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Evaluating and Enhancing the Personal Prayer Life of the Members of the Standifer Gap Seventh-day Adventist Church

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ABSTRACT

EVALUATING AND ENHANCING THE PERSONAL PRAYER
LIFE OF THE MEMBERS OF THE STANDIFER GAP
SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTIST CHURCH

by

Robert D. Mix

Adviser: Jon Dybdahl

ABSTRACT OF GRADUATE STUDENT RESEARCH

Project Document

Andrews University

Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary

Title: EVALUATING AND ENHANCING THE PERSONAL PRAYER LIFE OF THE MEMBERS OF THE STANDIFER GAP SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTIST CHURCH

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Date completed: October 2013

Problem

Daily, disciplined personal prayer is one of the most difficult, yet important exercises the Christian can undertake. Many Christians today talk about prayer more as a burden than as a pleasure. Even many pastors, including myself, have been frustrated about their prayer experience. I discovered very few of my church members or leaders spent much time in prayer on a daily basis.

Method

A ten-month sermon series and curriculum was formed and delivered during 2009. Its purpose was spiritual enhancement. It included ten sermons on the prayer life of Jesus and the early church, and ten interactive discussion periods geared to challenge the

participants into a more knowledgeable, active, and effective prayer experience. The success of this journey was measured by a questionnaire given during the first afternoon seminar and again at the last afternoon seminar. Comparison of results yielded some interesting insights.

Results

Twenty people voluntarily attended the first afternoon seminar and eight the final session. A comparison of the results of the questionnaires from the first afternoon session and the last session showed that an increase in time in personal prayer was associated with an increase in feelings of satisfaction in personal prayer. The increase of time in prayer was also linked to an increase in confidence in one's relationship with God. Overall those in the final group spent considerable more time with God on a daily basis, which created a deeper desire to spend even more time with Him!

Conclusions

The combination of time, learning, and practice seems to have contributed to an increase in satisfaction with personal prayer. It seems clear that the real benefit to the participants was not my expertise, but their willingness to explore, experiment, and wrestle with the challenges of prayer. This journey contributed to their growing closer and more confident in their relationship with God.

Andrews University
Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary

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LIFE OF THE MEMBERS OF THE STANDIFER GAP
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A Project Document
Presented in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Doctor of Ministry

by
Robert D. Mix
October 2013

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Personal History

During my childhood there were many nights when I woke up in the middle of the night on my knees. I had fallen asleep while kneeling in prayer. As I got older, my prayer times diminished dramatically yet they continued to be a sleeping aid. In general, I have struggled with having and maintaining a meaningful prayer life in spite of the biblical counsel that encourages that we “should always pray and not give up” (Luke 18:1). Honestly, there were moments when praying felt almost like a waste of time. I know that I am not alone in my struggle to obtain a consistent prayer life. In a survey of pastors from various denominations across North America, Grey Matter Research (2005) exposed the secret truth that majority of American pastors were frustrated with their lack of a prayer life. Their research showed that only sixteen percent of the pastors surveyed were satisfied with their prayer life.

My college religion classes and seminary training did not help me address this void in my spiritual life. As a pastor I studied, preached, and prayed. But deep down I still felt like prayer was a waste of my time. I felt more productive doing something—anything!

In wrestling with the idea of developing something on prayer for my project, I did an informal survey with the church board and discovered that among the leaders very few spent any significant time in daily prayer. In addition, through various discussions with church members, I found that many active members struggled with spending significant

time in prayer with God. Many felt guilty about this lack but did not know how to address the problem.

I determined to use this doctoral project to try to understand some of the mystery of why people so often neglect prayer. Hopefully, I will be able to develop some strategies to help those who want a more meaningful prayer life and a closer relationship with God.

The Problem

At the heart of this struggle is the truth that prayer does not come naturally to us even though we were originally created for fellowship with God (Gen 1-2). Our fallen nature leaves us afraid of God (Gen 3). Before sin, the first couple communed with God on a regular basis. White (1980, p. 29) tells us that what the first humans valued above all else “was the society of the Son of God... for they had much to say and many questions to ask.” But once they sinned “they sought to hide themselves from his inspection, whom they delighted before to meet (White, 1980, p. 39). According to Sproul, rebirth is the only thing that will create a desire for communion with God, yet “sin, even in the born again Christian, still resists the Spirit’s call to come close to our Creator” (Sproul, 2009, p. 17). Prayer is a gift from God, and He will help us in our feeble attempts as we learn to rely on Him (Rom 8: 26). Bounds makes it clear that we must discipline ourselves in this “trade” called prayer until it is learned (Bounds, 1990, p. 318).

Justification for This Project

The reason for this doctoral project is to unravel the purpose of prayer and to ascertain what it takes to have and sustain an unswerving and significant prayer life. This

will be accomplished through Bible study, a review of pertinent literature, and conducting seminars on prayer. This study should allow me to discover insights which will help people develop meaningful prayer experiences with God.

Expectations for This Project

This project should provide approaches to solve my own frustrations concerning prayer. I also desire to develop a method of helping fellow Christians experience a meaningful prayer life.

As a primary goal I want to document changes in prayer activities and attitudes – mine and the congregation -- during this project. A secondary goal, yet a meaningful one, is to see if education and apt resources would provide an increase in the members’ personal satisfaction with prayer. I also hope to be able to develop a process that will be helpful for other pastors or spiritual leaders to assist them in enhancing the prayer lives of those in their sphere of influence.

Delimitations

My own lack of confidence concerning prayer was a limiting factor. During the project process it was like the blind leading the blind. Yet I felt that through this project I would be able to deepen my own understanding of prayer and develop a more meaningful prayer life. I also wanted to enhance my ability to help others grow closer to God through their own prayer experience.

Limitations

The research methodology used was that of a survey questionnaire that participants completed at the beginning and at the conclusion of a monthly series of

sermons and seminars on the prayer life of Jesus. Since this prayer series occurred once-a-month over a 10-month period, a comparison of significance differences over the period may be evidenced.

I was dependent on people voluntarily attending the seminar sessions, so attendance numbers are not consistent each month. In addition, the constraints of the one-year time limit on the use of the questionnaire, imposed by the Internal Review Board (IRB) of Andrews University failed to provide me with enough time to do the literature review and the theology paper before undertaking the research study.

Another possible limiting factor is that I developed the questionnaire myself. Although, not a professional questionnaire developer, I felt the need to assume this task as part of the learning process.

Definitions of Terms

Fierce Prayer: The Bible never records Jesus falling asleep during prayer. That's because the prayers of Jesus were *fierce*. By *fierce* I don't mean wild, violent, ferocious, untrained, or angry; by *fierce* I am talking about being "robust, intense, strong, powerful, passionate, eager, unbridled, uncurbed, untamed. In its simplest form, a fierce conversation is one in which we come out from behind ourselves into the conversation and make it real" (Scott, 2002, p. 7). *Fierce* prayer is where we talk to God as to a close friend (White, 1892). *Fierce* prayer is about moral courage, clear requests, and taking action. It is about being real in our prayers. *Fierce* prayer reveals the importance of the relationship to the one praying because "the conversation is the relationship" (Scott, 2002, p. 6).

Mystical View of Prayer: "Mysticism is the pursuit of communion with, identity with, or conscious awareness of an ultimate reality, divinity, spiritual truth, or God through direct experience, intuition, or insight" (Wikipedia, n.d.).

I have made an arbitrary separation between the *mystical* view of prayer and the *traditional* view of prayer. In reality these overlap and are not as nicely drawn as I have done. But it has been helpful for me to understand and evaluate the various approaches to personal prayer.

Traditional View of Prayer: The traditional approach views a relationship with God being built upon the truths as revealed in Scripture. Prayer is one of the core disciplines in this process. In this approach prayer often plays a more utilitarian role such as intercession, or claiming promises to allow God to act in the current situation. The emphasis in this tradition is on God's activity in the current situation, rather than a

relationship. This approach sees our relationship with God being His activity in Christ, the cross, and the role of the Holy Spirit, not just a feeling during prayer.

The Project Process

In developing a questionnaire for this project I worked with the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at Andrews University. Once cleared by the IRB (November 2008), I was able to move forward in getting final approval for this project. The Doctor of Ministry approval committee felt strongly that I needed to extend the project over several months in order to determine if any real life-changes resulted. This prudent advice to lengthen the project to several months was accepted.

Before implementation of the project the local church board members were provided the parameters of what I was undertaking and a positive vote was received for implementation. In addition the church family was informed about the project and how it would proceed. They were invited to participate and be involved.

The project involved combinations of sermons and seminars. First, I conducted Sabbath morning sermons on the prayer life of Jesus. These sermons were followed by afternoon seminar sessions on practical issues concerning prayer. This combination of sermon and seminar was conducted over a ten-month time period. A questionnaire was administered at the beginning of the first afternoon seminar session and again at the end of the last afternoon seminar. At the end of the 10 months, the results were evaluated to see if there were changes in the prayer lives of the participants.

The Literature Review

There is so much literature on prayer that I had to limit the research. I chose to examine some of the Christian *mystical* literature to get a better understanding of this

approach to God. I also reviewed the more *traditional* approach to prayer—which utilizes Scripture as the foundation of what is truth. In addition, I analyzed materials from Adventist authors to see if they would have a different emphasis. Studying the writings of Ellen G. White for insights on prayer was very rewarding.

Due to time constraints, I had to wait until after the project study aspect was completed in order to finalize the theological and literature review sections of the project. If these two areas of research were completed before or were even concurrent to the study, they would have greatly enhanced the project and the afternoon seminars. Evaluating the data and writing the project document were very beneficial parts of the total project.

Opportunities to Share

I have had the opportunity to share the benefits of this study during the Oregon Camp meeting in the summer of 2012. This has allowed me to revisit my conclusion and share it in a more useable format. I adapted and reworked my biblical understanding of prayer into sermons that I preached at my churches and at the Camp meeting. This process of reviewing and reworking what I have been studying and experiencing has been a real blessing for me and for those who were able to attend.

There are several individuals who have journeyed through this project with me that have experienced an enhanced relationship with God because of their prayer experience. The project has been most rewarding, as well as a real blessing to many in the local church and community.

Conclusion

I determined to spend more time in prayer for the duration of this project. I chose

to spend at least one hour in prayer every day beyond my regular study and devotions. This has proven to be one of the most rewarding aspects of this project.

Doing the theology study and reading various authors on prayer have also been a blessing. This project has made me more conscious of the issues concerning prayer. As a result, I am constantly looking for insights into prayer. It is also a channel to invite others who are interested in this topic, into meaningful conversations.

Another personal reward was breaking through the fear and hatred of writing. The discipline of studying and writing for the project has helped move me beyond this limitation. It has been a huge blessing for personal and spiritual growth.

I am learning to be more *fierce* in my prayer time with God. Being more assertive and claiming the rights and privileges of being a child of God has been very helpful. Learning to claim promises for others has also been a blessing.

Sharing my findings and helping others grow in their prayer experience was very rewarding. Just being in the “school of prayer with Christ” on a daily basis deepened my relationship with God. This journey provided the confidence for sharing struggles with others so they can be more honest with their troubles. Learning to pray was like learning to swim. It helped to talk to others about it, but the real learning came with jumping in the water. Learning to pray begins when we pray, rather than continually talk about it.

This process of learning to pray as Jesus prayed had another side effect. It increased faith in the God who hears and answers prayer. Though there were many difficulties along the way, this whole project helped me be more confident in my relationship with God and provided a deepened assurance that God loves me and has my best interest at heart. As I studied about Jesus in Gethsemane surrendering to His Father

in prayer, my faith was challenged to grow in the area of surrender.

Additionally, I have begun to experience, through this in-depth study and wrestling with prayer, an inner freedom to be honest with God—and myself. I have become much more free to discuss my struggles concerning prayer with others.

Would I do it again? Honestly this whole process was a mixed blessing. Many things were sacrificed during this journey including health, hobbies, family, and time to relax. I have aged considerably. Nevertheless, it has been worth the sacrifices for the personal and spiritual growth I have experienced and have been able to share with others. It has moved me to a new level in my relationship with God.

CHAPTER 2
TOWARD A THEOLOGY OF PRAYER

Introduction

Is prayer important? Is it important to God that His followers pray? Jesus counseled His followers that they “should always pray and not give up” (Luke 18:1). So why does prayer “rank so high on surveys of theoretical importance and so low on surveys of actual satisfaction” (Yancey, 2006, p. 15)? I have personally struggled with a meaningful prayer life. Honestly, there are times when it almost feels like a waste of time. I know that I’m not alone because among the leaders of my church very few spend any significant time in prayer on a daily basis. Many people struggle to reach out to God and share with Him as Friend and Lord (Dybdahl, 2008, p. 45).

This is not a new phenomenon. In spite of the many blessings and benefits that come from communion with God, Bounds wrote over a hundred years ago that, “the sad confession must be made that God’s people do not pray very much.” He pointed out that, God’s people are “not essentially a praying people” (1990, p. 318). According to Sproul, a modern day evangelical theologian, “Prayer is to the Christian what breath is to life, yet no duty of the Christian is so neglected” (2009, p. 15). “Secret prayer is the breath of the life that counts” (Erickson, 1917, p. 26) and neglecting to pray allows God to fade out of one’s life. “If prayer is the place where God and humans meet” (Yancey, 2006, p. 17), then discovering how to pray should be the ultimate experience for a Christian.

Prayer is not a waste of time because it is fellowship with the King of the universe. “The goal of prayer is the ear of God” (Bounds, 1990, p. 325). “Prayer does not bring God down to us, but brings us up to Him” (White, 1892, p. 93). As communion

with God, prayer brings us the companionship of His presence. It is “the key in the hand of faith to unlock heaven’s storehouse, where are treasured the boundless resources of Omnipotence” (White, 1892, p. 94). Another author writes, “Prayer is the key, and faith turns the key and opens the door and claims the blessing,” (An Unknown Christian, 1945, p. 35). “Being along with God in prayer is the Christian’s supreme privilege and his greatest need” (Erickson, 1917, p. 128). It puts “us in the presence of God where He can by His grace and power remake and revive us” daily (Dybdahl, 2008, p. 119).

“Why should the sons and daughters of God be reluctant to pray” (White, 1892, p. 94) when God’s promises are so profound? One such promise is given to us through the prophet Jeremiah:

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

According to this promise the secret of success in prayer seems to depend on our heart condition and what we seek in pray. Prayer is the key that unlocks this essential connection with God!

The real target of prayer is not answers, but God Himself. Imagine: God offers us fellowship with Himself through prayer (see Deut 4:7). What amazing grace! The Creator fellowshiping with the creature through prayer! However, Sproul points out that our real struggle with prayer is that it does *not* come naturally to us even though we were originally created for fellowship with God. Our fallen nature leaves us indifferent to spiritual things, including prayer. Rebirth is the primary way that will quicken a desire for communion with God, yet sin, even in a born again Christian, is the cause for resisting the Spirit’s urging to come close to our Creator (Sproul, 2009, p.17). Prayer is a gift from

God, and He will help us in our feeble attempts at relying on Him (Rom 8:26). We must discipline ourselves to “keep at it until we to learn to pray” (Bounds, 1990, p. 318).

The Thesis for This Study

In this study we will see just how important prayer was throughout the Bible for the followers of God in developing their relationship with Him, and how important it was in fulfilling God’s plan of salvation. Personal prayer was the highlight of godly men and women throughout the Old Testament. Prayer was crucial in the life of Jesus as the Son of God. In fact, it was without question an important spiritual discipline in His life. In the book of Acts and many letters of the New Testament prayer was instrumental in helping the early church become a transforming agent for God in the world.

Process of This Study

I felt the need of relying on a personal study of Scripture while wrestling with this theology on prayer. Thus, the scholarship of others won’t be utilized. This process runs the risk of missing some good and insightful points along the way. However, the need to struggle with this was very fruitful. I mention this so the reader will understand why there will not be extensive quotations from biblical scholars. The New International Version of the Bible (1984 edition) will be used throughout this study unless otherwise noted.

This biblical study will begin with a brief look at the Old Testament and how it reveals the importance of prayer to the followers of God in that era. A few key texts will be examined in which God made powerful promises concerning the importance of prayer for a relationship with Him. The Old Testament demonstrates how important prayer was in preparing people for the anticipated coming of the Messiah.

The next focus will be on the importance of prayer in the life and ministry of

Jesus. Prayer became important in the life of the early church as they followed the practice of Jesus—including the Apostles Peter, Paul, James, and John. We will also include a discussion of the importance of prayer in the outcome of the cosmic battle against evil.

Prayer is Important in the Old Testament

Prayer in the Old Testament was often a dramatic communication process in which God usually played a very active part—sometimes even initiating the conversation. Often these messages were presented through angels, prophets, or patriarchs. He sometimes spoke to people through songs. Many of the Psalms are truly prayers set to music. “In the past God spoke to our forefathers through the prophets at many times and in various ways” (Heb 1:1). In the Old Testament prayer was significant for both women and men. Hannah is a great example of women who prayed from the heart (1 Sam 1:13).

The following examples demonstrate the importance of prayer in the Old Testament: From patriarchs to Pharaoh, and from Moses to Malachi, each protagonist seeks God through prayer.

Patriarchs to Pharaoh

There are several examples of people praying in the Old Testament. First, Enoch’s communication process is described as “walking with God” which resulted in his being taken directly to heaven and bypassing death (Gen 5:22-24). Second, as Job prays and intercedes for his friends, God hears and answers his prayer and blesses him with more than he had before (Job 42:7-10). Third, Abraham heard God’s voice and experienced God’s involvement in some dramatic dialogues (Gen 12, 15, 17, 18, 22). Abraham interceded for the inhabitants of Sodom (Gen 18). After Abraham lied to King

Abimelech, Abraham prayed for Abimelech and God healed Abimelech's household (Gen 20). Fourth, even Abraham's chief servant prayed to God while seeking a wife for Isaac (Gen 25:12-14, 26-27). Fifth, since prayer is fellowship with God, Jacob's dream and wrestling with God were obviously prayer (Gen 28, 32). Sixth, even Pharaoh during the time of the Israelite's exodus recognized the importance of prayer as a means of persuasive communication with God. He even asked Moses to pray for him and his nation (Exod 8:8, 28; 9:28; 10:17).

Moses to Malachi

Moses talked face to face with God as with a friend (Exod 33:11). Angels conveyed special messages to some of the judges (Judg 2, 5, 6, 13). An angel was also sent to Daniel (Dan 9). God responded to the prayer of Hannah and gave her a son, Samuel (1 Sam 1-2). Sometimes failing to pray can cause difficulties. Samuel records his understanding that it would be a "sin" for him not to pray for King Saul, though Saul had been rejected as God's chosen king (1 Sam 12:23).

