

# Prayer in Faith and Practice

*A collection of articles on prayer in church and personal life*

≈ By Ed Gallagher / South Pacific Edition, August 2009 ≈

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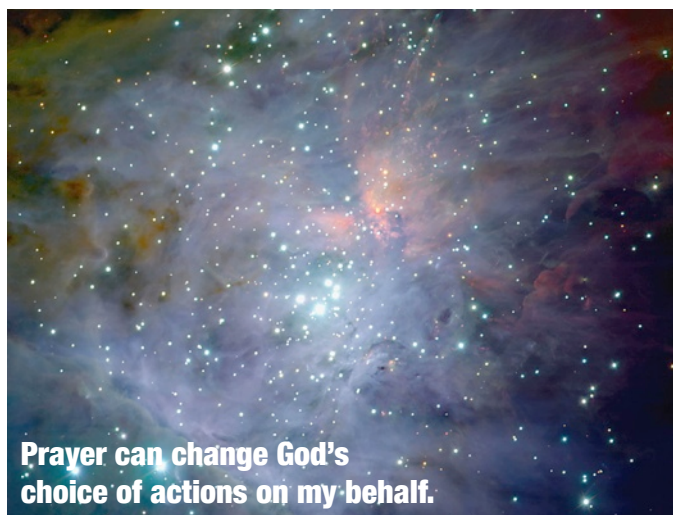
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# Does prayer change God? By Ed Gallagher



"Prayer doesn't change God; prayer changes *us*." You might have heard this assertion. Years ago, I believed it—but not any more.

True, my prayers don't affect God's character and they don't change his ultimate plan for the world. And in my praying, I should not try to make God see things my way, but rather ask him to help me see things his way.

But it is equally true that prayer actually brings about change in Heaven. It does not change God's character or ultimate will, nor does it force him to act against his best judgement. But Scripture is clear that prayer can change God's choice of actions on my behalf. It can dramatically affect the way God involves himself in my life.

Listen to God on this question: "If my people, who are called by my name, will humble themselves and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then will I hear from heaven and will forgive their sin and will heal their land." 2 Chronicles 7:14.

Notice that the promise in this verse is based on a condition: "If my people will pray." Action on Earth (prayer) leads to action in Heaven—forgiveness and healing that would not otherwise take place. God has a large supply of blessings ready for us in our daily living, but his gifts carry a condition. The condition is humble petition. It is prayer that opens God's storehouse of blessings, and from this perspective, yes—prayer changes God!

Some people have a problem with this. "God does whatever he wills, and it's presumptuous to think that our puny prayers have actual effect. Will God love someone more because we have prayed for that person?"

This is a rational argument but not a biblical one. Of course God will not "love someone more" because we have prayed for that person. His love reaches endlessly to all his created beings. But God himself tells us we

must pray for those who don't believe, pray for the household of faith, pray for rulers, pray for the sick, pray for everyone everywhere. This praying is not incidental; it's not a charade. It's the essence of God's activity on Earth.

Are we willing to grant that God has the prerogative to choose the weapons by which his kingdom will advance? He has chosen prayer as a primary weapon—and placed that weapon in our hands. If we use the weapon of prayer, the kingdom will advance. If we neglect it, the kingdom will stall. God is not creating his kingdom light-years away from us, but in us and through us. We are his friends and warriors in a great expedition to save the world.

Recall the teaching of Jesus on prayer, which we might summarise this way. . . . "Whatever you bind on Earth is bound in Heaven. If two of you agree in prayer, it will be done. Through prayer and the Spirit, you will do even greater things than I have done. Ask me for anything in my name, and I will do it. Ask whatever you wish, and it will be given to you. Your 'mustard seed' faith will move mountains—nothing is impossible for the one who prays!"

Prayer is not an exercise in futility or just a devotional ritual. It is an actual reaching out by faith into the mysterious heart and will of God. It is obedience to God's invitation to participate in the divine plan for saving the world. As John Wesley expressed it, "God does nothing but in answer to prayer." The understanding is well stated this way: "It is a part of God's plan to grant us, in answer to the prayer of faith, that which He would not bestow did we not thus ask."\*

Yes, it's true—prayer can and does change the course of history for people and nations. If God chooses to use your praying and mine as a chief method of the kingdom, the sin of presumption is not that I employ prayer in such a way, but that I *fail* to employ it in such a way!

Now the personal part. Will you accept the challenge of praying right into Heaven for the blessing of the world? It's a privilege few people exercise, but one that will change course of your life for the better—along with the lives of those around you.

\* Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy*, p 525.

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# The power of scripture praying By Ed Gallagher

Something bothered me as I drove home after a prayer time with the young Christian pastor. “His prayers,” I wondered. “What is it about his prayers? They’re unusually powerful. But I can’t put my finger on it. What is it that makes his prayers so strong?”

As I turned into my driveway, it hit me. “It’s the Bible!” I exclaimed out loud. “He puts the whole Bible into his prayers!” With this pastor it was just as the writer E. M. Bounds described it—“The Word of God is the basis and the inspiration and the heart of prayer.”

A few weeks later, when we got together again, I listened carefully as the pastor prayed. Here’s an example of what I heard. . . .

“Father, we’re not preaching ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord, and ourselves as your servants for Jesus’ sake. Thank you for making your light shine in our hearts, and for giving us this treasure in earthen vessels to show that the power is from God, and not from us. We do have some troubles, but we are not crushed, because we are fix our eyes this morning on what is unseen—on you, dear Jesus, our Lord and Saviour. We see you crucified and risen for us, and in you we accept our peace.”

Of course I recognised Paul’s testimony in 2 Corinthians 4. The pastor’s prayer continued with a marvellous interspersion between his own needs and praises, and the words of scripture. It was his own prayer—but at every turn he took the teachings and promises of God’s Word, and returned them to God as a gift from the heart.

This is a pattern given in the scripture. When the saved gather around God’s throne and express their praise, it is with the words of the psalms and prophets—“Great and marvellous are your deeds, Lord God Almighty. . . .” Examine Revelation 15:3, 4 and similar praise prayers in Revelation, and note how much of the scripture—especially the psalms—is in them. At the end, we will praise God joyfully with his own Word. So let’s get some practice now!

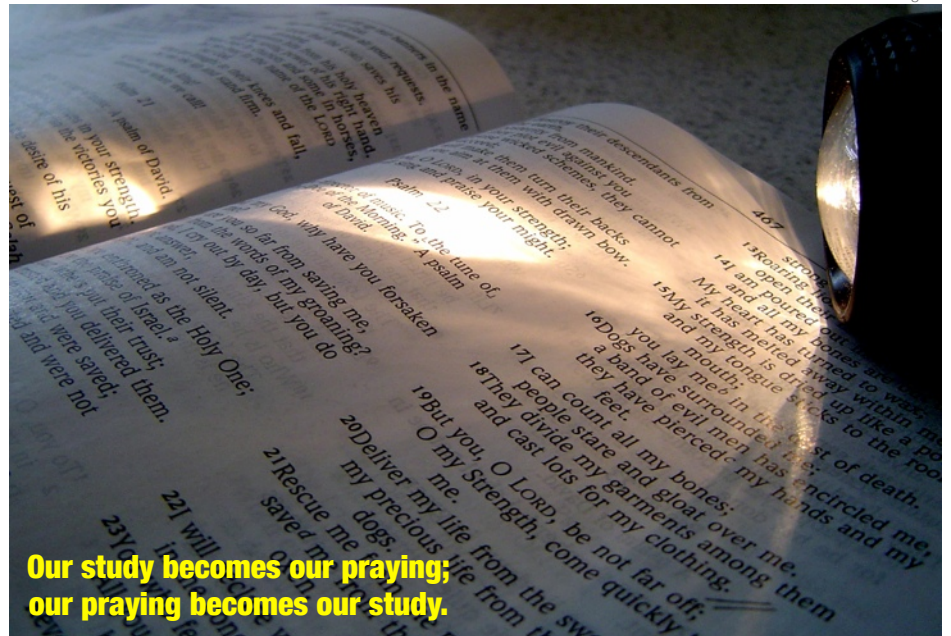
The pastor’s example inspired me. These days I’m attempting to integrate much more of God’s Word into my own praying, and I have felt the power of prayer increase.

This is one dynamic of what can be called “scripture praying”—taking the promises and teachings of the Word and reflecting them directly in the language of our prayers.

There is a second, closely related dynamic of scripture praying—and that is taking the privilege of prayer and embedding it in our Bible study. The power of Bible study multiplies when prayer inhabits and drives that study.

Let’s take an example. Suppose you are studying Matthew 6:19–24, where Christ taught about money and possessions. Instead of studying the passage academically, then going quickly to another task, take time to pray over every phrase for understanding and personal application. At each step of your study, *pray the teaching into your life*.

Photo: Ed Gallagher



Here’s an illustration of how you might pray. . . .  
“Lord, thanks for the reminder that I have been too busy storing up treasures on earth. My heart has been fixed on those treasures. Now I give my possessions back to you. They are yours, not mine. I want more heavenly treasure, treasure that lasts. Teach me how to make you my greatest desire, with everything else in second place.”

It’s important to take time over this kind of scripture praying, and not to rush it.

When we practice scripture praying, we find that the distinction between Bible study and prayer diminishes. Our study becomes our praying; our praying becomes our study. The Word comes to life, and so do our prayers—along with our Christian experience and our testimony to Jesus.

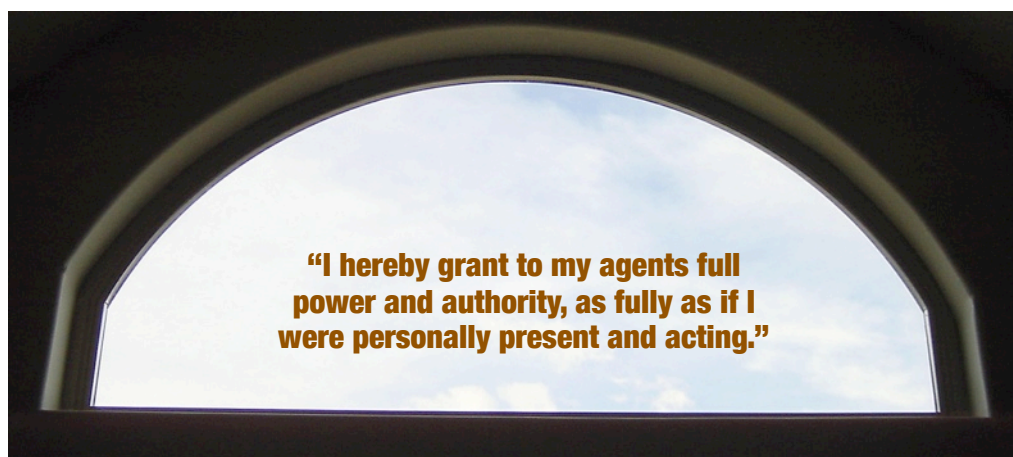
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# God's authority in your prayers By Ed Gallagher

Several years ago my wife and I put our home up for sale and then went to visit family in another part of the world. Before we left, we wrote a Power of Attorney that authorised a trusted friend to act in our place for action on the sale of our home. Notice this language in the Power of Attorney: "We hereby grant to our Agent the full power and authority to do every act, deed, and thing necessary or advisable to be done regarding the above powers, as fully as we could do if personally present and acting."

Before Jesus left this world to return to his Father, he wrote us a "Power of Attorney". There is no question about his authority to do so. "All authority has been given to me in heaven and on earth." Matthew 28:18. He had authority to judge, authority to lay down his life and take it up again, authority to grant eternal life to those who believe, authority over evil powers, and even authority over authorities!



But he was leaving, going back to his Father. How would his power continue?—by giving his own authority to his followers, who would represent him on Earth. Scripture tells us Jesus convened his 12 disciples and in sacred ceremony bestowed on them—committed to them, granted to them—power and authority. Luke 9:1. The authority he conferred was his own. It was authority to become children of God, authority to drive out evil and to heal, authority to overcome all the power of the enemy, and even authority to convey the forgiveness of sins in his name. See John 1:12; Matt. 10:1; Mark 3:15 and 6:7; Luke 9:1 and 10:19; John 20:23.

Imagine this! It's an incredible level of privilege and responsibility. Jesus was saying, in effect, "I hereby grant to my agents the full power and authority to do every act, deed, and thing necessary or advisable to be done regarding my own powers, as fully as I could do if personally present and acting."

The Greek word used for "authority" in the New Testament is *exousia*. It refers to privileged capacity and

delegated influence. It can be translated authority, jurisdiction, liberty, right, or power. As disciples of Jesus and members of his "body" the church, we are authorised to act on his behalf. This realisation should simultaneously lift us into the heights of Heaven, and drive us to our knees on the floor.

It's important for us to keep in mind that our spiritual authority is always delegated, never inherent. The moment we think we have power in ourselves, we are on the wrong side of things. Pilate said to Jesus, "Don't you realise that I have power [*exousia*] either to free you or to crucify you?" Jesus responded, "You would have no power over me if it were not given to you from above." John 19:11.

In history, the established church sometimes imagined that power to forgive sins lay within itself. The power always belongs to Jesus. At the same time, Jesus needs his church to present him to the world, and

to affirm the experience of salvation in the life of believers.

How do we exercise our God-given authority on Earth? By the presence of the Holy Spirit, and by the practice of prayer. There is no other way authorised by Jesus. To act as a "Power of Attorney" for God is not a matter of high education, great knowledge, status in the church, or carefully designed strategy. Look at

the people Jesus chose as his original disciples—they had none of these advantages! Our authority is a matter of believing the Word of God, receiving the baptism and power of the Spirit, becoming trustworthy agents of God, and wearing out our knees before Heaven's throne.

The centurion expressed it well. His message to Jesus (his prayer, in effect) was, "Say the word, and my servant will be healed. For I myself am a man under authority. . . . I say to my servant, 'Do this,' and he does it." Luke 7:7, 8.

In the same way we may exercise the authority of Jesus for benefit to those around us. Every day, let us act on the "Power of Attorney" conferred on us by our Lord.

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# Praying into the unseen world By Ed Gallagher

Photo: Ed Gallagher

There are three worlds into which we must pray—God’s world, my world, and the unseen world.

*God’s world* includes nations, world leaders, creation, and people everywhere—the whole cosmos for which Jesus died.

*My world* is clear—my life, my needs and temptations, my relationships and my witness.

*The unseen world* is less obvious, although the Bible speaks about it plainly. “Our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms.” Ephesians 6:12.

The Bible gives us a “heads-up” about the dark side. At the forefront of this side is “the god of this age”, “the prince of this world”, “the ruler of the kingdom of the air”. This evil leader is intent and focused. With his hosts of demons—fallen angels who joined his mission—his goals are to make life as painful as possible for the people of Earth, and to keep sinners from receiving the grace of God.

A veil separates the unseen world from the world that is seen. But sometimes, the veil is pierced.

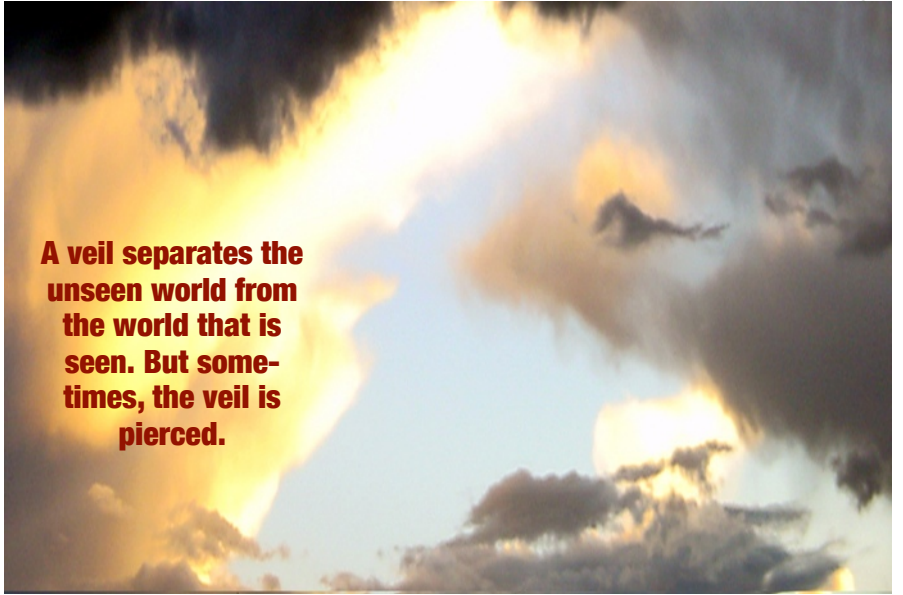
When Jesus died, the earth shook, rocks split apart, darkness descended at midday, tombs were thrown open, and the veil in the temple was torn in two. These miraculous signs evidenced the war taking place between Heaven and hell. God engaged evil in hand-to-hand combat. God won, but at great cost; and creation convulsed at the sacrifice.

