Prayer that Strengthens and Expands the Church

Glenn Livingston

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Foreword

We live in a time when God is much at work advancing His eternal purposes. Reports from around the world show many are coming to saving faith in Christ and that new churches are multiplying in areas where before there was no Christian witness.

There are also widespread reports that many see God at work today in another way. Many believers are reporting that God is doing something new in their lives in the area of prayer. The Holy Spirit is touching hearts with a new and deepening sensitivity to prayer. This is not to say that these believers have suddenly discovered prayer or that prayer had not previously been a vital aspect of their lives. But, far and wide, believers are sharing that the Holy Spirit is doing something new and fresh in their lives in the area of prayer. From my investigations, this increased and spreading sensitivity to prayer seems to focus on two areas:

• Prayer as it involves growing in personal communion and intimacy with God.
• Prayer as it involves the desire to intercede for the needs of others.

The Bible shows that times when God has given His people a deepening sensitivity to prayer have preceded God doing a new thing among His people and expanding His work through His people. This spiritual dynamic preceded, surrounded and supported all the great advances of God's purposes. Prayer generated a growing spirituality and heightened sensitivity to aligning with God's agenda. Prayer is the indis- pensable foundation that God has established for accomplishing the authentic advancement of His kingdom.

The history of Israel and the church is the history of God over- coming great obstacles in response to prayer. Each of us face difficult and complex problems in our lives and ministries. But we also see God at work, encouraging us in prayer to seek Him and His working in a new and deeper way, and to ask Him to remove barriers, giving solu- tions to those problems and leading us forward.

God is heightening the sensitivity of His church to prayer. This increasing sensitivity of God's people to prayer is truly a work of God. God is doing something extraordinary in our time. God Himself is work- ing in the hearts of many believers. In the salvation of a soul, God works but He also makes use of human instruments to deliver the Gospel message. Just as God makes use of us in the work seeing peo- ple saved, so also we can have a part in encouraging and mobilizing prayer. God is at work igniting a new passion for prayer.

But how would the Holy Spirit involve us to see this passion spread and become a movement of prayer? The writer of Hebrews urged, "Let us consider how to stimulate one another to love and good deeds" (Hebrews 10:24). Our prayers of intercession are deeds of love and good works that are a blessing to others. So let us consider how to stim- ulate one another to growth in the area of prayer. Consider how we might join with what God is doing to see prayer further stimulated even into movements of prayer among believers!

Throughout history there have been many "movements." But what are movements, and where do they come from? Movements, whether secular or spiritual, are groups of individuals who have come to a heightened sense of a common identity, usually involving a common cause, focus or idea. With spiritual movements, this sense of common identity comes from seeing and realizing Biblical truth in a new and deeper way. When numbers of individuals come to have common focus of vision, a passion for a particular issue, they become a movement.

The development of these resources has flowed from my work encouraging and resourcing those whom God is calling to provide leadership in mobilizing prayer in support of evangelism and church planting.

There is a definite pattern to the way these resources have been laid out. The Biblical foundations and principles that govern prayer (which are both timeless and supracultural) are presented in Sections I and II. Section II focuses on the functional aspects of prayer. Section III presents forms that may be useful in mobilizing group prayer. Section IV deals with specific issues involved in providing functional leadership for prayer.

I conclude with both a plea for mercy and a disclaimer. Please over- look any shortcomings in the form in which this material is presented and rather focus on the functional issues presented. These resources are presented in an abbreviated form for three reasons.

1. To bring sharp focus to the foundational issues involved.
2. To encourage readers/recipients to search the Scriptures for themselves to see if these things be so and to interact with God about what He has revealed on these prayer topics.
3. For ease of translation.

These resources are not a comprehensive treatment of prayer. The particular focus of these materials deals with equipping those whom God is using to encourage prayer and movements of prayer. The read- er will sense that the material involves an autobiographical sharing of the truths God has taught me. Since my thinking and understanding on prayer is still very much an ongoing process, the material remains incomplete.

The resources are presented with the expectation that each person, who senses that God desires to deepen and/or use him/her to provide leadership in prayer, will seek the Holy Spirit's leading in personally working through these issues and asking for sensitivity in sharing these truths with others.

I approach the idea of my writing a prayer resource guide with cau- tion. After all, prayer is a well-known and widely published subject. Yet, for me, prayer seemed vague and subjective. As I have sought the Lord for answers, He has used His Word to give me breakthroughs of under-

standing.
There is an irony about me being involved in encouraging prayer and seeking to facilitate movements of prayer. I am sure the reason I have such a hunger for learning to pray is because I sense I really know so little experientially about prayer. But I have had just enough taste of prayer that I am thirsty for more and God is guiding and greatly encour- aging me in this area. He is giving both the desire and ability (Philippians 2:13) to grow and experience the fullness of the Christian privileges more deeply, especially in the area of prayer. The Lord is teaching me to pray.

It is my prayer that this book will be used to deepen your intimacy with the Lord and ministry of prayer.

Glenn Livingston
Budapest, July 1997

Section One: Placing Prayer in Context

Overview of Facilitation of Prayer and Prayer Movements

It is God's plan that the knowledge of the Gospel spread so that Christ- centered, growing, multiplying churches are accessible throughout each nation. This will ensure that every person has the opportunity to hear and see the Good News of the Gospel in a way that is relevant to them and their situations. Such a deep and widespread advance of the church will require a mobilized laity, i.e., the mobilization to vision and ministry of the whole body of Christ with all the gifting and resources God has placed there. Encouraging prayer is a means God will use to mobilize His people to vision and proactive ministry, to cleanse, unite, guide and empower with spiritual vitality for His work.

The Lord desires to see His churches strengthened and many new churches started. He has sovereignly chosen to make use of means to accomplish His purposes. Prayer is one of the means God has given to see His purposes accomplished. Through prayer, every believer can participate in the advance of the Gospel. Therefore, it is important that the whole Body of Christ be encouraged in prayer, and especially intercessory prayer, in support of those issues that will advance God's church.

In encouraging prayer, the desire is to see a spiritual dynamic set in motion. This spiritual dynamic would spread and manifest itself in genuine and holistic movements of prayer among God's people. This

can form the foundation for both the revitalization and expansion of the church. The focus in the mobilization of prayer is encouraging the functional aspects of prayer. It involves more than recruiting individuals and groups to support a program or participate in prayer events. Movements of prayer, in their essence, are not centered on events or organization- al issues, but growing numbers of believers increasingly cultivating a growing lifestyle of prayer and active dependence upon the Lord.

The following are aspects in the mobilization of prayer that con- tribute to the expansion and multiplication of the Church.

1. Leadership is an aspect of mobilizing prayer that contributes to movement. It is not enough for leaders to simply believe in prayer. It must be a vital part of their lives. The need in the mobilization of prayer is for functional spiritual leadership, i.e., pacesetters for prayer. The word pacesetter derives from the runner in a race who moves ahead to set the pace. The pacesetter sets the example. The leaders God will use to mobilize prayer are prayer pacesetters, those who, by their words and lives, encourage intimacy with God and an aligning with God's plans and purposes.

A critical issue to seeing authentic movements of prayer arise among God's people is the need for leaders, pacesetters of prayer, to be multiplied on all different levels, i.e., cell leaders of prayer (men, women and youth) on church, city, regional and national levels. Therefore, identifying, resourcing and encouraging those who are already prayer leaders or those whom God is raising up as prayer lead- ers are important aspects of mobilizing a movement of prayer.

2. Sharing of vision is an aspect of mobilizing prayer that contributes to movement. The word vision is being used in the sense of the picture we hold in our minds of the future based on what God has revealed in His Word. The sharing of vision regarding God's desires and plans concerns three areas.

First, leaders should share a clear, scripturally based vision of what God has given us in prayer. Most believers recognize that prayer is foundational to spiritual life and ministry. However, for them to make changes in their lives, schedules, and priorities, in order to devote them- selves to growing in their prayer lives, would require compelling rea- sons. The compelling reasons given in God's Word need to be shared with all believers. God's Word must be shared in such a way that believ- ers come to realize in a new and fresh way that God wants to use both them and their prayers to move His purposes forward. Believers must grow in their understanding of truth regarding the strategic nature of prayer.

Their prayers are a means God has chosen to use to see His pur- poses accomplished. This truth becomes the motivation for devoting themselves in a new and fresh way to prayer. It moves them from pray- ing out of a sense of obligation or duty, "I know I ought to pray," to pray- ing because their prayers are important, "My prayers are a means God has ordained to use to see His purposes accomplished. Since my prayers are important, I choose to make prayer an increasing priority in my life." A second aspect which encourages prayer is the sharing of the vision the Scripture presents of God's purposes and intentions. Believers need to see their lives, their involvement in church and their mission in the world from God's perspective. God's plans involve the knowledge of His redemptive love being shared with all people. His plan involves using His church, vital groups of believers, to be salt and light through- out the whole world (II Corinthians 5:18-20). By this plan, all people would have a credible witness of the Good News of the Gospel. As believers begin to see and align their lives with God's plans and pur- poses, and expect God to use them, it motivates them in their prayer life. A third area that can vitalize a vision for prayer is research. The sharing of research on the spiritual situation of the "harvest field" and "harvest force" can highlight needs and opportunities. This research shows believers compelling reasons to devote themselves in a new and deeper way to prayer and to seek understanding, leading and empow- erment. (Example: Nehemiah 1)
When believers begin to see that God will use both them and their prayers to see His purposes accomplished, and these individuals begin to multiply, it will result in a growing movement of prayer among believers. So, facilitating prayer is more than recruiting individuals and groups to support a program or a cause or participate in prayer events. It involves sharing vision that will motivate and encourage believers to a deepening lifestyle of prayer. Movements of prayer will arise as believ- ers come more and more to align with God's plans and purposes: for them personally—a growing lifestyle of intimacy and intercession, of blessing others; for the church--all the gifting and resources mobilized to ministry; for the world--that the knowledge of the Gospel would flow out to every man, woman and child.

3. Sharing prayer focus is an aspect of mobilizing prayer that con- tributes to movement. It is natural for us to focus our prayers on our immediate personal needs. The Scriptures speak of praying for our daily provisions, and seeking forgiveness and protection. What we may not do so often
is pray along the lines of what God wants, for His plans and purposes. Most of the prayers, instructions on prayer and prayer requests found in Scripture concern encouragement for us to pray for issues that are strategic in seeing vital advances of the Gospel. In other words, when God answers these strategic prayers, the Gospel moves forward in significant ways, i.e., His will is done, His kingdom is advanced, and so forth. Praying in a strategic way has to do with our sensitivity to pray for issues God has shown will allow, guide and empower the Gospel to go forward. Praying in this manner strengthens the church and contributes to seeing the reality of a "church planting movement" (a widespread and systematic approach to the presentation of the Gospel to a whole region or people, SCP), which is the purpose of The Alliance for Saturation Church Planting (SCP).
Prayer should focus on at least two areas. First, prayer should be focused on issues involved in seeing God's purposes accomplished within the body of Christ. The greatest barriers to the advance of the Gospel are often found inside the church! These can be barriers in our relationships with God and with each other. Satan uses them to make the church weak and a poor witness for the Lord. Prayer should focus on cleansing, healing, unity, vision and growing genuine spirituality. (Ephesians 1:15-19, 3:16-21. Colossians 1:9-11, 4:12 are examples of how to pray for the church.)
The second focus involves encouraging prayer about issues the Holy Spirit shows in Scripture are vital for the advance of the Gospel. Examples are: prayer for laborers, open doors, boldness, the very words to say, protection, and wisdom. (Matthew 9:38, Colossians 4:3, Ephesians 6:19-20) as well as specific aspects regarding God's leading and empowering of evangelism and the planting of new churches. Such prayer needs to surround and undergird all the aspects of the SCP agen- da; including research, networking, vision-casting, training, mentoring, evangelism and church planting.

Note: In encouraging prayer, there is a need to keep the plain things on which God has given us clear instruction the main things and to avoid extra-Biblical issues that tend to divide the body of Christ.

4. Sharing Biblical principles of prayer is an aspect of mobiliz- ing prayer that contributes to movement. Just as we receive encourage- ment in other areas of the Christian life, so we are to stimulate one

another in prayer. God will use this to grow believers in their under- standing of prayer. Such encouragement involves a Biblical dealing with questions such as: What does prayer have to do with anything? Why do we pray? What are the foundations of intercession? What does it mean to co-labor with Christ in prayer...to be praying always? How can we pray in accord with God's will? What has fasting to do with prayer? How does God answer prayer? What should our expectations be about the timing of answers to prayer? Why does God not answer some prayer? There is much instruction on prayer in the Scripture. These principles need to be shared, allowing the development of forms appropriate to the culture and time.

5. Literature is an aspect of mobilizing prayer that contributes to movement. Literature is a vital way of communicating and keeping the focus of prayer on those issues that will move the church forward. The early church copied letters from the apostles and passed them around. This literature gave reports, continuing instruction and strategic prayer requests. It is helpful to develop and share Biblically based prayer liter- ature. These resources help communicate the goal in mobilizing prayer and keep the focus clear.

6. Networking of individual and group prayer is an aspect of mobilizing prayer that contributes to movement. Networking is the process by which individuals and organizations become connected with one another in order to achieve common goals. Networking among the whole body of Christ to encourage prayer is an important aspect of moving an SCP agenda. It involves networking among individuals and groups, i.e., children, young people, older people, business people, pastors, whole churches and denominations. (For more information on such networking, see p. 134.)

7. Mentoring of prayer leaders and those God is raising up as leaders is an aspect of mobilizing prayer that contributes to move- ment. Mentoring is the developing of purposeful relationships, where one who knows or has resources shares, either generally or at critical moments, in such a way as to assist personal and/or ministry develop- ment. The mentoring relationship involves a genuine personal interest

in the individual and his/her ministry. Most people understand posi- tional authority, but in mentoring there is a different kind of authority. It is a relational authority. Mentoring provides a relational dimension that is missing from most people's experience. The mentoring of emerg- ing leaders is an important aspect of both seeing new leaders raised up and modeling a more Biblical style of leadership. Leaders and emerging leaders of prayer benefit from mentoring. Periodically bringing the prayer leaders together for prayer, for Biblical encouragement, and times of praise fosters vision and unity and gives opportunities for them to mentor one another.

8. Sharing models is an aspect of mobilizing prayer that contributes to movement. In seeking to see God's purposes advanced, we need to look for particular ways of mobilizing prayer beyond personal interces- sion and weekly church prayer meetings. Prayer partners (2 people), prayer triplets (3 people), or prayer cells are some of the ways of mobi- lizing much intense prayer focused on the issues that will advance of the Gospel. These are ways of forming small groups of believers who commit to meet together regularly to pray. (See p. 129 for more infor- mation on these models.)

Conclusion:

The mobilization of prayer is foundational to the expansion and multi- plication of the church Throughout Scripture and in all of the accounts of revivals, we see that prayer—deep intercessory prayer—has preceded all the mighty visitations of God among His people. It seems when- ever God begins to do a new thing and He wants to mobilize His peo- ple (believers), He begins by calling them to pray. This is because Christianity is a lay movement. Widespread evangelism and church planting movements require a mobilized laity: The mobilization of all the gifting and resources God has placed in His body, the church to both vision and ministry. To see such a mobilization and advance of the church will necessitate more than goals, strategies, people and natural resources. There must be a genuine and holistic attention to prayer, for prayer is a vital resource that God has given us for accomplishing His purposes. Prayer is foundational to the mobilization and multiplication of the church. Therefore, mobilizing prayer among the whole body of Christ is a foundational component of facilitating saturation church planting
In seeking to facilitate prayer with a movement mindset, we are preparing and cultivating a climate for the strengthening and expansion of the church. We are preparing the soil of the church mentally, spiri- tually and organizationally to be an instrument God can use. To see whole nations reached for Christ, both qualitative and quantitative growth need to occur. Qualitative has to do with growing spiritual vital- ity among believers which affects their ability to minister. Quantitative has to do with growing and multiplying congregations.

What a great work God has called us to, to pray and minister in such a way that our world is changed!

We are ordinary people with an extraordinary God!

The Context of Prayer

The Holy Spirit continually prompts me with the thought, "What should the prayer life of a disciple of the Lord look like?" As we ponder this question, we realize prayer is but one aspect of the Christian life. Therefore, it must be treated in the larger context. A critical aspect in encouraging prayer and mobilizing prayer that will strengthen and expand the church is bringing continuing focus on some key founda- tions of authentic Christianity. The foundations of our faith are forever. They are designed never to change. But it seems possible for us Christians to lose clear vision of God's purposes on some foundational matters of the faith.

This greatly affects our prayer and prayer life. So, in mobilizing prayer, there is the continuing need to relate it to God's larger working. This involves holding up the purpose of the church, the purpose of leadership and the means God has given to see the accomplishing of His plans and purposes.

The purpose of the church

The church is a gathering of all those the Lord has chosen, called out and redeemed into a relationship with Himself. The church is God's idea, His special creation. Christ is the head. But why the church? What is the purpose of the church, these fellowships/congregations?

"Peter teaches that we, the church, 'are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, That we should show forth the praises of Him who has called you out of darkness into His marvelous light. Who in times past were not a people but are now the people of God' (I Peter 2:9). God's plan is to reveal Himself through the church.

In the epistle to the Ephesians, we find the fullest teaching on the church." Ephesians 2:10-22 speaks of the nature of the church. It is a body, God's household which is made up of both Jews and Greeks. Paul continues in 3:10-11 (KJV) by speaking of the purpose of the church.

To the intent

It seems there is an intent, a singular purpose for the church.

that now unto the principalities and powers in heavenly places might be made known

The Gospel is for man but there is also an audience which consists of spiritual being, angels and fallen angels.

by the church

There is a singular instrument that God desires to use.

the manifold wisdom of God,

This concerns "WHAT" God intends to communicate. Wisdom is singular. There is a singular grace God extended to man in Christ Jesus.
Manifold is plural. There are many ways or demonstrations of the wisdom of God.

According to the eternal purpose which he purposed in Christ Jesus our Lord:

There is a singular eternal purpose for the church.

God is revealing here that He created the church with a singular plan, to display, be a visible expression of His manifold wisdom. Paul closes this instruction on the church by praying for this reality to be accomplished, by praying that the church would manifest the manifold wisdom of God. That the church would be progressively filled with all the fullness of God, (Ephesians 3:21) so that (purpose clause) God may be glorified

in the church through out all generations.

The church was created with a singular purpose. That purpose involves God's plan to reveal His manifold wisdom, i.e. the kind of God He is, and the wonder of the Gospel and grace through those He has redeemed to an audience in the heavenlies and also here on earth so that He receives glory. Glory in the sense that men will acknowledge, praise and worship God for who He is...the great, holy and awesome one.
The church to be the visible expression of God's manifold wisdom. This necessitates the establishment of churches, vital growing, multiply- ing congregations of believers among all people. God's plan is to have living epistles gathered in local congregations to communicate spiritual reality into the world.

There are as many ways of communicating the wisdom and glory of God as there are believers who have experienced His grace. It is God's plan to make known these many stories of His grace and wis- dom, so God is better understood and glorified in the world. It is God's plan that local congregations, vital fellowships of believers, would be visual aids to display His manifold wisdom. This wisdom is to be man- ifested by those who have experienced demonstrations of God's grace into a world that has been much vandalized by Satan and sin.

In creating the church, God has a single purpose, to show His wis- dom in and through the church in three interrelated theaters of testimony: Worship—the upward focus of the church.

The Father seeks those that He has chosen and adopted to worship Him in Spirit and in truth John 4:23).

We gather to savor, value, celebrate and exalt the greatness of our God, His victory over sin and death and our relationship with the God of all creation. Worship reveals and glorifies God. Koinonia—bodylife, fellowship among believers, meeting and minis- tering to one another participating in the lives of one another, for we are family.

Every believer has received a spiritual gift to be used for the bene- fit of others. (I Peter 4:10, I Corinthians 12:7). Within the church, believ- ers are to be living out in their relationships the transforming message of the Gospel and ministering one to another for we are family. Koinonia reveals and glorifies God.

Mission—the outward focus of the church, penetrating the world, multiplying, growing.

The reality of our faith is most fully seen when the church, the salt and light, is scattered into the world, communicating, spreading a con- textualized message of the Gospel into every segment of society.

Jesus told His disciples, "As You sent Me into the world, I also have sent them" (John 17:18). Then He prayed for our unity that the world may believe.

One theater through which God shows forth His wisdom is through vital communities of believers being established everywhere. The church is God's special creation, to be the local representation of Christ pene- trating the whole earth with the knowledge of God. The Great Commission from the Lord involves a community response, for the church plants the church.

The word "parish" has been used for many years to describe a local church. Parish is defined as "a body of believers in the midst of an alien community." The church, those God has redeemed, is to be a living community that is a witness to Christ and His grace that changes lives.

Believers, living in an alien environment, "... are a chosen race...that you may proclaim the excellencies of Him who has called you out of darkness into His marvelous light" (I Peter 2:9). This witness is to bring others into the kingdom. Missions reveals and glorifies God.

The church was created by the Lord to display His manifold wisdom, through authentic spirituality, in worship, in body life, and in living communities penetrating the world with an incarnational witness of the Gospel.

The purpose of leadership

What is the purpose of leadership in the church? Is it simply to give someone a profession or an office?

In Ephesians, in the same context where we learn about the pur- pose of the church, we find that God has placed gifted people in the body, "for the equipping of the saints for the work of service" (Ephesians 4:12). There are leadership functions the body needs. The focus of leadership is not on a position or office, but on the function of equipping believers for ministry.

The Greek oikodome, translated equip, has the sense of "promot- ing spiritual growth," building up believers with spiritual resources so they can function as priests and co-laborers with Christ. These gifted leaders are to minister in such a way that the saints are equipped for ministry in the three interrelated theaters of testimony.

The Lord has given gifted leaders:

To equip believers to worship Him.

The truth one holds regarding God is what determines the ability to worship God. God desires those that would worship Him in spirit and in truth. Meaningful worship is based on feeding our spirit with truth. Believers need to be equipped for increasing intimacy with God and

proactivity in worship vs. a spectator mentality. Authentic worship does not focus on getting but rather giving. Although emotions may be aroused, authentic worship centers on savoring the greatness of Almighty God who is our Father.

To equip believers for koinonia, communion with one another.

God desires that believers live in authentic spiritual community, ministering to one another. He wants us to live out our relationships with one another the transforming message of the Gospel.

To equip believers for their mission in the world.

God desires that believers represent Him in the world by being living epistles of Christ (II Corinthians 2:3). This necessitates equipping them to walk in growing intimacy with God, to discover and use their spiri- tual giftedness, and be able to share their own stories of experiencing God's grace. God's children, both individually and collectively are to be living witnesses to Christ and His grace that changes lives. This witness reveals God and His wisdom and brings others into the kingdom.

The witness of God at work in these three interrelated theaters infil- trates the world, revealing God and His grace to people who are empty despite material affluence, who are lonely and afraid of death, who are looking for love, acceptance and purpose in life, who have a sense of guilt but do not know how to deal with it.

God has given gifted people to the church to equip the church. The function of leaders coincides with the purpose of the church. These gift- ed people are to use their gifts to further equip the body, the church, to do what God has created the church to do. The one eternal purpose of the church is to display... "the manifold wisdom of God" so God is truly known and glorified (Ephesians 3:10).