In the time of the kings of Israel, God usually sent a message through a prophet rather than angels. The voices of the Old Testament prophets became silent after Malachi for four hundred years.

Seeking God Through Prayer in the Old Testament

Prayer in the Old Testament often includes the idea of seeking a heart-felt relationship with God. Moses counsels the Israelites "if from there you seek the LORD your God, you will find him if you look for him with all your heart and with all your soul" (Deut 4:29). Isaiah tells God's people plainly, "Seek the LORD while he may be found; call on him while he is near" (Isa 55:6). Through Jeremiah God promises, "Then

you will call upon me and come and pray to me and I will listen to you. You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart. I will be found by you,” declares the LORD (Jer 29:12-14).

Seeking after God is described as seeking His “face” which probably means seeking His presence. David says, “Look to the LORD and his strength; seek his face always” (1 Chr 16:11). David records that, “The eyes of the LORD are on the righteous; and his ears are attentive to their cry” (Ps 34:15) and he continues, “The righteous cry out, and the LORD hears them; he delivers them from all their troubles” (Ps 34:17). In talking to Solomon God promised, “If My people who are called by my name, will humble themselves and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven and will forgive their sin and will heal their land” (2 Chr 7:14). God seems to imply that for prayer to be effective one must have a humble heart if personal fellowship with God is the goal. What a God who hears and answers our prayers!

Prayer and Precious Promises

Prayer in the Old Testament is one of the primary ways people communicated with God after sin since they no longer spoke with Him face to face (Gen 3:23). It is a privilege for His followers to stay in communication with their Creator, Guide, and Friend. The promises that are referenced above, about finding God and His love for us, are still precious and applicable for anyone who wants a meaningful relationship with God.

Prayer is Important in Preparing People for the Coming Messiah

As was demonstrated, prayer was an important method of communication

between God and man in the Old Testament. Most of the recorded prayers in the Old Testament were by prophets, priests, and kings (David—2 Sam 9:18-29; Solomon—2 Chr 6:1-42; Hezekiah—2 Kgs 19: 15-19; Jeremiah—Jer 32:17-25; Daniel—Dan 9:4-19). There are a few exceptions such as the prayer of Hannah (1 Sam 1-2) and Nehemiah (Neh 1:5-11). As one moves from the Old Testament to the New Testament a new personal dimension of prayer involving intimacy with God emerges. The Messiah encourages every believer to pray directly to God as “Father” (Matt 6:9; Luke 11:2).

Zechariah and Elizabeth

Even before Jesus was born people were being prepared for God’s Messiah through the gift of prayer. Zechariah, a priest and his wife, Elizabeth were praying (Luke 1:13). Their personal prayers were answered via Gabriel coming to him and announcing, “Do not be afraid, Zechariah; your prayer has been heard. Your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son, and you are to give him the name John” (Luke 1:13). Thus John prepared the way for the Messiah (Luke 3:4-6) by turning “the hearts of the fathers to their children and the disobedient to the wisdom of the righteous—to make ready a people prepared for the Lord” (Luke 1:17).

At the Temple

Luke leads his readers toward the actual presentation of the Messiah to the prayerfully faithful and to the world. As Jesus was presented in the temple at the age of eight days, Simeon held the young baby, because God had promised this righteous and devout man that he would see the Messiah before he died. Moved by the Holy Spirit he broke into a verbal prayer of praise to God because he had seen “a light for revelation to the Gentiles and for glory to your people Israel” (Luke 2:25-32). This prayer of praise

was prophetic.

Later the prophetess, Anna also met the baby Jesus. Luke tells us she was fasting and praying night and day and never left the temple (Luke 2:37). While looking upon Jesus “she gave thanks to God and spoke about the child to all who were looking for the redemption of Jerusalem” (2:38). Anna’s fellowship and prayer were wonderfully rewarded.

Prayer was Essential for Jesus

As one who believed the Old Testament, praying was a critical spiritual discipline during Jesus’ life and ministry. This is the way He communicated with the Father. He was often found in prayer from the moment Jesus entered public ministry at baptism on the banks of the Jordan River to the last words spoken from the cross. Prayer was the method used for an “abiding” relationship with the Father (John 14:9-11).

The writer of Hebrews reveals the fierceness of Jesus’ prayers. “During the days to Jesus’ life on earth, he offered up prayers and petitions with loud cries and tears to the one who could save him from death, and he was heard because of his reverent submission” (Luke 5:7).

Jesus was about thirty years of age when His baptism defined the beginning of His public ministry. When Jesus came out of the water, Luke tells us that, He was praying when the Holy Spirit came down like a dove and the Father’s voice spoke from heaven, “You are my Son, whom I love; with you I am well pleased” (Luke 3:21).

According to all three synoptic Gospels after Jesus’ baptism he went immediately into the wilderness for 40 days (Matt 4:1; Mark 1:13; Luke 4:2). While none of the Gospel writers actually state that Jesus was praying during this time, it seems fair to

assume that prayer was a vital part of that wilderness experience. The point is quite clear that He did reflect on Scripture since this is how He defeated Satan at each temptation (Luke 4:4, 8, 12).

Prayer as a Life Habit

Not only is prayer an important dimension during the initial phase of Jesus' ministry, but it is evident throughout His entire life. The Gospels give us some insight into His daily habit of personal prayer. Fellowship with His Father is vital for the success of His mission of saving the lost.

Both Mark and Luke give us a glimpse of a twenty-four hour day in the life of Jesus (Mark 1:21-35; Luke 4:31-42). He often went early in the morning to pray (Mark 1:35). Praying was not deterred by work or sleep (Luke 4:42). Luke also points out "Jesus often withdrew to lonely places and prayed" (Luke 5:16). These times of prayer were such an integral part of His lifestyle that the disciples usually knew where He could be found. For example Judas, on the night he betrayed his Master, seemed to know that Jesus would be in His usual place of prayer (John 18:2).

Major Decisions

The evidence suggests that Jesus prayed before major decisions. The following are two brief examples. Jesus set apart the twelve apostles from the rest of the disciples (Matt 10:2; Mark 3:14), but Luke says He was praying all night immediately prior to this decision (Luke 6:12-13). During one conversation Jesus asked who the disciples thought He was (Matt 16:13; Mark 8:27). However, Luke tells us that Jesus was "praying in private" just before he questioned them (Luke 9:18).

Special Occasions

A very important event transpired when Jesus took Peter, James and John to a mountain to pray (Luke 9:29). While Jesus was praying on this mountain “his face changed, and his clothes became as bright as a flash of lightning” (Luke 9:29) and the voice of God spoke from the cloud, saying, “This is my Son, whom I have chosen; listen to him” (Luke 9:35).

As Jesus and the disciples returned from the mountain, they met the other disciples, a father with a demon-possessed boy, and a crowd. The disciples of Jesus could not extricate the demon from the boy, even though Jesus had previously given them power to do so (Mark 3:14). After Jesus freed the boy, the disciples ask Him why they couldn’t drive out the demon. His answer is instructive, “This kind can come out only by prayer” (Mark 9:29).

On another occasion Jesus stood before the tomb of His friend, Lazarus. “Take away the stone” Jesus said (John 11:39). After some protesting they remove the stone. “Then Jesus looked up and said, ‘Father, I thank you that you have heard me. I know that you always hear me, but I said this for the benefit of the people standing here, that they may believe that you sent me’” (John 11:41-42). He then “called in a loud voice, ‘Lazarus, come out!’ The dead man came out...” (John 11:43-44).

Teach us to Pray

Because Jesus prayed so often and for significant time periods the disciples began to realize the importance of prayer. Thus, they asked Him to teach them to pray (Luke 11:1). He then shared with them a model prayer (Luke 11:2-4).

Prayer is Important at the end of Jesus' Ministry

Prayer impregnated the last days of Jesus' life. He had a huge burden for His immediate followers. He prayed they would stay faithful and that they would ask for the Holy Spirit as evidenced in John 14-16. He also prayed for those who would believe through their influence as referenced in John 17.

Interceding for Peter

During the Last Supper experience Jesus tells Peter, "Satan has asked to sift you as wheat" (Luke 22:31). Then He adds the good news, "But I have prayed for you, Simon, that your faith may not fail" (Luke 22:32). Here Jesus points Peter to a new concept of intercessory prayer, which will be discussed later. This concept will be utilized to make significance inroads into the kingdom of darkness.

Asking for the Holy Spirit

In John 14-16 Jesus gives counsel to His followers concerning the role of the Holy Spirit and how important He will be for them and their success. Jesus' followers are told that if they have faith in Him, they will do even greater works than He has done (John 14:12). He encourages them to "ask" for anything "in my name" and you will receive it (John 14:13, 14; 15:7, 16; 16:23, 24, 26). What a powerful promise that His followers are later to claim (Acts 2:32-33). The Holy Spirit fell on them at Pentecost in fulfillment of the promise. We will discuss this more later.

Jesus' Prayer in John 17

John gives us perhaps the most revealing insight into the personal prayer life of Jesus by recording the words of a complete prayer of Jesus (John 17). In this prayer we

see Jesus sharing His heart with the Father. We glean a wonderful insight into His compassion for His followers and their influence. This prayer is divided into three sections. The first section is about Jesus' relationship with His Father. The second is about the faith of His immediate followers. The third is about the faith experience of those who are to be influenced through them. An interesting observation is that nowhere does Jesus pray for comfort, ease, or deliverance. He spends most of His prayer time focusing on the needs of others.

Gethsemane

That same evening, knowing the time for His death is imminent, Jesus retires to a favorite place to pray near Jerusalem—Gethsemane (Matt 26; Mark 14; Luke 22). Here He shares the heavy burden with the Father. Three times Jesus pleads with the Father to be delivered from this deadly conflict. Three times He submits to the Father's will, "Not my will, but yours be done" (Luke 22:42). Luke interjects that Jesus prayed with such anguish that His "sweat was like drops of blood" and an angel came to strengthen Him (Luke 22:43-44).

He brought Peter, James, and John to be with Him so they could also pray; but they soon fell asleep (Mark 14:37, 40). Luke told us that Jesus "found them asleep, exhausted from sorrow" (Luke 22:45). Twice Jesus warned the disciples "pray so that you will not fall into temptation" (Luke 22:40, 46). They seem unable to stay awake and pray. The Bible says they slept!

The Cross

On the cross, hanging between life and death in probably the most agonizing time of His life, what was He doing? Praying! The majority of the words recorded which Jesus

uttered on the cross were prayers. While the soldiers were driving the nails into His hands and feet, He prayed, “Father, forgive them, for they don’t know what they are doing” (Luke 23:34). While hanging there in agony He quoted from Psalms (22:1), “my God, why have you forsaken me” (Matt 27:46; Mark 15:34). Just before dying, He called out in a loud voice, “Father, into your hands I commit my spirit” (Luke 23:46). John recorded His last words as, “it is finished” (John 19:30). The final climaxing activity of the Savior of mankind revealed the importance of prayer!

Jesus’ Prayers Were Fierce

Casual praying is not what Jesus did. One never read about Jesus falling asleep during His prayer sessions as the disciples did (Luke 9:32). That’s because the prayers of Jesus were *fierce*. *Fierce* prayer is talking to God “as to a friend” (White, 1892, p. 93). *Fierce* prayer is about moral courage, clear requests, and taking action. It is an attitude (Scott, 2002, p. 10). *Fierce* praying is a deep desire to be honest with God. It is being assertive in our communication with God. This is how Jesus prayed. “During the days of Jesus’ life on earth, he offered up prayers and petitions with loud cries and tears to the one who could save him from death, and he was heard because of his reverent submission” (Heb 5:7). This seems very clear as we read His prayer in Gethsemane, “Abba, Father, everything is possible for you. Take this cup from me. Yet, not what I will, but what you will” (Mark 14:36). What the gospel writers record is a short summary. Luke’s record is that God had to send an angel to revive Him and that Jesus sweat drops of blood (Luke 22:44). This is a fierce prayer!

Prayer in the Early Church

After Jesus ascends to heaven the disciples return to Jerusalem where they wait

according to the Lord's command (Acts 1:4) for the promised Holy Spirit (Acts 1:8). But what are they doing while they wait? "They all joined together constantly in prayer, along with the women and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with his brothers" (Acts 1:14). They supplement their praying with reading Scripture, which guided them in the replacement of Judas with Matthias (Acts 1:24).

Pentecost

When the day of Pentecost came Jesus' disciples (about 120 people according to Acts 1:15) were all together in one place (Acts 2:1). It may be safely assumed they were praying when the Spirit fell because Acts 1:14 tells us they were together constantly praying after they returned to Jerusalem. In his Pentecostal sermon Peter says that Jesus "has received from the Father the promised Holy Spirit and has poured out what you now see and hear" (Acts 2:33).

Boldness

After the Pentecostal experience on their way to pray in the temple, Peter and John miraculously healed a man in the name of Jesus and got in trouble with the same religious body that crucified Jesus (Acts 3-4). Again the early church is prompted to pray. They did not pray for protection, comfort, or deliverance. They prayed for *boldness*! God answered with boldness! "After they prayed, the place where they were meeting was shaken. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and spoke the word of God boldly" (Acts 4:31). They discovered the reason and value of praying.

Primacy of Prayer

As the early church grew in numbers it also grew in needs and demands. The apostles were confronted with a choice of teaching and preaching Jesus as the Christ, or

responding to the complaint of neglecting a certain few. They chose the weightier matter of prayer and the ministry of His word (Acts 6:4). Subsequently seven deacons were chosen to fulfill the needs of the young church. The selection process was directed by prayer and established by the laying on of hands. These deacons made a powerful impact on the church and community. Those same apostles, who at one time slept and ignored Jesus' counsel while Jesus prayed, now realized their need of the blessings that come only through prayer.

Prayer and Stephen

Acts chapter seven records the last sermon of Stephen, one of the deacons chosen to help with the needs of the early church. His sermon stirred the crowd so much they dragged him “out of the city and began to stone him. Meanwhile, the witnesses laid their clothes at the feet of a young man named Saul” (Acts 7:58; 22:20). Just before Stephen died, he offered a prayer of forgiveness—just as Jesus had done (Acts 7:60). The influence of Stephen's prayer most likely played a significant role in the converting process of young Saul. Luke tells us that after Jesus confronted Saul on the way to Damascus, Saul prayed (Acts 9:11).

Expanding the Church Through Prayer

In Acts, chapter ten, the role of prayer expands the gospel and embraces the Gentiles. Luke tells us that Cornelius, a Roman centurion “and all his family were devout and God-fearing; he gave generously to those in need and prayed to God regularly” (Acts 10:2). In answer to Cornelius' prayers, “he had a vision. He distinctly saw an angel of God, who came to him” (10:3). The angel tells him to send messengers to Joppa to look for Peter. At the same time Peter is praying on a rooftop while waiting for lunch. God's

answer to his prayer is a strange vision. As Peter is thinking about the vision, the Holy Spirit said to him, “Simon, three men are looking for you. So get up and go downstairs. Do not hesitate to go with them, for I have sent them” (Acts 10:19-20). Peter obediently goes and is able to share the gospel with Gentile believers who then receive the Holy Spirit just like they had at Pentecost (Acts 2) and these Gentile believers were baptized (Acts 10:44-48). This caused no small stir in the church back in Jerusalem. It boggled the minds of these Jewish believers that God would be able to save Gentiles. It was a major growing experience for the Jewish believers, but it led them to reach out to Gentiles (Acts 17:6).

Imprisoned

Eventually King Herod put Peter in prison with the intention of putting him to death (Acts 12:1-3). How did the church respond? Not with a petition, but with earnest prayer. As these prayers ascended to heaven an angel miraculously delivered Peter out of prison. “Suddenly an angel of the Lord appeared and a light shone in the cell. He struck Peter on the side and woke him up. ‘Quick, get up!’ he said and the chains fell off Peter’s wrists” (Acts 12:7). When Peter realized what had actually happened, he went to the home of the praying believers. They could not believe it! God miraculously answered their prayers. Another affirmation that God not only hears but answers prayer!

Prayer in Peter’s Letters

In his letters Peter talks about the importance of prayer for those living near the time of Christ’s second coming. He reveals that one’s attitude toward others, particularly one’s spouse, can somehow block one’s prayers from being answered (1 Pet 3:7). He quotes from the Psalms and reminds his readers that God’s ear is attentive to the prayers

of the righteous (1 Pet 3:12). It is in the next chapter that Peter really exposes the importance of prayer in these end times as he discusses the need for living for God. He writes, “The end of all things is near. Therefore be clear minded and self-controlled so that you can pray” (1 Pet 4:7). For Peter, prayer is very important to all believers—especially those who live at the very end of time!

A Persecutor Prays

When we first meet Saul, the persecutor of the church, we find him being a witness to the death of Stephen and his prayer of forgiveness (Acts 7:58-60). “Saul was there giving approval to his death” (Acts 8:1). Sometime later Saul is on his way to Damascus for the purpose of persecuting Christians. Jesus confronts Saul in a vision and relates His plans (Acts 9:3-6). When the blinded Saul arrives in Damascus God tells Ananias to go and minister to him. God says that Saul “is praying” (Acts 9:11).

While in Damascus, Saul proves that Jesus is the Christ (Acts 9:22). He later goes to Jerusalem and eventually ends up at Antioch where he is sent on a missionary journey with Barnabas. In obedience to the Holy Spirit the church in Antioch “fasted and prayed, they placed their hands on them and sent them off” (Acts 13:3). This begins the missionary movement of the early church. In following this example, Paul and Barnabas in churches they raised up, appoint elders through prayer and fasting (Acts 14:23).

Later Paul went on another missionary journey with Silas. While in Philippi on Sabbath, since there was no Jewish synagogue, they went down to a river to pray (Acts 16:13). While there they met, and later baptized, Lydia and her household (Acts 16:14). They got in trouble for casting out an evil spirit from a slave girl. They are beaten and put in prison (Acts 16:16-24). Around midnight they are praying and singing when a violent

earthquake shakes the prison. These factors lead to the conversion of the jailer and his whole household (Acts 16:25-34).

On to Rome

While traveling aboard a ship to Rome Paul and the other travelers were in a terrible storm. Paul tried to speak confidence to those aboard saying, “Last night an angel of the God whose I am and whom I serve stood beside me and said, ‘Do not be afraid, Paul, You must stand trial before Caesar; and God has graciously given you the lives of all who sail with you.’ So keep your courage, men, for I have faith in God that it will happen just as he told me” (Acts 27:23-25). This strongly suggests that Paul was in prayer when the angel spoke to him.

