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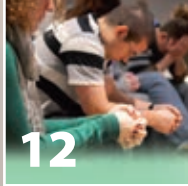
FrontLine

BRINGING THE TRUTH HOME



Teach Us
to Pray

Teach Us to Pray



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Our sincere thanks to Don Johnson for coordinating this issue of *FrontLine* magazine.

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When setting out to put

together this issue of *FrontLine*, we regularly encountered an objection from prospective writers. Not, “Sorry brother, I just can’t make any more commitments at this time,” but, “Brother, I just don’t feel adequate to write on that topic.” I sympathize with this objection. Who really feels adequate to discuss prayer? Even those who seem to pray well, to pray the “best,” recognize that we are but feeble wisps of vapor reaching out to commune with our infinite God. Who are we to tell other men about the “great” things we have learned about prayer?

Nevertheless, we are called to pray, and those of us in the ministry are called to teach God’s people. We hope you find this issue helpful for your own spiritual experience. To help us, Wally Morris helps us answer the question, “Why Is Praying So Hard?” Gordon Dickson gives us insight from the prayers of Daniel in “Seasons of Prevailing Prayer.” Greg Baker offers a testimonial concerning recent experience with prayer in his Utah congregation, “Upreach: The Local Church Reaching to God in Prayer.” Brent Niedergall has another question: “What If God Answered Prayer?” By that he means, “What if we really believed God answered prayer? Would our prayer life change?” Thomas Overmiller encourages us regarding corporate prayer, especially encouraging both men and women to join in the prayer meetings of the church in “Men and Women Praying Together.” My own attempt looks at the disciples and their request to the Lord, “Teach Us to Pray.” The disciples were familiar with prayer. However, when they witnessed Jesus praying, their hearts were stirred by their own inadequacy.

Our issue certainly isn’t the last word on prayer, but we hope that it might be a word that stirs you up again about your own praying. We hope that you will be more purposeful, diligent, and persistent in believing prayer. Our God hears the prayers of His saints. Do you believe this?

Don Johnson

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—Dr. Daniel R. Brown

I enjoyed reading the [March/April] issue of the *FrontLine* magazine themed with articles on mentoring young people in a new generation. I especially enjoyed reading the article by Mrs. Claudia Barba. She relayed stories regarding her father, Dr. Otis Holmes, and it brought to memory the many times his name was spoken in our home as my father had great affection for men such as Dr. Holmes and others who had mentored him. Her relaying the event of her father leaving a denomination due to its doctrinal decline brought to mind how my father was refused ordination in the denomination he had grown up in over his refusal to support liberal seminaries and mission programs. I found myself being very thankful for my father as he brought many into our home that were an influence on me in my early life. I remember Dr. Walter Fremont playing with me on the floor of our home when I was a young boy. We also had many guests in our home like Dr. Gilbert Stenholm, Dr. Bill Hall, Dr. Stewart Custer, the Drs. Jones, and others. As I open the pages of early Bibles I had as a youth, the back page is filled with signatures with names like Rice, Roberson, Hutson, Paisley, and others. As I entered my formal years of college and seminary there were names like Neal, Minnick, Bellis, Smith, Rude, Barrett, Frederick, Bell, Anderson, and others. I never want to lose the gratitude for those who invested their mentoring into me, and trust that we can do the same for the coming generation.

*Donald E. Karnes
Pastor, Grace Baptist Church, Norfolk, VA
Chaplain, Chesapeake Police Department*

I just wanted to give a thanks to Dr. Schaal for his short article on closing the generation gap.

I have attended several FBFI regional meetings and am often time [met] with gruffness and denigrations. I would not consider myself a thin-skinned individual as I'm currently serving in Africa, but the fact that upon first meeting these individuals, the undue criticism . . . they had to offer a younger generation was very perturbing.

I have several good friends in the FBFI that would be people you would be familiar with, that have been a great influence in my life. My family did not come from a church background, and many of these men have acted as spiritual fathers even in the short time we had together.

It's a reminder to me often that despite generational, cultural, or whatever gap there might be between me and another person, opportunities are rare and have a lasting impact.

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Reasons to Visit Proclaimanddefend.org Every Day

Proclaim and Defend is FBFI's online blog, news, and resource site that is intended to help FBFI leaders and others be more effective in serving God. Its format allows timely content that is easily accessible in twenty-first century ministry. P&D includes original articles from writers within our movement, links to articles of interest from a broad spectrum of sources, and links to resources for all aspects of today's ministry.

If you have not been to proclaimanddefend.org lately, you are missing something. We not only have extremely helpful articles posting on a daily basis in the main blog, but we also have links to many other articles of interest. We have designed the site to be most effective based on daily visits—here is why that is important.

A new blog post goes up every day on issues of importance to fundamental Baptists. People say fundamentalists do not write, but that's not true. They are writing and have been writing for many years. It is often hard for them to get what they write out there to you. The blog allows this to happen in a big way.

The site allows you to keep up to date. Links to news events, items of interest, opinion pieces from all over, and devotional articles can help you stay current with the world outside fundamentalism. These articles and links provide sermon-illustration material, support material, and other information necessary for a well-read Christian worker to know in today's ministry context. Even the reading-through-the-Bible-in-a-year tab is convenient for personal Bible reading and study.

You will also find links to resource material from other writers within our own group. E-books, paper publications, services, supplies, and scholarly articles and dissertations can easily be disseminated in this way. We will also post official statements from FBFI from time to time as the need requires.

The proclaimanddefend.org site is something that is useful and that we can be proud of as members of FBFI. Please use it, and encourage others to do so as well.



Teach Us to Pray

“Lord, teach us to pray, as John also taught his disciples” (Luke 11:1b).

The disciples voice an often heartfelt sentiment of Christians everywhere. Who among us really feels that we understand and practice prayer as God intended? Who among us would say, “I’m confident that my prayer life is more than adequate”? No mature believer would make this boast. Very few immature believers would make the boast. I suspect that even among unbelievers who are of a “spiritual” mind, contemplation of prayer also conveys a sense of their own inadequacy.¹ There is an impression in the minds of many, “I need something beyond myself.”

With that thought in mind, let’s think about the disciples’ question.

Things They Were Not Asking

Surely, the disciples were not asking, “Could you give us five steps for a better prayer life?” or, “How do you get power in prayer?” Our culture is full of advice and discussion about prayer. Take a moment to search this phrase on the Internet: “power of prayer.” You will find many Christian links, some better than others. Mixed in the list as well are Mormons, Hindus, yoga masters, New

Agers, and so on, all discussing the power of prayer. It seems very trendy to feel “in touch” with spiritual power. Prayer is the key. So they say.

The pagans of the first century likewise filled their lives with prayers. Their temples were full of gods to whom they prayed, from whom they sought favorable omens, with whom they desired spiritual connection and power. There is a superstitious sense that implies that if you say your prayers just right, you, too, can tap into divine power. How much of modern Christian advice about prayer resembles the mysticism of the ancients? Or the mysticism of the not-so-ancient, the trendy New Agers and Eastern religion enthusiasts of our day?

No, I don’t think the disciples were pursuing a mystic connection with God through prayer.

Moreover, it is also sure that the disciples were not asking, “What do you say when you pray?” or, “How do you pray?” These were men steeped in the Old Testament, taught the Bible from an early age. Not only had they had formal training in the Torah and the customs of the rabbis, but constantly from birth up in their homes, they were “rubbing shoulders” with the Scripture. Devout Jews adorned their homes with Scriptures, the many feasts and ceremonies of Judaism included

recitation of Scripture, and psalm-singing Levites accompanied temple worship. Much of the Old Testament would be committed to memory. Boys in the synagogue schools memorized vast quantities of Scripture.

Their Scriptures, the Old Testament, is, among many other things, a comprehensive book of prayers. From the very beginning, we read of the patriarchs praying, the troubled children of Israel praying (finally) in their distress during the days of the judges, and of course the Psalms record many of David's prayers (and those of others as well). The "Treasury of David" instructs the reader amply about *what* and *how* to pray. It is full of worship, adoration, meditation, petition, supplication, and even the desperation of the troubled soul.

Given this background, it cannot be that the disciples knew not what to pray or how to pray.

Some commentaries suggest they were asking for a prayer of identification, a prayer that marked them specifically as disciples of Jesus. This notion seems to stem from the phrase, "Lord, teach us to pray, as John also taught his disciples." Presumably, John likewise gave his disciples distinctive prayers that identified them as followers of John. Whether this was their request or not, early Christians used the Lord's Prayer like this. "In practice an individual would first pray this prayer immediately after baptism and their first participation in the Lord's Supper."²

John Gill argues against this idea, noting the difference in wording between the prayers as found here in Luke and the one offered in Matthew. He says, "That it was not intended as a prescribed set form, in so many words, is clear; since then it would not have been varied, as it is by the two evangelists, by whom it is recorded; for though they both agree in the main, as to the sense, yet not in the express words."³ He also argues that Jesus never intended the prayer to be a "set prayer" since the apostles never record using it as such throughout their long ministries.

Thus again it seems we have not yet hit on it. The disciples weren't looking for a special prayer as a "badge" of their Rabbi.

What Then? What Were the Disciples Asking?

Some key details in this incident (and in the parallel passage in Matthew) might help us answer the question. First, the question arose as the disciples observe Jesus Himself at prayer (Luke 11:1). We will come back to this, but the Lord's example must have impressed the disciples. As in all things Jesus did, He prayed in a way no one else ever prayed.

Second, the whole of Luke 11 is a lengthy instruction on prayer; the Lord's rehearsal of the Lord's Prayer is introductory and incomplete. It is almost as if the Lord is using verbal shorthand to remind them of this prayer given earlier in His ministry (and perhaps more than once, in His itinerate preaching). He reminds them of the model prayer and then moves to the parable of the friend arriving at midnight, prompting the host to implore bread of his neighbor incessantly, until the neighbor gets up and helps him. The Lord continues on this theme, stressing importunity and boldness in prayer.

Third, in the passage where we have the most complete version of the prayer (Matt. 6:9–13, part of the Sermon on the Mount), the Lord uses these words, "After this *manner* therefore pray. . . ." The Lord intends the prayer as a model, not a prescription. Luke supports this notion in Luke 11:2, "When ye pray"—commentator after commentator notes that this is an indefinite statement: "Whenever you pray. . . ." The instructions are general guidelines for all occasions of prayer.

The disciples want to pray as Jesus prays. He reminds them of the pattern and then proceeds with instructions on importunity and boldness. "And I say unto you, Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you" (Luke 11:9). Does this suggest something that is different about the Lord's act of prayer and our own?

The model prayer begins, "Our Father." When Jesus prayed, He entered the presence of God and spoke as if conversing with a friend. When Jesus closed out His ministry, He told His disciples that He no longer called them servants (*doulos*, slaves), but friends (John 15:15). The apostle Paul tells us that one benefit of salvation is access to the presence of God by faith (Rom. 5:2; Eph. 2:18). In Ephesians 3:12, our access is with "boldness and . . . confidence."

When the disciples were "but disciples," no doubt they lacked confidence in prayer. No doubt as they observed the Lord at prayer, He intimidated them by His grace, confidence, and power. No doubt they wished for the same kind of relationship with the Father that they saw the Son display (in his humanity).

Charles Hodge, in his *Systematic Theology*, offers seven requirements for "acceptable prayer." They are sincerity, reverence, humility, importunity, submission, faith, and the name (authority) of Christ.⁴ These requirements mark boldness and confidence to speak to our Creator as sons. Through church history, much abuse of all Christian practices served to keep individuals separated from God their Father. One blessing of the Reformation is a recovery of personal, earnest prayer. May we not let it escape us again.

"Prayer is the breath of a regenerate soul; as soon as a child is born into the world it cries, as soon as a soul is born again it prays."⁵



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¹ Note: I don't at all suggest that unbelievers are right in any of their thoughts concerning prayer. I am noting that unbelievers may express spiritual longings they don't really understand and call it prayer. This certainly is not prayer to the true God of heaven.

² Robert H. Stein, *Luke*, The New American Commentary, vol. 24 (Nashville, TN: Broadman Press, 1992), 324.

³ John Gill, *A Complete Body of Doctrinal and Practical Divinity: Or A System of Evangelical Truths, Deduced from the Sacred Scriptures*, New Edition, vol. 2 (Tegg & Company, 1839), 694.

⁴ Charles Hodge, *Systematic Theology*, vol. 3 (Oak Harbor, WA: Logos Research Systems, Inc., 1997), 701–5.

⁵ Gill, *Practical Divinity*, 2:682.

Why Is Praying So Hard?

Once upon a time, in a world far, far away churches had prayer meeting every week. People knew that coming to church in the middle of the week was primarily for praying, even though a few other activities took place as well. Everyone knew that praying was the purpose and the focus of the meeting. Well, something happened along the way. Gradually other activities, primarily for children and valuable in themselves, replaced the prayer meeting. Eventually more people came for the activities than the praying, and other people just stopped coming. Today not many churches have a church-wide prayer meeting. Although small groups meet for Bible study and praying, most people do not attend these small groups, and the experience of total church involvement in praying together and learning how to pray by listening to many different people pray has become almost extinct. This decline in prayer meeting in America has also occurred during the same period of time that the American culture has sunk into moral chaos.

How do you handle the complex, heartbreaking situations you face? What do you say to the wife whose husband uses much of his paycheck to buy alcohol? What do you say to the son or daughter whose father or mother is abusive, cruelly selfish, drugged, or drunk? What do you say to parents who find out their son's girlfriend is pregnant? What do you say to the young couple who find out

that their soon-to-be-born baby will have physical defects? What do you say to those who are disillusioned by other pastors and churches?

Although you may not know what to say, one option is always available: you can pray. The fastest way to help others is to pray. You may not be able to see them or talk to them, you may not know what to say to them, but you can pray for them.

Yet, we know this. We know the theology of praying. We read books about praying and have a wealth of knowledge about praying. We've heard people pray, we know the basic technique, and we know the words to use. We know the needs. So why is praying so hard? (Praying must be hard, since so few individuals and churches have regular times for praying.)

A Matter of Priority

The apostles decided they had two priorities: prayer and the ministry of the Word of God (Acts 6:4). Bible-believing churches have done well on the "ministry of the Word" part. Teaching and preaching the Bible is unquestionably an essential part of biblical ministry. However, we are not as consistent with our praying, either individually or as a church. Incorporating praying into our personal lives and church ministry is very difficult. People sometimes assume that pastors find praying easier since we have plenty of time and perhaps we are more "spiritual" than other people are. Yet praying requires just as much, if not more, effort and dedication from pastors as everyone else, since we have much freedom with our schedule and work. You may be surprised to learn that Sunday is the day on which I find it hardest to pray since the routine and schedule of Lord's Day is different from other days and much busier.

The difficulty of praying is not unique to our time. Christ encountered people who liked to hear but not do. That is one reason He said, "If ye love me, keep my commandments" (John 14:15; cf. vv. 21, 23). James wrote to people who liked to hear but not do, telling us to be remembering doers and not forgetting hearers (James 1:22). John the Baptist wanted to see evidence of repentance ("doing") before he baptized people (Matt. 3:8). The disciples did not ask, "Teach us *how* to pray"; they said, "Teach us *to* pray" (Luke 11:1). The "doing" has always been hard for us. Christ motivated people to pray by His own example and by His teaching. For example, He told His followers to

“ask, seek, and knock” in order to receive, find, and have the door opened to them (Matt. 7:7). Our asking is a key to getting answers. There is not a magic secret to praying. You just do it.