By God's design He has given gifted leaders to the church to equip believers. An individuals or group's ability to minister is based on his/her knowledge and experience of the grace of God. The leadership function is one of finding ways of bringing each believer to increasing fullness of spiritual life, which involves both growing intimacy with God and understanding and using ministry giftedness. When believers come to know God in a more intimate and deeper way, this becomes a pow- erful motivating factor to faith, spiritual growth and ministry. This moves believers toward personal proactivity in their faith and ministry. It espe- cially moves them toward the world as an arena of ministry.

This equipping will most fully happen not primarily through ser- mons or classroom teaching, but rather through life-on-life equipping. All these gifted people God has given the church are to minister in such a way that they are equipping their people to be Spirit-filled living epis- tles of the Gospel. Apostles are those who labor and equip others to see the domains of the Gospel expanded into unreached areas. Prophets are those with sensitivity to truth and righteousness which need to gov- ern and guard the work against fleshliness (sin) and error. Evangelists are those who equip others to share their faith and are also involved in mobile ministries with a focus on seeing people saved. Pastor/teachers are those who shepherd, nurture and teach the word of God to local groups of believers that they may be equipped and built up in the faith.

These gifted people are to minister in conjunction with the church not apart from the church. Their focus is to be on people, not buildings or programs; on community, not forms; on infiltrating and growing, not withdrawing.

God's means to accomplish His purposes

The means/resources God has ordained to make use of to see His pur- poses accomplished are people, the Word and prayer.

The first means God uses to move His plans and purposes forward is people. (I Peter 1:1-2) We believers were chosen by God before the foundation of the world to be His children (Ephesians 1:4), to be sojourners, those scattered, carrying the incarnational message every- where so that God's purposes are advanced. Our citizenship is in heaven, but our work is here.

Romans 10:14-15 asks "How then shall they call upon Him in whom they have not believed? And how shall they believe in Him whom they have not heard? And how shall they hear without a preach- er?" Believers must be sent and share the Gospel, so people hear, believe and call upon the name of the Lord. God does not command us to evangelize (Matthew 28:18) because He is in any way dependent upon our efforts, but because He has chosen to make use of means to accomplish His purposes. One of the means God has chosen to use is people.

A second means God uses to move His plans and purposes for- ward is His truth. Romans 10 shows that God uses people to see peo- ple saved and also that God uses His Word, the sharing of truth as a means to effect salvation. People go and share God's truth, which God uses to see unbelievers brought into a relationship with Himself.

Jesus said, "If you continue in My word, then you are truly disci- ples of mine; and you will know the truth, and the truth will make you free" (John 8:31-32). Jesus was teaching that God uses His word to set people free from ignorance and/or prejudice. The promise is that as one comes to know and practice the truth God has given, God will use His truth as the means of growing and sanctifying believers. God uses His truth as a means to accomplish his purposes. "Sanctify them in the truth." "Your word is truth" (John 17:17).

Real spiritual change, whether for salvation or sanctification, is affected by means of the Word of God. God uses truth to accomplish His plans and purposes. Nothing can be in the heart until it has been first in the mind. The primacy of time is that deepening knowledge must precede deepening affection. But the primacy of importance is the heart. Knowing and living this truth brings the transformation of the heart. Truth is a means God has chosen to use to see His purposes accomplished. Is there any connection between the Word and authen- tic worship, body life and mission? God desires those who will worship Him in spirit and in truth. The truth inspires authentic worship, body life, witness and prayer.

A third means God uses to move His plans and purposes forward is prayer. The Scriptures teach and show the clear message that God has linked Himself and His working in the world to us and our prayers (II Chronicles 7:14, Matthew 9:38, Luke 10:2, James 4:2). Prayer is a means God uses to accomplish His purposes both in us and through us. Prayer is a means of abiding and growing in our personal communion/intima- cy with the Lord. Prayer is a means of ministering, bringing change to our world. When prayer is seen from this perspective, it is approached with joy and anticipation and not with a sense of grim duty or obliga- tion. God has plans and purposes for us, our churches and our soci- eties. He will use our prayers to bring changes that advance His eternal plans and purposes.

While God is all powerful and can break into history with miracles at any time, He has chosen to use these three interrelated means to see His plans and purposes accomplished. The Lord will use people who are living lives aligned with His will. The Lord will use His written Word to teach and guide us and His work. The Lord will use the prayer of those who are living in active dependence upon Him and His leading in all their lives.

Conclusion:

As we treat the subject of prayer and build a picture of the prayer life of a disciple, we must deal with prayer within the larger context. It is natural for one to approach prayer in a self-absorbed way, i.e., our prayers really are lists of requests for God to make our lives more comfortable and pain free. Authentic prayer is built upon solid theological foundations. As we see God's larger purposes, they impact and move our prayer beyond a personal focus. Certainly one of the reasons God has given us prayer is for personal communion and abiding, but as we review Scriptures we discover that God had much more in mind for our prayer life.

God Almighty is working out His eternal plan and purposes. He created the church to be His ordained channel of accomplishing His plan. His plan and provision are for there to be vital, growing and mul- tiplying churches everywhere so there is a witness, a living drama, to His manifold wisdom among all people. God has given to the church gifted leaders with specific functions He has entrusted to us valuable means, people, truth and prayer that He desires to use to see His plans and purposes moved forward. These are the foundations. As we will build upon these foundations of the faith, we will rediscover an authen- tic Christianity and see the laity increasingly mobilized in prayers and labors toward the vision of vibrant, growing and multiplying churches. Planting and replanting these foundational truths are important aspects of mobilizing towards "movement."
Why, when we look at the church, do we see the chasm between God's intention for the church and what we see and experience? The church is what it is today based on the choices and decisions of those who have gone before us. The gulf which is evident shows there has been a straying from the foundations.

We believers are the body of Christ on earth today. Jesus is the head; we are the body. We are to be carrying out the intentions of the head (Colossians 1:18). We are now responsible for the church being all that the head of the church desires. Let us plant and replant the foun- dations God has given for His church so that we recapture within our minds and hearts the foundations of authentic Christianity. Let us rethink how these truths impact our church structures, i.e., how we do church. Let us begin to make application of these ideals in a less-than-ideal world with less-than-perfect people. Let us pray and work to see changes in our thinking and lives. Let us be full of faith and the expec- tation that God will be active to bring both qualitative and quantitative growth to His church, that God will bring His plans and purposes increasingly to pass as we commit ourselves to Him and His ways.

Intercessory prayer flourishes when believers become convinced:

•that God has plans that involve positive spiritual change in the status quo.
•that God can and will change hearts and situations.
•that their prayers are a means God will use to see His purposes accomplished.

Let us fervently pray:

"Lord, show us how to live lives that reveal Your manifold wisdom, so as to bring you glory. Lord, make Your people, Your church, a praise to You in all the earth."

Motivations of Prayer

The issue of motivation is a foundational aspect to be dealt with in the Christian life and in seeking to encourage prayer. We can do many things which are good and right, i.e., attend church, read the Bible, pray. But, as the Bible points out, we can be doing the right things with wrong motivations. We may approach many issues of the life of a dis- ciple as only fulfilling obligations God has laid upon us. A foundation- al issue to growing in our prayer life is coming to see why God has designed the Christian life so that we pray.

There are many interesting questions to wrestle with on the topic of prayer. Why do we pray? Are our prayers essential? Why are our prayers essential? It is probably safe to say that all believers agree that prayer is important. But practically, why do we pray? And really what does prayer have to do with anything? The Scriptures relate that Job was a Godly man (Job 1:1, paraphrase), who also wrestled with questions about prayer. He pondered, "Does it do any good to pray?" (Job 21:15). Job questioned why we pray and if prayer is essential. If we answer, yes, prayer is essential, then we must have an answer to why our prayers essential.

Take a few moments to ask yourself these questions: Why do we pray? Does it do any good to pray? Is our prayer essential? Jot down your

answers. With these answers in mind, think about a couple of things we know about God Himself. God has revealed Himself to be omniscient. He knows all things. Christ said, "Your Father knows what you need before you ask Him." (Matthew 6:8). And God is omnipotent. God is all powerful, so He is able to do all things. Thoughts begin to flood our minds. If God already knows all things, already knows our very thoughts, why should we pray? Since God is all powerful so that He can accomplish His will, if something is God's will, won't He just do it? Why do we need to pray? Or, if we do not pray, does that impede our all powerful God from working? Based on God's omniscience and omnipotence, are my prayers essential? If so, "Why?" These questions lead us to cry out, "Lord, teach me/us to pray...even why we should pray."

The teaching and examples of Scripture can help us with these foundational questions on prayer and give understanding why God has designed prayer to be part of the Christian life.

Exodus 2:23-24 is an example of the place of prayer:

"Now it came about in the course of those many days that the king of Egypt died and the sons of Israel sighed because of the bondage, and they cried out; and their cry for help...rose up to God."

The Israelites were in captivity in Egypt. They were suffering under an increasingly cruel oppression, and they cried out to God. God's peo- ple prayed to be free from slavery and to see the promises of God accomplished. The Lord said to Moses, "I have surely seen the affliction of my people who are in Egypt, and have given heed to their cry (prayers)...so I have come down to deliver them" (Exodus 3:7-8a).

God is omniscient. He had observed and known all about what His people had been suffering. As the pressures of their captivity grew, God's people began to pray in earnest, and God responded to their prayers. "I have come down to deliver them." God moved into action. God provided a plan (v. 8), leadership (v. 10), and empowerment to accomplish the task (vv. 19-20). The prophet Samuel commented on this incident. "Your fathers cried out to the Lord, then the Lord sent Moses and Aaron who brought your fathers out of Egypt and settled them in this place" (I Samuel 12:8).
It seems that God waited for His people to cry out, to pray. We see many examples in the Scriptures that show that God moved into action based on the prayers of His people. II Chronicles 7:14 is God's instruc- tion on the place of prayer: "If my people, which are called by my name, shall humble themselves, and pray, and seek my face, and turn from their wicked way; then will I hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin, and will heal then land" (KJV).

This is clear instruction from God. Note the time sequence here.

If we pray, then God will do for us what we cannot do for ourselves.

Again, it seems that God is willing to wait for His people to earnest- ly seek Him in prayer and that He moves into action based on the prayers of His people.

Matthew 9:36-38 is instruction that Christ gave on the place of prayer. "Seeing the people, He felt compassion for them, because they were distressed and dispirited like sheep without a shepherd. Then He said to His disciples, 'the harvest truly is plentiful, but the laborers are few. Therefore pray the Lord of the harvest to send out workers into His harvest.'"

If God, of His own initiative, sent forth laborers, then why would Jesus have told us to pray to the Lord of the harvest that He would send forth laborers? Jesus was teaching that a strategic issue in the advance of God's kingdom work is our praying out laborers, workers necessary to bring in a harvest of souls. Our prayers are the means by which all the necessary Christian workers will be raised up to bring an expansion of the church.
Christ was encouraging the prayer involvement of His people in issues that will bring expansion of His kingdom/Church. God will thrust out gifted workers in response to our prayer.

Luke 11:2 is more instruction that the Lord gave His disciples on the place of prayer. In response to their plea for teaching on prayer, the Lord said, "When you pray, say..." He gave them six aspects to be con- sidered in their prayers. One was that they were to pray, "Hallowed be Thy name. Thy kingdom come and Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven."

God desires His name to be held in respect and awe, His kingdom expanding (His rule being extended into the hearts of many) and His will increasingly done. If God's name will be revered, and His kingdom and His will is automatically going to be done on earth, would the Lord have taught us to pray in such a manner? The Lord is giving us respon- sibility to pray so these issues will increasingly become a reality.

The Lord was encouraging our prayers so His kingdom and His will are accomplished.

James 4:2 is instruction from the epistles on the place of prayer: The epistles are letters of instruction to believers. Believers are told, "You do not have, because you do not ask."

God was saying that because of your prayerlessness, your sense of self-sufficiency, you are going to miss some of God's blessing. There is no problem with the provision, but the problem lies in your lack of appropriation. There are things God is not going to do because you do not pray. There are things that are not going to happen, because you don't ask, pray.

The Lord is showing that He is willing to withhold His blessings because we have not given ourselves to a deep dependence upon God in prayer.

Conclusion:

What is the clear message about prayer that God is communicating to us? Is prayer essential? Yes! Why is prayer essential? There is a dynamic truth about prayer to be grasped in what God is showing us here and in many other Scriptures. Prayer is essential because the Scriptures show that God has linked Himself and His working in the world to us and to our prayers. Prayer is the means God has chosen to make use of to nurture us in our communion and intimacy with Himself. God uses our prayers as a means to advance His plans and purposes in the world. God can act miraculously, as in parting the Red Sea, but His more fre- quent way of working is through means. In choosing to make use of means, God involves our participation in seeing His eternal plans worked out. Prayer is a way I cooperate with God to see His purposes advanced.

This truth provides the motivation to pray, and to seek to grow and appropriate all God has for me in prayer! This truth moves me to see prayer as more than fulfilling an obligation. It moves me from the moti- vation of duty, "I know I ought to pray," perhaps even thinking prayer is burdensome, to, "Lord what a privilege it is to pray and to see increas- ingly what You God have entrusted to me in prayer." Prayer, as all aspects of the Christian life, is energized by grace, not duty.

My response to this truth: Do I understand why God has chosen to link Himself to us and our prayers? No, but because I see that God has revealed this truth, that He has linked Himself and the accomplishing of His purposes to our prayers, therefore by faith I commit myself to coop- erate with God.

Faith is trusting, beyond what we can understand, "Without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is and that He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him" (Hebrews 11:6). Prayer is an act of faith, an indication of our faith and trust in God.
In faith I ask the Lord to teach me to pray. Teach me more fully what you have given us in prayer. Teach me from Your Word what the

prayer life of a disciple should look like.

In faith I make it a priority of my life to grow more fully into the person of prayer that God desires me to be.

Take some time to review these Scriptures and ask God to lead you to other Scriptures that will confirm this truth. Throughout Scripture God has given us many encouraging examples of the prayers of believers that have changed history. Through prayers of believers, individuals, nations and history have been affected, i.e., Elijah, Esther, Nehemiah. Begin to keep a record of what God is teaching you about prayer.

What a great work God has called us to do, to pray in such a way that our world is changed.

Prayer as It Concerns Seeking Revival

An aspect of encouraging and mobilizing prayer is assisting believers in seeing the connection and place of prayer in moving God's plans and purposes forward.

In the story Jesus told of the prodigal son, God is like the father and we, His children (the church) are like the prodigal son. The things of this world woo us away from the Father. Little by little we forsake pursuing the holiness to which we are called and go off on our own into spiritual bankruptcy. The Father sees our sin and rebellion, and this rejection grieves Him. He grieves over all the sorrow and suffering and miseries we experience as a consequence of our sin. He is watching for us to come to our senses and return to Him.

Finally circumstances similar to what the prodigal experienced turn us to seek our Father and the truth. God has blessed this generation and given us this time of religious freedom, i.e., the ability to walk in our relationship with God and His truth and be spiritually active in our faith. But we believers have not always used either our freedoms or our pros- perity with good stewardship. Rather, our freedom and prosperity have tended to corrupt us. We must acknowledge that in so much we and the church are going our own way. We have allowed the world and its values and sliding standards to affect our passion for God. We are luke- warm toward God and His plans and purposes. There is indifference due to sin, false teaching, divisions, bitterness and legalism. Outwardly,

Prayer as It Concerns Seeking Revival

there is the appearance of spirituality. Much of it is nothing more than religious formality. Who among us does not sense a lack of positive godliness and love among God's people? The church is the way it is today because of choices of those who have gone before us. But now the choices are ours to make. If revival, the restoration of spiritual vital- ity, is to come to the church, it must begin among the most earnest believers. (It is interesting to note that most revivals have begun among those most sensitive to spiritual matters.) And if healing is to come to society, to whole nations, it must begin with the church. A revival to authentic spirituality among God's people will express itself in an awak- ening of unbelievers to spiritual life. It will provide the powerful testi- mony for the conversion and healing of the unsaved. As the uncon- verted come to Christ and allow God's transforming grace to work with- in them, this will bring change and healing to our societies.

What can we learn about how revival comes to believers? Are revivals only the sovereign work of God, or do we believers have a part in seeing the reality of revival come? If God has given us a part in see- ing positive spiritual change come to ourselves, the church and our communities, what is our part?

It may be helpful to define two terms we will be using in this chap- ter: By "revival," I mean the restoration of spiritual vitality among believ-

ers. Scripture uses the word revival more than 250 times in the Old Testament to denote reviving, restoring and healing. Revival involves change. Revivals come as a result of the Holy Spirit leading believers to discover or rediscover truth God has given in His word and to align their lives with this expression of God's will. In essence, revival is returning back to an authentic faith.

By "awakening," I am speaking of the impact that the revival of believers makes on the unsaved. This may involve the salvation of unbelievers or at least a growing sense of God's presence.

II Chronicles 7:14 (KJV) is clear instruction from the Lord. "If my people, which are called by my name, shall 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."

If my people which are called by My name,

An initial condition in revival is understanding who is the Lord is talk- ing to. We believers call ourselves Christians, Christ's ones. We call ourselves by God's name because we acknowledge His name and author- ity. We claim to align ourselves with the Lord and His plans and purposes. God desires that there be a united response among His people in seeking Him on the issue of revival (See II Chronicles 20:3-7). Then the Lord spotlights four aspects He expects us to be sensitive to if we really desire to experience revival.
shall humble themselves,

An initial aspect in seeking revival is humility. God is looking for an internal preparation of our hearts. God desires that we acknowledge that He is Holy; He is God Almighty, high and lifted up. He wants us to understand who we are in relation to Him. God tells us through James that He resists the proud. God actively resists those who will not submit themselves to Him. It is God's plan that we who are His children should live in dependence on Him and His resources. The essence of all sin is seeking to live independently from God. God is looking for us to humble ourselves, to admit our spirit of independence and, therefore, lack of spirituality. We humble our hearts and, with our words of con- fession and deeds, reflect a change of heart. David said, "I humbled my sour with by fasting" (Psalm 35:13, Daniel 10:2). Fasting is pictured in Scripture as an aspect of deeply and passionately seeking the Lord. Fasting is a way of dealing with our flesh and humbling ourselves before the Lord.

and pray

A second aspect that contributes to seeing revival is extraordinary prayer. This is prayer beyond acknowledgment of our needs. It involves a deep seeking of the Lord. A time of both individual and corporate prayer focused on the single issue of the need of revival. We see such corporate prayer in both the Old and New Testament. An example is believers praying in "one accord" (Acts 2:1). The connotation is they prayed with a single mind and voice. Their corporate prayer, in one accord, was the expression of their deep dependency on God for His revival grace. The release of the Holy Spirit came in answer to this prayer. We have the instruction that we believers "do not have because we do not ask" (James 4:2). (Can we in our times be accused as God accused those in the day of Hosea?) "And they do not cry to Me from their heart ...For the sake of grain and new wine they assemble them- selves, They turn away from Me" (Hosea 7:14).

and seek my face

(not visions or experiences but God Himself) Genesis 32:30, Judges 6:22.

A third aspect that contributes to seeing revival is a passionate seek- ing of the Lord Himself. We are to seek God's close, personal presence in our lives. This speaks of our pursuing a lifestyle of living close to God. Loving the Lord with an undivided heart. Jesus spoke of a religious people. He said, "This people honors Me with their lips, but their heart is far away from me" (Matthew 15:8). The true affections of their heart are not for the Lord or for spiritual things. The word hypocrite literally means to "wear a mask." It is easy to wear a religious mask, even with God, to not be really honest with Him and seek that close face-to-face.

David expressed his fervent desire to seek the face of the Lord this way, "Besides You, I desire nothing on earth" (Psalm 73:25). Another time he said, "One thing I have asked from the Lord, that I shall seek:

That I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life, to behold the beauty of the Lord and to meditate in His temple" (Psalm 27:4). David's greatest desire was to live in the presence of the Lord. This presents a picture of a lifestyle of living in close communion with God, of dealing with God face to face. This requires our being cleansed from all impurities so as to be filled in an increasing way with the Holy Spirit.
Paul spoke of seeking the face of the Lord. He said, "I count all things to be loss in view of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord" (Philippians 3:8). Paul's greatest desire was to cultivate a life that God was at the center of and always seek to live near to God. A condition of our seeking revival is our making it a priority to nurture a close face-to-face relationship with God.

and turn from their wicked ways,

A fourth aspect that contributes to seeing revival is our acknowledging and turning from our sin. Turn has to do with change of direction. We are to change our mind, turning from our present way of life and turn- ing to God's ways, and to accept His provisions to lead a holy life.

This turning involves dealing with all that grieves God, whether it is overt acts of rebellion that we commit or omissions, not doing the things we should be doing. Any and all unbelief, self-will, disobedience, bitterness, disunity, any doubtful thing in my life, whatever is robbing me of God's blessings must be turned from. "Behold, the Lord's hand is not short that it cannot save; Nor is His ear so dull that it cannot hear. But your iniquities have made a separation between you and Your God, And your sins have hidden His face from you so that He does not hear" (Isaiah

59:1-2).

We need to give ourselves to purity for we are set apart as a people special to God and His use. Revival involves not just the absence of overt sin, but positive devotion to the Lord. Turning involves both confession and the positive dedication of ourselves to God. "Consecrate yourselves; for tomorrow the Lord will do wonders among you" (Joshua 3:5).

Then God says:

will I hear from heaven

The Lord promises He will hear in the sense of He will respond to our prayers. God says, if my people are responding to me, then I will be attentive to their prayers.

and will forgive their sin

The Lord promises He will forgive us of our sin. "If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness" (I John 1:9).

and will heal their land.

The Lord promises He will bring healing to us and to our land. God has plans and purposes for His people. If we authentically respond to Him, He will do for us and our societies what we cannot do for ourselves.

Summary:

Here is clear instruction that God has given us. God says; If my people will then I will. It is a covenant that God has made with us, a conditional promise of revival. The fulfillment of the promise God has given us is based on our response and compliance with the require- ments given. We are not just to pray for revival, but to fulfill the condi- tions God has given us for revival.

II Chronicles 7:14 and many other Scriptures clearly show that God's people are the key to His working; to bringing spiritual revival among believers and positive social change, the blessings of God to their lands. God has not changed. God is still a covenant-keeping God, true to His word. There is not a time frame for this promise from God. It is not too late for us to accept God's holy challenge and devote our- selves to meeting His conditions, fulfilling the requirements for His great working among us.

The fulfillment of the promise is based on the united response of God's people. God's people are to: humble themselves before God; seek Him in extraordinary prayer; seek a close relationship with God; turn, confess and deal with problems of sin; and positively devote them- selves afresh to cultivating lives of holiness. We cannot of ourselves pro- duce or earn revival. We can only meet God's conditions for revival. It may take time to meet God's conditions for revival.

If God is burdening you with a desire for a deeper spiritual vitality in life, or burdening you with the need of revival in your life or in your church, what can you do? Yes, you are only one person. You may not be a pastor or leader. Most revivals have begun among laypeople. Businessmen, students, housewives, or workers have become burdened for revival and moved the process forward by their fervent prayers. Revivals come as individuals and small groups seek and experience a reviving of spiritual vitality in their own lives. Your response to the Lord can make a difference in your life and the lives of many others.

If God is giving you a thirst for revival, then commit yourself to pur- sue and continue to pursue personal revival as a priority. The initial focus should be on your own personal preparation. Fervently devote yourself to personally meeting God's conditions for revival in II Chronicles 7:14. Pray; ask God to create within you both the growing desire and ability to do His will in pursuing the aspects God will use to bring revival (Philippians 2:13).