All on board the ship came safely ashore on the island of Malta. Here the father of the chief official of the island was sick. “Paul went in to see him and, after prayer, placed his hands on him and healed him. When this happened, the rest of the sick on the island came and were cured” (Acts 28:8-9).

Paul’s Letters Reveal a man of Prayer

Acts gives us very little insight into the prayer life of Paul. It does mention his praying in Damascus after being confronted by Jesus (Acts 9:11). It is in his letters to various churches and people that we are given a glimpse of how much prayer saturated his ministry. Throughout his letters Paul emphasizes how much he is praying for the saints. In many verses Paul mentions his intercessory prayer for others: To the Romans, “I constantly remember you in my prayer at all times” (Rom 1:9-10); to the Corinthian believers, “I always thank God for you” (1 Cor 1:4); to the Ephesians, “Giving thanks for you in all my prayers.” “I keep asking that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ may give

you the Spirit of wisdom and revelation”, “I pray that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened” (Eph 1:16-18); to the Philippians, “I thank my God every time I remember you” and “In all my prayers for all of you, I always pray with joy” (Phil 1:3-4); to the Colossians, whom he had never met, “We always thank God when we pray for you” and “We have not stopped praying for you” (Col 1:3, 9); to the Thessalonians, “We always thank God for all of you, mentioning you in our prayers” and “We continually remember before our God and Father your work produced by faith” (1 Thess 1:2-3); again he tells them, “We ought always to thank God for you” and “We constantly pray for you” (2 Thess 1:3, 11); to young Timothy, “I thank God...as night and day I constantly remember you in my prayer” (2 Tim 1:3); to Philemon he says, “I always thank my God as I remember you in my prayers” (Phlm 1:4).

While reading Paul’s letters I get the impression that he spends much time in prayer. Intercessory prayer does not come easy to him, for he tells the people of Colossae, “I want you to know how much I struggle for you and those in Laodicea” (Col 2:1). In this letter he informs them that Epaphras, a fellow believer, is “always wrestling in prayer for you” (Col 4:12). Paul goes on to say, “I vouch for him that he is working hard for you and those of Laodicea and of Hierapolis” (Col 4:13). To the Thessalonians he states, “night and day we pray most earnestly” (1 Thess 3:10), and “we constantly pray for you” (2 Thess 1:11).

Prayer Warrior

Why does Paul tell the believers to whom he is writing that he is praying for them? Often he tells them the content of his prayer. Twice in Ephesians he records a prayer he has for them (Eph 1:15-23; 3:14-21). Both prayers discuss the gifts of the

Spirit, which help them know God's love and empowers them to witness for Christ. To the Philippian believers he records, "That you may abound more and more in knowledge and depth of insight" so they may be "pure and blameless on the day of Christ" (Phil 1:9). To the Thessalonians he writes, "We pray this so that the name of our Lord Jesus may be glorified in you, and you in him" (2 Thess 1:9). The believers were encouraged through these recorded prayers that probably helped them focus their Christian journey. The recorded prayers also give us guidance in how to pray for others.

Paul counsels believers to pray for kings and those in authority (Rom 13:1; 1Tim 2:1-4). In at least ten verses Paul asks believers to pray for him (Rom 15:30-31; Eph 6:19-20; Col 4:3-4; 1 Thess 5:25; 2 Thess 3:1-2; Phil 1:22; Heb 13:18-19). Paul says pray for everyone (1 Tim 2:1), and everywhere (1 Tim 2:8), and at all times (1 Thess 5:17) because God desires everyone to come to a knowledge of the truth and be saved (1 Tim 2:4).

The Important Relationship Between Prayer and Inner Peace

Paul's counsel for believers to "rejoice in the Lord always!" is in the context of the close proximity of the Lord (Phil 4:4-5) and how prayer keeps us in touch with this truth. That's why he encourages his readers to "not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God" (Phil 4:6). God not only hears you, but His peace that "transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus" (Phil 4:7). This inner peace of God is one earmark of the prayer of faith.

Paul follows with the secret for success in the battle of the mind. "Finally, brothers and sisters, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is

pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable—if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—think about such things. Keep your thoughts on what is positive, right and noble—the things that God is doing around you” (Phil 4:8). Paul challenges the Philippians to put into practice what Paul has modeled, “And the God of peace will be with you” (Phil 4:9). He takes his readers from the peace of God guarding their hearts and minds to the presence of the God of peace being with them.

This may be the key for knowing we have prayed long enough—when we experience the “peace of God” in our hearts. Then we know we are at peace with our Creator and His presence is near!

James and Prayer

James gives us some insight into what may have been happening among the believers in the early church. By the time James’ epistle is circulated among the churches (somewhere around 50-60AD) some believers seem to be having trouble with prayer. James tries to help these believers understand the proper use of prayer. “You do not have because you do not ask God. When you ask, you do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives, that you may spend what you get on your pleasures” (James 4:2-3).

Necessity of Faith

James through the Holy Spirit points out that if we lack wisdom, we should ask God and He will give us divine wisdom (Jas 1:5). Faith is an important part of the mystery of how prayer works. James is telling us that when we ask God, we must trust Him and not doubt (Jas 1:6-7). The comparison is made of one “who doubts is like a wave of the sea blown and tossed by the wind. That man should not think he will receive anything from the Lord; he is a double-minded man, unstable in all he does” (Jas 1:6-8).

Motives are Important

James also addresses the issue of asking, but not receiving. He states that motives of the heart are an important element in answers to our prayer. Selfishness can hinder God's answer (Jas 4:2-3). Doubt and selfish motives are two roadblocks to answered prayer. James' point: it is possible to pray incorrectly.

Prayer of a Righteous Person

Chapter 5 of James writes about what God can accomplish through a prayer that exhibits faith in Him. If anyone is sick, let them call for the elders so they can pray over him and anoint him with oil, "and the prayer offered in faith will make the sick person well; the Lord will raise him up. If he has sinned, he will be forgiven" (Jas 5:15). Believers can "pray for each other so that you may be healed" and that the "prayer of a righteous man is powerful and effective" (Jas 5:16). He then uses Elijah's prayer experience as an example of praying earnestly. "Elijah was a man just like us. He prayed earnestly that it would not rain, and it did not rain on the land for three years. Again he prayed, and the heavens gave rain, and the earth produced its crops" (Jas 5:17-18). James doesn't tell us about his prayer experience, like Paul does, yet we see throughout the epistle a desire to help believers experience the power of positive prayer and how prayer can unleash God's grace to the believer.

Prayer was Important in John's Ministry

In my study regarding prayer in the life of Jesus, John's gospel was a complete surprise to me. I was unaware how little prayer is mentioned in this gospel. The normal Greek words for prayer (*proseuche* and *proseuchomai*) were not even used. His most common words in reference to prayer were "ask" (*aiteo* and *eratao*) and they were used

sparingly. John makes no mention of the prayer at Jesus' baptism, no voice from the Father, no Holy Spirit coming down like a dove. John does not mention the transfiguration, nor was there any mention of Jesus struggling in Gethsemane though he was an eyewitness of these events.

John's Mysterious Lack

When I began this project, I believed that John's Gospel would give insight into Jesus' prayer life. So, why is there such a lack of information about prayer in this Gospel? While making a spreadsheet from the Gospels about the various Greek words used for "prayer" in the practice and teachings of Jesus, I was surprised that this Gospel is so silent. The most common Greek words used for prayer (*proseuche*) and pray (*proseuchomai*) are completely missing in John's Gospel! Why? When I expanded the search to include Hebrew words, or concepts of prayer, the words "ask" and "seek" (words often used in the Old Testament) emerged. John uses the Greek word *eratao*, (translated: to ask, seek, petition, and pray) five times (John 14:16; 16:26; 17:9, 15, 20). And the Greek word *aiteo*, (translated: to ask) ten times (John 4:9, 10; 11:22; 14:13, 14; 15:7, 16; 16:12, 24, 26). Zodhiates explains the difference in the two Greek words translated "ask" or "pray":

A very distinct meaning of *erōtāō* is to pray, but in distinction from the verb *aitēō* (154). The first provides the most delicate and tender expression for prayer or request with the one asking and the one being asked on an equal level, such as the Lord Jesus asking of the Father. This is made very clear in John 14:13; John 14:14 where the word *aitēō* is used in the case of us asking God as an inferior ask something of a superior, leaving it up to Him to do that which pleases Him. In v. 16 when the Lord Jesus is praying to the Father or asking the Father, the verb *erōtāō* is used, also used in John 17:9; John 17:15; John 17:20. (Zodhiates, 1991)

It seems that John may be using the Greek word *erōtāō* to underscore the divinity and thus the equality of Jesus to the Father. Even in the prayers of our Lord, John makes

a case for belief in the divinity of Jesus as Lord (John 20:30-31).

What really surprised me was that John makes *no* mention of the prayer at Jesus' baptism, transfiguration, or Gethsemane. He was an eyewitness at each of these occasions, so why the silence? This question could be a terrific future research topic. I assume that John was more interested in portraying the divine side of Jesus as the Son of God, equal to the Father, instead of the Son of Man, dependent Messiah, the second Adam. However, John did include the beautiful intercessory prayer of John 17.

John and the Seven-fold Command

In chapters 14-16 John records Jesus' teachings about the promised Holy Spirit. In this section Jesus commands us to "ask" seven times. John emphasizes this seven-fold command to get our attention. Six of those times He adds the phrase, "in my name." The following quotes are very specific. "I will do whatever you ask in my name" (14:13). "You may ask me for anything in my name (14:14). "If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be given to you" (15:7). "The Father will give you whatever you ask in my name" (15:16). "My Father will give you whatever you ask in my name" (16:23). "Until now you have not asked for anything in my name. Ask and you will receive" (16:24). "You will ask in my name" (16:26). What are the implications of this seven-fold command of Jesus to "ask"? What does it mean to *ask* "in Jesus' name?" And according to the context, is there something specific we should be asking?

The clearest implication is that we should be asking much more than most of us do. Note Jesus' words, "Until now you have not asked for anything...Ask and you will receive" (16:24). The context is the teaching of Jesus on the Holy Spirit (John 14-16). We

need to be bold in our petitions. The early church did take Jesus' seven-fold command seriously. They prayed (Acts 1:14) and Pentecost happened (Acts 2); they prayed again and the place was shaken and the Spirit filled them again (Acts 4:31); the Samaritans received the Holy Spirit (Acts 8:17); and some Gentiles (Acts 10:44-46).

In His last talk with the disciples before being crucified, Jesus is clearly preparing the disciples for His departure. Notice the movement in the asking process. First, they are to ask Jesus and He will do it (14:13,14). Then they ask Jesus and the Father who will do it (15:16; 16:23). Finally, Jesus says to ask the Father because He Himself loves them and He Himself will answer their prayers (16:26-28). Jesus wants the disciples to pray to the Father in His name for the Spirit to empower them to represent Him in this world and bring God glory by bearing fruit—just like He had done! This sounds like the other side of Jesus' prayer in John 17, where He prays about His own relationship with the Father, then He prays for the disciples, and finally He prays for those who will believe through their influence.

John 17

I am so thankful John recorded this prayer. It gives excellent insight into the prayer life of the Jesus. It is a wonderful window into the heart of our Savior and it may also demonstrate the content of His personal prayers. It is helpful to note that of the twenty-six total verses, twenty-one are devoted to intercession for others (John 17:6-26). Since eighty-one percent of Jesus' prayer is interceding for others, could this be an example for us?

The concept of John 17 is recorded elsewhere. Paul tells us that Jesus is still interceding for humanity (Rom 8:34). The writer of Hebrews informs us that Jesus is at

the right hand of the Father as our High Priest (Heb 7:25; 8:1-2). This intercessory ministry of our High Priest continues today. What good news!

John's Emphasis on "Confidence"

John wants every believer to have deep confidence in his relationship with God. "This is the confidence we have in approaching God: that if we ask anything according to his will, he hears us" (1 John 5:14). Here John uses the same Greek word translated "ask" (*aiteo*) that he uses in the seven-fold command in John 14-16 (John 14:13, 14; 15:7, 16; 16:23, 24, 26). He hopes readers understand that God does more than hear. Jesus said, "The Father knows what you need even before you ask him" (Matt 6:8). John encourages us that "if we know that he hears us—whatever we ask—we know that we have what we asked of him" (1 John 5:15). It is simply a matter of trusting His timing!

Prayer and Conflict With Evil

The many references of intercessory prayer—people praying for God to intervene in the lives of other people—throughout the Old and the New Testaments reveals an interesting, yet mysterious role that prayer plays in the conflict with evil.

The prayer of intercession moves us away from the level of our needs and into the needs of others. It seems that intercessory prayer somehow opens new possibilities for God to display His grace in places and for people because someone intercedes. This level of prayer also helps break the spell of selfishness in the one praying.

Intercession in the Old Testament

We get hints of this principle at work in the Old Testament. Job was asked to intercede for his friends so God could forgive them (Job 42:8). Abraham interceded for

the inhabitants of Sodom (Gen 18). God also wanted him to pray for King Abimelech (Gen 20). Moses interceded for Israel after the golden calf experience and God “relented and did not bring on his people the disaster he had threatened” (Exod 32:14). Samuel interceded for King Saul, even though God had rejected Saul as king (1 Sam 12:23). King Hezekiah’s prayer (Isa 37:14-20) made a difference in the future of Israel. Isaiah, speaking for God, told Hezekiah, “This is what the LORD, the God of Israel, says: Because you have prayed to me concerning Sennacherib king of Assyria...” (Isa 37:21). God intervened to save Israel. Centuries later Daniel prayed and God sent Gabriel to help him understand a vision concerning the timing and coming of the Messiah. It is easy to ascertain the significant influence of intercessory prayer in the Old Testament.

Intercession in the New Testament

The impact of intercessory prayer is clearly revealed in the New Testament as well. Throughout Paul’s letters he often refers to his prayers for the saints in various churches (2 Cor 13:7; Eph 1:18; 3:16-17; Phil 1:4; Col: 3, 10; 1 Thess 3:10; 2 Thess 2:11-12; Phlm 1:6). Many times he also requests that the saints pray for him (Rom 15:31; Eph 6:19-20; Col 4:3-4; 1 Thess 5:25; 2 Thess 3:1-2; Phlm 1:22).

The book of Revelation portrays God’s people praying and their prayers entering the heavenly sanctuary—into the very presence of God (Rev 5:8: 8:3-4). It seems that they are making a difference in the cosmic battle—though the exact process is left a mystery. It is very clear that the Father takes note of the prayers of His children (Rev 8:3-4).

Our Divine Intercessor

Jesus demonstrates intercessory prayer. He tells Peter that Satan has asked (RSV:

“demanded”) to sift him like wheat, but that He, Jesus, has prayed that his faith will stand the test (Luke 22:31-32). Nowhere do we see the power of intercession at work more clearly than in His prayer recorded in John 17 as discussed earlier. Even today Jesus continues His intercessory ministry, only now in the heavenly sanctuary as our High Priest (Rom 8:34; 1 Tim 2:5; Heb 7:25; 8:1-2; 9:24; 1 John 2:1). The Holy Spirit also participates in interceding for us (Rom 8:26) and guides us in how we should pray (Eph 6:18; Jude 20).

The Mystery of Intercessory Prayer

The exact process of how intercessory prayer works is a mystery. The Bible does not completely unveil the exact mechanism. As one prays for others, they are joining forces with Jesus (Rom 8:34) and the Holy Spirit (Rom 8:26). One is “praying in the Spirit” as the Spirit guides in prayer (Jude 20; Eph 6:18). These prayers are heard in heaven (Rev 5:8; 8:3-4), as were the prayers of Jesus while He was on earth, because of His “reverent submission” to the Father (Heb 5:7).

Paul shared some thoughts concerning intercession as he wrote to Philemon. Paul hoped to be released from prison and return to see his friend, in response to Philemon’s intercessory prayers (Philemon 22). Paul wrote to the believers in Thessalonica, “We constantly pray for you, that our God may count you worthy of his calling, and that by his power he may fulfill every good purpose of yours and every act prompted by your faith” (2 Thess 1:11). Is it possible that somehow our prayers give God permission to work more mightily in behalf of those for whom we pray? Besides Paul, the prophet Samuel considered it a sin *not* to pray for rejected King Saul (1 Sam 12:23).

Perhaps the reason that intercession is left as a mystery in Scripture is that in our

fallen condition we try to manipulate God through prayer. But the mystery of the inner workings of prayer didn't stop Jesus and other biblical heroes of faith from interceding for others. Though we may not be able to fully explain how intercessory prayer works we can take advantage of this amazing gift.

Surprised by the Importance of Intercession

In my study on prayer mainly focusing on the New Testament, I was surprised at the extent of intercession throughout. Jesus demonstrated this many times, including in John 17. Paul's writings also demonstrated the same phenomena.

Prayer is Important to God's Children

All who have accepted Jesus as their personal Savior are God's children (1 John 3:1-3). Since we have been adopted into the family of God we have all the rights and privileges as His children (Gal 4:6-7). Jesus said to His followers, "Greater works than I have done, you shall do" (John 14:12). Is it possible that we are underestimating what God wants to do through our prayers? Remember what Jesus said, "Until now you have not asked for anything in my name. Ask and you will receive, and your joy will be complete" (John 16:24).

Conclusion

Since the fall of Adam prayer has been an important ingredient in the communication process between God and His followers. Many promises throughout the Old Testament tell us that God wants to come close to His people through prayer. It prepared the way for the Messiah at His first coming. Likewise prayer also prepared the way for the coming of the Holy Spirit after Jesus' ascension to heaven. Prayer was

probably the most important spiritual discipline in the ministry of Jesus. After Jesus' ascension it was instrumental in the early church development including the ministry of the apostles Peter, Paul, James, and John.

Prayer not only brought Jesus into fellowship with His Father, it gave Him power to carry out the Father's will. It was to His spiritual health much like what breath was to His physical health. This also was true for the early church. The New Testament records a relationship between the prayers of God's people and the powerful manifestation of the Holy Spirit.

Peter challenges God's last day people to pray: "The end of all things is near. Therefore be clear minded and self-controlled so that you can pray" (1 Pet 4:7). Underlining the importance of prayer, Jesus' describes Laodicea, God's last day church, being very successful in doing God's work, but they have become neglectful of their personal relationship with Him. In fact, Jesus pictures Himself as being outside His church (see Rev 3:14-22). Here is the danger of neglecting fellowship with God through prayer. Our relationship with Him can grow cold as did Laodicea's, when we live independently of Him—even as we try to serve Him.

