

“If you have faith like a grain of mustard seed, you will say to this mountain,
‘Move from here to there,’ and it will move.
Nothing will be impossible for you.” Matthew 17:20

THE POWER OF PRAYER

FOR AMERICA’S FUTURE

Inspired thought-leadership from these and many others:



OS GUINNESS



ANNE GRAHAM LOTZ



TIMOTHY KELLER



KAY COLES JAMES



MICHAEL NOVAK



ERIC METAXAS

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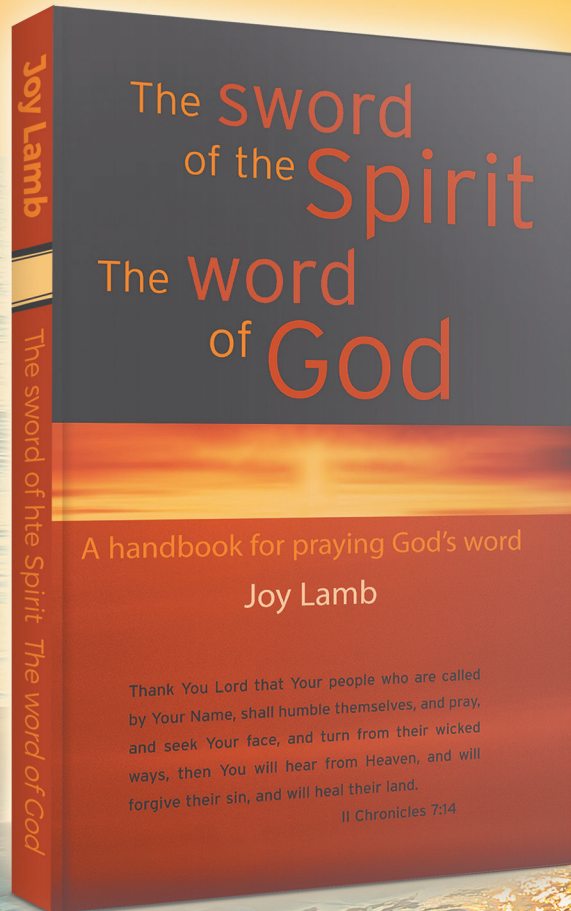
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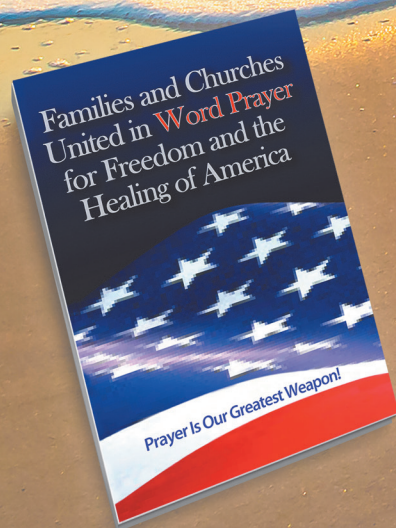
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Prayer pushes back the darkness of fear and uncertainty... yesterday, today and tomorrow



By Ellen Vaughn

I was in Northern Iraq earlier this year, interviewing Christians and other minorities who had been forced from their homes by ISIS. I visited with a Yezidi family living in a chicken coop. They told me how they had fled, with nothing, when they got the terrifying news that the terrorists were coming. In the confusion, they had gotten separated from their 19-year-old son. Later, they heard he had been killed by jihadi forces. They wept as they showed me his handsome photo.

As I walked into a gray camp full of similarly displaced Christians, a young girl with plump, black braids ran up to me and grabbed my hands. "Hello!" she shouted in broken English. "I am Tamara! I love you!"

Since we were evidently fast friends, I sat down with Tamara and her mother in their tin can of a temporary home.

Tamara's mom told me how they and seven other families had fled their home in Qaraqosh, barely in front of the advancing killers. Their driver got lost. They prayed, she said, and he found a safe road.

This woman lost her left eye to a terrorist bomb a few years ago. But her

focus is clear. "I want people in the U.S. to pray for us to return home," she told me through an interpreter. "We've been in this camp for so long. Our kids have no schools. No education. We keep thinking, this month we will go home ... this month we will go home. But still we are here."

When I asked her if it's hard to trust God in her circumstances, she smiled at me patiently, like a teacher with a remedial student.

"These sufferings have increased our faith in God. Without God we can do nothing. Even when we were trying to escape to get here, God changed our direction on the road, away from ISIS. At 11 p.m. each night, we ring a bell, and we all pray here in the camp. We have confidence that God is with us and He will do what is good for us. He saved us from ISIS, and He will get us home."

I also met a grandfather who told me his family didn't even know ISIS was advancing on their town... until a mortar landed in the courtyard where his grandsons were playing. Their grandmother was with them. She felt a flash of light, an enormous explosion, and a rain of shredded flesh. The little boys and a friend were killed.

The grandfather showed me terrible photos of the aftermath. The entire courtyard was smeared with blood.

I asked him about his faith. Did it still exist in the face of such horror?

"Yes!" he said vehemently. "I believe! And one thing I know. It is the blood of Christ that cleanses us from all evil."

A few weeks ago, I stood in the

wreckage of a village church in Egypt. It had been burned by Muslim Brotherhood adherents. The cross had been wrenched from the chancel; the window grills and ceiling fans were bent and melted. Charred Bibles lay in the ashes. I climbed with the pastor up a still-standing stairway to the apartment where he and his family had lived. A Winnie the Pooh mural was still visible on the scorched

At 11 p.m. each night, we ring a bell, and we all pray here in the camp. We have confidence that God is with us and He will do what is good for us. He saved us from ISIS, and He will get us home."

wall of his little daughter's room.

The family had been away when the terrorists attacked. I asked the pastor how he had coped with such loss, violation, and hatred.

"What do we do in the face of evil?" he asked. "We do what Jesus did. We pray, and we forgive. Even after the destruction, we would still have fed the Muslim Brotherhood if they were hungry, or cared for them if they were sick."

Back here at home, terrorism has drawn closer in recent months. Bloody death at an office party in California. Carnage in Paris. Arrests of sleeper terrorists. Random shootings pop up on our news

feeds almost every day.

In the ugly uncertainty, I've thought often of the brave brothers and sisters I met in the Middle East, and their absolute reliance on faith and prayer.

Surely our nation needs to wisely focus its military, political, and material resources on the war at hand. But peace in the face of horror comes only through spiritual power. As the Old Testament says, "Some trust in chariots and some in horses, but we trust in the name of the Lord our God."

Chariots, horses, and 21st century instruments of battle are well and good in the right hands. But in these chaotic times, stalked by evil, our ultimate hope is the gritty, courageous truth that our Christian friends in the Middle East have practiced for years: robust faith and constant prayer for the eternal care of One who is greater than ourselves, the One who spilled His blood to cleanse us from all evil.

They know that prayer may not always change our immediate situation in this life. But it always changes us.

Ellen Vaughn is a New York Times best-selling author and inspirational speaker who has written or co-written more than 20 books. Former vice president of executive communications for Prison Fellowship, she collaborated with the late Chuck Colson on a number of his seminal books. She serves as a senior fellow for the 21st Century Wilberforce Initiative, and on the board of directors for International Cooperating Ministries.

Murder, madness, terrorism... Why doesn't God fix it?



By Anne Graham Lotz

"GOD ISN'T FIXING THIS!"

So screamed the headline of the New York Daily News on December 3, 2015, referring to the recent terrorist attacks in Paris and San Bernardino. The lead article in the paper went on to marginalize prayer as a "meaningless platitude."

I would like to address why God isn't fixing this. Why isn't God fixing the turmoil, the division, the hatred, the misunderstanding, the rioting, the poverty, the political polarization, and the murderous plotting that seem to be

erupting all over our nation?

Why isn't He fixing the racial prejudice? The gender inequality? The sex trafficking? The drug-crazed violence? The religious intolerance? And other societal injustices? Why does our nation, whose motto is "In God We Trust," seem to be unraveling under God's watch?

Maybe... just maybe... it's because we view prayer as a meaningless platitude. Maybe... just maybe... it's because our knowledge of the God in whom we say we trust and to whom we address our prayers has been skewed - discounted by evolutionists, distorted by humanists,

discarded by secularists, disavowed by atheists, defied by the politically correct, and even discredited by the religious.

Maybe... just maybe... it's because the one true living God is waiting for us to sincerely, humbly, earnestly, and intentionally ask Him to fix this.

Maybe... just maybe... the problem is not God. Maybe the problem is you and me.

Many years ago I was in Suva, Fiji, at a conference for church workers hosted by Samaritan's Purse. The people had

Prayer shaming shames us all



By Os Guinness

The old term “straw in the wind” has become obsolete. For those who monitor today’s trends, what we are witnessing is nothing less than haystacks blowing in a hurricane. The recent “prayer shaming,” led by the New York Daily News and the Huffington Post, is a clear example.

Pitting prayer and action against each other, one headline shouted “God isn’t fixing this,” and ridiculed those who respond to massacres with words such as “My thoughts and prayers go out to the victims.” Prayers like that are

“I will pray for you” is simply another way of saying “I care for you,” and says nothing objective about any real time spent praying for the person. President Obama himself has often used the phrase, and one wonders if he ever actually dropped to his knees in the Oval Office to follow through with the words.

“meaningless platitudes,” people said. It is time to stop praying and start acting. Prayer is only a “placebo” and has “zero effect.”

Such prayer shaming is a clear measure by which to gauge where America is today, and how far this country has come in the last decade. Several responses must be spelled out clearly and discussed in greater depth. First, prayer shaming underscores that

for many people public references to prayer have become empty pieties that are no more than what philosophers call “pro-emotions.”

“I will pray for you” is simply another way of saying “I care for you,” and says nothing objective about any real time spent praying for the person. President Obama himself has often used the phrase, and one wonders if he ever actually dropped to his knees in the Oval Office to follow through with the words. A friend of mine often used to say, “Don’t tell me you’re going to pray for me unless you mean it. Prayer is a serious commitment.”

Second, the prayer shamers themselves are shamed by their shaming. On the one hand, their much-vaunted claims on behalf of “tolerance,” “inclusiveness” and “diversity” are yet again shown up for their strict limits, if not the hypocrisy of their intolerance. The recent attacks on prayer showed scant respect, if not outright contempt for other people’s beliefs, and were often clear evidence of the atheism’s slide into militant anti-theism and the general “ABC moment” in American culture (“Anything but Christianity”).

On the other hand, they showed none of the humility of the recent awareness in intellectual circles that, in Jürgen Habermas’s haunting confession, there is “something missing” in secularism. The recent trend toward “secularist religion” would once have been dismissed as an oxymoron. It is now stoutly defended as an attempt to assuage an insatiable hunger among atheists and “religious nones.”

Third, prayer shaming challenges religious believers, Jews and Christians included. We must all face the fact that many who do believe in prayer have grown far more secular in their consciousness than they realize. As advanced modern people we live in what sociologist Peter Berger has called a “world without windows.” Not long ago, what was unseen was not unreal. In fact the unseen was more real than the seen, for the seen world was understood in light of the unseen.

For us, however, William Blake’s “single vision” is the rule – what is real is bounded by the limits of the five senses, so that the unseen has become unreal. The result is a chasm between the way prayer is understood as powerful and practical in the Jewish and Christian Scriptures, and in most of history and much of the rest of the world, and the way it has become viewed as marginal and ethereal in the West.

Fourth, the prayer shaming

demonstrates America’s willful blindness in facing the intense religious and ideological realities of today’s global world, for it highlights what Max Weber called the “tone deafness” of many of our leaders and our elites.

As the urgent search for a new world order shows, Kant’s Enlightenment vision of “perpetual peace” is as distant as ever, and Nietzsche’s prediction of an unprecedented “war of spirits” is all too close to describing the cataclysm engulfing parts of our world.

“the golden triangle of freedom:” that freedom requires virtue, that virtue requires faith of some sort, that faith of any sort requires freedom, which requires virtue – and so on.

For those who know God, prayer is a conversation with God and a vital and indispensable part of such faith. Certainly “prayer changes things” and effects the course of history. But equally importantly, prayer changes us in the conversation, for it is in prayer that we see God rightly, we see ourselves rightly, and we see the world



It is commonplace to say that guns alone will not win these wars, but we have yet to appreciate what it means that the “spirit of the age” is more than a metaphor.

Lastly, prayer shaming and the wider trends that it represents call into question the foundations of the American republic. The genius of this country is that it simultaneously rejects any formal, official and established religious or ideological beliefs, yet it relies on the freely chosen beliefs of its citizens. In other words, American freedom relies on what might be called

rightly, all of which are essential to living the good life and to responsible citizenship in a free and open society.

Our brave new prayer shamers have forgotten something to their own loss: Action is not the alternative to prayer. Action goes hand in hand with prayer. The only alternative to prayer is prayer.

Os Guinness is an Englishman and the author of many books, including A Free People's Suicide. He lives in McLean, Virginia.



By Herbert London

Belief matters. Yet what is emerging in our culture is an opposition to traditional religion and the prayer that accompanies it. Great changes are afloat in Western culture. The world as we know it is becoming a markedly different place, and a more dangerous one, where the very basis of our civilization is increasingly challenged.

Some contend the secularist creed of multiculturalism, cultural relativism, economic egalitarianism and scientific rationality are the arbiters of human value. As each day passes, it is clear that these features of the secular creed underwrite a view ill-equipped to meet

the political and existential challenges of the twenty-first century.

The historical truth is that our way of life; including the liberty ensconced in liberalism, emerged and is sustained by Judeo-Christian principles. In 1954 President Dwight D. Eisenhower, not typically remembered for his Christian observance said, "Our government makes no sense unless it is founded on deeply religious faith..."

That faith takes many forms. But it is not coincidental that the Jefferson-authored Declaration of Independence relies on words in the Book of Genesis, e.g. "all men are created equal." Moreover, the idea that rights are granted by God, not by men or governments, is also a concept conceived by Jews in the Old Testament.

The U.S. Constitution is a tableau of reflections on Jewish law which concedes that evil must be addressed by countervailing impulses, the very essence of the vision embodied by Hamilton, Madison and Jay in the Federalist Papers.

Hence I pray. I pray for something beyond the self. I pray for a nation whose foundation is rooted in religious tradition. I pray that God will look favorably on a nation that occasionally loses it way.

Despite the campaign for secularism, a relentless campaign against religious

observance, most Americans profess belief in God and most still pray. However, that prayer is increasingly a private matter, so as not to give offense to nonbelievers. This limitation transforms

Hence I pray. I pray for something beyond the self. I pray for a nation whose foundation is rooted in religious tradition. I pray that God will look favorably on a nation that occasionally loses it way.

religion and alters the public square into a newly established "safe zone" where prayer is prohibited. In my judgment this is a shameful concession.

Ours is a nation founded by men who understood that religion, far from being an embarrassment, is a valuable and sustaining aspect of individual – and national – character. In a nation obsessed with "me," prayer is a potent antidote to solipsism. It is a moment beyond the self. Any society whose members are interested only in their own self-actualization, be it through personal gratification or the pursuit of some nebulous

"revolution," cannot really be called a society at all. Prayer gives perspective because it is a union of souls.

As I see it, the time has come for the United States to speak a language our adversaries can understand, one found in biblical principles. It may be too much to say America should be sacralized, but at the very least this nation should recognize and defend its religious heritage starting with the prayer: "Shema Yisrael, Adonai Eloheinu" (Listen Israel, God is One). God is the unifier and it is to this God that we owe our prayers.

As citizens of this great land, it is time to ask whether the Judeo-Christian beliefs that have been vouchsafed to this generation can be mobilized in prayer so that the spiritual fight that awaits us can be confronted effectively. Ours is the most liberating tradition the world has yet known. And it is that tradition we must defend through spiritual resilience and prayer. Prayer is our offense and defense. It offers strength and a shield against barbarism. That is why I bow my head in prayer each day.

Dr. Herbert London is president or the London Center for Policy Research at King's College in New York. A member of the Council on Foreign Relations, he was formerly president of the Hudson Institute in Washington, DC.

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come from dozens of surrounding islands to attend. I had just finished speaking on the prophet Samuel, presenting the tragic truth that, while he was a judge, a prophet, and a kingmaker extraordinaire, he was not a good father. His sons did not follow the Lord. My challenge to the mostly male audience was not to be so focused on ministry that they neglected their own wives and children.

When I invited them to repent of their sin and to commit to training up their children in the Lord, almost the entire audience of 600 pastors and church leaders surged forward. The result was an outpouring of urgent, desperate, passionate, heartfelt pleading with God to forgive, to have mercy, to bless. The air was electric. People were shouting, crying, pleading with God. Some stood with raised hands, others were on their knees, and still others were prostrate on the floor.

I remember a woman seizing me by the arm and pulling me into her circle for prayer. Pray? I was terrified to pray in such a group. When I opened my mouth,

my voice sounded hollow... wretchedly anemic.

I had never before heard prayer like I heard on that day in Fiji. Very rarely have I ever heard prayer like that anywhere.

Maybe... just maybe... the problem is that my prayers and yours are anemic. Maybe our prayers are missing key ingredients – key ingredients such as focusing on God for who He truly is and an all-out, no-holds-barred, go-for-broke, nothing-held-back, old-fashioned desperation to get God's attention.

Whether the issue is in our family, in our marriage, in our church, in our community, or in the wake of a terrorist attack, instead of buying into pop culture's attitude that says not only that God isn't fixing this but also that God can't fix this, are we desperate enough to stay on our knees until God does?

I am committed to prayer. But not the casual, everyday, pray-as-you-feel-like-it, run-of-the-mill, garden-variety type of prayer. I am committed to praying God's promises and holding Him to them. Promises such as:

Before they call I will answer; while they are still speaking I will hear. (Isaiah 65:24)

If my people, who are called by my name, will humble themselves and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then will I hear from heaven and will forgive their sin and will heal their land. (2 Chronicles 7:14)

"For I know the plans I have for you," declares the Lord, "plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future. Then you will call upon me and come and pray to me, and I will listen to you. You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart." (Jeremiah 29:11-13)

The prayer of a righteous person is powerful and effective. (James 5:16)

Therefore... by the blood of Jesus... let us draw near to God with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith... (Hebrews 10:19-22)

God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. Listen to Your children praying. You have said You would. We humble ourselves. We stop rebelling against You. We seek Your face. We confess we are sinners and choose to turn from our sin. We plead for Your mercy. We claim Your promise of forgiveness through the sacrificial death of Your Son. We believe that You have plans to

give America hope and a future of prosperity and security.

Please, Father God. Hear us and answer us as we come to you confidently in the name of the One who alone is able to "fix this." We pray in the name of the One who will give us peace when "the government is on His shoulders"... In the name of the Baby of Bethlehem who is the Prince of Peace... (Isaiah 9:6-7). Jesus the Christ. Amen

According to the testimony of God's own Word – the Bible – God is a prayer-hearing, prayer-answering, miracle-working God. How will we know that God will hear and answer our prayers? We won't until we humbly get on our knees, seek God's face, turn from our own wicked, self-centered ways, and pray.