Whenever we see death, disease, poverty, cruelty, immorality, terrorism, abuse, crime and war, we observe emblems of the larger battle—God against the devil, angels against demons.

It is important to recognise the existence of the dark side. But it is equally important not to fixate on it. The New Testament contains about 80 references to the devil—but *only* 80, compared with close to 3,000 references to Christ! We face a serious enemy, but that enemy is in defeat. The Lion of the tribe of Judah has triumphed. Revelation 5:5.

When Christ died, he not only forgave us our sins, but he also “disarmed the powers and authorities, making a spectacle of them, triumphing over them”. See Colossians 2:15. Christ has won!

Now Christ’s victory must be worked out in real life through the church. This is “our struggle”. Ephesians 6:12. In this struggle we have weapons, especially



**A veil separates the unseen world from the world that is seen. But sometimes, the veil is pierced.**

prayer. Paul concludes his list of weapons with this counsel: “Pray in the Spirit on all occasions . . . be alert and always keep on praying.” Ephesians 6:18.

How can we pray into the unseen world? In two primary ways.

*First, we can praise God for the success of our Saviour in the war between good and evil.* Visualise the temptations, ministry, crucifixion, and resurrection of Jesus—and thank God for his triumph through it all. Picture Jesus sitting victoriously at the right hand of the Father, ministering the benefits of salvation as your High Priest. Hebrews 9:24; 10:12–14. See him blessing the entire world with his accomplishment, and give him praise.

*Second, we can pray against the incursion of evil into our own lives and the lives of people around us.* Rebuke evil in Jesus’ name. Invoke the authority of the Word. Remind yourself of the devil’s complete failure to thwart the plan of salvation. Invoke Christ’s victory as you ask God for a barrier of protection around yourself and all who are trying to do good in this world. Pray for the ministry of angels, and for holy men and women throughout the world who work to ease suffering.

We are surrounded by “a great cloud of witnesses” in the world that is not seen. Hebrews 12:1. By faith, our eyes can pierce the veil and be fixed on our chief witness, Jesus. He left the unseen world and came into our world, so that even in this life we can look full into his wonderful face.

*Note: See also the article, “Confronting the dark side.” / This article first appeared in modified form in Mid-America Outlook, October 2005. Copyright © 2009 by Ed Gallagher (South Pacific edition). / Scripture quotations taken from the HOLY BIBLE, NEW INTERNATIONAL VERSION. Copyright © 1973, 1978, 1984 by International Bible Society. Used by permission.*

# Wrestling in prayer

By Ed Gallagher

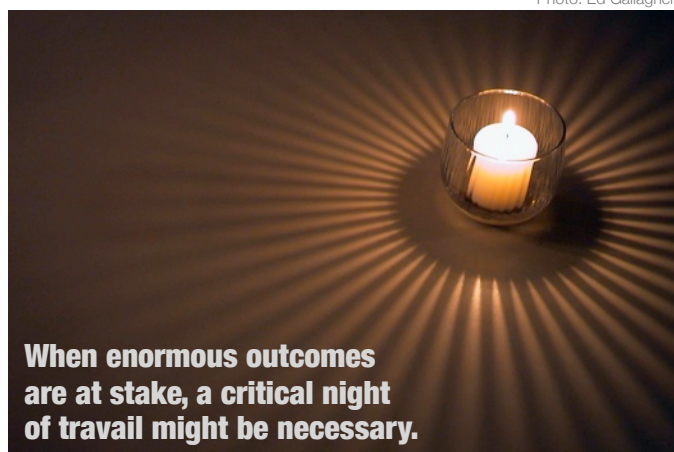
“Wrestling with God in prayer.” You’ve heard the phrase. It goes back to the patriarch Jacob, when he met God in a defining moment. Alone and in crisis, Jacob wrestled all night with “a man”. This “man” was in fact a heavenly being, because after the struggle Jacob said, “I saw God face to face, and yet my life was spared.” Genesis 32:30.

We know we should pray, but should we also “wrestle in prayer”?

It depends! We must remember what led to Jacob’s awful night. Years before, he conspired to deceive his brother Esau and steal the birthright blessing. It was a case of a man trying to take over God’s work and do it for him—with terrible results. Now, when Jacob learns that Esau is headed his way, he is swamped by fear. He and his loved ones may die.

Jacob’s wrestling is with God, but in a deeper sense it is with himself. It is his sin—his guilt, his remorse, his foreboding—that forces him into confrontation with God. The issue on which Jacob has previously failed, and which he has since ignored, must now be dealt with. Will he surrender his will to God and let God bring deliverance? Or, will he again fail the test and try to get the blessing by human effort and manipulation?

Photo: Ed Gallagher



**When enormous outcomes are at stake, a critical night of travail might be necessary.**

Jacob fights long and hard, yielding nothing. As daybreak nears, God decides that only a surgical strike will work. He touches Jacob’s hip and puts it out of joint. It is then—disabled, defeated and helpless—that Jacob is able to pray the desperate prayer of one under deep conviction: “I will not let you go unless you bless me.”

The struggle finished, Jacob limps out in pain to face his brother. This time, he has no strength in himself but all strength in God. There is a touching, unexpected reconciliation! Jacob’s situation and his character are transformed. He is no longer Jacob the “usurper”. Now he is Israel—the “godly ruler”.

Jacob’s experience teaches us that agonising does not persuade God, nor does it win against him. We have a choice. We can come quickly to surrender, or we can agonise. The struggle is in ourselves—in our misperceptions, in our straying wills, or in the common frailties of humanity. Oswald Chambers observed that if we wrestle directly with God, we may compel him to put us out of joint.\*

The normal life of prayer is not wrestling, but resting. When we are surrendered to God and in tune with his will, we may confidently bring our needs to him, and calmly expect that he hears and answers. We do not wrestle; we simply believe, and we leave our issues in his hands. This is the way of faith.

And yet, even the sinless Jesus had his night of agony in prayer. The everyday record of Jesus’ ministry shows what is typical—simple request, calm faith, and confident expectation. But Gethsemane, where our Saviour’s soul was troubled and overwhelmed with sorrow, shows that when enormous outcomes are at stake, a critical night of travail might be necessary.

Elijah, in the crisis on Mount Carmel, “bent down to the ground and put his face between his knees”. 1 Kings 18:42. This was a posture typical at that time for women giving birth. Elijah’s prayer was “earnest” or “fervent”, a travailing in prayer that gave birth to mighty victory and reformation. James 5:17.

The apostle Paul knew about wrestling in intercessory prayer. Perplexed about the Galatian believers and their deviation from the Gospel, he wrote, “My dear children, for whom I am again in the pains of childbirth until Christ is formed in you. . . .” Galatians 4:19. Paul spoke approvingly of a disciple named Epaphras, who was “always wrestling in prayer for you”. Colossians 4:12. And with the believers in Rome, Paul shared a mystery of prayer—that the Spirit of God travails within us, interceding “with groans that words cannot express”. Romans 8:26.

For all who weep and wrestle in prayer, there is this encouraging promise: “Those who sow in tears will reap with songs of joy. He who goes out weeping, carrying seed to sow, will return with songs of joy, carrying sheaves with him.” Psalm 126:5, 6.

\* *My Utmost for His Highest*, reading for Dec. 16.

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# Must we be holy to pray? By Ed Gallagher

We need not be *anything* to pray—that's the beauty of God's gift of prayer.

Prayer is one of the few activities on Earth that is completely non-discriminatory. Skin colour, gender, nationality, age, financial status, education, social standing, church relationship—none of these has any bearing on God's universal invitation to humanity: "Ask of me". Psalm 2:8.

Knees and eyes say it. On our knees, we are at one universal level. Eyes closed, we block out everything except the grace of God.

From this perspective, the Bible does not stipulate holiness as a prerequisite for prayer. "This poor man called, and the Lord heard him; he saved him out of all his troubles." Psalm 34:6. The word translated "poor" can also mean depressed, weak, afflicted, lowly, or needy. It means you and me—just as we are.

The sorrow-filled criminal on the cross next to Jesus fit this description. How unholy and unqualified can you get? But the criminal's prayer of nine words jetted into the heart of God, who was dying for him six feet away. The criminal's prayer ushered him immediately into the assurance of eternal life. Heaven showed no hesitation. Luke 23:40–43.

Good news from Calvary—the sense of being unqualified to pray is the very qualification we need in order to pray. This is why true praying is not in our name, but in the name of Jesus. "I will do whatever you ask in my name, so that the Son may bring glory to the Father. You may ask me for anything in my name, and I will do it." John 14:13, 14.

The "name" is the password, the authority, the right, the ticket, the passport. Jesus is that name. We might say holiness is indeed required to enter the courts of Heaven. But it is not our holiness, because we have none that we can call our own. Only the holiness of Jesus gets us into the presence of God. It is his qualification we present for entry—every time.

Let's make it personal. Jesus came to live and die as a human being, succeeding in every point where you have failed. He did this not for his own sake, but for your sake. It was all on your behalf, a gift of his love. He is your go-between, your representative, your priest. The moment you accept his provision for you,

he sees you as perfect, even while he undertakes the tough job of making you holy. Hebrews 10:14.

Because of this, we can "draw near to God with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled to cleanse us from a guilty conscience". Hebrews 10:22. The question is settled. Never again should we wonder if we're acceptable. "Let us then approach the throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need." Hebrews 4:16.

It is critical that we sense our need, that we feel sorrow for sin, and that we have a *willingness* to "turn from our wicked ways". 2 Chronicles 7:14. This is what we bring—sorrow for our sin, and a desire for change.

This is truth. Now let's remember a complementary truth. We come into salvation not to escape holiness, but to realise holiness. "The grace of God that brings salvation . . . teaches us to say 'No' to ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright and godly lives in this present age, while we wait for the blessed hope—the glorious appearing of our great God and Saviour,

Jesus Christ, who gave himself for us to redeem us from all wickedness and to purify for himself a people that are his very own, eager to do what is good." Titus 2:11–14.

It's a marvellous understanding. If there's any part of us that rebels against God's holiness, we won't stay in his presence for long. But if we stay—if we ask for and receive his work of cleansing and training—our joy and our usefulness for God increase dramatically.

Through prayers of confession, we enter God's presence. Then, staying in his presence, we find holiness, discipleship, powerful praying, and continued blessing.

It's in this context that we understand David's description. "Who may ascend the hill of the Lord? Who may stand in his holy place? He who has clean hands and a pure heart, who does not lift up his soul to an idol or swear by what is false. He will receive blessing from the Lord." Psalm 24:3–5.



Photo: Ed Gallagher

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# The urgency of secret prayer By Ed Gallagher

Here's a good question: Was there ever a time when Jesus refused to meet with people who wanted to be with him? Was there ever a time when he turned others away and put his own needs above the needs of others?

The answer, actually, is Yes! Here's the setting. He has just learned about the murder of his cousin, John the Baptist. Right away, he tries to retreat to a solitary place. He needs to grieve. And he needs to gain strength in the face of his own impending Cross—of which John's death is a painful portent.

But someone tells someone else about Jesus' whereabouts, and the word spreads, and soon there are thousands of people begging for his attention. Divine compassion overcomes human weariness. So he delays his retreat. He spends the day with the people, and teaches them, and heals them, and miraculously feeds them.

Toward the end of that day, the need for prayer becomes extreme. Jesus must now take time alone with his Father. So he *dismisses* the crowd. The Greek word is a strong one that in some contexts could be translated "divorces". There is haste, urgency and authority in his voice. There is no option—the crowd has to go; Jesus must follow a duty that calls more highly.

There is still the question of the disciples—his closest friends, his spiritual family. What about them? The scripture tells us he *makes* them leave—he compels them to leave, constrains them to get into a boat and go to the other shore.

The disciples are reluctant. They are concerned about leaving Jesus alone; they don't think it wise to cross the lake so late in the day; they are tired from the long day of ministry; and they are obsessed with the idea of making their Master the physical king over Israel. But Jesus will not hear of it; he firmly orders them to depart, and to leave him by himself.

It is only then that our Lord can rest in the place he longs to be—the solitary embrace of his Father. From around sundown until about four or five o'clock in the morning, he pours out his soul to Heaven. It is only with the Father that he can find consolation. It is only

from the throne-room of the universe that he can receive courage. Not in the crowds, not even in his closest companions, but in the Father's heart he finds his desired refreshment.

This was not the only time Jesus got away. Luke records, "As often as possible Jesus withdrew to out-of-the-way places for prayer." Luke 5:16, *The Message*\*. The gospels do not generally record the private life of Jesus. Their focus is on his public

ministry. So the fact that his private praying is mentioned as often as it is, testifies that prayer was not merely a thing he did from time to time. Secret prayer, for Jesus, was a way of living; the lifeline that kept him obedient, faithful, wise, and strong. He did not pray only to be our example. He prayed because he needed to pray. He prayed with joy, and he prayed with tears.

What Jesus practised, he also ordained. "When you pray, go into your room, close the door and pray to your Father, who is unseen." Matthew 6:6. We ourselves must take time to "close the door"—to friends, work associates, church members, and even family. Many a Christian has fallen into sin because of failure to "close the door" to others so that a door could open exclusively for the Father God.

For most of his ministry, Jesus did not have the convenience of a room with a door to close. For him, the place of prayer was a lonely spot in creation, where he retreated from those who made relentless demands on his time.

We make many excuses, none of them valid. Whatever it takes, we must regularly find a lonely spot for ourselves, and spend high quality time in that place, opening heart and mind with our Father in Heaven.

Photo: Ed Gallagher



**We must take time to "close the door"—to friends, work associates, church members, and even family.**

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# How to pray “without ceasing” By Ed Gallagher

“We can’t really pray all the time, can we? We can’t take that text literally.”

That text, of course, is 1 Thessalonians 5:17—“Pray without ceasing.” The original word for “without ceasing” means “uninterruptedly”, or “without omission”. Modern versions usually translate it “continually”.

Praise and prayer are the only habits the Bible tells us to practice all of our time. “Always pray,” said Jesus. “Pray in the Spirit on all occasions,” said Paul. “Always keep on praying. . . . Devote yourselves to prayer.”

Think about your physical life. What is the only thing you do in your physical life all the time—the one thing you have to do continually in order to live? You’re right—breathe! It’s the rule of life, breathe or die. And in spiritual life there’s also a natural rule—pray or die. It is prayer that sustains our spiritual life. No wonder it is called “the breathing of the soul”. And



no wonder, given how little time we spend in prayer, that our spiritual lives are sometimes sick and deathly.

Back to our question, which was asked with some consternation by a participant in a prayer seminar. Can we really pray all the time? Can we take “that text” literally?

For years, my own answer was “Maybe”. But these days, it’s a firm “Yes”.

I suggest three simultaneous approaches.

**First, the “Best Hour” approach.** Designate sacred time every day for focused, uninterrupted prayer. Martin Luther, a leading Protestant reformer with huge demands on his time, every day spent at least three of his very best hours in prayer. Too much for you? Then begin with 15 minutes and see where it leads. Keep this time absolutely sacred! When possible, early in the day is best. Make this a decision, a commitment. Prayer is joy, but it is also spiritual discipline.

**Second, the “Time Drop” approach.** As drops of rain fall unexpectedly onto our path, so drops of valuable, unallocated time fall into the course of our daily lives. An appointment is delayed. We wait in line at the grocery check-out. We take a break in the park. We lie awake at night. Dozens of such “time drop” opportunities come to us every day, but we usually fill them with idle thoughts, chatter, or intrusions from popular culture through radio, TV or magazines. Instead, carry with you some scripture, and when those drops of time appear, seize the opportunity. During those precious gifts of time, lift your mind into Heaven. Pray over the Word of God for yourself and for others.

Drive time presents a regular opportunity. If prayer for you is a distraction from driving, then by all means focus on your driving! But many of us can pray very well during normal driving. While driving, pray for yourself, for your family, for your church, for those involved in an accident you might pass, for a church or school you spot from the highway, for a homeless or derelict person who comes into view. I know one person who removes the radio from each car he buys, so he’ll spend more time in prayer! You might not go that far, but do use the “off” knob frequently, so you can tune in to God.

