

ISSUE THIRTY-FOUR, JULY-SEPTEMBER 2018

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Lessons from Acts

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Need a Speaker for Your Prayer Conference or Event?

There are a number of gifted speakers associated with *Prayer Connect*. Jonathan Graf regularly ministers in churches of varying sizes. Carol Madison is also available to minister in the area of prayer for revival and community transformation. Our parent organizations, Harvest Prayer Ministries and the Church Prayer Leaders Network, have many speakers associated with their ministries. You can find their contact information at the respective emails or websites.

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The mission of **PRAYERCONNECT** is

1. To encourage and equip believers toward a deeper walk with Jesus Christ through prayer—our experiential connection to God.
2. To resource prayer leaders and pastors with tools to help them motivate, disciple, and mobilize believers in churches to be a part of an army that seeks to pray the purposes of God for churches, communities, and the nations.
3. To be a unifying force between prayer ministries, community transformation groups, and churches.

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Previously in Prayer Connect

A powerful prayer life comes by way of a supernatural partnership with the Holy Spirit. As the Spirit prompts and directs us, our prayers become laser-focused and Kingdom-effective. This issue on “Supernatural Partnership” explores the joy of Spirit-empowered prayer. You can order this and other back issues at prayerconnect.org.



When Have We Prayed about It?

Our ministry recently changed office locations. We loved the space we had been in for the previous five years, surviving three landlords and no lease. Our landlord the past two years asked us for a three-year lease, but we believed we could not agree, given our financial situation as a nonprofit.



He let us stay until he found someone for the space. And one day earlier this year that appeared to be the case. An interested party traipsed through our office, picking out whose office would be whose. So the next morning we decided not to wait for the vacate notice.

Within five hours we found a wonderful, more functional space, three times the size of our old office, for \$600 less a month! A true miracle of God.

But wait. We did not stop and hold an impromptu corporate prayer meeting to discern God's will in this matter. We did not spend hours crying out to Him for direction. So what gives? Why the miracle with “little” prayer? Because we are a prayer ministry, I felt somewhat embarrassed by this wonderful answer to prayer with so little apparent prayer involved.

It caused me to think. In many believers' lives—especially leaders—more prayer is taking place than we realize. Paul writes in Romans 8 about living and walking in the Spirit. In verse 5 he tells us that “those who live in accordance with the Spirit have their minds set on what the Spirit desires.”

If you are a follower of Jesus Christ, you have the Holy Spirit indwelling you. If you are intent on staying connected to Him, I suspect you consistently meet with God. And throughout most days, your ordinary thoughts turn into prayer.

When we stay in this posture, the Spirit can speak to us. He can guide and direct even if we are not actively praying about a specific situation. We can “walk in the Spirit” and make Spirit-led decisions.

I long to see more churches engaging in regular corporate prayer meetings. And I long to see more elder/deacon boards and large church staffs regularly seeking God about the life of their ministry. But I also recognize that God can still lead, direct, and bless without a special prayer meeting to make every decision—provided leaders have an ongoing prayerful, Spirit-led relationship with Him.

What's My Point?

Prayer leaders and pastors: keep working to move prayer to the forefront of your churches. But don't become negative when prayer is not growing as you think it should. If your leaders are walking well with God in their personal lives, they can be led of the Spirit!

As for our office-space miracle, I know our staff continually prays for increased territory for ministry and for God's blessing over us. We continually surrender our lives and ministry to Him. And as we walk in that posture, God can do amazing things!

—Jonathan Graf



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God's Blessing on the National Day of Prayer | By Dr. Ronnie Floyd

I saw the Bible in action in many ways on Thursday, May 3, 2018, as believers all over our nation, and in other countries as well, united their hearts in prayer. This led to a climactic evening in Washington, D.C.'s historic Statuary Hall in the United States Capitol Building, during the 2018 National Observance of the National Day of Prayer (NDP).

As we promoted our theme of PRAY FOR AMERICA: UNITY, we saw America engage. Thousands of NDP gatherings and prayer observances happened in and for our nation.

By the time the observance began on Thursday evening, anticipation filled Statuary Hall. As we stood boldly and called for unity, the Lord commanded His blessing!

The Bible says in Psalm 133:3, "There the Lord bestows his blessing, even life forevermore." Where is "there"? It is found in verse 1: "How good and pleasant it is when God's people live together in unity!"

Yes, God bestowed His anointed, powerful blessing as we stood in unity.

The Lord Works Mightily

In my opening statements on the evening of May 3, I shared ways that God had already worked in our nation in thousands of gatherings that day. For example:

- In Maine, there were people praying for America on top of Cadillac Mountain in Acadia National Park, where the sun rises first in our nation.
- First Priority, a youth-led evangelistic organization, reported 25,000 students were praying for America.
- At each LifeWay Book Store across America, times of prayer for America were set and observed by employees and customers.
- In Hollywood, CA, a few hundred

Christian entertainment professionals gathered to offer prayers for America.

- The International Christian Film Festival, with more than 4,500 registrants from 52 nations in the world, took place in Orlando, FL, the week before, and they set aside a moment to pray for America by using the 2018 National Prayer for America.
- A few thousand people were expected in Spectrum Field in Clearwater, FL, as 70 pastors and churches joined together to pray for America.
- On the morning of May 3, Dr. David Jeremiah and the Shadow Valley Church in San Diego, CA, had a NDP observance and more than 25,000 people from around the world joined them online to pray for America.
- The morning of May 3, at the White House, President Donald Trump recognized and honored the National Day of Prayer—keeping and reaffirming the importance of faith in America, advancing the need for the power of prayer in America, and reminding everyone that the United States of America is truly One Nation Under God.

Our great God is at work across America, commanding His blessing.

God Uses People

During the National Observance, God used each person who led in worship, prayed, or spoke! These people were outstanding and helped us set up prayer times when God moved upon us powerfully.

Each person who prayed—Priscilla Shirer, Sammy Rodriguez, H.B. Charles

Jr., Congressman Mark Walker, and Pastor Frank and Sherry Pomeroy (Sutherland Springs, TX)—obviously prayed in tune with God, taking prayer seriously. God also used worship leaders UniVoice and the Brooklyn Tabernacle Singers in a powerful way. Yes, God uses people!

Social Media Explodes

Social media exploded globally. Even without taking into account secular media, DayStar Television, and some other outlets, here is what we know about the national reach of NDP:

- The National Day of Prayer trended #1 nationwide on Twitter throughout the day.
- The NDP trended twice, for two different tags on Twitter: #NationalDayofPrayer and #Pray4Unity.
- An estimated 200 million people were reached with the message of unity and prayer through social media. More than 300,000 people watched the NDP service on Facebook Live, and a potential one million would view it within the following few weeks.

The list could continue, but it is obvious that God worked mightily!

We know that all great movements of God are preceded by the extraordinary prayer of God's people. It is our prayer that the National Day of Prayer is the catalytic moment that ignites this nation to experience the next Great Spiritual Awakening. **PC**



DR. RONNIE FLOYD is the president of the National Day of Prayer and senior pastor of Cross Church in Northwest Arkansas.



Prayer Event in India Draws Thousands

Evangelist Anne Graham Lotz drew close to 500,000 people at a prayer event in India earlier this year, according to AnGel Ministries' reports (based on police estimates). At a separate gathering of 10,000, "almost every hand" went up when people were asked if they wanted to receive Jesus Christ as Savior, Lotz's ministry reported.

According to Vicki Bentley, a member of AnGeL Ministries Board, who traveled with Lotz to India, there were advertisements all over the city of Hyderabad for the second annual "National Day of Prayer." Local organizers helped put together the large gathering, and



thousands of people arrived on trains, buses, and other forms of transportation from the countryside.

Bentley described Lotz's address to the crowd: "Anne preached about Daniel the prophet. She explained from Daniel 9 that 'one man, who knew God and prayed, moved heaven and changed

a nation.' Then she challenged those present to pray as Daniel did," Bentley recounted. "As far as the eye could see and beyond, people cried out to heaven, agreeing together as Anne led in prayer for personal and national revival."

The meeting was organized by the Christian Council of Telangana, which brought together bishops from various denominations, including the Roman Catholic Church, Church of South India, and Methodist churches. The minority Christian faith has continued growing in India over the past several years, but they have faced significant persecution at the hands of Hindu radicals.

Prayer for Peace in Korea

Evangelical leaders and pastors from across the political spectrum are calling Christians to pray every Friday at noon for peace on the Korean Peninsula. One of the leading signatories is Leith Anderson, president of the National Association of Evangelicals, representing many organizations and ministries under the umbrella of Evangelicals for Peace.

The group's official statement regarding the call to prayer reads (in part):

"As American Christians with diverse approaches to force and nonviolence and yet all committed to pursuing peaceful relations among people and nations, we unite in prayer for permanent peace on the Korean Peninsula. We do this mindful of the millions of lives, including more than 230,000 Americans, that would be threatened by an escalation of conflict there.

"We are heartened by proposals for dialogue between our national leaders at a time when increasing tensions seemed

to be marching our countries perilously in the direction of greater conflict, if not war. We call on all Christians everywhere to join us in praying for a just and peaceful resolution.

"We pray for wisdom for our political, diplomatic and military leaders as they work across differences toward a goal of peace, security and freedom. We pray that God will bless the efforts of citizens who seek to bridge the vast differences between our countries."

President Reads Prayer Notes Every Day

In response to national protests and declarations against President Donald Trump by well-known people, Congressman Mike Bost (R-IL) and his wife began a campaign of collecting thoughts and prayers to encourage the president.

"We thought maybe we'd get 30, whatever," Rep. Bost told *CBN News*. "It came back—there were hundreds."

People from age five to almost 100 wrote the president encouraging messages. Bost had the letters delivered to the White House and had no idea if

they'd be read or not. Then, a few months later, he was invited to the White House with about 20 other congressmen to see the president sign a bill



into a law. While they were in the Oval Office, Trump wondered aloud why Rep. Bost's name sounded so familiar.

All of a sudden the president turned to the Illinois lawmaker and said, "Bost, Bost, prayer cards!"

"Wow! Yeah," Bost replied. "We sent you some prayer cards."

A White House aide then pulled the

bag of prayer cards off a shelf in the Oval Office, brought them to Bost and said, "You know we use these every day."

Vice President Mike Pence affirmed their use. "He's not joking," Pence said. "We read these every day and they're so wonderful."

Bost says he knows firsthand the impact that thoughts and prayers can

have on lawmakers. "Scripture is pretty clear that we need to pray for our leaders," he says. And it's something the Illinois lawmaker has put into practice his whole life, no matter which party the president comes from.