It's time to stop discussing prayer and marginalizing prayer and analyzing prayer...and pray! Then keep praying until Heaven is moved and this nation is secure.

Anne Graham Lotz is the founder of AnGeL Ministries and author of eleven books, of which her best known is Just Give Me Jesus. She is the daughter of evangelist Billy Graham.

Pray to stop Christian genocide in the Middle East



By Gregory J. Mansour

Christians in the west must urgently pray for their persecuted brothers and sisters in the Middle East. Let us call for a groundswell of petitions to God on behalf of these suffering Christians, particularly the faithful in Iraq and Syria. Prayer is powerful; it moves mountains; prayer brings hope and comfort to our fellow believers who feel so very abandoned.

Let the country's Christian leadership do what they can to reach out to and galvanize their pastors and people so all will pray for the suffering children, the widows, the mourning parents – pray for hope and peace.

Let the entire media landscape

burst with calls to prayer; parishes and congregations hold regular vigils to remember, honor and sustain the suffering Church throughout the Middle East; let there be processions in the streets calling all to prayer; let us work toward an annual day of prayer for the persecuted Church to prompt millions of believers.

The very survival of some of the most ancient Christian communities in the lands where our faith was born is at stake. It is no longer inconceivable that Iraq – through continued assaults by ISIS, emigration to the West and a continuing regional exodus – will be entirely without Christian faithful, and thousands of Syrian Christians who have fled the brutal civil war and the advance of ISIS and other jihadists groups may never be able to return to their homeland – a country and region already accustomed to the blood of millions of martyrs and whose ancient Churches lay claim to laying the very foundation of the faith through the conversion of St. Paul on the road to Damascus.

Let us pray for our political leaders, that they be willing to commit to real policy changes – actions to defend and protect embattled Christians and other religious minorities; a revision of asylum policies so that Christians and other minorities can be readily admitted to the US as victims of persecution; enforcement of a demand that all victims of war and persecution receive ample care from the UN and other agencies; and let us pray that our nation will include Christians alongside Yazidis as victims of ISIS, and that the US formally charges the terror organization ISIS with genocide.

The duty of Western Christians to pray for their deeply suffering fellow faithful – Catholic, Orthodox and Protestant, united in what Pope Francis has called an “ecumenism of blood” – goes even deeper. It is an expression of the acknowledgement that all Christians are part of the Body of Christ, and that when any member of the Body of Christ suffers, we all suffer.

Indeed, may such prayer of solidarity, deep communion and genuine empathy also touch upon and reveal our own struggles – emotional, physical, and practical – which are very real, even if they pale in comparison to the depth and anguish of the suffering of those who face the threat of death on a daily basis. In prayer, let us come to



Above: Christian girls Ashty at (Peace) Camp. One of them is wearing a rosary. Left: St. Mayrs Church - Syrian Orthodox in Homs Statue of Efreem with bullet holes in the head.



St. Mayrs Church - Syrian Orthodox in Homs Statue of Efreem with bullet holes in the head



Christian girl, Fr Werenfried Village IRAQ / ARBIL-CLD 14/00028

acknowledge our own vulnerability so that we too can better recognize the vulnerability and humanity of the victims of war and terror we are asking God to protect.

Let us pray so that we may discover the human face of our suffering brothers and sisters and share in the inspiration of their faithful witness. Consider

the powerful testimony of Abbot Abou Abdou, who leads the small Maronite community in the besieged city of Aleppo, Syria. He says of his flock:

“One can see on the faces of the majority the reflection of an inner happiness that takes you to the spiritual realm. They are able to thank the Lord with all their heart; they do not complain despite the persecution, all the distress and deprivations. There is a smile on their faces. They thank you and appreciate everything you do for them. My people, the children included, give me lessons in happiness.”

Let's not underestimate the power of prayer!

Bishop Gregory John Mansour heads the Eparchy of Saint Maron in Brooklyn, NY, which comprises 45 parishes and communities along the East Coast. He also is a member of the Advisory Council of Aid to the Church in Need-US, a papal agency that supports the suffering and persecuted.

America's rendezvous with (which?) destiny



By Ed Moore

In his famous 1964 "A Time To Choose" speech, the speech that put him on the national political stage, Ronald Reagan said of America, "You and I have a rendezvous with destiny." However, Reagan went on to say that this destiny would be determined by a path-choice that Americans themselves would make. As he ended his speech, Reagan framed that choice by saying, "We can preserve for our children this the last best hope for man on earth, or we can sentence them to take the first step into a thousand years of darkness."

President Ronald Reagan's belief, that America's rendezvous with destiny involved a choice, never varied. In 1980, my wife and I sat on the capitol lawn as we personally heard Ronald Reagan reaffirm this view during his first inaugural address. In this address he clearly declared, "I do not believe in a fate that will fall on us no matter what we do. I do believe in a fate that will fall on us if we do nothing." Please note the two choices.

Today, America is again at the crossroads of her rendezvous with destiny. The question is whether Americans understand that two paths lie before us, and whether American Christians will rise up to lead our nation in making the right decision. The hour is critical, and the hour is very, very late.

President Woodrow Wilson said, "America was born a Christian nation." Today's president is saying, "America is no longer a Christian nation." Who is right, and which path we choose will not be determined by our history or by any president. The path that lies before us will be determined by the collective choice of the American people themselves. Not all will choose the right path, but make no mistake; a consensus will be reached. This and this alone

will determine America's rendezvous with destiny.

If America is to survive, we as Christians must choose to contend for the soul of our nation. The challenge for American Christians is whether we will own up to this God-given responsibility. The real question thus becomes: "Will Christians do their duty?"

The Bible is replete with verses that send forth God's call to us to act on his behalf. In fact, the Bible actually tells us why nations are destroyed. Jeremiah 12:11 says: "The whole land is made desolate because no man layeth it to heart." According to Jeremiah, the reason nations perish is because no one is determined to make a difference. In other words, we perish by default. We perish because we choose not to contend for the soul of our nation. This is an abdication of our God-given responsibility and both Heaven and our children will rise up to judge us for such selfish complacency.

Surely, this is what God meant when he said, "I sought for a man among them, that should make up the hedge, and stand in the gap before me for the land, that I should not destroy it: but I found none." (Ezekiel 22:30) While the hope of our nation lies in God alone, the choice remains ours alone. Christians must not sit idly by while the



requires practical action born of spiritual obligations. In a nation where Heaven itself has made "we the people" responsible for choosing our own paths, we must get off the sidelines and get into the arena. We must be both discerning and informed. We must vol-

temptation of pride, the temptation of blithely declaring yourselves above it all and thereby removing yourself from the struggle between right and wrong and good and evil."

Christian America needs to heed this presidential warning. In January of 1981, Ronald Reagan placed his hand on the following Bible verse as he took the oath of office as President. It reads: "If my people, which are called by my name, shall humble themselves, and pray, and seek my face, and turn from their wicked ways; then will I hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin, and will heal their land." (II Chronicles 7:14) President Reagan placed his hand on this verse because he understood the preeminent importance of prayer, and he further underscored this need by giving Americans an actual annual date for our National Day of Prayer.

I believe that you and I as Americans still have a rendezvous with destiny. The pressing question is this... "Which destiny will it be?" If the United States is to continue as "One Nation Under God", we must not forget how to kneel. Whatever else we do, we must begin upon our knees!

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Senator Ed Moore served as a state senator of Oklahoma during the Reagan years. He now serves as founder and president of Prayer Force One, a rising national voice in America's growing prayer movement. He may be reached by going to: www.PrayerForceOne.com



wicked take over our country. To do so would be an unforgivable dereliction of duty!

To my fellow pastors and Christians everywhere I say, "Rise up O men of God!" for, "Now is the time for all good men, (and women) to come to the aid of their country!"

But what does this involve? What does such duty demand? How can we as believers make a real difference? I believe that Christian citizenship

unleash our time, influence others, vote; and above all... we must pray!

I ask you to hear again a solemn quote by Ronald Reagan. In an address before the National Association of Evangelicals on March 8, 1983, President Reagan cautioned Americans with these words:

"There is sin and evil in the world, and we are enjoined by Scripture and the Lord Jesus to oppose it with all our might. I urge you to beware the

Always winter but never Christmas



By Everett Piper

In C.S. Lewis' classic children's story, *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*, there is a scene where we find Peter, Susan and Lucy standing fearful and confused in a land that is frozen and nearly lifeless. A lamp-post stands somberly in a windless forest that is cold and pail, and the

few creatures the children do encounter live in hiding – frightened and paranoid.

Mr. and Mrs. Beaver tell the kids that Narnia is under the spell of an evil despot. There is no hope and there is no peace. Narnia has become a land of despair and defeat. Every day is as if it is “always winter but never Christmas.” This is the description of life under the White Witch's rule.

Suddenly, the children hear sleigh bells in the distance. At first, they are sure this is the sound of the witch on patrol with her legions, and they hide.

But no it's not the witch. The driver of the sleigh is a great, glad, giant of a man dressed all in red and white. It is Father Christmas! “I have broken through at last!” he cries. “She has kept me out for a long time, but her magic is weakening.”

Lucy and her siblings shiver with excitement. Father Christmas has come! And he not only brings presents but he brings peace. He not only offers cookies and cream, but love and compassion. He brings music and he brings

a message: “Aslan is on the move!” he shouts. “A Merry Christmas! Long live the true King!”

Today, many of us shiver as we try to shelter ourselves from the freezing winds of nightly news. Benghazi and Syria: Always winter but never Christmas. Palestine and Israel: Always winter but never Christmas. Russia and the Ukraine: Always winter but never Christmas. San Bernardino, Roseburg and Fort Hood: Always winter but never Christmas. Baltimore and Ferguson: Always winter but never Christmas. ISIS, Boko Haram, and Al Qaeda; Human trafficking, sexual slavery, Islamic intolerance and Sharia oppression; crucifying Christians, drowning them for sport, raping their children, dragging them to court; political arrogance, government corruption, stimulus spending and national debt: Always winter but never Christmas... This list seems endless.

But, remember there's better news! News of long ago when light shined on the hills of Bethlehem and Christmas arrived in a stable under the stars.

“Do not be afraid,” cries Christmas. “Winter has begun to melt away, I have broken through at last! For unto you is born this day in the city of David, a savior who is Christ the Lord. And the government shall be upon His shoulders and he will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace, King of Kings and Lord of Lords! Of His kingdom there will be no end. He will reign with justice and righteousness forever!” “I have broken through at last,” he shouts! “Glory to God in the highest! Peace on earth and good will toward men,” and... “Merry Christmas!”

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Dr. Everett Piper, Ph.D, is president of Oklahoma Wesleyan University in Bartlesville, Oklahoma. He is a daily and weekly radio commentator in Tulsa and author of “*The Wrong Side of the Door: Why Ideas Matter*,” an anthology of essays on the “pride of politics, the arrogance of the academy and the pathology of power.”

PRAYER IS A POWERFUL WEAPON

[NOVELIZATION BY CHRIS FABRY
BASED ON THE #1 MOVIE]

TONY AND ELIZABETH JORDAN HAVE IT ALL – great jobs, a beautiful daughter, and their dream house. But appearances can be deceiving. Their world is actually crumbling under the strain of a failing marriage. While Tony basks in his professional success and flirts with temptation, Elizabeth resigns herself to increasing bitterness. But their lives take an unexpected turn when Elizabeth meets her newest client, Miss Clara, an older, wise widow who challenges Elizabeth to start fighting for her family instead of against her husband.

“WITH A STRONG EMPHASIS ON FAMILY VALUES THIS STORY
CHALLENGES READERS TO ACT ON THEIR BELIEF IN THE
POWER OF PRAYER” – *Publisher's Weekly*

Now available at your favorite retailer! Read the book before you see the movie.

This is war – talk less, pray more



By Gary Miller

“For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the powers, against the world forces of this darkness, against the spiritual forces of wickedness in the heavenly places.” Ephesians 5:12

Prayer should be marked with a warning label: THIS IS WAR. Too often prayer arrives on the scene of a crisis, carried as a throw pillow, tucked under the arm of frightened Christian. Those who approach prayer seeking comfort without conquest rarely find either one.

The Fox News headline today was, “This is war.” With the streets of Paris wet with blood, French leaders appear

to understand the times. Time will tell if they know what to do. In The War against evil, knowing what to do and having the will to do it are two different things.

David Lane, Founder of the American Renewal Project, understands what is at stake, and he knows what to do. For two decades he has been quietly mobilizing pastors all over America to engage in the war for the soul of a nation.

Restoring a Judeo-Christian ethic is not a political effort to take a nation back, but a spiritual movement to turn the soul of America back to God. To the untrained eye, Lane’s American Renewal Project gatherings appear to focus on leading thousands of pastors to run for office, to register their people to vote, and to take their Christian convictions into the voting booth. They are so much more.

David Lanes says, “The mission is spiritual, only the by-product is political.” He describes the difference between chess and checkers. The board is the same, but the rules are different. Prayer makes the difference. Never try to defeat an opponent with a handful of checkers when the battle calls for the knights to attack. He often reminds pastors, “This is war.”

Pastors leading prayer meetings in their local churches prepare the way for the next Great Awakening. This is the game changer, and the key to victory in a battle for the soul of a nation. Thousands of pastors have responded to Lane’s

challenge by initiating prayer meetings in their churches. This is where the power comes from to carry on a prolonged battle for the soul of a nation.

Engaging in this battle against evil to make a name or to promote a book, may achieve both without making a difference. Men and women of prayer don’t call attention to themselves. They point people to God.

“The one concern of the devil is to keep Christians from praying. He fears nothing from prayerless studies, prayerless work, and prayerless religion. He laughs at our toil, mocks at our wisdom, but trembles when we pray.”

Samuel Chadwick (1860-1932)

“We wrestle not against flesh and blood,” is scripture, not a Hobby Lobby throw pillow. It should be tattooed on the heart of every pastor.

Prayer is not an optional method of war. It is an essential relationship with The Champion. Prayer draws the warrior closer to the side of Jesus, and He alone strikes fear in the enemy camp.

“If I could hear Jesus praying for me in the next room, I would not fear a million enemies. The distance makes no difference. He is praying for me.”

Robert Murray M’Cheyne

The culture war raging in this nation reveals an evil urge to purge the name of Jesus from the public square with breath taking speed. The potential power of

prayer is released when praying pastors defy political correctness with, “In the name of Jesus, Amen.”

My father, Don Miller, recently went to Heaven. From his hospice bed he shared his final thoughts on prayer. He propped himself up on his right elbow, looked me in the eye, and with great intensity said:

“Jesus is ready to give it away. Revival. Watch and pray! Tell them prayer is the priority. I want to pass it on. Pass it on! Pass it on! Potential, potential, potential. There is the potential of a great awakening, in a moment and in our lifetime. People who will want God more than anything or anybody. Oh that they would believe so strongly. Believe. Believe. Believe.”

Tearfully, I told Dad I would pass it on. He leaned back onto his bed and closed his eyes. With his face shining with contentment, he said, “Good boy.” Seven months later I can’t type these words without tears hitting the keyboard. Pastors! Believe it. THIS IS WAR! Pass it on.

Dr. Gary Miller, founder and executive director of Talk Less! Pray More! Ministries in Fort Worth, Texas, has served for the past 40 years, as a missionary, a pastor and a professor. Since 2010, he has been actively involved in mobilizing pastors to utilize prayer and voter registration as tools to regain their voice in the public square.

A prayer for the forgiveness of our nation

By Everett Piper

Father, you have told us that if your people will humble themselves and seek your face and repent, that you will hear us and heal us. You have also told us that if we confess our sins, that you are faithful and just and that you will forgive our sins and cleans us from all unrighteousness. God we bow before you today. We are humble. We repent. Please hear our prayer. Please, forgive us...

Forgive us for what we have taught our children: that evil is good and good is evil; that darkness is light and light is darkness; that bitter is sweet and sweet is bitter. Forgive us for teaching them that left is right and right is wrong, that true is false and falsehood is true.

Forgive us Holy God for teaching sexual promiscuity in our schools more effectively than we have taught sexual

restraint to our students. Forgive us for teaching self-esteem better than we have taught science and civics. Forgive us for teaching values clarification more than virtue. Forgive us for diminishing the value of marital fidelity and leaving our kids clueless as to how to defend the definition of marriage.

Forgive us for leading the generation that follows us, to believe it has the authority to define life for the generation that follows it, and that “choice” gives them the right to take away the right of the youngest to choose.

Forgive us for our narcissism: For proclaiming we are “as God,” and that we are the ones we’ve been waiting for and that we are the change we seek.

Forgive us for making justice unjust and injustice just.

Forgive us for celebrating lies rather than pursuing truth.

Forgive us for our self-refuting duplicity of pedantically preaching that the

tolerant do not tolerate those they find intolerable.

Forgives us for the hypocrisy of hating those we find hateful.

Forgive us for diminishing human dignity; for dumbing down the definition of a human being to nothing but the sum total of his or her sexual inclinations; to nothing but appetites, proclivities, passions and base desire.

Forgive us for pretending that we believe women should not be subjected to the power and the passions of men but then electing men who publicly use women for their personal passions.

Forgive us for boasting of freedom while yet living in bondage to our own deception. Forgive us for separating head from heart and fact from faith. Forgive us for severing belief from behavior and religion from reason. Forgive us for, as C.S. Lewis warned, “removing the organ and yet demanding the function” – for creating “men without chests” – for the

foolishness of “gelding the stallion and bidding him be fruitful.”

Forgive us for worshiping government more than God and trusting in Caesar more than Christ.

God, we ask you to forgive us. We ask that you rescue us from the ugly hell or our own making. We humbly petition you to grant a reprieve of your judgment. We ask that you give us liberty in Law and rescue us from the bondage of our own arrogance

In Jesus Name Amen.

Dr. Everett Piper, Ph.D., is president of Oklahoma Wesleyan University in Bartlesville, Oklahoma. He is a daily and weekly radio commentator in Tulsa and author of “The Wrong Side of the Door: Why Ideas Matter,” an anthology of essays on the “pride of politics, the arrogance of the academy and the pathology of power.”



By Terry Beatley

In 2009, my response to the power of prayer led me to New York to meet “The Keeper,” a terminally-ill doctor who self-identified as one of America’s mass murderers and who admitted to setting America on a perilous course.

I didn’t understand why God was sending me to meet him, but before leaving the interview my mission had been made very clear: I promised “The Keeper of the Abortion Industry Keys” I would reveal the strategy of his national deception and deliver his personal parting message until it becomes widely known. Keeping this promise has been an odyssey into the warped world of women’s healthcare, population control and judicial fiat. More importantly, though, my journey is a testimony to how the Lord answers prayers as I stay committed to delivering on my promise.

