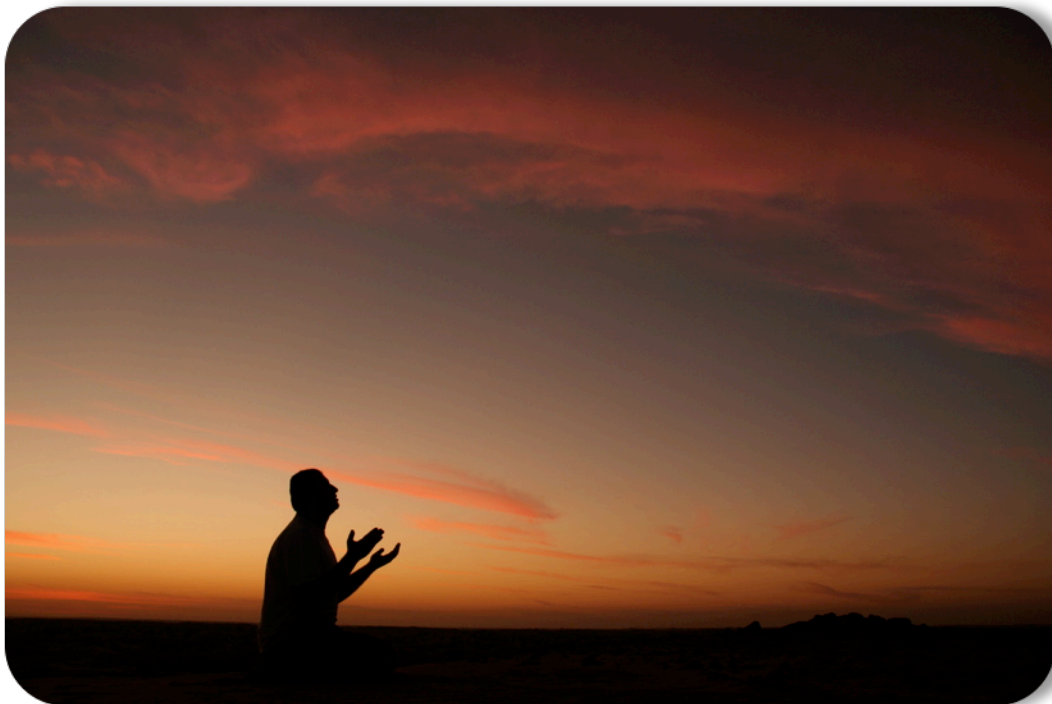


The Promise of Prayer

Parameters of Prayer 1



T. M. Moore

The Fellowship of Ailbe
A ReVision Study

The Promise of Prayer
Parameters of Prayer
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Susie Moore, Editor and Finisher

The Fellowship of Ailbe

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Welcome to *The Promise of Prayer*

Welcome to *The Promise of Prayer*, Part 1 of a four-part study on *Parameters of Prayer*. In this series of studies, we will consider the teaching of Scripture concerning prayer and its role in the life of faith. God intends prayer as the *defining discipline* of our walk with and work for the Lord. For too many of us, however, our prayers are something less than that.

We won't take prayer more seriously, nor work at it harder, unless we first understand what God promises us in prayer. That we can come freely into the presence of God, and lay out our needs and requests to Him, is no mean privilege. Understanding what God promises when we turn to Him in prayer should encourage us to master this discipline and make good use of it.

Hebrews 4.16 encourages us to come boldly to the Lord in prayer, there to find mercy and grace to help in our time of need. In this one verse, the promise of prayer is revealed. Our task is to unpack, understand, and lay hold on that promise, so that we might become the kind of people whose lives are characterized by prayer without ceasing. For we will not realize more of the presence, promise, and power of the Kingdom of God unless prayer becomes the ambience and environment in which we live.

These studies are designed for individual or group use. While you may derive much benefit from studying on your own, that benefit can be greatly enhanced by joining with a friend or a group to read, discuss, share, challenge, and pray for one another.

If you're in a group, make sure you prepare for each study by reading through the lesson in advance and answering the questions in writing. Take turns leading your group. Let every member share in the privilege and responsibility of facilitating discussions. Group leaders should not feel like they have to "have all the answers." Their task is simply to lead the group through the readings and questions, and to help everyone participate.

Visit our website, www.ailbe.org, to subscribe to our free instructional newsletters, including *ReVision*, *Scriptorium*, and *The Week*, and *Crosfigell*, featuring insights from Scripture and our Celtic Christian forebears.

T. M. Moore
Principal

1 Access

Let us therefore come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need. Hebrews 4.16

Friends of Jesus

“You are My friends,” Jesus said to His disciples. What an unspeakable, inestimable privilege! To be a friend of Jesus! His companion, colleague, and intimate acquaintance! Jesus, Who spoke the worlds into being! Jesus, Who healed the sick, gave sight to the blind, raised the dead, proclaimed the Kingdom, fulfilled all righteousness, died and rose again, and now rules on high, upholding the universe and everything in it by His Word of power, gathering and sanctifying His elect, and preparing a place in eternal glory for all His *friends*! What a glorious calling and *promise*, to be a friend of Jesus!