ABIGAIL ROBERTSON, adapted from
CBN News (cbn.com)

BGEA Chaplains Respond to Shootings with Prayer

Crisis-trained chaplains from the Billy Graham Evangelistic Association (BGEA) were requested to provide emotional and spiritual care to the coun-



ty in January after a 15-year-old student fatally shot two fellow students and injured 14 others with a handgun at Marshall County High School in Benton, KY. Fourteen chaplains were deployed to comfort this population of about 4,500.

The chaplains were welcomed at multiple events, including a prayer vigil, memorial service, and government meeting. Chaplain Coordinator

David Hicks commented that many people have rededicated their lives to Christ. "You can see the Spirit of God working here," he said.

Chaplains had the opportunity to pray with school administrators and many of

the shooting victims and their families. The community expressed gratitude to the chaplains, even pausing at stoplights to say thank you.

"This is as faith-based a community as I've ever encountered," said Bob Cooper, a crisis-trained chaplain. At the school's first basketball game after the shooting, four teenage boys were seen carrying Bibles. These boys had been planning and praying for a revival long before the tragedy occurred within their school.

LIZZY LONG, Billy Graham Evangelistic Association (bgea.org)

Australia Fasts and Prays for USA

For the sixth year in a row, Australia called the nations of the world to join with them to pray and fast for four days for the United States, from April 30–May 3, 2018.

Commissioner James Condon, a member of the National Day of Prayer and Fasting team, says, "God has done remarkable things in America since we began to pray and fast, but God can do greater things yet! We in Australia believe it is our turn to stand in the gap for the nation of America and pray for revival and transformation for the USA through prayer and fasting according to 2 Chronicles 7:14. Whilst America has a new administration, the need for a new National Awakening has never been more apparent."

Commissioner Condon from the

Salvation Army continues, "We in Australia are grateful for the protection that America gave Australia and the nations of the free world during World War II. The Battle of the Coral Sea, fought by the USA in 1942, was the turning point in the Second World War for Australia. America continues to be a blessing to the world. Even to this day the USA is the largest contributor of foreign aid among all the countries of the world. Thank God for America!"

Warwick Marsh, also from Australia's National Day of Prayer and Fasting team, says, "We are thankful for America's strong Christian heritage, but this will not save America. Only the blood of Christ can. America and Australia need revival and reformation."



Prayer Calendar

Cry Out America
Tuesday, September 11
awakeningamerica.us

See You at the Pole
Wednesday, September 26
syatp.com

America's Tent of Meeting
September 27–29
awakenthedawn.org

Day of Prayer for Peace
of Jerusalem
Sunday, October 7
daytopray.com



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PRAYER

—AND—

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Lessons from Acts

WHEN THE EDITORIAL STAFF of *Prayer Connect* decided to do an issue of the magazine on the topic of prayer in the Book of Acts, I took the summer of 2017 to pray my way through Acts. I sat on my porch many evenings while I outlined every instance of prayer I found. Then I journaled my personal prayer responses to everything related to the way God advances His Kingdom through the faithful prayers of ordinary people.

This journey deepened my faith and my longing to see the same power demonstrated in my own prayer life. Of course, as I prayed, I had surges of great confidence but also times of momentary wavering. That seems to be a pattern in my prayer life whenever I ask God for supernatural breakthroughs. But I pray on!

NATURAL BENEFITS

Acts is loaded with prayer principles for those who, like the early Christians, live a prayer lifestyle. This sample of truths both encourages me and challenges me:

- We need to know Jesus intimately if we are to lead well in the Kingdom (1:21–22).
- Scripture is a wonderful way to frame our prayers in appealing to the character of God. The apostles often quoted the Word to express their hope and expectation for breakthrough, based on what they knew

to be true of God (2:14–36).

- The apostles prayed and trusted the Spirit to lead and direct them in every move they made, even with the casting of lots to determine new leadership! (1:24–26).
- The power of repentance invites the refreshing work of the Spirit (2:38).
- The greatest prayer we can offer someone is for healing in the name of Jesus—both for their soul health and their physical health (3:4–6).
- Prayer empowers God’s people to boldly speak the truth of Jesus (3:12–16).
- When we share intimacy with Jesus in prayer, people will notice (4:13).
- Opposition fueled the early believers’ prayers. They did not focus on escape from persecution but rather invited the Spirit to fill them with greater boldness to speak of Jesus. Persecution is a catalyst for the gospel (4:29–31).

As you can see, I only have space here to write my impressions from chapters 1–4. The other 24 chapters are also packed with faith-filled prayer, the Holy Spirit’s power, and earth-shaking manifestations of God’s Kingdom!

SUPERNATURAL POWER

In this issue, we try to capture some prayer lessons in Acts. Dick Eastman

explains many of the supernatural components of prayer, including empowerment, courage, unity, and generosity. As a global ministry leader, he believes the advancement of the gospel comes through embracing the supernatural. Daniel Henderson devotes his ministry to training pastors to pray, preach, and lead with the kind of power found in Acts. He writes about the need to “sit there” and listen to the Spirit before making any moves or decisions. And Sue Detweiler reminds us that Spirit-led prayer will disrupt the status quo, challenge boundaries of faith, and turn the world’s system upside down!

After working my way through Acts, I came to the closing verses that sum up Paul’s ministry—always fueled by prayer. Imagine this kind of supernatural breakthrough:

For two whole years Paul stayed there in his own rented house and welcomed all who came to see him. He proclaimed the kingdom of God and taught about the Lord Jesus Christ—with all boldness and without hindrance! (28:30–31).

It’s summer again. How about if we all sit on our porches and pray through Acts? I could use another round of hope and expectation for supernatural empowerment!

CAROL MADISON is editor of *Prayer Connect*.



*Timeless Insights
from the Early Church*

THE IMPACT *of* PRAYER



DR. A.T. PIERSON, A CONTEMPORARY OF EVANGELIST Dwight L. Moody, wrote, “Generally, if not uniformly, prayer is both starting-point and goal to every movement in which are the elements of permanent progress. Wherever the Church’s sluggishness is aroused and the world’s wickedness arrested, somebody has been praying.”¹

This was certainly true of the early Church. The Book of Acts is a record of answered prayer and a demonstration of the supernatural in response. All this was at the heart of the spread of the gospel.

Today, the Book of Acts is very much alive in the advancement of the gospel globally. Consider an Asian nation where our ministry, Every Home for Christ (EHC), launched a work more than 25 years ago. The entire country had only 25,000 believers, at best, out of a population of some 20 million.

Despite danger, our workers bravely took the gospel from village to village. Soon our office was following up on 3,000 or more decision cards monthly. We have now processed more than 350,000.

I traveled to that nation to see firsthand what God was doing in answer to prayer. “Was there an explanation to this miraculous growth?” I queried our director.

“It’s because of miracles in answer to prayer,” he explained, “just like in the Book of Acts.” He added, “More than 60 percent of all our conversions are the result of signs and wonders.”

He told a story about a team of EHC evangelists who visited a mountain village, hoping to share the gospel. In that culture the chief of a village must grant permission for anyone to visit a village in such a way. The chief bluntly refused. Understandably dejected, our workers visited a neighboring village. But first they gave the chief several gospel messages in the local language, hoping he might change his mind and invite them back.

Within days, that chief’s daughter became ill to the point of death. Village witchdoctors and tribal medicine could not help her. The chief remembered the words of the evangelists and still had some of the gospel booklets about Jesus—Savior and Healer.

He ordered the evangelists to return. They prayed

BY DICK EASTMAN

in faith over the sick child, and she was healed instantly. The chief quickly gave our team permission to visit every home, and almost everyone in that village came to Christ as the result of that one miracle. Not only that, the chief offered property to build a church.

The Book of Acts is more than a mere record of how God moved among His children in the early Church. It's a manual and model for praying believers today.

SEVEN-FOLD IMPACT OF SUPERNATURAL PRAYER

One of the most fascinating passages in Acts demonstrates several ways the early believers responded to persecution as the Church began to grow.

After they prayed, the place where they were meeting was shaken. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and spoke the word of God boldly. All the believers were one in heart and mind. No one claimed that any of their possessions was their own, but they shared everything they had. With great power the apostles continued to testify to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus. And God's grace was so powerfully at work in them all (Acts 4:31–33).

These believers clearly knew they were serving a supernatural God who performed supernatural acts.

The word *supernatural* is almost synonymous with the Book of Acts. *Super* means “over and above; higher in quality or degree.” *Natural* means “having a normal or usual character; not out of the ordinary.” Combining these words, *supernatural* means “departing from or over and above what is considered usual or normal—that which transcends the laws of nature.”

In the backstory to this passage, the apostles, specifically Peter and John, had witnessed a remarkable miracle: a 40-year-old lame man healed at the Gate Beautiful (see Acts 3:1–9). A massive crowd gathered in response to the miracle. Peter preached about repentance, and some 5,000 believers were added to

the Church (see Acts 4:1–4).

Obviously, this greatly troubled the authorities, who arrested Peter and John. Acknowledging the astonishing miracle—thousands had seen the once-lame man “walking and jumping, and praising God” (Acts 3:8)—they felt they had no option but to let Peter and John go. But the authorities threatened them never to speak of Jesus again.

Peter and John returned to their fellow believers who immediately prayed, asking the Lord to reveal Himself supernaturally:

“Lord, consider their threats and enable your servants to speak your word with great boldness. Stretch out your hand to heal and perform signs and wonders through the name of your holy servant Jesus” (Acts 4:29–30).

They prayed for supernatural intervention—and God didn't let them down. Seven distinct results made an impact—something of a second Pentecost for the advancement of the gospel. Each of these impacts must be prefaced with “when they had prayed.” Prayer was key to each supernatural outcome.

IMPACT #1 SUPERNATURAL SHAKING

Whereas the outpouring of the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost included a mighty rushing wind accompanied by tongues of fire resting on all present (Acts 2:1–4), the prayer of Acts 4:31 resulted in a literal, physical shaking of the place where the believers had gathered.

This passage reminds me of an unusual experience early in my ministry. About 150 young people were attending a prayer retreat at Mammoth Mountain in Southern California. I decided to give a brief devotional on prayer and then have the youth kneel and quietly confess anything that might hinder their praying throughout the weekend. After I shared from Acts 4:31–33 I said, “You never

know, when you begin to pray, but that God might just come in a unique way to shake things up! Let's all get on our knees and expect God to meet us!”

Suddenly a 3.5 earthquake struck directly below the mountain! Granted, the region had quakes of that magnitude relatively often. But the building shook enough to cause a mini-revival among the youth.

