



WAYNE A. MACK

FOREWORD BY S. LANCE QUINN

REACHING
THE EAR
OF GOD

PRAYING MORE...AND MORE LIKE JESUS

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DR. WAYNE A. MACK

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To our thirteen grandchildren
whom we love dearly and pray for regularly,
that each of them might personally know what it means
to pray and live more and more in accordance
with the teachings of our Lord Jesus Christ.



Courtney,
Nathan,
Stephanie,
David,
Ashley,
Michaela,
Audrey,
Jacob,
McKenna,
Cambria,
Catelyn,
Carolina,
and
Andrew

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Many people have been involved in helping me bring this book to fruition. To them I owe a great debt of gratitude. Without their help, in the midst of a very busy schedule, this book would have never come into existence. As you read the book, you may find some mistakes, in that I haven't been inspired as the biblical writers were. You may also find that the style is not as scintillating as you would like it to be. Please blame any negative thing about the book on me, and give these dear people who helped me the credit for any of the positives. They have been of immense help in birthing this book.

Who are these people? In a sense, all of the people of Grace Fellowship Church of the Lehigh Valley of Pennsylvania helped me to develop this book, in that the material presented in it was first presented to them in our training hour classes. They listened and responded to the material and hopefully grew in their Christian lives through it.

Several other people from the church were more specifically involved in getting this book ready for publication. Janet Dudek was initially responsible for typing and editing the contents. She spent many hours at this task. Her skill at helping me condense and phrase the material, her dedication, hard work, and support were invaluable. Her husband Jeff, an English teacher, looked over her shoulder (and figuratively speaking, mine as well) and gave valuable critique of grammar and style.

Gwen Knepp, from our church, also spent many hours typing some of the first manuscripts. My wife Carol did her usual thing—reading the manuscripts, making comments on better ways of stating the information, and then helping in developing the study ques-

tions scattered throughout the chapters and at the end of each chapter. And, oh yes, I also want to thank our daughter Beth who read the manuscript and gave some assistance to the study questions.

As you read this book, you will also become aware of two other people who gave me an immense amount of help in writing. These two people are now in heaven, but they are still speaking through their books. One of them is Thomas Watson and the other is Martyn Lloyd-Jones. Watson's book on the Lord's Prayer is superb—so biblical, practical, and interestingly written. Lloyd-Jones's input came from his *Studies in the Sermon on the Mount*. You will find quotes from these two men scattered throughout my book. So I would be remiss not to acknowledge the assistance I have received from them.

Thanks to all these people, but especially thanks to God for His goodness and for His giving me something to write about. I pray that this book will be used mightily to bring glory to our triune God and great blessing to His people for whom Christ died and rose again.

F O R E W O R D

Charles Spurgeon's famous statement that a Christian's life of prayer is like the slender nerve which moves the hand of omnipotence signals the huge level of importance God places upon our prayers. Could anything be more important and exciting to the Christian than seeing Almighty God being moved to answer your own specific prayers? Wayne Mack emphatically doesn't think so, and that is why he has written the marvelously helpful and instructive book on prayer which you now hold in your hand.

"Wait a minute!" you say. "You're trying to sell me on the idea of buying another book on prayer? No thanks. I've read my fair share of Christian books on prayer and I certainly don't need another one." I admit when this book first came across my desk, I might have been tempted to agree. I too have already read many Christian books on the subject of prayer (who hasn't?), and I too have seen Christian bookstore shelves lined with that many more books on prayer (again, who hasn't?!), so why yet another treatise on prayer? I suggest two main reasons should motivate you to purchase and read this one.

First, let me tell you a little about the author himself and why he is qualified to write on this vital topic. I have known Dr. Mack for many years now, and what has always stood out to me has been his own faithfulness and diligence in prayer. He is no armchair theologian or writer when it comes to his own devotion to prayer. He genuinely enjoys communing with his heavenly Father! I have seen this side of him, as some might say, in an "up close and personal" way. Indeed, I myself have been the beneficiary of his intense prayers for me. When I have had to make major ministry decisions, Wayne Mack was one of the first men I called to seek advice and counsel.

He carefully interceded for me, asking God to give me guidance and direction. Those experiences are etched in my mind as I read his book on prayer, seeing in a unique way how his prayer life and teaching intersect.