But, who are the friends of Jesus?

Doubtless every believer likes to think of himself or herself as a friend of Jesus. We believe in Him, that He died for our sins and rose again for our salvation. We delight to worship Him and to be with others who do. And we find it comforting to recall His promise to be with us always, in every situation, every day of our lives (Matt. 28.20).

Surely we who do these things can count ourselves among the friends of Jesus?

Well, what did Jesus say? “You are My friends if you do whatever I command you” (Jn. 15.14). Let’s not miss that qualifying word, *whatever*. Jesus didn’t say, “You are My friends if you like being with Me.” Or, “If you believe in Me for forgiveness and salvation.” Or, “If you go to church.” As important as each of these is, even taken all together they cannot guarantee you or anyone else the status of being regarded by Jesus as among His friends.

Whatever Jesus commands

To be counted in that number, you must do *whatever* Jesus commands you. And when it comes to the commandments of our Lord Jesus, it’s best to take them according to the priority He places on them. First among these is that we abide in Jesus and seek His Kingdom and righteousness (Jn. 15.4-10; Matt. 6.33). Abiding in Jesus will find us listening to His Word and keeping His commandments. Seeking His Kingdom is the form obedience takes in every area of our lives.

Close on the heels of this, and intimately connected to abiding in Jesus and seeking His Kingdom, is the work of prayer. “Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden...” (Matt. 11.28). They join the circle of Jesus’ friends who abide in Him and seek His Kingdom, devoting themselves to continuous, untiring prayer (Lk. 18.1).

The friends of Jesus may be known by the fervor and faithfulness of their prayers. The writer of Hebrews thus with good reason commands us to come boldly into the throne room of God, to join with our great High Priest and Friend in the work of prayer. Jesus promises us friendship with Himself and access to the Father in prayer, and they who are His friends *dwell in* that access increasingly.

Access for what?

But to *what* is access promised? And to what *end*?

The writer of Hebrews calls us into [the very throne room of Christ](#), to immerse ourselves, by means of the eye of faith (Eph. 1.15-23), in the glory, splendor, beauty, and might where Jesus dwells at the right hand of God. There we join our voices with those of saints and angels to cry “Glory!” to the Father, to sing our praise, declare our thanks, and seek the mercy and grace we need for daily obedience to our King.

Jesus promises that His friends may come through Him into that place, behind the veil, where He rules the world with truth and grace, there to obtain mercy and find grace to help in our time of need.

What we seek from our heavenly Friend, as we come before Him, is *mercy* – to forgive, cleanse, and sustain us; and *grace* – the medium of exchange in the Kingdom economy of God, the powerful spiritual coinage that has Kingdom purchasing power in every area of life. The mercy and grace we seek in prayer, and that we may confidently expect our Friend and King to grant us by His Word, have power to soothe troubled souls, embolden fearful hearts, empower spoken words, engender loving deeds, transform relationships, renew culture, and set our world rightside-up for King Jesus.

They are friends of Jesus – friends of Jesus! – who lay hold on the access He provides and come boldly, frequently, unceasingly, expectantly, humbly, and with rejoicing into His heavenly throne room, there to seek and secure the mercy and grace they need to live for and serve their Friend and King in every area of their lives.

Who are the friends of Jesus? Those who enjoy access to His throne room, and seek Him there, to abide in Him and obtain mercy and find grace for advancing His Kingdom.

For reflection

1. Of what does your prayer life consist at this time? Can you see ways you might improve your prayers?
2. In prayer, how real is your experience of the throne room of Jesus? Have you worked through the free 28-day devotional, *Glorious Vision*? This is an excellent resource to help you begin finding your way around in the throne room of the Lord. You can download it by [clicking here](#).
3. In what areas of your life are you most aware of needing *grace to help* you in seeking and advancing the Kingdom of God?

Next steps – Boasting in the Lord: Paul says that one goal in working our [Personal Mission Fields](#) (2 Cor. 10.13-18) is to increase boasting in the Lord – talking to and about Him in words of praise and thanksgiving. Such boasting rises naturally from us as we abide in Christ and seek His Kingdom in prayer. How can you add a bit more boasting in the Lord to your life today? What will that boasting entail?

2 Audience

Whenever the living creatures give glory and honor and thanks to Him who sits on the throne, who lives forever and ever, the twenty-four elders fall down before Him who sits on the throne and worship Him who lives forever and ever, and cast their crowns before the throne, saying:

“You are worthy, O Lord,

To receive glory and honor and power;

For You created all things,

And by Your will they exist and were created.” Revelation 4:9-11

A glorious din!