Many Christians today talk about prayer more as a burden than as a pleasure and have feelings of guilt while they blame themselves for their failure in prayer (Yancey, 2006, p. 14). But as Bounds points out prayer is like a craft, or a trade that must be learned through practice over time:

Prayer is a trade to be learned. We must be apprentices and serve our time at it. Painstaking care, much thought, practice, and labor are required to be a skillful tradesman in praying. Practice in this, as well as in all other trades, makes perfect. Only toiling hands and hearts will make us proficient in this heavenly trade. (Bounds, 1990, p. 318)

Bounds goes on to raise a very practical challenge and a lingering question:

“Where are the Christ-like leaders who can teach the modern saints how to pray and put them at it?” (Bounds, 1990, p. 492). Maybe our prayer needs to be, “Lord, teach us to pray, so we can teach others!”

CHAPTER 3

A LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

Much has been written about prayer. Prayer is universal (Andreasen, 1957; Webb, 2005). Many world religion and segments of society have practiced some form of prayer—or communication with God, or a perceived god (Ikerman, 1980; Peterson, 2009). Prayer expresses our personal relationship with God (Benner, 2002; Brown, 2003). Every generation and every individual has to rediscover the art, science, and pleasure of prayer for themselves (Bounds, 1990; MacArthur, 1995).

This abbreviated literature review will uncover various authors' purposes for prayer. Consequently, this should help me understand the core issues that people struggle with in prayer. I am searching for some tools that will help provide meaning and direction in prayer.

Because of the sheer volume of available material on prayer, this review is limited to only Christian writings. Some of literature from both the *mystical* and the *traditional* (more evangelical) understanding of prayer are included. The teachings of Ellen G. White are explored. The subtle differences of emphasis concerning prayer among some Seventh-day Adventist authors are also evaluated.

In just the past twenty years there has been a large array of published research that sheds light on this very practical and important topic of prayer. Much of the recent scholarly interest concerning prayer has been directed toward understanding its influence on health and well-being, with very little attention given to the actual aspect of prayer

(Baker, 2008; Clements, 2002; Mok, 2003; Smith & Denton, 2005; Walker, 1997). Others have been concerned about using prayer in the counseling setting (Wagley, 1993; Weld & Erisken, 2007), while omitting the process. One project (Hass, 2007) has tried to answer this question: can anyone really hear prayer outside the human skull? Recently there have been a number of doctoral dissertations on prayer dealing with how to teach church attendees to pray (Choi, 1999; Chumley, 2008; Crawford, 2007; Haavick, 2006; Kethchum, 2005; Kuiper, 2005; McLennan Tajiri, 2009; Nelson, 2002; Sadler, 2004; Tomaine, 2004; Van Doren, 2005; Whiteman, 1987). However, books are by far the most common medium in which prayer is discussed. Most of these books are on the practical, pastoral level and geared for the average reader.

Prayer is Revealing

One's core understanding of God impacts the way prayer is practiced (Webb, 2005). In fact, prayer is the best evidence of one's core view of God—not just what one says, but what one really believes (Packer, 1973). Because there are various views of God (Webb, 2005), there are also many ways individuals practice prayer (Chase, 2005). According to Jacobsen (1987) spiritual maturity can be gauged by the *content* of prayer.

To the skeptic, prayer is a delusion, a waste of time (Yancey, 2006). Yet, it is difficult to overstate the importance of prayer in Christianity, for it is "belief and ritual at the same time" (Mauss, as cited in Baker, 2008, p. 22). Yet many Christians find it very difficult to pray (Lloyd-Jones, 2000). Within the Christian community there are a variety of viewpoints and practices on prayer (Webb, 2005).

Christian Literature on Personal Prayer

I organized the Christian literature on prayer in two categories. This helped me to

better understand their origin and the spiritual leanings of the various authors. The categories I utilized are the *mystical* and the *traditional* approaches to prayer. Even though these are not hard-core classifications, I believed they would give a better understanding of the various perspectives and a method for evaluation. The authors are organized chronologically according to the publication date in order to show the rich and varied insights each author contributes to the topic of prayer. Maybe the real insight is: Prayer is to be experienced, defined, and refined by each person in his or her journey with God.

The Mystical Approach to Prayer

“Mysticism is the pursuit of communion with, identity with, or conscious awareness of an ultimate reality, divinity, spiritual truth, or God through direct experience, intuition, or insight” (Wikipedia, n. d.). Christian mysticism goes back hundreds of years. It defines prayer as an intimate experience, or encounter with the living God. It is personally connecting with the god within. Some want to “practice His presence,” others want to *experience* the god within. There is a fine line between this view that would quote Paul in Col 1:27, “Christ in you” with modern humanistic psychology. This promotes the idea that the person is what is most important and that one needs to get in touch with one’s inner self. Maslow’s theory of self-actualization is very similar, and is accepted as a main school of thought in higher education and psychology.

The contemplative tradition of prayer is sometimes referred to as “Christian mysticism” (Haavik, 2006). According to Leech, many Protestants, and especially evangelicals, are suspicious of contemplative prayer (Leech, 2001). Leech suggests that the heart of mysticism is union with God, and defines prayer as the process by which we

“enter into a relationship with God” (p. 134). According to Webb (2005), this “mystical theology” is at the heart of the Nicene Creed, a theology that assumes God is beyond rational human thought, but that He can be experienced through love and communion.

In the twentieth century there has been a revived interest in contemplative prayer, both among Roman Catholics and Protestants (Haavik, 2006). Even among some Seventh-day Adventists—traditionally a very conservative evangelical Christian denomination—there seems to be an increased interest for a more mystical experience with God. In *Ministry Magazine*, one of their leading journals for ministers of that denomination, Moore (2009), encourages ministers to make space for God through contemplation that will assist one in practicing the presence of God through various spiritual disciplines. According to Moore, one of the most essential disciplines is the practice of solitude, which allows for fellowship with God and creates time and space for meditation and prayer. In a recent article published in the *Adventist Review*, the leading weekly journal of the Adventist Church, Anderson (2013), president of Southwestern Adventist University, takes a similar stance claiming that he is a Christian *mystic* because he wants to go beyond intellectual understanding into loving companionship with Christ.

Some modern Christians are very concerned that the mystical/spiritualistic approach to religion is even creeping into the area of medicine (Noyes, 2012). God says to *seek* Him with all our heart (Ezek 36:26-27), but this is not the same as seeking a god *within* our heart. Believing that God lies within each of us and that we can find Him within ourselves without acknowledging Scripture, or the Cross, is dangerously close to seeking a god of our own making which the Bible calls *idolatry*. This is a modern Christianized edition of pantheism and it sounds quite similar to the promise of the snake

in the Garden of Eden that Eve could be as God (see Gen 3). Peth speaks out against the dangers of “contemplative prayer,” or “centering prayer” as having their roots in pantheistic influences derived from Hinduism and Buddhism (Peth, 2012).

Some Christian Mystics

An unknown fourteenth-century English monk who authored *The Cloud of Unknowing* (1380), the first great spiritual classic written in the English language, writes, “Prayer in itself properly is naught else, but a devout intent directed unto God, for the getting of good and removing of evil” (Chapter 39) If a relationship with God is desired, spend time with Him. He is truly known through love. Words—and even thoughts—are inadequate to truly know Him. Those involved in “contemplative prayer,” rarely use words. If they must, the fewer the better seems to be the rule. Some mystics come close to the idea of knowing God through contemplative gazing and almost ignore God’s self-revelation throughout Scripture. Yet they have much to teach about coming close to God as a Father who loves His children.

Teresa of Avila (1515-1582)

Many mystics compare prayer to breathing—including Teresa of Avila, a sixteenth-century Spanish mystic, who said that “mental prayer...is nothing else than an intimate sharing between friends; it means taking time frequently to be alone with Him who we know loves us” (Kavanaugh & Rodriguez, 1979, p. 13). For Teresa and many others prayer is intimate communion with God. It can happen any time during the day or night—not just during prescribed periods of devotional time. For her, the important thing is to understand that God is near and one’s only task becomes tuning into His presence (Havvik, 2006).

Brother Lawrence (1614-1691)

During the 16th century, both Teresa of Avila and John of the Cross established a reformed branch of the order known as the “Discalced Carmelites.” Brother Lawrence worked in a kitchen at the Discalced Carmelite Prior in Paris, France, and wrote letters to a friend about practicing God’s presence in his daily activities—no matter how mundane. These letters were later published and became a classic for this powerful form of practical prayer (Brother Lawrence, 1958). For Brother Lawrence, prayer is the mere sense of God’s presence (p. 24), and that “our only business was to love and delight ourselves in God” (p. 18).

Madam Guyon (1648-1717)

Madam Guyon was a seventeenth-century French mystic who believed that verbal dialogue could distract one from focusing the mind and heart on God. When distractions and wondering thoughts become a problem, Guyon and most contemplative writers suggest some form of non-engagement with the mind as the best strategy. Rather than trying to control thoughts, withdraw the mind. “Keep turning within to the Lord’s presence. By doing this you will win the war with your wandering mind and yet never directly engage in the battle” (Guyon, 1975, p. 12). For the mystics prayer includes words, but may also exclude words. This sounds similar to emptying the mind as eastern religions teach in their meditation practices. Here is where this approach differs from the *traditional* approach, which sees a relationship with God being built upon an intelligent, informed relationship through mind and heart, based upon Scripture. However, the *mystical* approach is a sincere desire to know and become like God in character. Contemplative prayer (sometimes referred to as “centering prayer” which emphasizes the

discipline of interior silence) is a special form of prayer. It involves using one's will to consciously think about God through meditation on Scripture, or focusing on some attribute of God's character, or perhaps using the Psalms. Contemplation focuses on God's initiative, His divine activity in the soul as a gift from Him. In this prayer it is believed, God will come to the waiting soul.

Guyon describes this process of contemplative prayer:

First of all come into the Lord's presence by faith. As you are there before Him, keep turning inward to your spirit until your mind is collected and you are perfectly still before him. Now, when all your attention is finally turned within and your mind is set on the Lord, simply remain quiet before him for a little while. Perhaps you will begin to enjoy a sense of the Lord's presence. If that is the case, do not try to think of anything. Do not try to say anything. Do not try to do anything! As long as the sense of the Lord's presence continues just remain there. Remain before him exactly as you are. (Guyon, 1975, p. 22)

Frank Laubach (1884-1970)

While working as a missionary in the Philippines, Laubach, who classified himself as a "modern Christian mystic," began practicing the abiding presence of Christ, just as Brother Lawrence had done about 200 years before. Through this daily moment-by-moment surrender to God he began to experience the leadership of God in everything he did or said. He wrote about this in several letters to his father, which were later published (Laubach, 1973). During his missionary pilgrimage he developed his famous *Game with Minutes* in which he urged Christians to keep God in mind for at least one second of every minute of the day (Laubach, n. d.). In this way Christians could develop an attitude of constant prayer spoken about by the Apostle Paul (1 Thess 5:17).

The Quaker Tradition

Thomas Kelly (1893-1941)

Thomas Kelly, a Quaker missionary, teacher, and mystic believer urged his readers to center their lives on God's presence and find quiet and stillness in a lifelong conversation between God and His creatures (Kelly, 1941). Thus he reflects the "early Quaker theology of Christ as an Inner Light that shows you your true condition" (Wikipedia, n. d.). Kelly believed that the Shekinah presence is within everyone, and that the "Slumbering Christ" is stirring to be awakened. This living Christ within is the Initiator and we are the responders. His secret presence is at work opening the door of our heart to Him (Rev 3:20). In this process we are able to live "an amazing 'Inward Life with Him,' so that firmly cleaving to Him, we always look out upon all the world through the sheen of the Inward Light, and react toward men spontaneously and joyously from this Inward Center." Kelly urges his readers to yield to God, for He is a far better Teacher than the mere use of words. One needs to find the Instructor Himself, of whom "words are a faint and broken echo" (Kelly, 1941, p. 6). He continues by suggesting this practice is the heart of all true religion. It is the secret of the inner life of Jesus Christ, the Master of Galilee. Kelly comes close to partaking of *pantheism*, which believes that the universe is in God, and He is above and within all things He created. This is somewhat differentiated from pantheism, which holds that God is not a distinct being but is synonymous with the universe, or at least it's energy force. Both philosophies probably originated in Hindu thought.

Richard Foster (1942 – present)

Prayer takes quiet time. It takes much time according to Richard Foster (1978), a

Quaker author, who extols the ancient practice called, “holy leisure” also promoted by the early church Fathers. He writes, “If we expect to succeed in the contemplative arts, we must pursue ‘holy leisure’ with a determination that is ruthless to our date books” (Foster, 1978 p. 27). Foster believes that prayer is the center of all spiritual disciplines because it “is the central avenue God uses to transform us” (p. 33). Speaking of the “giants of the faith” he says, “for them to breathe was to pray.” Their lives were permeated with prayer. For Foster, prayer is coming “in contact with God so that His life and power can flow through us into others” (p. 38). It is listening and receiving an inner sense of compassion, just like God (p. 40).

In a later book (1981), he says the discipline of prayer helps us learn to live with God as the Center of our life, for God desires “to be not on the outskirts, but at the heart of my experience” (p. 80). Every activity of life becomes an opportunity to commune with God. This he called “perpetual communion” with the Father (1978, p. 33). His counsel is to “seek as many ways as possible to keep God constantly in mind.” This desire to practice the presence of God is the secret of all the saints, who daily practiced bringing God into all the practical activities of everyday life. In this process one is “coming alive to God.” This works best when concentrating on others rather than self (Foster, 1981, p. 85).

About ten years later, he added the practice of authentic prayer, which moves us “inward,” “upward,” and “outward.” Prayer is transformational, bringing intimacy with God and enlarging our heart to reach others in ministry. Foster’s main emphasis on prayer is a relationship with God. He portrays God as being emotionally hurt by the negligence of those created in His image. He longs to restore the relationship. Foster

concludes that prayer is an expression of love. The divine love of God summons all people into inner transformation, invites them into an intimate relationship, and calls them into ministry.

Modern Eastern Orthodoxy

Plekon (2005) a priest of the Orthodox Church in America, and professor at Baruch College, describes prayer as the “practice of personal devotion” that may begin in the mind or in words, but in the end it must descend from our head into our heart. He believes that “prayer is to become so much a part of us that our very breathing, or very living becomes prayer.” He struggles with trying to merge personal prayer with the public liturgical forms of worship. Plekon defines the “Jesus Prayer” as commonly used in the Orthodox tradition as, “Lord Jesus Christ, Son of the living God, have mercy on me a sinner,” or the somewhat shorter version: “Lord, have mercy,” or the shortest version, “Jesus.”

Summary

According to the *mystic* the heart is the meeting place for man and God (Haavik 2006, p. 81). The value of the contemplative prayer life is not in the quality of the prayer experience, but in the measure of a changed life (p. 83). Another gift of the contemplative prayer tradition is the practice of praying Scripture, which is an important means of entering into the presence of God. The use of Scripture is very helpful.

For the *mystics* and the contemplative prayer tradition God dwells within the inner world of the soul. As a result of the Cross, the human heart is the “Holy of Holies” where God and man meet (Haavak, 2006).

For many *mystics* prayer comes dangerously close to emptying the mind as many

eastern religions teach. Here is where this approach differs from the *traditional* approach, which sees a relationship with God being built upon the truths as revealed in Scripture. However, the *mystical* approach stresses a sincere desire to know God and become more like Him. The belief of knowing God through *naval gazing* can be dangerous if one ignores God's self-revelation throughout Scripture. The caution of Scripture is: be very careful trusting one's heart, for it is very deceptive (Jer 17:9).

I found very little within this tradition that spoke about intercessory prayer, or claiming the promises of God. However, the emphasis on a relationship with God was refreshing. Prayer goes much deeper than accomplishing something in the world, it is abiding in God as well. Learning to enjoy our Creator.

The value of the Christian *mystical* tradition is that it points to prayer as a means of developing a personal relationship with God. However, it is important to keep close to a scriptural understanding of God, or one could easily make gods of one's own feelings, or imaginations—which would be idolatry. Jesus said the truth would set us free, and that we should worship God in spirit and truth (John 4:24). He also said that to know God is eternal life (John 17:3)—not just a good feeling about Him.

The Traditional Approach to Prayer

Nineteenth Century Christian Authors

Andrew Murray (1794-1866)

Murray, a Dutch Reformed missionary to South Africa authored the book, *With Christ in the School of Prayer*, a 31-day course on prayer, which emphasizes intercessory prayer. It is considered a classic. The book states, "The Father intends the answer (to our

prayers) to be a token of His favor and of the reality of our fellowship with Him.”

“Prayer is not monologue but dialogue.” “Listening to God’s voice is the secret of the assurance that He will listen to mine” (Murray, 1887, p. 122). Murray points out:

A life marked by daily answer to prayer is the proof of our spiritual maturity. It shows that we have attained the true abiding in Christ, that our will is truly one with God's will. It also reveals that our faith is strong enough to see and take what God has prepared for us, that the Name of Christ and His nature have taken full possession of us, and that we have been found fit to take a place among those whom God admits to His counsels, according to whose prayer He rules the world. Prayer is very blessed; the answer is more blessed still. It is the response from the Father that our prayer, our faith, and our will are indeed as He would wish them to be. (p. 120-121)

For Murray the idea that God may not answer a prayer is an excuse for not coming into the expectations of God. He says, “Power with God is the highest attainment of the life of abiding” (p. 8). Hence, the clearest “proof” of this abiding relationship with our Creator is that He answers our prayers. We cannot manipulate Him. He is not at our disposal. We are transformed into His likeness and have His mind as we pray. Murray urges, “God hears prayer” (p. 9). God longs to answer our prayers that are offered according to His will. “The will of God to bless is dependent upon the will of man to say where the blessing must descend” (p. 168).

“Prayer is conversation and fellowship with God” (Murray, 1982, p. 164) thus it takes time. Time allows God an opportunity to work in us. A vital key in the whole Christian life is faith. We must ask ourselves before, during and after prayer, “Do I pray in faith?” For God to answer the prayer of faith, we must be able to say, “I believe with my whole heart” (Murray, 1982, p. 164).

George Muller (1805-1898)

One of the greatest men of prayer known in Christian history, George Muller fed thousands of orphans in Bristol, England yet never asked for a dime. This financial

sustenance was through prayer alone. From a book compiled by Brooks from Muller's narratives, the reader can see that Muller's passion was to "show in an unmistakable way, both to believers and unbelievers, the secret of believing prayer, the manifest hand of a living God, and His unfailing response, in His own time and way, to every petition which is according to His will" (Muller, 1898, p. 8). It reveals a very dependent and stretched Muller, as he trusted the calling of God to establish the orphan work in Britain.