Second, I encourage you to move on from simply reading the foreword to actually reading and thereby profiting from this book's content. Let me explain what I mean. Christians often look "at" books, but never really read the book itself. They can sometimes be found "looking over" the covers or dust jackets (including being impressed by the endorsers), possibly even thumbing through certain chapters here and there, picking out sentences or maybe even paragraphs, but never really *reading* and *interacting* with the substance of the book's main thesis. Granted, this cursory acquaintance with a book may be all the time a person can devote when inside a bookstore, or when one is referencing several possible books for some future study. But when it comes to sitting down and reading a substantive book on a biblical topic as vital as prayer, you will want to devour *Reaching the Ear of God: Praying More . . . and More like Jesus*. As the subtitle suggests, it is this feature of the book that most stands out. As Dr. Mack shows us—on page after page—Jesus reveals His intimate relationship with God the Father, and how that kind of intimacy is also available to all true believers through prayer. He also shows us that it is available only through an intimacy with God's precepts and person, and only when done in the precise ways Jesus Himself prescribes. In an age when so much is done in a self-styled fashion, learning to pray in a Jesus-styled way is crucial. So, while you may have *seen* many books on prayer before, I think this might well be the book on prayer on which you should *focus* your attention.

Finally, as you study this resource on prayer, you'll notice some other considerable contributions. From the searching application questions (which show the author's dynamic counseling skills forged over forty years in ministry), to the extensive familiarity with the whole of Scripture (which shows the author's ministerial training, experience, and knowledge), to the interweaving of both the theological and practical elements of the Christian life (which shows the author's own rich reading of solid Christian literature),

this book stands out above others on the subject. Wayne Mack is a reliable guide to a better prayer life, which is itself a way to greater intimacy with God. Who wouldn't want to have the kind of prayer life that can pave the way to greater intimacy? That is why Wayne Mack labored to write this book, and I for one thank God that he did. After you are finished reading it, I pray you will thank both of them.

S. Lance Quinn

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INTRODUCTION

Recently while reading a book on prayer by E. M. Bounds, I was struck by an illustration he used about the power of prayer. The book was called *The Possibilities of Prayer* and the chapter entitled “Wonders of God through Prayer.” In that chapter Bounds uses an illustration about the power of prayer based on Revelation 8:3–5:

Prayer is a tremendous force in the world. Consider this picture of prayer and its wonderful possibilities. God’s cause is quiet and motionless on the earth. An angel, strong and impatient to be of service, waits around the throne of God in heaven. In order to move things on earth and give impetus to the movements of God’s cause in the world, he gathers all the prayers of God’s saints in all ages, and puts them before God just as Aaron used to perfume himself with the delicious incense when he entered the holy sanctuary, made awesome by the immediate presence of God. The angel impregnates the air with that holy offering of prayers, and thus takes its fiery body and casts it on the earth.

Note the remarkable result. “There were voices, and thunders, and lightnings, and an earthquake” (Rev. 8:5). What tremendous force is this that has convulsed the earth? The answer is that it is “*the prayers of the saints*” (v. 4), turned loose by the angel around the throne, who is in charge of those prayers. This mighty force is prayer, like the power of earth’s mightiest dynamite.¹

As I read these words by E. M. Bounds based on Scripture, I was gripped by the statement that prayer is a mighty force like the power of earth’s mightiest dynamite. Then I was forced to ask the question: If this assessment by Bounds about the power of prayer

is true, why don't we see more of that dynamite being exploded in our churches and in our world today?

As I thought about this question, two possible answers came to mind. One, perhaps we're not seeing more of that dynamite because we don't pray enough. Perhaps we're not keeping the bowl of prayer full enough. And certainly, there's good reason to believe that is true. We don't have enough men like Bounds and the apostle Paul or Epaphras who prayed without ceasing and labored fervently in prayer (James 4:2; 1 Thess. 5:17).

And two, perhaps we aren't seeing much dynamite because we are not praying in the way we should be praying. John 4:23–24 indicates that acceptable worship must be in truth, and 1 John 5:14–15 indicates that effective prayer is prayer that is in accordance with the will of God. Perhaps we're not seeing more of that dynamite because we don't pray in accordance with the will of God, because we are, in the words of James 4:3, asking amiss.

