Prayer 101

John Edmiston

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Developing Confidence In Prayer

This sermon works on a very simple idea – pray what God wants you to pray!

Confidence in prayer is often eroded over the years by unanswered prayer on issues that are important to us or by praying for a promises out of context and ending up disappointed with God.

For instance God promises Cyrus AI will give you the treasures of darkness". I cannot claim this specific prophecy to a particular individual to myself unless I have it very clearly confirmed to me by the Holy Spirit. Not every Christian can rule a vast empire!

Getting our confidence in prayer back again involves going to the Scripture and praying:

1. For the things God asks us ordinary believers to pray for.
2. Satisfying the conditions He places upon us for answered prayer.

As we will see there are ten things that God specifically asks us to pray for and even PROMISES us by His faithfulness that He will answer. These include:

1. Salvation and Forgiveness
2. The Holy Spirit and His Gifts
3. Provision of Daily Needs
4. Wisdom
5. The Ability To Cope With Today/Deliverance From Temptation
6. The Difficult People In Your Life
7. The Good Things That You Are Seeking God For
8. Bold Proclamation Of The Gospel
9. For Governments To Grant Freedom To The Proclamation Of The Gospel
10. The Cries Of The Church In Unity
11. Healing Based On Repentance and Confession

Issues of Authority

Sometimes we lack confidence in our prayers because we lack confidence in our authority in Christ.

1. God asks us to pray.(See the next three pages of verse!)
2. God gives us the Holy Spirit to help us pray. (Romans 8:26)
3. He is a gracious and generous God. (Romans 8:32 NASB) He who did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how will He not also with Him freely give you all things?
4. He has seated us in heavenly realms (Eph 2:6,7) where we shall judge angels (1 Cor 6:3) and made us citizens of heaven with direct access to God (Eph 1:19,20; Hebrews 4:14-16).
5. He has forgiven us our sins so they are no longer an obstruction to our prayers and fellowship with Him (Col1:13-15; 1 John 1:7-10).

6. Elijah was a man with a nature like ours and was able to pray mighty prayers (James 5:16-18). God promises to hear our prayers that are in His will (1 John 5:14,15).

General Promises

And Jesus answered and said to them, "Truly I say to you, if you have faith, and do not doubt, you shall not only do what was done to the fig tree, but even if you say to this mountain, 'Be taken up and cast into the sea,' it shall happen. (22) "And all things you ask in prayer, believing, you shall receive."(Matthew 21:21-22 NASB)

And whatever you ask in My name, that will I do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son. (14) If you ask Me anything in My name, I will do it. (John 14:13-14 NASB)

If you abide in Me, and My words abide in you, ask whatever you wish, and it shall be done for you. (John 15:7 NASB)

You did not choose Me, but I chose you, and appointed you, that you should go and bear fruit, and that your fruit should remain, that whatever you ask of the Father in My name, He may give to you. (John15:16 NASB)

"And in that day you will ask Me no question. Truly, truly, I say to you, if you shall ask the Father for anything, He will give it to you in My name.

"Until now you have asked for nothing in My name; ask, and you will receive, that your joy may be made full. (John 16:23-24 NASB)

You lust and do not have; so you commit murder. And you are envious and cannot obtain; so you fight and quarrel. You do not have because you do not ask. You ask and do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives, so that you may spend it on your pleasures. (James 4:2-3 NASB)

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

And this is the confidence which we have before Him, that, if we ask anything according to His will, He hears us. {15} And if we know that He hears us in whatever we ask, we know that we have the requests which we have asked from Him.(1 John 5:14-15 NASB)

Salvation and Forgiveness

And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. And do not lead us into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For Thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, forever. Amen. For if you forgive men for their transgressions, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive men, then your Father will not forgive you transgressions. (Matthew 6:12-15 NASB)

If anyone sees his brother committing a sin not leading to death, he shall ask and God will for him give life to those who commit sin not leading to death. There is a sin leading to death; I do not say that he

should make request for this.(1 John 5:16 NASB)

That if you confess with your mouth Jesus as Lord, and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you shall be saved; for with the heart man believes, resulting in righteousness, and with the mouth he confesses, resulting in salvation. For the Scripture says, "WHOEVER BELIEVES IN HIM WILL NOT BE DISAPPOINTED." For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek; for the same Lord is Lord of all, abounding in riches for all who call upon Him; for "WHOEVER WILL CALL UPON THE NAME OF THE LORD WILL BE SAVED."(Romans 10:9-13 NASB) (author's emphasis)

The Holy Spirit And His Gifts

"For everyone who asks, receives; and he who seeks, finds; and to him who knocks, it shall be opened.

{11} "Now suppose one of you fathers is asked by his son for a fish; he will not give him a snake instead of a fish, will he? {12} "Or if he is asked for an egg, he will not give him a scorpion, will he?

{13} "If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more shall your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask Him?"(Luke 11:10-13 NASB)

Pursue love, yet desire earnestly spiritual gifts, but especially that you may prophesy. (1 Corinthians 14:1 NASB)

Therefore let one who speaks in a tongue pray that he may interpret. (1 Corinthians 14:13 NASB)

Provision of Daily Needs

Give us this day our daily bread. (Matthew 6:11 NASB)

"But if God so arrays the grass of the field, which is alive today and tomorrow is thrown into the furnace, will He not much more do so for you, O men of little faith? (31) "Do not be anxious then, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'With what shall we clothe ourselves?' (32) "For all these things the Gentiles eagerly seek; for your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things. (33) "But seek first His kingdom and His righteousness; and all these things shall be added to you. (Matthew 6:30-33 NASB)

The Ability To Cope With Today/ Deliverance From Temptation

And do not lead us into temptation, but deliver us from evil. (Matthew 6:13 NASB)

And said to them, "Why are you sleeping? Rise and pray that you may not enter into temptation."(Luke 22:46 NASB)

But pray that your flight may not be in the winter, or on a Sabbath. (Matthew 24:20-22 NASB) Therefore do not be anxious for tomorrow; for tomorrow will care for itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own.(Matthew 6:34 NASB)

No temptation has overtaken you but such as is common to man; and God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will provide the way of escape also, that you may be able to endure it.(1 Corinthians 10:13 NASB)

Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. {7} And the peace of God, which surpasses all comprehension, shall guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. (Philippians 4:6-7 NASB)

For The Difficult People In Your Life

"But I say to you, love your enemies, and pray for those who persecute you bless those who curse you, pray for those who mistreat you.(Matthew 5:44; Luke 6:28 NASB)

Wisdom

But if any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all men generously and without reproach, and it will be given to him. {6} But let him ask in faith without any doubting, for the one who doubts is like the surf of the sea driven and tossed by the wind. {7} For let not that man expect that he will receive anything from the Lord, {8} being a double-minded man, unstable in all his ways. (James 1:5-8 NASB)

We have not ceased to pray for you and to ask that you may be filled with the knowledge of His will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding. (Colossians 1:9 NASB)

The Good Things That You Are Seeking God For

"Ask, and it shall be given to you; seek, and you shall find; knock, and it shall be opened to you. {8} "For everyone who asks receives, and he who seeks finds, and to him who knocks it shall be opened.

{9}"Or what man is there among you, when his son shall ask him for a loaf, will give him a stone?

{10} "Or if he shall ask for a fish, he will not give him a snake, will he? {11} "If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more shall your Father who is in heaven give what is good to those who ask Him! (Matthew 7:7-11 NASB)

Bold Proclamation Of The Gospel

Then He said to His disciples, "The harvest is plentiful, but the workers are few. {38} "Therefore beseech the Lord of the harvest to send out workers into His harvest." (Matthew 9:37-38 NASB)

With all prayer and petition pray at all times in the Spirit, and with this in view, be on the alert with all perseverance and petition for all the saints, {19} and pray on my behalf, that utterance may be given to me in the opening of my mouth, to make known with boldness the mystery of the gospel, {20} for which I am an ambassador in chains; that in proclaiming it I may speak boldly, as I ought to speak. (Ephesians 6:18-20 NASB)
Devote yourselves to prayer, keeping alert in it with an attitude of thanksgiving; {3} praying at the same

time for us as well, that God may open up to us a door for the word, so that we may speak forth the mystery of Christ, for which I have also been imprisoned; {4} in order that I may make it clear in the way I ought to speak. (Colossians 4:2-4 NASB)

For Governments To Give Freedom To The Proclamation Of The Gospel

First of all, then, I urge that entreaties and prayers, petitions and thanksgivings, be made on behalf of all men, {2} for kings and all who are in authority, in order that we may lead a tranquil and quiet life in all godliness and dignity. {3} This is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Savior, {4} who desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth. (1 Timothy 2:1-4 NASB)

The Cries Of The Church In Unity

"Again I say to you, that if two of you agree on earth about anything that they may ask, it shall be done for them by My Father who is in heaven. {20} For where two or three have gathered together in My name, there I am in their midst." (Matthew 18:19-20 NASB)

Healing Based On Repentance And Confession

Is anyone among you sick? Let him call for the elders of the church, and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord; {15} and the prayer offered in faith will restore the one who is sick, and the Lord will raise him up, and if he has committed sins, they will be forgiven him.

{16} Therefore, confess your sins to one another, and pray for one another, so that you may be healed. The effective prayer of a righteous man can accomplish much. (James 5:14-16 NASB)

The Lord's Prayer as a Pattern for the Prayer Life of the Believer

Introduction

As Christians we are to love the Lord our God with all our heart and mind and soul and strength - which means we will pray to him regularly as the one we love. We are also called to love our neighbor as ourselves - which means, in part, that we will be regularly praying because we love our neighbors and bring the needs of our fellow man to God. So prayer is essential to our relationship to God and part of our duty toward our neighbor. While there is no command in the Bible "thou shalt have a daily quiet time" it is fairly obvious that prayer is to have a large part of the Christians life. Commands such as "pray without ceasing", "pray at all times in the Spirit" indicate regular times of prayer which were meant to be kept up. People who are on fire for God are people who pray regularly. However prayer is an art form and a bit of a struggle at first. Many people give up on prayer because they expect it to come easily and spontaneously. It doesn't - you have to be taught how to pray.

One of the first things you need is a simple flexible structure to direct your praying. If you don't at least have some idea of a structure then daydreams and distractions take over. Our minds tend to run away from prayer. Structure in prayer trains us to be successful in prayer.

Next we need help expressing our thoughts and emotions to God - at least to start with. Praise is a fairly unnatural activity for Australians and we are not much given to outbursts of passion. Our hearts and minds need to be directed upward.

Thirdly, we need open-endedness so we can keep on growing in God.

Fourthly, our prayer style should guide us into the will of God and the realm of answered prayer.

The Lord's Prayer does all these things when it is used as the structure behind your prayer life. The first five minutes of your quiet time can be spent hallowing God's name, the next five minutes praying for "Thy Kingdom come , thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven..." touching on everything from missionaries to wise decisions.

Then on to your needs "give us this day our daily bread", another few minutes asking for forgiveness of self and forgiving the hurts others have done to you, finally asking for protection from the evil one and perceived threats and temptations ending the eyes being raised to God in praise. If only five minutes is given to each section - you can easily pray for half an hour. Without that structure most of us are flat out praying for ten minutes. This sermon will simply teach you how to use the Lord's Prayer as the backbone of your prayer life.

The Lord's Prayer Explained

The "Lord's Prayer" breaks a few of the conventional rules of prayer. For instance, confession is one of the last activities, not one of the first. There is much praise and intercession before there is any confession. There is no grovelling in sin. The cross of Christ is foreshadowed in this prayer in that for the Christian sin is not a catastrophe. All your sins past present and future have been dealt with by Christ according to the kindness and grace of God. Sin should never be treated lightly and confession is important to your spiritual health. However, its place is last not first. We can come boldly into the presence of God and find grace and help in time of need.

The next unusual thing about the Lord's Prayer is its apparent brevity. It takes only 30 seconds or so to say. It is almost disappointingly short. There are I think two reasons for this – firstly, it was meant to be memorized. Secondly, it had two uses 1.) As a guide to praying 2.) As a model prayer. In both uses Jesus wanted His Kingdom prayer to contrast with the "meaningless babble of the pagans", or the extended vain-glorying of the scribes and Pharisees. So His ideal prayer was to the point and focused on the glory of God.

Thirdly, the prayer at no points attempts to persuade God. God is presented as a loving Father who knows our needs and is willing to answer them. He is not abstract or far removed but close and personal.

Fourthly, it is unusual in that there is only one condition for it being answered – and it is not that we be good boys and girls. The condition is that we forgive those who have been bad boys and girls. Self-righteousness is the only thing that can stop the Lord's Prayer being answered. We are all seen as in need of forgiveness. We are all called sinners in need of grace by the Lord's Prayer and we are to extend grace. Softness of heart will overflow with blessings from God. Some verses I often come back to on this topic are found in Luke 6:35-38.

But love your enemies, do good to them, and lend to them without expecting to get anything back. Then your reward will be great, and you will be sons of the Most High, because he is kind to the ungrateful and wicked. (36) Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful. (37) "Do not judge, and you will not be judged. Do not condemn, and you will not be condemned. Forgive, and you will be forgiven. (38) Give, and it will be given to you. A good measure, pressed down, shaken together and running over, will be poured into your lap. For with the measure you use, it will be measured to you."

Fifthly, and perhaps most startling, the Lord's prayer invites us into the very counsels of God. His name, His Kingdom and the doing of His will are now our concerns. We are allowed to call Him Father and ask for heavenly things that are "too high for us". I cannot think of anyone in the Old Testament who called YHWH Father up until the Lord's prayer and the resurrection and ascension of Christ, the business of heaven was in general, the business of the Lord alone. Now we are invited in. You and I in our quiet time can pray that the angels in heaven may praise and serve God more faithfully, we can pray that nations may bend to the will of God, we direct some of the resources of heaven to places of need in the Kingdom of God. We can pray for the salvation of souls. We can influence angels, men and nations.

Getting Inside The Lord's Prayer

So far we have had a few brief glances at the Lord's prayer and what it means to us. Whole books have

been written on that topic and we have to leave that section behind to move on to the "how to " bit. How can we change the Lord's Prayer from a boring ritual into the living backbone of our quiet time? We need to "get inside" the Lord's Prayer and picture what it is about. This is best done one phrase at a time.

Firstly, repeat the phrase in your mind, or even aloud until it starts to click - maybe two, three or four times. "Our Father, who is in heaven, hallowed be your name.." Let the picture build in your mind, see God on His throne, see the angels praising Him. Maybe you feel like singing a chorus...
10
As you do this a picture may form of a need "Lord help our church to really worship you..." or "Lord make my heart holy, teach me to praise you...As the though fades come back to the Lord's Prayer and the phrase Our Father, who is in heaven, hallowed be your name...let it soak in a new w picture might come to mind, pray for that, just keep the thought of hallowing God's name before you, treating him with respect, seeing him as Holy, Beautiful, wonderful, Almighty, worthy of praise.

Your kingdom come, Your will be done , on earth as it is in heaven

Focus on the battle, on God moving forward, on God overcoming, on the wonderful return of the Lord Jesus to judge the living and the dead. Picture what it would be like if God's will was done on earth as it is in heaven. Picture everyone healthy, picture all tears wiped away, picture all wickedness banished forever, picture total love, picture families together, picture glory covering the earth. Picture God's perfect will done in every single life and pray for it.

Give us this day our daily bread

The bills on the fridge spring to mind. Pray for your neighbors needs as well. Pray for the needs of the church. Remind God we need to function. Put down your self-sufficiency and admit to God that you really need His blessing. Grab hold of God and don't let Him go until you are blessed.

Forgive us our sins as we forgive those that sin against us

Confess pride, greed, bitterness, self-centeredness, desire for glory. Forgive the annoying, the ungrateful, the jealous, the backbiting. picture your sins being put on the cross and nailed there out of the way. Or picture them as balloons that pop when you confess them. Picture your most un-favorite person and then picture Jesus forgiving that person just as Jesus forgave you. Ask God to forgive them of their sins, their failures, forgive them for disappointing you, forgive them for not loving you. Take all your anger towards that person and drop it over the side of a boat traveling over the sea, watch all your anger float away then sink down, turn around feeling lighter. Bless the person you just forgave in the Spirit.

Lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil

Think of the tough situations you are going through. Ask God to reduce the testing, to have mercy on you, to take Satan out of the way if the evil one is involved.

Think of a temptation. Picture the fridge door with your temptation written in big letters across it. Pray for self-control. See yourself doing the right thing over and over. Picture yourself winning in the strength Christ supplies. Praise God that He will lift you above it. Rehearse in your mind and your Spirit how you

will overcome your temptations and tests. Do it until you are sure of God's strength helping you through. Commit your life to Him.

For Yours is the Kingdom and the Power and the Glory

Raise yours eyes to God again. See His greatness. See Him in control of the Universe, see Him hearing and answering your prayers. Give Him praise and perhaps sing a hymn or chorus. Rest in God. Finish your prayer time.

God has given us the ability to dwell on His word vividly and to "get inside" Scripture and experience it. We do not do this to empty our minds like in New Age meditation, rather we do it to fill our minds with the truth of God's word. We always come back to the Scripture properly interpreted as the basis for our thinking and picturing. I want you to get inside the Lord's prayer in anyway you can and turn it from a boring ritual into the exciting backbone of your prayer life.

Believing The Lord's Prayer

One of the great advantages of the Lord's prayer is that it leads you to pray in the will of God. Therefore, when you use it as a structure for your quiet time you are quite likely to have your prayers answered. It is easier to have faith when you are sure what you are doing and saying is in the will of God. How then can we have faith-filled Spirit filled quiet times?

1. Remind yourself of your position in Christ and of the great grace of God.
2. Open the Word of God and think on it ,ask God to allow His word to come alive to you and bring response from the Holy Spirit who dwells in all who believe.
3. Ask the Holy Spirit to help you pray.
4. Turn to the Lord's prayer, taking one phrase at a time. Think on and repeat each phrase. Make requests on the same theme as that phrase. Picture the things happening.
5. Be confident that Jesus taught us to pray that way because it is in the will of God and because it leads to answered prayer. Thank God He has answered your prayers and rejoice.

Let's go over those steps again. Awareness of Position and Grace
Bible's Inspiration Spirit's Help Lord's Prayer
Faith and Thanksgiving

Conclusion

Because we must love God and our neighbor we must pray and pray regularly. However, we need a way of overcoming boredom and distraction. I suggest the Lord's Prayer to you as God's Model Quiet Time.

Tonight I want you to go back committed to renewing your times with God, to improving both the quality and quantity of your praying and to learn how to dwell in the Spirit and to walk with God. You and I were made for prayer – let's get on with it.

Some of you may have been touched by tonight's sermon and want to do business with God. Bring the burdens of your heart down the front and set them before God. There will be elders here to talk to you if

you want someone. While the front is open to any and every need some of you may want to take this moment to promise God that you will renew your prayer life and ask Him to teach you how to pray. Come down the front and let it all be dealt with and make a fresh start for God.

Blessing

Jesus said, “Ask, and it shall be given to you; seek and you shall find; knock and it will be opened to you.” May the Lord teach you to ask seek and knock, and may you see His grace and kindness to in open and obvious ways . May you grow in the love of God and may the peace of God surround your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.

How To Be An Intercessor

The disciples asked Jesus "Teach us to pray, just as John the Baptist taught his disciples to pray". So we see that John the Baptist and Jesus both taught people how to pray. Jesus taught the disciples the Lord's Prayer. He also taught much about prayer in the Sermon on the Mount and at numerous other points in His ministry. Therefore, we can conclude that prayer – like tying our shoelaces – is something we have to be taught, and it is something we should learn early on in our walk with God.

Intercession is the self-sacrificial work of pouring one's self out for others in prayer. Jesus intercession for us is the model. In His work of "standing in the gap" for us, He:

a. Left the comfort and glory of Heaven.
b. Took on our nature and our place in life.
c. Became a servant.
d. Became subject to death. Completely pouring himself out for those He interceded for. e. Got results - and is bringing many to glory as a result of what He has done.

Here are some starting comments about how to enter in to the glory-filled ministry of intercession.

1. Start slowly it is hard and intense work.

2. Read some of the great intercessory prayers of Scripture (John 17; Daniel 9:1-19; Exodus 32:7-14; Genesis 18:22-33).

3. You need to ask God to show you His glory.

Moses saw God in the burning bush before he went to intercede for Israel. Isaiah saw God in His glory in the temple before going out to proclaim his prophetic message. Paul saw Jesus as a bright light on the Damascus Road before becoming an apostle to the Gentiles and "suffering all things for the sake of the elect" (2 Tim 2:10). The revelation of the glory of God is an essential prerequisite to powerful ministry – especially that of intercession. It is impossible, or nearly so, to sustain a passionate prayer life to a God we know only in theory. We need to know how great and wonderful God is. How holy he is. How dark sin is. How much God is merciful. How necessary we are to His plan. He calls us into a relationship of usefulness. We are instruments of his glory. Sent by His power. Getting His results.

4. You need ask God to show you the glory of those who are saved and the terrible fate of those who are lost.

Intercession involves having an intense vision for the lives of others in the light of God. We need a knowledge – a certain knowledge that God is full of glory and that He intends to make all who believe in Him glorious. We need to see that without the gospel people will decay into hate and selfishness and

become like rotting tires on a dump, that they will “perish”. That the only possibility of eternal glory for anyone lies in Christ. Without this certainty and knowledge intercession will be fruitless and unsustainable. You cannot continuously pray out of duty - you must also pray out of a deep love and concern for those who are lost. Check out the following Bible verses (Romans 8:28-30; 1 Corinthians 15: 35-58;1 Corinthians 2:7; Colossians1:27-29; Luke 13:1-5; John 3:15,16; Revelation 20:1-11,Isaiah; 66:18-24, Daniel 12:2,3).

5. Get to know the basics of prayer.

Do the basic studies at the start of this book first – especially the study on the ascension of Jesus Christ. Without a clear understanding of our place in the heavenly realms we will be powerless confused and ineffective.

6. Make a list of people to pray for and get going.

God will teach you as you do it. Learning is a combination of theory and practice in a circle called “praxis”. We learn about the theory of prayer and then we go and out and do it which in turn raises more questions so we go back to our theory and reflect on it a bit more then go back and practice... which raises more questions so we dive into Scripture again... It is a wonderful, fruitful lifestyle. So learn about prayer -then do it!

7. Be aware of the spiritual powers and how to engage in conflict with them.

Jesus faced the devil in the wilderness. Paul says “we wrestle not against flesh and blood but against powers and principalities...in the heavenly realms.” Here is a prayer to help you:

Praying for those under demonic influence.

I confess the sins of my parents and ancestors. (Exodus 34:6-8) (Particularly those involving participation in idol worship, magic, sorcery, witchcraft and the occult including some Lodges.)

I renounce all the works of the devil. (Leviticus 19:26-31; Deu. 7:5, 25 18:9-14; Acts 19:17-20; Gal 5:19-21).

I ask God to cleanse me completely from sin through the powerful work of the blood of Jesus Christ (1 John 1:7-10).

I give back to God any ground in my life that Satan may have had control of and place myself completely under the Lordship of Jesus Christ. I also ask Jesus to fill me completely with the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:33; Ephesians 5:18) and to break all bondages of Satan in my life (Jn 8:33-36) and remove all blindness from my heart (2Cor 4:3,4; Eph 4:17,18; 1Jn 2:11).

I take my authority as a son of God (John 1;1) knowing that one day I shall judge angels (1Cor 6:3) and that I am raised up with Christ and seated with Him in heavenly realms (Eph 2:6) far above all authority in heaven and on earth. (Eph 1:20,21). In the name of Jesus who holds all authority in heaven and on earth (Matthew 28:18) I command Satan and all his hosts to depart from me, my family and my house to

the place God has appointed for them, never to return.

This prayer can be prayed for others as well as for oneself. (see Daniel 9:1-17) Pray twice daily for two to three weeks.

(See also some other articles on this topic: “Demons Defeated”, “Dealing With Curses, Hexes And Spells”, “What’s Wrong With The Occult?”, “Spiritual Warfare For The Totally Afraid”.)

8. Make a study of fasting (and do it!).

Many of the great saints of God have practiced fasting and there are many good reasons for fasting – among them to know God’s will and receive power in prayer. I don’t have enough space here to discuss it but see my article on fasting for some guidelines.

Conclusion

There is a lot more I could say about intercession but this is long enough already. Ask God to teach you. Read the Scripture. Read biographies of great intercessors – “Rees Howells -Intercessor” by Norman Grubb is one that I guarantee will inspire you. Also “Bone of His Bone” by Baron Von Heugel or “Prayer” by O.Hallesby. “Prayer” by Richard Foster is a very deep book and “Don’t Just Stand There Pray Something” by Ronald Dunn is a good starting out book. Anyway if you have any questions just e-mail me!

Praying For Governments

First of all, then, I urge that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgivings be made for everyone, {2} for kings and all who are in high positions, so that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and dignity. {3} This is right and is acceptable in the sight of God our Savior, {4} who desires everyone to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth.(1 Timothy 2:1-4 NRSV)

There are five reasons given here for praying for governments:

1. That Christians may lead a quiet and peaceable life.
2. That Christians may be able to have godliness and dignity.
3. It is right and acceptable in God's eyes.
4. That people may be able to be saved.
5. That people may be able to come to a knowledge of the truth.

When governments are favorable to Christianity as they are in the Pacific Island nations of Vanuatu, Fiji, Tonga, and Papua New Guinea the Christians are able to live quite and peaceable lives, their pursuit of godliness is respected and they are not humiliated in anyway for their faith. They can have dignity. God sees this as good and acceptable.. In these countries it is easy to spread the gospel and for people to come to know the truth about God, themselves and the world around them. Substantial nation-wide or city-wide revivals are reasonably common.

In contrast Albania was, for many years, the most atheistic and anti-Christian country on earth. Christians were actively persecuted and humiliated, they could not pursue godliness, live in dignity or spread the gospel. Albanians did not come to a knowledge of the truth about God themselves or the world around them. This situation is not God's will. A whole generation of Albanians did not receive salvation as a result. The country is now as economically bankrupt as it was spiritually bankrupt.

The difference between Albania and Tonga is the difference that intercessory prayer can make to a nation. The Pacific Island nations were founded on missionary effort and have active prayer groups praying for their government. In Papua New Guinea "Operation Brukim Skru" (Operation Bended Knee) has 100,000 people praying for the PNG government (out of a population of only 3.5 million). Wherever you are in the world you can transform your nation through prayer.