A Matter of Motivation

A strange aspect of praying is that once I start praying, I seem to have crossed a major hurdle. It's the *starting* to pray that's difficult. One reason that starting to pray is difficult is because we are always in a spiritual battle. Ephesians 6:10–20 explains the intense and personal spiritual battle between Satan and his demonic forces and God and believers. The specific dynamics of how this happens are not clear, but the result is clear: Just beginning to pray is hard. Perhaps some of this difficulty relates to *motivation*. Motivation is an internal desire often created by external circumstances. Since motivation comes from personal interest, what personal interest might the Lord create in order to motivate praying? Sickness, unemployment, personal loss, natural disaster? I have found that I am most motivated to pray when I face serious problems. In fact, I have created many of my own problems by not praying enough, or not praying when I should.

The praying of a properly motivated believer can accomplish much (James 5:16–18). Praying works best when that praying has persistence, personal interest, and some degree of emotional involvement. One key to motivated and energized praying is some personal connection to the need. If someone else's child is very sick, you are interested. However, if *your* child is very sick, then you are *very* interested. Your personal connection to the need is your motivation. When has your praying had intense emotional motivation? Probably when the need was very personal and very immediate.

So if motivation is one of the major incentives for praying, then how do you get motivated? Although the best long-term factor, motivating yourself is hard to accomplish. Usually external factors will be the key to motivation.

Consider national and world events over the last twenty or thirty years. Has any of this motivated us to pray? The tsunami of moral and sexual changes regarding marriage and gender, the horrible increase in violence, the astounding cruelty of people to each other, the lack of moral political leadership, and the dramatic rejection and ridicule of biblical Christianity—has any of this motivated us to pray? If not, then what more events wait in the future to convict our hearts and motivate us to obedience?

Psalms 107:9 tells us that God satisfies the thirsty soul and fills the hungry soul with what is good. How thirsty and hungry have you been recently? Perhaps part of the problem of many Christians is that we usually are not that thirsty or hungry. Your culture and hard work provide such a large degree of personal and family comfort that you usually live very comfortably and satisfied. When those circumstances change, suddenly you find motivation.

Several years ago, my wife and I visited our daughter and her husband for the birth of their first child. At the time, they lived in the southern California high desert, near Joshua Tree National Park. I rented a bicycle for a few days to ride in the park, which contains hundreds of acres of isolated desert. I brought two water bottles with me and froze both of them so that I would have cold water during the ride. However, in the heat, dry climate, and steep inclines I became very thirsty long before the frozen water had thawed enough to drink. I stood on the side of the road, with no one around, begging some drops of water to come out of the bottles. I was thirsty, and I was motivated.

E. M. Bounds wrote, “The church is looking for better methods; God is looking for better men.” I do not know the details of your personal prayer life. I suspect that you know you could do better. I suspect that you know you *must* do better. When we would rather watch TV for two hours than pray for ten minutes, we know we must do better. Praying is an investment in eternity. Isaiah 62:6–7 refers to watchmen on the walls of Jerusalem, but their work was not military but intensely spiritual and practical. The watchmen were never to be silent, never to seek rest for themselves, always to remind the Lord and not give the Lord any “rest” until He fulfilled His promises concerning Jerusalem. So one motivation for praying is knowing that the Lord includes us in the fulfilling of what He has already promised to do.

Praying can be difficult because we never actually see the Person to whom we are talking. In normal conversation, people can see each other or hear each other. Since God is invisible, praying is a one-way event without any physical person to look at while we pray. Because of this, praying requires a great amount of faith in order to keep praying with confidence.

Perhaps one reason that praying is difficult for us is that praying seems boring, routine, using the same words and clichés and always praying for the same people and needs. Part of our prayer ministry will always involve praying for the same people and needs since most of those people and needs are ongoing and unresolved, such as health concerns and unsaved people. One way to help motivate praying and reduce the “sameness” of praying is to pray the words of the Bible and adapt those words to particular needs and situations. For example, you can pray for specific people to develop the specific fruit of the Holy Spirit (Gal. 5:22–23) or adapt some of Paul's praying, usually mentioned at the beginning of his letters, to specific people. For example, you can pray the words of Ephesians 1:17–19 or Philippians 1:9–11 for yourself and people you know.

Praying will never be easy. The battle is often unseen, distractions are constant, and motivation sporadic. Nevertheless, we must have praying churches. In order to have praying churches, we ourselves must pray. Without this essential ministry, we accomplish nothing that will last.

Wally Morris has been the pastor of Charity Baptist Church, Huntington, Indiana, for twenty-four years.





Seasons of Prevailing Prayer

In Daniel 9:3 we learn that Daniel set his face to seek the Lord by prayer. Would you be willing to do the same?

The name “Daniel” means “God is my Judge.” The same is true for all of us; we do what we do in the sight of God. In 2 Chronicles 16:9 the prophet Hanani declared this important truth to King Asa: “For the eyes of the LORD run to and fro throughout the whole earth, to shew himself strong in the behalf of them whose heart is perfect toward him.” So set your face to seek the Lord. Enter into a season of prevailing prayer with the full knowledge that “the prayer of the upright is his delight” (Prov. 15:8). The Book of Daniel includes four references to seasons of prevailing prayer.

A Season of Corporate Prayer

In the first episode, the lives of Daniel and his friends were in danger. They gathered in *corporate prayer* (group prayer) to “desire mercies of the God of heaven.” The Lord answered, and “Daniel blessed the God of heaven” (Dan. 2:18–19).

A Season of Private Prayer

On another occasion, Daniel faced the threat of death alone. In a foolish decision, the king had decreed it to be

“politically incorrect” to pray to anyone but himself for thirty days. How did the man of God respond? “Now when Daniel knew that the writing was signed, he went into his house; and his windows being open in his chamber toward Jerusalem, he kneeled upon his knees three times a day, and prayed, and gave thanks before his God, as he did aforetime” (Dan. 6:10). This shows us the value of *consistent private prayer*. In this season of prevailing prayer, Daniel “believed in his God” (Dan. 6:23). The Lord delivered him from the lions’ den.

A Season of Intercessory Prayer

In the third season of prevailing prayer, Daniel carried a burden for his nation, Israel. His *intercessory prayer* sprang from his understanding of biblical prophecy. Daniel helps us to understand the answer to an important question: since biblical prophecy is true, what should we do? Daniel’s answer is in Daniel 9:3: “And I set my face unto the Lord God, to seek by prayer and supplication, with fasting, and sackcloth, and ashes.”

Charles McClain commented that Daniel 9:24–27 “contains perhaps the most significant prophecy for understanding most other OT and NT eschatological [prophetic] passages.”¹ “It has been described as ‘the ‘key’ to prophetic interpretation . . . the ‘backbone’ of prophecy.”² “Desmond

Ford says that it is not only the devotional heart of the book but also contains ‘the crown jewels’ of Old Testament prophecy.”³ This crucial prophecy came between two seasons of prevailing prayer.

The practical application for today leaps off the page in Daniel 9:1–3:

In the first year of Darius the son of Ahasuerus, of the seed of the Medes, which was made king over the realm of the Chaldeans; In the first year of his reign I Daniel understood by books the number of the years, whereof the word of the LORD came to Jeremiah the prophet, that he would accomplish seventy years in the desolations of Jerusalem. And I set my face unto the Lord God, to seek by prayer and supplication, with fasting, and sackcloth, and ashes.

When Daniel saw the political movements of his day (v. 1), he earnestly studied biblical prophecies (v. 2), and set his heart for a season of prevailing prayer (v. 3). In our day we are also watching significant changes among the nations and their leaders. What did Daniel choose to do when he saw that the Medes and Persians had conquered the Babylonians? According to verse 2, he pored over the Old Testament prophecies. There he found the prophecy recorded in Jeremiah 29:10–13:

For thus saith the LORD, That after seventy years be accomplished at Babylon I will visit you, and perform my good word toward you, in causing you to return to this place. For I know the thoughts that I think toward you, saith the LORD, thoughts of peace, and not of evil, to give you an expected end. Then shall ye call upon me, and ye shall go and pray unto me, and I will hearken unto you. And ye shall seek me, and find me, when ye shall search for me with all your heart.

Consequently, Daniel the prophet obeyed God’s Word and began to call upon the Lord, seeking Him with all his heart. Now we know what we ought to do because biblical prophecy is true!

A Season of Persistent Prayer

There is one more reference to a season of prevailing prayer in Daniel 10. Once again, it connects with understanding biblical prophecy.

In those days I Daniel was mourning three full weeks. I ate no pleasant bread, neither came flesh nor wine in my mouth, neither did I anoint myself at all, till three whole weeks were fulfilled (Dan. 10:2–3).

In this season of prevailing prayer, we see the value of *persistent prayer*. Consider the answer that Daniel received in Daniel 10:12–13:

Then said he unto me, Fear not, Daniel: for from the first day that thou didst set thine heart to understand, and to chasten thyself before thy God, thy words were heard, and I am come for thy words. But the prince of the kingdom of Persia withstood me one and twenty days: but, lo, Michael, one of the chief princes, came to help me; and I remained there with the kings of Persia.

Consider three of these phrases carefully. Each of these was spoken by the heavenly messenger sent by God:

- **“From the first day”** that Daniel set his heart to understand, God heard him. Set your heart on this certainty. Yours can be a season of prevailing prayer from the very first day.
- **“I am come for thy words.”** God’s answer came as a direct result of Daniel’s persistent, prevailing prayer. As New Testament believers, we have even greater confidence. Because Jesus gave Himself for our sins, died and rose again, we can make our bold appeals before the throne of grace (Heb. 4:16). “And this is the confidence that we have in him, that, if we ask any thing according to his will, he heareth us” (1 John 5:14). Daniel’s answer came because of his prayerful words; your answer will come in the same fashion.
- **“But the prince of the kingdom of Persia withstood me one and twenty days.”** Make no mistake: prayer is spiritual warfare. This is a reference to the conflict between the demons and the angels. This ongoing clash is the unseen battle behind current events. Those who know how to pray are like the highly trained Special Forces in today’s military.

If you truly set your face to seek the Lord, you can expect all kinds of resistance. Take heart from this trouble! You are getting through to God. A. B. Simpson wrote, “Many of our battles are fought in view of heaven alone. . . . Have you not felt, beloved, in some quiet hour, in the secret of your closet, that you were going through a decisive battle which no mortal saw? Within the silent walls of your chamber an issue was being decided which would affect all eternity.”⁴ C. H. Spurgeon wrote, “He who knows how to overcome with God in prayer has heaven and earth at his disposal.” From the very first day that you set your heart to pray, you know that God hears you. One of the greatest privileges you have is to know that the answer comes “for your words.” So enter into this spiritual warfare and persevere in these seasons of prevailing prayer.

Gordon Dickson is the senior pastor of Calvary Baptist Church in Findlay, Ohio. This article is an excerpt from his devotional booklet on seasons of prevailing prayer.



¹ Charles E. McClain, “Daniel’s Prayer in Chapter 9,” *Detroit Baptist Seminary Journal*, Volume 09:1 (Fall 2004), p. 266.

² Ibid., citing James Montgomery Boice, *Daniel* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1989), pp. 103–4.

³ Ibid., citing a quote from Paul D. Feinberg, “An Exegetical and Theological Study of Daniel 9:24–27,” *Tradition and Testament: Essays in Honor of Charles Lee Feinberg*, ed. John S. Feinberg and Paul D. Feinberg (Chicago: Moody Press, 1981), p. 189.

⁴ A. B. Simpson, *A Larger Christian Life*, Chapter 6, “More than Conquerors.”

Upreach

The Local Church Reaching to God in Prayer

In the fall of 2015 God began teaching me the truth of a Puritan prayer:

Let me learn by paradox that the way down is the way up, . . . that to bear the cross is to wear the crown, that to give is to receive, that the valley is the place of vision.*

We generally speak of the valley as a destination to pass through from time to time. We're eager to glean brief lessons as we zip through it on our way to the mountaintop. Sometimes, however, God lovingly holds our souls to the turf of the valley floor; sometimes He plunges us yet further down so that His waves crash relentlessly above (Ps. 42:7). For some, these seasons linger interminably beyond their imaginations; these cry out in despondent anguish, "O LORD, how long?" (Ps. 6:3). God occasionally fastens His children to dust and to desperation (Ps. 102:1–11) so that they will bear the very marks of Christ Jesus Himself (Col. 1:24–26), the Man of sorrows, the One well-acquainted with grief (Isa. 53:3).

Although perpetual, emotional anguish does not typically define the believer's life (Rom. 15:13), the New Testament anticipates that valley-like language best illus-

trates certain aspects of the Christian journey. Jesus preaches, "Blessed are the poor in spirit: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven" (Matt. 5:3). He says that following Him means daily crucifixion (Luke 9:23), perpetual uncertainty in everyday affairs (Matt. 8:20), and certain abuse from the world that hates Him (John 15:18).

Those who serve Christ vocationally tend to frequent the valley of vision. Paul commands his protégé Timothy to endure suffering (2 Tim. 4:5); Jesus sent His disciples "as sheep in the midst of wolves" (Matt. 10:16). The landscape of church history is littered with downcast souls. A favorite story is that of Martin Luther who, after suffering through an extended bout with despair, rose to his feet and, in the sort of sanctified defiance that typified Luther, demanded, "Come, let us sing that Psalm [130], 'Out of the depths,' in derision of the devil."

Crying Out for Air

It is a sad commentary on my sinful soul that God had to hold me in the valley to teach me to pray. Prior to the valley, prayer was a helpful, albeit necessary, spiritual endeavor. Once in the valley, prayer became the very air my soul breathed. But not initially. And not just prayer in a general sense. No, I needed prayer empowered by the gospel's

most robust declarations. Deep emotional anguish is not the path for every believer, but it was God's journey for me.

Before I could cry out with certainty that God would hear me, I had to learn the gospel-centeredness of true intercession, namely, that my standing before God is secured by none other than Christ's once-for-all sacrifice (Heb. 9:12). God the Judge promises never to throw my blood-red sins back into my face (Rom. 8:1) because Jesus always lives to make intercession for me (Heb. 7:25). Tempted as I was (and am) to gaze upon my sin, the Spirit of the living God restrains my once captive, fearful heart and teaches me to cry Abba (Rom. 8:15) to the Father who has thundered my justification and our resulting peace (Rom. 5:1). The Spirit not only prevents me from turning my face in shame from God's blinding holiness but intercedes for me with inexpressible pathos at the very moment my heart and my mind fail (1 John 3:20; Rom. 8:26).

I am commanded to charge into the throne room of the self-existent King (Heb. 4:16) because God, in His immeasurable grace, grants double divine representation at His holy bar. And now this God invites me as an adopted prince (Eph. 1:5) to join the intercessory choir of the Triune God (Zeph. 3:17).

Duly empowered by God's almighty declarations, I felt ever more comfortable in His eager fellowship. Soon, God began opening new vistas of prayer from the valley floor: I could pray in all the different ways the Bible commends. I began exploring biblical prayers and—you'd think I would have learned this by now—I was blown away at the sheer variety of biblical prayer.

Just as Levitical priests recited memorized blessings upon the people (Num. 6:24–27), so Moses wrote a hymn that was to stand as an ever-memorialized prayer in song (Deut. 31:19–32:47). As patterned and programmatic prayers flow from both the Pentateuch and the Psalter, so God commends the short, spontaneous prayers of faithful pillars such as Nehemiah (Neh. 2:4) and fallen prisoners such as Samson (Judges 16:28–30).