In writing this book, I have two main purposes in mind: first, that all of us would be motivated to pray more than we have to this point. Most of us need motivation in that area. I have yet to meet any individuals who would say that they pray as much as they think they should. My second purpose is to help us to understand prayer Jesus' style. I want us to learn from history's greatest prayer expert. Jesus really knows everything there is to know about prayer. John 11:42 tells us that God the Father always heard Him. So in writing this book, I will be explaining and applying the passage in which He gave His clearest instructions on the subject—the passage in which He said three times, “When you pray” don't do this, and “when you pray” do this (Matt. 6:5–13). I have chosen to explain and apply this passage because if we pray the way He tells us to pray we can be sure that we will be praying for the things that are according to God's will.

Yes, Revelation 8:3–5 illustrates the fact that the right kind of prayer is powerful. It is like earth's mightiest dynamite. It was so in past times, and it still will be today as we pray the right kinds of prayers. So let's sit at the feet of Jesus and allow Him to teach us how to pray effectively. Come with a humble, teachable, hungry heart and listen carefully to what Jesus has to say about prayer His style.



THE NATURALNESS OF PRAYER

What would you include on your list of the major issues in the Christian life? I'm sure that many, perhaps most, Christian leaders would rate the subject we're dealing with in this book close to the top of their list. In this book, we're going to be studying the subject of effective prayer. We're going to be answering many questions about what it means to pray in a God-pleasing way. We're going to be learning lessons from history's greatest expert on the subject of prayer, the Lord Jesus Christ. We're going to be sitting at His feet and letting Him teach us how to really pray effectively. Could there be anything more important or exciting than that? How could it be otherwise when we have such a great teacher as the Lord Jesus Christ Himself and when we're studying one of the most important subjects that anyone could consider? Are you ready to learn? Are you ready to be a good student? I hope so because, as many others have said, this is one of the most important issues in the Christian life.

Prerequisites to the Study of Effective Prayer

A Desire to Learn

As we begin this study, there are a few preliminary issues about which we need to think. First, if we want to benefit from

this teaching, we must have a desire to learn. I once spoke with a woman who described to me a problem her son was having at school. It seems he was doing very well in every subject except one. This was not due to a lack of ability, but rather to a lack of interest. He did not learn because he did not care to learn.

A desire to learn is essential for any successful study. God does not force us to learn from Him. In Psalm 25:8–9 David said, “Good and upright is the LORD; therefore He instructs sinners in the way. He leads the humble in justice, and *He teaches the humble His way.*” Jesus said much the same in Matthew 11:28–29, “Come to Me, all who are weary and heavy-laden, and I will give you rest. *Take My yoke upon you, and learn from Me, for I am gentle and humble in heart;* and you shall find rest for your souls.” If we truly desire to learn from God, we must come humbly for instruction. James 4:6 says, “God is opposed to the proud, but *gives grace to the humble.*” The proud do not learn from God. Proud people think that they know everything, and so God has no use for them. On the other hand, He will pour out His grace and favor on the humble.

In Matthew 5:6, Jesus taught us that God gives righteousness only to those who desire it: “Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied.” Likewise, God instructs only those who desire to learn: “I praise Thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that Thou didst hide these things from the wise and intelligent and didst reveal them to babes” (Matt. 11:25). If we are not learning from God, it may be that we are not teachable. A humble desire to learn must accompany this study of prayer.



APPLICATION

Why is a desire to learn such an important part of learning to pray effectively? Record what the following verses indicate about this issue:

Psalm 25:8–9

Matthew 11:28–30

James 4:6

Matthew 11:25

1 Peter 2:3

Purity of Heart

Second, if we want to profit from this teaching, we must have purity of heart. In academics, there is no vital connection between knowledge and holiness. The most ungodly person in the world can earn a Ph.D. In the fourth century A.D. there lived a brilliant scholar named Augustine. He knew more than did all his professors, but his life was very immoral. He understood nothing of real Christianity, and others much less brilliant knew far more about spiritual things than he. It was not until Augustine was converted and turned his back on worldly wisdom that he became one of the greatest defenders of the Christian faith. He is considered largely responsible for the overthrow of two powerful heresies in the early church: Manicheanism and Donatism. Augustine is extolled even to this day for his brilliance in spiritual matters. None of this came about, however, until he became a Christian and pursued holiness.