Heaven is a very noisy place. *Spiritually* noisy, to be sure, but *noisy* nonetheless.

David notes that in the place where God dwells on His throne, with Jesus at His right hand, “everyone says, ‘Glory’” (Ps. 29:9). The book of Revelation amplifies that brief summary by reporting on the continuous tumult of singing, prayers, and celebrations on the part of saints, angels, and wondrous creatures before the throne of God. John reports that the “living creatures” continuously, night and day, cry, “Holy, holy, holy, Lord God Almighty, Who was and is and is to come!” (Rev. 4:8). And whenever they do that, which is *all the time*, the rest of heaven’s population erupts in praise to God, in declaring the worthiness of Christ and His power to advance His Kingdom (Rev. 5:9), and in celebrating the calling of His people as a Kingdom and priests (Rev. 5:10). Which then cues angels by “ten thousand times then thousand, and thousands of thousands” (Rev. 5:11), to join the continuous chorus in celebrating the greatness of the Lamb King. That, in turn, opens some kind of amplification system into the heavenly throne room, through which pour the praises and blessings of “every creature which is in heaven and on earth and under the earth and such as are in the sea” (Rev. 5:13).

Imagine the glory and excitement of all this heavenly din! Nothing you’ve ever experienced in terms of noise and celebration and singing and praising comes anywhere close to what is *continuously going on* in the throne room of glory to which we have access as friends of Jesus Christ.

So what hope do we have, in the midst of all that, of having our prayers be heard by God?

Much indeed, because in the midst of all that glorious din, all that holy spiritual noise, Jesus takes you by the hand, presents you to the Father in glory, and says, “Here am I and the children whom God has given Me” (Heb. 2:13). Whereupon, with Jesus presenting you, vouching for you, interceding for you (Heb. 7:25), and seating you with Him at the Father’s right hand (Eph. 2:6), God the Father of glory turns His ear *specifically toward you*, and grants you audience, according to His promise through Jeremiah, “Call to Me, and I will answer you, and show you great and mighty things, which you do not know” (Jer. 33:3).

It’s one thing to have *access* to the glorious throne room of our King and God. It’s another thing altogether to know you have His *attention*.

The joy of audience

David understood just how precious this promise of audience is. In Psalm 28:1 he wrote, “To You I will cry, O LORD my Rock: Do not be silent to me, Lest, if You *are* silent to me, I become like those who go down to the pit.” His very *life* depended on knowing that God hears His prayers! In Psalm 86:1-3, David shows that our hope of knowing more of our salvation, of receiving mercy from the Lord, of knowing joy in Him and His forgiveness, depend on the Lord bowing His ear toward us, and hearing our prayers. In verse 7 David

wrote confidently, “In the day of my trouble I will call upon You, For You will answer me.”

This assurance of knowing that God would have mercy and show grace in hearing his prayers was a source of great joy and rejoicing for David. It made him bold to plead with God to teach and lead him in the truth, to increase fear of the Lord in him, and to enable him to glorify God in every area of His life (Ps. 86.11-13). He knew that God’s mercy toward him would issue in strength for his daily trials (vv. 14-16), protect him against every threat or in the midst of every trial, and be a sign of more good things to come from the Lord of glory (v. 17).

Knowing God would hear his prayers, David was bold to seek access to Him, according to His Word.

Do you *know* that God hears your cries for mercy and grace? And does *knowing you have an audience with Him* embolden you to seek His glory, strength, and goodness for all your walk with and work for Him?

Dead or alive?

For David, if God would not hear his prayers, he might just as well have been dead (Ps. 28.1). Life would not be worth living apart from the mercy and grace he needed each day, and which he could only obtain from the Lord through prayer.

Too many of us, I suspect, are not convinced, like David was, that God actually hears our prayers. Not only are we small and insignificant, and unskilled in the discipline of prayer, but the clamoring of so many angels, saints, and creatures of all kinds must surely drown out any puny effort we might make to catch the ear of our sovereign God and heavenly Father. We might as well be dead as hope that God will hear our prayers.

But as you abide in Jesus and seek His Kingdom through prayer, Jesus escorts you into God’s presence, where you can be fully assured that your prayers will be heard. The promise of *audience* comes to the friends of Jesus as they, abiding in Him and seeking His Kingdom, come boldly before the throne of grace to find mercy and grace to help, in whatever their time of need.

For reflection

1. When you pray, are you certain that God *bears* your prayers? Are there any conditions under which He might *not* hear your prayers? Explain.
2. How aware are you of the *glorious din* of heaven, when you come before the Lord in prayer? Should the contents and tone of their singing and prayers influence your prayers? Explain.
3. Review the prayers offered in heaven, cited in this article from Revelation 4 and 5. How much of this kind of praying factors into your prayers?