What had motivated me to meet this doctor? Seven months earlier, a friend referred me to the senior pastor of a primarily black congregation in rural

Virginia. Together we watched *Maafa 21*, a documentary about black genocide in the 21st century. It explains the genesis of Planned Parenthood and the worldview of its founder, Margaret Sanger who launched “The Negro Project” – a strategy for controlling births of those she deemed less desirable.

When it was over I nervously asked the pastor what he thought. He pointed his finger at me and said, “I’ll tell you what I think. I will never vote for a pro-choice candidate ever again, for if I do, I’m voting to annihilate my own race. And furthermore, abortion is just plain wrong. I did not know the truth about Planned Parenthood and Sanger’s ‘Negro Project,’ but I am more convinced than ever that abortion is the ultimate injustice. Terry, all Americans need this information, not just black Americans.”

He thanked me for sharing it with him and encouraged me to never quit. I felt as though the Lord gave me a glimpse at what could heal America: renewing dignity to the gift of life because all lives matter.

Following our meeting, I prayed for seven months asking the Lord what he wanted me to do. One evening at a 24-hour prayer vigil at my church I sat alone in a peaceful, candle-lit room praying for guidance. Then His answer came – a consistent and repetitive thought: Go and interview Dr. Bernard Nathanson, the doctor who demanded that Planned Parenthood jump into the abortion trade. Go and interview him.

I was surprised and troubled by

this idea. I knew the doctor’s history but I couldn’t imagine why I was being instructed to interview the father of the abortion industry, once known as “The Abortion King.” I argued with God that he had the wrong person for the job. It made no sense to me that a stay-at-home mom from Virginia would even be granted an interview. I lost the argument and two weeks later I was sitting beside the very frail, 83-year old Dr. Nathanson, co-founder of what is known today as NARAL Pro-Choice America, a political action organization.

Dr. Nathanson deeply regretted unleashing the abortion industry and he desperately wanted our country – and the world – to be liberated from his pro-choice propaganda lies. At the end of the interview I felt a deep sense of compassion for him and asked, “Dr. Nathanson, I know you are too sick to travel around anymore getting your message out. If you have something to tell America, I promise I will carry it for you across our nation. Do you have a message for our country?”

Pausing to contemplate, he turned and looked at me. Slowly and carefully he responded, “Yes. Yes I do.” He gently implored, “Continue teaching the strategy of how I deceived America, but also deliver this special message. Tell America that the co-founder of NARAL says to ‘Love one another. Abortion is not love. Stop the killing. The world needs more love. I’m all about love now.’”

I shook his hand promising him that our country will learn the truth. I had

no idea how to proceed, but God did. He moved my family to Fredericksburg, Virginia, into a very powerful, pro-abortion state senator’s district. His egregious voting record strongly suggested he was an ally to NARAL and Planned Parenthood, and no friend to parental rights or the unborn. Through prayer, God made it very clear I was to help defeat the senator’s bid for re-election.

Praying in a special place called The Wilberforce Garden became my mainstay. With my knees and elbows in the grass, I cried out to God asking that He would make a way for the senator’s defeat and for my promise to Dr. Nathanson to be fulfilled. Then, the Lord began to answer in the most profound and vivid ways making His presence known. What I didn’t realize was that over the next year as I exposed the aggressive abortion industry and its dependence on elected officials, God was knitting an action-packed story together and the framework for a feature film in which to complete the mission.

I experienced that the power of prayer should never be underestimated, nor should we worry when He asks us to step out of our comfort zone and onto the water.

Terry Beatley is a writer, lecturer and political activist for the rights of unborn children. She has served as Virginia coordinator for ParentalRights.org, raising awareness of the need for a Parental Rights Amendment to the U.S. Constitution, and is on the board of Virginia Christian Alliance.

The abortion king repents

Self-identified ‘mass murderer’: “I deceived America”

The power of desperate prayer

God doesn’t answer prayer; He answers desperate prayer



By Doug Stringer

“Transformation of an enterprise begins with a sense of crisis or urgency,” he told the students. “No institution will go through fundamental change unless it believes it is in deep trouble and needs to do something different to survive.” Lou Gertsner, former CEO of IBM, at Harvard Business School, December 2002

Today we are living in very challenging, critical and volatile times. Every day the news is filled with more human tragedy or disaster. Crises are escalating at an unprecedented rate. We cannot afford to put our heads in the sand and pretend

everything is okay. We also cannot afford to slip into depression and sleepwalk through life hoping it will turn out all right. We simply cannot hit our snooze buttons any longer while ignoring the sounding warnings and alarms around us. We must Respond!

Joel, an ancient prophet, spoke of a wake-up call to a nation in crisis. He pleaded for his nation to gather before God in a great sacred assembly. Their time of great crisis and need called for a corporate response, a response of corporate prayer, repentance, and renewed consecration before God. They had to recognize that they could not save

themselves; it would take God’s intervention. America is now in such a state of crisis. The epic crises facing our nation and threatening our future demands an epic response.

In ancient Israel, when the commander of the Assyrian army threatened Israel with annihilation, King Hezekiah knew he could do nothing to save his nation. Desperate and overwhelmed, he realized their only hope was to seek the Lord in passionate prayer. He took the threatening letters and laid them out before the Lord. He tore his clothes,

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By Steve Warman

On a sunny December afternoon, my day's errands were interrupted by emerging news reports of a mass shooting in San Bernardino, California.

This tragedy added yet another chain to the deadly link of violent terrorism that has dominated recent headlines. Just days before, the Planned Parenthood shooting in Colorado Springs left four dead, and less than three weeks had passed since deadly, coordinated terrorist attacks overtook a peaceful, November Paris night.

Previously, upon hearing reports of violent terrorism, I would immediately pray for the victims' needs and ask for comfort for their families. With the Paris attacks, I joined many as we superimposed the French flag's

colors upon our Facebook profiles. But on the afternoon of this most recent California attack, I felt a new shift in my spirit. I experienced a wave of outrage, for I was tired of senseless violence and death. I determined to pray for more than comfort: I began to pray directly against the violence.

With over two decades of pastoring experience, as well as growing up the child of a pastor, I know much about prayer. I personally have prayed thousands of prayers. I believe prayer is heard from heaven and has the ability to heal our land (2 Chronicles 7:14). Though I've often prayed for our nation and world, I recognized that I had never prayed against violence. This changed that day. I began to specifically pray against violence and terrorism.

I prayed that hate would be replaced with love. I prayed that those who do not value human life or view all humanity as God's beautiful children would be silenced and unable to find an audience for their hate-filled rhetoric. Then, I looked to my Bible to find a pattern for praying against violence.

About three thousand years ago, David, the King of Israel, faced violent men. Long before planes were flown into buildings, explosives detonated, or even guns manufactured, godly men sought God's protection and

deliverance from violence.

David's prayer, as recorded in Psalm 140, remains a solid pattern for our world's needs today. I would like to share with you how to pray against

With over two decades of pastoring experience, as well as growing up the child of a pastor, I know much about prayer. I personally have prayed thousands of prayers. I believe prayer is heard from heaven and has the ability to heal our land (2 Chronicles 7:14).

violence according to Psalm 140.

1) Pray for protection from violence: for yourself, your family, your nation, and your world. Verses 1, 2 and 4: "Rescue me, Lord, from evildoers; Protect me from the violent. Who devise evil plans in their hearts and stir up war every day. Keep me safe, Lord, from the hands of the wicked; Protect them from the violent, Who devise ways to trip my feet."

2) Pray that the hate-filled and murderous speech, causing people

to rage against each other, will stop. Verse 3: "They make their tongues as sharp as serpent's: the poison of vipers is on their lips."

3) Pray that you, your family and friends do not become entangled with those who indoctrinate or lead to a culture of terrorism and violence. Verse 5: "The arrogant have hidden a snare for me; They have spread out the cords of their net and have set traps for me along my path."

4) Acknowledge that you trust in God to shield and protect you. Verses 6-7: "I say to the Lord, 'You are my God.' Hear, Lord, my cry for mercy. Sovereign Lord, my strong deliverer you shield my head in the day of battle."

5) Pray that developing plans for terrorism and violence will be thwarted and unsuccessful. vs. 8 "Do not grant the wicked their desires, Lord; Do not let their plans succeed."

As we enter the New Year, let us join together, while recruiting others, to pray against violence. I encourage you to unite with me, praying and believing for a 2016 filled with peace.

Pastor Steve Warman is the Senior Pastor of The Apostolic Church in Auburn Hills, Michigan. He is the author of The Second Try, and Walking on Dragons.

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put on sackcloth, and prayed. First he acknowledged the nation's helplessness praying, "This day is a day of distress and rebuke and disgrace, as when children come to the moment of birth and there is no strength to deliver them."

Then Hezekiah declared the greatness of God and petitioned the Lord for help. His prayer proclaimed that God alone is God, Creator of the heavens and earth. He pleaded that God would open His eyes to see and His ears to hear the threats against the nation and that God would come to their aid.

In authentic humility, Hezekiah prayed and God intervened.

Today the nations are again raging and the whole earth groaning. Human wisdom and ideologies cannot save us. Our institutions have failed us.

A wise king named Solomon once said, "Hope deferred makes the heart

sick." He also said, "A merry heart does good like a medicine." Many of us are desperate and overwhelmed, our hearts are sick with despair. Too many are losing hope and find themselves in need of strength to move forward. We need to cry out to the Lord for His intervention. We need to realize He is our only hope – but He is a great Savior!

Throughout history, humble and honest leaders have called upon the Lord in authentic repentance and consecration, asking God to hear from heaven and heal their land. Even George Washington, when faced with an impossible situation – the Revolutionary War – commissioned a flag with the words "An Appeal to Heaven," a phrase from John Locke's Two Treatises of Government acknowledging that God was our country's only hope.

In this day of difficulty and chaos, we need an appeal to heaven once again. It starts with us. Moses prayed, "Show me your way." The prophet Jeremiah, speaking to the people on behalf of God at a time when his nation was facing great difficulties, reminded them to call on

God so He could show them "great and mighty things they did not yet know." He shared with them God that God wanted to renew His covenant with His people and restore the nation, if they would acknowledge Him as Lord.

James, one of the early Church fathers, said, "The effective and fervent prayer of the righteous avails much." Today more than ever we need to be a people who pray effectively and passionately. As the late Leonard Ravenhill often said, "God doesn't answer prayer. He answers desperate prayer." Our private posture with God affects our public influence; humility before God gives us a right heart.

Like in the days of Hezekiah, we are living in overwhelming, desperate times. As I have travelled the globe I have come across people from countries like Iran, Indonesia, China, Pakistan, Uganda, Nigeria, India and many other regions who are praying fervently for America because they know that if the heart of our nation, which is the Church, is awakened then the soul of the nation will be healed and they too will become beneficiaries.

Will we, out of our own desperate situation, come before God in authentic humility, repentance, and consecration? And would He incline His ear to hear our cries and be moved to turn an impossible situation around? Our only hope is an appeal to heaven, coming in humility before the living God, pleading for His intervention on behalf of our nation and the world.

If we come out of desperation and not with religious incantations and shallow platitudes, God can hear from heaven and heal our land. Only He can heal the soul of our nation, as He reconfirms His covenant and restores our foundations.

Dr. J. Doug Stringer is founder and president of Turning Point Ministries International, which birthed an international movement known as Somebody Cares, a network of organizations impacting their communities through unified grassroots efforts. He began identifying community needs through his work in the inner-city of Houston, Texas in 1981.

What prayer is, how to pray, why, when and what to pray about;
How prayer can enhance your peace of mind, your business, and your relationships and home and work.



By Michael Novak

In my grandparents' time, life was far slower, and there were lots of extra minutes for living inwardly. Today we begin each day with lists of all the varied things we have to accomplish: pick up Stephen or Emily, take them to music practice or sports, do the grocery shopping, get the front two rooms cleaned, do the laundry, get two hours of writing done, put dinner on early since Emily has a recital at 7:00. And a lot more than that.

Awareness of being with God, and God's surrounding us, tends to get squeezed out. But how can we give God to others if we do not nourish him within our own hearts night and day?

As in every other area of life, regular exercise makes a huge difference in performance. After lots of repetition, actions become second nature. People who have practiced them for some time do not need to think about them, they find themselves doing them for the pleasure of it.

1. If you are an atheist, in your view there's no God to answer prayer, so prayer is useless. This may be what you believe, but try something else, as a challenge. Every evening say a prayer, asking God to guide you in what you ought to do next. This prayer requires no words. Just empty mind and heart for less than a minute. Do this for two weeks, just to give it a fling. If you hear nothing and learn nothing, you will not be surprised. So it's harmless.

2. In the first moments after getting up, maybe when brushing your teeth, ask God to accept every breath you take during the day to come as a prayer. Tell him you mean every thought and action of the day to be a prayer. Ask him to help you all through the day to think sometimes of his presence.

3. Choose another action that comes just a few moments after that – kissing your children, or pausing for a quick hug from your spouse as you part for the day, or perhaps the moment of turning your car keys in the ignition, or looking in the rear view mirror – say another little prayer. Offer the day to God again. Ask him to take care of all of you all through the day. Pray for the needy, those who suffer, those who fight for life. Just a fleeting thought will do. Just to remind yourself of the immense spiritual struggle going on all around you. And to attune your own inner heart to that struggle in

your own life.

5. Every time you hear a police or ambulance siren, say a swift prayer for those who may be suffering terribly at that moment, and ask God to be with them, and to be present to you too. Unite your own life to their suffering. In the suffering of Jesus on the cross. All of us, one.

6. When you are impatient, stuck waiting in line or in traffic, make the very most of this time by recalling God's presence, with gratitude.

7. "Where there is charity and love, there God is." All day long, every time you see an act of affection, friendship, or kindness, let it remind you that God is all around you. Where there is love, there God is. Moreover, love is contagious. The more of it you throw in the waters around you, the more *caritas* will ripple outwards. Little smiles and little pats on the back go on and on until they go round the world. Receiving kindness, people tend to pass it on. As Dostoevsky wrote, there is an invisible current of "humble charity" circling around this planet, moving love from one place to another.

Another exercise is to recall often that you are "made in the image of God." God is infinite, and so in order to reflect all the facets of his beauty, an infinite number of humans is needed (so to speak), each to reflect a fragment of his loveliness. If one of these humans is eliminated, that facet

of God's beauty is missing. The image of God is disfigured. That is one more reason why it is so awful to harm another human being.

The consequence is that each time we meet a human being, even an unpleasant one, we are invited to look more carefully, to see if we can discern what is most beautiful somewhere within him (though it may need to be drawn out), that God placed there in love for him, and to render him a (perhaps hidden) image of Himself.

This habit makes every human being that we meet a reflection of God's radiant being, worthy of our attention and our love. Each human encounter also makes us aware of the presence of God. "How do we know that we love God?" St. John's Epistle asks. The test is a simple one. Just saying the words "I love you" is not enough. The key is this: "if you have love for one another."

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Michael Novak, winner of the 1994 Templeton Prize in Religion, is the author of some 45 books, including two novels and one small book of verse. His latest is *Social Justice Isn't What You Think It Is*. He is of Roman Catholic faith and was Ronald Reagan's ambassador to three human rights sessions in Geneva and one session of the Helsinki Round meetings in Bern in the 1980s.

Daily exercises to keep your prayer muscles strong

Thank God He doesn't answer all our prayers



By Eric Metaxas

Would you believe that you actually don't want God to answer all of your prayers, even if they're all incredibly heartfelt prayers? Would you believe that a God who did that isn't the kind of God you'd want to exist if you knew what was good for you? Let me try to explain what I mean.

It's only logical that if God always answered our prayers as we wanted him to, those answers to our prayers could hardly be considered miraculous.

They would only be part of a predictable system that we could manipulate, if only we knew how. It really makes God not God, but a "God" or a god whom we are ultimately able to control through our efforts, whether via prayer or via our "moral" actions designed to elicit a favorable response.

If that is the God in question, we who think of ourselves as his devotees are actually not worshiping him but rather a wished-for and prayed-for outcome, which is a fulfillment of our desires, whether noble or selfish. It follows that we are really quite indifferent to the God behind that outcome, if he is there at all. It is the outcome itself to which we are

passionately devoted. So in this scenario, we are really treating God like a tool to be used, and we hardly acknowledge him any more than we thank the hammer or saw.

If the goal of prayer is really to "get the results we want," we have a strange, candy-machine idea of God. It is as though we need only to put something in and we get something back. It's a kind of trade. With this sort of a "God," there is no doubt that if I do x, then he must do y. In a way, he has no choice in the matter. If that's true, why would there be any gratitude on the part of the one

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The odd, compelling richness of daily prayer



By Kay Coles James

Prayer is really kind of odd when you stop to think about it. Whether spoken aloud, or composed in the recesses of your mind, the premise is that you are attempting to communicate with something or someone outside yourself, outside this world!

As a high school senior, I remember thinking, “If I am going to get down on my knees, share my innermost thoughts and feelings, plead to God to help solve all the high school craziness in my life, then I need to know if He is really there, and capable of doing anything about all of my perceived problems!” Even bowing my head to pray before a meal seemed odd to me. Who am I talking to? What on earth did He have to do with the plate of food sitting in front of me?

Through the ministry of the Billy Graham Crusades, I found answers. He explained that Jesus is real, and worthy of our trust. Dr. Graham challenged me (and thousands of others that night) to give Jesus all rights to my life. He explained that if I took that step of faith, the God of the Universe, through His son Jesus Christ, and with the power of the Holy Spirit, would “take up residence in my life.” I had no idea what that meant or how to accomplish it. I just invited Him into my life and determined to sit back and see what happened. Almost fifty years ago, I did

just that. And then life happened.

Fast forward.

This is what I now know. God is real. Sometimes life is wonderful and full of happy surprises. Sometimes the hurt, disappointment and pain seem unbearable. He loves me and cares about the details of my life. Miracles are real. God hears and answers every prayer.

Over the years, I have discovered that the more I know and experience God, the richer my prayer life becomes. As a young Christian I would present God with my daily requests/demands. If they were not responded to exactly as I had asked, and within a timely manner, I was disappointed, annoyed and sometimes angry. What good is a God that can’t or won’t give me exactly what I want, when I want it?

After a lifetime of reading and studying the Bible, experiencing God’s presence in my life, and seeing His reflection in nature, music and art, my view of God has radically changed. He is not Santa waiting for my prayers to drift up to the North Pole so that he can start fulfilling

my wish list. No, he is the great I AM. He is the Alpha and the Omega. The all knowing, all powerful, all loving, Creator God of the Universe! The more I know God, the more my prayer life changes.


