



The  
*Power* of  
*Prevailing*  
*Prayer*

Exploring  
18 Hindrances  
to Prayer

Moses C. Onwubiko



# THE POWER OF PREVAILING PRAYER

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EXPLORING 18 HINDRANCES  
TO PRAYER

*by Moses C. Onwubiko*

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# Dedication

It is my greatest honor to dedicate this book, *The Power of Prevailing Prayer*, to all of you, my partners here in the U.S., and to those of you, around the world, who indefatigably pray for me and the ministry, which God in His matchless grace, entrusted into my hands. You are like Aaron and Hur to me, who supported Moses' arms in prayer, when they were weak and kept them from falling until Israel prevailed in battle (Ex. 17:12-14). "Your Father who sees in secret will reward you" (Matt. 6:6).

## **GEM Board Members**

I call the GEM Board members: John Brunner, Lakiesha Crawford, Debby Hagar, Linda Monroe, Wallace Mosley, Tim Rybacki, Bob Smith, Lee Smith and myself, a "God-assembled-team." They are invaluable and indispensable God chosen vessels in His Vineyard. Their contribution to the ministry is incalculable. They have and will forever have my overflowing gratitude.

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My bosom friends, John Brunner, Wayne Haub, and Bruce Bumgardner may the Lord never forget the labor of love, which you have shown me. May He reward you for the endless support that you give to His servant — Moses C. Onwubiko.

## **Standing Ovation**

My Standing ovation goes to no other, than Jesus Christ, King of kings, Lord of lords, my Savior, Redeemer, Master and best Friend, for His love and unsurpassed sacrifice, which He made to secure my so great salvation, and the privilege to bring the truth to God's people for the glory of God the Father.

Being a prayer warrior is not a spiritual gift;  
being a prayer warrior is achieved by diligently studying and  
obeying God's Word, and making prayer a habit.

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# Introduction

Are you one of those who asks, “Has God changed? Is He still the same God of the Bible? Is He still a prayer answering God?” Have you ever wondered if God’s invitation in Psalm 50:15 to “Call upon Me, I will answer you” is still applicable today? Have you pondered why we do not have instant results in our corporate prayer like the early church did? When Peter, John and other leaders of the early church were praying for the strength to continue preaching the word of God, they experienced instant results. “When they had prayed, the place where they had gathered together was shaken, and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak the word of God with boldness.” (Acts 4:31) Do you ever feel like God isn’t listening to you or answering your prayers?

You are not alone. Thousands of years ago, Gideon questioned, “If the LORD is with us, why then has all this happened to us? And where are all His miracles which our fathers told us about, saying, ‘Did not the LORD bring us up from Egypt?’” (Judges 6:13 NKJV). The things that were told to them in the Torah (the first five books of the Bible) were no longer happening in his day. He wondered if God was still listening and answering prayers.

Some years ago my missionary friend George and I were in Poland for an evangelistic meeting. I remember it as vividly as if it were yesterday. On Saturday, the last day of the meeting, the host pastor approached me and whispered to me, “Reverend, could you please pray for rain? Our town has not had any rain in three months.” In my opening prayer before my message, I prayed that God would send the much-needed rain in the land.

That evening after supper, I went into my room and wrestled with God in prayer. I asked Him to authenticate my message by answering my prayer, so that the audience would know that I had given them His Word. I prayed all night. I opened my window in the morning. God had answered the prayer; there was rain. I must confess, I had goosebumps all over me. It was as if I were watching a movie, it seemed so unreal.

I was totally overwhelmed with joy to see that what I had read about Elijah in James 5:17-18, is still true today. “Elijah was a man with a nature like ours, and he prayed earnestly that it would not rain,

and it did not rain on the earth for three years and six months. Then he prayed again, and the sky poured rain and the earth produced its fruit.”

When I went down for breakfast the first words that came out of George’s mouth were, “God really answered your prayer.” Before my message that Sunday, I thanked God for sending rain. It was a sobering moment for the audience who had heard me praying for rain the previous evening. God had honored His message.

This book on prayer is designed to answer questions about why too many of our prayers go unanswered. I believe, if God answered more of our prayers, our life experiences and relationships in marriage, friendship, church, business, and in our world at large would be transformed. We will also examine eighteen hindrances to prayer and see where and why our prayers may have roadblocks.

The Bible holds many examples of great men and women, who wrestled with God in prayer with positive results. They were ordinary people like us, as mentioned in James 5:17. Hannah wrestled with God in prayer to conceive a child (1 Sam. 1:10-13). Anna spent her life in prayer pouring her soul on God’s altar in the Temple, “night and day” (Luke 2:36-38). And the Lord rewarded her, by allowing her to see the Messiah before her death (Luke 2:36-38). This is to name just two women. In our study, we will take a closer look at four men: Elijah, Jacob, Moses, and Hezekiah and their relationship with God to see the correlation between their spiritual life and prayer.

Keep in mind, prayer is a normal conversation. Through it you give God feedback from His Word by praising Him, giving thanks to Him, and bringing your petitions and intercessory needs to Him. We are invited to “draw near to the throne of grace” (Heb. 4:16 ESV). Prayer is not reserved for special saints. Amazingly two members of the Godhead, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit, actually intercede with God the Father on behalf of all believers, also known as “saints” (Heb. 7:25; Rom. 8:26). We are not to pray to Jesus Christ, nor to the Holy Spirit. Jesus instructed us, “Pray, then in this way: ‘Our Father who art in Heaven’” (Matt. 6:9). All prayers are channeled to the Father through our Great High Priest, Jesus Christ. “Truly, truly, I say to you, if you shall ask the Father for anything, He will give it to you in My name” (John 16:23). Yes, all prayers are brought to the Father in Christ’s name by the enablement of the Holy Spirit (Eph. 6:18).

One of our associates asked a very important question: What about children and the intellectually challenged who are not capable of comprehending all the nuances of prayer as taught in this book? Would their prayers be hindered?

God in His infinite wisdom, grace, and fairness deals with us all based on who we are, what we know about Him and what we do with what we know. God's Kingdom belongs to children (Matt. 19:14). They are innocent. Their mental faculties are not as developed to process information as adults, and so God meets them where they are in grace. He answers their prayers accordingly. That goes for the intellectually challenged, whose mental ability is impeded. God answers them. That should be comforting news to parents who might wonder about their children, who pray beautifully, but don't understand the principles that are taught in this book.

Some people have asked, "Why do we need to pray; doesn't God already know what we need?" This kind of question cannot be found in Scripture. There is no record of any believer asking such a question in the Bible. They simply gave themselves to prayer (Acts 2:42). Is this the question of a lazy believer, who is in search of reasons not to engage with God in prayer?

Scripture commands, "Devote yourselves to prayer" (Col. 4:2) and to "pray without ceasing" (1 Thess. 5:17). It should be noted that divine communication is two-way. God communicates to us through His Word; we respond to Him through Holy Spirit-enabled prayer.

Do you pray? Do you pray with confidence? Are your prayers being answered? It is my prayer that the Lord may turn your life into a praying life. I ask this in the mighty name of Jesus Christ.

“Man is looking for better methods. God is looking for better men.  
Men are God’s methods.”  
~ E. M. Bounds



“Prayer is the key that unlocks all the storehouses of God’s  
infinite grace and power.”  
~ R. A. Torrey

# Quick Draw

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“If My people who are called by My name will humble themselves, and pray and seek My face, and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin and heal their land.”

~ 2 Chronicles 7:14 NKJV

As the United States of America was facing one of the most terrifying pandemics that the world has ever known, on Sunday, March 15, 2020, the U.S. president declared a day of prayer: “It is my great honor to declare Sunday, March 15th as a National Day of Prayer. We are a Country that, throughout our history, has looked to God for protection and strength in times like these.... No matter where you may be, I encourage you to turn towards prayer in an act of faith. Together, we will easily PREVAIL!”<sup>1</sup>

Then a couple of months later, he invoked the Congressionally enacted National Day of Prayer: “NOW, THEREFORE, I, DONALD J. TRUMP, President of the United States of America, do hereby proclaim May 7, 2020, as a National Day of Prayer. I encourage all Americans to observe this day, reflecting on the blessings our Nation has received and the importance of prayer...”<sup>2</sup>

The title of this chapter, “Quick Draw,” was carefully selected to prepare our minds for the issue of prayer. Naturally, people are quick to press the *prayer button* when they are in a jam — God, help!

<sup>1</sup> <https://wgntv.com/news/president-trump-declares-sunday-a-national-day-of-prayer-amid-covid-19-outbreak/> (accessed 11/5/2020)

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.whitehouse.gov/presidential-actions/proclamation-national-day-prayer-2020/> (accessed 9/ 8/2020)

We do it all the time. Elected officials call on the nation to pray when there is a national disaster, as President Trump did. Churches call on their members to pray when there is a disaster, and many churches did this in response to COVID-19. An individual in a dilemma hits the button — “God help me,” I need this problem solved now.

The truth is: You have done it, I have done it, and we do it all the time. But wait. Isn't it what we are supposed to do? Did God not say in Psalm 50:15, “Call upon Me in the day of trouble; I shall rescue you, and you will honor Me”? Isn't it the right thing to do, to call the Almighty when one is in a jam? Of course, who can argue that? But why doesn't He rescue us when we call? Why is it that the One who said, “Call upon Me” is also the One who said, “though you multiply prayers, I will not listen” (Isa. 1:15)? What's happening? Is God contradicting Himself?

How do we account for a passage such as, “It will also come to pass that before they call, I will answer; and while they are still speaking, I will hear” (Isa. 65:24)? Who are *they*? Why is Daniel's prayer answered instantly, “Do not be afraid, Daniel, for from the first day that you set your heart on understanding this and on humbling yourself before your God, your words [prayers] were heard [instantly]” (Dan. 10:12)? And yet God told others, “they will cry out to the LORD, But He will not answer them” (Mic. 3:4). What's the difference between one whose prayer received immediate attention as promised in Isaiah and others whose prayer did not leave the prayer launcher? The difference is huge; it's a measure of their attitude toward God's manual, the Bible.

### ***The Importance of a Manual***

Most aspects of our life are guided by an operation manual. A constitution is a manual for law and order in a society. There are manuals for assembling cars, appliances, toys, and so much more. The Bible is the manual for life. No one can do without a manual.

A man was assembling his new lawn mower without the manual. His wife came by and said, “Honey, you are not looking at the manual?” The husband replied, “Sweetheart, I have done this a million times, I don't need a manual.” Just as he was about to tighten the last screw, his wife passed by and said, “What about these two little pieces here?” He replied, “The manufacturer may have put in extras; there's nothing to it, sweetheart. Relax.”

He took his lawn mower into the yard and tried a dozen times to start it, without success. He came back and picked up the manual. Imagine! Those two pieces were part of the equipment. He put them in and, voila, the engine started right up. That illustrates the way many of us rush to hit the prayer button without reading God's instructional manual, the Bible. We cry, we wail, all to no avail. Has God left the throne of His grace? No! We have not read the manual to see the prayer prerequisites, to know what is required of us to make the operation of our prayer life successful.

### ***Following the Prayer Manual***

2 Chronicles 7:14, in my opinion, is the most quoted passage on prayer in all of Scripture. If it wasn't already, then more than likely it is now during the worldwide COVID-19 pandemic. Turn on your television, you will see people gathering in town squares quoting 2 Chronicles 7:14 and praying. On radios, the story is the same. Churches organize prayer chains, hoping to force God to act. You may have even quoted it or memorized it, as many have. We should quote Scripture. But did you notice the context of that verse in the manual?

No question about it: 2 Chronicles 7:14 is an invitation to call upon God when a nation is suffering because of divine discipline. This was originally addressed to Covenant Israel, but it is applicable to any group that claims to be God's children.

If my people, who are called by my name, will humble themselves and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, and I will forgive their sin and will heal their land (2 Chron. 7:14 NIV).

Context is everything in biblical interpretation. Let's put our passage in its context by looking first at verse 13, which says, "If I [God] shut up the heavens so that there is no rain, or if I [God] command the locust to devour the land, or if I [God] send pestilence [such as coronavirus] among My people".

Verse 13 showcases God's disciplinary action because of the failure of His people. In verse 14, God outlined the remedy for the removal of national discipline, or any discipline related to spiritual

failure. Although 2 Chronicles 7 is specific to Israel, Scripture is clear that Gentile nations also should submit to God (Ps. 33:12). Therefore, the general principles of 2 Chronicles 7:14 apply to all nations (Jer. 18: 7-10). The *BIG* question is this, have we paid attention to and fulfilled the four conditions that God outlined within verse 14?

Listen carefully to God’s instructions and conditions contained within the verse. Remember, He cannot compromise His Word. Look closely at what He says.

### **1. Humble Ourselves Before God**

Acknowledge that God is sovereign, and we are not. It is not politicians nor scientists, nor anything, nor anyone, that will solve our crisis. Only God knows all the facts and has that power. Humility is a mental attitude, it is total acceptance that, whatever we are, God has made us and without Him we can accomplish nothing (John 15:5).

### **2. Pray**

God wants us to pray. Prayer is an expression of humility, a recognition of God’s supreme authority, and our dependence on Him for everything. It is a means whereby we enter a marvelous fellowship with God. We must pray in such a way that God hears our prayers. If we have not forgiven others, then God will not forgive us and will not hear<sup>3</sup> our prayers (Matt. 6:14-15). The Psalmist tells us, “If I had not confessed the sin in my heart, The LORD would not have listened [to my prayer]” (Ps. 66:18 NLT). The prophet Isaiah said the same thing — unrepentant, unconfessed sin blocks the believer’s prayer. “It’s your sins that have cut you off from God. Because of your sins, he has turned away and will not listen anymore” (Isa. 59:2 NLT).

### **3. Seek God’s Face**

We seek God’s face through study of the Bible, the Word of God — His guide for life and living. We are to hold ourselves up to the mirror of the Word to see if we are conforming ourselves to it. We are instructed, “Do not conform to the pattern of this

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<sup>3</sup> “Does not hear” means God does not listen. God hears all but does not answer all.



world but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is — His good, pleasing, and perfect will" (Romans 12:2 NIV). God wants you to seek His face. Will you?

#### **4. Turn from Evil Ways**

Failure to turn from our evil ways is a roadblock to aligning ourselves with God's will and having God act on our behalf. How can you remove this hurdle? Go back and connect the first three points. Approach God with a humble heart. Pray like David, "search me, O God... see if there is any offensive way in me" (Ps. 139:23-24 BSB). You and I must examine our hearts and our motives. We must seek God's face and seriously ask if we are living by what is right in our own eyes" as in Judges 21:25, or by what is right in the eyes of God? Are we doing things out of reverence for the Almighty God, to bring honor and glory to His holy name? Or are we motivated by resentment, retaliation, bitterness, anger, revenge, or lust for money or power?

Honestly, we must take an inventory of our life. If we are motivated by ungodliness, we must have a change of mind like the Prodigal Son, "when he came to his senses, he said... 'I will get up and go to my father, and will say to him, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven, and in your sight' '"(Luke 15:17, 18).

### ***Mercy And Grace***

The Prodigal Son was not denying or down-playing his failure. He knew that he had failed. He knew the consequences. In his repentance he said, "I am no longer worthy to be called your son" (v. 19). When you mess up, when you fail someone you love, pain is associated with it. Our spiritual failures grieve God. That we too should feel grief is normal.

The moment we realize that our evil ways grieve Him, we must take the steps to restoration and acknowledge that our behavior was wrong (1 John 1:9). It does not take weeks or months to be cleansed. We are cleansed instantly. Fellowship is restored. But for God to remove the discipline, our change of heart must be accompanied with genuine resolve to move away from our former evil practice. "People who conceal their sins will not prosper, but if they confess and turn from them, they will receive mercy" (Prov. 28:13 NLT).

God’s grace is bigger than our failures. Our God is “gracious and compassionate” (Joel 2:13). He is ever ready to welcome us back. That is exactly what the Lord had in mind when he taught the parable of the Prodigal Son. “So he [the Prodigal Son] got up and came to his father. But while he was still a long way off, his father saw him and felt compassion for him, and ran and embraced him and kissed him” (Luke 15:20).

### ***T’s Crossed & I’s Dotted***

When we ignore God’s requirements for answering prayer, it is a total waste of our time to approach Him in prayer. Before you answer an invitation to join a prayer meeting, be sure that you have taken the steps to ensure that God will hear you from heaven. So let us turn from those evil ways and have all our interactions reflect honesty, kindness, and compassion toward others.

Here is the truth: when these four conditions outlined in 2 Chronicles 7:14 are met, God has obligated Himself to fulfill His part. In fact, we can hold God to His Word and say, “God, You said...”

