

## SPIRITUAL PRACTICES FOR LIFE PRAYER

Prayer catapults us onto the frontier of the spiritual life. Of all the Spiritual Disciplines prayer is the most central because it ushers us into perpetual communion with the Father. Meditation introduces us to the inner life, fasting is an accompanying means, study transforms our minds, but it is the Discipline of prayer that brings us into the deepest and highest work of the human spirit. Real prayer is life creating and life changing. “Prayer—secret, fervent, believing prayer—lies at the root of all personal godliness,”<sup>1</sup> writes William Carey

### A. Misconceptions that Defeat the Work of Prayer

#### 1. Prayer Mainly Involves Asking Things from God

Mark 1:35

Very early in the morning, while it was still dark, Jesus got up, left the house and went off to a solitary place, where he prayed.

Isaiah 29:13

The Lord says:

“These people come near to me with their mouth  
and honor me with their lips,  
but their hearts are far from me.

Their worship of me

is based on merely human rules they have been taught.

Answers to prayer are wonderful, but they are secondary to the main function of prayer, which is a growing, perpetual communion. To sink down into the light of Christ and become comfortable in that posture, to sing, “He walks with me and He talks with me” and know it as a radiant reality, to discover God in all of the moments of our days, and to be pleased rather than perturbed at the discovery—this is the stuff of prayer. It is out of this refreshing life of communion that answered prayer comes as a happy byproduct.

#### 2. Prayer Must Always be a Struggle

Psalms 119:35

Direct me in the path of your commands, for there I find **delight**.

### 3. Everything is Already Fixed

James 5:18

The prayer of a righteous person is powerful and effective.

1 Corinthians 3:9 (CSB)

<sup>9</sup> For we are God's coworkers.

### 4. Praying More than Once for the Same Thing Shows Lack of Faith

Luke 18:1-4

Then Jesus told his disciples a parable to show them that they should always pray and not give up. <sup>2</sup> He said: "In a certain town there was a judge who neither feared God nor cared what people thought. <sup>3</sup> And there was a widow in that town who kept coming to him with the plea, 'Grant me justice against my adversary.'

<sup>4</sup> "For some time he refused. But finally he said to himself, 'Even though I don't fear God or care what people think, <sup>5</sup> yet because this widow keeps bothering me, I will see that she gets justice, so that she won't eventually come and attack me!'"

## B. Realizations that Help us Cultivate an Effective Prayer Life

To pray is to change.

Prayer is the central avenue God uses to transform us.

"You ask and do not receive, because you ask wrongly, to spend it on your passions" (James 4:3).

To ask "rightly" involves transformed passions. In prayer, real prayer, we begin to think God's thoughts after him: to desire the things he desires, to love the things he loves, to will the things he wills.

### 1. Real Prayer is Something We Learn.

The disciples asked Jesus, "Lord, teach us to pray" (Luke 11:1).

Luke 11:2-4

He said to them, “When you pray, say:

“Father,  
hallowed be your name,  
your kingdom come.<sup>[b]</sup>  
<sup>3</sup> Give us each day our daily bread.  
<sup>4</sup> Forgive us our sins,  
for we also forgive everyone who sins against us.<sup>[c]</sup>  
And lead us not into temptation.<sup>[d]</sup>”

## 2. Real Prayer Flows out of our Relationship with God.

“Prayer is the chief exercise of faith.”  
It is our response to the believing the gospel.

John 15:7

But if you remain in me and my words remain in you, you may ask for anything you want, and it will be granted!

Galatians 4:6

And because we<sup>[a]</sup> are his children, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, prompting us to call out, “Abba, Father.”

Romans 8:15

So you have not received a spirit that makes you fearful slaves. Instead, you received God’s Spirit when he adopted you as his own children.<sup>[a]</sup> Now we call him, “Abba, Father.

## 3. Real Prayer is Exercising our Faith in and Expressing our Dependence on God

### 1. The Prayer of Worship

Psalm 103:1-6

Praise the Lord, my soul;  
all my inmost being, praise his holy name.  
<sup>2</sup> Praise the Lord, my soul,  
and forget not all his benefits—  
<sup>3</sup> who forgives all your sins  
and heals all your diseases,  
<sup>4</sup> who redeems your life from the pit  
and crowns you with love and compassion,  
<sup>5</sup> who satisfies your desires with good things  
so that your youth is renewed like the eagle’s.

<sup>6</sup> The Lord works righteousness  
and justice for all the oppressed.