**Third, the “Prayer Bubble” approach.** As you put into daily practice the “Best Hour” and “Time Drop” approaches, you’ll find yourself developing around you an atmosphere of prayer—a “bubble” of God’s presence and power that goes with you wherever you go. So even while you are focused on work, you have an awareness of God, and of your experience in God. You pray over your work; you pause often to ask for help in it. You are “in God” just as you are in the building in which you work. That “bubble” becomes an atmosphere of peace and an aura of wisdom that testifies to others about the power of God at work in your life.

You are now “praying without ceasing”. You sense the difference. You feel the joy. And others around you know that something new and extraordinary has come into your life.

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# Transforming the tight spots By Ed Gallagher

"I'm in a tight spot." It's a familiar phrase, and a familiar plight. *Tightness*. It denotes confinement and tension. Walls of adversity closing in. Problems pressing. Little space to breathe. Hemmed in. No freedom to run.

A prison cell is a tight spot. Serving in war can be a tight spot. The loss of income, a friend who betrays us, crisis in relationships or business—these are tight spots. Disease and incapacity is a tight spot. Family dysfunction and abuse is a tight spot. The loss of a loved one is a tight spot. Addiction is a tight spot. Sin is a tight spot.

Are you in a tight spot right now? If so, there's a message from God for you.

The message is startling in its context. Here it is: "In all their distress he too was distressed." Isaiah 63:9. You've probably read this before, but now, pause to receive its full blessing.

The Hebrew word used here for "distress" means "tightness," or "tight place". "In all their tight spots, God experienced the tightness." Think about this! God enters into your distress; your anguish sweeps over him personally. Your pain is his pain—no matter whether it's a sorrow you have brought about through your own actions, or a sorrow that has simply come upon you. You suffer; the God who loves you suffers with you.

Isaiah 63 pictures God robed in splendour, striding among his people. Because of sin, the people are in a tight place. In fact, they are terribly bloodied. As God walks among them to dispense justice and mercy, their blood gets all over him. His splendour becomes tarnished. Startling words: "Their blood spattered my garments, and I stained all my clothing." Verse 3.

My friends, we have a God who walks among us in our worst times, and gets covered with the blood of our distress. The pain of our world is not confined to our world. It throbs in Heaven itself.

If this were the entire picture, we would be comforted but we might still be without hope. We need to know, Will the pain end? Will my tightness become freedom? Will my anguish give way to joy?

The answer is provided in a question and answer in Isaiah 63:1. "Who is this, robed in splendour, striding forward in the greatness of his strength? 'It is I, speaking in righteousness, mighty to save.'"

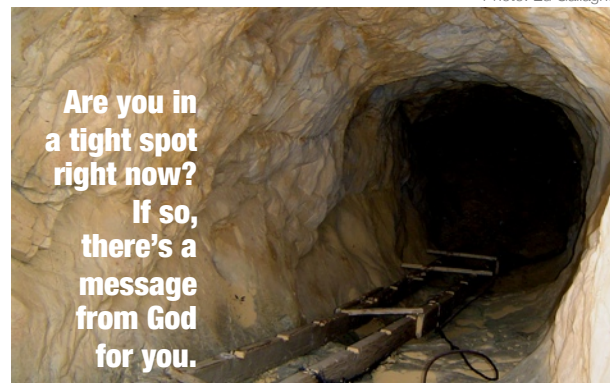
This God who suffers with us and gets himself covered with the blood of our distress has a dual role.

He is not only our Comforter—he is our Rescuer. He is mighty to save, releasing us from our tight spots and freeing us to leap with joy in open spaces.

Now look at all of verse 9. "In all their distress he too was distressed, and the angel of his presence saved them. In his love and mercy he redeemed them; he lifted them up and carried them all the days of old."

This is Heaven's "Lift and Carry" mission, and it was accomplished in God's Son. Jesus lived among us, going through our trials and giving us profound encouragement. He was tested and wounded. He suffered and entered into death. But he rose again and forged for us a path to freedom.

Photo: Ed Gallagher



Jesus guaranteed release from our tight spots—more frequently than we deserve in this life, and absolutely when he makes all things new. To re-phrase Isaiah 63:9: "In love and mercy Christ has redeemed us; he lifts us up and carries us all the days of our lives."

Where does prayer come into the picture? Everywhere!

Prayer is crucial in our tight spots. Every calamity is a call to prayer. When adversity closes in, prayer is the way we activate faith. It is the way we say, "Lord, include me in your Lift and Carry mission."

Some trials are so severe that we feel we cannot even pray. That's all right—when you cannot rise up in God, you may simply sink into him. Prayer at such times may be more a gasp of the soul than a grouping of words. With a gasp of the soul, God lifts you up and carries you, as a parent lifts up a child who has fallen to the ground. In your distress, God too is distressed. He will enter your grief and guide you patiently through your painful passage, one day at a time.

This is the "cup of suffering" that in Christ becomes at the same time, amazingly, a "cup of thanksgiving." See 1 Corinthians 10:16. The process is not logical, nor is it natural. It calls for faith, not analysis. It's supernatural—a miracle—and it transforms our tight spots.

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# The miracle of praise in trial

By Ed Gallagher



**God gives us a miracle if we want it—the miracle of a transformed viewpoint.**

Several years ago I received a year-end letter from some friends in California, USA. There were details about children, events and so on. Then there was a sentence that jumped out from the page: “God has richly blessed us this year with many trials.”

I couldn’t believe it, but there it was—“God has richly blessed us this year with many trials.”

At the time, I had only a small idea about the point of view conveyed in this comment. More than a decade previously, I had gone through a bevy of griefs involving several large losses, including the loss of my marriage. By grace I survived these trials, but never did I consider them God’s “rich blessings”.

My friends in California saw their trials as opportunities for growth in Christ and praise to God. Some might say they were in denial, or delusional. I now understand that they were Spirit-filled and biblically empowered.

The scriptures are consistent about the perspective we may take on life’s trials. “Every day I will praise you.” Psalm 145:2. “In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world.” John 16:33. “Through Jesus, therefore, let us continually offer a sacrifice of praise.” Hebrews 13:15. “Give thanks in all circumstances, for this is God’s will for you in Christ Jesus.” 1 Thessalonians 5:18. “Always giving thanks to God the Father for everything, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.” Ephesians 5:20. And from James comes the clincher: “Consider it pure joy, my brothers, whenever you face trials of many kinds.” James 1:2.

If this seems unnatural, it’s because it is! By nature, when we come into trials we complain and get upset and anxious, even angry. Big trials dishearten us; small frustrations steal our peace. But God gives us a miracle if we want it—the miracle of a transformed viewpoint.

The idea of being hopeful and thankful during trial should not be regarded as home-style psychology or simplistic distraction. Praise should not be dismissed as a pacifier in the mouth of a wailing baby.

Tragedies like the Holocaust during World War II demonstrate that some tortured souls survive while their comrades die, because they adopt a viewpoint pervaded with hope.

Somehow these few are able to lift their minds above their misery. They catch a vision of a higher purpose, a positive future. This attitude does not change every sad circumstance, but it does change the people who assume the attitude. Then, even if death comes, it is a death faced with heroism and courage instead of despair.

In the Christian realm, this is the miracle of praise. Praise redirects our minds to God’s peace and power, which in turn keeps us from being overwhelmed by our anxiety and weakness. Praise lifts our spirits above the immediate trauma. It raises us into Heaven, where we discover the long-term viewpoint of God that helps us deal effectively with our circumstances.

Consider Paul and Silas in prison—see Acts 16. They are disgraced, beaten, bruised, bleeding, and chained. In these miserable circumstances they choose to adopt a viewpoint of praise to God—and they express this viewpoint publicly with joy-filled song. Their praise transforms them, it transforms the prison, and it transforms the jailer and his family. Think how much differently this story would read if Paul and Silas had instead indulged the natural way—self-pity, complaint, and resentment.

When you and I face our next trial, let’s lift our hands to Heaven and receive God’s Spirit to inspire this kind of prayer. . . . “Lord, I thank you for the opportunity this challenge gives me to praise you for always taking care of me in the past. Now I trust you to take care of me in this experience, no matter how hard it becomes or how long it lasts. In my sadness and frustration I praise you, Jesus, for you are the Master of this situation and you are the resurrected Lord of my life!

“I look to you for comfort and resolution, and I praise you for already having heard and answered this prayer. Keep me faithful in thanksgiving to you, despite the circumstances I face. In your powerful name I pray, Amen.”

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# I'm blessed—so why am I guilty? By Ed Gallagher

Believe it or not, there are some people who have few significant trials and who see themselves as so blessed by God that it makes them feel guilty!

These people have worked hard and made good decisions; now they enjoy the rewards. They are healthy, they understand and live the Gospel, they have solid relationships, their finances are sound, they live in a nice environment, they take vacations, they are generous with their means, and they enjoy life. But because they have Christ's compassion, it's hard when they see people around them bombarded with one bad thing after another. That's where a measure of guilt comes in.

You might laugh and say, "I'm ready for that kind of guilt any time."

Let's get something straight. God is interested in our happiness, not in our misery. He's in the joy business.

The Bible tells us God "sets apart the godly for himself". Psalm 4 says he sends the light of his face on us, and he hears and answers our prayers—which brings us great happiness. He provides relief in our

Photo: Ed Gallagher

**We may ask God for good times, for one blessing after another. And not feel guilty about it.**



trials, and lets us lie down and sleep in peace. Is this the God you know? If not, is it the God you'd *like* to know?

Here's another promise: "The righteous will flourish like a palm tree, they will grow like a cedar of Lebanon; planted in the house of the LORD, they will flourish in the courts of our God. They will still bear fruit in old age, they will stay fresh and green." Psalm 92:12-14.

In ancient times a man named Jabez looked out on his world and didn't like it. Too much pain; heaps of trouble. He was sorely aware his own name meant "grief and sorrow". So he cried out to God, "Oh, that you would bless me and enlarge my territory! Let your hand be with me, and keep me from harm so that I will be free from pain." What a prayer! So selfish—he

should feel guilty for praying like this, right? But look at the story's punch line: "And God granted his request." See 1 Chronicles 4:9, 10.

The privilege extends into New Covenant times. John testifies, "From the fullness of his grace we have all received one blessing after another." John 1:16. John writes to a friend, "I pray that you may enjoy good health and that all may go well with you." 3 John 2. This is an appropriate prayer. We may ask God for good times, for success, for health, for meaningful service, for one blessing after another. And not feel guilty about it.

It's true we must avoid "the prosperity gospel". That's the blessing of God twisted into avoiding Earth's pain; into belief that Christians *deserve* wealth and success. It's the misconception that we have a right to amass riches merely for our comfort, and that our blessings make us a bit higher and better than those who suffer and those who are poor. The Word of God condemns such belief. See Luke 6:24; 12:21; 14:12-14; 18:24; 1 Timothy 6:9, 10, 17, 18; James 2:5, 6; Revelation 3:17, 18.

Jabez did not pray only for freedom from pain. He prayed for "the hand of God" to accompany him, so that as his influence extended, he could be the hand of God in healthy blessing for the world. Jesus stated the "hand" principle nicely: "Freely you have received, freely give." Matthew 10:8.

King David knew lots of trouble, but he also relished times of prosperity. "You have made my lot secure. The boundary lines have fallen for me in pleasant places; surely I have a delightful inheritance." Psalm 16:5, 6. No sign of guilt here, just a heart full of joy for God's blessings—and eagerness to share his blessings in service.

Do you want God's extreme favour in your life? Here's an important part of the deal: obedience to his will. "If I had cherished sin in my heart, the Lord would not have listened." Psalm 66:18. God cannot bless continued evil or carelessness—though his mercy and patience are amazing. If you want abundant health, for example, good decisions and action are needed. You might need to get off the couch! Ask God to show you the things in your life that need to change, so you will not restrict Heaven's blessing.

When the favour comes, there's no need to spoil it with guilt. Praise God, and share the gift in service for others.

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# God of the darkness

By Ed Gallagher

I'll never forget a visit I made years ago to a home in darkness. At midday, blinds were shut. Lights were out. A candle burned. The woman inside was trapped in never-ending grief from the death of her daughter 13 years before.

Despair happens. "My heart is heavy with a burden for my drug addicted son," someone wrote to me. "He can no longer hold a job and cannot take care of his family. He lives each moment for the next fix. I have prayed, but I am feeling despair."

This is darkness, and there is no answer to it—except the Cross of Christ. We must pause at the darkness of the Cross, for it reveals a mystery. "From the sixth hour until the ninth hour darkness came over all the land." Matthew 27:45.

This is not the darkness of midnight, but an unknowable darkness of midday. Luke says simply, "the sun stopped shining". Luke 23:45. It is a cavernous darkness, "thick and dreadful"—like that which came upon Adam at creation, when he symbolically "died" so that out of him might come new life. It is "a darkness that can be felt," like that of the plague on Egypt. It is "blackest darkness". 2 Peter 2:7. It is the gloom of the world laid on the Light of the world.

The darkness that accompanies this epochal death is not merely the absence of light; it is the flight of good in the face of evil. The face that once "shone like the sun" does not shine now. Matthew 17:2. The clothes that became "white as light" on the Mount of Transfiguration are no clothes at all now; they give way to the shame of nakedness, exposing the condition of all of us in our sin.

The darkness comes in the wake of cruel slander. "He trusts in God. Let God rescue him now if he wants him." Matthew 27:43. Criticism and slander always lead to darkness, especially in the church. By these things we curse each other, just as religious people of the time cursed Jesus.

For the Man crucified and broken, the darkness envelopes, erupts, cascades, and finally descends into despair: "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?"

Spectators grope their way back to Jerusalem, where torches flare and candles flame. But the Son of God can make no such journey. Spiked to a tree, he knows he must remain there to die the darkest death on behalf of sinners.

Those who quickly dismiss Christ's despair—or the despair believers may experience in times of acute struggle—fail to understand humanity's role in the battle between good and evil. Despair is a real

condition. It must be acknowledged and expressed if light is to return. This is the necessary, biblical path of godly lament—a path taken by Job, David, Jeremiah, and Christ himself.

On the path of lament, unthinking clichés ("Cheer up. . . . Don't take it so seriously. . . . Just believe. . . . You shouldn't talk like that, you know") offend God and the sufferer.

The good news is that God is not Lord of part, he is Lord of all. He is Lord even of darkness. At creation, God separated light from darkness and asserted his ownership of darkness by giving it a name: "Night". Even the darkness, as created by God, was declared "good".

Photo: Ed Gallagher



At the Exodus, darkness protected the people of God. At Mount Sinai, God made darkness his covering and canopy. Psalm 18:11.

At the Cross, the darkness that oppresses also becomes the darkness that comforts. The darkness is "the mantle of God" that clothes the Saviour's naked body against curious eyes. With the darkness, the jeering of the onlookers is silenced; curses go mute. In the long hours of darkness, Jesus retreats to the one refuge remaining—the silent, strong embrace of his Father's arms. "Father, into your hands I commit my spirit."

In the Father's embrace, even while darkness continues, Christ rests in ultimate truth—"God is light; in him there is no darkness at all." 1 John 1:5.

There is no ready rescue for the dying Saviour; the grave continues his darkness and confirms it.

But wait! Morning comes. There is a flash like lightning. In a moment, Heaven's special forces realise full, resplendent victory over the dominion of darkness.

This is not only the Saviour's story. It's our story, too.

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# Prayer—good for your health By Ed Gallagher

“Dear friend,” writes John to Gaius, “I pray that you may enjoy good health and that all may go well with you, even as your soul is getting along well.” 3 John 2.

Can you see the connections here? In John’s perspective, four blessings—friendship, prayer, physical health and spiritual health—are wrapped up together. Each of the four relates to the others and helps build the others. Is there any one of the four blessings that you would want to be without?

When we come into a crisis of illness or injury, we turn to God in prayer. We know that prayer will be part of our recovery. But how is it in your life when there’s no crisis? Do you appreciate the value of prayer to your health in the course of a normal day?

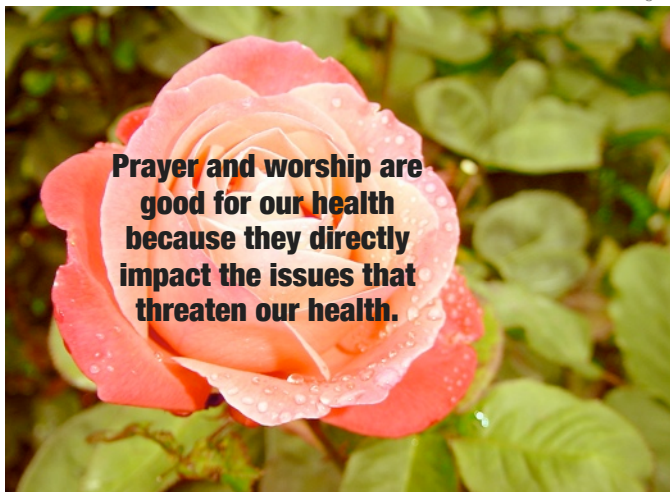
Dozens of studies in the last decade or so indicate that overall, people who pray and worship enjoy better health than those who do not. Articles on the subject are common, with titles such as “Faith Is Powerful Medicine”. Believers appear less likely to get diseases, and to recover more quickly after surgery. The vast majority of physicians believe that faith and prayer can play powerful roles in healing for their patients.