Muller believed the greatest challenge to understanding God's will has to do with the human heart. He testified, "I seek at the beginning to get my heart into such a state that it has no will of its own in regard to a given matter" (1898, p. 11). He stated:

I seek the Will of the Spirit of God through, or in connection with, the Word of God. The Spirit and the Word must be combined. If I look to the Spirit alone without the Word, I lay myself open to great delusion also. If the Holy Ghost guides us at all, He will do it according to Scripture and never contrary to them. (1898, p. 13)

Muller then would take into account the providential circumstances that would often indicate God's will. Then he would pray for God to reveal His will correctly. He concluded his view on how to discern God's will by stating:

Through prayer to God, the study of the Word, and reflection, I come to a deliberate judgment according to the best of my ability and knowledge, and if my mind is thus at peace, and continues so after two or three more petitions, I proceed accordingly. In trivial matters, and in transactions involving most important issues, I have found this method always effective (1898, p. 15).

Muller's dependency on Scripture as well as prayer sets him apart from those who would want God to speak through their mind in an inner silence. Answers to prayer have been a great proof of God's presence, love, and leading for Muller.

Charles Spurgeon (1834-1892)

Charles Spurgeon, a British Particular Baptist preacher in the nineteenth century, was known as the "prince of preachers." He said that everything we do, even our "prayer

is a response to the prompting of God” (Spurgeon, 1996). True prayer is an approach by the soul to the throne of God. According to Spurgeon we dare not come before the King of the universe with an unbelieving, doubting heart! Prayer brings us to the throne of grace. We come with confidence, expectancy, and love in response to His promptings.

E. M. Bounds (1835-1913)

Bounds pastored in the southeastern United States before and after the Civil War. He emphasized that prayer is essential if a minister wants effective spiritual energy. Prayer is the most important factor in the Christian life. It is the only thing that causes real revival and reformation. Pastors should rely on the power of prayer. They should teach their people to pray. For Bounds prayer is the heart of being a Christian. “The one place where the Lord’s presence and power will be more fully realized than any other is the closet of prayer” (Bounds, 1990, p. 193).

Twentieth Century Christian Authors

Martin Lloyd-Jones (1899-1981)

Lloyd-Jones, the minister of the Westminster Chapel in London, was a leading twentieth century voice for evangelical thinking. He wrote, “We sometimes think prayer is simple, but it is not” (Lloyd-Jones, 2000). He was in agreement with many others who express that learning to pray is difficult. Agreeing with Bounds, Lloyd-Jones states, “Man is at his greatest and highest when upon his knees he comes face to face with God” (1959/1976, p. 322). This is the privilege and the challenge of prayer—coming face to face with God! No wonder it is so difficult for the average Christian. To consider it easy is to admit ignorance of the facts. Prayer “is the highest activity of the human soul, and

therefore it is at the same time the ultimate test of a man's true spiritual condition. There is nothing that tells the truth about us as a Christian people so much as our prayer life" (1959/1976, p. 322).

William Adam Brown (1865-1943)

Brown, a Presbyterian minister and president of Yale University, wrote a book that caught my interest because of its title and date of publication (*The Life of Prayer in a World of Science*) published in 1928—almost eighty years ago. Brown believed prayer was the heart of all vital religion, yet he often found it hard to pray. He was being honest about his own struggle. In a world, enlarged and transformed by science, prayer opens the door to communion with God. The author wrote about the haste of living in this modern age (1928), while he was rediscovering the power and blessings of prayer. This discovery was influenced by psychology, history, philosophy, and education. He defined prayer as “the name we give to the practice of the presence of God” (Brown, 1928, p. 3), also as “holy communion with the living God” (p. 66). The challenges of this journey are many: preoccupation and busyness; distance from the sense of God's closeness; familiarity yet a lack of devotion; the loss of a vivid sense of God as a determining factor in daily life; a critical spirit in which simple faith is undermined; the breakdown of the home with the restlessness it brings; and the love of being in constant motion. He also pointed out we cease being participants when we philosophize about prayer. Brown believed the most difficult hurdle of all was the widespread confusion about the existence of God.

For Brown, prayer was divided into four general areas: appreciation, fellowship, creativity (learning from experimenting and expecting), and discipline. “In prayer we become aware of God at work” (p. 125). God wants to be approached in faith. When we

try to confine God to His past revelations, or ignore them and seek Him only in the present, we find that He is always greater than any or all of His revelations. There will always be more of God than we can ever know. “We will never exhaust His infiniteness” (p. 128). We should live in a constant state of “expectancy” in which we believe that God will act again and transform our world. Life is filled with boundless possibilities because of our faith in the God who is more than His revelation in history.

God is in the business of making Himself know to those who are created in His image (p. 131). As a result, Brown says, “prayer is the most serious business in life.” The genius of Christian prayer is that it is done in solitude, yet it is not a selfish exercise. As we spend time alone with God, we begin to be captured by His heart. In intercessory prayer God “reveals to us what He desires for others” so we can pray for them properly (p. 144). The paradox of the individual and the social gospel finds a solution in prayer. “The man who has learned to pray is no longer alone in the universe” (p. 180). He is living in the Father’s house with the Father’s heart of love for those around him.

An Unknown Christian (1945)

Sometime around the first part of the nineteenth century a little book was written by an unknown Christian, entitled, *The Kneeling Christian* (1945), which is a prayer classic. Sounding somewhat *mystical*, it reads, “Only a child of God can truly pray,” because prayer is to be near God. “All that true prayer seeks is God Himself, for with Him we get all we need. Prayer is simply ‘the turning of the soul to God’” (p. 51). Reflecting Lloyd-Jones, the author describes prayer as a statement of one’s maturity with God. It gives God opportunity to reveal His will.

Watchman Nee (1903-1972)

Watchman Nee, a Chinese Christian author, discusses the importance of prayer ministry in the local church (Nee, 1995). His thinking is based on the words of Jesus, “whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven” (Matt 16:19; 18:18). Nee believed heaven is controlled by earth, and God chooses to limit His sovereignty in order for man to be able to exercise his free will. Therefore, prayer ministry has a most important role in the ministry of God on earth. Prayer is man’s channel for “harmony” with God’s will. It is this “harmony” that brings about God’s response on the earth (p. 8-11).

Oswald Chambers (1874-1917)

Oswald Chambers said, “we pray to get a deeper understanding of God and His will” (Chambers, 1935/1963, p. 80). “Prayer is not simply getting things from God, that is a most initial form of prayer; prayer is getting into perfect communion with God” (p. 260). “Prayer is the way the life of God is nourished” in the believer (p. 241). Speaking of doing God’s work, Chambers says, “prayer does not fit us for the greater works; prayer is the greater work” (p. 291). The real business of every born-again Christian is “intercessory prayer” (p. 172). Chambers challenges each Christian to:

launch out in the reckless belief that the Redemption is complete, and then bother no more about yourself, but begin to do as Jesus Christ said—pray for the friend who comes to you at midnight, pray for the saints, pray for all men. Pray on the realization that you are only perfect in Christ Jesus. (p. 173)

J. I. Packer (1926-present)

Packer (1973) challenges us to go deeper in the experience of prayer than just a *mystical* feeling. He suggests that just having a dialogue, or even an inner experience is in conflict with the Gospel. He points out that Jesus had to die before He could be

resurrected. Here is the crux of the matter of prayer for Packer: It must focus not only on the resurrected and living Christ within, but also on the death of Christ. One cannot share in the love and glory of God if one is going to ignore the cross of Jesus Christ. This is the struggle and missing link of eastern mysticism—which has no Cross in which God reveals His deepest self. Peace with God comes through the shed blood of His Son on Calvary—not through some inner experience alone. According to Packer, genuine Christian prayer must include this “cross” of dying to self before coming into God’s presence.

Dick Eastman (1944-present)

Eastman (1978) is the president of Every Home for Christ and president of the National Prayer Committee for the United States. For him prayer is the only answer to our daily confrontations with the devil. Prayer is the contact of a living soul with God. It is the simplest act a creature of God can perform. In prayer we develop a relationship with our Creator. Eastman divides the practice of prayer into twelve steps and encourages the person praying to spend five minutes at each step, thus spending an hour each day—“the hour that changes the world.”

Henri Nouwen (1932-1996)

Nouwen (1979) believes we must do more than just pray mentally, because mental prayer keeps our heart in isolation from God. We are in control of the process of mental prayers. He appeals for a “prayer of the heart” that brings all our thoughts, whether “beautiful or ugly, high or low” into the presence of God. In this way, “our unceasing thinking is converted into unceasing prayer, moving us from self-centered monologue to God-centered dialogue” (p. 67). Leaning toward the *mystical* traditional

Nowen calls this a “prayer of the heart” that brings us to a place of rest in the Lord’s presence.

Herbert Lockyer (1886-1984)

Lockyer (1982) focuses on the biblical truth of prayer and desires to give practical instruction to enhance and inspire the average Christian. He believes that prayer is the ultimate art that can be learned since it is the instrument by which God chooses to manifest His power. Lockyer asserts that the person who avoids prayer is “not really a Christian” (p. 9-10). For Lockyer prayer is an act of homage from the creature to the Creator. Prayer is more than just a means of getting what we want from God. It is truly an act of giving glory and adoration to God. He sees this as a precious privilege and the responsibility of every child of God.

Gordon MacDonald (1960-present)

As a pastor, author, and administrator, MacDonald suggests something very obvious, yet is often missed among Christians: that prayer is unnatural for man. For him prayer is defined as “visiting with God.” He states that, “In order to pray meaningfully, the mind has to be slowed down to a reflective pace” (p. 150). Slowing down can be a real challenge. Prayer must go beyond just asking for things. If we reduce it to the act of “asking,” the answers often do not coincide with expectations, which may cause discouragement. However, according to MacDonald, the problem is not with God’s abilities or sensitivities, but with our expectations. Here is revealed one of the most beautiful opportunities of prayer—it is to transform our heart so it loves what God loves, hates what God hates, and wants what God wants (Ezek 36:26-27). Here is another aspect of our struggle with prayer—because prayer signals “weakness and dependency.” It also

takes precious time (MacDonald, 1984, p. 147-149).

Bill Hybels (1958-present)

According to pastor Hybels (1988), the purpose of prayer is much more than a request, praise, or even getting answers and guidance. He defines prayer as “maintaining constant communion with God the Father and with God the Son through the Holy Spirit” (p. 141). He suggests using the progressive pattern of adoration, confession, thanksgiving, and petition. Hybels believes Jesus is the best model and the only true expert on prayer. He points out that if you want to develop an effective prayer life follow what Jesus did and do what He taught about prayer—that is “pray secretly, sincerely, and specifically” (p. 40).

John MacArthur (1939 – present)

MacArthur suggests the essence of prayer is simply talking with God as a beloved friend. This communion with God is as vital to the Christian as breathing. Echoing the thoughts of Spurgeon (1996), MacArthur describes prayer as anchoring the soul while lifting one to the very throne room of God. Prayer brings one into intimate, rich fellowship with God (MacArthur, 1995).

Douglas Rumford (1953 – present)

Rumford (1996), a pastor and author, suggests that the central experience of prayer and the whole Christian life “is the practice of the presence of God” (p.99). Every activity of the Christian life either leads toward or away from a living relationship with the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. God is always with us, we simply need to become aware of the fact daily (p. 112). Prayer is a powerful process for surrendering self to God’s

sovereignty—which is the work of a lifetime (p. 129). Genuine prayer requires time to listen as well as speak.

Jim Cymbala (1959 – present)

Cymbala (1997) wrote a book about his experiences at the Brooklyn Tabernacle church and how prayer was the secret of their “success.” He abhorred the thought of just having more church services and hungered for God to be the ruler in their lives and ministry. God revealed the value of leading people to pray. If they did, then He would perform a miracle of unbelievable proportions. The mid-week prayer meeting was the barometer of their success, or failure. It became the engine that drove the church. The book was an inspiring testimony of the influence of prayer.

Howard Baker (1951 – present)

Baker (1998) writes of meditative prayer as the way to open ourselves to God. He speaks specifically of meditating on Scripture that leads to a direct encounter with Jesus. Most of us desperately need the restorative power of quietness that only a lone encounter with our Maker will provide. Sounding somewhat *mystical*, Baker describes prayer as more than “simply asking” or following a pattern. It is a “soul conversation” that will lead us into a true encounter with God. We can learn to pray the true heart concerns of God Himself. Thus we experience a heart transformation through meditative prayer—especially using the Psalms, for they will direct our focus toward God.

Tom Elliff (1944 – present)

Elliff (1998) writes that losing a sense of intimacy with God is a very sobering experience. He believes that God is calling people to a life of prayer. It is above all else

communion with God (p. 34). The most difficult part of prayer is not asking, but believing (p.47). “Quiet places where we spend quiet times will be places and times of intimate communion with God” (p. 36). Elliff says:

When we come to God in prayer, recognizing our weakness and our dependence on Him, He frees us from earthly bondage and places heaven’s resources at our disposal. But prayer must be based upon the truths of God’s Word. This is non-negotiable. (p. 46)

Jan Johnson (1947 – present)

Johnson (1999) believes the real purpose of prayer is to build a relationship. Consequently we need to surrender ourselves to God daily. In this daily relationship with God our heart is changed to reflect His heart. Sounding somewhat like a Christian mystic, she suggests using *contemplative prayer* to open oneself to God’s presence and direction. In an earlier book she suggests that the real purpose of prayer is learning to enjoy God’s presence in our daily life. She uses Brother Lawrence as a model of this kind of spiritual enjoyment.

Elizabeth M. Hoekstra (1963 – present)

Hoekstra (1999) suggests that all humanity has spiritual *ADD* (attention deficit disorder) in that we move through life reacting impulsively to influences around us, which makes it painfully difficult to have quiet communion with God. The greatest challenge is to live fully surrendered to Him. The purpose of prayer is to deepen our complete trust in Him.

Twenty-first Century Christian Authors

Anita Mathias (1964 – present)

Mathias suggests that prayer will bring us into the realm of *paradox*: For we need

solitude in order to pray, but “prayer returns us to the engagement of love.” In order to pray effectively one needs a “fierce yearning” – a “God hunger” – that will launch spiritual growth. One also should meditate on Scripture and be disciplined enough to follow biblical wisdom. The author speaks of “trying to be continually aware of the quiet presence of Christ” which will bring quietness. As quietness flows over us it will engender creative thought. “We must persist in the discipline until it becomes instinctive, until we convert every thought, desire and frustration into a prayer, turning to God as naturally as a flower turns its face to the sun” (Mathias, 2000). She reminds us that spiritual growth will be gradual, like a tree planted by a stream of water (see Psalm 1) it will bear its fruit in due season. Prayer “demands self-forgetfulness” which is losing our self in our Lord. We can be lured into prayer by the promise of joy. Jesus said, “Unless a grain of wheat falls into the ground and dies, it remains alone. But if it dies, it yields a mighty harvest” (Mathias, 2000).

Chip Dodd (1960 – present)

Dodd invites us to the spiritual discipline of listening with the heart and hearing God’s call as it echoes in every emotion. He describes prayer as a response and submission to the God who comes to the heart’s door and knocks (Rev 3:20). Eternal life is negated if the heart is closed to God. An open heart means admitting our feelings, needs, desires, and hopes. If we refuse to become honest before God about our inner woundedness, we miss the experience of living fully. In a wounded state, we choose NOT to trust that God’s desire is best. The result is missing the joy of an authentic relationship because of our past experiences. “Previous wounding causes us to intentionally neglect or ignore what is true—that we are created in the image of God for

relationship” (Dodd, 2001). Though Dodd is writing to help wounded people find healing in their relationship with God and others, a warning is appropriate: the human heart is deceitful above all things and desperately wicked (Jer 17:9).

David Benner (1943 – present)

Benner provides the following simple exercise, which reveals much concerning one’s spiritual journey: “Imagine God thinking about you. What do you assume God feels when you come to mind?” According to Scripture, God is *bursting* with feelings of love for those created in His image. No matter what one believes about God, when He thinks of you, “love swells in his heart and a smile comes to His face” (Benner, 2003). Benner sees God being emotionally involved with those created in His image. “God’s bias toward us is strong, persistent, and positive.” We tend to develop the same focus that we believe God has. If God’s unchanging love for you is in doubt, then contemplating the parable of the prodigal son (Luke 15:11-32) is Benner’s antidote.

In an earlier article Benner (2002) wrote the various traditions of Christianity impact one’s understanding and desire for spiritual maturity – including prayer. He worries that the interest in spirituality by mental health professionals may be nothing more than a passing fad. He contends that anyone helping another grow spiritually is advocating “the reality of God’s presence.” All Christians truly need “the support of spiritual friendship and guidance” for living a life of love, which is the goal of spiritual growth.

Philip Yancey (1949 – present)

Yancey believes that the key to understanding how prayer and God interact is “relationship.” Agreeing with Benner (2003), Yancey encourages, “God yearns for

relationship with the creatures made in his image” (2006, p. 143). In prayer the emphasis shifts from self-centeredness to God-centeredness. “Prayer is the act of seeing reality from God’s point of view.” This vantage point is based on a relationship versus a transaction. Meditative prayer, which focuses on God, helps with self-forgetfulness. According to Yancey, the main purpose of prayer is to get to know God. He makes Himself known through His Word. Thus one needs to keep the Bible very close as one prays.

Accepting this as being correct, one of the great dangers of teaching “how to pray” is conveying the concept that everyone is forced into the same mold. According to Yancey, each person’s prayer life will be wondrously unique. A relationship with God is a living, dynamic, changing process, and our prayer experience is to be the same.

Maggie Dawn (1957 – present)

Dawn (2007) points out that constant prayer shapes a person. This continuity in prayer actually tests and sifts beliefs until only the truly important remain. She quotes an African proverb, “When you pray, move your feet,” pointing out that prayer as Jesus taught is not just a private matter. For Dawn, there are times when our prayers must include public action. Prayer is not just personal therapy. It is about refusing to believe that the way things are determines the way they’ll always be.

Seventh-day Adventist Authors on Personal Prayer

Ellen G. White on Personal Prayer

In 1957, H.M.S. Richards, Sr. addressing pastors and seminarians recounted one of Ellen White’s public prayers that he had personally witnessed:

Within thirty seconds after she (Ellen White) began to pray, we were all in the presence of God. I was afraid to look up, lest I should see God standing there by her side. She was talking with Him, and she was completely oblivious of others around her. Within a minute you could hear sobs all over the building. That great congregation was in tears. There was one mind, one conviction of the Holy Ghost, the Spirit of the Holy Fire, the Spirit of God, as she prayed.