How To Pray For Your Government

let's look at David's prayer for the government of his newly crowned son - Solomon.
Give the king your justice, O God, and your righteousness to a king's son. {2} May he judge your people with righteousness, and your poor with justice. (Psalms 72 NRSV)

Pray that the government will be just and that it will be given discernment of right and wrong that comes from God.

{3} May the mountains yield prosperity for the people, and the hills, in righteousness. Pray that the government may have a prosperity that reaches "the people" not just the leadership. {4} May he defend the cause of the poor of the people, give deliverance to the needy, and crush the oppressor.
Pray that the government defends the just cause of the needy. Pray that it has the moral fortitude to crush the oppressor and stand up to the powerful who are wicked. Pray that it will support programs that bring deliverance to the needy.

{5} May he live while the sun endures, and as long as the moon, throughout all generations. Pray for the personal health and prosperity of those in government.

{6} May he be like rain that falls on the mown grass, like showers that water the earth. Pray that the government is refreshing to the people and a source of goodness, blessing and growth. {7} In his days may righteousness flourish and peace abound, until the moon is no more. Pray for enduring peace and stability and a well-founded and lasting moral order. {8} May he have dominion from sea to sea, and from the River to the ends of the earth. {9} May his foes bow down before him, and his enemies lick the dust. {10} May the kings of Tarshish and of the isles render him tribute, may the kings of Sheba and Seba bring gifts. {11} May all kings fall down before him, all nations give him service.

Pray that it may be a powerful and well honored government because it has served God well. Pray that it may not be humiliated by powerful nations but instead may be honored by all.

{12} For he delivers the needy when they call, the poor and those who have no helper. {13} He has pity on the weak and the needy, and saves the lives of the needy. {14} From oppression and violence he redeems their life; and precious is their blood in his sight.

Pray that the government may consider every human life to be precious and have the "needy on their agenda". Pray that it may be the helper of the helpless. That the government may consider itself a servant of the needs of the people and despise no-one.

{15} Long may he live! May gold of Sheba be given to him. May prayer be made for him continually, and blessings invoked for him all day long.
Pray for the spiritual protection and blessing of the government – that "prayer may be made for him continually". Pray for the personal salvation and continuing sanctification of those in power. Pray for their protection from the snares of the devil – especially greed, sexual temptation and pride.

{16} May there be abundance of grain in the land; may it wave on the tops of the mountains; may its fruit be like Lebanon; and may people blossom in the cities like the grass of the field.

For an abundance of basic necessities and food. For people to "blossom" and grow, for the nation to experience God's "shalom" - blessedness and prosperity.

{17} May his name endure forever, his fame continue as long as the sun. May all nations be blessed in him; may they pronounce him happy.

For a good international reputation.

{18} Blessed be the LORD, the God of Israel, who alone does wondrous things. {19} Blessed be his glorious name forever; may his glory fill the whole earth. Amen and Amen. {20} The prayers of David son of Jesse are ended. Praise God who alone does wondrous things for their transformation that He can work in your nation.

Pray on the basis of God's glory being enhanced through godly governments. Claim the promise that His glory will fill the earth and this includes your nation and every city, state and county within it.

Supplications, Prayers, Intercessions, and Thanksgivings

First of all, then, I urge that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgivings be made for everyone, {2} for kings and all who are in high positions, so that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and dignity.(1 Timothy 2:1-2 NRSV)

Supplication indicates an earnest heartfelt prayer for God's extra-ordinary authority to be used in a particular matter. It is asking for an extraordinary move of God. Something "outside the normal channels". It is "special pleading". This may include asking God to send a revival, stop the passage of ungodly legislation , protection from invasion or war, or to act in a mighty way for the good of His gospel. Prayers is the normal word for petitions and includes the everyday requests for the health, prosperity and wisdom of the government. "Intercessions" comes from the Greek "deesis" meaning "to chance upon" or "to have an audience with a king". Hence, "to have the good fortune to have an audience with a King", in this case it is the King of Kings. We are to take the kings to their King!

Thanksgivings... whoops! Grumblers against governments take heed! We are to give thanks for them because they uphold justice and stop the world descending in anarchy and chaos. (Romans 13:1-7) We also need to give thanks for governments as we are to give thanks for in things. (1 Thessalonians 5:18 NKJV) in everything give thanks; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you. If we appreciate a good government and its good actions they are likely to be repeated and become strongholds of goodness and prosperity. Thank God today for what He is doing through your government - feeding the hungry, healing the sick, punishing the wicked, setting standards for housing and infrastructure, building highways and communication networks, administering justice, educating your children, defending your liberty.

What To Do About Discouragement With The Government

There are two things to do about discouragement 1. Start believing in a God who can do all things. 2. Get together with other positive like-minded Christians to pray for your government. When we try and tackle national level change alone we can end up like Elijah fleeing to a cave and crying out "I alone am left...". Companionship such as he later experienced with Elisha and the school of the prophets got things going again.

Do not give in. Praying for governments opens the doorway for revival and for the continued proclamation of the gospel. Praying for governments will mean that not just this year but for years to come you will be able to live a godly life in quietness and peace. Finally, let's give it Paul's priority..."first of all"(1Timothy 2:1).

How To Pray For The Lost

Many of us - if not all of us , owe our conversion to friends and family who prayed us into the Kingdom. Prayer is the big weapon for the salvation of souls. Argument and debate without prayer is dry and fruitless. Do not spend all your time bashing your head against the arguments of people. Instead, bash into Heaven with strong prayers on behalf of those you want to be saved.

Why should we pray for the lost?

1. Out of love - if we love our neighbor as ourselves we will want him or her to know Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior too.
2. Out of holy fear - if we realize that Hell is for real and for eternity then we will not want our friends, family or neighbors to go there.
3. Out of knowledge of the nature of God - who loves to be merciful and desires that all men should be saved and come to a knowledge of the truth.
4. Out of knowledge of the power of prayer - prayer often succeeds when all else has failed. It is the only way we have of asking God to move in someone's life and heart. We know that the prayer of a righteous person is powerful and effective. We know that prayers according to God's will are answered. This is not spiritual manipulation from a distance. Rather prayer grants the person the ability to see clearly and make a free and informed choice, free from the manipulative bondages and blindness that the devil tries to impose. We can legitimately pray that a person may be able to freely choose between the mercy and glory of God and the temporary trash of this world. We can pray that their blindness be removed and Christ shown to them convincingly and clearly. Imagine if we could present every non- Christian with a clear convincing presentation of the facts. Imagine they were made to choose between the love of Jesus Christ, eternal glory, a magnificent resurrection body , life in heaven etc. versus pain and torment and death and disgrace for all eternity . Only a crazy person would choose to remain a non Christian. Prayer allows the unbeliever to glimpse the facts for what they are and to make a sensible choice. It is not unfair or manipulative -it is the fairest, most freeing way we have.

Praying for Structures

Paul writes to Timothy about his FIRST PRIORITY in 1 Tim 2:1-8.

I urge, then, first of all, that requests, prayers, intercession and thanksgiving be made for everyone (2) for kings and all those in authority, that we may live peaceful and quiet lives in all godliness and holiness. (3) This is good, and pleases God our Savior, (4) who wants all men to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth. (5) For there is one God and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, (6) who gave himself as a ransom for all men--the testimony given in its proper time. (7) And for this purpose I was appointed a herald and an apostle--I am telling the truth, I am not lying--and a teacher of the true faith to the Gentiles. (8) I want men everywhere to lift up holy hands in prayer, without anger or disputing.

God wants us to pray - for kings and all those in authority... in order that people may be saved and come

to a knowledge of the truth. This points out a sometimes forgotten aspect about praying for the lost - that governments can do a lot to help or to hinder the process of evangelism. For instance, in Albania, one of the world's most atheistic communist states a generation of people has been raised without the remotest awareness of Jesus Christ or the gospel. Albania is in ruins as a result and is without the social services or human compassion that the influence of the gospel brings. On the other hand Samoa and some of the Pacific nations are very Christian and the Government actively encourages participation in Christian activities. Everyone has some knowledge of the gospel and many are saved.

God wants "all people everywhere" – that means the lot of you without exception – to pray for those in authority so that we may openly have permission to preach the gospel without hindrance. Please pray that: Our school system may remain open to Christian chaplaincy and R.E. That tax concessions for some areas of Christian work may remain in place and that more areas e.g. donations to missionary societies may be made tax exempt. That anti-Christian laws in some States may be repealed. That the Government recognize the contribution that true Christianity can make to Australia . That we change from being a secular country to a Christian nation. That we may remain able to proclaim Christianity , in all its truths, in all areas of our society. That people such as nurses who have difficult issues of conscience be allowed to be truly Christian and abstain from practices they consider inappropriate to their faith.

Also as issues such as pornography laws etc. pop up from time to time we can make them a matter of prayer by "all people everywhere". I look upon such praying is as paving the way for the gospel - it is very hard to sow the seeds of faith in a mind filled with pornographic trash. Pornography greases the path to Hell and banning it is a positive action not a negative one.

So part of our praying for the lost is praying for structures that block the spread of the gospel to be removed. The second part of praying for the lost is praying for individuals, families, villages and nations to be saved.

How To Pray for The Lost

The following ideas have been pinched from a small pamphlet called "How To Pray For The Lost" which I discovered years ago and have found very useful. I have also added in a few practical hints of my own.

The first thing you need to understand when praying for the lost is that the price has been paid. When Jesus died upon that cross He paid the price for every single sinner on the earth. When you are praying for the lost remember that the price has been paid and make that the starting point for prayer.

"Lord you bought Joe Bloggs at Calvary, he is yours and so is his wife Joanne Bloggs and now we are asking You to claim Joe and Joanne for yourself, to remove the chains that bind them. Don't let the devil have those you have bought Lord, be glorified in them and through them Lord. Take them back to yourself , set them free, Christ has done it, now we claim it . Amen "

Knowing that Christ has paid the price gives us confidence to pay boldly. It is not as if we have to bargain at all. The price is paid – that person rightly belongs to God who has bought them back out of slavery and sin. The technical name for this is "praying on the basis of redemption" or in some circles "praying for the lost in the power of the blood of Jesus" . Stand before God, confident that He wants your friend saved and confident that He has already paid the price for that to happen.

PERSISTENTLY AND REGULARLY – praying for people to be saved can at times be a very long battle. We need to pray persistently and regularly for those we want to be saved. In Luke 18:1 ff Jesus makes it clear that persistence pays off and tells us that w ought to "pray and not get weary.."

PRAY WATCHFULLY - It pays to be alert to the spiritual state of the unbeliever and to pray appropriately - are they curious about God yet? Are they convicted about their sin? Are they attracted to Jesus? Are they involved in something they would find very difficult to give up if they became a Christian? Pray specifically for where the person is at spiritually so they can take one or two steps closer to faith in God. "Lord you know how Joe finds it hard to believe your Bible – please show him it is true and that it can be relied on..."

Specific Things to Pray for:

1. That God will make them curious about spiritual things. The first hurdle is often sheer apathy with regard to the truth. Pray that God will stir them up to search out the truth about Life, The universe and Everything -for themselves.
2. Pray that God will surround your friend with witnessing Christians. Pray that they will feel absolutely surrounded and unable to escape from God. This forces people to consider Christ and the difference between their lives and the lives of true Christians.
3. Ask that they may clearly grasp that they are sinful. Unless there is a clear perception of sin there can be no true repentance from sin. They must know that they are in the wrong.
4. That God will grant them an almighty thirst for God's Word. That even as unbelievers they will want to read the Bible especially Genesis, Psalms, Isaiah and the Gospels.
5. Plead for a clear understanding of Jesus as Savior and Lord. With some of the heresies abroad today Jesus is often misunderstood. Pray that your friends may see Jesus as real and historical and also as divine. Pray that God may clear up any misunderstandings in these areas and be prepared to answer questions. Be clear about Jesus being the only way to a true and favorable relationship with God.
6. Intercede for your friends at any points where they are being held under Satan's power. Ask for release from wrong ways and bad influences. Their friends may be a real obstacle to their salvation, pray that they may not give in to them but may instead have the courage to believe in God. There is today an increasing interest in the occult and some people are badly hooked -pray for their release from this dark addiction so that they may be free to believe.
7. Ask for grace toward your friends so that they may develop godly tastes which lead them toward God and salvation. Pray that they may start liking Christian music or if they are literature buffs that C.S. Lewis, John Donne, Milton and T.S. Elliot may hold a fascination for them. If classical music – pray that the great Christian works of Bach and Handel may intrigue them. If rock music that the contemporary Christian rock bands with good messages may become their passion. Pray that in everything from bush-walking to building models that somehow their tastes will be drawn to that which witnesses to Christ.

CHALLENGE I am going to leave you with the challenge of making a list of people you will pray for . Also, get your home groups to buy a small notebook, rule it up, "Person," "What We Will Pray", "When It Was Answered." We can really see things happen when we persistently pray for the lost on the basis of what Christ has done on the cross.

Praying For Your Heart's Desires

Delight yourself also in the LORD, And He shall give you the desires of your heart. {5} Commit your way to the LORD, Trust also in Him, And He shall bring it to pass. {6} He shall bring forth your righteousness as the light, And your justice as the noonday. {7} Rest in the LORD, and wait patiently for Him; Do not fret because of him who prospers in his way, Because of the man who brings wicked schemes to pass. {8} Cease from anger, and forsake wrath; Do not fret; it only causes harm. (Psalms 37:4-8 NKJV)

So I tell you, whatever you ask for in prayer, believe that you have received it, and it will be yours. (Mark 11:24 NRSV)

Those conflicts and disputes among you, where do they come from? Do they not come from your cravings that are at war within you? {2} You want something and do not have it; so you commit murder. And you covet something and cannot obtain it; so you engage in disputes and conflicts. You do not have, because you do not ask. {3} You ask and do not receive, because you ask wrongly, in order to spend what you get on your pleasures. {4} Adulterers! Do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God? Therefore, whoever wishes to be a friend of the world becomes an enemy of God. (James 4:1-4 NRSV)

Let your gentleness be known to all men. The Lord is at hand. {6} Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God; {7} and the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus. (Philippians 4:5-7 NKJV)

Now this is the confidence that we have in Him, that if we ask anything according to His will, He hears us. {15} And if we know that He hears us, whatever we ask, we know that we have the petitions that we have asked of Him. (1 John 5:14-15 NKJV)

Briefly review the above Bible verses and extract all the principles on prayer that you can find..

The great challenge of prayer for the ordinary person is to be granted the desires of their heart. Prayer, for most of us who are not specially called to intercession, is getting God to grant us the righteous and good desires of our heart. How frustrating it is when they are not! When a sin does not budge, when a friend is not converted, when we struggle in loneliness or illness or poverty. The promises seem so powerful and reality so distant from them. The promise of prayer and the practice of prayer seem so different.

Point one is that God grants "the desires of our heart". Prayer needs to be telling God about our whole hearted desires. I have learned that whole-heartedness is essential to miraculous answers to prayer, when Peter took those first few triumphant steps on the water it was because he was whole-hearted in following Jesus. He let his whole heart lead. Daniel 9 is a whole-hearted prayer for the return of the Jews that may well have moved heaven and Cyrus!

James tells us that prayer is to be “without doubting” and that double-minded (lit. double-souled, di-psuchos) person “receives nothing”. I find that most Christians have to struggle to get in touch with the desires of their heart where Jesus lives. Its like there are a number of layers of confusion, for me there is the layer of mental confusion, anxiety and intellectual doubt - the area of the plausible and the implausible, the possible and the impossible, “I don’t think that can happen ..etc”. That is the outer layer. Then there is the layer of confused emotions “I understand x but I feel y”. This is the area where we “can’t believe that God would be like that”. Where we come up with the “God loves missionaries but not me” and the “God can’t possibly be paying attention to me..” feelings. Underneath all those waves there is the still place where the Spirit lives and prayer begins. That is the place of the desires of my heart. I just tell God what I desire. Its up to Him to make it possible. Don’t pray your doubts, don’t try and tell God the mechanism or you will end up full of doubts and confusion, don’t tell God how to move the mountain just tell him that you want it moved.

When you pray the fundamental questions are:1. Do I want it 2. Can God allow it.(if its immoral or significantly violates someone else’ free will then God cannot allow it). Assuming that it is neutral or a good request then ask yourself “Do I want this with my whole heart”. If you do then pray it and expect to receive it. Forget about what your mind says is possible or your emotions say is going to happen, just let God know your whole-hearted desire no matter what is.

This leads us to the “how to”. How do we get our prayers answered and results for the Kingdom, our daily needs met and our hearts desires answered. Here are the steps:

1. Ascertain whether the request is within the broad bounds of His moral will. When John uses the term “according to His will” here he means according to the broad moral will of God. It is only in modern parlance that we have coined the phrase “God’s will” to refer to specific things such as which person to marry. In Scripture the term always refers to things such as the Ten Commandments. When it comes to who to marry the terms Scripture uses are “the counsel of the Lord” or “the word of the Lord” (on a specific matter). It may seem like semantics but it is important in this case. Far too many people get blocked at this step and get in a lather about whether their perfectly OK request is “God’s will” or not. Its a mix up that is not needed.
2. If we are believers and the request is within the bounds of Scripture then we can be confident that God has heard our prayer.
3.Once we know He has heard us we can be confident that we will receive what we have asked of Him.
4. In which case we should believe that we have received it. We should hold on to that fact. We should believe God as Abraham did when praying for Isaac despite being 100 years old. (Romans 4:20-22 NKJV) He did not waver at the promise of God through unbelief, but was strengthened in faith, giving glory to God, {21} and being fully convinced that what He had promised He was also able to perform. {22} And therefore “it was accounted to him for righteousness.”
5. After believing we have received it we wait in expectant hope - and we DO RECEIVE. This works. Scripture says it will work. I have seen it work. I would not teach it to you if it did not work.
6. There are two main obstacles that you will have to remove if you are not to waver in unbelief. The first is your belief about what is possible with God and what is not possible with God. This includes thinking that God has to use “normal means”. God has means we don’t know about or understand. Abraham believed God for a son despite him being 100 and Sarah 90. He put aside humanmreasoning and calculation and believed the promise of God.

Secondly, we have to put aside our feelings about the situation. There are often deep emotional blocks to faith. These include “I am unworthy”, “God doesn’t care for me”, “these things don’t happen for people like me..” and many others. Sarah displayed this emotional blockage when she laughed at the idea of conceiving a son. She saw it as God playing a huge joke on her. There is a certain degree of spiritual discipline required in order to keep these interfering things out and stay on track especially if the request is a long-term one.

OK I hope you have got the idea. May I emphasize two things a) This is not for worldly gain or fleshly pleasures b) It works! It works! It works! I have seen it work for 20 years. God is faithful to His word.

Review and Practice

Write down one or two things that you desire with your whole heart and bring them to God in prayer each day for a week. Also do the following workshop with some friends in your Bible study group

Praying For Your Heart’s Desires Workshop

Trust in the LORD, and do good; Dwell in the land, and feed on His faithfulness. {4} Delight yourself also in the LORD, And He shall give you the desires of your heart. {5} Commit your way to the LORD, Trust also in Him, And He shall bring it to pass. (Psalms 37:3-5 NKJV)

Now this is the confidence that we have in Him, that if we ask anything according to His will, He hears us. {15} And if we know that He hears us, whatever we ask, we know that we have the petitions that we have asked of Him. (1 John 5:14-15 NKJV)

1. List three desires of your heart that, to your understanding, are in God’s moral will.

2. Now list the anxieties and intellectual doubts you have about God answering them.

3. Use the Scriptures, logic and your Christian testimony to answer these doubts.

4. Now list the emotional blocks, feelings and sheer unbelief you have about God being good enough or powerful enough or nice enough or you being worthy enough etc.

You may also sense some deep spiritual blocks that need to be prayed through. Ask Jesus for help (Mark 9:24 NKJV) Immediately the father of the child cried out and said with tears, “Lord, I believe; help my unbelief!”

5. Now use Scriptures, logic, your Christian testimony and the encouragement of your brothers and sisters in the Lord and tackle these blocks to belief.

6. Now agree in prayer together and bring each others heart’s desires to God.

“Again I say to you that if two of you agree on earth concerning anything that they ask, it will be done for them by My Father in heaven. {20} “For where two or three are gathered together in My name, I am there in the midst of them.” (Matthew 18:19-20 NKJV)

7. Have you reached a feeling of breakthrough in prayer? Do you sense God answering? Has He said anything to you about the desires of your heart? Write down what you are sensing from Him.

8. Do you sense a course of action that you must undertake for your heart's desire to be realized? Is there some way you can "put legs under your prayers"?

Bible Study - Praying In The Spirit

This is one of those nasty Bible studies where I don't tell you the answers. You actually have to read the Bible and work them out under God's gracious guidance. May the Lord richly bless you as you study His Word!

Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom, teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord. (Colossians 3:16 NKJV)

Research the following verses surrounding the topic "Praying in the Spirit".

Romans 8:26

1 Corinthians 14:2-5

1 Corinthians 14:14-16

Ephesians 6:18

Research the following references to the phrase "In the Spirit"

John 11:33

Acts 18:5

Acts 18:25

Romans 8:10,11

Romans 2:28,29

Galatians 3:3-5

Galatians 5:16-18,25

Ephesians 4:23ff

Philippians 3:3

Colossians 2:5

1 Timothy 3:16

Revelation 1:10,11

1) Describe a “typical case” of Spirit-filled prayer - what stands out most to you?
2) How are the things like unity, love, peace, joy associated with prayer in the Spirit?
3) How many of these experiences are ecstatic?
4) How many are relatively normal?
5) How can we pray in the Spirit? How is like learning to live and “walk” in a new way?
6) How would praying in the Spirit change you?

PRACTICE SESSION

List six items, that are God’s will (1 John 5:14,15) that you want to pray for.

Ask God to fill you with His Holy Spirit - the Spirit of Jesus (Eph. 5:18) Ask for guidance as you pray in the power of His Holy Spirit.

Ask God to pray in you and through you. (Romans 8:26f)

Have You Ever Thought About Fasting?

Fasting has a good biblical pedigree, it was practiced by Jesus, John the Baptist, the apostles, the Old Testament saints and the New Testament church. It has also been regularly practiced wherever revival has come and many of the Christian greats such as John Wesley, Martin Luther, John Calvin John Knox, Finney and Moody practiced prayer and fasting to enhance ministry effectiveness.

The merest suggestion of self-denial sends cold shivers down the spine of most modern Christians. We seem to find every excuse to dodge fasting. I might have the wrong motives. My health isn't quite up to it... Isn't it a bit fanatical. Unfortunately for us Jesus did say that we were to deny ourselves, take up our cross daily and follow Him (Mark 8:34). The spirit of the world is firmly against self-denial and preaches ungodly and profligate indulgence. Perhaps this is why fasting is proving so powerful for church growth today - because it represents Christians making a serious break with the spirit of the world in order to consecrate themselves to God.

The motive behind fasting is all important. Fasting in order to lose weight and look good is hardly a Christ-centered, cross-bearing act of self-denial. It may still be difficult and painful but it is essentially self-centered. Fast whenever you desperately want God to do something. Fast when you want power in the spiritual realm for Kingdom purposes here on earth.

Fasting is a potent spiritual weapon for the transformation of difficult situations faced by Gods people. Esther declared a three day fast (Esther 4:3) when her people were threatened with destruction from the wicked Haman. Deliverance came from God, her people were rescued, Haman hung and the Jews victorious. Jesus fasted to conquer Satan in the wilderness. (Matthew 4:2) Saul and Barnabas were sent out on their first missionary journey after a session where the leadership of the church in Antioch were ministering to the Lord and fasting (Acts 13:3) David even prayed for his enemies when they were ill – with sackcloth and fasting, for their deliverance. (Psalm 35:13) Countless saints have fasted to find the will of God for their lives or intercede for loved ones. True godly fasting is powerful tool for personal, social and spiritual change. But beware of imitations! Fasting can become a source of spiritual pride as it did for the Pharisee (Luke 18:2) or become a public show (Matthew 6:16) Jesus says such fasting is self-rewarded and ineffective. True fasting is not just a ritual but involves a determination to obey God in all areas of life. (Isaiah 58:1-14) . This leads us to the problem of how to go about it.

Start with one day fasts where you allow yourself fruit-juice. Skip breakfast and lunch and after the sun sets eat well. After you have done this a number of times gradually move to two and three day fasts. Most spiritual problems can be resolved in two to three days and I have never had to fast for longer. Wait on God He will indicate to your spirit how long you need to fast for. It is generally wise not go on ten day or longer fasts without a medical checkup from a sympathetic Christian GP. You don't have to pray all day when you fast. Just carry on with your daily work and use the normal meal and snack times for prayer. Jesus tells us to anoint our heads with oil..in other words look happy and act normal while you are fasting. Don't look like a bucket of gloom. Alert those who need to know and those who prepare meals but otherwise keep fasting private. The results of fasting make it enjoyable. When prayers are answered and lives changed you will love fasting for the joy it brings into the world and the discipline will seem

worthwhile. Well as the shoe ad says Just do it.

The Christian's Anointing

But you have an anointing from the Holy One, and you know all things. (1 John 2:20 NKJV)

But the anointing which you have received from Him abides in you, and you do not need that anyone teach you; but as the same anointing teaches you concerning all things, and is true, and is not a lie, and just as it has taught you, you will abide in Him.(1 John 2:27 NKJV)

Now He who establishes us with you in Christ and has anointed us is God, {22} who also has sealed us and given us the Spirit in our hearts as a guarantee. (2 Corinthians 1:21-22 NKJV)

I counsel you to buy from Me gold refined in the fire, that you may be rich; and white garments, that you may be clothed, that the shame of your nakedness may not be revealed; and anoint your eyes with eye salve, that you may see. (Revelation 3:18 NKJV)

There are 19 references to anointing in the New Testament. Four refer to anointing the sick. Four refer to the spiritual anointing that was on Jesus. Two refer to anointing as an ordinary Jewish custom. Five refer to the anointing of Jesus feet or His anointing for burial. The remaining four refer to the spiritual anointing that is on Christians and they are the verses shown above.

These verses show that the main purpose of the Christian's anointing is to help us to know God better. Both references in 1 John refer to knowledge and the teaching ministry of the Holy Spirit, the Corinthians reference is to us being established in God, the reference in Revelation to spiritual perception. There is no implication that we ordinarily have to seek this particular anointing, it is something that all Christians have (1 John 2:20,27). It is part of the deposit of the Holy Spirit in our lives and comes as part of our salvation. (2 Corinthians 1:21,22)

This is consistent with other Scriptures that outline the teaching ministry of the Holy Spirit.(John 14:26 NKJV) "But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name, He will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all things that I said to you. (1 Corinthians 2:10-12 NKJV) But God has revealed them to us through His Spirit. For the Spirit searches all things, yes, the deep things of God. {11} For what man knows the things of a man except the spirit of the man which is in him? Even so no one knows the things of God except the Spirit of God. {12} Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, that we might know the things that have been freely given to us by God. "These verses show us that the Holy Spirit takes the things of God and reveals them to Christians so they can understand what a wonderful salvation they have. The anointing helps us to see what we have received in Jesus.