As believers, we pray not because science says it’s good for us, but because we enjoy including God in our conversation. Prayer is at the heart of God’s love for us, and our love for him. Prayer is relationship and lifestyle.

Prayer and worship are good for our health because they directly impact the issues that threaten our health—issues like anxiety, addiction, isolation, guilt, hopelessness, self-absorption, carelessness, and neglect.

Prayer is a powerful relaxation response, decreasing blood pressure, metabolism, heart rate, and breathing rate. It’s more than a matter of mouthing words. Research indicates the benefit is higher when the person has real faith in God.

Photo: Ed Gallagher



A praying Christian understands creation and destiny, respects the body, develops meaningful relationships, and becomes active for God.

Do praying people get sick? Of course! Just as they have accidents. The ultimate death rate for praying people is the same as for non-praying people—100 per cent. But prayer can have profound effect on the timing of our death and the manner of our death—and more importantly, on the quality of each day we live.

When I rise in the morning and begin my day with prayer, a course is charted for the day that is more hopeful, trusting, peaceful, and fulfilled than otherwise. Returning to prayer many times through the day, I find refreshment directly from Heaven. How could this be anything other than beneficial for my health?

When stresses arrive—frustration, impatience, temptation, disappointment, insecurity, criticism, anger—I find a resource that is free and powerful. Too often, I fail to come quickly enough to my heavenly resource, but I may always come.

This is the everyday experience. Now, what about our crises of illness or injury? Divine healing was prominent in Christ’s ministry and is strongly taught in the Scriptures. “Praise the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits—who forgives all your sins and heals all your diseases . . . who satisfies your desires with good things so your youth is renewed like the eagle’s.” Psalm 103:2–5.

There are people who misconstrue miraculous healing and make it appear like a vaudeville show—but we must not let such excesses spoil the genuine blessing. Why should we hesitate to ask God in full faith for his healing power, when his promises are strong and clear?

God heals the believer—sometimes immediately, more often over time, and always at the resurrection. While we ask in faith, we do not dictate to God the manner or timing of our healing. If healing is immediate, we praise him. If it’s over the course of time, we praise him. If we wait until resurrection, we praise him.

It’s been well said that “sometimes it takes more faith *not* to be healed”. History’s saints (like John the Baptist) who have suffered and died in their crises were no less loved by God, nor was their faith necessarily weak. One day, the great Healer will make all things new, and present us with the full flower of creative health—not for a lifetime, but for eternity.

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# In college—and in God By Ed Gallagher

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We don't take our parents with us when we go off to college or university—we leave them at home. We're thankful for their support and prayers, but in most cases we're eager to be off by ourselves as newly established adults.

Whether we're staying local or going far away, the college transition is momentous—a huge rite of passage. All that we are and all that we will become is now defined by our personal choices.

At age 18, I crunched my stuff into a few suitcases and crossed an ocean to college. I was so excited that I forgot to pray. I let God fade. There were people to meet, things to arrange, friends to make, a life to establish, an independence to express.

Within weeks, I found that while college was exciting, it was also demanding. Along with fun and good times were disappointments, complications, pressures. There were mistakes to be made, failures to be experienced. There were too many decisions. There was not enough time to do what I was expected to do. And there were no family members or long-established friends to provide rescue and relief. I was surrounded by people, but this made lonely times more intense.

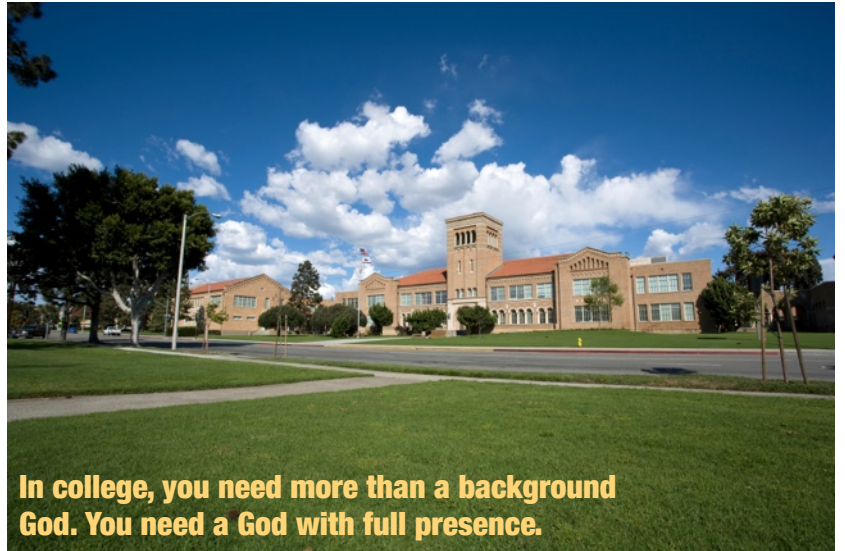
By the end of my first term, I realised I needed more than a background God. I needed a God with full presence. I began to seek God as a Parent and Friend with whom I could establish a relationship of knowing and loving, asking and receiving. I knew that seeking God wouldn't make my challenges disappear, but it would give me standing to deal with my challenges. I read this promise in my Bible: "Those who seek the Lord lack no good thing." Psalm 34:10.

The Spirit of God led me to a decision that seemed crazy. I would get up no later than 5 am, Monday through Friday, and spend a full hour with God, no matter what. I would study my Bible, and I would pray. Was it easy? No! Did it make a difference? Enormously.

The days became brighter, the challenges more tolerable. Every evening, I would stroll down by the river. It was a prayer walk. I would take any frustrations or difficulties from the day and lay them on Jesus. And I'd praise him for the joys—which were many.

I would see another student, a young man, standing under a tree for a long time most evenings. His head was always bowed. I couldn't see angels, but I could sense them. This student was the quietest boy in the dorm. I didn't know his name. But I knew he and God were at peace.

One evening, on the return part of my stroll, the boy was no longer standing by the tree. At the dorm,



ambulance lights flashed. The one whose name I didn't know had collapsed and died. I may have been the last to see him alive. Later, I learned he carried a secret—a congenital heart defect that destined his life to be short. I was deeply affected. His life and death confirmed that I should keep on making God an intimate part of my college experience.

Final exams were usually two to three intense hours—this was a traditional system that we concluded was based on torture! In the exam room, I would bow my head and spend the first ten minutes in prayer. "God, this time is yours. You know the challenge. Bring to my mind the things I have learned. As for the things I haven't learned, how about a miracle? May the same blessing be given to my fellow students. . . ."

I saw miracles in one exam after another. The Spirit of God seemed to fill the room and transform torture into blessing.

Even with its joys and miracles, college for me was in many ways a struggle. I was glad to graduate into the next chapter of my life.

For your college experience and every challenge you face, I recommend intimacy with God. There is no substitute. There is no more powerful way to establish your identity and to define your life as an adult and as a believer in God.

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# Action steps for powerful praying By Ed Gallagher

There is no formula for powerful praying. Prayer is a mysterious action of the Holy Spirit, and our attempts to define it fall short. Even if your words are stumbling and weak, know that “The prayer of the upright is God’s delight.” See Romans 8:26; and Proverbs 15:8, KJV.

With this assurance, here are six action steps for powerful praying that can help bring even more of God’s delight into your prayers. . . .

**Ask.** Those who approach spiritual life on a largely rational basis may stumble over this, but yes, God does more when we ask him to do more, and less when we fail to ask. The mission of salvation rested on the condition that the Son would pray, and from the King receive his power. Psalm 2:7, 8. Heaven’s blessings of forgiveness and healing are based on a condition — “If my people . . . will humble themselves and pray.” 2 Chronicles 7:14. The alternative to asking is assuming; joy comes through asking.

**Believe.** “If you believe, you will receive whatever you ask for in prayer.” Matthew 21:22. It is *believing* when we ask, that brings God’s blessings. “When he asks, he must believe and not doubt.” James 1:6. This is faith, and faith is best understood in terms of quality rather than quantity. Faith is not a substance manufactured, but a relationship that grows. It is childlike trust in a great God; resting in God and taking him at his word. “Lord, I believe; help thou mine unbelief.” Mark 9:24, KJV. These words of a sick boy’s father may be the finest expression of faith in all the scriptures.

**Claim.** This word reminds us of homesteaders who chose a piece of land and settled on it, and of miners who staked their claim on a site. To claim a promise of God is to take personal possession of it, to express it before God and then make it your own by faith.

Daniel’s prayer recorded in Daniel 9 gives an excellent example. Daniel reviews God’s promise and actions, and then prays, “O Lord, listen! O Lord, forgive! O Lord, hear and act! For your sake, O my God, do not delay.” He prays with humble and holy assertiveness—he “stakes a claim”. When this step is firmly based on the Word, it brings amazing results.

**Agree.** Jesus taught that when church members and believers unite in prayer and “agree” about what they ask the Father, there comes a unique level of power to bind evil and unleash Heaven’s

blessings. See Matthew 18:18, 19. The first Christians “all joined together constantly in prayer”. Acts 1:14. When Peter was in prison, “the church was earnestly praying to God for him”. Acts 12:5. No wonder the Spirit was powerful among the early believers! So pray in private, but also find others with whom to establish a meaningful fellowship in prayer.

**Adore.** How often our prayers are dominated with petition, and practically devoid of praise. “Let us continually offer to God a sacrifice of praise—the fruit of lips that confess his name.” Hebrews 13:15. Adoration of God is not so much for his sake as for ours. It is the best therapy possible for our dark times! It is a miracle of the Spirit that brings Heaven’s healing for our minds, emotions and bodies. Following the examples of Daniel, King David, the apostles, and many others, place every prayer request in a window of praise, and see the power flow.

**Relinquish.** This is a powerful word that means “leave behind, give up, give over, stop holding on to, release, yield, commit, deposit, surrender”. The meaning is illustrated in Paul’s touching farewell to church leaders: “Now I commit you to God and to the word of his grace.” Acts 20:32. Sometimes in our prayers we worry over issues or people. Instead, pray “Lord, this challenge is too big for me. It is beyond my wisdom and power. I therefore relinquish this issue, this person, entirely to you. I give this all over to you, and by faith accept that you are now 100 per cent in charge of it, for your glory and for the greatest blessing possible.”

**Ask, believe, claim, agree, adore, relinquish**—action steps for powerful praying. Will you put them into practice, beginning now?

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Photo: Ed Gallagher



**The word “claim” reminds us of homesteaders who chose a piece of land and settled on it, and of miners who staked their claim.**



# Companions in pain

By Ed Gallagher

Recently I received painful news. The wife and mother in a family I love was diagnosed with a serious form of cancer, and the outlook was grim.

Night and day, these people—the husband and wife and two teenage boys—were on my mind and in my prayers. It was my privilege to participate with other praying people in a service of anointing in their home.

Soon they let their friends know they'd found a rallying point in God's Word—2 Corinthians 1:8–11. I looked it up. To my surprise, I found a powerful teaching on pain and prayer, one I had never studied.

In the verses leading up to this section, Paul describes God as “the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort”. A treasure in words! Paul says the Father understands our suffering because his own Son suffered. From the Son, suffering flows into our lives—and with it flows the comfort of the Father.

This is a blessing not only in private, but in community. Paul says there's a wider purpose attached to the comfort we receive—we are then able to extend comfort to others when they go through pain.

Comfort is not a pool that accumulates, but a river that flows. It flows from the Father, through the Son, on to us as believers, and then through us to others who are hurting. This flowing is a *koinonos* (Greek)—a sharing, a fellowship, a partaking, a companionship that unites Heaven and Earth in God's healing power.

The Holy Spirit is everywhere in this flowing. It's no coincidence that flowing water is one of the primary symbols of the Spirit, and that the New Testament word for “comfort” is also a name for the Spirit—“the Comforter”.

As I received updates from my friends—the family impacted by cancer—I found myself strangely encouraged. I was supposed to be comforting them, but they were blessing me. This is the fellowship of consolation.

Paul's writings on suffering are not intellectual; they are personal. “We were under great pressure, far beyond our ability to endure, so that we despaired even of life. Indeed, in our hearts we felt the sentence of death.”

Can you identify with this description? Look at it again. Do the words reflect an experience in your

life? If the description is for you, the comfort is also for you.

It's important to know that Paul deals honestly with troubles. He sinks under pressure. He cannot endure it. He despairs. He feels as though he's on death row. He is *not* “happy all the time”, to use the misguided phrase of a children's song. There is a glib faith that denies suffering's reality and depth—but this is no faith at all. Our Saviour himself knew desperation, especially in Gethsemane and on the Cross.

But like our Saviour, Paul steps out from despair to claim the promise of God. He expresses pain, but he also expresses faith. “This happened that we might not rely on ourselves but on God, who raises the dead. He has delivered us . . . and he will deliver us. On him we have set our hope.”

Photo: Ed Gallagher



Now to the role of prayer. Frequently, I come across sincere people who question how our human prayers can have an effect on God's sovereign universe. Do our services of prayer and anointing affect outcomes? This is an intellectual and rational question, and a reasonable one.

But the issue is essentially *spiritual*. The critical question for me is, Am I willing to let God speak for himself? Will I submit my query to his answer?

Paul is unequivocal. Heaven's specific blessing does not come out of the blue. Rather, it arrives “as you help us by your prayers”. Think about this! *Healing accompanies praying*. “Then,” Paul concludes, “many will give thanks on our behalf for the gracious favour granted us in answer to the prayers of many.”

This scripture gives good reason to pray collectively for our friends. United prayer actively places their deliverance and destiny in Heaven's hands. The outcomes are then entirely safe with God.

Our praying is not subject to question, nor is it optional. It is crucial. It is divine invitation—part of the plan, part of the fellowship, part of the healing, part of the joy, part of the faith. So, let's pray.

*Postscript.* Two years after the date this article was written, the desperately ill wife and mother is doing remarkably well under God's specific and clear blessing.

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# The joy of partnership in prayer By Ed Gallagher

There's a story about a small boy who was trying to lift a heavy stone, but he couldn't budge it. His father, passing by, stopped to watch his efforts. Finally he said to his son: "Are you using all your strength?"

"Yes, I am," the boy cried, exasperated.

"No," the father said calmly, "you're not. You haven't asked me to help you."

We do better in this world when we have someone to help us. This is a hard truth when we see ourselves as self-made and independent. In some ways independence is a virtue, but in other ways it is a vice.

When Jesus established the Christian church, it was not on the basis of independence, but on the basis of partnership. Peter, James and John were partners in fishing when Jesus called them to become partners with him in evangelism. Luke 5:10. Paul said believers are called into a "partnership in the gospel". Philippians 1:5. He saw himself as a partner with believers, and usually took with him a partner in ministry. See Philemon 1:17; 2 Corinthians 8:23.

The Greek word translated "partner" in these scriptures is a variation of the well-known word *koinonia*. This word speaks about companionship, communion, sharing, and fellowship.

At the heart of such fellowship is prayer, because prayer establishes partnership in God. Jesus illustrated this in Gethsemane the night before his crucifixion, when he asked his closest companions to stay awake and *pray* with him.

Is there a partnership of prayer in your life? Is there a trusted person who prays for you regularly, and for whom your own thoughts rise in prayer day by day?

The elements of a partnership in prayer are simple. First, each person commits to pray for the other daily. Second, the partners pray together—in person or by

phone—at least once a week. Third, whenever a special need arises, the partners communicate that need with each other, and give time to prayer over it. And fourth, the partners commit to praise God consistently in all the challenges and blessings of their lives.

We must be aware that the devil hates this kind of prayer partnership, because he knows the strength of it. So there are some important safeguards.

A husband and wife can be excellent prayer partners within their marriage, but otherwise prayer partnerships should be same-gender. Partners must allow equal focus and time one to another, so that one of the partners does not dominate; each partner should think more about giving than receiving. The partnership should be for spiritual support, not for attempted therapy. Each partner should respect the time and available energy of the other. And most importantly, each must be committed to faithfulness, integrity and confidentiality in the partnership.