Scripture clearly teaches a connection between holiness and growth in spiritual knowledge. In James 1:21 James said, “Therefore putting aside all filthiness and all that remains of wickedness, *in humility receive the word implanted*, which is able to save your souls.”

God teaches only those who are willing to put aside sinful ways and who hunger for holiness. Peter said this in 1 Peter 2:1–2, “Therefore, putting aside all malice and all guile and hypocrisy and envy and all slander, like newborn babes, long for the pure milk of the word, that by it you may grow in respect to salvation.” The ultimate goal of salvation is much more than gaining heaven; it is becoming more like our Lord Jesus Christ. That should be the consuming desire of every believer, but our hearts must be humble and holy for that work to be done in us.

If we do not hunger for God’s Word—Bible study, godly preaching—one of two things is true. Either we are not believers at all, or our lives are clogged up with sin. I remember, as a child, watching my mother prepare dinner. Being impatient, I would see something I wanted right then, but my mother would always tell me that if I ate before dinner, I would spoil my appetite. This is what God says to us: if we want to eat the garbage of the world, we are going to spoil our appetite for spiritual things. Instead, we must clean the sin out of our lives to make room for the teaching and blessing of the Word of God. In order to profit from any godly teaching, we must come with a pure heart.



APPLICATION

Explain what the following verses indicate about the connection between humility and holiness and learning how to pray effectively.

James 1:21

1 Peter 2:1–2

Psalm 66:18

A Desire to Apply the Teaching

Finally, if we want to profit from the teaching of the Word, we must desire to apply what we have learned. God is not interested in simply filling our heads with facts. God wants us to take what we learn and act on it. James 1:25 says, “But one who looks intently at the perfect law, the law of liberty, and abides by it, not having become a forgetful hearer but *an effectual doer*; this man shall be blessed in what he does.” We will be blessed when we become not just hearers of the Word, but doers of it.

If we are going to benefit from this teaching on prayer, we must be willing to apply it in our lives. I do not consider myself an expert on prayer; I feel as the disciples did in Luke 11. They saw Jesus praying and realized that, in comparison to their own prayers, they did not know how to pray at all. They came to Jesus and said, “Lord, teach

us to pray.” They noticed a great difference between the prayers of Jesus and their own prayers. Like Mary, we all need to sit at the feet of Jesus and learn more from Him.

APPLICATION

Explain what the following verses indicate about the connection between learning how to pray effectively and applying Scripture to our lives.

James 1:25

Philippians 4:6–8

John 7:17

The People of Effective Prayer

In Matthew 6:5–13 Jesus taught His disciples to pray with what is known as the Lord’s Prayer. Let’s look first at what Jesus taught about the people of effective prayer. In other words, to whom was this particular passage on prayer given? Some would say that Jesus was teaching everyone. If we look at the context of the passage, however, we will discover otherwise. The immediate context of the Lord’s Prayer is found in verses 5 and 6: “And when you pray, you are not to be as the hypocrites. . . . But you, when you pray, go into your inner room, and when you have shut your door, *pray to your Father* who is in secret.”

Jesus was not talking to everyone because He was not speaking to hypocrites. Jesus was teaching people who have a right to call God their Father. Those who do not know God as their Father are “children of wrath” (Eph. 2:3) and their father is the devil (John 8:44). John 1:12 says, “*But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, even to those who believe in His name.*” When we have received Jesus Christ by believing in His name, God grants us the right to be called His sons. Jesus was teaching God’s children how to pray.

He continued, “And when you are praying, do not use meaningless repetition, *as the Gentiles do*” (Matt. 6:7). At that time, the word

“Gentile” meant “unbeliever.” Gentiles were outside the family of God and apart from God’s covenant. Jesus was not teaching unbelievers to pray because the only prayer that God will hear from unbelievers is a prayer for mercy and forgiveness—in other words, a prayer for salvation. If a person has been praying and God does not seem to be answering, it may be that he or she is an unbeliever. God does not promise to hear the prayers of hypocrites or unbelievers.

