

BIBLICAL PRAYER

By

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“Do not take rest and do not give Him rest ... ” (Is. 62:6–7)

Introduction

I. Four Fundamentals of Effective Prayer

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A. Six Prerequisite Parameters

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Introduction

Hopefully the following quotations will succeed in alerting God’s people to take the place and function of prayer with the utmost of seriousness, in prompting them to study its ins and outs with the greatest of care, and ultimately in galvanizing them into a prayer action with the profoundest of purpose and intensity:

“Prayer is the most unexplored area of the Christian Life.

Prayer is the most powerful weapon of the Christian life.

Prayer is the most hell-feared battle in the Christian life.

Prayer is the most secret device of the Christian life.

Prayer is the most underestimated power in the Christian life.

Prayer is the most untaught truth in the Christian life.

Prayer is the most demanding exercise in the Christian life.

Prayer is the most neglected responsibility in the Christian life.

Prayer is the most conquering outreach in the Christian life.

Prayer is the most opposed warfare in the Christian life.

Prayer is the most far-reaching ministry in the Christian life.

Prayer is birthed in time, but grasps eternity.

Prayer strengthens the weak and weakens the strong.

Prayer touches the power of the world to come.

Prayer avails because it prevails.”

(Leonard Ravenhill, *Revival God’s Way*, 87, 96)

If “Holy Scripture is Heaven Speaking through the Holy Spirit,

Scriptural Prayer is Heaven Received by the Holy Spirit”

(Adapted from Adolphe Monod, *Living in the Hope of Glory*

(Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2002), 154)

Bottom Line: A Life of Biblical Prayer is

(1) Rooted in an **Intolerable Burden** for the Cause of God to advance **Irresistibly**
(Dan. 9:3ff; Neh. 1:4ff)

(2) Fed by an **Indomitable Confidence** in the Promises of God to do so **Unequivocally**
(Dan. 9:16ff),

(3) Accompanied by an **Unconditional Surrender Unreservedly** to pay Any Price for this to occur (Neh. 2:1-6:15).

Now on to the two major sections of this **Topical Focus** that deal with the four fundamentals and the twelve requirements of effective Biblical Prayer. If the latter can be earmarked as a “Residence” (alluding to Mt. 21:13), a place where God’s people joyfully “reside,” are fully “at home,” and therefore habitually congregate, the four fundamentals are the indispensable “Pillars” of the “House of Prayer,” and the twelve requirements its “Living Stones” as the gladly embraced marks of the “Christian-in-Residence.”

I. Four Pillars of Effective Prayer

The four “pillars” or fundamentals or provide a taste of the broader biblical setting of prayer in which James has a pivotal niche. As has been argued, James opens the NT as the natural extension and capstone of the OT, and as the indicator, if not foundation of the direction of the rest of the NT.

1. The First Pillar

Biblical Prayer occurs both at the entrance (Gen. 32:26; Lk. 18:13; Acts 2:21) and in the fabric of the Kingdom (Gen. 18:23; Lk. 18:1; Acts 2:42). As J. C. Ryle states, humans can be saved, even if they have never read the Bible. The message of the Gospel can be transmitted to illiterates by preaching, etc. But no one will ever be saved apart from heartfelt prayer, which recognizes that the key to the jail of our sins is not in man’s own pocket, but in the hand of God as a matter of sovereign grace. This requires that man “puts in his application with God.” It, further, implies that in the final analysis, even if we must pray as we are taught to pray (Mt. 6:5-15), no one can properly pray as we ought to pray for the second time, or for the one-millionth time for that matter, unless one has truly prayed for the first time. In both instances, at the entrance (Acts 2:21) and in the fabric of the Kingdom (Lk. 18:1-8; Acts 2:42), one asks for mercy (Lk. 18:31; Heb. 4:16) in time of (ultimately desperate) need. This stands to reason, since mercy is always granted to folks who are going down the drain in “impossible” circumstances and situations. Both unbelievers as wretched sinners and believers as wretched saints qualify in that regard. Entrance in the Kingdom requires Christ’s triple cure of his heart in regeneration, his righteousness in justification and his holiness in sanctification. Since man does neither have a “good will” in the area of regeneration, nor “good works” in the area of justification, nor “good efforts” in the area of sanctification, he is stuck, in fact, “stuckier than stuck.” Therefore he pleads for mercy. However, the same applies to believers. The continuing threesome of daily repentance/faith, daily forgiveness, and daily obedience that correspond with, are an extension of, must match, and are an expected outflow from definitive regeneration (John 3:5), definitive justification (Rom. 5:1) and definitive sanctification (Heb. 10:10), are not in his power either! So they do and must continually ask for mercy as well.

Incidentally, the biblical emphasis upon prayer as the indispensable requirement to enter the Kingdom of God is seriously undermined by the near universal terminology of “accepting Jesus” as its relatively recent substitute. A. W. Tozer correctly bemoaned the fact that in this terminology, which is not found in Scripture, the Church opted for, if not sank to the lowest common denominator which both easily and frequently short-circuits (the recognition of the need for) repentance. After all, the issue is not, whether “I ‘accept’ Jesus,” but whether “God accepts me” (So also emphatically, David Platt, 27). In fact, I am unacceptable to God as “a triple hell-bound sinner,” with a rebellious heart, a guilty slate and an offensive life, whose only hope is found in the triple divine mercy in terms of Jesus’ heart in regeneration, Jesus’ righteousness in justification, and Jesus’ holiness in sanctification. Once this is recognized, the stage is set vividly to introduce the need for the sinner to repent (Acts 17:30) and *to call on the Lord for his triple mercy* (Rom. 10:13). In short, in the preaching of the Gospel God does not put in an application with man to accept Jesus, but breaks his pride by exposing the triple reason why man must put in his application with God, with the promise that everyone who calls on him will be made acceptable in Jesus (Eph. 1:8-9). James’ man-humbling and God-exalting teaching, both on prayer and all other matters in his Epistle, does not make sense, cannot be understood, and will not become a functional reality, unless this is recognized, embraced, experienced, and displayed.

In short, where the First Pillar is in place, a sense of utter dependence prevails in non-Christians and Christians alike. This is a sense that combines both a measure of “despair,” fueled by the human condition, and an indomitable “hope,” kindled by God’s goodness.

2. The Second Pillar

Biblical Prayer is before anything else *communion* with God (Lk. 6:12; John Calvin, *Institutes*, III, xx, 4, 5, and Albert C. Wieand, *The Gospel of Prayer* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1953), 58ff, with references to John 8:28-29; 17:3; 2 Cor. 13:14; 1 John 1:3b). One must enter into the throne room of God, close the door behind oneself, and long (Ps 42:1-2; 43:4; 63:1-2; 73:28) for *wholehearted*, that is, authentic, “heartfelt,” communion to occur. It is not just a matter of the mind, the will or the emotions. It is an “experiential reality” that cannot be conceptualized or taught. Neither can it be produced volitionally or whipped up emotionally. For lack of a better terminology, it must be “caught.” In fact, precisely because it is a matter of the heart, which is man’s “mission control center,” man’s most essential, if not “ultimate” reality, the “real I,” it transcends its three internal functions of thinking, willing, as well as feeling by definition. However, for a starter, it can (must!) be “fed” and “facilitated.” Its “nutrient” is the Word, its “nutritionist” the Spirit of Christ, and its “expediter” the Body of Christ. For authentic communion to occur believers must abide in the Word (John 15:7) and the Spirit (Rom. 15:30), in fact, be constantly filled to the brim with both (Col. 3:16; Eph. 5:18), and in fellowship (Ps. 27:4), preferably, but not exclusively, in small and intimate accountability groups (Mt. 18:20; see below for further details on the latter).

Further, the “presence” of communion with God is marked by (Revival) “glory” that produces a joyful “melody in the heart” (Eph. 5:19; Col. 3:16) that overflows in thanksgiving and praise (See for a (small) sample of thanksgiving, Ps. 50:14; 1 Thess. 5:18; Eph. 5:20, Col. 1:12; 2:7; 3:15, and for praise, John Calvin, *Institutes*, III, xx, 28, with reference to Ps. 18:1, 3; 40:2; 42:10; 51:15; 102: 18, 21; 106: 17; 116:1; Is. 38:20; Hos. 14:2; Jonah 2:10; Heb. 13:15). Incidentally, one should formulate one’s requests (Phil. 4:6) only *after* the giving of unalloyed thanks *in* literally everything, in the so-called “good” (Lk. 17:15-19) *and* the so-called “bad” (Job 1:21b), as well as *for* literally everything, inclusive of the so-called “bad” (Ps. 119:71; Rom. 8:28; Jam. 1:2), as I argue further below. Otherwise these requests are bound to be questionable to say the least (Jam. 4:3). This is to say, only if thanksgiving is the uncompromised “launching pad,” “the platform,” for making requests can there be any reasonable assurance that they are not shamefully self-focused or appallingly self-serving. At any rate, all this is essentially what James is after in James 4:8a, an *experiential, heart-throbbing, life-displaying, energy-generating, action-producing communion with God!* According to a Puritan writer who like so many of his peers is clearly a “physician of the heart” (Thomas Brooks, *The Secret Key to Heaven: The Vital Importance of Private Prayer*, 214-233) such communion can take place in sorrow and tears, even if not in joy or delight (Ps 51:17). It is not enjoyed alike by everyone. Abraham had a greater communion with God than Lot, Moses a more intimate one than Aaron and Miriam, and Peter, James and John a fuller one than the other apostles. Some prepare for it better than others (2 Chron. 30:17-20; Ps. 1:17; Eccles. 5:1), press for it more than others (Ps. 73:8; Is. 26:8-9), improve it more humbly, more faithfully, more constantly than others (Ps. 27:4, 8; 63:1), need it more than others (1 Cor. 12:14-30), meet with outward and inward interruptions differently from others which leads to greater, lesser, stronger, weaker, closer, more remote, more constant, or more interrupted communion. It energizes graces, such as faith, repentance, love (1 Tim. 2:8; 2 Tim. 1:17; 1 Jn. 1:3). It engenders the praise of God (Ps. 15:1; 148:13; 1 Chron. 29:13; Acts 3:11-13; 16; Rev. 4:10-11; 5:11-12). It leaves the soul in a better, more humble, more watchful, more spiritual, more broken, more enlivened, more resolved, and more heavenly frame. It produces strength (Eccles. 9:10), and so fits the soul for all its various internal duties, such as self-examination, meditation, soul-humiliation, as well as external duties, such as family prayer. It humbles the soul (Gen. 18:27; Num. 16:22; Job 42:5-6; Ps. 22:6; Is. 57:15; Rev. 5:10-11), such as in a prayer like this, “Lord, I see, and yet am blind; I will, and yet rebel; I hate, and yet I love; I follow, and yet I fall; I press forward, yet I faint; I wrestle, yet I halt,” Finally, its secret power weakens corruption, breaks the power of special sin, moves the heart resolutely against its darling lust, and fills it with indignant rage and bitter hatred against any and all idolatry (Is. 2:20; Hos. 14:8). In sum, true communion will echo an ancient saying, “I never come to you, but by you. I never am with you, but through you. I never come from you, without you” (Adapted from Bernard of Clairvaux).

Finally, the evidence of prayerful communion with God is twofold. It looks up expectantly and it steps out vigorously. It looks up expectantly like a David (Ps. 5:3; 40:104; 85:8; 130:1-2, 5-6; Hab. 2:1; Heb. 10:37). God’s people hunger for God to move

in answer to prayer. It hardly makes sense to offer up prayers and then to neglect to find out what became of them. At the same time it steps out vigorously like Moses (Ex. 22:19-20). God's people cherish an "unstoppable" ministry, globally speaking, in terms of "making disciples" and "training disciples" with all that both of these undertakings entail (Mt. 28:19-20; see also Eph. 5:19a; Col. 3:16a).

In short, where the Second Pillar is in evidence, there is a sense of deep "contentment" and "enjoyment" in God that zealously and incessantly seeks to embrace, experience, celebrate, reflect, display, and spread his "glory" (1) in being by mirroring his (communicable) attributes, (2) in word by praising him, and (3) in action by decisively "putting his hand on the plow," literally "giving up everything," "never looking back," "reaching forward," and "pressing on," all, to "advance the Kingdom," to savor "the smile of God" in the process and to "receive the crown of righteousness" in the end (Lk. 9:62; 14:33; Phil. 3:14-16; 2 Tim. 2:15a; 4:8; Jam. 1:12; 2 Pet. 1:11).

3. The Third Pillar

Biblical Prayer, as the call for mercy already indicated, proceeds "literally" (!) from "Nothing" (1 Ki. 18:43; John 15:5) to "Everything" (1 Ki. 18:45; Phil. 4:13; see also passionately Monod, *Living in the Hope of Glory*, 155). This will provide an "intolerable burden" in prayer for those who are simply "unable and unwilling" to live with "Nothing" and have a soul thirst and hunger for "God's Everything," as spelled out in his Word. But it also provides the impetus of an incessant urgency behind their prayer and an indomitable expectation that God will come through (See esp. Neh. 1:4ff; Dan. 9:1ff; Lk. 2:36-37; Acts 1:12-14; see also Monod, 156-158). All this is characteristic of believers who surrender whatever they possess with "nothing" left in order to obtain the Kingdom as the greatest possible treasure, "the pearl of great price," because to them it is "everything" (Mt. 13:44-45). Of course, "nothing" in the context of this third pillar does not suggest that no possible achievements are within the human reach and jurisdiction. After all, every human must, and does take dominion on a daily basis. Neither does "everything" connote that all possible accomplishments are within man's reach or jurisdiction. Human dominion taking has its creaturely boundaries, as anyone soon finds out who endeavors to jump across the Grand Canyon. However, "nothing" does imply that by themselves neither sinners nor saints can achieve "anything" that meets the standard of God's holiness, and on their own can accomplish "anything" that pleases him. By the same token "everything" implies that by grace saints can do "everything" that he commands and meets his approval. All this is also the burden of James 3. There is no full-orbed, thriving Christianity that is not thoroughly aware of one's total impotence to produce practical godliness. It may exhibit legal obedience, but this has no part in, in fact, is poles apart from Gospel holiness. Neither is there authentic Christianity that does not cast itself in this impotence upon God's omnipotence in Christ as the Source of Gospel holiness, and in the Spirit as its Agent, and consequently displays this in "everything."

In short, where the Third Pillar is present, there is sense of awe that marvels about "amazing grace" that "sucks honey out of poison" for the wretched sinner (Ps. 58:4; see

also Deut. 32-32-33) and the wretched saint (Jam. 3:8) alike.