Next steps – Preparation: Meditate on Revelation 4 and 5. Try incorporating into your prayers the prayers you read about there. How can this help to bolster your confidence that God will actually hear your prayers?

3 Absolution

My little children, these things I write to you, so that you may not sin. And if anyone sins, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous. And He Himself is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the whole world.
1 John 2.1, 2

First things first

In prayer we enter the very throne room of God, where we may expect our heavenly Father to hear our prayers for mercy and grace in our time of need. God is ready to absolve us of the guilt of our sins and to lift the burden of shame and defeat that weighs upon us because of them.

But we need to make sure we observe the proper *order* of things when we come before the Lord in prayer.

Our prayers can secure mercy from God, and mercy is what we need first of all every day. If justice is receiving what you *deserve* from God, and grace is receiving what you *don't deserve*, then mercy is *not* receiving what you *do* deserve from God. What we deserve from God is condemnation, wrath, rejection, and separation from Him forever, because all of us have sinned; and God is of purer eyes than to behold evil, and the wages of sin is death (Rom. 3.23; Hab. 1.13; Rom. 6.23). So whenever we come to the Lord in prayer, let us make certain that, first of all, we seek mercy from Him – mercy which He is ever ready to bestow.

Our Advocate

John's word of encouragement to us is couched in conditional language: "*if anyone sins...*" He doesn't presume, and he doesn't condemn. He simply advises us that we do not have to bear the guilt and shame of our sins, the heavy burden of our persistent failures to obey, any longer than it takes to turn to Jesus in prayer. *If we sin*, John says, we have an Advocate – a Counselor, Comforter, and Encourager – Who will enter with us into the Father's presence, and intercede for us with Him, pleading for mercy on our behalf by showing the wounds of His suffering. Jesus has borne our sins – past, present, and future – in His own body on the cross. He has separated our sins from us as far as the east is from the west, so that our heavenly Father will remember them no more.

Though we must strive mightily to bring holiness to completion in the fear of God (2 Cor. 7.1), we will continue to sin until we are translated unto glory, and the law of sin and all its ugly accoutrements bedeck our bodies and souls no more. Thus we will continue to require mercy so that the burden of sin will neither discourage nor defeat us.

So when we come before God in prayer, making use of the access He provides through Jesus, and, with Jesus advocating for us, granting us audience with the Father, let us make certain that *first* of all we appeal through Jesus for the mercy we need to be liberated yet again from the burden of guilt and shame which our sins lay upon us.

Have no sin?

Someone may object to such a blanket assessment of our condition by insisting that he doesn't sin. To assert this is to deceive oneself and to make God to be a liar, since *He* explains that *all* of us sin (1 Jn. 1.8, 10; Rom. 3.23). Why would someone hold to such a belief?

I can think of two reasons. First, a person who claims he doesn't sin, and therefore has no need of the sin-absolving mercy of God, may not fully understand the nature of sin and the power it exerts within us. This comes about by being ignorant of the Word of God, especially of His Law, which describes the nature of sin and reveals its pervasive scope (Rom. 7.12; 1 Jn. 3.4). Sin continues within the souls even of those believe as a

kind of *law* of our not-yet-glorified existence. The Apostle Paul identified this law at work within himself, frustrating his attempts to do good and leading him, under the burden of sin, guilt, and shame, to cry out to God for mercy through Jesus Christ (Rom. 7.21-25). If we say we have no sin, then we become ensnared in two fallacies, the first, that we are holier and more advanced in our sanctification than the Apostle Paul, and the second that we are above the plain teaching of God's Word concerning the continuation of sin in our lives.

A second reason someone may not think he has a need for mercy is because he has not been in the presence of God as often as he should. Many people look to God more as their *servant* than their *sovereign*. God exists to do for us, to make us happy, help us during times of trouble or trial, or comfort us when things go wrong. He's there whenever we need Him, and when we don't, then we can handle matters ourselves.

Isaiah certainly didn't feel this way (Is. 6.1-5). Neither did David (Ps. 51), Daniel (Dan. 9.3-10), or Peter (Lk. 5.1-8), or Paul, as we have seen. These men knew God intimately, resorted to His presence often, trembled at His holiness and might, and so pled with Him for mercy to cleanse them from their sin. If we knew God and spent as much time with Him as these men did, we would not deceive ourselves into thinking that we have no sin.

When we come to God in prayer, God promises to grant us mercy and absolution, first of all. Let's be sure we seek such mercy humbly, honestly, expectantly, and gladly.

For reflection

1. Meditate on Psalm 66.18. According to this verse, why must seeking God's mercy be the first order of our prayers?
2. How would you counsel a new believer in understanding the nature of sin and our continuous need of the mercy of God?
3. How do you experience Jesus advocating for you before the Father?