*Then* God will forgive our sin, hear our prayer, and heal our land.

Does God answer our prayers? Yes. Answering prayers is one of the many ways God is glorified, “Call upon me in the day of trouble; I will deliver you, and you shall glorify me” (Ps. 50:15 ESV). In the coming four short chapters, I will present men whose prayers changed the course of history.

### ***Spiritual Exercise***

1. Name three things in this chapter that can hinder your prayer:

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2. What is humility?

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3. Could any of the things mentioned in this chapter be a hindrance to your prayer? What are they?

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4. List actions you plan to take to resolve any hindrances to your prayer in this chapter.

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## *Repairing a Broken Altar*

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“He repaired the altar of the LORD *that was* broken down. And Elijah took twelve stones. ...Then with the stones he built an altar in the name of the LORD.”

~ 1 Kings 18:30-32 NKJV

The greatest secret in getting our prayers answered lies in our understanding that God cannot be worshipped on a broken altar. Sadly, the church is full of broken altars, both individually and corporately. You ask, “What do you mean by a broken altar?”

An altar is a most sacred point of meeting between God and the worshipper. There the worshipper offers sacrifices, offerings, and prayers unto God. Noah was the first person known to erect an altar. He “built an altar to the LORD, and took every clean animal...and offered burnt offerings on the altar” (Gen. 8:20 NKJV). There God entered a covenant with him (v. 21). Take note: Noah’s offering was made up of “*every clean animal,*” which tells us his sacrifice was holy.

Others who erected altars were Abraham (Gen. 12:7; 13:4; 22:9), Isaac (26:25), Jacob (33:20; 35:1-3), and Moses (Ex. 17:15). It’s not within the scope of this work to go into detail about altars. These men are called to our attention to show us the biblical origin and use of altars. They are a place of honor and worship of the Almighty.

Biblically, there are two types of altars, outward and inward. They play a vital role in our worship. They must meet God’s standard of holiness if the worshipper is seeking God’s presence. God cannot come near a defiled or broken altar. His holiness demands that He stay away. Let us consider these altars.

## ***Old Testament — Outward Altar***

An outward altar is a physical, visible altar made with human hands. The first types of these constructions were built by Noah, Abraham, and others. Then it became centralized in the Tabernacle and afterward in the Temple. God instructed Moses on how to construct an altar so that it remained undefiled. “Now if you make an altar of stones for Me, you must not build it with stones shaped by tools; for if you use a chisel on it, you will defile it” (Ex. 20:25 BSB). Observe, God is concerned about keeping the altar holy. There the priest offered prayers and sacrifices for the sins of the people.

## ***Church Age — Inward Altar***

The coming of Pentecost marks a new beginning in God’s program. It renders the physical temple and its altar obsolete. They have been relocated. Today, “we are the temple of the living God” (2 Cor. 6:16). Both God’s temple and His altar are invisible, made without human hands. Our soul represents this magnificent altar. There God meets the believer frequently for worship. Church age worship is inward, “God is spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit [inward dwelling Spirit] and [biblical] truth” (John 4:24).

In the church age, every believer is a priest (1 Peter 2:9), which gives us the privilege to represent ourselves directly before God. It is the duty of a priest to pray for himself and others: therefore, it is sinful to neglect that duty (1 Sam. 12:23).

Let there be no confusion. It is true that a visible outward altar associated with a physical temple ended at Pentecost, and the believer is now the new temple. However, this change does not negate the mandate of “not forsaking our own assembling together” (Heb. 10:25). Fellowship of believers is an integral part of worship. God demands it!

Let us consider the heart of this section, repairing a broken altar. God screens the soul before He meets the worshiper, whether inward or outward. Consider what the LORD told one worshipper:

“So if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there before the altar. First go and be

reconciled to your brother; then come and offer your gift.”  
(Matt. 5:23-24 BSB).

Observe the worshipper. The individual came to worship God having wronged someone else and was therefore unqualified for worship until he reconciled with the other person. The condition of your soul is critical in worship. You cannot approach God in worship with sin in the soul. King David put it this way, “Who may ascend into the hill of the LORD? And who may stand in His holy place? He who has clean hands and a pure heart. ...” (Ps 24:3-4a).

### ***Israel in Spiritual Chaos***

Scripture reveals that the nation of Israel was in a prolonged state of spiritual degeneracy. “For many years Israel has been without the true God, without a priest to instruct them, and without the law” (2 Chr. 15:3 BSB). Their abandonment of God resulted in discipline. “God troubled them with every kind of distress” (15:6). God never leaves moral decay unpunished (Prov. 11:21).

### ***Elijah the Man of the Hour***

God raised Elijah to challenge Israel. He prayed, and God withheld rain “for three and a half years” (James 5:17). The people suffered tremendously because of the severe drought. Then, after three and a half years, Elijah came back on the scene. He came to turn their hearts back to God, who is a merciful and gracious God, who is always seeking the return of His people. “Let the wicked man forsake his own way and the unrighteous man his own thoughts; let him return to the LORD, that He may have compassion, and to our God, for He will freely pardon” (Isa. 55:7 BSB).

### ***God or Baal on Mount Carmel?***

Some years ago, on a mission trip to Israel, I had the privilege of standing on the same mountain where God’s prophet, Elijah, challenged the prophets of Baal about 3,000 years ago. What a site! It was on that mountain that a line of demarcation was drawn between false worshippers and true worshippers. Of all the things Elijah could have used to ascertain who were the true worshippers, he used prayer.

When Ahab saw Elijah, Ahab said to him, “Is this you, you troubler of Israel?” He said, “I have not troubled Israel, but you and your father’s house *have*, because you have forsaken the commandments of the LORD and you have followed the Baals. Now then send *and* gather to me all Israel at Mount Carmel, *together* with 450 prophets of Baal and 400 prophets of the Asherah, who eat at Jezebel’s table.” So Ahab sent *a message* among all the sons of Israel and brought the prophets together at Mount Carmel. Elijah came near to all the people and said, “How long *will* you hesitate between two opinions? If the LORD is God, follow Him; but if Baal, follow him.” But the people did not answer him a word. Then Elijah said to the people, “I alone am left a prophet of the LORD, but Baal’s prophets are 450 men. Now let them give us two oxen; and let them choose one ox for themselves and cut it up, and place it on the wood, but put no fire *under it*; and I will prepare the other ox and lay it on the wood, and I will not put a fire *under it*. Then you call on the name of your god, and I will call on the name of the LORD, and the God who answers by fire, He is God.” And all the people said, “That is a good idea.” (1 Kings 18:17-24).

### ***Elijah Offers Baal Worshipers First Choice***

Elijah closed any loophole. He wisely gave the Baal worshippers no room to claim that their god was angry because they offered him the smaller bull. Elijah asked them, “Choose one ox for yourselves and prepare it first for you are many, and call on the name of your god, but put no fire *under it*” (v. 25).

They offered prayer to Baal from morning to noon to no avail. ““Baal, answer us!’ They shouted, but there was no response; no one answered” (v. 26 NIV). They did everything they could, but their sacrifice was untouched. Elijah mocked them to shout louder. They took him up on his suggestion and shouted louder (v. 27). Heaven was silent. Why is that? Because their spiritual life was a failure. They had lost sight of the true God. Their offering was made on a broken altar and their prayer was misdirected to a false god—who is not God at all.

This is true of so many Christians today. Many have broken, unrepared spiritual altars. Some worship a different god: money,



spouse, children, or profession. The list is long. With a broken spiritual life, people approach God in prayer. But God has warned them, “Yes, even though you offer many prayers, I will not be listening” (Isa. 1:15).

This is the state of many Christians today. Are you one of them? Truly, what is the condition of the altar of your soul? Can a Holy God be invited in? Are your prayers being answered? Examine your life in the same way I am compelled to examine mine. No one is immune to spiritual failure.

### *Petitioning God for the Seemingly Impossible*

Elijah did four things before offering the remaining ox. First, he repaired the broken altar, which the false prophets did not do (1 Kings 18:30-32). Second, he made a big trench around the altar to show that his God is One for whom nothing is impossible (v. 32). Third, he cut the ox in pieces and placed them on the altar. Fourth, he challenged them to “fill four pitchers with water and pour it on the burnt offering and on the wood.” He told them to do it three times until there was a flood of water. He even filled the trench with water (v. 33-35). Hold it! Do fire, water and wood go together? No! We use water to extinguish fire, not to ignite it.

Elijah approached the altar and prayed,

“O LORD, the God of Abraham, Isaac and Israel, today let it be known that You are God in Israel and that I am Your servant and I have done all these things at Your word. Answer me, O LORD, answer me, that this people may know that You, O LORD, are God, and *that* You have turned their heart back again.” Then the fire of the LORD fell and consumed the burnt offering and the wood and the stones and the dust, and licked up the water that was in the trench. When all the people saw it, they fell on their faces; and they said, “The LORD, He is God; the LORD, He is God” (1 Kings 18:36-39).

What an obedient servant of God! What a prayer! What a sight! What a display of the immense power of the awesome God of the universe! Elijah’s prayer was for God’s glory, “answer me... that

this people may know that You... are God.” It was all about God! Even when Elijah prayed, let it be known “that I am Your servant,” Elijah’s objective was that Israel would believe his message about God so that God would be glorified.

How does your prayer measure up? Is it focused on bringing glory to God, or is it more self-centered? God said that His ear is not dull to hear, but we are hindered by our broken altars (Isa. 59:1-2).

Pause. Reflect on your spiritual life. This is most serious, for we are in a spiritual war. You either take the enemy out, or he will take you out. Reflect, check your internal altar, and adjust before turning to the next chapter.

### ***Spiritual Exercise***

1. What is a broken altar and how can it be repaired?

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2. Why did God answer Elijah and not the prophets of Baal?

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3. Why did God instruct the Israelites not to build their altars out of cut stones in Exodus 20:25?

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4. Is there anything that can hinder your prayer and what action will you take to amend your altar?

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# *When the Humble Pray*

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“Now the man Moses was very humble — more than any person on earth.”

~ Num. 12:3, ISV

This chapter is dedicated to the Moses of the Bible, a great man of humility. Do you know that humility is the gateway to the throne room of God? Humility is the mental attitude whereby you realize that who you are is because of who and what God is. He tells us, “apart from Me you can do nothing” (John 15:5).

E. M. Bounds said: “Humility keeps itself from the public gaze. It does not seek publicity. ...It does not care for prominence. ...It never exalts itself in the eyes of others or in the eyes of itself. ...There is no self-praise in humility. ...Pride, self-esteem, and self-praise effectively shut the door of prayer.”<sup>4</sup>

Humility is a rare Christian grace in the courts of heaven.<sup>5</sup> It catapults a believer before the throne of God’s grace. Those who understand the God of the Bible approach Him humbly. They view Him differently and act on His Word with humble hearts and reverence. Moses was such a man like no other. He knew God. His knowledge of God affected his person on every front.

## ***Moses Gains God’s Heart***

Tim Keller said, “The essence of gospel humility is not thinking more of myself or thinking less of myself, it is thinking of myself less.”<sup>6</sup> James declares that, “God gives greater grace to the humble

<sup>4</sup> E. M. Bounds, *The Classic Collection on Prayer* (Orlando Florida: Bridge Logos Publishers, 2001), 103, 104

<sup>5</sup> Bounds, 104

<sup>6</sup> Tim Keller, *The Freedom of Self-Forgetfulness*, 2017, 10 Publishing, a division of 10ofthose.com, Leyland, England

(James 4:6). Moses' humility and obedience brought him favor before the throne of God's grace. When you read of his obedience you see that, "Moses did everything just [exactly] as the LORD had commanded him" (Ex. 40:16 BSB). Elsewhere we read, "So Moses... did just [exactly] as the LORD had commanded" (7:6 BSB). "Moses was very humble — more than any person on earth" (Num. 12:3 ISV).<sup>7</sup>

Because of his life of humility and obedience, "the LORD would speak to Moses face to face, as a man speaks to his friend" (Ex. 33:11 BSB). He was God's friend. He received favor as few others have. Whatever he requested of God, he received. The Lord told him, "I will do this very thing you have asked, for you have found favor in My sight, and I know you by name" (33:17 BSB). Reflect on this as we consider his intercessory prayer.

### ***God's Anger Burns Against Israel***

Humanizing God is a mistake that many Christians make. Too often, we acknowledge God's attribute of love but refuse to take into account His attributes of holiness and justice. We must balance our knowledge of God. He is a God of love and justice. "God is love" (1 John 4:8). "God is a consuming fire" (Heb. 12:29). When any person or group violates His holiness, His justice is called for in equal measure. He disciplines. This is particularly true of His people Israel. God made His anger known:

The LORD said to Moses, "I have seen this people, and behold, they are an obstinate people. Now then let Me alone, that My anger may burn against them and that I may destroy them; and I will make of you a great nation" (Ex. 32:9-10).

The background for God's anger was Israel's sin of idolatry. "They... made themselves an idol" (Ex. 32:8 NIV), which was a rebellion against God's commandment (20:4). God was so angry that His recourse was a total obliteration of the whole nation. He offered to "make of [Moses] a great nation" (32:10).

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<sup>7</sup> Most conservative scholars believe Numbers 12:3 was an divinely inspired addition to the text by Joshua after Moses died.

## ***Moses' Intercessory Prayer***

What an incredible offer, "I will make you a great nation." If Moses accepted this offer, he could be relieved of the troublesome Israelites and replace Abraham as the father of a great nation. Egocentrism, self-centeredness, and pride would have taken the offer. Rather, Moses' mental attitude of compassion, concern for others and love is revealed. He was not interested in fame. He didn't care for prominence. He cared for God's glory.

Then Moses entreated the LORD his God, and said, "O LORD, why does Your anger burn against Your people whom You have brought out from the land of Egypt with great power and with a mighty hand? Why should the Egyptians speak, saying, 'With evil intent He brought them out to kill them in the mountains and to destroy them from the face of the earth'? Turn from Your burning anger and change Your mind about doing harm to Your people. Remember Abraham, Isaac, and Israel, Your servants to whom You swore by Yourself, and said to them, 'I will multiply your descendants as the stars of the heavens, and all this land of which I have spoken I will give to your descendants, and they shall inherit it forever.'" (Ex. 32:11-13)

### ***Moses' Composure***

Observe the wonderful way Moses spoke to God in intercessory prayer. It was a normal conversation based on a relationship that Moses had developed with God, through his faith. You sense calmness and confidence as he approaches God, because he knows that over the years, he has matured into a relationship with His Father-God. Moses was not speaking to God like One who is at a distance or as an unapproachable One. Moses knows that God hears him as a friend hears a friend, and so he brings his petition to the One whom he knows is full of compassion.

### ***Thought-out Petitions***

Observe the systematic way Moses presents his entreaty. He asks God why His anger has reached the boiling point against His people. He reminds God that Israel is His chosen people. Moses brought the Egyptians into the picture as potential mockers of God's holy name.

Then he reminds God of His covenant promises to Abraham. Moses went as far as asking God to blot his name out of His book if God would not forgive Israel (Ex. 32:32). This is what I call a thought-out prayer. He didn't just wail and agonize. He had his list and point by point he made his case before God, the One in whom he found favor.

The same is true of the Lord in His High Priestly prayer in John 17. He thought out His requests and point by point presented them to the Father with reasons. He asked the Father to glorify Him and He gave Him a reason: that through it, He may glorify the Father (v. 1). He asked for the restoration of His glory which He had with the Father before the world was (v. 5). He gave Him a reason: "I have brought You glory" (v. 4 NIV). He asked the Father to protect His disciples and He gave the Father the reason: He was returning to heaven (v. 11).

Does your prayer resemble the prayers of Moses and the Lord? When you say, "Heavenly Father" do you sense a grounded relationship with Him as did Moses and the Lord? This is a sober moment. This is a moment to re-evaluate our prayer life. There's nothing sweeter than having our prayers answered: "I thank You... [because] You always hear Me" (John 11:41-42).

Moses was confident that God would hear him. "So the LORD relented from the harm which He said He would do to His people" (Ex. 32:14). Moses was an obedient child of God, whose life pleased God. Are you an obedient child of God? Is your life marked with humility? If your answer is, "Yes," maybe you are not. A humble person does not claim to be humble. Rather he thinks about God's grace upon his life.

Before you turn to the next chapter, pause and reflect. Take a moment and examine your prayer life. Do you approach God with confidence and humility? Is there any area of your life that might be robbing you of confidence before Him? "Dear friends, if we don't feel guilty, we can come to God with bold confidence. And we will receive from him whatever we ask because we obey him and do the things that please him" (1 John 3:21-22 NIV).

Let us now watch the wrestling match of all time, a man wrestling with God in prayer.