4. *The Fourth Pillar*

Biblical Prayer is both personal (Acts 2:21) and corporate (Acts 4:21, 24). One's relationship to God is always an individual relationship, but no one is an isolated island. Therefore both the "one" and the "many," the corporate body (Acts 12:5) and each individual believer (Mt. 6:6; see also 1 Sam. 1:13), should receive their proper due (See also John Calvin, *Institutes*, III, xx, 5, 30). Again James brings both out with great force. Individual prayer is woven in the warp and woof of each individual Christian (Jam. 1:5; 4:2; 5:17-18; see once again Thomas Brooks, *The Secret Key to Heaven: The Vital Importance of Private Prayer*, esp. 7-79, 183-190, 207-213, with copious references to Scripture passages that summon to private prayer, that refer to folks who exemplify private prayer and that urge us to follow in their footsteps, such as Gen. 18:22-32; 21:33; 24:63-64; 25:22; Ex. 32:11-13; 1 Sam. 1:13; 1 Ki. 8:38; 17:20-23; 19:4; 2 Ki. 4:32-35; Neh. 1:6, 11; Job 27:10; Ps. 5:3; 6:9; 27:4; 31:22; 34:6; 38:8-9; 42:1-4; 55:16-17; 63:1-3; 64:1; 73:28; 88:1, 13; 109:4; 119:20, 145, 147, 164; Prov. 2:20; Is. 26:16; 62:1, 6-7; Jer. 1:25; Lam. 3:8, 44, 55-57; Dan. 6:10; 9:20-23; Hos. 12:3-4; Joel 2:13; Jonah 2:1; Zech. 12:10ff; Mt. 6:6; 14:23; Mk. 1:35; 6:46; 5:16; Lk. 6:12; 18:1ff; 21:37; 22:39, 41, 44-46; Acts 9:11-12; 10:2, 4, 9, 30-31; Rom. 1:9; 15:30; 1 Cor. 11:1; Eph. 1:15-16; 6:18; Phil. 1:3; 3:7; 4:9, 12-13; Col. 4:2, 12; 1 Thess. 1:6; 3:10; 5:17; 1 Tim. 2:8; 2 Tim. 1:3; 3:10-12; Tit. 2:7; Heb. 5:7; 6:12; 7:25; 10:22; Jam. 5:16; 1 John 2:6). But it is also woven in the warp and woof of the Church as the body of Christ (Jam. 5:16; see A. Bennett, *The Valley of Vision: A Collection of Puritan Prayers and Devotions* (Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth Trust, 2011); E. M. Bounds, *Complete Works of E. M. Bounds on Prayer* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2004). Holiness is ever derived from Christ only (Col. 3: 1-3). Therefore it is mandatory personally to abide in him (John 15:5). This calls for a "daily" appointment with God, advisedly in the morning before the activity of the day. If the believer opens the day with God, he may close it with a hearty "Thank You." If he merely closes the day with prayer, he will end up with a repentant "Forgive Me." But it is equally channeled through the body of the Church (Eph. 4:1-16). This forcefully brings corporate prayer, inclusive of "small group prayers," into view.

It is strongly recommended that every Church service starts out by worshiping up a storm with Psalms as well as God-centered hymns and songs to reach the heart of the audience through the emotions, in both the love for, and the joy of the Lord in the Holy Spirit (1 Pet. 1:8; Rom. 14:17). This should pave the way for preaching up a storm with God's Word and the Unction of the Holy Spirit, to get hold of the heart of God's people through the mind (Acts 1:8; 2:4, 14-40; 1 Thess. 1:5-6). This, in turn, should culminate in praying up a storm, based upon the content of the preached Word in the power of the Holy Spirit, led by the pulpit and continuing in the pew, whether individually or in small groups, to touch the heart of the assembly through the will (Acts 2:42; 4:23-31; Rom. 15:30). Only this "culmination" can (and will) lead to the "obedience of heartfelt faith" (Rom. 1:5; 16:27). On the other hand, without it the impact of the preached (or read)

Word will be practically nil (Jam. 4:2)!

The objective is that through such prayer the Word of God, received in joy (Acts 2:41), will turn into the obedience of faith (Rom. 1:5; 16:26). Would it not be awesome if immediately following the preaching of the Word, in the order of each worship service, as historically practiced by Justin Martyr and recommended by Jonathan Edwards, the assembly would refuse to break up, until and unless all the congregants on their knees had surrendered to that Word, and would display this in a plea for the very holiness of life that is portrayed in the message, holiness, such as paying the tithes, care for the widows and the orphans, sexual purity, biblical business ethics, evangelistic outreach, etc., etc.? It would breathe new life in many a congregation. Potential spiritual “mortuaries,” marked by the pall of coldness, barrenness and deadness, would be transformed into warmhearted, joyful, and brimming “sanctuaries,” evidenced by the “rivers of living water” in evidence in both Spirit-filled pulpit (public) and pew (private) that our Savior himself holds out as such an eye-opening and inviting prospect (John 7:37-39)!

In short, where the Fourth Pillar is in existence, the Church turns into an organized, disciplined and irresistible army because all the “components” march shoulder to shoulder to advance the Kingdom. All this puts prayer in graphic perspective.

But now on to a detailed description of the several biblical features of truly biblical, effective prayer! Such prayer, as one commentator put it, does and must go “by the rules” (Phillips, 131; see also Adams, 57-64, for an excellent treatment of (only) four of these features, which he designates as “four essential conditions that must be met, when praying”). Well, here are the “rules” or “conditions” that I have been able to identify in Scripture. I have come up with twelve of them, but prefer to designate them in this context as “sparkplugs.” After all, they are designed and required by God powerfully to “fire” up the “prayer engine!”

II. Twelve “Sparkplugs” of Effective Prayer

Introduction

I have identified several requirements or conditions as the manifold driving force behind effective prayer in Scripture. If, as I stated already, prayer can be compared with an engine, these conditions can also be called the “sparkplugs” of prayer. When it is compared with a “residence,” where God’s people make their “home,” they can just as graphically be earmarked as its “living stones” (or building blocks). There appear to be twelve of them. Three are mentioned in the Epistle of James! If even one of these “building blocks” is missing, the functionality of the building is jeopardized. If even one of these sparkplugs does not “fire,” the prayer engine will stall. As a result the anticipated wisdom James instructs us to ask for (Jam. 1:5) will turn into “wishful thinking.” So, heartfelt and effective biblical prayer, as is in evidence in many biblical personalities, such as Daniel (Dan. 9:1ff), Nehemiah (Neh. 1:1ff), Paul (Phil. 1:21), and in untold millions in Church history, such as a praying Luther in Germany, a praying Hyde in

India, and the praying Church in Korea, should meet all twelve requirements.

It will become clear that believing prayer, prayer in confidence, prayer that is marked by total surrender rather than the rebellious vacillation, mentioned in James 1:6, is part of a larger package. The growth in confidence proves to be commensurate to the functional presence of all twelve biblical requirements, specifically of those that precede confident prayer in the enumeration. In short, this topical treatment is a determined pastoral undertaking to extricate the readers of this Commentary from the quagmire of any and all self-destructive vacillation. Wavering is manifestly the peak of an iceberg, that is below the waterline of life and therefore mostly invisible. This is an effort to put the biblical prayer iceberg systematically together in the dry-dock of this Commentary, so that those who embrace its truth will launch it into the sea billows of their life with its ups and downs in order to calm these billows, remove all obstacles, such as the heights of pride and the potholes of despondency (Is. 40:4; 57:14) and so to help facilitate the travel on the highway (Is. 40:3) of endurance en route to perfection (Jam. 1:3-4) as required (Jam. 1:5-8).

In short, the following summary of the twelve sparkplugs is designed to help understand and inspire the very faith, the very confidence, James requires as indispensable for answers to prayer. It is indubitable that the presence and growth of such faith, confidence, is proportionate to the fine-tuning of all sparkplugs. They can be divided in two groups of six. The first six cover the prerequisite *Foundational Parameters*, the latter six the requisite *Personal Characteristics* of effective prayer. While the sum total of the Twelve Sparkplugs reflect the benchmark set by God the Father, and God the Holy Spirit personalizes them, God the Son embodies them, as the headings indicate.

The *Prerequisite Foundational Parameters* of effective prayer pertain to (1) its Starting Point: Christians do and must pray with and from the Heart of the King; (2) its Ground: They do and must pray in the Name of the King; (3) its Content: They do and must pray according to the Will, that is, the Word of the King; (4) its Origin: They do and must pray enlivened by the Spirit of the King; (5) its Fabric: They do and must pray in the Holiness of the King; (6) its Fire Hearth: They do and must pray in the Body of the King. The *Requisite Personal Characteristics* of effective prayer pertain to (1) its Mindset: Christians do and must pray in the Humility of the King; (2) its Hallmark: They do and must pray with the Confidence of the King; (3) its Heartbeat: They do and must pray with the Fervency of the King; (4) its Resolve: They do and must pray with the Persistence of the King; (5) its Dynamism: They do and must pray with the Urgency of the King; (6) its Harmony: They do and must pray in the Consensus of the King in a Godly Alliance that is characterized by full agreement with each. If these twelve “sparkplugs” in the prayer engine or “living stones” in the “house of prayer” are fully operational in the believer, one can only imagine what a “saintly” confidence this would produce!

Now on to the details of “Kingdom Prayer,” frankly the only type of prayer that is endorsed in Scripture! Incidentally, just like the sparkplugs in an engine do and must fire in a specific order for the engine to run smoothly, so the twelve “sparkplugs” of prayer

are presented in an order that seems to make the most sense from a biblical perspective.

A. Six Prerequisite Parameters of Effective Prayer

1. Starting Point: The Heart of the King

The *Starting Point* of any and all prayer, except the one that “calls on the name of the Lord for salvation” (Acts 2:21; Rom. 10:14; see also Gen. 4:26), is the *Regenerate Heart* (See Deut. 5:29), that is, the *Heart of Jesus*. As has been observed already, before the moment of conversion the human heart is the worst that man has to offer. It is idolatrous (Ezek. 14:4), degenerate (Ezek. 16:30), desperately wicked (Jer. 17:9), has only evil intentions without exception, and can only produce evil thoughts continually as a never ending stream (Gen. 6:5). In fact, it is a heart that is blind and at the same time refuses to see (Deut. 29:2-4). It is said to resemble a venomous cobra that is deaf and at the same time (!) stops its ears (Ps. 58: 1-5, esp. 2, 4; see also Deut. 32:32-33), indicating that its inability to think, speak, and act in any other way than according to its nature (deaf) is rooted in its unwillingness (stops its ears) (See also Deut. 31:27). There is no way that any prayer arising from evil intentions and wrapped up with evil thoughts can ever be acceptable, let alone be pleasing to God. It takes a heart transplant (Ezek. 36:26), the demolition of the old heart (Deut. 10:16; 30:6; Jer. 4:4) and its replacement by a new heart (Ezek. 11:19; 18:31), for any godliness whatsoever, inclusive of godly prayers, to emerge. A heart transplant, of course, demands a Donor. Only Jesus qualifies as such. He takes the blind and rebel hearts of his own with him to the cross, and when he is crucified and dies, those hearts are crucified and die in union with him (Rom. 6:3, 6; 2 Cor. 5:14). Then, when he rises from the dead, new hearts emerge in union with him as well (Rom. 6:11; 2 Cor. 5:17). These are clearly Jesus’ heart multiplied, “cloned,” for his elect (Rev. 7:4ff), the innumerable multitude (Rev. 7:9ff) that he calls his own (2 Tim. 2:19). While the old heart is the worst unbelievers have to offer before their conversion, the new heart is the best that believers have to offer after their conversion (So especially John Flavel, *The Works of John Flavel* (London: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1968), V, 433). This heart is truly awesome. It delights in God (Ps. 37:4; 73:26), in his law (Rom. 7:22; Eccles. 7:25), and in his promises (Dan. 9:1ff). This is why it constantly communes with God and regularly cries out to him throughout the night (Lk. 6:22; see also Ps. 84:2; Lk. 9:18; 11:1) (quantity of prayer). This is why it totally surrenders to his Word whatever the agonizing cost (Mt. 26:36-46; Lk. 4:4, 8, 12; 22:40-46) and unceasingly casts itself upon the promises of God (Lk. 3:21; see also Jer. 29:13) (quality of prayer). What else can one expect from Jesus’ (cloned) heart than to mirror the original? Without this heart prayers are a travesty at best. They may have a semblance of hypocritical authenticity. But they soon go by the wayside (Job 27:8-10). God does not honor prayers without it (Jer. 29:13), and we cannot expect him to do so (1 Sam. 28:6), unless, once more, they call upon the Lord for a new heart (Ezek. 36:37; Acts 9:11) as “the first order of business.” The twofold bottom line is this. A stony heart can only froth at the mouth (Ps. 66:18; Prov. 18:2; Eccles. 10:12b-13a; Is. 6:9-10; Mk. 7:21-22; John 14:6). In one spine

chilling instance its prayers are even earmarked as the object of God's anger (Ps. 80:4; see also Lam. 3:8; and John Calvin, *Institutes*, III, xx, 16). Jesus' heart, on the other hand, spells abundance of life (Prov. 4:20-23) and is marked by fullness of glory (Ps. 116: 13, 17; Rom.1:8ff; 1 Cor. 1:4ff; Eph. 1:15ff; Phil. 1:3ff; Col. 1:3ff; 1 Thess. 1:2ff; 2 Tim. 1:3ff; Philem. 4; Rev. 8:3-4). There is an unbridgeable gulf fixed between a stony heart and Jesus' heart that only the full-orbed Gospel of the Kingdom can remedy. But once Jesus' heart has been implanted, the prayers that flow forth from it will have a telling quality. Folks "with the heart of Jesus" who "with deep feeling" pray "from the heart of Jesus" (John Calvin, *Institutes*, III, xx, 31, with reference to Jer. 29:13; see also Hab. 3:2; Gal. 4:19) will understandably reflect as well what is "on the heart of Jesus!" This is to say, they will be determined by the model prayer that the Lord Jesus taught in the Sermon on the Mount (Mt. 6:9-13; see also R.C. Sproul, *The Prayer of the Lord* (Orlando: Reformation Trust Publishing, 2009) in their life's "focus" (the first three petitions), their life's "pattern" (the second three petitions), and their life's "anchorage" (the last three conclusions). This is to say, they will reflect the God-centered prayer pattern that he exemplified at the conclusion of his discourses in the Upper Room (John 17) and displayed especially at the start of the *Via Dolorosa* in the Garden of Gethsemane (Mt. 26). To experience the fathomless union, the corresponding harmony and the magnetizing fellowship with his Father in heart and life and therefore to display and advance the glory of his Name as his greatest good, of his Kingdom as his sole objective, and of his Will as his exclusive guideline, was the grand and magnificent obsession of his ministry in life and death (See Andrew Murray, *With Christ in the School of Prayer* (Wellington: James Nisbett & Co, n.d.), 9-15, 24-31, 129-136). So this is what he modeled and taught his disciples.

He instructed them as well to petition for their daily sustenance, their daily forgiveness and their daily protection. This is to say, as soldiers they recognize that they stand in need of C-rations only, that they will receive forgiveness only as they forgive their fellow soldiers, and that they must ever acknowledge that the Enemy is too strong for them to overcome on their own.

But they are *not* on their own. Christ couches all of this against the awesome backdrop of the reality of God's Kingdom, Power and Glory." "His, indeed, is the Kingdom and the Power and the Glory *forever!*" This bolsters "prayer-warriors" in the pursuit of life's threefold focus as stated in the first three petitions of the Lord's Prayer. It also empowers them, provides them with the reason and the "wherewithal," to "count it joy" when exposed to the most blazing heat of battle, experienced in life's threefold pattern, as portrayed in the second three petitions of the Lord's Prayer, certain of the victory (Jam. 1:2) (See John Calvin, *Institutes*, III, xx, 35-49 for a marvelous exposition of "The Lord's Prayer;" as well as the thorough treatment of the same subject in the Westminster *Larger Catechism*)!