Next steps – Transformation: Look at the references to Isaiah, David, Daniel, Peter, and Paul (Rom. 7.21-25). From these passages, compose a prayer that you can use throughout the day to seek the mercy of God as you need it. Write that prayer out and carry it with you.

4 Assistance (1)

Likewise the Spirit also helps in our weaknesses. For we do not know what we should pray for as we ought, but the Spirit Himself makes intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered. Romans 8.26

Hesitant to pray

I'm quite certain every Christian would say that prayer is important. We are commanded to pray, even to pray without ceasing or growing weary (1 Thess. 5.17; Lk. 18.1). We have *access* to prayer through our Lord Jesus Christ, who is able to bring us into the very presence of God the Father, where we have the promise of *audience*, that He will hear our prayers.

In prayer we find merciful absolution from sin and grace sufficient to meet all our needs. Prayer is the most characteristic of Christian disciplines, since by it we enter into and sustain communion with the living God.

But for all this, most Christians would confess that their experience of prayer is neither as consistent, as full and fruitful, or as enjoyable as they think it ought to be. Many of us have little confidence in our ability to talk with the Father beyond a few well-intended platitudes or simple formulas. We pray because we think we should, not because in prayer we find the kind of uplifting and sustaining communion with the Lord that thrills us with the joy and pleasure of His presence, as He makes all things new.

We're not confident of our ability to pray as we should; indeed, we could go further, and admit with the Apostle Paul that "we do not know what we should pray for as we ought," and so we settle into a life of prayer that tends toward being perfunctory, unsatisfying, and disappointing.

But God the Father understands our weakness. He is sympathetic with our frustration, and He has determined to supply us with amazing and *infallible* helps to aid us in the practice of prayer. And this work of helping us in prayer begins within us, by the power of God at work in His Spirit.

The indwelling Spirit

The Spirit of God, Who dwells in every believer, is at work to make us willing and able to do what is consistent with the good pleasure of God (Phil. 2.13). He works to convict us of sin, instruct us in righteousness, and urge us along in obedience, lest we fall under the discipline of the Lord (Jn. 16.8-11; Heb. 12.3-11). He sows and tends the seeds of spiritual life and gifts, so that we may grow to be witnesses for Christ and nurturing members of His Body (Gal. 5.22, 23; 1 Cor. 12.7-11; Acts 1.8). He brings us into the presence of God and His glory, and, as we linger there, works to transform us into the image of our Lord Jesus Christ (2 Cor. 3.12-18).

The Spirit of God is continuously at work within us toward these ends, but we too often fail to seek His filling. We quench His power through neglect or disobedience, and play hooky from His teaching of all the Law and Word of God (Eph. 5.18-21; 1 Thess. 5.19; Ezek. 36.26, 27). The Spirit is able to do in us, and through us, exceedingly abundantly beyond all that we have ever dared to ask or think (Eph. 3.20). And He eagerly engages with us, when we come before the Father in prayer.

We do not know how to pray as we should. But the Spirit does. He has the right agenda. He knows how spiritual growth works best. He knows the mind of Christ and God. He is the power for entering and advancing the Kingdom and righteousness of God. He is there in the moment, at every moment, when we need the grace of God to guide us in words and deeds to fulfill our Kingdom-and-glory calling from the Lord.

When we pray

So when we go to prayer, in spite of our weakness, inconsistency, hesitancy, and ineptitude, He stirs within us to bring us access to and audience with the Father, in ways so mysterious, the Apostle Paul observes, that we can't even describe them.

As we pray, the Spirit joins with us in prayer. He surrounds our stammering tongues, illuminates our unimaginative minds, and refines our trite clichés with spiritual groanings which cannot be uttered. We cannot utter them, nor can we hear them. They are the Spirit's groanings – of compassion, longing, urging, clarification, enhancement, and pleading – with which He magnifies our prayers and delivers them through Jesus into the very presence of the Father.

The more we pray – feeble and faltering though such prayers may be – the more time and space we give for the Spirit to work with our prayers. He searches the deep recesses of our souls as we pray, bringing into cognition feelings, hopes, desires, and longings which we cannot even express (1 Cor. 2.10-16; Ps. 139.23, 24). The Spirit of God is the great Translator of things we are unable to articulate in prayer. So we go to prayer, employing whatever words we can, knowing them to be entirely inadequate, but knowing as well that the Spirit knows us better than we know ourselves. And He intercepts our feeble efforts, strengthens and enlarges them with earnest spiritual groanings, and parks them in the presence of our prayer-hearing God.

Let us therefore go often to prayer, and linger there, even if only in silence, while the Spirit, Who works within us, comes to the aid of our prayers with transforming power.

For reflection

1. What would you most like to see happen to improve your prayer life? Can you achieve this without the assistance of God's Spirit?
2. Would you say that your prayers tend to line up with the *agenda* of the Spirit? Explain.
3. The Spirit comes to aid in prayer whenever we pray. So, the more we pray, the more of His assistance we can expect. What could you do to increase the amount of time you spend in prayer?