For me, prayer is now far more than a daily ritual. It’s quieting myself as I approach the throne and enter into His presence. It’s offering up a grateful heart for the many blessings in my life. It’s giving praise and thanksgiving. It’s seeking comfort for a broken heart or a major disappointment. It’s asking forgiveness for the sin in my life. It’s seeking divine guidance and wisdom. It’s aligning myself with God’s will for my life. It’s an opportunity to spend time with the God I love, and the God who has demonstrated over a lifetime His real and tangible love for me.

Kay Coles James is an author and former presidential appointee who also served as Virginia’s Secretary of Health. She currently serves on corporate boards and is president of the Gloucester Institute, a leadership training center for young African Americans.

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Experiencing awe and intimacy with God



By Timothy Keller

In the second half of my adult life I discovered prayer. I had to.

In the fall of 1999 I taught a Bible study course on the Psalms. It became clear to me that I was barely scratching the surface of what the Bible commanded and promised regarding prayer. Then came the dark weeks in New York after 9-11 when our whole city sank into a kind of corporate clinical depression, even as it rallied. For my family the shadow was intensified as my wife Kathy struggled with the effects of Crohn's disease and then I was diagnosed with thyroid cancer.

At one point during all this my wife urged me to do something with her we had never been able to muster the self-discipline to do regularly. She asked

me to pray with her every night. No, every night. She used an illustration that crystallized her feelings very well. As we remember it, she said something like this:

"Imagine you were diagnosed with such a lethal condition that the doctor told you that you would die within hours unless you took a particular medicine – a pill every night before going to sleep. Imagine that you were told that you could never miss it or you would die. Would you forget? Would you not get around to it some nights? No – it would be so crucial that you wouldn't forget, you would never miss. Well, if we don't pray together to God, we're not going to make it because of all we are facing. I'm certainly not. We have to pray, we can't let it just slip our minds."

For both of us the penny dropped, we realized the seriousness of the issue, and we admitted that anything that was truly a non-negotiable necessity was something we could do. That was over twelve years ago, and Kathy and I can't remember missing a single evening, at least by phone, even when we've been apart in different hemispheres.

Kathy's jolting challenge, along with the growing conviction that I just didn't get prayer, led me into a search. I wanted a far better personal prayer life. I began to read widely and experiment in prayer. As I looked around I quickly came to see that I was not alone.

"Can't anyone teach me to pray?"

When Flannery O'Connor, the famous Southern writer, was 21 and studying writing in Iowa she sought to deepen her prayer life. She had to.

In 1946 she began keeping a handwritten prayer journal. In it she describes her struggles to be a great writer. "I want very much to succeed in the world with what I want to do... I am so discouraged about my work... Mediocrity is a hard word to apply to oneself..." These kinds of declarations can be found in the journal of any aspiring artist, but O'Connor did something different with these feelings. She prayed them. Here she followed a very ancient path, as did the Psalmists in the Old Testament, who did not merely identify, express, and vent their feelings but instead processed them with brutal honesty in the reality of God's presence. Flannery O'Connor wrote in her book *A Prayer Journal*:

"...effort at artistry in this rather than thinking of You and feeling inspired with the love I wish I had. Dear God, I cannot love Thee the way I want to. You are the slim crescent of a moon that I see and my self is the earth's shadow that keeps me from seeing all the moon...what I am afraid of, dear God, is that my self shadow will grow so large that it blocks the whole moon, and that I will judge myself by the shadow that is nothing. I do not know You God because I am in the way."

Here O'Connor recognizes what Augustine saw clearly in his own prayer journal, *The Confessions* – that living

well depended on the re-ordering of our loves. To love our success more than God and our neighbor hardens the heart, making it less able to feel and sense. That, ironically, makes us poorer artists. Therefore, because she was a writer of extraordinary gifts, her only hope was in the constant soul re-orientation of prayer.

Yet she believed that with the journal "I have started on a new phase of my spiritual life... the throwing off of certain adolescent habits and habits of mind. It does not take much to make us realize what fools we are, but the little it takes is long in coming. I see my ridiculous self by degrees." O'Connor learned that prayer is not simply the solitary exploration of your own subjectivity. You are with another, and that Other is unique. God is the only person from whom you can hide nothing. Before Him you come to see yourself in a new, unique light. This is the most intense possible relationship between persons. Prayer therefore leads to a self-knowledge that is impossible to achieve any other way.

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Rev. Dr. Timothy J. Keller, D.Min., is an American pastor, theologian and Christian apologist. He is best known as the founding pastor of Redeemer Presbyterian Church in New York City, New York, and the author of The New York Times bestselling books The Reason for God: Belief in an Age of Skepticism, The Prodigal God, and Prayer.

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getting what he wants? Hasn't he earned it by doing his part? If that's true, he owes God nothing, because he did what was necessary and now he simply expects what is coming to him.

In other words, perhaps I say a certain prayer a certain number of times and perhaps I forgo this pleasure for a certain period of time, and in return I get what I'm after. It's a system that allows me to get what I want without the necessity of acknowledging God or having a relationship with God.

Perhaps the thinking is that God is so rich it's no big deal for him to give me what I want, so why should I be grateful? Perhaps I know I am only using God because I despise him and only want to do what I must to get what I want. It puts me and what I want at the center of things

and again creates a God who is no God.

This approach is what I've previously called "Dead Religion," which is contrasted with what I have called "True Faith," where the relationship with God is central, and the things we get from him are peripheral. We can think of it this way: If a child really loves her father and knows he really loves her, she trusts him. When he gives her what she wants, she is happy and grateful. But even when he doesn't give her what she wants, she knows that he has a reason for not giving it to her, and not just any reason but a reason that has her ultimate welfare and concerns at heart. So although it might take some effort, in the end she cannot help but be grateful. If we have that kind of a God in mind, then even when we don't get what we want or ask for, we can trust there is wisdom and real love toward us in not giving it to us.

There are many people who may talk about God and prayer and who outwardly look very religious, but they're

really just performing rites and deeds and prayers so they can get what they want. If they felt that those rites or deeds or prayers wouldn't get them what they wanted, they would stop doing those things.

So they are not really worshiping the God they claim to be worshiping. They are selfishly worshiping getting what they desire. For them, God is only a means to that end. If he doesn't give them what they want, they cut him off. Any parent understands that we don't want our children to treat us that way.

If we are talking about a loving God, we are talking about a God who asks us to trust him, whether we get what we ask for or don't. But he will never force us to trust him. That is entirely up to us. We have free will and we can accept his love or reject it, or claim it doesn't exist at all. We can trust him or distrust him as we like. But if he really and truly is the God of the Bible, who loves me with an unchanging and self-sacrificial love (agape),

then I really and truly can trust him in all circumstances, which is tremendously freeing.

In fact, I can go one step further than trusting him. To use a biblical phrase, I can rejoice in him. But this is only possible if we really do know that God has our best interests at heart at all times. Of course, we have to decide on our own whether we believe that. But if we come to see that that is true and do allow ourselves to believe it, we are precisely where he created us to be: in his loving hands.

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Eric Metaxas is a New York Times #1 bestselling author and nationally syndicated radio host. The preceding is excerpted from his book, Miracles: What They Are, How They Happen, and How They Can Change Your Life (2015), now in paperback from Plume.



The Story of the American Prayer Initiative

The American Prayer Initiative was borne out of profound concern over the slide this country has taken – a slide that didn’t “just happen.” For decades, powerful secular forces have strategically and persistently attempted to put a firewall between Americans and their God.

They scored a ground breaking victory in the early 60s when a few judges were persuaded that “separation of church and state” is a Constitutional principle - when those words are found nowhere in any of America’s founding documents. The ruling resulted in the elimination of prayer and the Bible from schools. The book that was considered to be the Gold Standard for character development in America since the day the Mayflower landed, and a textbook in American schools until after the turn of the twentieth century.

When we dismissed the Scriptures from our common experience, the spiritual and moral underpinnings of the country began to slide. A common understanding of the difference between right and wrong has faltered. Self-evident truth is no longer self-evident. As we have lost touch with God, we have lost touch with the Author of love. The consequences are everywhere.

Marriage as it has been known since the beginning of time, is crumbling as the bedrock institution of life in America. The unwed birthrate was less than five percent in the 1960s. In America today, forty-two percent of all babies

are born to unwed mothers – when we know that single parenthood is the single biggest factor contributing to poverty and dependency in America. Sixty-four percent of babies born to women 30 years old and younger are born to single women. Since 1973, 56 million children have never had the chance to breathe their first breath due to the choice of their own mothers.

Over eighty percent of prisoners in America are from fatherless homes, when we know that fatherlessness – more than poverty or race – is the most common factor in predicting criminal behavior. One out of every 32 men in America is or has been incarcerated. Addiction is rampant. Since the 1960s, graduation rates and average SAT scores have plummeted. A majority of Americans 30 and under have a higher opinion of socialism than they do of free enterprise and capitalism. America is \$18 trillion in debt.

There is a link between the spiritual/moral slide in America and the economic slide. Two-thirds of the national budget is spent on social programs in an attempt to sustain the unsustainable. The single biggest item in the budget is welfare. Government is incapable of carrying the financial load of a culture spinning out of control.

After much prayer, Vonette Bright and Nancy Schulze gathered several noted women of faith to a meeting in Washington, D.C. to develop a strategy to help turn the tide in America. There was enough feminine firepower in the room to initiate just about any kind of movement they set their minds to, but

after an intense day of discussion it became clear that America is in too deep. Without prayer, we don’t have a prayer. It is seriously time for “we the people” to connect with the God of our forefathers, most of whom were men of profoundly deep faith.

A simple prayer movement was born. The women wrote prayers for the country which were compiled under prayer topics - one prayer topic for every day of the month, repeated each month for a year or longer. According to research, eighty percent of Christians are unsure how to pray. The American Prayer Initiative serves as a launching pad for the prayers of Americans who want their country to return to God.

The prayers uniquely focus on the founding principles and constitutional roots of the country, asking the Almighty to restore America to His will and ways. Prayers of American presidents are included – prayers that will astonish most Americans by their open and obvious faith in Jesus Christ. The daily prayers can be sent to one’s inbox.

Secular forces in America have attempted to rob the country of her faith-based heritage and the genius of her founding principles, which were borne out of Scripture. If Americans are to reclaim, redeem and rebuild the country, it is time to return to the One who knows what is best for the people and the planet He created. Prayer is the key. The Scriptures are replete with promises that the fervent prayers of righteous men and women avail much.

Do we have two minutes in a day to pray for our country? He will respond.

A Tribute to Vonette Bright

Vonette Bright spent a lifetime believing that prayer is the greatest privilege and the greatest power a person – or a nation – can have. It was Vonette Bright’s quiet and effective work that guided the process of establishing – by law - the National Day of Prayer on the first Thursday of May. She sensed that President Reagan might be the last best hope to sign such legislation, and stood by his side as he signed the bill into law on May 8, 1988.

Two days before Christmas, Vonette Bright’s long and extraordinary life on earth came to a close. Since 1951, as co-founders of the largest para-church ministry on earth, Dr. Bill Bright and his wife, Vonette, dedicated their lives to help fulfill the Great Commission through Campus Crusade for Christ, now called “Cru.” Over a half million trained volunteers and staff virtually cover the globe for the cause of Christ.

Dr. Bright produced “The Jesus Film” which has been translated into more than 1,300 languages and seen by more people than any film in the history of mankind. In 35 years the film has brought more than 200 million souls to Christ – averaging one person every 5.5 seconds. Other ministries initiated by Bill and Vonette Bright are too numerous to mention.

There was genius in their marriage – a synergism borne out of their total commitment to God, to each other, and to a purpose greater than themselves – telling as many people as



**Co-founder, Campus Crusade For Christ
Founder, National Day Of Prayer Task Force
Co-founder, The American Prayer Initiative
Author, Speaker**

Vonette Bright spent a lifetime believing that prayer is the greatest privilege and the greatest power a person – or a nation – can have.

possible about the very real love of God through His Son, Jesus Christ. They owned nothing, and yet they wanted for nothing. Their lives are a testament to the faithful providence of God.

Anyone who had the privilege of praying with Vonette could sense her utter reverence for God. Her comfort in conversation with Him would flow - real, open, direct communication with the Creator of the Universe. Vonette prayed first of all gratefully, lovingly, in complete trust that the ear of the Almighty was engaged. Then she got right down to taking care of business with the One who can make it happen, never wavering for a split second that He would move if it was in His will to do so.

When Vonette Bright prayed, she transacted business. And so did God.

Among other things, it is why her name is placed on virtually every list of giants of the faith in America. Vonette was a genuine, truly gracious, gentle lady with the heart of a lion. No Pollyanna, to be sure, Vonette was *real*, with wisdom borne of years in prayer and 54-plus years at the side of her late husband, Bill Bright.

The American Prayer Initiative is the last major prayer project of Vonette Bright’s long and faith-filled life. We are blessed – truly blessed to have known, learned from and loved a true “Godmother of the Faith” in America, and we have been honored to co-labor with Vonette in the creation of the American Prayer Initiative.

★ ★ ★ ★ ★ American Prayer Initiative Founders ★ ★ ★ ★ ★



Vonette Bright



Nancy Schulze



Shirley Dobson



Penny Nance



Kay Coles James



Janet Parshall



Anita Staver



Katherine Bright



Rebecca Hagelin

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Devi Titus



Brenda Josee



Marilyn Musgrave



Susan Allen



Dee Jepsen



Vicki Tiahrt



Beverly Tauke



Mariam Bell



Jennifer Kemp Andrews



By Tim Scott

I can still remember the day that I fully gave my life to Jesus Christ. It was on September 22, 1983. I had just turned 18 and was attending a Fellowship of Christian Athletes meeting at Presbyterian College. That day one of my teammates – JR – held an altar call. Something was different. I went down, got on my knees and prayed. I told God about my greatest need. I needed for him to love me unconditionally, accept me and guide me the way a father does.

I know in my heart that something special happened during that prayer. When I stood up, I had found my heavenly father. From that day forward, the importance of prayer has become clearer for me and the results even more powerful.

Prayer, that simple ongoing conversation with our heavenly Father, has led me through the mountains and valleys of

life. The most jarring personal low point since the death of my mentor when I was 19 years old came earlier this year – the tragic massacre at Emanuel AME in Charleston.

That June night, churchgoers were murdered in cold blood by a young man whose heart was filled with hate. This unimaginable act took the lives of nine men and women, each mothers, fathers, sisters, brothers, sons, daughters and friends. The Emanuel 9 are now forever etched into our state's history, and we continue to mourn for them and the future they all should have had.

But even in the midst of that dark time, we saw nine families, still reeling from grief and pain, show us the true power of faith. During the bond hearing for the man who was accused of murdering their loved ones, they shared three simple words: “we forgive you.” They stood in that courtroom and displayed for the world the absolute best of who we are as Americans. Upon watching this, I immediately thought of the Lord's Prayer, Matthew 6, which states in part “and forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us.”

The day after the shootings, I was also heartened to see the outpouring of support from folks around Washington as part of a prayer vigil on the Capitol grounds.

People wanted to come together as a community and pray for the victims, their families and our beloved state. Members of Congress, from both sides of the aisle, staff, South Carolinians and those who had Charleston on their minds and in their hearts, paused to weep with and pray for us.

Because of the nine families and their strength, we saw our state come together perhaps as never before – with faith serving as the glue. I knew then, that with the power of prayer and the inspiration given to us by the families, that our city and state would work every single day to replace hate with love, pain with kindness, and hostility with good will.

And as I returned to Washington, I felt the love and support of my colleagues, who shared that Charleston was a part of their prayer lists and morning devotionals. This reinforced to me that, as we debate important issues that determine the future of our nation, prayer is a powerful North Star in Congress. In fact, in my Washington office hangs a print depicting the first prayer in Congress. It reminds me that prayer is one of the important foundations that helps me work on behalf of our fellow Americans. I think of that first prayer, and one of the things they prayed for was that “Be Thou present, O God of wisdom, and direct the

councils of this honorable assembly; enable them to settle things on the best and surest foundation.”

As we continue on that journey to build a better nation, I am constantly touched when a family or group will ask if they can pray for me. It is always a humbling moment, because with all of life's issues, they ask to pause to pray for me. And when they ask me if I have any special requests, nine out of ten times, I ask them to pray for wisdom. I believe that remains the most important thing anyone can put on their prayer list for public servants at all levels. With wisdom from God, we can continue to bring people together, address the major issues facing America and ensure our great country remains a city on a hill. That should be all our prayers.

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Senator Tim Scott (@SenatorTimScott) is South Carolina's junior Senator. He currently serves on the Finance Committee; Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions (HELP) Committee; Banking, Housing, and Urban Affairs Committee; Small Business and Entrepreneurship Committee; and the Special Committee on Aging. He is also a longtime member of Seacoast Church in Mount Pleasant, South Carolina and a former member of the church board.

Calling America to prayer



By Joy Lamb

This nation is presently in a situation in which nothing but prayer can bring restoration. No law, no ordinance, no bill, no executive order, no presidential candidate, no speech, no sermon – nothing can accomplish the task.

Prayer, and only prayer will accomplish the healing of America.

How could a country that was once

so blessed spiral into such degradation? Could it be that it all began when we started pleasing people and ourselves instead of pleasing God?

In 1963 one woman took prayer out of the schools, without too many complaints. Then we entered the season of “if it feels good, do it!” Commitment was replaced with “I need my space.” Then sleepovers after the second date became commonplace which produced voracious sexually transmitted diseases and unwanted pregnancies, the latter fostering the ultimate abortion act which has caused an ongoing holocaust for the unborn.

Sunday church worship has been replaced with Sunday sports worship.

Remember Sundays when all the stores were closed and one had a moment to catch one's breath? Remember when the family sat around the table and actually conversed with each other? Today the

family is struggling just to be classified as a family. There is such a ploy being carried out by very determined group of people pleasers and self-pleasers to do away with the family altogether. The spiritual impact on America has been devastating on young and old alike.

All the above are very minor compared to the horrors that are taking place today. The ones listed above were simple things that turned us away from God and started the people-pleasing era. Oh God forgive us! Give us back our land, and help us to become God pleasers.

The Lord tells us, “If My people who are called by My name will humble themselves and pray, and seek My face, and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven and I will forgive their sin and I will heal their land.”

This call to prayer is not just for a handful of dedicated praying people in the corner of the church, or in a prayer

group. This call to pray is for every man, woman, and child. It is for every church. God's Word: “My Father's house shall be a house of prayer.” For every Christian and Jew, “All people everywhere shall pray.”

Not only will He heal the Land, but He will heal you and give you new life. The greatest gift you will ever receive is to know how much you are loved by Jesus Christ, and to experience the healing power of having been forgiven, and to know that you are an important participant in God's plan for healing America.

It's the Christmas season. Open your gift.

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Joy Lamb is the author of The Sword of the Spirit, the Word of God: A Handbook for Praying God's Word. To order this helpful book, please visit www.theswordofthespiritbook.com.