## *Spiritual Exercise*

1. Name two things, from this chapter, that characterized the life of Moses.

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2. Why did God want to destroy Israel?

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3. Explain humility in your own words.

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4. Is there anything you learned in this chapter that might hinder your prayer? How will you ask God to help you remove that hindrance?

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# *Wrestling with God in Prayer*



“Men always ought to pray and not lose heart”

~ Luke 18:1, NKJV

Have you ever had a need that caused you to wrestle with God in prayer? Mind you, prayer is not a mere uttering of words every now and then to God, especially when we are in a jam; prayer is a wrestling exercise consisting of faith, endurance, tenacity, perseverance, and confident expectation. Isaiah the prophet tells us, “Take no rest, all you who pray to the LORD. Give the LORD no rest until he completes his work [acts]” (Isa. 62:6-7 NLT). Isaiah spoke of a two-fold rest: your rest and God’s rest. When you don’t rest from knocking, God does not rest from hearing your banging on the door of His throne room.

Our Lord taught this in the holy Scripture (Luke 18:1-8). He used a parable of a widow who went to ask a cruel judge to “give her legal protection” (v.3) to illustrate how we should wrestle with God in prayer and not faint. When the judge turned down her request she refused to take “No” for an answer and banged non-stop. She wrestled with the judge by continuously going to him again, and again, and yes, again with the same request, knocking at his door until she forced him to act. “For a while he was unwilling; but afterward he said to himself, ‘Even though I do not fear God nor respect man, yet because this widow bothers me, I will give her legal protection, otherwise by continually coming she will wear me out’” (vv. 4-5).

Did you hear what the judge said? He is a wicked judge, who neither respects God, nor has an ounce of compassion for anyone, yet he gave her what she wanted, not on the grounds of mercy or compassion, but because of the widow’s persistence. “She will wear me out.”

Consider our God. The Lord draws a sharp contrast between the wicked judge and our loving, caring, gracious, merciful, and compassionate God. “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?’” (vv. 6-7 NIV).

Will the God of mercy not be merciful to you who wrestle with Him in prayer “day and night”? Certainly, He will. He will not look the other way to anyone who comes before Him in humility and obedience and wrestles with Him in prayer.

### ***Investing Time in Prayer***

Wrestling with God in prayer requires time, which must be set aside. There is no good excuse for failing to create time for prayer. People who give an excuse don’t understand the danger of becoming a casualty on the spiritual battleground. They do not understand the nature of spiritual warfare. “The devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone [a prayerless believer] to devour” (1 Peter 5:8). Investing time requires two things: discipline and perseverance.

#### ***Self-discipline***

Self-discipline is an essential asset in the spiritual life. It demands that we separate the essentials from the non-essentials and give the essentials, such as studying God’s Word and prayer, the time they deserve. It demands that we prioritize. David and Daniel should be our guides. They were both extremely busy with affairs of state, David as king of Israel and Daniel as ruler over Babylon under King Nebuchadnezzar. Yet, David could say “Morning, noon, and night I cry out in my distress, and the LORD hears my voice [in prayer]” (Ps. 55:17 NLT). Daniel “continued kneeling on his knees three times a day, praying and giving thanks before his God, as he had been doing previously” (Dan. 6:10). David and Daniel spent three times a day in prayer. How often do you pray?

#### ***Perseverance***

Perseverance is fueled by self discipline. You must be disciplined to persevere in keeping the allotted time you have set aside for prayer. Choose a time that works for you and stick to it.

Make time to pray. It cannot be overly stated: Intercessory prayer for ourselves and others makes a huge difference.

“Pray so that you will not fall into temptation” (Luke 22:46 NIV). As a priest, you sin when you fail to intercede for others (1 Sam. 12:23). Now we are poised to consider Jacob’s wrestling experience with the Lord.

### ***Jacob Wrestles with God***

We need a little background. Jacob deceived his father Isaac and received the blessing that rightfully belonged to his brother Esau (Gen. 27:37-38). That embittered Esau and drove him to the edge of wanting to kill Jacob (v. 41-42). Jacob’s mother encouraged him to flee to Haran and stay with her brother Laban until Esau’s fury subsided (v. 43-45).

#### ***Jacob Flees to Haran***

On Jacob’s way to Haran, the Lord appeared to him in a dream one night and confirmed Abraham’s covenant blessings with him (Gen. 28:12-14). In other words, God promised to convey on him Abraham’s blessings: “Your descendants shall also be like the dust of the earth...” (v. 14). He sealed His covenant with a promise: “Behold, I am with you and will keep you wherever you go, and will bring you back to this land; for I will not leave you until I have done what I have promised you” (v. 15).

God promises to be with Jacob, and to keep him wherever he goes, and to bring him back to the land of his father and grandfather, and to never leave him until all these promises have come to pass. Although verse 15 is specific to Jacob, many believers have rightfully claimed the principles of this amazing verse because it reveals the character of God. God is the same from age to age, and He is the only One who is forever faithful and trustworthy. God will not let go of us until His promise or plan for our lives is fulfilled. That speaks volumes about God’s character!

#### ***Jacob’s Homecoming***

God abundantly blessed Jacob in a foreign land as promised. His sons have been multiplied. He has kept him and his family from harm wherever they went just as He promised him (Gen. 28:13-

15). The last piece to complete this remarkable puzzle of blessing is the return to the land of his father and grandfather. Jacob has been dreaming about going home, but he was aware of his brother's bitterness against him.

### *Jacob's Prayer to God*

Jacob was afraid of his brother, Esau. He didn't know what the future held for him and his family when he would meet him. Jacob sent a message to his brother and the report came back that Esau was coming to meet him with 400 men (Gen. 32:6). He panicked. "Jacob was greatly afraid and distressed" (v. 7). Who wouldn't be?

Remember there was not a single page of Scripture written in Jacob's day. But he knew what to do in times of distress. Prayer was his solution. "Then Jacob prayed, 'O God of my grandfather Abraham, and God of my father, Isaac — O LORD, you told me, 'Return to your own land and to your relatives.' And you promised me, 'I will treat you kindly' '" (Gen. 32:9 NLT). Observe Jacob's calm, composed conversation with God as a son would have with his father. He reminded God of His mandate and promise. "You told me, 'return to your own land'. ...You promised me, 'I will treat you kindly.'" Yes, God told him to return to the land (Gen. 28:15). He promised to be with him (v. 15).

Jacob basically recited God's promises back to Him. Knowledge of God's Word is a prerequisite to prayer.

Observe Jacob's humility, "I am unworthy of all the lovingkindness and of all the faithfulness which You have shown to Your servant" (Gen. 32:9). Remember that humility is a gateway to the throne of God's grace. It paves the way for solemn communion with God. Jacob made his prayer request known: "Deliver me, I pray, from the hand of my brother... Esau; I fear him... " (v. 11). He was honest: "I am fearful."

He reminds God again of His promise, "For You said, 'I will surely prosper you and make your descendants as the sand of the sea, which is too great to be numbered'" (v. 12). God loves to be reminded of His promises. He never forgets anything, but it gives Him pleasure that you know His Word.

## ***God Came Down to Wrestle with a Man***

Imagine, the Creator wrestling with His creature — “a mere breath” (Ps. 39:11). There is much about God our mind cannot fully grasp. “Then Jacob was left alone, and a man wrestled with him until daybreak” (Gen. 32:24). Notice: The man did not wrestle with Jacob until he was alone. It’s a great lesson about private prayer. In private prayer one can wrestle with God uninterrupted. No distractions. The need to be brief in public prayer in order to be thoughtful of others is no longer a restraint. You can pray for hours if you desire.

The match between the two was so intense, and Jacob was not letting go of this stranger who had engaged him in a match. Picture a dad wrestling with his four-year old son on the playground. The boy jumps all over his dad, flexing all his muscles as if he could slam his dad on the ground. At first, Jacob didn’t know that he was wrestling with his Maker. Often God allows us to wrestle with Him. He just wants us to know that He cares. He is not so mighty that we cannot approach Him. What a God!

Amazingly, “When he [the stranger] saw that he had not prevailed against him [Jacob], he touched the socket of his thigh; so the socket of Jacob’s thigh was dislocated while he wrestled with him” (32:25). Wow. He simply touched Jacob’s thigh and dislocated it. No man can do that, but God can. Jacob now realizes that he was wrestling with the Angel of the Lord, the pre- incarnate Christ, who appeared to him like a man (Hos. 12:3).

Jacob’s knowledge of his divine encounter empowered him to wrestle on even with a dislocated thigh. He persevered. The Lord tells him, “Let me go” (v. 26). His answer was intriguing, “I will not let you go unless you bless me” (v. 26). He wrestled on until he received his full blessing. The Lord changed his name from Jacob to Israel, because he has “striven with God and with men and prevailed” (v. 27). There he received untold blessings, which has affected Israel for all time (v. 29).

## ***Biblical Examples of Prayer Wrestlers***

**David** sang, “In the day of my trouble I shall call upon You [in prayer], for You will answer me” (Ps. 86:7). “In the day of my trouble I sought the LORD; In the night my hand was stretched out without weariness; My soul refused to be

comforted” (77:2). Read the last passage again. That’s the portrait of a man who wrestled with God in prayer.

**Daniel** too prayed fervently. His record was amazing, “in mourning for three entire weeks... So I was left alone... no strength was left in me, for my natural color turned to a deathly pallor, and I retained no strength” (Dan. 10:2, 8).

**Our Lord** wrestled with God in prayer all night long in the Garden of Gethsemane. His prayer was so intense that His tiny blood veins ruptured, causing His blood to mix with His sweat. “His sweat became like drops of blood, falling down upon the ground” (Luke 22:44).

How do you think we, being human, can make it in this unseen ferocious spiritual war with a mediocre prayer lifestyle? Let me help you with the answer. We cannot. Repeat: *we cannot*.

You who are wrestling with God in prayer for the church, nation, the world, your family and yourself, “Take no rest... Give the LORD no rest until He” acts (Isa. 62:6-7 NLT). Now we are poised to show that prayer, indeed, can and does change things.

### ***Spiritual Exercise***

1. Name two things that are essential in investing time in prayer.

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2. How many times did David and Daniel pray each day?

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3. According to Genesis 28:15 and 32:9 what is the most important thing Jacob did in his prayer?

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4. According to Proverbs 28:9, what happens to your prayer when you don’t know God’s Word?

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5. How often do you pray?

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# Can Prayer Change Things?

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“You do not have because you do not ask.”

~ James 4:2, NASB

Satan has, for so long, propagated the lie that prayer does not change anything. Many believers have bought his lie and are rendered powerless. When James the apostle was arrested, there is no biblical record that the church prayed for his release; he was decapitated. But when Peter was arrested, with the same fate as James’ awaiting him, we are told that “Prayer for him [Peter] was made fervently by the church to God” (Acts 12:5). God answered and rescued him (vv. 7-11).

People ask, “If God is Sovereign, and does what pleases Him, whether we pray or not, what difference does my prayer make?” The idea that God’s sovereignty acts randomly without divine restriction, plan and purpose is foreign to Scripture. God works in concert with the prayers of believers in carrying out certain aspects of His plan. This is the unsearchable wisdom of God, who calls us His co-laborers (1 Cor. 3:9).

There are things God will not do until we ask Him. Do you know that lack of prayer is a manifestation of pride? When we do not ask for God’s help, we are saying, “God, we don’t really need You; we can handle our problem.” That’s arrogance, that’s pride. Let us look at two great kings and how they handled pride and the results of their decisions.

## ***King Asa — Delivered to Death***

Reflect on this passage: “In the thirty-ninth year of his reign, Asa became diseased in his feet, and it became increasingly severe. *Yet even in his illness he did not seek the LORD [in prayer], but only the physicians.* So in the forty-first year of his reign, Asa died and rested with his fathers” (2 Chr. 16:12-13 emphasis added).

What a sad note on King Asa's historical record. He was one of the finest kings Judah ever had: He brought revival to the nation. He was in good standing with God (2 Chr. 14:2). He challenged Judeans to seek the Lord (vv. 4-7). He brought them to a covenant with the Lord to "seek the LORD God of their fathers with all their heart and soul" (2 Chr. 15:12). So how did he go from total dependence on God to reliance on man? We'll come to that. But first consider his action in times of trouble.

### ***Asa Relied on God***

The Ethiopians came with a million men and 300 chariots to make war against Asa, who had only half that at 580,000 men (2 Chr. 14:8-9). "Then Asa called to the LORD his God [in prayer] and said, 'LORD, there is no one besides You to help in the battle between the powerful and those who have no strength; so help us, O LORD our God, for we trust in You, and in Your name have come against this multitude. O LORD, You are our God; let not man prevail against You'" (v. 11).

What do you do when you face a difficult situation? Asa was aware of God's promise, "Call upon Me in the day of trouble; I shall rescue you" (Ps. 50:15). He took God up on His offer. God kept His promise: "So the LORD routed the Ethiopians before Asa and before Judah, and the Ethiopians fled" (2 Chr. 14:12). God answered his prayer.

### ***Asa's Pride — Reliance on Man***

Asa had another war against Baasha, King of Israel. This time he set God aside and sought help from a man, King Benhadad of Aram. He made a treaty with him, giving him "silver and gold from the treasures of the house of the LORD" (2 Chr. 16:2). His action displeased God. Hanani the seer came to him: "*Because you have relied on the king of Aram and have not relied on the LORD your God, therefore the army of the king of Aram has escaped out of your hand*" (v. 7 emphasis added). Did you hear what God is saying? "Trust me, not man. You lost because you relied on man instead of Me."

What could have happened if he had prayed? God, in His sovereignty and omnipotence, could have given him victory. The seer questions Asa, making him remember God's past help: "Were



not the Ethiopians and the Lubim an immense army with very many chariots and horsemen? Yet because you relied on the LORD, He delivered them into your hand” (v. 8). Asa became angry with God’s servant “and put him in prison.” He also “oppressed some of the people at the same time” (v. 10). Asa had failed spiritually.

### *Asa’s Fatal Disease*

Asa had become prideful and horizontally minded, looking to man. If we believe the Bible, that nothing happens to a believer apart from God’s permission, we can believe that Asa’s disease had God’s stamp of approval. He no longer looked vertically to God. Please note: It is not sinful to seek a physician’s assistance. Luke, the Apostle Paul’s disciple and assistant, was a physician. It becomes sinful when you sideline God and rely only on man. “Cursed is the man who trusts in mankind, who makes the flesh his strength and turns his heart from the LORD” (Jer. 17:5 BSB). That is just what Asa did, and two years later the Lord took him home. Why? Reflect on that question as we observe another king and ask again: “Can prayer change things?”

## ***Hezekiah’s Deliverance from Death***

“In those days Hezekiah became mortally ill. And Isaiah the prophet the son of Amoz came to him and said to him, Thus says the LORD, ‘Set your house in order, for you shall die and not live’” (Isa. 38:1).

Hezekiah, like Asa, was another one of the finest kings in Judah who also brought the nation back to the Lord. He lived a life that honored God (2 Chr. 29:2). God blessed him immensely (2 Chr. 32:27). But with blessing and success came pride (v. 25). Know this truth: success attracts pride and only the prudent can avoid its snare.

Hezekiah was a man of prayer. He knew how to wrestle with God in prayer. When besieged by the most powerful nation in his day, Assyria, he turned to the Lord and joined hands with the prophet Isaiah in prayer “and cried out to heaven” (2 Chr. 32:20). The Lord answered them and delivered the nation (v. 22).

He took the threatening letter the king of Assyria wrote him to the temple “and spread it before the LORD ... [and] prayed before the LORD: ‘O LORD, God of Israel, enthroned between the cherubim, You alone are God over all the kingdoms of the earth. You made the heavens and the earth. And now, O LORD our God, please save us from his hand, [Assyria’s king], so that all the kingdoms of the earth may know that You alone, O LORD, are God’” (2 Kings 19:14-15, 19 BSB).

In response to Hezekiah’s prayer, God sent the angel of the Lord, who killed 185,000 Assyrians in one night, which made the Assyrians retreat to their home country and stay there (vv. 35-36).

### ***Pride Yields to Humility***

Imagine a prophet coming to your house to bring you a word from God: “Thus says the LORD, ‘Set your house in order...you shall die.’” It happened to Hezekiah because, like Asa, he became prideful. Those were Isaiah’s words to him, but in this instance, Hezekiah did not accept “Thus says the LORD...” to be final. He knew that God was a merciful and compassionate God. He believed in the power of prevailing prayer. Therefore, Hezekiah wrestled with God in prayer refusing to take “No” for an answer. “Hezekiah humbled himself and repented of his pride” (2 Chr. 32:26 NLT).