Whether practiced or impromptu, prayer is often helplessness on display. Mighty King Jehoshaphat publicly confessed before the women and the children of his realm, "We have no might. . . . neither know we what to do: but our eyes are upon thee" (2 Chron. 20:12). Jesus taught us to pray for our "daily bread" (Matt. 6:11), and Paul confesses that often "we know not what we should pray for" (Rom. 8:26). Believers may boldly display their most profound weaknesses, for not only does God know our needs before we pray (Matt. 6:8), but He delights to pour strength through those very debilitants (2 Cor. 12:5–10).

Prayer, furthermore, is always communal. For much of conservative Protestant Christianity, prayer is a monologue from sinner to God. Yet the Spirit fills the Bible's pages with divine reciprocation: Jesus receives His answer at the end of His Garden

agony (Matt. 26:44–46); the church at Antioch heard from the Spirit of God while they were worshipping and fasting (Acts 13:1–2); John was "in the Spirit on the Lord's day" when he received the unveiling of Jesus Christ (Rev. 1:10). However exceptional these examples may be, read how God answered Rebekah's inquiry (Gen. 25:22–23), meditate over how God spoke to Hannah's hurt through Eli's judgmental interruption (1 Sam. 1:10–17), and ponder how God pitied Hezekiah's heart-wrenching lament over a life apparently cut short (2 Kings 20:1–6). By communion, the Bible portrays a fellowship akin to Christ's presence in a real, albeit spiritual, way during the Lord's Supper. No, God will likely not respond audibly as He did at Antioch, but we are nevertheless inside the Spirit's interceding grace at every moment of prayer (Eph. 6:18; Rom. 8:26–27).

Like the Cry of a Child

And so, empowered by the immensity of God's gospel promise and inspired by the sweep of biblical example, our church began monthly prayer services called Upreach, taken from 1 Timothy 2:8: "I will therefore that men pray every where, lifting up holy hands." During Upreach, we lift our hearts to pray in all the ways the Lord commends: praise, public confession, intercession, testifying, declaration, singing, supplication, and more. And even though our people are not keen hand-raisers, the picture is clear enough.

We joke that we make it up as we go. Sometimes we ask an individual to lead in a lengthy, prewritten prayer; sometimes we encourage multiple, short prayers that last no longer than five to ten seconds. We prefer to pray in larger groups of twenty to thirty (rather than twos or threes) to keep a whole-body feel. We use biblical prayers as a guide for the evening, and we always remember that singing is prayer. We never pressure people to pray aloud, but the exercise has led to a surprising number of requests for help in overcoming fear of public intercession.

Tempting as it is to provide more concrete examples, I think it would be counterproductive, as every church should have a prayer format unique to itself. Just as a mom knows the unique cry of her child, so the Savior is attuned to the individual voice of every one of His churches (Rev. 2:1). I would strongly recommend that every pastor discover a prayer service unique to his fold as he attempts to lead his people in "all [types of] prayer" (Eph. 6:18).

Yes, he'll make it up as he goes. Yes, his people will have to break from long-worn prayer patterns. Yes, his people will be made uncomfortable. And yes, God will bless immensely.

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Whether
practiced or
impromptu,
prayer is often
helplessness on
display.

**The Valley of Vision: A Collection of Puritan Prayers and Devotions, ed. Arthur Bennett, XX.*

What If God Answered

Cogitate on the quality and quantity of the personal prayers you utter each day.

They're probably a valuable part of your morning devotional time. Then there are your pre-meal prayers when you thank the Lord before digging into that stack of chocolate-chip pancakes at breakfast, your fish tacos and apple juice at lunch, and don't forget that Tater Tot casserole for dinner. Your average day probably includes a healthy smattering of prayers, and then you say one more right before bed. We produce prayers filled with praise, gratitude, confession, and requests—prayer, prayer, everywhere. Does God answer prayer? Yes, of course He does! That's easy. Jesus made bold declarations such as, "Every one that asketh receiveth; and he that seeketh findeth; and to him that knocketh it shall be opened" (Luke 11:10). And remember in John 14:13–14 when He said, "And whatsoever ye shall ask in my name, that will I do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son. If ye shall ask any thing in my name, I will do it." No questions about it, God answers prayer.

That's not to say God gives us everything we ask for when we ask for it. How many of your church family's pleas for healing from cancer, the salvation of lost loved ones, or the birth of a healthy child have not been answered with a "yes"? But our God is a good and loving Father who in His infinite wisdom can see the complete picture from every angle and always does what is best. (See Luke 11:13 if you have any doubts.) At the same time, our Father places some requirements on us when we come to Him in prayer. The Bible addresses our need to pray according to His will (1 John 5:14–15), to pray in the name of Jesus (John 14:13–14), to pray in faith (James 1:6), and in obedience (Ps. 66:18–19).

With those clarifications in mind, a careful study of Scripture leaves us with no doubt God answers prayer. So why ask the ridiculous question, "What if God answered prayer?" He does, but I don't think we always pray as if we believe it. James chided his readers, "Ye have not, because ye ask not" (James 4:2). I would go on to say, "Ye ask not because ye doubt God will answer." Because if we

did believe God would answer, shouldn't our prayer life be better than what it is? Asking, "What if God answered prayer?" sounds ridiculous, but if Christians unanimously affirm God answers prayer, shouldn't our prayer lives look a little different? Shouldn't they be better? I daresay our prayer lives would improve immediately and drastically if we were to pray as if we truly believe God answers prayer.

Why do you go through the effort of filing income taxes each year? For one reason, every rational person recognizes there is a steep cost for failing to do so. There is a second reason as well: you believe there's a strong incentive to file because (you hope) there is a refund with your name on it. In a way, these beliefs impact your life. Our beliefs on prayer should impact, even transform, our prayer life. You should experience at least four prayer-life transformations if you believe God answers prayer.

Transformation #1: Your Prayers Will Become Your Priority.

I'm going to illustrate each of these transformations with a fictional astronaut named Douglas. (Because . . . why not?) Douglas is orbiting the earth alone in his spacecraft, and a serious malfunction has occurred. A critical component has failed, and poor Douglas has no idea what to do. You see, his turboencabulator has failed, and without it, all hopes of returning to earth are dashed. What is our astronaut's first logical order of business going to be? He's going to contact mission control with a good old, "Houston, we have a problem." Why not contact someone else? Why not just brood? The reason he immediately picks up the hotline to mission control is that he knows they're the best qualified entity to help. When it comes to something we need, shouldn't our first order of business be to go to the best qualified entity to help us? Paul seemed to think so when he wrote Philippians 4:6 ("Be careful for nothing; but in every thing by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God"). The belief that God answers prayer should stir us to make prayer our first response, not a last-ditch effort.

Prayer?

Transformation #2: Your Prayers Will Become More Specific.

Paul says in Philippians 4:6 to make our requests known to God “by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving.” Supplications are urgent requests. Our astronaut, Douglas, has a supplication. His turboencabulator needs fixing. Don’t you think his supplication to mission control will be very specific? He can’t just say, “Houston, please bless my spacecraft.” He’s going to be precise and put careful thought into how he communicates every detail. The “vain repetitions” Jesus proscribes in Matthew 6:7 point out how needful it is to think when we pray. The belief that God answers prayer should stir us to pray precise prayers.

Transformation #3: Your Prayers Will Become More Frequent.

Douglas, the astronaut, is going to update mission control every step of the way to keep them informed and to express his dependency. His situation is dire and hopeless without them. He’s not necessarily talking to them every second of every day. Maybe he has to wait until he orbits into position, or maybe he has to conserve power (as people are apt to do when they have a broken turboencabulator). Nevertheless, as much as possible, he’s constantly, continually—you could even say “unceasingly”—praying. There’s a good verse that speaks to this, isn’t there? “Pray without ceasing” (1 Thess. 5:17). The belief that God answers prayer should stir us to pray more.

Transformation #4: Your Prayers Will Become More Passionate.

How much value do you think Douglas is going to place on those transmissions beamed between his spacecraft and mission control? Do you think those transmissions will bore him? Will he daydream and fall asleep during his requests for assistance and guidance? Of course not; those communications are too valuable to him. He knows his call for assistance receives a response of doing everything

possible to bring him home. His dependence is enormous. Assuming he gets back (and for the sake of a happy ending, let’s say he does), imagine his attitude and expressions of praise for mission control. We would expect it to be immense. He knows he couldn’t have gotten home without them. Prayer performed with the belief that God answers will be passionate, not boring. Think of Jesus’ parable of the widow and her persistent pleas in Luke 18:1–8. Do you remember Joshua’s prayer for the sun to stand still during battle against the Amorites in Joshua 10? Was Joshua bored? How about Elijah’s unrecorded prayer in the context of 1 Kings 17 that the Lord would constrain the rain? His earnest and fervent prayer is a lesson for us in James 5:16 where we read, “The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much.” The belief that God answers prayer should stir us to pray with passion.

Like Elijah’s prayer, praying from the vantage point of confidence can avail much. Believing God answers prayer will impact your prayer life. Douglas the astronaut always knew he could talk to mission control, but it meant much more to him when he realized he had a need that only they could meet. God answers prayer. If you doubt it, think of all the prayers He has answered: all those meals He blessed, all the times He granted you those traveling mercies, the time He saved you, the times He’s saved someone your church family was praying for. How about all those times He’s has forgiven your sins and restored you to fellowship with Him? Consider the innumerable number of times His will has been done and His name has been glorified. Consider how you should pray to the God who actually does answer prayer. It should stir you to put a premium on the words you are speaking to your Father. So before you pray, evaluate your attitude toward prayer by asking yourself, “What if God answers this?”

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MEN & WOMEN PRAYING TOGETHER GOING BEYOND SCRIPTURE

Sometimes we go too far.

As we endeavor to uphold what Scripture teaches, we can make applications that not only go beyond Scripture but also counteract other things that Scripture affirms. For instance, when we endeavor to remain distant from sinful influences, we may inadvertently isolate ourselves from meaningful relationships with nonbelievers. When we do this, we withdraw ourselves to a degree that we become unable to befriend and influence nonbelievers for Christ.

Sometimes we go beyond Scripture in another unfortunate way. In our desire to follow biblical church leadership principles, we restrict appropriate involvement from women in worship and ministry. To be sure, the New Testament affirms that men should serve as leaders in church worship and ministry, assigning to them the roles of pastor and deacon (1 Tim. 3:2, 4, 12). It also assigns definitive teaching ministry to men, in church gatherings with men and women together (1 Tim. 2:11–12). However, we should not apply these principles to a degree in which

we suppress the many necessary and appropriate ways in which women should be free to contribute.

Considering Second Temple Judaism

When a church reaches beyond Scripture to restrict the involvement of women in worship, it resembles the extra-biblical approach of Second Temple Judaism. During this historical period Jewish rabbis segregated women from men in temple worship. Though they permitted women to participate in worship activities at the temple, they confined them to a space called “the Court of the Women.” Both men and women could enter this space, but only men could move to other areas (though women could proceed further to offer sacrifices). Furthermore, rabbis prohibited women from participating in public prayers at the temple, relegating them to private prayers at home.

Knowing this background, it is fascinating to observe that the Old Testament neither taught nor encouraged these practices.¹ For instance, God did not prescribe the Court of the Women and the segregated protocol that accompanied it.² As such, this serves as an example of how Jewish rabbis enforced extraneous religious traditions as being the commands of God (Matt. 15:9). Out of a desire

for male leadership as taught in Scripture, it is possible that churches today commit the same error. We may go beyond what Scripture teaches and restrict women from legitimate participation in worship.

Prayer is one way that women may involve themselves in worship, and this includes public prayer in the company of men. In support of this practice, we should recognize that the New Testament provides strong evidence for women praying alongside men in congregational settings. Therefore, rather than disrupting the biblical guidelines for male leadership in church, it harmonizes with them.

Examining New Testament Precedent

Early church history, as recorded by Luke, reveals that men and women prayed together. A notable example of this occurred prior to Pentecost when men and women prayed together in a shared room (Acts 1:14). Here Luke reports that the eleven disciples prayed “with the women.” This is significant because the Greek preposition translated as “with” means something more than merely being “among” or “in the presence of” the women. He is not saying that the men prayed while the women listened as silent partners. He is saying instead that these men and women were praying together in an equal and vocal way. The men prayed, and the women prayed too. To confirm this understanding, we should recognize that the same meaning applies when Luke mentions that the disciples and the women also prayed “with his brethren” (the brothers of Jesus). So then, in the same way that the disciples prayed, the brothers of Jesus and the believing women prayed also. They did this together in the same assembly.

Subsequently, Luke reports that both men and women converted to Christ, and these believers continued gathering together afterward on a regular basis (Acts 2:41–42). As they gathered (and not in gender-segregated groups), they continued engaging in apostolic teaching, fellowship, breaking bread, and prayer. This indicates that they participated in these activities as a mixed group. Just as women did not fellowship in segregated gatherings alone, neither did they pray in separate groups alone.

Beyond this precedent found in the transitional Book of Acts, the New Testament epistles provide further confirmation that men and women prayed aloud together. This demonstrates that God intended for cooperative prayer to be a normal, ongoing feature of congregational worship. In a letter to the church at Corinth, Paul observed that women were praying together with men in church gatherings (1 Cor. 11:5, 13). Although elsewhere in this letter he cited a variety of phenomena happening in the church that he corrected as being wrong, he made no such correction on this point. He neither corrected men and women for praying together nor warned them against doing so. In this way, he affirmed that joint prayer was normal behavior for a church and not an aberration.

Following New Testament Guidelines

As we recognize New Testament affirmation for men and women praying together, we must also recognize that

Scripture accompanies this practice with important guidelines. For instance, in 1 Corinthians Paul accompanied his recognition of this practice with some guidance for upholding biblical principles (11:2–16). Whether you understand this guidance to require that ladies wear head coverings, keep long hair, or reflect a submissive spirit in some other way, the guidelines themselves assume that women should pray together with men.

In a later letter Paul urged Timothy to lead the men and women of the church at Ephesus in regular corporate prayer (1 Tim. 2:8–10). Here again he provided basic guidelines for doing so. First, he provided instructions for men. He taught that they should approach such prayer with a heart that is morally pure, free from anger, and free from arguments within the church (1 Tim. 2:8). Second, he provided instructions for women. They should participate in a way that minimizes visual distraction, whether in sensual or materialistic ways (1 Tim. 2:9–10; cf. 1 Pet. 3:3–4).

Encouraging Mutual Participation

Knowing this, pastors should allow both women and men to pray aloud in corporate worship. In fact, they should do more than *allow* women to pray. They should *encourage* them to pray, *just as* they encourage men to pray. As they encourage this mutual participation, they should also teach the church to follow the biblical guidelines that Paul provided to the churches in Greece and Asia Minor.

When a church requires women to remain silent during times of congregational prayer, it prevents them from making a crucial contribution that God commends and silences genuine expressions of worship. No matter how well intended, this miscalculation prevents the church from becoming mature in Christ and effective in ministry as God intends, preventing every member from making God-given contributions (Eph. 4:16). However, when a church encourages men and women to pray aloud in gathered worship, it follows a biblical pattern that upholds the priesthood of every believer and the equal significance of every member (Gal. 3:27; 1 Pet. 2:5). To this end, a pastor should consider whether he is encouraging men and women to participate actively in corporate prayer.

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¹ Though God assigned to men the priestly leadership roles in the temple, He neither restricted nor segregated female participation in general worship activities (Num. 8:5–6; 1 Chron. 23:28).