Prayer partnerships don't have to be life-long. Circumstances change, needs change. God brings a variety of people into our lives—the right people for the right time. It may be a good idea to think of a prayer partnership as a one-year commitment, renewable as each partner feels led.

If I do not have a partner in prayer, how can I find one? There is only one safe and effective way, and that is to pray for it. Keep praying and hoping, and look for God's leading.

Remember you are looking not for a friend, but for a partner in prayer. Friendship may grow out of the prayer partnership, and a friend can make a good prayer partner, but the two roles are distinct.

My own life is enriched with a meaningful prayer partnership with my wife, Betty. How often she prays

the exact best word of God into my mind! And I enjoy an enduring prayer partnership with two close friends, Tim and Chris. Their support in prayer provides an immeasurable spiritual lift for me each week.

I was not always blessed this way, and I realise you might not be. So now I am praying that you will begin to seek and find the joy of a meaningful partnership in prayer.

**We do better in this world  
when we have someone to  
help us.**



Photo: Ed Gallagher

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# Is God in your greeting? By Ed Gallagher

"Hey!" "What's up?" "Hello." "How are you?" "Hi." "Good morning." Every language and subculture has its greetings. "G'Day"—common Down Under, in Australia and New Zealand. Greetings open gates that are otherwise closed and locked.

Centuries back, we find an amazing greeting. It's in a story we pick up as two people make their way along a dusty trail from Moab to Bethlehem.

One of the travellers is an older woman, a Jew. She's grieving, dispirited, bitter. Her husband has died; both of her sons too. She's leaving nothing, and going home to nothing.

The other woman is a young adult, a Moabite in her prime. She is also grieving. She's the older woman's daughter-in-law. Her husband's body lies in a grave, farther behind with every step she takes.

Naomi is drawn back to Judah because there is nowhere else to go. Ruth travels with her mother-in-law, because she cannot imagine life without her. She has made her commitment to Naomi's God. "Where you die I will die, and there I will be buried."

For widows in these times, death cloaks the mind. From every perspective the outlook is bleak.

Naomi finds refuge with long-lost relatives. Ruth falls into the welfare system. She joins the poorest of the poor, picking up left-over barley behind harvesters in the fields.

Suddenly, the richest man in Bethlehem appears. He's young, single, and from the same family line as Naomi's dead husband. Boaz surveys the field workers and the gleaners who follow them. He takes a deep breath, then shouts a greeting: "The LORD be with you!"

The workers and the gleaners stop. They stand up, look toward Boaz, and in spirited ceremony shout back, "And the LORD bless you!"

This is no "Hi" or "Hello". The words are filled with meaning, filled with holiness, filled with God. The greeting is covenantal communication ordained by Heaven.

It's a communication confirmed in New Testament times. The angel Gabriel greets Mary this way; Paul ends some of his letters this way.

The historical church continued the tradition: "The Lord be with you"—"And also with you." Old English picked it up—"God be in your morning"; "God be in your night." Yes, here are the origins of "Good morning" and "Good night".

In this greeting, the more you look, the more you see.

"The LORD"—in the Old Testament this form always refers to the high and mysterious name for God, God

Almighty; the God who makes a covenant with his people, and keeps it to the death.

"With"—this is a significant expression. It can be translated both "The LORD be with you" and "The LORD is with you."

The concept is revolutionary. Almighty God with us! Religions of the world teach a god we must climb up to, or whom we must bring down to ourselves. The Bible proclaims a God already with us—first in creation, then in redemption.

When God came to us in redemption, he gave the Person of that redemption a carefully chosen name: Immanuel. The covenantal greeting is embedded in the name Immanuel—"God with us".

Photo: Ed Gallagher



"With you"—direct, personal, all-embracing. The blessing by Boaz targeted not only paid workers, but also destitute gleaners, including Ruth. "Who am I?" exclaims Ruth. "I am a foreigner, with no standing."

You know the rest of the story. Boaz steps into action as a kinsman-redeemer. He takes an interest in Ruth and Naomi, blessing them in person. He pays a price to free Ruth from exclusion and poverty, and he marries her. From their line comes King David, and then the baby born in Bethlehem, whose name is Immanuel—God with us.

So, is God in your greeting?

"The LORD be with you"

"And the LORD bless you."

Try it! Put it into practise, beginning today. When you can, show others how to respond.

This greeting is holy connection. It's sacred blessing. In a purposeful sense, it is prayer. Our exact words might vary from these, depending on the person and the circumstances. But as we identify with Immanuel, God will be in our greeting, and gates will open.

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# Prayer at the hospital bedside By Ed Gallagher

The hospital bedside is a holy place. There, trivial things make way for significant issues of life, death, relationships, pain, hope, and salvation. "Through faith and prayer the sickroom may be transformed into a Bethel."<sup>\*</sup>

Every hospital chaplain has seen miracles in this holy place. Sometimes miracles of physical healing; more often the higher miracles—healing of emotions, relationships and soul.

Chaplains do important work at the hospital bedside, yet friends and loved ones can do an even more significant work, through their compassion, their practical help, and a ministry of prayer. The patient is fortunate who has such people at the bedside! Medical science widely recognises the benefit.

Some Christians may feel insecure about prayer in a hospital room—and miss marvellous opportunities. Here are some suggestions for effectively praying for the sick. . . .

**Be sensitive to the patient's desires.** If the patient asks you for prayer, by all means pray! Or, you may suggest prayer with the words, "I would be happy to pray for you if you'd like." Then take your cue from the patient's response. Never push prayer on a patient, and never react negatively if a patient declines.



**"The sickroom may be transformed into a Bethel."**

**Be sensitive to the patient's background.** Is the patient Christian? Jewish? Hindu or Moslem? Sceptical or of a secular mind? Keep his or her spiritual context in mind as you pray.

**Be sensitive to the patient's condition.** A short, heartfelt prayer is best, especially if the patient is in pain, is very weak, or is partially sedated. Come close to the patient, and speak with sufficient volume for the patient to hear.

**Be sensitive to hospital caregivers.** Look for a moment when the patient is not being attended by caregivers, and not being visited by others. If no such opportunity appears, don't hesitate to say something like this to those in the room: "Jack has asked me to pray for him. It will take only a minute. Would you like to join us? Or, could you give us a moment when it's convenient?"

**Consider the environment.** Noise is a special distraction to prayer. If practical, close the door of the room and turn off the TV—with careful consideration if another patient shares the room.

**Use the ministry of touch.** Appropriate touch is powerful and appreciated in most cases. As you pray, you might hold the patient's hand or shoulder, or stroke an arm, naturally staying clear of any area of treatment or pain.

**Pray personally, hopefully, biblically, specifically, and simply.** Here's an example of these elements. . . . "Lord, you know the need that Mary faces. She is fearful about the surgery. She is suffering some pain. And she misses her home and family. Thank you, Father, that you love Mary dearly and that you have promised you will never leave or forsake her. Send a special blessing of healing for her right now. Ease her pain. Give her some good sleep tonight. Be present at each step of the surgery tomorrow morning at 9 o'clock. And restore her quickly to her husband, Ben, and her children, Susan and David. Thank you, Lord, for hearing and answering this prayer. May your will be done in every detail. Stay with Mary now in your everlasting love, I pray in Jesus' name, Amen."

**Pause after your prayer.** Don't "disconnect" too quickly. Silence is precious. Sometimes, the patient will want to respond with his or her own prayer—a further opportunity for you to minister through careful listening and affirmation.

**Encourage, don't condemn.** If the patient's own destructive lifestyle has contributed to the illness, he or she may be acutely aware of this. Don't use prayer to condemn. As you have opportunity, gently share the forgiveness of Christ and the power of the Spirit for change.

<sup>\*</sup> Ellen G. White, *The Ministry of Healing*, p. 226.

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# Confronting the dark side By Ed Gallagher

Years ago when I was a student in a boarding school, a fellow student described for me a night of terror. All night long in his dormitory room, he had felt tormented by evil spirits. Previously, he had been around someone involved in satanism, and now the dark side was bent on claiming another victim.

My friend felt as though he was being beaten and strangled. He fought for his life, breaking out in a sweat and repeating over and over, "Jesus!" Hour after hour he was assailed, until with morning, he found release.

We are all under general attack from the forces of hell, but sometimes an individual comes under direct and specific attack. This was true during Jesus' ministry on Earth, and it remains true today. Direct attack is usually the result of poor decisions by which people make themselves nakedly vulnerable to the enemy.

Without clear and obvious evidence, however, we should be slow to conclude that someone is under direct attack and "has a demon". Evil is present enough in the ordinary course of living our lives—given our desperately wicked hearts and a completely fallen world.

If I do find myself or others around me under direct attack from the dark side, how can I respond? Note these five important lines of approach. . . .

**First, treat the attack seriously and meet it with every spiritual weapon.** A casual, presumptive approach will fail, illustrated by the inability of Jesus' disciples to free a child from demon possession. Mark 9:17–29. The child found release through Jesus when his father asserted: "I do believe; help me overcome my unbelief!" This is the "shield of faith," one of several weapons in the armour of God with which we must be fully clothed. Ephesians 6:10–18. Christ's righteousness, the Spirit, the Word, and earnest prayer are especially significant.

**Second, find a team of spiritual warriors who will stand by your side.** Never enter such warfare alone! Jesus warned us about this. "I am sending you out like lambs among wolves." For this reason, he commissioned his disciples in pairs. Luke 10:1, 3. And, when Jesus promised Heaven would ratify the requests of the church on Earth, he included a condition—that two or three come together and agree on these things. Matthew 18:18–20.

**Third, use the Word of God to assert Heaven's authority with boldness.** Jesus said to his disciples, "I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven. . . . I have given you authority . . . to overcome all the power of the enemy; nothing will harm you." Luke 10:17–19. Our promise is clear: "Resist the devil, and he will flee

from you." James 4:7. Claiming God's Word in faith, we may give the same joyful report as the disciples: "Lord, even the demons submit to us in your name." Luke 10:17.

**Fourth, by God's power change whatever needs to be changed in order to grant the devil no further foothold.** Scripture tells us not merely to avoid evil but to flee from it. Put distance between yourself and the enemy! A dangerous friendship may have to be given up; a particular location might have to be shunned; some types of literature, music and artefacts will need to be discarded; and certain kinds of internet sites and entertainment must be forever out of bounds. Those under attack must solidly engage this type of decision-making and discipline.

**Fifth, utilise God-given, sanctified ritual to solidify the victory.** When appropriate, baptism can be one such ritual. I know of serious cases of satanic assault that came to a complete stop through earnest prayer associated with baptism. Another powerful ritual is anointing with oil—unique in that it was ordained by God under both the Old and the New Covenants. With other prayer warriors, come together to anoint individuals and—when appropriate—material objects, or structures such as doorways. Anointing is not "magic". It is agreement with the Word of God and a tangible symbol of the Holy Spirit's perfect power over spirits of evil.

Photo: Ed Gallagher



*An important footnote. . . .* Jesus warned us that evil spirits love "a house swept clean". Luke 11:24–26. For this reason, it is good to include in our praying a requirement that the evil spirit not only leave but "never enter again". Mark 9:25. Fill your life and your home with the Word of God, the Holy Spirit, and protecting angels, and there will be no room for the enemy's return.

Note: See also the article, "Praying into the unseen world." / This article first appeared in modified form in *Mid-America Outlook*, February 2004. Copyright © 2009 by Ed Gallagher (South Pacific edition). / Scripture quotations taken from the HOLY BIBLE, NEW INTERNATIONAL VERSION. Copyright © 1973, 1978, 1984 by International Bible Society. Used by permission.

# Bring back the joy!—1 By Ed Gallagher

I remember a visit to an aquarium several years ago. There was a place where we stood in front of a thick glass panel, in the path of a simulated flash flood. Lightning flashed, thunder roared, and a torrent of water crashed down the canyon toward us. Our minds told us the glass panel would protect us, but instinctively, every one of the dozens of visitors jumped back, out of the path of the flood.

Everyone, that is, except a very small boy—he might have been six or seven, but he had the thin, fragile frame of a five-year-old. He stood in place, all alone, his face inches from the glass. As the flood crashed against the panel, he danced—arms and legs flailing all over the place, his face lit up in pure delight. And he yelled at the top of his voice. It was hard to hear his words because of the noise of the flood, but it sounded like a chant of ecstasy: “I’m brave! I’m brave! I’m brave! I’m brave!”

I realised we had been blessed with a demonstration of spontaneous, innocent joy—a phenomenon all too scarce in modern life.

How’s your joy today? How long has it been since you exalted in life and in God? How frequently do you break into unabashed praise for a marvellous Creator, for support through challenges that flood your life, and for the firm standing that is yours in Christ?

It’s sometimes observed that if there’s one dominant characteristic in churches today, it’s a prevailing sense of sadness. Visit around, look into faces, and you will see sadness where there ought to be joy, stiff formalism where there ought to be praise. “We ask God to forgive us for our evil thoughts and evil temper, but rarely, if ever, ask Him to forgive us for our sadness.” R. W. Dale.

“Forgive us for our sadness.” Recently someone wrote to me, despairing over her local church. “There’s no joy,” she said, “no young people and no joy.” Her church appears to be reverent, orderly, proper—and sad.

Many years ago, a well travelled church pioneer was appalled at the sadness she witnessed in churches. She attributed the sadness to formality, judgemental attitudes, and “prevailing monotony”. She asked, “Shall we be as cold as statues of marble? . . . Shall we

be unmoved when the plan of salvation is unfolded before us?”\*

Now let’s come to the heart of the matter. Joy is not in the world, joy is not in the functions of church, joy is not in rigorous self-help and determination, joy is not in a finely honed set of beliefs. Lasting joy is in Jesus, nowhere else. Joy enters my life to the extent that I know my sins to be forgiven by him, and to the extent that I am in daily personal friendship with him.

“May my joy be in you,” Jesus said, “and your joy complete.” See John 15:11. To his Father he prayed, “May they have the full measure of my joy within them.” John 17:13. It was only when the sorrowing disciples worshipped the resurrected Lord that they

were able to return with great joy, and to praise God continually in the temple. Luke 24:52, 53.

Do we want joy in our personal lives? We must find it in Jesus. Do we want joy in church life? We must find it in Jesus. A door closed to Jesus is a door closed to joy. To the extent that we study Jesus, teach Jesus, preach Jesus, talk and sing about Jesus, and praise Jesus, his joy will flow. Lives and churches are empty of joy because their focus has moved away from Jesus. Bring back Jesus, and we bring back the joy.

In practical terms, much of this depends on our praying. “Until now you have not asked for anything in my name,” Jesus explained. “Ask, and you will receive, and your joy will be full.” John 16:24. Living without prayer is like living in bankruptcy. It is more than likely that if joy is missing in your life or your church, it’s because prayer and praise are largely missing, too. So pray! Pray

deeply, pray frequently. Ask for Jesus, plead for his joy, and praise him for answering, over and over again.

One more thing. As joy depends on Jesus, joy depends with equal significance on the Holy Spirit. The Spirit cannot be separated from Jesus because the Spirit is the personal presence of Jesus. To seek Jesus is at the same time to seek his Spirit—the Spirit of joy. That’s our subject in the next article.

\* Ellen G. White, *Counsels to Parents, Teachers and Students*, p 371.

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Photo: Ed Gallagher



# Bring back the joy!—2

By Ed Gallagher

"We ask God to forgive us for our evil thoughts and evil temper, but rarely, if ever, ask Him to forgive us for our sadness." R. W. Dale.

That's a quote mentioned in part 1 of this article, and it's worth thinking about again. "Forgive us for our sadness."

Not long ago I joined a Christian group on a retreat in the canyon lands of southern Utah, USA. It was an outreach—several who came were new Christians or non-Christians. When it was over, one of the non-Christians (a young adult), said "This was great! It wasn't what I expected. I didn't know Christians could be happy and have so much fun."

This is our challenge—to show the world that the Christian way is not a life of sadness and gloom, but of happiness and the joy of living, in spite of the trials we face.

Jesus had the same challenge in his ministry. The world around him was filled with the sadness of sin and disease—but the sadness was not limited to the world. Unfortunately, the church of the time was filled with the sadness of what's known as formalism—the rules and rituals of lifeless religion.



**The Christian way is not a life of sadness and gloom.**

Photo: Ed Gallagher

In Jesus himself, the difference was obvious. Luke describes Jesus as "full of joy." Luke 10:21. This is amazing. Because of his mission the Messiah was "a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief"—yet he was also, in his daily living, somehow enabled to be "full of joy"! How can this be? Luke provides the answer. Jesus was full of joy by one power only, and that was "through the Holy Spirit".

Have you thought about the Holy Spirit in regard to joy? Have you considered that, if there seems little joy in your own life or your congregation, it might have something to do with the absence of the Holy Spirit?