Not all praying, of course, produces a physical shaking. But I believe that when God gets His people's attention today, preparing their hearts to encounter Christ personally, many of their prayers bring about a spiritual shaking.

IMPACT #2 SUPERNATURAL EMPOWERMENT

The second impact of this Acts 4 Pentecost-like outpouring of God's Spirit was a supernatural empowerment. Just before the ascension of our Lord, He declared, “You will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth” (Acts 1:8).

To empower is “to give power or authority to; to authorize; to enable, permit.” Becoming Christ's witnesses came supernaturally and produced believers who could function in the supernatural.

IMPACT #3 SUPERNATURAL COURAGE

A third impact naturally flowed from the second. Holy Spirit saturation included a baptism in boldness, a supernatural courage.

One cannot read Acts without marveling at the holy boldness and courage of the early disciples. They were a praying people. And that prayer produced courage.

Consider the courage of Stephen (Acts 7: 54–60), whose powerful sermon led to his martyrdom. As he was being stoned to death, ringleader Saul consented to it—and watched. Stephen's last words, an eight-word prayer, impacted

not only Saul but the Church universal for generations. Stephen prayed simply, “Lord, do not hold this sin against them” (Acts 7:60).

God heard that prayer and the Saul of Acts 8 became the Paul of Acts 9.

IMPACT #4 SUPERNATURAL UNITY

A fourth impact of this outpouring of God’s Spirit was a supernatural unity. This was an “over and above what is considered normal” unity. Acts 4:31–32 says, “After they prayed . . . all the believers were one in heart and mind.”

One quality of every great revival is unity. The growing global prayer movement of our day is bringing the Body of Christ together. We see that unity especially in movements such as America’s National Day of Prayer. In the late 1970s, a handful of prayer leaders formed the National Prayer Committee. And we rejoiced in 1988 when President Ronald Reagan signed a bill into law, designating the first Thursday of May as America’s official National Day of Prayer.

This past National Day of Prayer, Statuary Hall in the Capitol Building was packed with congressional representatives, business and ministry leaders, and intercessors, celebrating this day. Nationally, in 40,000-plus local gatherings, hundreds of thousands of believers united in prayer for our nation.

A spirit of united prayer in our nation clearly is growing! Could another Great Awakening be on the horizon?

IMPACT #5 SUPERNATURAL GENEROSITY

A spirit of generosity and corporate care also resulted from this Acts 4 prayer encounter. “After they prayed . . . No one claimed that any of their possessions was their own, but they shared everything they had” (vs. 31–32). Praying people become giving people.

A study of past revivals and awakenings shows a similar spirit of generosity. I recall a time in our ministry when

we were tested financially. Our nation was in a severe recession. Yet God had convicted our executive director, Tim Middlebrook, that our ministry should be debt free. At that time, we faced 20 additional years of \$30,000 monthly payments for our headquarters, The Jericho Center.

At a monthly School of Prayer I was conducting, I asked Tim to share his burden about our finances. Afterward, one of the intercessors approached me, weeping. She gave me a check for a rather odd sum, totaling just over \$5,000, down to a few cents. The Lord had impressed on her that she should empty her bank account, even to her last penny, as firstfruits on paying off our debt.

I wept with her and said I believed something had “broken” in the heavens because of her gift. She had given all she had! And that demonstrated supernatural generosity. Within 24 months, without sending any specific debt-retirement appeals to our ministry’s general donor list, the entire debt of our building was retired 20 years early!

IMPACT #6 SUPERNATURAL ANOINTING

Those who gathered for that early Church prayer encounter also received a supernatural anointing of authority and power: “With great power the apostles continued to testify to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus” (Acts 4:33). Prayer made this possible. These anointed early believers witnessed with supernatural authority.

Luke, the author of Acts, also recorded in his Gospel these words of Jesus to His 72 disciples: “I have given you authority to trample on snakes and scorpions and to overcome all the power of the enemy; nothing will harm you” (Luke 10:19). I believe God unleashed this power as a result of the prayers of these early believers.

Prayer is the key to all fruitful evangelism. I’m convinced that the degree to which prayer is mobilized will be the degree to which the world is evangelized!

IMPACT #7 SUPERNATURAL FAVOR

Finally, the prayers of these early disciples resulted in the release of a supernatural favor. The biblical word for this favor is *grace*. The passage concludes with a simple but vital statement: “And God’s grace was so powerfully at work in them all” (v. 33).

Some time ago, a team of our EHC workers, traveling in a remote area of Papua New Guinea, came to a wide river separating them from a village they could see on the other side. But they also could see several crocodiles lining the river banks. They huddled for prayer and decided to hang onto logs and float across, holding their backpacks, filled with literature, above their heads.

One by one, while villagers watched, our team crossed the river safely. The village chief joyfully invited them into the village and allowed them to share the gospel. The team leader used the story of Daniel in the lion’s den to demonstrate how Jesus Christ can save men and women from the jaws of Satan and sin—and crocodiles!

The chief declared, “Until today we have worshiped the crocodile as our god. From today we will worship only Jesus Christ and the God of these men!”

The favor of God.

Truly, the Book of Acts and the impact of supernatural prayer are very much alive in the advancement of the gospel globally. Have we fully tapped into its power? **PC**

¹A.T. Pierson, *The Fundamentals: Volume 9, Chapter 6: Divine Efficacy of Prayer*, scribd.com/document/297160901/The-Fundamentals-Volume-9-Chapter-6-Divine-Efficacy-of-Prayer.



DICK EASTMAN is international president of Every Home for Christ (ehc.org), a home-to-home evangelism ministry with 8,000 staff operating in 189 national offices globally. He is the author of 15 books on prayer and evangelism, and a member of America’s National Prayer Committee. His ministry has equipped more than three million believers to pray for global evangelism.

*The Role of Prayer in
Decision-Making*



BEFORE YOU MAKE A MOVE



IN LATE NOVEMBER 2003, I preached at a very large church in Minnesota—part of a potential call as their next senior pastor. The congregation had been through difficult storms. They had recently moved into a brand-new, 360,000-square-foot facility on massive acreage. The building featured a 4,200-seat worship center.

Just weeks after the relocation, they discovered moral failure in their dynamic pastor of 15 years. They were left with an 18-million-dollar mortgage in addition to the ten-million-dollar shortfall in their previous capital campaign.

I knew this suburban, upper-middle-class congregation's priority and commitment to world missions, but I also know the tendency of wealthy Americans to rely on their own resources. So I preached from Acts 13:1–3:

In the church at Antioch there were prophets and teachers: Barnabas, Simeon called Niger, Lucius of Cyrene, Manaen (who had been brought up with Herod the tetrarch) and Saul. While they were

worshipping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, "Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them." So after they had fasted and prayed, they placed their hands on them and sent them off.

The church needed clear direction for the next step. So did my family and I. After preaching, I led the church in an evening worship-based prayer service. We earnestly wanted to hear from the Lord.

By the following Sunday, I accepted the call after a 99.5 percent affirmation by the congregation. This began a challenging but Kingdom-advancing chapter in all of our lives based on the assurance that the Holy Spirit had spoken to us, specifically through Acts 13:1–3.

We all have areas of our lives in which we need clear direction. We long for supernatural empowerment in our service for Christ. The Book of Acts, and this scene from 13:1–3 in particular, encourage us to trust the God who promises to lead us by His Spirit for the sake of His gospel mission.

BY DANIEL HENDERSON

DON'T JUST DO SOMETHING— SIT THERE!

PRAYER LEADING TO DIRECTION

In the Book of Acts the early Church made nearly every major decision in the environment of earnest prayer—either personal or corporate:

- The believers prayed for direction in advancing the gospel and in other issues of leadership.
- In the upper room, they waited for the power and direction of the Spirit prior to Pentecost (Acts 1), even choosing Matthias to replace Judas (1:23–26).
- In Acts 4:23–31, after encountering the first wave of persecution, the church gathered to seek the Lord's direction and power.
- In Acts 6:1–7, the apostles devoted themselves to “prayer and the ministry of the word,” and the Lord gave direction for taking care of the widows and advancing the gospel.
- Saul (Paul) spent three days in prayer and fasting before God sent Ananias to restore him and release him into his calling (Acts 9:9–18).
- Other accounts demonstrate that believers often fasted and prayed before they moved ahead in the advancement of the gospel. The Spirit gave specific directions about where to go and where not to go. Paul's various missionary journeys serve as an example.

A COUNTER-INTUITIVE CALL

Our culture is marked by motivational phrases: “Get'er done!” “Lead, follow, or get out of the way.” “If you snooze, you lose.” “Get in the game.” “Give it all you've got.”

And we often say, “Don't just sit there—do something.” But as I preached from Acts 13 that pivotal Sunday, my

title was, “Don't Just Do Something—Sit There.”

In Acts 13:1–3, the Holy Spirit gave these early Church leaders clear direction. In their case, it was the birth of world missions, not because they conferred to create a vision for reaching the world for Christ. Rather, they were “worshiping the Lord and fasting.” They were seeking the Lord with no agenda other than to experience His guidance and share His life. The modern ministry mindset generally cannot fathom this concept.

But the early Church leaders were intense and intentional—not just to chart a course for life and ministry but also to discover the mind of the Spirit. Ministry by, from, and for Christ. Ministry that changed the world.

They knew that ministry is not achieved. Ministry is received. They knew that prayer is not an escape from the thorny predicaments of life. Prayer is engaging with the One who alone can give the wisdom, direction, power, and unifying grace to approach our concerns as opportunities for Christ's glory—manifesting His strength through the weakness of human vessels.

THE ROLE OF TOOLS

These days we have more tools for personal direction and ministry accomplishment than at any time in Church history. At the click of a mouse or tap on a smartphone we can access the latest insights, order the finest resources, and purchase the best high-powered technology aids. We have established buildings and budgets that would blow the minds of pastors from previous generations. Generally, there is nothing wrong with these tools.

But there is a world of difference between simply *using* these tools and *depending* on them. The acid test is the prayer level in the lives of our leadership

teams, our congregations, and ourselves.

If we are to *achieve* God's plan, we must first *receive* God's direction.

THE HOLY SPIRIT: OUR “HOW TO”

In recent days I have pondered why the early Church prayed as *they* did—yet *we* struggle to give even marginal devotion to prayer. I have concluded the primary difference is that the early Church understood that the Holy Spirit is the “how to.”

Typically, today we think the Holy Spirit *helps us* with our “how to.” We have so many other tools that we view the Holy Spirit as our *advisor* in ministry rather than the *source* of all ministry. We can google an answer in a few seconds. Why should we spend two hours in prayer?