Then Hezekiah turned his face to the wall and prayed to the LORD, and said, “Remember now, O LORD, I beseech You, how I have walked before You in truth and with a whole heart, and have done what is good in Your sight.” And Hezekiah wept bitterly. Then the word of the LORD came to Isaiah, saying, “Go and say to Hezekiah, ‘Thus says the LORD, the God of your father David, I have heard your prayer, I have seen your tears; behold, I will add fifteen years to your life’” (Isa. 38:2-5).

Do you think that Hezekiah would have lived if he hadn’t prayed? Are you convinced yet that prayer does indeed change things? Let me briefly dissect the passage. God did not change. I believe that Hezekiah’s illness was related to his pride. He crossed God’s holiness and God responded with discipline. Hezekiah changed; he went from humility to pride and then back to humility. Hezekiah

adjusted to God's justice by becoming humble. God showed him mercy.

### ***Making Your Case Before God***

Look at the content of Hezekiah's prayer request. He began by asking God to "remember."<sup>8</sup> Who else in our study has asked God to remember? Jacob asked God to remember His promises. Moses asked God to remember His promises to Moses' ancestors, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Hezekiah asked God to remember how he had walked before God in truth and obedience. He appealed to God based on his spiritual walk with Him.

Have you made your case before God? Why should God answer your prayer? This is a question you should answer honestly before you begin to pray. Jacob gave God a reason (Gen. 32:9), Moses gave God a reason (Ex. 32:13), Hezekiah gave God a reason (Isa. 38:3), Jesus gave the Father a reason (John 17:4-5). Do you give God a reason?

### ***Imitating Prayer Wrestlers***

In our imitation of the prayer wrestlers, we need to copy two things: lifestyle and frequency in prayer. So far we have noted some Old Testament prayer wrestlers. In the New Testament, the Apostle Paul stands out. He exhorted us to "Be imitators of me, just as I also am of Christ" (1 Cor. 11:1). He wrestled with God in prayer as no one else did. He urged us to "Pray without ceasing" (1 Thess. 5:17). He prayed for churches everywhere. To the Romans he wrote "... God is my witness, whom I serve with my spirit in the gospel of His Son, that without ceasing I make mention of you always in my prayers" (Rom. 1:9 NKJV). To the Corinthians he wrote, "I thank my God always concerning you" (1 Cor. 1:4). To the Ephesians he wrote, "Therefore I... do not cease to give thanks for you, making mention of you in my prayers" (Eph. 1:15-16). Those are but a few, the list is long.

Paul's wrestling in prayer was not just for churches, but also for individuals. He prayed for Philemon, "I thank my God, making mention of you always in my prayers" (Phile. 1:4 NKJV). He prayed

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<sup>8</sup> Both the Hebrew and Greek terms for "remember" and "act" mean more than recall to mind. They mean "to act on" when God is the subject.

for Timothy, his son in the Lord, “I remember you in my prayers night and day” (2 Tim. 1:3 NKJV). Paul, who exhorted us to pray for “all men...kings and all who are in authority... [for unsaved and saved],” must have been praying for them himself (1 Tim. 2:1-4).

### *Lifestyle*

What these prayer wrestlers both in the Old and New testaments have in common is their love for God’s Word and obedience to it. Knowing that having prayer answered is based upon conditions, we must ensure that our spiritual life is God-honoring: “Whatever we ask we receive from Him, because we keep His commandments and do the things that are pleasing in His sight” (1 John 3:22 emphasis added). Even the Lord used His obedience as an appeal in His prayer (John 17:4-5).

If you are lagging in your spiritual life, begin right now to wrestle with God in prayer, day and night, to enable you to love His Word and live a life of obedience. It’s only when your life is lived vertically, toward God, that your prayer will receive attention. A prayer that seeks God’s kingdom first cannot go unanswered. Scripture is clear: “Because he [the believer] has loved Me, therefore I will deliver him... He will call upon Me, and I will answer him” (Ps. 91: 14-15).

### *Frequency in Prayer*

Scripture demands praying frequently, “Pray without ceasing” (1 Thess. 5:17). Make prayer a habit. Think prayer. It can be short or long, but “pray... on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests” (Eph. 6:18 NIV). While the Bible never tells us how many times we should pray in a day, we should at least copy Bible heroes like David, who prayed “evening, morning and noon” (Ps. 55:16-17) or like Daniel, who prayed three times a day (Dan. 6:10). We can exceed them, if we desire, because prayer is vital in everything.

## ***Spiritual Exercise***

1. Could Asa have been healed of his illness and why?

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2. What is the difference between Asa and Hezekiah in their illnesses?

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3. What reasons did Hezekiah give in his prayer for healing?

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4. Can you give God a reason why He should answer your prayer?

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5. What two things should we copy to imitate prayer wrestlers of the Bible?

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# *Unanswered Prayer*

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“Even when I cry out and call for help, He shuts out my prayer. You have covered Yourself with a cloud So that no prayer can pass through.”

~ Lamentation 3:8, 44, NASB

Communication is a thread in the fabric of any relationship. It’s a two-way weaving endeavor. God weaves one end and passes it to us through His Word; and we loop it back to Him through prayer. It completes the tapestry of our relationship with God. It’s the norm. Or is it? Many believers do not want a relationship with God. They do not want to hear what God says in His Word, but instead, they just want God to hear what they have to say to Him. Let me be gracious but firm. God is not interested in what you have to say to Him through prayer: when you are not interested in what He has said to you in His Word. Your prayer is an abomination to Him (Prov. 28:9).

There are eighteen hindrances to prayer. We will cover each of these points individually in the coming chapters. They all relate to spiritual failure. But what if the believer is in good spiritual standing and yet receives silence when he prays? Job had this experience. His spiritual life was of the highest standing. God gave him high praise (Job 2:3). Yet he could say, “I cry out to You for help, but You do not answer; when I stand up, You merely look at me” (Job 30:20 BSB). What’s the matter? Isn’t obedience key to having God answer our prayers?

## ***Explaining God’s Silence***

Let there be no misunderstanding: Not all delayed prayers are related to spiritual failures. Although God has promised a quick

response to the prayers of those who love Him (Ps. 91:14-17; Isa. 65:24), often a believer can be in good standing and yet have their prayers put on hold. This can be for several reasons, all of which have to do with Divine Timing. Two spiritual giants whose prayers were put on hold come to mind: Job and Daniel.

### ***Job's Prayer on Hold***

Reading through the book of Job, it is apparent that he was in a trial as a witness. Satan had entered God's courtroom to challenge His fairness, accusing God of bribery, saying, "Does Job fear God for nothing?" In other words, Satan alleges that Job fears God only because He has "blessed the work of his hands" (Job 1:9-10). In response to that accusation, God permitted Satan to try Job, wiping out everything he had. Job cried day and night to God in prayer, all to no avail. God kept silent because of Job's ongoing trial. The same can be true of you, if you are on the right course spiritually and your prayers are stalled. God has a reason; He has not forgotten you.

### ***Daniel's Prayer on Hold***

Christians underestimate the fierceness of spiritual warfare. There's an ongoing battle between good and evil. It's real! Satan is fighting tooth and nail to see if he can win just one battle against God, whose record is flawless. He has never lost a battle. Having never won, Satan works to frustrate God's plan.

Daniel's love of God was evident in his actions. His love for God kept him undefiled while others abandoned the Mosaic Law. He "made up his mind that he would not defile himself" (Dan. 1:8). He was an earnest man of prayer who prayed three times a day (Dan. 6:10). His relationship with God was exemplary. He was eager to hear what God had to say in the Holy Scripture. There, he learned that God had predetermined the years of Judah's captivity (Dan. 9:2; see Jer. 29:10).

Having listened to God through His Word, he reciprocated, "So I gave my attention to the LORD God to seek Him by prayer and supplications, with fasting, sackcloth and ashes" (Dan. 9:3). His prayer received a quick response.



While I was speaking and praying, confessing my sin and the sin of my people Israel, and presenting my plea before the LORD my God for the holy hill of my God, while I was speaking in prayer, the man Gabriel, whom I had seen in the vision at the first, came to me in swift flight at the time of the evening sacrifice. He made me understand, speaking with me and saying, “O Daniel, I have now come out to give you insight and understanding. At the beginning of your pleas for mercy a word went out, and I have come to tell it to you, for you are greatly loved. Therefore consider the word and understand the vision.” (Dan. 9:20-23 ESV).

On another occasion, his prayer was delayed. “I, Daniel had been in mourning [prayer] for three entire weeks” (Dan. 10:2). At last he received an answer to his prayer.

Then he [Gabriel] said to me, “Do not be afraid, Daniel, for from the first day that you set your heart on understanding this and on humbling yourself before your God, your words were heard, and I have come in response to your words.” But the prince of the kingdom of Persia was withstanding me for twenty-one days; then behold, Michael, one of the chief princes, came to help me, for I had been left there with the kings of Persia. (vv. 12-13).

Do you understand what the angel told him? His prayer was answered instantly but there was a delay due to the unseen spiritual warfare. You see, Satan regularly works to try and frustrate God’s answer to our prayers. That’s all the more reason to intensify your prayer life as Daniel did. That’s not only in the Old Testament. It happened to the Apostle Paul: “For we wanted to come to you — I, Paul, more than once — and yet Satan hindered us” (1 Thess. 2:18).

Stay on your knees; we’re in a spiritual war. I agree totally with Reuben A. Torrey, a theologian and D. L. Moody associate:

“When the devil sees a man or woman who really believes in prayer, who knows how to pray, and who really does pray, and above all, when he sees a whole church on its face

before God in prayer, he trembles as much as he ever did, for he knows that his day in that church or community is at an end.”<sup>9</sup>

### ***Spiritual Exercise***

1. Why might our prayer be delayed despite our obedience to God’s Word?

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2. Why was Job’s prayer on hold?

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3. Why was Daniel’s prayer on hold?

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4. What should you do when your prayer is on hold?

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<sup>9</sup> Warren W. Wiersbe, *Classic Sermons on Prayer* (Grand Rapids: Michigan, Hendrickson Publishers 19878), pp. 89-90

# *Approaching God in Prayer*

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“Dear friends, if our hearts do not condemn us, we have confidence before God.”

~ 1 John 3:21, NIV

It’s such a wonderful experience to approach the Father in response to His altar call, “Draw near with confidence to the throne of grace, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need” (Heb. 4:16). Many of God’s children answer the call, but only a handful enter His throne room. Some don’t because they lack confidence. And still others can’t approach Him because of guilt. Guilt is a terrible impediment. David can tell us about it. Guilt kept him from God’s presence until he confessed his sins and was restored (Ps. 32:3-5).

Since prayer is an integral part of worship, two things are required:

1. That we have knowledge of His Word.
2. That we are controlled by the Holy Spirit. “God is spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in [by means of the] spirit and truth [biblical knowledge]” (John 4:24).

The question is: How much of God’s Word do you know? God’s Word is God’s language. You cannot talk to Him unless you know His Word. Believers are frustrated by too many unanswered prayers. Some have given up altogether. Why is it that we pray, and pray, and yet no answer? I have offered eighteen hindrances to prayer, and the first five will be covered in this chapter.

*First Hindrance:*  
***Lack of Interest in the Study of God's Word***

“If one turns away his ear from hearing the law, even his prayer is an abomination” (Proverbs 28:9 ESV).

The study of God's Word and prayer are synonymous to inhale and exhale — like breathing in and breathing out. Just as you cannot breathe out until you breathe in, likewise, you cannot pray until you have God's Word in your soul. R. A. Torrey concurs, “These two things, prayer and the study of the Word of God, always go hand in hand, for there is no true prayer without study of the Word of God, and there is no true study of the Word of God without prayer.”<sup>10</sup>

Suppose your dad wrote you a letter about a month ago, and you've not read it. In it, he tells you how much he loves you and how he's struggling to bring you two together. He has sacrificed almost all he has so he can provide for your reunion. He asks you questions that need an immediate response. Imagine sending him a reply when you've not read his letter. What would you tell him? Think for a minute. How can you praise him and thank him for his immense sacrifice? That's an illustration of what we do when we approach God in prayer without having read His love letter to us.

***God's Word, His Love Letter to Man***

The Bible is God's love letter to the world, written by forty authors under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit in a space of sixteen centuries. In it, God has revealed Himself, unveiled His plan for His creatures, and has given rules and regulations to govern us. Remember, communication with God is two-way. He speaks to us through His completed Canon of Scripture and we respond through prayer.

***Hallowed Be Your Name***

The Lord in His prayer model taught us how to pray. “When you pray, say: Our Father... hallowed be Your name” (Luke 11:2 NKJV). All prayers are channeled to the Father. “Hallowed be Your name” is

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<sup>10</sup>Warren W. Wiersbe, *Classic Sermons on Prayer* (Grand Rapid Michigan: Hendrickson Publishers, 1987), p. 90

recognition of God’s majesty and we praise Him for His worthiness. Elsewhere we are asked to enter His gates with thanksgiving and praise (Ps. 100:4). How can we fulfill all these if we don’t know His nature? How can we in good conscience thank Him if we don’t know who He is or what He has done?

We cannot speak God’s language unless we know His Word. Too often, we ask God for things He said we shouldn’t, because we haven’t studied the instruction in His letter. Jesus Christ is adamant in John 15:7, “If you abide in Me, and My words abide in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you.” Do you see the two conditions given in this verse for your prayer to go through? Having God’s Word in your soul and being in fellowship. We will look at fellowship later in this chapter.

You anger God when you approach Him in disregard for His Word. “If one turns away his ear from hearing the law, even his prayer is an abomination” (Proverbs 28:9 ESV).

### *Second Hindrance:* ***Lack of Love for God***

“Because he [the believer] has loved Me, therefore I will deliver him; I will set him securely on high, because he has known My name. ...He will call upon Me, and I will answer him; I will be with him in trouble; I will rescue him and honor him.” (Ps. 91:14-15).

Love for God is intertwined with love for His Word. You cannot love God until you know Him. You cannot know Him until you know His Word. Love and obedience are two sides of the same coin. Love prompts one to obedience. Verse 15 of Psalm 91 is loaded with promises. God promises to answer the prayer of the believer who loves Him deeply. He promises to be with him in trouble, and to rescue him when he is in a bind. That’s not all; it goes on to say He will honor him.

Lack of love shows that we have no regard for God and His mandates, which shuts the door to God’s throne. Love for God is what carries our prayers to Him. “Because he has loved Me... He will call upon Me, and I will answer him.”

*Third Hindrance:*  
***Lack of Obedience to God's Word***

“Whatever we ask we receive from Him, because we keep His commandments and do the things that are pleasing in His sight.” (1 John 3:22).

Obedience paves the way to the approach to God's throne. Disobedience is turning a deaf ear to what God has asked us to do. In Deut. 1:40, God asked the Israelites to go in and possess the Promised Land. They disobeyed, yet later they went to God in prayer. Moses wrote, “You rebelled against the command of the LORD your God. ...You came back and wept before the LORD, but he paid no attention to your weeping and turned a deaf ear to you (vv. 26, 45 NIV).

Even Christ in His human nature used His obedience as grounds for His prayer request (John 15:4, 10). All those we read about in the Bible, who had their prayers answered, were God's obedient children. “Because we keep His commandments” says John, He will answer us when we pray. If you have been disobedient, why not begin today to experience the joy of obedience?

- Obedience is evidence of love (John 14:15, 21).
- Obedience keeps one abiding in God's love (John 15:10).
- Obedience makes a case for answered prayer (Ps. 26:1-8; Isa. 38:1-5; John 17:4-5).
- Obedience gives the believer boldness before God (1 John 3:21-22; Heb. 4:16).
- Obedience gave David, Hezekiah, Jesus Christ, (just to name three), boldness in prayer before God (Ps. 26:1-8; Isa. 38:2-5; John 17:4-5).
- Disobedience blocks prayer (Isa. 1:15).

*Fourth Hindrance:*  
***Unconfessed Sin***

“If I had not confessed the sin in my heart, the LORD would not have listened” (Ps. 66:18 NLT).

God is holy. “In Him there is no darkness at all” (1 John 1:5). We cannot have fellowship with Him or approach Him in prayer unless we too are holy. “You shall be holy, for I am holy” (1 Peter 1:16). Before Isaiah the prophet could stand in God’s presence, He had to be made holy. He was made holy only after he acknowledged his sins to God (Isa. 6:2-7).

By uttering the word “Father,” the believer is ushered into the presence of God. But if the believer is soiled with sin, God shuts the way to His throne. Fellowship is essential to keep the line of communication between God and His child open. He cannot have fellowship with sin (1 John 1:7).