The anointing brings us knowledge which helps us to see. Just as a bird-watcher who knows about birds sees more happening in the woods than someone who is ignorant of ornithology the Christian who knows the things of God sees more and learns more from life. A continuous loop of learning is formed. The anointing opens our eyes that we may see, we then learn under the anointing and see even better which brings even more knowledge and so on. As Jesus said(Matthew 25:29 NKJV) 'For to everyone who has, more will be given, and he will have abundance; but from him who does not have, even what he has will

be taken away. On the other hand unbelief results in lack of actual experience of the things of God and the gradual loss of knowledge so that the Christian loses the ability to see and spiritual darkness descends. The final sentence is"I am about to spit you out of my mouth.". If we are not learning the things of God for ourselves and finding that more and more is being given to us then we are sliding backwards and in danger of judgment.

A rather grim passage of warning in Hebrews tells us what is involved in being enlightened...

For it is impossible for those who were once enlightened, and have tasted the heavenly gift, and have become partakers of the Holy Spirit, {5} and have tasted the good word of God and the powers of the age to come, {6} if they fall away, to renew them again to repentance, since they crucify again for themselves the Son of God, and put Him to an open shame. (Hebrews 6:4-6 NKJV)

The enlightened Christian whose eyes have been opened by the Holy Spirit is a "taster" of the things of God. Tasting is experiential knowledge. Unlike seeing or hearing which can be done at a distance or even touching which can be "at arm's length" tasting involves immediate personal knowledge where you come close to, experience, and even take in some of the things of God. The anointing brings us into contact with the Holy Spirit, the good word of God, and the powers of the age to come. The person who wishes to continue in the anointing must taste the things of God and approve them. They must "eat" and "drink". They must not refuse what they now know for certain to be good. Most people do not think that the things of God a bad. They just think the things of the world are better. If we are to keep our spiritual eyes open we must highly value the things of God and gain an eternal perspective on the things of this world. Just before he wrote about the anointing the apostle John said...

Do not love the world or anything in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. {16} For everything in the world—the cravings of sinful man, the lust of his eyes and the boasting of what he has and does comes not from the Father but from the world. {17} The world and its desires pass away, but the man who does the will of God lives forever.(1 John 2:15-17 NIV)

What had gone wrong with the Laodecian church – so wrong that they needed an anointing of their spiritual eyes"and anoint your eyes with eye salve, that you may see."? They were blind! Jesus says to them...(Revelation 3:17 NKJV) "Because you say, 'I am rich, have become wealthy, and have need of nothing'; and do not know that you are wretched, miserable, poor, blind, and naked;"Their love of the world had made them blind to the things of God. They needed a new anointing if they were to understand even basic spiritual truths. Why do some Third World Christians seem to "see" the truths of God so much more clearly than we tend to? Why are so many Western Christians riddled with doubt? Why are our churches filled with sexual immorality, greed and apathy? Perhaps because we have not paid due attention to our anointing that helps us see. Perhaps because we think we know when we don't know at all. We receive from men but never directly for ourselves from God. If you think that you may not be seeing the things of your salvation clearly then ask Jesus to show you how to walk and live in the anointing you have already received. Ask Him to send the Holy Spirit to open your spiritual eyes. Let's go get some eye salve from Jesus!

Opening our spiritual eyes

Paul sees prayer as a vital weapon in developing our spiritual perception and "applying the eye salve" so

that we can see the things of God most clearly.

I keep asking that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the glorious Father, may give you the Spirit of wisdom and revelation, so that you may know him better. {18} I pray also that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know the hope to which he has called you, the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints, {19} and his incomparably great power for us who believe. That power is like the working of his mighty strength, {20} which he exerted in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly realms. (Ephesians 1:17-20 NIV)

Though the Ephesians were undoubtedly Christians they still needed the eyes of their heart to be enlightened. This awakening is different to the awakening that occurs at conversion. This is not an awakening to sin but an awakening to hope. Look at what Paul says...

I pray also that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know the hope to which he has called you, the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints, {19} and his incomparably great power for us who believe.

Only saved people can know these sorts of truths. The anointing opens our eyes to the amazing goodness and immense power of God. I can testify that I am still learning about just how good and how powerful Jesus Christ is.

It is obviously God's will that we grow in the knowledge of Jesus. He has sent us His precious Holy Spirit to enable it. However it is far from automatic. We need to value and seek after truth. However He has promised to be abundant and generous to those who seek Him...

"Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you. {8} For everyone who asks receives; he who seeks finds; and to him who knocks, the door will be opened.

{9} "Which of you, if his son asks for bread, will give him a stone? {10} Or if he asks for a fish, will give him a snake? {11} If you, then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give good gifts to those who ask him! (Matthew 7:7-11 NIV)

Therefore, the depths of the knowledge of God - the fruit of the anointing will be best found by those who diligently pursue it in faith. Thus the anointing requires a zealous obsession in those on whom it dwells. The cure for the Laodecian church was a renewal of zeal and right direction in their pursuit of God.

"As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten. Therefore be zealous and repent. (Revelation 3:19 NKJV) Finally, receptiveness to the anointing is essential for its proper operation in our lives. We are to welcome Jesus work in us instead of resisting Him or locking Him out.(Matthew 10:14 NIV) If anyone will not welcome you or listen to your words, shake the dust off your feet when you leave that home or town. This receptiveness needs to be a deep internal work as the parable of the four soils shows.

But the one who received the seed that fell on good soil is the man who hears the word and understands it. He produces a crop, yielding a hundred, sixty or thirty times what was sown."(Matthew 13:23 NIV)

Spiritual things need to be received with an open-hearted faith.

I tell you the truth, anyone who will not receive the kingdom of God like a little child will never enter it." (Mark 10:15 NIV)

Thus Jesus exhorted the Laodecian church to again become receptive to His ministry in their midst. Here I am! I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with him, and he with me. (Revelation 3:20 NIV)

Thus we need to open doors in our hearts to receive what to us is new revelation through the anointing. We must be open to being astonished and surprised by God for He is not predictable and His truths do not fit the traditions of this world. I am not suggesting that we be blown around be every wind of doctrine but rather that we be open to new truth springing forth from the word of God. It must be scripturally based. But as Luther said "There is yet more light to break forth from the Word of God".

Summary and Conclusion

All Christians have been given an anointing from God so that we may know the things that are of God. This anointing teaches us all things and is responsible for opening our spiritual eyes. Disregarding the anointing out of a preference for the things of the world is an insidious trap that leads to spiritual blindness and rejection by God. If we have headed in this direction we need to quickly repent. We can walk in the fullness of God's anointing power by prayer, by zealous pursuit of the knowledge of God and by receiving Him deeply into our hearts like a little child.

Anointed To Pray

But you have an anointing from the Holy One, and all of you know the truth. (21) I do not write to you because you do not know the truth, but because you do know it and because no lie comes from the truth. (24) See that what you have heard from the beginning remains in you. If it does, you also will remain in the Son and in the Father. (25) And this is what he promised us--even eternal life. (26) I am writing these things to you about those who are trying to lead you astray. 27 As for you, the anointing you received from him remains in you, and you do not need anyone to teach you. But as his anointing teaches you about all things and as that anointing is real, not counterfeit--just as it has taught you, remain in him. (1 John 2:20,21,24-27)

These verses are the only place in the New Testament where Christians are said to have an anointing. What does the anointing do?

Who has it?

Why do we need it?

In the Old Testament kings and priests and prophets were anointed. However in the New Testament: But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light. (10) Once you were not a people, but now you are the people of God; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy. (1 Peter 2:9-10)

We are all priests and kings now because of the grace of God. Because of what Jesus has done for us we now have an exalted place in the heavenly realms and we are all "anointed ones". Let's look at some more verses, first of all at the mind-blowing in Matthew 11:11-13.

I tell you the truth: Among those born of women there has not risen anyone greater than John the Baptist; yet he who is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he. (12) From the days of John the Baptist until now, the kingdom of heaven has been forcefully advancing, and forceful men lay hold of it. (13) For all the Prophets and the Law prophesied until John.

Did you know that the least Christian is greater than the Old Testament saints such as John the Baptist, Elijah, and Moses. Notice I did not say "better" I said "greater" because that's what the Bible says, that's what Jesus said. Greater simply because in Jesus we have a higher place than Old Testament saints. We are not better we have just received more grace. What is this "high place" I keep talking about? let's look at a few more verses.

And God raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus, (7) in order that in the coming ages he might show the incomparable riches of his grace, expressed in his

kindness to us in Christ Jesus. (Ephesians 2:6-7)

Which he exerted in Christ when He raised Him from the dead and seated Him at His right hand in the heavenly realms, 21 far above all rule and authority, power and dominion, and every title that can be given, not only in the present age but also in the one to come. (Ephesians 1:20-21)

I have given them the glory that you gave Me, that they may be one as We are One: (23) I in them and you in Me. May they be brought to complete unity to let the world know that you sent Me and have loved them even as you have loved Me. (24) "Father, I want those you have given Me to be with Me where I am, and to see my glory, the glory you have given Me because you loved Me before the creation of the world. (John 17:22-24)

Since, then, you have been raised with Christ, set your hearts on things above, where Christ is seated at the right hand of God. (2) Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things. (3) For you died, and your life is now hidden with Christ in God. (4) When Christ, who is your life, appears, then you also will appear with him in glory. Colossians 3:1-4

We have been admitted into the inner counsels of God. We are seated with Christ at God's right hand far above all power and dominion. We have been given glory from God and our life is hidden with Christ in God.

The great authority and power we now wield goes unappreciated by most Christians. We are generals in God's army - who have forgotten how to use their authority. Paul gives us an interesting glance into the authority of the believer in 1 Corinthians 6:3.

Do you not know that we will judge angels? How much more the things of this life. We also have the authority to combat and overcome the forces of darkness:

For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms. (Ephesians 6:12)

For though we live in the world, we do not wage war as the world does. (4) The weapons we fight with are not the weapons of the world. On the contrary, they have divine power to demolish strongholds. (5) We demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God, and we take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ. (2 Corinthians 10:3-5)

Our position "in Christ" gives us cosmic authority. We are greater than kings, Old Testament saints, and will one day judge the angels. We are an anointed people. But what use are we to put this anointing to? We are anointed to pray!

1. Think of three or four situations needing powerful, authoritative prayer. Break into groups of at least three and pray for them.
2. Thank God for placing you with Christ at God's right hand and giving you great glory and authority - just because He wanted to demonstrate His kindness to you (Ephesians 2:6,7).
3. Write out three ways you intend improving your prayer life when you get back from camp.

The Ascension of Jesus Christ

The consequences of the ascension of Jesus Christ are so amazing that they changed the whole way that people prayed and worshiped God and participated in Him. Jesus took apart the heavenly realm when He ascended and removed the power of the evil principalities and powers to dominate the life of those who believed in Him (Ephesians 4:8-13; Col 2:13-13). Furthermore, He took us with Him on His journey into the heavenly realms so that the believer in Jesus Christ is now a citizen of heaven (Philippians 3:20), a resident of the heavenly Jerusalem (Hebrews 12: 22-24) and is seated with Christ in the heavenly realms (Ephesians 2:6) with a graciously given heavenly status that was previously impossible for any human to achieve under the Law (Matthew 11:11-13, Ephesians 2:4-10). Jesus ascension also resulted in the outpouring of the Holy Spirit (John 7:39; 16:7; Acts 2:33) and the giving of spiritual gifts to the church (Ephesians 4:8-13).

Perhaps the best starting point is the purpose statement given in Ephesians by Paul. This is the "why" of the Ascension and of Pentecost.

Therefore, He says: "When He ascended on high, He led captivity captive, And gave gifts to men." {9} (Now this, "He ascended"; what does it mean but that He also first descended into the lower parts of the earth? {10} He who descended is also the One who ascended far above all the heavens, that He might fill all things.) {11} And He Himself gave some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers, {12} for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ, {13} till we all come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ. (Ephesians 4:8-13 NKJV)
Now Paul's purpose statement lists a number of reasons behind the ascension-outpouring. The ultimate reason for the ascension is that"He might fill all things"(Eph 4:10). See Col 1:15ff for more on that! What does he want to fill all things with? Himself! What then is the outpouring of the Holy Spirit about–filling ALL believers with Jesus! Being filled with the Spirit of Jesus is the purpose of Pentecost and the ascension.

This connects with the other great purpose expressed in this passage. That believers may come to a unity of faith and become"a perfect man"in the stature and fulness of Christ. That is the objective we see most clearly now. To build up Christians, God sovereignly gives the ability to edify His body to certain people as a gift.

On the way to do this Jesus takes"captivity captive"spoiling the demonic world of its spiritual powers. Like the conqueror He is He then distributes spiritual gifts to men. They include the five-fold ministries and the gift of tongues on the day of Pentecost and the various spiritual manifestations necessary for the building up of the body of Christ. So we see that the purposes behind the ascension-Pentecost are - that Christ might fill all things, that captivity would be captured, that spiritual gifts might be given to the church , which would then become like Christ. The purpose of Pentecost is Spirit-filled and empowered images of Jesus Christ.

Taking Captivity Captive

The following is a schematic diagram of how things were in Old Testament times. It shows how much both Jews and Gentiles were captives. The Jews were captives under the Law and the Gentiles captives under their demonic religions. Quite obviously not everything can be fitted onto a single diagram and it is not to scale or meant to be theologically normative but it will, I hope, help us to grasp what the state of things was.

Let's look at what it is trying to tell us. There are four levels - God, the angelic realm (inhabited by both good and evil angels), mankind and creation in general. Mankind rules creation, the angelic realm is more powerful than mankind and God rules over all. It is the middle portion of the diagram that is the most interesting. We can see from Acts 7:53 and Galatians 3:19 that the Law was given through angels.

1 Corinthians 10:20 also tells us that the Gentile religions were the work of demons and that the worshipers worshiped demons and not God. So we see that before Christ both Jewish and Gentile religion was under the direct control of the angelic realm. The good angels mediated the Jewish religion and the demons mediated the innumerable Gentile religions. Both systems were somewhat similar (though the Law was vastly superior) and listed in the middle of the diagram are some of the similarities. Both Jewish and Gentile religions had temples and priests and sacrifices and tithes and offerings and dietary restrictions and special days and festivals and various taboos and categories of clean and unclean things.

Though the Jewish religion was much holier and more moral it operated with much the same basic external structure as the Gentile religions. They had the same externals - though the internals were very different. Judaism however did not resort to witchcraft, divination, sorcery or magic which are exclusively in the domain of Satan. In both Colossians and Galatians Paul calls these external things - the taboos, festivals etc the "elementary principles of this world" or the "stoichea". Thus mankind in the Old Testament was ruled by religions based on the exact performance of rituals and the keeping of numerous laws and taboos. Relationship to God was through a priestly caste and involved sacrifices. Except for a very few individuals there was no ongoing relationship with God. Sin led to death which, at that stage, was under the power of the devil (Hebrews 2:14,15). The general experience of both Jewish and Gentile believers was one of fear and bondage (Hebrews 2:14,15). All this was to change with the death, resurrection and ascension of Jesus Christ.

After Jesus' Work On The Cross, Resurrection and Ascension

Again we have a diagram - the main change being the creation of the Church and its high status in the heavenly realms.

Let's look at some of the changes and seek to explain them. Death moves out of Satan's control

(Hebrews 2:14,15) into that of Jesus Christ who now has the keys of Death and Hades (Revelation 1:18). The accusing power of the law over us is broken (Colossians 2:13-15) because it is nailed to the cross. Jesus has been raised up above every power and principality in the heavenly realms and we-who are "in Him" - are of course seated where He is. (Ephesians 1:20-23 NKJV) which He worked in Christ when He

raised Him from the dead and seated Him at His right hand in the heavenly places, {21} far above all principality and power and might and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this age but also in that which is to come. {22} And He put all things under His feet, and gave Him to be head over all things to the church, {23} which is His body, the fullness of Him who fills all in all.

The Church contains you and I so the exaltation of the Church is the exaltation of the believer. Thus the fact that the Church has been made to be the "fulness of Him who fills all in all" has amazing consequences for the believer. Paul continues to show how we have been raised "from the guttermost to the uttermost..."

And God raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus, {7} in order that in the coming ages he might show the incomparable riches of his grace, expressed in his kindness to us in Christ Jesus. (Ephesians 2:6-7 NIV)

Thus we see that we have (past tense) been raised up with Christ and seated with Him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus (verse 6 above). This was done not because we were good but because of God's great grace which Paul calls"the incomparable riches of His grace...". Thus we have been taken from being sinners (Romans 3:23, Ephesians 2:1-4) and made into people who are"seated in the heavenly realms". We are now given a status and authority far beyond anything we deserve so that God may show just how gracious He can be.

This new spiritual status of the believer, this citizenship of heaven, is absolutely central to Paul's teaching. So much so that Paul is quite astonished when Christians do not grasp that we are to rule the world and judge the angelic realm.

Do you not know that the saints will judge the world? And if the world will be judged by you, are you unworthy to judge the smallest matters? {3} Do you not know that we shall judge angels? How much more, things that pertain to this life? (1 Cor 6:2-3 NKJV)

To Paul it is just a gospel basic that Christ has triumphed and that we share His triumph and rulership as inheritors of the Kingdom. Christ has ascended above the angelic realm and we have also done this "in Him" therefore, we have been invested with an authority greater than that of the angels and will one day judge them. (Note: Authority is different from strength, Napoleon was probably not the physically strongest member of his army but he had authority. So Christians do not have the power of angels yet but we do have position and authority and the right to be in command.) Thus Christians can exorcise demons because we are now at a higher level of authority than that of the fallen angels.

Since we are above the angels we are above their systems or the "stoichea". Thus Christians are not to observe taboos, festivals, days, months, years, Sabbaths, make sacrifices, or worry about tithes, offerings or priests. Let's look at this because it has been a stumbling block to so many believers.

Even so we, when we were children, were in bondage under the elements of the world ("stoichea"). {4} But when the fullness of the time had come, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the law, {5} to redeem those who were under the law, that we might receive the adoption as sons. {6} And because you are sons, God has sent forth the Spirit of His Son into your hearts, crying out, "Abba,
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Father!" {7} Therefore, you are no longer a slave but a son, and if a son, then an heir of God through Christ. {8} But then, indeed, when you did not know God, you served those which by nature are not gods. {9} But now after you have known God, or rather are known by God, how is it that you turn again to the weak and beggarly elements, to which you desire again to be in bondage? {10} You observe days and months and seasons and years. (Gal 4:1-10 NKJV)

Thus the religious observance of "days and months, and seasons and years" is a sign of being in bondage to the "elements of the world". These external observances are no longer a part of the Christian faith. You can use a calendar - but you must not attach any religious significance to the dates on it! Faith not festivals is what makes us closer to God.

Paul amplifies this at length in Colossians chapter 2 and I will only quote a portion of it here. Firstly He shows how the cross disarmed the principalities and powers and took away their legal right to enforce their taboos.

And you, being dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, He has made alive together with Him, having forgiven you all trespasses, {14} having wiped out the handwriting of requirements that was against us, which was contrary to us. And He has taken it out of the way, having nailed it to the cross. {15} Having disarmed principalities and powers, He made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them in it. (Col 2:13-23 NKJV)

Then Paul carefully goes through the consequences of being forgiven and of no longer being under the power of laws, taboos and ceremonies.

So let no one judge you in food or in drink, or regarding a festival or a new moon or Sabbaths, {17} which are a shadow of things to come, but the substance is of Christ. {18} Let no one cheat you of your reward, taking delight in false humility and worship of angels, intruding into those things which he has not seen, vainly puffed up by his fleshly mind, {19} and not holding fast to the Head, from whom all the body, nourished and knit together by joints and ligaments, grows with the increase that is from God.

The radical nature of our freedom from these "basic principles of the world" is described as a "death". Just how many responsibilities does a dead person have? None! So the Christian no longer has any obligatory responsibilities to cultural taboos, festivals, Sabbaths or dietary regulations. Paul continues...

Therefore, if you died with Christ from the basic principles of the world, why, as though living in the world, do you subject yourselves to regulations; {21} "Do not touch, do not taste, do not handle," {22} which all concern things which perish with the using; according to the commandments and doctrines of men? {23} These things indeed have an appearance of wisdom in self-imposed religion, false humility, and neglect of the body, but are of no value against the indulgence of the flesh.

To put it simply all "religiosity" has been put behind us when we enter into the death, resurrection and ascension of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Freedom

We have freedom, we do not have to live in fear as if we serve a God who will be angry over the smallest error. Its a bit like sending someone to mow the lawn and they come back nervously asking

"Which blade of grass do I mow first?" and you say "Start anywhere as long as it gets done". God has given us tremendous freedom and we don't have to live in a spirit of slavery worried about getting everything "just right" – about which blade of grass to mow first. Such is the spirit of religious fear. It is akin to the pagan dread of the spirits - if the ceremony is not done "just so" then curses would come forth. The "spirit of fear" produces people who cringe before God over every tiny detail. However with

the death, resurrection and ascension of the Lord Jesus Christ that is done away with. The situation now is one of love and sonship.

For you did not receive the spirit of bondage again to fear, but you received the Spirit of adoption by whom we cry out, "Abba, Father." {16} The Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, {17} and if children, then heirs; heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ, if indeed we suffer with Him, that we may also be glorified together. (Rom 8:15-17 NKJV)

We are beloved sons of God living in freedom. As sons of God, above the angels, we are going to inherit a kingdom prepared for us since the foundation of the world. We are heirs. In that Kingdom we will be seated on thrones with Jesus (Revelation 3:21), we will rule over the nations (Revelation 2:26,27), we will judge the world and even angels (1 Corinthians 6:2,3), we will become beings with immortal and imperishable bodies (1 Corinthians 15:45-55) and dwell safely in amazing wealth, peace and freedom (Revelation 21 & 22). When this occurs what it means to be a "son of God" will be revealed. At the moment it is, at best, vaguely understood. When this occurs the meaning of our being seated in heavenly realms with Christ Jesus will become absolutely clear. Christ will take up His authority over all creation through us and amazing changes will occur. The whole world will be set free! Paul continues on in Romans 8 to say...

For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us. {19} For the earnest expectation of the creation eagerly waits for the revealing of the sons of God. {20} For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of Him who subjected it in hope; {21} because the creation itself also will be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God. {22} For we know that the whole creation groans and labors with birth pangs together until now. (Rom 8:18-22 NKJV)

Thus the death, resurrection and ascension of the Lord Jesus Christ was the critical turning point that has ensured the total freedom of all creation! Creation, now in bondage, will move into "the glorious liberty of the sons of God". God is in the business of setting all things free. He desires liberty - not cringing enslavement, for all! However it is a two-step movement firstly there is freedom from the old religious system, our coming out from domination by the elementary principles of this world and from sin and death. Then step two is not anarchy - but having God's moral code written on our hearts through the Holy Spirit. (Hebrews 8:10) We are freed to become who we were always meant to be – righteous, holy, spirit-filled beings of love.(Galatians 5:16-24) This is the work of the Holy Spirit and why the ascension of Jesus Christ is also strongly associated with the sending of the Holy Spirit.

The Holy Spirit and the Ascension of Jesus Christ

"Most assuredly, I say to you, he who believes in Me, the works that I do he will do also; and greater works than these he will do, because I go to My Father. (John 14:12 NKJV)

Nevertheless I tell you the truth: it is to your advantage that I go away, for if I do not go away, the Advocate will not come to you; but if I go, I will send him to you.(John 16:7 NRSV)

And being assembled together with them, He commanded them not to depart from Jerusalem,but to wait for the Promise of the Father, "which," He said, "you have heard from Me; {5}"for John truly baptized

with water, but you shall be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now." (Acts 1:4-5 NKJV)

Foreseeing this, David spoke of the resurrection of the Messiah, saying, 'He was not abandoned to Hades, nor did his flesh experience corruption.' {32} This Jesus God raised up, and of that all of us are witnesses. {33} Being therefore exalted at the right hand of God, and having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, he has poured out this that you both see and hear. (Acts 2:31-33 NRSV)

"And as I began to speak, the Holy Spirit fell upon them, as upon us at the beginning. {16} "Then I remembered the word of the Lord, how He said, 'John indeed baptized with water, but you shall be baptized with the Holy Spirit." (Acts 11:15-16 NKJV)

During the Last Supper Jesus clearly indicates that when He "went to the Father" something would happen to the disciples would enable them to do great works of power equivalent to His own (John 14:12). Later on in the upper room discourse He reveals this to be the sending of the Helper, the Holy Spirit which could only be sent after His departure.(John 16:7) In his last conversation with His disciples He termed this empowerment the baptism in the Holy Spirit (Acts 1:4,5) and promised them they would receive it soon and that it would make them powerful international witnesses to Him (Acts 1:8). On the day of Pentecost it was poured out in a manner that was both visible and audible (Acts 2:32-33) and likewise during the Gentile Pentecost at Cornelius' place where it is also referred to as "the baptism in the Holy Spirit". (Acts 11:15,16)

The heavenly realms are now occupied by Jesus and since we are in Him, we have been seated with Him in these realms (Ephesians 2:6). Therefore we can have confident access to God and unhindered participation in the things of the Spirit with Whom we have been baptized (1 Cor 12:13). This does not mean that we all have all gifts or that all will have one particular gift. God is sovereign in how He distributes the gifts of the Spirit. (1 Cor 12:7-11) Within His sovereignty there is evidently some room for us to ask for particular manifestations of the Spirit. (Luke 11:13, 1 Cor 12:31, 14:1)

To sum up... The purpose of Pentecost is Spirit-filled and empowered images of Jesus Christ. The Pentecost event is known as the baptism in the Holy Spirit which was received by the Jews (Acts 2:32,33), the Gentiles (Acts 11:15,16) and the Christians at Ephesus (Acts 19:1-6)and Corinth (1 Cor 12:13). It is for all the Church. The outcome of the Pentecost event is power for ministry (Acts 1:8) through the Holy Spirit "coming upon" people (Acts 2:32,33) and sovereignly giving spiritual gifts for the edification of the body of Christ (1 Cor 12:1-7).The Holy Spirit is not a mere "experience". He is Christ coming to fill all things.(Eph 4:10; 5:18) He wants to fill you with Jesus and transform you into His image.(Eph 4:8-13; Rom 8:29-31) He also wants to AIBI power you to be a witness for God. (Acts 1:8) You may ask for Him and God will gladly give the Holy Spirit to you (Luke 11:13) (in new ways. It's a puzzle, we have Him but we can still receive His power) though you should ask for "the greater gifts" to be used in love for the edification of the church. (1Cor 12:31, 14:1)

Conclusion

The ascension of Jesus Christ to "fill all things" was the end of religion as it is generally conceived and the beginning of a Spirit-filled and joyous relationship with God. The main thing that Jesus wants to fill is you! To that end He has sent His Holy Spirit into this world to dwell in the hearts of believers sanctifying them to be like Him and empowering them to do good works. He has also created a new thing

- the Church, which is distinct from the world and angels and which will rule over both. He has placed believers in the heavenly realms with Him and freed them from the innumerable fear-filled obligations of the old religious systems. He has brought us into sonship and membership of the household of God. This church is to consist of "images of Jesus Christ" indwelt by His Spirit and living in direct personal relationship with God. Therefore there is no longer any need to observe new moons, Sabbaths, tithing, religious festivals, to have a church building, a priest, or to abstain from alcohol, red meat, pork or certain types of seafood. There is no need to be celibate, be involved in rituals of self abasement or penance or to punish oneself. That is all gone. What has replaced it is a life that flows from being indwelt by God, a life that is characterized not by solemnity and punctilious observation of fearful rituals but by freedom and love and joy and peace.