² God provided David with the blueprints for the first temple (1 Chron. 28:11–12). These featured two courtyards, an inner space reserved for priestly activity, and a large outer space available for everyone else who came to worship, including men and women (2 Kings 21:5; 2 Chron. 4:9; 1 Kings 6:36). When Herod expanded the second temple of Zerubbabel, the Jews added the Court of the Women and incorporated the rabbinic, segregated protocol.

Praying for Victory

“This Book will keep you from sin, and sin will keep you from this Book.” I’m sure you’ve heard that one before, and there is a lot of truth to it. The Word of God is more than mere words on a page: it is the voice of God to our souls, admonishing, correcting, encouraging, guiding—a lamp unto our feet and a light unto our path. Spiritual victory over sin, the flesh, and the devil comes by absorbing and living God’s message to us through His Word.

However, it is quite possible to maintain regular Bible-reading habits while neglecting the practice of faithful prayer. We do so to our detriment—prayer is likewise a vital component of spiritual victory. In preparing for this issue of *FrontLine*, I came across this quote from the Presbyterian Charles Hodge.

Means of grace, as before stated, are those means which God has ordained for the end of communicating the life-giving and sanctifying influences of the Spirit to the souls of men. Such are the word and sacraments, and such is prayer. It has not only the relation which any other cause has to the end for which it was appointed, and thus is the condition on which the blessings of God, providential or spiritual, are bestowed; but it brings us near to God, who is the source of all good. Fellowship with Him, converse with Him, calls into exercise all gracious affections, reverence, love, gratitude, submission, faith, joy, and devotion. When the soul thus draws near to God, God

draws near to it, manifests his glory, sheds abroad his love, and imparts that peace which passes all understanding. Our Lord says, “If a man love me, he will keep my words: and my Father will love him, and we will come unto him, and make our abode with him.” (John 14:23.) In such fellowship, the soul must be holy and must be blessed.*

As Baptists, we are not comfortable *at all* with the term “sacraments,” and the term “means of grace” makes many of us kind of queasy. Can we lay aside that discomfort and get some benefit from what Hodge says?

Hodge says that prayer “brings us near to God, who is the source of all good.” There can be no doubt about it; prayer is that part of our devotional life where we participate actively in communion with God. Bible reading is very important. I always emphasize it every New Year with our church people, setting out Bible-reading schedules and preaching on developing personal reading habits. However, Bible reading is only half of a devotional experience. It is the part where we are passive, and God speaks to us. What kind of relationship would we have with our spouse if they were the only one who ever did the talking? (Perhaps some wives or husbands might like it!) Seriously, though, no one could call a one-way communication scenario much of a relationship.

Jesus said to His disciples in Gethsemane, “Watch and pray, that ye enter not into temptation: the spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak” (Matt. 26:41). In the midst

Continued on page 26



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SOUND WORDS

HOLD FAST THE FORM OF SOUND WORDS—2 TIMOTHY 1:13

First Partaker

I Have Somewhat to Say unto Thee

An excellent title for a sermon: *somewhat to say unto thee* (Luke 7:40). The nineteenth-century English minister J. C. Ryle seized it for his first published sermon in the mid-1840s. It proved to be almost prophetic. Ryle's writing ministry would eventually stretch to over fifty years.

This is the second of two columns attempting to arouse enthusiastic interest in the ministry and writings of J. C. Ryle. Spurgeon spoke of his *profound regard* for Ryle and called him *an evangelical champion . . . one of the bravest and best of men*, even while disagreeing sternly with Ryle's remaining within the Church of England (*The Sword and Trowel*, 1879).

The previous article discussed Ryle's *Recent Biographers*, his *Writings*, and his *Pivotal Experiences*. This sequel will expand on his *Writings*, particularly those most popular in his own day: his tracts. Ryle wrote over two hundred of these pamphlets, ranging in length from just a few pages to over fifty or sixty (available at tracts.ukgo.com/john_charles_ryle.htm).

The word "tract" suggests to us an evangelistic content and appeal. But Ryle's tracts dealt with all manner of biblical topics, both theological and practical. Eventually seventy-five of them were republished as separate chapters in eight volumes entitled *Home Truths*. Later, many of these same chapters were rearranged and published under more provocative titles such as *Knots Untied*, *Old Paths*, *Practical Religion*, and *Holiness*.

Holiness remains Ryle's most widely read work. I introduced J. I. Packer's edition of it (complete with

seventy-five pages of biography) in the earlier article. *Knots Untied* concerns debated subjects within the Church of England: the nature of the church, the ministry, baptism, worship, the Lord's Day, etc. *Old Paths* takes up major doc-

trines such as the inspiration of Scripture, sin, justification, and the work of the Holy Spirit. *Practical Religion*, on the other hand, contains nineteen tracts concerning the daily duties, dangers, and experiences of true Christians. Of this work J. I. Packer wrote when it was republished in 1959, *This book is what it professes to be—a manual on the practice of Christianity. It seems to me to be one of the best there is. . . . One has to go back to the Puritans to find the great central themes of the Christian life expounded with such depth, realism and searching power.*

In this article I want to sample chapters (tracts) from three of these books. There will be the unavoidable loss of context, sequencing, pacing, and climax that have so much to do with a particular paragraph's impact in any written work. Even without these benefits, I hope that there will be something here that sparks interest, perhaps even finds its way into one or two of our sermons as a reinforcing, pungent quotation.

Practical Religion

Practical Religion is my favorite Ryle title (other than his commentary on the Gospel of John). In it Ryle treats topics seldom explored ("Self-Inquiry," "Self-Exertion," "Reality," and "Formality") as well as others perennially emphasized by nearly any preacher ("Prayer," "Bible Reading," "Charity," etc.).

The opening tract, entitled "Self-Inquiry," is a searching evangelistic appeal to churchgoers (like those in our own pews). Ryle asks ten questions, purposely worded to unsettle smug, unfounded confidence regarding one's spiritual state. *Do we ever think about our souls at all?*, Ryle begins. If so, *do we ever do anything about our souls? Or are we trying to satisfy our consciences with a mere formal religion?*

"The husbandman that laboureth must be first partaker of the fruits"
(2 Tim. 2:6)

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Ryle's fourth question asks *whether we have received the forgiveness of our sins*. But he clarifies that he's asking for more than intellectual assent. He wants to know whether we "feel" our forgiveness. He tells the testimony of an old Christian woman about this.

The beginning of eternal life in my soul was a conversation I had with an old gentleman, who came to visit my father when I was only a child. He took me by the hand one day, and said, "My dear child, my life is nearly over, and you will probably live many years after I am gone. But never forget two things. One is, that there is such a thing as having our sins forgiven while we live. The other is, that there is such a thing as knowing and feeling that we are forgiven." I thank God I have never forgotten his words.

Repeated acts of confessing Christ will produce habits. Habits once formed will produce a settled character. Our characters once known, we shall be saved much trouble. Men will know what to expect from us, and will count it no strange thing if they see us living the lives of separate peculiar people.

How is it with us? Ryle asks. Let us not rest till we "know and feel" . . . that we are forgiven.

A timelessly relevant chapter in *Practical Religion* is bluntly titled "**The World.**" Based on the text "Come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord" (2 Cor. 6:17), it begins with a serious attempt to demonstrate *that the world is a source of great danger to the soul*. Ryle continues, *While many avoid the subject of separation from the world, and many positively hate it, and many are puzzled by it, give me your attention while I try to show you "the thing as it is."*

I appeal to any old Christian who keeps his eyes open, and knows what is going on in the Churches. I ask him whether it be not true that nothing damages the cause of religion so much as "the world"? It is not open sin, or open unbelief, which robs Christ of His professing servants, so much as the love of the world, the fear of the world, the cares of the world, the business of the world, the money of the world, the pleasures of the world, and the desire to keep in with the world. This is the great rock on which thousands of young people are continually making shipwreck. They do not object to any article of the Christian faith. They do not deliberately choose evil

and openly rebel against God. They hope somehow to get to heaven at last; and they think it proper to have some religion. But they cannot give up their idol: they must have the world. And so after running well and bidding fair for heaven, while boys and girls, they turn aside when they become men and women, and go down the broad way which leads to destruction. They begin with Abraham and Moses, and end with Demas and Lot's wife.

What follows are three sections in which Ryle attempts to clarify what separation from the world is *not* (six points), what separation from the world is (six points), and *secrets of real victory over the world*. Among the latter are *the habit of boldly confessing Christ*.

Repeated acts of confessing Christ will produce habits. Habits once formed will produce a settled character. Our characters once known, we shall be saved much trouble. Men will know what to expect from us, and will count it no strange thing if they see us living the lives of separate peculiar people.

The Upper Room

This volume contains two tracts that have been frequently republished as separate titles. One is "**The Duties of Parents,**" appearing in recent decades in booklets of around fifty pages in length. The other is "**Thoughts for Young Men.**" Many publishers have reprinted it, including Banner of Truth in a small book of ninety-six pages.

Containing seventeen points, "**The Duties of Parents**" is a stellar example of scriptural "tough love." If you would train your children rightly, Ryle begins, *train them in the way they should go, not in the way that they would. Remember children are born with a decided bias towards evil, and therefore if you let them choose for themselves, they are certain to choose wrong.*

There's the "tough." But here's the second point: *Train up your child with all tenderness, affection and patience.* There's the love. And here's one of the ways in which he argues for it.

Few are to be found, even among grown-up people, who are not more easy to draw than to drive. There is that in all our minds which rises in arms against compulsion; we set up our backs and stiffen our necks at the very idea of forced obedience. We are like young horses in the hands of a breaker: handle them kindly, and make much of them, and by and by you may guide them with thread; use them roughly and violently, and it will be many a month before you get the mastery of them at all.

Now children's minds are cast in much the same mold as our own. Sternness and severity of manner child them and throw them back. It shuts up their hearts, and you will weary yourself to find the door. But let them only see that you have an affectionate feeling towards them,—that you are really desirous to make them happy and do them

good,—that if you punish them, it is intended for their profit, and that, like the pelican, you would give your heart's blood to nourish their souls; let them see this, I say, and they will soon be all your own. But they must be wooed with kindness if their attention is ever to be won. . . . Love is one grand secret of successful training. Anger and harshness may frighten, but they will not persuade the child that you are right.

Ryle's eighth point addresses a sensitive issue with some young parents whose philosophy of childrearing appears to be somewhat reactionary against what they regard to have been the heavy-handedness of their own upbringing.

I have heard it said by some, that you should require nothing of children which they cannot understand; that you should explain and give a reason for everything you desire them to do. I warn you solemnly against such a notion. I tell you plainly, I think it an unsound and rotten principle. No doubt it is absurd to make a mystery of everything you do, and there are many things which it is well to explain to children, in order that they may see they are reasonable and wise. . . .

Reason with your child if you are so disposed, at certain times, but never forget to keep him in mind (if you really love him) that he is but a child after all,—that he thinks as a child, he understands as a child, and therefore must not expect to know the reason of everything at once.

Set before him the example of Isaac, in the day when Abraham took him to offer him on Mount Moriah (Gen. 22). He asked his father that single question, "Where is the lamb for a burnt-offering?" and he got no answer but this, "God will provide Himself a lamb." How, or where, or whence, or in what manner, or by what means,—all this Isaac was not told; but the answer was enough. He believed that it would be well, because his father said so, and he was content.

Tell your children, too, that we must all be learners in our beginnings,—that there is an alphabet to be mastered in every kind of knowledge,—that the best horse in the world had need once to be broken,—that a day will come when they will see the wisdom of all your training. But in the meantime if you say a thing is right, it must be enough for them,—they must believe you and be content.

"Thoughts for Young Men" is so widely published and universally known that I won't say much about it here. However, one subpoint of the first section ("Reasons for Exhorting Young Men") calls attention to something we readily acknowledge but seem so easily to forget.

The devil uses special diligence to destroy the souls of young men, and they seem not to know it.

Satan knows well that you will make up the next generation, and therefore he employs every art betimes to make you his own. . . . You are those on whom he plays off all his choicest temptations. He spreads his net with the most watchful carefulness to entangle your hearts. He baits his traps with the sweetest morsels to get you into his power. . . . You are the grand object of his attack.

He would fain make you think evil good, and good evil. He will paint and gild and dress up sin in order to make you fall in love with it. He will deform and misrepresent and caricature true religion in order to make you take a dislike to it. . . . He will promise you everything, as he did to Christ, if you will only serve him. He will even help you wear a form of religion, if you will only neglect the power.

The devil uses special diligence to destroy the souls of young men, and they seem not to know it. Satan knows well that you will make up the next generation, and therefore he employs every art betimes to make you his own. . . . You are those on whom he plays off all his choicest temptations. He spreads his net with the most watchful carefulness to entangle your hearts. He baits his traps with the sweetest morsels to get you into his power. . . . You are the grand object of his attack.

Knots Untied

Some of the tracts in this book would prove to be unusually enlightening to those who have lost their way in this present time of ecumenical confusion. One that I read appreciatively twenty years ago in a Banner of Truth book of a different title (*Warnings to the Churches*) is "**The Fallibility of Ministers.**" It's based upon Paul's record of Peter's dissimulation at Antioch (Gal. 2:11–16). Ryle's chief concern seems to have been the erosion of the doctrine of justification by faith alone within his own denomination (Church of England). His points build toward a climactic warning about that one issue.

- I. The first lesson is, that *great ministers may make great mistakes.*
- II. The second is, that *to keep the truth of Christ in*

His Church is even more important than to keep peace.

- III. The third is, that *there is no doctrine about which we ought to be so jealous as justification by faith without the deeds of the law.*

But there is much in the tract that is equally applicable to any other doctrine or practice upon which ministers pronounce. Consider, for instance, the very wording of his first two points: *great ministers may make great mistakes, and to keep the truth of Christ in His Church is even more important than to keep peace.* Those are eminently memorable and needful of being repeated—often!

Ryle observes that though Peter was among the greatest of the apostolic company, the Holy Spirit saw fit to record no less than three great errors which he committed: attempting to dissuade the Lord from the cross, denying the Lord three times, and at Antioch endangering the leading truth of Christ's Gospel.

Surely we may say, "Lord, what is man?" The Church of Rome boasts that the Apostle Peter is her founder and first Bishop. . . . Let us only remember, that of all the Apostles there is not one, excepting, of course, Judas Iscariot, of whom we have so many proofs that he was a **fallible** man.

Even though he was himself committed to staying within the Church of England despite her many errors, Ryle courageously defended those who felt duty-bound to separate from her.

Divisions and separations are most objectionable. . . . They weaken the cause of true Christianity. . . . But before we blame people for them, we must be careful to lay the blame **where it is deserved**. False doctrine and heresy are even worse than schism. If people separate themselves from teaching which is positively false and unscriptural, they ought to be praised rather than reproved. In such cases separation is a virtue and not a sin. The old saying must never be forgotten, "He is the schismatic who cause the schism."

Ryle concludes with an appeal to every member of a church.

Let me first of all ask everyone who reads this paper to arm himself with a thorough *knowledge of the written Word of God*. Unless we do this we are at the mercy of any false teacher. We shall not see through the mistakes of an erring Peter. We shall not be able to imitate the faithfulness of a courageous Paul. An ignorant laity will always be the bane of a Church. A Bible reading laity may save a Church from ruin.

Another important tract in *Knots Untied* is "The

Christian Sabbath, Or Lord's Day." This is a topic which concerned Ryle deeply throughout his entire ministry. He wrote nearly twenty tracts on it and regarded the loss of Christian conscience regarding the Lord's Day as a sure proof of the low state of vital religion in nineteenth-century England. It was, he said, like a cancer *eating into the heart of the Protestant churches*.