My smartphone is packed with dozens of downloaded apps. Although I could easily view the Holy Spirit as an app that I tap when I need specific assistance, I need to understand that the Holy Spirit is the operating system, not an app. When I embrace this reality, all the other “how tos” (such as direction, provision, empowerment) become secondary.

Zechariah wrote, “‘Not by might nor by power, but by my Spirit,’ says the LORD of hosts” (Zech. 4:6). And those words are as rich and relevant today as they were the day they were penned thousands of years ago. The endless supply of the Spirit is still sufficient, but He cannot propel a sophisticated, self-sufficient power boat. We need a different image: May God help us set our sails and catch the wind of the Holy Spirit, embracing the old paths and receiving new power for a fresh advancement of the gospel—for the glory of Christ.

INSPIRATION NOT IMITATION

In his article “Prayer Life vs. Life of Prayer” my friend and fellow pastor Kee-ney Dickenson writes, “We pray in the context of ministry, but Jesus ministered in the context of prayer.”¹

BRAND NEW FROM DANIEL HENDERSON

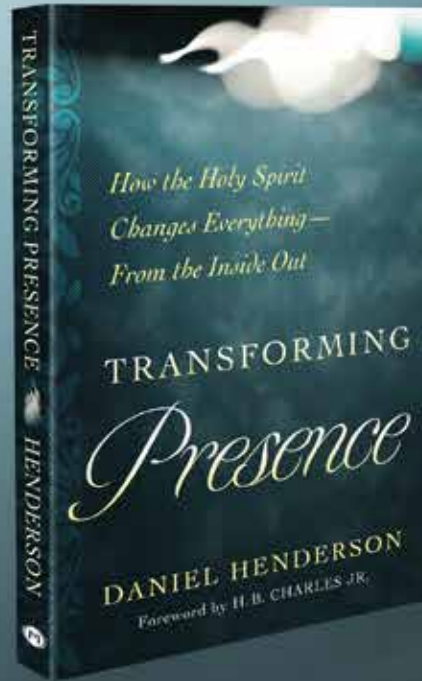
The early Church leaders had seen, felt, and been forever changed by the way Christ lived, taught, and implemented the gospel ministry. They were emulating the One who lived in this zone of spiritual sensitivity, insight, and power every day—through His life of prayer. They dared not create a different paradigm. They had to walk in His steps through prayer and the ministry of the Word.

For many years in my pastoral ministry, I practiced what I describe as “direction by imitation.” This included attendance at conferences, reading books by successful pastors, and seeking to implement what God had blessed in other people’s contexts. Of course, disappointment often resulted because our church was not those churches, and I was not those leaders. When we try to wear someone else’s ministry clothes, they don’t fit.

After studying Acts 13:1–3, we shifted our approach to “vision by inspiration.” In 2001 we launched a 40-Day Spiritual Discovery, using a churchwide devotional study and prayer guide we designed for every member of the congregation. We urged everyone to fast in some fashion (such as solid food, dessert, television, Internet, or shopping).

Of course, we sponsored accelerated prayer opportunities each week. At the end of this united, extraordinary season, the pastors and elders gathered for a retreat to discern what we had “received” during this journey.

With unanimity we came to a conclusion about the ministry direction for the next year. At the time, we did not calculate that it would involve a 25 percent annual increase in general-fund giving. Our previous trend had been around ten percent. Despite much pushback from the finance team, we forged ahead, sharing this plan with the congregation and continuing to submit it to the Lord in our various weekly prayer times. We believed that if we could not trust this prayer-infused process, we might as well throw spaghetti on the wall and just concoct something from the image of smeared tomato sauce.



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After an overwhelming vote of approval from the congregation (since they, too, had a vital role in this direction), we began our new budget year on July 1. We did not conduct any stewardship campaign or preach on generosity. We moved ahead with the things that sprang from our 40-day discovery.

We finished that ministry year exactly 25 percent ahead of the previous year! The increased giving enabled us to fund all the Holy Spirit had placed on our hearts to advance the gospel.

This is not some formula for an annual budget increase. Rather, it illustrates the priority of engaging in a credible, prayerful, participatory process of receiving the Lord's mind and will for our lives.

I've come to believe that He reserves His most fruitful plans for those who maintain the most focused passion—for Him. God is always glad when we give

Him our undivided attention. We continued this process in the years to follow with fruitful results.

SIT THERE

It's been said that "if you are excited about what God is doing elsewhere, don't mimic the miracle; imitate the faith." The early Church followed the example of Jesus who said, "The Son can do nothing by himself; he can do only what he sees his Father doing, because whatever the Father does the Son also does" (John 5:19).

Those believers pledged to do only what the Spirit of Christ in them was doing. Through prayer they received His direction. With all the superficial options available to us today, we must not abandon the vital role of seeking the Holy Spirit—earnestly and enduringly.

Jesus' last words to every church in the Book of Revelation (chapters 2 and 3) was, "Whoever has ears, let them hear

what the Spirit says to the churches." Our Lord would not have given this command and then gone mute. No, He speaks to us via His Spirit in conjunction with His Word.

Just as our church discovered in a tumultuous time, let us remember—each time we need clear direction—that the Holy Spirit *is* our "how to." So don't just do something. Sit there. And pray to the Lord, "Speak, for your servant is listening" (1 Sam. 3:10). **PC**

¹Keeney Dickenson, "Prayer Life vs. Life of Prayer," 64fellowship.com/resources/articles/prayer-life-vs-life-of-prayer.



DANIEL HENDERSON coaches pastors and business leaders in the principles of a strategic and spiritually significant life. He is the author of 12 books. This article is adapted from his book *Old Paths, New Power* (Moody). For more information, visit strategicrenewal.com and 64fellowship.com.



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in trouble?

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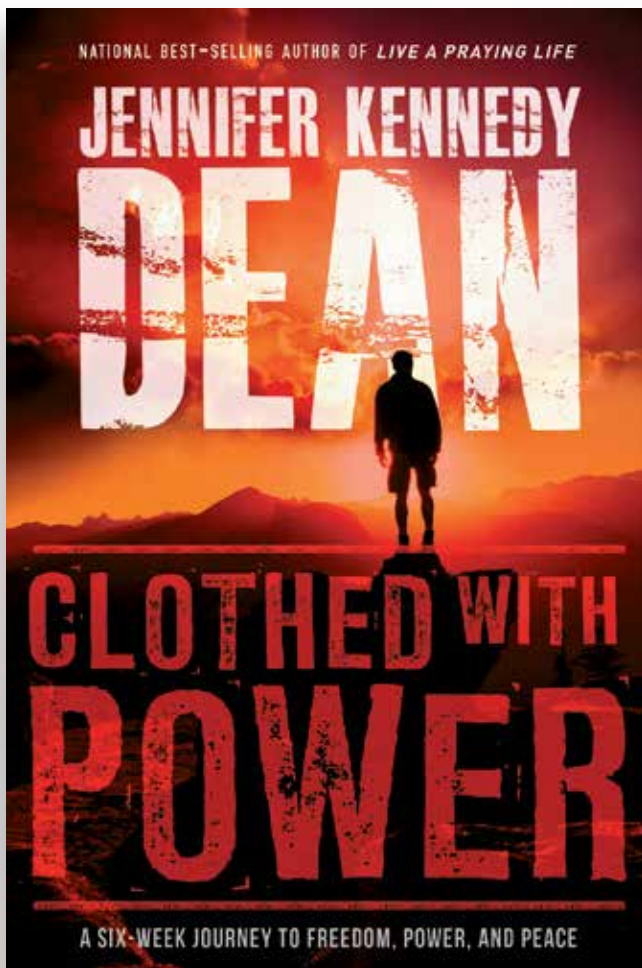
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DISRUPT — THE — STATUS QUO



AFTER 28 YEARS OF LIFE AND MINISTRY in Nashville, TN, our hearts were being stirred. My husband and I fasted, sought counsel, and prayed risky prayers:

“God, we are Your servants. We are willing to go *anywhere* You want us to go. We will do *anything* You want us to do. We are willing to serve *anyone* You call us to serve.”

After considering established ministries in Virginia or North Carolina, I sensed God was doing something new. I prayed, “God! What are You doing? Make it clear!”

One day I awakened with a vision of Texas surrounded in flames. It was a compelling picture in my mind that Texas was outlined by fire. I wept as I sensed God answering our prayers. God was calling us to this big state to plant a church and prepare leaders for revival.

Why did we need such a compelling picture?

When Wayne and I first moved to Nashville to plant a church, I was 22 and finishing college, and Wayne had graduated from seminary. We loaded up our newlywed furniture, packed our bags, and moved. It didn’t seem like a big deal.

But this Texas move meant leaving adult children and a community we loved. We felt secure in Nashville. We weren’t moving to a “job” as a pastor or educator; our denomination was *sending* us to initiate a new work.

Most of us have faced life-altering transitions. How do we pray and listen to God when we have our own preconceived ideas? To pray risky prayers requires leaving the comfortable to receive God’s promises.

I have come to this realization about faith-based, Book-of-Acts-style prayer:

Faith unlocks the door to prayer and opens the way to God’s presence. . . . If you want to learn about prayer, you have to have faith. You have to believe that God rewards those who diligently seek Him (Heb. 11:6). To be diligent is to actively pursue God.¹

SUE DETWEILER

THE HUMBLE CONTINUE TO MATURE THROUGH PRAYER.

Our eager, earnest pursuit of God captivates His heart. When we seek Him, we'll find Him. But He may answer us in surprising ways. If we have built a box defining who God is, He will certainly break out of our box!

PRECONCEPTIONS BROKEN

Many breakout stories in Acts introduce a new Kingdom operating system, but Cornelius and Peter discovered a new way of thinking, processing, and understanding God—a dramatic, far-reaching moment in the early Church's history.

Although Cornelius was a devout, God-fearing man, the newly forming Judeo-Christian community would not have considered Cornelius "one of us." The *Jews*, after all, were God's chosen. They wouldn't have imagined this scene: an angel appearing to someone outside their fellowship:

"Cornelius!" the angel said. Cornelius stared at him in terror. "What is it, sir?" he asked the angel. And the angel replied, "Your prayers and gifts to the poor have been received by God as an offering!" (Acts 10:3-4, NLT).

What? A Gentile could capture the attention of God?

Today, we tend to think we know who's in or out with God, too.

But Jesus' Kingdom had already abolished the world's system, turning everything upside down. The new community of faith challenged the boundaries and upset the status quo.

The angel instructed Cornelius to send men to Joppa, to summon a man named Simon Peter. Cornelius obeyed immediately—no argument, simply expectation and excitement.

BOUNDARIES REDEFINED.

The same day, Peter was seeking God on

a rooftop. Peter fell into a trance, and God rocked his world. God gave him a vision: The sky opened and a sheet came down, filled with detestable animals forbidden in Jewish diets.