Finally, and in line with John 17, they will ever praise God that the Lord Jesus has been glorified (John 17:1-5), and that as a result the apostles in the joy of the Lord and the holiness of the Word functioned powerfully in the face of the world's hostility and opposition from the word "go" (John 17:6-19). Furthermore, they will ever pray for the

continuing leadership in the Church as well as for all believers throughout its history (John 17:20-26), and commit themselves irrevocably and prayerfully to do God's will whatever the cost (Mt. 26:39-40).

In closing a word of caution is in place. The heart of Jesus clearly resembles a "palace" that replaces a "slum." But this is not to say that it cannot be cluttered up with "debris." Hence James calls upon God's people constantly to purify their hearts (Jam. 4:8) with the cleansing blood of Christ (1 John 1:7) and the sanctifying and mortifying Spirit of Christ (Rom. 8:4, 13). Special attention, however, must be given to "secret sins," whether in thought, word, or deed. While they may not be as scandalous and contagious as public sins, they are closest to the heart, and therefore pose a much more damaging personal threat. They are disgraceful and sordidly sinister because they are contemplated or done "on the sly" (Eph. 5:12). They are festering and therefore doubly dangerous because they are "not open to public remedy." Perpetrators of secrets sins are again and again fooled in believing that no one will find out what they are up to (Job 24:15; Prov. 7:7-20). But nothing escapes God. One cannot hide anything from him (Prov. 5:21; 15:3; Heb. 4:13). Eventually he will bring everything out in the open (Gen. 42:21-22; 50:15-22; 2 Sam. 12:9-12; 2 Ki. 5:20-27; Lk. 8:17). In the meantime secret sins drain the offenders of their spiritual vitality and waste their physical bodies (Ps. 32:3-4). Often they are plagued by their conscience, which has been defined as "God's spy in the bosom." Unless this 'spy' is seared, it is as "quick in writing as the sinner is in sinning." It keeps "a daily diary, records time and place, plays judge, submits evidence, applies the law, urges penalty and passes sentence" (See for all this, Brooks, 267, 270-272). This is enough to conclude that "secret sins" suck the life out of prayer and kill its effectiveness. After all, the very preoccupation to hide them from view betrays that offenders have a greater slavish fear of man than a heartfelt respect for God! In short, for prayer to be alive and thrive, "secret sins" better be shunned like the plague!

2. Ground: The Name of the King

The *Ground* of any and all effective prayer is the *Name of Jesus* (John 14:13-14; 16:23-24).¹ In the context of John 14 the "Name" stands for Jesus as the Crucified Savior (John

¹ See John Calvin, *Institutes*, III, xx, 17, 18, "And as a rule has been laid down as to prayer, as a promise has been given that those who pray will be heard, so we are specially enjoined to pray in the name of Christ, the promise being that we shall obtain what we ask in his name. 'Whatsoever you shall ask in my name,' says our Savior, 'that will I do; that the Father may be glorified in the Son;' 'Hitherto you have asked nothing in my name; ask, and you shall receive, that your joy may be full' (John 14:13; 16:24). Hence it is incontrovertibly clear that those who pray to God in any other name than that of Christ contumaciously falsify his orders, and regard his will as nothing, while they have no promise that they shall obtain. For, as Paul says, 'All the promises of God in him are yea, and in him amen' (2 Cor. 1:20), that is, are confirmed and fulfilled in him. And we must carefully attend to the circumstance of time. Christ enjoins his disciples to have recourse to his intercession after he shall have ascended to heaven, 'At that day ye shall ask in

14:6) and the Ascended King (John 14:12b). Christ is the Way to God. Only by warmly embracing him as Savior can the believer ever hope to enter into the presence of God. Further, Christ has all the authority in heaven and on earth. Only by gladly acknowledging him as Master and Lord can the believer be assured of being a force in the Kingdom of God. But what a force! He will do greater things than Jesus ever did himself (John 14:12a). Since this cannot apply to either holiness or miracles, in which our Lord towers over everyone else, there is only one area left for consideration, that of securing conversions. Starting with Acts 2, the fulfillment of what are both a promise and a mandate is a matter of biblical and historical record. Clearly the crucified and ascended Savior and Lord is an awesome King! In fact, the Christian may and must pursue “anything” from God in his name, and expect an affirmative answer.

However, does this passage, and notably the word “anything,” convey that the sky is the limit, and that we should feel free to make any (outlandish or bizarre, or not so bizarre) requests, inclusive of personal requests, whatsoever, in fact, may make any (honest or not so honest) “demands” that our fertile (or not so fertile) brain can come up with, as some suggest as the correct translation? This is patently false, for in the abstract, God would even have to permit Satan to end up in heaven, if faced with such request. No, “anything” in Scripture does not always mean “anything without exception.” In fact, even in ordinary language this is rarely the case. It is invariably “anything in context!” By way of illustration, when a cashier in a restaurant asks a departing customer, whether “everything” was OK, it is not a “limitless” question that opens up the floor for just “everything” or “anything” “under the sun.” The question is restricted. Only the “everything or anything *in the restaurant context*” is a legitimate discussion subject! No one in his right mind will let go with just “any” tale of woe about a blown engine, a bankrupt business, a broken marriage, or “anything” of the sort! The range of “anything” in Scripture is undoubtedly awesome. But, as we will now see, also in Scripture it has a well-defined boundary.

The John 14:14 context, as has already been observed, is Christ as crucified Savior (John 14:4) and ascended King (John 14:13). Both truths are the constituent elements of the content of Christ’s “Name” as the indispensable ground of prayer. In short, whatever “anything” entails, it is predicated (1) upon Him as the sole avenue to the Father, and therewith upon union with him as the unqualified condition for “any” answer to prayer, (2) upon his Kingdom as the grand strategy of the Father, and therewith upon the “hot pursuit” of that Kingdom as the conclusive determinant for the content of prayer, and (3) upon Him and his Kingdom as in authoritative and dominant control, and therewith upon the glad acknowledgement of his Kingship as the guarantee for the effectiveness of prayer.

In short, John’s “anything” is “anything in the context of the Kingdom in terms of motivation, standard and goal,” specifically in terms of the awesome “greater things” of multitudinous conversions. In this context the Christian may ask “anything” from God in

my name’ (John 16:26). It is certain, indeed, that from the very first all whosoever prayed were heard only for the sake of the Mediator.”

Christ's name. In fact, he should ever ask for the already mentioned "greater things" and all that this entails, as both a promised and mandated reality! The promise occasions prevailing prayer until they materialize to whatever degree. The mandate prompts us to put our hands to the plough in order to obtain them and declares us culpable when they do not. It may well be that we will be asked in the Judgment whether we have contributed to these "greater things," both individually and corporately. This is God's grand objective. It should be ours as well to the point that we will not take rest and will not give God rest until the Church ("the greater things") is the praise in the earth. Refusal or failure to be part of God's great undertaking means that we are AWOL (Absent without Leave), which may mean DOA (Dead on Arrival) (See also Wieand, *The Gospel of Prayer*, 149ff, with reference to John 14:14; 15:16; 16:23-26).

From a biblical perspective "anything else," that is, without a Kingdom focus, does not belong in, and may not be a part of a believer's prayer and can only be disqualified as an illegitimate component. The Lord's Prayer is abundant proof. The threefold focus of the first three petitions is the consecration of the Name, the promotion of the Kingdom, and the submission to the Will of God. This is both the need and the glory of God's people. When it is "finally" our turn in the fourth petition, it is "only" to receive our Commissions as soldiers of the Crucified Savior and Ascended King! The fifth and the sixth petition simply round off this picture. In other words, anything that promotes the Kingdom will receive favorable consideration.

However, the Name of our Lord does not only stand for him as our Mediator of Redemption through his Crucifixion and as our Strategist of Kingdom Advance through his Ascension. As an added dimension he is also as our Model of Intercession in the presence of God (John Calvin, *Institutes*, III, xx, 17). We are not "by ourselves" or "on our own." In our prayers we join our "Elder Brother" in an "all-comprehensive and spiritual life-union of love" (Murray, *With Christ in the School of Prayer*, 186-195). This can only enhance our assurance that "anything" in the fabric of the Kingdom and for the progress of Kingdom, inclusive of "the greater works" of multitudinous conversions, is not just a (remote) possibility, but an (every-day) certainty!

Still, this "sparkplug" does not say everything. In Scripture the emphasis upon the Name of the King is simply introductory to spelling out the content of prayer in greater detail and more precisely in terms of the Word of the King. This is why 1 John 5:14 is an added extension to John 14:14, "If you ask anything according to my will (that is, the revealed will or Word of the King), you have already received it." This brings the content of "anything" in focused view in terms of the range of prevailing prayer, the next parameter.

3. Range: The Word of the King

This *Range* for any and all effective prayer is the *Will of God*, expressed in the *Word of God* (Dan. 9:2-3; John 15:7; 1 Tim. 4:5; 1 John 5:14; see also John Calvin, *Institutes*, III, xx, 5). Two passages in particular lay an indissoluble connection between the Word and prayer. When the Word of God is stored up in the heart of believers to overflowing in real

fellowship as “the living voice of God,” they may ask at will from the heart whatever they wish “in living faith” and be assured that they will reach the heart of God (John 15:7; see Murray, *With Christ in the School of Prayer*, 170-177). Further, everything is sanctified by the Word and prayer (1 Tim. 4:5). Clearly, “no Word, no holiness” (John 17:17)! Similarly, “no prayer, no holiness” (Jam. 4:2)! So, no Word, no Prayer, no Holiness! The Word is the identifying means (content) and prayer the appropriating means (pipeline) in the process of sanctification. The biblical connection between Word and prayer is so tight, that the Church should never put anything in the pipeline of prayer, unless and until it is cleared by the content of Scripture, whether in the form of an injunction, a promise, a threat, a principle, a pattern, or otherwise. This insures that no alien substances can contaminate, or clog up the pipeline!

The curtailment of prayer to the boundaries laid down in God’s Word, as advocated here, is not simply an arbitrary opinion. Scripture itself indicates that there are limits which believers may not transgress. Whatever the “sin-unto-death” signifies, it is the clear injunction of Scripture that those who have committed this sin have placed themselves outside the pale of godly prayer (1 John 4:16b). This establishes the boundary principle! Frankly, what more appropriate way to honor this principle could there possibly be than by praying “Scripture only?”² Biblical substance puts God-centered steel in the prayers of believers, rather than man-centered mush. Elijah, whom we hope to meet more extensively later on, serves as an illuminating model in this context. He was an ordinary Christian (Jam. 5:17), but took center stage through his prayers. He asked for the rains to cease, and they did. Between three and four years later he prayed once more, this time for the rains to start up again, and they did. What was the man’s secret? He seems truly exceptional. Basically, it was really nothing earth shaking! He catapulted onto the stage of the universe “simply” by taking Leviticus 26:3-5 and Deuteronomy 28:9-12 as well as Leviticus 26:14-20 and Deuteronomy 28:20-24 seriously, and turning them into prayer at the appropriate time. “Idolatry?” “No Rain!” “Repentance?” “Rain!” In short, he identified himself *in toto* with God’s Word and twice “prayed up a powerful storm,” first a “dust storm,” and subsequently a “rain storm.”

Two other biblical samples of such total identification with God’s cause as defined in God’s Word are found in Daniel 9 during the Babylonian exile, and in Nehemiah 1 following this exile. Elijah, Daniel and Nehemiah, this cluster of three personifies John 15:7 as well as I Timothy 4:5. Together they illustrate the biblical benchmark for the Christian. In other words, Christians should have E. as their middle initial, since they are

² See also John Calvin, *Institutes*, III, xx, 5, “We are to ask only in so far as God permits (apparently in his Word). For though he bids us pour out our hearts (Ps. 62:8) he does not indiscriminately give loose reins to foolish and depraved affections; and when he promises that he will grant believers their wish, his indulgence does not proceed so far as to submit to their caprice. In both matters grievous delinquencies are everywhere committed. For not only do many without modesty, without reverence, presume to invoke God concerning their frivolities, but impudently bring forward their dreams, whatever they may be, before the tribunal of God. Such is the folly or stupidity under which they labor, that they have the hardihood to obtrude upon God desires so vile, that they would blush to impart them to their fellow men.”

on a par with Elijah (Jam. 5:17). If in addition they would add a D. for Daniel and a N. for Nehemiah, and rise to their prayer level, there is no telling what God might do! After all, “you accomplish precisely nothing for the simple reason, that you are not a prayer-focused people, and when you happen to say your prayers, it is often and regrettably no more than man-centered, self-indulging ‘mush’” (Paraphrase of James 4:3-4). “Let us no longer throw the blame of our unanswered prayer on the secret will of God, but on our own praying amiss ... Let us believe that we can know if our prayer is according to God’s will ... Let us yield our hearts to have the word of the Father dwell richly there, to have Christ’s word abiding in us ... We shall soon understand that (this Word determines) all that God’s power and love has promised to do and (authenticates the confidence) that he hears the petitions which we ask of him” (1 John 5:14). The Word, whether it conveys a promise, an injunction, a prohibition, or any kind of “reality,” is by definition God’s “living water.” Prayer is the God-ordained “pipeline,” through which this “water” enters into the desert to turn it into a “fertile field” (Is. 32:15; Jam. 4:2c). It better be a comprehensive pipeline that has an awesome diameter, an awesome direction, and goes an awesome distance (See Murray, *With Christ in the School of Prayer*, 230-239).

Finally, there is no guarantee that prayers be answered outside the framework of the Word of God, because there is no promise to that effect. Candidly, believers should not even desire to receive an answer that is not an extension of the Word! In short, the “anything” of John 14:14 is for all practical purposes the “anything” of the Word of God. Who in the world would ever wish to go outside or beyond this Word? For in this Word the Christian has “everything!” This is why it must not only have “the full spotlight,” but also “be handled accurately” (2 Tim. 2:15). This bans “worldly and empty chatter” that “strays from truths” that are clearly revealed and established, and function as a destructive and deadly gangrene (2 Tim. 2:16-18) as well as “foolish and ignorant speculations that produce quarrels” (2 Tim. 2:23). Such speculative “curiosity” that tries to probe secrets that God has reserved for himself (Deut. 29:29; Rom. 11:33), force “strange doctrines,” “myths,” “endless genealogies,” “fruitless discussions,” “bold unsubstantiated assertions” and “useless wrangling about words” (1 Tim. 1:4, 6-7; Tit. 1:14) upon the Church that ruin people and promote ungodliness (2 Tim. 2:16), has vividly been described as “spiritual drunkenness.” At any rate, for the content of that Word to become a truly living reality in the believer’s prayer a third sparkplug is indispensable. Its focus is upon the Holy Spirit.