Surely we would have to say the same with shame regarding the nearly catastrophic effects upon Fundamentalism of our careless regard for the Lord's Day. Is not the diminishing attendance of our Sunday-night services, if not the doing away with them entirely, the reaping of what we have been sowing for decades on Sunday afternoons? Need any more be said?

Ryle warned, *It is not too much to say that the prosperity of decay of English Christianity depends on the maintenance of the Christian Sabbath. Break down the fence which surrounds the Sunday, and our Sunday Schools will soon come to an end. Let in the flood of worldliness and dissipation on the Lord's Day, without check or hindrance, and our congregations will soon dwindle away.*

I don't equate the Lord's Day with the Jewish Sabbath. It seems to me that there is, in fact, a liberty regarding the Lord's Day which the Jews did not possess under the old dispensation. But it most certainly is not the liberty to pursue worldly pleasure. I agree with Ryle when he clarified,

I do not tell anyone that he ought to pray all day, or read his Bible all day, or go to church all day, or meditate all day, without let or cessation, on a Sunday. All I say is, that the Sunday rest should be *a holy rest*. God ought to be kept in view; God's Word ought to be studied; God's House ought to be attended; the soul's business ought to be specially considered; and I say that everything which prevents the day being kept holy in this way, ought as far as possible to be avoided.

I am no admirer of gloomy religion. Let no one suppose that I want Sunday to be a day of sadness and unhappiness. I want every Christian to be a happy man: I wish him to have "joy and peace in believing," and to "rejoice in hope of the glory of God." I want everyone to regard Sunday as the brightest, cheerfulest day of all the seven; and I tell everyone who finds such a Sunday as I advocate, a wearisome day, that there is something sadly wrong with the state of his heart. I tell him plainly that if he cannot *enjoy* a "holy" Sunday, the fault is not in the day, but in his own soul.

J. C. Ryle urged people to read his tracts. For one he pled, *Give it a fair reading. Do not put in on the fire. Do not tear it in pieces. Read it! Read it! Read it to the end!*

I'd like to repeat Ryle's plea. Read his tracts. Not necessarily all of them, but at least some of them! Read the ones touching upon topics touching your ministry. You'll be blessed. You'll likely find yourself quoting them in sermons for years to come. ☞

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Bring . . . the Books

Two Works by Richard Baxter

You've settled back in your favorite easy chair, a bowl of ice cream in one hand and the remote in the other. Nothing interesting on tonight . . . except for that show is not exactly known for being the cleanest in the world. To watch or not to watch? Here's some advice.

Entertainment is so easy, and it quickly turns addictive, ensnaring us at our weakest. Typically, the wisest or most productive among us care little for it. How many lives have already been ensnared, distracted, nullified, and destroyed? When in doubt about whether a show is "bad enough," just don't.

Sounds like the writer has his finger on the pulse of our media-saturated culture. Actually, these cautions were written by Richard Baxter 350 years ago, warning people to beware of moralistic stage plays. The contemporary relevance of his words tells us that people and problems have changed less than we might think.

Richard Baxter (1615–91) lived through some of the most challenging periods of the English Reformation. Constantly forced to flee and relocate, he spent time in prison for preaching without government permission. After building a meeting house in London, he was able to preach there only once. In 1680 all of his books and personal effects were seized. Later, because of allegedly criticizing the state church, he was fined, imprisoned, and threatened with public whipping . . . when he was in his seventies! In short, this was a man who endured in pastoral ministry, even though it literally cost him everything.

And yet the rewards were great. His most successful ministry was a span of seventeen years at Kidderminster, where he saw nearly the entire town of 2000 people transformed. If that sounds implausible, so does the way he did it. In his classic work *The Reformed Pastor*, Baxter records meeting regularly with each family, both to help them and to understand firsthand the struggles they faced. Troubled that people could sit under preaching for decades and still not understand the basics of salvation or theology, Baxter found that thirty minutes with someone in person sometimes went further than years of public preaching. (This book is inexpensive in print and free online. J. I. Packer listed *The Reformed Pastor* as one of the top five books that influenced him most.)

This solidly practical knowledge shows in his massive tome *The Christian Directory*. When he was legally banned from preaching, Baxter turned to writing full-time and created this comprehensive work to provide careful, biblical counseling for doubters, new believers, lapsed or struggling Christians, families, and churches. The scope of topics is breathtaking. If you can think of a hard counseling question, Baxter probably has an answer for you already. Consider a tiny sampling of the questions he answers:


- Thirty-six practical tips for countering unbelief (Part 1, Chapter 4)

- Tips for redeeming time (Part 1, Chapter 5)
- How to balance fashion with appropriateness in clothing (Part 1, Chapter 10)
- How to decide whether you should marry, or what to do when parents and their children have different views (Part II, Chapter 1)
- Ten motivations for men to lead their families (Part 2, Chapter 5)
- How to keep up fervency in prayer (Part 2, Chapter 23)
- What to do if a church member confesses to his pastor a heinous or capital crime (Part 3, Chapter 26)

“. . . when
thou comest,
bring with thee
. . . the books”
(2 Tim. 4:13)

Throughout, Baxter demonstrates a savvy, practical wisdom that could come only from many years of pastoring well. Asking, for instance, whether believers ought to follow current fashions, Baxter suggests the pattern of respectable people of your same station in life. We should avoid calling attention to ourselves through unnecessary novelty. Modesty is always critical. And we must be wary of our motives, remembering that our souls matter more than our bodies. But on the other hand, we should not be “too censorious of others for different fashions. . . . To carp at every one that goeth finer than yourselves or to censure them as proud because their fashions are not like yours may be of worse [consequence] than the fashions you find fault with.” This is sound, practical, balanced, biblical wisdom.

Another powerful benefit of this book is the confirmation that our contemporary struggles are nothing new. Perhaps the form or expression has changed a bit. But Baxter is wrestling with the same basic constellation of issues that concern us in 2018. That he identifies our problems and answers them so incisively from a distance of 350 years shows that his wisdom comes from an eternal source.

The good news is that you can get *The Christian Directory* for free as well.* The language is dated, but Baxter is one of the most readable Puritans. Use it when you're stumped. Use it to check yourself when making decisions. Use it to motivate yourself to be a better father, wife, pastor, or church member. You will not regret the time spent. 

*Search for “Internet Archive Baxter Directory” to find a free PDF scan, or a nicely formatted Kindle edition for \$1.99 at bit.ly/BaxterDirectory. Finally, there is a double-columned print edition by Soli Deo Gloria.

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David's multiple wives (2 Sam. 3:2–5; 5:13; 12:8) introduce a troubling paradox. How could the man who penned “O how I love thy law, it is my meditation all the day” practice polygamy if it is so clearly contrary to God's law?

Look up “Marriage” in the *New Bible Dictionary* and you'll find this statement: “Polygamy . . . is not forbidden in Scripture.” *Technically*, yes; Scripture nowhere says “thou shalt not have more than one wife at a time.” But the statement lacks the nuance provided by many other passages of Scripture. “One-flesh” union was divinely intended to characterize marriage from the beginning (Gen. 2:24). Jesus attributed the “one-flesh” explanation not to Moses but directly to God Himself (Matt. 19:4–5). Monogamy is everywhere *implicit* in the Scripture; all the passages that touch on marriage regulations use “wife” in the singular, never the plural. Still, it is difficult to point to any passage that *explicitly* prohibits polygamy, a practice that was historically culturally common.

Further complicating the issue is God's own statement that *He gave* to David his master's wives (2 Sam. 12:8). The implication of 12:11 helps a little; the statement is clearly an expression of God's judgment and rejection of Saul—more of a commentary on the predecessor than an approval of the practice, per se. Some argue that the language in 12:8 and 11 simply means that God gave the *kingdom* of Saul to David in a total transfer of power and prestige: “the expression must be a stereotypic formula signifying that everything in principle was turned over for David's disposition” (Kaiser, *More Hard Sayings*, 172). The text never includes Saul's wives (Ahinoam and Rizpah) when it lists David's wives. (Besides, how old would they have been by the time David became king?) Still, it's difficult to reconcile such language coming from a God who everywhere else, it seems, requires monogamy.

The wording of the royal regulations in Deuteronomy 17:16–17 needs to be considered carefully: the king “shall not multiply horses to himself. . . . Neither shall he multiply wives to himself. . . .” Surely the prohibition against multiplying horses did not mean the king could have only *one* horse. Likewise, in the absence of any other *explicit* law prohibiting more than one wife, and given the accounts of polygamous patriarchs like Abraham and Jacob—accounts that are uncritical of the practice, even if they do point out its complications—it *could be rationalized* that the prohibition against multiplying wives does not necessarily mean the king could have only *one* wife.

Let you pull out the matches and start piling wood around my keyboard, I am not offering this as a valid

interpretation of the regulation. I am trying to imagine how *David* might have reconciled his genuine love for God's law with what is to us so glaring a sin as polygamy.

So, how many wives constitutes “multiplying”? Compared to Solomon's seven-hundred-plus, David's seven-plus (2 Sam. 3:2–5; 5:13) seems almost “reasonable.” But Deuteronomy 17 also states the reason for the regulation in the first place: “that his heart turn not away.” Craigie observes, “The prohibition probably envisages an increase in foreign wives, which would incur a deviation from the true Israelite religion” (NICOT, *Deuteronomy*). David's wives never had the negative spiritual impact that Solomon's wives had, in part because Solomon loved not just many women but many *foreign* women (1 Kings 11:1–2). Perhaps part of the solution to the incongruity of David's multiple wives is their nationality and adherence to Judaism.

First Kings 11:1–4 is helpful by way of contrast. It underscores the *foreignness* of Solomon's wives (11:1–2), enumerates how *many* he had (no one argues that 1000 constitutes “multiplying”), and specifically mentions the very *effect* warned against in Deuteronomy 17:17. Because they were non-Israelite pagans, they “turned away his heart after other gods” (11:4) so that he “went not fully after the LORD” (11:6) but instead “went after” Ashteroth and Milcom (11:5), and built temples for Chemosh and Molech (11:7) and for the gods of all his other foreign wives (11:8). The passage also specifically includes an intentional contrast with David; Solomon's “wives turned away his heart after other gods, and his heart was not perfect with the LORD his God, *as was the heart of David his father*” (11:4) so that Solomon “went not fully after the LORD, *as did David his father*” (11:6)—even though David, too, had wives and concubines.

The avoidance of *foreign* wives was a key distinction between David and Solomon; the only possible exception appears to have been Maacah (2 Sam. 3:3). Perhaps David believed he was observing the “spirit” of Deuteronomy 17:17 by taking (apparently) only Hebrew wives, by not taking an “excessive” number, and by maintaining a wholehearted, steadfast loyalty to the Lord alone.

None of this means that David was blameless, any more than 1 Kings 15:5 means that David committed only one sin in his entire life. Paul argues that even a clear conscience does not justify my actions before God (1 Cor. 4:4); my conscience may be seriously misinformed. But it may help resolve an anomaly that has bothered many. And it's a reminder that the lapses and oversights of the fathers may be multiplied in our sons. ☞

“Rightly
dividing
the Word
of Truth”
(2 Tim. 2:15)

“Is this worth it?” “I just don’t know if I can keep on doing this.” These are frequent struggles in the Christian life. From our limited perspective, it can be difficult to see how our efforts are making any eternal difference. In seeking to describe the positive attributes of those that he served alongside, Paul often used the term “faithfulness.” This word is used in reference to Tychicus, Epaphras, and Onesimus. We know very little of these men, especially Tychicus and Epaphras. However, they share a common characteristic that the Holy Spirit chose to highlight in the pages of the inspired Word of God—faithfulness. The importance of faithfulness is also underscored by the words of our Lord in the Parable of the Talents in Matthew 25:23: “Well done, good and faithful servant; thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will make thee ruler over many things: enter thou into the joy of thy lord.”

Studying church history gives us the opportunity to see beyond our limited perspective. By looking at the lives of those who have come before us we are able to gain a better understanding of how God uses those people who served in obscure roles and unknown places. Two such individuals are John Flavel and William Farel. During their lifetimes, neither one of these men enjoyed great notoriety or fame. In many ways they were overshadowed by more well-known figures. However, they remained faithful to the task they had been called to, and the benefits are still being felt today.

William Farel (1489–1565)

William Farel was a French evangelist born in 1489. Martin Luther and Ulrich Zwingli were born just five years earlier, and John Calvin would be born twenty years later. Born into nobility, he studied at the University of Paris, which was one of the leading academic institutions during this time. His principle teacher was none other than the pioneer of the French Reformation, Jacques Le Fèvre d’Étaples. As a contemporary of Martin Luther, Farel was greatly influenced by Luther’s teaching. He is known by several titles, such as “The Pioneer of Protestantism in Western Switzerland” and “The Elijah of the French Reformation.” These titles came to him because of his fiery approach to ministry. Church historian Philip Schaff notes, “He was a conqueror, but not an organizer of his conquests; a man of action, not a man of letters; an intrepid preacher, not a theologian” (Schaff, *The History of the Christian Church*, 8:238–9).

If Farel was filled with fire, it was because of his unswerving commitment to the truth of Scripture and the gospel. On one occasion while he was making a defense of his ministry before the Episcopal Council,

he demonstrated this commitment for the truth of the gospel with great passion: “I go about preaching Christ, who died for our sins and rose for our justification. Whoever believes in him will be saved; unbelievers will be lost. I am sent by God as a messenger of Christ, and am bound to preach him to all who will hear me. I am ready to dispute with you, and to give an account of my faith and ministry” (Schaff, *The History of the Christian Church*, 8:243–4).

Undoubtedly, one of the most crucial moments in the ministry of William Farel came when his life intersected with the life of John Calvin. The year was 1536. Farel had been hard at work in Geneva for several years prior to this. During the earlier part of this time, Geneva was not a welcoming place for Protestantism and the Reformers. In fact, on January 1, 1534, the bishop forbade all preaching without his permission and ordered the burning of all Protestant Bibles. This did not deter Farel. He pushed forward in Geneva and preached faithfully in private homes. On March 1 a monk by the name of Francis Coutelier publicly attacked the Reformation. This was more than Farel could bear, and he ascended the pulpit to refute him. This was his first time preaching in public in Geneva. From this point onward, there was much opposition to the preaching of the gospel in Geneva, but Farel and those with him did not relent, though they faced much violence. All of this was used by God to lay the groundwork for the arrival of Calvin.

By the year 1536 John Calvin had already penned his *Institutes of the Christian Religion*. Calvin was recognized as a learned scholar, and he hoped to continue his education in Strasbourg. However, the war raging between Spain and France had closed the road to Strasbourg, so Calvin was forced to go through Geneva. Originally, his intention was to stay just one night there. Geneva had a reputation for being a pleasure-loving town. Besides that, the town was now in utter disarray because of the factions that existed between the Roman Catholic Church and Protestantism. Bruce Shelley notes, “An inflammatory Reformer named William Farel had been preaching in Geneva for four years, and Catholic masses had ceased. But Geneva’s Protestantism rested chiefly on political hostility to the bishop, not doctrinal convictions” (Shelley, *Church History in Plain Language*, 267). Speaking of the believers in Geneva, Schaff tells us, “They mistook freedom for license. They were in danger of falling into the opposite extreme of disorder and

“To every preacher of righteousness as well as to Noah, wisdom gives the command, ‘A window shalt thou make in the ark.’”