So, before we approach His throne of grace in prayer, we need to search our souls. David said, “Search me, O God, and know my heart... see if there be any hurtful way in me” (Ps. 139:23-24). John tells us, “If we confess our sins [to God], He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness” (1 John 1:9). If sin is detected, confess it.

- Sin breaks our fellowship with God (1 John 1:5-22).
- Broken fellowship hinders our prayer (Ps. 66:18; Isa. 59:1-2).
- Confession of sins restores fellowship and opens the prayer line (1 John 1:9).

*Fifth Hindrance:*  
***Lack of Holy Spirit Enablement***

“Never stop praying, especially for others. Always pray by the power of the Spirit. Stay alert and keep praying for God’s people” (Eph. 6:18: CEV).

Are you aware that the three Members of the Godhead are involved in our prayer? They are. All prayers are directed to the Father (Matt. 6:9), through the name of Jesus Christ our great High Priest (John 14:14) and enabled by the Holy Spirit (Rom. 8:26). We will study this more in depth in chapter 11.

In Romans 8:26, the Apostle Paul gives us good news, “In the same way the Spirit also helps our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we should, but the Spirit Himself intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words.” When we do not know how to pray, or even what to pray for, the Holy Spirit comes to our rescue. Thank God! He makes up for our weakness.

In Ephesians 6:18, the Apostle Paul expanded on the Holy Spirit’s enablement. More than a dozen Bible translations, including NIV, NLT, NASB, KJV and BSB, used the preposition ‘*in*’ in their translation of Ephesians 6:18, “Pray *in* the Spirit.” That can be confusing. Maybe not to the people of Paul’s day, but certainly in our day. Some take it to mean “pray in tongues.” That is not what Paul had in mind. Rather, “pray *by* the power of the Spirit” (emphasis added).

- The Holy Spirit indwells every believer (1 Cor. 3:16; 2 Tim. 1:14; Gal. 4:6).
- He knows the thoughts of God and man (1 Cor. 2:10).
- He ushers a Spirit-filled believer into God’s presence (Eph. 6:18).
- He then enables the believer to pray according to God’s will, thus bringing about a response to our requests (Rom. 8:27; 1 John 5:14; Isa. 65:24).

Unless we are controlled by the Holy Spirit, we cannot be in fellowship. If He controls us, then He empowers us and enables us to stand in God’s presence as holy ones to present our case before a holy God. Remember, only the confession of our sins restores our filling of the Holy Spirit and our fellowship with God.



## *Spiritual Exercise*

1. Name five hindrances to prayer.

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2. Name two things sin does to the believer.

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3. What is the primary reason for God answering our prayer?

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4. What's the evidence that you love God?

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## *The Joy of Answered Prayer*

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“Who is like You... O LORD? Who is like You, majestic in holiness, awesome in praises, working wonders?”

~ Ex. 15:11 NASB

It’s sweet to come before God with our praise, thanksgiving, and petitions; it’s even sweeter to leave with hands full of answered prayers. That joy knows no bounds. God invites us, “Call upon Me” and promises, “I will answer you” (Ps. 50:15). He gives a reason for answering us, “that My Name might be praised” (v. 15). Answered prayer brings joy to the heart and initiates praises and glorification of God. That was true of the Israelites when they were sandwiched between the Red Sea and the Egyptian army who were coming to annihilate them. Moses cried for deliverance to the Lord, who answered and rescued them by parting the waters of the Red Sea so the Israelites could pass through. Then He released the waters on the pursuing Egyptian army, thus drowning them all. Safe from their enemies on the other side of the Red Sea, the Israelites sang and praised the Lord, “Who is like You... Awesome in praises.”

Few things weigh the heart down like unanswered prayer. We pray, and pray, and pray and still pray, but heaven keeps silent. We know that God wants to answer us, so why is there no sign of Him responding to us? Answering this question is the focus as we examine an additional four hindrances. When we are in violation of God’s holiness, we can be sure that our prayer will go nowhere, no matter how long we agonize in prayer. God cannot compromise His holiness.

*Sixth Hindrance:*  
***Perpetual Carnality***

“Listen! The LORD... is not... too deaf to hear you call. It’s your sins that have cut you off from God. Because of your sins, he has turned away and will not listen anymore” (Isa. 59:1-2: NLT).

It’s hard to imagine how a believer can live life and not talk to God or how he can talk to God day after day, week after week with no answer from heaven. It’s hell on earth. God wants us to experience joy, happiness, and peace. He wants to answer our prayers. But a lifestyle of carnality is a stumbling block to realizing the joy of answered prayer.

God is straightforward in Isaiah 59:1-2. He’s ever ready to answer our prayers. We are not hindered by any lack of compassion or love on God’s part. We are hindered by our sinfulness. We often chose the pleasure of sin over the luxury of the joy of answered prayer. We cannot have both; one must go. J. C. Ryle put it succinctly, “Praying and sinning will never live together in the same heart. Prayer will consume sin, or sin will choke prayer.”<sup>11</sup>

It cannot be over emphasized. A lifestyle of sin closes all doors to God’s blessings, including the blessing of answered prayer. Micah 3:4 is clear, “Then they will cry out to the LORD, But He will not answer them. Instead, He will hide His face from them at that time because they have practiced evil deeds.” Can you say that your life is God-honoring? To the extent that you are not living as God intends, your prayers cannot be answered. But you can change course like the Prodigal Son (Luke 15:14-19) and acknowledge your sins to God (1 John 1:9). God is holy, we must approach Him in holiness (1 Peter 1:15).

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<sup>11</sup> J. C. Ryle, *A Call to Prayer* (Edinburgh: UK, The Banner of Truth Trust, 2004), p.9

*Seventh Hindrance:*  
***Lack of Repentance***

“And rend your heart and not your garments.’Now return to the LORD your God, for He is gracious and compassionate, slow to anger, abounding in lovingkindness and relenting of evil.’” (Joel 2:13).

God is God and not like man. He is more interested in what goes on in our soul than in our actions. He told Samuel the prophet, “God sees not as man sees, for man looks at the outward appearance, but the LORD looks at the heart” (1 Sam. 16:7). The phrase, “rend your heart and not your garments” in Joel is an idiomatic expression. In other words, don’t worship God with empty talk. Let your heart be in harmony with your action.

Some people in perpetual carnality think that all they need to do is simply say to God, “I am sorry,” or “God, I confess that I have a lifestyle I can’t give up of enjoying casual sex and looking at pornography.” Or maybe you have a lifestyle of gossip and maligning others and want to be forgiven, but you just don’t want to give up being the one that others come to for the inside story. Or maybe you say, “God, I confess my sin of cheating others, but God, I just don’t want to give it up; I make a lot of money cheating others. Please forgive me.” People who say these kinds of things don’t really understand the God of the Bible. They downplay the consequences of sin and the ramifications of lack of genuine repentance.

What I said may have stirred you. That’s good, at least it grabbed your attention. The Apostle Paul wrote to the Corinthians, “Now I am glad I sent it [his letter], not because it hurt you, but because the pain caused you to repent and change your ways. It was the kind of sorrow God wants his people to have, so you were not harmed by us in any way” (1 Cor. 7:9 NLT). Our view of God’s holiness is measured by how we view and treat sin.

Repentance requires a change of heart. Interestingly, wherever the Greek verb *metanoeo* (“to change the mind,” “to think differently,” “to change place”) is associated with a New Testament believer, it’s always associated with a believer in prolonged carnality. It’s never used, of a believer who is walking in the light

and occasionally stumbles, as in 1 John 1:5-9. He has nothing to change. He walks onward in the light. Consider a few cases where the word *metanoeo* is used beginning with the Ephesian church: “Remember therefore from where you have fallen and repent and do the deeds you did at first” (Rev. 2:5). The church was in a state of prolonged spiritual failure. The Lord asked them to change. The same was true of the church at Pergamum. The Lord called them to repent from their tolerance of false teaching (vv. 14-16). Scripture called out the woman Jezebel. She led the Christians of Thyatira into immorality. Of her the Lord said, “I gave her time to repent.” He warns those who have fallen into sin with her to repent, otherwise judgment will come (Rev. 2:20-23).

Look further to the church at Laodicea (3:14-19). The church had been lukewarm for a long time. With discipline looming, the Lord admonished them to repent (v. 19). He asked them to change their attitude. Zane C. Hodges calls us to note, “The word repentance is not used... anywhere in the epistle [of John].” The reason for this is simple: “Christian repentance is appropriate when a pattern of sin is persisted in and needs to be changed.”<sup>12</sup>

Repentance requires an inventory assessment of spiritual failure. The believer must look into his soul, identify where he has sinned, and then change his mind (*metanoeo*) about his sin (Rev. 2:5). This change of mind produces a desire to change directions as the Prodigal Son did. In this process the believer confesses his wrongdoing (sin) before God and is restored to fellowship (1 John 1:9).

God’s Spirit enables the believer to change course. It cannot be done by will power alone or just feeling sorry for sin. The Holy Spirit supplies the power to change. One must have the desire to change along with the power from the Holy Spirit. “People who conceal their sins will not prosper, but if they confess and turn from them, they will receive mercy” (Prov. 28:13 NLT). Other passages abound (Isa. 1:12-16; Acts 8:20-23; Rev. 3:3).

- True repentance brings about a positive change. The Prodigal Son repented; he moved away from the hog pen and returned home (Luke 15:14-22). That’s true repentance!

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<sup>12</sup> Zane C. Hodges, *The Epistles of John* (Denton: Texas, Grace Evangelical Society, 1999), p. 63 “50

- David repented from his sin of adultery and murder and asked God to create in him a new heart (Ps. 51:1-10).

*Eighth Hindrance:*

***Pride***

“Though the LORD is on high, Yet He regards the lowly;  
But the proud He knows from afar” (Ps. 138:6 NKJV).

Pride is a prayer blocker. It is elevating ourselves above the rest while also viewing others with contempt. It is trusting in ourselves that we are righteous (Luke 18:9). The Lord, in teaching on prayer in Luke 18:9-14, compares two people praying, a Pharisee and a tax gatherer, to show us how our prayers are treated before God. The Pharisee represents the self-righteous religious elites of Israel, who assume they are more righteous than anyone else. The tax-gatherer represents the lowest rung of society who know that, morally, they are no good.

“The Pharisee stood and was praying this to himself: ‘God, I thank You that I am not like other people: swindlers, unjust, adulterers, or even like this tax collector’” (Luke 18:11). Observe, his prayer was to himself and not to God. That will be true of you if you approach God in prayer with an arrogant heart. The Pharisee, the self-justified, self-righteous, pseudo prayer warrior went home with unanswered prayer (v. 14). E. M. Bounds said it best, “Pride, self-esteem, and self-praise effectively shut the door of prayer.”<sup>13</sup> This brings us to the other side of the same coin, lack of humility.

*Ninth Hindrance:*

***Lack of Humility***

“If my people, who are called by my name, will humble themselves and pray...I will hear from heaven, and I will forgive their sin and will heal their land” (2 Chr. 7:14 NIV).

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<sup>13</sup> E. M. Bounds, p. 104

Humility, among other things, is keeping a proper perspective of one's value in life, recognizing that our esteem must come from our relationship with God; realizing that, apart from God, one cannot achieve anything in life. If this is true of your inward thoughts, you can say like Paul, "But whatever I am now, it is all because God poured out his special favor on me—and not without results. For I have worked harder than any of the other apostles; yet it was not I but God who was working through me by his grace" (1 Cor. 15:10 NLT).

Humility paves the way to the throne of God, giving you every good thing, including answers to your prayers. It is true of the tax-gatherer: "But the tax collector, standing some distance away, was even unwilling to lift up his eyes to heaven, but was beating his breast, saying, 'God, be merciful to me, the sinner!'" (Luke 18:13). Observe, his action and the expression of his inward thoughts, "God, be merciful to me, the sinner." He couldn't even look up, expressing his unworthiness before God. His prayer was answered (v. 14). He came to God empty handed, realized that he had nothing to offer God, and went home full. That's humility. But, when there's lack of it, our prayer is blocked.

### ***Spiritual Exercise***

1. What are the four hindrances to prayer listed in this chapter?  
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2. Who needs repentance, according to Revelation 2:4-5, 14-16; 3:14-19?  
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3. What is the mark of true repentance, according to Luke 15:14-22?  
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## *The Power of Forgiveness*

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9



“Jesus said, ‘Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing.’”

~ Luke 23:34, NIV

We forgive, not because the offender deserves it, but because forgiveness keeps us from the sin of bitterness. You must first understand the magnitude of Christ’s forgiveness of your own sin before you will be able to forgive those who have wronged you. Scripture demands, “Even as Christ forgave you, so you also *must do*” (Col. 3:13 NKJV). In fact, Christ goes further than forgiving you; He promises to “remember [your] sins no more” (Heb. 8:12). His forgiveness of your sins is the grounds for your reconciliation with God.

Look into your life and take an inventory of your sins. We all fail God daily, even after our salvation. We were condemned in Adam (1 Cor. 15:22); we share the guilt of Adam’s original sin and our own personal sins (John 8:24). Our faith in Christ alone causes the eternal penalty of sin to be deleted and never to be retrieved. “I have blotted out [deleted] your transgressions like a cloud and your sins like a mist” (Isa. 44:22 ESV). Because of this you celebrate membership in God’s family. Consider this dynamic truth: You wronged Him; He came down from heaven and paid for your sin. You trusted that good news, and He forgave you!

Think of it: God has forgiven you of so much. Hasn’t He? In Luke 12:48 we read, “From everyone who has been given much [forgiveness], much will be required.” Look at it this way: Imagine you wrecked God’s most expensive car with a price tag of \$20 million. He forgave you. In turn, should it be hard for you to forgive

someone who broke one spoke of your 20-year-old bicycle? Our acts of forgiveness, no matter how large, are nothing in comparison to what God has forgiven us.

If you refuse to forgive, He will turn away from you, as He taught us in this parable. “You wicked slave, I forgave you all that debt because you pleaded with me. ‘Should you not also have had mercy on your fellow slave, in the same way that I had mercy on you?’” (Matt. 18:32-33).

Here’s the truth: God is not pleased when you fail to factor His forgiveness of your sins into your treatment of others who wrong you. It breaks His heart when you become so callous and indifferent to someone because they have wronged you, even if the hurt is very painful. Your bitter attitude toward the person causes God to turn a deaf ear to your prayer. With this in mind, we are now ready to examine three additional hindrances to prayer.

*Tenth Hindrance:*  
***Lack of Forgiveness***

“If you forgive those who sin against you, your heavenly Father will forgive you. But if you refuse to forgive others, your Father will not forgive your sins” (Matt. 6:14-15 NLT).

Let’s not forget; prayer is more than “Father, give me this and give me that; do this and do that for me.” Prayer is feedback in the two-way relationship that you, by faith, are building with God. God speaks to us through His Word; we respond in adoration, praise, thanksgiving, and petition through prayer. This communication involves all three Members of the Godhead, who commanded, “You must be holy in everything you do, just as God who chose you is holy” (1 Peter 1:15 NLT). We are exhorted to “cleanse ourselves from everything that defiles body and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God” (2 Cor. 7:1 BSB). This is because prayer ushers us into His presence.

Jesus Christ is serious about forgiveness. Why? Because you must be in fellowship for your prayer to go through. Lack of forgiveness leaves you in the grip of animosity, high-powered anger,

and bitterness. The poison of bitterness makes it impossible to be in fellowship with a Holy God, shutting you out of the throne room of His Grace.

“It’s your sins that have cut you off from God. Because of your sins, he has turned away and will not listen anymore” (Isa. 59:2 NLT). Listen to David, “If I had not confessed the sin in my heart, the LORD would not have listened” (Ps. 66:18 NLT).

The Bible is clear: if you remain in the status quo of an unforgiving spirit, you stall your prayers. You can weep, wail, fast and agonize in your prayer closet, even around the clock, yet God will turn His ear away from you.

- An unforgiving spirit closes the door to prayer (Ps. 66:18).
- Forgiveness of others is the condition for the forgiveness of our post-salvation sins (Matt. 6: 14-15).
- Forgiveness expunges animosity and bitterness from the soul (Eph 4:30-32).
- God’s forgiveness of believers restores fellowship with Holy God (Col. 3:12-13; 1 John 1:9).
- Genuine forgiveness of others who wronged you, and treating them with the love of Christ, unlocks the throne room of God’s grace (1 John 3:21; Heb. 4:16).