I'll tell you, my friends, it made many changes in lives. People were surprised by the power and presence of God. They never expected that. They came to see a prophet, something strange – but God took hold of them. They were weeping and crying out. Talk about psychology if you want, there wasn't any of that there. She was quiet until she started to pray, and then, just like that, it was there – a tongue of fire. She had it when she prayed. I was there, and I know. When she got up, she was just a dear old lady again." (Richards, 1957, p. 407)

This “dear old lady” knew how to pray. Perhaps this is why she gives some of the clearest and most practical insights on personal prayer. At times she sounds somewhat like a Christian *mystic*, but she will always utilize Scripture in the process of encouraging a relationship with God. I will explore a few of her insights, perspectives, and purposes of prayer.

Steps to Christ (1892/1908)

In her classic book, *Steps to Christ (1892/1908)*, she defines prayer as “the opening of the heart to God as to a friend” (p. 93). White and many others who base their understanding of God upon the Bible regard prayer as a precious gift from God. In her discussions on prayer White sounds a little like Teresa of Avila and other mystics as Wikipedia (n.d.) points out. However, White would never encourage seeking God through an inner journey without the guidance of the Scripture. One of her beliefs include, “Unceasing prayer is the unbroken union of the soul with God, so that the life of God flows into our life; and from our life, purity and holiness flow back to God” (p. 98).

The author describes God as waiting “to bestow upon us the fullness of His blessing. It is our privilege to drink largely at the fountain of boundless love. What a

wonder it is that we pray so little” (p. 94). Speaking about the privilege of constant connection with the Almighty, she says, “If we would but think of God as often as we have evidence of His care for us we should keep Him ever in our thoughts and should delight to talk of Him and praise Him” (p. 102). “We do not pray any too much, but we are too sparing of giving thanks” (p. 103). She encourages readers to “gather about the cross. Christ and Him crucified should be the theme of contemplation, of conversation, and of our most joyful emotion” (p. 104). White closes this chapter on prayer with a challenge to include more praise in our prayers. Everyone should come before his Creator with reverent joy, “thanksgiving, and the voice of melody” (p. 104).

Gospel Workers (1892/1948)

This volume included a chapter entitled, “Secret Prayer.” It repeats some of the same ideas as *Steps to Christ*—and expounds upon the several *purposes* for *secret* prayer that are very reminiscent of Teresa of Avila (1515-1582) and other Christian *mystics*. “It is secret communion with God that sustains the soul-life.” “Prayer is the breath of the soul.” “It is the secret of spiritual power.” “Power will come from God in answer to the prayer of faith.” “Prayer is the opening of the heart to God as to a friend.” “The life of the Christian is a life of constant prayer.” “We may commune with God in our heart; we may walk in companionship with Christ.” Our faith provides confidence that God hears our prayer: “It is God to whom we are speaking, and our prayer is heard” (White, 1892, pp. 254-258).

Desire of Ages (1898)

In White’s book on the life of Christ, *The Desire of Ages*, concerning Jesus’ prayer life, she states, “prayer is an expression of our dependency on God” (White,

1898). There is a danger in trusting to human plans and methods. We tend to depend on outward performance, which slowly separates our soul from God, even when one works for the Lord. As we depend on our own performance we pray less and have less faith. “While we are to labor earnestly for the salvation of the lost, we must also take time for meditation, for prayer, and for the study of the word of God” (p. 362). Since Jesus shared in our needs and weaknesses, He was wholly dependent upon God. It was in the secret place of prayer that “He sought divine strength.” It was in “communion with God” that Jesus could “unburden the sorrows that were crushing Him. Here He found comfort and joy” (p. 363). Here she uses her favorite definition of prayer—“communion with God.” Through this “continual communion” Jesus “received life from God, that He might impart life to the world.” Applying this principle to each reader she states, “His experience is to be ours” (p. 363).

Sounding somewhat like a Christian *mystic*, White recognizes that each person needs a personal experience in obtaining knowledge of God’s will concerning his or her life. “We must individually hear Him speaking to the heart. When every other voice is hushed, and in quietness we wait before Him, silence of the soul makes more distinct the voice of God” (p. 363). If a person takes time for quiet “communion with God” they will be “surrounded with an atmosphere of light and peace” while living amid the flurry of life’s intense activities. Jesus frequently went to a solitary place to commune with His Father. “Often He passed the entire night in prayer and meditation, returning at daybreak to His work among the people” (p. 260). To every follower of Jesus, White promises, “continual devotion establishes so close a relation between Jesus and His disciple that the Christian becomes like Him in mind and character” (p. 251).

White sometimes sounds like a *mystic*, but she would not fit comfortably into the *mystical* tradition for she would never encourage prayer, or worship of God without studying His Word. How else can one know the true character of God? Prayer alone is not sufficient for fallen human beings to withstand the powers of Satan and his evil forces. White writes, “It was by the word of God that Christ overcame the wicked one” (p. 257). “Those who turn from the plain teachings of Scripture and the convicting power of God’s Holy Spirit are inviting the control of demons” (p. 258).

Ministry of Healing (1905)

In the concluding chapter of *Ministry of Healing* White expresses her favorite term, “communion with God” eight times to describe the engaging benefit of prayer. We must live a “two-fold life” of practical, earnest work and communion with God. “Nothing is more needed in our work than the practical results of communion with God” (p. 512). In our weakness we can lay hold of infinite strength through prayer. “We must have less trust in what we ourselves can do, and more trust in what the Lord can do for and through us” (p. 513). “Surrender your will and way to Him. Make not a single reserve, not a single compromise with self. Know what it is to be free in Christ” (p. 514). “As you ask the Lord to help you, honor your Savior by believing that you do receive His blessing. All power, all wisdom, are at our command. We need only to ask” (p. 514). This experience is not limited to just the times we are on our knees in prayer, because White encourages us to:

Walk continually in the light of God. Meditate day and night upon His character. Then you will see His beauty and rejoice in His goodness. Your heart will glow with a sense of His love. You will be uplifted as if borne by everlasting arms. With the power and light that God imparts, you can comprehend more and accomplish more than you ever before deemed possible. (p. 514)

Summary

For White prayer must be blended with a study of Scripture. It is in Scripture that we behold the reality of God as He reveals Himself. Prayer is the opening of the heart to God and is the privilege of every child of God. It is an expression of our dependence on God. It gives us knowledge of God's will for our life. She sounds somewhat *mystical* as she uses her favorite definition for prayer, "communion with God."

Twentieth Century Adventist Authors

Matilda Erickson (1880-1957)

Erickson (1917) ties prayer to service for others. She suggests that keeping in touch with God is the secret in this life. Somehow the same prayer that draws us close to God also draws us close to our fellow men. Time in the chamber of secret prayer and Bible study is the meeting place with Jesus. This is the place for knowing "Him as He is—the best of all personal friends" (p. 53). How does that friendship develop? She suggests reading biographies of great men and women who knew Jesus as their Friend. The Holy Spirit will also help us develop this friendship with Jesus. Prayer is the most important factor in a Christian's life. The Christian's first duty is to rightly represent his Master to others. "Nothing else will give us such clear vision of ourselves or of Christ, as will secret prayer." "The chamber of secret prayer helps us live the life that counts—the life of victory over sin, the life of faithful and successful soul winning." The author concludes, "being alone with God in prayer is the Christian's supreme privilege and his greatest need" (p. 128).

Taylor Bunch (1885-1967)

Bunch, an Adventist scholar says that prayer is the greatest privilege of the Christian and is like “the breath of the soul and the secret of spiritual power” (1946, p. 92-93). “Prayer is communion, or conversation with God” (p. 12). It connects our heart with God’s heart. “Prayer is the holiest exercise of the soul” (p. 27). “It is the power that moves the arm that moves the world” (p. 12).

For Bunch prayer and the study of the Bible must be “properly balanced, in order that they may be effectual” (p. 20). God “talks to us through His Word; we talk back through prayer” (p. 21). God’s word gives us an understanding of God’s will. “It tells us what He requires of us and what our conduct should be. But it is prayer that puts life and power into our religious experience. It puts the spirit of Jesus into the doctrines of Jesus” (p. 21).

M. L. Andreason (1876-1962)

Andreasen, another Adventist scholar, wrote an impressive volume on prayer. In it he shares his struggle in discovering the blessings in prayer (1957). He notes that prayer is a universal practice of mankind. “It is part of his nature, whatever his skin” and “men shall pray to the end of time, even if it be only to the rocks and mountains” (p. 25). Prayer is the “highest spiritual exercise of the soul” (p. 29). It is “fellowship and companionship with the Almighty” (p. 15). “It is a high and blessed privilege” (p. 30). “Prayer is more than talking with God or talking to Him. It is fellowship with God, life with God. The highest joy in fellowship or friendship is not found in talking, but rather in the communion of spirits which transcends words” (p. 15). This volume discusses many practical issues such as: Does God change when we pray? Prayer for beginners; the

relationship between prayer and meditation; praying for the sick; and the silence of God.

Glen Coon (1932-1997)

Coon (1974) has had quite an impact on many Adventists with the ABC's of prayer he developed. He encouraged people to claim God's promises and experience God's activities in their life. For Coon one must go beyond trembling in God's presence and ask boldly in faith. He describes this as the "scientific prayer of faith," or "the prayer of reception." Coon sometimes referred to it as "the ABC's of prayer." The prayer of reception says, "Lord I believe this promise. I believe you are now fulfilling this promise and I thank you that you have fulfilled it." This prayer is the "secret" that Coon unmasks in his ABC's of prayer. "We *claim* that we *have* received because the gift promised in in that promise. It is through the miracle of instant creation" (p. 19).

Joe Englekemier (1993)

Englekemier (1993) quotes H.M.S. Richards, Sr., "Prayer is the most talked about and least practiced of all Christian beliefs" (p. 12). This is the struggle for many Christians. The author challenges his readers to do "whatever it takes" to develop a meaningful prayer life. This opens the door for "a life of almost unlimited potential for good" (p. 18). Building on the concepts of the "scientific prayer" of Coon (1974), Englekemier supports the claiming of biblical promises, but he also points out the joy of growing in a friendship with Jesus. When a person becomes aware of this "ever present Friend" it brings joy into the daily life and creates an attitude of praise. Understanding how awesome God really is led the author to practice more "whatever it takes" to pray and experience the power of intercessory prayer. He challenges the reader: (1) to really get to know Jesus, and (2) regularly test God's promises. He describes the importance of

infusing praise into the daily prayer routine.

Carol Johnson Shewmake (1989/1995)

Prayer, for Shewmake (1989), is a two-way conversation with God. He speaks, we listen and obey. This book is her journey of how God helped her develop a deep and meaningful relationship with Him through prayer. Perhaps the greatest help for her was learning to pray through the dark times—not just accept them—by expressing her longing to be completely God’s and wrestling with Him until the darkness faded. She describes the freedom when she “purposefully and wholeheartedly” reached out to God (p. 40). She was able to experience the power of God in chasing away the darkness through pray that freed her immediately. Shewmake discusses the idea of using the Old Testament sanctuary as a model for prayer as we come into the presence of God for prayer (p. 54).

In a later book (Shewmake, 1995) she unpacks God’s plan of intercessory prayer in which we aid God in His work of saving people. “Loving others is the key to effective intercession” (p. 84). When we join Jesus in this important work of intercession, “We can have no greater privilege” (p. 120). She shares five practical ways of getting started in a ministry of intercession: 1) “Cultivate a spirit of thankfulness for God’s work in the lives of those I am praying for,” 2) “I look for any visible improvement in their lives—spiritual, physical, or financial—and specifically thank God for it,” 3) “Realize I do not always know how to pray. I do not know the real needs, but the Holy Spirit always does,” 4) “I ask the Lord to give me more love for the people I pray for, more intensity of desire in my prayers. I want it to matter to me what happens to those whom the Lord has entrusted me to pray for.” “The only prayers that God can honestly answer are those that come from the heart,” and 5) “The way to make my prayer ministry more positive is to

act in concert with prayer. I write letters, make telephone calls, and visit when it is appropriate—and possible” (p. 115). She counsels, “For our own encouragement it is wise to keep a prayer journal listing how God is working in the lives of those on our prayer lists. It is easy to forget the Lord’s blessings if we do not write them down!” (p. 115).

Ron Halvorsen (1995)

For Halvorsen (1995) “prayer is a two-way communion and fellowship between man and God that results in the supplying of man’s needs and the defeat of God’s enemy” (p. 93). Halvorsen reminds the reader that obedience to God’s commands is necessary before venturing into the arena of interceding for others. For him as for many of the previous writers reviewed intercession is an important part of prayer.

Randy Maxwell (1995)

Maxwell (1995) says that prayer brings us into “contact” with the living God—this should be the greatest desire of the Christian. Maxwell raises some important questions: “Do we really believe that God hears and answers prayer? Are we convinced that prayer makes a difference—that unlimited power is made available to us through prayer? Do we really feel a need for prayer?” (p. 98). His challenge is “to view prayer, not as exercise or discipline, but as relationship—sharing life with your best friend” (p. 102). The author believes that “every Christian is called to be an intercessor” (p. 127).

Chris Coffin Stevenson (1996)

Stevenson (1996) reports that prayer “allows God to work in us and through us” (p. 12). The deeper purpose of prayer is to build a growing relationship with Him. Thus

when we neglect to pray it is actually a “sin” because it is neglecting to nurture a relationship with God (p 11). By persistently coming to God in prayer, we build a meaningful relationship with Him. Learning to continually practice God’s presence, like Brother Lawrence, helps to put God at the center of one’s life (p. 89).

Roger Morneau (1925-1998)

For Morneau (1997) intercession is a vital link in prayer. Morneau believed that God impresses us during our daily activities if we are open to His promptings and obedient to His revealed will. Though there is a mystery in intercessory prayer, God will impress us concerning those for whom we should be praying. Such prayers allow Him to work more mightily in their behalf. Prior to his death in 1998 many people requested prayer. They had faith God would answer Morneau’s prayers. Before committing to intercede, he had them promise to share when God answered.

Richard O’Ffill (1999)

O’Ffill compares the process of prayer to breathing: “We don’t breathe to *get*, we breathe to *be*!” (O’Ffill, 1999, p. 23). Thus we pray to *be*, not to *get*. If we are going to understand the true purpose of prayer we need to have a clear concept of God not only as our Holy Father, but also as our King and Ruler (p. 30). The key to successful prayer is an attitude of humility (p. 62). The real purpose of prayer is to discover and do the will of God—which means we must trust Him completely and be surrendered to Him (p. 34).

Twenty-first Century Adventist Authors

Mike Tucker (2005)

Tucker tells us that prayer was the power source for Jesus. Prayer is not so much

about getting answers, as it is about getting to know our heavenly Father and understanding His heart. “Pray so that you might know the Father. Pray that He might give you the gift of Himself!” Tucker quotes the Scottish New Testament scholar William Barclay who says, “Real prayer is simply being in the presence of God” (Tucker, 2005, p. 94). For Tucker, the real purpose of prayer is to bring us into the presence of God.

Philip Samaan (2006)

Samaan encourages those who think their prayers are like a dead-end street going nowhere to remember that Jesus prayed for you (John 17) and continues to pray for you (Rom 8: 34). “The greatest blessing in prayer is communion with Jesus” (Samaan, 2006, p. 26). Jesus is our mighty Intercessor – regardless how weak we believe our faith to be. We are never alone when we pray. It is our privilege to unite our *puny* prayers with His *powerful* ones. Jesus, the Son of God is praying for you! His prescriptive intercession fulfills the needs of each soul. “I may correctly say of Christ: the fervent prayer of this Righteous Man avails much” (p. 54).

Jon Dybdahl (2008)

Dybdahl defines prayer as, “reaching out to share with God as Friend and Lord” (Dybdahl, 2008, p. 45). He cautions that although we want to have God as a Friend and to be in a close relationship with him, yet we should be careful to honor Him as Lord of the universe. This God who loves us is capable of doing for us what we cannot do for ourselves. He is also the holiest being in the entire universe. The author shares that one should “not begin to pray unless he can pray honestly” (p. 45). Dybdahl points out that “meditation is a vital component of prayer” (p. 60). For the Christian, prayer is “the heart

of devotional life” (p. 123). In prayer it is important to understand “that we can actually commune with God and that He speaks to us” (p. 133).

Derek Morris (2008)

Building on the counsel of Jesus, “The harvest is plentiful, but the workers are few. Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field” (Luke 10:2), Morris believes “The Lord of the harvest can take non-laboring distracted, discouraged laborers and renew them by His grace, empower them by His Spirit, and send them out as focused, effective harvesters” (Morris, 2008, p. 31). Morris shows the counsel of Jesus is truly radical in its original Greek, “Lord of the harvest, I earnestly beg You to throw out laborers into Your harvest, and You have my permission to begin with me” (p. 44-45). When we pray this prayer “we are giving Him permission to do something radical” (p. 42) and use us in the process. “When you give the Lord of the harvest permission to involve you in His harvest, as a lamb among wolves, He asks you to demonstrate an attitude of radical dependence” (p. 65). This radical dependence on God will take you out of your comfort zone and into His radical joy because He will work in you and through you His good pleasure. Remember “if the plan isn’t big enough to scare you, it’s not big enough for God” (p. 95).

Patty Ntnhemuka (2009)

Ntnhemuka (2009) discusses how to hear God speak as a daily habit. That habit combines God speaking through our conscience, the Bible, and quiet time. “If we make a daily habit of taking those quiet moments to sort through our thoughts and feelings, praying and opening ourselves up to our Creator, we can begin to recognize the difference between the clamor of our brains and the quiet whisper of God.” In reference

to the Bible she suggests, “As we read, we listen. Because just as desperately as we want to hear God, God wants to talk to us even more.”

Bobby Moore (2009)

In a recent lead article in *Ministry Magazine*, a Seventh-day Adventist journal for ministers, Moore (2009) encourages pastors to make space for God through contemplation. This will assist them in practicing the presence of God through various spiritual disciplines. According to Moore, an essential discipline is the practice of solitude. It promotes fellowship with God for meditation and prayer. We must be intentional if we are to enjoy growing up to be more like Christ.

S. Joseph Kidder (2009/2011)

In his book on a healthy church, Kidder (2011) underscores the significant role of the pastor who follows the model of Jesus in prayer. Jesus places the highest priority of His life on spending time alone with the Father. His life reveals an intense passion for God’s presence. The issue of prayer is so important that Jesus declared without this connection we can do nothing (John 15:5). The work of ministry (for both pastor and parishioner) is first and foremost a summons to know the Lord Jesus Christ intimately and passionately. The heart of pastoral work is to connect with God and lead others likewise. The author shares how prayer changed him and transformed his church family through submission and connection with God. Prayer is the means by which God unleashes His power into our world.