We're not talking about something that's impossible or impractical. As it was for Jesus, so it was for his disciples. Like their Lord, the disciples were "filled with joy and with the Holy Spirit". Acts 13:52.

The apostle Paul admitted that sometimes he felt dispirited, yet he was a man of God's joy because he knew God's Spirit. He wrote about righteousness, peace and joy that come by the Holy Spirit. He assured us we may overflow with joy by the power of the Spirit. The fruit of the Spirit, he said, is love, joy and peace. Paul testified that even in persecution, there is joy given by the Holy Spirit.

In the same way that people and churches are empty of joy because their focus has moved away from Jesus, so there is lack of joy because there is little thought given to the Holy Spirit.

"If all were willing, all would be filled with the Spirit. Wherever the need of the Holy Spirit is a matter little thought of, there is seen spiritual drought, spiritual darkness, spiritual declension and death."\*

Drought, darkness, declension and death—now there's a definition for sadness! It's troubling that churches do not talk about the Spirit, pray for the Spirit and preach about the Spirit, when this is the way of our joy and the source of our power.

How do we receive the blessing of the Spirit? The method is so simple that most of us don't believe it and won't do it. *Ask* for the Spirit, Jesus said. "Ask and you will receive, and your joy will be complete." John 16:24. We would rather search all over the world for a perfect programme on the Spirit or a wonderful book on the Spirit, than take time to get on our knees together with open Bibles, and *ask*.

It's a simple secret. Joy is in Jesus, and nowhere else. Physically speaking, Jesus no longer walks on Earth. But before he left, he gave us the gift of his presence through the Spirit. When we ask for this gift we will receive it. And as we receive it, we have Jesus with us more powerfully than ever—and that is joy,

pure joy!

Now let's get personal. Will you consider beginning each day, for the rest of your life, with your own prayer for the presence and power of Jesus through his Holy Spirit? I invite you to claim the promise he made—"Ask and you will receive, and your joy will be complete."

\* Ellen G. White, *Acts of the Apostles*, page 50.

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# Imagine this!

By Ed Gallagher

It is one of the most remarkable chapters in the Bible, yet it seldom gets attention. The chapter reveals a gift that goes by the title, "The Wisdom of God in a Mystery" (KJV).

The Wisdom of God in a Mystery is a blessing that was prepared and gift-wrapped in Heaven before time began. This gift was created before Earth was created—and your name was attached to it! Through the days of Noah, Abraham, David, and Elijah, there were few hints about the secret gift. It was not destined for patriarchs, prophets or kings, but for you and me as disciples of our crucified Lord.

The chapter we're describing is 1 Corinthians 2. There is one verse in this chapter (verse 9) that's well known—"No eye has seen, no ear has heard, no mind has conceived what God has prepared for those who love him."

Here lies a clue about the secret gift. The gift is beyond our five senses. We cannot see it, hear it, taste it, smell it, or touch it. It is beyond normal human perception.

Now comes a truth that may be surprising. The gift that God has prepared for those who love him is *not* specifically the future glory of Heaven and the New Earth. Although the words of 1 Corinthians 2:9 may be helpfully applied to the future life, we find Paul making no such application in the context.

In the next verse, Paul says the inconceivable things that God has prepared are *already ours*—by the gift of the Holy Spirit. Imagine this! The secret blessing God prepared before creation is the pouring out of his Spirit in our own day, bringing you and me into incredible intimacy with our Creator.

Look at 1 Corinthians 2 for yourself. We might paraphrase and interpret this way. . . .

"Who knows your own mind? Only you, of course—in your own spirit. Who knows the mind of God? Only God, of course—in his own Spirit. Now here's the amazing thing. God connects his strong Spirit to our weak spirits! He links his mind with our minds, and in this way gives us an advantage our ordinary senses could never discover—his own mysterious wisdom for our naturally foolish lives.

"By his Spirit we can know the deep things of God. By his Spirit we discern and express spiritual truths, making spiritual assessments that reflect God's thinking rather than our own.

"The prophet Isaiah asks a fine rhetorical question—'Who has known the mind of the Lord?' Now we may answer! We as believers know the mind of the Lord, because he has given us his own Spirit. Yes, it's a mystery, but we can describe the outcome in practical terms this way: *We have the mind of Christ.*"

Think about this. By nature, we tend to have the mind of the devil. But by the Holy Spirit, we may have the mind of Christ. This teaching is so overwhelming that we are tempted to question it. Our scepticism reveals human wisdom at work—what Paul calls "the wisdom of this age" and "the spirit of the world". Our

enemy is pleased when we react with suspicion to the Holy Spirit.

Now here's joy. The mysterious gift brings our prayers to life! Paul says God's Spirit groans in us as he interprets with us the mind and will of God. Romans 8:26, 27. This is the nature of prayer—not so much words we devise for God, but his Spirit and ours communing together in marvellous intimacy. The Bible calls this

experience "praying in the Spirit". Ephesians 6:18; Jude 1:20.

If God originally created in us a true "sixth sense", perhaps this is it—the intuition of Heaven, spoken into us by God's Spirit. Maybe this was how Adam and Eve, before their fall, enjoyed perfect communion with God. No doubt a token of the gift was granted to Enoch, long after the fall, as he walked with God. Genesis 5:24; Hebrews 11:5.

Perhaps you recognise intimacy with God as an experience you long for. If so, ask for this gift today. Remember, it comes through the Holy Spirit, who is promised to you now. As certainly as you ask, you will receive.

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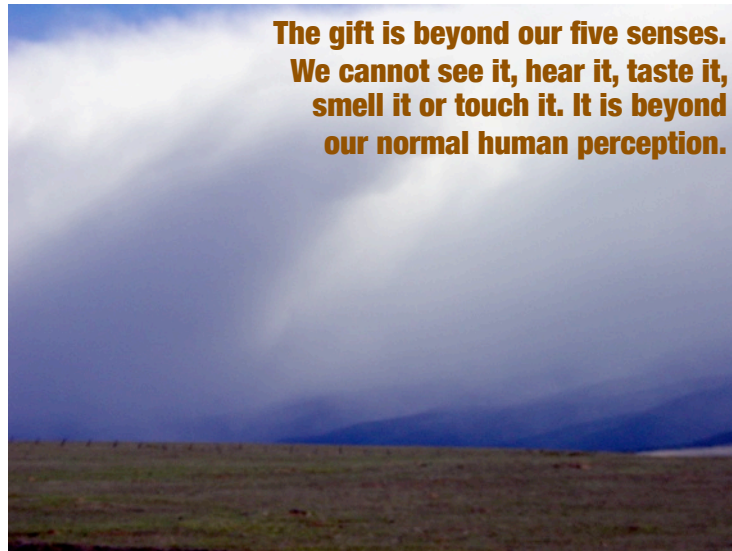


Photo: Ed Gallagher

**The gift is beyond our five senses. We cannot see it, hear it, taste it, smell it or touch it. It is beyond our normal human perception.**

# Praying in the Spirit

By Ed Gallagher

What does it mean to “pray in the Spirit”? For decades, no-one asked me this question. But lately, I’ve been asked it a number of times. Praying in the Spirit is a privilege God wants us to understand.

It’s a biblical experience. “Pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests.” Ephesians 6:18. This heavenly direction is the climax of Paul’s instruction about putting on the full armour of God. The apostle Jude confirms the instruction: “You, dear friends, build yourselves up in your most holy faith and pray in the Holy Spirit.” Jude 20.

Praying in the Spirit is clearly important. It should be done on all occasions. It caps our ability to withstand evil. And it’s crucial if we want to be established in faith.

I have come to believe that praying in the Spirit is at the core of Christian experience. A book could be written on the subject, and still only the surface would be scratched. Here, we can offer only a few lines of direction for your personal study.

**First, to pray in the Spirit means to pray in Christ.** “In Christ” is the chief way in which the apostle Paul describes the Christian walk. There are more than 240 references in the New Testament to the experience of being in Christ. This subject is at the centre of special revelations Paul received in the Arabian desert—“inexpressible things, things that a man is not permitted to tell”. To Paul was given the “much more” that Jesus realised his disciples could not bear at the time—but which the Spirit would soon reveal. John 16:12, 13.

When I pray consciously *in Christ*, the Spirit interprets to me the actual mind of God. Through God’s own Spirit, my mind is caught up into God’s mind. God’s will and God’s thoughts progressively become my will and my thoughts. This is the miracle of praying in the Spirit. It is not a cause for pride, but a cause for deep humility.

The experience would be preposterous if it were not described and promised in scripture. It’s a glorious dynamic, a mystery largely inexpressible in human language—as Paul confessed. To understand more fully, study these chapters: Galatians 1, 1 Corinthians 2, 2 Corinthians 12, Ephesians 3, and Colossians 1.

**Second, to pray in the Spirit is to pray with the Spirit’s specific direction and power.** “The Spirit helps in our weakness. We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groans that words cannot express. And he who searches our hearts knows the mind of the Spirit,

because the Spirit intercedes for the saints according to God’s will.” Romans 8:26, 27.

It is astonishing that scripture names not only Christ, but also his Spirit as our intercessor. It is not that we have two intercessors, but rather that what Christ accomplished by his blood on the Cross, he now works out in our experience through his Spirit. The Cross is the historical reality; the Spirit is the dynamic application.

Christ longs to take the benefits of his sacrifice on the Cross and apply them deeply in your everyday life. He does this by the intercession of his Spirit. His Spirit is his personal presence that works within you when you pray, searching your human mind and heart and connecting you with the divine mind and heart.

The question is, are you inviting Christ to work deep within you when you pray? Are you asking Christ to search out the deep things of your life and interpret to you the deep things of his life? When your answer is Yes, you are consciously praying in Christ and in his Spirit.

**Third, to pray in the Spirit means to make seeking God the primary discipline of your life—without compromise.** How few there appear to be who do this, and how I wish I had more effectively put this into practice in my own life to this point.

In Ephesians 3, Paul describes how he kneels before the Father, pleading that church members will have the power of God’s Spirit in their innermost being. He longs for Christians to quit being surface level, and to become deep-level. The apostle wants us to be thoroughly in Christ, rooted and established in his love. He wants us to probe the full dimensions of God’s mercy, and in so doing get rid of our spiritual vacuum and become “filled to the measure of all the fulness of God”.

Paul declares that when we are thoroughly in Christ, God will do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power at work within us.

Note the expressions. “Immeasurably more,” “ask-imagine,” and “his power at work within us”. In practical terms, these translate into praying in the Spirit—with all kinds of prayers and requests, every day and on all occasions. May this be your experience beginning today, and for the rest of your life.



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# Will we welcome revival?

By Ed Gallagher

In his “Narnia” series of allegorical stories, C. S. Lewis describes a scene in which the children are at last in the beautiful new land. The sky is clear, the trees and flowers delightful. But the children come across a strange thing. Some dwarfs are sitting, huddled closely together in what they believe is a stable, pitch-black and smelly. The dwarfs complain how horrible life is, with everything dark and unpleasant.

The children try to distract the dwarfs, try to convince them that life really is grand if they will only come out of their delusion and look around. But no matter how hard the children try, the dwarfs decline to listen and refuse to budge. They are stuck in their illusion; it is their reality.

Through the voice of Aslan the Lion, Lewis makes a profound statement to describe the dwarfs’ condition: “Their prison is only in their own minds, yet they are in that prison; and so afraid of being taken in that they cannot be taken out.”\*

This statement could apply to many in Christian churches. Huddled in darkness. Refusing to welcome light. Deaf to the appeal of the Spirit. So afraid of being taken in that they cannot be taken out.

This is the condition of God’s people often described by the Old Testament prophets. And it is the condition described by John in his message to the churches of Sardis and Laodicea. Revelation 3. It is the condition that broke the heart of Jesus—“O Jerusalem, Jerusalem...how often I have longed to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you were not willing!” Matthew 23:37.

There are many factors that keep God’s children from revival, but perhaps the most challenging is fear and suspicion of being deceived. This was the problem with the church of Jesus’ time. The people refused their Saviour because his teachings and his spiritual nature were radical, posing a threat to established ways. Many today allow suspicion to blind their eyes to the Saviour and to the Spirit he wants to pour out.

But isn’t it important to watch out for deception? Yes! Deceiving spirits prowled the landscape during Jesus’ ministry. In our own time, evil spirits come from “the dragon, the beast and the false prophet”. Revelation 16:13. We must be alert. False revivals are marked by extremes in behaviour that glorify self rather than God, and by teachings and actions that do not conform to the example and teaching of Jesus.

But how sad, if the devil keeps us in such fear of false revival that we get no revival at all! We must always keep in mind that the

best defence against false revival is this: true revival. The church cannot afford to sit around in a “Laodicean” state and point the finger at false revival, because with either condition the devil is completely satisfied.

What are the marks of true revival? One of the most visible is joyful praise. Look at the revivals described in the scriptures—for example, the revival under King Nehemiah and the revival of Pentecost—and you’ll find unabashed praise breaking out all over! “The sound of rejoicing in Jerusalem could be heard far away.” Nehemiah 12:43. “They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, praising God.” Acts 2:46-47. I mean no disrespect for those who like to be “staid and circumspect” in religion, but at some point before we get to the Sea of Glass, we will actually need to *express* our praise! See Revelation 15:2-4.

Other marks of true revival include much prayer, faithfulness to God’s word, confession of sin, reformation of life, reception and ministry of the gifts of the Spirit, courageous testimony to Christ, generosity, intercession, and love that overcomes argument and division.

Now to the intimate part. Are you personally open to the baptism and power of the Spirit? “Ask, and you will receive,” Jesus promised. The only condition is our eagerness to receive.

This is the question. Are we willing and eager? Or will we continue to huddle in darkness?

\* See C. S. Lewis, *The Last Battle* (Penguin Books Ltd., © Copyright the Estate of C. S. Lewis, 1956), pp 131-135.

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**How sad, if the devil keeps us in such fear of false revival that we get no revival at all.**

# Careful how you pray!

By Ed Gallagher

"Pray in the Spirit." Ephesians 6:18; Jude 20. What does this mean?

It means more things than we can describe here, but one meaning is this: To pray in the Spirit means to pray along the same track in which God's Spirit is working. It means to discern the will and the way of God, and then to pray confidently within his will and within his way.

How often we charge ahead and pray along the lines of our own will, our own way, our own spirit!

A single person spies a potential mate and right away prays, "Lord, send that person my way! That's the exact one for me." As the old line says, We must be careful what we pray for—we might get it. Years later, the trauma of a troubled marriage might compel the prayers of discernment that should have been prayed at the start.

Our praying can be either human-based or God-dependent. In human-based praying, we think, "This is wonderful; I'm really experiencing God's blessing in this"—when the truth might be that we're using prayer to form God in our own image. "This is what I really want, God—now I'm asking you to bless it!"



**One key to discerning God's will at the crossroads of our lives is to be equally prepared to accept from God an answer of Yes or No.**

Photo: Ed Gallagher

Sooner or later, we come into pain by failing first to pray long and hard for discernment. Am I willing to *wait* upon the Lord? Am I resting in the place of surrender to God, especially when his will differs from my will?

One key to discerning God's will at the crossroads of our lives is to be equally prepared to accept from God an answer of Yes or No. To reach this point, we might need to devote a full day to prayer, or to plan a week or a month of special prayer with some fasting. Through such discipline the Spirit reveals God's will. Afterwards, we can wholeheartedly express the prayer of Christ—not a feeble "If it be thy will", but a firm "Thy will be done". (See Matthew 6:10 and 26:42, KJV.)

The important process of prayer for discernment should accompany every major decision in our lives—the opportunity for education, the purchase of a

vehicle or a property, the taking of a new job, the choice of a spouse, the move to a different location.

It's not that God cannot bless us if we fail to pray for discernment. He knows and understands our weakness. He will do the best he can even when our praying is shallow and human-based. But how much more pleasant it is for God and for us, if we wait upon him for discernment, and act only after we clearly perceive his will. Our waiting is warmed by the promise, "Those who seek the Lord lack no good thing." Psalm 34:10.

The need for biblically informed discernment applies not only to our prayers for ourselves, but also to our prayers for the church and the world.

An example is our praying about persecution of Christians. We may pray for peace. Psalm 122:6. Yet in the New Testament it is startling to find no instruction or example about praying for persecution to stop. Rather, in the face of endless persecution, Christians pray for boldness, resilience, protection, and deliverance. They pray for their enemies and for the persecuting emperor—just as the Lord instructed. Matthew 5:44. They pray for the gospel to proceed and

for sinners to be saved. The peace they treasure is the personal tranquility that Christ promised through trial. See John 14:27; 16:33; and Matthew 10:34.