Note also the larger context of this passage. This teaching is part of a sermon that Jesus preached, recorded in Matthew 5–7, called the Sermon on the Mount. It begins, “And when He saw the multitudes, He went up on the mountain; and after He sat down, *His disciples came to Him*. And opening His mouth He began to teach them” (5:1–2). Jesus was teaching those who were already His disciples and who had committed themselves to following Him. Later, in verses 13–14, Jesus said, “You are the salt of the earth; but if the salt has become tasteless, how will it be made salty again? . . . You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden.” Only believers are the salt of the earth and the light of the world. Jesus’ teaching in the Lord’s Prayer is addressed specifically to believers.



APPLICATION

1. Summarize what Jesus taught in Matthew 6:5–8 about the people of effective prayer.
2. List the various reasons why the prayer found in Matthew 6:9–13 can be prayed only by believers. Answer this question from this passage. Why does Jesus’ teaching here not apply to non-Christians?

When, Not If, You Pray

Notice the significance of the word “when” in Matthew 6:5–7, “And *when you pray*, you are not to be as the hypocrites; for they love . . . to be seen by men. Truly I say to you, they have their reward in full. But you, *when you pray*, go into your inner room, and when you have shut your door, pray to your Father who is in secret. . . .

And *when you are praying*, do not use meaningless repetition, as the Gentiles do.”

Jesus assumed that His disciples would pray. He does not say “if you pray,” but “when you pray.” Matthew Henry said, “You may as soon find a living man who does not breathe as a living Christian who does not pray.” If a person does not pray, it is an evidence that he or she is not a believer. J. C. Ryle said:

I have looked carefully over the lives of God’s saints in the Bible. I cannot find one of whose history much is told us from Genesis to Revelation who is not a man of prayer. I find it mentioned as a characteristic of the godly, that they call on the Father and that they call on the name of the Lord Jesus. I find it recorded as a characteristic of the wicked that they do not call upon the Lord. I have read the lives of many eminent Christians that have been on earth since Bible days. Some of them, I see, were rich, some poor; some were learned, some unlearned, some of them were Episcopalians, some Presbyterians, some Baptists, some Independents, some were Calvinists and some Arminians, some have loved to use liturgy and some to use none. But one thing I see they all had in common; they have all been men of prayer. I have studied the reports of missionary societies in our own times. I see with what joy the heathen men and women are receiving the gospel in various parts of the globe. There are conversions in Africa, New Zealand, in India and South America. The people converted are naturally unlike one another in every respect, but one striking thing I observed at all missionary stations, the converted people always pray.

I do not deny that a man may pray without heart and without sincerity. I do not for a moment pretend to say that the mere fact that a person is praying proves that he is a child of God. As in every other part of religion, so also in this, there is plenty of deception and hypocrisy. But this I do say, that not praying is a clear proof that a man is not yet a true Christian. He cannot really feel his sins, he cannot love God, he cannot feel himself a debtor to Christ, he cannot long after holiness, he cannot desire heaven. He has yet to be born again, he has yet to be made a new creature, he may boast confidently of election, grace, hope and knowledge and deceive ignorant people, but you may rest assured it is all vain talk if he does not pray.¹

Jesus said “when you pray,” because he knew that it is natural for a child of God to pray.

APPLICATION

Explain in your own words the significance of the words “when you pray” in Matthew 6:5–7.

Why It Is Natural for a Christian to Pray

It is natural for Christian to pray because *the Spirit of prayer dwells in them*. First Corinthians 6:19 says, “Or do you not know that *your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit* who is in you, whom you have from God, and that you are not your own?” When we become Christians, the Spirit of truth, faith, holiness, grace, and supplication comes to live in us. “And I will pour out on the house of David and on the inhabitants of Jerusalem, the *Spirit of grace and of supplication*, so that they will look on Me whom they have pierced” (Zech. 12:10). Paul said it this way in Romans 8:15, “For you have not received a spirit of slavery leading to fear again, but you have *received a spirit of adoption as sons by which we cry out, ‘Abba! Father!’*”

The Spirit of God causes believers to pray. Romans 8:26 says, “And in the same way, the Spirit also helps our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we should, but *the Spirit Himself intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words.*” One of the ministries of the Spirit is to help us in our praying; therefore, where there is no prayer, there is no Spirit and thus no salvation. Romans 8:9 says, “However, you are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if indeed the Spirit of God dwells in you. *But if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he does not belong to Him.*”

APPLICATION

1. Summarize why the fact that a Christian is indwelt by the Holy Spirit makes it natural to assume that a Christian will be a praying person.
2. Write out the verses of Scripture that support this concept.