Next steps – Transformation: Begin to increase the amount of time you spend in prayer, focusing as you pray on the Spirit's agenda for your life.

5 Assistance (2)

So when they heard that, they raised their voice to God with one accord and said: "Lord, You are God, who made heaven and earth and the sea, and all that is in them, who by the mouth of Your servant David have said:

'Why did the nations rage,

And the people plot vain things?

The kings of the earth took their stand,

And the rulers were gathered together

Against the Lord and against His Christ.'" Acts 4.24-26

How do you find the words?

If ever a congregation needed urgent help in prayer, it was this one.

Once the power of the Holy Spirit was unleashed among the followers of Christ, the Kingdom of God began to come with great power, on earth as it is in heaven. Thousands believed. Many were healed. Suddenly people began loving their neighbors as themselves, and sharing freely with one another, to meet whatever needs they could. House by house, neighborhood by neighborhood, the teaching of Christ was spreading, taking root, and beginning to turn the world rightside-up.

But not everyone was pleased with these developments, and it didn't take the enemies of the Lord longer before they moved to stifle the witness for Christ and squelch the growing Christian movement.

Peter and John had healed a lame man, following that with a sermon that saw yet more thousands come to faith in Jesus. Dragged before the religious authorities, they were strictly warned that they must no long preach or teach in the name of Jesus. And it was made clear to them that failure to comply would bring serious repercussions.

A wave of anxiety must have swept over the Christian community when they learned that Peter and John had been detained. That anxiety surely swelled when, upon their release, the apostles related to the people the judgment and warnings of the religious leaders of Jerusalem.

What should they do? Was this to be the end of their new lives in Christ? How could they be silent about this One Who was making all things new in their lives?

Upon hearing the apostles' report, the people seemed to fall as one united Body into an attitude of prayer. But what would they pray? What words could express what they were feeling, and what they were up against at that moment?

Look to the Psalms

We don't know exactly how this happened, but let me suggest a possibility. Imagine you are at a large meeting of believers, gathered together to hear some somber or even threatening news. The room falls silent upon hearing the report, with only whisperings and fearful mutterings echoing here and there.

Then suddenly, from somewhere in the back, a single voice begins, "Amazing grace! How sweet the sound!" What do you do? What does *everyone* in that room do? They take up the song with confidence, and sing those familiar words together as their plea and witness to the Lord.

And this, I'm sure, is what must have happened amid the anxiousness and uncertainty of that throng of

believers in Jerusalem. Someone began to pray aloud Psalm 146.6: “*Lord, You are God, who made heaven and earth and the sea, and all that is in them...*” Then, quickly moving from there to Psalm 2, the prayer continued, and *all who were present in that assembly* joined their voices together, using the words supplied by God Himself, to bring their earnest longings before the Lord. These people fell into praying the psalms together because they had learned to pray them for all their lives.

Praying the psalms

God has provided us with inspired scripts to guide us in our prayers. When words fail us in prayer – and they will fail us often – we have God’s own Word to guide us, just as it guided those believers in Jerusalem in their time of need. The Psalms offer us words to guide our praise and thanks, words to express our fears and failures, words to enlarge the scope of our prayers, enrich the power of them, and rest the hope of them in the mighty and saving works of God.

For centuries, Christians have found in the psalms, words, feelings, and promises to assist them in their prayers. We are not wise to think that neglecting words provided by God Himself could be a route to help us improve our prayers. God has written the scripts; let us take them up with relish.

By learning to pray the psalms, and praying through them faithfully, we will discover a breadth, depth, and level of confidence in our prayers that we cannot otherwise achieve. Start with a few familiar and beloved psalms. Pray them as they are written, then in your own words. Linger over them in silence, waiting for the Lord to reply. Add more psalms as you are able, until you are using all the words of God to assist you in your prayers as you seek mercy and grace to help you in your time of need.

For reflection

1. Which psalm would you start with in order to begin using the psalms in your prayers? Why this one?
2. Why does it make sense to use words God Himself has provided for us as we come before Him in prayer?
3. What kind of adjustments do you expect you’ll have to make as you begin trying to pray the psalms as your own prayers?

Next steps – Preparation: Choose one psalm, and pray it over the next several days. Don’t rush. Pray the words of the psalm as it is written. Then, let the Lord’s words suggest a direction for your prayers, just as the believers in Acts 4 did. Come back to the psalm in your prayer, wait on the Spirit, and follow as He leads you in praying through the rest of the psalm..

6 Assistance (3)

But He, because He continues forever, has an unchangeable priesthood. Therefore He is also able to save to the uttermost those who come to God through Him, since He always lives to make intercession for them. Hebrews 7.24, 25

What in heaven is Jesus doing on earth?