A voice said, "Get up, Peter; kill and eat them."

But Peter argued—with God! Never had Peter eaten forbidden foods. (See Acts 10:10–14, NLT.)

We dare not be too critical of Peter's resistance. Our own closely held disciplines of devotion may help us know God better, but the humble continue to mature through prayer.

Prayer is as natural as breathing. . . .

Prayer is not "doing our religious duty." We are called to pray big, risky prayers that require an answer from the One who is more powerful than anyone in the universe.²

Peter knew God intimately, yet he found himself at odds with God's fresh Word. Carrying the gospel to the ends of the earth required a "new wineskin," new ways of thinking and being.

A DEEPER CALL

Personal spiritual growth is rooted in a deepening prayer life—one that changes status-quo thinking. As we engage in prayer, God leads us outside our walls into His Kingdom harvest.

Peter's challenging vision transformed him for Kingdom opportunities. While Peter puzzled over the vision, the Holy Spirit spoke: "Three men are looking for you. So get up and go downstairs. Do not hesitate to go with them, for I have sent them" (10:19–20).

God was moving supernaturally. Yet Peter had to make a choice: Would he

allow God to challenge and expand his worldview to include Gentile salvation?

In a similar way, we can choose to stay within status-quo boundaries, or we can choose to go deeper, allowing God to rock our world and expand *His* Kingdom.

You have the power to choose what God chooses. You have been invited to walk with the God of the universe to make history happen.³

Peter and Cornelius were making history together as they responded to the supernatural move of God's Spirit. He had to show Peter the vision three times because Peter did not understand. But his heart was committed to following God. Both Peter and Cornelius *obeyed God and opened the door to each other*.

In prayer Peter was transformed. Yes, he began by arguing with God. It's a common response. But opening his heart through prayer shattered the "Jews-only" status quo. Peter now knew—and could proclaim to the world—that Jesus' salvation is the hope of *all* nations.

A HISTORY-MAKER CALLING

We make history when we open our hearts to God and others through prayer. He wants us to go beyond our list of personal concerns, to ask Him for the nations (Ps. 2:8).

When Wayne and I were planting our first church in Nashville, one of our team members volunteered to watch my toddler two mornings a week. I saw this as a way to accomplish more on my to-do list. However, as I prayed, God made it clear that He was inviting me to listen to His voice and learn greater obedience.

I cleared the schedule on those two

mornings and set my heart to seek God. As I listened for the whisper of His voice, He began sending me on prayer missions.

One morning in the late '80s, I went to the Ryman Auditorium. One hundred years earlier, a rough riverboat captain, Thomas Ryman, was transformed in a tent revival, and he financed an impressive auditorium to house revivals in Nashville.

On that morning, as I marched around the deserted building, it didn't look impressive. But I encountered a man named Ray Hughes, who had been sent there that day to pray for an outpouring of God's Spirit. Eventually Ryman Auditorium was renovated, and Ray Hughes planted a church there.

Why do I tell this story? When we daily pray and act on what we hear, we extend God's Kingdom to be the hope of all nations. Unfortunately, sometimes we don't put ourselves into the continuing story of the Book of Acts. But God is still leading His people through the power of prayer.

STATUS QUO DISRUPTION

You and I are living in Acts 29—the “continuation” of the story Luke wrote in 28 chapters. What God did then, extends into our lives. If we want to step into greater faith and maturity in our prayer lives, here are a few steps we can take:

1. Develop disciplines of prayer.

Practicing the presence of God calls us to the deep rhythms of His grace. The following beginning points are also revival points. Whenever you become dry, go back to these basics:

- *Daily prayer* cultivates intimacy. Maintain continuous conversation with God.
- *Daily Bible reading* enlarges perspective and challenges the status quo. Join the surprising adventure of the Scriptures to imprint His Kingdom mentality on your life.
- *Regular journaling* can record ways God is speaking today. Keep a journal close at hand. Write out prayers, thoughts, and questions,

listen for God's response, and write what you hear.

- *Regular fasting* cleanses the soul, purifies the body, and renews the mind. Cultivate a lifestyle of prayer and fasting, and you can pull down enemy strongholds and fill your heart with joy.

2. Break out of the predictable and expect the supernatural. God has woven a call to significance deep within us. “We are God's handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do” (Eph. 2:10). Expect God to interrupt your days and give you unexpected divine appointments. Respond to the supernatural by obediently going into His harvest daily.

3. Break out of your friend circle and become a light to all nations. God has called us to be like Jesus—overturning tables of injustice, becoming hope for

the hopeless, and carrying His light to our dark world.

Accomplishing all God calls us to be and do requires stretching. Isolated within our own crowd, we won't fulfill our purpose.

We can be history makers and light carriers. Our “Acts 29 calling” stretches us to pray risky prayers, to let God expand our vision, and to reach for God's best—undoubtedly outside the box! **PC**

¹Sue Detweiler, *Women Who Move Mountains: Praying with Confidence, Boldness, and Grace* (Minneapolis: Bethany, 2017), 33.

²Ibid, 49.

³Ibid, 51.



SUE DETWEILER is an author, speaker, radio host, and coach with more than 25 years of experience in leadership, ministry, and education. Sue and her husband Wayne recently relocated to the North Dallas, TX, area to plant Life Bridge Church. You can find Sue on social media @suedetweiler or suedetweiler.com.

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BIBLE STUDY

Note: This Bible study is formatted for small group open discussion. If you use this study by yourself, we suggest you journal your answers to the discussion questions. Also, please use suggested translations where indicated. Biblegateway.com is an excellent source for translations you may not have on hand.



I'M JUST BACK FROM LEADING A prayer retreat. I had planned the sessions. Decided the focus. Chosen the illustrations. Selected the Scriptures. Picked the prayer practices. Created the handouts. I was organized and ready. I knew how the retreat would go, from start to finish.

At least I thought I did. But the Holy Spirit had a different idea.

I led the Friday evening session according to my outline. Everything went smoothly. Nothing dramatic happened, and the evening went fine. I retired to my room, consulted my notes for the next day, prayed, and went to bed.

A few hours later, I startled awake. It was 4:00 a.m.

Pray for Brian (not his real name), the Holy Spirit seemed to be saying. Although I hadn't met Brian yet, I knew who He was talking about. Brian had the look of a guy who is perpetually frustrated and unhappy. I hadn't paid much attention to him. However, the Holy Spirit seemed urgent. So I prayed.

Change the beginning of the morning session, the Holy Spirit seemed to be saying. *Scrap how you were going to do it—I have a different plan.*

What could I say? I scrapped my plan. I listened for His redirection. Then I scrambled to do what was needed to

implement it. I was flying by the seat of my pants—which I don't ordinarily like to do!

Nevertheless, ten minutes before the morning session began, I was ready. Breathless, but ready.

Without telling the group about the change of plans, I led according to the Spirit's redirection. And there was a palpable difference in the group. They were engaged. Joyful. Awed, even. They responded in worship. And Brian was part of that. His countenance even changed. The Lord was among us!

Because I obediently moved forward in the Spirit's new plan, I got to see the Lord at work in the group—especially in Brian. Brian left different than he had come. He'd met the Lord—because the Holy Spirit knew far better than I did what needed to happen at that retreat. For me, it was an Acts moment.

This issue of *Prayer Connect* encourages us to approach God with open hands and loosely held agendas. It challenges us to expect Him to do great things when we release our control and let Him be in charge. And sometimes it means flying by the seats of our pants. But isn't that what Acts is all about?

See for yourself as you work through this Bible study.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Dick Eastman says, "The Book of Acts is more than a mere record of how God moved among His children in the early Church. It's a manual and model for praying believers today." Assuming that's true, it is vital that we know what Acts says about prayer. Read the following passages and note the who, what, and why behind each prayer. Also note the results. (Not every passage will include every detail.)

BY CYNTHIA HYLE BEZEK

- 1:14: _____
- 4:23–31: _____
- 6:1–7: _____
- 7:59–60: _____
- 9:40–42: _____
- 10:1–16: _____
- 12:1–12: _____
- 13:1–3: _____
- 16:25–34: _____
- 20:17–38: _____
- 28:7–10: _____

Look over the list you just wrote. What do you learn about prayer from these verses? How are you motivated or challenged?

Daniel Henderson writes that the early Church understood the Holy Spirit as the “how to” rather than a mere helper or advisor. Explain the difference—and why the distinction is important. Do any of the verses you read above illustrate this point? Explain.

ACTION STEPS

Sue Detweiler points out that the prayers of Acts were history-making. God “wants us to go beyond our list of personal concerns, to ask Him for the nations,” she writes. What adjustments can you make to your prayer list to become more of a global-minded intercessor?

Detweiler also explains that praying as the early Church did invites God to “interrupt your days and give you unexpected divine appointments.” Why don’t you try it? Tell God you are willing to have Him interrupt your day. Ask Him to send you specific divine appointments. Make sure to tell your small group or a friend what happens as a result.

Dick Eastman points out that a “quality of every great revival is unity.” Ask God to show you areas in your personal life or sphere of influence where there needs to be greater unity. In addition to prayer, what action steps would He have you take? **PC**

CYNTHIA HYLE BEZEK is a regular contributor to *Prayer Connect* and director of curriculum for Community Bible Studies (communitybiblestudies.org).

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An Unlikely Key to Finding Joy in Prayer

Joyful

BY PIERRE EADE

Is it possible to experience a refreshing joy in prayer? I am convinced that our times with the Lord are always meant to be exuberantly joyful. Psalm 16:11 says, “You make known to me the path of life; you will fill me with joy in your presence, with eternal pleasures at your right hand.”

One of the greatest keys to the joy available to every believer is a word not typically associated with joy but with the exact opposite. And that’s where the problem lies.

This word, put into action, contains the power of overwhelming joy for the believer. But many have sabotaged the word, making us feel it will actually bring us greater misery!

One day, however, God helped me see this ancient practice from a different vantage point.

DRUM ROLL, PLEASE!

What is this one mystical, powerful, ancient word and practice that can provide us with greater joy than we may have today? It’s *repentance*.

Wait! Don’t run off quite yet. Don’t turn the page to a different article. Don’t put down the magazine and pick up the remote control. Hang with me for a moment so I can explain why this one aspect of our prayer life has gotten such a bad rap.

First, when many of us think of repentance, we think about all the bad things

we have done. Who wants to talk about their “stuff”—to a human or to God? We all have issues, hang-ups, faults, and weaknesses. And if we want to be downright biblical, we can call them *sins*. We become uncomfortable talking about our sins to anyone—God, spouse, kids, friends.