It is natural to assume that believers will pray because *we are followers of Jesus Christ*. Jesus said in Luke 9:23, “If anyone wishes to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow Me.” First John 2:6 says, “The one who says he abides in Him *ought himself to walk in the same manner as He walked*.” John went on to say that, if anyone claims to abide in Christ and does not imitate Him, he is a liar. In other words, the Bible teaches that if anyone is not interested in following Jesus, he or she is not a Christian. Jesus said this Himself in John 10:27, “My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and *they follow Me*.”

As followers of Christ, we should consider His example, and Jesus was a man of prayer. In Hebrews 5:7 we find this description, “In the days of His flesh, *He offered up both prayers and supplications with loud crying and tears to the One able to save Him from death*.” There are more than thirty references in the Gospels to Jesus praying. In John 17:20 Jesus said, “I do not ask in behalf of these alone, *but for those also who believe in Me through their word*.” In fact, He is still praying even now. “*He intercedes for the saints according to the will of God*” (Rom. 8:27), and “He is able to save forever those who draw near to God through Him, *since He always lives to make intercession for them*” (Heb. 7:25). One of the primary things Jesus is doing in heaven now is praying for us; as followers of Christ, we also should pray.

It is also natural to assume that we will pray because, as believers, we love Jesus Christ. This is one of the ways that the Bible describes Christians. In Ephesians 6:24 Paul closes his epistle, “Grace be with all those *who love our Lord Jesus Christ with a love incorruptible*.” First Peter 1:8 says, “And though you have not seen Him, *you love Him*.” Who is it that loves Jesus? Jesus explained, “*If you love Me, you will keep My commandments*” (John 14:15); “*He who has My commandments and keeps them, he it is who loves Me*” (John 14:21); and “*If anyone loves Me, he will keep My word*” (John 14:23). Very simply, those who keep the Lord’s commandments love Him. Consider, then, His commandments regarding prayer, “Ask and it shall be given to you” (Matt. 7:7); “at all times [men] ought to pray and not to lose heart” (Luke 18:1b); “Until now you have asked for

nothing in My name; ask, and you will receive” (John 16:24). If we love Jesus, we will keep His command to pray.



APPLICATION

1. Summarize why being a follower of Jesus Christ makes it natural to assume that a Christian will be a praying person.
2. Write out the verses of Scripture that support this concept.

It is natural to assume that we will pray because *prayerlessness is a sin*. We often think of it as simply a problem of laziness or forgetfulness, but the Bible calls it sin. Isaiah 64:6 talks about the Israelite’s sin: “For all of us have become like one who is unclean, and all our righteous deeds are like a filthy garment; and all of us wither like a leaf, and our iniquities, like the wind, take us away.” In the next verse Isaiah explains what sin this is: “And *there is no one who calls on Thy name*, who arouses himself to take hold of Thee” (64:7). One of their sins was a failure to pray.

The Bible defines sin in many ways and one of these is found in James 4:17, “Therefore, to one who *knows the right thing to do, and does not do it, to him it is sin*.” Sin is not only doing what we should not do; sin is not doing what we should do. Since God says that we ought to “pray without ceasing” (1 Thess. 5:17), failing to pray is sin.

In 1 Samuel 12 the prophet Samuel told the Israelites that the Lord was angry with them because of their sins. Under conviction, they came to Samuel and said, “*Pray for your servants to the LORD your God, so that we may not die*” (12:19). Samuel answered them, “Do not fear. You have committed all this evil, yet do not turn aside from following the Lord, but serve the Lord with all your heart. . . . For the LORD will not abandon His people on account of His great name. . . . Moreover, as for me, far be it from me that I *should sin against the LORD by ceasing to pray for you*” (12:20–23). Samuel knew that he would be sinning against the Lord if he did not pray.