A man known as Brother Yun spent 20 years serving Christ in the underground Christian movement in China. When told that prayers were going up for the government in China to collapse, so Christians could live in freedom, Yun replied,

"Don't pray for the persecution to stop! We shouldn't pray for a lighter load to carry, but a stronger back to endure! Then the world will see that God is with us, empowering us to live in a way that reflects his love and power."\*

This is "praying in the Spirit"—discerning God's will and God's way, and praying along the same track in which we see the Spirit of God at work. This approach to intercession brings godly power into our prayers for ourselves, and into our prayers for the world.

\* *The Heavenly Man: the Remarkable True Story of Chinese Christian Brother Yun*, with Paul Hattaway (Monarch Books, Grand Rapids, Michigan; Copyright © Brother Yun and Paul Hattaway 2002), p. 287.

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# Change—God's way

By Ed Gallagher

Photo: Ed Gallagher



**Change at its core is a test over faith and prayer.**

Is your church sensing a call to change? If so, it must also hear a call to pray. When we move in new directions, our movement should not be a daring dash on our feet, but a committed crawl on our knees.

Change at its core is a test over faith and prayer. "Everything that does not come from faith is sin....I urge, then, first of all, that requests, prayers, intercession and thanksgiving be made." Romans 14:23; 1 Timothy 2:1.

The presenting issue might be church growth, evangelism, worship style, finances, leadership, organisation or a new building. But the question is, Are we willing to be instructed by God, to trust him, and to obey him? Are we willing *first* to get on our knees and stay there until we know God's specific will, and until we receive wisdom and power from his Spirit?

Ironically, it was knees that got the church into trouble in the time of Esther—the knees of Mordecai, when he refused to bow to Haman. But it was also knees that got the church back on its feet! When the crisis came, Esther did not respond with hand-wringing or endless committees. She called for Jews to engage in three days of fasting and prayer. Then, when believers were sure of God's will and empowerment, Esther stepped with courage into the crisis. God blessed with incredible deliverance.

Look at each advance in Bible times—such as the revival under Nehemiah and the Spirit's power at Pentecost—and we see a fellowship of prayer informing and driving the advance.

Look at great missionary movements—like those led by Hudson Taylor in China and David Livingstone in Africa—and we see success in proportion to time in prayer.

Look at modern revivals, and we find the same. Early Adventism was marked by much prayer—more often spontaneous than planned. In other Christian circles, the "Prayer Meeting Revival" of 1857-59 was a movement on its knees. The revival began with six people in New York City, led not by a preacher but by a quiet businessman. The time was marked by intercession, repentance and confession, without hysteria or fanaticism. Ultimately, this revival impacted an

estimated one in every 30 people across America. Dwight L. Moody, at age 21, received his call into Christian service during this period.

Yet how often we find ourselves stretching, straining, pushing and pulling, rather than praying. It seems we would rather do anything than pray! Ministry professionals among us—myself included—are trained in theology, preaching, counselling, church dynamics and administration. But how many of us have been trained in God's school of prayer? How many of us stay long enough and quietly enough before the throne to be baptised in God's Spirit?

Consider this: "Wherever the need of the Holy Spirit is a matter little thought of, there is seen spiritual drought, spiritual darkness, spiritual declension and death...."

"Since this is the means by which we are to receive power, why do we not hunger and thirst for the gift of the Spirit? Why do we not talk of it, pray for it, and preach concerning it?...For the daily baptism of the Spirit every worker should offer his petition to God. Companies of Christian workers should gather to ask for special help."\*

We gather, but usually not for prayer. We gather for business, discussion, conflict resolution, planning and policy-making. There is often a need for these, but there is *always* a need for prayer. Angels must cringe in embarrassment over our prayerlessness. How frequently we come into difficulty because we don't thoroughly seek God's will and bathe our ventures in his grace.

So, if we're out for change, let's make this change before all others—*prayer before action, prayer throughout action, prayer beyond action*. Then, like Esther, we can step with courage into crisis, and be part of a great deliverance.

\* Ellen G. White, *Acts of the Apostles*, p. 50.

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# Heaven's power for change By Ed Gallagher

Is your church changing? The previous article described the need for change driven by prayer, rather than by our own power.

The army of Christ must often make strategic changes. There are times when we are called to move in new directions, because old directions no longer work. But when we go in new directions, our movement should not be a daring dash on our feet. Rather, it must be a committed crawl on our knees.

Sometimes, we pray strongly in the implementation stage, but we have hardly sought God at all in the *initiation* stage. So we find ourselves saying, "OK, Lord, we've worked hard and initiated our plans—now please bless them!"

Dependent praying must be equally present in the planning as in the doing. When difficulties come, it's easier to proceed with courage if we are confident the venture flows from Heaven.

At Pentecost, conversions in the public square did not come out of nowhere. They came out of the upper room. See Acts 1:4-14. If the Book of Acts teaches one great lesson, it is this: First the praying, then the power.

If you have failed to pray adequately during the planning, don't despair! God is full of mercy. His soldiers can go into strategic retreat to seek their Commander's will and power.

Now let's get practical. How can a church integrate prayer power into the process of change? God can reveal dozens of ways to those who seek him. Here are some examples....

**Much prayer in meetings.** Planning sessions that give merely a minute or two for prayer and then move directly into shared ignorance are doomed! How about 20 minutes for prayer, or 30? Especially in times of need, much time must be spent reading applicable promises from the Word and interceding in prayer. Business aids like PowerPoint (the presentation programme by Microsoft®) can be helpful, but we must remember the power point for our churches is not technology—it's the Holy Spirit.

**A stronger prayer presence in worship.** "My house shall be called a house of prayer for all nations." Isaiah 56:7. This is evangelism—extending the Gospel to all people through movements driven by prayer. But often prayer is the least part of worship—unplanned, hurried and lifeless. Public prayer can be meaningful, praise-filled, specific, creative and soul-winning. There's no finer place to model powerful praying than in our worship services.

**Prayer integration in the Bible class.** Our Bible classes need the three important elements of fellowship, Bible study and outreach. Integrated into each of these can be a powerful dynamic prompting change—spontaneous, heartfelt prayer. In your Bible class, see what a difference the dynamic of prayer can make.

**A call to corporate prayer.** Regardless of the time period—one day or 40 days or something in between—a period in which church members are challenged to seek the Lord in special prayer will open the way for extra blessing. "Declare a holy fast; call a sacred assembly. Summon the elders and all who live in the



Photo: Ed Gallagher

land to the house of the Lord your God, and cry out to the Lord." Joel 1:14. The format can be varied and creatively designed for selected groups—including mothers, children, youth, professionals, working men and women, and retirees. Let the Spirit lead, then see the Spirit flow.

**Home groups for prayer.** Try a five-week commitment, meeting once a week in consistent locations. Claim promises from the Word, and seek and document God's leading for your church. One or two groups might choose to meet at the church.

**Prayer-walking.** Adults, youth and children can form teams to walk around the church property, around neighbourhoods, around schools or factories or shopping malls or government offices. As you walk, praise God and make specific intercession. Ask God to teach you how to reach the people you're passing. If people ask who you are and what you're doing, tell them—and see if they'd like to join you.

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# Prayer for your pastor

By Ed Gallagher

The pastor rose that morning in significant need. He was sick—had been for days. His wife was away working. The sky was overcast and featureless. The pastor felt disheartened, lonely. “Lord,” he prayed, “send someone to pray for me today—in person!”

It was a long shot. He lived in an isolated location. He expected no visitor. But at mid-morning a neighbour he hadn’t seen for months came by. This was a Christian man, and he sensed something about the pastor’s spirit. Suddenly his arm was around the pastor’s shoulders, and he asked the perfect question: “Could I pray for you?”

“Could I pray for you?” Sweet words for any of us—including your pastor. It’s certain your pastor could use at least the normal dose of prayer and encouragement that all of us crave, yet some pastors go week after week with little visible sign of this benefit.

Pastors are spiritual caregivers. They spend themselves for people around them. It’s a work that is both rewarding and taxing. There are times when ministry is upbeat, but there are also times when disappointment is daily fare. Pastors in the spotlight sometimes fail greatly; pastors in the background sometimes exhaust themselves and quietly fade away.

Between the ideal of successful ministry and the reality of daily experience falls a shadow. It is the shadow of Satan’s battlefield—a battle in the heart and a battle in the world. Research on pastors and their spouses shows that frustration and discouragement are common, yet pastors generally believe they must present an image of strength no matter how they feel.

This is where you come in! “Pray for us,” wrote Paul to the believers. 1 Thessalonians 5:25. The same Paul who testified “I know whom I have believed” also wrote about times when he felt downcast. We can sense the struggle of his spirit. “We are hard pressed and perplexed. . . . No-one came to my support. . . . I had no peace of mind. . . . Come before winter, bring my cloak.” As Paul asked the believers to pray for him, so God asks us to pray for our pastors.

How can members pray for their pastor? First, pray for your pastor in private every day—and from time to time remind your pastor that you are doing this. Second, gather at appointed times with other people of

prayer and pray together *for* your pastor and—when possible— *with* your pastor. Third, arrange for a prayer team member to pray on the phone or in person with your pastor at least once a week. For effectiveness and to safeguard, this prayer team member should be the same gender as the pastor, or perhaps a senior church member.

Fourth, strongly consider replacing the usual 15-second prayer prior to the worship hour with a genuine time of prayer—at least five minutes and preferably more. If the elders are not keen on this, let prayer team members lead it. In any case, involve prayer team members. Pray for the anointing Spirit, pray that Jesus will be lifted up, pray that people will be saved. This time of prayer is more important than the organisation, the music and everything else, unless

we’re willing to take issue with Jesus—“My house shall be called a house of prayer.”

There’s an extra benefit in this time of spiritual anointing—and that is the difference it will make in your pastor’s preaching!

Finally, be alert to opportunities for concerted prayer for your pastor—family crisis, loss, change, illness, discouragement, decision-making.

Develop an environment in your church in which it is safe for your pastor to share personal needs and challenges with at least a few selected people.

Our Lord earnestly asked his disciples, “Stay here and watch and pray with me.” Prayer for our spiritual leaders is not an option. It is a calling, and it is a privilege that reaps enormous blessing for ourselves and our congregation.

**Recommended reading:** E. M. Bounds, *Complete Works* (also *Classic Collection*)—chapters entitled “Prayer and the House of God”, “The Preacher’s Cry: ‘Pray for Us!’” and “Preachers Need the Prayers of the People.”

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**There are times when ministry is upbeat, but there are also times when disappointment is daily fare.**

# Hope for the troubled church By Ed Gallagher

Troubled families are not hard to find. The inner causes of the trouble are sometimes difficult to determine, but the outward signs are easy to spot—disorganisation, turmoil, verbal or other abuse, disrespect, communication breakdown, lack of caring, and unhappiness.

The last of these signs is the most telling. A troubled home is a joyless home, a home with few smiles and little laughter, a home that has been well described as a place “where the shadows are never lifted”.

Just as there are troubled families, at times there are troubled churches. The signs may not be as obvious in a church, because the trouble is diffused by the larger number and greater diversity of people. And there is more incentive for camouflage—sunny Sabbath smiles can hide hurt, division, anger, and dysfunction.

Ideally, troubled people should be able to come to church and find with God’s people a degree of refuge, release and healing. Praise God, this is often the case! We have all seen healthy congregations rally around troubled people and guide them toward solutions.

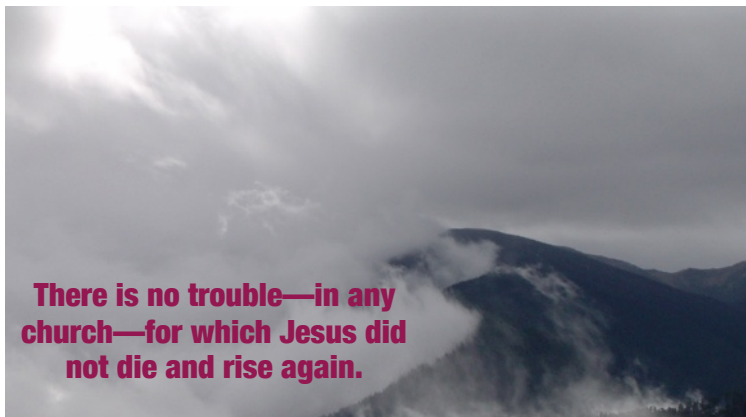


Photo: Ed Gallagher

But what happens when the church itself is unhealthy and troubled? What can we do when our own congregation is characterised by destructive attitudes, poor relationships, discouragement, criticism, lack of caring, division, an absence of vision, and a scarcity of joy?

**First, let it be known that Jesus loves such a church!** No, he does not love the trouble, but he loves the troubled people. He weeps, and holds his arms wide open, calling, “Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest.” Matthew 11:28.

There is no trouble—in any church—for which Jesus did not die and rise again. “Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her . . . to present her to himself as a radiant church” Ephesians 5:25–27. A radiant church! It’s the opposite of a troubled church. As depicted in Debussy’s musical masterpiece entitled “The Submerged Cathedral”, even a church sunken in

selfishness and sin can—by God’s grace—rise up through the waves and be bathed in glorious sunlight.

**Second, the troubled congregation must clothe itself with “the full armour of God”. Ephesians 6:13.** A troubled congregation is a congregation under attack from the enemy. “Our struggle is against the spiritual forces of evil.” Ephesians 6:12. One of the first steps toward victory is for church members and leaders to recognise and acknowledge that they are under attack.

In the struggle we have our weapons—righteousness, the gospel, faith. And the sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God. All these weapons must be activated; none should be neglected. The entire arsenal is undergirded by prayer. Paul concludes his list of weapons by saying, “Pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests. . . . Be alert and always keep on praying for all the saints.” Ephesians 6:18.

What if it seems hardly anyone wants to pray? Then let the two, three or four who *do* want to pray come together and pray up a storm! Renewal often begins when just a few people come together and pour out their hearts to God.

**Third, look for help from a godly leader.** This might be a member of the congregation, or the pastor, or an outside helper. We are not necessarily thinking of an expert in conflict resolution. We are thinking of an expert in the Word of God and the love of the Spirit. A troubled church usually needs a wise leader, at least for a time, to inspire members toward healing. No matter who is appointed, surround that person with prayer. Psalm 107 is a song for the troubled church. This psalm describes a church that was wandering in a desert, hungry and thirsty, sitting in gloom, tossed by storms, and bound by chains of rebellion and neglect.

At last, when the people were “at their wits’ end”, they found renewal in the enduring love of the Lord. Four times in this psalm, we read, “Then they cried to the Lord in their trouble, and he saved them from their distress.” Look at how God responded! He redeemed them, gathered them, led them, satisfied them, brought them out of darkness, broke their chains, healed them, stilled their storms, guided them to safe haven, fed them, settled them, lifted them up, and made them fruitful.

“Whoever is wise,” the psalm concludes, “let him heed these things, and consider the great love of the Lord.”

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# Will anyone meet for prayer?

By Ed Gallagher

Ask people to come to an ice cream social, and the challenge might be having enough ice cream. Ask them to come to a committee meeting, and the responsible ones will appear. But invite people to a prayer meeting, and eyes glaze over and apologies flow.

What a contrast with the early Christian church. No sooner were three thousand new believers baptised, than “they devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer”. Acts 2:42. There was prayer at the temple courts, prayer by the riverside, prayer in believers’ homes. Look at the results: miracles, generosity, unity, joy, praise, and steady growth—outcomes we often lack today.

In the early experience of many a church, a similar dynamic appears. “When the message of truth was first proclaimed, how much we prayed. . . . Frequently we spent hours in earnest prayer, two or three together in claiming the promise; often the sound of weeping was heard and then the voice of thanksgiving and the song of praise. Now . . . we should be more earnest, more zealous, and fervent than in those early days. Our perils are greater now than then.”\*

Yet, if we simply urge attendance at prayer meetings, we contribute little to the challenge. No-one likes “a religion of urging.” Few people will attend a prayer meeting out of obligation, and if they do, they will probably fulfil their own prophecy and find what they expect—boredom and disinterest.

If our prayer meetings are lifeless and boring, a small attendance is understandable. But often the problem is in the human heart—and I include my own heart in this challenge. When I long more than anything else for excitement, entertainment, career success, and material comfort, I am not at the same time longing for the things of Christ, which include fellowship, prayer, generosity, and the salvation of souls. It is not possible for me to strive for two primary and contrary goals at once.

Jesus described this as more than a casual preference for God over material things. He said that by contrast, we must learn to hate and despise material things.