4. Origin: The Spirit of the King

The *Origin* of any and all effective prayer is the *Holy Spirit* (Eph. 6:18; Jude 20). Twice in the NT is the believer told to pray “in the Spirit.” The somewhat quaint expression of “praying it through,” which appears to have been common coinage in the original Puritan circles, in the early Wesleyan Holiness Movement and among old-line Pentecostals, but is mostly forgotten today, indicates what is at stake here. What comes into view is the “agency” of the Spirit! This “agency” is momentous. He “personalizes” the New

Covenant that the Father “promises” (Jer. 31:31-34; Ezek. 36:25-27) and the Son “personifies” (Is. 42:6; 49:8) by implanting the heart of Jesus in regeneration (John 3:5), sealing the righteousness of Jesus in justification (Eph. 1:13-14), and implementing the holiness of Jesus in sanctification (Rom. 8:4, 13; 15:16). However, in the latter instance this “agency” does not just aim at the believer’s sanctification in general. It is equally operational in the arena of prayer in particular. In fact, the Spirit is indispensable to both the process of sanctification and the practice of prayer as an integral part of this process. While the Word determines the content, the Spirit provides the empowerment for both. This is to say that the indwelling Spirit (Rom. 8:11) must generate and own the prayers of believers in order for them to pray in the Spirit. He does not only “make intercession on our behalf with unutterable groanings” (Rom. 8:26). He turns our very own “dead words” into a “living reality” (See also 1 Thess. 1:5). Without his operational presence prayer is basically meaningless prattle, just as without such presence the conduct of the believer is at best a matter of legal, essentially lifeless obedience. “Praying it through” is ever a live issue among those who understand their total dependence upon the grace of the Spirit. It is not uncommon to read in a Puritan diary that half of the prayer time was preparation for prayer. “Suddenly” the touch of the Spirit would be there! And the experiential difference was palpable! It is the same experience that a fighter airplane must enjoy when it seeks to refuel in midair, secures a connection with the boom of the tanker airplane, and becomes the beneficiary of new life for its engines that will make them “cheerfully” roar and powerfully speed on their way. Genuine prayer is a kind of “supernatural breathing” through the Holy Spirit of prayer, who is “the Breath of God” and so becomes “the breath of the new life in us” (See Murray, *With Christ in the School of Prayer*, 48-54, 196-203; and Arthur Bennett, ed., *The Valley of Vision: Collection of Puritan Prayers and Devotions* (Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth Trust, 2011), throughout, esp. 27, 28, 37.

The analogy with preaching is striking. According to Paul, when the Word was preached to the Thessalonians, it did not come in word only, but in power and in the Spirit, and (therefore!) with great assurance, conviction, and effectiveness. It produced repentance, godliness, and missionary zeal, and above all love for Jesus (1 Thess. 1:5ff). However biblical one’s prayer may be, as well as one’s conduct or preaching for that matter, in terms of ground (identification with the name of the King) or content (reflection of the Word of the King), it is and remains at best a cold marble statue, however beautifully sculptured, until it comes to life through the operational presence of the Spirit. Martyn Lloyd-Jones once related that in his youth Spirit-anointed preaching would not be uncommon. In the instance of a particular preacher the Spirit would “stir” him on an average of one Sunday in three. This could occur in the beginning, in the middle, or toward the end of the message. In the latter case, members of the congregation would gladly settle down for an additional half hour or more, in order to experience preaching that would electrify them as well! However, he concluded with the lament that those days appeared to be a matter of the past (See also Wieand, *The Gospel of Prayer*, 156ff)! In short, we “pray (the Word) *until* we pray (in the Spirit),” we “preach (the Word), *until* we preach (in the Spirit) and, covering the waterfront, we “obey (the Word), *until* we obey (*in the Spirit*),” In sum, we “live, think, will, feel, speak, act, etc., etc. (the

Word), *until* we live, think, will, feel, speak, act, etc., etc. (in the Spirit)!” After all, we can only “come alive *in the Spirit*” and “be sanctified *by the Spirit*” (Rom. 16:17). Until this materializes, we can only and at best come up with “legal obedience” from “below,” whether this is obedience in general or the obedience of prayer in particular. Such “obedience” is as far removed from “Gospel holiness” from “above,” that is, from Jesus through the moving touch of the Holy Spirit, as the North Pole is from the South Pole.³

Once again the Word and the Spirit prove to be indissolubly linked together. To be sure, the former constitutes the track on which the bullet train of life runs. But the latter must produce the electric power for that train to spring into life, to gather speed, and to hasten to its destination! This power is, and must be operational across the board in the Church of Christ to be a viable and effective entity, whether in terms of prayer, preaching, practical godliness, or otherwise. This introduces us to the fifth sparkplug.

5. Fabric: The Holiness of the King

The *Fabric* of any and all effective prayer is *Holiness* (Ps. 66:18; Prov. 28:9; Jam. 4:3; 5:16). Again and again Scripture warns that prayer must be embedded in the totality of a life of practical godliness in terms of its communal setting, its personal fabric, its internal motivation, its lofty standard and its ultimate goal. Such practical godliness should be a given once the Heart, the Name, the Word, and the Spirit of the King are functioning realities. Joshua’s prayer is tersely interrupted, in fact, abruptly terminated by God himself, when the covenant community is stained by an odious evil. He is bluntly told not to expect even one inch of further progress until and unless it is removed. Failure to do so would mean nothing less than forfeiture of the future (Josh. 8:10ff). But this is not all. Scripture takes it a step further by pointing out that to contemplate sin in one’s heart already is a sure way to forego a hearing from God (Ps. 66:18), and to shut one’s ear to the law is an equally sure way to turn one’s prayer into a disgrace and an outrage (Prov. 28:9). Ironically, this indicates that one can actually accumulate sins in and by the very activity of praying. James adds for good measure that self-centeredness in motivation and self-gratification in aim is a reprehensible dead-end street as well (Jam. 4:3-4). To top it off, in a time of a general and serious spiritual downgrade that precipitates God’s stinging rebuke and devastating judgment (Ps. 80:5-16), he is even “angry against the prayers of

³ See also John Calvin, *Institutes*, III, xx, 5, “Hence it appears that to pray aright is a special gift. We do not speak thus in indulgence to our sloth, as if we were to leave the office of prayer to the Holy Spirit, and give way to that carelessness to which we are too prone. Thus we sometimes hear the impious expression that we are to wait in suspense until he takes possession of our minds while otherwise occupied. Our meaning is that, weary of our own heartlessness and sloth, we are to long for the aid of the Spirit. Nor, indeed, does Paul, when he enjoins us to pray *in the Spirit* (1 Cor. 14:15), cease to exhort us to vigilance, intimating, that while the inspiration of the Spirit is effectual to the formation of prayer, it by no means impedes or retards our own endeavors; since in this matter God is pleased to try how efficiently faith influences our hearts.”

his people” (Ps. 80:4), which calls for Revival before their prayers become acceptable again (Ps. 80:17) (See for the concept of Revival, **Topical Focus #1: Biblical Revival**). The bottom line is simple. Only a man who is purposefully righteous in driving force, standard and objective, that is in the full range and in all the dimensions of the word, can expect his prayers to “arrive” and to yield rich dividends (Jam. 5:16) (See also John Calvin, *Institutes*, III, xx, 3, 7, 10, 26, with references to Ps. 32:6; 34:15; 86:2; Is. 1:15; 38:2; Jer. 29:13; 1 Tim. 2:8; 1 John 3:22).

Finally, one commentator correctly introduces the concept of “wasted prayers,” and subsumes under this category the prayers of the wicked (Prov. 15:29; Is. 59:2), of pharisaical types (Lk. 18:11), of those who mistreat their wives (1 Pet. 3:7) or the poor (Prov. 21:13), of folk who scheme sinfully (Ps. 66:18), or pray wrongfully (Jam. 4:2-3) (Adams, 52-54). Wrongful prayer is defined in James 4:3 as self-centered prayer, prayer that aims at self-gratification, that makes “me” feel good, that is after the attainment and retention of “my” pleasures as the *summum bonum*. In short, the reference to wrongful prayer seeks to alert us to the fact that our prayers need to be purified in their motivation, benchmark and objectives. As we shall see, James 4:2 informs us that “my” pleasures are actively sought by my evil desire (lust). While the term desire (*epithumia*) in itself is neutral, at this juncture it has a thoroughly negative connotation. Evil desires are twofold. They either pursue sinful pleasures, all those that are forbidden in the Decalogue. Or they pursue legitimate pleasures “in wrong ways, at wrong times for wrong purposes” (Adams, 34). In short, prayers are not “toll free.” As mentioned, they can even be the target of God’s anger (Ps. 80:4). In this context the well-known and remarkable volume on prayer by E.M. Bounds, *Power through Prayer*, is “must” reading. *He vividly shows that in prayer as well as in anything else God’s method is God’s man serving God’s Kingdom to God’s glory in God’s way!* But there is more! Harmoniously following the first five sparkplugs, and specifically woven of one cloth with the fifth one, there is a sixth sparkplug, the body of the King as the workshop of the Holy Spirit, in which everything is “sanctified by the Word and prayer” (1 Tim. 4:5; see also John 15:7).

6. Fire Hearth: The Body of the King

The *Fire Hearth* for any and all effective prayer is the *Intimacy* of small groups in the Body of Christ (Mt. 18:19; Acts 13:1-2). Prayer is ever Satan’s target. Just as antagonists would wrestle for the possession of the proverbial gun which will settle a dispute once and for all, so Satan puts a premium on taking away our prayer life. As has already been observed, no one can either be saved or sanctified apart from prayer. At the same time, no one in the covenant community is an island all by his or her lonely self. The personal prayers of the individual are supported and carried by the corporate prayers of the body. Still, just as in the human body the left big toe never touches the right shoulder blade, so it stands to reason that all church members do not have an intimate relationship with each other. However, the big toe is connected with the foot in an intimate way, just as the shoulder blade is linked to the shoulder, and receives sustenance and support from it. Similarly in the body of Christ small groups, preferably consisting of five believers,

should gather to cultivate in mutual support and accountability the presence of the various sparkplugs in order to ensure effective prayer. Believers are just like coals in a hearth that will flame up when heaped together, but will die out when separated. The number five is chosen for a reason. The larger the group the less intimacy, the smaller the group the greater the progress! But even when in a group of five two are providentially absent, the small group is still intact. Groups of three or four do not have this luxury. Absenteeism of any kind tends to make such small group non-functional. This Commentary makes a strong recommendation for each local body of Christ to organize itself in small groups of both men and women to pray around the circle at least once a week for a set period of time, one hour, two hours, until the Spirit produces the urgency and fervency that makes one lose the sense of time in the presence of God (See also for “The Privilege and Power of Group Prayer,” Wieand, *The Gospel of Prayer*, 218ff, with reference to Mt. 18:19-20; Acts 1:14; 2:1, 42-47; 4:23-31; 12:1-9; 13:1-2). Praying around the circle may (greatly) assist participants who tend to be shy. It also will avoid awkward lulls of protracted silence. Further, the prayers should be clearly articulated for everyone to hear so that the participants truly can join each other, take each other along in their approach to God, and as a result function as a mutual means of grace. While “mumbling” may imply a lack of urgency and fervency, it certainly will not be “edifying,” as it may easily produce wandering thoughts in the other members of the small group.⁴ Furthermore, such meetings should not start with prayer requests to ensure that no valuable time is lost. Besides, any potential requests will be shared automatically in the prayers that are offered up. Finally, the leader should break in to conclude the

⁴ See John Calvin, *Institutes*, III, xx, 5, “Let everyone in professing to pray turn thither all his thoughts and feelings, and be not (as is usual) distracted by wandering thoughts; because nothing is more contrary to the reverence due to God than that levity which bespeaks a mind too much given to license and devoid of fear. In this matter we ought to labor the more earnestly the more difficult we experience it to be; for no man is so intent on prayer as not to feel many thoughts creeping in, and either breaking off the tenor of his prayer, or retarding it by some turning or digression. Here let us consider how unbecoming it is when God admits us to familiar intercourse to abuse his great condescension by mingling things sacred and profane, reverence for him not keeping our minds under restraint; but just as if in prayer we were conversing with one like ourselves forgetting him, and allowing our thoughts to run to and fro. Let us know, then, that none duly prepare themselves for prayer but those who are so impressed with the majesty of God that they engage in it free from all earthly cares and affections. The ceremony of lifting up our hands in prayer is designed to remind us that we are far removed from God, unless our thoughts rise upward: as it is said in the psalm, ‘Unto thee, O Lord, do I lift up my soul’ (Psalm 25:1). And Scripture repeatedly uses the expression to *raise our prayer*, meaning that those who would be heard by God must not grovel in the mire. The sum is, that the more liberally God deals with us, condescendingly inviting us to disburden our cares into his bosom, the less excusable we are if this admirable and incomparable blessing does not in our estimation outweigh all other things, and win our affection, that prayer may seriously engage our every thought and feeling. This cannot be unless our mind, strenuously exerting itself against all impediments, rise upward.”

meeting when the agreed upon time is expired.

Of course, all this is not to deny that big toes and shoulder blades belong to one and the same body. This will be very much in evidence when the shoulder blade is in a (shooting) accident. Piloted by the big toes, the feet will hurry to the emergency ward for treatment. But it is to emphasize that each part of the body has immediate contact (only) with its surrounding members, which must be cultivated. At any rate, for any member of the physical body to go it alone is certain death. To do so in the Body of Christ is no less dangerous! But a profitable “contact” that advances the Kingdom is not an automatic given. The first six parameters, inclusive the sixth one, must be augmented by the last six characteristics of biblical prayer to come into its own.