*Eleventh Hindrance:*

### ***Unresolved Personal Conflict***

“Therefore if you are presenting your offering at the altar, and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your offering there before the altar and go; first be reconciled to your brother, and then come and present your offering.” (Matt. 5:23-24)

Prayer runs on the fuel of your spiritual life. Any debris of sin clogs the fuel injector and brings your spiritual life to a halt. The

Lord wants us to resolve any conflict we may have with anyone before proceeding with our prayer. “Leave your offering there before the altar and go; first be reconciled.” He didn’t say, “Go ahead and finish your prayer; but be sure to resolve your conflict afterward.” No, He said, “Stop. Go and resolve the matter.”

You see, our great High Priest, through whom our prayers reach the Father, has given us a mandate that must be obeyed. The Christian life is about choices. If you have a conflict with anyone, you must take one of two options: one, resolve it and have your prayer answered; or two, refuse to deal with it and have your prayer blocked.

Do you have a conflict with anyone? What steps have you taken to resolve the conflict? We should always remember that it is not about us; it is about the glorification of God. There is never an adequate reason to deny God the glory due Him.

The Apostle Paul strikes a chord: “Do all that you can to live in peace with everyone” (Rom. 12:18 NLT). In other words, even if you are the victim, for the sake of God’s glory, resolve the conflict. Likewise, he challenged the Corinthians who were filing lawsuits against each other, “Why do you not rather accept wrong? Why do you not rather *let yourselves* be cheated? (1 Cor. 6:7 NKJV). Consider Jesus Christ, “He knew no sin.” Yet God the Father punished Him, laying on Him the sins of us all.

To have access to the throne of God, you must resolve any personal conflict you may have. May God help us to approach Him in prayer, in holiness (1 Tim. 2:8).

*Twelfth Hindrance:*  
***Lack of Domestic Tranquility***

“You husbands in the same way, live with your wives in an understanding way, as with someone weaker, since she is a woman; and show her honor as a fellow heir of the grace of life, so that your prayers will not be hindered” (1 Peter 3:7).

By “domestic tranquility” we mean a marriage relationship. God takes marriage seriously and turns a deaf ear to the prayer of

a couple whose marriage is not God-honoring. Is your marriage honoring to God? If not, here is one reason why your prayers bounce back. You may say, “My husband is a *knucklehead*.” God knows that and asks you to live a holy life despite his behavior: “In the same way, you wives, be submissive to your own husbands so that even if any of them are disobedient to the word, they may be won without a word by the behavior of their wives” (1 Peter 3:1).

The same is true for you, husband. If your wife is not interested in pursuing God, then you carry the spiritual torch and let it shine. This opens one prayer line in the family. But where bitterness and animosity control both parties, the prayer line is shut off. Ask yourself: “Is yielding to lack of tranquility worth it?” Is it worth causing prayer, the greatest weapon God ever gave you, to be neutralized, leaving you standing powerless to defend against Satan’s assault?

You both must realize that it is not about your *rights* or *authority*; it is about God and bringing glory to Him. Answered prayer is one way God is glorified, “Call on me in the day of distress; I will deliver you, and you will glorify me” (Ps. 50:15 ISV). Sadly, lack of domestic tranquility makes this wonderful promise null and void for the couple.

- Spousal conflict affects prayer negatively. God rejects any prayer that is offered on the altar of domestic conflict (1 Peter 3:7).
- Spouses must resolve their conflict before they approach the throne of God’s grace (Heb. 4:16).
- One spouse going it alone can carry the marriage on the strength that only God can provide. That spouse’s prayer will not be hindered if his or her spiritual life is on course.

Let me remind you that, “Your adversary, the devil, prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour” (1 Peter 5:8). Without the use of your prayer weapon, you are defenseless and vulnerable to his attack. He will devour you. This is not God’s purpose for your life. God wants you to be victorious. If you have a broken marriage, work to restore it “so that your prayers may not be hindered” (3:7).

## ***Spiritual Exercise***

1. Name three hindrances to prayer in this chapter.

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2. What can lack of forgiveness do to your prayer?

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3. According to Matthew 6:14-15, what happens when you don't forgive others?

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4. Explain how lack of domestic tranquility can affect prayer.

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## Touching God's Heart

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# 10



“Whoever is generous to the poor lends to the LORD,  
and he will repay him for his deed.”

~ Proverbs 19:17, ESV

One secret of having our prayers answered lies in our ability to touch God's heart. Can you touch His heart? Have you ever touched His heart? You touch the heart of God, so to say, when you touch the needy, the poor, the orphans and less privileged through your acts of kindness and generosity. You touch His heart when you love those He loves. Your love for Him draws His ear to your prayer, “Because he has loved Me, therefore I will deliver him; I will set him securely on high, because he has known My name” (Ps. 91:14).

The Psalmist brings the truth to light: “*Because* he has loved Me, *therefore...*” Observe the correlation between the words, “because” and “therefore.” God is touched, His heart is moved to shower you with blessings unimaginable because of your love for Him. Wow! look at all that we get just for loving God.

“Because he has loved Me, therefore...”

1. “I will deliver him” (v. 14).
2. “I will set him securely on high” (v. 14).
3. “He will call upon Me, and I will answer him” (v. 15).
4. “I will be with him in trouble” (v. 15).
5. “I will rescue him and honor him” (v. 15).

6. “With a long life I will satisfy him” (v. 16).
7. “And let him see My salvation.” (v.16)

See the blessings your love for God can bring? To love God is to love what He loves and to hate what He hates. What does He love? Among the many things He loves are: caring for the needy, the widow, the orphan, and the poor. “How blessed is he who considers the helpless; the LORD will deliver him in a day of trouble. The LORD will protect him and keep him alive, and he shall be called blessed upon the earth” (Ps. 41:1-2).

Invariably when you touch the needy, you have reached out and touched God. When you give to the poor, you have given to God. “Whoever is generous to the poor lends to the LORD, and he will repay him for his deed” (Prov. 19:17 ESV). God places tremendous importance on the care of the less privileged. He made room in the Mosaic Law to accommodate them (Deut. 15:7-10). Poverty and inequality are part and parcel of our fallen world. They are here to stay and cannot be eradicated. (v. 11).

In this chapter, we will consider four additional hindrances to prayer. God desires to hear from you. He invited you, “Call upon Me in the day of trouble; I will deliver you, and you shall glorify Me” (Ps. 50:15 ESV). You may say, like God’s children of James’ day, “I pray all the time.” But are you getting your prayers answered? James addresses this problem in the fourth chapter of his Book. Let us look further to see how our motives influence our prayers.

*Thirteenth Hindrance:*  
***Selfishness***

“You ask and do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives, so that you may spend it on your pleasures” (James 4:3).

James explained to his audience why their prayers went unanswered each time they prayed: “you ask with wrong motives.” God scrutinizes the intent of our hearts when we come before His



throne. Selfishness stands in the way of prayer. Unselfishness warms God's heart and causes him to respond to our prayers in ways that stagger our imagination. Observe how God worked in Solomon's life: "The LORD appeared to Solomon in a dream at night; and God said, 'Ask what you wish me to give you'" (1 Kings 3:5). What if you were Solomon? What would your answer be? Take a moment and think. Solomon had a test of unselfishness; he passed in a remarkable way. He was given a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to ask God for anything that would enrich his life. But instead of wealth or fame, he asked for wisdom. That pleased God because Solomon was more concerned about others and God's glory than he was about himself.

God said to him,

Because you have asked this thing and have not asked for yourself long life, nor have asked riches for yourself, nor have you asked for the life of your enemies, but have asked for yourself discernment to understand justice. ...Behold, I have given you a wise and discerning heart, so that there has been no one like you before you, nor shall one like you arise after you. I have also given you what you have not asked, both riches and honor, so that there will not be any among the kings like you all your days (vv. 11-13).

Solomon was abundantly blessed. Not only was his prayer answered, but in addition, God gave him much more. You too can uncover a key to God answering prayer — unselfishness. When you desire God's glory in prayer, He will surprise you (Matt. 6:33).

The Apostle Paul in the second chapter of Philippians emphasizes this important truth: "Do nothing from selfishness or empty conceit, but with humility of mind regard one another as more important than yourselves; do not merely look out for your own personal interests, but also for the interests of others" (Phil. 2:3-4).

The prayer of one who loves God ascends to the throne of God on the fiery chariot of unselfishness; while selfishness extinguishes its fire. "You ask and do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives [selfishness], so that you may spend it on your pleasures."

*Fourteenth Hindrance:*  
***Lack of Keeping a Vow***

“Pay your vows to the Most High; Call upon Me in the day of trouble; I shall rescue you, and you will honor Me” (Ps. 50:14-15).

Making a vow and taking an oath are two slightly different things. Context will clarify. A vow is a pledge or a promise to do something for the Lord and an oath is an affirmation of truth. Vows pre-existed the Mosaic Law. Jacob made a vow to the Lord long before a single page in the Hebrew Bible was recorded (Gen. 28:20).

A vow is a voluntary pledge made in the name of God, either for the support of His saints or His work. “When you make a vow to the LORD your God, you shall not delay to pay it, for it would be sin in you, and the LORD your God will surely require it of you. *‘However, if you refrain from vowing, it would not be sin in you’*” (Deut. 23:21-22 emphasis added).

In the Law, Moses commanded God’s people, “Fear the LORD your God, serve Him only, and take your oaths in His name” (Deut. 6:13 NIV). In those days, they swore by invoking God’s name, or heaven, earth, Jerusalem, or the temple to validate truth. The Lord abolished this practice in the Sermon on the Mount: “But I tell you not to swear by anything when you make a promise! Heaven is God’s throne, so don’t swear by heaven. But let your ‘yes’ mean ‘yes’, and your “no” mean “no”. Anything more than this is from the evil one” (Matt. 5:34 CEV, 37 CSB).

The Lord did not abolish making a promise or a pledge, He did away with affirming a promise by swearing. Let your integrity be the validation of your truthfulness. In the Old Testament, Jacob made a vow or pledge (Gen. 28:20). The Apostle Paul exhorts the Corinthian church to honor their pledge or vow, which they made to help the suffering churches in Jerusalem (2 Cor. 8:11). He never asked them to swear or to make an oath that they would fulfill their promise. He left that to their integrity.

Solomon underscored the truth concerning a pledge or vow in the fifth chapter of Ecclesiastes:

Guard your steps when you go to the house of God. Go near to listen rather than to offer the sacrifice of fools, who do not know that they do wrong. *Do not be quick with your mouth, do not be hasty in your heart to utter anything before God.* God is in heaven and you are on earth, so let your words be few. When you make a vow to God, do not delay to fulfill it. He has no pleasure in fools; fulfill your vow. *It is better not to make a vow than to make one and not fulfill it.* (Eccl 5:1-2, 4-5 NIV emphasis added)

Making and paying a vow are intertwined with prayer. A vow is not required for a prayer to be answered, but if we make a vow or a pledge God requires timely fulfillment. God answers prayers because we meet requirements as taught in Scripture.

On the other hand, you should guard your thoughts. Don't let anyone play on your emotions, putting you in the spotlight of making a vow or pledge you cannot fulfill. The Apostle Paul exhorts believers to give "according to what a person has, not according to what he does not have" (2 Cor. 8:12).

In essence, don't let your prayer be hindered because you are withholding a voluntary pledge you made for the Lord's work. "Pay your vows to the Most High. *And Call upon Me in the day of trouble; I shall rescue you, and you will honor Me*" (Ps. 50:14-15 emphasis added). Note the connection "pay your vow" *and* "Call upon Me."

*Fifteenth Hindrance:*

### ***Lack of Mercy***

"In everything, therefore, treat people the same way you want them to treat you, for this is the Law and the Prophets" (Matt. 7:12).

Do not think that we can walk right into God's presence anytime we want and ask to receive anything we want unconditionally. There are prayer-based rules and regulations that must be followed. One rule is that we show mercy to others. Mercy is what you are asking God for when you are in His presence. "Therefore let us draw near

with confidence... that we may receive mercy... to help in time of need” (Heb. 4:16). Mercy is withholding from an unworthy person what he deserves. Someone who wrongs you may deserve payback in full measure, but mercy pleads for withholding this payback.

In His teaching, Jesus Christ presents what we call “the golden rule.” “Treat others the same way you want them to treat you” (Luke 6:31). God is the Chief Judge. He’s your umpire who makes a call based on equity and obedience. If you withhold mercy to another, it makes no sense to run to God and ask Him to give you the same mercy you deliberately withheld from another.

Who do we think God is? An unprincipled God who never factors our treatment of others in His treatment of us? James is clear: “There will be no mercy for those who have not shown mercy to others. But if you have been merciful, God will be merciful... [to] you” (James 2:13 NLT). This is straightforward. It says that if you are unmerciful when you come before His throne for mercy, He will deny you. Your prayer will go unanswered.

Mercy receives attention in Jesus’ teaching on the Mount, “Blessed are the merciful, for they shall receive mercy” (Matt. 5:7). This is God’s way; it is the right way! “Give and it will be given to you... by your standard of measure it will be measured to you in return” (Luke 6:38). It boils down to this: Withholding mercy from others hinders your prayer for mercy.

- You cannot receive mercy until you show mercy (James 2:13).
- An outpouring of mercy to others unlocks God’s mercy to you (Heb. 4:16).
- Lack of mercy shuts down prayers for mercy (Matt. 5:7).

#### *Sixteenth Hindrance:*

### ***A Mind that is Closed to the Needs of Others***

“If someone has enough money to live well and sees a brother or sister in need but shows no compassion — how can God’s love be in that person?” (1 John 3:17 NLT).

The Apostle John brings our attention to *fake love*: how can God’s love be in a believer who closes his heart to the needy? How can you claim to love God and close your heart to His child? Remember, your love for God is the path to special treatment before His throne (Ps. 91:14-15).

But John is asking, “How can you claim to love God when you close your heart to the needy?” If you do, your claim to love God is baseless.

Job claimed to be there for the widow, the poor, the needy and the orphan who desperately needed help (Job. 29:11-16). No wonder God praised him, “no one on earth is like him” (Job 1:8). He loves what God loves; and cares for what God cares for — the needy, the orphan and less privileged. This is God’s way, the highway to His throne.

Here is the truth: “He who shuts his ear to the cry of the poor [the needy] will also cry himself [in prayer to the Lord] and not be answered” (Prov. 21:13).

C. S. Lewis wrote:

Charity — giving to the poor — is an essential part of Christian morality. ...I do not believe one can settle how much we ought to give. I am afraid the only safe rule is to give more than we can spare. In other words, if our expenditure on comforts, luxuries, amusements, etc., is up to the standard common among those with the same income as our own, we are probably giving away too little. If our charities do not at all pinch or hamper us, I should say they are too small. There ought to be things we should like to do and cannot do because our charitable expenditure excludes them.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> C.S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity* (UK: Geoffrey Bles, 1952).

## ***Spiritual Exercise***

1. Name four things in this chapter that can hinder your prayer:

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2. What one ingredient, according to Psalm 91:14-15 and 1 John 3:17, can either foster or hinder your prayer?

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3. Could any of the things mentioned in this chapter be a hindrance to your prayer?

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4. List actions you plan to take to resolve any hindrances to your prayer in this chapter.

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5. When do you plan to take an action?

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Suggestion: Start your action, first, by acknowledging your shortfall before God: “If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness” (1 John 1:9).

# *Unwavering Faith*

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“Truly I say to you, whoever says to this mountain, ‘Be taken up and cast into the sea,’ and does not doubt in his heart, but believes that what he says is going to happen, it will be granted him.”

~ Mark 11:23

This chapter deals with faith, the supreme factor in prayer. The Lord declares, “Therefore I say to you, all things for which you pray and ask, believe that you have received them, and they will be granted you” (Mark 11:24). Precisely, everything we have discussed hinges on faith. Take faith away, and our prayer falls apart. Scripture is clear: “Without faith, it is impossible to please God” (Heb. 11:6 NIV).

God still wows His children, and what I am about to tell you will almost sound to some like a fairy tale. This story began years ago with my elder brother, Chinyere. When he moved to Nashville, Tennessee, to teach at Tennessee State University, he visited almost every church in the vicinity in search of a sound Bible-teaching church. He couldn’t find one, so he and his family decided to worship at home.

When my wife and I moved here we too visited many churches, just as my brother had, and sure enough, we had the same experience. We couldn’t find a church where we could be spiritually fed. This may sound unimaginable, but believe it or not, it’s difficult to find a church in my area that teaches God’s Word in a manner faithful to the simple gospel of salvation by faith alone in Christ alone. We really shouldn’t be surprised because the Bible has something to say about the future: There will be famine for the Word (Amos 8:11; Tim. 4:3).

To our surprise we discovered that a handful of people we knew were having the same struggle. They suggested we start worshipping together, so our small group began holding services at various places, with me teaching when I was not on the mission field.