But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, long-suffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, {23}gentleness, self-control. Against such there is no law. (Gal 5:22-23 NKJV)

Word Study – The Kingdom (of God)

As the world draws close to the year 2000 and Christians ponder the meaning of a "New World Order" the Bible teaches us of a far more radical and truly ideal New World Order - the Kingdom of God, brought in through the ministry, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ of Nazareth and inaugurated in power on the day of Pentecost. This word study will help bring this powerful doctrine to light and give you confidence and hope as you face the future - no matter what the political outcomes are This article draws heavily upon from G.W. Bromiley's "Theological Dictionary of The New Testament".

The two main Greek words are "basileus" a King, and "basileia" a Kingdom. Ancillary words are "basileuo" to be king, to reign and "symbasileuo" to reign together with. The main phrases we will be concerned with are "basileia tou theou" Kingdom of God and "basileia ton ouranon" Kingdom of Heaven.

The "king" is the legitimate ruler. In both Greek and Hebrew thought the King derives his authority from God and is the source of all law in the land. For us this means that Jesus Christ is the authoritative governor of the heavens and the earth. It is His laws ultimately that must be obeyed. Even the kings, princes and tyrants of this world, the city state despots, the Jewish Sanhedrin and Caesar himself are accountable to the "royal law"(James 2:8) handed down by Jesus Christ. Thus Jesus is truly the King of Kings and Lord of Lords (1 Tim 6:16) before whom every knee will bow to the glory of God the Father (Phil 2:9-11).

Christ is king in the NT. He is first "king of the Jews" (Mt. 3:2; Mk 15;2, etc.), accused as such (Lk. 23:2-3), but also treated as a pretender (Jn. 19:12). The people want him as king in a political sense; hence he resists their pressure (Jn 6:15). Yet in a true sense he is indeed the promised "King of Israel" (Mt. 27:42; Mk.15:32).He enters Jerusalem as such (Zech. 9:9; Mt. 21:5), and as such will conduct the last judgment (Mt. 25:34). Outside the Gospels the NT seldom refers to Christ as King of the Jews or of Israel (though cf. Acts 17:7). John offers a christological definition of the kingdom in 18:37, and Revelation gives the royal title a cosmological dimension. I Tim. 6:16 gives Christ the same title as Revelation: "King of kings and Lord of lords:" I Cor. 15:24 implies the kingship of Christ when it speaks of the subjection of all other rule, authority, and power until at last the kingdom is handed to the Father.

There are three "ideal Kings" in Scripture – Melchizedek, David and Jesus Christ. Melchizedek is a priestly King who received tithes from Abraham. David was the great earthly King of Israel who, though flawed, walked with God and Jesus Christ is the Messiah, Redeemer and God. These three kings are important for our understanding of the Kingdom of God. The constant theme of the prophets is that the Kingdom of the Messiah would be a better version of David's reign(Isaiah 9:6,7; 16:5; 55:3-

5). A more ideal version where peace would be more profoundly experienced.(Jer 23:5-8) It was as if we were to look at the Davidic kingship as the closest human approximation to the Kingdom of God. When Jesus came His messiahship and the nature of His Kingdom was acknowledged by the title "Son of

David" as well as "King of the Jews". Hebrews expands on the idea of priestly Kingdom with its exposition of the role of Melchizedek in chapters 6 and 7 and the vision of the heavenly Zion in Hebrews 12. The Kingdom of God is a kingdom of believer-priests (1 Peter 2:5,9, Revelation 1:6) with Jesus as the High Priest (Hebrews 8:1,2 , 9:11).

The Kingdom of God/Kingdom of Heaven/Kingdom of The Father/Kingdom of Christ

These four expressions refer to slightly different aspects of the one reality. The Kingdom of Christ is the realm where Jesus Christ is the Messiah King, this Kingdom will put an end to all earthly Kingdoms (Rev. 11:15). Its present aim is stated in a difficult portion of 1 Corinthians 15: 24-25.
Then comes the end, when He delivers the kingdom to God the Father, when He puts an end to all rule and all authority and power. (25) For He must reign till He has put all enemies under His feet."

Thus we see that Christ's Kingdom while it "has no end" (Luke 1:33) gains its continuity from becoming the "Kingdom of the Father". As the purified and holy Messianic Kingdom it stands between the present evil age and all the ages to come. Thus wrongdoers will have to be gathered out of it by angels and the last judgment (Matt 13:41) and it will come while this earth in its present form and some will see the Son of Man in His Kingdom (Mt 16:28). It was inaugurated at the cross, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ- most particularly through the ascension. The thief on the cross realized that Jesus was in the process of entering into His Kingdom (Luke 23:42). Christ's Kingdom is "not of this world" John 18:36 and is not gained by force or militant discipleship (Jn 18:36). It is clearly linked with Christ's appearing (2 Timothy 4:1) and we are to be saved for it (2 Tim 4:16). Entrance into it is for Christians, especially those committed to spiritual growth (2 Peter 1:11). Christ's Messianic Kingdom will have no place for evil and sinners will have no inheritance in it (Ephesians 5:5). This verse also tells us that the kingdom is "the kingdom of Christ and of God".

For this you know, that no fornicator, unclean person, nor covetous man, who is an idolater, has any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and God. (Ephesians 5:5 NKJV)

The kingdom of heaven emphasizes the nature of the Kingdom as being "from above" and both transcending and interpenetrating earthly Kingdoms just as heaven both transcends and interpenetrates our present reality. It is a term chiefly used by Matthew. It is clearly a reign of God that is not arrived at by human effort but which is graciously given "from above". The term "Kingdom of the Father" (Matt 13:43; 26:29; 25:34, Luke 12:32) It is His Kingdom that we are to pray for in the Lord's prayer (Luke 11:2)and His kingdom in which the righteous shall shine like the sun (Matt 13:43). The relationship between the various levels of Kingship (God, Christ and believers) is summed up in Luke 22:29,30.

And I bestow upon you a kingdom, just as My Father bestowed one upon Me, that you may eat and drink at My table in My kingdom, and sit on thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel.

God bestows a kingdom on Christ who then bestows a kingdom on His followers so that they become "kings and priests to our God"(Rev. 1:6, 5:10). We are twice called co-rulers with Christ (1 Cor 4:8; 2 Timothy 2:12) but this information is not given to us so that we may be filled with inordinate pride as the Corinthians seemed to be (1 Cor 4:8) but so that we will be encouraged to endure in service with patience and obedience ((2 Timothy 2:12). However the concept of us reigning with Christ is of fairly broad application (Rev. 20:6) and Billheimer in his book "Destined For The Throne" has suggests that part of

the reason for us learning to pray is so that we will "know the ropes" of Kingdom rulership when we take up our prepared places in the heavenly realms (Ephesians 2:7).

The major reference is of course to the "Kingdom of God" which is unshakeable (Hebrews 12:28), heavenly (2 Tim 4:18) and eternal (2 Peter 1:11). Here are 12 short notes on the Kingdom:

1. God gives the Kingdom as a gift (Luke 12:32) to those who seek it above all things (Matt 6:33) God calls us to it (1 Thess 2:12), sets us in it (Col 1:13), and makes us worthy of it (2 Thess 1:5).

2. The Kingdom belongs to the poor in spirit, the persecuted and the "child-like" (Matt 5:3,10; 19:14).

3. The unaltered natural ("flesh and blood") man cannot enter the Kingdom of God(1 Cor 15:50). The Kingdom is entered by being "born again" (John 3:3)through irrevocable commitment (Luke 9:62) producing a new man in Christ Jesus (2 Cor 5:16,17).

4. The Kingdom is peace and joy in the Holy Spirit (Romans 14:17).

5. The Kingdom of God is accompanied by real power (Mark 9:1; 1 Cor 4:20) and is the most powerful kingdom of all (Revelations 11:15).

6. His Kingdom power is manifested in healings, miracles, exorcisms and raising of the dead (Matthew 4:23,24; 10:7,8 ; 12:28: Luke 9:2; 10:9).

7. It is a "glorious kingdom" - it will surpass all other kingdoms in wisdom ,beauty, power, and wealth (I Thess 2:12; Mark 10:37; Matt 6:13; 2 Tim 4:18; Rev. 21:10-22:5).

8. The Kingdom has small and humble beginnings – but grows! (Matt 13:31-32).

9. The Kingdom of God interpenetrates the structures of this world with an almost "invisible influence" (Matt 13:33, Luke 17:20-21) and is spiritually discerned (Mark 4;11; John 3:3, cf1 Cor 2:14). Eventually it will be made manifest or obvious to all (Matthew 25:31-34, Phil 2:9-11; 2 Tim 4:1,18), the structures of this world will collapse, (Rev 11;15, 18:1-19:7) the heavens and earth depart (2 Peter 3:10) and only the Kingdom of God remain. (Hebrews 12:26-29, Luke 1:33).

10. The kingdom is brought into being by being proclaimed – this proclamation can be to individuals or to entire communities. The Gospel is this proclamation (Mark 1:14, Matt 4:23, Luke 4:43, Acts 8:12).

11. The kingdom is "a living thing" and participates in the properties of living things such as growth, vigor and having a "time to harvest" (Matthew 13:24:33).

12. The Kingdom of God requires some diligence to enter in. Like a prized pearl or treasure it must be sought and valued above all things (Matthew 13:44, 45) And a certain spiritual alertness and readiness of heart is always required of believers. (Matt 25:1ff).Radical steps may be necessary if we are to fully enter it and leave the hindrances of those world behind (Matthew 5:29-30; 19:12).

Temporary enthusiasm is insufficient (Luke 9:62) and the cost must be counted(Luke 14:28) and

sometimes the supreme sacrifice be paid (Matt 10:37-39).

The kingdom, and entering it, are so important for us that we must be 'diligent to enter in'. Some interpretations of grace minimize this aspect of diligence. Sin is the greatest hindrance and certain sins will ensure that we are 'outside the kingdom'. The intent of the process of sanctification and washing with the blood of Christ is to remove these sins from us.

Do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived.

Neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor homosexuals, nor sodomites, {10} nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners will inherit the kingdom of God. {11} And such were some of you. But you were washed, but you were sanctified, but you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus and by the Spirit of our God. (1 Corinthians 6:9-11 NKJV)

Wealth is another great hindrance to inheriting the Kingdom of God.

Then Jesus said to His disciples, "Assuredly, I say to you that it is hard for a rich man to enter the kingdom of heaven. {24} "And again I say to you, it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God." (Matthew 19:23-24 NKJV)

As are a preoccupation with worldly things (Luke 9:20ff) , spiritual lethargy (Matthew 18;23ff; 25:1ff), and absorption into a self-centered lifestyle (Matthew 25:31-46). People can be hindered from entering by legalistic teachings (Luke 11:52) or released into it through the apostolic proclamation of Jesus as the Christ and the Son of God (Matthew 16:19).

Praying Like David Prayed

In this article I would like to teach you to “pray as David prayed”, to do this we shall be looking at the book of Psalms. But first we need to look at three aspects of praying as David prayed.

The structure of the Psalm

A Psalm is not a poem or a song though it may be set to music or be in poetic format. Psalms are not primarily works of art. A Psalm is an intense personal prayer between a man and his God. Psalms are anchored in life and reality with a vengeance. Psalms vary in structure greatly but a fairly good approximate structure is found in Psalm 25...

Initial Call To God Situation To God Thinking About God God To Situation Resolution

Final Call To God

Look at Psalm 25, and see how it fits this pattern:

To you, O LORD, I lift up my soul; {2} in you I trust, O my God. Do not let me be put to shame, nor let my enemies triumph over me. {3} No one whose hope is in you will ever be put to shame, but they will be put to shame who are treacherous without excuse. {4} Show me your ways, O LORD, teach me your paths; {5} guide me in your truth and teach me, for you are God my Savior, and my hope is in you all day long. {6} Remember, O LORD, your great mercy and love, for they are from of old. {7} Remember not the sins of my youth and my rebellious ways; according to your love remember me, for you are good, O LORD. {8} Good and upright is the LORD; therefore he instructs sinners in his ways.
{9} He guides the humble in what is right and teaches them his way. {10} All the ways of the LORD are loving and faithful for those who keep the demands of his covenant. {11} For the sake of your name, O LORD, forgive my iniquity, though it is great. {12} Who, then, is the man that f the LORD? He will instruct him in the way chosen for him.{13} He will spend his days in prosperity, and his descendants will inherit the land. {14} The LORD confides in those who fear him; he makes his covenant known to them. {15} My eyes are ever on the LORD, for only he will release my feet from the snare.{16} Turn to me and be gracious to me, for I am lonely and afflicted. {17} The troubles of my heart have multiplied; free me from my anguish. {18} Look upon my affliction and my distress and take away all my sins. {19} See how my enemies have increased and how fiercely they hate me! {20} Guard my life and rescue me; let me not be put to shame, for I take refuge in you.{21} May integrity and uprightness protect me, because my hope is in you. {22} Redeem Israel, O God, from all their troubles!

Psalms and our Spiritual State

The psalm is spirit calling to Spirit and as such comes from the inner being. Some Psalms are very broken , others raw and angry, others sorrowful and deep, whatever the Psalm is it is the spirit of the

Psalmist calling out too God. Let's look at Psalm 51 together...

For the director of music. A psalm of David. When the prophet Nathan came to him after David had committed adultery with Bathsheba.

Have mercy on me, O God, according to your unfailing love; according to your great compassion blot out my transgressions. {2} Wash away all my iniquity and cleanse me from my sin. {3} For I know my transgressions, and my sin is always before me. {4} Against you, you only, have I sinned and done what is evil in your sight, so that you are proved right when you speak and justified when you judge.

{5} Surely I was sinful at birth, sinful from the time my mother conceived me. {6} Surely you desire truth in the inner parts ; you teach me wisdom in the inmost place. {7} Cleanse me with hyssop, and I will be clean; wash me, and I will be whiter than snow. {8} Let me hear joy and gladness; let the bones you have crushed rejoice. {9} Hide your face from my sins and blot out all my iniquity. {10} Create in me a pure heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me. {11} Do not cast me from your presence or take your Holy Spirit from me. {12} Restore to me the joy of your salvation and grant me a willing spirit, to sustain me. {13} Then I will teach transgressors your ways, and sinners will turn back to you. {14} Save me from blood guilt, O God, the God who saves me, and my tongue will sing of your righteousness. {15} O Lord, open my lips, and my mouth will declare your praise. {16} You do not delight in sacrifice, or I would bring it; you do not take pleasure in burnt offerings. {17} The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise. {18} In your good pleasure make Zion prosper; build up the walls of Jerusalem. {19} Then there will be righteous sacrifices, whole burnt offerings to delight you; then bulls will be offered on your altar.

What is David's spiritual state as he begins this Psalm?
What changes seem to occur?
Would you be game to publish a poem as intimate as Ps 51?

Calling for Blessings

Many of the Psalms are bold requests for blessings from God, sometimes they even seem extravagant they ask so much. Read David's prayer for Solomon in Psalm 72, how extravagant does it seem? Was it fulfilled?

Endow the king with your justice, O God, the royal son with your righteousness. {2} He will judge your people in righteousness, your afflicted ones with justice. {3} The mountains will bring prosperity to the people, the hills the fruit of righteousness. {4} He will defend the afflicted among the people and save the children of the needy; he will crush the oppressor. {5} He will endure as long as the sun, as long as the moon, through all generations. {6} He will be like rain falling on a mown field, like showers watering the earth. {7} In his days the righteous will flourish; prosperity will abound till the moon is no more. {8} He will rule from sea to sea and from the River to the ends of the earth. {9} The desert tribes will bow before him and his enemies will lick the dust. {10} The kings of Tarshish and of distant shores will bring tribute to him; the kings of Sheba and Seba will present him gifts. {11} All kings will bow down to him and all nations will serve him. {12} For he will deliver the needy who cry out, the afflicted who have no one to help. {13} He will take pity on the weak and the needy and save the needy from death. {14} He will rescue them from oppression and violence, for precious is their blood in his sight. {15} Long may he

live! May gold from Sheba be given him. May people ever pray for him and bless him all day long. {16} Let grain abound throughout the land; on the tops of the hills may it sway. Let its fruit flourish like Lebanon; let it thrive like the grass of the field. {17} May his name endure forever; may it continue as long as the sun. All nations will be blessed through him, and they will call him blessed. {18} Praise be to the LORD God, the God of Israel, who alone does marvelous deeds. {19} Praise be to his glorious name forever; may the whole earth be filled with his glory. Amen and Amen. {20}

This concludes the prayers of David son of Jesse. a) What blessings are being asked for?

How confident does David seem that Solomon would be blessed?
How many of these blessings tie in with promises of God?

The "New Song"

This is not license to indulge so called creativity or a call to Christian musicians to increase their output. It is a call to believers to sing about the marvelous things God is doing in their lives. The phrase a "new song" is used 6 times in Psalms and all of these occasions connect it directly to God DOING something. For instance, Psalm 98:1...

Sing to the LORD a new song, for He has done marvelous things; His right hand and His holy arm have worked salvation for Him.

The other references are Psalm 33:3-4; 40:1-3; 96:1-3; 144:9-10; 149:1-4.

Songs and actions go together in the Old Testament. For instance after the Red Sea, Miriam led the women in a few verses of a new song "the horse and rider thrown into the sea...". The occasion brings about the song. Thus the call to sing a new song is a call to believers to acknowledge God when He acts and sing to Him in praise for His mighty deeds. It is fundamentally a call to thankfulness, celebration and praise.

Praise the LORD. Praise the LORD, O my soul. {2} I will praise the LORD all my life; I will sing praise to my God as long as I live. {3} Do not put your trust in princes, in mortal men, who cannot save. {4} When their spirit departs, they return to the ground; on that very day their plans come to nothing. {5} Blessed is he whose help is the God of Jacob, whose hope is in the LORD his God, {6} the Maker of heaven and earth,the sea, and everything in them the LORD, who remains faithful forever.

{7} He upholds the cause of the oppressed and give food to the hungry. The LORD sets prisoners free, {8} the LORD gives sight to the blind, the LORD lifts up those who are bowed down, the LORD loves the righteous. {9} The LORD watches over the alien and sustains the fatherless and the widow, but he frustrates the ways of the wicked. {10} The LORD reigns forever, your God, O Zion, for all generations. Praise the LORD. (Psalm 146)

What actions of God are calling forth this song?
Christians are sometimes accused of singing songs they don't really mean about a marvelous active God they have never experienced. Do you think it was the case with the Psalmist ?
How would your prayer life change if you could really see what God was doing and thank Him for it?

Exercises

1. Compose a psalm the way David did, think of a situation in your life and write a short prayer to God going through the sequence Call To God, Situation to God, Thinking About God, God To Situation, Resolution, Final Call To God. Share your psalm with a friend.

2. Write a “new song”, think of a “marvelous thing” the Lord has done in your life and praise Him for what He has done.

3. Call on God for a blessing, write a short call to God to pour out a specific blessing/series of blessings on you/your family/church etc. Tie it in with the nature and heart of God and His promises to us.

4. Pray for one another.

Spiritual Warfare for the Totally Afraid

Demons are variously caricatured as “naughty spirits” and even portrayed as “sources of wisdom” in some New Age teachings. The Bible however sees demons as truly evil and deceptive beings arrayed in rebellion against God and whose fate will be eternal torment imprisoned in a lake of fire. This latter view is far closer to the reality experienced by demon-possessed people and those who have dealt with demons in others.

A demon possessed person is often deeply deceived - thus showing the deceptive nature of demons, a demon-possessed person often engages in activities that display a lack of conscience toward others or a delight in the evil and the bizarre. This betrays the evil, amoral and actively wicked attitude of the demonic. A demon-possessed person is often angry at ministers, scornful of Scripture, fearful of communion, mocking at morality and may hold bizarre views of Christ. Christian praise and worship can cause strong negative reactions. This displays the demonic hatred of God and rebellion toward His legitimate authority over this Earth that He made. Those who deal with demons sometimes find that demons are both aware of and terrified of the eternal fate that awaits them. They believe in the lake of fire even if some theologians do not. This article will look at what the Bible says about demons, their fate, and how we can stop them hindering our Christian life.

Let’s start with the positive.

Jesus’ Triumph Over The Demonic Realm

He who sins is of the devil, for the devil has sinned from the beginning. For this purpose the Son of God was manifested, that He might destroy the works of the devil. (1 John 3:8 NKJV)

You are of God, little children, and have overcome them, because He who is in you is greater than he who is in the world. (1 John 4:4 NKJV)
We know that whoever is born of God does not sin; but he who has been born of God keeps himself, and the wicked one does not touch him. (1 John 5:18 NKJV)

The book of 1 John was probably written when the persecutions of the emperor Diocletian really began to bite. Satan and the his instrument - the pagan Roman Empire seemed to be indefinite ascendancy over the church, God and all the forces of good. 1 John is thus a very radical and bold epistle in its claims to victory in Christ. There are three realities described here:

1. The reality of Christ’s mission in particular His incarnation. The reason Jesus Christ was manifested in human form was so that He could tackle Satan on his own turf and destroy all his works. Like a hand-grenade exploding in the Devil’s face the incarnation brought the awesome power of the Son of God into proximity with evil so that it might completely destroy it.

2. The reality of Christ in us the hope of glory. He who is in us is He who came to destroy the works of the devil. Jesus overcame the world then, and now, He is in us, and continues to overcome the world.

3. The reality of the indestructibility of our real eternal selves which are based on Christ in us. A person who has been born again has a new self that is created on a new order and a higher plane. It is eternal, imperishable and indestructible, it cannot be defiled. It is sinless and cannot sin. It is born of God and partakes of the very principles of the nature of God (but on a much different scale).(1 John 3:9 NKJV) Whoever has been born of God does not sin, for His seed remains in him; and he cannot sin, because he has been born of God. This new self battles with the flesh in a life long struggle for dominance (Galatians 5:16-18) so Christians still do sin but this sin is not a part of them that will still be with them in Heaven. There will be no need for Purgatory, the new self has been sinless from the "new birth".

This new self cannot be "touched" by the evil one. The person we will be for the next ten million years cannot be affected by sin , defilement or temptation and it has already passed out of the judgment of God (John 5:24, Romans 8:1,2). While Satan can destroy your flesh (1 Corinthians 5:5) he cannot touch the real eternal you.(See article on the Inner Man for more detail)

These three powerful realities mean that even though Satan and his demons are at times quite formidable foes they ultimately cannot harm us. They are defeated rebels whose rebellion will come to nothing in the end. Jesus Christ came to destroy ALL the works of the devil and through His church that task is being completed and will be finally climaxed at the return of Christ. Let's look at how the devil lost the weapons from his armory.

Inasmuch then as the children have partaken of flesh and blood, He Himself likewise shared in the same, that through death He might destroy him who had the power of death, that is, the devil. (Hebrews 2:14 NKJV)

The incarnation gave Jesus the flesh and blood He needed so that through death He could defeat Satan's ability to wield the power of death, keeping the world in fear and abject slavery.

And you, being dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, He has made alive together with Him, having forgiven you all trespasses, {14} having wiped out the handwriting of requirements that was against us, which was contrary to us. And He has taken it out of the way, having nailed it to the cross. {15} Having disarmed principalities and powers, He made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them in it. (Colossians 2:13-15 NKJV)

(For further expansion on this verse see the article "The Cross In Colossians"). These verses in Colossians indicate that the weapon of accusation has been removed. Satan has been disarmed by the forgiveness we have received. He no longer has any basis for accusing us. The Charge sheets are all nailed to the Cross.

Satan's ultimate defeat will be an ignominious vanquishing(Revelation 20:10 NKJV) The devil, who deceived them, was cast into the lake of fire and brimstone where the beast and the false prophet are. And they will be tormented day and night forever and ever.

The Christian's Power and Authority Over the Demonic Realm

The Christian's power and authority over the demonic realm is not based on having more "might" than the demonic realm (I do not know of any Christian with the spiritual might anywhere near that of Satan) but on authority. The distinction is important. Joash became king of Israel when he was 7 years old. Though physically puny and intellectually hardly a match for bad queen Athaliah he had more authority than her or any of his rivals. He was king. Similarly even a "baby Christian" has more authority in the spiritual realm than the biggest baddest demon on the block. As a small child is more important than the largest fiercest lion so God has deemed that even the least Christian outranks the mightiest power and principality. The authority comes because of their position in the heavenly hierarchy. In God's household we are the "sons" and angels, even the mightiest of them are just servants of God. And sons outrank servants.

Are they (i.e. angels) not all ministering spirits sent forth to minister for those who will inherit salvation? (Hebrews 1:14 NKJV)

(Do you not know that we shall judge angels? How much more, things that pertain to this life? 1Corinthians 6:3 NKJV)

We have undergone a spiritual transformation as a result of the gospel. In the Old Testament we were "

a little lower than the angels", we were like children who, in their minority, have less status than say the butler and are expected to treat the household servants with respect. But with the gospel we have come of age and are now full-fledged sons of God.