Charles Spurgeon

confusion” (Schaff, *The History of the Christian Church*, 8:247). Someone was needed to step in and bring structure and management.

When Farel got word that the young Frenchman John Calvin was in town, he descended upon the younger Calvin and pled with him to stay in Geneva and partner with him in bringing the Reformation there to fruition. Calvin resisted. He saw himself more as an academic than a pastor. He longed to hide away in Strasbourg and write books that would help the Reformation across Europe. When he saw he was making no headway with Calvin, Farel pronounced a curse, damning Calvin’s quiet studies in Strasbourg when the need was so acute in Geneva. Amazingly, Calvin conceded. Whether it was fear of God or the effect of Farel’s display of earnestness, we do not know for sure. Maybe both.

Though they would be expelled from Geneva just over a year from when Calvin had arrived, their work there left an indelible mark and was the beginning of a lifelong friendship between Calvin and Farel. In fact, it was William Farel who performed the marriage ceremony of John Calvin and Idelette de Bure Stordeur.

Farel would take his final earthly journey in May 1565. He traveled to see the Protestants at Metz, and he took this last opportunity to preach. Schaff writes regarding this final sermon, “He preached with the fire of his youth” (Schaff, *The History of the Christian Church*, 8:249). William Farel died on September 13, 1565.

John Flavel (1628–91)

Sixty-three years after the death of William Farel, John Flavel was born. He was the son of Richard Flavel, a minister who died of the plague while imprisoned for nonconformity. John Flavel was a diligent student at University College Oxford. In 1656 he accepted a call to be minister in the thriving seaport of Dartmouth. He did not earn much income there, but the work was spiritually profitable. Many turned to Christ under his ministry. One of the members of his congregation had this to say concerning John Flavel: “I could say much, though not enough of the excellency of his preaching; of his seasonable, suitable, and spiritual matter; of his plain expositions of Scripture; his talking method, his genuine and natural deductions, his convincing arguments, his clear and powerful demonstrations, his heart-searching applications, and his comfortable supports to those that were afflicted in conscience. In short, that person must have a very soft head, or a very hard heart, or both, that could sit under his ministry unaffected” (Erasmus Middleton, *Evangelical Biography*, 4:50–51).


Flavel was ejected from the pulpit in 1662 for nonconformity, but he continued to meet secretly with his parishioners. On occasion he would preach for them in the woods. Once he even disguised himself as a woman on horseback to reach a secret meeting place where he preached and administered baptism. At another time, when pursued by authorities, he plunged his horse into the sea and managed to escape arrest by swimming through a rocky area to reach Slapton Sands.

In 1665, when the Five Mile Act went into effect, Flavel moved to Slapton, which was beyond the five-mile limit of legal disturbance. There he ministered to many people in his congregation. At times he would preach secretly in the woods to larger numbers of people, sometimes as late as midnight. Once, soldiers rushed in and dispersed the congregation. Several of the fugitives were apprehended and fined, but the remainder brought Flavel to another wooded area where he continued his sermon. Flavel preached from other unique pulpits, such as Salstone Rock, an island in the Salcombe Estuary that is submerged at high tide.

Through it all John Flavel remained steadfast and faithful in his pursuit of Christ and his ministry. This is nowhere seen more clearly than in his own words. Middleton records that Flavel wrote in his diary, “To make sure of eternal life, said he, is the great business which the sons of death have to do in this world. Whether a man consider the immortality of his own soul, the ineffable joys and glory of heaven, the extreme and endless torments of hell, the inconceivable sweet peace of conscience, or the misery of being subject to the errors thereof: all these put a necessity, a solemnity, a glory upon this work” (Erasmus Middleton, *Evangelical Biography*, 4:54).

In a closing assessment of Flavel, biographer Erasmus Middleton has this to say: “He was a man of a middle stature and full of life and activity: he was very thoughtful, and, when not discoursing or reading, much taken up in meditation, which made him digest his notions well. He was ready to learn from everybody and as free to communicate what he knew” (Erasmus Middleton, *Evangelical Biography*, 4:63).

Many in the Christian life are weighed down by constant opposition. Perhaps the lethargy of God’s people is discouraging and frustrating. However, the task is not yet done. Though it’s easy to fall into the snare of comparison, we must remember that what God requires is quite simple. We are measured by our faithfulness. The apostle Paul reminds us that faithfulness was what qualified him for ministry: “I thank Christ Jesus our Lord, who hath enabled me, for that he counted me faithful, putting me into the ministry” (1 Tim. 1:12).

By God’s grace, stay the course and finish the race with faithfulness. 



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Prayer is not overcoming God's reluctance. It is rather laying hold of God's willingness. —George Mueller

We should strongly consider changing our praying from need-based to worship-based. Prayer that emerges out of times of worship is much more God-centered.

—Daniel Henderson

We need to say, "I will pray, though I never have an answer in this life." It melts hard hearts to see believers take denials or postponements which proud people will not do.

—Thomas Goodwin

Prayer . . . the key of the day and the lock of the night.

—Thomas Fuller

Is it possible that the church's increase in funds and technology has insulated us from that kind of urgent praying that is born of necessity? See Revelation 3:17.

—David M. Atkinson

Do not turn to prayer hoping to enjoy spiritual delights; rather come to prayer totally content to receive nothing or to receive great blessings from God's hand, whichever should be your Heavenly Father's will for you at that time.

—Madam Jeanne Guyon

There is nothing that makes us love someone so much as praying for them.

—William Law

Prayer is the spreading out of our helplessness, in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, before the loving eyes of a Father who knows and understands and cares and answers.

—Cameron V. Thompson

The more we cultivate a knowledge of God, the more precise will be our praying.

—John White

The apostles knew that their high commission as apostles, instead of relieving them from the necessity of prayer, committed them to it by a more urgent need.

—E. M. Bounds

If we would have God give an open ear to us, we must have deaf ears to the world.

—E. M. Bounds

Some of our prayers need to be cut short at both ends and set on fire in the middle.

—Dwight L. Moody

If God answers our prayer and we do not heed the answer because we do not like the answer, God has answered in vain.

—Thomas Goodwin

If we truly have the right prayer attitude, we will constantly send up silent petitions unto God throughout the day's activities.

—B. H. Spallick

Much prayer, much faith, much Christ in the heart.

—Alexander Whyte

True prayer is born out of brokenness.

—Frances J. Roberts

Prayer does not fit us for the greater work; prayer is the greater work.

—Oswald Chambers

If I could hear Christ praying for me in the next room, I would not fear a million enemies. Yet the distance makes no difference—He is praying for me.

—Robert Murray McChesney

The warning against vain repetition in prayer has a wider application than the praying of the heathen; it takes in all thoughtless words and careless forms in prayer.

—A. T. Pierson

It may never have occurred to you that God's honor and reputation are subjects you should be praying about. In fact, they should form the very basis of your praying.

—John White

The character of our praying will determine the character of our preaching. Light praying will make light preaching.

—E. M. Bounds

The three conditions of the approach to prayer that God finds acceptable are: a forgiving spirit, a believing spirit and a persisting spirit.

—A. T. Pierson

God is far more apt to answer prayers that grow out of and conform to His big attributes than He is to answer prayers that are limited to the small circle of our self-centeredness.

—David M. Atkinson

I go to God—to God before whose throne the Lord Jesus is ready to hand my petitions to Him; yea, He ever lives to make intercession for me.

—John Bunyan

Compiled by Dr. David Atkinson, pastor of Dyer Baptist Church, Dyer, Indiana.

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Biblical Integrity in Worship

There are hundreds of verses in the Bible that directly address singing, praising, and the worship of God.

A grand text which captures many of the biblical concepts surrounding worship is found in 1 Chronicles 16:23–34.

Sing unto the LORD, all the earth; **shew forth [proclaim]** from day to day his salvation. **Declare** his glory among the heathen; his marvellous works among all nations. For great is the LORD, and greatly **to be praised**: he also is **to be feared** above all gods. For all the gods of the people are idols: but the LORD made the heavens. Glory and honour are in his presence; strength and gladness are in his place. **Give [ascribe]** unto the LORD, ye kindreds of the people, give unto the LORD glory and strength. **Give [ascribe]** unto the LORD the glory due unto his name: **bring an offering**, and come before him: **worship** the LORD in the beauty of holiness. **Fear [tremble]** before him, all the earth: the world also shall be stable, that it be not moved. Let the heavens **be glad**, and let the earth **rejoice**: and let men say among the nations, The LORD reigneth. Let the sea roar, and the fulness thereof: let the fields rejoice, and all that is therein. Then shall the trees of the wood sing out at the presence of the LORD, because he cometh to judge the earth. O **give thanks** unto the LORD; for he is good; for his mercy endureth for ever.

The heart of this text is in verse 29: “**Give [ascribe]** unto the LORD the glory due unto his name: **bring an offering**, and come before him: **worship** the LORD in the beauty [splendor] of holiness.”

Our Lord Jesus Christ very clearly described the minimal requirement for worship: “God is a Spirit: and they that worship him **must [of moral necessity]** worship him in spirit and in truth” (John 4:24). God reserves the right to decide how He will be worshipped—here *in spirit and in truth*.

The expression “integrity in worship” assumes that God always operates in the realm of integrity! Through biblical history, violations of integrity in worship have resulted in varying degrees of direct judgment. Dathan and Abiram were consumed by the flames of God’s judgment as they presented *false fire* to the Lord. The children of Israel in their insistence of having their own way lost out on God’s best for them: “He [God] gave them their request; but sent leanness [a wasting disease] into their soul” (Ps. 106:15). David brought up the ark of the covenant on a cart pulled by

oxen, and Uzzah tragically lost his life in this act of irreverence. The Corinthian believers suffered sickness and death because of their desecration of the Lord’s Supper.

Worship is about God, not man. Worship is not the entertainment of man—it is the entertainment of God. Worship is not about how we feel nor is it about that which we like and enjoy. It is about that which God enjoys—that which makes Him *feel good*. The question we must ask after attending church is not “What did I get out of the service?” but “Did God enjoy the service?”

I submit the following observations from the many Scriptures concerning worship, singing, and praise. Biblical worship should be:

- Carefully structured: not sloppy, not unplanned, not careless.
- Meticulous in its detail.
- Always according to the biblical pattern.
- Detailed and accurate as to symbolic doctrinal meaning.
- Completely in accord with biblical truth.
- Sourced in the spirit of man—his higher, regenerated nature directs his worship. Spirituality must always be defined and measured in terms of biblical integrity, NOT that which caters to the flesh.
- Adorned in spectacular beauty—the splendor of holiness. Those who lead the worship in the Scriptures are in attire characterized by splendor.
- Unswayed by the whims of man nor designed to appeal to unregenerate men.
- Bringing something to and for God—one should not worship empty-handed.
- Centered in very personal sacrifice or offering to God—bringing something to God, not self-indulgent pleasure.
- Reverent in the extreme—God should be held in awe.
- Characterized by an emphasis on the four foundational and controlling attributes of God:
 1. God is uniquely *uncreated*.
 2. God is uniquely *infinite*.
 3. God is uniquely *triune*.
 4. God is uniquely *holy*—characterized by *integrity*.

- Very lively at times—David “danced” before the Lord.
- Expressive of the desires and nature of God as pictured in the offerings [fr. *olam* = to draw near] in Leviticus:
 1. Atonement—full substitutionary payment and sending away—salvation.
 2. Sin and trespass offerings—confession and restitution.
 3. Burnt offering—consecration.
 4. Meat [grain] offering—generosity in giving.
 5. Peace [shalom] offering—thankfulness and praise.
- Totally God-centered.
- Expressing an awareness of the goodness and greatness of God.
- Characterized by praise and thanksgiving. True humility is not a self-deprecating but an elevating of God—a

declaration of total indebtedness to and dependence upon God.

- Centered in God’s pleasures (“sweet-smelling savour”).
- Revealing and expressing the glory of God.
- Exclusive of all other objects and objectives—“No other gods ‘along side’ of Me.”

All of the above presumes the absolute integrity (holiness) of God and the sinfulness of man.

- Man’s greatest need is to meet God’s needs.
- Man’s greatest need is to do things God’s way.
- Man’s greatest need is the gratification of God.
- Man’s greatest need is the approval of God.
- Man’s greatest need is the glorification of God.

Dr. David C. Innes has served the congregation of the Hamilton Square Baptist Church as its senior pastor since January of 1977.



Mail Bag

Continued from page 5

I hope this e-mail finds Dr. Schaal, because I was encouraged greatly by his article today!

*Branden Bowen
Madagascar*

Just a note to say I thoroughly enjoy *FrontLine* magazine and Proclaim and Defend. I share some of the P&D articles on two of my Facebook pages. And I took pictures of the current *FrontLine* magazine and put them on those pages too.

*Pastor Bruce K. Oyen
First Baptist Church
Spearfish, SD*

Iam really enjoying the May/June 2018 edition of *FrontLine* concerning the “Membership Matters” theme. The articles are spot on, and [the issues] are not often so clearly presented. Reformed theology is sweeping through our circles and is turning the heads of the next generation. For some reason (perhaps unintentionally) “the books” and the gurus have taken precedence over the Scripture in the minds of many people. Thank you for the biblical clarity in which the true Baptist position is stated—especially in the article by Dr. Marriott. I am going to ask our pastor to get a copy for everyone in our congregation.

*Dan Pelletier
Hamilton Square Baptist Church
San Francisco, CA*

Thank you for letting us know that our subscription to *FrontLine* has been renewed. I enjoy it very much and always read it “cover to cover,” as they say.


Please let [the donor] know there are still those over here in Spain who are standing true to our convictions

that we settled on years ago. We have no plans to change and are immensely grateful to the Lord that the work I have been involved in continues to carry on also in the same vein.


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of a most intense trial, as these men soon would be, the Lord exhorted prayer as a safeguard in temptation. In the Lord's Prayer, we have the petition, "And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil" (Matt. 6:13). The Lord Himself connects prayer with victory over sin. We have no greater authority!

Would we grow to be good? Would we have victory over sin? Then we must let God talk to us, and we have to talk to God. Hodge adds, "Fellowship with Him, converse with Him, calls into exercise all gracious affections, reverence, love, gratitude, submission, faith, joy, and devotion." Do you want to love God more? Pray more. Do you want to revere God more? Pray more. Do you want to be grateful? Pray more. Do you want to submit to God's will? Pray more. Do you want joy? Pray more. Do you want devotion? Pray more.

God calls us to pray without ceasing (1 Thess. 5:17). We should be in the habit of talking to God all the time. Nevertheless, if you take time to sit down to read your Bible, shouldn't you take some time for thoughtful, persistent, devoted prayer to your Lord and Savior? If you draw near to God, He will draw near to you (James 4:8). If you are drawing near to God, don't you think you will be less interested in temptations when they come? Don't you think you will have greater power and victory in your life?

We were created for this kind of fellowship. Our ancestor, Adam, lost it through sin. Instead of worshiping the Creator, mankind in the following generations substituted the creature. Rather, mankind substituted many creatures. Most of all, he substituted the imaginations of his heart to take the place of God. With his idols, man communes daily. He talks up the glories of his God-substitute, praising it to his friends, begging it to bring satisfaction—in essence, praying to something that cannot hear and cannot speak.

Adam lost our fellowship with God, but Jesus Christ secured it again for them that believe, granting us the authority to be called the sons of God. The apostle John tells us that this is why he and the other apostles preached the gospel: "That which we have seen and heard declare we unto you, that ye also may have fellowship with us: and truly our fellowship is with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ" (1 John 1:3). The fruit of the gospel is fellowship with the Father and the Son. God means for us to continue in fellowship with Him every day.