Pursue revival with a holy boldness. Both Nehemiah and the lead- ers of the early church show the importance of the personal prepara- tion of those whom God would use to see great advances of His plans and purposes. There was a spirit of earnestness with which they sought God in fasting and prayer. Pray for the quickening of the Holy Spirit among God's people. "Lord, bring revival and let it begin with me."

They were cultivating a spirit of earnestness and repentance in antici- pation of revival (Revelation 3:19).

Also ask God to show how to work toward encouraging others to seek revival with you I Kings 19:18 God reminded His prophet, "I have left 7,000 in Israel, all the knees that have not bowed." Pray and ask God to lead you to others who would faithfully stand with you in seek- ing Him through prayer and fasting both for a personal and national revival by God. In Scripture whenever God begins to do a new thing and He wants to mobilize His people (believers) He begins by calling His people to a new intensity of prayer. As God's people, we are the key to His working, healing our lands. But we cannot claim the prom- ises of God's working without fulfilling the requirements He has given and linked Himself to. In your public prayers, pray for issues that will bring revival. "God be gracious to us and bless us, And cause His face to shine upon us That Your way may be known on the earth, Your sal- vation among all nations" (Psalm 67:1-2).

Our seeking of the Lord should be full of faith

and confidence that, whether or not we ever see a great, widespread revival in society,

God will bring continuing revival to our hearts.

Discernable Steps toward Revival

The term "revival" is being used to speak of a "restoration of spiritual vitality among believers." The Scriptures give us records of both personal and general revivals. In the great workings of God recorded in the Scriptures and also in church history, including the past 400 years, there seems to be a pattern that leads to revival.

Revivals seem to begin as the Holy Spirit gives believers, both sin- gularly and in small groups, a heightened sense of their own spiritual need. This is expressed in a desire to see change in their lives and a grow- ing thirst for spiritual vitality and intimacy with the Lord. This work of the Holy Spirit manifests itself in their cultivating deepening prayer lives.

God uses this new sensitivity to personal spiritual need and to prayer to bring these individuals and small groups of believers to be more conscious of the presence of God. Hearts that previously were hardened and unmoved by divine truth are changed. God's holiness becomes clearer and more real to believers. Also, whenever the Holy Spirit is at work, He brings a preoccupation with the Scriptures. Those in whom the Holy Spirit is working come to have a deeper under- standing of truth, which allows them to begin to see their error. They have a desire to bring all things into submission to the Word, which is the expression of the will of God. Revival begins as the Holy Spirit works among small groups of believers to bring them to a renewed and heightened vision of God and His will for them and His church.

This work of the Holy Spirit then begins to spread a realization of personal spiritual need among the body of Christ. The Holy Spirit brings exposure and conviction of sin, which is expressed in both private and public confession, repentance and reconciliation. Issues of sin and disunity are dealt with, which restores purity and unity with God and one another. There is a growing determination to live closer to the Lord. The church becomes more sensitive to the Lordship of Jesus Christ. There never has been a spiritual revival which did not begin with an acute sense of sin. Before there can be a spiritual advance, we must be rid of that which has been hindering it.

This new prayer communion with God and deepening desire to do His will revitalizes the church and its ministries. Things that may have been common, like prayer or worship, take on a new and fresh mean- ing to God's people. As believers come to see God and their relation- ship with Him in a new and fuller way, this becomes a powerful moti- vating factor to grow in faith.

Believers become more alive to God and the Holy Spirit's leading. Their prayers and their lives show an interest and concern beyond themselves, especially to the condition of those who do not know God. When revival comes among believers, the church is revitalized. This work of God's Spirit cannot be contained within the church walls. Those revived become quick to publicly confess faith in Christ in word and deed. They live more fully as salt and light in the world.

The Holy Spirit directs and empowers the outward advance of the Gospel to bring an awakening of faith among unbelievers. The expres- sion of authentic revival is the impact that revival makes on the sur- rounding unsaved community.

From analyzing both II Chronicles 7:14 and the revivals in history, we see that revivals come by the sovereign work of God. God initiates revival by working in the lives of believers. He gives believers a deep sense of seeking the Lord for His deeper work within them. Many times this involves a renewed vision of Christ and His church. This brings a new obedience to the Lordship of Jesus Christ and energizes lives and ministry. This is God's part.

We also note that revivals are always related to the obedience of God's people. Our part in seeing revival is to respond to God's initia- tive by fervently pursuing Him in the issues for which He has given us responsibility and will use to bring spiritual change. This is our part.

The Lord has plans and purposes He desires to see accomplished. He desires that His church be the vibrant bride of Christ—a pure and radiant testimony to the world of the kind of God that He is.

We believers must acknowledge that we are without hope of reforming ourselves or healing our land. People and governments are increasingly powerless to govern or to deal with humanity and its prob- lems. Neither is there help from education, science, courts of law, pris- ons, business, or good intentions to bring about positive changes in society. If healing is to come to society it must begin with the church. So who or what is keeping us from revival?

We believers know the only answer to people's manifold problems. Jesus is the only hope. Do we really believe Jesus is the answer? Let us choose to put common things aside and instead concentrate on deeply seeking the Lord for a restoration of spiritual vitality, an authentic Christianity. God has promised He will use such a response of faith to bring change to both us and our societies.

Praying for Revival

Both personally and in groups asking God to:

1. work within us a thirst and deep hunger for communion and intimacy with Himself, and for His visitation upon our land.

2. produce within us a holy discontent with things as they are.

3. give us a new sense of the urgency of the need for a deep and widespread advance of the Gospel in our land.

4. reveal to us new dimensions of His Holiness and understand- ing of His eternal purposes, that the Lord would increasingly manifest His glory and presence among His people.

5. search us and reveal all impediments within us to His using us, that we might be cleansed vessels for His use and stand united in seeking the advance of His plans and purposes.

6. raise up a spirit of prayer among His people, which would be evidenced in a growing lifestyle of prayer and living close to God, and growing passion for intercession for those issues that will advance His kingdom's purposes.

7. give us a new sensitivity to the guidance of the Holy Spirit and a vision for the church as He desires it.

8. give us an eagerness to be used by the Lord and a willing- ness to obey and trust Him more fully.

9. open our eyes to see where He is working so as Elisha's ser- vant, we can recognize His working and exercise greater faith to join Him in it.

10. fill us with the desire and ability to increasingly live faithful, fervent, focused lives.

What a great work God has called us to,

to live and pray in such a way that our world is changed.

We are but ordinary people, but with an extraordinary God.

Defining Prayer

Prayer is a pouring out of the heart and spirit to God, in praise, communion, dependence, or intercession, assisted by the Holy Spirit, in alignment with God and His will, and in faith.

The basic nature of prayer is the sincere opening of the heart to God: "Trust in Him at all times, O people; pour out your heart before Him" (Psalm 62:8). Prayer involves a communion of the heart...not just lip labor, a smooth voice, seeming affection, earnestness, or pretended sanctity. God searches our hearts to see the root of the prayer, whether it is of the flesh or spirit. The Pharisees thought they mastered prayer, because they expressed themselves well and at great length. But their words did not flow from their hearts, but were just outward shows, pre- tense, to impress others (Matthew 6:5-7).

Prayer must come from the heart, a heart in harmony with God. Prayer is not just words to say, but words full of meaning which only ring true if they express an inward reality. The main thing in prayer is not the mouth, but the heart, a heart in line with God and His will.

Aspects of prayer involve praise, communion, dependence and intercession.

The power of prayer is the assistance of the Holy Spirit: "Building yourselves up on your most holy faith, praying in the Holy Spirit" (Jude 20). The Holy Spirit continues the work of Jesus by medi- ating His presence and ministry. The Holy Spirit of God stirs us to prayer, grows us in our understanding of prayer through the Scriptures and guides and empowers our prayer.

The Holy Spirit initiates spiritual life and sustains it. Believers are to live by the Spirit and to walk by the Spirit (Galatians 5:25). The Greek word for walk is stoicheo. It carries the sense of proceeding under another's control. We are to be filled with the Spirit and led by the Spirit, an aspect of which is "praying at all times...in the Spirit" (Ephesians 6:18). Those filled with the Holy Spirit are filled with prayer, because prayer is active dependence upon God.

We are to pray in alignment with God and His will: The Holy Spirit quickens the mind and heart to make use of the Word of God so we can pray according to His will for those things that advance His plans and purposes. The Holy Spirit guides us to pray for that which is valuable in God's eyes. We have received the Spirit sent by God that we might know the things that are freely given to us (I Corinthians 2:12).

"This is the confidence which we have before Him, that, if we ask anything according to His will, He hears us" (I John 5:14-15). Only the Spirit can teach us and guide us to pray in such a way. To pray with spiritual understanding (Colossians 1:9).

Satan will tempt us to pray for things which, if we had them, would prove not to be real blessings and would not bring glory to God. We may ask amiss, pray wrongly (James 4:3). At a particularly difficult time, Christ told His disciples, "Or do you think that I cannot appeal to My Father, and He will at once put at My disposal more than twelve legions of angels? How then will the Scriptures be fulfilled? (Matthew 26:53-54). Christ is showing a sensitivity to pray according to God's will. The Spirit teaches us and guides our prayers according to the purposes of God.

Prayer is to be offered in faith: Let us come boldly to the throne (Hebrews 4:16) in full assurance, not doubting that God hears our prayers and will use our prayers to see His plans and purposes moved forward (Hebrews 11:6). The Scriptures show believers offering prayer in various ways.

1. Personal prayer

"When you pray, go into your inner room, close your door and pray to your Father" (Matthew 6:6).

This speaks of our finding a quiet place where we can give our undivided attention to intimacy and communion with the Lord.

2. Corporate prayer

"These all with one mind were continually devoting themselves to prayer" (Acts 1:14).

The Scriptures show many pictures of God's children uniting together for prayer. As Jesus taught His disciples to pray, He phrased His instruction with words that commend it more to corporate use than personal private use. Of course, as an individual praying alone I can say "Our Father...Give us our daily bread, forgive our debts and lead us not into temptation" The plural personal pronouns, ("our," "us," and "we"), remind me that this prayer lends itself to group prayer, praying as a part of a family of believers. The disciples' prayer is an invitation not only to pray, but also to pray with other believers. There is something contra- dictory about praying with the words "our," "us," and "we" but never experiencing prayer with other believers.

3. A lifestyle of prayer

"Praying at all times" (Ephesians 6:18). "Pray without ceasing" (I Thessalonians 5:17).

We believers are encouraged to "draw near" to the Lord (Hebrews 10:22). The sense of the original Greek is that of encouraging our continuously drawing near to God in prayer. This would involve cultivating a continuing deep dependence and dialogue with God: sharing our hearts with God, expressing gratefulness, seeking God's guidance, pro- tection and listening for His promptings.

4. Occasions when the Holy Spirit prompts or constrains us to stop to pray for a particular matter.

He may give a special sense of burden, perhaps even to fast and pray.

Prayer and the Word of God

The Lord told His disciples: "If you continue in My word, then you are truly disciples of Mine; and you will know the truth, and the truth will make you free" (John 8:31-2). He also said, "I am the truth" (John 14:6). The truth Jesus is speaking about is not merely facts or concepts but a person. God gave the written truth, the Scriptures, so we might relate to Him who is the living truth. As we relate to the Word of God, to the written truth, we are relating to a person, to the Lord Himself.

Vine's Dictionary of New Testament Words defines the Greek word that is translated as truth as meaning: "the veritable essence of a mat- ter." The Holy Spirit uses the Scriptures to move us beyond a surface understanding of a matter, as prayer, so as to discover the reality and essence.

These resources approach prayer from the point of seeking to cap- ture the essence of what the Lord desires us to know and understand about prayer. It is our increasingly knowing, understanding and living in relation to truth that brings the transformation of the heart and our prayer life. These resources are assembled based on the premise that the Word of God is foundational to Biblical prayer. Authentic prayer is built upon solid theological foundations. The mind of the Lord has been revealed to us in the written word of God so that we might more fully understand prayer and pray in accordance with the mind of the Lord.

The Lord has given us much truth on the subject of prayer. Prayer, in its essence, is not a matter of feelings or volume (how much we pray), but how much we and our prayers are in accordance with God and His will. The Scriptures reveal God's will for our lives and our prayers. As we align with this truth and pray according to Scripture, our prayers reflect our aligning with the plans and purposes of God. God desires that prayer be shaped by the Word.

What specifically is the connection between the Word of God and prayer? The Word of God:
1. encourages and inspires us to pray,
2. instructs us and
3. becomes the content of prayer.

James 5:16-18 illustrates three of the ways that the Word of God encourages prayer. "Pray for one another so that you may be healed." The Word encourages prayer by telling us that prayer is something we should be doing. Then the Word goes on to say that, "The effective prayer of a righteous man can accomplish much." The Word encourages prayer by giving us promises that prayer is important. The Word also says, "Elijah was a man with a nature just like ours, and he prayed earnestly that it would not rain, and it did not rain on the earth for three years and six months" (v. 17). The Word gives us accounts of believers whose prayers God used to advance His plans and purposes and change the course of history. The Word encourages prayer by relating stories which inspire and motivate us to prayer.

The Word of God also instructs our prayer and becomes the con- tent of our prayer. The Word instructs our prayer by showing us what to pray. As we pray according to the instruction, the Word also becomes the content of our prayer. The instruction and examples on prayer in God's Word are given to us by the Holy Spirit just as the rest of the truth in Scripture is.

As we pray Scripture, we will be praying prayers inspired by the

Holy Spirit, i.e., praying for those things and asking for those issues that will allow, guide and empower the Gospel to go forward in significant ways.

The Lord is revealing to us the content, the "issues" to be praying about, even giving us the words to be lifting up that will advance God's plans and purposes.

The issue is not so much what we think needs to be prayed about, but rather praying according to God's will. In prayer, as in other areas of the disciple's life, we must practice self-denial to our opinions, desires, and plans so we can align with the Lord's will. There are so many things that can be prayed about. But the place to start is praying according to the instruction the Lord has given. The prayer and requests mentioned in Scripture teach us how to pray.

God has given us an interesting thought in Psalm 106:15 (KJV) "And he gave them their request, but sent leanness into their soul."
God may answer a prayer. He may give us our requests, but send leanness to our souls. It seems we can pray not according to God's will, but according to ourselves, based on our own thoughts and expecta- tions. God may answer these types of prayers, but they do not fulfill His will/purposes for they are fleshly.

Conclusion:

There a close connection between the Word of God and prayer.

The Word of God is the foundation of Biblical prayer. Authentic prayer is built upon solid theological foundations. The Scriptures encourage and stimulate us both to pray and to grow in our prayer life. They instruct us so that we know the mind and will of God and can pray accordingly. The Word also becomes the content of our prayer as we hold up God's words and promises before Him.

Since God has not left us to our own understanding of prayer, we ought to make diligent use of this means of grace, God's Word. Let us be bold to ask, to pray, that the Lord will use His Word to teach us to pray, to grow us in our prayer life. And let us saturate ourselves in the Scriptures so the thoughts and words of God reside in our hearts (Psalms 1, and 19:14). Then, our prayers are shaped and guided by God's revealed will.

Section Two: Foundational Issues of Prayer

“Lord, Teach Us To Pray”

One day the disciples of the Lord came to Him with this request, “Lord, teach us to pray.”

Is it not interesting that Peter, James, John, and Andrew would make such a request? These men were all Jewish and were well-acquainted with both personal and public prayer. Yet, they came to a point of sens- ing a need in the area of prayer. They asked for help. They said, “Lord teach us to pray just as John taught his disciples” (Luke 11:1). It seems, as they were with Jesus and also through their interactions with the dis- ciples of John the Baptist, that they had become increasingly sensitive that prayer was an area of their lives in which they needed to grow. They were thirsty to grow in their understanding of prayer as a vital function.

Jesus answered this request by taking time on many occasions to teach them both to pray and to understand the function of prayer. He also continued to model prayer and the importance of prayer before them. We have no record of Christ teaching His disciples how to preach or do many other things, but He did take time to teach His disciples how to pray.

When the disciples asked the Lord to teach them to pray, He responded, “Pray, then, in this way” (Matthew 6:9-13). The Lord did not give His disciples a formula to be recited; He gave them a model to use. He instructed them on aspects to be considered in our prayers.

The first aspect to consider in prayer concerns our addressing and exalting God.

“Our Father...”

“Father” is a term which presents God to us as a person, not some force, idea or concept. “Father” presents the closeness of our relationship. Those whom God has chosen and adopted as His children may address Him as “Father” It is both an intimate and respectful term of address. God is our loving, heavenly Father because we have been reconciled to Him through His Son Jesus Christ and are His children through faith in Christ (John 1:12, 3:3, Galatians 4:7). The essence of the Gospel is the message of reconciliation and relationship with God through Jesus Christ.

Biblical prayer is offered to the Father, through the merits of His Son, directed and assisted by the Holy Spirit (Romans 8:26-27). We believers have access to boldly approach God (Hebrews 4:16a) for Jesus has opened a way. We ask in His name, acknowledging our unworthi- ness and identifying with the worthiness of Jesus and asking, praying, as He would ask. We seek the Holy Spirit’s assistance so our prayers are according to the mind of the Lord.

“Our Father who art in Heaven.”

The creator of all—who has no equal and who is holy, loving, wise, true, and unchanging—has a personal, caring relationship with those who are His. The One to whom we are praying is both the God of all creation and our Father. We submit ourselves to Him and trust Him because He has adopted us as His own.

In prayer, it is easy to focus on the results we want rather than God and our relationship with Him. God has designed prayer to be rela- tional. We begin by focusing our attention on the kind of God to whom our prayer is offered and our relationship with Him.

After cultivating the presence of God, the next aspect of prayer involves three petitions relating to God. The first involves exalting God’s name. “Hallowed be Thy name”

This speaks of the public reputation and renown of God. The essence of our Father’s character is He is holy. There is no shadow or blemish with Him.

We praise God for who He is. “Holy, holy, holy is the Lord God, the Almighty” (Revelation 4:8). We are to hallow His name. “Let You and Your name not be despised or used in blasphemy, but increasingly be regarded as holy, revered, honored and obeyed for You are due all respect and devotion.”

The second and third petitions relate to God’s concerns. “Thy king- dom come, Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven.” The apostle John taught, “The whole world lies in the power of the evil one” (I John 5:19). Until people are liberated by Jesus Christ and transferred into His kingdom, they remain slaves of Satan. God’s kingdom is not a place but a sphere where His sovereignty is recognized, where there is a positive relationship and allegiance to the Lord (Romans 14:17-18). We are to ask God to extend His kingdom by letting the light of the Gospel shine into the hearts of those blinded by the god of this world (II Corinthians 4:4-6). Also we pray maranatha. “Lord, we look forward to Your second coming, when You will fill the earth with Your glory and all creation will bow in submission to Your royal rule.” We pray, asking for the swift coming of the King of kings.

“Thy will be done...”

“Father, we surrender to Your reign over all parts of our lives. Your will is that your children be holy as you are holy, so we may truly manifest

Your character in this world. Root out all that impedes your perfect will being accomplished in us. Father not as we will, but as You will. Lord, transform us by Your truth and lead us to live as citizens of Your kingdom.

"Father, we pray not just for ourselves but intercede for (evangel- ism) numerical growth of the kingdom, for the founding of new churches where there presently are none, for spiritual growth and unity of the present churches, for Your hand of blessing over present min- istries. You have encouraged us to "Ask of Me, and I will surely give the nations as your inheritance, And the very ends of the earth as your pos- session" (Psalm 2:8). Lord, we claim the promise that the very gates of hades shall not impede the spread of Your kingdom or will."

The third aspect of prayer involves petitions regarding our basic needs.

"Give us this day our daily bread."

The petition concerns the provisions necessary for us to live. Bread is a picture of the basic needs of man and reminds us of the manna God provided to sustain Israel in the wilderness. "Father, we humble our- selves, express our complete dependence upon You for our everyday personal needs from the greatest to the smallest. We choose not to depend on our own talents, abilities, skills, money, but You, O God." This does not diminish the responsibility to work, for even the ability to work comes from God. The essence of this petition is, "God, keep on giving to us each day Your provision for our daily needs. We will be sat- isfied with the provisions You give us."

The fourth aspect of our prayers concerns our need to both receive and give forgiveness.

"And forgive us our trespasses as we forgive others."

We are to recognize our need for purity in approaching our holy God. "Lord, grant us a true revelation of ourselves. Search our hearts and thoughts. Lord, show all the ways we have missed the mark of Your will for our lives" (Psalm 139:23-24). A true knowledge of self comes not from self-searching, but letting the word of God search us (Hebrews 4:12-13).

Then, we acknowledge and confess our sin and thank God that the blood of Jesus Christ cleanses us from all unrighteousness. "If we con- fess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness" (I John 1:9). Lord, thank You that Jesus has dealt with all that separates us from You, our holy God. And Father, we also forgive everyone who has sinned against us." As we come to increasing understanding of the greatness of our offenses against the Lord, the injuries others may have done to us pale by com- parison. Since God has forgiven us, we extend forgiveness to others. We are quick to forgive and will harbor no unforgiveness or bitterness toward anyone. "For if you forgive others (all past and present), your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive others for their transgressions, then your Father will not forgive your trans- gressions" (Matthew 6:14-15).

This Scripture is showing that our relationship with God is bound up with our relationship to others. We are to forgive everyone from our heart (Matthew 18:21-35).

• By forgiving others, we are sure of growing understanding of God's forgiveness. (Luke 7:47) Jesus seems to be saying that the one who does not forgive may be revealing they really do not know God's forgiveness.

• The Scriptures teach that our withholding of forgiveness gives Satan an opening to work (II Corinthians 2:10-11) but forgiveness brings inner healing to our souls."
• "The prayer of the righteous availeth much, is powerful and effective" (James 5:16).

"We ask You Lord, search us, show us where we need to forgive others and give us the ability to forgive. Lord, it is hard to truly forgive and so we seek Your work within us, both to will (desire to forgive) and to have the ability to completely forgive. Lord, remove all the barriers of unforgiveness, that we might be a clean vessel. We know 'the eyes of the Lord move to and fro throughout the earth, that He may strong- ly support those whose heart is completely His'" (II Chronicles 16:9).

A final aspect for prayer concerns protection from the deceiver.

"Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one."

"Lord, we ask for Your divine protection, for ourselves. You have taught us that the evil one stands against us because we are Yours and seek Your will. Lord, we seek Your strengthening us to be alert to all the ways the evil one desires to sift us as Job or Peter. We ask for Your sen- sitivity to his lies and works of deceit, his attempts to keep us in igno- rance of truth and his ability to establish strongholds of deception by which he can subvert Your desire for our lives and discourage us. We make use of the armor You have given us. We pray on the truth which is a hedge of protection from Satan and all his wiles. We also pray that we might not enter temptation" (Luke 22:40).

We accept the encouraging testimony the Lord has given us through Paul. Paul shared that in spite of all his trials and difficulties, "The Lord stood with me and strengthened me and I was rescued out of the lion's mouth. The Lord will rescue me from every evil deed, and will bring me safely to His heavenly kingdom" (II Timothy 4:17-18).

"Amen" is an expression of confidence that God has heard us and will work to bring the answers according to His timing and purposes.

Prayer is foundational to the Christian life. We identify with the dis- ciples and acknowledge that we all have room to grow in our prayer lives.

What can we do to see personal growth in prayer become reality?