But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, to those who believe in His name.(John 1:12 NKJV)

Therefore the law was our tutor to bring us to Christ, that we might be justified by faith. {25} But after faith has come, we are no longer under a tutor. {26} For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus. (Galatians 3:24-26 NKJV)

This transformation means that a huge change in status has occurred so that inhabitants of the Kingdom of God are truly awesome spiritual beings.
And raised us up together, and made us sit together in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, {7} that in the ages to come He might show the exceeding riches of His grace in His kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. (Ephesians 2:6-7 NKJV)

Which He worked in Christ when He raised Him from the dead and seated Him at His right hand in the heavenly places, {21} far above all principality and power and might and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this age but also in that which is to come. (Ephesians 1:20-21 NKJV)

Assuredly, I say to you, among those born of women there has not risen one greater than John the Baptist; but he who is least in the Kingdom of heaven is greater than he. (Matthew 11:11-13 NKJV)

We have been raised up with Christ and seated at His right hand in the heavenly realms far above all principalities and power and might and dominion so that Jesus could say of us that the least in the

Kingdom of Heaven is greater than the mightiest of the Old Testament saints. This is “amazing grace” and is God displaying His kindness for all the world to see.

Wielding Our Weapons

With this in mind let’s look the authority we have been given and how we are to wield it.

Then He called His twelve disciples together and gave them power and authority over all demons, and to cure diseases. (Luke 9:1 NKJV)

After these things the Lord appointed seventy others also, and sent them two by two before His face into every city and place where He Himself was about to... Then the seventy returned with joy, saying, “Lord, even the demons are subject to us in Your name.” {18} And He said to them, “I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven. {19} “Behold, I give you the authority to trample on serpents and scorpions, and over all the power of the enemy, and nothing shall by any means hurt you. {20} “Nevertheless do not rejoice in this, that the spirits are subject to you, but rather rejoice because your names are written in heaven.” {21} In that hour Jesus rejoiced in the Spirit and said, “I thank You, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that You have hidden these things from the wise and prudent and revealed them to babes. Even so, Father, for so it seemed good in Your sight. {22} “All things have been delivered to Me by My Father, and no one knows who the Son is except the Father, and who the Father is except the Son, and the one to whom the Son wills to reveal Him.” {23} Then He turned to His disciples and said privately, “Blessed are the eyes which see the things you see; {24} “for I tell you that many prophets and kings have desired to see what you see, and have not seen it, and to hear what you hear, and have not heard it.” (Luke 10:1; 17-24 NKJV)

Jesus commissions the twelve and then the seventy to have power of evil. In these verses we discover three things:

1. The power we have over the demonic realm is a gracious gift from Jesus”I give you...”to equip us for ministry (it is in the context of a ministry trip).

2. This power is both offensive, “I give you the authority to trample on serpents and scorpions, and over all the power of the enemy”’, and defensive, “and nothing shall by any means hurt you”.

3. That our operating principle is not to be power consciousness but instead humble gratefulness for the grace of God.”Nevertheless do not rejoice in this, that the spirits are subject to you, but rather rejoice because your names are written in heaven.”

Binding and loosing – the Apostle Peter

“And I also say to you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build My church, and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it. {19} And I will give you the keys of the Kingdom of heaven and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven.” (Matthew 16:18-19 NKJV)

Christians in general

“Assuredly, I say to you, whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven. {19} Again I say to you that if two of you agree on earth concerning anything that they ask, it will be done for them by My Father in heaven. {20} For where two or three are gathered together in My name, I am there in the midst of them.”(Matthew 18:18-20 NKJV)

Binding Satan and his demons

“And if I cast out demons by Beelzebub, by whom do your sons cast them out? Therefore they shall be your judges. {28} But if I cast out demons by the Spirit of God, surely the kingdom of God has come upon you. {29} Or how can one enter a strong man’s house and plunder his goods, unless he first binds the strong man? And then he will plunder his house.” (Matthew 12:27-29 NKJV)

“And if I cast out demons by Beelzebub, by whom do your sons cast them out? Therefore they will be your judges. {20} But if I cast out demons with the finger of God, surely the kingdom of God has come upon you. {21} When a strong man, fully armed, guards his own palace, his goods are in peace. {22} But when a stronger than he comes upon him and overcomes him, he takes from him all his armor in which he trusted, and divides his spoils.” (Luke 11:19-22 NKJV)

Thus we see that the power to bind and to loose has been delivered over to God’s church (Matthew 16:18-19) and can be exercised by any two or three Christians coming together in agreement before God (Matthew 18:18-20). Because of the authority we have been given on the basis of the completed work of Christ we can come against Satan as “someone stronger” and overpower him, binding his activities (Matthew 12:29), neutralizing his weapons (Luke 11:22) and taking back the things he claims ownership of. (Luke 11:22).

In The Name Of Jesus

And whatever you ask in My name, that I will do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son. {14} If you ask anything in My name, I will do it. (John 14:13-14 NKJV)

You did not choose Me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit, and that your fruit should remain, that whatever you ask the Father in My name He may give you. (John 15:16 NKJV)

The seventy returned with joy, saying, “Lord, in your name even the demons submit to us!” {18} He said to them, “I watched Satan fall from heaven like a flash of lightning. {19} See, I have given you authority to tread on snakes and scorpions, and over all the power of the enemy; and nothing will hurt you. (Luke 10:17-19 NRSV)

She kept doing this for many days. But Paul, very much annoyed, turned and said to the spirit, “I order you in the name of Jesus Christ to come out of her.” And it came out that very hour. (Acts 16:18 NRSV)

The name of Jesus is the delegated authority of the Son of God. In the Gilbert and Sullivan opera “The Pirates of Penzance” the pirates are arrested and the police say “We charge you yield in Queen Victoria’s name...”. They confront the pirates in the delegated authority of Her Majesty Queen Victoria. When we come against Satan and his demons we can say “We charge you yield in the name of Jesus Christ the Son

of the Living God, King of Kings and Lord of Lords". The "name that is above every other name" is the ultimate source of authority. Say the pirates in the opera had answered...we resist in the name of the Pirate King..then there would have been a clash of authority (in fact they said "we love our Queen..it was very sarcastic..) In such a clash of authority it is the "highest name" that wins. A queen outranks a counts who outranks knights of the realm that outrank commoners etc. So it is in the heavenly realms. Such is the privilege of Christians that we are allowed to use "the name that is above every other name" when we challenge demonic authority. We come bearing the highest authority in the Universe.

And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross. {9} Therefore God also has highly exalted Him and given Him the name which is above every name, {10} that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of those in heaven, and of those on earth, and of those under the earth, {11} and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father. (Philippians 2:8-11 NKJV)

So to use the name of Jesus in prayer is a declaration of authority. Even Jewish exorcists found it had enormous authority until it was challenged (Acts 19:13-18). They were operating on "bluff" they were not converted and had no right to use the authority of Jesus name in exorcism. The basis of praying in Jesus name is , first of all, being converted. Jesus name can be used in two ways 1)In declarative mode "In the name of Jesus I command..." e.g. when Peter healed the lame man at the Gate Beautiful (Acts 3:6 NKJV) Then Peter said, "Silver and gold I do not have, but what I do have I give you: In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, rise up and walk.".

Secondly, it may be used to request things from God eg, in the verses from John's gospel above"And whatever you ask in My name, that I will do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son.". The difference between command mode and request mode is that we command lesser beings but command greater ones. So when addressing a demon, a disease or a mountain or a storm we operate in command mode as sons of God proudly bearing the authority of Jesus name. When addressing the Father or Jesus we do not presume on the authority we have been given but we come humbly as expectant children with every right to ask and to receive but always in wonder and awe for we have a majestic God. Go boldly into the battle armed with the name of Jesus Christ.

Tearing Down Strongholds

For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war according to the flesh. {4} For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal but mighty in God for pulling down strongholds, {5} casting down arguments and every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God, bringing every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ. (2 Corinthians 10:3-5 NKJV)

Strongholds are built out of thoughts (Gk. noema). When Satan builds a stronghold in a human heart, a church, a nation or across a whole planet he uses thoughts. Thoughts of fear, hatred, envy, enmity and strife. Thoughts that create jealousy and distrust. Thoughts that turn people against God. Thoughts that entice to pride and rebellion. Greedy thoughts, lustful thoughts, evil and cruel thoughts. Brick by brick, thought by thought, constellating together into a demonic aggregate, a wall that blocks out the light and keeps a world in darkness. Note that they are described as "arguments and every high thing that exalts itself". A spiritual stronghold is often characterized by a form of pride known as hubris that exalts itself against God. Herod in the book of Acts is an example of this when he accepted worship from

men and was struck dead by God. (Acts 12:21-23) The Gnostic heresies of Colossae (Colossians 2:8, 18-23) the bizarre "knowledge" of Corinth (1 Corinthians 8:1-3) and the "teaching of The Nicolaitans (Rev 2:6,15) seem also to fit this category. Those with religious delusions are nearly always full of pride and impossible to reason with. That is why Paul calls it a "stronghold". Bible-based apologetics has its place here on demolishing the "lofty arguments" and replacing them with truth.

Jesus' confrontations with the Pharisees and Sadducees and His teaching on the Sermon On The Mount were real "stronghold busters" (You have heard it said...but I say to you...).

Thoughts control emotions and actions. If your doctrine tells you that you are no good then you will feel worthless. If your doctrine demands perfection you will feel constantly guilty. This will lead to actions based on your thoughts and feelings e.g. a life of constant striving. A stronghold can become so intense that the person loses touch with reality. To see this in action we need only look at the severely demon-possessed with their destroyed thought life, shattered emotions, lack of contact with reality and constant fear.(Mark 5:1-20) Satan controls us to the extent that he can control our thinking. Yet God has given us weapons against this that are"mighty in God for the pulling down of strongholds"so there is no problem with our weapons ! Let's learn to use them. The weapons are listed in Ephesians 6:10-18.

Finally, my brethren, be strong in the Lord and in the power of His might. {11} Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. {12} For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places. {13} Therefore take up the whole armor of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand. {14} Stand therefore, having girded your waist with truth, having put on the breastplate of righteousness, {15} and having shod your feet with the preparation of the gospel of peace; {16} above all, taking the shield of faith with which you will be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked one. {17} And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God; {18} praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, being watchful to this end with all perseverance and supplication for all the saints.

The strongholds of Satan are pulled down by people whose lives show moral integrity and faith and who know the word of God and can pray in the Spirit at all times. It is a soldierly combat. For example say Satan has established a stronghold of lustful thoughts in your mind. You need to pull down those lustful concepts about the opposite sex through a thorough study of God's word and knowing what the human body is, and is not, meant for . (see article Your Body Is A Temple Of The Holy Spirit) then you need to fill your mind with things that are noble and lovely and true (Phil 4:8)) praying in Jesus name for God to demolish this stronghold in your life. If the stronghold is in your church - say a spirit of parsimony and greed then you may need to teach on generosity and giving prayerfully wielding the sword of the Spirit until the false concepts of stewardship have come tumbling down and the church is renewed in faith. If the stronghold is in your nation you may need to debate publicly, use the media and refute the lies that keep people bound while guarding yourself and your own life from the counter attacks that will come. As I said earlier our weapons are "mighty in God" they are amazing weapons if wielded rightly. Do not be intimidated the authority of Jesus and the "big guns" of God's weaponry are on our side.

The 12 Laws of Faith

The following 12 laws of faith can be found in Hebrews 11.

1. The Law of Existence – you must believe that God is. Also that He is active with regard to you personally.

2. The Law of Just Providence – you must believe that He rewards those who diligently seek Him.

3. The Law of the Invisible – you must be prepared to believe in things beyond the experience of your senses, in things that have never happened before in your world.

4. The Law of the Future Preparation – you must believe that God s working for you and preparing things in advance for the people He loves who trust Him.

5. The Law of Endurance – you must be prepared to wait patiently until God's time and purposes are fulfilled. Faith hangs in there.

6. The Law of Assured Conviction – the ability to see the mountain sized problem as a mere acorn in God's hand. To acknowledge that you have the answer with certainty.

7. The Law of Incomplete Knowledge – Abraham went out not knowing where he was going.

8. The Law of Reliance on Rhema – Abraham believed God's personal Rhema word to him and it was counted to him as righteousness.

9. The Law of Heavenly Ambition – Faith is directed into God's purposes and to God's ends and cannot function properly if focused on the here and now. Faith seeks the city that is to come.

10. The Law of Possibility – all things are possible with God -even raising Isaac from the dead.

11. The Law of Renunciation – faith operates in renouncing all that is not-faith and grasping God's purposes ONLY. Faith is uncontaminated by the courts of Pharaoh and the ambitions of this world.

12. The Law of Conquest - external in conquering Canaan, internal in resisting persecution and testifying to God. Faith does not submit to circumstances.

Little Faith, Great Faith, Participating Faith

Little Faith

The first thing we shall look at is the times when Jesus says people had little or inadequate faith. I want to say straight off that Jesus never said to any sick person "You remain sick because you lack faith." The closest He ever comes to that is when the disciples fail to heal the epileptic boy... and there He blames the disciples and not the boy. It was the failure of the disciples faith not the lack of the sick person's faith that worried Jesus.
Secondly, lack of faith can have many causes and we will look at them later. But basically lack of faith is the inability or refusal to see, grasp and use spiritual truth.

But if God so clothes the grass of the field, which is alive today and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will he not much more clothe you--you of little faith? Matthew 6:30 (NRSV)

Here Jesus says anxiety over God's ability to provide the necessities of life is a lack of faith. God obviously provides food for the birds and clothes the lilies of the field in splendor, then He who knows what we need will not fail to supply. I remember reading this verse as a rather poor missionary and telling God off and saying that I was not well enough clothed and would He kindly keep His promise. Shortly afterward, a friend of a friend who owned a fashion store in Hong Kong sent me two suitcases full of silk clothes of the very highest quality and I lived in silk for years. God keeps His word – even to those of little faith.

1. Little faith is saying God's clear promises, can't, won't or don't come true.

The ones on the rock are those who, when they hear the word, receive it with joy. But these have no root; they believe only for a while and in a time of testing fall away. 14 As for what fell among the thorns, these are the ones who hear; but as they go on their way, they are choked by the cares and riches and pleasures of life, and their fruit does not mature. Luke 8:13-14 (NRSV)

Here faith lacks roots in the heart of the person. They are easily discouraged and give up under hard times or become barren and unfruitful Christian worriers rather than God's warriors.

2. Little faith gives up easily on the things of God.

And when he got into the boat, his disciples followed him. 24 A windstorm arose on the sea, so great that the boat was being swamped by the waves; but he was asleep. 25 And they went and woke him up, saying, "Lord, save us! We are perishing!" 26 And he said to them, "Why are you afraid, you of little faith?" Then he got up and rebuked the winds and the sea; and there was a dead calm. 27 They were amazed, saying, "What sort of man is this, that even the winds and the sea obey him?" Matthew 8:23-27 (NRSV)

What a fantastic passage of Scripture. These faithful disciples follow Jesus into the boat. Then up comes a storm and they are close to sinking. They are terrified and wake Jesus. He says to the wind and the waves "Peace be still" (in Luke) and tells them off for having such little faith. The disciples are expected to believe that God cares for their lives and will not let them come to an untimely end. Jesus expects them to look past the natural circumstances to the power and provision of God.

3. Little faith only sees the circumstances and cannot grasp and apply God's truths at the necessary moment.

And they went back and told the rest, but they did not believe them. 14 Later he appeared to the eleven themselves as they were sitting at the table; and he upbraided them for their lack of faith and stubbornness, because they had not believed those who saw him after he had risen. Mark 16:13-14 (NRSV)

But now, because you did not believe my words, which will be fulfilled in their time, you will become mute, unable to speak, until the day these things occur." Luke 1:20 (NRSV)

Here we see people who have put God in a box and said "he can do this much and no more" and "God would not do that for me..." We dare not ever limit God. Jesus knew of this tendency and the gospels record Jesus saying "All things are possible to those who believe"or "Nothing is impossible with God" nine times. We need to become people who genuinely see nothing as impossible with God.

4. Little faith limits God. Little faith says "This is not possible – even with God, at least not for me".

How can you believe when you accept glory from one another and do not seek the glory that comes from the one who alone is God? John 5:44 (NRSV)

Pride makes it impossible to grow in faith. God does not allow us to rely on other people for our "glory" and self-esteem. Faith needs us to be dependent on God for all things especially for our sense of who we are. Faith says "I am a humble child of God and He is my heavenly father who
loves me therefore I am OK". Worldliness says "I am rich and powerful and attractive, therefore, I am OK" such an attitude is deadly to growth in faith.

5. Little faith is not humble toward God . Little faith loves the praise of men and seeks human reputation rather than the approval of God. It lacks the spiritual insight to focus on heavenly rewards.

So the five sources of little faith are:

1. Hardness of heart.
2. Giving up easily.
3. Being overwhelmed by circumstances and unable to apply God's truths.
4. Deciding what is possible and impossible for God.
5. Pride and the seeking of respectability.

Great Faith

If these things bring little faith then we would expect the opposites to bring great faith – and you would be dead right. The five ingredients for great faith are:

1. Softness of heart (fruitful soil, parable of the sower).
2. Persistence and endurance in the faith.
3. Seeing, believing and acting on God's truths despite anxieties and circumstances.
4. Believing that nothing is impossible with God.
5. Humility, lowliness and glorying in God alone. Let's see how Scripture supports this:

When he entered Capernaum, a centurion came to him, appealing to him (6) and saying, "Lord, my servant is lying at home paralyzed, in terrible distress." (7) And he said to him, "I will come and cure him." (8) The centurion answered, "Lord, I am not worthy to have you come under my roof; but only speak the word, and my servant will be healed. (9) For I also am a man under authority, with soldiers under me; and I say to one, 'Go,' and he goes, and to another, 'Come,' and he comes, and to my slave, 'Do this,' and the slave does it." (10) When Jesus heard him, he was amazed and said to those who followed him, "Truly I tell you, in no one in Israel have I found such faith. (11) I tell you, many will come from east and west and will eat with Abraham and Isaac and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven, (12) while the heirs of the kingdom will be thrown into the outer darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth." 13 And to the centurion Jesus said, "Go; let it be done for you according to your faith." And the servant was healed in that hour. Matthew 8:5-13 (NRSV)

Jesus left that place and went away to the district of Tyre and Sidon. (22) Just then a Canaanite woman from that region came out and started shouting, "Have mercy on me, Lord, Son of David; my daughter is tormented by a demon." (23) But he did not answer her at all. And his disciples came and urged him, saying, "Send her away, for she keeps shouting after us." He answered, "I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel." (25) But she came and knelt before him, saying, "Lord, help me." (26)

He answered, "It is not fair to take the children's food and throw it to the dogs." (27) She said, "Yes, Lord, yet even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their masters' table." (28) Then Jesus answered her, "Woman, great is your faith! Let it be done for you as you wish." And her daughter was healed instantly. Matthew 15:21-28 (NRSV)

But as for that in the good soil, these are the ones who, when they hear the word, hold it fast in an honest and good heart, and bear fruit with patient endurance. Luke 8:15 (NRSV)

If you notice something the same about the Canaanite woman and the Roman Centurion it is that both had a deep sense of their unworthiness before God but an unshakable belief that God would act on their behalf. The centurion is commended for his great faith in understanding the nature of Jesus' authority...that all Jesus had to do was speak the word and his servant would be healed. He does not strut around before God but comes very humbly to Jesus. Jesus was willing to visit this man's house but he did not feel worthy to have Him. His word would be sufficient. Here we see four of the five principles of great faith at work. The Centurion had:

A soft and merciful heart.

An understanding of spiritual principles and God's authority. He believed that nothing was impossible with God.

He was very humble and did not take up the opportunity to big-note himself in front of the crowd or Jesus or even to have the Messiah for lunch.

The Canaanite woman with the demon-possessed daughter shows the this quality of persistence - to the point of annoying the disciples. She possessed an unshakable faith in the mercy that Jesus would bestow.

Again we see a soft and merciful heart, A grasping of spiritual truth despite adverse circumstances. In this case the truth that even Gentiles were not outside God's mercy .

Faith that nothing was impossible to God. Persistence.

A humble heart that abased itself before God.

Both the Roman Centurion and Canaanite woman were Gentiles and are the only people in the gospels commended by Jesus for their great faith.

Growing Into Great Faith

Now for the conclusion of the matter – how can you and I become men and women of faith who see things happen when they pray and whose lives please God. What qualities shall we try to work into our lives so that we eventually grow into great faith?

1. We will aim at being soft-hearted caring and merciful, open to the truths of God and the needs of others. As Luke puts it people who "hold fast the word in a good and honest heart".

2. We will aim at grasping spiritual truths and believing them. We will not scoff at the miraculous or the power of God but seek to understand His mercy, justice and power and how it operates.

3. We will believe that nothing is impossible with God and that no circumstance is too difficult for Him to change.

4. We will hold onto our faith like a pig-dog on a bone. We will persist before God with our requests and not let go. We will keep on believing even though circumstances would cause many others to doubt and give up.

5. We will not grandstand around before God or men but be gentle and lowly and humble of heart. We will seek our approval from God, not from the world around us.

May I suggest four steps, the initials of which form the word ROPE.

Repent of your pride, skepticism and unbelief. Confess to God that you are a person of little faith, that you do not believe as you should and that you want help to grow in faith. "Lord I believe, help thou mine unbelief."

Open your heart to the word of God. Treasure the truths of God. Seek to find out how God acts and to trust God in all circumstances on the basis of what you have learned of Him.

Persist in prayer and faith. Never, never, never give in. If its worthwhile hold on to it – and your faith is worth much.

Expect great things from God, attempt great things for God. This was the motto of a famous missionary- either C.T. Studd or Hudson Taylor. The centurion and the Canaanite woman expected great things from God.

The apostles after Pentecost were filled with faith and expected great things from God and attempted great things for God – and they succeeded.

Participating Faith

The Bible doesn't use these exact words but they summarize for me the Hebrews 11 gift of exceptional faith. Though the centurion had great faith it was not the same as a Paul or a David or a Moses or an Abraham. These giants of the faith participated in the plans and purposes of God. They took God at his word and launched out not knowing where they were going. They sought a Kingdom that was not of this world. They ACTIVELY AND DELIBERATELY PARTICIPATED IN THE PROMISES OF GOD. Let's look at this a bit further.

Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen. {2} For by it the elders obtained a good testimony. {3} By faith we understand that the worlds were framed by the word of God, so that the things which are seen were not made of things which are visible. {4} By faith Abel offered to God a more excellent sacrifice than Cain, through which he obtained witness that he was righteous, God testifying of his gifts; and through it he being dead still speaks. {5} By faith Enoch was taken away so that he did not see death, "and was not found, because God had taken him"; for before he was taken he had this testimony, that he pleased God. {6} But 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. {7} By faith Noah, being divinely warned of things not yet seen, moved with godly fear, prepared an ark for the saving of his household, by which he condemned the world and became heir of the righteousness which is according to faith. {8} By faith Abraham obeyed when he was called to go out to the place which he would receive as an inheritance. And he went out, not knowing where he was going. (Hebrews 11:1-8 NKJV)

Each of these people demonstrated their inner conviction by outward actions that participated in the plans, purposes and promises of God. Abel offered an acceptable sacrifice. Enoch lived a life pleasing to God. Noah built an ark. Abraham went out not knowing where he was going. They took on God's plan as their life intent. Faith is the "substance of things hoped for". For these people faith was not wishing or hoping it was reckoning on God's promises as "substantial", as reliable, as something they could walk out on like a plank of wood.

The minimum level of faith is specified as believing that God is and that He rewards those who seek Him. (v6) The maximum is the ability to forsake all for God's Kingdom purposes as Abraham did many

times and many saints have done since. These people know that though this life's rewards may be few that they WILL inherit something greater still in the resurrection. For them this is not fanciful theology or religious conjuring but a real hope - a hope with substance. Something that they can and do build their lives on.

These all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off were assured of them, embraced them and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth. {14} For those who say such things declare plainly that they seek a homeland. {15} And truly if they had called to mind that country from which they had come out, they would have had opportunity to return. {16} But now they desire a better, that is, a heavenly country. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for He has prepared a city for them. {17} By faith Abraham, when he was tested, offered up Isaac, and he who had received the promises offered up his only begotten son, {18} of whom it was said, "In Isaac your seed shall be called," {19} concluding that God was able to raise him up, even from the dead, from which he also received him in a figurative sense. {20} By faith Isaac blessed Jacob and Esau concerning things to come. {21} By faith Jacob, when he was dying, blessed each of the sons of Joseph, and worshiped, leaning on the top of his staff. {22} By faith Joseph, when he was dying, made mention of the departure of the children of Israel, and gave instructions concerning his bones. {23} By faith Moses, when he was born, was hidden three months by his parents, because they saw he was a beautiful child; and they were not afraid of the king's command. {24} By faith Moses, when he became of age, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter, {25} choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God than to enjoy the passing pleasures of sin, {26} esteeming the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures in Egypt; for he looked to the reward. (Hebrews 11:13-26 NKJV)

The desire of those who have decided to participate in the plans and promises of God is for His purposes alone. They desire the heavenly city - not the earthly. They esteem the reproach of Christ to be greater riches than the treasures of Egypt – and how great those treasures were has only recently been revealed by modern archeology. This is the true love of God – to enter in to all He calls us to without reserve or hesitation and leaving this world behind as a vapor and a cloud. Will you set your heart on the purposes of God and start the journey, the pilgrimage, of participating faith?

And They Kept On Believing...

Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen. (2) For by it the elders obtained a good testimony. (3) By faith we understand that the worlds were framed by the word of God, so that the things which are seen were not made of things which are visible. (4) By faith Abel offered to God a more excellent sacrifice than Cain, through which he obtained witness that he was righteous, God testifying of his gifts; and through it he being dead still speaks. (5) By faith Enoch was taken away so that he did not see death, "and was not found, because God had taken him" for before he was taken he had this testimony, that he pleased God. (6) But 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 11:1-6)

What is Faith?

Faith is a sure trust in a good God. There are two definitions of faith in these first few verses of Hebrews 11. The first definition deals with what faith is. (Hebrews 11:1,6 NKJV) Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen. The second definition tells us what faith believes and does.

But 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.

Faith is "the substance of things hoped for". This peculiar phrase has caused much confusion. Some have erred by declaring that faith is a substance or a force. It is not, it is a personal disposition. It is a trusting attitude toward God. The Greek word used here is "hupostasis" which means "essence, substance, foundation, confident assurance, guarantee or attestation (as in attesting documents)". Thus faith is the essence or foundation of things hoped for. Faith is knowing that what you hope for is going to happen because God said it is going to happen. Thus long-lasting hope is based on solid faith. Faith is the humble and yet confident striding through life with your hand in the Hand of your Creator. Faith is believing what God says when He gives you a promise.