In an earlier book Kidder (2009) defines prayer as a way of maintaining constant and meaningful communion with God. Prayer is about knowing Him, worshipping Him, loving Him, adoring Him, and having a deep, passionate, and intense relationship with

Him. Prayer is the vehicle whereby we become aware of God's presence, His activities, and His grace.

Howard Peth (2012)

How does God communicate with mankind? Eastern *Mystic* meditation, which tells us to empty our mind of every thought, is the opposite of the biblical meditation that God desires. Peth writes to caution Christians about the contemplative prayer movement because of its source in eastern religions, and the dangers of emptying one's mind. It is the empty mind where the forces of evil can come in and lead us astray (Peth, 2012).

Eric Anderson (2013)

Anderson struggled with the definition of *mystic*. One definition was someone who has had a direct experience with God. The "Christian believer communicating with God in prayer" needs the corrective balance of being consistent with divine revelation in Scripture. The author pointed to the heart of Christianity as union with Christ. He quoted Evelyn Underhill, an Anglo-Catholic writer and a proponent of the power of contemplative prayer, as she described her "cure for spiritual exhaustion and restlessness was a certain kind of prayer—the prayer of adoration."

The author explained his desire to "experience what was described in the writings of men and women who loved God intensely." Anderson continued, "What I needed, though I did not know it, was more mysticism in my Christianity." As he searched for a heart relationship, not just a head relationship, he found that "all of us require the powerful and repeated therapy of deeply reverent worship, the prayer of adoration, and listening for God's voice." He shared his testimony, "If we seek companionship with Christ, He will lead us to richly satisfying springs of living water." Having personally

experienced this, he concluded, “I suppose that makes me a Christian mystic.”

Summary

Because of the sheer magnitude of material, this review was limited to the Christian community of faith. I tried to understand the true purpose of prayer according to authors from various backgrounds and experiences. Some had more of the *mystical* tradition approach and others had more of the *traditional* approach to prayer. I reviewed literature from both traditions. These are not hard-core classifications, but they do give some perspective through comparison and analysis. This review points out where some overlap occurs and where each tradition adds a richer understanding of prayer.

In the Christian community of faith few authors view prayer as a mechanism to control God (Cohen, Wheeler, Scott, Edwards & Lusk, 2000, p. 40). Some authors understood prayer as a gift of grace in which God invites our presence to dialogue, listen, commune, and simply to be with Him. It seems that many modern evangelical authors—though they hold to the *traditional* view of prayer—were influenced by the tradition of the *mystics* and actually refined their purpose of prayer to be more relationally focused by using such words to describe the purpose of prayer as “communion” (Andreasen, 1957; Benner, 2002; Brown, 1928; Chambers, 1963; Chase, 2005; Elliff, 1998; Foster, 1992; Hybels, 1988; MacDonald, 1984; White, 1905), or simply “practicing the presence of God” (Chambers, 1963; Haavik, 2006; Johnson, 1999; Kelly, 1941; Lloyd-Jones, 2000; Nowen, 1979; Rumford, 1996; Samaan, 2006; Tucker, 2005).

Some described prayer as “dialogue with God” (Bounds, 1990; Dybdahl, 2008; 1995; Murray, 1887; Nowen, 1979; Spurgeon, 1996); while others clearly saw prayer as “transformational” (Baker, 1998; Brown, 1928; Dawn, 2007; Dodd, 2001; Foster, 1992;

Hybels, 1988; Mathias, 2000; Packer, 1973; Thampu, 2005; White, 1905).

Conclusion

For the Christian there is a tension in prayer. It should never be separated from Bible study. It is in the Bible that God reveals His character. Without the Bible, we are left to our own imagination to create a god of our own making—which the Bible calls idolatry. In spite of this danger, true prayer that transforms is where God’s love for us and our love for God are experienced and expressed most clearly. This love exchange is at the heart of prayer.

For most authors the essence of prayer is that in prayer we give ourselves to God and He also gives Himself to us. God—not answers—is the ultimate purpose and destiny of prayer. It is truly an act of grace—the infinite, almighty, all-powerful God of the universe every individual into a personal encounter with Him that is unique and special. Wow! What an invitation. What a privilege.

CHAPTER 4

METHODOLOGY AND IMPLEMENTATION

My project evaluates and attempts to enhance the prayer life of the members of the Standifer Gap Seventh-day Adventist Church located in Chattanooga, Tennessee. In this chapter I will discuss the project methodology, and how it was implemented. In November of 2008 the IRB of Andrews University approved the questionnaire developed for this project. The project time line was a ten-month period from January through October in 2009.

Introduction

Selecting a project involved much mental energy, time, and carefully weighing of topics. One criterion was to discover something that would first and foremost benefit the church members. My interests centered on spiritual maturity versus church function. I elected prayer. This topic appeared both exciting and challenging because personal prayer had been a secret frustration. A survey of pastors from various denominations across North America by Grey Matter Research (2005) exposed that my secret was not a unique phenomenon. Only sixteen percent of those pastors surveyed expressed a positive satisfaction. This survey helped me realize this was a needed area to explore. From the comments and interaction of many church members, I realized that prayer satisfaction was an issue for the members of my congregation.

This chapter uncovers the ministry context for the church as it relates specifically to obstacles and opportunities for this project on prayer. Following this is a description of the research methodology used to evaluate and hopefully enhance our prayer experience.

The main content of this chapter describes the step-by-step procedures of this project.

The Ministry Context

I was pastoring the Standifer Gap Seventh-day Adventist Church for the duration of this project. It has a membership of 430 with approximately half being fairly active. The members are mostly of Caucasian descent. The medium age of the congregation is approximately 55 years young. The worship style is a more traditional, conservative style. The church also supports and guides an elementary school.

Several bedroom communities surround the Standifer Gap church. Most of these community families commute to Chattanooga or other surrounding areas for work, shopping, and recreation. Within this community most families are affiliated with some Protestant denomination, while most of the rest profess no religious affiliation.

The strong Adventist presence in this area has a tendency to encourage a person to focus more on lifestyle than a personal relationship with God. The area is a very desirable place for Adventists to retire, especially for denominational workers. The close proximity to Southern Adventist University and several other Adventist educational institutions propels many Adventist families to settle here. This provides an opportunity for a home environment while attending school. There are also a variety of Adventist churches in the area. Many pastors stay at one church for an extended period of time. The result is people change churches instead of pastors moving. The sum of these factors result in most church growth occurring through movement among members, rather than outreach programs. The combination of these facts creates a rather competitive environment for membership. This results in many churches hosting and promoting many programs. Sabbath afternoon is a prime time for many programs.

A preliminary survey of the Standifer Gap church board members revealed the following: Over 50% of those responding were not satisfied with their personal prayer life; approximately 60% spent less than fifteen minutes in prayer per day. The board represents a cross section of this local church in age, gender, and race. Could the dissatisfaction of these church leaders with their prayer life represents a common thread within the church body? The obvious response would be affirmative, but this project may uncover just the opposite.

In conversation with various members I discovered many who expressed no need for a more meaningful prayer life. Their expressed attitude is: As long as they are comfortable and things are going fine, there is no need to “waste time” in prayer. They recognize the value of prayer, and say everyone should pray, but as for them prayer seems to make no real difference.

Research Methodology

I began this project by focusing on getting approval from the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at Andrews University for a questionnaire that could assess changes in personal satisfaction concerning the prayer life of the volunteer participants. Once approval was obtained, I was able to get final clearance for the project from the Doctor of Ministry committee. This was prior to beginning any serious research or writing, since I needed approval of the project before I really knew that the area I had chosen would be approved.

On the recommendation of the approval committee at the Seminary I proceeded with a ten-month long project. Since the IRB granted a one-year timeline for use of the questionnaire, I felt I needed to proceed at once. As a full time working pastor, in order to

maintain the one-year time frame allotted by the IRB, I was unable to complete the theology paper or the literature review before proceeding. This would prove to be a serious handicap.

I prepared a series of ten sermons on principles of prayer based on the prayer life of Jesus. I preached one sermon on Sabbath morning, which coincided with the afternoon seminar session. These events transpired over a ten-month period. An afternoon seminar regarding practical issues concerning prayer followed each sermon.

At the initial afternoon seminar meeting, each participant completed the questionnaire cleared by the IRB. I also used this same questionnaire at the concluding seminar. Thereafter I analyzed and compared the results of the questionnaire to ascertain or define any changes. The afternoon seminar attendance was totally on a volunteer basis. This caused attendee variation from meeting to meeting. However, there was a core group that attended almost all of the sessions.

My goal was to document changes in prayer activities and attitudes. I hoped to discover an increase in prayer satisfaction through this educational approach.

Development of the Intervention

Preceding the actual project I explained the project process to the local church board. This included a debriefing concerning the hope for a core group of volunteers who would be interested in enhancing their prayer experience. These volunteers would be asked to attend afternoon sessions for the purpose of discussing deeper issues regarding prayer. The local church board voted to proceed.

As I shared the series of sermons on prayer during the Sabbath morning worship service, I gave a strong promotion for the afternoon session. The afternoon sessions were

to discuss, think through, and challenge each other to action. The goal was for these volunteers to meet once a month for approximately an hour over a ten-month period. I discovered this was easier planned than implemented. The interruptions caused by summer vacations and numerous other major events in the area forced schedule changes several times.

The afternoon small group meetings provided time for discussing practical principles of prayer, encouraged serious Bible study, and the implementation of the principles analyzed. We discussed such topics as the blessings, challenges, and roadblocks in prayer. At the conclusion of the afternoon seminars volunteers took the same questionnaire initially utilized. A comparison of the results would reveal any improvement in the spiritual journey with God through prayer. It is not totally fair to make an exact comparison since the same volunteer population failed to attend each session, especially the initial and concluding sessions. However, some general conclusions proved to be very insightful.

Implementation of the Project

In late January I shared a sermon a few weeks before beginning the project and I explained how the implementation would flow. I knew the project stretched out over several months; but what I did not know was how difficult it would be to actually implement the afternoon sessions!

While creating the series of sermons on prayer, I also developed a series of seminar topics on important practical prayer issues for the afternoon sessions. I now know these would have been greatly enhanced by completing the theology paper and literature review first. I felt compelled to proceed due to the time limitation of finishing

within the one-year period allotted.

Sermon Series: “Developing Intimacy With God”

The sermon series developed for this project looked at Jesus’ teachings on prayer and the practice of prayer by Jesus from baptism to the Cross. We evaluated the privilege of praying in His name and why an attitude of forgiveness is so essential. We explored Jesus’ prayer in John 17 and how He taught His disciples to pray. The sermons in this series were spread throughout the ten-month period to correspond with the afternoon seminar sessions. Each sermon was intended to be a stepping-stone for attending the afternoon seminar session.

Afternoon Sessions: “Fresh Fire”

The Sabbath morning sermon included a strong appeal for participation in the afternoon seminar meeting that followed. Each afternoon session was open to anyone who wanted to attend.

A study guide was developed to intensify the discussions and provide something to ponder after the session. During the first session participants had the opportunity to share their struggles and frustrations with prayer. This was very insightful. I was surprised by the honesty of some with their sense of the uselessness of their prayers. One person said he prayed for a person, and that person died. He felt he was to blame, so he quit praying for people. He has carried a sense of shame for years.

Several afternoon sessions were spent looking into the wonder and privilege of praying to our Creator, and how He craves a personal relationship with everyone. The series ended by looking at practical ways we could practice God’s presence in our everyday lives.

I was surprised with the turn out. I hoped that at least twelve people would show up, but deep down inside I hoped for many more. At the first afternoon meeting 20 people showed up and 19 filled out the questionnaire. Attendance for the afternoon meetings sometimes reached as many as twenty-three people, but averaged in the high teens and low twenties. At the final session eight people attended.

Along the way

Each month I became increasingly aware how valuable the Biblical research and the literature review would have been for this project. I felt handicapped at giving guidance and help. Inadequacies overwhelmed me. Did the members feel a lack of depth and breadth? I know many were blessed. The insights gained through the research would have enhanced everything.

As I listened to those in attendance voice their struggles with prayer, I realized this was not an easy project. I became increasingly aware that I was touching the heart of the Christian journey. Prayer seems to be where one comes face to face with one's own inadequacies. It's a time to struggle with the sometimes seemingly distant, yet close God they worship. There is much mystery in this journey that is sometimes unnerving.

There was a huge learning curve that happened during this project. I quickly discovered that not everyone was ready or willing to deepen his or her prayer life. I also found that I was not totally prepared to help others deepen their prayer life. I often felt a need for more in-depth study and prayerful contemplation of the various topics before leading the group discussions. This brought out insecurities about prayer. It also forced me to look sincerely and more exhaustively into the privilege of prayer.

We cannot underestimate the role of the Holy Spirit in preparing the hearts of the

people for growing deeper in their personal walk with God through prayer, Bible study, and personal devotions. Next time I would highly recommend developing a prayer team to be praying for myself, the members of the church, and each participant during a project like this.

Conclusion

In this chapter we looked at the ministry context of the Standifer Gap Seventh-day Adventist Church as it pertains to this project on prayer. We also discussed the research methodology that was used to determine how to evaluate any changes in attitudes and practices of prayer by the participants. Then we looked at the project process from development of the questionnaire to the implementation of the Sabbath morning sermons and Sabbath afternoon seminar sessions over a ten-month period. I concluded with some things I learned along the way.

CHAPTER 5

OUTCOMES AND EVALUATIONS

Introduction

Prayer is at the heart of the Christian journey. The absence of a willingness to share our experiences in prayer is amazing. While going through pastoral training, I received very little—if any—training in prayer from either my formal education, including the seminary, or from seminars which followed. Even though I preached several series of sermons on prayer, deep down inside I always believed something was missing, but I didn't know what.

In one of my churches, G. Coon and Coon's book, *The ABC's of Prayer* (1974) generated much interest. I felt something was missing in his book, but couldn't put my finger on what it was. For many years during my pastoral journey I struggled with being satisfied with my prayer life. Toward the end of this project the mystery of prayer began to come clear. It was actually during the writing of this paper and putting the information from my Biblical research and literature review together that it finally came into focus.

This chapter will discuss expectations for this project, some surprises along the way, the outcome of the project, lessons learned, and recommended changes. I will also share how this project and the aftermath of this journey have transformed my life, and how I will utilize the project information in ongoing ministry to help others in their prayer journey.

Expectations

Since I was extremely interested in enhancing my prayer experience, I assumed

the majority of my church family would also be interested. I anticipated a closer relationship with God that this project might offer. My pastoral experience revealed that many church members lacked a meaningful walk with God and were very weak in their prayer life. I assumed this project would be a wonderful learning opportunity in which we'd all grow closer to God. An unknown factor was how many people would attend the afternoon seminar meetings. I set a goal on twelve people for having a meaningful learning experience.

I secretly believed that by enhancing the prayer life of Christians their entire journey would come alive. Thus, they would experience a more vibrant relationship with God. The obvious outcome, so I thought, would be a deeper desire to share their love of God with others.

Surprises

There were a few surprises along the way that proved very insightful and humbling. First, was the lack of participation from the majority of church members. Every sermon had a powerful appeal to attend the afternoon session where they could learn more about prayer. However, the Sabbath afternoon seminar attendance was sparse compared to the size of the church. Second, I now realize prayer, or any other aspect of the spiritual disciplines, requires the working of the Holy Spirit beyond anything the pastor or a sermon can do. Third, it is also true that prayer is so very personal it can really only be *caught*, not *taught*.

The assumption that people would attend because I believed they needed to enhance their prayer life was not accurate. Also, assuming people would come because prayer was of interest to me did not prove to be true, either.

Another surprise was the workings of God's grace in my life. Since this project was on prayer, I decided to set aside at least one hour per day for prayer. Though this time did not include Bible study or sermon preparation they were certainly enhanced by the time spend in prayer.

Research Methods

Prior to determining the value of a project on prayer, the local church board members completed a questionnaire about their prayer habits. I was surprised to discover how little time the church leadership actually spent on prayer. This fact deepened my awareness that a prayer project was a real need for the entire church family.

Questionnaire

The research method I utilized for evaluating any progress from this project was a questionnaire (see Appendix A) given to those who attended the first and last afternoon seminar sessions. The purpose was to compare and evaluate the results of the questionnaire to determine any measurable differences. Would the preaching and training process make any real life-transforming differences?

Since attendance was on a volunteer basis, there was the possibility that few, if any, of the first session attendees would attend the last Sabbath afternoon meeting ten months later. However, there was a basic core group who attended almost every afternoon session. After the final afternoon session, I compared the data and drew several conclusions. In addition, there were also several areas this method pointed out which need further investigation.

Sermon Series

Each Sabbath morning before the afternoon seminar, I preached a sermon from the series developed for this project entitled, “Developing Intimacy With God” (see Appendix H for a list of sermon topics). At the end of each sermon a powerful plea was made to the congregation for enhancing their prayer journey with God by coming out to the afternoon meeting. Since Jesus is our supreme model for prayer, I focused on His prayer life, what He taught about prayer, and how the early church followed His example.

As I was counseled to spread this project over a ten-month period, I decided to do one sermon and seminar per month. We started the project in February and finished in October.

Afternoon Seminar Series

The Sabbath afternoon series was entitled, “Fresh Fire” (see Appendix I for a list of seminar topics). These meetings were more like a support group for encouragement to deepen our desire to commune with God on a daily basis. We looked at various hurdles and possible solutions for developing a life of intimacy with God through prayer. I wanted people to feel free to ask questions. This seminar was intended to be informational and allow people to share their struggles and joys with each other—a support group for people who wanted a more meaningful prayer experience. Each session was geared to last for one hour. A study guide was provided for each session.

Personal Journey

During this project I also spent considerable time wrestling with the issue of prayer for myself. This was the most rewarding aspect of this project. The hour of pray each day I chose to spend during this project process was transformational in both my

personal and professional life. I intend to never go back to a casual prayer experience. My question is: why did I wait so long in my Christian journey to start this deeper prayer experience?

Interpretation

First Session Results

Twenty people attended the first afternoon seminar on February 14, 2009, titled “Fresh Fire.” All 20 attendees filled out the Informed Consent Forms, and 19 of them completed the Questionnaire (see Appendix B) -- eight men and eleven women. Of the 19 participants, most were in the 46-60 age range (8), two from the 18-30 age range, two from the 31-45 age range, and five from the 61 plus age range. This may seem like an older age spectrum, but it was reflective of the population of the church family.