An initial step is to make the decision before the Lord that growing in our prayer life is going to be a personal priority in our lives. Then ask for God's enabling in the matter.

"Lord teach us to pray. Show me what the prayer life of a disciple should look like. Teach us to commune more closely with You. Lord, grow us in our understanding of prayer. Lord, what does it mean:

• to watch and pray? (Matthew 26:41, Ephesians 6:18, Colossians 4:2)
• to fast and pray? (Matthew 17:21)
• to pray always? (Luke 18:1, Ephesians 6:18)
• to pray without ceasing? (Colossians 4:2, I Thessalonians 5:7, Acts 12:5, 12)
• to pray in the will of God? (Matthew 26:39)
• to pray in the Spirit? (Romans 8:26-27, Jude 20)
• to ask and seek and knock in prayer? (Matthew 7:7-8)

"Lord, also grow us in understanding of how to pray, what hindrances affect our prayers, how to resist the adversary in prayer, how to deal with our expectations when answers don't seem to come.

"Lord, teach us to pray like Moses, who upheld Joshua and the people of Israel as they stood against the Amalekites in the valley below. Or like Elijah who is held up as an example of an average per- son whose prayer You used to change the course of history. Build us up in our prayer lives for Your glory." "Open my eyes, that I may behold wonderful things out from Your law" (Psalm 119:18). And we claim the promise God has given us. "Call to Me and I will answer you, and I will tell you great and mighty things which you do not know" (Jeremiah 33:3). God will answer our prayer and teach us how to pray as we study the prayers recorded in Scripture.

So we pray. "Lord, teach us to pray. Lord, deepen us in prayer. Lord, we don't have an Elijah, John or Jesus here to teach us, but You are here by Your Word and the Holy Spirit." In giving us the prayer He taught His disciples, the Lord has not just given us words to memorize and recite, but He has disclosed His thoughts and will to us. As we choose to align with and embrace God's thoughts and will, both we and our prayers will increasingly be in harmony with God and His purposes.

We can follow through by appropriating the other teachings and examples of Scripture into our prayers. Prayer does not come naturally. It must be nourished and cultivated if it is to grow and produce fruit.

Just as we would train for an athletic competition or our life's work, so we must build and develop our prayer life. The secret is not just know- ing about prayer, but doing it in a faithful, focused and fervent way.

The Prayers of the Apostle Paul

The apostle Paul's life and ministry are great examples for us. Paul was the greatest missionary, church planter, and theologian who ever lived. He called us to imitate him as he imitated Christ. Paul said, "therefore I exhort you, be imitators of me. For this reason I have sent to you Timothy, who is my beloved and faithful child in the Lord, and he will remind you of my ways which are in Christ, just as I teach everywhere in every church" (I Corinthians 4:16-17).

Paul is more than an example to us because of his life. The Holy Spirit has guided his prayers and superintended their inclusion in the Scriptures. Therefore, Paul's prayers are an authoritative example for us. Through Paul, God is seeking to teach us about prayer. God has plans and purposes He is seeking to see accomplished. Prayer is one of the means that God uses to move His purposes forward. Through Paul, the Lord has given us instruction for how to pray. Paul instructs us regard- ing prayer in two ways. He shared with us some of the prayers he prayed. Paul also taught through his prayer requests. When Paul shared an issue to be prayed about, he gave us valuable instruction. The instructions Paul gave on prayer cover the many facets of ministry. Following are examples from the Scriptures, by the apostle Paul, regard- ing the place and content of prayer in ministry:

Paul believed that prayer was a vital aspect of evangelism. Paul prayed, and he encouraged believers to pray for him in his evangelistic efforts. "Brethren, my heart's desire and my prayer to God for them is for their salvation" (Romans 10:1). The Gospel had so affected Paul that his heart's desire was for the salvation of unbelievers. This passion was evidenced in both his evangelistic and church planting activities. Both Paul's prayers and his ministries flowed out of his passionate desire to see people saved. Paul prayed because he realized that the conversion of unbelievers required more than his efforts. Paul knew God must be at work in their hearts.

Paul also desired to minister in harmony with and dependence on the Holy Spirit. So Paul prayed and encouraged other believers to pray for his evangelistic and church planting efforts.

He solicited prayer for the strategic issues that would allow the Gospel to spread. What did Paul see were strategic issues to be praying for so people would be born again?

Paul requested prayer, "that utterance may be given to me" (Ephesians 6:19). Paul sought prayer for the logos, the very words to speak, the appropriate expressions for sharing the Gospel. Another ver- sion of the same verse says; "Pray also for me, that whenever I open my mouth,

words may be given me" (NIV). Paul sought God's leading as to how the Good News of the Gospel is to be proclaimed.

We see numerous examples of God answering such prayers. When Paul arrived at Philippi to present the Gospel, he apparently found there was no synagogue. He was led to go down by the river where he joined a prayer meeting and in this way he had an opportunity to share the Gospel. The entrance strategy for the Gospel was different when Paul went to Athens. This city was the center of culture and philosophical thought. The beauty and magnificence of the architecture were overwhelming. When Paul arrived in Athens, he began walking around the city. I am sure he was praying, asking God to give him the words to share the Gospel with these unbelievers. God answered that prayer. God gave Paul just the right way to present the Gospel to these unbelievers (Acts 17:16-23).

As Paul walked around the city praying for God to give him the words to say God caused Paul to notice all the statues these Athenians had erected to honor their gods. Among these statues, Paul noted there was even a statue to an unknown god. Later, as Paul spoke to the crowds on Mars Hill, he began his presentation of the Gospel by com- mending the Athenians for being very religious people. He said he was impressed with their interest in religion. Then he drew their attention to the fact that they had even erected a statue to an unknown god. Paul said, "By your own confession, you Athenians admit there is a god who is unknown to you but who is the object of your worship." Paul said, "I am here to tell you about that unknown God. To proclaim the true God to you. God had given Paul a strategic way to present the Gospel to the Athenians. Paul can't be charged with introducing new gods to the Athenians. He is but giving fuller knowledge of a God they acknowledge and have dedicated an altar to.
At Ephesus there was a different strategy. Paul initially spoke in the synagogue, but then was led to start a series of dialoguing/teaching meetings in a rented building. For two years Paul taught daily, reason- ing and discussing the Gospel. As a result of using this strategy, all in Asia heard the word of the Lord.

While the Gospel never changes, Paul did not present the Gospel in exactly the same way everywhere he went. We too need God's strate- gies, the words to share, the appropriate expressions that will advance the Gospel. Today most people think they know about God, Christ and salvation. But the concepts they have been presented and hold are sometimes very distorted. God is viewed as distant, stern and judgmen- tal. Christ is viewed as powerless and hanging on a cross. God's acceptance is not a gift to be received but must somehow be earned. Therefore, let us pray, "Lord, give us the words to say to announce the Good News of the Gospel."

Another strategic issue for which Paul requested prayer was, In the opening of my mouth, to make known with boldness the mystery of the Gospel that...I may speak boldly as I ought to speak" (Ephesians 6:19-20). Paul requested prayer that he might receive strength to boldly make known the Good News of the Gospel in spite of all obstacles. As you look at the adversity and opposition that Paul faced, the question arises, what kept Paul going as a Christian worker? Paul was beaten five times with 39 lashes for preaching the Gospel. Three times he was beat- en with rods. Once he was stoned and wounded so badly he was left for dead. Three times he was shipwrecked, troubled on every side, put in prison (I Corinthians 11:24-27).

What kept Paul from becoming fearful and discouraged? He prayed and encouraged others to pray that God would strengthen him to have a boldness from God to continue proclaiming the Gospel in spite of all threats and obstacles. Paul wrote to Thessalonian believers, that in spite of our suffering and the shameful way we were treated, "We had the boldness in our God to speak the gospel" (I Thessalonians 2:2). The early church prayed for boldness. "Lord in spite of the threats, grant us boldness to speak your Word" (Acts 4:29, paraphrase). Such preaching turned the world upside down (Acts 17:6). A strategic issue to see the Gospel go forward is believers praying for God to give boldness to pro- claim the Gospel.

Another issue that Paul asked believers to pray about is that, "God will open up to us a door for the Word, so that we may speak forth the mystery of Christ" (Colossians 4:3-4). Paul wrote to the believers in Corinth testifying that when he came to Troas to preach Christ's Gospel, ". . . a door was opened unto me of the Lord" (II Corinthians 2:12, KJV).

Paul said and showed that it is important to pray for the Lord to open doors, to remove obstacles in the way of their sharing the Gospel, and to give opportunities to witness and to empower the sharing of the Gospel. The Holy Spirit has included in Scripture examples of God answering prayers to open doors. "A woman named Lydia...and the Lord opened her heart to respond to the things spoken by Paul" (Acts 16:14). The Lord opened the door of the heart of a business woman from Thyatira and so the first European was converted. At the end of his first missionary journey, Paul reported back to his sending church in Antioch. "When they had arrived and gathered the church together, they began to report all things that God had done with them and how He had opened a door of faith to the Gentiles" (Acts 14:27). The focus was not on all the problems and adversity, or great sermons preached, but what God had done. He had opened the door so Gentiles were now becoming saved, part of the church. Later Luke wrote about the mission work in Ephesus, and he concluded by saying that. "All who lived in Asia heard the word of the Lord" (Acts 19:10). How did such a wide- spread sharing of the Gospel in an entire region happen? Paul wrote from Ephesus saying, "I will remain in Ephesus until Pentecost for a wide door has opened" (I Corinthians 16:8-9). Again, God had answered prayers for open doors so the Gospel could move forward. In all these references to God opening doors, the Holy Spirit is high- lighting the importance of asking Him to go before us and open the doors.

In the context of encouraging prayer Jesus said believers were to "Ask, seek, knock and it (the door) will be opened to you" (Matthew 7:7-8). The Lord was teaching us the importance of our prayer, that we are to pray and He will open the doors for the Gospel to spread. Jesus has the keys (Revelation 3:7-8). He opens the doors that no man can open.

Paul prayed, and he encouraged believers to pray for open doors. He knew the importance of seeking God's going before him to open doors and remove obstacles that impede the Gospel, for God's enablement.

Paul asked for prayer that he would "make it (the Gospel) clear... as I ought" (Colossians 4:4). He was seeking God's empowering so he can

clearly proclaim the Gospel.

Conclusion:

Paul believed that prayer was a vital aspect of evangelism and church planting. He knew there were strategic issues to be prayed about. He prayed and asked others to pray that God would go before him and open doors that the Gospel might advance, that God would even give the very words to share, that God would give boldness and empower the very sharing of the Gospel.

Paul believed that prayer was a vital aspect of confirming new believers and churches and their leadership. Paul rejoiced in see- ing people become born again, but he knew they then needed to be incorporated into local bodies of believers. Paul told us that he and his fellow workers returned to the places where they had worked evange- listically, "strengthening the souls of the disciples, encouraging them to continue in the faith" (Acts 14:22). Paul returned to these new believers to confirm their hearts and to encourage them to grow in faith. "And when they had appointed elders for them in every church having prayed with fasting" (Acts 14:23). Paul prayed with fasting. Fasting involves time. Paul took time to fast and pray with these new converts and to pray over the leadership God was raising up for these new churches. In praying with them, Paul was not only upholding them before God but also teaching by modeling the importance of prayer.

Paul believed that prayer was a vital way he could shepherd believers even when physically he could not be present with them. Paul wrote to the Thessalonian believers telling them, "We give thanks to God always for all of you, making mention of you in our prayers" (I Thessalonians 1:2). Paul wrote to his young disciple and coworker Timothy: "I constantly remember you in my prayers, night and day" (II Timothy 1:3). Paul wrote to the Colossian believers, "though I am absent in the body, nevertheless I am with you in spirit" (Colossians 2:5). There is no evidence that Paul was ever at Colossae. He did not plant this church and probably had never met these believers. But they lived so vividly in Paul's prayers that it was as if he were right there with them. He characterized this close bond he felt toward them as if his spirit was there with them.

To the Roman church, Paul wrote, "For God...is my witness as to how unceasingly I make mention of you always in my prayers" (Romans 1:9). Paul had not yet been to Rome or met the Christians there, but he called God as his witness that he constantly remembered them in his prayers. Paul knew prayer was a vital way by which he could minister and stand with these believers, even though he had not yet met them. Prayer was an integral part of Paul's ministry. He was committed to more than an occasional prayer. Paul's prayers involved a prevailing, earnest intercession for other believers.

Paul believed that prayer was vital to effectively minister God's Word. He taught us how to minister the Word of God in his Ephesian epistle. By outlining the first three chapters of Ephesians, we can see the following. In the first half of chapter one (1:3-14), Paul shared with these believers foundational spiritual truth they need to know and believe. Basically Paul shared about the spiritual blessing of being in Christ.

In the second half of chapter one (1:15-23), Paul shared with these believers how he is praying for them. This was a prayer of both thanks-giving and intercession for God's enabling of them. Paul prays about these truths he had shared with them:

• that these Ephesians, both individually and corporately, would have their spiritual eyes opened to realize these spiritual blessings,
• that the Holy Spirit would illuminate their knowing and under- standing about God and these truths as the Spirit intends,
• that they might know the hope of His calling, the riches of the glory of His inheritance, and greatness of His power towards us who believe.

In chapter two and part of chapter three (2:1-3:12), Paul shared more spiritual truth, expanding on the subject of redemption. Paul showed that salvation involves transference by God from one dominion of power and authority to a superior dominion of power and authority. He spoke of the reconciliation of not only our relationship with God, but each other. A whole new entity, the church, had been created--a new entity made up of Jews and Gentiles. Then there is a short digres- sion to give his apostolic credentials.

In the last half of chapter three (3:14-19), Paul again prayed for those he was seeking to build up in truth. He was especially interested that these believers grasp the extent of God's love and grace. So Paul requested:

• that they experience the strengthening of the Holy Spirit in their inner man,
• that these truths would not just be received in their thoughts, but be received and affect these believers in their inner being,
• that as a continuing experience, Christ would dwell in their hearts and they would be progressively filled with all the fullness of God.

Paul realized that spiritual truth can be in the mind without being in the heart. Doctrine can be understood with the mind without it ever piercing the heart/soul so as to change us in our innermost being. Paul's method in sharing Biblical truth was to teach the spiritual truths believ- ers must know in their mind and also to pray for God to illuminate these truths to their hearts. I Corinthians 2:10-11 teaches that the illumination of the Scriptures is distinctly the work of the Holy Spirit. He is the one who uses truth to change our hearts so Christ-like character is developed.

Paul believed that prayer was vital in spiritual warfare. Paul knew that the Lord had given him the commission, "to open their eyes (the unbelievers) so that they may turn from darkness to light, and from the dominion of Satan to God, that they may receive forgiveness" (Acts 26:18). Paul knew that by proclaiming the Gospel he was involved in spiritual warfare. He knew that in his life and ministry he wrestled not just against flesh and blood, but with a real, cunning, powerful and active spiritual adversary, Satan (Ephesians 6:12). Paul experienced this opposition. He wrote to the Thessalonians, acknowledging that "Satan hindered" him from coming to them (I Thessalonians 2:18).

Paul warned the Ephesian believers of the spiritual battle they were involved in (Ephesians 6:10-20). He told them to put on the whole armor of God and to stand against the devil's schemes. Paul was instructing us to avail ourselves of divine resources/strengthening for the purpose of successfully resisting the influences and attacks of the evil one. Our preparedness and ability to stand our ground involves knowing, believing,

using the Word as a sword, and speaking/praying God's truth. Paul knew he was to be active in this spiritual warfare, not to ignore the devil but to resist him.

Paul knew that the preaching of the Gospel is the most aggressive manner of moving against the realm of the evil one and his hosts. Paul saw the importance of seeking out other believers to stand with him and his ministry team in prayer. He said, "Brethren, pray for us that we will be rescued from perverse and evil men" (II Thessalonians 3:1-2). We suffer at the hands of men, but our true battle is not against flesh and blood. It is with the one who inspires and directs them in their opposi- tion to the Gospel. When Peter was being severely tested by Satan, Jesus assured him of His prayers. We can defend and strengthen each other through our prayers. Paul was in Rome when he wrote these instructions on spiritual warfare to the Ephesians. In the same context, Paul encouraged them to pray specific prayers as he sought to make the Gospel known in places of opposition and hostility. Paul did not ask believers to pray against the demonic principalities over either Ephesus or Rome, but rather that God would open doors, remove the obstacles in the way of the Gospel going forward, give the words to share and empower the sharing.

As we think of the apostle Paul, the picture that comes to our minds is that he was a man of much action. Paul was an energetic evan- gelist, church planter, teacher, theologian, discipler, going so many places and accomplishing so much. Yet, it is easy to miss the place of prayer in Paul's life, that Paul was such a man of prayer.

Paul was the greatest missionary who ever lived, the greatest the- ologian of the church, and the greatest church planter. What Christian ever left such a trail of blessings as Paul? Paul filled his writings with the importance of prayer. Prayer was not something Paul just talked about. Prayer was an evident priority in his life and ministry. Paul made it clear he could never have accomplished what he did had prayer had not been a priority in his life and ministry. Paul understood that God has ordained prayer as a means of seeing His purposes accomplished. In a very real way, God has linked Himself and His working in the world to our prayers. Because Paul believed; he aligned his life and ministry with prayer.

From searching out in Scripture the prayers and prayer requests of Paul we can learn:

• That prayer was a vital aspect of his ministry, Paul modeled a lifestyle of prayerful dependence upon the Lord.
• The Holy Spirit would have us pray for things that will allow, guide and empower the Gospel to go forward.
• The strategy Paul used to mobilized prayer in support of himself and his ministry of evangelism and church planting.

1. Paul spoke much of the importance of prayer in his life and ministry. Paul shared verbally, in a continuing way, the importance of prayer as a foundational aspect of the Christian life and ministry.

2. We see in his ministry the demonstration that prayer was a founda- tional way that he ministered, moved the Gospel forward. His writings are filled with references to the place of prayer in both his life and min- istry. Paul did not just talk and write about the importance of prayer. He demonstrated prayer was not theoretical but a practical and founda- tional issue. Paul personally prayed much for the work and upheld the believers in continuing prayer. He gathered with believers so they could pray together.

3. Paul made it a priority to solicit and encourage the prayer support of all believers. Paul was bold to call believers to prayer. "I urge you brethren,...to strive together with me in your prayers to God for me" (Romans 15:30). Paul gathering with believers so they could pray together. He saw the importance of mobilizing the laity. Paul encour- aged believers in their prayer life, and he asked for their prayer support. He conveyed the clear thought to believers that in their prayers they were doing something important. They were co-ministering with him and his ministry team. Paul's focus was on encouraging the function of prayer, not organizational issues.

As Christians, we believe prayer is a foundational issue of the Christian life and of ministry. It is foundational because it is a vital means God has given for advancing His purposes. Prayer is a way we co-labor with God to see His kingdom expand on earth. Since prayer is vital, we must seek to appropriate everything God has given us in prayer.

This involves:

• Our active commitment to see continued growth in our own per- sonal prayer lives. We should ask the Lord to teach us to pray and help us grow us in our prayer life.
• Our searching the Word to understand prayer. The Holy Spirit will make use of the Word to teach and grow us in our prayer life.
• Our encouraging others in their prayers and enlisting their prayer support for the issues that will see the Gospel go forward.

The early church was a praying church, a fasting and praying church. The leaders of the early church were men of prayer, and God used them to turn the world upside down (Acts 17:6). Let us cultivate the truth that prayer is a vital means by which God's plans and purposes are accom- plished, in spite of great obstacles.

Personal Intimacy and Holiness

The Scriptures teach a foundational truth about prayer. God uses our prayers as a means of accomplishing His purposes in us and through us. Prayer is not some inherent power God has given us. The power does not reside in us. Prayer is not some kind of magic wand. Rather, prayer is a relationship between God and people. God has linked Himself and His working to us and our prayers.

Among the Scriptures that show this is James 5:16 which says, "The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much" (KJV). The first

phrase in that Scripture, “The effectual fervent prayer,” concerns the characteristic and content of our prayers. The second phrase, “of a right- eous man availeth much,” concerns us. God has expectations regarding the lives of those who pray.

In God’s eyes there is no separation between us and our prayers. Both are required foundations for the prayer that God will use to accom- plish His purposes. God said He will not hear the prayer of the unright- eous (Isaiah 59:2, Ezekiel 8:18). Although they pray, He said He would not hear them. In contrast, “The eyes of the Lord run to and fro throughout the whole earth, to show Himself strong in the behalf of them whose heart is perfect toward Him” (2 Chronicles 16:9, KJV). God wants to show Himself mighty in behalf of those whose hearts are right toward Him, those who have a whole-hearted devotion to the Lord. The foundation of intercession is a personal lifestyle of righteousness which is revealed in both growing faithfulness and intimacy with God.

The Lord said, “If you abide in Me, and My words abide in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done unto you” (John 15:7). The Lord was teaching that abiding is the foundation to prayers that God answers. In the same context (John 15:4-11), the Lord presented an illustration of the closeness of the relationship He desired between Himself and believers. He pictured Himself as the vine and believers as branches. Jesus used the word, “abiding,” to describe this intimate living relation- ship He has called us to live in.

Abiding is a word that pictures a lifestyle of living close to God and drawing on His spiritual resources so as to live a fruitful life. It is God’s will that believers live in such a close relationship with Him.

At salvation God brings us into a relationship with Himself. He engrafts us into the vine. Then comes the abiding--our living in an increasingly close and intimate relationship with God and depending on Him. As with all relationships, our relationship with the Lord requires nurturing for it to grow and deepen. Practically, how are we to abide and to grow in our relationship/intimacy with God, so we are increas- ingly living a holy, righteous life?

The Scriptures are the revelation of God. God’s will is that we use the written Word of God to more closely follow the Living Word, Jesus. As we relate to the Scriptures, the following strategy may help focus on the cru- cial issues involved in abiding and growing in intimacy with the Lord.
Cultivating Developing Divine Affections is a foundational issue in abiding and growing in our relationship and intimacy with the Lord. The Holy Spirit encourages us to draw near to God with a sincere heart (Hebrews 10:22). Christ said the same thing in another way. He said to “love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind. This is the great and foremost commandment” (Matthew 22:37). God’s will for us is that loving God be the focal point of our lives, that the active and continuing inclination of our hearts is to be toward Him and His truth. The Scriptures teach that none of us is born with an inclination toward God or the things of God. Our natural affections are the opposite. For us to have godly affections requires a change of heart and necessitates our cultivating and developing holy affections in contrast to having worldly affections and loving the world (Colossians 3:1-2).

Affections concern what we are really alive to. Picture yourself as a satellite dish. Is your focus of life characterized as focusing on God or the world? Or, is there a focus on some of each? The worldly affections of the rich young ruler kept him from following the Lord. The Lord demands positive devotion (Luke 18:22).

Can we really say with David, “There is none upon earth that I desire beside thee” (Psalm 73:25, KJV)? For David there was no other person or thing that he desired besides the Lord and His close presence.

The developing of holy affections is the integration of the Lord and His revealed will into my whole life. “In all your ways acknowledge Him” (Proverbs 3:6). This involves the replacement of our natural affec- tions. First Peter 1:15 speaks of our being holy in all manner of life and guarding against influences of the world creeping into our lives.

But is the capability of developing such holiness and divine affec- tions beyond our grasp? Can we escape our natural affections for the things of the world and the flesh and develop holy affections? We may tend to put such holy people on a pedestal and think that they are dif- ferent and that striving after such a lifestyle is not realistic for the aver- age person. God’s Word disarms this kind of thinking, for it clearly teaches that the developing of divine affections is God’s will for all His children.