We were meeting in a hotel, fighting setup and lack of space for children, when one of our members saw a church building that was for sale. Then, I told her that by faith we would buy that church building, even though we had less than \$600 in our church account and the property was on the market for over a million dollars. She gave me a big smile, knowing that our members were few and none wealthy.

I went to God in prayer, the only place I knew to go. Then, I contacted a real estate agent and shared our vision with her, namely, to have a grace-oriented, sound Bible-teaching local church in our community, with a focus on missions; and, I told her about the church building for sale. She was excited about the vision and without asking me how much we had in our account, she contacted the seller's agent, to show us the building. It was custom made for our needs.

I stood behind the pulpit and said to myself, "One day, I am going to preach in this pulpit." The seller's agent suggested that I meet the pastor of the church, who owned the building. I was about to leave for an overseas mission trip and had to postpone the meeting until my return.

By the time I returned, the price had dropped below \$1 million. Early each morning, day after day, I would go behind the church building and pray, asking God to give us the building. Our agent called me and said that it had been laid upon her heart to donate several thousand dollars toward the purchase. Can you believe it, an agent giving money to a client? It's unheard of! God was at work. I continued praying day and night. In answer to my prayer, God moved in the hearts of a handful of His children, who have been following our group from a distance (Ex. 35:21). With no gimmicks or coercion, they collectively sent us contributions adding up to thousands of dollars, enough for our earnest money.

The news gets better. The pastor of the church and I finally met. I shared our vision with him, namely to equip believers and train missionaries to serve locally and overseas through an established



missionary organization. He caught the vision and presented it to his board. A week later, the board voted to sell the property to us for their original purchase price ten years before, which reduced it another \$200,000. God was at work! But He was not finished.

Just after we signed an earnest money contract on the property for the reduced price, another church made an offer at the full original price, but the seller turned the offer down. They had made up their mind to sell it to us. We went to every bank in town for a loan and some of them laughed at us because we were a young church with only a handful of members. No bank would agree to finance us and the closing date was fast approaching. I continued in prayer, crying to God for help.

The closing date came and went without any financing in place, so I approached the seller for more time. The Lord granted us favor and even though there were other buyers in line, the sellers extended the closing date sixty days, on the condition that the \$35,000 earnest money would be forfeited if we didn't close on the final agreed-upon date.

Prayers continued as we petitioned God to sell a truckload of “the cattle on a thousand hills” and send us the money. All our bank applications were declined. Three days before closing, when all hope was gone, the Lord moved a couple who, without any phone call or solicitation for help, wired a very large donation to our church account, even though they were not members of our church. The selling pastor was “over the moon” excited when he heard what God had done at the last second. The new donation, along with the earnest money, provided a significant down payment. The selling pastor and his board agreed to owner finance the property and we closed on the church. God amazed us and gave us the church. God still answers prayers.

“Have faith in God” (Mark 11:22) is a faithful exhortation of “the author and perfecter of our faith” (Heb. 12:2 BSB). God is a prayer-answering God, who is always ready to answer us. We've now come to the two arms of prayer: faith and perseverance.

## ***Faith***

Like a rocket, prayer takes off on the fuel of faith, and without that, prayer remains on the launch pad. Hebrews 11 tells us, “faith

is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen” (v. 1), and that “without faith it is impossible to please Him” (v. 6). Nothing impresses God more than the expression of faith. It gives Him joy when His children trust in Him: “Have faith in God.” However, God is not pleased when we don’t trust Him. Look at what He said to Moses and Aaron about the Promised Land: “Because you did not trust in me... you will not bring this community into the land” (Num. 20:12 NIV).

“Believe in the LORD your God, and you will be upheld; believe in His prophets, and you will succeed” (2 Chr. 20:20 BSB).

Consider our Lord’s statement, “Truly I say to you, whoever says to this mountain, ‘Be taken up and cast into the sea,’ and does not doubt in his heart, but believes that what he says is going to happen, it will be granted him” (Mark. 11:23).

Baffled by His statement, some well-meaning, sincere, and honest Bible teachers have interpreted the word “mountain” to mean problems. While mountain may include difficult circumstances, I believe the Lord uses the word “mountain” in the text literally.

The context is the instant withering of a fig tree at the command of the Lord (Mark. 11:14, 20-21). Looking at a fig tree, He pointed His disciples to a mountain, “whoever says to *this* mountain.” It is poor hermeneutics to translate fig tree literally and mountain metaphorically. Using mountain metaphorically in this context dampens the weight of faith, which the Lord seeks to promote. There is nothing faith cannot accomplish if the request brings God glory and is consistent with God’s will.

Joshua did the unimaginable. He commanded the pausing of an established law of nature: “On the day the LORD gave the Amorites over to Israel, Joshua said to the LORD in the presence of Israel: ‘Sun, stand still over Gibeon, and you, moon, over the Valley of Aijalon’” (Josh. 10:12 NLT). His command was literal. Because it would bring God glory, He honored it. “So the sun stood still and the moon stayed in place until the nation of Israel had defeated its enemies. ... The sun stayed in the middle of the sky, and it did not set as on a normal day” (v. 13 NLT). “There has never been a day like this one before or since, when the LORD answered such a prayer. Surely the LORD fought for Israel that day!” (v. 14 NLT).

On another occasion, at Joshua’s command, the priests crossed the Jordan river. They simply touched their feet in the water: It

became dry land (Josh. 3:14-16). On still another occasion, Moses stretched his staff over the Red Sea, and the waters were parted and there was dry land, and then the process reversed itself (Ex. 14:21). Other instances abound, but these three are sufficient to make the point that if removing a literal mountain will honor God, He will do so in response to faith.

What is faith? Let me tell you upfront what faith is not. Faith is not blind. Your faith must line up with God's plan and purpose. Such faith can move mountains. You ask, "What kind of faith is that?" It is the faith of the righteous (James 5:16); it is the faith of obedient sons and daughters of God (1 John 3:21-22); it is the faith of a soul that is saturated with God's Word (John 15:7); it's the faith that believes in the omnipotence of God (Matt. 19:26); it's the faith that yearns for God's glory (1 Kings 18:37).

### ***An Unfounded Faith***

Before you challenge God, be sure that what you are asking Him to do can pass a simple test of common sense. A young boy was taught in Sunday school class that "with God *everything* is possible." He was told that if anyone asks anything in faith, without any doubt, that God will do it (Mark. 11:24). That's Scripture. But does it really mean *everything*?

One day, the boy failed to do his homework, which was due at school the next day. Since the presentation was outdoors, he prayed fervently that it might rain so that the class would be canceled. He applied what he was taught at Sunday school. He prayed without doubting. In fact, he believed with all his heart that it would rain, so much so that he wore a raincoat to school even though the morning was as clear as it could be. His classmates looked at him like he was weird — because he was!

There was not a drop of rain that day. He failed his homework assignment. He became depressed, feeling that prayer doesn't work and so concluded that the whole Bible is just manmade.

Where did he fail? He failed to realize that:

1. We do not use prayer to manipulate God to cater to our needs.
2. Answer to prayer is for God's glory (Ps. 50:15).

Faith must be definitive and specific — an unqualified, unmistakable request. What’s more: it must not be a vague, indefinite, shadowy thing. It must be more than an abstract belief in God’s willingness and power to respond. It must be a definite, specific asking for — expecting the things we asked for.<sup>15</sup>

### ***Developing Faith***

“How is faith developed?” That’s a good question. The Apostle Paul tells us in Romans 10, “faith comes by hearing... the word of God” (v. 17 NKJV). As we get to know God through studying and applying His Word, as our relationship with Him deepens through our knowledge of Him, our faith in Him increases. That was true of Abraham, who was “fully assured that what God had promised, He was able also to perform” (Rom. 4:21). The more we know God — His character, His faithfulness, and unchanging promises — the more our faith in prayer increases.

#### *Seventeenth Hindrance:*

### ***Lack of Faith***

“But he must ask in faith without any doubting, for the one who doubts is like the surf of the sea, driven and tossed by the wind. For that man ought not to expect that he will receive anything from the Lord” (James 1:6-7).

James is clear, “that man [who lacks faith] ought not to expect that he will receive anything from the Lord.” Lack of faith shuts down prayer. Doubt accompanies lack of faith. Doubt is lack of trust in God’s ability to accomplish a certain task or fulfill a certain request. It makes God look too small for your problem.

Wherever God detects lack of faith or doubt in a prayer, He turns a deaf ear to the request. Doubting is another way of saying, “God, I am not sure You are capable of doing what I am asking You to do.” Bounds said it succinctly: “Lack of [faith] lies at the root of all poor praying, feeble praying, little praying, unanswered praying.”<sup>16</sup>

<sup>15</sup> Bounds, p. 12

<sup>16</sup> Bounds, p. 13

## *Perseverance*

We have come to the second stage of prayer. “Men ought always to pray, and not to faint” (Luke 18:1 KJV). Perseverance empowers prayer. It is the engine that drives our prayer forward to the throne of His grace until it is answered. It is the enduring tenacity, the tug-of-war mentality that’s not willing to let go until your request gets an answer. God honors persistent prayer, prayer that does not give up.

Perseverance in prayer, until a clear answer is received, is a good thing. The Lord says, “Men ought always to pray, and not to faint.” How long should one persist in prayer? Until the need is met. Elijah persevered in prayer seven times until he was heard (1 Kings 18:43). It is on “the seventh time, that he [Elijah’s servant] said, ‘Behold, a cloud as small as a man’s hand is coming up from the sea.’ And he said, ‘Go up, say to Ahab, “Prepare your chariot and go down, so that the heavy shower does not stop you” ’” (v. 44). He prayed, not once, not twice, but seven times.

Daniel persisted in prayer, and twenty-one days later, he got an answer to his prayer (Dan. 10:2, 10-14). The Lord, Himself, went to His Father three times in Gethsemane, “praying very fervently; and His sweat became like drops of blood” (Luke 22:44). “An angel from heaven appeared to Him and strengthened Him” (v. 43 BSB). The Apostle Paul tells us of his own experience: “Three times I pleaded with the Lord” (2 Cor. 12:8 BSB). He got an answer on his third plea: “My grace is sufficient for you” (v. 9). These are all instances of perseverance in action.

Remember, in Chapter 4 we reviewed the parable the Lord told about a widow and a wicked judge? The helpless widow would not give up and finally the judge, who feared no one, finally consented to give her legal protection, just to get rid of her (Luke 18:4-5).

Drawing from the parable, the Lord made a heart-wrenching statement: “Hear what the unrighteous judge said; now, will not God bring about justice for His elect who cry to Him day and night, and will He delay long over them?” (vv. 6-7). If a wicked judge could take up a case because of perseverance, how much more the Righteous God, would He not respond to you “who cry to Him day and night”?

*Eighteenth Hindrance:*  
***Lack of Perseverance***

“Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you” (Matt. 7:7).

In Matthew 7:7, the words “ask,” “seek” and “knock” in the original Greek, are in the *present tense* and the *imperative mood*, which can be understood as keep on asking, keep on seeking, and keep on knocking. The present tense underscores perseverance, and the imperative means it is not an option; it’s a divine mandate. God has commanded you not only to pray, but to persevere. When you don’t, you simply are disobeying Him, which blocks your prayer from reaching Him.

***Spiritual Exercise***

1. How is faith defined, according to Hebrews 11:1?

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2. What are the two hindrances to prayer in this chapter?

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3. How do we develop our faith?

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4. According to Hebrews 11:1, what’s the main ingredient, which pleases God?

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“Lord, teach us to pray, just as John taught his disciples”  
~ Luke 11:1 BSB

If I said, “Let us pray,” I imagine we would hear this:

*Our Father in heaven,  
Hallowed be Your name.  
Your kingdom come.  
Your will be done  
On earth as it is in heaven.  
Give us this day our daily bread.  
And forgive us our debts,  
As we forgive our debtors.  
And do not lead us into temptation,  
But deliver us from the evil one.  
For Yours is the kingdom and the power  
and the glory forever. Amen (Matt. 6:9-13 NKJV).*

This passage is often called the Lord’s Prayer. How many times have you heard it recited? Countless times, I imagine. If the Lord were here, He would rebuke the church for its ritualistic rote. He never meant it to be recited. It was Jesus’ answer to the apostles’ request, “Lord, teach us to pray.”

Interestingly, there are two schools of thought concerning the Lord’s Prayer. The majority subscribe to Matthew 6:9-13 as the Lord’s Prayer, while others hold it to be John 17. I am one of those who subscribe to John 17. It’s His heartfelt prayer the Lord made for His disciples and the church at large. John 17 is an example of a prayer — an outpouring of inward thoughts.

The truth is that neither John 17, nor Matthew 6, is meant to be repeatedly recited. The phrase “The Lord’s Prayer” means He owns it. Matthew 6:9-13 is ruled out as a prayer for Himself because He had no debt to be forgiven (v. 12). John 17 is credited to Christ. He owns the prayer in its entirety. It was His thoughts, point by point, a prayer request to the Father. We are not to recite it, for we cannot pray, “Now, Father, glorify Me together with Yourself, with the glory which I had with You before the world was” (John 17:5). The same way Jesus cannot pray, “Father, forgive us our trespasses.”

Matthew 6, then, is a prayer model. That’s how the early disciples understood it. It is never repeated anywhere in the epistles of the New Testament. Luke records the first corporate prayer of the church in Acts 4:24-30. They lifted their prayer to the Father. The Apostle Paul’s prayers are on record in his epistles. He didn’t recite Matthew 6. Rather, he applies its lesson that prayers are directed to the Father. He prays, “For this reason I bow my knees before the Father, from whom every family in heaven and on earth derives its name” (Eph. 3:14-15).

Prayer is an expression of inward thoughts. Its content changes as needs change. What you prayed today is not necessarily what you will pray tomorrow. In addition, the Lord taught that all prayers *must* be channeled to the Father: “In this manner, therefore, pray: *Our Father in heaven*” In essence He is saying, “Recognize heaven as the Father’s place of abode, and hence direct your mind heavenward when you pray.”

**The Role of the Father in Prayer:** Mind you, all the members of the Godhead are involved in our prayer. Prayers are directed to the Father, not to Jesus nor to the Holy Spirit, because the Father is the decision maker. Imagine, God’s Son and the Holy Spirit intercede for you with the Father (Heb 7:25; Rom. 8:26). So, we are invited to join these two and “Pray: *Our Father.*”

**The Role of Jesus Christ in Prayer:** All prayers must go through our Great High Priest, Jesus Christ, for a stamp of approval. “Truly, truly, I tell you, whatever you ask the Father *in My name*, He will give you” (John 16:23 BSB emphasis added), so we pray in His name.

**The Role of the Holy Spirit:** Prayers must be empowered by the Holy Spirit: “Always pray *by the power of the Spirit*” (Eph. 6:18



CEV emphasis added). Many translations used the preposition “in” — “pray in the Spirit.” That can be misinterpreted to mean speaking in tongues. As mentioned before, you must be in fellowship so that the Holy Spirit can fill and empower you, without which you cannot appear before a Holy God (Eph. 5:18).

So now we have clarified that prayers are directed to the Father, in His Son’s name by the enablement of the Holy Spirit. The LORD went on to teach, “Say... *Hallowed be Your name.*” It’s not chanting or the repetition of “Hallowed be Your name” each time you pray. That is what Isaiah the prophet referred to as “tradition learned by rote” (Isa. 29:13). The lesson is for us to recognize God’s majesty and praise Him for who and what He is.

The early church applied the prayer model: “So when they heard that, they raised their voice to God [the Father] with one accord and said: ‘LORD, You are God, who made heaven and earth and the sea, and all that is in them.’” (Acts 4:24 NKJ). They hallowed His majesty. The word “hallowed” means greatly honored or revered. Paul did the same: “For this reason I bow my knees before the Father, from *whom every family in heaven and on earth derives its name*” (Eph. 3:14-15 emphasis added). He acknowledged and revered God’s majesty by recognizing that everything originates from Him.

The Lord’s teaching factored forgiveness into the prayer. When you stand before God, confessing your sins, it is assumed you have already forgiven those who wronged you (Matt. 6:12). The LORD couldn’t be more firm: “If you do not forgive others, then your Father will not forgive your transgressions” (v. 15). There you have the nuggets of the Lord’s teaching on prayer. Learn from it and incorporate its elements into your prayer. The early church did not engage in a rote recitation of Matthew 6:9-13. Let us follow their example rather than manmade tradition.

A normal prayer is informal. It is a heart-to-heart, child-to-father conversation. Each time the conversation is different, depending on the need of the moment. It is improper to memorize a conversation someone had with his or her father and recite the same thing with your father. That’s not a conversation. It’s someone else’s thoughts; He wants to hear your own.

God wants to hear from us: “Call upon Me, I will deliver you” (Ps. 50:15 NIV).