Matthew 6:24. Material possessions are not inherently sinful; they can be blessings and tools in service. But each material item I own makes a demand on my money, time and attention, and can crowd out spirituality. So the question I must face is not only, “Do I love God?” but also, “Do I despise the things that detract from my love for God?”

Our planet is hurtling to its final destiny, while many among us are building fabulous lives on foundations of sand.

Back to prayer meetings—but let’s expand the context beyond formal prayer. Consider the whole dynamic of *meeting for the purpose of prayer*. This is the real challenge and opportunity. “Two or three together claiming the promise.” The record of the first Christians and of first believers in many Christian movements speaks of spontaneity—hearts so filled with Christ and his joy that you couldn’t *stop* the people from getting together for prayer. It was a natural thing for them to do.

In almost every congregation there are groups of “two or three” whose hearts are clearly overflowing with love for Christ. Let these people get together to pray—in a home or at the church or in a park or somewhere else. There’s no need to get permission from church leadership! Christ gives us all the authority and motivation we need. Informal prayer gatherings may be just as significant as a formal weekly meeting, and perhaps more so.

Prayer and praise are infectious. A movement of prayer beginning with two or three can grow, and spawn new groups of two or three.

The infection could feed into a weekly general prayer meeting that will likewise be filled with joy and meaningful intercession. In the next article, we’ll return to this and consider how to design a weekly prayer service that breathes life in a congregation.

\* Ellen G. White, *Maranatha*, p. 86.

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Photo: Ed Gallagher



**Invite people to a prayer meeting, and eyes glaze over and apologies flow.**

# What about prayer meeting? By Ed Gallagher

“What about prayer meeting? Why are so few people interested in getting together for prayer?” It’s a question I often hear from those who lead ministries of prayer. Their frustration is understandable, because they love community praying and have experienced its power.

True, some people seem to practice prayer as a particular calling and gift—praise the Lord for that. At the same time, all of Christ’s disciples are called to spend time in prayer, and the call cannot be limited to prayer in private. Jesus gave us the “two or three gathered together” principle. Matthew 18:18-20. He said that the power and authority of Heaven break loose when his disciples come together as a body and *agree* in prayer.

In the previous article it was expressed that informal gatherings for prayer may be just as significant as a formal weekly meeting, and perhaps more so. Spontaneous prayer gatherings empowered the early Christian church and can do wonders in our own time. But there can also be great benefit in a scheduled weekly prayer meeting.

The key is to design these meetings for maximum possible interest and impact. The early church example suggests a mix of five key elements—song, fellowship, the Word, personal ministry, and prayer. See Acts 2:42–47 and Colossians 3:16, 17.

Here I’ll describe one potential format along these lines, as an example.

**First, “Hallelujah Time!”**—about 10 minutes of adoring God through song and testimony. The leader or a helper carefully chooses songs ahead of time, to capture the purpose and to support the theme for the meeting.

**Second, “Invoke the Power”**—five minutes of invitational prayer. This is a time to request the presence of Jesus through his Spirit.

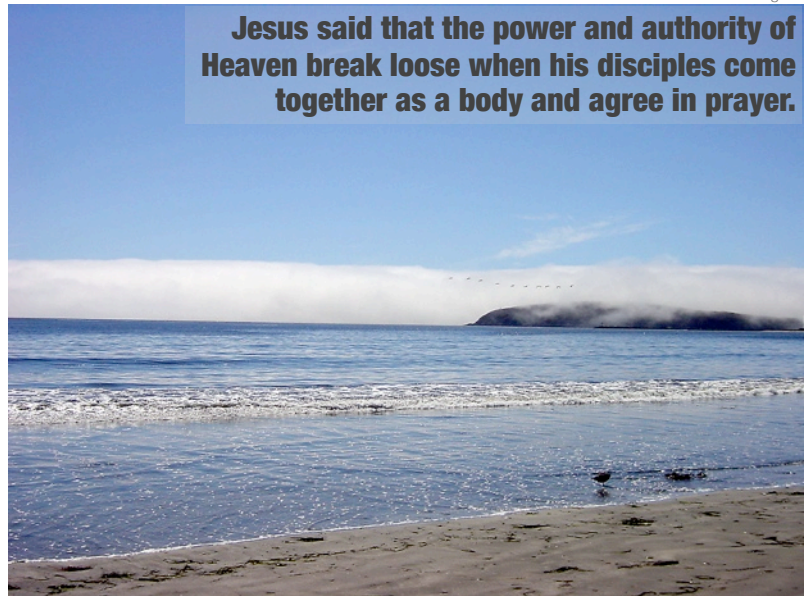
**Third, “Listen to God”**—about seven minutes of scripture reading. Ahead of time, choose a powerful scripture that speaks to known needs. Ask participants to read aloud with passion and enthusiasm.

**Fourth, “Respond to the Word”**—about 10 minutes for leader-guided prayer over the scripture that has just been read. Have the Bible open, and speak God’s words back to him in faith! Include much praise. Ask participants to remain focused during this time, applying the Word directly to their own lives and to the congregation.

**Fifth, “Invite the Blessing”**—five minutes of song, this time choosing –songs that express personal need and consecration.

**Sixth, “Alter Time”**—30 minutes for participants to name needs and then to intercede together for those needs. Take one need at a time and pray *immediately* and specifically for that person or that need. Include prayer for the unsaved. Ask attendees to state their need in just one or two sentences, so there is ample time for prayer.

Photo: Ed Gallagher



**Seventh, “Final Praise”**—about eight minutes for a closing song or two, and prayers of thanks to God.

This suggested format totals one hour and fifteen minutes. Start on time, no matter how many are present; and end on time. If you wish, add an optional, fifteen-minute “Afterglow” for further fellowship and personal ministry among any who wish to stay a little longer.

There are many ways to design an effective prayer meeting; this is just one example.

Should the meeting be firmly structured, or open and fluid?

Actually, it should be both! To stay on track and accomplish a purpose, the meeting should be carefully planned and structured. To accommodate unanticipated needs and to follow the Spirit’s sometimes surprising agenda, it should be open. Only God can give you the perfect blend.

Bathe the meeting in prayer—before, during and after. Do not seek to control; seek only for the Spirit to control. But do plan, and do lead. Then look for and expect God’s mighty blessing, just as he promised.

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# Missing in prayer

By Ed Gallagher



**Are your prayers extending to those dying without Christ?**

Many in our modern society are people of prayer. What do we pray for? Research shows we pray for our health, for our family members, and for our finances. Also for God's guidance, and for intimacy with him. All good things to pray for.

But something is missing, and that something is prayer for the unsaved. We're not thinking here of prayer for sister Jane and son Paul and best friend Christie—though of course those close to us should be in our prayers. We're thinking of the man or woman we notice at the bus stop each morning, the troubled family three doors down the street, and the multitudes who don't know Jesus. Are strangers included in your daily prayers, or are they missing?

One survey indicates that among people who pray, only about 3 per cent pray for people they do not know.

When Jesus prayed, he prayed for and wept over the lost of Jerusalem. Matthew 23:37. And in the greatest intercessory prayer recorded in scripture, Jesus said this: "My prayer is not for them alone [that is, for the Christian family]. I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message." John 17:20.

The heart and mind of Jesus extended in prayer to the millions who did not know him. Are your prayers extending to those dying without Christ? If unbelieving strangers are not in our prayers, it means they are not in our hearts and minds—and that's a problem.

The apostle Paul urged believers to pray "for all the saints". Ephesians 6:18. But this was not the limit of his counsel. "I urge, then, first of all, that requests, prayers, intercession and thanksgiving be made for *everyone*—for kings and all those in authority. . . . This is good, and pleases God our Saviour, who wants all men to be saved and come to a knowledge of the truth." 1 Timothy 2:1–4.

Paul reminds us that Christ gave himself as a ransom for *all* the people of the Earth. In the light of this mission, he writes, "I want men everywhere to lift up holy hands in prayer". 1 Timothy 2:8.

In and around the 19<sup>th</sup> century, a great missionary movement spread from Great Britain and some other nations to China, India, south-east Asia, and Africa. You've heard some names from this period—Carey, Judson, Taylor, Moffat, Livingstone, Schweitzer.

Hudson Taylor, for example, took on the challenge of preaching Christ to the Chinese people—one-quarter of the world's population. When he arrived in China, there was one Protestant Christian for every one million people. Fifty years later, the ratio was one Protestant Christian for every 2,000 people. In the most unpromising circumstances, the Holy Spirit moved in a way seldom seen since Pentecost.

This missionary movement was driven by a single great dynamic—the gospel commission taken seriously; along with prayer, prayer, prayer! Hudson Taylor was a naturally weak man, physically and spiritually. He was introspective, often lonely, frequently ill, and sometimes depressed. But he knew the source of his power, and daily he spent hours interceding with God. His testimony is clear: We "move man by God through prayer alone".

Will you now take stock of your own pattern of prayer? If the unsaved have been missing from your prayers, will you seek God's power to change this?

When you see a sad person at the shopping mall, send up a prayer for that one. When you come across someone practising sin, pray for that one. In your praying, extend your mind to all for whom Christ died. Focus on particular nations, or particular cultures or groups of people. Pray for victims of crime; pray for prisoners; pray for drug addicts; pray for prominent leaders; pray for minority people in your area; pray for the unemployed; pray for single parents; pray for teens and children; pray for schools and teachers. Choose one group to pray for; and next time, another group.

In our churches, how seldom prayers and intercessions are made for the unknown lost! If Christ is ever to return, this must change.

The beauty of prayer for the unsaved is that if it is sincere, it translates into action. When I am praying for people who need Christ, I am asking God, "How can I be used in answer to my own prayers?"

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# Have we lost hope for the lost? By Ed Gallagher

Do you long to see sinners saved through your church? If so, here's a scripture worth looking at:

*The word's getting out on Zion:*

*"Men and women, right and left,  
get born again in her!"*

*God registers their names in his book:*

*"This one, this one, and this one —  
born again, right here." Psalm 87:5, 6.\**

Can you picture it? God looking around your neighbourhood, picking out people to send to your church, where they can find changed lives in Christ.

"This one, this one,  
and this one—born  
again, right here."

A few months ago I visited a small church, about 20 attending. Since my last visit there one year before, two or three new people from the community were regularly participating. "How did this come

about?" I asked the church leaders. "God sent them," was the reply. "God picked them out and sent them."

The other day I was talking with two pastors from a large city church, hundreds attending. The pastors mentioned how delighted they were that a new person approached them after worship the previous week—a woman from the community, previously unknown. She said she wanted to learn about having a changed life and becoming a church member.

Would you like this kind of experience in your congregation? What's the key?

It has nothing to do with coincidence, and there are times when it has little to do with any special programme or outreach. It has everything to do with intention and expectation.

As you plan your worship and ministries, is it your conscious intention to attract and meet the needs of new people whom God might direct your way?

As you conduct your interaction with people, is it your expectation that God will use you to bless others in his name, and lead someone to look into being born again because of your influence?

Intention. Expectation. Too many of us have become so used to things as they are, that we appear to have lost hope for the lost. We need renewed intention, revived expectation!

I was not surprised to learn from the leaders of the small church that they had engaged in sustained prayer that God would send new people to their congregation. They intended, they expected, they prayed. And God responded.

It was no surprise, either, to learn that at the large church, prayer warriors met early that morning to intercede with God for at least one person who would come to the congregation and find life with Christ that day, right there. Same dynamic—they intended, they expected, they prayed, and God responded.

"But we've prayed like that before," you might say. "And nothing happened." So, what's the solution? To stop praying? To stop intending and stop expecting? To stop hoping, watching and waiting?

We must be faithful in prayer, persistent in prayer, never giving up. We

need the spirit of Jacob in our prayers: "I will not let you go unless you bless me." Genesis 32:26.

An important factor is corporate prayer—praying *together*. Jesus gave the church authority to bind evil and release good. He said that if two or three disciples agree together in his name, he will step in and answer abundantly. Matthew 18:18–20.

Here's a comment on these verses: "The promise is made on condition that the united prayers of the church are offered, and in answer to these prayers there may be expected a power greater than that which comes in answer to private prayer. The power given will be proportionate to the unity of the members and their love of God and for one another."\*\*\*

Let's regain our intention and expectation. Let's pray together often. God will respond, and sinners will be born again right here.

Photo: Ed Gallagher



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\*\* Ellen G. White, Letter 32, 1903.

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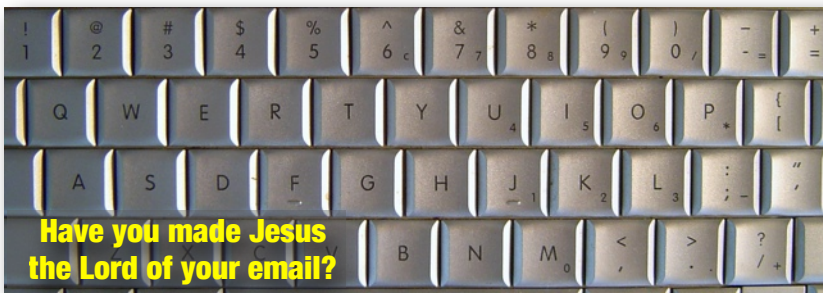
# God and your email

By Ed Gallagher

Oswald Chambers offers this challenging thought: Every detail of our lives is under the scrutiny of God.\* Every detail! Jesus said it first: "I tell you that men will have to give account on the day of judgement for every careless word they have spoken. For by your words you will be acquitted, and by your words you will be condemned." Matthew 12:36, 37.

As soon as we read such a challenge, we must remind ourselves of its true and acceptable context—the gospel.

Our salvation is based not on our ability to be perfect, but on Christ's perfect life, death and ministry on our behalf. At the same time, we realise that the grace-filled Saviour who forgives us is also the Lord who calls us to holiness in every detail. It is holiness—the work of the Spirit in our lives—that testifies to the universe that our salvation is real. This is why our words will be brought into judgement. Judgement involves evidence, and our words give evidence about the reality of our salvation.



Which brings us to email. Have you made Jesus the Lord of your email? When you write email, and when you forward email, are you taking Jesus into account? Is your email sanctified? When your business associates, friends and acquaintances pull up your email messages and attachments on their computer screens, can they tell you are honest? Can they see you are pure? Can they feel you are kind? Can they sense you have God's Word in your heart? Can they tell you are different from the usual, worldly person?

Let me be quick to confess my own failings on this point. After all, someone might read this who once received a less-than-sanctified email from me! The internet fools us with its camouflage. We say things by email in a way that we might never repeat if we were face-to-face with the recipient.

With email, it is easy to be curt, unresponsive, evasive, sarcastic, unkind, or crude. And even when we're trying to be nice, email filters out tone of voice. Email cannot convey a smile, a handshake, sparkling eyes, or a friendly touch on the shoulder. The words are just words—millions of digital symbols arranged as cold language. Understanding this, we must seek the

Holy Spirit to guide us in our choice of words by email.

Failure to respond is a common discourtesy in email communication. True, there are many unsolicited messages that don't deserve response and shouldn't get one. But in normal email communication, as in normal face-to-face communication, lack of response sets a poor example of Christian character.

Because email cannot convey non-verbal communication—tonal quality, gestures, facial expression and so on—we must find and add the words that convey the character of Christ. This is not difficult to do. Expressions such as "Thank you for your message. . . . I appreciate your concern. . . . I understand your frustration. . . . I apologise for my delay. . ." go a long way toward conveying Christian courtesy and kindness—yet such expressions are often missing from email communications, even in church circles.

But we can and should go further. As disciples of Christ, we must seize opportunities to speak a word for the gospel. We can look for such opportunities in our email messaging. Even in a purely business communication we can add something like, "I know you are facing considerable pressure in your work, and I want you to know I am thinking about you." Words from Christ!

When we know the recipient has a religious orientation, we might add something like, "I hope things are well for you. I have been including you in my prayers lately. Is there something I can especially pray about for you?" Words from Christ!

When we email someone we know is a Christian, we can be specific. "I'm praying God will encourage you today in your challenges. Remember Paul's affirmation—"I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me."" Words from Christ!

Occasionally you might want to pray with someone via email. Carefully write your prayer, review it, pray over it, and send it.

If nothing else, we can add a "God bless you", or "May Heaven's peace rest on you today." An encouraging Bible promise in the automatic signature line is one additional, easy way to bring our emails into sanctified service for God.

\* See *The Complete Works of Oswald Chambers*, p. 19. (Discovery House Publishers, Grand Rapids, Michigan. Copyright © 2000 by Oswald Chambers Publications Association, Limited.) Also see *My Utmost for His Highest*, readings for July 31 and Sept. 1.

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