B. The Requisite Characteristics of Effective Prayer

1. Mindset: The Humility of the King

If it is biblical and true, as the third “pillar” formulated above argues, that prayer starts from “nothing” to arrive at “everything,” humility is certainly in place. When we plumb the depth of this “nothingness,” this will become even more overwhelmingly clear. “Nothing” in the life of wretched sinners and saints alike is not just a “neutral” term, something like “starting from scratch” with a blank piece of paper. Since also in wretched saints there is still the continuing presence of “an overflow of wickedness” (Jam. 1:21), we function in and operate from a starkly “negative” territory! On the one hand, I can honestly and joyfully exclaim with David, “I delight to do your will, o my God, and your law is within my heart; I proclaim the good news of righteousness in the great assembly; indeed, I do not restrain my lips, o Lord, you yourself know; I have not hidden your righteousness within my heart; I have declared your faithfulness and your salvation; I have not concealed your loving-kindness and your truth from the great assembly” (Ps. 40:8-10). But on the other hand, I have to confess at the same time, in the same breath and with that same David, “My iniquities have overtaken me, so that I am not able to look up; they are more than the hairs of my head; therefore my heart fails me” (Ps. 40:12). In a real sense, this is the picture of “The Consummate Christian,” as long as he lives on this earth. No wonder that David cries out for “the tender mercies” of his God (Ps. 40:11, 17). As we already saw, only folks who are terminal require “mercy!” Wretched sinners are terminal in that they stand in need of the “mercy” of definitive salvation (Lk. 18:13). Wretched saints are equally terminal in that they stand in need of the “mercy” of progressive sanctification (Heb. 4:16). That all this calls for utter and never ceasing “humility” stands to eminent reason. When even our perfect Savior is marked by “humility of heart” (Mt. 11:29; 21:5), how much more should this characterize his followers, especially in their prayers (See Lk. 18:11-12 in contrast to 13-14; Rom. 7:24-25). In the words of John Calvin, “He who comes into the presence of God to pray must divest himself of all vainglorious thoughts, lay aside all idea of worth; in short,

discard all self-confidence, humbly giving God the whole glory, lest by arrogating anything, however little, to himself, vain pride causes him to turn away his face. Of this submission, which casts down all haughtiness, we have numerous examples in the servants of God. The holier they are, the more humbly they prostrate themselves when they come into the presence of the Lord. Thus Daniel, on whom the Lord himself bestowed such high commendation, says, ‘We do not present our supplications before you for our righteousness but for your great mercies. O Lord, hear; O Lord, forgive; O Lord, hearken and do; defer not, for your own sake, O my God: for your city and your people are called by your name.’ This he does not indirectly in the usual manner, as if he were one of the individuals in a crowd: he rather confesses his guilt apart, and as a suppliant betaking himself to the asylum of pardon, he distinctly declares that he was confessing his own sin, and the sin of his people Israel (Dan. 9:18-20). David also sets us an example of this humility: ‘Enter not into judgment with your servant: for in your sight shall no man living be justified’ (Ps. 143:2). In like manner, Isaiah prays, ‘Behold, you are angry; for we have sinned ... we are all as an unclean thing, and all our righteousness is as filthy rags; and we all do fade as a leaf; and our iniquities, like the wind, have taken us away. And there is no one who calls upon your name, who stirs himself up to take hold of you: for you hast hid your face from us, and have consumed us, because of our iniquities. But now, O Lord, you are our Father; we are the clay, and you our potter; and we all are the work of your hand. Be not angry very sore, O Lord, neither remember iniquity forever. Behold, see, we beseech you, we are all your people’ (Isa. 64:5-9). You see how they put no confidence in anything but this: considering that they are the Lord’s, they despair not of being the objects of his care. In the same way Jeremiah says, ‘O Lord, though our iniquities testify against us, do it for your name’s sake’ (Jer. 14:7). For it was most truly and piously written by the uncertain author (whoever he may have been) that wrote the book which is attributed to the prophet Baruch, ‘But the soul that is greatly vexed, which goes stooping and feeble, and the eyes that fail, and the hungry soul, will give you praise and righteousness, O Lord. Therefore, we do not make our humble supplication before you, O Lord our God, for the righteousness of our fathers, and of our kings.’ ‘Hear, O Lord, and have mercy; for you are merciful: and have pity upon us because we have sinned before you’ (Baruch 2:18, 19; 3:2) (John Calvin, *Institutes*, III, xx, 8)!⁵

⁵ See also the following, “In fine, supplication for pardon, with humble and ingenuous confession of guilt, forms both the preparation and commencement of right prayer. For the holiest of men cannot hope to obtain anything from God until he has been freely reconciled to him. God cannot be propitious to any but those whom he pardons. Hence it is not strange that this is the key by which believers open the door of prayer, as we learn from several passages in the Psalms. David, when presenting a request on a different subject, says, ‘Remember not the sins of my youth, nor my transgressions; according to your mercy remember me, for your goodness sake, O Lord’ (Ps. 25:7). Again, ‘Look upon my affliction and my pain, and forgive my sins’ (Ps. 25:18). Here also we see that it is not sufficient to call ourselves to account for the sins of each passing day; we must also call to mind those which might seem to have been long before buried in oblivion. For in another passage the same prophet, confessing one grievous

We can conceivably glean the following rule of thumb from David, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Baruch and all those who follow in their footsteps. As soon as in any context “the good becomes the enemy of the best” the humility that Scripture requires is by definition gone, conspicuous by its absence. Scripture is utterly clear. Even “the best” must throughout their lives confess, in fact, until the moment of their death, that they are “never good enough!” Paul exhorts “the good” in no uncertain terms that especially in what constitutes their goodness they must even and ever excel more (1 Thess. 4:1, 10). In this he himself sets the tone and so functions as a model to be followed universally and perennially by everyone everywhere. “Not that I have already become perfect, but I press on ... forgetting what lies behind and reaching forward to what lies ahead. I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus” (Phil. 3:12-14). I wonder what percentage of Christians seeks to emulate Paul. Only once has the present writer encountered the scenario in which someone who considered Church membership issued the following statement during her “interview.” “You must swear an oath that you will confront me the very moment you notice a sin of omission or commission. If you refuse to do so, I will take out membership somewhere else.” This illustrates the sparkplug of biblical humility which drives to prayer and characterizes it as godly (See also 1 Ki. 8:22-61). Frankly, the bottom line is this. As soon as anyone believes to have arrived, “hostility,” yes, “*hostility*,” against God’s best is inevitable, whether consciously

crime, takes occasion to go back to his very birth, ‘I was shapen in iniquity, and in sin did my mother conceive me’ (Ps. 51:5); not to extenuate the fault by the corruption of his nature, but as it were to accumulate the sins of his whole life, that the stricter he was in condemning himself, the more placable God might be. But although the saints do not always in express terms ask forgiveness of sins, yet if we carefully ponder those prayers as given in Scripture, the truth of what I say will readily appear; namely, that their courage to pray was derived solely from the mercy of God, and that they always began with appeasing him. For when a man interrogates his conscience, so far is he from presuming to lay his cares familiarly before God, that if he did not trust to mercy and pardon, he would tremble at the very thought of approaching him. There is, indeed, another special confession. When believers long for deliverance from punishment, they at the same time pray that their sins may be pardoned; for it were absurd to wish that the effect should be taken away while the cause remains. For we must beware of imitating foolish patients who anxious only about curing accidental symptoms neglect the root of the disease! No, our endeavor must be to have God propitious even before he attests his favor by external signs, both because this is the order which he himself chooses, and it were of little avail to experience his kindness, did not conscience feel that he is appeased, and thus enable us to regard him as altogether lovely. Of this we are even reminded by our Savior’s reply. Having determined to cure the paralytic, he says, ‘Your sins are forgiven;’ in other words, he raises our thoughts to the object which is especially to be desired—viz. admission into the favor of God, and then gives the fruit of reconciliation by bringing assistance to us. But besides that special confession of present guilt which believers employ, in supplicating for pardon of every fault and punishment, that general introduction which procures favor for our prayers must never be omitted, because prayers will never reach God unless they are founded on free mercy (John Calvin, *Institutes*, III, xx, 9, with further reference to Ps. 25:7; 1 John 1:9).

or not. Godly exhortations are not recognized as indispensable (any longer), and eventually ignored, sidestepped, resented or outright rejected. From this perspective the arrogance of “the good” may historically well have been the greatest culprit to bring the Church to a virtual standstill and eventually to cause its downfall again and again (See also Jam. 5:19-20). It is a well-known fact that no “Revival” has ever been initiated by an “arrived establishment” in Christ’s Church. In fact, it always routinely opposed it under the guise of seeking to maintain “order” and charging or accusing God’s instruments in “Revivals” of “disorderliness.” This is already in evidence in the NT (See also Num. 11:27-29; Mt. 15:23; 19:13).

At any rate, all this, of course, is not to state, as Calvin already implied as a cause for profound thanksgiving, that the type of humility which is called for across the board on the part of *wretched* saints preempts a buoyant confidence and energetic boldness on their part as *wretched saints*. Quite the contrary, these are a “must” (Heb. 5:16; see also Ps. 5:3; 33:22; 56:9; Mt. 21:21-22; Eph. 3:12). Here we encounter complementarity of truth at its finest! Once again, in the words of Calvin, “Notwithstanding of our being thus abased and truly humbled, we should be animated to pray with the sure hope of succeeding. There is, indeed, an appearance of contradiction between the two things, between a sense of the just vengeance of God and firm confidence in his favor, and yet they are perfectly accordant, if it is the mere goodness of God that raises up those who are overwhelmed by their own sins. For, as we have formerly shown (*Institutes*, iii, 1, 2) that repentance and faith go hand in hand, being united by an indissoluble tie, the one causing terror, the other joy, so in prayer they must both be present. This concurrence David expresses in a few words, ‘But as for me, I will come into your house in the multitude of your mercy, and in your fear will I worship toward your holy temple’ (Ps. 5:7)” (John Calvin, *Institutes*, III, xx, 11).

This is why we can turn to the next sparkplug with a great sense of assurance as well as gratitude. While prayer admittedly starts with (less than!) “*nothing*,” it must invariably and joyfully aim and seek to arrive at (more than?) “*everything!*”

2. Hallmark: The Faith of the King

The *Hallmark* of any and all effective prayer is the Unwavering Confidence of Biblical *Faith* (Mt. 7:7; 17:20; 21:21-22; Mk. 11:22-24; Rom. 4:20; 14:23; Jam. 1:6). This Confidence is the unwavering “sparkplug” of effective prayer that is introduced early on in the Epistle of James. The blueprint of the prayer engine with its twelve sparkplugs now pays off handsomely. While the determination of the precise function, as well as the meaning and significance of confidence in the present context, must await the interpretation of the text in my Commentary on both James 1:6 and James 5:14, its contours begin to emerge against the backdrop of the sparkplugs of the prayer engine already enumerated. Faith in both passages is clearly a subjective certainty, a rock-like “assurance of the things hoped (and prayed) for,” and an equally rock-like “conviction of things not (yet) seen” (Heb. 11:1). It has no doubt that “these things” will materialize, sooner or later. But how in the vagaries of life can such “assurance” and such

“conviction” be expected to be an experienced “reality?” Frankly, this is basically a “no-brainer,” but only if and when it is founded upon the Name of the King, fed by the Word of the King, empowered by the Spirit of the King, immersed in the Holiness of the King, fed in the Body of the King, and inundated with the Humility of the King. In this godly setting of “precious stones” it turns into a “jewel” itself.

In this framework the Confidence of the King, as Andrew Murray, *With Christ in the School of Prayer* (Wellington: James Nisbett & Co, n.d) emphasizes, is always “child-like” (39-47, with reference to Mt. 7:9-11), ever “bold” (55-62, 230-239, with reference to Lk. 11:5-8; 1 John 5:14-15), invariably “well-defined” (71-77, with reference to Mk 10:51; Lk. 18:41), habitually “conjoined to fasting” (94-102, with reference to Mt. 17:19-21), and consistently “*certain to obtain an answer*” (32-38, 78-93, 129-136, with reference to Mt. 7:7-8; Mk. 11:22-24; John 11:41-42), which centers in the “all-comprehensive gift of the Spirit” (48-57, with reference to Lk. 11: 48-54, 55-62), culminates in a life-time of active obedience (144-151, 178-185, with reference to John 14:12-13; 15:16) and glorifies the Father (152-160, with reference to John 14:13). This is to say that biblically “the prayer of faith” is not simply interested in the fellowship with God, however deeply rewarding this is. “While it is a very blessed experience, *the answer to prayer is more blessed still*, since it is the response from the Father that our prayer and our faith are what he would wish them to be” (167-169). Murray decries the attitude that so cherishes the fellowship in prayer that the outcome of prayer takes the back seat, and in a real sense becomes immaterial. He does so, not because he counts the outcome of prayer to be of higher value than the fellowship in prayer, but because in his estimation the Father means the answer to our prayers to be a token both of his favor and of the reality and authentication of our fellowship with him. Therefore, while not higher in “intrinsic” value, the outcome is definitely more “glorious” than fellowship. This is why biblical prayer thirsts for answers and expects them in bold, confident faith and believing, confident boldness that God will be there in times of need (Heb. 4:16) and will honor his Word (1 John 5:14; see also Dan. 9:2). After all, his answers provide us with a profound taste of God’s favor and with a soaring joy about his endorsement (1 Pet. 1:8). In short, when their prayers are based upon and filled with the Word of God, whether this comes in the form of a promise, an injunction, a threat, a prohibition, or otherwise, his people better not take “no” for an answer. It is their lifeline. Therefore they cannot and may not take “no” for an answer. If they do, they end up with “nothing.” And that spells death!

Still there is a wrinkle. The two sparkplugs focusing on the Name of the King and the Word of the King are objective certainties. The Lord Jesus has omnipotent authority in heaven and earth (Mt. 28:18). Further, his royal Word stands forever and cannot fail (Is. 40:8). Both are unshakable realities. On the other hand, the four that focus on the Spirit of the King, the Holiness of the King, the Body of the King, as well as on the Humility of the King, are “subjective” in nature. They are fluctuating realities. This has implications for assurance. It is the teaching of Scripture, that while assurance inviolably rests on the twin pillars of Christ and the Word, at the same time it is commensurate to and goes up and down both with the operational presence of the Holy Spirit as the Spirit of sanctification/mortification (Rom. 8:4, 13), with the extent of his productivity in the

Christian in terms of sanctification/mortification (Is. 32:17; 1 John 3:19-24), with the intimate involvement in the Body of Christ (Ps. 73:17) and with the degree of humility (Ps. 138:6). Here the complementarity of truth emerges once again. In Scripture confidence rests objectively on the unshakable foundation of the Name and the Word of the King. But also in Scripture it diminishes subjectively when the Spirit is grieved (Eph. 4:30), quenched (1 Thess. 5:19), outraged (Heb. 10:29), or even neglected (Rom. 8:13), and the Church is devalued (Heb. 10:25; see also Acts 2:42) with all that this entails in terms of holiness and humility. The cry, “Abba, Father” (Rom. 8:15; Gal. 4:6) will, and should be muffled when this occurs (Ps. 51:11). It also will, and should diminish when grievous sins are committed (1 John 3:19-20). The spiritual pain in such diminishing assurance is analogous to pain in the physical realm and serves a great purpose. Physical pain alerts the sufferer to a physical problem as the indispensable precursor to its treatment and cure. Similarly, spiritual pain alerts the sufferer to the reality of a spiritual problem that must be faced, handled and settled. From this perspective diminishing assurance is a gracious love-gift of God. Not to experience physical pain is an indication of paralysis that easily ends up in death. There are no warning signals that there is something wrong with the body. Not to experience spiritual pain is indicative of spiritual paralysis, if not lack of regeneration. In such case spiritual death either knocks on the door or has already moved in, if it ever left. Truthfully, blessed are the folk who are sensitive to a holy God and his Holy Word, and tremble before him (Ps. 2:11; 99:1; 114:7; Jer. 5:22; Dan. 6:26; Hos. 11:10, 11; Acts 9:6; see also Phil. 2:12) as well as in the face of that Word (Ezr. 10:3; Is. 66:2; Dan. 10:11). For both to occur, of course, powerful (Revival!) preaching that extols the awe-inspiring majesty of our God and the lofty benchmark of his Word is a *sine qua non*. Candidly, those who do not (learn to) tremble in the fear of “awe,” whether due to glaringly defective preaching or to glaringly stubborn hearts, eventually will (learn to) tremble in the fear of dread in the face of the wrath of God and impending doom (Is. 32:11; Jer. 10:10; 51:29; Ezek. 26:16, 18; 32:10; Am. 8:8; Jam. 2:19; see also Heb. 10:31; 12:29). In short, diminishing assurance evidenced in self-condemnation is unmistakable proof of the presence of faith and as such the ground for renewed assurance (1 John 3:19-20). Furthermore, subsequent repentance and renewed obedience bolsters this assurance (1 John 3:21) and gives rise to powerful and answered prayer (1 John 3:22). Finally, both self-condemnation and renewed obedience with all that they entail are a direct result of the operational presence of the Holy Spirit (1 John 3:23). All this explains why fluctuations in assurance may be frequent, are nuanced, and should be productive. They will result in short accounts in the interaction with God, a flourishing life in the presence of God, and a glorious confidence in the approach of God, whether in prayer or otherwise. Anyone who is without any such fluctuations, has never experienced them, and cannot attest to them, is either perfect or regrettably (still) devoid of spiritual life. All in all, through the Holy Spirit “full assurance” that knows no “wavering” is both an attainable possibility (Heb. 6:11b) and a categorical “must” (Jam. 1:6) in order for prayer to be both acceptable and effective. It is also a definite reality that can be anticipated and experienced. But it can and will only occur upon the presence of practical righteousness (Is. 32:17) that is diligently pursued