Often it is noted that sin breaks, mars, and hinders that fellowship. That is true. But isn't it also true that prayer enhances, increases, and enlivens the fellowship? When we are talking to God, we are, in that moment, walking with God. If our only communion with God is a few minutes reading a chapter a day, is it any wonder that we find temptations so much more attractive? We need to fill our lives with our God.

May we learn to pray, making our devotional life active, and gaining spiritual strength to overcome sin.

* Charles Hodge, *Systematic Theology*, vol. 3 (Oak Harbor, WA: Logos Research Systems, Inc., 1997), 708.



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Just Keep Praying

Overcoming Discouragement in Prayer

I remember over twenty years ago now a real struggle with the concept of regular, focused prayer. I was impressed by the incredible, habitual, lengthy prayer habits of Christian heroes I'd read about. But personally, I couldn't achieve like those people. I had unreasonable goals of daily perfection, complete concentration, hours-long duration, and absolute solitude. My perspective was unrealistic, unhealthy, and unbiblical.

The Bible says that we're to pray—fervently (James 5:16), for people (1 Tim. 2:1), after a pattern Jesus gave us (Matt. 6), in His name (John 14:13–14), and humbly with sincerity (Luke 18). But what God doesn't do—I know now—is prescribe a legalistic regimen that we can't reach or maintain. *Have you been there? Have you felt discouragement about praying?*

Fighting discouragement in prayer is half of it for me—just not giving up on this spiritual activity. But the Lord has used teaching, books (check out Matthew Henry's *A Way to Pray*), and the personal encouragement of Christian friends to adjust my thoughts to work towards a stronger prayer life.

Transparency

For a long time I knew exactly how a good praying Christian should sound. I could hear myself as I would start to pray—I sounded official, like nice public prayers I'd heard. But putting on a front is dishonest in prayer. It's pride to say, *I'm good*, when I'm not. That pretense actually discourages me because I know the reality, and trying to live on a pedestal isn't comfortable for long.

Besides, God knows the real me. When I come to Him, I don't need to use lofty language or present myself as someone who deserves His attention. Coming with my needs means I'm needy. Coming with my sins means I've failed. Coming with praise means I look up to Him as the most worthy, most exalted, and most holy Being there is—the *One* who can provide and forgive gloriously.

Part of my adjustment has been to lay myself open mentally as I go to Him in prayer. And I can tell you, it gives freedom and encouragement to stop pretending and talk honestly to God.



Immediacy

God has been doing something in my family over the last ten years called, "Let's Throw Routine Out the Window." No, not really! But He has ordained multiple moves and life changes (churches, friends, houses, schools, communities) plus all the resultant upheaval. Finding a nice, set schedule for extended, concentrated prayer habits—that's felt impossible during some stretches.

One thing keeping me from utter prayer despair is learning to call on God in the moment (John 12:28; Neh. 2:4). I don't have to wait for coffee, inspirational music, a quiet room, or a huge chunk of time. I can talk to God now—about needs weighing on my heart, joy I want to tell Him in praise, questions I have about my life.

Prayer can occur in seconds—faster than any voice-text. Maybe you're a busy pastor, or work second or third shift, or have little kids and few breaks—these limitations don't have to eliminate prayer. Saying short thoughts to Him often will develop a spirit of constant prayer through the day (1 Thess. 5:18).

Community

Some of you have experienced this—joining with others in prayer and finding immense encouragement because you no longer feel alone. Discouragement happens, in part, when I withdraw from the fellowship of prayer with friends and isolate myself. Conversely, when I choose to get together with someone (like, weekly at a church prayer meeting), share concerns, and pray for a few minutes with them, I feel great support.

If I'm growing as a Christian who wants to pray more and pray better, I need to reach out to those around me and pray with them. Time alone with God is wonderful, but so is prayer with friends.

"Teach Us to Pray" is a great hymn by Eric Alexander and Paul Jones—one which our church learned recently. May these words encourage you in prayer.

In mercy, Lord, draw near, incline our hearts to pray.

O stir our souls to seek Your face and live by what You say.

Abby Huffstutler is a freelance writer and editor living just outside Akron, Ohio. Her husband, Joel, is the pastor of Falls Berean Bible Church, and they have three daughters.



98th Annual Fellowship Report

Doug Wright

Conference themes often receive passing attention from only one or two speakers. They are like a centerpiece on a dinner table. People appreciate them, but once the food arrives the centerpiece fades into the background and may even get moved so table space can be better utilized. The theme of the 98th FBFI Annual Fellowship at First Baptist Church of Troy, Michigan, was “The Generation to Come.” The phrase is used twice in Psalm 78:4–7 and was the key ingredient in everything from the planning stages to the actual messages in the conference. The results and benefits were outstanding!

First Baptist Church of Troy and Pastor Mike Harding, along with his staff, continued the tradition of hosting with excellence. Their church family made us feel more than welcome through their well-organized preparation. They served some wonderful meals and gave their all to have a facility and program that enhanced the conference. The services included music that was not only well done but heart stirring.

First Baptist’s care of their guests made listening in the general sessions and workshops pleasurable. As mentioned earlier, the theme “The Generation to Come” permeated the general sessions. The slate of speakers included men from both older and younger generations and focused especially on the relationship between what we call the “Millennials” and those long established in ministry. A particular focus was the divide that seems to keep one generation from understanding the other. Satan has effectively sought to keep one generation from respecting another and has minimized the biblical injunction of mentorship. Rather than being confrontational, the speakers demonstrated genuine, Spirit-filled efforts to understand the challenge and embrace the solutions.

The meeting, of course, included great fellowship, a board meeting, and chaplain training. Each of those is worthy of mention, but the supreme value was the centrality of God’s Word in addressing the theme of the meeting. With that in mind, we look forward to the 2019 Annual Fellowship from June 10–12 at Red Rocks Baptist Church in Denver, Colorado. I trust the benefits received from this year’s meeting will encourage you to prioritize the 2019 fellowship.

You can hear the sessions from the 98th Annual Fellowship at proclaimanddefend.org/2018/06/20/audio-from-the-98th-annual-fellowship-meeting.



NOTABLE QUOTES

Praying is lifting up the soul to God, and pouring out the heart before him.—Matthew Henry

We rush into God's presence, run through a string of petitions, jump up, and go out. If someone should ask us an hour afterward for what we prayed, oftentimes we could not tell. If we put so little heart into our prayers, we cannot expect God to put much heart into answering them.—R. A. Torrey

Prayer is not begging God to do something which He is loath to do. It is not overcoming reluctance in God. It is enforcing Christ's victory over Satan. It is implementing upon earth Heaven's decisions concerning the affairs of men.—Paul Billheimer

It is sheer impossibility for man with sin grained into his fibre through centuries to understand the horrors with which a sinless one thinks of actual contact with sin.—S. D. Gordon

The secret of the Church's spiritual power today lies not in the multiplication of organizations, the

development of skillfully devised plans of operation, the achievement of organizational unity through the consummation of church mergers, nor yet in the swelling of church rolls, but in persevering Spirit-taught intercession.—D. Edmond Hiebert

I defy you to think otherwise than magnificently of God. And then, after that, I equally defy you to forget, or neglect, or restrain prayer. Once you begin to think aright of Him Who is the Hearer of prayer; and Who waits, in all His magnificence, to be gracious to you—I absolutely defy you to live any longer the life you now live.—Alexander Whyte

Prayer is not merely coming to God to ask something from Him. It is above all fellowship with God, and being brought under His power of holiness and love, till He takes possession of us, and stamps our entire nature with the lowliness of Christ, which is the secret of all true worship.—Andrew Murray

Compiled by Robert Conduct, FBFI Executive Board member and pastor of Upper Cross Roads Baptist Church, Baldwin, Maryland.

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ON LANGUAGE & SCRIPTURE

I just read a great book that all word nerds would enjoy: translator David Bellos' entertaining *Is That a Fish in Your Ear?: Translation and the Meaning of Everything*.

I found Bellos particularly fascinating when he talked about the translation practices at the European Union offices, and what it means practically for all the EU's many languages to be treated as equals. Finding people who can translate from Estonian to Portuguese is tough (I've never succeeded in doing it myself), so they have to come up with workarounds.

But here's one thing I didn't like—I wrote "junk" next to it in the margin of my Kindle. He criticizes Genesis 2:19 and its statement that Adam named the animals. He says the verse suggests "that language is not among the things that God created but an arbitrary invention of humankind, sanctioned by divine assent" (85).

I think he's wrong to blame the Bible here, but I want to make sure my readers do not, in fact, conclude from Genesis 2 that language is an invention of mankind rather than an amazing gift of God.

Language is perhaps the most important thing in the world that was never created. Like God Himself, the existence of language is simply assumed on creation day 1. "And God **said**, Let there be light." The main hint Genesis 1 gives us about the origin of language is, "And God **said**, Let us make man in our image." God, before man is given the breath necessary for speech, is talking to someone—presumably the other persons of the Trinity or (as some think) an angelic court. Language predates us.

Bellos also criticizes Genesis 2:19 for implying that language is just a list of words. And once again he's right about language and wrong about what the Bible is teaching. Language is indeed more than vocabulary. It's characteristic patterns and structures, such as the special patterns of intonation and accent that my little six-year-old daughter manages to reproduce perfectly while reading Mo Willems books out loud, even though I've never sat down to teach these patterns to her (as my Spanish teacher had to teach the Spanish ones to me because I was too old to pick them up naturally). Language is dialects and accents and regionalisms and sociolects and idiolects and pidgins and creoles and connotation and symbols and all kinds of cool stuff I can never get enough of. It isn't just words.

I don't think Bellos is right to criticize the Bible for messing up our view of language. But let's not misinterpret or misapply Genesis 1-2, all the same.



Dr. Mark L. Ward Jr. is the author of *Authorized: The Use and Misuse of the King James Bible*.

Select Studies in Isaiah

Isaiah is unique for many reasons, but two of them are a miniature apocalypse and a series of Messianic Servant Songs.

Isaiah's "Little Apocalypse"

This four-chapter oracle (Isa. 24–27) describes the catastrophic devastation of the entire earth, along with the establishment of the international divine reign from Zion resulting in the universal worship of God. Those emphases clearly anticipate the events described in the Apocalypse of John the Apostle. It's no wonder this section of Isaiah has been labeled the "Isaiah Apocalypse" or the "Little Apocalypse."

The oracle opens with terms of *devastation* (24:1, 3–4, 6–8, 13, 17–20; cf. 26:20–21), but this devastation is not merely local or national. The prophecy also employs the language of *universality* to express the international scope of this destruction; the terms *'eret* (earth, land), *tēbel* (world, continents), and *'damah* (earth, ground) occur a combined total of 35x in these four chapters. A few are local references, but the vast majority are universal in scope, sometimes underscored by uses of the word *all* (24:7, 11; 25:6, 7, 8).

References to *divine exaltation* highlight the positive side of the oracle's eschatological focus. Songs of praise surface throughout this segment, including international praise from the west (*sea*), from the east (*dawn*), and from the islands of the sea (24:14–16a). The prophet himself leads in this praise for God's future acts (25:1–4), and Judah will be singing in her land "in that day" (26:1–5).

Another recurring theme is *restoration* particularly expressed in connection with *the mountain of the LORD* (24:23; 25:6, 7, 10; 27:13). And the future focus of the section is capped off by the classic prophetic eschatological time-indicator, "in that day" (24:21; 25:9, 10; 26:1; 27:1, 2, 12, 13).

Chapter 24—Praising God for Judging the Earth

The oracle opens with the emphasis on universal destruction, the only other such time since the Flood (Gen. 6–9). The devastation will be total, worldwide, without discrimination, and certain because the Lord has spoken it (24:1–3). The reason for this universal devastation is universal transgression of "the everlasting covenant" (24:4–6)—a reference to the covenant God made the last time He destroyed the earth (cf. Gen. 9:16). God has kept His side of the covenant unfailingly (Gen. 9:8–17), but man has habitually ignored his obligations (Gen. 9:1–7). Significantly, both Genesis 9 and Isaiah 24 are universal in scope. This universal judgment will result in the emotional desolation

of the wicked (24:7–13), but the praise on the part of God's people everywhere for His righteousness (24:14–16). This universal devastation is inescapable (24:17–20), includes both celestial and terrestrial powers (24:21–22), and is followed by God's universal reign from Zion (24:23). A close comparative reading between Isaiah 24 and Revelation 6–19 reveals multiple parallels.

Chapter 25—Praise to God for Fulfilling His Words

Here Isaiah teaches by personal example how the godly respond to the kinds of events described in chapter 24. The pronoun changes signal a division of the chapter between praise *to* Yahweh (1–5) and further prophecy *about* Yahweh's actions (6–12). The Lord is praised for His amazing plans (1) and His righteous judgment on human rebellion (2–3), while faithfully protecting those who trust in Him in the midst of judgment (4–5). God will feast His people (6), swallow up death (7–8), banish sorrow, and right all wrongs (8) in the day that He saves His people (9) and dismantles the wicked (10–12).

Chapter 26—The Future Song of Salvation

Multitudes of believers have anchored their souls in the promise "Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace, whose mind is stayed on thee: because he trusteth in thee" (26:3). That promise—steady-minded trust in Yahweh brings peace—is the leading theme in the eschatological song of Judah during (I believe) the millennial kingdom. That doesn't mean it's not applicable now, but the glory of that truth will be magnified when the entire, redeemed nation of Israel owns it as well. The song divides into two stanzas: peace *in* Yahweh's people comes from trusting Him (26:1–11), and peace *for* Yahweh's people comes from His gracious intervention (26:12–18).

Chapter 27—Yahweh Is Israel's Keeper

Isaiah describes God's care for His restored people Israel in the millennium. The vineyard (Israel) that once produced only wild grapes (Isa. 5) now finally fills the world with sweet fruit (27:1–6). Yahweh's judgments on Israel, severe as they have been, have not been total and permanent like His judgments on the other nations (26:7–11). "In that day" the land God promised Israel will finally be fully obtained and all will come to worship Yahweh in Jerusalem (26:12–13). Mark Twain once remarked, "All things are mortal but the Jew. . . . What is the secret of his immortality?" The secret, in part, is Isaiah 27:1–6.

—Apocalypse and Songs

Isaiah's "Servant Songs"

The phrase "Servant Songs" designates a series of thematically related passages describing the work of someone identified as Yahweh's "servant." The terminus of some of the songs is debated, but here are the passages:

- 42:1–9
- 49:1–12
- 50:4–11
- 52:13–53:12
- [61:1–3]
- [63:1–6]

Isaiah 61 and 63 are debated, in part because the word "servant" does not appear. Nevertheless, Isaiah 61 contains at least six themes in common with the four uncontested Servant Songs. And Isaiah 63, Grogan admits, should perhaps also be included among the Servant Songs ("Isaiah," *EBC*). In my estimation, both passages qualify as Servant Songs: both are clearly descriptive of Messianic mission, character, and actions, and both include an essential feature of the Messianic Servant's eschatological role that is missing from the other four songs: divine vengeance. However, space permits only a brief survey of the first four Servant Songs.

OT theologian Bernhard Duhm (1847–1928) first christened this series of passages in Isaiah as the "Servant Songs," which is "is something of a misnomer, for there is no evidence they were ever sung, but the term has come to stay" (Grogan, *ibid.*). Others call them simply Servant Poems.