The developing of holy affections is impossible without God’s assis- tance. Jesus said, “Apart from me you can do nothing” (John 15:5). Philippians 2:13 instructs us that it is God who works within us to give us both the desire and ability to develop holy affections. To see our affections changed, let us ask God to do this work of changing the affec- tions of our hearts. “You do not have because you do not ask” (James 4:2). We ask God to do for us what would otherwise be impossible. Let us also cooperate with God by cultivating a love for both the truth and truth-giver.

The Word is the revelation of both God and His will. God accom- plishes a work of transforming grace within us as we cooperate with Him by feeding our hearts and filling our thoughts with spiritual truth. Spending time in God’s Word and meditating on God and what He val- ues is the way of cultivating a love for God and the things that He loves, such as truth, love and wisdom.

In the developing of holy affections in the heart, there is the need for a dual process. It is a process of identifying and purging the unholy and cultivating the holy. In seeking to deal with sin, it is not enough to try to combat sin by trying to say no to temptation and sin. God’s will is not that we merely seek to suppress sin but that we see a vital part of getting victory over sin is our cultivating of holy affections. We root out the rocks and weeds that impede the relationship and nurture that which will lead to growth and fruitfulness. The natural man does not hate sin; he only hates the mess and inconvenience that results from it. When God asks for us to love Him with all our hearts, He is not speak- ing of sinless perfection. Rather, He is speaking of the active inclination of our hearts. Are we aiming at a whole-hearted devotion, a lifestyle of living close to

God? This process of developing holy affections is the work of God, but we have also have a part—to cooperate by using the means of grace God has provided. Cultivating divine affections, which is loving and valuing what God loves, is process. Psalm 1:1-3 shows the process of receiving blessing and the result for those who work the process. Blessed is the person who delights in the revelation of God's truth, whose active inclination of the heart is toward God. This person is shunning the counsel and values of the world and positively delight- ing—valuing God and the things God values. As God becomes more fully our focus and is enthroned in our affections, He and His will are integrated into every aspect of our lives. As we positively delight in the Lord, we will gain a distaste for sin because of a superior satisfaction or blessedness in God. We will find ourselves increasingly seeing the world and others as God sees them, which will deeply affect both us and our prayers.

Cultivate living close to God is another foundation of abiding and growing in our relationship and intimacy with the Lord. David expressed it this way, "One thing I have asked from the Lord, that I shall seek: that I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life" (Psalm 27:4). David's affections focused on God. David's greatest desire was to be living in the presence of God; he desired a lifestyle of living in communion with God. Paul spoke this way of his affections: "I count all things to be loss in view of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord" (Philippians 3:8).

The focus of Paul's life was to grow in knowing God, which requires living near to God, so as to develop intimacy. Believers are encouraged to "draw near" to God (Hebrews 10:22). The sense is of us keeping on, continuously drawing near to God.

The issue of abiding, of more fully living in the Lord,s presence, of continually drawing near to the Lord, involves our developing a lifestyle of communion/intimacy with God. Prayer is a particular way to cultivate living close to God. The Scriptures speak of "praying without ceasing" (1 Thessalonians 5:17) and "praying at all times" or on all occasions (Ephesians 6:18). Paul's encouragement was for us to continuously keep on coming to God in prayer, to be praying about everything. Paul was an active and busy person. How could he be praying always, praying without ceasing? I think what Paul had in mind was the offering of spontaneous short prayers of dependency and cooperation. Praying without ceasing pictures a lifestyle of prayer communion with God. For many, our prayer lives are characterized as a time of prayer in the morn- ing, again in the evening, before meals and perhaps on occasion when all else fails. This is not a scriptural picture of prayer. We are to nurture a lifestyle of prayer and communion with the Lord. We are to pray not just at set times, or when we are in the mood, or when our backs are against the wall. We are to develop the habit of praying always, a con- tinuing communion with the Lord.

Let us cultivate "praying without ceasing." Examples of sponta- neous, short prayers of dependency and cooperation are: "Lord show me what to do" and "Lord give me wisdom and discernment; strength- en me to love, to be gentle, to be a blessing to others." Prayer for oth- ers is a practical way of demonstrating love toward others and, there- fore, carrying out the second great commandment (Matthew 22:36).

Developing a lifestyle of prayer is a way of cultivating a lifestyle of living close to God and increasing dependence on Him. Doing this will not only affect our communion and abiding, but also keep us spiritual- ly alert. As we watch and pray, we are spiritually alert to the guidance of the Holy Spirit and the attacks of Satan (Matthew 26:41, Mark 14:38, Ephesians 6:18). Prayer is a key way we are alert to attacks of the evil one and stand against them. James 4:6 teaches that our real protection from sin and Satan involves using the truth of God and active submis- sion to God.
Also, we should not overlook opportunities for times of deep prayer communion with God and His Word. We should be sensitive in our daily schedules for opportunities to spend extra/special time alone with God and His Word—times when we can be wholly taken up with the Lord. "Be still, and know that I am God" (Psalm 46:10, KJV). Daniel was a busy government administrator, but he set aside three times of prayer daily (Daniel 6:10). Intimacy takes time. Nurturing intimacy necessitates our scheduling special times to be alone with God.

An aspect of abiding and growing intimacy with God is cultivating a conscious reliance upon His presence and His leading. Regarding cul- tivating His presence, it may be helpful to focus on the Lord as a per- son—on His throne in heaven at the right hand of the Father. Remember Stephen, "being full of the Holy Spirit, he gazed intently into heaven and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God" (Acts 7:55). What a difference Stephen's focus made in the dis- couraging and threatening circumstances. He was strengthened in his faith as he remained occupied and focused on the presence of the Lord. He died praying, communing with the Lord and seeking blessings for others.

Regarding cultivating God's active leading, remember Jesus minis- tered as the Father showed Him (John 5:19-20, John 17). The Father loves us as much as He loves the Son, so we can expect the Father to show us what He wants us to do. This moves us beyond ourselves and our plans, so that we become more sensitive to God and His leading in ministry. In the case of prayer, God leads us in how to pray and bless others and what to trust Him for. An aspect of abiding is our cultivating not only His presence but also His leading. We are cultivating the truth that the Lord will guide and energize us for all He desires us to do (Philippians 2:13).

Cultivating a lifestyle of continuing communion with God and reliance upon Him is an aspect of growing intimacy which is the foun- dation of intercessory prayer. "In all thy ways acknowledge Him, and he shall direct thy paths" (Proverbs 3:6, KJV).

Cultivating spiritual disciplines is an aspect of abiding and growing intimacy. We note spiritual disciplines modeled as an integral part of the lives of godly men and women. Cultivating spiritual disciplines involves our conscious choices to feed our spirit and deny our flesh and its dic- tates. Spiritual disciplines are the practical means God uses to feed the spirit and begin to deal with the flesh, which is our self-will. Jesus had much to say about self-denial, not as an end in itself but in order to fol- low Jesus. Denying self must occur in order for the Lord to become increasingly the center of our lives (Matthew 16:24).

Since the world, the flesh and the devil seek to impede our rela- tionship and intimacy with the Lord, it is important that we cultivate growing in spiritual disciplines. An example of such a discipline are retreats of silence. Jesus modeled a balanced life—times of intense min- istry and periods of relaxation and even solitude. The Lord instructed us, "Be still, and know that I am God" (Psalm 46:10, KJV). The heroes of the faith were people who understood the importance of times of solitude. Sometimes, others can be a hindrance to the kind of person- alized experiences

we need to learn the deep spiritual truths of God. The still small voice of God is so easily drowned out in the busyness of daily life. We all need times of solitude away from distractions so we can spend time in contemplation of God and spiritual truth to give per- spective and direction to our lives and ministries.

Other disciplines modeled in Scripture by those who were intimate with the Lord are: fasting and fasting coupled with prayer (see"The Place of Fasting"), deep study and memorization of Scripture, meditation and tithing. Cultivating spiritual disciplines is a vital part of abiding and growing in intimacy with the Lord.

Conclusion:

Our preparation for prayer and the ministry of intercession involves our cultivation of a growing lifestyle of holiness and intimacy with God. Cultivating is an active, not passive, pursuit. Building a lifestyle of com- munion and intimacy with God can be likened to training for an athletic competition. It takes more than desire. It requires choice, time and effort to build a lifestyle of living close to God. God has linked Himself and His working to us and our prayers. We are co-labors with Christ, which implies a closeness of relationship, with the same goals, priori- ties, ways of working, and commitment to seeing same tasks accom- plished. Again, prayer is not magic. Prayer is not an inherent power to possess. Prayer is relational. First and foremost, prayer involves our rela- tionship with the Lord.

The foundation of intercession is growing intimacy with God. The intimacy develops as there is a cultivating of divine affections, living close to God and spiritual disciplines. Many of God's choicest servants were not the most brilliant or most educated, but intimacy with God and prayer were priorities in their lives. Their choices to nurture their rela- tionship with God released the Holy Spirit to fill them and work in them and through them. The Christian life is initiated by faith, and the rela- tionship grows and develops by faith. "Pray unto me, and I will heark- en unto you. And ye shall seek me, and find me, when ye shall search for me with all your heart" (Jeremiah 29:12-13, KJV).

How will we respond to God's call:

to grow in intimacy with Him?
to live lives of experiencing Him and the fullness of His intentions?
to live and pray in such a way that our world is changed?

Portraits of Intercessors

What characterizes intercessory prayer? What characterizes prayer intercessors?

Throughout Scripture God has highlighted a foundational truth regard- ing prayer. The truth is that our prayer is a means God uses to see His plans and purposes accomplished. God has chosen to link Himself and His working in the world to us and our prayers. The Scriptures show many examples of the prayers of believers which God has used to change the course of history. These examples encourage us to the importance of intercessory prayer and also instruct us.

So, from the Scriptures, let us build an understanding of both the function of intercession and the intercessor themselves. While we may separate these two for our analysis, we need both to build a full portrait of the intercessor.

The Scriptures makes particular references to the function of intercessors. Although the references to intercession in the Scripture are not extensive, God has given us pictures of both intercessors and their function. God spoke this way about intercessors. "I searched for a man among them who would build up the wall and stand in the gap before Me for the land,...but I found no one (Ezekiel 22:30). "On your walk, O Jerusalem, I have appointed watchmen; All day and all night they will never keep silent. You who remind the Lord, take no rest for yourselves; And give Him no rest until He establishes And makes

Jerusalem a praise in the earth" (Isaiah 62:6-7). These verses show that God intends to make Jerusalem a praise in all the earth. How does God move this purpose forward? He was looking for individuals, for those watchmen who were willing not to just watch in silence but to be full of faith and actively praying both day and night until God's plans and purposes were accomplished.

The Scriptures give us examples of intercessors. A picture of an intercessor is the patriarch Abraham interceding for both Lot and the people of Sodom (Genesis 18:16-33). Moses praying to see the nation of Israel delivered from their enemies is another picture of an interces- sor. The explanation given for the victory obtained in the valley by God's people was the intercessory prayers Moses offered up on the mountain (Exodus 17:8-12).

The New Testament shows examples as Simeon and Anna, "serv- ing night and day with fasting and prayers" (Luke 2:37). These two seem to be part of a group who were interceding for Messiah's coming. In the early church we find those as Epaphras, who Paul describes as "always laboring earnestly for you in his prayers for I testify...that he has a deep concern for you and for those who are in Laodicea and Hierapolis" (Colossians 4:12-13). He had great zeal in prayer. These are but a few of pictures God has given us of intercessors. These are men and women that God has used to see His plans and purposes accomplished.

Elijah is a particular example that helps us to paint a portrait of both intercession and an intercessor. The context is I Kings 17:1 through 19:3. This passage relates Elijah's ministry of intercession which God used to advance His purposes. This Old Testament example is cited by James in the context of giving instruction on prayer. "The effective prayer of a righteous man can accomplish much. Elijah was a man with a nature like

ours, and he prayed earnestly" (James 5:16-17). God used his prayers to change the course of history. Since Elijah is held up as an example of an intercessor, let's take a closer look at what Scripture has to say about both this man and his prayers.
"The effective prayer of a righteous man can accomplish much" (James 5:16-17).

"The effective prayer." These words speak of the actual prayer. In the Greek the word for the adjective used here is energeo. It gives the idea of prayers that are effected, guided, inspired and empowered by the Holy Spirit. The characteristic and content of such prayer is in con- formity to the mind of the Spirit.

"of a righteous man." This concerns the one who prays. Righteousness speaks of a relationship. This concerns personal faithful- ness in the relationship with the Lord. It does not picture sinless per- fection but rather one who has an undivided heart. The type of person whose prayer is powerful is a normal human being living in a vital, growing relationship with God in spite of living in the midst of many difficulties. Prayer is not a religious thing to do or a power to possess, but a very relational issue. The authority in prayer is based on a func- tional oneness with the Lord.
"can accomplish much." This speaks of the effect of such prayer by such a person. Such a person and such prayer are powerful. When Christ spoke that "the gates of hades will not prevail against" the advance of the church, He used the same word but with a negative pre- fix. In other words the gates of hades are powerless to stop the forward progress of the church.

"Elijah was a man with a nature like ours, and he prayed earnestly that it would not rain, and it did not rain on the earth for three years and six months. Then he prayed again, and the sky poured rain" (James 5:17-18). How did just an average man as Elijah dare to pray such prayers? And how did he dare to stand against and think he could actu- ally defeat a powerful government and religious system born up by occult powers? The Scriptures tell us. Listen to his prayer. Lord God of Abraham, Isaac, and Israel, let it be known this day that thou art God in Israel, and that I am Thy servant and that I have done all these things at Thy word (I Kings 18:36).

Elijah's prayer shows the same two inter-related thoughts that are presented in James 5:16. Elijah was a man living in right relationship with God. He was truly a servant of the Lord. First, this speaks not of perfection but a commitment to a lifestyle of living in close functional relationship with the Lord. He lived a focused life which involved mak- ing the hard choices involved in living close to the Lord. Second, Elijah was both acting and praying according to God's Word. Elijah's bold prayers were not of himself, but rooted in God's Word. The authority of his prayer came from both his life as a righteous man and his praying according to God's will. It is not how much we pray but how much we and our prayers are in accord with God and His will. In God's eyes there is no separation between us and our prayers. Both are required foundations for the prayer God will use to advance His purposes. This brings us to focus on the two foundations of intercession.

First, "How can we learn to pray effectual, fervent prayers?" How can my prayer be more inspired and guided according to the will of God? How can I pray more in conformity to the mind of the Spirit? We acknowledge our need to grow in our prayer life. We diligently pray, "Lord, teach us to pray." We also commit ourselves to pay particular attention to the instruction the Scriptures have given on prayer. The Holy Spirit has superintended the inclusion of many references on prayer into Scripture.

These include both instruction on prayer and examples of prayers that God used to advance His purposes. As we pray according to the Scripture's instruction, we will be praying in harmony with the will of God. We ask God to teach us, grow us in our prayer lives. We also make it a priority to allow God to teach us from His Word. We are full of faith that the Scriptures will accomplish their intention and grow us in our prayer lives.

Second, "How can I grow in my relationship/intimacy with God, so I am increasingly living a holy, righteous life? We are told that "Elijah was a man with a nature like ours." Elijah was a normal human being. He was a man of flesh and blood like you and me. He experienced life's hardships, problems, and temptations. He was prone to the same weak- nesses as we are, for he had a physical body that became tired and hungry and his mind at times became weary of life and discouraged. Elijah was not considered successful by the world's standards. He was not a leader and did not belong to a group/ministry. Elijah had no wife, family, or kindred spirits to encourage him. Sometimes the problems of his life and ministry got him down. Once he became so discouraged that he just wanted to lie down and die. But Elijah is held up to us as an example to be remembered for his powerful prayers. Elijah was an ordinary person with a relationship with an extra-ordinary God. This relationship came as he cultivated a lifestyle of living close to the Lord. Once again, the place to start is by asking, praying for God to work this reality in us and to give us both the desire and ability to do His good pleasure (Philippians 2:13). Also we commit ourselves to a lifestyle char- acterized by increasingly living close to God.
"For the eyes of the Lord move to and fro throughout the earth, that He may strongly support those whose heart is completely His" (II Chronicles 16:9, I Peter 3:12). In all the great advances of God's work, we see intercessors, those praying individually and in groups, some- times for months, sometimes for years, to prepare the way of the Lord. They not only ask in prayer, but also intensely seek and knock. Intercessors have a lifestyle of hungering and thirsting for communion and intimacy with God. They have a holy determination to seek God and be rid of anything that hinders their relationship and usefulness to God (Psalm 24:4-5). They are willing to go without food, sleep, com- forts, good company. They have a deep desire to understand God's will and to be used of God to see His purposes accomplished and especially to bless others.

God has given us many portraits of men and women of prayer that He has used in vital ways to advance His purposes. Many were not the most brilliant or most educated, but we see that prayer was a priority in their lives. In all these examples, we see that great obstacles before God's people have spurred them to pray, to make use of God's divine resources.

In these latter days, God is still looking for those who will stand in the gap on behalf of the land and people to prepare the way of the Lord. The Lord desires to use us and our prayer in vital ways that advance His purposes. Will we more intently devote ourselves to seek- ing to become men and women who are growing in our relationship with the Lord and praying prayers inspired and guided according to God's will?

Hindrances to Prayer

The Lord has opened the way for all believers to come boldly in prayer before His throne of grace (Hebrews 4:16). This access to the Lord in prayer is both a privilege and a responsibility. The Scriptures speak of believers praying and God not hearing their prayers. God has told us that at times "He does not hear our prayers" (Isaiah 59:1-2). Another time the Lord said, "though they cry (pray), yet I will not listen to them" (Ezekiel 8:18). "And even though they pray, they will not be answered" (Proverbs 21:13). God also gives us explanations as to why He does not hear particular prayers. It is not that God cannot hear our prayers but rather that He is not willing to.

We have established previously a foundational truth the Scriptures show about prayer: that God has chosen to link Himself and His work- ing to us believers and to our prayers. As God's people, we and our prayers are the key to His working. Therefore, there is the need for us to be sensitive to things that would in any way hinder God's hearing and answering our prayer. So what are the things God says stand in the way of His hearing and answering our prayer?

There are three main areas:

1. Issues of Personal Sin

"Behold the Lord's hand is not so short that it cannot save; nor is His ear so dull that it cannot hear. But your iniquities have made a separa- tion between you and your God, And your sins have hidden His face from you so that He does not hear" (Isaiah 59:1-2).

God showed David the truth that "if I regard wickedness in my heart, The Lord will not hear" (Psalm 66:18). The word "wickedness" speaks of self will, rebellion against God which is sin. Let's understand clearly what sin is. Sin is "missing the mark." It is anything in my life that is not pleasing to God or in harmony with His will. We sin, miss the mark, in either of two basic ways. When God says, "Thou shalt not...." and we go ahead and do it anyway, we sin by actively going against the clear prohibitions of God. These are sins of commission.

There is another way that we sin. We sin when we do not do those things God has revealed are His will for us to do. "Therefore, to one who knows the right thing to do and does not do it, to him it is sin" (James 4:17). God's intention for us is more than just refraining from evil; i.e., not killing, lying or cheating, etc. The great commandment involves loving God with all our hearts, having a heart seeking after God and the things God values and loves. God's will for His children is not only their forsaking all sin or even any questionable habits or activ- ities, but their cultivating becoming positively holy, set apart unto the Lord. "Be holy yourselves also in all your behavior" (I Peter 1:15). There is the need to be increasingly sensitive to any place where we fall short of God's standards, where we are not positively submitted to and pleas- ing God, for these are sins of omission.

The word "regard" speaks of allowing and even enjoying sin (Psalm 66:18). These are areas of our lives that are not yielded to God. God is clearly stating that undealt with sin or continuing rebellion in our personal life will affect God's hearing and answering my prayers.

God presents this issue of God's hearing and answering our prayer from another perspective. The Lord said, "If you love me, you will keep my commandments" (John 14:15). The Lord is saying to us if you love me, express your love by accepting and following my directions. Then the Scripture teaches that, "We have confidence before God, and what- ever we ask we receive from Him, because we keep his command- ments and do the things that are pleasing in His sight" (I John 3:21b-2). Our love for God is the motivation for bringing our wills and our prayers into conformity to His will, which ensures their answer. "He who turns away his ear from listening to the law, Even his prayer is an abomination" (Proverbs 28:9).

So in summary, God has linked Himself and His working to us and our prayers. We are co-laborers with Christ. He has called us to a holy task, to pray in such a way that both we and our world are changed. This is a holy labor God has called us to. God's answering our prayers is contingent upon our being increasingly holy before Him, upon our being able to lift up holy hands in prayer. James 5:16 tells us it is the prayer of the righteous that has great effect and the corollary is the prayer of the unrighteous has little effect. The righteous are those who are walking with God. They are in tune with God and His will for their lives. God hears their prayer.

God has highlighted some specific areas to be sensitive to deal with so that our prayers will not be hindered.

Peter, in speaking about our relationships with our spouses, taught that if we are insensitive to or neglect fulfilling our God-given respon- sibilities in these relationships, our prayers will be hindered. Live and relate to your spouse as God intends, "so that your prayers will not be hindered" (I Peter 3:7). One may have great zeal and activity for Christian work, but not Christ-like consideration for one's spouse. This, God says, affects our prayers. We need to take time to spread out our married lives before the Lord. Remember our marriage vows were made before God. "Lord, do I love my spouse as Christ loves the church?"

Peter and James both taught us that, "God resists the proud but gives grace to the humble" (I Peter 5:5-6, James 4:6-8). Pride is not only a problem in our relationships with other people, but it also interferes with our relationship with God and hinders Him answering our prayers. Pride is expressed in self-centeredness, self-sufficient attitudes, relying on our own abilities and skills, the desire to control, the unwillingness to deal with unresolved conflicts and holding of grudges. An unwill- ingness to forgive others or resolve conflicts is a form of pride (Matthew 18:35). God actively resists both the one who is prideful and his prayers.

James taught us that another reason God does not answer prayer is because of our wrong motives. "Ye ask (pray) and do not receive, because

you ask with wrong motives, so that you may spend it on your pleasures" (James 4:3-5). God clearly sees our motives and says they are important in prayer. We need sensitivity to our natural inclination, which is to ask for carnal desires—seeking to get for self. Examples of such desires are to possess either material things or abilities to impress oth- ers, to receive the admiration of peers. The underlying motive for this kind of prayer is self versus the seeking of God's will and glory. This is a kind of praying that God will not hear because it is wrong in its motive. It is as if we are praying for the resources to commit spiritual adultery. Unholy motives, especially the lust for power, are sins that impede God hearing and answering our prayer.

James gave us another reason that God refuses to answer prayer. He instructed us, "But he must ask in faith without any doubting, for the one who doubts is like the surf of the sea driven and tossed by the sea, for that man ought not to expect that he will receive anything from the Lord" (James 1:6-7). We are to ask in faith not wavering. This corre- sponds with "without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is and that He is a rewarder of those who seek Him" (Hebrews 11:6). Prayer is not just words to speak. It must involve the exercise of faith that God hears and the confident expectation that God will answer our prayers.