(Heb. 6:11a; 10:35; 1 John 3:21; Phil. 2:12; see also Deut. 28:66) and implemented through the Holy Spirit (1 John 3:24). Otherwise it is bound to be presumption. At any rate, the necessity of unwavering faith stands like a rock and is not debatable. “All those, who come to God, whether in prayer or otherwise, *must* believe that his Existence is a rock-like certainty.” And at the same time “that He is equally certain to reward those who diligently seek him” (Heb. 11:6). Period! Period! He is all-Powerful. So he can reward. He is all-Good. So he stands ready to reward. He is all-Truth, and cannot lie. So he will reward. “The prayer of faith excites us by its immense possibilities ... laughs at impossibilities, and cries, ‘it shall be done,’ because it sees all things beneath God’s feet, and is motivated by the desire for his glory.” In the terms of Faith’s “Hall of Fame” in Hebrews 11, and esp. Hebrews 11:33-37, the believer’s response always is, and always must be the same. When “kingdoms need to be conquered,” “Sir, I believe God” (Acts 27:25). When “acts of righteousness need to be performed,” “Sir, I believe God.” When “promises need to be obtained,” “Sir I believe God.” When “the mouths of lions need to be shut,” “Sir, I believe God.” When “the power of fire needs to be quenched,” “Sir, I believe God.” When “strength is needed in weakness,” “Sir, I believe God.” When “armies need to be put to flight,” “Sir, I believe God.” When “I am tortured,” “Sir, I believe God.” When “I experience mockings, chains, imprisonment,” “Sir, I believe God.” When I am stoned, tempted, put to death,” “Sir, I believe God.” When “I am ill-clothed, ill-fed, ill-treated,” “Sir, I believe God.” When I am banished to deserts, caves, holes in the ground,” “Sir, I believe God” (See Leonard Ravenhill, *Sodom Had No Bible*, 61-64).

Two additional words are in place. The first one pertains to the tact and finesse Jesus uses to teach and graduate “students” in his “School of Faith.” As has been mentioned already, the Syro-Phoenician woman goes through four phases in her prayer. She starts with an intolerable burden (Mt. 15:22), continues with a sense of desperation (Mt. 15:23) and an act of “hungry” surrender (Mt. 15:25), and concludes with “opening her mouth” wide in unmistakable faith that she will be fed with “a crumb of grace” (Mt. 15:27). It is Jesus or nothing. She has nowhere else to go. So she does not let him go! Clearly, genuine faith expectantly casts itself in utter impotent circumstances upon Divine omnipotent mercy as one’s last (Read: first) resort and one’s only hope. This crescendoing “four-phase” growth pattern, however, is precipitated by Jesus’ “four-fold” response. At first he did not answer her at all (Mt. 15:23), then he continues to deny her plea (Mt. 15:24) and explains the reason why (Mt. 15:26), but ends with an immediate and resounding, “yes,” echoing her resounding, concluding as well as conclusive faith! Christians better remember, recognize, and reflect this exquisite tapestry of universal principles throughout their lives, and prove to be graduates of Jesus’ School of Faith, which doubles as a School of Prayer. It may well prove to be a life-preserver in the darkest of days. At any rate, the type of faith that is present in the Syro-Phoenician woman is a far cry from “hypocrisy” that may start out strong, but is quickly “exhausted,” lacks “sticking” power, and will fade rapidly (Job 27:8-10)!

The second word is one of caution. Confidence may never turn into presumption. In order to stave off this deadly danger Christians, as has been mentioned already, should

ever pray “in joyful confidence, but (trembling) on the edge of lurking despair.” James 3 hammers home the reality of the “the edge of lurking despair” in the face of a direct pipeline to hell via the tongue (Jam. 3:6, 8), while James 4 breathes “joyful confidence,” by extolling the offsetting grace of God vis-à-vis this pipeline (Jam. 4:6, 10). In the former he mirrors the earlier teaching of Jesus in John 15:5, “Without me you can do nothing.” In the latter he precipitates the later teaching of Paul in Philippians 4:13, “With him you can do everything.” Going over the edge spells gloom, defeat and uselessness, moving away from the edge produces presumption, pride and demise, whether in the short or the long run (Rev. 3:16). Christians do well to pray that God will shield them from both dangers in the spirit of, and broadly analogous to Proverbs 30:8b-9, “Give me neither poverty nor riches lest I be full and deny you, and say, ‘Who is the Lord?’ Or lest I be poor and steal and profane the name of my God.” The realities of these two dangers will undoubtedly contribute to the embrace of the next sparkplug that naturally follows the heartfelt desire for, and the continuing presence of biblical confidence. This is fervency of spirit in seeking the face of God, pursuing the presence of God, and enjoying the approval of God (Rom. 12:11-12).⁶

⁶ In the words of John Calvin, *Institutes*, III, xx, 11, “Under the goodness of God he comprehends faith, at the same time not excluding fear; for not only does his majesty compel our reverence, but our own unworthiness also divests us of all pride and confidence, and keeps us in fear. The confidence of which I speak is not one which frees the mind from all anxiety, and soothes it with sweet and perfect rest; such rest is peculiar to those who, while all their affairs are flowing to a wish are annoyed by no care, stung with no regret, agitated by no fear. But the best stimulus which the saints have to prayer is when, in consequence of their own necessities, they feel the greatest disquietude, and are all but driven to despair, until faith seasonably comes to their aid; because in such straits the goodness of God so shines upon them, that while they groan, burdened by the weight of present calamities, and tormented with the fear of greater, they yet trust to this goodness, and in this way both lighten the difficulty of endurance, and take comfort in the hope of final deliverance. It is necessary therefore, that the prayer of the believer should be the result of both feelings, and exhibit the influence of both; namely, that while he groans under present and anxiously dreads new evils, he should, at the same times have recourse to God, not at all doubting that God is ready to stretch out a helping hand to him. For it is not easy to say how much God is irritated by our distrust when we ask what we do not (even) expect of his goodness. Hence, nothing is more accordant to the nature of prayer than to lay it down as a fixed rule, which it is not to come forth at random, but is to follow in the footsteps of faith. To this principle Christ directs all of us in these words, ‘Therefore, I say unto you, what things so ever you desire, when you pray, believe that you receive them, and you shall have them’ (Mark 11:24). The same thing he declares in another passage, ‘All things, whatsoever you shall ask in prayer, believing, you shall receive’ (Mt. 21:22). In accordance with this are the words of James, ‘If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all men liberally, and upbraids not, and it shall be given him. But let him ask in faith, nothing wavering’ (Jam. 1:5). He most aptly expresses the power of faith by opposing it to wavering. No less worthy of notice is his additional statement, that those who approach God with a doubting, hesitating mind, without feeling assured whether they are to be heard or not, gain nothing by their prayers. Such persons he compares to a wave of the sea, driven with the wind and tossed. Hence, in another passage he terms genuine prayer ‘the

prayer of faith' (Jam. 5:15). Again, since God so often declares that he will give to every man according to his faith he intimates that we cannot obtain anything without faith. In short, it is faith which obtains everything that is granted to prayer. This is the meaning of Paul in the well-known passage to which dull men give too little heed, 'How then shall they call upon him in whom they have not believed, and how shall they believe in him of whom they have not heard?' 'So then faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God' (Rom. 10:14, 17). Gradually deducing the origin of prayer from faith, he distinctly maintains that God cannot be invoked sincerely except by those to whom by the preaching of the Gospel his mercy and willingness have been made known, nay, familiarly explained." And in *Institutes*, III, xx, 12, "We (are) taught by the Holy Spirit, who tells us to 'come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need' (Heb. 4:16); and elsewhere teaches us to 'have boldness and access with confidence by the faith of Christ' (Eph. 3:12). This confidence of obtaining what we ask, a confidence which the Lord commands, and all the saints teach by their example, we must therefore hold fast with both hands, if we would pray to any advantage. The only prayer acceptable to God is that which springs (if I may so express it) from this presumption of faith, and is founded on the full assurance of hope. He might have been contented to use the simple name of faith, but he adds not only confidence, but liberty or boldness, that by this mark he might distinguish us from unbelievers, who indeed, like us, pray to God, but pray at random. Hence, the whole Church thus prays, 'Let your mercy O Lord, be upon us, according as we hope in you' (Ps. 33:22). The same condition is set down by the Psalmist in another passage, 'When I cry unto you, then shall my enemies turn back: this I know, for God is for me' (Ps. 56:9). Again, 'In the morning will I direct my prayer unto you, and will look up' (Ps. 5:3). From these words we gather, that prayers are vainly poured out into the air unless accompanied with faith, in which, as from a watchtower, we may quietly wait for God. With this agrees the order of Paul's exhortation. For before urging believers to pray in the Spirit always, with vigilance and assiduity, he enjoins them to take 'the shield of faith,' 'the helmet of salvation,' and 'the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God' (Eph. 6:16-18)! Let the reader here call to mind what I formerly observed, that faith by no means fails though accompanied with recognition of our wretchedness, poverty, and pollution. How much so ever believers may feel that they are oppressed by a heavy load of iniquity, and are not only devoid of everything which can procure the favor of God for them, but justly burdened with many sins which make him an object of dread, yet they cease not to present themselves, this feeling not deterring them from appearing in his presence, because there is no other access to him. Genuine prayer is not that by which we arrogantly extol ourselves before God, or set a great value on anything of our own, but that by which, while confessing our guilt, we utter our sorrows before God, just as children familiarly lay their complaints before their parents. Nay, the immense accumulation of our sins should rather spur us on and incite us to prayer. Of this the Psalmist gives us an example, 'Heal my soul: for I have sinned against you' (Ps. 41:4). I confess, indeed, that these stings would prove mortal darts, did not God give succor; but our heavenly Father has, in ineffable kindness, added a remedy, by which, calming all perturbation, soothing our cares, and dispelling our fears he condescendingly allures us to himself; nay, removing all doubts, not to say obstacles, makes the way smooth before us." Frankly, this is an amazing quotation. It seems that Calvin compiled the kaleidoscope of complementary prayer features, which he holds out in this section in a comprehensive fashion, from *all* the (78) Davidic Psalms in the Book of Psalms without missing a beat!

3. Heartbeat: The Fervency of the King

The *Heartbeat* of any and all effective prayer is an at times agonizing *Fervency* (Jer. 29:13; Gal. 4:19; Phil. 4:6; Jam. 5:17). That a heartfelt desire for and a rapturous experience of the Name, Word, Spirit, Holiness and Body of the King, and its resultant utter Humility and brimming Confidence, produces the Fervency of the King stands to reason. Many times Scripture combines prayer and supplication (Phil. 4:6) indicating that times of prayer are times of intense emotion (Ps. 119:53, 136; Jer. 4:19; Dan. 9:3; Rom. 9:1-3). In prayer the believer enters into the throne room of God. In supplication he removes everything from it, including his joys and sorrows, closes the door behind him and has only eyes for God (See Rev. 4:8). Soon he pours out his heart to God in fervent, boundless worship and thanksgiving. Only after thanksgiving suffuses him for all the people, the events, and the things he has encountered (Job 1:21b; Ps. 119:71; Phil. 4:12; Jam. 1:2), and not before, does the door open up again, and do petitions become the focus. The clear implication is that without prior unconditional and all-encompassing thanksgiving petitions simply cannot be trusted (See also Ps. 50:14-15). They are bound to be self-centered and man-centered, which is roundly condemned in James 4:3 as we shall see later. Fervency is required across the board, “in everything.” Also for one’s breakfast cereal, when one can choose from among ten types of boxes, neatly stacked up in the cupboard or put out on the breakfast table? Yes, and that for at least two reasons. First, with possibly the largest percentage of mankind below or close to the poverty line, there is every reason to be ardent, in what may seem to be the smallest blessings. After all, the rich do not have it coming to them! It betrays unwarranted smugness not to pray fervently in “everything” (Phil. 4:6). Second, believers should not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from God (Deut. 8:3). Therefore, great and painstaking care should be taken to ensure by and in prayer that “everything,” including copious meals for breakfast, as well lunch and dinner for that matter, indeed, flows forth from the promises of God, and is not the product of an ultimately “smart and independent operator!” What does not come exclusively from God is, and should be unwanted! Only ardent prayer can hope to prevent the common pitfall of human self-reliance and self-sufficiency from victimizing the believer to his own destruction (Rev. 3:15-20). After all, “to pray without fervency is like hunting with a dead dog” (Spurgeon; see also John Calvin, *Institutes*, III, xx, 6, 12).⁷ It has also been said to be like a body without a soul, or

⁷ See also John Calvin, *Institutes*, III, xx, 6, “In asking we must always truly feel our wants, and seriously considering that we need all the things which we ask, accompany the prayer with a sincere, nay, ardent desire of obtaining them. Many repeat prayers in a perfunctory manner from a set form, as if they were performing a task to God, and though they confess that this is a necessary remedy for the evils of their condition, because it were fatal to be left without the divine aid which they implore, it still appears that they perform the duty from custom, because their minds are meanwhile cold, and they ponder not what they ask. A general and confused feeling of their necessity leads them to pray, but it does not make them solicitous as in a matter of present consequence, that they may obtain the supply of their need. Moreover, can we suppose anything more hateful or even more execrable to God than this fiction of asking the pardon of

like a gun without a bullet. Therefore, “Beware of declension in prayer. Whenever you feel the closet becoming a dull place, whether through laziness (Prov. 6:6), lack of alertness (1 Pet. 5:8), worldly concerns (Lk. 10:40-42; 14:16-22), focus on ultimately inconsequential non-essentials (1 Tim. 4:8; 6:8-10), you may be sure something is wrong. Go straight to God that he may ‘heal it’ (Hos. 14:4). Do not trifle with it. Nor resort to other expedients to relieve the dullness, such as shortening the time, or getting some lively religious books to take off the weariness. Go at once to the great Quickener with the cry, ‘Quicken us, and we will call upon your name (Ps. 80:18)’” (Bonar, 25). Once fervency, which is ultimately the fervency of Christ as its source and model, is in evidence, the next sparkplug, incessant praying, is its logical companion. Naturally, such prayer can only be experienced through the Holy Spirit in dependence once again upon Christ as our source and in the footsteps of Christ as our model!