## 2. The Prayer of Repentance

### Psalm 51

Have mercy on me, O God,  
because of your unfailing love.  
Because of your great compassion,  
blot out the stain of my sins.  
<sup>2</sup> Wash me clean from my guilt.  
Purify me from my sin.  
<sup>3</sup> For I recognize my rebellion;  
it haunts me day and night.  
<sup>4</sup> Against you, and you alone, have I sinned;  
I have done what is evil in your sight.  
You will be proved right in what you say,  
and your judgment against me is just.<sup>[a]</sup>  
<sup>5</sup> For I was born a sinner—  
yes, from the moment my mother conceived me.  
<sup>6</sup> But you desire honesty from the womb,<sup>[b]</sup>  
teaching me wisdom even there.  
<sup>7</sup> Purify me from my sins,<sup>[c]</sup> and I will be clean;  
wash me, and I will be whiter than snow.  
<sup>8</sup> Oh, give me back my joy again;  
you have broken me—  
now let me rejoice.  
<sup>9</sup> Don't keep looking at my sins.  
Remove the stain of my guilt.  
<sup>10</sup> Create in me a clean heart, O God.  
Renew a loyal spirit within me.  
<sup>11</sup> Do not banish me from your presence,  
and don't take your Holy Spirit<sup>[d]</sup> from me.  
<sup>12</sup> Restore to me the joy of your salvation,  
and make me willing to obey you.  
<sup>13</sup> Then I will teach your ways to rebels,  
and they will return to you.  
<sup>14</sup> Forgive me for shedding blood, O God who saves;  
then I will joyfully sing of your forgiveness.  
<sup>15</sup> Unseal my lips, O Lord,  
that my mouth may praise you.  
<sup>16</sup> You do not desire a sacrifice, or I would offer one.  
You do not want a burnt offering.

<sup>17</sup> The sacrifice you desire is a broken spirit.  
You will not reject a broken and repentant heart, O God.

### 3. The Prayer of Thanksgiving

#### 1 Thessalonians 5:16-18

Rejoice always, pray continually, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus.

#### 1 Chronicles 16:34

Give thanks to the Lord, for he is good; his love endures forever.

#### Hebrews 13:15

Through him then let us continually offer up a sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of lips that acknowledge his name.

#### 1 Chronicles 29:13

And now we thank you, Our God, and praise your glorious name.

### 4. The Prayer of Guidance

#### Matthew 26:39-44

He went on a little farther and bowed with his face to the ground, praying, "My Father! If it is possible, let this cup of suffering be taken away from me. Yet I want your will to be done, not mine."

<sup>40</sup> Then he returned to the disciples and found them asleep. He said to Peter, "Couldn't you watch with me even one hour? <sup>41</sup> Keep watch and pray, so that you will not give in to temptation. For the spirit is willing, but the body is weak!"

<sup>42</sup> Then Jesus left them a second time and prayed, "My Father! If this cup cannot be taken away<sup>[f]</sup> unless I drink it, your will be done." <sup>43</sup> When he returned to them again, he found them sleeping, for they couldn't keep their eyes open.

<sup>44</sup> So he went to pray a third time, saying the same things again.

### 5. The Prayer of Faith

#### James 5:13-18

<sup>13</sup> Is anyone among you in trouble? Let them pray. Is anyone happy? Let them sing songs of praise. <sup>14</sup> Is anyone among you sick? Let them call the elders of the church to pray over them and anoint them with

oil in the name of the Lord. <sup>15</sup> And the prayer offered in faith will make the sick person well; the Lord will raise them up. If they have sinned, they will be forgiven. <sup>16</sup> Therefore confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous person is powerful and effective.

## 6. The Prayer of Command

Mark 9:14–29

<sup>14</sup> When they came to the other disciples, they saw a large crowd around them and the teachers of the law arguing with them. <sup>15</sup> As soon as all the people saw Jesus, they were overwhelmed with wonder and ran to greet him.

<sup>16</sup> “What are you arguing with them about?” he asked.

<sup>17</sup> A man in the crowd answered, “Teacher, I brought you my son, who is possessed by a spirit that has robbed him of speech. <sup>18</sup> Whenever it seizes him, it throws him to the ground. He foams at the mouth, gnashes his teeth and becomes rigid. I asked your disciples to drive out the spirit, but they could not.”

<sup>19</sup> “You unbelieving generation,” Jesus replied, “how long shall I stay with you? How long shall I put up with you? Bring the boy to me.”

<sup>20</sup> So they brought him. When the spirit saw Jesus, it immediately threw the boy into a convulsion. He fell to the ground and rolled around, foaming at the mouth.

<sup>21</sup> Jesus asked the boy’s father, “How long has he been like this?” “From childhood,” he answered. <sup>22</sup> “It has often thrown him into fire or water to kill him. But if you can do anything, take pity on us and help us.”

<sup>23</sup> “‘If you can?’” said Jesus. “Everything is possible for one who believes.”

<sup>24</sup> Immediately the boy’s father exclaimed, “I do believe; help me overcome my unbelief!”

<sup>25</sup> When Jesus saw that a crowd was running to the scene, he rebuked the impure spirit. “You deaf and mute spirit,” he said, “I command you, come out of him and never enter him again.”

<sup>26</sup> The spirit shrieked, convulsed him violently and came out. The boy looked so much like a corpse that many said, “He’s dead.” <sup>27</sup> But Jesus took him by the hand and lifted him to his feet, and he stood up.

<sup>28</sup> After Jesus had gone indoors, his disciples asked him privately, “Why couldn’t we drive it out?”

<sup>29</sup> He replied, “This kind can come out only by prayer.”