Go from prayer wimp to audacious prayers



By Max Lucado

You'd think as a pastor for more than 30 years, I'd have prayer down.

How hard can it be? I have friends who excel in prayer. They inhale heaven and exhale God.

They would rather pray than sleep. I sleep when I should pray. They belong to the PGA: Prayer Giants Association.

Not me. I'm a card-carrying member of the PWA: Prayer Wimps Anonymous.

Hello, my name is Max. I'm a recovering prayer wimp.

It's true. I doze off when I pray. My thoughts zig, then zag, then zig again. If attention deficit disorder applies to prayer, I am afflicted. When I pray, I think of a thousand things I need to do, and I forget the one thing I set out to do: pray.

Sure. We all pray... some...

But wouldn't we like to pray... More? Better?

Prayer is not a privilege for the pious, not the art of a chosen few. Prayer is simply a heartfelt conversation between

God and his child. My friend, he wants to talk with you. Even now, as you read these words, he taps at the door. Open it. Welcome him in. Let the conversation begin.

Prayer really is that simple. Resist the urge to complicate it. Don't take pride in well-crafted prayers. Don't apologize for incoherent prayers. No games. No cover-ups. Just be honest – honest to God. Tell him everything that's on your heart. Your worries, your fears, your unfixable fixes.

But here's the thing about prayer. If it depends on how I pray, I'm sunk. But if the power of prayer depends on the One who hears the prayer, then I have hope.

And if the power of prayer comes from the One who hears it, then I don't have to be timid.

You heard me right. Our prayers shouldn't be bashful or half-hearted. They should be bold.

Boldness in prayer is an uncomfortable thought for many. We think of speaking softly to God, humbling ourselves before God, or having a chat with God... but agonizing before God? Storming heaven with prayers? Wrestling with God? Isn't such prayer irreverent? Presumptuous?

It would be had God not invited us to pray as such. "So let us come boldly to the very throne of God and stay there to receive his mercy and to find grace to help us in our times of need" (Hebrews 4:16 tlb).

So how do we go from prayer wimps to audacious prayers like that?

We start by consulting God in everything. Always. Immediately. Quickly. Live with one ear toward heaven. Keep the line open to God.

At every decision. At each crossroads. Acknowledge him, heed him, ask him, "Do I turn right or left?"

A relationship with God is exactly that, a relationship. His invitation is clear and

simple: "Come and talk with me, O my people" (Ps. 27:8).

We abide with him, and he abides with us. He grants wisdom as we need it.

But God doesn't. He will help us in our trials and give us wisdom along the way. But we must regularly consult him. In everything.

I once tried giving my wife, Denalyn, this level of guidance. We were using the GPS on my smartphone to locate a particular destination. Denalyn was driving, and I was reading the map. Just for the fun of it, I muted the volume on the voice and told her that I would share the direction at the moment she needed it, not before.

She did not like that plan. She wanted to know the entire itinerary at once. She preferred to have all the information rather than bits and pieces of it.

But I insisted. I told her, "This is good spiritual training. God works this way."

"But you're not God."

Good point. I told her the entire itinerary.

But God doesn't. He will help us in our trials and give us wisdom along the way. But we must regularly consult him. In everything. His word is a "lamp unto [our] feet" (Psalm 119:105), not a spotlight into the future. He gives enough light to take the next step.

Once we're living like that, we'll more easily call on God for great things.

That's what my friend Greg Pruett does. He is trained as an engineer, linguist, and Bible translator. But his most significant contribution might be in the area of "extreme prayer."

In 2008 he assumed the role as president of Pioneer Bible Translators. The great recession was sucking dollars out of the economy and confidence out of the public. The ministry's financial chart indicated a free fall toward insolvency. Greg had no experience in leading such an organization, and he had no tangible place to cut expenses. Resources were few, and the donors were disappearing.

Greg knew of only one response: prayer. He says, "That's when I began to learn not to pray about my strategies, but to make prayer the strategy." He called on his board members to pray boldly and specifically.

And the next year he described the result. "When I saw the end-of-the-year report, I knew God had heard our prayers. I searched in vain for a tangible explanation. I wanted to find trends to explain how it worked, so we could do it again. I never could... I just know [God] provided. All I had was God and prayer."

Maybe God and prayer are all you have too. Discouragement, deception, defeat, destruction, death. They roar into your world like a Hells Angels motorcycle gang.

Don't give an inch. Respond in prayer – honest, continual, and audacious prayer.

There's power in even the simplest prayer. So if you're looking for a seat at the next Prayer Wimps Anonymous meeting, you might find one next to this Texas preacher. I'll be there, and I'll be asking God for great things.

Pastor Max Lucado is a bestselling author of more than 32 books, including Glory Days: Living Your Promised Land Life Now and Before Amen: The Power of a Simple Prayer. He serves the people of Oak Hills Church in San Antonio, Texas. (www.MaxLucado.com)

A wild ride with Jesus as chairman of the board



By Art Ally

Although prayer has been an important part of my life for the past 40-plus years of my career in the world of investments, it wasn't until the Lord prompted me to launch a biblically responsible mutual fund dedicated to His principles (i.e. avoid investing in companies that are pursuing an unholy agenda through their involvement and support of things like abortion, pornography, active promotion of non-traditional married lifestyles, etc.) that my prayer life became intense.

I projected that I needed to raise \$1 million in capital to fund this project so I made a list of 50 Christian investor friends that could have easily invested \$50,000 each but, to my surprise, only three of them chose to invest. Bottom line: the Lord knew who He wanted to invest – I only thought I knew – so He led me to the remaining investors, most of whom I didn't know.

We had a verbal agreement with our initial money management firm that they would manage our initial fund, so I had their name imbedded in our Offering Memorandum. They called me the

week before I began raising the capital to inform me that their board had met and decided they could not manage our fund as it might offend some of their other clients. Just fifteen minutes after receiving that call a friend, out of the clear blue, who had just joined another money management firm stopped in my office to introduce me to his new firm. After some fast due diligence, they became our initial money manager.

Next, even though my pro-forma projections were fairly accurate, our fund

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By Lee M. Cole

St. Thomas Aquinas possessed intellectual gifts that were exceptional for his time, or, for that matter, any time in history. His intellectual prowess and output were prodigious, evidenced by the more than eight million words he wrote during the course of his life.

His work synthesizes pagan philosophy, Jewish and Islamic reflections upon God, and, most centrally, the Christian understanding of both God and nature. That Aquinas could see their points of convergence was a testament to the depth of his own knowledge and to his penetrating insight into the natural world, the human being, and especially God – who stood at the center of these conversations. Aquinas possessed a mastery of the whole that has perhaps been equaled, but has likely not been surpassed.

And yet, near the end of his life, St. Thomas laid down his pen and described all of the words he had written – all eight million of them – as nothing but “straw.”

What would drive such a fertile and

brilliant mind to consider his life’s work of so little value?

Each morning, Aquinas began his day with a humble prayer, “For Ordering a Life Wisely.” The prayer expresses Aquinas’ sincere desire to increase in his knowledge of God and to do all things in His service:

Put my life in good order, O my God.
Grant that I may know what You require

But the most powerful moment of prayer in Aquinas’ life occurred on December 6, 1273, the feast day of St. Nicholas, just months before his death. While at prayer – strangely enough, in the Chapel of St. Nicholas – he received a mystical vision of God.

me to do. May any joy without You be burdensome for me, and may I not desire anything else besides You. May all work, O Lord, delight me when done for Your sake, and may all repose not centered in You be ever wearisome for me.

As a Dominican friar, Aquinas spent hours in prayer each day. He was often observed weeping while praying or during Mass, especially during the sacrament of the Eucharist.

But the most powerful moment of

prayer in Aquinas’ life occurred on December 6, 1273, the feast day of St. Nicholas, just months before his death. While at prayer – strangely enough, in the Chapel of St. Nicholas – he received a mystical vision of God.

After this vision, Aquinas carried out his final days as one separated from his beloved. To experience God in that tangible way, through prayer, and then to return to the daily task of writing about Him through the feeble instruments of reason and words was too much for Aquinas. While he did not stop writing altogether, he did set aside his major projects, first and foremost, the Summa Theologiae. The work with which he remains so famously associated, was left unfinished.

Aquinas centered his whole life on studying and knowing God. His prayer life and his theological life were the very same life – both were ordered toward communion with God. Alongside the image of Aquinas the scholar, then, we must place Aquinas the lover of God, who fervently desired to know Him more and more.

It is in this context that we must understand the words of Aquinas. For it is immediately after his mystical vision that he confided in his colleague and secretary, “All that I have written seems to me as straw.”

How incredible! Aquinas judged that it was prayer – and especially this personal revelation received while in prayer – that made his studies and writings seem “as straw.” While this image of straw might suggest a renunciation of all his life’s work, let’s think more deeply about his words.

Why did Aquinas call them “straw?”

Here we might ask, “Where does straw figure most prominently in the Christian imagination?” Evidently enough, in the Nativity of the child Jesus. Straw is found lining the manger, where the infant lays His head.

While Aquinas himself never explained his words, I think the Nativity offers a fitting and fruitful way to interpret their meaning. It is perhaps no mere coincidence that setting the manger scene at Christmas, taken for granted today, became popular during Aquinas’ lifetime. With this in mind, his writings and studies were deemed straw – not to be discarded – but to be placed in the manger to receive the presence of the incarnate God.

Aquinas’ writings and prayers reveal a man who seeks to know God in order to love Him all the more deeply.

And when, through prayer, Aquinas finds his heart’s desire by experiencing God in a mystical vision, all his work, all his eight million words, are judged to be straw – straw laid down to prepare for the reception of Christ. Such is the presence and power of God.

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Dr. Lee Cole is an assistant professor of philosophy at Hillsdale College in Hillsdale, Michigan. This essay derives from his interview with Hugh Hewitt, and the detailed transcripts are available online:

<http://www.hughhewitt.com/dr-larry-arann-professor-lee-cole-conclude-series-thomas-aquinas/>

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did not grow as I had projected so we ran out of capital in 18 months which resulted in the lowest point of my life. Those investor partners trusted me with \$1 million and it was gone! Well, I went back to them and they agreed to invest an additional \$500,000. Trouble was, we still didn’t grow fast enough for the revenue to cover expenses so we ran out of money again – in fact, we ran out of money three more times. Each time at the eleventh hour, the Lord brought someone across my path – someone I had no way of knowing – who asked if they could invest in our partnership.

During this time, the Securities and

Exchange Commission chose to audit us three times during our first two years – something unheard of in our industry. The first two times the auditors really did not like our mission and principles (to say the least) and would have loved to shut us down. Although we diligently followed their rules and regulations, you have to maintain adequate net capital to stay in business. Actually, they probably could have shut us down but the Lord wouldn’t let them.

After running out of capital the fourth time, I guess the Lord finally decided He could trust us so our shareholder assets began to grow to the point that we became profitable.

I could go on and on about the number of times our Chairman (Jesus Christ) intervened on our behalf, but I will share just one more. As we grew,

it became clear that we needed to add additional funds for investors to achieve adequate asset diversification so we engaged a team of institutional consultants to help us locate top-tier money managers for our new funds.

Although these consultants were believers, they didn’t think it possible for any top-tier money management firm to agree to manage a fund for us. After all, we started each new fund with zero assets (most managers had high initial minimums), we restricted the companies in which they could invest due to our moral screening research, and we had a fee schedule well below their absolute minimums for their largest clients. Well, I asked them to humor me and conduct the search anyway. They agreed and, even though they were believers, it wasn’t until the various

managers agreed to our terms that they understood who our real Chairman actually was. As a result, I am pleased to report that all of our funds are managed by firms that are best-of-class in their various asset categories.

Twenty-two years ago, the pundits said this (moral screening of our investments) couldn’t be done and still achieve respectable returns. Well, with almost a billion invested in 13 mutual funds, success speaks for itself. We are still here, and we have only our Chairman to blame! Although He may, and usually does, jam us through keyholes along the way, don’t try to tell me that prayer doesn’t work.

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Art Ally is Founder and President of the Timothy Plan Family of Mutual Funds

The power of prayer in America's future



By George Augustus Stallings, Jr.

America, a nation conceived in liberty and justice, was built on the foundation of Judeo-Christian principles that, to this day, serve as guiding lights in our nation's hope for tomorrow. Our founding fathers were men of deep and abiding faith who understood God's providential course in forging a nascent nation out of dangling and disjointed colonies.

In their growing dissatisfaction over England's tightfisted control and unyielding monopoly over their lives in local governmental affairs, coupled with an unquenchable thirst for independence, a band of God-fearing men coalesced clandestinely under the cover of darkness,

while clinging to their faith, not knowing their fate or where it would ultimately lead them. Only God knew and only in God did they trust.

A determined people had reached the inevitable conclusion that "enough was enough!" If things were to change, they had no other choice but to take matters into their own hands by becoming "the masters of their fate and the captains of their souls."

What possibly could have been the driving force that fanned into a flame, their burning passion to take destiny into their own hands by way of a concerted effort to make one out of many? The founding fathers could not have done it based solely on their own strength or inner resolve. There had to have been some other power above and beyond them, yet also within them, that was a determining factor in propelling them toward their quest for independence.

It was the power of prayer that led, drove and motivated men of faith, in the crucible of their struggle, to give birth to the incarnation of God's Providence for this nation. Otherwise, how could they have withstood the vicious onslaught of a mighty British Army that was dead set on silencing and annihilating anything and anyone that stood in the way of usurping and overthrowing the crown's sovereign rule? You cannot destroy a mighty world power with guns and bayonets alone.

There is an adage that says: "prayer changes things." Let's take it one step further: "Prayer not only changes things but

changes people so that people can change things!" Prayer forged America, prayer has sustained America through turbulent and tumultuous times and prayer must remain an integral and indispensable part of America's future if she is to continue to lead the world in this providential age.

Prayer reveals and unlocks the secrets of God's Providence in our modern world. What is this providential age? It is an era when the Will of God reigns in the hearts of all humankind. It is a time that ushers in an epoch free of tyranny, threat and thievery.

Prayer reveals and unlocks the secrets of God's Providence in our modern world. What is this providential age? It is an era when the Will of God reigns in the hearts of all humankind. It is a time that ushers in an epoch free of tyranny, threat and thievery. It is a period when a world is no longer held hostage or lives under the fear of ISIS, DASH or other terrorist regimes. It is an age when we come to understand and appreciate what it means to live as brothers and sisters, one family under God, rather than perish together as fools.

None of these noble aspirations can be

achieved without the power of prayer in our daily and corporate lives. Prayer transcends religion, race and ethnicity, socioeconomic and geo-political backgrounds. It is a universal language that bespeaks our relationship and attitude toward God and a divine, spiritual conversation that we have with our Creator that links us not only to our maker but to one another.

America's future rests in embracing the power of prayer. Prayer can break down the resistance within all of us to stop limiting the role that each one of us plays in securing the well-being and healing of our nation and world. If the power of prayer served as an instrument in the creation of so great a nation, then what can prayer facilitate in ensuring that a people assume its rightful position in securing America's future?

If not now, then when? If not you, then who? Yes, you and I can change the course of a nation and the world through the power of prayer. Let us continue that universal conversation with our Creator as we strive toward unity with one another.

Prayer can change people who, then, can change the world.

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Archbishop George Augustus Stallings, Jr. is the founder and patriarch of Imani Temple African-American Catholic Congregation, in Suitland, Maryland. He also serves as the national co-chairman of the American Clergy Leadership Conference, headquartered in New York City.

Prayer is life's ultimate 'app'



By Dan Cummins

"Carefully read and follow directions."

However, self-made men follow their own directives. "Damn the torpedoes, full speed ahead!" Reading the manual is sound advice that real men seldom heed because "directions are for wimps!"

Self-made men tend to worship in vain at the altar of their creator.

For the rest of us mere co-dependent mortals, directions are indispensable ingredients for success. Nowadays following directions has become so much easier. Thanks to my GPS "app," I can readily arrive at my destination via the quickest route, on time every time. How did I ever make it with those clumsy hard-to-fold-back-to-their-original-form printed maps?

With a touch of my fingertip, a woman's voice points the way. She guides me turn by turn through traffic delays, around accidents and by the quickest route possible. I just listen and follow her commands. Miraculous!

In the same way, prayer is a miraculous little "app" downloadable to program our daily lives, making it possible

to reach our destinations stress-free. Access to a "higher navigational system" provides confidence to go places never dreamed of before. Just listen and follow directions.

Prayer is definitely about listening. When in prayer one should be more in tune to hearing from God than talking to God.

Prayer is putting ourselves in the optimal place to receive godly directions. While in my cell phone provider's service area, I have all the needed signal. Out of range, I can no longer hear that indispensable voice saying "in 500 feet, turn right." The closer one follows God, the fewer U-turns will be required!

Without His grace and daily directions, I could have never arrived at my current destination - a historic place of ministry in the nation's capital. JoAnn and

I are involved in the restoration of weekly worship services for Congress in the U.S. Capitol Building, following a 144-year absence.

Our journey began one Wednesday evening in rural East Texas. Our small Bridlewood congregation, which we started two years before in a cattle-sale barn, was praying for America. I closed the vespers with a simple request. "Lord," I prayed, "if there's any way for this small country church to become a blessing to our nation, open a door for us." I was quite surprised when two years later, that metaphorical door turned out to be the actual door to Washington. In two short years, God directed us from a storefront church to the Capitol. Prayer is the only explanation. The destination was

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Talking with the spirit of God

Spiritual laws in a physical world



By William Ames Curtright

Would you like to have a two-way conversation with God? We talk with our voice, God talks with blessings of the Holy Spirit.

To learn about how to communicate with God, we have the Bible and God's Holy Spirit to call upon. To talk to God, we have to talk in the language of God, which is the Holy Spirit.

With prayer we are talking in His language. From the Bible we gain His wisdom. First John 2:20 tells us, "You have unction (divine wisdom) from the Holy One and know all things." In John 17:5, Jesus says, "And now Father, glorify me with yourself with the glory which I had with you before the world was."

Prayer brings us back to God. It is also the way we acknowledge that we are not God, but a conduit to God. Prayer is calling on a responsive Holy Spirit for help

and blessings. God loves it when those He has created gather together to pray to Him.

Through prayer we gain understanding of these spiritual truths:

That God exists and loves us. That God has a plan for each of us. It is prayer to God that leads us back to Him when sin has separated us from Him. Through prayer, we can talk to God, receive miracles, answers, blessings and forgiveness (Jesus Christ is a symbol of God's forgiveness). Constant prayer keeps us close to God and elevates our spiritual level. At the highest of these spiritual levels are God, miracles, and angels.

God's Holy Spirit

When Jesus died, His Holy Spirit came to those who believed in Him. In the beginning, before all time, God the Father, Jesus the Son and the Holy Spirit were present in perfection and joyfully alone in the Trinity (Ephesians 1:4-5; 2 Timothy; John 17:24). Before the universe was created, we know that Jesus was with God in all the glory given Him "before the world was." (John 1:1 and John 17:5).