Second, for me, anytime I start thinking about my own misgivings, two nasty little gremlins tend to pop up: *guilt* and *shame*.

- The voice of guilt says, “You have *done* something bad” or “You have not *done* enough good.”
- The voice of shame says, “You *are* something bad.”

In either case, it is bad news, not good news. Guilt focuses on what I have done wrong, and shame focuses on who I am as a person.

So it’s common to avoid confession in prayer unless it becomes absolutely necessary—like when we’ve had one of those *really* bad slam-a-door, lay-on-your-horn, pull-out-your-hair (or wanting to pull out someone else’s) type of days.

Confession requires talking about the things that cause guilt and shame. It feels like being sent to the principal’s office. Unless forced to go there, we avoid that place!

EXPECTATION

CHANGED PERSPECTIVE

Several years ago my view of repentance began to change as I studied the words of Jesus in order to answer this question: What does Jesus have to say about the nature of God the Father?

This simple inquiry led me to start a Bible study at our church. The things I learned about the nature of the Father, through Jesus, revolutionized my understanding so much that I wrote a book titled, *Our Good Father: Seeing God Through the Eyes of Jesus*.

One of the quintessential passages that changed my view of confessing my sins in repentance to God was Jesus' story of the prodigal son in Luke 15. In this chapter, Jesus first tells two somewhat related stories of a lost coin and a lost sheep. Both stories contain a common theme: those who find what is lost have exuberant joy over what they have found! (See verses 6 and 9.)

Following these joyful stories, Jesus tells us of the prodigal son. I had heard the story so many times that I could recite it by rote: the young and immature son spends his dad's hard-earned money (his own inheritance) on riotous living. He ventures back home, full of guilt and shame, figuring he could at least become one of his dad's hired servants (vs. 17–19).

This story is a perfect picture of the

way I used to see the practice of confession in prayer—coming to God with my head down and my heart filled with guilt and shame. In a low, depressed, sulking voice I would talk to God, “Here I am Lord—a sinner.”

That all changed when I studied this passage from the Father's perspective. The line that blew my spiritual doors off the hinges was Jesus' description of the father's response: “While [the son] was still a long way off, his father saw him and was filled with compassion for him; he ran to his son, *threw his arms around him and kissed him*” (v. 20, brackets and italics added).

Imagine! The father “threw his arms around him and kissed him”!

Read that again. The message here is revolutionary. When we, as God's children, come before God in prayer—admitting our faults, failures, and sins—the Father throws His arms around us and lands a kiss on us! Now why was I never taught about *that* God in Sunday school?

This one astounding truth transforms the practice of confessing and repenting of our sins. Instead of an exercise of dread, it's one of overwhelming joy! Every time I repent of my sins and turn to God, He greets me with His overwhelming mercy, grace, love, and acceptance. The Father welcomes me back, not scolding me with an “I told you so” sermon, but giving me a hug and a kiss. Talk about good news!

THREE REASONS FOR JOY

So how can confession in prayer bring overwhelming joy in our walk with the

Lord? Here are three takeaways from the story of the prodigal son:

1. Confession is meant to take away guilt and shame, not add more of it. I have to remind my young boys to take showers because they often overlook the importance of this area of personal hygiene. Yet they always feel better when they come out, all clean.

In the same way, repentance cleans us up and makes us feel much better! Repentance is like a good shower. It is meant to remove the dirt and grime, not add to it. “If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and *purify us* from all unrighteousness” (1 John 1:9, italics added).

2. The focus of repentance is not my sin. It is God's forgiveness. If I see confession as “all about me,” I walk home to God like the prodigal son—head down, shoulders hunched over. I'm focusing on what I have done wrong, how I have fallen short, and the punishment and servitude I deserve.

If I take my focus off me and my sins and shift my focus to God and His grace, the whole narrative of repentance changes. Jesus took the penalty of our sins upon Him at the cross. Therefore, confession is no longer a story about the lost son (or daughter) who has been such a bad child; it is about the joy the Father feels, welcoming us home!

3. God greets me with open arms and even a big kiss! Satan works hard to convince us that the more bad we do, the further we should run from God. He wants sin to create a wedge between us and our Father.

The gospel tells us that our sins should actually drive us closer to God,

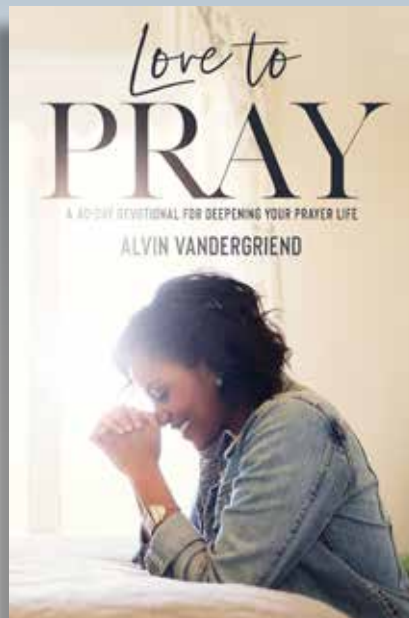
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knowing His grace is sufficient to provide forgiveness—and to restore the intimacy lost every time I sin. “Come near to God and he will come near to you. Wash your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded” (James 4:8).

FREELY AND FREQUENTLY

With the story of the prodigal son in mind, we, as children of God, can run freely and frequently to the Father. We can confess our sins and shortcomings, knowing He is welcoming us home with open arms!

Here are three ways to incorporate repentance into your prayer time:

- Take time to sit quietly before the Lord. Ask Him to bring to mind any sins that have grieved Him. “Let all that I am wait quietly before God, for my hope is in him” (Ps. 62:5, NLT). As the Lord reveals impure thoughts, words, or deeds, humbly acknowledge your faults before Him and receive His grace and forgiveness.
- If you enjoy journaling, take time to write out your sins and failures. As a way of recognizing God’s forgiveness, rip the page out of your journal and put it through a paper shredder!
- Slowly and thoughtfully read through Psalm 51 as your own prayer to God. When a particular verse speaks to your heart, take time to pause, reflect, and meditate on what God is saying to you.

Whatever means of prayer dialogue we choose, we can find joy in remembering that confession and repentance of our sins in prayer is about the joy our Father feels in receiving us back home. He will fill us with joy in His presence.

Welcome home! 🏠



PIERRE EADE is a conference speaker on the topics of spiritual growth and renewal. He is the author of *Born to Grow* and *Our Good Father*. He blogs at discipleshipnetwork.com.



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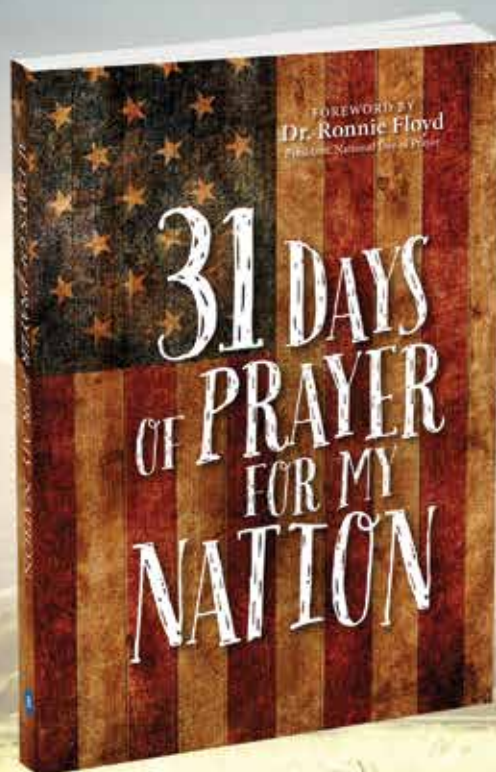


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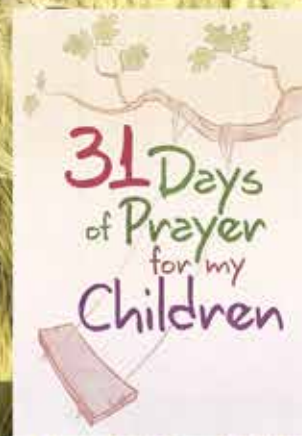
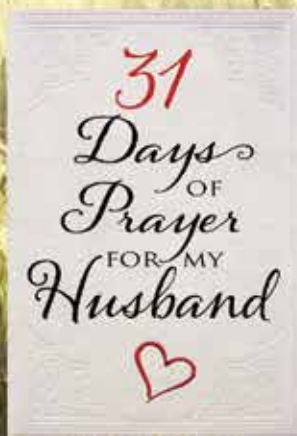
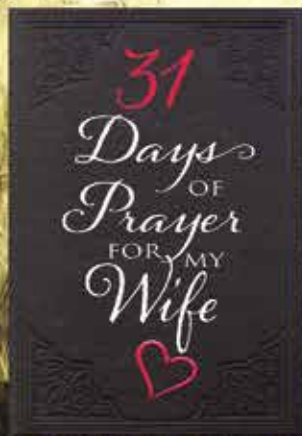
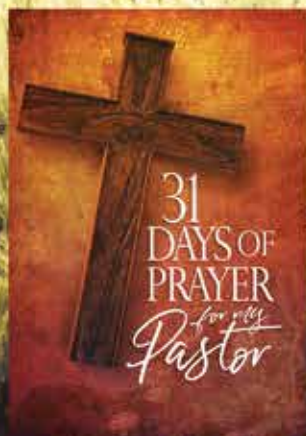
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COVERING COLLEGE STUDENTS IN PRAYER

ONCE They

BY JOYCE GODSEN

Ben was the poster child of a college-bound student. He was homecoming king of his high school class and gave the opening address at his graduation. His fellow students and teachers loved him. Ben loved Jesus and was a shining light for the Lord in his public school. He was kind to both the popular and unpopular kids in his class and exuded the confidence of a secure child of God.

Similar to the families of most of his peers, Ben's parents divorced when he was a young child. He grew up with the uncomfortable, familiar routine of traveling back and forth between two homes and two sets of parents. While he excelled in math and science and had even considered becoming an engineer, Ben's deepest desire was to become a youth pastor. He was thrilled when he was accepted to the Christian college of his choice. With a track record of success, a generous scholarship, and utmost faith in God, he left home to begin his college freshman year.



Leave Home

Two months later, Ben made a phone call that halted his higher education pursuits. He couldn't explain everything over the phone, but he asked his dad to come and take him home. The exact circumstances seemed unclear, but it finally came out that he had dropped out of the collegiate band and lost his hefty scholarship. He didn't believe the college professors were teaching the Bible correctly, and he adamantly claimed there was spiritual warfare on the campus.