The Scriptures teach that, "the poor will never cease to be in the land; therefore I command you saying, 'You shall freely open your hand to your brother, to your needy and poor'" (Deuteronomy 15:11). Further the Scriptures teach, that, "He who shuts his ear to the cry of the poor will also cry himself and not be answered" (Proverbs 21:13). Isaiah 58:6-10 teaches that the stingy man is powerless in prayer. God links His will- ingness to answer our prayer to our compassion expressed in practical actions toward the poor. Our heavenly Father entrusts us with resources to use for His purposes and not be hoarded for self. Lack of compas- sion affects God's willingness to answer our prayers.

Conclusion:

God has ordained prayer as a means of accomplishing His purposes both in us and in the world. God has linked Himself and His working to us and to our prayers. Therefore, it is important for our lives and our motives to be in line with God and His will. God has revealed that all deviations from His will can be an impediment to our relationship with Him, with His working in us and through us—which includes answer- ing our prayers. "For the eyes of the Lord move to and fro throughout the earth that He may strongly support those whose heart is complete- ly His" (II Chronicles 16:9).
God desires us to lift up holy hands; and He has made the provi- sion for us to be holy (I Timothy 2:8). If issues of sin are unresolved, they are impediments to God's hearing and answering our prayers. Before we can advance, we must get rid of what is hindering. The prayer of the righteous accomplishes much. Holy living is essential for intercessory prayer.

The Scriptures teach that our hearts are deceitful above all things and desperately wicked, who can know it? (Jeremiah 17:9). It is natural to think that sinners are "other people." It should be our constant prac- tice to ask the Holy Spirit to: "Search me, O God, and know my heart; try me and know my anxious thoughts; And see if there be any hurtful way in me" (Psalm 139:23) because "if I regard wickedness in my heart, the Lord will not hear" (Psalm 66:18).

In sincerity we pray and ask God to do for us what we either are blinded to or cannot do for ourselves.

God expects us to face our sins honestly, to acknowledge and con- fess the instances He reveals where we fall short of His standard. We ask God to remove from within us every obstacle to Christ being enthroned in our affections. Then we thank God, that He has shown us our sin and forgiven us our sin on the basis of Christ's death on the cross. God is so good to us in that we believers need not be plagued with doubts about our acceptability before God. But God does hold us responsible to face and deal with our sin in a Biblical way. "If we confess our sins He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness" (I John 1:9). The provision of the blood has been made to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. If we do not deal with our sin, our sin becomes a barrier to His hearing our prayer. Our sin hinders God's working not only in us but also through us.

The problem of "using prayer" in a wrong way. Referring to the incidents about God's people recorded in the Old Testament, God said, "Now these things happened to them as an example. And they are writ- ten for our instruction" (I Corinthians 10:11). These Scriptures are illus- trations from life that have been preserved to give us pictures of spiri- tual truth. It is God's purpose that from these examples we gain under- standing of both God and His ways. I Samuel 2:12-4:11 is such an exam- ple. I Samuel 2:12-3:13 presents a picture that there were continuing problems of sin among God's people which were not dealt with. God's name was not being honored by God's people. Men in leadership were dishonoring God and His name. Their hearts and minds were far from God (I Samuel 2:35). God had placed a prophet among them who pro- claimed God's will and words. "The words of Samuel came to all Israel" (I Samuel 3:20-4:1). So the people all knew God's will.

Then came a military invasion by the Philistines (I Samuel 4:1-2). A great battle ensued in which Israel was badly defeated. After the battle, the Israelites discussed their defeat. "Why has the Lord defeated us today before the Philistines?" The people saw their defeat as somehow God's doing. But there was no real questioning by them as to why they, God's people, were so soundly beaten by these unbelievers. There seems to be no trace of earnest self examination or seeking God. They did not deal with the issue of sin. Instead, they grasped at a form as the solution to their problem.

"Let us take to ourselves from Shiloh the ark of the covenant of the Lord, that it may come among us, and deliver us from the power of our enemies" (I Samuel 4:3). It, the ark, will save us. When this solution to their problem of dealing with the Philistines was presented, the people became greatly excited. They saw the ark as divine reinforcements and so they shouted and carried the ark before them into battle as a banner. But it did no good. God's people were defeated again. They had no regard for the relationship and presence of God that the ark represent- ed. Rather they said, "Let us use this form, it will save us." But the ark, the form, did not save them for they did not have a right relation- ship/communion with God. The problem was not with God, but His people. Sin hinders God working in and through us.

God is seeking to make us sensitive to the problem of seeking the protection and/or blessing of prayer without regard for the relationship. This is using prayer in the wrong way. It is a problem of focusing on results with no regard for the relationship it represents. God has linked Himself and His working to us and our prayers. This involves a com- munion that God desires with man, an inclining our hearts to God, a living close to God as pictured in Psalm 1. Prayer is not a magic wand. Prayer is not a power to possess. It is a relational means God has given us that He uses to accomplish His purposes, both in us and through us. Our sin can hinder to the Lord from hearing and answering our prayers.

An additional area that can hinder our prayers—the sins of the fathers:

God tells us in Scripture that He visits "the iniquity of the fathers on the children, on the third and the fourth generations" (Exodus 20:5). Also we have numerous examples of the necessity of dealing with the sins of our fathers, i.e., those who have gone before us. "We know our wickedness, O Lord, The iniquity of our fathers, for we have sinned against You" (Jeremiah 14:20). "If they confess their iniquity and the iniquity of their forefathers then I will remember also My covenant" (Leviticus 26:40-42). "I and my father's house have sinned" (Nehemiah 1:4-6, 9:2). From exile Daniel wrote that because of our sins and the iniquities of our fathers, Jerusalem and Thy people" are suffering all this. (Daniel 9:3-20 especially noting vv.5, 11 and 16).

Through these Scriptures, God is showing us that we all stand in a line, a continuum, of all who have gone before us.

The spiritual law of sowing and reaping is always in effect. Time and again in the history of Israel, later generations suffered due to the sins of their fathers. They dealt with the consequences of decisions of those who had gone before them. The 40 years of wandering in the wilderness and the Babylonian captivity are examples of succeeding generations living with the consequences of the sin of their ancestors.

The Scriptures show us the need to be sensitive to the sins of those who have gone before us and, therefore, have influenced us. The church is what it is today based on the choices of those who have gone before us. We need to verbally acknowledge and confess where the church, our church or group, has missed the mark and ask God to bring us back to His intentions. We need to acknowledge and deal with long standing issues of sin within the church, for these impurities hinder God's working in us and through us. Left unresolved, these issues are impediments to God's hearing and answering our prayers.

Related to the issue of the sins of those who have gone before us is the issue of present corporate sin. Scripture reveals that God sees us corporately. He sees us as a unit, for we are His body. At Kadesh Barnea (Numbers 14) God told His people to go in and possess the land. Most of the Israelites voted to not trust/believe God about entering and pos- sessing the promised land. But there were some such as Joshua and Caleb who were full of faith in God, but these also suffered with the unfaithful from the consequences of corporate sin. They too spent 40 wasted years wandering in the wilderness. Later (Joshua 7:1-13), as the Israelites finally entered the land, Achan sinned. His sin and its conse- quences affected the whole camp. There could be no moving forward until one man's disobedience had been dealt with. We see that God is serious about sin in the camp.

Paul instructed, "A little leaven leavens the whole lump of dough" (I Corinthians 5:6). Leaven in the Scriptures stands for the presence of sin or evil. "Even as the body is one and yet has many members...And if one member suffers, all the members suffer" (I Corinthians 12:12-14 and 26). Believers are interrelated.

The letters to the churches in Revelation, chapter 2 and 3, are indictments against churches, corporate bodies of believers. They high- lighted issues of sin that needed to be dealt with because the problems were affecting the whole church. The message the Spirit is communi- cating is, stop hindering what God is doing and wants to do.

The Scriptures show the need for us to be sensitive to corporate issues, to deal with present sin within the body. It is easy to see and grieve over the injustice, violence, immorality in the world. But do we see and grieve over the problems with in the body of Christ? The church is divided and, therefore, impotent. Who among us does not sense a lukewarmness and lack of positive godliness among God's children?

If issues of sin in the camp are left unresolved, they are impedi- ments to God's hearing and answering our prayers.

The Place of Fasting

As the Scriptures present the issue of prayer, there are continuing ref- erences and examples linking prayer with fasting. Prayer coupled with fasting characterized times when believers were fervently seeking God. Old Testament examples of prayer linked with fasting show God's instruction to His people to "Return to me with all your heart, and with fasting" (Joel 2:12). There are many examples which show God's peo- ple responding to His instructions to fast, such as Nehemiah chapter 1, and Esther 4:14, etc.

Some may say, "But those are Old Testament instructions and examples. We are living in New Testament times." Since Jesus is the head of the church, what is His instruction regarding fasting? Jesus taught in two ways, through His words and His example.

In the Gospels, we note that Jesus fasted and prayed regularly. By His example, Jesus demonstrated that fasting was a vital part of His prayer life. In addition, Jesus taught His disciples about fasting. The Scripture records that many in Jesus' day had questions about fasting. Jesus was asked, "Why do John's disciples and the disciples of the Pharisees fast, but Your disciples do not fast?" Jesus replied, "While the bridegroom is with them, the attendants of the bridegroom cannot fast, can they?... But the days will come when the bridegroom is taken away from them, and then they will fast in that day" (Mark 2:18-20, Luke 5:33- 35). Christ, the bridegroom has been taken away; and we, the church, are awaiting His coming.

Teaching about issues in the life of a disciple, Christ said, “When you give” (Matthew 6:2). Then Jesus went on to talk about, “When you pray” (Matthew 6:6). Then Jesus twice said, “When you fast” (Matthew 6:16-17). Does fasting sound optional for one who is a disciple of the Lord? It seems, by our Lord’s example and His clear instruction, that fast- ing was a vital part of being a disciple.

In the book of Acts and the Epistles, prayer and fasting were com- mon spiritual practices in the early church. Fasting is noted as a vital part of seeking God in prayer. Acts records prayer, fasting and church expansion all going hand in hand. Both prayer and fasting are means God uses to advance His purposes. Acts 13:2 records, “...while they were ministering to the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit” came to them with instruction and guidance. The expansion of Paul’s ministry and the expansion of the church into Asia Minor and Europe began in prayer and fasting. The advances of the Gospel in the early church were built on a foundation of prayer and fasting. Paul spoke of his fasting often (II Corinthians 11:27, KJV). Paul related that, as he confirmed new bodies of believers, churches and their leaders, he prayed and fasted with them (Acts 14:23).

History relates that the early church fasted and prayed two days a week. It is our conclusion, by the instruction of our Lord and His exam- ple, and that of the early church, fasting is presented as God’s will. The Lord expects His disciples to fast. Fasting is also presented as a vital aspect of prayer and fervent intercession.

Since the Lord by His example and instruction is clearly calling those who are His disciples to fasting, let us look at what fasting is and what purposes the Lord may have in calling us to fast. The Hebrew word for fasting means “to cover the mouth.”

Scripture reveals several types of fasts:

a partial fast: Daniel 10:3, abstaining from delicacies, or meat and wine or the example of John the Baptist who ate only simple food. an absolute fast: Acts 9:9, Esther 4:16, no solid food or liquids. a total fast: Deuteronomy 9:9, Moses, or I Kings 19:8, Elijah While we are talking of types of fasts, we note the Scripture pres- ents both personal and group fasts. The Scriptures give no specific instruction regarding the type, length or frequency of our fasting for spiritual purposes. It seems if we really want to know, God’s Spirit will lead us.

So Biblical fasting is presented as the deliberate abstinence, from some or all food, for a spiritual purpose. This deliberate fasting reveals a burden of the heart, a deep seeking of God, that is greater than the desire for physical food. It involves the setting aside of legitimate appetites of the body to concentrate on spiritual communion and intercession.

What could be the Lord’s reasons for calling us to fast. Why has fasting been designed into the Christian life? In the following, you will see that God has given fasting as the means by which many purposes are accomplished. All these purposes reinforce God’s call for us to fast. “God is opposed to the proud, but gives grace to the humble” (James 4:6). David said, “I humble my soul with fasting” (Psalm 35:13). Ezra led the nation to fasting so “we might humble ourselves before our God” (Ezra 8:21). Fasting is a way we humble ourselves by cultivating a heart for God’s grace. Fasting is a way of dealing with a specific area of our flesh, our pride. Christ cautioned that, “When you fast, do not put on a gloomy face as the hypocrites do” (Matthew 6:16-17). There is the need to be on guard against our pride turning fasting to hypocrisy. Even good things, as in the spiritual discipline of fasting, can be subverted by our pride. One reason God has given us to fast is as a means of humbling ourselves before God.
The apostle Paul reminds believers, “you have been bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body” (I Corinthians 6:20). Paul gave personal testimony that, I discipline my body and make it my slave (I Corinthians 9:24-27). Disciples of the Lord are to lead disciplined lives. Our lives are not to be controlled or dictated by our flesh. Rather, the body is to be kept in subjection to our spirit and the Spirit. Through fast- ing, we begin to deal with self-will by building and strengthening habits of self-denial. None of us like to say no to ourselves. Fasting, as a reg- ular discipline, is a means of dealing with our flesh so that we develop a willingness to deny self and follow God, to allow the Spirit to reign in our flesh.
Jesus’ disciples questioned Him one day about a particular ministry problem. His reply was that this kind of problem is “only overcome by prayer and fasting” (Matthew 17:21). “The Lord said, is this not the fast which I chose, to loosen the bonds of wickedness, (self-will) to undo the bands of the yoke, and to let the oppressed go free and break every yoke?” (Isaiah 58:6). The Scriptures associate fasting with a deep seek- ing of God and His working. In such passages as Esther 4:15-17 and II Chronicles 20 we see the course of nations has been changed through fasting. Fasting is a means of bringing spiritual strengthening to individ- uals and the church.

The Lord said, “Return to Me with all your heart, and with fasting, weeping and mourning; and rend your heart and not your garments; Now return to the Lord your God, For He is gracious and compassion- ate, Slow to anger, abounding in lovingkindness and relenting of evil” (Joel 2:12-13). The Lord was pleading with Israel to repent, change their minds, for God is always ready to respond to sincere repentance. The repentance involves not just being religious, but turning to God. Fasting is often seen in connection with confession of sin and sincere repen- tance as in Jonah 3:5-10. Fasting is the means of expressing a work of repentance in our heart.

The Lord taught that to receive heaven’s answers, we need to ask, seek, knock. Each of these words indicate a deeper intensity of seeking (Matthew 7:7). “Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteous- ness, for they shall be satisfied” (Matthew 5:6). A paraphrase may be: “Blessed are they who cultivate a spiritual appetite for God.” Blessedness is a progressive state that is dependent upon the fulfillment of the conditions given. Anna “was serving with fastings” (Luke 2:37). She hungered for the Lord. We are told that Paul “was three days with- out sight, and neither ate nor drank” (Acts 9:9). For Paul, understanding spiritual realities was so important that he prayed and fasted from all food and drink for three days. Daniel, by fasting and prayer, sought to be more spiritually sensitive and receive understanding of God’s Word (Daniel 10:3-12). Acts 13:1-4 records a time of fasting and prayer pre- ceded the Holy Spirit’s call to a greater ministry and advance of the Gospel. Fasting is a means of intensely pursuing the Lord for His hand of blessing.

In the various reasons God gives for calling us to fast, there is much overlap. It seems like the core reason that a disciple is to fast is that it is a

means God has given which allows us to live closer to Him. Fasting is for our benefit. The cultivating of such spiritual disciplines as fasting involves the conscious choices to feed the spirit and deny the flesh and its dictates. Jesus had much to say about self-denial, not as an end in itself, but in order to follow Jesus. Denying self helps make the Lord the center of my life (Matthew 16:24). "Like a city that is broken into and without walls, Is a man who has no control over his spirit" (Proverbs 25:28). The cultivating self-discipline leads to security. Cultivating spiritual disciplines is a vital part of abiding and growing in intimacy with the Lord. Spiritual disciplines, such as fasting, are modeled in Scripture as an integral part of the lives of Godly men and women.

Conclusion:

Much of what is characterized as Christian work is based on the organi- zation of an abundance of material, financial and educational resources. In our efforts to reach people for Christ we seem prone to organize evan- gelistic crusades, open-air preaching, films, all types of training, literature distribution, community development and humanitarian aid, and so forth. What seems greatly overlooked is the cultivation of a deep dependence on the Spirit for accomplishing the work of God in us and through us. The Scriptures caution us against our inclination to seek to do spiritual work in our flesh. The early church fasted and prayed because there was no other way to advance the Gospel into enemy territory.
As we think about fasting, we face three enemies: the world, the flesh and the devil. The world will think we are crazy to fast and not to indulge ourselves with the good things which are at our disposal. Our flesh will rebel at fasting, but it is clearly God's will. The devil will stand against our fasting by filling our minds with many excuses as to why we cannot fast. The question is: will we humble ourselves and cultivate the Godly discipline of fasting in our lives to see God's spiritual pur- poses moved forward in us and through us?

What is our response to God's call for us to fast? Do we have a spir- itual hunger to experience Him more fully in our lives? To see the continuing defeat of Satan in our lives? Are we thirsty to have God at work in our churches? Are we thirsty to have God at work in our land? Will we let the world, the flesh and the devil have their way? Times of prayer and fasting have always preceded times of revival among God's people. "And my people will...then I will..." (II Chronicles 7:14).

If the Holy Spirit is heightening your sensitivity to grow in your understanding and ability to fast then faithfully pursue Him on it. The apostle Paul gave us understanding of how it is possible for us who are so weak to respond to God's call to fast. The Holy Spirit works within us, giving both the desire and the ability to do His will (Philippians 2:13). If God is giving you the desire to fast, know He will also give you the ability to fast. Pray, ask God for the ability to develop this area of your spiritual life. Then set a plan to fast and do it as a part of devel- oping your prayer life. Continue to pray for God's enabling and rely upon His empowering.

Expectations Regarding Answers to Prayer

God desires to use us and our prayers to see His plans and purposes move forward. He has established prayer as a means He will use to see His plans accomplished. We desire that God would teach us, grow us in our prayer lives because we want to be used of God. What a great thing it is for God almighty to use us and our prayer to see His plans and purposes accomplished in us, our church, city, and nation. He uses us and our prayers to change the course of history.

In prayer, it is normal for us to have expectations and evaluate our prayer with regard to:

• the results, which has to do with how God answers prayer,
• the timing, which has to do with when God answers prayer.
• our emotions, which has to do with how we deal with our feelings in all this.

Biblical expectations regarding how God answers our prayers:

The Scriptures show God's answers to prayer in the following ways:

He answers prayer through His direct supernatural intervention in the situation. He performs miracles such as the parting of the Red Sea or by sending fire and rain from heaven or in the case of Peter. "Peter was kept in prison; but prayer for him was being made fervently by the church to God for him" (Acts 12:5). God sent an angel to rescue Peter from prison by breaking the chains that held him and opening the locked iron gate. God was answering prayer in a supernatural way.

There is no possible explanation other than this is a supernatural inter- vention of God.

Another way that God answers prayer is through His providential intervention. God works through His people, guiding, blessing, giving wisdom in such a way that His purposes are moved forward. Surely it is God who is at work, but we see Him not.

An example of God working providentially is found in Esther. A decree had been issued by the king, allowing the enemies of God to plan a massacre that would totally wipe out God's people. God's peo- ple responded by seeking Him with fasting and prayer. Then Esther the queen (who was Jewish) invited the king to a supper she had prepared. She had such a deep burden over what was about to happen, but apparently sensed God would not have her make a request to the king in her people's behalf, so she said nothing about the grave problem her people faced. Instead she invited the king to another supper the fol- lowing day. During the night, God caused the king to have insomnia and then God providentially caused the king to ask for a book to be read to him. The servant opened the book to a special passage which recounted how Mordecai the Jew once saved the king's life from some treacherous men seeking to kill him. This incident from years before, the preservation of an account of it, and the reading of it to the king at this particular time resulted in the Jews being saved from mass slaugh- ter. The plan of their

enemies was totally overturned. God has provi- dentially intervened in answer to prayer.

At other times God answers prayer through His internal interven- tion. God works within an individual so as to change the person with- out changing the circumstances. God strengthens the inner person with grace and peace.

In II Corinthians 12:8-9, Paul related that he experienced some type of problem referred to as "a thorn in the flesh." The problem could have been either physical or emotional. Paul repeatedly earnestly prayed for God to take this problem away, but God did not. Instead, God used this problem to strengthen Paul, to open his understanding of the sufficien- cy of God in spite of continuing problems. The thorn in the flesh brought the opportunity for spiritual growth and kept Paul from pride. God was at work bringing an inner, not an external, change. He was sustaining and growing Paul.

In prayer we may ask fervently for healing, but we must never insist on it. To insist implies that I, not God, have the correct perspective on what this affliction is all about. Sometimes God's purpose for allowing pain in our lives is clear; at other times, it is not.

The Scriptures show that sometimes God answers our prayer by working in a combination of ways. We see this in the life of Joseph. Joseph was sold into slavery in Egypt. "Now his master saw that the Lord was with him and how the Lord caused all that he did to prosper in his hand. So Joseph found favor in his sight and became his person- al servant; and he made him overseerer over his house, and all that he owned he put in his charge. It came about that from the time that he made him overseerer in his house and over all he owned, the Lord blessed the Egyptian's house on account of Joseph" (Genesis 39:3-5).

God worked by providentially blessing Joseph so he prospered while being a slave and was promoted to be in charge of a rich man's entire holdings. God later externally intervened by giving Joseph super- natural understanding of the interpretation of Pharoah's dreams (Genesis 40:6-41:16). God intervened within Joseph's heart, giving him wisdom to see God's sovereignty in all the issues of his life. This kept Joseph from becoming resentful or bitter toward God and his brothers who had hated him so much that they sold him into slavery. In speak- ing to his brothers, Joseph said, "As for you, you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good, to bring about this present result, to pre- serve many people alive" (Genesis 50:20).
To recap regarding our expectations about how God answers prayer, we see God answering:

• by His supernatural intervention, performing miracles;
• by His providential working; orchestrating situations and events;
• by His internal intervention, bringing change within the person rather than changing the outward circumstances;
• by His working in a combination of ways.

As we pray, we acknowledge that we do not know or understand all that God is doing and, therefore, how He will answer our prayer. As three believers faced being thrown into the burning fiery furnace, they were confident their God was able to deliver them. Of God's ability they had no doubt, though of His plan they were not quite sure. All were totally amazed with the answer to their prayer. God did not chose to deliver them from the furnace but in it (Daniel 3:17).

Biblical expectations about when God answers prayer:

A second issue concerns our expectations about God's timing in answering our prayers. In the examples given above, Esther did not just pray for an opening to speak to the king about her peoples' plight, and when it came, just plow ahead. She was discerning about the timing of when God would have her make her petition to the king. We note how important that her discernment turned out to be. By delaying her request, she gave God time to fully prepare the king's heart. Aligning with God's timing was critically important.

Many, many generations had prayed for Messiah to come. Galatians 4:4 relates that "But when the fullness of the time came, God sent forth His Son." God had a plan, and Christ came at just the right time. God answered those prayers.

Zechariah and Elizabeth were a righteous couple before God. They had been faithful to God and had prayed for many years for God to bless them with children. Yet, they grew old without ever having received the blessing of children. Their hearts may have been heavy from disappointment for long years of unanswered prayers. In spite of their advanced age, they never forsook the altar. Then, at just the right time, God answered their prayers and gave them a son. That son was John the Baptist, who was the forerunner of the Messiah. Jesus said this about John, "For I say to you, among those born of women there is no one greater than John" (Luke 7:28). God gave them not just a son but the greatest prophet who ever lived.
If your prayers have not been answered or if, through the years, your dreams have failed and now it seems too late or too impossible for God to do mighty works in your life, remember the example of Zechariah and Elizabeth and stay at the altar.