It's easy to overlook the importance of the work Jesus is presently doing at the right hand of the Father on high. We delight to recall our Lord's ministry during His incarnation. We humble ourselves in sorrow and rejoicing over His crucifixion and resurrection. And we eagerly look forward to His return in glory, to take us home to be with Him forever.

But what about now? What in heaven is Jesus doing on earth? And what, if anything, might that have to do with our prayers?

Jesus is very busy at the right hand of God. He upholds the universe and everything in it by His constant, unfailing power (Heb. 1.3). He rides forth by His Spirit, in His Church, to seek and to save the lost every day (Ps. 45.3-5; Rev. 6.1, 2; Lk. 19.10). He works by His Spirit and truth to sanctify believers and build His Church (Jn. 17.17; Eph. 2.19-22; Matt. 16.18).

And, even with all this to do, He continually intercedes for us, advocating with the Father on our behalf for mercy and grace to help us in our times of need.

The advocacy of Christ

I think it's easiest to understand the intercessory work of Christ when we remember that, in the Godhead, the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit maintain a continuous triad, an ongoing, uninterrupted and unutterable conversation, replete with holiness, beauty, goodness, truth, and mutual love. The Father, Son, and Holy Spirit rejoice in each other's company and communion, so much so, that they need nothing outside themselves to supplement, satisfy, support, or delight them.

We get glimpses of this mystery from time to time in the Scriptures, as when we hear the members of the Trinity communing together in making human beings (Gen. 1.26), or when the Father speaks to the Son, appointing Him King over His domain (Ps. 2.7-9; Ps. 110.1, 4), or when the Son presents the children the Father has given Him (Heb. 2.11-13).

We who believe have been known to God from all eternity past (Eph. 1.4). Our names were written in the Lamb's book of life and have been part of that divine conversation long before the first words of creation were ever spoken (Rev. 3.5; 13.8; 17.8; 20.12; 20.15). We who believe have been part of that triad in the unseen glory of God from forever past. Our names have been lovingly spoken and our lives carefully prepared and reviewed in an eternal conversation between the members of the Triune God.

So it marks no change in the content of that divine conversation that now our Lord Jesus is continuously making mention of us and interceding for us before the Father in prayer. We have been on His heart from forever. Now the content of His intercession for us comes through the merit of His suffering, the victory of His resurrection, the power of His grace, and the efficiency of Spirit-wrought faith to bring our needs before the Father.

Whereas the Spirit intercedes for us with groanings that cannot be uttered *as we seek the Lord in prayer*, Jesus *always lives* to make intercession for us. He maintains a constant communication with God on our behalf. He

can call down angels to help us in a wide variety of ways. He continually requests the Father to keep us and sanctify us, to empower us as His witnesses, and equip us as members for the building-up of His Body. He is a constant reminder to the Father that, while neither we nor our prayers are of any significance in and of themselves, in Jesus' Name, and through His blood and righteousness, our prayers matter and can contribute to the unfolding Kingdom economy of the Lord.

A High Priest forever

Jesus is not like the Hebrew high priests, who went into the presence of God once a year, there symbolically to represent the people of Israel. Jesus is *always* in God's presence, the King of Righteousness and King of Peace, and He represents us not *symbolically* but *really* and *personally*, seeking mercy and grace to help us in our times of need.

The fact that Jesus always lives to talk with the Father about us should encourage us, as often as we can, to join that conversation, if only to listen in silence as the Spirit discovers our needs, groans them to Jesus and the Father, and Jesus seconds His groanings with His own continuous intercession on our behalf.

God has given us three great helps to assist us in our prayers. His Spirit groans for us; His Word guides us; and His Son governs and intercedes for us. The fact of such assistance in prayer should greatly encourage us to master the challenge of praying without ceasing, that we may know the power and joy of prayer for making all things new in our lives.

For reflection

1. How do you envision the Lord Jesus as He intercedes for you with the Father? Where is He? What does He say?
2. What does it mean to pray without ceasing? Do we always have to be talking in order to do this? Explain.
3. Does the fact of these three helps make you want to pray more? Explain.

Next steps – Conversation: Talk with a Christian about the three helps God has given us for prayer. How does your friend make use of these? How can you encourage one another to do so?

7 Answers

“Because he has set his love upon Me, therefore I will deliver him;
 I will set him on high, because he has known My name.
 He shall call upon Me, and I will answer him;
 I will be with him in trouble;
 I will deliver him and honor him.
 With long life I will satisfy him,
 And show him My salvation.” Psalm 91.14-16

“Call to Me, and I will answer you, and show you great and mighty things, which you do not know.” Jeremiah 33.3

Mercy and grace

As we’ve seen, the writer of Hebrews promises that, as we come boldly before the throne of God in prayer, we may expect to find *mercy and grace* to help in our times of need. *Mercy* comes in the form of absolution from sin, bringing with it relief from guilt, assurance of salvation, and renewed confidence and rest in our relationship with the Lord. Whenever we come to the Lord in prayer, we need mercy; and whenever we seek mercy, though our pleas for mercy be neither as full nor as complete as our sins require, we may know assuredly that when we confess our sins, to the best of our ability, the Lord will forgive us our sins, and cleanse us from *all* unrighteousness (1 Jn. 1.8-10).