"Servant" is a common designation in the OT generally and in Isaiah in particular; it's used to describe David and other kings, pagans such as Nebuchadnezzar or Cyrus, or—especially in Isaiah—Israel collectively (41:8). In the Servant Songs, however, "the servant cannot be the collective remnant but only an individual" (Payne, "Servant of the Lord," *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*), "as both the grammar and the outcome of the servant's ministry make clear" (Merrill, *Everlasting Dominion*, 512). In fact, even when the servant seems identified as "Israel" (49:3), he is immediately distinguished from the nation, whom he brings back to God (49:5) (Wolf, "Servant of the Lord," *Baker Theological Dictionary of the Bible*). Moreover, "his sinless character (53:9) and the magnitude of his work (42:4) forbid his equation with any merely human leader in the future. . . . The NT (Jn. 12:38, 41; Acts 8:32–35) specifies Jesus Christ as the only embodiment of ideal Israel, the final accomplishment of the remnant (Is. 49:6)" (Payne, *ibid.*). "A careful reading of the . . . servant songs has led

many scholars to argue that the servant refers to an individual who fulfills in himself all that Israel was meant to be" (Wolf).

It is axiomatic that the Servant Songs apply to Christ; there is, however, a duality of reference to both Christ and Israel. Christ is the perfect personification of what Israel was intended (and is destined) to be. Similarly, Christ is the perfect personification and model of what the Church is intended (and destined) to be. This is clear, as Grogan points out, from the initially surprising application of Servant material (49:6) not only to Christ (Acts 26:23) but also to Paul and Barnabas (Acts 13:47).

The Divinely Enabled Servant (42:1–9)

This Song includes more clustered references than the others to Yahweh's delight in and preservation of the Servant (42:1, 6); hence he is described especially in terms of Yahweh's sustaining him for his work. He is described first in terms of his mission—to bring universal justice (vv. 1, 3, 4)—and second in terms of his method—he will not be belligerent or destructive, but meek and gentle (vv. 2–4). (It is not surprising that more than one commentator has noticed the parallels between this passage and the qualifications for a "servant of the Lord" in 2 Tim. 2:24–26.) The Servant's role is (a) to personify the means by which God enters into covenant relationship with people, and (b) to embody God's light to the Gentiles (vv. 5–6), in order to illuminate those in darkness and liberate those in bondage (vv. 7–9).

The Divinely Commissioned Servant (49:1–12)

The song opens with the Servant's prenatal calling (v. 1) and his divine preparation and concealment (v. 2). His purpose is to glorify God (v. 3). His disappointment at the appearance of initial failure is replaced with his ultimate confidence in the Lord's sovereign knowledge, control, and reward (v. 4). God, in fact, expands his mission beyond Israel to be a light to the Gentiles as well (vv. 5–6), resulting in the Servant's vindication and glorification (vv. 7–8). His work includes restoration, liberation, provision, protection, and inclusion of a great multitude (vv. 8–12).

The Divinely Instructed Servant (50:4–11)

One of the most remarkable aspects of the incarnation is (1) the Gospels' repeated explanation that Christ did all He did not as God by His own independent power but as Man by the power of the Holy Spirit as Man (e.g., Matt. 12:28), and (2) Christ's repeated assertion that He did not

originate His own message but spoke only and always what the Father gave Him to speak (e.g., John 8:26, 28). In this third Servant Song, the Servant's submission to learning from God (50:4–6) produces confidence in God's vindication of his ministry (50:7–9) and energizes his exhortation to God's people to trust Yahweh and rely on Him entirely (10–11).

In the first two songs "the messianic servant has been viewed primarily in regal . . . terms" but in chapter 50 "the scene becomes vastly different" and "paves the way for the suffering servant *par excellence*" in chapters 52–53 (Merrill, 513), who suffers not merely at the hands of men but of God, and is consequently exalted by God for

his obedience ("Suffering Servant," *Dictionary of Biblical Imagery*).

The Divinely Smitten Servant (52:13–53:1)

This most famous of the Servant Songs traces the Servant's exaltation (52:13), humiliation (52:14–53:2), experience of rejection and grief (53:3), substitutionary suffering for the sins of others (53:4–6, 8), submissive and uncomplaining suffering (53:7), innocent suffering (53:9), effectual and victorious suffering (53:10–11), and his exaltation again because of his suffering (53:12).

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E. M. Bounds on Prayer

There are two extreme tendencies in the ministry. The one is to shut itself out from intercourse with the people. The monk, the hermit were illustrations of this; they shut themselves out from men to be more with God. They failed, of course. Our being with God is of use only as we expend its priceless benefits on men. This age, neither with preacher nor with people, is much intent on God. Our hankering is not that way. We shut ourselves to our study, we become students, bookworms, Bible worms, sermon makers, noted for literature, thought, and sermons; but the people and God, where are they? Out of heart, out of mind. Preachers who are great thinkers, great students must be the greatest of prayers, or else they will be the greatest of backsliders, heartless professionals, rationalistic, less than the least of preachers in God's estimate. The other tendency is to thoroughly popularize the ministry. He is no longer God's man, but a man of affairs, of the people. He prays not, because his mission is to the people. If he can move the people, create an interest, a sensation in favour of religion, an interest in Church work—he is satisfied. His personal relation to God is no factor in his work. Prayer has little or no place in his plans. The disaster and ruin of such a ministry cannot be computed by earthly arithmetic. What the preacher is in prayer to God, for himself, for his people, so is his power for real good to men, so is his true fruitfulness, his true fidelity to God, to man, for time, for eternity. It is impossible for the preacher to keep his spirit in harmony with the divine nature of his high calling without much prayer. That the preacher by dint of duty and laborious fidelity to the work and routine of the ministry can keep himself in trim and fitness is a serious mistake. Even sermon-making, incessant and taxing as an art, as a duty, as a work, or as a pleasure, will engross and harden, will estrange the heart, by neglect of prayer, from God. The scientist loses God in nature. The preacher may lose God in his sermon. Prayer freshens the heart of the preacher, keeps it in tune with God and in sympathy with the people, lifts his ministry out of the chilly air of a profession, fructifies routine and moves every wheel with the facility and power of a divine unction.

Mr. Spurgeon says: "Of course the preacher is above all others distinguished as a man of prayer. He prays as an ordinary Christian, else he were a hypocrite. He prays more than ordinary Christians, else he were disqualified for the office he has undertaken. If you as ministers are not very prayerful, you are to be pitied. If you become lax in sacred devotion, not only will you need to be pitied but your people also, and the day cometh in which you shall be ashamed and confounded. All our libraries and studies are mere

emptiness compared with our closets. Our seasons of fasting and prayer at the Tabernacle have been high days indeed; never has heaven's gate stood wider; never have our hearts been nearer the central Glory." The praying which makes a prayerful ministry is not a little praying put in as we put flavour to give it a pleasant smack, but the praying must be in the body, and form the blood and bones. Prayer is no petty duty, put into a corner; no piecemeal performance made out of the fragments of time which have been snatched from business and other engagements of life; but it means that the best of our time, the heart of our time and strength must be given. It does not mean the closet absorbed in the study or swallowed up in the activities of ministerial duties; but it means the closet first, the study and activities second, both study and activities freshened and made efficient by the closet. Prayer that affects one's ministry must give tone to one's life. The praying which gives colour and bent to character is no pleasant, hurried pastime. It must enter as strongly into the heart and life as Christ's "strong crying and tears" did; must draw out the soul into an agony of desire as Paul's did; must be an inwrought fire and force like the "effectual, fervent prayer" of James; must be of that quality which, when put into the golden censer and incensed before God, works mighty spiritual throes and revolutions. Prayer is not a little habit pinned on to us while we were tied to our mother's apron strings; neither is it a little decent quarter of a minute's grace said over an hour's dinner, but it is a most serious work of our most serious years. It engages more of time and appetite than our longest dinings or richest feasts. The prayer that makes much of our preaching must be made much of. The character of our praying will determine the character of our preaching. Light praying will make light preaching. Prayer makes preaching strong, gives it unction, and makes it stick. In every ministry weighty for good, prayer has always been a serious business. The preacher must be pre-eminently a man of prayer. His heart must graduate in the school of prayer. In the school of prayer only can the heart learn to preach. No learning can make up for the failure to pray. No earnestness, no diligence, no study, no gifts will supply its lack. Talking to men for God is a great thing, but talking to God for men is greater still. He will never talk well and with real success to men for God who has not learned well how to talk to God for men. More than this, prayerless words in the pulpit and out of it are deadening words.

Taken from *Power through Prayer* (Chapter 4, "Tendencies to Be Avoided") by E. M. Bounds.

So Many Opportunities

The role of a public-safety chaplain is variegated. Although the military chaplaincy is reasonably standardized, there is no uniform understanding of the precise role of the chaplain among police, fire, and EMS. This ambiguity can create challenges because of the variety of expectations, but it also creates opportunities for an ambitious chaplain to create a role for himself.

Many chaplains respond to tragedies and spend time “hanging out” with responders, but a few have the special privilege of being called upon to do training with personnel. As I’ve earned certifications and teaching credentials (particularly in the area of Critical Incident Stress Management—CISM), opportunities for providing training have expanded and continue to grow.

For the last several years I’ve had the opportunity to spend an entire day with our newly hired firefighters teaching a class called “Stress Management for First Responders.” This gives me a unique opportunity to lay some groundwork for the challenges they will face in their career. Although this is largely a secular situation where we provide general advice, it comes as no surprise when I speak to them about the importance of faith in their overall well-being. I challenge them to consider eternal questions and present the ministry



of the chaplain as a source of assistance. Many other opportunities have flowed from this one—gospel conversations, counseling opportunities, and even a young firefighter who asked me to perform his wedding.

Upon the completion of training, the cadets participate in a badge-pinning ceremony at which I pray and present each of them with a special Bible designed to appeal to firefighters. Recently, First Baptist Church in Troy, Michigan, donated a shipment of these Bibles, which will be going into the hands of brand-new firefighters at the outset of their service in our department. I pray—as I know you do—that the Word of God makes its way into their hearts and they are transformed through the gospel of Christ.

Most of us have heard of the tragic news some weeks ago of the school shooting in Santa Fe, Texas. Ten were killed and another thirteen were injured. The community, along with its first responders, was shaken. In the days following the tragedy, a few chaplains from around the state, including myself, were called in to serve the first responders affected by this tragedy. It is sad to see the heartache, but in the face of such tragedy



there is a special privilege to respond and represent Christ.

Whether through teaching, routine interaction, or responding to traumatic events, chaplains have tremendous opportunities to serve and have important conversations of eternal importance. We are thankful for those of you who support our troops, first responders, and the chaplains that serve them. Pray for the continuation of these opportunities and for God to use our chaplains.

Jeremy Van Delinder serves as the chaplain for Round Rock Fire Department in Round Rock, Texas, and Texas Task Force 1 (Urban Search and Rescue Team). Jeremy has two decades of experience in emergency services, having worked as an EMT, firefighter, and public safety officer. He has been the chaplain for RRFD since 2012.



The Spiritual Pothole of Doubt

In previous articles I have addressed the spiritual potholes of discouragement and distraction. Now I want to look at the spiritual pothole of doubt. Many children of God have been hampered in their effectiveness for Him by this matter of doubt. Throughout the Scriptures we find individuals whose lives were weakened and, in some cases, destroyed because of doubt.

We read in 2 Kings 6 that there was a great famine in Samaria; it was a time of severe distress for the people. Then the prophet Elisha came and declared good news to them in 2 Kings 7:1: "Hear ye the word of the LORD; Thus saith the LORD, To morrow about this time shall a measure of fine flour be sold for a shekel, and two measures of barley for a shekel, in the gate of Samaria." However, a man who was apparently one of the king's chief advisors said to Elisha in verse 2, "Behold, if the LORD would make windows in heaven, might this thing be? And he [Elisha] said, Behold, thou shalt see it with thine eyes, but shalt not eat thereof." Elisha rebuked this man because he doubted the word of the Lord. But Elisha also told him that he would not eat of God's plenteous supply, he would only see it.

So what happened? Well, there happened to be four lepers who were starving and said in verse 4, "If we say, We will enter into the city, then the famine is in the city, and we shall die there: and if we sit still here, we die also. Now therefore come, and let us fall unto the host of the Syrians: if they save us alive, we shall live; and if they kill us, we shall but die." So these four lepers went into the camp of the Syrians and found it completely deserted. Second Kings 7:6-7 explains why: "For the LORD had made the host of the Syrians to hear a noise of chariots, and a noise of horses, even the noise of a great host: and they said one to another, Lo, the king of Israel hath hired against us the kings of the Hittites, and the kings of the Egyptians, to come upon us. Wherefore they arose and fled in the twilight, and left their tents, and their horses, and their asses, even the camp as it was, and fled for their life." These lepers found the camp empty of people but full of all their possessions and food they had left behind. They went and told the king's household about the good news, and in verse 16 "the people went out, and spoiled the tents of the Syrians." There was a great time of celebration and joy for everyone—except for one person. We read in 2 Kings 7:17, "And the king appointed the lord on whose hand he leaned to have the

charge of the gate: and the people trode upon him in the gate, and he died, as the man of God had said, who spake when the king came down to him." Verse 20 adds, "And so it fell out unto him: for the people trode upon him in the gate, and he died." This man doubted what God had said, and it cost him his life.

Another biblical example of the consequences of doubt is found in the life of Zacharias. The Lord sent an angel to give him a wonderful promise; in Luke 1:13 the angel Gabriel said to him, "Fear not, Zacharias: for thy prayer is heard; and thy wife Elisabeth shall bear thee a son, and thou shalt call his name John." But Zacharias answered in verse 18, "Whereby shall I know this? for I am an old man, and my wife well stricken in years." Gabriel responded in verse 20, "Behold, thou shalt be dumb, and not able to speak, until the day that these things shall be performed, because thou believest not my words, which shall be fulfilled in their season." Verse 22 says, "And when he came out, he could not speak unto them: and they perceived that he had seen a vision in the temple: for he beckoned unto them, and remained speechless." Zacharias could not speak a word until his wife Elisabeth delivered their promised son. In verses 63-64, "And he asked for a writing table, and wrote, saying, His name is John. And they marvelled all. And his mouth was opened immediately, and his tongue loosed, and he spake, and praised God." Zacharias' doubt cost him his speech for a period of time.

No doubt we are all familiar with the account of our Lord Jesus Christ walking on the water. Peter said in Matthew 14:28, "Lord, if it be thou, bid me come unto thee on the water." The Lord did, and Peter got out of the boat and began to walk on the water—until he looked at the waves, became afraid, and began to sink. Verse 31 says, "And immediately Jesus stretched forth his hand, and caught him, and said unto him, O thou of little faith, wherefore didst thou doubt?" Peter's doubt led to his sinking.

These examples in Scripture ought to be a challenge to all God's people. Doubt can lead to death, loss of speech, and sinking despair. We should never doubt what God declares!

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Recommended Books on Prayer

Biographical

Diary and Life, Andrew Bonar
Mountain Rain, Eileen Crossman (biography of James O. Fraser)
How I Know God Answers Prayer, Rosalind Goforth
The Autobiography of George Muller
Answers to Prayer, George Muller

Devotional/Sermonic

A Praying Life, Paul Miller
Power through Prayer, E. M. Bounds
Purpose in Prayer, E. M. Bounds
Private Prayer: The Secret Key of Heaven, Thomas Brooks
The Return of Prayers, Thomas Goodwin
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