In Psalm 10:4 the Bible describes wicked people as those who do not pray. “The wicked, in the haughtiness of his countenance, *does not seek Him*. All his thoughts are, ‘There is no God.’ ” Again, in

Psalm 14:4, Scripture says, “Do all the workers of wickedness not know, who eat up my people as they eat bread and *do not call upon the Lord?*” Wicked men do not seek God in prayer. As believers, we should hate all sin as our Lord hates all sin, and therefore, it is natural to assume that believers will pray because prayerlessness is a sin.



APPLICATION

1. Explain why prayerlessness is a sin.
2. Write out the verses of Scripture that support this concept.

Believers should also pray because *they claim God as their Father*. Psalm 100:3 says, “Know that the LORD Himself is God; it is He who has made us, and not we ourselves; we are His people and the sheep of His pasture.” There is only one God, and we are not He. He is our Creator, and we, as believers, are His people through the blood of Christ. He brought us into His family and has put into our hearts His Spirit who allows us to pray to Him. He has taken care of us and provided everything that we need for life. “*All things came into being by Him*, and apart from Him nothing came into being that has come into being” (John 1:3).

We consider it a tragedy when earthly children refuse to talk to the parents who have brought them into this world and nurtured them. No one’s parents are perfect—and some are even wicked—but it is a horrible thing when children, who owe so much to their parents, will have nothing to do with them. It is truly heart-breaking. Such ingratitude is unnatural even in the physical realm, but how much more so in the spiritual realm!

We have a heavenly Father who listens to us, and it is our privilege to talk to Him. Our Lord Jesus Christ was God manifest in the flesh, but while He walked this earth He laid aside the use of His divine attributes—His wisdom and power—and became man in every respect except sin. And Jesus, again and again, described God as His Father. He was totally dependent on the Father: “Truly, truly, I say to you, the Son can do nothing of Himself, unless it is some-

thing He sees the Father doing; for whatever the Father does, these things the Son also does in like manner” (John 5:19).

In John 8:28 the Lord Jesus said, “When you lift up the Son of Man, then you will know that I am He, and I do nothing on My own initiative, but I speak these things as the Father taught Me.” Throughout the Gospels we find references to Jesus going out and spending whole nights in prayer to the Father. Jesus, as a man, needed and received in prayer instruction from His Father. He spent an entire night in prayer before choosing His twelve disciples. Jesus talked everything over with His Father because He and the Father were one.

We are familiar, of course, with His fervent prayers in the Garden of Gethsemane, just before going to the cross. Jesus cried out, “Father, if Thou art willing, remove this cup from Me; yet not My will, but Thine be done” (Luke 22:42). Jesus acknowledged God as His Father, and so it was natural for Him to be constantly talking to His Father. It is natural for us who call God “Father” to do the same.



APPLICATION

1. Summarize why God’s being the heavenly Father of Christians makes it natural to assume that a Christian will be a praying person.
2. Write out the verses of Scripture that support this concept.

Finally, it should be natural for believers to pray because *prayer is connected to receiving blessings from God*. It is a means which God has appointed for us to obtain things from Him. In Matthew 7:7 Jesus instructed us, “Ask, and it shall be given to you.” James 4:2 says, “You do not have because you do not ask.” If we are not receiving from God, one of three things is true: one, we are not believers; two, we are asking with wrong motives—for our own selfish desires, says James 4:3; or three, we are simply not asking. To ask God for all our needs is to acknowledge our dependency on Him. “Until now you have asked for nothing in

My name; ask, and you will receive, that your joy may be made full” (John 16:24).

J. C. Ryle has commented:

Some without doubt have a larger cup of sorrow to drink than others, but few are to be found who live long without sorrows or cares of one sort or another. Our bodies, our property, our families, our children, our relations, our servants, our friends, our neighbors, our worldly callings—each and all of these are fountains of care. Sicknesses, deaths, losses, disappointments, partings, separations, ingratitude, slander—all of these are common things. We cannot get through life without them. Someday or other we find this out. The greater our affections, the deeper our afflictions, and the more we love, the more we have to weep. What is the best recipe for cheerfulness in such a world as this? How shall we get through this valley of tears with least pain? I know no better recipe than the habit of taking everything to God in prayer.