Faith is the "evidence of things not seen". Faith considers "God said it will happen.." as actual evidence. Looking at our italicized definition in the previous paragraph we see that men and women of faith know that what they hope for is going to happen. They know this on the evidence of God alone. If God has told them so then it will come to pass. Faith sees evidence where the world cannot see it. I am currently engaged to a girl I have not met except over the Internet. The confidence we feel is entirely due to the fact that we believe that God has brought us together. Unless that was so we would run a mile. The evidence for us is in God.

In verse 6 we see that the person of faith believes a) that He is and that, b) He is a Rewarder of those that diligently seek Him. Faith believes that God exists and is good and is accessible and is powerful enough

to deliver rewards to His people. This is not the "god of the philosophers". Rather this is the God who acts in real life. He is not silent or remote or aloof. He is good and He is accessible. Furthermore, He is a Rewarder of those that diligently seek Him. Many "philosophers" scoff at the notion of God rewarding people as primitive and insufficiently elevated. However, those who are of faith grab hold of the reward! God does not reward the spiritually apathetic but instead rewards those who believe in Him enough to be diligent in their pursuit of God.

What Is Not Faith?

On the other hand four things are not of faith:

1. Anxious fear is when we come to the conclusion that the power of dire circumstances is greater than the power of God the Creator.

2. Unbelief is the rebellious act of refusing to believe what God has clearly said.

3. Doubt is the unstable process of oscillating between faith and unbelief.

4. Presumption is making something up and then "trusting it" as if God had said it. None of these are faith!

Anxious fear (as contrasted with godly fear) may seem like "just a natural human response" yet it is not a godly response. Such fear does not factor God into life. Anxiety thinks on the natural plane and does not trust in the goodness and power of God. The goodness and power of God is seen as unreliable "when it comes to the crunch". Areas like our finances and our health are particularly prone to this. Jesus addresses such fears directly in Matthew 6:19-34 and the Bible verses quoted below. Thus anxious fear is not of faith and is sin.

But when Jesus heard it, He answered him, saying, "Do not be afraid; only believe, and she will be made well."(Matthew 6:30 NKJV)

Now if God so clothes the grass of the field, which today is, and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will He not much more clothe you, O you of little faith? (Luke 8:50 NKJV)

Unbelief is the hard-hearted attitude of refusing to accept the Word of God as true. It can happen to Christians even the best of them!

Later He appeared to the eleven as they sat at the table; and He rebuked their unbelief and hardness of heart, because they did not believe those who had seen Him after He had risen. (Mark 16:14 NKJV)

So we see that even the 11 disciples after the resurrection suffered from a measure of unbelief. The trouble with unbelief is that it appears so rational. It seems more rational to believe that dead people stay dead. Unbelief is common today with the rise of the secular world view. That is why miracles are so uncommon in the West, we have become like Nazareth – overly familiar with Jesus and with a distinct, but wrong, idea of who He is.

“Is this not the carpenter’s son? Is not His mother called Mary? And His brothers James, Joses, Simon, and Judas?... {58} Now He did not do many mighty works there because of their unbelief. (Matthew 13:55-58 NKJV)

Unbelief needs to be guarded against in the Christian community. It is not just “unbelievers” that suffer from the sin of unbelief! The “brethren” can as well .

Beware, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief in departing from the living God; {13} but exhort one another daily, while it is called “Today,” lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin. (Hebrews 3:12-13 NKJV)

Sin and unbelief are closely related. Sin makes us reluctant to believe because then we would see our sin more clearly. It also hardens the heart making it unresponsive to God. Faith is built in community by us encouraging and exhorting one another and being alert to any unbelief that may occur.

Doubt involves a continuing oscillation between faith and unbelief. For instance a new convert may enthusiastically embrace the faith then be assailed by doubts regarding the existence of God one day and be back believing enthusiastically the next. Doubt often leads to settled unbelief. Rarely does it lead to faith. It destabilizes the believer and the world, flesh and the devil find the person easy prey.

If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all liberally and without reproach, and it will be given to him. (6) But let him ask in faith, with no doubting, for he who doubts is like a wave of the sea driven and tossed by the wind. (7) For let not that man suppose that he will receive anything from the Lord; (8) he is a double-minded man, unstable in all his ways. (James 1:5-8)

Presumption is trying to “believe” what God has not said. It can be accidental or deliberate. When it is deliberate it is a grave sin. After the congregation of Israel refused to cross into Canaan out of fear God was clearly angry with them. He sentenced them to 40 years in the wilderness. After this the people decided that they would now try to enter Canaan despite God saying that He would not help them.

They were soundly defeated and Moses said they were defeated because of their presumption.

“Then you answered and said to me, ‘We have sinned against the LORD; we will go up and fight, just as the LORD our God commanded us.’ And when everyone of you had girded on his weapons of war, you were ready to go up into the mountain. (42) “And the LORD said to me, ‘Tell them, “Do not go up nor fight, for I am not among you; lest you be defeated before your enemies.”’ (43) So I spoke to you; yet you would not listen, but rebelled against the command of the LORD, and presumptuously went up into the mountain. (44) And the Amorites who dwelt in that mountain came out against you and chased you as bees do, and drove you back from Seir to Hormah. (45) Then you returned and wept before the LORD, but the LORD would not listen to your voice nor give ear to you. (Deuteronomy 1:41-45 NKJV)

Faith Always Continues To Believe

By faith Abraham obeyed when he was called to go out to the place which he would receive as an inheritance. And he went out, not knowing where he was going. (9) By faith he dwelt in the land of promise as in a foreign country, dwelling in tents with Isaac and Jacob, the heirs with him of the same

promise; (10) for he waited for the city which has foundations, whose builder and maker is God. (11) By faith Sarah herself also received strength to conceive seed, and she bore a child when she was past the age, because she judged Him faithful who had promised. (12) Therefore from one man, and him as good as dead, were born as many as the stars of the sky in multitude—innumerable as the sand which is by the seashore. (Hebrews 11:8-12 NKJV)

Abraham continued to believe in God despite all the "physical evidence". He had a sure word and he held on to it and treasured it and made it his hope. Eventually it produced results and his descendants populate the Middle East today (both Arabs and Jews are descendants of Abraham). Three of the world's major religions (Judaism, Christianity and Islam) were started by his descendants and his name is honored by most of the people in the world. This old, childless, wandering man of faith has certainly been blessed!

For Abraham there was no church or temple or Bible or law code or priest (except the mysterious Melchizedek) , and no set ritual except circumcision. He walked with God by faith alone. He heard directly from God and lived from year to year in the strength of those revelations and promises. He did not waver in faith.

The tenacity of Abraham's faith is a testimony to what true faith is like. It hangs on and keeps believing. It knows the promise of God will be fulfilled.

Faith Does Not Live For This World

These all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off were assured of them, embraced them and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth. (14) For those who say such things declare plainly that they seek a homeland. (15) And truly if they had called to mind that country from which they had come out, they would have had opportunity to return. (Hebrews 11:13-15 NKJV)

Men and women of faith are "strangers and pilgrims on the earth". They operate differently from the surrounding world system and have their vision set on things that are "afar off". Thus faith is NOT a mechanism for getting money from God. It is not focused on material prosperity at all. Those who are of faith may be blessed with material prosperity but that is not what their faith is focused upon. Material prosperity is a by-product of faith that is directed towards things "afar off".

Faith Perceives God's Purposes

But now they desire a better, that is, a heavenly country. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for He has prepared a city for them. (17) By faith Abraham, when he was tested, offered up Isaac, and he who had received the promises offered up his only begotten son, (18) of whom it was said, "In Isaac your seed shall be called," 19 concluding that God was able to raise him up, even from the dead, from which he also received him in a figurative sense. (20) By faith Isaac blessed Jacob and Esau concerning things to come. (21) By faith Jacob, when he was dying, blessed each of the sons of Joseph, and worshiped, leaning on the top of his staff. (22) By faith Joseph, when he was dying, made mention of the departure of the children of Israel, and gave instructions concerning his bones. (Hebrews 11:16-22 NKJV)

Abraham's faith understood God's purposes for Isaac and was so confident that God would perform them that he was prepared to sacrifice Isaac thinking God would raise Isaac from the dead in order to complete His purposes. Isaac understood God's purposes for Jacob and Esau and was able to bless them confident that his blessing would come to pass. Jacob through faith understood the destiny of the twelve tribes and Joseph saw the Exodus occurring and gave instructions concerning his bones. Thus we see that true faith grasps God's purposes and is confident that they will come to pass.

Faith Knows Where True Treasure Lies

By faith Moses, when he was born, was hidden three months by his parents, because they saw he was a beautiful child; and they were not afraid of the king's command. (24) By faith Moses, when he became of age, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter, (25) choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God than to enjoy the passing pleasures of sin, (26) esteeming the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures in Egypt; for he looked to the reward. (Hebrews 11:23-26 NKJV)

Moses knew that all real and substantial treasure is in Christ. The vast treasures of the Egyptian Pharaohs were as nothing to "them reproach of Christ". It takes faith to see this in the first place. It does not seem commonsense at all to choose mistreatment with the people of God over power, prestige and wealth. However, many missionaries have done just that giving up jobs as doctors, engineers, teachers or other professionals to suffer disease and hardship for the sake of the Kingdom of God. I think it was Dawson Trotman, who founded the Navigators, who was an engineer. After building a particular bridge he thought to himself - all my work is going to be burned up when Christ returns, that bridge will be just a puff of smoke! He decided he wanted to work with things that last forever. After a bit of Bible study he worked out that the two things that last forever are the word of God and people so he set out to work with those instead and a world-wide ministry was born. Men and women of faith think like that.

Faith Sees Him Who Is Invisible

By faith he left Egypt, not fearing the king's anger; he persevered because he saw him who is invisible. (28) By faith he kept the Passover and the sprinkling of blood, so that the destroyer of the firstborn would not touch the firstborn of Israel. (29) By faith the people passed through the Red Sea as on dry land; but when the Egyptians tried to do so, they were drowned. (30) By faith the walls of Jericho fell, after the people had marched around them for seven days. (31) By faith the prostitute Rahab, because she welcomed the spies, was not killed with those who were disobedient. (Hebrews 11:27-31 NIV)

All of the above incidents require a belief in One who is invisible. Moses' ability to see "Him who is invisible" gave him boldness before Pharaoh, respect for God's commands during the Passover, and protection from pursuing enemies. It gave Joshua victory over a walled city and preserved Rahab from annihilation. It was not her respectability that saved her, she was a prostitute, rather it was her respect of God. None of these things could be observed with the naked eye. The parting of the Red Sea was not something you could naturally anticipate. Those who were of faith passed through and those who were rebellious drowned.

In three of the above cases the ability to see Him who is invisible was a direct matter of life and death. Those who observed the Passover lived. Those who didn't lost their first-born sons. Those who had faith went through the Red Sea, those who persecuted God's people drowned. At Jericho the one person who

had faith lived and the rest were destroyed. So it will be at the return of Jesus Christ.

Faith Is As Bold As A Lion

And what more shall I say? For the time would fail me to tell of Gideon and Barak and Samson and Jephthah, also of David and Samuel and the prophets: (33) who through faith subdued kingdoms, worked righteousness, obtained promises, stopped the mouths of lions, (34) quenched the violence of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, out of weakness were made strong, became valiant in battle, turned to flight the armies of the aliens. (35) Women received their dead raised to life again. Others were tortured, not accepting deliverance, that they might obtain a better resurrection. (36) Still others had trial of mockings and scourgings, yes, and of chains and imprisonment. (Hebrews 11:32-36 NKJV)

Faith makes people strong and bold. The overwhelming testimony of Scripture is that men and women of faith are bold, strong and courageous. They are the unflinching ones. They are the overcomers, the giant-slayers, the ones who do mighty deeds. Unbelief accomplishes nothing. Unbelief preserves the insipid. Doubt drives nothing forward and presumption merely paves the way to certain defeat. Faith brings victory.

Faith is Undervalued by the World

They were stoned, they were sawn in two, were tempted, were slain with the sword. They wandered about in sheepskins and goatskins, being destitute, afflicted, tormented— (38) of whom the world was not worthy. They wandered in deserts and mountains, in dens and caves of the earth. (39) And all these, having obtained a good testimony through faith, did not receive the promise, (40) God having provided something better for us, that they should not be made perfect apart from us. (Hebrews 11:37-40 NKJV)

Men and women of faith go unappreciated. The stock market does not value them, the honors system does not recognize them, and the established church often criticizes and rejects them. Faith has no validity for worldly people. Those who live by faith may often feel they lack a place in society and lack validation in its structures. On a sterner note they may actually be killed, imprisoned or tortured for their faith (see the article on the persecuted church).

Faith does not necessarily bring material prosperity. It can bring you affliction, torment, and a cave as a home. Many of these references actually refer to the time of the Maccabees when the Jews were treated very cruelly because they stood against defilement of the temple with an image of Zeus. When faith takes a stand it is often hated. Yet men and women of faith are treasured by God who sees them as people "of whom the world was not worthy".

Faith is Only Made Complete In the Church Through Christ

And all these, having obtained a good testimony through faith, did not receive the promise, (40) God having provided something better for us, that they should not be made perfect apart from us. (Hebrews 11:39-40 NKJV)

It seems unfair that those who had such a good testimony would not receive the promise but have to wait. This is actually a merciful thing. Otherwise there would be two groups of saints in heaven, those living

before the cross with only a few privileges and those living after the cross with many due to God's great grace. The reward of the Old Testament righteous saints has been delayed so that they will celebrate with the Church and be part of the one body of Christ and participants in the grace that is in Jesus Christ. Faith brings us into Christ and into the Church. By this I mean not an organization but the spiritual fellowship of believers in Jesus Christ. Faith takes us on a journey and we find other travelers there with whom we must share. We have a common destiny in heaven with Jesus and a common gospel and a common Holy Spirit. Thus faith is not merely an individual thing but has a corporate dimension to it.

The Prayer of Faith

So Jesus answered and said to them, “Assuredly, I say to you, if you have faith and do not doubt, you will not only do what was done to the fig tree, but also if you say to this mountain, ‘Be removed and be cast into the sea,’ it will be done. (22) And whatever things you ask in prayer, believing, you will receive.” (Matthew 21:21-22 NKJV)

And the prayer of faith will save the sick, and the Lord will raise him up. And if he has committed sins, he will be forgiven. (16) Confess your trespasses to one another, and pray for one another, that you may be healed. The effective, fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much. (17) 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 land for three years and six months. (18) And he prayed again, and the heaven gave rain, and the earth produced its fruit. (James 5:15-18 NKJV)

Here lies perhaps the greatest of frustrations for the believing praying godly Christian. We read verses like those above and, believing their encouragement with all our heart, set out in fervent prayer. We see some answers, many answers, but the one thing we REALLY want eludes us. I have been praying for a godly partner for three years now... with no result whatsoever. Thousands of other prayers have been answered but that one (at least at the time of writing) still eludes me. So I write this in humility. I do not claim to have discovered the key to the vaults of Heaven. I do claim that believing prayer can work many great things. I do claim that if you believe that if you pray earnestly and in faith that you will see astonishing things happen. I do claim that the Bible is true. I do not claim that you will get all you want. Your fleshly desires will remain unfulfilled.(James 4:3 NKJV) You ask and do not receive, because you ask amiss, that you may spend it on your pleasures. God also has His time for answering things (Ecclesiastes 3:1-11). So within these limits let us look at the adventure of praying in faith.

1. Have faith and do not doubt. Faith is a steady assurance that a good God will hear us. (1 John 5:14,15) and that He is faithful. Prayer is not “worrying before God”. Prayer puts worry to rest (Philippians 4:6,7). Faith-filled prayer is steady and rock solid and knows what it is praying about.

2. Faith speaks confidently. You (will) say to this mountain, ‘Be removed and be cast into the sea,’ (and) it will be done. Faith is not just a thought or belief it is a belief that shapes our words and conduct. Faith shapes the actions of the believer. The least of these actions is our speech. For faith to be faith at all it must be capable of making us speak words of faith. If you truly believe in God - don’t you say so - at least to your friends? Your beliefs shape your words. The person who truly believes the mountain will move will command it to move. The faith will produce the words - and the mountain will move.

3. Faith asks “And whatever things you ask in prayer, believing, you will receive.” Faith does not just sit and think. Faith does not just worry about it wishfully. Faith gets up, goes to God, and asks for it. Faith asks God for things. Some see this as tacky, as less than fully Christian, As if asking God for things was beneath them. By doing so they proclaim that they have forgotten that they are creatures of the Creator

with needs He must meet. We CANNOT have our most basic needs in life met unless, like a little child, we come to God and ask. Faith does not demand selfishly it asks respectfully. God is on the throne, we are asking a boon from the King – not ordering the footman to obey. Faith is always humble and reverent.(Hebrews 5:7 NKJV) who, in the days of His flesh, when He had offered up prayers and supplications, with vehement cries and tears to Him who was able to save Him from death, and was heard because of His godly fear.

5. Faith asks fervently (James 5:16 NKJV). The effective, fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much. The faith that moves mountains is not lukewarm. It is fervent like a flame. It cuts its way through to God like an oxy-acetylene torch. It proceeds from a focused mind and a glowing heart. Faith is always fervent because it draws on the energy of God from whom proceeds blazing fire. Lukewarmness is a sign that we have started to walk by sight and to make our decisions by what we think and calculate is reasonable. Faith is not based on what our eyes see but on what the Scriptures say. By its very nature it must be fervent then for (Jeremiah 23:29 NKJV) "Is not My word like a fire?" says the LORD, "And like a hammer that breaks the rock in pieces? If God's Word is a fire then faith is built out of the flames. It is hot stuff.

6. Faith is productive (James 5:16 NKJV). The effective, fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much. The word translated "effective" is energoumene which is related to our word energetic". It actually means "to be effective" "to produce". Faith is concerned with actually producing something. It wants to get on with this job. Faith does not just gaze romantically at candles. Faith does not play at religion. Faith gets on with God's work. Faith is in the diligent steward carrying out God's Kingdom work for His Master. Faith is in the evangelist burdened to see souls won. Faith is in the bible teacher who wants to see lives changed. Faith gets angry at mere chit-chat. Faith demands action. And faith demands action from God. Elijah wanted results. Elijah prayed. Things happened. His demand for results made his prayer fervent and his faith bold.

7. Faith proceeds from a righteous nature. There is no use being productive and fervent and thoroughly evil. You will not be heard. (Matt 7:20-21). Righteousness is absolutely essential to answered prayer. You must be in Christ and clothed with His righteousness which you then work out into your thoughts, nature and actions. (See the article Hungering and Thirsting For Righteousness for a full discussion of this). Faith operates out of God's word and out of obedience. It is a dependent creature-Creator relationship. Faith trembles at God's word. Believing people believe the words of God and seek to put them into action. It is like a computer technician being asked "don't you believe the manual?" "Well of course I do" is the reply which is quickly followed by "Why then do you constantly disregard it thinking you know better or never even read it at all?". If we truly believe then we will obey.

8. Faith succeeds Faith in prayer "avails much" – the mountain moves, faith works, it succeeds, it makes things happen. I have seen faith work wonders. It heals the sick (James 5:15) and provides daily needs as well as all that is necessary for the advancement of God's Kingdom. Faith succeeds because it is in a successful God.(Isaiah 14:24 NIV) The LORD Almighty has sworn, "Surely, as I have planned, so it will be, and as I have purposed, so it will stand. Because God's plans always succeed then prayer based on faith in God is always successful.

Go out and pray and pray and pray. We all learn to pray by praying. Take your faith and ask it to be made into a productive, righteous, fervent flame of God. Persist. Storm Heaven. Open the Scriptures and pray

them. Take the mighty Word into your life. Content yourself with nothing less than successful praying. Disregard the testimonies of the lukewarm, the faint-hearted and the unbelieving. Believe the testimonies of Scripture and great men and women of God. Prayer is meant to succeed. Prayer does not just change us - it moves mountains. These promises are there to make you bold for God. Be bold - and do not shrink back.

Praying In Faith

And the prayer of faith will save the sick, and the Lord will raise him up. And if he has committed sins, he will be forgiven. {16} Confess your trespasses to one another, and pray for one another, that you may be healed. The effective, fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much. {17} 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 land for three years and six months. {18} And he prayed again, and the heaven gave rain, and the earth produced its fruit. (James 5:15-18 NKJV)

The Seven Aspects

Well what are the attributes of prayer that heals and prayer that works miracles. Do you need to be an extraordinary sort of person? No, not at all "Elijah was a man with a nature like ours," says the apostle James and he meant it! The extraordinary thing is not the nature of the pray-er but the faith the prayer is offered in. There are seven aspects to faith that moves mountains and heals the sick – most of them can be found in Hebrews 11.

1. Faith believes in the creative power of God. (Hebrews 11:3)
2. Faith believes in the invisible attributes of God. (Hebrews 11:1,6)
3. Faith believes that God rewards those who seek Him. (Hebrews 11:6)
4. Faith believes what God says – particularly His promises. (Hebrews 11:8ff)
5. Faith believes that God is holy and therefore refuses to sin. (Hebrews 11:24,25)
6. Faith waits patiently for the fulfillment. (Hebrews 6:12-15, Luke 18:1,2)
7. Faith is sensitive to God's agenda. (Hebrews 11:17-19)

To sum these things up - faith is man or woman who is totally at God's disposal. If God promises - they believe, if God commands they obey, if He calls, they go.

Faith and Grace

Then Jesus said to the centurion, "Go your way; and as you have believed, so let it be done for you." And his servant was healed that same hour. (Mat 8:13 NKJV)

Then He touched their eyes, saying, "According to your faith let it be to you." (Mat 9:29 NKJV) Throughout chapters 8 and 9 of Matthew Jesus repeatedly makes the point that faith saves people. I have chosen just two of them for this study. These two make it very clear that faith directs grace. Faith is the riverbed in which grace flows. "As you have believed, so let it be done for you.." "according to your faith let it be to you". This even applies to saving faith. (Eph 2:8 NKJV) "For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God," . We receive grace through faith. We receive grace for salvation through faith, for healing through faith and for all God's saving acts big and small – through faith.

We cannot earn grace. Paul goes to great lengths to point out that that "earned grace" is a contradiction in terms. In fact he devotes the whole epistle of Galatians to this topic. Here are a couple of verses from Romans...

Now to him who works, the wages are not counted as grace but as debt. {5} But to him who does not work but believes on Him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is accounted for righteousness. (Rom 4:4- 5 NKJV)

And if by grace, then it is no longer by works; if it were, grace would no longer be grace. (Rom 11:6 NIV)

The point is this is simple - our prayers are never answered because we have been good. They are answered because we are in Christ and because we are recipients of grace through faith. The notion that God hears our prayers because we have been "good children" is Santa Claus theology. It is works all over again. If that was so our prayers would be answered even if we did not have any faith at all - provided we were good enough. However God never separates prayer from Christ. God makes our prayer life dependent on our believing in Him and in His Son not on our performance - praise the Lord!

Doing It

How can we then apply this to our daily ordinary prayer life? Firstly if we are to pray in faith we should be flexible in our praying and be prepared to adjust our agenda to God's agenda if it should turn out that way. We are His servants - not the other way around. Secondly we should be anchored in God and His word and have a firm conviction that it is true - just as true as 2+2=4. Thirdly when we have a definite and clear idea of what we are praying for before God then we must pray persistently until we see it come true. We must never give in. Prayer should never be offered with an attitude of "maybe God will answer, maybe He won't" but a conviction that He will! Faith is the certainty that God has heard us!

Now this is the confidence that we have in Him, that if we ask anything according to His will, He hears us. {15} And if we know that He hears us, whatever we ask, we know that we have the petitions that we have asked of Him. (1 John 5:14-15 NKJV)

Conclusion

Praying in faith is thus the main way in which we receive God's grace. This is scary because our faith seems so fragile and small. Yet even fragile small faith that is alive and growing can do mighty things.

So Jesus said to them, "Because of your unbelief; for assuredly, I say to you, if you have faith as a mustard seed, you will say to this mountain, 'Move from here to there,' and it will move; and nothing will be impossible for you. (Mat 17:20 NKJV)

Prayer in Practice

1. How do you feel about the Bible's claims that God answers prayers made in faith?

2. The things that stop us believing are often “the evidence of the senses”. Abraham was very old when Isaac was born so it seems “impossible”. How can you get past this in your thinking?

3. Name some promises of God that you can rely on when you pray?

4. Faith is eroded by over-questioning God about the issue. What makes you waver? Are you continually “checking up on God?”

The Wise Habit of Saying Grace

Its Biblical!

Today I heard a Christian radio program from America talk for an hour about eating and dieting but never once mention giving thanks. Nutrition was more important than superstition which is what saying grace seems to be for many. If you ask most Christians why they say grace the reply is likely to be because we are not one of the starving millions and we ought to be grateful – or because it is a good witness.

I have discovered some very good biblical reasons for giving thanks at mealtimes. For instance: Did you know Jesus is recorded as giving thanks at mealtimes nine times ? He gave thanks to God as He fed the five thousand and broke bread at the Last Supper. In the epistles the church wrestling with the question of clean and unclean foods. The key verse is 1 Timothy 4:4.

For everything created by God is good, and nothing is to be rejected, provided it is received with thanks giving.

Here Paul is opposing false teachers who went on about right and wrong foods. They forbid marriage and demand abstinence from foods, which God created to be received with thanksgiving by those who believe and know the truth. (1Timothy 4:3) .

These verses indicate that from the beginning of Creation God meant thanksgiving and food to go together. Saying Grace acknowledges both the goodness of the Creation (all foods are good) and the goodness of the Creator. It is our most regular way of telling God that we are still gratefully dependent on Him.

Sure - Saying Grace can become a boring and meaningless ritual especially if the meaning has never been explained to us in the first place. The next section of this article will deal with creative ways of giving thanks. Giving thanks for food at mealtimes is a well recorded practice of our Lord, of the apostles and of the Early Church. It is theologically sound. It is a sign of spiritual health – giving thanks is the natural response of the believing heart to Gods good provision in Creation. Giving thanks seems to play a part in making all foods clean and frees us from guilt and condemnation (Rom 14:6).