On earth God's Holy Spirit is a blessing; a gift that can be tapped into. We can pray, "God, through your Holy Spirit, help me and guide me!" That is the power of prayer; it is a direct line to God through His Holy Spirit. When man talks about God, praises God, and prays and sings to God, miraculous and wonderful things happen. God has always been there to guide and comfort us as we walk through life.

Prayer Can Heal

Can prayer heal? The answer is "yes!" Prayer and faith can heal and create

miracles. Prayer can change a situation. Prayer with faith can move a mountain. "Faith the size of a mustard seed is sufficient," Jesus said. The answer for soldiers, police officers, servants of man or troubled youth is prayer. Prayer and faith can save that officer, that soldier, that child in this imperfect world. Prayer can save a life.

Physical and Spiritual Laws

Why God created this world for us is beyond our comprehension. Physics or physical law, as well as time and the universe, are gifts God gives us to help us understand and define our planet Earth. We live in a physical body, but it contains God's Spirit through Christ. God creates life. Only He can create it. Thus, we pray for guidance and understanding.

How Should We Pray?

In order to talk to God, we must ask that He be present with us. Our attempts to communicate with God must be with humility and submission while asking for God's guidance and help.

When his disciples asked, "Father, Teacher, how shall we pray?" Jesus replied, "Our Father, Who art in heaven" (by calling His name) "Hallowed be Thy name," (tell God how great He is, praise Him) "Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done," (a call for help and guidance) "on earth as it is in Heaven" (this is a call to make earth like it is in heaven).

When we pray, God loves us and takes us back, over and over. Jeremiah 24:7 "I will give them a heart to know Me, for I am the LORD; and they will be My people, and I will be their God, for they will return to Me with their whole heart."

Enjoy and praise Him and His

creations around you. Thank Him.

Miracles from Prayer

A book I read recently by Suzie Federer, *Miracles in American History*, talks about George Washington, who constantly prayed and ordered his troops and citizens to pray and fast. Washington prayed often, as our military should. When we pray, we receive miracles and guidance.

Lt. Gen. (Ret.) Jerry Boykin writes in "Black Hawk Down" that God loves a soldier. He loves and provides miracles for them. Mr. Boykin can certainly tell you about prayers and miracles. His helicopter received 46 bullets! In Mogadishu, he was shot with a .50 caliber bullet and survived.

As a pilot in Vietnam and in the bush, I remember a few times when I asked my instructor to take over and a few times when I asked God to take over. God gives us free choice, so when we pray, we give Him permission to take the controls. "Lord," we might say, "Take over, I cannot do it anymore." God then steps in. Extraordinary events begin here.

I can tell you. I have been there.

.....
Dr. William Ames Curtright, DBA, founded "Gathering of the Eagles," which annually hosts the West Coast's largest assembly (over 50 groups) of Tea Party, Conservative Republican and liberty-minded people (www.gatheringoftheeagles.com). He is also CEO of Ames Research Labs and an accomplished bush pilot. A Vietnam veteran and three-time candidate for Oregon governor, he is a descendant of the Ames family of Massachusetts. Many of his family helped start our nation. Dr. Ames helped establish and fund the Ames Shovel Archives and Museum at Stonehill College.

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pre-programmed in the download, but we had to follow directions.

Our prayers had opened the app, and we then entered our desired destination – an open door to bless America. When I said, "amen," it activated His turn-by-turn navigational system. It wasn't long before we heard a familiar voice say, "in 500 feet, turn right." All we had to do then was choose to obey. Were we ever surprised with the outcome!

You've heard that "a journey of a thousand miles begins with one step." The

first step is the most important. We began by organizing prayer rallies in East Texas communities asking people to "come pray with me." That's what we called our events – "Come Pray with Me." To our amazement, a thousand people would show up to pray for America. We had made the right turn!

Next, we joined the mobilization team of then Texas Governor Rick Perry's "The Response USA" in Houston's Reliant Stadium in the summer of 2011. JoAnn and I were put in charge of front-gate activities. Another right turn!

Then came the big turn, the unexpected turn, the final turn to our desired destination – an open door to bless the nation. Through another series of

miraculous events in 2012, we approached House Speaker John Boehner to hold a service in Statuary Hall commemorating the first inaugural of President George Washington, something no private citizen had ever done. Our request was miraculously granted.

Five years later, "Washington A Man of Prayer 2016" will again be televised globally over satellite and streamed on the internet to over 700 million homes. From this annual event, we now hold "The Jefferson Gathering" – a weekly Christian worship service for members of Congress literally in the Capitol Building.

People often ask, "Pastor, what can I do? I'm just one person. All I can do is pray." That's right! You can pray!

Prayer changes things. It changes lives, it changes families, it changes churches, and it changes nations. Prayer shapes history. Never underestimate the power of your prayer. When you pray, heaven is moved, and things on earth begin to move.

"Despise not the day of small beginnings." If God can use a country preacher from East Texas, He can use anyone. You just have to activate your app and faithfully follow His directions. And soon, you too will hear, "You have arrived at your destination."

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Rev. Dan Cummins is convening pastor of "The Jefferson Gathering" and co-founder with his wife JoAnn, of "Washington A Man of Prayer."

Save your (#hashtag) good thoughts — pray!



By Jason Bentley

God speaks to those who take time to listen, and He listens to those who take time to pray. Think about the privilege of prayer. It's a friendship with benefits. Jesus invites me to spend time with Him whenever I want, while sincerely caring about everything I face, feel, and fear. The best part is that the more I talk with Jesus, the more like Him I become.

Furthermore, when tragedy and chaos

invade my world and yours, as it did most recently in Paris, prayer pulls people together, asks hard questions to the only one who has the answers, and comforts the soul.

Prayer makes sense because prayer makes a difference.

Despite the overwhelming benefits of this opportunity in our lives, I've noticed an increasingly popular, ever growing trend on social media that sounds good on the surface but is actually quite empty and powerless.

I know you've seen it – someone going through a hard time will request love, help, and support, then a person connected to them will say, "Sending good thoughts/vibes your way..."

Say what!?!? What are your "good thoughts" going to do for me? How will that fleeting moment of empathy or good will registering on your brain wave make any kind of difference? Want to really love, help, and support me? PRAY.

Sending #GoodThoughts might be trending but it highlights four things:

A humanistic view – It elevates us, the created, to the god-like status of Creator. Why turn to God and call on Him when my "good thoughts" have just as much power as He does? Do you really believe that it is in your power to influence

external things and control outcomes in another's life?

An absence of faith – If you're a Christian but respond to others with "good thoughts" rather than prayer, you have become what Pastor Craig Groeschel calls a "practical atheist." You claim to have faith in God, but do not live it out in your everyday life. Mark Batterson writes in his New York Times best-selling book *The Circle Maker* that "Our biggest problem is our small view of God. That is the cause of all lesser evils. And it's a high view of God that is the solution to all other problems. Bold prayers honor God, and God honors bold prayers. God isn't offended by your biggest dreams or boldest prayers. He is offended by anything less. If your prayers aren't impossible to you, they are insulting to God."

A tragic misunderstanding – If your view of prayer is obligatory, meaningless, ritualistic mental energy, no wonder you want to respond in a manner that is just as ineffective. However, if you understand prayer as (1) building and enjoying a relationship with God and (2) the way to engage Him for guidance, miracles, transformation, and more – then nothing will keep you from it!

A shallow, self-centered life – It can't be self-centered if you're briefly thinking

about someone else, right? Is it lazy if you're actually moving your fingers to comment on a Facebook post? Well, it's certainly easier to have a passing moment of silence to comfort your conscience with how humanitarian and compassionate you are than it is to persistently and earnestly talk with God about your friend. All the good intentions, warm fuzzies, and good thoughts you generate, while maintaining your usual schedule hasn't helped one person nor will it ever. Interrupt your routine and take real action. Seek God. Pray!

The greatest tragedy in life is the prayers that go unanswered because they go unasked.

"Pray for each other so that you may be healed. The earnest prayer of a righteous person has great power and produces wonderful results (James 5:16.)"

What do you need to start praying about?

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Rev. Jason Bentley is lead pastor, along with his wife Alejandra Bentley, of the multicultural, non-denominational HighPoint Church in Kent, Washington. He is a featured speaker for the American Clergy Leadership Conference.

No surprise — we pray when we're in trouble



By Gregory L. Clark

I grew up under the influence of prayer. I can still remember my mother tucking me into bed at night and guiding me in a conversation with God before I went to sleep. I didn't understand everything going on in those moments, but I knew it was important. Prayer is so simple that a child can do it, and yet so

profound that Jesus Christ himself found it necessary to pray.

Numerous studies have shown the benefits of prayer. According to research, prayer helps people heal faster, live happier and have overall healthier lives. Although studies such as this have been done as recently as this year, prayer remains an exercise ignored among the lives of many Christians. This is not to say that Christians do not pray, but it is to say that we do not pray enough, and when we do pray, our prayers are often misdirected.

As a pastor I have seen this firsthand. Following 9/11, many of the churches in communities all across America were full on Sundays as well as the midweek prayer service. But it did not last. It was only a temporary surge in faith. According to a survey done by the Barna Research Group in 2006, the surge lasted less than five years. While several conclusions may be drawn from that study, one thing is for certain: We pray when we are in trouble.

There is nothing wrong with praying in times of trouble. The Bible gives numerous examples of praying for

deliverance in moments of distress. But that kind of praying must be predicated on another kind of prayer: prayer for our own spiritual lives. If we wait until we are in trouble to pray, we have waited too long. We must not view prayer as a last resort but as our first defense.

In Matthew 5-7, Jesus taught his disciples about fasting, enduring persecution, the sacredness of marriage, loving our enemies, avoiding hypocrisy and wrongly judging others, just to name a few.

After hearing these demands that are placed upon a citizen of the kingdom, the disciples must have felt like the Apostle Paul when he said to the Corinthians, "Who is sufficient for these things?" How are we going to love our enemies, be pure in heart, reflect Christ in a hostile culture, go the second mile and not worry ourselves to death?

The answer should come as no surprise to the follower of Christ: "Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives, and he who seeks finds, and to him who knocks

it will be opened" (Matthew 5:7-8).

It should be stated that this is not a carte blanche request for our material desires and pleasures. Instead, it shows us how to pray for the character of the kingdom in our lives. This kind of praying is powerful.

Again, there is nothing wrong with praying when you have lost your job, or your kids have rebelled, your car has broken down or you're worried about the election. But those prayers will have more weight if you focus on this first principle of prayer: "But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you" (Matthew 6:33).

Is there power in prayer? You better believe it, and God is just waiting for you to ask.

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Rev. Gregory L. Clark has been a Southern Baptist pastor for 26 years, and is a proud husband, father, grandfather and veteran. He currently serves on the board of directors for the Baptist State Convention of North Carolina.

Climbing out of the cultural sewer

National prayer line focuses on repentance and restoration



By Ms. Dran Reese

In 2005, I awakened to a dramatic cultural change, and it was not for the better. Deciding to study the contributing societal issues, I was stunned to learn of an intentional effort to remove God from every institution in America, ultimately from families – and even the church.

This effort is planned, deliberate and well-executed. Its result deafens America to God's intentions for His creation. All around us men and women, young and old, are falling into lewd, gross immorality – sexual and otherwise. Even babies in the womb have greatly suffered, their mutilated, aborted bodies bought and

sold for profit. That is just the tip of the iceberg. It sickens my heart to see how low we have sunk with civic government, media, and education leading Americans in this numbing of our national conscience.

As a Christian growing in faith, I decided to get involved. The more I learned, the more I saw how unaware I was of God's "non-negotiable" moral values – and I was not alone. Over the years, I have found this ignorance to be pervasive in the church. I found myself praying in a way I had never done before. It was with a spirit of heartfelt repentance for our seeming indifference – yours, mine and ours – as we collectively ceased to make faith relevant in the culture.

But, I didn't want to go it alone. To that end, I started what has become a nationwide, daily prayer conference call that is named, RandRPrayer.org. "R and R" is short for "Repentance and Restoration." Nothing like hitting a subject head-on, on what you don't know!

Ah, but on the prayer line, we have learned it is a spirit of humility that unlocks God's mercy. He tests us with a hypothesis: "If – if – if My people who are called by My name will humble themselves, and pray, and turn from their wicked ways, then ..." 2 Chronicles 7:14

The word "if" implies repentance, and that is not an attractive word. Repentance doesn't invoke joy. It invokes sorrow, and

sharing in grief over how wicked our nation has become – aborting millions of babies, lewd immorality, human trafficking, and so much more. Yet, repentance is believing that God will be merciful and kind. It is believing you can be an agent of change who lives a life revived in faith. Repentance is the door through which to pass to reach the prize: restoration. Thus, the second name for this prayer line is restoration, as we seek God to restore our land.

With all America's faults, we are still a great nation worth saving. I believe it. We, on the prayer line, believe it. Steadfastly, we pray for the church to move into her rightful position and see restoration actually occur. God wants to restore us. But, first – wait for it ... we must humble ourselves and repent.

Showing up with all our human frailties, those of us on the prayer line manage to meet every day – same time, same line, same Spirit of the Lord. We pray while having our morning coffee. We pray while we are working. We pray from our desks. We pray in our kitchens. We pray kneeling and prostrate. We pray in silence. We pray in our closets. We pray as one body with one purpose: to see the restoration of America's relationship with God.

Learning from each other, some prayer warriors inform us of breaking news before most people even know what

is going on. I am so grateful for that. Unfortunately, much of the news is not good, as we enter dark days where the mere mention of Jesus in a work environment will get you written up. This is unprecedented and sinful.

It breaks my heart to see the nation's current path. We have never been a perfect country. Yet, we have more love, faith, and generosity than most any other nation. We are worth fighting for. That is what we Christians do. We never give up believing that Jesus is the remedy for our national sins.

To this end, we pray daily for our government officials, our states, and Israel. We have partnered with the American Prayer Initiative in posting their topical prayers, and we host prayer guests who lead a variety of national organizations.

Those on RandRPrayer.org desire nothing less than to restore our Judeo-Christian ethic in government, schools and media. We pray not because we have to, but because we want to with hearts open to hear from God and obey through Christ-centered action. It has become a privilege and honor to daily touch the Lord of all creation through prayer and to do so in communion with friends.

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Ms. Dran Reese, founder and president of The Salt & Light Council, is host of the daily prayer line www.RepentanceandRestoration.org (www.RandRPrayer.org)



By David Kupelian

There's no greater or more famous prayer than the Lord's Prayer. Ironically, theaters throughout Britain recently banned an "advert" featuring the Lord's Prayer, intended to run just before the new "Star Wars" movie. Apparently it's politically correct for a fantasy "force" to be "with us" – but not the Real One.

In any event, even though most

readers have probably recited it thousands of times, let's look at the "Lord's Prayer" with fresh eyes.

Jesus, when he taught this prayer 2,000 years ago, first laid down a couple of ground rules: "Use not vain repetitions, as the heathen do, for they think that they shall be heard for their much speaking." Besides, he added, "your Father knoweth what things ye have need of, before ye ask him." That said, Jesus gifted to mankind this short (only 66 words) but perfect way to commune with the Creator of the universe:

Our Father which art in heaven, Hallowed be thy name.

Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven.

Give us this day our daily bread.

And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors.

And lead us not into temptation, but

deliver us from evil: For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, forever. Amen. (Matthew 6:9-13 KJV)

So let's look at it: First, Jesus exhorts us to honor God and humble our will before His and to seek His continued sustenance. (No problem, we think.)

Later we're told to ask for God's protection as we acknowledge His supremacy in all things. (Great, that makes perfect sense too, we think.)

But in between those two parts comes one line that delivers an essential, life-changing commandment, the beating heart of the Lord's Prayer, and the fulcrum of change in our lives, the place where miraculous things happen to us – or don't, if we don't heed it:

And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors.

So crucial is this line that, immediately following the prayer, Jesus reinforces the

forgiveness requirement in the starkest terms imaginable, to make sure nobody misses it:

For if ye forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you; But if ye forgive not men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses. (Matthew 6:14-15 KJV)

Now that gets my attention.

Forgiveness requires that we let go of resentment and bitterness at injustices, disappointments and betrayals, and even, as Christ said, that we love our enemies and pray for those who persecute us. The big problem we have with this is that anger – whether subtle irritation or full-blown, out-of-control rage – is what sustains our prideful, sinful nature, which literally feeds on resentment and hostility while providing us an illusion of

Prayer was pivotal for Jesus, and should be so for us



By Bob McEwen

Everything in life is either physical or spiritual.

A painting is physical. The beauty of a painting is spiritual. Physical things can be consumed, can wear out. The spiritual doesn't. The physical can be weighed and measured. The spiritual cannot.

One can read the pronouncements of George Patten. However, quoting the commands of General Patten will not reproduce his leadership. There is no pound box or 3 yards of leadership. Leadership is not consumed by 10 soldiers or 1000 soldiers. Thus, leadership must be spiritual.

Wisdom is the capacity to distinguish which is physical and which is spiritual.

The Bible, the operations manual for man that was written by the Manufacturer, distinguishes between the physical and the spiritual. Galatians 5 says, "the works of the physical are these: adultery, fornication, wrath, envy,

murder, drunkenness" and such. Reads like the topics on the cover of the tabloids in the grocery line. On the other hand, the fruit of the Spirit is: "love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, meekness and temperance." These are the things that polls repeatedly show are what the world is looking for. What the world seeks.

While mankind claims to be seeking spiritual ends he regularly employs physical means. We would call this being foolish or unwise. One cannot achieve spiritual ends using physical tools.

A new kitchen is physical. Joy is spiritual. While a new kitchen might make one happy for a time, kitchens cannot create Joy.

A building is physical. Love and peace are spiritual. One cannot build a physical building with the spiritual tools of love and peace. Trying to find love, joy and peace with physical tools or trying to build a building with spiritual tools reveals an absence of wisdom.

The Scripture (God's operators manual) says if any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all men liberally and upbraideth not; and it shall be given him (James 1). How does one receive wisdom from God? By asking, in prayer. Prayer is spiritual. One cannot measure or weigh it. God's presence is spiritual (John 4:24). Thus, as we confront the struggles of life, if we desire the presence or mind of God, we may have it through prayer.

When Christ was on earth, his ministry was quite brief. Just three years. During those 36 months he changed the world for all time. One can today look at the globe and observe that where his Spirit is strongest love, joy and peace are most prevalent. Where his teachings are most rejected, death and poverty are greatest.

So, it might be instructive to observe how Christ, as a man, used his time while here on

earth. And, it is very clear that He prayed. Repeatedly, He would use His valuable time to go off privately, to pray. Prayer must be important.