This was the practice of all the saints whose history we have recorded in Scripture. This is what Jacob did when he feared his brother Esau. This is what Moses did when the people were ready to stone him in the wilderness. This is what Joshua did when Israel was defeated before Ai. This is what David did when he was in danger at Keilah. This is what Hezekiah did when he received the letter from Sennacherib. This is what the church did when Peter was put in prison. This is what Paul did when he was cast into the dungeon at Philippi. The only way to be really happy in such a world as this is to be ever casting all of our cares on God. It is the trying to carry their own burdens that so often makes believers sad. If they will only tell their troubles to God, He will enable them to bear them as easily as Samson knocked down the gates of Gaza. If they are resolved to keep them to themselves they will find one day that the very grasshopper is a burden.

There is a friend ever waiting to help us if we will only unbosom to Him our sorrow. A friend who pitied the poor and sick and sorrowful when He was upon the earth. A friend who knows the heart of a man for He lived 33 years as a man amongst us. A friend who can weep with weepers for He was a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief. A friend who is able to help us for there never was earthly pain He could not cure. The friend is Jesus

Christ. The way to be happy is to be always opening our hearts to Him. Oh, that we were all like the poor Christian black person who only answered when threatened and punished, "I must tell the Lord." Jesus can make all happy who trust Him and call on Him whatever be their outward condition. He can give them peace of heart in a prison, contentment in the midst of poverty, comfort in the midst of bereavements, joy on the brink of the grave.

There is a mighty fullness in Him for all His believing members, a fullness that is ready to be poured out on everyone who will ask in prayer. Oh, that men would understand that happiness does not depend on outward circumstances, but on the state of the heart. Prayer can lighten crosses for us however heavy. It can bring down to our side one who will help us bear them. Prayer can open a door for us when our way seems hedged up. It can bring down one who will say, "This is the way, walk in it." Prayer can let in a ray of hope when all our earthly prospects seem darkened. It can bring down one who will say, "I will never leave you nor forsake you." Prayer can obtain relief for us when those we love most are taken away and the world feels empty. It can bring down one who can fill the gap in our hearts with Himself, and say to the waves within, "Peace, be still." Oh, that men were not so like Hagar in the wilderness, blind to the well of living waters close beside them.²

Considering all these things, it is natural to assume that we would pray. God has given us many promises and has said that one of the appointed means by which we obtain things from Him is by prayer. We do not know exactly the connection between God's sovereignty and our praying, but the Bible teaches it. In Acts 9, Saul was converted and God asked a man by the name of Ananias to go to him. Ananias, of course, knew who Saul was and why he had come to Damascus: to kill Christians and throw them in prison. Ananias was incredulous that God would ask him to go to such a man. But God reassured him of His purpose and confirmed Saul's conversion by telling Ananias, "He is praying" (Acts 9:11). As soon as Saul became a Christian, he began to pray. There is no reason to fear a person who prays the way Jesus taught us to pray because that person is a believer and loves God. May God challenge and stimulate

us to devote ourselves to prayer. In the following chapters, we will continue by studying the principles and the pattern of prayer.

If you are reading this, and you are not a believer, you are a child of wrath and your father is the devil. Though this is not pleasant to hear, Jesus, who is the Truth, said it. I want to encourage you with this: there is a God in heaven who sent His only Son to keep the Law for you and to die on the cross to pay the penalty for your having broken the Law. If you will repent of your sins and trust in the Lord Jesus Christ, He will forgive you and save you. You will then receive His Spirit in your heart—the Spirit of adoption—and you will have a desire to fellowship with your Father. May God move you to pray to Him for mercy, for forgiveness, and for salvation, for Jesus' sake. If you do this, God, in His great mercy, will make you a member of His family and put His Holy Spirit in you. Then you also will be able to pray as Jesus taught us to pray.



APPLICATION

1. Summarize in your own words the encouragements to pray that are found in the lengthy quote from J. C. Ryle.
2. Summarize in your own words the most important truths presented in this chapter.
3. Write out and work on memorizing one or two verses found in this chapter.
4. In what ways were you encouraged, challenged, or convicted by the material in this chapter? In keeping with the material presented in this chapter, how should your prayer life be changed?