Finally, we are to give thanks in all things for that is Gods will for us in Christ Jesus.(1 Thess 5:18) And what better to give thanks for than delicious food? Its just about afternoon tea time, so I think I shall go and practice some Christian thanksgiving. A final thought – A Christians diet should have thanksgiving in every course as a matter of course.

Creative Ways of Saying Grace

Thank you God for this good food...Amen Five seconds flat... Now let's eat. Grace can become a rushed habit, a Christian incantation at meal times. Let's look at what we can do to truly give thanks to God.

1. Make it a time of prayer for all members of the family. Pray for one another and the concerns of the day. Let each person share their needs then pray for the lot when you say grace. This really is very loving and warm and makes everyone feel built up and cared for.

2. Turn off the television. It is nearly impossible to say thanks over a commercial or the news. God wants your total attention. Give it to Him. It also sends a clear signal to children that God is very important . He is even more important than television!

3. Incorporate touch and holding hands. This sends the signal that you are a family under God united before Him in love. It makes grace a special time. Increasingly, I am noticing that children are hungry to be loved and touched. Holding hands to say grace says God is love and warmth.

4. Have some silly graces for stressful days. Joy and laughter should be part of every Christian home. Some days everyone is so stressed out that the dinner table feels like a battlefield. Let stress out in a fun way before the meal by saying or singing a crazy grace. Some may object to this as irreverent and that is OK. For me God is fun and comfortable and he likes me - and if I cant be silly at home before the Lord – here can I be crazy?

5. Sing grace with guests. Make grace with guests different - Sing a well known grace the guests can join in or get the kids to enthusiastically teach it to them. Let the joy flow from your family to your friends.

6. Use Bible-reading notes. A short Bible reading or devotional before the meal can work as long as it is less than five minutes long. No-one wants the food to go cold! Suitable notes can be obtained from Scripture Union or CLC or any other good Christian bookstore.

7. Make the people more important than the meal. Sometimes grace is regarded as an inconvenient barrier to the joys of pigging out. People and God come second – a long way second, to the rush for more. This is idolatry and a reversing of our Christian values. Meals are one opportunity to demonstrate that we are a family before God. Jesus used them to build relationships and create times for teaching and discipleship. We need to put the family before the food. In the end everyone will feel happier from being properly valued as people.

8. Regularly remind everyone of why you give thanks. Do not let grace become meaningless. We need regular reminders to keep the meaning of grace fresh in our hearts.

18 Reasons For Unanswered Prayer

If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all liberally and without reproach, and it will be given to him. {6} But let him ask in faith, with no doubting, for he who doubts is like a wave of the sea driven and tossed by the wind. {7} For let not that man suppose that he will receive anything from the Lord; {8} he is a double-minded man, unstable in all his ways. (James 1:5-8 NKJV)

There are four basic categories of reasons why your prayers are not answered other than "the sovereignty of God". These are:

1. Spiritual sins – doubt, hypocrisy, pride, flippancy. Etc.
2. Poor relationships – rudeness, unforgiveness, malice, anger, wrath, divisiveness.
3. Major sin - things categorized as "doing evil" (1 Cor 6:9,10).
4. Praying amiss - lack of persistence, not fasting, not using Jesus' name, etc. These form the basis for the following 18 reasons.

Doubting God

Not asking God in the first place but trying to obtain it by quarreling.

Asking wrongly for worldly pleasures.

Treating your wife in an inconsiderate manner.

Doing evil.

A flippant attitude to holy things.

Hypocritical attention-seeking.

Using vain repetition (e.g. like Buddhist prayer wheels, etc).

Lack of unity especially among Christian leaders.

Spiritual discernment and disciplined life.

Unforgiveness.

Lack of persistence.

Spiritual pride.

Wrath/anger.

An erratic life that seldom“abides” in God.

Not according to God’s will (God’s broad, moral will is meant here).

Not asking “in Jesus name” i.e. asking in the will and clear purposes of Jesus and with His designated authority.

Not believing in Jesus.

The Father loves those who believe in His Son and will answer their prayers as a result.

You will probably find two or three of the above in your own life. Write them down and write down a plan for doing something about them. Start with asking God for forgiveness for those things and appeal to Him to hear and answer your prayers.

Prayer

“Lord, we are so weak in many ways. Forgive us our sins and clear us of guilt in our praying. If it was not for Jesus we would not be heard at all. Teach us to pray in ways that are good and acceptable so that we may be heard before Your throne and be answered swiftly.” Amen.

The Sword Of The Spirit

And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God. (Ephesians 6:17 NKJV)

For the word of God is living and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the division of soul and spirit, and of joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart. {13} And there is no creature hidden from His sight, but all things are naked and open the eyes of Him to whom we must give account.(Hebrews 4:12-13 NKJV)

He had in His right hand seven stars, out of His mouth went a sharp two-edged sword, and His countenance was like the sun shining in its strength. (Revelation 1:16 NKJV)

What Is The Sword Of The Spirit?

"Out of His mouth came a sharp two-edged sword". The Jesus we see in the gospels certainly was "sharp" and His replies to the Pharisees "cut them to the quick". When Jesus speaks it is with incisive words. His tongue can be a surgeon's scalpel to heal or a magistrate's sword to deliver judgment. His sharpness in speech flows from an accuracy in perception. It is because He knows intimately what is in our hearts that He can speak to them with such precision. The Word of God in the mouth of Jesus is a weapon that can demolish strongholds.

The Holy Spirit wields His sword, the word of God, to cut deeply through to the thoughts and intentions of the heart because He knows us at the deepest possible level and everything is open to Him. The Holy Spirit knows the depths of God and the depths of man and when we let Him govern our communication we gain a sharp tactical wisdom that this world cannot contradict (Luke 21:14,15) and it is then we can be said to be wielding the sword of the Spirit.

"Therefore settle it in your hearts not to meditate beforehand on what you will answer; {15} "for I will give you a mouth and wisdom which all your adversaries will not be able to contradict or resist. (Luke 21:14-15 NKJV)

In Isaiah this spiritual endowment gives the Messiah acute wisdom and tactical ability. (Isaiah 49:2 NKJV) And He has made My mouth like a sharp sword; In the shadow of His hand He has hidden Me, And made Me a polished shaft; In His quiver He has hidden Me." True Christian thinking confounds the wisdom of this world. It operates on a higher and much more strategic level under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. The disciples after Pentecost were able to confound the wisdom of the Jewish and Roman authorities so that they become enraged when faced with wisdom they could not resist. This was promised by Jesus (Luke 2:14,15 above) and fulfilled in the lives of Stephen and the apostles (and numerous Christians down the years).

And they were not able to resist the wisdom and the Spirit by which he spoke. (Acts 6:10 NKJV)

In Revelation the sword is used against two groups of people 1. heretics 2. the rebellious nations. Its first use is against the proponents of the Nicolaitan heresy at Pergamos.

And to the angel of the church in Pergamos write, These things says He who has the sharp two- edged sword:...{15} "Thus you also have those who hold the doctrine of the Nicolaitans, which thing I hate.

{16} 'Repent, or else I will come to you quickly and will fight against them with the sword of My mouth". (Revelation 2:12-17 NKJV)

Secondly, the sword is used against the nations. In Revelation 19 the returning Jesus is coming with His angels to a rebellious and apostate world that is under the domination of the Beast. "

And the armies in heaven, clothed in fine linen, white and clean, followed Him on white horses. {15} Now out of His mouth goes a sharp sword, that with it He should strike the nations. And He Himself will rule them with a rod of iron. He Himself treads the wine press of the fierceness and wrath of Almighty God." (Revelation 19:14-16 NKJV)

The sword of the Spirit, the word of God is a spiritual weapon of immense power that, in Revelation, is something to be truly feared. There is a sense of "or else.." to it. It is more than just quoting a bible verse at someone. It is speaking God's words with authority and precise accuracy into a situation just like Jesus and the apostles did. It may involve quoting Scripture and that is precisely how Jesus used the sword of the Spirit to defeat Satan in the wilderness.

However, it is not quoting Scripture or arguing Scripture in just a theological sense. Using the sword of the Spirit means authoritatively declaring a Scripture into a particular situation where it fits. When Jesus said to Satan "It is also written "You shall not test the Lord your God.", it wasn't a debate. It was a closure, a declaration, a slamming of the door. The sword of the Spirit is precise, authoritative and final.

How then can we wield the Sword of the Spirit?

The sword of the Spirit is an accurate authoritative statement that reflects what God thinks about a certain life situation. Therefore two things are necessary to wield the sword of the Spirit. The first is a clear perception of the situation and the second is knowing God's will so clearly that you can speak authoritatively into that situation.

A useful question is "What are the thoughts and intentions of this person's heart." This, at first sight may seem impossible to know but that is not always the case.

Counsel in the heart of man is like deep water, But a man of understanding will draw it out. (Proverbs 20:5 NKJV)

Some people have fairly easily discerned thoughts such "with my tongue I will prosper and none can resist me" or "there is no God" or "life is meaningless so let's party before its over". Once you have discerned this inner motto of the person's heart you can address it with an appropriate word from God.

Let's see how the prophet Malachi does this.

You have wearied the LORD with your words; Yet you say, "In what way have we wearied Him?" In that you say, "Everyone who does evil Is good in the sight of the LORD, And He delights in them," Or, "Where is the God of justice?" (Malachi 2:17 NKJV)

By exposing what people are thinking in their hearts and comparing that to God's holy standards a very powerful statement is made.

Let's look at Jesus doing this with the Pharisees.

"Two men went up to the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. {11} "The Pharisee stood and prayed thus with himself, 'God, I thank You that I am not like other men; extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this tax collector. {12} 'I fast twice a week; I give tithes of all that I possess.' {13} "And the tax collector, standing afar off, would not so much as raise his eyes to heaven, but beat his breast, saying, 'God, be merciful to me a sinner!' {14} "I tell you, this man went down to his house justified rather than the other; for everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted." By comparing the attitudes and thoughts of the heart of both people with the standards of God the Pharisees self-righteousness was clearly exposed. Jesus also uses sarcasm in that He says the Pharisee "prayed thus with himself.." indicating that the prayers had an audience of one - the Pharisee. Here we see just how sharp the sword of the Spirit can be. (Luke 18:10- 14 NKJV)
A deep knowledge of Scripture is absolutely necessary to wielding the sword of the Spirit. You have to know God's will in the situation before you can speak into it accurately and the best place to find God's will is in the Scriptures. Once we have a knowledge of the situation and know what the Scriptures say about it we need to ask God for the words and images with which to clothe that idea. The Jews delighted in fitting and accurate proverbs and skilfully woven images. The prophets, under God's inspiration produced some of the loftiest thinking and cutting imagery written anywhere at any time.

Such powerful imagery is vivid and compelling but also very logical. It sums up a situation exposing its evil and/or its folly and makes change a logical necessity. Here Isaiah addresses the then prevalent practice of idol worship.

The blacksmith with the tongs works one in the coals, Fashions it with hammers, And works it with the strength of his arms. Even so, he is hungry, and his strength fails; He drinks no water and is faint.

{13} The craftsman stretches out his rule, He marks one out with chalk; He fashions it with a plane, He marks it out with the compass, And makes it like the figure of a man, According to the beauty of a man, that it may remain in the house. {14} He cuts down cedars for himself, And takes the cypress and the oak; He secures it for himself among the trees of the forest. He plants a pine, and the rain nourishes it.

{15} Then it shall be for a man to burn, For he will take some of it and warm himself; Yes, he kindles it and bakes bread; Indeed he makes a god and worships it; He makes it a carved image, and falls down to it. {16} He burns half of it in the fire; With this half he eats meat; He roasts a roast, and is satisfied. He even warms himself and says, "Ah! I am warm, I have seen the fire." {17} And the rest of it he makes into a god, His carved image. He falls down before it and worships it, Prays to it and says, "Deliver me, for you are my god!" {18} They do not know nor understand; For He has shut their eyes, so that they

cannot see, And their hearts, so that they cannot understand. {19} And no one considers in his heart, Nor is there knowledge nor understanding to say, "I have burned half of it in the fire, Yes, I have also baked bread on its coals; I have roasted meat and eaten it; And shall I make the rest of it an abomination? Shall I fall down before a block of wood?" {20} He feeds on ashes; A deceived heart has turned him aside; And he cannot deliver his soul, Nor say, "Is there not a lie in my right hand?" This imagery makes Isaiah's argument so clear and convincing and compelling that we are amazed that people still continue to worship them! (Isaiah 44:12-20 NKJV)

This brings us to our final point. The sword of the Spirit is not always successful. It is not a magic weapon. People can continue in hard-hearted stubbornness. Jesus did not convert all of Israel - in fact they crucified Him. Paul did not convince all his opponents and the prophets were nearly all killed - it is said that Isaiah was sawn in two in a hollow log. Using the sword of the Spirit will get you opposed.

It will stir people up and their "swords" - sometimes physical ones will be used against you. Here is the first reference to the word "sword" in the New Testament.

"Do not think that I came to bring peace on earth. I did not come to bring peace but a sword. {35} For I have come to 'set a man against his father, a daughter against her mother, and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law; {36} and 'a man's enemies will be those of his own household. {37} He who loves father or mother more than Me is not worthy of Me. And he who loves son or daughter more than Me is not worthy of Me. {38} And he who does not take his cross and follow after Me is not worthy of Me. {39} He who finds his life will lose it, and he who loses his life for My sake will find it." (Matthew 10:34-39 NKJV)

Prayer

"Lord Jesus, we should tremble before You. Fear and reverence and awe and worship and glory and honor are due to You. May our mouths be like Your mouth speaking a wisdom this world cannot contradict, sharp, Spirit-filled Truth flowing from the eternal perspective of Heaven. Lord may we break down hard hearts and open people up to the gospel with precise words that penetrate the heart. Give us the sword of the Spirit Lord and teach us how to use it with skill so that the Kingdom grows. Amen."

Because of Their Many Words...

“And when you pray, do not be like the hypocrites, for they love to pray standing in the synagogues and on the street corners to be seen by men. I tell you the truth, they have received their reward in full.

{6} But when you pray, go into your room, close the door and pray to your Father, who is unseen. Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you. {7} And when you pray, do not keep on babbling like pagans, for they think they will be heard because of their many words. {8} Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask him. {9} “This, then, is how you should pray: “’Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name, {10} your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. {11} Give us today our daily bread. {12} Forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. {13} And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one.’ {14} For if you forgive men when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. {15} But if you do not forgive men their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins. (Matthew 6:5-15 NIV)

Guard your steps when you go to the house of God. Go near to listen rather than to offer the sacrifice of fools, who do not know that they do wrong. {2} Do not be quick with your mouth, do not be hasty in your heart to utter anything before God. God is in heaven and you are on earth, so let your words be few. {3} As a dream comes when there are many cares, so the speech of a fool when there are many words. {4} When you make a vow to God, do not delay in fulfilling it. He has no pleasure in fools; fulfill your vow. {5} It is better not to vow than to make a vow and not fulfill it. {6} Do not let your mouth lead you into sin. And do not protest to the temple messenger, “My vow was a mistake.” Why should God be angry at what you say and destroy the work of your hands? {7} Much dreaming and many words are meaningless. Therefore stand in awe of God. (Ecclesiastes 5:1-7 NIV)

The more the words, the less the meaning, and how does that profit anyone? (Ecclesiastes 6:11 NIV) We have all been in long prayer meetings where someone has managed the 15 minute marathon prayer.

As a Pentecostal I go to prayer meetings that are long and loud and have a touch of theater about them. Is this how Jesus meant us to pray? Well, fortunately, the answer is “No”. God is merciful! (grin)

Jesus tell us:

Not to pray long prayers.

Not to think it’s the amount we pray that counts.

Demonstrates this by praying very concisely in the Lord’s Prayer (just 56 words I think).

If Jesus tells us to pray short prayers -why do we pray long ones and think they are better than the ones Jesus taught us to pray? If Jesus says don’t go on and on - He means it. If Jesus says that we are not heard

“because of our many words” he means it. Disobeying this command is just like disobeying any other command Jesus gave.

Now, as New Testament believers we have direct access to God and are told to pray boldly (Hebrews 4:12-16) and concisely (see above). We are still to be in awe of God but we don’t have to earn a hearing – the cross means we are heard straight away “we have access through the one Spirit”.

He came and preached peace to you who were far away and peace to those who were near. {18} For through him we both have access to the Father by one Spirit. (Ephesians 2:17-18 NIV)

In Romans 5 Paul talks of grace and “the access in which we stand”. Its permanent access – we are “standing” in it. He also says “you have been seated with Christ in the heavenly realms” (Eph 2:6) and we are “citizens of heaven” (Eph 2:19, Phil 3:20). We don’t have to come into the heavenlies we are there now in a very important sense. The sum of all this is that the prayer meeting wind up – the launching our prayers into outer space etc. is totally unnecessary. We are there already and we can say what we need to say in a few simple words and then stop. Bold and short, putting a lot of faith in a few words.

Let’s look at some of the most powerful and well known prayers in the New Testament and see how long they are:

The longest one I know of is the one in Acts 4: And when they heard this, they lifted their voices to God with one accord and said, “O Lord, it is Thou who DIDST MAKE THE HEAVEN AND THE EARTH AND THE SEA, AND ALL THAT IS IN THEM, {25} who by the Holy Spirit, through the mouth of our father David Thy servant, didst say, ‘WHY DID THE GENTILES RAGE, AND THE PEOPLES DEVISE FUTILE THINGS? {26} ‘THE KINGS OF THE EARTH TOOK THEIR STAND, AND THE RULERS WERE GATHERED TOGETHER AGAINST THE LORD, AND AGAINST HIS CHRIST.’ {27} “For truly in this city there were gathered together against Thy holy servant Jesus, whom Thou didst anoint, both Herod and Pontius Pilate, along with the Gentiles and the peoples of Israel, {28} to do whatever Thy hand and Thy purpose predestined to occur. {29} “And now, Lord, take note of their threats, and grant that Thy bond-servants may speak Thy word with all confidence, {30} while Thou dost extend Thy hand to heal, and signs and wonders take place through the name of Thy holy servant Jesus.” {31} And when they had prayed, the place where they had gathered together was shaken, and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit, and began to speak the word of God with boldness. (Acts 4:24-31 NASB) (156 words) (author’s emphasis)

Now most people talk at around 150 words a minute so that prayer is just over a minute long and it caused the place to shake!

Lest have a look at some other well known prayers:

I pray that out of his glorious riches he may strengthen you with power through his Spirit in your inner being, {17} so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith. And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, {18} may have power, together with all the saints, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, {19} and to know this love that surpasses knowledge--that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God. {20} Now to him who is able to do immeasurably

more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us, {21} to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, for ever and ever! Amen. (Ephesians 3:16 21 NIV)

The loquacious Paul who could preach so long that people fell out of windows uses just120 or so words here – just under a minute long. Finally we get down to some prayers that are short but very powerful.

Prayers that still storms and raise the dead.

Peter - "In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth rise up and walk". (12 words) Jesus: "Father forgive them for they know not what they do". (10 words) Jesus: "You deaf and dumb spirit, come out of him". (9 words)

Bartimeus: "Jesus, Son of David have mercy on me". (8 words) Stephen: "Lord, do not hold this sin against them". (7 words) Jesus: "Into Thy hands I commit my spirit". (7 words)

Jesus; "Lazarus come forth". (3 words) Jesus: "Be made whole". (3 words) Jesus: "Peace, be still". (3 words)

Jesus "Talitha kum". (little girl arise) (2 words) Jesus "Tetelestai". (it is finished) (1 word) John: "Marantha". (1 word)

Are you getting the idea? Length and power have absolutely NOTHING to do with each other. If Jesus can raise the dead or still a storm with just three words that is enough!

That sits us on our heels. "Inside ourselves we think - but I couldn't arise the dead with three words, I cannot do anything with that small an amount of prayer, I'd need much more than that..." To be as kind as I can - if you think this way you don't understand prayer yet. Sorry. You have missed the boat. There is no such thing as an amount of prayer. There is such a thing as an amount of faith and a LOT of faith put into just one word is enough to move the Heavens. You are NOT heard because you pray a long time. That is a PAGAN concept. They think "they will be heard for their many words". That is NOT the case. You are heard for your FAITH – not your volume, your nice words or the quantity of your prayers.

The amount of faith you have is inversely proportional to the amount of anxiety you have. People with great faith don't worry, People with "little faith" are the target of that favorite line of Jesus "Why are you afraid O ye of little faith". If you have faith that you will be paid each fortnight you don't get anxious or afraid about your pay-packet. You KNOW that each second Thursday or whenever - is when you get paid. Its reliable, you have faith in it, you don't think twice about it. Similarly after a few years of being a Christian you cease worrying about whether God exists. You know He does. Its certain, you have faith about that. Its settled. When you really believe something you cease worrying about it. Heaven is eternal so Time is different in the heavenly realms. Most things in the Spirit world are completely unaffected by time – because they are eternal. A common example is if someone is hurt so deeply that their spirit is affected – that pain can be just as fresh twenty years later as it was on the day it was inflicted. It has stayed in their spirit and time has not touched it. Such matters are either resolved or unresolved. Once they are resolved they are resolved eternally as well. They are resolved for good. In prayer what we are doing is dealing with realities that are unaffected by time. In prayer things are either settled or unsettled.

You have the victory or you don't. If you are churning around in anxiety and much "prayer" then you don't have faith and you don't have victory your unsettled praying indicates that. When you have faith you need only say a few words and the matter is settled, the storm is stilled, all is done and you walk away calmly and certain of God in the situation. Like Abraham you do not waver in faith. You are rock solid. Its fixed. Long prayers are generally an indicator of anxiety and the longest New Testament prayer in Acts 4 was prayed by very anxious and persecuted people asking for boldness!

Solomon is very blunt about things as says "the more the words the less the meaning" (see Ecclesiastes passages above). It seems that our gabbling on dilutes our faith and actually reduces the impact of our prayers in heaven. Faith, which is awe of God, petitions Him with a few well chosen words. Even Paul's prayer for the Ephesians, as lengthy as it is, is full of deep meaning and carefully chosen words and phrases. So remember its not the amount you pray but the amount of faith you have that counts. Big faith, few words. That's the formula. How do you get more faith? By grasping hold of the Scriptures "faith comes by hearing..." It's listening attentively to God's Word in the Scriptures that will build your faith so you can pray with big faith and little words.

Jesus and Healing

Working Out What The Bible Says On: Jesus and Healing

Introduction

Jesus' attitude is always the "plumbline" for our attitudes. Things "straighten up" when we see things from His point of view. This study aims to work out what Jesus' attitude was towards healing. Its a controversial area for us today but it was very much part of Jesus' life and ministry and as we watch Him in action - we may just learn something. May God bless you as you read this.

Let's start with the obvious!

Jesus always saw sickness as something to be healed

Whenever Jesus came across sickness His attitude was to heal it. (Matthew 4;23-25, 8:16,17, 9:35)

Jesus had compassion on the sick. Just as we automatically have compassion on our own children when they are ill. It would be a most cruel and unusual parent that seeing one of their own children ill would think " This child should suffer some more in order to learn a lesson". These natural instincts we have are part of the image of God in us and reflect the heart of God. All who came to Jesus for healing, were healed. None were told to wait until... (put whatever you like in the gap).

Jesus sometimes saw sickness as the direct work of the devil

Sickness can come from the Devil in two main ways - as a direct attack on the life of a righteous person, permitted by God but not "God's will". Job's sores (Job 2:4-7) and the sickness of the woman bound in the spirit of infirmity (Luke 18:10-16) seem to be in this category.

Jesus sometimes saw sickness as the direct result of sin.

Throughout the Old and New Testament there has always been a strong connection between sin and sickness. Except for the book of Job and some cases of barren but righteous women there was an almost universal causal connection between the disruption of fellowship with God and bodily illness. This flows from the Bible's view of the person as a whole being body-soul-spirit knitted into one with each part affecting the other. Consequently spiritual health can also impart physical health and quicken our mortal bodies. (Romans 8:11) There is no record of Jesus being ill, though He was mortal and human and subject to the normal exigencies of human flesh. While Jesus broadens the OT understanding so that not all sickness was due to sin he twice indicated that a person's illness was based in prior sin. (Mark 2:5, John 5:14) Paul is more explicit about it in his writings to the Corinthians who had a strong triumphalistic streak. He indicated that sickness could be the result of Church discipline for gross immorality –

“handing someone over to Satan for the destruction of the flesh..” (1 Corinthians 5:1-5) . The abuse of the Lord’s supper was also seen to result in physical illness (1 Corinthians 11: 28-32). In extreme cases sin may even result in physical death. (1 Corinthians 11:30, Acts 5:5-10, Romans 1:26-28). The normal aim of such illness is repentance and the soul being saved on the day of salvation.(1 Cor 5:1-5, 11:28-32). Thus it is wise for the person seeking healing to confess any known sin and to get right with God before prayer is administered. This naturally leads to the question Should we heal someone that the Lord is chastening? The answer to this is simple. If they turn to God in their illness and submit themselves to the elders of the church, confessing their sins and asking for healing (as in James 5) then the chastening has done the work of leading them to repentance and we should heal them. Thus there is no contradiction between “healing all who ASK for it” and allowing the Lord to chasten people unto repentance. The very act of asking is a sign of seeking God. Later we will cover how to help people when repentance is needed prior to healing. While Jesus and the apostles acknowledged a connection between sin and physical illness they never blamed anyone for being ill (or even lacking faith in their healing) but rather always sought to heal them.

Jesus often drew a direct connection between faith and healing.

Healing is a manifestation of the kingdom of God in our mortal bodies and I think a pre-figurement of the resurrection. Like all Kingdom realities healing is received by faith. Jesus explicitly this in Matt 8:10, 9:28,29, 15:28; Mark 2:5; 9:24, 10:52 and the parallel passages.

Jesus saw healing as one of the signs of the Presence of the Kingdom

In Matt 4:23, 9:35, and Luke 9:11 healing and the preaching of the Kingdom are tied together In Jesus ministry. The ministry of the disciples(the 12 and the 70) is to have both aspects the Kingdom proclamation and the demonstration of Kingdom power (Matt 10:7,8, Luke 9:2). Luke 10:9 is quite explicit.

And heal the sick there, and say to them, “The kingdom of God has come near to you.” (Luke 10:9 NKJV)

In Matt 12:28 Jesus associates exorcism in His name with the Presence of the Kingdom.

“But if I cast out demons by the Spirit of God, surely the kingdom of God has come upon you.” (Matthew 12:28 NKJV)

This role of healing in demonstrating the validity of the gospel and the Presence of the Kingdom is graphically demonstrated when the imprisoned John the Baptist sends his disciples to Jesus...