Ben returned home, full of anxiety. Clearly something had gone wrong, and he had gotten involved with a strange religious group that targeted young Christian college students. His mother took him for a psychiatric evaluation. His father read through Scriptures with him and counseled his son in the truth of God's Word. A year later, and after a time

of rest, Ben began attending a local two-year college, pursuing a technical degree.

Ben's story is all too common. Many of today's college students are overwhelmed with issues they are not prepared to handle on their own. Our prayers can mean the difference between a student remaining faithful to Christ or straying onto a path that leads to destruction. Our prayers can help students graduate and move forward in life, rather than struggling aimlessly and giving up, perhaps missing God's calling. But how, specifically, can we pray for them?

- 1. Pray that God will give them wisdom.** Considering all the new responsibilities of these burgeoning adults, pray that God will daily

grant them wisdom. James wrote, “If any of you lacks wisdom, you should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to you” (1:5).

With the advent of technology and online schooling, today’s college students are inundated with information that they need to interpret and understand correctly. God’s wisdom is a gift greater than human intelligence alone. College professors are responsible for teaching the latest research and discoveries and have authority to administer tests and give grades. They are not, however, able to make the mind understand. That is the responsibility of the student—and ultimately the objective of the Lord.

At times students hear arguments and theories that do not line up with the truth of God’s Word. Graduating at the top of my class in both high school and college, I was led to believe I was in charge of my future and “the sky is the limit.” I received a rude awakening when the great recession of the 1990s left no jobs for educated and intelligent young graduates. My generation was labeled Generation X—and since we had not found our place in the American workforce, we were encouraged to stay young and never grow up. Now in my 40s, I see how detrimental that mindset was for me.

When we ask God to give our students wisdom, He will equip them with the power to distinguish between God’s truth and false philosophies. John 16:13 says, “When he, the Spirit of truth, comes, he will guide you into all truth. He will not speak on his own; he will speak only what he hears, and he will tell you what is yet to come.”

College classes present various popular opinions, theories, and historical information that students are required to study and comprehend—much of it crucial to their preparation for the future. However, not everything taught in college should be received as an absolute standard of truth. We must pray that the

Holy Spirit will lead college students into His knowledge. Discernment is a gift that comes from God.

2. Pray that God will protect their minds and hearts.

Many freshmen experience what we know to be “homesickness” and may even fall into depression as they adjust to living in a new environment. Even students who do not move far away or choose to live at home during college still go through a transition into adulthood that can produce great stress and anxiety. They desperately need prayer for their psychological and emotional development—protection for their minds and hearts.

Some students may not understand or be able to talk about their emotions and feelings. We must intercede on their behalf, assured that God knows their hearts and understands their needs. Acts 15:8 reminds us, “God, who knows the heart, showed that he accepted them by giving the Holy Spirit to them, just as he did to us.”

As in Ben’s example, sometimes students who seem most likely to succeed are the ones who end up struggling the most. We expect high-performing students to continue their climb up the ladder of success, unimpeded. When they don’t—or can’t—the emotional and unexpected plot twist can leave minds and hearts open to spiritual attacks.

3. Pray for the development of their character.

Jesus left us with the warning that we will have trouble in this world (John 16:33). Even so, our response to difficulties should be different from the world’s because Jesus tells us to “take heart” in His victory over the world.

When we pray for college students, we are praying for our future leaders. Leaders must be tested so that they develop true character and strength. Here are a few areas of character we can pray for:

- perseverance and endurance during tests and trials
- steadfastness, not growing weary or feeling defeated
- humility to accept correction and guidance when needed
- obedience to Christ when challenges and temptations come.

Character matters at this crucial juncture!

4. Pray for purity in their relationships and for direction regarding a future spouse.

College students are also making decisions about marriage partners. The relationships they develop during college play a formative role in adulthood. False friendships can lead to broken hearts. Poor choices about intimacy will have far-reaching consequences. We should continually ask God to guide, protect, and keep His children on a right path.

5. Pray for a deep understanding of who they are in Christ.

Above all, these young people need to understand their identity in Christ. Ephesians 1:16–21 is a powerful Scripture worth committing to memory and praying on behalf of students. Paul’s prayer for the Church models the way we can pray for college students in all these areas:

I have not stopped giving thanks for you, remembering you in my prayers. I keep asking that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the glorious Father, may give you the Spirit of wisdom and revelation, so that you may know him better. I pray that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know the hope to which he has called you, the riches of his glorious inheritance in his holy people, and his incomparably great power for us who believe. That power is the same as the mighty strength he

exerted when he raised Christ from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly realms, far above all rule and authority, power and dominion, and every name that is invoked, not only in the present age but also in the one to come.

Other ways to pray for them to understand their identity in Christ include:

- Child of God (John 1:12)
- Accepted by Christ (Rom. 15:7)
- No longer a slave to sin (Rom. 6:6)
- Set apart (Jer. 1:5)
- Chosen as a royal priesthood (1 Peter 2:9).

Partnering in the Battle

While we may not understand exactly how God is at work on college campuses or what battles these students are fighting, we can ask them how to pray for their crucial decisions. If we at least *ask*—whether they answer us or not—we are letting them know that we want to partner with them and support them on their journey.

Today’s universities are a battleground, where true faith in Christ is targeted and attacked. Students are vulnerable to many temptations from both peers and professors. 1 Peter 5:8 reminds us, “Be alert and of sober mind. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour.”


In response to the real threat of persecution, many shrink back from the fight and forego the opportunity to overcome the enemy through God’s limitless power. When we recognize the opposition today’s college students face, we can ask God to give them strength to defeat the enemy and bring God’s light to dark places.

Appealing to the Higher Authority

Although the vain philosophies and arguments of the day appear to be the controlling force on college campuses, as intercessors and people of prayer, we

know we can appeal to a higher authority. When we pray for college students, we can pray with faith and confidence that God is ready and able to meet every need and rescue His children from harm. Let us call upon God’s authority to tear down enemy strongholds in Jesus’ name (2 Cor. 10:4).

In doing so, we will bring great blessing

and hope to a young generation stepping into God’s call. 



JOYCE GODSEN was raised in New York City and played violin in the New York Youth Symphony. In 2009 she moved to Iowa, where she teaches, writes, and ministers in song by performing in churches, bars, and coffee shops.



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and together we will accomplish more for the glory of our Lord.



Intercessors, Listen Up and Take Notes

I often went away from group prayer times without giving much additional thought to the prayers I heard there. In fact, many times I would forget completely what we prayed. It was kind of like listening to a sermon in church but the next day not having the foggiest notion what the pastor had said!

Then one day, as I listened to others' prayers of intercession, an emerging pattern dawned on me. One prayer flowed into another. God's heart for the situation seemed to pour out, phrase by phrase, person by person—occasionally punctuated by murmurs of agreement, readings of related Scriptures, and declarations of warfare prayer when someone identified and resisted a scheme of the enemy.

I realized that God was really speaking through people's prayers. I grabbed a pen and started taking notes.

When the prayer time was over, I had in front of me a list with two columns: "God's heart" and "the enemy's schemes." I had jotted down things we prayed *for*, such as unity, faith, increased provision, and a greater ability to see God's hand at work. I had noted things we prayed warfare prayers *against*—such as disunity, confusion, fear, and offenses. I had also listed Scriptures that came to our minds as we prayed.

I felt like I had marching orders! By simply trying to capture on paper what the Holy Spirit had revealed during the prayer time, I realized I had recorded God's direction for continuing to pray in agreement.

Big Benefits

I've found that jotting down what I sense the Holy Spirit saying as I pray, helps me listen to God's voice. His Word firmly

states the need to pay close attention when He speaks. "Listen and hear my voice," He urges, "*pay attention* and hear what I say" (Isa. 28:23).

To Ezekiel, He said, "Son of man, look carefully and listen closely and *pay attention* to everything I am going to show you, for that is why you have been brought here" (Ezek. 40:4). The writer of Hebrews echoes the exhortation: "We must *pay the most careful attention*, therefore, to what we have heard, so that we do not drift away" (2:1, emphases added in all passages).

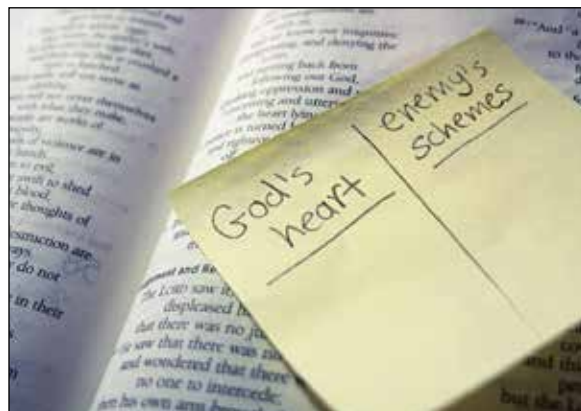
During prayer, taking a few seconds to scribble a key word or idea helps me stay focused. Taking notes enables me to see patterns and relationships in a given situation that often reveal God's mind and heart—as well as the enemy's schemes.

Afterward, having the notes motivates me to persevere when I might otherwise forget to keep praying. I'm surprised how often the Holy Spirit prompts me to do follow-up intercession by bringing to mind things I wrote down.

Worth Noting

When I take notes during group prayer time (or when I'm praying alone), I record these components:

- 1. Revelation of God's heart for the situation.** For example, if multiple people express prayers for healing, unity, or another theme, I write it down. The Holy Spirit may be emphasizing that request.
- 2. Specific schemes and strategies of the enemy.** A pattern may also emerge in what people are praying



against. I jot down any specific assignment of the enemy I sense the Holy Spirit may want me/us to resist with spiritual warfare prayer.

- 3. Scriptures and other impressions.** Often the Holy Spirit brings to mind Scripture passages or mental pictures that clarify and provide a framework for what people are praying. I record these for future reference and for follow-up intercession.

During a sermon, I often take notes to capture the main points my pastor is making so I can remember later what the Holy Spirit was teaching me through the message. If I truly believe God speaks to His people through prayer (and I emphatically *do*), then I need to give His voice the same respect and follow-through that I give my pastor. Note-taking in prayer is a great method for doing this.

I encourage you to give it a try. Listen up—and take notes!

ARLYN LAWRENCE is a speaker, editor, and co-author of *Prayer-Saturated Kids* with Cheryl Sacks. She previously served as an editor and columnist for *Pray!* magazine. This article is from her blog intercessionignited.com.



I Prayed for You, Mohammed!