There may be a difference between when we want or expect a prayer to be answered and God's timetable. We must align with God's timing in bringing His purposes to pass. We do this by having faith that God has heard our prayer and He is working to bring His purposes to pass.

An issue often related to timing is the issue of the will of God.Jesus had a friend named Lazarus. Lazarus became sick, and the request was made to the Lord to heal him. Jesus had previously healed the sick- nesses and afflictions of many people. Jesus did not heal Lazarus, and he became sicker and finally died. After Lazarus was dead, Jesus came and brought him back to life. Why did Jesus allow Lazarus to die? Jesus' silence in not answering the prayer was not rejection, but it provided the opportunity for a greater revelation of Himself. Jesus had previous- ly healed many. With Lazarus, He wanted to reveal His power and authority to resurrect from the grave. With Lazarus, Jesus revealed a new dimension of His glory and power to Mary, Martha and His disciples (John 11:45).

At the end of his third missionary journey, Paul prayed and asked the Roman Christians to pray for safety (Romans 15:30-33). What Paul got was a riot, arrest and imprisonment. Two years of waiting for a trial, an attempted assassination and a ship wreck. Paul did not get what he prayed for or expected. When Paul was arrested and placed in jail, he prayed about his imprisonment and the church prayed. But Paul remained in prison many years because God had other purposes. God used Paul's imprisonment to advance the church, to expose the palace residents to the Gospel, and to encourage many formerly silent Christians to become bolder to speak the Gospel/witness (Philippians 1:12-14). This time in prison also gave Paul the opportunity to write the epistles we value today.

In our prayers, we must take into account that we do not know or understand all that God is doing. We need to consider that God's tim- ing in bringing the answers to our prayers involves not only our prayer but also His purposes. God may answer our prayers in a way that moves beyond our request and greatly advances His purposes. We are to incline our hearts to God and bring our requests to God with open hands. We are to let God be God, working and answering according to His will, timing and purposes (Philippians 4:6-7).

With regard to the timing of answers to prayer, we realize there is an adversary at work. The Scripture gives at least one example show- ing that the answers to our prayers can be delayed due to spiritual war- fare in the heavens. Daniel was involved in an intense time of prayer and fasting. Satan was hard at work, seeking to block the answer from getting through from the throne of God to the praying, waiting servant (Daniel 10:12-13). Satan seeks to discourage us from praying by delay- ing answers to prayer. But God is sovereign, and He uses time to move His purposes forward.
A final aspect to remember regarding the timing of answers to prayer concerns our understanding the need to persevere in prayer. Scripture tells us to "pray without ceasing." In teaching about prayer, Jesus told a story to illustrate a truth (Luke 11:5-18). Jesus said there was a man who had no bread. This man realized he stood in total need for he had no means of meeting his own basic need for bread or the needs of others. The man boldly and persistently pursued, seeking from one whom he knew had the provision to meet his own needs and the needs of others. The issue is not God's reluctance but our persistent diligence in seeking from God.

Jesus also talked about persistence from the aspect of cultivating a deep dependence upon the Lord in overcoming spiritual adversity. He said, "This kind (of problem) does not go out except by prayer and fast- ing" (Matthew 17:21, Mark 9:29).

The Scriptures remind us, "Without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is and that He is a rewarder of those who seek Him" (Hebrews 11:6). "Let us not lose heart in doing good, for in due time we will reap if we do not grow weary" (Galatians 6:9). We are to be persistent in our prayer and not to give up, for God promises there will be a day of reaping. To be per- sistent in prayer is an act of faith, not in prayer, but in God. Our dili- gence in prayer is an expression of our faith in God.

A final area has to do with Biblical expectations regarding our emotions in prayer.

God has created us with emotions. We Christians experience both mountaintops and valleys in our emotions. The valleys between the mountaintops are a reality of the Christian life.

It is natural that we rate our prayer times by results, which can include our emotions. Sometimes our prayer times may seem good, and other times they may seem cold and forced.

We need to remember, "The prayer of the upright is His (God's) delight" (Proverbs 15:8b). God delights in the prayers of the upright, regardless of our emotional feelings. He delights in our prayers because they are evidence of a heart that is trusting in Him.

God understands our weaknesses, including our weaknesses in prayer. Remembering this will guard us against too much introspection or focus on feelings. In praying, we are not to be seeking perfection, but merely sharing our hearts with God. Prayer is foremost a matter of the heart, not emotions. We are to walk by faith, not by emotions. we realize that emotions, such as joy or weeping, may or may not be a part of our prayer.

In prayer, we need to purposely draw the focus off ourselves and put it on God. We pray in reliance that Christ is on the throne. This focus enabled Stephen to be able to pray, even as he was being stoned to death. "But being full of the Holy Spirit, he gazed intently into heaven, and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God" (Acts 7:55). What a difference Stephen's focus made in such discourag- ing and threatening circumstances. As the people whom Stephen desired to share the Good News of the Gospel with were stoning him, he focused on God on His throne and was able to bless and pray for those who opposed him.

As we have reviewed the subject of Biblical expectations regarding answers to prayer, we see how important it is to our prayer lives. Biblical expectations regarding how and when God answers prayer, and the emotions which may or may not be involved are foundational to prayer. These give us understanding of how to cooperate more fully with the Lord in exercising the privilege of prayer with the God of all creation.

Spiritual Warfare

Spiritual warfare is an area where there is a wide divergence of under- standing. We need to avoid two extremes. One extreme gives too much credit to Satan; and the other, not enough. The way to avoid these pitfalls is to understand what the Scriptures say about spiritual warfare, develop a sound theology, and make the appropriate applications of truth. Sound Biblical practices can only flow from a sound Biblical theology.

The New Testament epistles were letters of instruction written to believers to give understanding of the Christian life. On the subject of spiritual warfare; we have these very clear teachings. "Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of His might. Put on the full armor of God, so that

you will be able to stand firm against the schemes of the devil. For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the powers, against the world forces of this darkness, against the spiritual forces of wickedness in heavenly places" (Ephesians 6:10-12). "For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war according to the flesh, for the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh, but divine- ly powerful for the destruction of fortresses" (II Corinthians 10:3-4). "Submit yourselves therefore to God, resist the devil and he will flee from you" (James 4:7, KJV).

Note the personal pronouns: that you will be able to stand, our struggles, we do not war according to the flesh, submit yourselves and resist. These pronouns show the truth that all believers are involved in spiritual warfare. This life is war. There is not a warfare part of life and a non-warfare part of life. This conflict may have physical manifestations but it is primarily spiritual in nature. God has given all believers the responsibilities to use the resources He has given, to defend themselves. They are to put on and use the whole armor God has provided.

Since we are all involved in a war, it is important for us to under- stand more about the nature of this conflict and the resources God has given us. The instruction from Ephesians 6:11-12 begins with a command for all of us to "put on the full armor of God." This is not a suggestion but a command from the Lord. The reason for the command is, "that you will be able to stand firm against the schemes of the devil. For our strug- gle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers against the pow- ers, against the world forces of this darkness, against the spiritual forces of wickedness in heaven" There are real spiritual opponents who desire and work to see our faith and testimony destroyed.

II Corinthians 10:3-5 defines more fully how the enemy works against us. We believers "walk in the flesh." We live in a physical body with a mind, that gives us the ability to think; a will, so we can make choices rather than function as animals of instinct; and emotions, that give us the ability to feel. The flesh speaks of what we are naturally. In addition, we believers have a quickened spirit and the Holy Spirit with- in us.

We are all involved in what is characterized as spiritual war. The Christian life is pictured not merely as a walk, but a war. This conflict we are involved in is not primarily physical in nature but spiritual. The physical dimension of life is important, but the physical is controlled by spiritual considerations. While we live and walk about in the flesh, we are not to rely on our own natural resources (mind, will, emotions), but choose to rely on the spiritual resources God has given. In this warfare, we do not march out and fight using physical weapons, but our weapons are spiritual.
Further, we are instructed that the general nature and objective of this spiritual warfare concerns "the pulling down of strongholds." This is accomplished by the "casting down imaginations, and every high thing, that exalts itself against the knowledge of God." These are the rationalizations, the wisdom and philosophies of man which claim to know better than God. These thoughts must be pulled down from their prominent positions in our thinking by the process of "bringing into captivity every thought, to the obedience of Christ."

The Scripture is teaching us that the prime place of warfare is with- in the mind of man, his thoughts and thinking. Satan is a liar, the father of all lies (John 8:44) and the deceiver (Revelation 12:9). He is the one who brought deception into this world. He continues to promote lies and ignorance of truth in the thinking of people so that they will rely on these lies and will not trust God. These lies and deceptions become strongholds of ignorance and prejudice in people's minds. They must be revealed and demolished with God's weapons. Then new strong- holds of truth must be built up in their place. Of course, Satan attacks in other areas of our lives besides our minds and our thinking Even as he attacks us through health (II Corinthians 12:7) or hindering circum- stances (I Thessalonians 2:18), his main objective remains to affect our thinking, to get us to believe and act on his lies. Scripture shows that our thinking, what we really believe, determines our words and actions, our behavior. Satan attacks in many ways but he is always aiming to influence or take captive our minds.

In instructing believers Paul said, "I fear lest by any means as the serpent deceived Eve so your minds would be corrupted" (II Corinthians 11:30). Examples of this work of Satan are when "Peter took Him (Jesus) aside and began to rebuke Him, saying, 'God forbid it, Lord! This shall never happen to You.' But He turned and said to Peter, 'Get behind Me, Satan!'" (Matthew 16:22-23). Jesus said this thought and the words that expressed it were inspired by Satan. Later in the early church, we are given another such incident. "But Peter said, 'Ananias, why has Satan filled your heart to lie to the Holy Spirit and to keep back some of the price of the land?'" (Acts 5:3). Believers are not immune to Satan's attacks. Satan can and does influence us by putting thoughts in our minds. This is why we must take every thought captive.

James gave an overall strategy to approach spiritual warfare. "Submit therefore to God. Resist the devil and he will flee from you" (James 4:7). What does it mean to submit to God? This speaks of being in right relationship with God, of being cleansed so Satan has no hold on us or blindness to truth. The word submit (hupo tasso) means to actively arrange ourselves under another's authority. Our living in active submission to God is foundational because in spiritual battle, we are not to do it in our own power but to exercise spiritual authority delegated to us. This authority is based on our prior arranging of self under the authority of God. We cannot expect to be effective resisting the devil if we are not first living under the authority of God. This means there is no area of my life I will not allow the Holy Spirit to control.

The first aspect of a strategy in dealing with spiritual warfare is for us to submit ourselves to God. Our protection from sin and Satan is grounded in our active submission to the Lord, living near to God. Only then can we move toward the second aspect which involves resisting the devil in all his plans and schemes. We are to make use of the divine- ly powerful weapons God has made available to us to resist the enemy. The weapons are the Holy Spirit, God's truth and prayer.

We stand against and resist the evil one as we actively trust the enabling of the Holy Spirit and prayerfully bring truth and the promis- es of God against all our thoughts. We ask ourselves, "Is this true? Is this line of thinking according to God's will?" Satan can only succeed through our disbelief, our ignorance, our deception regarding truth, or our prayerlessness. Prayer is our expression of faith in both God and His truth. "They overcame him (the devil) because of the word of their testimony" (Revelation 12:11). We are to use the Word of God to active- ly resist the lies and deceit of our adversary, and we stand on the prom- ise that Satan will flee.

At the end of his life, Paul said he had received many trials and much adversity from Satan. In spite of all these Paul testified, "the Lord stood

with me...and strengthened me and I was rescued out of the lion's mouth. (figurative for Satan I Peter 5:8) The Lord will rescue me from every evil deed and will bring me safely to His heavenly kingdom" (II Timothy 4:17-8).

All believers are to be constantly cultivating within their thinking the mindset, that they are involved in a life and ministry where the spir- itual is in control. Spiritual warfare praying is a sphere of praying beyond mere asking. It involves a believer holding truth over the hosts of evil in either their strongholds or their attacks upon some person, place or the spread of the Gospel, until the victory is won. It is a sphere of praying more intensely focused on our submission to God's will and enlisting and trusting God's assistance against a spiritual adversary.

Spiritual warfare praying involves our defending ourselves from Satan's establishing strongholds in our minds. We submit ourselves in a continuing way to the Lord and pray in truth so as to give Satan no opportunity, no ground. Such praying also involves our priestly ministry of praying for others. With regard to believers, we pray truth for them as we would for ourselves.

Regarding unbelievers, the Scripture teaches, "that the god of this age has blinded the minds" (II Corinthians 4:4 and Ephesians 4:18). So what is the chief problem with the lost? Is it that they are such sinners? No. Their root problem is the god of this age has blinded the minds of unbelievers to truth. Unbelievers may think they can see and under- stand reality and truth, but Satan has blinded them and easily deceives them. Satan comes against people by seeking to influence their think- ing. He uses his deceptions, (lies) and ignorance of truth to build strong- holds of ignorance and prejudice in their thinking. People rely on these lies and will not trust God. Satan is the one responsible for spiritual blindness and hardness. Sinners are "held captive by him (Satan) to do his will" (II Timothy 2:26). Who of us before we were saved ever knew or believed we were being deceived by Satan? Yet that is exactly how Ephesians pictures all of our lives before we met Christ (Ephesians 2:2). The Gospel is clear but men are blinded to it by Satan.

The apostle Paul was commissioned by the Lord. Listen to his com- mission, "To open their eyes so that they may turn them from darkness to light and from the dominion of Satan to God; that they may receive forgiveness of sins" (Acts 26:18). Paul ministered to this need by pray- ing for the unsaved (Romans 10:1) and presenting the light of the truth of the Gospel against the darkness. The preaching of the Gospel, cou- pled with praying spiritual truth against the strongholds Satan has in their minds, is the most powerful means of moving against the evil one. This will bring the light of God's truth to dispel darkness and set the captive free and establish new strongholds of truth. "You will know the truth, and the truth will make you free" (John 8:32).

There is a danger in us believers ignoring our responsibilities in spiritual warfare. This is most graphically seen in numerous Old Testament examples. They show God giving believers responsibilities to defend themselves against their adversaries and to engage them in a warfare which was both physical and spiritual. Kadesh Barnea is an example of the truth that all believers are involved in the conflict (Numbers 13-14). God had a plan which involved His people living in a particular place. God brought His people out of captivity in Egypt and through the wilderness to the southern edge of this land. He then told them to go in and possess the land. God's people are to march into the promised land and possess it in spite of the adversaries who seek to block God's people and purposes.

Individuals, such as Joshua and Caleb, encouraged their people to trust God and move in a united way in faith and obedience against the enemy as God directed. But the majority were unwilling to obey and trust God on this issue. Israel's unwillingness to accept their God-given responsibilities resulted in their wilderness experience, a time and place of arrested spiritual growth, which was never part of God's plans for His people. Forty wasted years and none of those who were unwilling to trust God ever saw the promised land. They all died in the wilderness. They never received what God intended for them. Let us be full of faith and zeal to do Gods will and, therefore, to be overcomers.

Section Three: Models of Mobilizing Prayer

Establishing Prayer Groups

It is a distinct work of the Holy Spirit to quicken the hearts of believ- ers with a deepening sensitivity to prayer. The Holy Spirit uses means to bring about this quickening. He uses His Word, many times through the encouragement of other believers. As key truths about prayer are shared with others, the Holy Spirit:

• brings growing understanding of prayer (John 14:26),
• instills both the desire and ability to commit ourselves in a new and deeper way to prayer (Philippians 2:13),
• assists us in our prayers (Romans 8:26-27) so that they become more effectual and fervent (James 5:16).

As God works this process in the hearts of believers, the impor- tance of the ministry of prayer deepens and spreads among God's peo- ple. Prayer develops into a lifestyle. This work of God manifests itself first in the prayer lives of individuals. Then, through public prayer and life's encounters, the evident work of God overflows to the corporate life of the church.

Models

In seeking to see God's purposes advanced, we need to be sensitive to look to particular ways to mobilize prayer beyond personal intercession and weekly church prayer meetings. Some examples of ways of form- ing small groups of believers, committed to meeting together regularly to pray are: prayer partners (2 people), prayer triplets (3 people), or prayer cells. Through these models, much intense prayer can be focused on issues that will bring an advance of God's purposes.

Prayer Cells

"Prayer cell" is an especially descriptive word because it brings to mind the growing and reproducing element that is the desired characteristic of these groups. An example of how prayer cells can function is as fol- lows. They begin with a time of first quieting themselves and inviting the Holy Spirit to guide the time. Then they share with each other how things are going in their own lives spiritually. There must be a realness and genuineness with God and one another. Next, they ask God to instruct and grow them in their prayer lives. Then, they make use of the means God will use to answer this prayer, the Scriptures. A short, induc- tive Bible study helps uncover truths about prayer. Prayer, as other areas of the Christian life, needs to be developed. The prayers and prayer requests of the apostle Paul are instructive. They show us prayers inspired by the Holy Spirit and highlight key issues we are to be lifting up in prayer to see advances of the Gospel. Then comes a time of inter- cession. Individuals pray in accordance with how the Scriptures teach first and then for other specific prayer requests. Intercession is made for individuals, groups and issues involved in advancing God's kingdom. The time concludes by praying for the growth of the prayer cell and encouragement for cell members to share what they are learning about prayer with others. Encourage cell members to share with others about prayer and invite others, especially new believers, to join a prayer cell convenient to where they live or work. The ideal number for a cell seems to be four to six participants before it divides. This allows all to fully participate.

Leadership

Each prayer cell needs a leader. Each should also have at least one person in training for leadership. The leader is a conduit for bringing cur- rent prayer requests and answers to prayer into the cell. The leader also shepherds the functioning of the cell, being sensitive to encourage the participation of all. The leader also trains new leaders and encourages the multiplication of the cells.

It is important that the cell leader and those in training to lead receive continuing encouragement in prayer and leadership issues. The encouragement should be given in times of formal teaching and also informal times of mentoring. People are educated in formal settings but they are trained in informal settings where one life impacts another. God will use these equipped men and women to spread the prayer movement, and to mentor future prayer cell leaders.

Scheduling

There is usually an established time frame for the prayer cell meeting. Some cell groups meet for an hour; some, for an evening; others, for a whole night. These groups usually meet once a week, at a time that does not conflict with any church meetings. It is beneficial for the dif- ferent cell groups to periodically come together, in the city or region, for prayer, praise and encouragement. During these larger gatherings, the members of the prayer cells have the opportunity to see more fully that they are part of a movement that God is raising up.

Initiating Prayer Cells

The mobilizing of prayer begins with prayer. Ask God to lead you to individuals and groups where He is quickening hearts with a deepening sensitivity to prayer. Ask God to give you opportunities to share and bring encouragement on prayer. This is praying for divine appointments.

Begin to speak about prayer.

In normal conversations with other believers, speak about what God is doing or desires to do to advance His kingdom where you live. Share things God has recently shown you about prayer and its importance in seeing God's purposes move forward.

Network kindred hearts together. For those who express interest in prayer, link them with others who desire to pray for issues that will advance God's plans and purposes. In your daily conversations, ask everyone you meet if they know other people who may be interested in prayer. Find ways to meet and follow up these contacts; invite them to a prayer cell or help them establish one. Network the prayer intercessors to those involved in evangelism, church planting, and other aspects of ministry.

Relating to Existing Prayer Groups

As you network among believers to mobilize prayer, you will find exist- ing groups that gather for prayer regularly. These may be church groups, youth groups, or special interest groups. Praise God for His work among these different groups, and encourage them in prayer. As Biblical encouragement and instruction on prayer are shared, it will quite naturally bring a focus for prayer on the strategic issues that God has given us to pray for His kingdom to advance. It is also profitable to network these prayer groups to those involved in evangelistic and church planting initiatives. The expectation is not that these groups would all completely align with our prayer focus. While some would, and others would begin to pray for issues involved in the strategic advances of the Gospel.

Prayer Walks

Prayer walks are a way we can more fully ensure that all are being prayed for (I Timothy 2:1-2). Prayer walks get us face to face with people we may not normally see and diverse groups in the area in which we are seeking to minister, so that we can pray blessings on these peo- ple and situations.

Prayer walking is walking and interceding in the particular places where we desire to see God's purposes advanced. Prayer walks may be either literal or figurative walks. In the latter, we remain in our prayer closets and "walk" by seeing these people and areas of ministry in our mind and lifting them up in prayer. For those who may be house- bound, this is a vital way to be involved in God's work. In literal prayer walks, we walk and lift up in prayer the people, situations and issues we encounter. These prayers can be either just the dialogue of our heart, no audible words, or soft audible words.

A Scriptural example of a prayer walk may be when the Israelites came to Jericho. God initiated a plan to see this city taken, and one aspect involved believers walking around the walls of the city for one week. They were instructed not to say a single word or speak to each other for a whole week. Why would God give His people such instruc- tions? Perhaps it would be profitable to picture ourselves as one of those walking around the walls of the fortress city Jericho. During those days of marching around this great enemy fortress, what thoughts are going through our minds?

I think this exercise of being quiet, not speaking to each other for a whole week, was designed by God to give the Israelites time to con- template their situation and the great walls that shut them out of both Jericho and the promised land. These walls were barriers, obstacles to be overcome, if this stronghold of opposition was to be taken. These believers quit their normal activities and conversations to concentrate on their unified objective. As they walked in silence around the city, they had time to contemplate the impossibility of their situation, which would lead them to see the necessity of calling out to God (prayer), seeking His divine resources to move in this situation. The silence of their walk was filled with much fervent prayer asking for God's work- ing in the situation.

An example of an individual prayer walking can be seen in Paul's approach to ministry at Athens (Acts 17:16, 22-23). When he arrived in Athens, he sought for the Lord to lead him in how to present the Gospel to the sophisticated Athenians. Paul first walked around the city making observations and praying, "Lord give me utterance that I might make known the Gospel" (Ephesians 6:19). Paul was walking and asking that the very words and expressions of the Gospel may be given him. Also he asked, "Lord give me boldness and the ability to share the Gospel with these religious people" (Ephesians 6:19-20, paraphrase). "Lord open a door for the message and strengthen me that I may make it man- ifest as I ought" (Colossians 4:2-3, paraphrase).

As Paul walked and prayed through the streets of Athens, the Holy Spirit answered his prayers. Paul became sensitive to the many statues and altars in the city that were erected to idols. Paul saw these people were very religious but were without knowledge of the one true God. Later, when he had opportunity to speak and present the Gospel on Mars Hill, he made use of this leading the Holy Spirit had given him.

Our motivations for this public ministry of prayer walking are important. Jesus spoke a word of caution about those who loved to stand praying on the streets. (Matthew 6:5). He was not saying that pray- ing on the street was wrong. The problem was these people's motiva- tions. Jesus said that they prayed publicly that they would be seen by men. Jesus was addressing the motivation of those who pray publicly. Wrong motivations can subvert good and vital ministries.