4. Resolve: The Persistence of the King

The *Resolve* of any and all effective prayer is *Persistence* (Job 27:8-10; Dan. 6:10; Lk. 11:8; 18:1, 7; 21:36; Rom. 12:12; Eph. 6:18; Col. 4:2; 1 Thess. 3:10; 5:17; 1 Tim. 5:5). Scripture records many instances of “unceasing prayer.” In fact, it calls for the presence of unceasing prayer more than for any of the other sparkplugs. After all, “Prayer unaccompanied by perseverance leads to no result (John Calvin, *Institutes*, III, xx, 51)! This, of course, does not imply 24/7 prayers, twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week. This is a physical impossibility. But precisely what then does it mean? Before I answer this question I wish to return (once more) to the already mentioned rationale for unceasing prayer. If prayer is “from nothing to everything,” prayer simply cannot be interrupted, if “everything” is to prevail. If it does, the believer plunges back into “nothing,” regardless the applicable area, spiritual, moral, or otherwise! Prayer is similar to the breathing lung system in the body. This may never stop operating, if the oxygen is to reach the tissues in the body, also in this context regardless the applicable area, whether the internal organs, such as the heart and the brain, or the extremities, such as the

sins, while he who asks at the very time either thinks that he is not a sinner, or, at least, is not thinking that he is a sinner; in other words, a fiction by which God is plainly held in derision? But mankind, as I have lately said, are full of depravity, so that in the way of perfunctory service they often ask many things of God which they think come to them without his beneficence, or from some other quarter, or are already certainly in their possession. There is another fault which seems less heinous, but is not to be tolerated. Some murmur out prayers without meditation, their only principle being that God is to be propitiated by prayer. Believers ought to be especially on their guard never to appear in the presence of God with the intention of presenting a request unless they are under some serious impression, and are, at the same time, desirous to obtain it. Nay, although in these things which we ask only for the glory of God, we seem not at first sight to consult for our necessity, yet we ought not to ask with less fervor and vehemence of desire. For instance, when we pray that his name be hallowed--that hallowing must, so to speak, be earnestly hungered and thirsted after.” See also *Institutes*, III, xx, 12.

feet and the hands, or otherwise. If it is, death is both sure and quick. Incidentally, just as the lack of oxygen affects specific parts of the body, such as the brain, more quickly than other parts in its near immediate consequences, so lack of prayer may affect some parts of the life of the believer, such as the fellowship with God, more quickly than others in its immediate consequences as well.

John 7:37-39 presents a similar picture with its four pivotal activities of thirsting, coming, drinking, and flowing. If one is not thirsty (repentance), one will not come (faith). If one does not come, one will not drink (prayer). If one does not drink, one will not flow (holiness). Clearly, the nature and extent of practical godliness (the flow of rivers of living water through the Spirit of Christ) is determined by the nature and extent of prayer (drinking of Christ). The nature and extent of prayer is determined by faith (the appropriation of Christ). And the nature and extent of faith is determined by repentance (the hunger for Christ). There is an unmistakable concatenation. The earlier activities are never a cause to an effect. But they are invariably a means to an end. The grand objective, of course, is the flow of rivers of living Holy Spirit “Revival-water” with its Ten Mighty Characteristics. Whenever we only trickle, both the reason and the remedy stare us in the face! The realization of the end is commensurate to the presence of the means! No thirsting, coming and drinking? No flowing! Against this backdrop to ask the question why the Church has lost the Middle East and Europe and is increasingly losing the USA, is to answer it!

But there is an additional deep-seated and an additional overarching dimension to the rationale for “unceasing prayer.” First, it displays “a union with Christ who ever lives to pray.” In it “he makes us partakers with himself of his prayer-power, that is, communicates his *unceasing* prayer-life to us and maintains it in us,” rooted in a heart that “*evermore* rejoices” and resulting in a heart that “in *everything* gives thanks” (1 Thess. 5:16-18).” Second, unceasing prayer “is the forgetting of self and yielding ourselves to the life of God and his honor that enlarges the heart, that teaches to regard everything in the light of God and his will, that is tested by the one thing that fills the heart, the glory of God, that has learned that only what is of God can be really to God.” Therefore it “becomes a bold and confident looking up, a joyful and triumphant crying from the inmost heart, for God to demonstrate the sum total of his perfections and so to show forth his glory in the building of his Church and the advance of his Kingdom through his tireless servants and uncompromised means (Eph. 6:18-20).” As such unceasing prayer constitutes “a manifestation of heaven come down to us, the foretaste of the life where they rest not day or night in the song of worship and adoration” (See Murray, *With Christ in the School of Prayer*, 248-254).

Turning now to the precise meaning of praying without ceasing, this seems to have two fundamental characteristics. First, when something is “worth praying for,” and legitimately qualifies as a subject for prayer, it is worth praying for until God provides an answer. This kind of persistence is, indeed, the resolve of prayer (Mt. 7:6-8; Lk. 18:1). It is the prayer of saints, who have set their heart on its fulfillment, and are willing to go on interminably, saints, such as Daniel who prayed “from morning till evening” (Dan. 9:3, 21), Nehemiah who prayed “for days,” “day and night” (Neh. 1:4, 6), and the apostles

who prayed all of ten days from Ascension to Pentecost. There is one biblical person, however, who literally left all these in the dust. Her name is Anna. She was “awesome,” and takes “the grand prize,” as it appears that she went “homeless,” “sleepless,” and “foodless,” apart from the “bare necessities” of life, for possibly as long as fifty years (Lk. 2:37)! All this clearly indicates that together with the others she did not take “no” for an answer! This was far from presumptuous for three reasons. To start with, she prayed the promises of God. Therefore she did not *need* to take “no” for an answer. She was on solid ground! Further, without the fulfillment of the promise she would not have a future. Therefore, she *could* not take “no” for an answer. She was in the desperate straight of a dead-end street. Finally, she had received the solemn injunction to pray. Therefore she was not *allowed* to take “no” for an answer. As a co-worker of God, just as the others, she was under orders “not to take rest, neither to give God rest until he had established Jerusalem once and for all as the praise of the earth” (Is. 62:6-7; see also George Muller, *The Autobiography of George Muller* (New Kensington, PA: Whitaker House, 1985) and the awe-inspiring “Revival model” of incessant prayer that is portrayed in it).

But there is a second characteristic. Prayer, that truly enters into the throne room of God and experiences his glory, loses all sense of time. After all, God has put eternity in the heart of man (Eccl. 3:11). Already when humans are wholeheartedly wrapped up in other human beings, in highly attractive objects or in awesome events, it seems that “time stands still.” How much more should this be the case when man fellowships with his God on the heart level! In the rapturous experience of the fellowship of love time intersects with eternity. It produces an inexpressible joy, filled with the glory of God (1 Pet. 1:8), and transcends ordinary human understanding (Eph. 3:19). Believers will do well to seek the face of God until time, indeed, seems to stand still. Only then does unceasing prayer come into its own. However, this is not an easy summit to reach. For this reason Scripture introduces the eleventh and twelfth sparkplug. The eleventh sparkplug focuses on praying with “urgency” as the dynamism of prayer and the twelfth one the harmony in prayer, in which the members of small, manageable accountability groups stand shoulder to shoulder as they inspire each other and are in total agreement in the motivation, content and objective of their prayers!

5. Dynamism: The Urgency of the King

Frankly, I fear that neither the heartbeat of fervency nor the resolve of persistence will ever come into their own, until and unless the *dynamism* of *urgency* is in evidence. Urgency is a product of four factors. First, it is set in motion by a deep *concern* for “immediate answers” (Ps. 119:53, 136; Jer. 4:19; Rom. 9:1-3). Second, it is activated by the utter *need* for “immediate answers.” “*Now* is the day of salvation!” (2 Cor. 6:2). “*Today*, if you will hear his voice, do not harden your heart!” (Ps. 95:7-8; Heb. 3:7-8; 4:7). Tomorrow may well be too late. Frankly it has been so for too many folks in too many settings. J. C. Ryle was once told by a man whom he evangelized that he preferred to wait until his death bed to respond to the summons to repent and believe. After all, so did the “thief on the cross!” Ryle’s comment was, “But how do you know that you will

not prove to be the other thief?” Third, it is triggered by a great *hunger* for “immediate answers.” “Hear the voice of my supplication when I cry unto you” (Ps. 28:2). “Make haste to help me, O Lord, my salvation” (Ps. 38:22). “Hear my prayer, O Lord, and give ear to my cry” (Ps. 39:12). Any lack of Kingdom advance does and should make for a disconsolate prayer warrior. Candidly, an analogy of John Knox’s heartfelt cry, “Give me Scotland or I die,” should in one way or another mark the life of all believers, especially the life (ironically) of those who “celebrate” this cry or simply quote it with approval! Fourth, it is precipitated by a profound *gratitude* for “immediate answers.” “He will answer from his holy heaven!” (Ps. 20:6). “You have answered me!” (Ps. 22:21). “The righteous cry out, and the Lord hears!” (Ps. 34:17). “Certainly God has heard me. He has attended to the voice of my prayer. Blessed be God who has not turned away my prayer!” (Ps. 66:19-20). Not so incidentally, once the urgency of prayer is experienced, both the heartbeat of fervency and the resolve of persistence in prayer are bound to come into their own as well! But how does the necessary “urgency” emerge? It seems such a rare commodity! Well, to restrict myself to the Psalms, they are much more than individual expressions of individual emotions. They are the covenantal cry of men locked in mortal Kingdom combat. No Combat? No “Urgency!” A Church that functions as an R&R Center, if not (merely) as an Infirmary, rather than a thriving and pulsating Armory, where men and women are trained for battle in and for the cosmic warzone, can only “psychologize” and “trivialize” the Psalms in an all too self-centered, all too earthly-minded, and essentially all too happiness-oriented manner. This, in turn, must instill the fear, once more, that it is bound to be or become AWOL (Heb. 10:36-39; Jam. 1:22; Rev. 3:15-16) and destined to be or end up DOA (Rev. 3:1). Such Church cannot even envision, let alone heed a “Siren Call to Arms,” which starts, again, with a summons “not to take rest, nor to give God rest, until he has established the Church as a praise in the earth” (Is. 62:6-7), with all that this entails in terms of Mighty Preaching, Mighty Conversions, Mighty Assemblies, Mighty Holiness, Mighty Generosity, Mighty Saturation Grassroots Evangelism, Mighty Societal Impact under Mighty Leaders in Mighty Combat. It may well be that the lack of urgency is “the great culprit” that as a Divine judgment had us lose the Middle East to idolatrous Islam, Europe to atheistic Secularism, and has us losing the USA to godless Humanism. This should precipitate the cry, “Lord, give us ‘Urgency,’ or we die! Or better yet, “Lord, raise us from ‘the dead,’ and grant us ‘Urgency!’” All this in the spirit of the triple seemingly “desperate” refrain of Psalm 80:3, 7, and 19, “Restore us, O God; restore us, O God of hosts; restore us, O Lord God of hosts. Cause your face to shine, and we shall be saved.” The crescendoing urgency at the beginning of this threefold refrain is hard to miss!

May be the greatest catalyst to urgent prayer could be the consideration of “eternity.” A painter was once asked why he was so painstakingly meticulous in applying the finishing touches to his art work before he would release it to the world. His answer was, “I paint for eternity.” May be the Church should follow in his footsteps in pursuing its spirituality (“created in the image of God”), its humanity (“dominion taking”) and its sexuality (“multiplication”) *sub specie aeternitatis*. In reverse order, it would consciously “multiply” for eternity, that is, produce children to populate the local Church and serve

the local Church to produce members of the Holy City, the Bride of Christ (Rev. 19:7-8; 21:2). It would purposefully “take dominion” for eternity, that is, develop all of created reality in its many facets, such as education, business, politics, etc. and areas, such as agriculture, industry, etc., to advance the Kingdom. It would intentionally develop its “spirituality” for eternity, that is, it would worship, preach, read, rejoice, sing, fast, weep, and also pray with a view to heaven and hell. It would not put all its eggs in the basket of “temporal things” and, whether deliberately or not, avoid issues of life and death, heaven and hell, by devoting all its energies or staking all of its hopes on this-worldly undertakings of whatever kind, and getting all its pleasures or drowning all its sorrows in this-worldly diversions, such as movies, sports events, performing arts. Efforts can be made in myriads of ways to ignore, sidestep or drown out issues of heaven and hell, whether with a restless, troubled, and agitated or a restful, untroubled, and calm conscience. But eventually they must be faced! Successful undertakings cannot indefinitely lift one’s spirit! “The Dow Jones or the S&P 500 is up big time!” Successful diversions cannot indefinitely soothe one’s spirit! “My team won the World Series, or the World Cup!” All this will pale sooner or later, will give only a temporary spike, and the eternal realities will catch up with everybody. When it caught up with Augustine, he cried out, “Hack me, hew me, burn me here, but spare me hereafter, spare me hereafter” (See Brooks, 284-288). When this hits the heart *head on*, which it must, it will grieve over its failure to pray, will strive to cultivate it, will free itself from the non-stop hustle and bustle of this world, will seek to enflame its love for Christ, will yearn to be flooded with the Spirit

For all who painfully continue to experience and “fight” a regrettable lack of urgency that to their dismay they do not seem to be able to overcome the next sparkplug may well function as a God-sent. It has done so for many. It can and should be instrumental in fanning embers into flame! In fact, it is designed for that very purpose.

6. Harmony: The Consensus of the King

Scripture places a heavy emphasis upon unity in the body of Christ (John 17:21; Phil. 2:2), and this includes prayer (Rom. 15:30). Christians are not soloists. They are allies! While two Christians can possibly function as an effective duet (Mt. 18:19), they are ultimately members of a “choir” and must make unreserved and unimpeded “consensual agreement” with all the choir members without exception a top priority for the “performance” to be harmonious and effective. Such agreement, indicative of a united front, is, and should be all-encompassing. Christians do, and must, seek “union” not only with all fellow-believers, but also in the totality of their createdness in the image of God, that is, in their hearts as their mission control center, in the internal functions of their thinking (their minds), their willing (their volition), and their feeling (their emotions), in their creative imagination, in their dominion taking, as well as in their words and their actions. All this does, and must come to expression in their prayers. They are not “lone rangers” with their own motivation, standard and objective. They are, and must be “allies” across the board. They are, and must be like zealous warriors, who rhythmically

and in unison march toward their objective at the drumbeat of Scripture, like coordinated armored columns that systematically advance to their goal, like synchronized squadrons of war planes that methodically sweep in at their target. There is nothing haphazard or careless, let alone self-assertive and dysfunctional about them.