Bekele Shanko, born in Ethiopia, now serves with Cru as vice president for Global Church Movements in Orlando, FL. During a missions-emphasis speaking engagement at Wooddale Church in Eden Prairie, MN, he shared a unique prayer idea:

I have a friend by the name of Henry, who walks every morning for half an hour and prays for people by name. . . . He says, “God, this morning would You remember a person named Mohammed? Would You open his eyes to see Your glory and Your greatness and Your salvation?”

Whenever he meets a new person, he asks, “What’s your name?”

And then when a person says, “Mohammed,” Henry says, “Wow, Mohammed! I have been praying for you.”

“You have been praying for me? How? How do you know me?”

And Henry begins to share the

love of God. He prays for Fatima, he prays for Kelia, he prays for Iamed. . . .

You can also pray by name.

You know some of the most popular names in America? I was just googling to know which names are most popular so that you can pray for them. Emma is number one in America. You say, “God, please remember Emma today.” For how many Emmas can you pray? So many Emmas!

You can pray for Olivia, for Sophia, for Eva, for Isabella. Those are the top 5 prominent names in America among the ladies. And then men: Noah, Liam, William, Mason, and James . . . you can pray for them.

You are “praying in” the Kingdom of God to earth.

Scripture repeatedly speaks of God’s interest in each one of us “by name.”

In Isaiah we read, “Thus says the Lord,

your Creator, O Jacob, And He who formed you, O Israel, ‘Do not fear, for I have redeemed you; I have called you by name; you are Mine!’” (Isa. 43:1, NASB). This is an *individual* calling of redemption, as well as a *national* one, which we also see when God told King Cyrus He called him by name (Isa. 45:3). And in the New Testament Jesus speaks of calling His sheep by name (John 10:3).

So follow Henry’s lead. Walk, pray, and name names. Add other names that have meaning for you—people in your community who share your first name, people with your spouse or siblings’ names. Pray for others who share the names of your children or grandchildren.

Then invite the Spirit to lead you to these people who need to hear about the love of Christ.

Will You Pray with Us?

We value you as our prayer partners. As we lead prayer ministries and encourage the prayer movement across our nation, we need as much prayer as anyone! We have a vision for revival and spiritual awakening that is driven by the power and direction of the Spirit. So please pray with us that we will not waver in our message and hope for the next Great Awakening!

Here are some other requests:

- Pray for a growing subscription base among the many volunteers with the National Day of Prayer (NDP) and among others with a heart for prayer. Ask the Lord to use *Prayer Connect* to encourage and strengthen them in their prayer leadership in their churches and communities.
- Pray for the national leadership of Dr. Ronnie Floyd (NDP president) and Dr. David Butts (chairman of America’s National Prayer Committee). God is using them strategically to speak of the hope of revival in our nation through unified prayer. They also both serve on the *Prayer Connect* editorial team. Pray for their sensitivity to the leadership of the Holy Spirit in their ministries.
- Pray for Jonathan Graf as he serves as publisher of both *Prayer Connect* magazine and PrayerShop Publishing. Ask God to lead him to potential writers who can bring value to publishing resources related to prayer. Pray also for favor as he works with advertisers and marketing strategies.

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Kneeling Forms Behind the Power | By Armin Gesswein

In the Book of Acts, in God’s Holy Book, we can actually see Christ building [the Church].

Moreover, He even left us a model—a full-size model, not a mini-model—in the famous upper room. It is in plain view: about 120 members, all praying together in a prayer meeting! Every member was present. Here is the crowning miracle of all Christ’s earthly miracles—His new wonder in the world, the last thing He did on earth before He ascended to heaven.

In Acts the Lord Jesus gave us not only a model, but also a blueprint for building. Here we have the “Book of the Church,” the *ecclesia*, the assembly, the congregation. I must learn with Jesus how to build His assembly so that it turns out to be like His model. How is this to be done?

The model and the blueprint correspond. Our Lord builds a praying congregation in Jerusalem. His plan calls for a praying congregation to be the new vehicle for everything He has in mind.

The Prayer Meeting First

Why does the prayer meeting have such priority? Why was it the first thing Jesus established when He built His church? Why was every member present . . . involved in “prayer and supplication”? What motivated all the new members—by the thousands—to become prayer meeting members, and to do so at once? How could they raise and uphold this kind of a standard for every member? To ask such questions is to ask God for some of His greatest secrets for our congregations.

It is very revealing and rewarding to note how many different assembly meetings are described in Acts. In chapter 2

we see the whole Jerusalem assembly on fire with its own kind of powerful action all day long. Then, in chapter 3, more assembly action and preaching hits us with full force and moves us right into chapter 4 with further high explosives from the same congregation. In chapter 5 we find ourselves in a very different . . . atmosphere, full of the awe of God and power of the rarest kind on earth.

In chapter 6 we see yet another kind of assembly action, and we can read on and on and find ourselves still in the glorious action of the risen Christ at work in building His Jerusalem congregation. Thank God for the tremendous potential of one small congregation of about 120 members!

The most important and strategic of all the assemblies recorded are the prayer meetings. Like powerful munitions, they appear at the most crucial times and win the day.

Of all the many assemblies, the most power-packed are the prayer meetings. When the chips are down, when the battle is joined at the very gates of hell, the prayer meetings rise to the call of duty and take over. Like a mighty army of God, the church marches forward on its knees—on its witnessing feet, too, but its method is to take ground first on its knees, in prayer.

Side Activity?

Why do we feel a prayer meeting [is] a little side activity? Think of the prayer meetings that generated the mighty revivals in our nation’s history. Think of the “American Pentecost” of 1857–58 when the nation became a nation of prayer. Think of the famous Jayne’s Music Hall prayer meeting in Philadelphia where thousands gathered for prayer every noon, giving birth to revivals in

churches all over that area.

Speaking on Acts 1:14, Dr. A.T. Pier-son once said: “There never has been a revival but by such united supplicatory praying, and no revival has ever continued beyond the continuation of that same praying.”

Most churches are said to fail because they do not generate their own power. Prayer is the generator. The great London preacher Charles Spurgeon once took some people down to his Metropolitan Tabernacle basement to show them his “power plant.” There, on their knees, were about 300 people praying for the service!

In chapter 12 we see the Jerusalem church still praying at the same high upper-room level. Once again, the battle is joined. Peter, their powerful leader, is to be executed. Why did they not call on just a few—the “prayer warriors, those in the church who really [knew] how to pray and lay hold on God”? Because they *all* knew how! “Prayer was made *without ceasing* of the church unto God for him” (v. 5, italics added, KJV). There was an all-night prayer meeting in Mary’s house, “where many were gathered together praying” (v. 12). And Peter was delivered from prison and death by an angel!

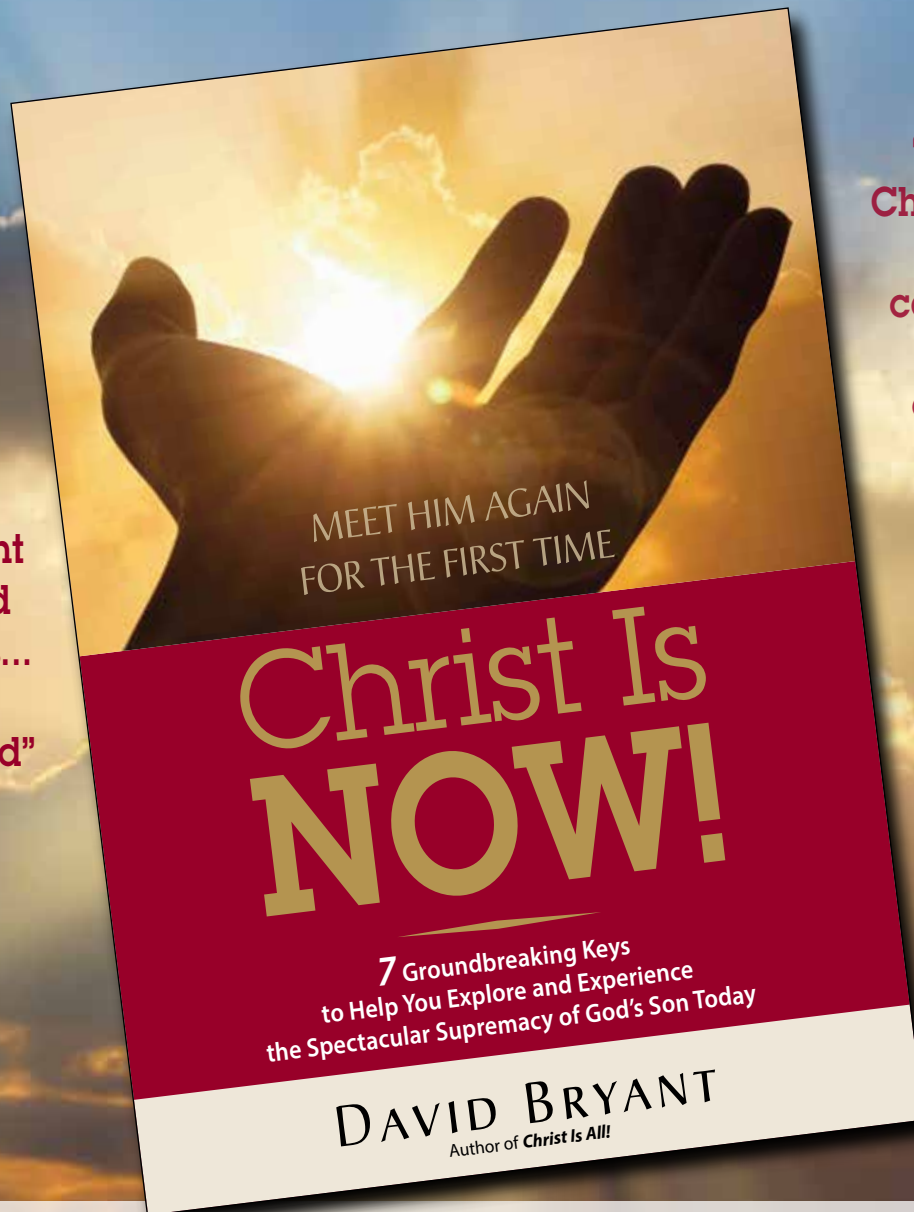
Why a prayer meeting first? Because there is nothing in His Church that does not depend on prayer! Its new abundant life, love, unity, purity, power, constant renewal, warfare, world evangelization, leaders, [and] unending advance without defeat—all depend on praying.

If God is going to do it, it has to be by prayer. **PC**

ARMIN GESSWEIN (1907–2001) was a pastor and prayer leader who founded the Revival Prayer Fellowship. This excerpt is adapted from his bestselling book *With One Accord in One Place* (available at prayershop.org).

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Dr. Richard Ross, professor at Southwestern Theological Seminary
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