## ***Spiritual Exercise***

1. What is the essence of what is often called the Lord's prayer?

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2. Give three reasons why we need to address our prayers to God alone:

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3. What role does each member of the Godhead play in our prayer?

The Father: \_\_\_\_\_

The Son: \_\_\_\_\_

The Holy Spirit: \_\_\_\_\_

4. Is Matthew 6:9-13, often referred to as the Lord's prayer, meant to be recited? Explain.

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5. Why didn't the early church disciples repeat Matthew 6:9-13?

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## *Final Thoughts on Prayer*

13



“I waited patiently for the LORD to help me, and he turned to me and heard my cry.”

~ Psalm 41:1 NLT

As we come to the last chapter of our focus on the hindrances to prayer, let's pause, and reflect on the dynamic trio of an effective prayer: faith, perseverance, and patience. These three actions keep the flame of our prayer burning until God answers. Faith refuses to doubt God's Word. Perseverance continues the request until the matter is resolved. Patience hangs its hat on hope — absolute confidence — that, come what may, God will answer all prayer at the time of His choosing. At the close of this chapter we will see these three come together in an incredible answer to prayer. But for now let us pray together.

### ***Please Join Me in Prayer***

Before we pray together, let us first go through the list of prayer hindrances to ensure that none of them will be a hindrance to us in our corporate prayer.

Answer yes or no as we go through the list:

1. Do you study God's Word daily?
2. Do you love God personally?
3. Do you strive to obey God's Word?
4. Do you have any unconfessed sin?

5. At this moment, are you Holy Spirit filled? (A believer is filled with the Holy Spirit after he or she confesses all known sins to God).
6. Are you in perpetual carnality?
7. If you answered “yes” to question 6, have you changed your mind (repented) about your sin?
8. Does pride dominate your thought pattern?
9. Are you humble? (If you are, you wouldn’t say “yes.” Your answer would be like Paul’s answer: “By the grace of God, I am what I am” 1 Cor. 15:10).
10. Are you holding back forgiveness?
11. Do you have an unresolved conflict with anyone?
12. Do you have spousal domestic conflict?
13. Are you selfish?
14. Do you have an unfulfilled pledge that’s related to God’s work?
15. Do you show mercy to other people?
16. Do you close your mind to the needs of others?
17. Do you have faith in God’s ability to answer your prayer?
18. Do you persevere in prayer?

***Participation Requires Us to be Clean Before a Holy God:***

If you answered yes to any of the questions 4, 6, 8, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14 or 16, how do you plan to resolve the problem? For instance, if you are refusing to forgive someone, or you have an unresolved personal conflict, are you willing to resolve it today? If your answer is, “I am not ready yet,” then, regrettably, I am unable to invite you

to join in prayer. Obey Scripture: “Go, first be reconciled to your brother, and then come” and pray (Matt. 5:24).

On the other hand, if the spiritual failure does not involve others, for instance, you don’t study or obey His word, you can turn to God right now and acknowledge that you truly have failed Him in those areas. Moses tells us something about God: “The LORD, the LORD God, [is] compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in lovingkindness and truth” (Ex. 34:6). The Apostle John tells us, “If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness” (1 John 1:9).

So right now, take a minute to inventory your life and confess your sins directly to God. God will forgive you instantly for any sin you confess to Him. But note that if you are in perpetual carnality due to a carnal lifestyle, your lifestyle is entangling you in a constant sin pattern. It is critical that, in addition to confessing your sin, you change your mind about your behavior.

### ***1 Tim. 2:1-4***

“First of all, then, I urge that entreaties *and* prayers, petitions *and* thanksgivings, be made on behalf of all men, for kings and all who are in authority, so that we may lead a tranquil and quiet life in all godliness and dignity. This is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Savior, who desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth” (1 Tim. 2:1-4).

Our prayer is divided into two: the known will of God and the unknown will of God.

### ***The Known Will of God***

The known will of God is revealed in Scripture. Charles Stanley said, “If it’s consistent with the will of God — it will be consistent with the Word of God.” The Apostle John affirms, “And this is the confidence that we have before Him: If we ask anything according to His will, He hears us” (1 John 5:14 BSB). Prayer based on the known will of God increases the believer’s faith. He knows that he is asking God to act on His promises. The believer knows that God cannot go back on His Word. So, he perseveres until God answers.

As we approach the throne of grace, let us first offer praise and thanksgiving to God (Matt. 6:9; Phil. 4:6) before we make intercessions for others and finally petitions for ourselves.

Let us pray together for:

- Spiritual enlightenment and growth for other believers and for yourself (Eph. 1:16-19).
- Spiritual wisdom and discernment for others and for yourself (James 1:5; Phil. 1:9).
- Our president and other leaders in authority (1 Tim. 2:2).
- Revival and Great Awakening. God desires that unbelievers would come to Him through faith in our Lord Jesus Christ (2 Peter 3:9) and that believers would come to the knowledge of Him (1 Tim. 2:1, 4). Every historical revival or Great Awakening can be traced to an answer to perseverance in prayer.
- Unity in our churches (John 17:23).
- Our love to abound for one another (John 13:34-35).

### ***The Unknown Will of God***

These prayer needs are a little difficult to work through because we do not know whether what we are asking God is what is best for us. They include our personal needs and much more. If your life is pleasing to God, and you are constantly in prayer for the things that are the known will of God, His Holy Spirit will direct your heart to pray accordingly.

So my brother and sister, “Pray without ceasing” (1 Thess. 5:17). Pray today, tomorrow and every day. Paul said this: “Continue earnestly in prayer, being vigilant in it with thanksgiving, meanwhile praying also for us, that God would open to us a door for the word, to speak the mystery of Christ... that I may make it manifest, as I ought to speak” (Col. 4:2-4 NKJV). We at Grace Evangelistic Ministries ask that you pray this prayer for us so that we may be effective servants in the proclamation of God’s Word.

## *My Prayer Time*

Some have asked me, “How do you study... how do you pray... how long do you pray?” I was reluctant to include those details; however, if my doing so can help anyone be encouraged, or challenged to engage in prayer, then let it be all to the glory of God.

**Choosing a quiet place and time:** David said, “In the morning, O Lord, You will hear my voice; In the morning I will order my prayer to You and eagerly watch [wait]” (Ps. 5:3). The LORD Himself enjoyed intimacy with the Father in solitude. Scripture gives us sufficient evidence. “In the early morning, while it was still dark, Jesus got up, left the house, and went away to a secluded place, and was praying there” (Mark. 1:35). “It was at this time that He went off to the mountain to pray, and He spent the whole night in prayer to God” (Luke 6:12). Other passages abound (Matt. 14:13, 23; Luke 4:42; 5:16).

Jesus Christ emphasized the concept of quietness and privacy in His teaching on prayer: “when you pray, go into your inner room, close your door and pray to your Father who is in secret” (Matt. 6:6). He underscores privacy. Keep in mind, this is a private prayer. I personally enjoy talking with the Father in the wee hours of the morning.

**Spiritual life:** I keep my eyes locked on my spiritual walk with God. It grieves me whenever I know that what I did or said may have grieved God. I keep His Word in front of me constantly, both in studying and living. I endeavor to obey His Word perfectly, but often come short. I acknowledge my shortfalls whenever I am aware of them (1 John 1:9).

**“Imitate me...”** (1 Cor. 11:1 NIV). That is our challenge from the Apostle Paul. I admire and look to Bible prayer warriors. I am grateful that my parents named me Moses because Moses of the Bible stands out to me. What impresses me about him is the way he communicated to God — so freely and so effortlessly. He talked to God on a personal level as a friend would. He revered God like no other person of his day, but was not afraid of Him. Imagine telling God pointedly, “If Your Presence does not go with us, do not lead us up from here” (Ex. 33:15). Simply stated: “I am not leaving this place if You are not coming with us.” Moses was open and honest with God.

On another occasion Moses told God, “If You would only forgive their sin... But if not, please blot me out of the book that You have written” (Ex. 32:32 BSB). Moses exemplified the epitome of relationship and friendship. His relationship with God was unequalled. He developed such a wonderful friendship with God that he spoke to Him like a friend. I envy him and crave such friendship with God daily.

**Answered prayers:** Remembering God’s favor and many answered prayers helps me in my prayer life. I count my blessings and reflect on how God in His infinite grace has answered my prayers in the past. He holds accountable anyone who does not factor in God’s past favor toward them in order to trust Him for the future (Ps. 78:11, 49). After the Exodus from Egypt, Caleb contemplated God’s past favor toward Israel and concluded that He would give them the Promised Land, no matter the obstacles (Num.13:30). So, when I pray, I consider how He has answered my prayers in the past and trust Him to do so now.

**Reasoning with God:** Like Moses, I always ponder the outcome of unanswered prayer where God’s glory is at stake. Moses reminded God that the Egyptians would reproach His name should He destroy Israel (Ex. 32:32). He calmly reasoned with the Almighty. In my prayer, I do likewise. I reason with God on the grounds of His glory.

**When, and what do I pray for?** I pray for just about everything. I pray for little things just as much as I pray for big things. I pray quick prayers, short prayers, and long prayers. I pray everywhere: I pray while driving, with eyes open. I listen to the silent prompting of the Spirit to pray, as when He put on my heart at 3:00 a.m. to pray for my best friend. I woke up and prayed. A few hours later, his wife called me, and told me that my friend was in the hospital with a mild heart attack. It was around the time I prayed for him. That’s just one incident.

When I pray, I look for the answer. I persevere until the answer comes. Know that God takes pleasure in answering our prayers. He wants you to pray. Answered prayers bring glory to Him. “Call upon Me in the day of trouble; I will deliver you, and you shall glorify Me” (Ps. 50:15 NKJV). “Call to Me and I will answer you, and I will tell you great and mighty things, which you do not know” (Jer. 33:3). God is full of surprises. He is ever ready to surprise those who honor Him. He will honor you as you seek Him in sincerity.



## *Testimony of God's Grace*

In closing, I want to share my most precious answered prayer where faith, patience and perseverance paid off with the most wonderful blessing for our family. After tragically losing our first child within 24 hours of birth, we petitioned heaven and waited on the Lord to bless us with another child to fill the void of the pain and loss.

All the medical experts — radiologists, obstetricians, and gynecologists — who examined my wife told us pointedly that it was no longer medically possible for her to have a baby because of the multiple fibroids she had. Our primary-care doctor even advised us to think about adoption instead. My wife and I continued in prayer. I kept encouraging her that God would respond in His own time.

At the onset of our marriage, I prayed to God for one child, specifically a girl, who would keep my wife company as I travel around the world to do His work. I chose Sophia as a name for her, even before I entered the ministry. My wife and I continued in prayer. I kept encouraging her that God would respond in His own time.

She endured five miscarriages and years of heartbreak. Yes, five. We were now 17 years into our marriage without a child, even though we had continued in prayer. When all hope seemed to have been dashed, she became pregnant once again. When she started bleeding heavily the night before our mission trip to Kenya, Zimbabwe, and Australia, we could only conclude that yet another miscarriage had occurred. I wasn't comfortable leaving her at home by herself, so we proceeded with our plans. Several hours into our flight, the bleeding stopped.

We went to a Kenyan hospital the following morning to have the doctor perform a D&C (dilation and curettage), a procedure to clear the uterine lining after a miscarriage. The doctor examined her briefly and sent her for an ultrasound.

To our greatest surprise, there was a heartbeat! The baby was still intact, despite the bleeding. The doctor prescribed bed rest for my wife; so she stayed in the hotel all week, while I did the Lord's work training pastors, and we both continued to pray. Later we flew on to Zimbabwe. She was in the room, and I was in the field. A week later, we flew to Australia for more mission work. When we were finished, we flew back to the States and went for medical attention. The baby was still there.

Seven months later, the fibroids forced my wife into labor prematurely. When we arrived at the hospital, the doctor discovered there was lack of oxygen in the womb and an emergency C- section was performed. Our baby girl, Sophia — the Sophia we had prayed for — weighed only 3-1/2 lbs. But the moment she was born, she stopped breathing. The medical team jumped into action and by God’s grace her breathing was restored. She was airlifted by helicopter to a bigger hospital, where she was placed in an incubator for 30 days. I knew that God had answered all of our prayers when we brought our baby girl home from the hospital.

Today, she looks older than her age and excels in her academic work. She is simply a trophy of God’s marvelous grace and faithfulness. God answers prayers. He often shows up when all hope seems to be gone.

# Epilogue

Over 20 years ago I wanted to write a book on prayer but there were so many attacks. Then in 2020, because of so many unimaginable things going on, I found myself teaching prayer to our congregation. Praying for God's intervention and mercy is our only answer, yet few truly understand prayer.

When one member lent her class notes on prayer to a friend who attends another church, the friend took them to her Sunday-school class, who decided to use them for a Bible study. Lives were changed! People were forgiving and repenting, and burdens were lifted and prayers answered.

It was then that I realized how important it was to share these simple principles with others. Never before have my associates and I experienced so much pushback and so many attacks from the enemy to take us off task and delay this book. This only underscored the importance of helping believers to identify and eliminate hindrances to prayer. We desperately need prayer and prayer warriors. Moreover, we need to make sure every precious prayer reaches the throne of grace!

May God use the teaching in this book as a source of blessing and challenge, and may He grant you a burning zeal to engage in prayer today, tomorrow and every day until the Lord Jesus returns, in the mighty name of Jesus Christ. Amen!



## ***Buy Truth, and Do Not Sell It***

(Proverbs 23:23a)

Are you aware that sound Bible teaching is a precious and priceless piece of spiritual jewelry? Indeed, church history has shown how difficult sound teaching is to come by, especially in modern day Christianity! So, when God from His oasis of grace leads us to the pearls of truth in His infallible and inerrant Word, we ought to cherish them without reserve. The Bible is the treasure box that holds your capacity to enjoy abundant life, to reap maximum happiness in life, friendship, marriage, business, and to enjoy unprecedented blessings for today and tomorrow; therefore, “buy truth” [stay grounded in the Word] “for wisdom is better than jewels; and all desirable things cannot compare with her” (Proverbs 8:11).

Truth: For you are not under law BUT under GRACE (Romans 6:14b).

# Publications Available

## **Tracts:**

*Eternal Security of the Believer (English and Spanish)*

*God Speaks Through Storms*

*Riding the Death Train (A Message of Hope)*  
(English and Spanish)

*Shower of Christian Love*

*Who Are You?*

## **Books:**

*Biblical Doctrine of Salvation*

*Comfort in Suffering*

*Disaster: God's Warning Bell*

*Focus on Christian Marriage*

*Forgiveness by Confession Alone*

*Giving, An Integral Part of Worship*

*God's Plan after Salvation*

(English and Spanish)

*James: Faith Without Works is Dead*

(An Urgent Call to Practical Christianity)

*Joseph, A Pillar of Grace*

*Overview of God's Grace*

*Paul, a Trophy of God's Grace*

*Power of Prevailing Prayer*

(Exploring 18 Hindrances to Prayer)

*Signs & Wonders*

(A Biblical Reply to the Claims of Modern Day  
Miracle Workers)

*The Spiritual Gift of Tongues*

(A Biblical Response to Modern Day Tongues)

*What is the Spiritual Life?*



“Grow in the grace and knowledge of our  
Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To Him be the glory, both now  
and to the day of eternity. Amen.”

(2 Peter 3:18)

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**Moses C. Onwubiko** is the president and founder of Grace Evangelistic Ministries, Inc., an international, Bible based, nondenominational missionary organization, founded in 1997. Evangelism is our primary goal and the ministry takes the grace gospel of Jesus Christ around the world anywhere the Lord opens a door. GEM evangelizes the lost, trains pastors and encourages believers.

Rev. Moses has spoken in almost 100 countries around the world in Africa, Asia (including the Middle East), Australia, Europe, North and South America and has published fifteen books and five tracts which are distributed free of charge. The gospel tract "Riding The Death Train" has been translated into many languages and has been enthusiastically received around the world. You can learn more at [GEMworldwide.org](http://GEMworldwide.org).

**Do you wonder if God is still answering prayers as He did in the Bible? If so, why do we feel too many of our prayers go unanswered? What about the prayers of our children? Do they count?**

***The Power of Prevailing Prayer will answer these questions and more. It also considers eighteen common, yet little understood, hindrances to prayer. Many have found renewed vigor in their prayer life from discovering the simple principles clearly outlined in this small but powerful book.***

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There is no price list for any of our materials. No money is requested. When gratitude for the Word of God and understanding of the need to reach unsaved souls with the simple grace gospel and sound Bible teaching motivate you to contribute, you have the privilege of giving and sharing in the dissemination of the Word of God. This is a grace ministry.

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