Believers share that sometimes God calls them to prayer walk alone. They sense that God is calling them to walk in an area and pray. At other times, prayer walks may involve small groups or an entire prayer cell. It is less threatening for people to see two or three strolling along together in apparent conversation with each other than a large group. This also allows for the opportunity to stop to interact with peo- ple the Lord may give you divine appointments with. Some prayer walks are single events and others are done on a regular basis. It is good to have a piece of literature to leave with any who express any interest. A tract, a New Testament, or the address of a nearby church would be helpful.
Prayer walks are valuable ways to mobilize prayer toward three basic goals:

For researching the target area

This involves walking and asking God to give discernment regarding evaluating the various aspects of the situation in which we are seeking to minister. “Lord, show us where You are working.” We find an exam- ple of God giving such discernment when Paul was in Corinth. Paul had been preaching the Gospel, and many were being saved and a church had been started. Then Paul began to encounter growing opposition, even among religious people. This opposition caused Paul to seriously consider moving on to another city. The Scriptures record that the Lord communicated information to Paul which affected his ministry plans. God told Paul, “Do not be afraid, any longer, but go on speaking..., for

I have many people in this city” (Acts 18:9-10). The Lord showed Paul there are still many sheep yet to be called (John 10:27). With this new information, Paul changed his plans and continued there in Corinth a year and a half (Acts 18:11).

“Lord, show us those things that are barriers to the advance of the Gospel.” We can see and be aware of the many physical things that impede the advance of the Gospel. But we need to be aware of the spir- itual factors at work behind the physical. The adversary has sown many seeds of deception, ignorance and lies, described in Scripture as “strong- holds.” They are fortresses Satan has established in the thinking process- es of people, both individually and collectively (society, culture) (II Corinthians 10:3-5).

These strongholds of thinking in people’s minds produce the spir- itual confusion, prejudices and attitudes about life that keep people sep- arated from God and each other. These strongholds of ignorance and deception need to be pulled down (just as Jericho’s walls) by praying truth, the light of the Gospel into these situations, which dispels the dark. “The truth will make you free” (John 8:32). Our adversary, the devil, is a liar. Deception is his most powerful weapon for standing against the advance of God’s purposes.

Through prayer walks, the target area is researched for sensitivity to where God is already at work and to the various impediments to the Gospel.

For interceding for the target area

A second purpose for prayer walks is to intercede and ask God’s bless- ings upon the people and situations we encounter as we walk:

• For family, employment, government and religious situations
• For schools nursery, elementary and secondary, trade, universi- ties and seminaries
• For problems of crime, drugs and prostitution; racial harmony; unjust structures that allow evil to flourish and keep people with- out hope
• For people in transition.

Many times there seems to be an increased receptivity to the Gospel when people are in times of transition or out of their natural culture. These would involve times of sickness, trauma, war, death, unemployment.

Regarding praying for various governmental authorities, we are specifically instructed to be praying “for kings and all who are in author- ity” (I Timothy 2:2). “So that we may lead a tranquil and quiet life in all godliness and dignity.” We are to pray that these government leaders would provide an environment conducive to the advance of the Gospel.

Scripture speaks of a king named Cyrus who was an unbeliever. We are told, “The Lord stirred up the spirit of Cyrus king of Persia.” The king publicly testified about what God was leading him to do. He said, God “has appointed me to build Him a house in Jerusalem” (Ezra 1:1-2). King Artaxerxes was another unbeliever in whose heart God worked to move His purposes ahead. He shared that the Lord “had put such a thing as this into the king’s heart, to adorn the house of the Lord” (Ezra 7:27). We can ask God to stir up the hearts of governmental leaders to be favorably disposed towards the Gospel and Christians.

For making contacts in the target area

Through prayer walks, we have opportunities to come into contact with the unbelievers we desire to see blessed. They may ask us what we are doing. “We are asking God to help and bless people in this area. Is there anything we can be praying about for you or your family?” Many are amazed at the openness of unbelievers to intercessory prayer on their behalf. When people get up against the wall, even atheists will pray or be willing to ask for prayer.

So many times unbelievers share something that is a real problem to them. For the most part, these requests are for “felt needs.” Felt needs are those things people perceive to be their basic needs. Examples of felt needs are loneliness, marriage, financial and medical problems. While these are certainly problems, they are temporal problems. Their most critical problem is their spiritual need. They lack a relationship with the Lord and the power to deal with bondage to sin in their lives. But take time right then to pray with them for their request. God seems to delight in answering prayers for felt needs as a means of revealing Himself and making unbelievers more open to deal with their spiritual needs. Later, continue to pray for both them and their request. Also see if you can follow up this contact and begin to develop a relationship with this person. One advantage of doing frequent prayer walks in a specific area is the ability to begin to develop relationships that will advance the Gospel. Like Jesus, we can be sensitive to being personal- ly involved in friendly, helpful ways with those for whom we are pray- ing. This is living out faith by ministering with more than words (James 2:16). Remember, God wants to use both us and our prayers to advance His plans and purposes.

Jesus was especially sensitive to the felt needs of unbelievers. He often moved to meet these felt needs in order to prepare the soil of their hearts to receive the Gospel. An example is Luke 17:11-19. The ten lep- ers cried out, “Jesus, Master have mercy on us.” They perceived their greatest

need was to be physically healed of leprosy. Jesus met their perceived/felt need with the expectation that they would then deal with their real need. Their real need was a spiritual relationship with God. Only one leper came back and fell at the feet of Jesus worshipping Him (which was an expression of his new relationship). The Lord answered his prayer regarding a felt need to prepare his heart to receive spiritual healing.

At the wedding in Cana, Jesus met a felt need. At the reception it became evident to Jesus they were running short of wine. If this short- age of wine became known, it would adversely affect the reputation of the father of the bride. This father had a greater need than his felt need for more wine. Jesus was sensitive to the father's felt need and that it was the will of the Father to meet this need, so He did (John 2:1-11).

This is the way Solomon prayed for unbelievers. "Lord, when they pray, hear them and answer their prayer, that they may come to know you and to reverence you, and know you have established a true faith upon the earth" (I Kings 8:41-43 paraphrase).

It is the Lord's intention that His church be growing and multiply- ing. It is His plan that we believers be penetrating our communities with a living faith which involves our faith that God hears and answers prayer. Prayer walks are a way of mobilizing much prayer focused on advancing the Gospel in a particular area. Through this prayer, we gain understanding of the situation in which we seek to minister; we bring blessings upon the people and we begin to develop relationships that will advance the Gospel. What would our neighborhoods and cities look like if God's people walked about praying for them?

Section Four: Leadership Issues

A Biblical Perspective on Leadership

It is important to often revisit the New Testament perspective on spiri- tual leadership. Differences exist between leadership models presented in the Old Testament and those in the New Testament. Old Testament leadership seems concerned with huge movements on a national level. New Testament leadership seems more focused on the step-by-step development of people, both as individuals and groups. The concept of leadership which we hold affects the way we approach ministry. Our concept of leadership needs to be built on the teachings and examples given for the church and its expansion. What type of leadership was used to cause the early church to spread and grow so dynamically?

The Lord taught, "Whoever wishes to become great among you shall be your servant" (Matthew 20:26). The Lord taught that the lead- ership that would advance His purposes did not focus on hierarchy or organizational matters, but rather on motivation to serve others. Jesus was clear to point out to His disciples the difference between Old Testament and New Testament leadership. Our aspirations to leadership are to be valued only as they arise from commitment to servanthood, not privileged status or lording it over others. The test the Lord was giv- ing here is, "Does my leadership serve others?" The apostle Paul expressed his servant's heart by resourcing others through equipping, mentoring, and continually upholding them in prayer.

"Remember those who led you, who spoke the word of God to you; and considering the result of their conduct, imitate their faith" (Hebrews 13:7). New Testament leadership was based on a godly life to be imitated and followed. The trust and confidence leaders elicit is based on more than position or on what they say. Leadership is not just a person who knows or says. Leadership is derived from relationship not organizational structure. Paul shared how he provided spiritual lead- ership to them. "But we proved to be gentle among you, as a nursing mother tenderly cares for her own children. Having so fond an affec- tion for you, we were well-pleased to impart to you not only the gospel of God but also our own lives, because you had become very dear to us" (1 Thessalonians 2:7-8). Godly character is the foundation of Biblical influence and leadership.

The Acts of the Apostles, in a continuing way, evidences the dynamic leading of the Holy Spirit in the advances of the Gospel. The clear message was that the ministry was practically led on the field by the Holy Spirit. Acts 16:6-9 shows the place of a keen sensitivity of Paul to the leading of the Holy Spirit. The apostles in Jerusalem did not seek to organize, control or direct the field advance of the early church. Nor did Paul operate completely independently from them and their coun- sel. So we note that the development of individuals and the church seemed to have very little to do with organizational structures, but rather was very decentralized, "grass roots" and dependent upon the leading of the Holy Spirit.

In Colossians Paul referred to those who served him as "fellow ser- vants" (Colossians 1:7). To be sure, those who ministered with Paul had differing callings, gifts and abilities. Yet, all were seen as equally valu- able. Paul did not operate alone. He functioned as part of a diverse min- istry team. In no way could the apostle Paul be likened to a general or Chief Executive Officer. Rather, he functioned as one among a ministry team linked together by their relationship to God and commitment to seeing His purposes accomplished.

Peter, Stephen, Paul, Barnabas, and others were communicators of vision. "Vision" is the picture we hold in our minds of a future reality that is based on what God has revealed in His Word. They communi- cated vision for what God had done in the past, for what God was presently doing and what He had revealed He desired to see accom- plished. Such leaders give certainty and big-picture purpose to others. Sharing vision is an integral part of leadership for those who are encouraging and mobilizing the church and prayer.

The leadership style that will advance God's purposes;

• Has as a prime orientation/motivation of serving others.

Leaders see themselves and their role as being as a resource to others.

• Is based on the influence of godly character. Character is valued over charisma.
• Has keen sensitivity to the leading of the Holy Spirit. Prayer is a vital reality in their lives
• Values all other participants as co-workers.

Leaders love the Lord and His church.

• Understands and communicates vision and perspective.

Leaders have vision for the growth and expansion of God's kingdom.

Even a superficial reflection on history reveals that people have an innate propensity to abuse leadership and to seek to institutionalize it. This must be guarded against. Christian leadership is one thing, and sec- ular leadership—with the tendency to emphasize charisma, organiza- tion, and programs—is another. If Christ's model is not followed, it is not Christian leadership.

Core Convictions as a Basis for Cooperative Ministry

In bringing people and groups together for prayer, an initial important question is, "Who, theologically speaking, can we work with?" There are those who call themselves Christians. They profess seemingly common goals and, therefore, seek to be involved with us in ministries. But many have a theology that is quite different in its foundations and allegiances to groups and/or churches who historically and presently stand in both word and deed against a clear presentation of the Biblical Gospel. Some promote the inclusion of these in ministries, such as prayer based on love and seeking "unity." While there is room for differences in under- standing and practice in some areas, at some point the Gospel message is changed so it becomes "another gospel" (Galatians 1:6-9). These spu- rious practices and doctrines bring disunity to the body of Christ.

In the time of Nehemiah, Satan sought to disrupt the work of God's people in many ways. Some who proclaimed themselves messengers of God, prophets, expressed their desire to join Nehemiah and the work in Jerusalem. But these were wisely excluded, and it later became apparent that their core convictions and intentions were quite different (Nehemiah 6:10-14).

In Jesus' day, there were many "religious people." He taught, "Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven. Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name? and in thy name have cast out devils? and in thy name done many wonderful works? And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity" (Matthew 7:21-23, KJV).

The Ephesian believers were commended by the Spirit of God for they tested those who claimed to be apostles but were found to be liars (Revelation 2:2). Paul faced the problem of those who professed to be followers of the Lord Jesus Christ but promoted "another gospel" (Galatians 1:6-9). They seemingly had a common goal but not a com- mon faith. We note throughout Scripture that our adversary is always seeking to subvert the workings of God. Believers have been given responsibility to deal with such problems. As disciples of the Lord, we ask, "Who can I minister with?" or "Am I to work and minister with any- body and everybody?" How are we to deal with this issue? More impor- tantly, "How would our Lord have us deal with this issue?"

God has given us the resources to deal with this issue. He tells us to recognize that we wrestle not against flesh and blood but are involved in what is characterized as spiritual warfare. Believers have real spiritual adversaries in Satan and his followers. So we pray, expressing our dependency upon God and seeking Him and His protection both for ourselves and the work of God. David prayed for God's protection from "those who speak peace with their neighbors, while evil is in their hearts" (Psalm 28:3). Along with our prayer for discernment and pro- tection, we use the truth God has given us by focusing on two interre- lated questions:

1. What are the core convictions of what it means to be a Christian?

2. Can those who desire to join us in ministry identify with us on these core convictions?

Why do we labor and pray for the advance of the Gospel? We do so because we hold, with holy boldness, core convictions God has given us to believe, which are also the basis for our being able to labor together.

From God's Word, we establish what the core convictions are of what it means to be a Christian.

We believe that the Scriptures teach:

• they are the inspired revelation of God and the only basis for faith and Christian living.

"All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness; so that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work" (II Timothy 3:16-17).

The Scripture is complete and all the revelation that is needed—Sola Scriptura.

• there is one God, eternally existent in three persons, Father, Jesus the Son and Holy Spirit. They are one in essence, co-equal and co-existent.

• that the Lord Jesus Christ is the sole source of salvation. Jesus said, "I am the way" (John 14:6). There is an exclusivity here, for all other paths to God are eliminated. The apostle Peter said, "There is sal- vation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven that has been given among men by which we must be saved," (Acts 4:12). The apostle Paul said, "There is one foundation the Lord Jesus Christ" (I Corinthians 3:11). For there is one God, and one mediator also between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, who gave Himself as a ransom for all" (I Timothy 2:5-6).

• that salvation is by grace, a free gift apart from works. "By grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; not as a result of works, so that no one may boast" (Ephesians 2:8-9). God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us. For if while we were enemies we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son" (Romans 5:8,10). Scripture presents that salvation is the free gift of God.

• salvation is appropriated by personal faith in who Jesus Christ is and what He accomplished in His death and resurrection. "If you con- fess with your mouth Jesus as Lord and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved" (Romans 10:9). Jesus said, "But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, even to those who believe in His name" (John 1:12). "Therefore having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ" (Romans 5:1). Salvation is only possible through a

relationship with Jesus Christ. It is personally activated in an individual through the regenerating work of the Holy Spirit which caus- es one to realize his lost and sinful condition and enables his repentance and trusting the Lord Jesus Christ.

• there is the expectation that the body of Christ would spread and grow numerically (Matthew 28:19, Ephesians 4:15-16). It is God's plan that the knowledge of salvation available in Jesus Christ should be shared with all people, that they may believe and be saved. He has entrusted the spreading of the Gospel to us who have experienced redemption ourselves. We believers are ministers of reconciliation, ambassadors, co-laborers with Christ. These words are all pictures God has given that present the active participation of believers in the advances of the Gospel. The church, God's redeemed, are His instru- ment of proclaiming the Gospel, both verbally and through modeling, demonstrating the relevance of faith and the transforming power of the Good News.

Now that we have established the core convictions of what it means to be a Christian, of what Biblical faith involves, we can move to the second critical question. Can those who desire to join us in ministry identify with us on the core convictions of what it means to be a Christian? This will give us answers to the question of, "Who can we minister with?" and also provide a constant guideline for our future min- istry together.

Let us not confuse seemingly common goals with common faith. We know that sincerity is not the issue but rather truth. Let us ask those who desire to join us in ministry, if they identify with us on the core convictions of what it means to be a Christian. We are doing what God told us to do and that which was modeled by the early church. We are using God's Word, these core convictions, as guide posts to protect both ourselves and the work of God.

Our strategy is to encourage and mobilize prayer among the whole body of Christ and to enlist widespread involvement in ministries of prayer. From the initial stages and in a continuing way, the foundation- al truths of the Gospel are clearly emphasized. We invite participation of all who can embrace and identify with these core values of what it means to be a Christian. The Lord prohibits us from being yoked togeth- er in ministries or prayer leadership or to sit under the spiritual leader- ship or teaching of one who is unwilling to embrace the foundational truths of what it means to be a believer.

Clearly, we accept that Biblical faith consists of more than just acceptance of certain intellectual truth, but it is not less than that. Biblical faith can only exist in the presence of truth. Biblical faith is not just mental assent but belief, a living and trusting in these foundations of our faith. The issue is not the amount of our faith but the ground of our faith. For those who would desire to participate in ministry as fel- low members of the family of God, can they identify with these core values of what it means to be a believer?

The unity Jesus was praying and dying for is neither a unity at any cost, nor a unity that costs nothing. It is a unity that springs forth rather naturally where the Spirit of truth is allowed to rule. It is a unity that has to be guarded and maintained by submission and dependence upon His revealed will, His Word of truth, the Scriptures. To pursue unity at the expense of truth is treason toward God. Only the Word can protect us and the church from our arch enemy, the deceiver.

We recognize that it seems very easy for us to be out of Biblical balance.
1. We can be those who don't care about doctrine or obedience but want to love Jesus.
2. We can be those who care only about doctrine but not about love.
3. We can be those who care about obedience but not about love.

There is a connection in knowing truth, loving God, (if we love we will obey) and obeying His word which is the expression of His will. These are not three separate experiences but all part of the single expression of Biblical faith. Our goal is seeking to maintain a Spirit-filled relationship grounded in truth: In things essential there must be unity, in nonessentials tolerance, in all things charity.

Conclusion

This material has sought to treat prayer from the aspect that it would be a resource for leaders and mobilizers of prayer that strengthens and expands the church. One of the joys of my life is leading workshops for those involved in mobilizing prayer. These workshops are structured as interactive times which I usually begin by handing out some founda- tional questions on prayer.

One of the ways I sense that God teaches us is by getting us to wrestle with the right questions and then leading us in the Scriptures to the answers. This moves us ahead in our understanding of key issues. The questions I use come from my own struggles with prayer. For many years prayer seemed so mysterious. The answers seemed to be shallow and some even trite. Prayer for me was kind of like grasping to get a hold of smoke.

You could see it was there, even smell it but I couldn't get hold of it. It just kept slipping through my fingers. But then in my sense of great need I called out to the Lord to do something in my prayer life...Lord teach me to pray. He answered that prayer by showing me things in the scripture that gave me answers and understanding which changed my prayer life.

So in the workshops the participants work thru the questions in small groups and then come back together. I have them share their answers which really helps me to sense where this group is in their understanding of prayer. This also provides a platform to affirm good answers and interject others.

As you reflect on the material in this book in light of these ques- tions, you will be aware that it is written to provide multiple answers to these foundational questions.

1. What is your interest or desire or burden regarding prayer? This question provokes some personal introspection. Typical replies to this question are:

I have just a general or increasing burden for prayer, as yet undefined.

I desire to grow in intimacy with God.

I have a desire to intercede about particular issues, ie. unity, seeing people saved, new churches started, etc.

I have a desire to pray with and encourage others in their prayer.

Whatever the interest in prayer it is important to write out what God is doing in your life or calling you to do. We have Paul's encouragement to; "Take heed to the ministry which you have received in the Lord, that you may fulfill it" (Colossians 4:17). When we are unclear, we are ineffective and easily side-tracked.

Nehemiah is an example of one whose interest in prayer started with a general concern, then new information fueled his desire to seek the Lord for answers. This developed into a prayer burden and a deep seeking of God with other believers. As God brought answers to their prayers, a plan came forth, and Nehemiah's ministry developed and God's purpose were advanced.

2. How can believers be motivated to pray? Or how can believers be motivated to grow in their prayer life?

a. Scriptural examples can be shared of the prayers of God's people changing the course of history.
b. Dynamic truths about prayer can be shared such as:

God has linked Himself and His working in the world to us and to our prayers.

Our job description shows our function is that of ambassadors for Christ, co-laborers, and priests representing others before the throne of the Lord.

Life is war. We will not really be motivated to pray until we truly grasp this truth. Neither will we know what to pray until we understand life this. Spiritual warfare prayer is enlisting God's resources, to defend ourselves against spiritual adversaries.

c. We can flesh out portraits of the biblical personalities God has used, for they all show the vital importance of prayer, i.e. the Apostle Paul for whom prayer was vital part of his life and ministry.
d. Fresh testimonies of God's working in response to our prayers can be shared.
Our faith, even to pray, comes by hearing and using the word of God. So it is important to present truth and the Spirit of God will use it to motivate believers to the importance of prayer, to devote themselves to prayer.

3. What can be done to see that prayer is according to God's will? How can prayer be focused on those issues which will advance God's purposes and not become sidetracked?

a. Recognize a chief ploy of satan is to keep us from praying in the will of God. So realize he will be at work even as we pray. An example is the way satan sought to divert Peter. Jesus said Satan inspired the thoughts of Peter (Matthew 16:23).
b. There are Biblical models of prayer we can learn from and follow.
The examples of prayer we see in scripture, the Lord's prayer,

Paul's prayers, etc. reveal God's will. As we pray according to these models we know we are praying God's will. This will assist us to focus our prayers and keep us from being diverted.

c. There are Biblical principles of prayer that God has given to guide us in praying.
d. God has revealed His plans and purposes that we might align our lives and our prayers with His desires.
e. We can cultivate a dependence on the guidance of the Holy Spirit.
Especially in prayer we can be sensitive that God may call differ- ent people to differing aspects or levels of prayer.

4. What can be done to grow and expand the number of believers involved in prayer and movements of prayer? We know that God must be at work quickening believers both with the desire and the ability to grow in their prayer life. But what can we do to cooperate with God in seeing prayer grow, deepen and expand among the body of Christ ?

a. We can make it a high personal priority to pray for the Lord to raise up a mighty army of those who would pray and intercede for the advances of the Gospel (Luke 11:1). Especially that God would raise up many to provide leadership in prayer. These will be pace- setters for prayer, who encourage and equip others for the ministry of intercession.
b. We can pray for Divine connections with others in whose heart God is working in the area of prayer and others involved in advancing the Gospel. Pray for God to give you ways and oppor- tunities to encourage them and labor together.
c. We can model a growing lifestyle of prayer as a priority and reali- ty in our own life. And share how God is teaching and growing us in our prayer life. This would include the Scripture's motivational encouragements, examples, models of intercessors, etc. We can pray for and encourage pastors, youth leaders, Sunday school teachers, etc. to share scriptural messages on prayer.

d. Communicate what we are doing in mobilizing prayer, not only verbally but in written form. Literature can contribute to our efforts.
e. Share models for mobilizing and focusing prayer, cells, walks, con- certs of prayer.

5. How do we go about resolving the problem of seemingly unanswered prayer and deal with the discouragement that can come from it?

a. We can encourage the development of Biblical expectations as to how God answers prayer.
b. We understand God's answers to prayer are conditioned by His will, timing and purposes. We focus not on results but on our responsibility. We pray in faith that God hears our prayer and is always at work in our lives.
c. We need to be sensitive to things that hinder God's hearing and answering our prayers.
d. We realize that sometimes we need to persevere in prayer. Our faith is not in prayer but in God.
e. We need to actively resist the devil because he seeks to discour- age us and our faith in God.

In the beginning of this book an initial question was posed for consid- eration. What should the prayer life of a disciple of the Lord look like? Hopefully this book has highlighted some aspects that will give and allow growth in both the personal and corporate prayer life.

The bottomline is: God has invaded our lives in such a way that we shall never be the same again. He has called us to be co-labors with His Son, Jesus Christ. He has given us prayer and access to the very throne of God Almighty. He has called us to pray in such a way that both we and our world are changed. We are just ordinary people but with an extraordinary God. Let us increasingly seek for the Lord to teach us to pray and devote ourselves to grow in this vital aspect of being a disciple. Amen.

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