Renewed in the mercy of the Lord, we may likewise expect that we will find *grace* to help us in our times of need. God promises to answer our prayers, to be with us in trouble, to deliver and honor us, to increase our experience of His salvation, and to show us great and mighty things we have never known before. And all these come to us from out of the treasury of His riches in grace.

In these last days, as the Lord is unfolding His divine economy, and His Kingdom is advancing on earth as it is in heaven, it pleases the Lord to “show the exceeding riches of His grace in *His* kindness toward us in Christ Jesus” (Eph. 2.7). As surely as we may expect to know the *mercy* of God through our prayers, we may expect to realize His *grace* for all our times of need.

Grace in prayer

We may realize God’s promise to answer our prayers with grace in two ways. The first is the grace we may know *in* prayer, that is, while we are actually communing in prayer with Him.

In simplest terms, the grace we may know in prayer comes from realizing the presence of the Lord, receiving us and taking us into Himself as we pray. In the presence of the Lord we may *experience* His grace in three ways. First, we experience the grace of the Lord as He makes His *glory* known to us (2 Cor. 3.12-18). The glory of the Lord is all the qualities and essence of the Lord, made manifest to us in unmistakable ways, so that we become aware of being in the presence of something *weighty, fearsome, majestic, full of splendor, and radiant with beauty, goodness, and truth*. This is a work of God’s Spirit, as He brings us through His Word into the presence of God Who is revealed there. When you experience this gracious presence of glory, you will say with Peter, “It is good for us to be here.”

Second, the grace we experience in the presence of the Lord in prayer takes the form of *joy*. In the Lord’s presence is fullness of joy (Ps. 16.11). When we are overcome by joy, we experience a sense of total wellbeing, complete freedom from fear, doubt, worry, or disappointment. We feel relieved of all burdens, content and at peace in the midst of any situation, and stretched beyond all our problems or nagging concerns into a realm

of joy that no adversity can reach.

Finally, the glory and joy of the Lord, which we know by grace when we come to Him in prayer, produces an experience of *pleasure* – holy pleasure, delight unspeakable, a pleasure with which no other pleasure on earth can compare and of which we will never tire (Ps. 16.11). When we come to God in prayer, we may expect Him to answer us with grace – by showing us His glory, filling and surrounding us with joy, and enrapturing us in pleasure from beyond this world.

Grace through prayer

But the grace with which God answers our prayers does not end in prayer. That grace is but the preparation we need for the grace that comes *through* prayer, the grace by which we manifest in our everyday experience what we have gained from the Lord in our time of prayer. The riches of grace which God kindly shows us in prayer becomes a treasury of grace that we spend throughout the day, sharing by our words and deeds, in a wide variety of ways, the transforming reality of grace with the people around us.

The grace gained in prayer will flow through us like rivers of living water to touch others with life from beyond the veil (Jn. 7.37-39). This grace is *sufficient* for all our needs. If we are suffering, grace sustains us and enables us, like Jesus, to speak words of comfort to others. If we are confused, grace reminds us of the truth that is in Christ Jesus, Who is the same yesterday, today, and forever. When we are with others, whether they be friends or irritants, grace appears in our words and deeds to glorify Jesus and make Him known.

We are called to be agents of grace, spending this precious coin of the realm of Christ's Kingdom, to purchase for others the blessings of God, and in so doing, to be blessed of God ourselves as we return in prayer for mercy and grace to help in our time of need.

God promises to answer our prayers. When we seek Him for mercy and grace, we may sometimes be surprised at how He answers such prayers, but we will never be disappointed.

For reflection

1. How do you experience the grace of God *in* prayer?
2. What opportunities do you have to show the grace of God *through* prayer in your daily life? How can you prepare *in* prayer to be an agent of grace?
3. What do we mean when we confidently assert that God answers prayers?

Next steps – Transformation: Pray for God to show His grace through you in specific ways today. Wait on Him to know His grace in prayer, then listen as He prepares you to go forth and show His grace through you to others.

For reflection or discussion

1. How would you summarize what God promises us when we come to Him in prayer?
2. In your experience, what are the greatest obstacles keeping you from improving your life of prayer?
3. How can Christians help one another to know more of the glory, joy, and pleasure of God in prayer?
4. Are you finding the psalms to be of help in encouraging you to pray and guiding you in prayer? Explain.
5. What's the most important lesson you've learned about the promise of prayer from this study?

Prayer:

The Fellowship of Ailbe

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Thank you.