Indeed, if we are seeking love in our life or family. If we lack joy in our hearts. If we need peace in our home or nation we are instructed where to look. God's Spirit is the source of these things man is seeking. We can have them in our hearts (minds) by asking. And we ask by the powerful instrument of Prayer.

"Let this Mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus: Who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God: but made himself of no reputation, took upon him the form of a servant and was made in the likeness of men:

"And being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and was obedient unto death, even the death of the cross.

"Wherefore God also hath highly exalted Him, and given Him a name which is above every name: That at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, and every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord to the Glory of God the Father."

When our mind just doesn't have the answers to life, work or family, God has told us the wise place to look for the answers... to Him. We can talk with Him through the simple medium of Prayer. Prayer: that's us talking with God.

He most often answers us through his word, the operator's manual, the Bible. That's God talking with us.

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Congressman Bob McEwen (R-Ohio, 1981-93) was a six-term U.S. Representative from Ohio's Sixth District. He is currently executive director of the Council for National Policy.

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righteousness. Thus, fasting from the "meal" of resentment and truly forgiving those who have "trespassed against us" requires repentance on our part.

And where is repentance to be found? I love this short but transcendently meaningful explanation by John the Apostle: "Here is the message we heard from him [Jesus] and pass on to you: that God is light, and in him there is no darkness at all. If we claim to be sharing in his life while we walk in the dark, our words and our lives are a lie; but if we walk in the light as he himself is in the light, then we share together a common life, and we are being cleansed from every sin by the blood of Jesus his Son." (1 John 1:5-7 NEB)

John mentions here no complicated dogma, no required religious observances, rituals, pilgrimages, or special diet. Just a sincere appreciation of God's forgiveness and this glistening instruction: If we "walk in the light, as he himself is in the light" - that is, if we calmly and humbly welcome God's light of understanding to shine in our minds and souls, by which light we will observe our dark, angry, sinful nature - He will grace us with repentance. And "then," assures John, "we share together a common life, and we are being cleansed from every sin by the blood of Jesus his Son."

Again, living "in the light" - not losing ourselves in worry over the past, or anxiety and fear over the future, but staying faithful in the present moment, in the presence of God - involves facing our own vexing imperfections and faults, without condemning ourselves, or covering up the sin, or struggling with it to fix it, but just patiently waiting on God for help. When we do that, we are, in that very moment, being transformed, redeemed, graced to "share together a common life" with God.

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David Kupelian is a veteran journalist, vice president and managing editor of online news giant WND, and the bestselling author of several influential books, including "The Marketing of Evil," "How Evil Works," and - just released - "The Snapping of the American Mind: Healing a Nation Broken by a Lawless Government and Godless Culture."

A life-giving connection in life's wilderness



By Andi Brindley

Circumstances will change prayer from a duty to a life-giving connection to God's Spirit. During a prolonged period of hardship in my life, a friend wise in the ways of prayer spoke words to me that changed my prayer life forever.

"Andi," she said, "you need to force-feed yourself the Scriptures, even if it's only a verse a day. You need the Holy Spirit to minister to you in a way no person can right now, and he will use the Word to do that." I knew she was right, but I needed more than human help.

The next day I opened my Bible

Force-feeding would be an apt description. My eyes fell on this verse in Psalm 62, "One thing God has spoken, two things have I heard: That you, O God are strong, and that you, O Lord, are loving."

I closed my Bible. That was all I could take in... God is strong and God is loving.

The Holy Spirit took these words and began to reawaken something inside and I prayed for the first time in a while: "God, I cannot square this with what I see happening in my life, but I will put that aside

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Ask God, as Moses did, “Teach me your ways so I may know you.”



By Sharon Tanaka

I have been a Christian for many years. Looking back to those years, I now realize that, although I prayed, it was mainly when I needed something, or when something important to me was in doubt or danger. But that began to change when God started to show me through changing circumstances within my wonderful family, that my heart's hope was not set on Him, but on the ones I loved most in this world. Through unsettling changes in our family, God compelled me to pray, and through prayer, began to show me what my heart was really set upon. When I started to pray in earnest for my

family members, I realized I did not know what I needed to pray for. I was desperate to know what was lacking in my prayers, and what God desired for me to understand. I now see in hindsight, that God placed me in different surroundings, moved me out of my comfortable Christian world of many years, and put me in a new place – a different country and language, a new city, a new church family.

At the time it was disorienting and I lacked the support of familiar community. I had no choice but to listen to Him – through His Word, and through new friends and teachers – and as I listened, He faithfully, lovingly taught me.

He taught me the gospel. I thought I knew all about that. But as I listened to Him, and began to pray to understand that gospel more deeply, my prayers started to change – because I began to realize the reason I didn't know how to pray was because I didn't know my Heavenly Father intimately, experientially in relationship. I only knew Him in a rational, doctrinal way.

God wants me to make Him my hope. My own heart's desires – no matter how good – can all too easily become my hope, instead of God's. So the more He compels me to pray, the more my heart is pulled toward Him. If I pray out of my emotions of the moment, I am confident and at peace one day, then filled with anxiety and fears the next, depending on what the

circumstances of my loved ones are. But if I root my prayers in God's word to me, I can know I am praying his heart's desires, by responding to what He has first told me.

I started asking God to show me in His Word: what He wanted me to know about Himself, what He wanted me to see about my own heart, and what I should ask Him for myself and my family members. What is His heart's desire for them, rather than mine?

And He began to show me. I started writing down things that I felt the Holy Spirit was pressing on me to pray. Every day as I meditated on His Word, something new went into my notebook. So I prayed. Then I heard a teacher who taught about prayer from the encounter Moses had with God after the people had worshiped the golden calf. God was angry with the Israelites' unfaithfulness, and He told Moses that He would no longer go with the people. Moses began to plead with God: “Teach me your ways so I may know you.”

And then Moses interceded for the people, praying, “If your Presence does not go with us, do not send us from here... What else will distinguish me and your people from all the other people on the face of the earth?” God answered him, “I will do the very thing you have asked, because I am pleased with you and I know you by name.”

When Moses next pressed upon God, “show me your glory,” God answered, “I

will cause all my goodness to pass in front of you, and I will proclaim my name, the Lord, in your presence.”

It was the presence of God that we needed more than anything else. And I heard for the first time that the purpose of prayer is to open our hearts to God and experience His presence through His Word. My own heart needed to be ready to pray by seeing in the gospel the beauty of who Christ is and what He has done for us – and that's what my family needs most too – and then we will be ready to receive the many good things God desires for us.

I'm so very thankful for how God has faithfully and patiently led me to this point. I also have come to realize that if He cares about my relationship with Him this much, then He will take the time needed to bring my loved ones into that same relationship in the way He knows is best for each one. He continues to awe me again and again by showing me new things He desires in His goodness to give – the best of all being, knowing Him and His presence.

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Sharon Tanaka is a wife and mother of four. She and her husband have raised their children overseas as well as in the U.S. Sharon co-leads the prayer ministry at Redeemer Presbyterian Church in New York City.

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for the moment. I will count on your strength and your love.” I was immediately steadied.

About 20 years later my marriage ended. I felt as if I had landed in a vast wilderness, shaken, frightened and disoriented. I prayed, “Lord, I need to know you are here. Please open my eyes to see the ways you will be guiding me in the countless decisions that are facing me.”

I read about God instructing the Israelites to keep a place of worship central at every point of their wilderness journey. I would pray, “Lord, please keep the truth about who you are centered in my life.” Whenever I prayed, I intentionally began with worship rather than diving into what I wanted God to do about my problems.

I read about God supernaturally sustaining the Israelites as they went out of their tents every morning to find

fresh manna waiting for them. I would pray, “Lord, meet me when I come to your Word and feed me so that I can be sustained for the day ahead.” I began to come to the Word with the same expectancy that the Israelites must have felt when they opened their tent doors every morning. Like them, I was never disappointed.

With our eventual divorce came a string of losses.

One night, the crush of it all became unbearable. I dropped to my knees by the side of my bed. My praying was more like wailing. When I could find words, I said, “You promise you will not give me more than I can handle, but I think you just did. I will believe you are strong and loving because you say you are and I know you won't lie. But this feels mean. I have to know you really are who you say you are, or I can't go on.”

I engaged in a wrestling with God that I would have thought to be irreverent or improper. But really, it was a desperate cry for him to come close and

show me that He was real.

The next day I had to practice “force feeding” once again and through the Word God began to answer that desperate cry. I read in Psalm 73, “When my heart was grieved and my spirit embittered, I was senseless and ignorant; I was a brute beast before you. Yet I am always with you.”

Even when I was thrashing around, unable to put words together, feeling alone and abandoned by God, I was always with Him. The Spirit took these words and forged His way through the fear and anguish that had engulfed me. My heart was immediately lifted as this assurance took hold.

The following Sunday, Timothy Keller preached on Jacob wrestling with God. I will never forget these words. “Sometimes it feels like God is trying to kill you, but He's really after a transformed life.”

Here in the Word was a completely new way to interpret my life. I hadn't asked for that, but it was what I needed

to move forward.

I am a feeble pray-er who has come to treasure the Scriptures. For in them, God, by His Holy Spirit, enables me to pray when my heart is cold and dull. He directs my prayers when I am floundering, and answers my prayers in ways far richer than mere problem-solving.

I have seen it again and again. Through the Scriptures, the Holy Spirit brings us in touch with the very heart of God, full of love, committed to our good in every circumstance, and always eager for us to come to Him.

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Andi Brindley is on staff at Redeemer Presbyterian Church in New York City and lives by the ocean on the Jersey Shore where she finds great joy in ministry she is able to do in her home. Being part of a small group of intercessors for over 20 years has been formative in her understanding and experience of prayer.

Increasingly, science is making the case for prayer

The case for faith

Prayer and spirituality in mental health care

By Eric Scalise
and Tim Clinton

Prayer and spirituality can be mysterious, but they are real, and have offered countless millions a place of refuge, solace, comfort, hope and a deeper sense of purpose – especially in times of tragedy or crisis, where grief and despair crouch at the doorstep of the soul, seeking to rob a person of vitality and life. One might say prayer is an inherent aspect of human nature and incorporates concepts such as wholeness, restoration, comfort, joy, guidance, and hope in the hereafter. The discipline of prayer is often viewed as a way to help explore one's ongoing search for meaning and creates an appreciation for deeper things.

Some argue the wounds of the soul are among the most difficult to detect and quantify. For those who believe in God, it begs the question: Does faith really matter when it comes to treating and resolving complex psychological problems? Although the role of prayer and spirituality continue to be evolving constructs among the social sciences, thus far, the research literature generally affirms their profound and dynamic impact on mental health and wellbeing.

This includes ongoing systemic studies by credible entities such as the National Institutes of Health (NIH), most of which show consistent and measureable benefits associated with prayer and other spiritual interventions.

A person's religious beliefs and practice often serve as a positive source of interpersonal strength. According to researchers, a vibrant personal faith encounter, especially through prayer and quiet meditation, has proven to increase resilience and successful treatment for a variety of conditions including chronic pain, alcoholism, poly-substance abuse, depression, and comorbidity among trauma survivors.

Several researchers looking at depression examined more than 80 studies conducted over the past 100 years and found that spiritual/religious factors among individuals who placed high a value on their faith and



engaged in prayer and other religious activities, generally accounted for lower rates of depression and reduced symptomology

Another study of over 400 chronic patients confirmed the causal relationship between the participant's faith orientation and his or her symptomology. A significant majority (80%) utilized some form of religious belief or activity such as prayer, to cope with their symptoms on a daily basis, with 65% reporting their religious practice moderated symptom severity.

While patients facing coronary artery bypass surgery did not show tangible physiological benefits, Benson's broader research has shown the brain's limbic system activates during prayer and helps bring balance and stability to the automatic nervous system, heart rate, blood pressure, and metabolism.

Nearly half (48%) indicated their faith became even more relevant whenever symptoms worsened, while 30% stated this was the most important thing that kept them motivated in treatment. The longer patients integrated spiritual coping mechanisms, the lower their symptom levels were in six different categories (obsessive-compulsiveness, interpersonal sensitivity, phobic anxiety, paranoid ideation, psychosis, and total symptomology).

The most prevalent coping strategies were prayer (59%), followed by attending religious services (35%), worshipping God (35%), meditation



(33%), reading Scriptures (30%), and meeting with a spiritual leader (15%).

Cardiologist and Harvard Medical School researcher, Dr. Herbert Benson, has been studying the impact of prayer for the past 30 years. He founded the Mind/Body Medical Institute in Boston and led the Study of the Therapeutic Effects of Intercessory Prayer (STEP). While patients facing coronary artery bypass surgery did not show tangible physiological benefits, Benson's broader research has shown the brain's limbic system activates during prayer and

Given these kind of documented results, there appears to be tangible value for developing a more comprehensive mental health model that integrates the disciplines of psychology and theology. The implication is that treatment providers need to think and practice in terms of a bio-psycho-social-spiritual orientation.

Appropriate referrals to chaplains, other clergy members, and faith-based mental health clinicians who are equipped to engage clients within their cultural framework is a valid consideration for expanded and collaborative care.

Yes spirituality is mysterious and yes, it is real. Faith and faith-based treatment protocols continue to show promise in the literature and researchers should be encouraged to pursue the ongoing exploration of this emerging construct.

Spirituality, while intensely personal, offers "believers" an anchor for the soul. It has a hopeful effect that can motivate a client and enhance the change process in ways that are transformational because it incorporates the whole person. Do prayer and faith make a difference? They can.

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Dr. Tim Clinton, Ed.D., LPC, LMFT, is president of the nearly 50,000-member American Association of Christian Counselors (www.aacc.net), the largest and most diverse Christian counseling association in the world. He is a professor of Counseling and Pastoral Care, and executive director of the Center for Counseling and Family Studies at Liberty University in Lynchburg, VA, and a Licensed Professional Counselor and Licensed Marriage & Family Therapist.



By Curt Thompson

Over the past 15 years, there has been a major change in the role played by neuroscience and its associated disciplines, especially as applied to mental health issues. With the publication of *The Developing Mind* in 1999, physician Daniel Siegel ushered in the new field of interpersonal neurobiology.

Clinicians worldwide have come to see the value of linking abstract, theoretical notions of human change to embodied transitions manifested, for example, in the concepts of neuroplasticity (the brain's ability to change and grow) and epigenetics (the study of genes).

Interpersonal neurobiology has shown us that positive neuroplastic changes during meditative prayer and securely attached relationships lead to greater integration of the prefrontal cortex (i.e., healthier relationships lead to healthier brains and vice versa).

In my book, *Anatomy of the Soul*,

one of my goals was to draw people's attention to the deep connection between Christian spiritual formation and its practices (prayer, fasting, sharing the Eucharist, worship, confession, etc.), attachment research, psychotherapy and real somatic changes that take place in the brain/body matrix.

Educating patients and assisting them to experientially explore the brain's functions and its connection — not only to therapeutic interventions but also spiritual growth — provides tangible, helpful tools by which their relationship with God matures along with their general psychological health.

The explosive growth in awareness of these interlocking domains of the mind's activity is something for which to be grateful. Essentially we are discovering more of God's good creation, how it works and, as St. Paul articulates in Romans 1:20, how becoming familiar with it points us to God's nature and power.

This information is also changing the landscape of what constitutes fundamental expectations for professional training requirements. It is not too much to imagine that within the next two decades, many professional disciplines related to mental health will require basic proficiency in the neurobiological correlates of human behavioral change.

Science, and its unspoken way of understanding what is authoritative in the universe, has become the dominant

lens through which we reflect upon the world. Of all the disciplines, neuroscience currently reigns as queen. Appealing to the authority of neuroscience has become fashionable in just about every realm of culture. It is the authority to which we turn in law, business and education.

Many times the mere inclusion of an image of the brain in the presentation of data grants the data greater credibility. Somehow, if we can connect behavioral events to activity in the brain, we believe that explains it. This tendency pays homage to a reductionist view of the universe, which appeals to our desire for certainty in a world that, according to the biblical narrative, is less one of certainty, as we humans long for, but rather one of trust — not in abstract data, but in relationships. And relationships are never as certain as we would like.

We must be wise in our awareness of the beauty and the limitations of brain studies, which, like any science, can tell us the "how," but not necessarily the "why" or "for what purpose" of behavior. The moment we turn to the latest neuroimaging scan as the authority to "prove" our lives are changing because of prayer, we have subjected the authority of Jesus to the authority of the prevailing plausibility structure.

It is for this reason, ironically, that it is so important we as clinicians are well informed about the amazing connections

between neurobiology, relationships and our lives in the body of Christ. If the world increasingly turns to neuroscience as the final judge of human behavior, we will be those to whom the world also turns as interpreters of this information — and we must be prepared to articulate its possibilities and limits. For every part of creation can only serve its creator well when it does so within the bounds for which it was intended to operate.

A question that needs to be asked is, "Where do we go to understand who we are becoming?" Yet we must always bear in mind the God who created the brain is personally in the middle of our pain and suffering, bringing healing in the form of a relationship and changing us along the way. We can afford to be no less mindful that God is in charge of neuroscience, and not the other way around.

Dr. Curt Thompson, M.D., is a psychiatrist in private practice in Falls Church, Virginia. Dr. Thompson is board-certified by the American Board of Psychiatry and Neurology. Throughout his career the main focus of clinical and research interest has been the integration of psychiatry, its associated disciplines and Christian spirituality. This excerpt was used with permission by the author and Christian Counseling Today, a publication of the American Association of Christian Counselors (aacc.net).

Transitioning to our eternal life, God's blessing of peace is powerful



By Norma Christie

"Yea though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for Thou art with me!"

In one moment our whole world changed! The results from a "routine

base-line" CAT scan found my husband, Dave, and me crying tears, hugging one another and crying out to God as we embraced, not knowing what the future held. The CAT scan showed a spot on one lung. After a bronchoscopy and lung biopsy, our worst fears were confirmed. The diagnosis was Stage 4 lung cancer.

Further testing showed the lung cancer to be inoperable. We prayed God's promises as He gave us His peace — every step of that precious time — twelve months that Dave was given to live out his days here.

The months that followed were filled with visits to the oncologist,

family physician, dentist, radiologist and other medical specialists. Dave was on oxygen 24/7. We had hope for God's miracle of healing in his body. Our pastor and elders from church visited and shared Scripture and prayed with Dave and served Communion.

Pastor Kevin anointed Dave with oil, according to Scripture, and we believed that God had power to heal him and drive out the cancer. We also knew that God is sovereign and holds the power of life and death.

As we walked in God's Word, we found His promises to be true!

"Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice! Let your

gentleness be evident to all. The Lord is near. Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus." Philippians 4:4-7

The peace of Jesus that surpasses all understanding was God's special gift to us as we walked through that dark valley of cancer. In one of Pastor Kevin's visits, near the end of Dave's life here on earth, Kevin told Dave that he had

Psychology meets theology and spirituality



By Mark McMinn

The simple categories of modernity – categories such as Christian counselor and secular psychologist – have become murky in the swirling winds of postmodernism. Perhaps it is best to open ourselves to the opportunities for authentic dialog with folks in various professional communities.

