems. Others are so full of bitterness because of the problems that they lose their ministry effectiveness. What should you do? It was obvious to us that my wife couldn't keep up that pace. We started praying for wisdom and direction. Eventually I knew that we needed to hire a teacher. Within a

very short time, God provided a young lady who traveled with us three years. She left our ministry, but God provided another teacher, who served with us four years. So often in life, we face difficult situations and don't know what to do. That's why we must seek. That's why we keep on knocking. God opens doors and shows us what to do. Praying is pursuing the will of God.

We Yield to God When We Know What to Do, but Struggle to Do It

Often we face trials we don't want to go through. God never promised to make His will easy. His pathway is lined with painful thorns, distressing problems, difficult people, and discomforting pressures. When I was in seminary, I committed myself to go anywhere in the world, but I quickly prayed, "God, please don't send me to Michigan." You see, everyone in my school seemed to be from Michigan or Pennsylvania. Well, I'm a southerner. I'm southern bred; I'm southern fed; and when I die, I'm going to be southern dead. Well, can you guess what happened? Sure enough, I ended up living in Michigan for sixteen years, and I found that the state is full of wonderful churches and many godly believers. I am truly thankful that I obeyed God, even though His will and mine weren't always one and the same initially.

Even Jesus Christ struggled with His Father's will. On the night before His crucifixion, He entered the Garden of Gethsemane under tremendous pressure. He struggled with what He had to do to fulfill His Father's will. He had to go to the cross and be made sin for us. That was His struggle! Listen to His request in Luke 22:42: "Father, if thou be willing, remove this cup from me." What did He mean by those words? Exactly the way they sound. He didn't struggle with obeying God; He fought with what He had to do to obey God. He had to be crucified on a cross and be cursed by His own Father.

In your heart, do you ever battle with what God wants you to do? Jesus' prayer reveals His commitment to obedience: "Nevertheless not my will, but thine, be done" (22:42). He renounced His own will and submitted to His Father's; seeing Jesus' submission, the Father sent an angel to strengthen His Son. To this day, Holy Land pilgrims find a plaque on the wall surrounding the Garden of Gethsemane in Jerusalem. The plaque sums up the prayer of our Lord on that eventful night: "With His prayer 'Yes, Father' and the total surrender of His will, Jesus triumphed in the darkest night of temptation and suffering. Thus He showed us that by consenting to the will of God and committing ourselves to it, we too shall be led out of darkness into the light of victory." Strength comes to those who yield to do God's will.

Suggestions for Yielding

1. Yield yourself to God's control and pray for the filling of the Spirit of God. The Holy Spirit is the true source of the wisdom that enables you to make good decisions.
2. Make a list of areas in your life in which you are seeking God's will. Yield them to God and ask for the fulfillment of His will in each situation or opportunity.
3. Pray for the wisdom to make right decisions, clear direction from the Lord, and opportunities that will bear spiritual fruit.
4. When struggling with a problem, cast yourself on the Lord. Do not try to get out of the trial; instead, yield to the Lord and ask Him to accomplish His divine purpose in your life.



APPENDIX A

Names and Images of God in Scripture

Names of God

a forgiving God	God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ
a fortress of salvation	God Most High
a glorious crown	God my maker
a jealous and avenging God	God my Rock
a master in heaven	God my Savior
a refuge for His people	God my stronghold
a refuge for the poor	God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob
a sanctuary	God of all comfort
a shade from the heat	God of glory
a shelter from the storm	God of gods
a source of strength	God of grace
a stronghold in times of trouble	God of hope
an ever present help in trouble	God of love
architect and builder	God of peace
commander of the Lord's army	God of retribution
Creator of heaven and earth	God of the living
defender of widows	God of the spirits of all mankind
eternal King	God of truth
Father	God our Father
Father of compassion	God our strength
Father of our spirits	God over all the kingdoms of the earth
Father to the fatherless	God who avenges me
God Almighty (<i>El Sabaoth</i>)	
God Almighty (<i>El Shaddai</i>)	