Concretely, in the context of this **Topical Focus**, they do, and must, be united in asking God, “Give us all twelve sparkplugs of prevailing prayer, or we die.” They must be united in asking God in the context of Scripture, “Give us the total content of your Word, or we die.” They must be united in asking God in the context of James, “Give us a biblical Revival Status, a biblical Reinforcement Ministry, as well as a biblical Recovery Mode, when and where necessary (See **Topical Focus #1: Biblical Revival**), or we die. Apply to us the way to practical godliness (Jam. 1: 1-27), the principles of practical godliness (Jam. 2:1-26), the implementation of practical godliness (Jam. 3:1-4:10), the range of practical godliness (Jam. 4:11-5:18), or we die. They also must be united in asking God for the purpose of James (Jam. 5:19-20) to be or to become a reality in their midst, “Give us in the footsteps of James the zeal and the wherewithal to target wretched sinners and wretched saints to save them from death and to cover a multitude of their as well as our own sin, or we die.” They must be united in the conviction of the “infinite significance” of all these facets of holiness. They must be united in the recognition that only the Holy Spirit can produce this multi-faceted holiness. They must be united in the certainty (Jam. 1:6) that their united prayers, sparked in the twelve-fold biblical manner and aiming at all biblical components of holiness will be answered without exception (1 John 5:14)! But they never arrive at this type of agreement with each other, until they “agree with God” and take his side in everything, always taking a strong stand against everyone who “disagrees” with him and obstinately rebel against him!

Consensual “agreement” in both faith and practice (Eph. 4:3-6, 13-16) that comes to expression in united prayer covers the waterfront. It includes the (biblically appropriate) desires of the heart (Ps. 37:4), the (biblically right) reasons of the mind (Rom. 12:2), the (biblically proper) motivations of the will (Mt. 26:39, 42), the (biblically pure) prompting of the emotions (Heb. 12:2; Jam. 1:2), the (biblically laudable) content of the creative imagination (Jam. 4:13-16), the (biblically endorsed) strategy of dominion taking (Gal. 2:7-8), the (biblically reputable) manner and time of speaking and responding (Eph. 4:29, 31; Jam. 4:11), the (biblically sound) way and occasion of acting, pro-acting, and reacting (Phil. 4:9), and the (biblically required) necessity of perseverance in godliness and ministry, both personally and corporately (Mt. 24:13; Heb. 10:39; 12:1, 3; Jam. 1:3). When all this is in place, rivers of living, Holy Spirit water (John 7:37-39) will quantitatively as well as qualitatively flow forth from “us” and, once again, quantitatively as well as qualitatively turn deserts into fertile fields (Is. 32:15), cemeteries into maternity wards (Ezek. 37:1ff) and Dead Seas into fresh water lakes (Ezek. 47:1ff). In short, united prayer that is marked by uncompromised agreement, is centered in the power and presence of Christ, and is conspicuous by its unwavering certainty of the outcome, is God’s means to God’s ends (See Murray, *With Christ in the School of Prayer*, 111-117, with reference to Mt. 18:19-20; Rom. 15:30; 2 Cor. 1:11; Phil. 1:9; Col. 4:3).

In this context the potential pitfalls with all this entails in terms of “great trouble and guilty disgrace” (Neh. 1:3) that all too often mark both the history of the Church and the life of believers (Jam. 4:1-10), are clearly too many to enumerate. This, undoubtedly, prompted Paul to plead with the Philippians for unity of mind in the essential elements of the Gospel that he had laid out for them in the areas of regeneration (Phil. 3:1-3), justification (Phil. 3:4-9), and sanctification (Phil. 3:10-11), with the added conviction that God would illumine issues where unanimity is lacking, coupled with the exhortation by all means jointly to carry on to the degree that agreement prevails (Phil. 3:15-16). This should convince Christians to find as much common ground as possible without compromising Paul’s essentials (Phil. 3:17-19), to commit the rest to God, and in the meantime to stand shoulder to shoulder wherever two or three are together (Mt. 18:20). This clearly applies to the Church as well as to all other spheres of society, such as the marriage, the family, etc.

Frankly, it may well be difficult to assess to what extent prayers have remained, do remain and will remain unanswered precisely because of infighting whether rooted in selfish ambition (Jam. 3:16; 4:3) or “honest” (?) disagreement (Acts 15:36-39). But in the light of the clear cut statement of the Lord Jesus, “if two of you agree on earth concerning *anything* that they ask, it will be done for them by my Father in heaven (Mt. 18:19), the damage done by “disagreements” may well be incalculable. This does, and should hold true, even if “anything” is always “anything-in-context,” as I argued above. Clearly, “disagreements” have obstructed many a ministry and derailed many a Church, many a marriage, many a family, and, for that matter, many an evangelistic outreach in society in general, starting with the obstruction and derailment of “united” prayer (See yet Charles G. Finney, *Lectures on Revival* (Minneapolis: Bethany House Publishers, 1988), 192-206, as well as his *Experiencing Revival* (New Kensington, PA: Whitaker House, 1984), 117-118, for a set of intriguing as well as challenging comments, be it in a larger and unacceptable Semi-Pelagian context, on both Mt. 28:19 and the notion of “agreement” in prayer in terms of motivation, attitude, content, standard, procedures, and objectives).

Conclusion

Four Practicals in closing! The first one concerns the place and function of prayer in Acts 2:42. The second one focuses on the relationship between prayer and fasting. The third one summarizes Christ’s two schools of prayer, in which he addresses both the “what” and the “how” of prayer. The fourth and last item contains a definition and some exhortations that reflect what this **Topical Focus** is all about and supplements it.

1. The First Practical

The place and function of prayer in Acts 2:42 are intriguing. This verse presents us with the four essential elements of every Christian Church, Preaching, Fellowship, the Lord’s Supper and Prayer.

Preaching is the first and foremost means of grace. It functions as the “pipeline” from

God to man.

Fellowship is the second means of grace and resembles the bloodstream in the body. It is the “pipeline” from God through man to man. The oxygen of the Word of God that is derived from the preaching enters into the body of the Church through the 24/7 inhaling lung system, which subsequently disperses it to every part of the body through the bloodstream of sharing the Word in the incessant fellowship of speaking and acting the Word. The pulpit needs the pew to be fully effective. No circulation, no oxygenation! No oxygenation, amputation!

The Lord’s Supper has the third spot, and with it a very strategic place and function. It is the means of grace that puts on display the combination of preaching and fellowship. All that the preaching conveys can only be realized as a grace from Christ (1 Cor. 11:24-26; Col. 3:1-3) that flows through the body (1 Cor. 10:17; Eph. 4:11-16). Baptism symbolizes and seals to “wretched sinners” the three gifts of the New Covenant, promised by the Father, produced by the Son and transported by the Holy Spirit, namely regeneration, justification and sanctification (Ezek. 36:52-27) as “definitive” realities. In the Lord’s Supper, however, believers as “wretched saints” flee to Christ as the New Covenant personified, to obtain the progressive outflow of these three gifts, namely fresh repentance and faith, fresh forgiveness and fresh holiness when and to the extent that these are indicated and required by the Word preached. Since Christ is with the Father, to flee to Christ in the sacrament is to make a “pit stop” in heaven. In the Lord’s Supper believers also align themselves in their heart, their mind, will and emotions with their fellow believers as New Covenant members, in fact, opt to make this pit stop together arm in arm, to put themselves at each other’s disposal, to glean from each other, and through this Fellowship to identify and facilitate fresh repentance and faith, forgiveness and holiness. Frankly, since without Jesus we can do nothing, and without the body we are nothing (much, if anything), we need the Lord’s Supper and its pit stop in heaven, not just every week, but every day, every hour, every minute, in fact, every second. However, this is clearly impossible to implement. After all, the Lord’s Supper is a communal sacrament in the orderly assembly of the saints. Hence it is not at the disposal of individual saints every day, hour, minute or second.

Here prayer enters the picture. It is the extension of the Lord’s Supper as the embodied display of Preaching and Fellowship. As saints we flee incessantly to Christ (as preached in the Church and shared in fellowship) in adoration, in confession, in supplication for mercy (Heb. 4:16) and intercession for each other (Eph. 6:18). This can be done every second, even if believers are not physically together. In addition to their weekly or semi-weekly get together, as well as their small group meetings they can vow to meet both Christ and each other for a pit stop in the throne room whenever this is necessary, up to every nano-second. In fact, simply by entering the throne room at any time, they *will* meet all the (millions of) others, who are congregating there as well, inclusive of their small group members! Thus the Spoken Word (in preaching), the Shared Word (in fellowship) and the Shown Word (in the sacrament) turn into the Strengthening Word (through prayer). The order of the constituent elements in Acts 2:42, inclusive of prayer in the fourth spot, is both eminently exquisite and utterly applicatory.

But what else can one expect from a Divine Author?

2. The Second Practical

The relationship between prayer and fasting should receive much more attention than it usually does, and the practice of fasting should be taken much more seriously than it usually is. For one, as the following quotation, reflecting on actual Revival times, indicates, fasting fortifies prayer. “Whenever a Church, mourning the absence of divine influence, was brought to bow down before God, with fasting and sackcloth and supplication, there was reason to hope that deliverance was at hand. I say with fasting, for, lightly as this religious ordinance is regarded by man, experience demonstrates its adaptedness to give intensity to special prayer” (Ebenezer Porter, *Letters on Revival*, 24). But further, as this quotation in the footsteps of Scripture underscores as well, fasting is complementary to a deep “hunger” for Kingdom advance and essential for Kingdom “success” (Joel 1:14; 2:12, 15; Mt. 17:19-21; Acts 13:2-3). Last but not least, however, fasting is fundamentally the reverse side of a profound “thirst” for God, deeply to experience his presence (Acts 9:9) and to be thoroughly aware of his approval (Mt. 9:15) in the utmost of contentment (Phil. 4:11), gratitude (Eph. 5:18) and joy (1 Pet. 1:9). Since Biblical “success” in all its manifestations, whether in the practice of intensified prayer, the vision of Kingdom advance, the enjoyment of God’s presence, or otherwise, is invariably rooted in self-denial (death to self) (John 12:24; Phil. 3:10), “fasting” and the Christian are virtually synonymous and should be interchangeable! This is to say, the “thirst” for God and the “hunger” for his Kingdom to come should be so overwhelmingly present that it pushes any appetite of any sort into the background, if not into (temporal) oblivion (Mt. 4:2). To put it in a fully biblical variant on James 4:2, “You do not have (big time), because you do not pray and fast (big time)!”

3. The Third Practical

A summary of what has been mentioned *already* regarding Christ’s two schools of prayer, namely the “what” and the “how” of prayer.

First, the “what” is encapsulated in sum and substance in what Jesus taught the disciples in the Lord’s Prayer (Mt. 7:9-13). This Model Prayer functions as the perennial parameters within which all prayers of all believers must take place at all times in all places and in all circumstances. It is God-centered to the core and does not allow for any deviation. It is God-centered in the threefold Focus of all human endeavors (Petitions 1-3), in the threefold Warp and Woof of all human experiential progress (Petitions 4-6) and in the threefold Foundation of all human effectiveness (Conclusion 1-3).

Furthermore, the “how” is encapsulated in sum and substance in what Jesus taught the Syro-Phoenician woman (Mt. 15:21-28) as complementary to the “what.” Whether fully conscious of it or not, she reflects the sum and substance of the Lord’s Prayer when

she, rather remarkable for a Gentile woman, cries out against the Demonic “onslaught of darkness” in the name of the Jewish “King of Light” (“Son of David”) in four phases, resembling College 101, 201, 301 and 401. As has been mentioned in an earlier context, she displays an intolerable burden for her cruelly demon-possessed daughter in her cry for mercy (22), a sense of desperation in her continued shouting (23), a total and hungry surrender in prostrating herself before Jesus with a heartfelt plea for help (25), and ends up in unwavering faith by “opening her mouth” fully expecting (27) that it would be filled (Ps. 81:10), even as dogs are fully confident that any table crumbs are theirs by definition. Somehow all the “sparkplugs” of prayer seem to come together in the fourfold prayer of this amazing woman. No wonder that she graduated *summa cum laude*, disciplined by her acknowledged King in what resembled four “lectures.” Jesus starts out by not answering her (23), subsequently denies her request (24), then gives a reason for this (26), and ends up granting it instantaneously in answer to her faith (28). The fourfold prayer and the fourfold response are clearly intertwined. In fact, the fourfold response on Jesus’ part tests and precipitates the fourfold progression of the woman. The universal pattern is there for everybody to see! So the Church better start out with an intolerable burden, for the lost or for anything else in line with the Lord’s Prayer and promised or commanded in Scripture, persevere in a sense of desperation, prostrate itself in hungry surrender, and end up “opening its mouth” in unwavering faith! Because it has no other choice! It is King Jesus or nothing!

4. The Fourth Practical

According to John Bunyan, “Prayer is a sincere (Ps. 16:1-4; 66:17-18; Prov. 15:8; Jer. 29:12-14; Hos. 7:14), sensible (2 Sam. 7:27; Ps. 38:6, 8-10; 69:3; 77:2; 103:1-4; 116:3-4; Is. 38:14; Jer. 31:18; Dan. 9:3-4; Mt. 26:75; Ph. 4:6; Heb. 5:7), affectionate (Gen. 32:24, 26; Ps. 38:10; 42:1; 69:3; 84:2; 119:20, 174; Dan. 9:19; Lk. 22:44) outpouring (Ex. 33:13; Deut. 4:29; Ps. 38:9; 42:2, 4; 62:8; 71:1-5; Dan. 9:17; 1 Tim. 5:5; Heb. 11:6) of the heart or soul to God (Heb. 11:6), through Christ (Ps. 18:2; 25:11; 27:1; 28:1; Dan. 9:17; John 14:14-16; Eph. 1:6; 5:30), in the strength and assistance of the Holy Spirit (Rom. 8:26-27; 1 Cor. 2:11; Eph. 2:18), for such things as God has promised or according to his Word (Ps. 119:25, 28, 41-42, 49, 58, 65, 74, 81-82, 107, 147, 154, 169-170; Dan. 9:2; Mt. 6:6-8; 26:53-54), for the good of the Church (John 17:9-26; Eph. 1:16-21; 3:14-19; Phil. 1:9-11; 2:15; Col. 1:13) with submission to the will of God (Mt. 6:10; 1 John 5:14-15; 1 Cor. 2:11)” (Summarized from *Free Grace Broadcaster* (Issue 221, Fall, 2012), 4-14). In addition to this J.C. Ryle exhorts believers to pray “with reverence and humility” (Gen. 18:27; Eccl. 5:2; Job 40:4), to fill up their prayers “with the Spirit,” to pray “regularly,” to “persevere in prayer” (Col. 4:2; 1 Thess. 5:17), to be “earnest in prayer” (Gen. 32:26; Dan. 9:19; Heb. 5:7), to pray “in faith” (2 Sam. 7:25; Mt. 11:24; see also Acts 12:15), to pray with “boldness” (Ex. 32:12; Josh. 7:9), to pray with “fullness” in contrast to “stunted, dwarfish, clipped, contracted, hurried, little, narrow, diminutive prayers,” to pray “specifically” (Gen. 24:12; 32:11; 2 Cor. 12:8), to pray “intercessory prayers,” to pray with “thanksgiving” (Phil. 4:6; Col. 4:2), to pray with

“watchfulness” (Summarized from *Free Grace Broadcaster*, 34-42). Both Bunyan’s definition and Ryle’s exhortations are woven of one cloth with the present **Essay** and are quoted to underscore its content and aim.