And John, calling two of his disciples to him, sent them to Jesus, saying, “Are You the Coming One, or do we look for another?” {20} When the men had come to Him, they said, “John the Baptist has sent us to You, saying, ‘Are You the Coming One, or do we look for another?’” {21} And that very hour He cured many of infirmities, afflictions, and evil spirits; and to many blind He gave sight. {22} Jesus answered and said to them, “Go and tell John the things you have seen and heard: that the blind see, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, the poor have the gospel preached to them. {23} “And blessed is he who is not offended because of Me.” Jesus saw healing as a

demonstration of the real Presence of the Kingdom that would encourage those who struggled to believe. (Luke 7:19-23 NKJV)

Jesus saw healing as a work that His disciples and His church could also work

This is partly covered above. Here are a few verses indicating the spread of healing from the 12 to the 70 to the wider church:

And when He had called His twelve disciples to Him, He gave them power over unclean spirits, to cast them out, and to heal all kinds of sickness and all kinds of disease. (Luke 10:1,9 NKJV) After these things the Lord appointed seventy others also, and sent them two by two before His face into every city and place where He Himself was about to go..."And heal the sick there, and say to them, 'The kingdom of God has come near to you.' (Matthew 10:1 NKJV)

Also a multitude gathered from the surrounding cities to Jerusalem, bringing sick people and those who were tormented by unclean spirits, and they were all healed. (Acts 5:16 NKJV)

Is anyone among you suffering? Let him pray. Is anyone cheerful? Let him sing psalms. {14} Is anyone among you sick? Let him call for the elders of the church, and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord. {15} And the prayer of faith will save the sick, and the Lord will raise him up. And if he has committed sins, he will be forgiven.(James 5:13-15 NKJV)

The theological mandate for this is found in the empowering Presence of God experienced by Jesus at His baptism and experienced by the Church at Pentecost. With this is mind Jesus could say to his disciples "Do you not believe that I am in the Father, and the Father in Me? {11} Believe Me that I am in the Father and the Father in Me, or else believe Me for the sake of the works themselves. {12} Most assuredly, I say to you, he who believes in Me, the works that I do he will do also; and greater works than these he will do, because I go to My Father." (John 14:10-12 NKJV)
"The works" spoken of here are the works Jesus did between His baptism and the cross. It is indicated that the Spirit-filled believer (discussed elsewhere in this chapter and very much in mind) "will do also" some of these works and perhaps do "greater works" because the Spirits power will be manifest in the believer and in the believing community. We cannot do Jesus' works of creation or redemption but we can do the works He did during his ministry – preaching the Kingdom , healing the sick, driving out demons etc. Jesus seemed disappointed and in fact angry when His empowered and called disciples failed to do these works (Luke 9:39-42) and doing them seemed to be an integral part of his approach to training them for ministry (Luke 9 and 10).

Jesus saw healing as a demonstration of God's mercy and compassion, it was never "earned". Mercy is a somewhat neglected concept. It means that you have the right to punish or destroy but do not do so. It was used technically when someone had lost a duel and the victorious party had every right to kill them. The victor could lift his sword point thus showing mercy. God's mercy goes much further than "not killing' but even unto restoring the person to wholeness. Jesus gladly responded to those who appealed for healing on the basis of the mercy of God (Matthew 9:27, 15:22, 17:15, 20:30,31). Jesus also frequently healed out of compassion (Matt 14:14, 20;34, Mark 1:41, 5;19, 9:22- 24, Luke 7:13-15). Compassion is Christ's practical response to human need. It includes the practical action of the Good Samaritan and of Christ feeding the hungry multitudes (Luke 10:33, Mark 8:2) it is never just an empty

sentiment. The power of God is linked to the compassion of God. However God's mercy and compassion is His to command and should never be taken for granted (Romans 9:15). The gospel record though should lead us to believe that His compassion is readily available to all who seek it. Remarkably it was this aspect, more than almost any other, that enraged the religious leaders of His day. They often sternly opposed Jesus' healings being angered at the mercy He demonstrated.(Matt 9:9- 13, 32-34, 12:10-15, Jn 9:13-34) The Pharisaical mindset sees healings as "rewards" perhaps due to the saintly righteous but certainly not due to sinners. I cannot recall a single Pharisee being healed. This leads to three rough rules of thumb "You will only receive as much grace as you think you need." (Luke 18:9-14) and "No grace comes to those who think they deserve it."(Luke 18:9-14; Galatians 3:2-5, 5:1- 11, Romans 11:6) and "You receive more grace than you give but you have to give it first" (Luke 6:35- 38).

Jesus saw healing as a sovereign work of the Father not as an act of "Christian magic".

There is a fine line between the "magical" and the "Christian" uses of supernatural power. Supernatural power becomes "magical" when it is seen to operate separately from the will of the Father. For instance the bronze serpent that Moses held up in the wilderness eventually had to be destroyed because its healing properties were attributed to it separately from YHWH and it thus became an idol. (2 Kings 18:4). A similar thing happened to the ark of the covenant in the days of Eli (1 Samuel 4:3,4) when it, not the Lord, was credited with victory for Israel. Consequently it went into captivity for a while. (1 Samuel 4&5). The temptations Satan used on Jesus were temptations to achieve the purposes of God by means divorced from the will of God. He was asked to turn stones into bread for his own gratification. He was asked to use His new endowment of supernatural power for the purposes of showmanship and jump from the Temple. Finally, He was to conquer the world – but acknowledge Satan as the source of his Kingdom. The word of God and fasting kept Jesus from these temptations. It strikes me that these must be very powerful temptations to be able to be used on Jesus and it does seem that certain Christians are in their grip – to their very great spiritual peril (Matt 7:21-23). Jesus kept His integrity in ministry by only doing that which He saw the Father doing. (John 5:19,20, 36; 10:32,37,38; 14:10-12). Relationship with God and obedience were keys to His overcoming this most subtle of temptations. Thus the safest way to minister is to minister in an attitude of holy fear, reverence, praise and worship. Therefore, preparatory worship is more than emotionally satisfying it also draws us into the necessary state of humility and obedience that can safeguard us from wrong desires. Paul Tournier treats this aspect of the temptation to magic in healing well in his book "A Doctor's Casebook In The Light Of The Bible" pages 113-116 (written in 1954!). He finishes up by saying "There are then two contrary errors: to refrain, for fear of magic, from every kind of bold and sensational act, even when God requires it of us; this course has been all too common in the Church, and is what has made us as poor as it is today in manifestations of God's power. And, on the other hand, through zeal to demonstrate that power, to run after the sensational, even when God does not will it, and so fall into magic; certain religious sects are guilty of this. In the Gospel, the skeptics sneered at the miracles in Galilee and at the Cross: 'He saved others; let Him save Himself, if this is the Christ of God, His chosen' (Luke 23:35) . Neither the miracles nor the Cross can be taken out of the gospel without distorting it."

Jesus always healed what the person wanted healed

There is a tendency to be wiser than the patient when one is in healing ministry and doctors, counselors and psychiatrists are particularly guilty of this and I am afraid some Christians are getting in on the act. If a person wanted to be healed of leprosy or blindness that was what got fixed. Even though Jesus knew

the hearts of people He did not say "Your real problem is...". Jesus took people's problems at face value and healed them. He was not an arrogant know all and He left people with their dignity.

Jesus remembered the social context when He gave instructions after healing.

Jesus treated the sick as part of a social structure that needed to accept that the person had been healed. Lepers had to show themselves to the priest and be certified as clean so they could resume their place in society. (Matthew 8:2-4, Luke 17:12-19) Certain illnesses can relapse (particularly schizophrenia) if the family does not incorporate the person as "healed" but still views them as "sick". Jesus frequently gives instructions to the family or the sick person that initiates a resumption of normality. (Matt 8:14,15; 9:6; Mark 5:43; 10:52; John 11:44).

Even though Jesus had a powerful healing ministry it was not His top priority.

His redemptive work on the cross, the training of the disciples and the proclamation of the good news of the Kingdom were all given a higher priority than healing the multitudes at various times. Healing was an integral part of the whole and a visual and practical demonstration of His message but it was never of ultimate importance. (Mark 6:12,13; 30-32; Luke 4:40-43; 9:51).

Jesus saw healing as a manifestation of Divine authority and power.

The original commission to Adam was to 'subdue the earth" to bring about God's order and perfection in Creation. As the last Adam Jesus subdued evil spirits and even illness which represents a serious imperfection in God's created order. To do this He exercised spiritual authority which He also passed on to others.(Matthew 8:9-13; 9:6; 10:1; Mark 3:15; 6:17; Luke 5:17; 6:19; 9:1; 10:19). Healing requires power and authority to flow from God. Sometimes evil spirits can strongly resist this power and a "power encounter" may take place such as that with the Gadarene demoniac in Mark 5. Healing is a miniature exertion of God's restoring power and is a way of "doing His will on earth as it is done in Heaven" – where there will be no more sickness or crying or pain. (Rev 20:1-3)

The Spirit and the Word In Healing

This article will examine the relationship between the Word of God, the Spirit of God and healing power. The "equation" I will use is "the Spirit of God plus the Word of God equals the Creative Power of God".

Right at the start of the Bible the Spirit broods over the waters and then God speaks bringing creation into being. This is the first revelation of how God acts and it is the most fundamental revelation about how God acts. Under revival conditions when the Spirit of God is powerfully present - as in Jesus ministry and during the heyday of the early church then we have a condition into which all someone had to do was speak the word of Christ and healing occurred. During a recent revival in South America it was not uncommon for people to be spontaneously healed during expository preaching - even if the topic was not healing at all. The preached word has a tremendous power to unlock the brooding power of the Holy Spirit.
Here are some Bible verses that illustrate the connection between the Word of God and healing:

So the water remains healed to this day, according to the word of Elisha which he spoke. (2 Kings 2:22 NKJV)

He sent His word and healed them, And delivered them from their destruction. (Psalms 107:20 NKJV)
The centurion answered and said, "Lord, I am not worthy that You should come under my roof. But only speak a word, and my servant will be healed. (Matthew 8:8 NKJV)

When evening had come, they brought to Him many who were demon-possessed. And He cast out the spirits with a word, and healed all who were sick. (Matthew 8:16 NKJV)

Therefore I did not even think myself worthy to come to You. But say the word, and my servant will be healed. (Luke 7:7 NKJV)

And said, "If you diligently heed the voice of the LORD your God and do what is right in His sight, give ear to His commandments and keep all His statutes, I will put none of the diseases on you which I have brought on the Egyptians. For I am the LORD who heals you." (Exodus 15:26 NKJV)
My son, give attention to my words; Incline your ear to my sayings. {21} Do not let them depart from your eyes; Keep them in the midst of your heart; {22} For they are life to those who find them, And health to all their flesh. (Proverbs 4:20-22 NKJV)

So they departed and went through the towns, preaching the gospel and healing everywhere. (Luke 9:6 NKJV)

The connection seems quite plain - God's word in the heart brings health and God's word spoken out in faith brings healing.

Back to our equation... the Spirit of God plus the Word of God equals God's Creative Power unleashed. The first requirement is the Presence of the Spirit in power. If the Spirit could be made to be powerfully present through prayer then we would have a God who appeared on our command and that is just not so.

We cannot control the Spirit's Presence in power. We need to recognize that. However we can request it, and it is a prayer that God often answers. Luke's gospel encourages us to ask for the Spirit's Presence in power.

If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask Him! (Luke 11:13 NKJV)

So there is some good Biblical precedent for asking for the Spirit's Presence. However when the Spirit is tangibly present and clearly in our midst we must do what He says. He is God and God is always the Boss – of every service and situation. This is where I think we make our most common mistake. We try to harness the Spirit. God is not a horse. If we invite the Holy Spirit in our midst it is we who will be put into harness. Jesus Christ makes it quite clear that it is we who wear His yoke – not the other way around. The second common mistake is that we hesitate even when the Spirit has spoken clearly to us. We say something like "That is too difficult or too embarrassing.... what if it doesn't work....". Now if God has spoken clearly it will work however sometimes it requires considerable persistence. When God told Israel to go up against Gibeah in the civil war against the tribe of Benjamin they were soundly defeated and suffered heavy casualties on the first days before succeeding on the third. Obedience may not mean immediate success, it may mean immediate failure and loss, but when obedience is persisted in then success will come. We need to stop hesitating ,start obeying and to keep on obeying even when things look doubtful and dismal. The financing of the Bill Newman Crusade is a case in point. The financing was a tremendous struggle and weighed the Crusade Committee down heavily, it often threw on the wisdom of having the Crusade. In the natural they could not have gone ahead. Every projection of income verses expenditure left us well short. However we believed it was God's will and despite many discouragements the Crusade went ahead. On the Thursday after the Crusade we were only $900 short and a couple of churches chipped in and a businessman on the committee picked up the tab for the rest. By the time that final committee meeting was finished we had assurances that our finances were covered in every detail. From memory about $22,000 was supplied by God. Unhesitating obedience to the Spirit's prompts plus persistence in faith led to spiritual victory and a Crusade that saw

207 responses. The third and last reason that we fail to respond to the manifest Presence of the Spirit is that we have failed to discipline the flesh and its works. In Galatians 5:16 and 17 it is clearly stated that the flesh and the Spirit are mutually opposed. To the extent that you allow the works of the flesh you diminish the works and fruit of the Spirit. Churches that allow gossips to function and spread "hatred, discord and jealousy.." unchecked are allowing the Spirit to be opposed just as effectively as if that let adultery or witchcraft go undisciplined. They are all listed among the works of the flesh. The flesh can creep in in the way we regard the Holy Spirit. Amongst the works of the flesh is sensuality (Jude 1:19) and when we treat the Holy Spirit as a form of emotional entertainment, a feeling to be enjoyed or a delicious experience to be had we are on the brink of sensuality – if not toppling right over into it. I think that it is no coincidence that those movements that have had an enduring revival in their midst have been characterized by much discipline of the flesh on a personal level through prayer and fasting and on a corporate level through firm church discipline of any and every work of the flesh. To sum up the section on the Spirit. If we are to see God's Holy Spirit manifest in power amongst us we must cease trying to harness God but take His yoke upon us in prompt and persistent obedience to His commands and prompts and discipline our lives so that the works of the flesh are uprooted at both personal and corporate levels.

Then we need the word of God spoken in faith to the situation at hand. I will break this into two halves

1. The speaking of the Scriptures into the situation 2. The speaking of a rhema word into the situation. Personally I find speaking Scripture into a situation the more powerful of the two since I can much more easily join my faith to it with absolute confidence in what I am speaking. The Word of God in Scripture spoken by the Spirit of God in the heart is a powerful tool for healing. Part of my reason for supplying you with the 40 Scripture verses on healing is so that you will have a word from God that you can speak in faith as part of your healing ministry. What is the difference between "speaking" and "reciting' the word of God. Reciting the Word of God seems to have little power. It is directionless, it is not spoken into a situation or to a person. When the Word of God is spoken it is spoken to a person or into a situation. During the Crusade we picked up a strange prayer from Zechariah chapter 4 where a mountain is moved by shouting "Grace! Grace!" to it. So whenever we had to move a mountain we quite literally shouted "Grace!" to it. Mountains don't have ears but God does and He heard the word uttered in faith and addressing that situation. In Mark's gospel we see mountains moved by mere words...

So Jesus answered and said to them, "Have faith in God. {23} "For assuredly, I say to you, whoever says to this mountain, 'Be removed and be cast into the sea,' and does not doubt in his heart, but believes that those things he says will be done, he will have whatever he says. {24} "Therefore I say to you, whatever things you ask when you pray, believe that you receive them, and you will have them. (Mark 11:22-24 NKJV)

Notice how the mountain is spoken to... It is spoken to in faith, without doubt, verbally, out loud and it the mountain is addressed – not God. Jesus did NOT tell us to pray "Dear God, please move this mountain.." We are not to speak to God but to the mountain. Creation needs to hear God's authority - through our lips. Let's go back to mountain chucking Zechariah....

So he answered and said to me: "This is the word of the LORD to Zerubbabel: 'Not by might nor by power, but by My Spirit,' Says the LORD of hosts. {7} 'Who are you, O great mountain? Before Zerubbabel you shall become a plain! And he shall bring forth the capstone With shouts of "Grace, grace to it!"' "(Zechariah 4:6-7 NKJV)

How is the capstone brought forth.. With shouts of Grace, grace to God? NO! With shouts of "Grace, grace to IT...the mountain ". Let's apply this to healing. I cannot think of a single example of New Testament healing where God is prayed to (intercessory style) to effect the healing. The lame man at the Gate Beautiful is told "In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, rise up and walk...". The leper is told "Be healed". The dead girl is told "tabitha kum..little girl arise..." , Lazarus is told "Lazarus come forth.." The word of God is "Be healed" and His authority to heal is applied to Creation by the faith- filled people of God. There seems to be drastic change between Old Testament and New on this point. Certainly people in the Old Testament cried out to God for Him to heal. Generally they did not see that God's authority was vested in them to any significant degree . Perhaps the clue lies in the phrase "the Kingdom of God is at hand". In the kingdom God's rulership is enforced and manifested through His servants. Because of Christ's work on the cross the authority we carry is far greater than that experienced in the Old Testament. We are seated with Christ in heavenly realms and on His behalf exercise "all authority in heaven and on earth...".

"Assuredly, I say to you, among those born of women there has not risen one greater than John the

Baptist; but he who is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he. (Matthew 11:11 NKJV)

By logical implication the least NT believer is greater than any OT saint. Not better than, but greater than, carrying more authority than. We can command healing to occur in the name of Jesus. When the Spirit is manifestly present we can, in faith, speak to the sick person using a Word from God and command healing to occur.

The authority to command healing does not work mechanically. It requires faith in God and the manifest Presence of the Holy Spirit. The Spirit of God + the Word of God = the Creative Power of God. How do we know that the Holy Spirit is present and present to heal? This is "watching" for what the Father is doing. We need the spiritual sensitivity to sense when God is at work to heal and the courage to join Him in his healing work.
Then Jesus answered and said to them, "Most assuredly, I say to you, the Son can do nothing of Himself, but what He sees the Father do; for whatever He does, the Son also does in like manner. {20} "For the Father loves the Son, and shows Him all things that He Himself does;and He will show Him greater works than these, that you may marvel. (John 5:19-20 NKJV)

However, Scripture indicated that when God's activity was healing - then all were healed. God's will is not who will get healed – no one was ever refused healing by Jesus. God's will is that of the timing of the manifestation. There are times when God is present to heal and there are times when His activity is something else. But when his activity is to heal and His Spirit is present and we are there in faith we can speak the word to all who need healing and they will be healed. At least that is what I see Scripture indicating (1 Corinthians 12:11 NKJV). But one and the same Spirit works all these things, distributing to each one individually as He wills. When one reads 1 Cor 12-14 and looks a bit at the Greek you are struck by the impression of "flashes of giftings". One person gets one gift for the common good then another gets something else and the Holy Spirit is activating first one ministry, then another in the assembled body of Christ and all things are done decently and in order.

And there are diversities of activities, but it is the same God who works all in all. {7} But the manifestation of the Spirit is given to each one for the profit of all: The Old Testament has a strong concept of "the appropriate time' a time to live, a time to die etc. Getting the timing right was not a matter of using a watch but tuning the time you wanted to do things with when God wanted it to happen. (1 Corinthians 12:6-7 NKJV)

Putting this all together if the Holy Spirit is saying to your heart "I want you to be healed tonight" then that is God's timing for you. Do not delay. When God speaks that is the time. when He wants you to respond. That's why he spoke then and not some other time. If God says "I am here and I wish to heal everyone who is present.." then we need to grab everyone and haul them in just as if Jesus had walked through the door with power to heal.

As you sit there listen to what the Spirit is saying to you. Maybe you are sensing God wants to do a particular work in your life just now, maybe it isn't healing, don't worry about it if God has revealed that to you now then we will deal with it now. He is not on our schedule - we are on His schedule. Ask yourself what does God want to do in my life right now? When you have done that ask "How can I apply God's word authoritatively to this situation?' Write down what God wants you to do and go and put into action – right now!

On Your Own: What I sense God wants to do in my life: An authoritative Word from Scripture that applies to my situation: God's command for my condition: What I need to do right now!: In The Spirit On The Lord's Day I, John, both your brother and companion in the tribulation and kingdom and patience of Jesus Christ, was on the island that is called Patmos for the word of God and for the testimony of Jesus Christ. {10} I was in the Spirit on the Lord's Day, and I heard behind me a loud voice, as of a trumpet. (Revelation 1:9-10 NKJV)

John was "in the Spirit on the Lord's day". This says a couple of things. (1) That a Christian can be "in the Spirit" and (2) that there is a state called "in the Spirit" which is different from normal living and is which involves a deeper level of communion with the spiritual realm and with God. The phrase "in the Spirit" is used three other times in the book of Revelation. Here they are:

Immediately I was in the Spirit; and behold, a throne set in heaven, and One sat on the throne. (Revelation 4:2 NKJV)

So he carried me away in the Spirit into the wilderness. And I saw a woman sitting on a scarlet beast which was full of names of blasphemy, having seven heads and ten horns. (Revelation 17:3 NKJV)

And he carried me away in the Spirit to a great and high mountain, and showed me the great city, the holy Jerusalem, descending out of heaven from God. (Revelation 21:10 NKJV)

"In the Spirit" in Revelation means a state of heightened spiritual perception. It enables the apostle to move among spiritual realities and to behold things that he could not behold under normal physical limitations. It also involves "translation" to heaven, to a wilderness and to a high mountain. In chapter one though no "translation" is implied. Let's see how else the term is used in Scripture. The first reference is in Ezekiel at the beginning of the chapter on the Valley of Dry Bones.

The hand of the LORD came upon me and brought me out in the Spirit of the LORD, and set me down in the midst of the valley; and it was full of bones. (Ezekiel 37:1 NKJV)

This seems very similar to John's experience. It is the only OT reference to the phrase. In the New Testament we find the phrase used 24 times and in a number of different ways. (numbers taken from occurrences in the NKJV translation, it may be different in other translations) It can mean...
In the Spirit in contrast to in the flesh. (Romans 8:9; Gal 3:3) In the Spirit in contrast to in the letter. (Romans 2:29)

In the spirit and power of Elijah – that is "in the nature of...". (Luke 1:17) In the spirit of your mind. (Ephesians 4:23)

From the deepest parts of ones being. (John 11:33; Acts 19:21)

In the spirit as "inspired", "under the power of the Spirit" often involving an ecstatic/worshipful state we see this in the following references:
He said to them, "How then does David in the Spirit call Him 'Lord,' saying: (Matthew 22:43 NKJV)

In that hour Jesus rejoiced in the Spirit and said, "I thank You, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that You have hidden these things from the wise and prudent and revealed them to babes. Even so, Father, for so it seemed good in Your sight. (Luke 10:21 NKJV)

And see, now I go bound in the spirit to Jerusalem, not knowing the things that will happen to me there. (Acts 20:22 NKJV)

For he who speaks in a tongue does not speak to men but to God, for no one understands him; however, in the spirit he speaks mysteries. (1 Corinthians 14:2 NKJV)

We need then to ascertain whether or not this state is exceptional or is normative for mature Christians. John on Patmos writes as if it was normal for him to be "in the Spirit on the Lord's day". Another reference in Philippians suggests this may be the case.

For we are the circumcision, who worship God in the Spirit, rejoice in Christ Jesus, and have no confidence in the flesh. (Philippians 3:3 NKJV)
Two more verses suggest that our worship is to be impelled by the presence of the Spirit of God.

In whom you also are being built together for a dwelling place of God in the Spirit. (Ephesians 2:22 NKJV)

Praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, being watchful to this end with all perseverance and supplication for all the saints. (Ephesians 6:18 NKJV)

These verses indicate that the Christian is a Holy Spirit-indwelt person and that being indwelt by God should have a profound impact on us from time to time. I am not advocating that we should expect the heavens to be opened to us each Sunday. I am suggesting that we should be more conscious of the indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit and there should be times when we are so thoroughly immersed in Him that we can say of ourselves "I was really in the Spirit then."

I know I try to avoid ecstatic states as much as possible. I am a person who likes to be in control. I like leading, thinking, writing, teaching. I am less than comfortable with feeling, perceiving, experiencing and sensing. My background is in Inorganic Chemistry. I like facts and equations and precise measurements – the stoichiometry of life. I am uncomfortable with the book of Revelation and with the spirituality of John the apostle. Yet I cannot lightly dismiss it. It is there. Along with Daniel, Paul, Zechariah, Moses, Ezekiel and Isaiah. There is an enormous tradition of ecstatic experiences among great men of God.

Being "in the Spirit" as in under the control of the Holy Spirit with an increased spiritual sensitivity is found in David when he composed the Psalms, Elisha when he prophesied and in many others as they received their words from God. At Pentecost the one hundred and twenty spoke in tongues glorifying God under the inspired influence of the Holy Spirit. This started a tradition of ecstacy that was continued in Caeserea Phillipi (Acts 10:44-47), Ephesus (Acts 19:6) and Corinth (1 Cor 14:1-5) amongst others. The New Covenant contains a promise of increased intimacy with God and a veritable flood of "in the Spirit" type experiences to the point where all Christians from the greatest to the least would participate to some extent in them.

And it shall come to pass in the last days, says God, That I will pour out of My Spirit on all flesh; Your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, Your young men shall see visions, Your old men shall dream dreams. {18} And on My menservants and on My maidservants I will pour out My Spirit in those days; And they shall prophesy. (Acts 2:17-18 NKJV)

Being "in the Spirit" does not necessarily mean speaking in tongues for it is clear that not all speak in tongues (1 Corinthians 12:30). It may mean that you compose a song to God, or teach with exceptional clarity and power or administer the church with exceptional wisdom.

And God has appointed these in the church: first apostles, second prophets, third teachers, after that miracles, then gifts of healings, helps, administrations, varieties of tongues. {29} Are all apostles? Are all prophets? Are all teachers? Are all workers of miracles? {30} Do all have gifts of healings? Do all speak with tongues? Do all interpret? (1 Corinthians 12:28-30 NKJV)

It seems clear to me then that we should ask the Holy Spirit to make our Christian lives such that we can say that we have definitely been "in the Spirit". This may not suit some people but the Holy Spirit is God. To tell God that we don't want His workings in our lives is dangerous stuff indeed. Let's ask God to so move in our lives that we can be found "in the Spirit on the Lord's Day".

Prayer

"As we worship this Sunday let it be an 'in the Spirit' time for us Lord Jesus when You reveal Yourself to us in majesty and glory and love. Amen"