God who gives endurance and encouragement	Lord of all the earth
great and awesome God	Lord of heaven and earth
He who blots out your transgressions	Lord our God
He who comforts you	Lord our maker
He who forms the hearts of all	Lord our shield
He who raised Christ from the dead	Lord who heals you
He who reveals His thoughts to man	Lord who is there
helper of the fatherless	Lord who makes you holy
Him who is able to do immea- surably more than all we ask or imagine	Lord will provide love
Him who is able to keep you from falling	maker of all things
Him who is ready to judge the living and the dead	maker of heaven and earth
Holy Father	Most High
Holy One	my advocate
Holy One among you	my comforter in sorrow
I Am	my confidence
I Am Who I Am	my help
jealous	my helper
judge of all the earth	my hiding place
King of Glory	my hope
King of Heaven	my light
living and true God	my mighty Rock
Lord (<i>Adonai</i>)	my refuge in the day of disaster
Lord Almighty	my refuge in times of trouble
Lord God Almighty	my song
Lord (<i>Yahweh</i>)	my strong deliverer
Lord Most High	my support
Lord my banner	one to be feared
Lord my Rock	only wise God
	our dwelling place
	our judge
	our lawgiver
	our leader
	our mighty one
	our Redeemer
	our refuge and strength

righteous Father
righteous Judge
Rock of our Salvation
Shepherd
Sovereign Lord
the Almighty
the compassionate and gracious
 God
the eternal God
the consuming fire
the everlasting God
the exalted God
the faithful God
the gardener (husbandman)
the glorious Father
the glory of Israel
the God who saved me
the God who sees me
the great King above all gods
the just and almighty one
the living Father
the majestic glory
the majesty of heaven
the one who sustains me
the only God
the potter
the Rock in whom I take refuge
the spring of living water
the strength of my heart
the true God
You who hear prayer
You who judge righteously and
 test the heart and mind
You who keep your covenant of
 love with your servants
You who love the people

Your glory
Your praise
Your very great reward

Names of Jesus

a banner for the peoples
a Nazarene
All
Alpha and Omega
Ancient of Days
Anointed One
Apostle and High Priest
author and perfecter of our faith
author of life
author of salvation
blessed and only ruler
branch of the Lord
Bread of God
Bread of Life
bridegroom
chief Cornerstone
Chief Shepherd
chosen and precious
Cornerstone
Christ Jesus my Lord
Christ Jesus our hope
Christ of God
consolation of Israel
covenant of the people
crown of splendor
eternal life
faithful and true
first to rise from the dead
firstborn from among the dead
firstborn over all creation

firstfruits of those that have fallen asleep	Jesus
fragrant offering and sacrifice to God	Jesus Christ
friend of tax collectors and sinners	Jesus Christ our Lord
God of all the earth	Jesus Christ our Savior
God over all	Jesus of Nazareth
God's Son	judge of the living and the dead
great High Priest	King of Kings
great light	King of the Ages
Great Shepherd of the sheep	Lamb of God
guarantee of a better covenant	light for revelation to the Gentiles
He who comes down from heaven and gives life to the world	light of life
He who searches hearts and minds	light of men
head of every man	light of the world
head of the body (the church)	living bread that came down from heaven
head over every power and authority	Lord and Savior Jesus Christ
heir of all things	Lord (<i>Kurios</i>)
Him who died and came to life again	Lord of Lords
Him who loves us and has freed us from our sins	Lord of peace
His one and only Son	Lord of the harvest
holy and righteous one	Lord of the Sabbath
Holy One of God	Lord (<i>Rabboni</i>)
holy servant Jesus	man accredited by God
hope of Israel	Man of Sorrows
horn of salvation	Master
image of the invisible God	mediator of a New Covenant
Immanuel (God with us)	merciful and faithful High Priest
indescribable gift	messenger of the covenant
	Messiah
	morning star
	my friend
	my intercessor
	one who makes men holy
	one who speaks to the Father in our defense