What are the new horizons for those interested in psychology, theology, and spirituality in Christian counseling? I suggest three in this brief article, though many more could be mentioned.

New Horizon 1: complexity of spiritual interventions

If the world of counseling could be neatly bifurcated into the psychological and the spiritual, then the sorts of interventions we offer would be a fairly simple matter. Psychologists would use secular psychotherapy methods, and spiritual directors, clergy, and pastoral counselors would use spiritual methods.

However, it is not so simple. Christian leaders are often trained in psychological methods and, increasingly, mental health providers are being trained in spiritual interventions.

In today's counseling, we must consider the spiritual implications of psychological methods and the psychological implications of spiritual methods. The question is not so much whether to pray with a client, or whether using Scripture is fitting, but when and how to pray or use Scripture with a client.

These are nuanced matters that call for psychological understanding, spiritual awareness, and godly wisdom. Consider the following examples – one positive, and one not so positive.

I worked with a client named Celeste (name changed for confidentiality). Among Celeste's various strengths was her capacity to stand strong under enormous amounts of stress. At one point in the interview, she referred to herself as a pillar – an apt metaphor for the way she lives.

Near the end of the session, I guided Celeste through a prayer-based relaxation exercise based on the ancient Eastern Orthodox prayer known as the "Jesus prayer" ("Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me, a sinner"). This spiritual intervention was deeply moving to her as she sensed the peace of releasing her burdens into God's care. It had positive psychological effects and, at the same time, touched her spiritually.

New Horizon 2: challenge of dual accountability

More and more, Christian counselors are licensed by the states and provinces in which they practice. They are licensed as professional counselors,

marriage and family therapists, psychologists, clinical social workers, and so on. For the most part, I take this to be a positive trend, but it does raise a concern that our biblical counseling

Historically, those involved in spiritual formation and spiritual direction have been accountable to the Church. However, now that mental health professionals are interested in religious interventions and spiritual transformation, we face various ethical challenges that come with dual accountability.

colleagues have been noting for many years. Namely, if a Christian counselor is licensed by the state, to whom is the counselor accountable?

Historically, those involved in spiritual formation and spiritual direction have been accountable to the Church. However, now that mental health professionals are interested in religious interventions and spiritual transformation, we face various ethical challenges that come with dual accountability. If a licensed professional counselor provides spiritual direction for a counseling client, is the counselor accountable to a state licensing board, a church community, or both?

New Horizon 3: be open to cooperative dialogue

Speaking of active conversation, this

postmodern age ushers in all sorts of new possibilities for talking with one another. Secular mental health associations are suddenly open to talking about spirituality, and if Christians remain silent who will speak for us? Nevertheless, when we do speak, we must recognize that our seat at the table will last only as long as we mind our manners.

We can be open and clear about our faith commitments – and we should be – but we also need to recognize that others will not necessarily see things in the same way we do as Christians. This calls us to listen well and respect and love others regardless of our differences.

"Live wisely among those who are not believers, and make the most of every opportunity. Let your conversation be gracious and attractive so that you will have the right response for everyone." (Colossians 4:5-6).

These are days of incredible opportunity. May God grant each of us grace and truth as we seek to find a missional presence in our interactions with colleagues and clients.

Note: Excerpt used with permission by the author and Christian Counseling Today, a publication of the American Association of Christian Counselors (www.aacc.net).

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CHRISTIE

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many friends at Memorial Part Church who loved him and were praying for him. Dave answered, "God is answering their prayers. Otherwise, I couldn't have this much peace."

Each morning we prayed together. When Dave prayed he always thanked God for getting us safely through the night and for His faithfulness, for the peace He was giving us in the midst of the serious situation, and for all His blessings – especially our wonderful family. He prayed other words, but I

was always touched when he thanked God for His peace in the ordeal of cancer. Two and a half years since Dave went to be with his Lord Jesus Christ, I am still resting in that same wonderful peace of the Lord.

At a time of extreme need, God demonstrated His power in the ER. Because of severe pain in his chest, Dave was taken by ambulance to the hospital. I called our church to ask for prayers. Linda, our daughter, was with us. Dave was lying in the ER in excruciating pain, but nothing was being done for him. I called out, asking someone to please help him! Everyone left, apparently to find a doctor.

At that moment, Linda took one of

his hands and I held the other. Each of us laid our free hands on his head and we began to intercede in the Spirit. This was spontaneous – no words were spoken ahead of the prayer. As we prayed together in the Spirit, we sensed that Dave was being relieved of the pain. Even as Jesus had calmed the stormy sea in the Gospels, He had calmed that severe pain, miraculously.

A few minutes later the ER doctor came into the room and said that he had been told that he needed to come to prescribe meds for pain. He asked, "What happened?" Dave answered, "These ladies prayed for me." God had demonstrated His mighty power to heal. We also knew the sovereignty and

love of God.

God is faithful and powerful and loving toward all his children.

In so many ways, our loving God made his wonderful presence known to us as we walked through that dark valley. "The Lord is faithful to all his promises and loving toward all he has made." Psalm 145:13

.....
Norma Christie grew up in a small mining camp in Tennessee for her first twelve years and then moved to Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania where she met her husband of 54 years.

Where faith meets mental health and happiness



By Harold G. Koenig

Do actively practicing Christians experience a fuller, more abundant life compared to everyone else? Many wonder about this, especially those who are called to counsel Christians who often appear to be suffering terribly from depression, anxiety, or other forms of emotional distress. Scientific research has the ability to shed light on such questions from an objective standpoint, one that is not influenced by theological opinion, bias or hearsay.

The research indicates those who are more actively involved in a Christian life do experience greater life satisfaction, more happiness, and greater well-being than those who are less actively involved.

This is also true for other constructs such as optimism, hope, meaning and purpose, gratefulness, and numerous positive emotions and virtuous traits. That fullness of life also goes beyond mental health to include relational health, and possibly even physical health.

Emotional Well-being

We found that committed religious belief and devout practice (such as prayer) are related to higher levels of emotional well-being, happiness, and life satisfaction. Three hundred and twenty-six separate studies had examined these relationships, and the overwhelming majority (79%) reported statistically significant positive relationships. The same is true for research examining optimism (83%), hope (73%), and having a sense of meaning and purpose (93%).

Relational Well-being

Those who are more engaged in their faith tradition also have more support from friends and better marriages. Eighty-two of 104 studies (79%) find that those who are more religious report significantly greater social support than those who are less religious. Of the 79 quantitative studies measuring religiosity and marital satisfaction and stability, 68 (86%) reported better marriages and significant positive connections. Nearly nine out of 10 objective quantitative studies by health researchers published in peer-reviewed science journals find that religious devotion is associated with

more stable, more satisfying marriages and lower divorce rates.

Physical Well-being

Enhanced emotional and relational well-being also translates into better physical health. In the past 20 years, more and more research has shown that the mind and emotions are intimately connected with the body, and are directly linked with the basic physiological functions responsible for health and healing (immune, endocrine, and cardiovascular systems).

When we experience stress and negative emotions, those systems become compromised and altered, increasing vulnerability to illness. The opposite occurs with the experience of positive emotions such as joy, peace, hope, meaning and purpose. Religious people who have more positive and fewer negative emotions, have more social support, and live healthier lives (less smoking, drinking, drug use, etc.), are physically healthier.

Summary

Yes, everything else being equal, religious people do have better emotional, relational, and physical health (and most of that research has been done with people of the Christian faith). This does not mean those who become mentally or physically ill are less religious, do not pray enough, or do not have strong enough faith.

The relationship between religion and

health is a complex one that is affected by many factors, including genetic influences, environmental dynamics, age and gender, and other variables in which the individual has little or no control. Sometimes, it is not until a person becomes sick and/or experiences tremendous suffering that he or she develops a deeper spiritual life.

Given that a person's engagement in spiritual practices (e.g., prayer, meditation, worship, etc.) and a church community appears to promote social and emotional well-being, and even serves as a buffer against disease and illness, the Church may need to play a greater role in the future of healthcare in America.

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By Keith Cooperrider

When we were very young, we were enchanted by magical powers, by superheroes, wizards and fairies. We cheered as goodness waged war against evil and sometimes imagined ourselves on the front lines with the good guys. As we grew older, we saw

our world differently, and the magic and wonder of our youth gave way to the reality of a far less than wonderful world.

But each of us is still connected to that magic. Prayer is that magical power that connects us to the source of energy and love in our world. Just as we receive love from that energy, we can receive guidance from that energy, too.

How is it possible that our silent prayers can affect what happens? How can our invisible thoughts cause actions in the visible world? It happens all the time: Many people start each day with a plan, what they need to do and how they need to do it. Our thoughts are carried out by our bodies each day. In a similar way, our thoughts can affect what happens on a larger scale as well. Our positive

The magic of prayer

God is the source of positive energy in the universe, the origin of love and all things hopeful and positive. It is God's loving energy that inspires us to return that love and live for the sake of others.

thoughts of confidence, love and hope can negate thoughts of worry, hate and fear and can affect the outcome of whatever we are thinking about.

Prayer is a way to put out positive energy with hopeful, healing, loving thoughts. God is the source of positive energy in the universe, the origin of love and all things hopeful and

positive. It is God's loving energy that inspires us to return that love and live for the sake of others. Selfish thinking is the source of fear, hate and all things negative. Prayer is our way to connect to God's positive energy and to feel part of something much bigger than just ourselves.

I recently faced a medical crisis, and at first, it was very difficult to understand how such a thing could happen to me. Some people in that situation might be angry with God and wonder why they were dealt such a bad hand. But this was not a time for negative thinking and negative energy. Only positive energy could save me. I have had an "ideal" life, which means that whatever comes my way I have confidence that I can "deal" with it with

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Healing and therapeutic prayer in counseling



By Ian Jones

Gary (name changed for confidentiality) had been victimized and beaten repeatedly by his father. He was in counseling, in part, to renew contact with his dad and communicate the Christian love he had discovered in Christ. However, Gary used his words poorly and to inflict guilt and shame on his father. The counselor, understanding the dynamic, added an assignment: “When you are about to call your father on the phone, I want you to pray for him, and then, when you have finished talking with him and hang up, I want you to pray for him again.”

The purpose of prayer

Prayer comes from a Latin Word that means to obtain by entreaty or petition; an earnest request to God. Prayer is the conversation of the soul with God, not a monologue, but a two-way street that requires listening. It can be spoken, contemplative, formal, informal, impromptu, planned, secret, social, private, public,

intermittent, or continuous. Inner healing and therapeutic prayer are used in counseling to invite God’s healing presence to come and restore, forgive, erase, transform, and set free the inner life of the client in order to allow him or her to detach from sinful choices and painful trauma, and grow in all that Christ would have.

Prayer as an expectation and command

Is there any subject that is off-limits for your prayers? Of course not. Then your counseling should be a significant part of your prayer life. Spiritual interventions, such as prayer, should be essential components of the Christian counselor’s practice. However, all spiritual applications should include and follow a policy of informed consent.

Research shows that prayer is often utilized as a counseling intervention and that it is considered particularly relevant to counseling ministry by many prominent practitioners. Faith-based counselors can always bathe their session preparation and post-session assessment in prayer, as well as engage in continuous silent prayer for guidance and direction from God while in session.

Prayer in counseling

Various types of prayer are found in Scripture, and some are germane particularly to a counseling context. While we are not always able to vocalize to God our prayers every hour of the day, our hearts must be constantly in full presence, awareness and communion with God.

Brother Lawrence, the 17th century Carmelite lay brother, suffered from depression for ten years before finding peace through practicing the presence of God. Prayers of thanksgiving for the

work of God can also be offered in counseling (Psalm 50:23). Through prayer, we can confess our sins, which often lie at the root of failings and crises (Luke 18:13).

Prayers of blessing (numbers 6:22-27), of petition, intercession and supplication (1 Samuel, 1:17, Matthew 6: 11-13, 2 Corin-

Research shows that prayer is often utilized as a counseling intervention and that it is considered particularly relevant to counseling ministry by many prominent practitioners. Faith-based counselors can always bathe their session preparation and post-session assessment in prayer, as well as engage in continuous silent prayer for guidance and direction from God while in session.

thians 9:14), for the sick (James 5:14-16), as an entreaty for an urgent need (1 Timothy 5:5), and for protection (Mark 14:38), can all be helpful when working with clients.

The Apostle Paul asked for prayer on his behalf for the right words (Ephesians 6:19), something so essential and common when working with others.

The power of prayer

Counseling without prayer is like running without oxygen. Through prayer, God communicates to us, hope

and confidence, guidance and assurance, love and presence. Prayer is for protection and offense; defending against the attacks from the enemy of our souls and attacking evil. We can pray for wisdom, knowledge, insight, discernment, forgiveness, power, deliverance, blessing, protection, justice, assistance, victory over sin and oppression, peace restoration, people in need, and opportunities to minister.

We can pray for everything: “Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your request be made known to God” (Philippians 4:6).

Gary started to pray for his father and within a few weeks, God began healing his life. His attempts to inflict pain on his father no longer brought him pleasure. Gary discovered, “You cannot hate someone you are praying for.” He began to forgive his father for all the pain and abuse he had suffered, and in the process of prayer and communion in the will of God, it brought him a new freedom, as love replaced his anger and hatred.

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COOPERRIDER

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God’s help. So I determined to deal with this hand in a positive way.

I found out very soon that there were many people praying for me all over the world. I could feel that positive energy and support, which gave me strength and courage. Instead of fearing the future, I was inspired instead by the positive energy coming from the prayers of others. I felt love instead of fear. And with the energy from this love, I gained the courage I needed.

Buoyed by my own positive attitude, my medical progress exceeded my doctors’ expectations and helped me take the next step toward healing. My battle is just beginning, but I believe that God is with me, because I feel the prayers of so many who love me.

My mother-in-law, who we call Nana, has a wonderful relationship of prayer with God. She prays with confidence that God will listen and that God will act. Naturally, we all think we know what is best for us and we pray for that result. But Nana knows that God works differently. When asked about getting answers to our prayers, she tells us to expect answers but not always in the way we imagine or hope

for. She says that God may not exactly give us what we want, but we can trust that He will give us what we need.

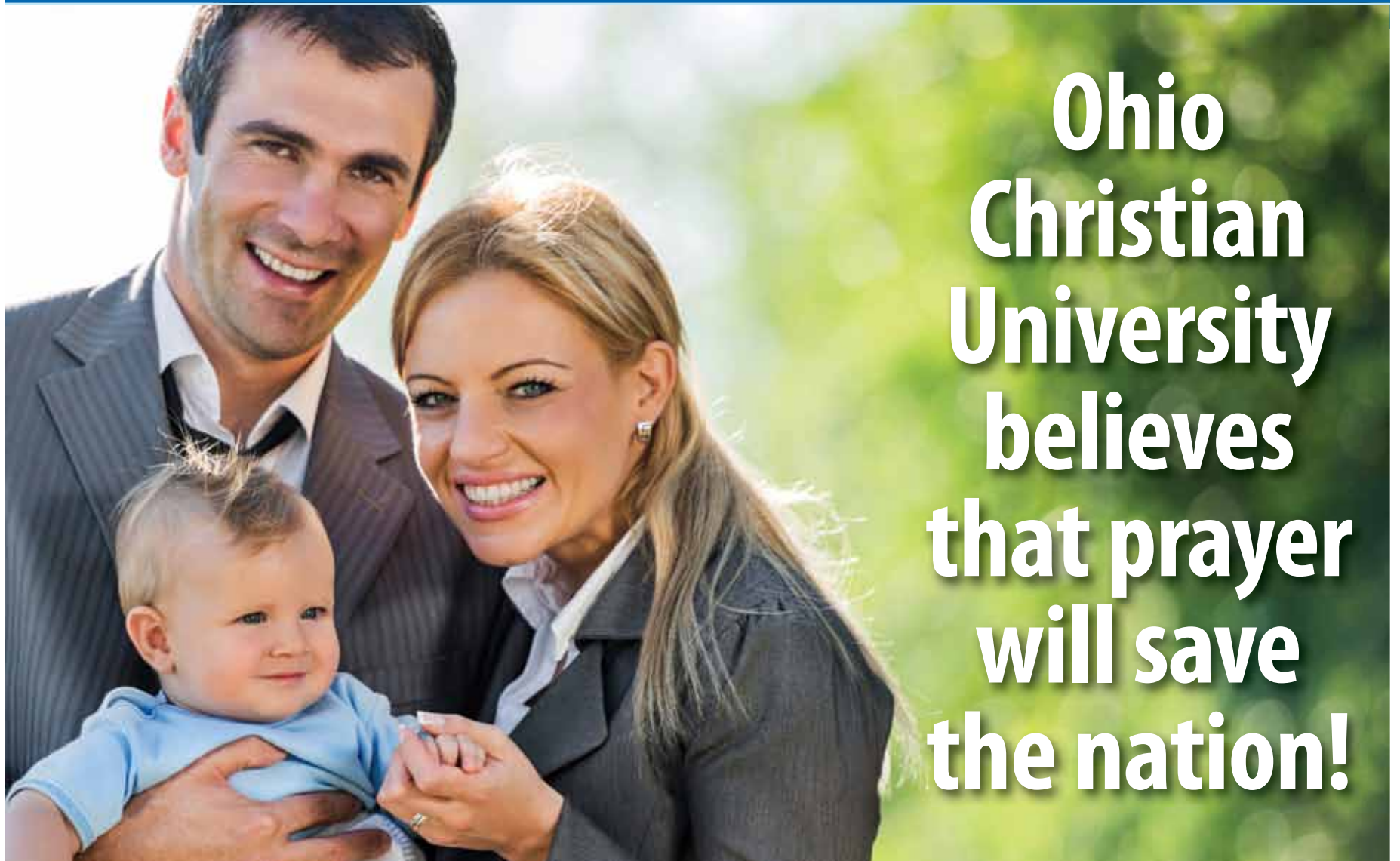
Sometimes I pray for something that is too big – like the outcome of an election or the end to a conflict. I wonder if my small prayer could make a difference. Would the outcome be just what I as one person hoped for, even though millions of others are also affecting the energy? Perhaps my prayer is just one “vote” out of millions. There is great power in the prayers of many.

Group prayer brings people together and multiplies the effect of each prayer. We realize the common bond that we all share – that we are all children of God’s love and that we

all want the same thing—a return to love and peace. After a deep prayer with someone, how can we hate them? Muslims, Christians, Jews all pray to the same God. Yet our distrust and fear of one another tears us apart as we seek a world on our own terms. What if we could pray together for peace, not on our terms but on God’s terms and as Nana says, God will give us what we need.

Mr. Keith Cooperrider recently retired after more than 30 years as the chief financial officer of The Washington Times.

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