one who will arise to rule over the nations	the bright morning star
our glorious Lord Jesus Christ	the exact representation of His being
our only sovereign and Lord	the first and the last
our Passover Lamb	the gate (door)
our peace	the Head
our righteousness, holiness, and redemption	the last Adam
physician	the life
Prince and Savior	the living one
Prince of Peace	the living stone
Prince of Princes	the Lord, our righteousness
Prince of the Hosts	the man from heaven
ransom for all men	the man, Jesus Christ
refiner and purifier	the most holy
resurrection and the life	the one and only
righteous judge	the only God our Savior
righteous man	the radiance of God's glory
righteous one	the rising of the sun (dayspring)
Rock eternal (Rock of ages)	the stone the builders rejected
ruler of God's creation	the testimony given in its proper time
ruler of the kings of the earth	the true light
Savior of the world	the true vine
second man	the Truth
Shepherd and overseer of your souls	the way
Son of Man	the Word (<i>Logos</i>)
Son of the Blessed One	true Bread from heaven
Son of the living God	wisdom from God
Son of the Most High God	witness to the peoples
source of eternal salvation	wonderful counselor
sure foundation	Word of God
Teacher	Word of life
the Amen	your life
the atoning sacrifice for our sins	your salvation
the beginning and the end	

Names of the Holy Spirit

a deposit (earnest)

another Counselor

breath of the Almighty

Holy One

Holy Spirit

Holy Spirit of God

seal

Spirit of Christ

Spirit of counsel and of power

Spirit of faith

Spirit of fire

Spirit of glory

Spirit of God

Spirit of grace and supplication

Spirit of His Son

Spirit of holiness

Spirit of Jesus Christ

Spirit of judgment

Spirit of justice

Spirit of knowledge and of the
fear of the Lord

Spirit of life

Spirit of our God

Spirit of sonship (adoption)

Spirit of the living God

Spirit of the Lord

Spirit of the sovereign Lord

Spirit of truth

Spirit of wisdom and of
understanding

Spirit of wisdom and revelation
the gift

the promised Holy Spirit

voice of the Almighty

voice of the Lord

witchcraft
worldliness
wrath / anger

Sins of the Church

compromise with false doctrine
division among believers
failure to be salt in a corrupt
 world
failure to pray
failure to respond after hearing
 the Word
failure to support missionaries
failure to win souls
false accusers
gossip against church members
heresy
immorality of church
 membership
lack of love among believers
laziness of the church workers
lukewarmness and carnality
neglect of attendance at services
neglect of the Holy Spirit's
 ministry
worldly music, TV, movies,
 videos
powerlessness among believers
rebellion against pastoral
 leadership
sedition
unbelief of leaders to go forward
 in faith
whispering / backbiting / evil
 speaking
worldliness in the church

Sins of the Family

abuse and incest
adultery
burdensome debt
complaining
dishonor
disobedience to parents
divorce
failure to make reconciliation
failure to witness to your
 relatives
fighting and bickering / debate /
 strife
husbands not loving their wives
lack of communication
lack of love
nagging
neglect of discipline
neglect of family prayer and
 devotions
neglect of family time
rebellion in children
unfaithfulness to church
unwillingness to forgive
wives not submitting to their
 husbands
variance (discord, strife)

Sins of the Nation

abortion
child abuse
corruption in entertainment
corruption in government
debt
drug abuse
failure to honor the Lord's Day

haters of God
homosexuality / unnatural, vile
affections
immorality
legalized gambling (lottery)
loving pleasure more than
loving God
materialism
men stealers (slavery)
murder
persecution of Christian
ministries
removal of prayer from public
schools
traitors
truce or covenant breaking
unbelief in the universities