Most (17 of 19) of the respondents said that they felt closest to God when they prayed. Thirteen felt equally close to God in Bible study and in serving others. Twelve felt equally close to God when in quiet contemplation and in nature. Eight felt close to God when they sang. One person suggested that he/she felt closest to God in small group studies. Not one person checked that they really didn’t feel close to God *most* of the time. This portion of the questionnaire explored their feelings about prayer.

How many minutes did these people spend in prayer per day? Two spent zero to one minute per day. Five spent one to five minutes per day. Six spent five to fifteen minutes, four spent fifteen to thirty minutes, and three spent thirty to sixty minutes. Nobody checked that they spent more than sixty minutes per day.

Next, they were asked to select the number that most accurately reflected their *feelings* about their prayer life most of the time—within a spectrum of 1 being very

unsatisfied to 10 being very satisfied. Twelve (12) said they would fall in the mid-range (4-6), two were unsatisfied (they both circled 2), and five were somewhat satisfied (one marked 7 and four marked 8). It appeared as though there may possibly be a relationship between prayer satisfaction and time spent in prayer.

The last part of the questionnaire listed ten statements about their prayer life. They were asked to rate each sentence from 1 being *never true* and 10 being *always true*. For each question I added up all the numbers each person marked and then divided by the number of respondents. This computation rendered a comparison for each question. The top two questions (8.2 each) were “I sense deeply God’s love for me personally” and “I have an intensified desire to do God’s will.” Next was “I have a deepening desire to spend more time with God” (7.8). Followed closely (7.5) by “I have courage to face the duties of the day.” The lowest rated statement was “I feel at peace in my overall relationship with God” (6.4).

The results suggest the group had somewhat of a positive personal relationship with God, but for some it wasn’t based on their prayer experience. There were five people who spent less than five minutes in prayer per day, but there were thirteen who spent at least five minutes to an hour. However, nobody circled that they spend an hour or more a day in prayer. The amount of time spent in prayer may need clarification. For some it may be that unless they were on their knees they were not “in prayer.” Did they count their time praying while they were driving, walking, or working?

Final Session Results

Eight people attended the final session of “Fresh Fire” from our church on October 17, 2009. This was the least attendance of any of the sessions. At the end of the

seminar they filled out the Questionnaire: “My Personal Prayer Life With God” (Appendix C). There were three males and five females. Two were in the 18-30 age range, four in the 46-60 age range, and one in the 61 plus age range, one did not check any age range. This group felt closest to God when they studied the Bible (8) and when they prayed (7). Three areas with six (6) people checking all three: “In quiet contemplation,” “When in nature,” and “When serving others.” The lowest number rating was in the area of singing (4). One person specified, “I have a mindset of Jesus/God most of the time. This mindset has developed to a stage where it’s part of my nature.” Another person wrote that they feel closest to God when they “look at pictures of family.”

When asked to rate their satisfaction with their prayer life most of the time, this group was on the “satisfied” (one each for 5,6,7,and 8) to “very satisfied” (two circled 9 and two circled 10). Only one person spent from 1-5 minutes in prayer every day. The most (4) spent from 15-30 minutes and three (3) spent at least an hour every day. This could indicate a relationship between the amount of time spent in prayer and satisfaction in one’s relationship with God. Further study is needed.

The last area of the questionnaire asked participants to rate 10 statements about their prayer life. The highest rating (9.3 out of a possible 10) was “I have a deepening desire to spend more time with God.” Two items tied for the next highest rating (8.8): “I am filled with faith in Him” and “I have an intensified desire to do God’s will.” Just below that at (8.7) was “I have courage to face the duties of the day.” And then (8.5) “I know that my spiritual strength is increased.” The lowest rating (7.8) was “I feel at peace in my overall relationship with God.”

Comparison of Results

Comparing the results of the two questionnaires is insightful (Appendix D). Even though there were less than half the people in attendance at the final session, the results reveal an overall increase in their satisfaction of their prayer experience that correlates with an increase in the amount of time spent in prayer. Several people at the final afternoon session attended the first session and showed an increase in both time and personal satisfaction in prayer.

Both groups had similar results for feeling close to God when they prayed (89% versus 88%). The final group was somewhat stronger in the area of feeling close to God through Bible study (68% versus 100%). Feeling close to God through serving others was close in both groups (68% versus 75%).

In the area of how the two groups felt about their prayer lives most of the time, the first group had seven responses in the “unsatisfied” range (1-4), while the final group had no responses in this area. In the “satisfied” range (7-10) the first group had 26% while the final group had 75%. The final group expressed a 50% increase in satisfaction in their prayer experience.

When asked to reveal how many minutes they spent in prayer every day on the average, the first group had twelve (63%) who spent less than fifteen minutes a day, while the final group had only one person (13%) who spent less than fifteen minutes a day. The first group had seven people (37%) who spent more than fifteen minutes a day, and the final group also had seven people (88%) who spent more than fifteen minutes per day. Clearly a much higher percentage (50%) of the final group spent more time in prayer than the first group. None in the first group spent at least an hour per day, while

the final group had three individuals who spent at least an hour per day in prayer.

The last section of the questionnaire dealt with the results of each person's prayer life and that person's relationship with God. Giving each sentence a rating from *never true* (1) to *always true* (10), each person gave his or her personal value to each sentence. I added the scores and divided by the number of participants to give a number value for each sentence for each group. Nearly every sentence was given a higher rating by the final group over the first group, implying a more positive opinion about both their prayer life and their relationship with God.

Both groups rated the first question, "I feel at peace in my overall relationship with God" lowest. The first group rated it (6.4), while the last group rated it (7.8). It would be interesting to understand why both groups ranked *peace* with God lowest.

Both groups gave the same rating (8.2) to the third question, "I sense deeply God's love for me personally." That score (8.2) was the highest score among all the questions by the first group, while it was a moderate score for the last group.

The last group gave their highest score (9.3) to the final question, "I have a deepening desire to spend more time with God." The first group gave this a moderate score (7.8). This could indicate that spending more time with God creates a deeper desire to spend more time with Him! My personal experience proved this true. It seems to be what the response of the participants also indicated.

Without further clarification one could be in danger of reading too much into the results of the questionnaire. It would be interesting to ask open-ended questions, or simply to use the questions as discussion starters, and listen to the responses to discover more insights into the personal journey of each participant. Since everyone has a unique

relationship with God, there will be unique experiences in the innumerable journeys with God—including prayer.

Outcomes

Evaluation of the Data

In comparing the data from the two questionnaires spread over the ten-month period of this project, there was an increase in both time in prayer and feelings of satisfaction. The increased time in prayer also correlated with those participating who had gained confidence in their overall journey with God.

The high correlation between time spent in prayer and positive satisfaction with one's prayer experience can't just be *time* spent in prayer. There must also be something positive happening during the prayer time and one's life in general. What was happening during this time in prayer for those who marked very satisfied? An open-ended question may be very helpful in discovering some practical insights from those who were involved.

Implications of the Data

Since the final session group spent considerably more time in prayer a more positive outcome resulted. The combination of both time and their learning experience—through exposure to preaching, study, the seminar series, and their own practice of prayer seems to have contributed to increasing their satisfaction in prayer.

I also know that some who were struggling the most with their prayer experience in the first group did not keep coming to the afternoon seminars, even though they attended the Sabbath morning worship service. One must be very careful about assigning

reasons for not continuing their attendance at the afternoon sessions.

Reviewing this project and its results has helped me see its value, even though this project was not perfect. The results are clear: As people spent more time in prayer their relationship with God was enhanced, they felt closer to Him, and they wanted a deeper experience with Him. Wow!

Repeating this project would be much easier since reviewing the literature and the theology study. However, the major benefit for the participants was not my expertise, but their exploration and experimentation with prayer and their relationship with God. Here lies the greatest reward. By their participation they entered into a deeper experience with God! Those who endured the whole journey and battled with their internal fears and frustrations grew stronger and more confident in their relationship with Him.

I was unable to document my assumption that people who grow closer to God are more apt to share their faith with those around them. This would be deserving of further study.

Testimonies of Participants

Two individuals sent me testimonies of how this project impacted them. The first one came to me right after the first session (see Appendix E for the full email). It gives some insights into the struggle of this person and expressed the frustration that others too may be struggling with how to develop a meaningful prayer life. The writer expressed her frustration with “talking into the air.” “Prayer is one of my biggest battles in maintaining a relationship with God.” She describes, “willing” her “prayers upwards towards heaven” and that they seem to bounce off the ceiling and slap “back in my face.” She has a hunger for God, but gets tired of hoping and being disappointed. She admired my

willingness to discuss the subject of prayer openly, but was doubtful it could be helpful. She moved out of the area soon after the first session.

Another email dated July 25, 2010—well after the ending of the project expressed the blessing this person received in breaking through her frustration with meaningful prayer (See Appendix F for the entire email). This person is learning to trust God’s answers, no matter what they are, realizing God has better things for her than she can imagine. She applied the principle of choosing a special place for prayer, and to listen quietly for God’s words to come back to her. She also began keeping a prayer list. She describes her evening prayer time as being similar to her morning prayer, but saturated with thanksgiving for what God had done throughout the day. Her testimony was to “pray daily for God to make changes in my life as he sees fit.” This prayer attitude “has made me more caring than I’ve been in the past.” This person has since become involved in the local church prayer ministry and in giving Bible studies!

These two emails came unsolicited. I should have asked participants during the afternoon seminar to write out their experience with prayer over the past several months during the project. Such information may have provided better insight than the questionnaire.

My Impressions

I was surprised at how few church members attended the Sabbath afternoon seminar. Twenty people attended the first meeting. I’m not positive why so few attended, but in the close proximity of Adventism there are many options on any given Sabbath. People also desire Sabbath afternoon family time and want to get away in the afternoon. I am sure the afternoon seminar was right in the middle of the naptime for several

members. After being in this area for several years I don't think there is good time. I set my goal on twelve attending every seminar meeting. There were always more attendees except the last meeting, which only had eight.

There seemed to be a very good spirit among those who attended. I felt that some wanted a magic bullet to enhance their prayer experience. I am convinced the afternoon seminars would have been greatly enriched if the theology paper on prayer and the literature review had been completed prior to the first sermon. However, due to the one-year time limit imposed for this project, I did not have the necessary time to do this level of research as a working pastor before implementing the project.

Some Lessons Learned

This journey has opened my eyes to the privilege of prayer. It has also led me into a deeper understanding of the struggles, rewards, joys, and challenges of a meaningful prayer life. This deeper understanding is what I had hoped for as an outcome. The writing was my single most difficult challenge concerning this project, but it proved to be very helpful. Writing has forced me to think and process in ways that I would not have done otherwise. I've been pushed to reflect and analyze how to better help people in their personal journey with God through prayer.

Prayer is at the heart of our personal relationship with God. Beyond a sermon and a seminar, what people need are gentle nudges to keep them on the cutting edge of growing deeper with God. My thinking is a short series of sermons on prayer, or a seminar that would "nudge" people in their prayer journey would be helpful. A short series once a year, or a sermon now and then could keep *nudging* them closer to intimacy with God.

It may well be that people need instruction and encouragement spread over several years to enhance their prayer life until it becomes a lifestyle habit. The danger is it may slip into an empty ritual. Since prayer is the vital connection with God one must guard against that danger. As we learn to linger in His presence our relationship with Him becomes more real and more precious. It is in His presence that we receive peace of mind, joy, and contentment (Phil 4:6-7). Here we find direction and strength for the day. We must learn to linger in His presence here and now, if we want to enjoy His presence in heaven (Rev 21:3-4).

Personal Rewards

When I began this project, I decided to spend at least an hour a day in prayer. This has challenged me at the core of my relationship with God, and I was forced to struggle with many issues that have helped me grow beyond a superficial relationship.

One of the biggest helps for me was using the “A-C-T-S” model of prayer (adoration, confession, thanksgiving, and supplication). Beginning prayer with my focus on God was huge! This was an important key in unlocking a more meaningful journey with God through prayer. It helped me focus more on Who He is, than what I think I need—even if what I think I need is to be used to build up His kingdom. I learned to be more thankful and appreciative of what God is doing all around me.

This is a life-transforming journey for me. I am still struggling with meaningful intercession. I believe it makes a difference. But how to do it more effectively and move beyond the “duty” of intercession is where my struggle is right now. I want to do more than just go through the motions by using a list—I want a heart for those for whom I am interceding.

Beyond This Project

After I had finished the project study, concluded my research analysis, and wrapped up the writing for this project document, I accepted a call to the Oregon Conference of Seventh-day Adventists. The leadership had previously invited me to speak, on the topic, prayer during their Camp meeting. The invitation provided the impetus for me to share and illustrate some of the insights on prayer that I had gained from my research and study. I titled my presentation of sermons “Wasting Time With God” (see Appendix J for sermon titles). This series was a real blessing to many people -- some spoke to me about their journey with prayer during and after Camp meeting. In fact, several months later different folk have shared with me how much those meetings have blessed them in their prayer life and their general walk with God.

Conclusion

As previously mentioned, if I had completed the theology paper and the literature review prior to the seminar it would have been enhanced. However, it was a real growing experience for me. The challenges I struggled with during the afternoon seminar actually deepened my focus while doing research for the theology paper and literature review. So doing it backwards was a blessing in disguise.

Next time people would be asked to write out their frustrations and questions prior to any formal teaching or discussion. From these one could determine specific issues that are more important to the group. Each participant would be asked at the final session to write out his or her own experience with prayer and with God.

In addition I'd recommend using open-ended questions. Rephrasing some of the questions on the questionnaire could be beneficial. This would allow for some insights

regarding the progress of the participants.

Perhaps the greatest thing I would implement would be to develop a prayer team to pray for the church family, the participants, and me.

Recommendations for Further Study

One theme that would be interesting to investigate is to see if there is a correlation between prayer satisfaction and time spent in prayer. The correlation, if any, between the time spent in prayer and a sense of peace in one's personal relationship with God could be interesting. In addition, the concept of prayer as "wasting time" could be an interesting topic for further examination.

Prayer satisfaction may not be the only thing one needs to evaluate. Some people have a positive prayer experience one day, but not the next. What does being satisfied with one's prayer experience really mean? A person who is not very spiritual and prays very little may be very satisfied, while a person who is hungry for a deeper relationship with God may never be completely "satisfied." There may be a better method for measuring one's prayer experience other than using the "satisfaction" scale.

I was impressed during my study for this project of the strong connection between Bible study and prayer. It would be helpful to understand the relationship between them. It would be interesting to explore what aspect of learning to pray was most conducive for developing a vibrantly growing prayer experience. My suspicion is that it may vary depending on the individual, since prayer is such a personal experience. Another area to explore would be the correlation between discouragement and answers to prayer.

People's reluctance to pray may need to be investigated. Why were so few people interested in developing their prayer life, or was that only my understanding of their lack

of attendance at the afternoon meetings? I may have over-read the reaction of those who did not attend the afternoon sessions. It would be interesting to explore people's real interest in prayer—not just what they mark on a piece of paper.

Another idea that would be fruitful to explore is the confidence in one's relationship with God and one's desire to share it with others. This was one of my assumptions at the beginning of this project, but I was unable to verify the validity of it.

APPENDIX A

Questionnaire: "My Personal Prayer Life With God"

I have had the Informed Consent Letter read to me and recognize that by completing and returning this questionnaire that I am giving my informed consent to participate.

Male ___ Female ___ Age: (18-30) (31-45) (46-60) (61+)

I feel closest to God when: (Check as many as apply)

- I pray
- I study the Bible
- I am in quiet contemplation
- I am in nature
- I participate with others in corporate worship
- I sing
- I serve others
- I don't really feel close to God *most* of the time
- Other (please specify): _____

My personal prayer life:

Circle the one number that most accurately reflects your feelings about your personal prayer life most of the time:

Very unsatisfied = 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 = Very satisfied

My personal prayer life consists of how many **minutes per day**?

(Circle the most consistently honest answer) (*minutes*)

0-1 1-5 5-15 15-30 30-60 1 hour +

Ten statements about my personal prayer life: (Rate each statement below by writing

a **number** from 1 to 10 that most honestly reflects your prayer experience)

(Never True = 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 = Always True)

Because of my personal prayer life with God:

1. I feel at peace in my overall relationship with God. ____
2. I feel confident in talking to others about God. ____
3. I sense deeply God's love for me personally. ____
4. I have courage to face the duties of the day. ____
5. I know that my spiritual strength is increased. ____
6. I am filled with faith in Him. ____
7. I have an intensified desire to do God's will. ____
8. I get helpful insights and new ideas that help me. ____
9. I am more able to overcome temptations in my life. ____
10. I have a deepening desire to spend more time with God. ____

Thank you for participating in this study, Pastor Bob Mix

APPENDIX B

Survey Results From the First Afternoon Seminar

Date Questionnaire administered: 2-14-2009 20 Informed Consent Forms were returned and 19 Questionnaires

Male _8_ Female _11_ Age: (18-30)=(2) (31-45)=(2) (46-60)=(9)
(61+)=(5)

(One male did not check age group)

I feel closest to God when: (Check as many as apply)

- 17 - checked "I pray"
- 13 - checked "I study the Bible"
- 12 - checked "I am in quiet contemplation"
- 12 - checked "I am in nature"
- 4 - checked "I participate with others in corporate worship"
- 8 - checked "I sing"
- 13 - checked "I serve others"
- 0 - checked "I don't really feel close to God *most* of the time"
- 1 - checked "Other (please specify)" and wrote: "Small group studies"

My personal prayer life:

Circle the one number that most accurately reflects your feelings about your personal prayer life most of the time:

Very unsatisfied = 1=(0) 2=(2) 3=(0) 4=(5) 5=(2) 6=(5) 7=(1) 8=(4) 9=(0) 10=(0)
= Very satisfied

My personal prayer life consists of how many **minutes per day**?

(Circle the most consistently honest answer) (*minutes*)

0-1 (1) 1-5 (5) 5-15 (6) 15-30 (4) 30-60 (3) 1 hour + (0)

Ten statements about my personal prayer life:

(Rate each statement below by writing a **number** from 1 to 10 that most honestly reflects your prayer experience)

(Never True = 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 = Always True)

Because of my personal prayer life with God:

Score average:

- | | |
|---|-----|
| 1. I feel at peace in my overall relationship with God. ____ | 6.4 |
| 2. I feel confident in talking to others about God. ____ | 7.2 |
| 3. I sense deeply God's love for me personally. ____ | 8.2 |
| 4. I have courage to face the duties of the day. ____ | 7.5 |
| 5. I know that my spiritual strength is increased. ____ | 6.6 |
| 6. I am filled with faith in Him. ____ | 7.3 |
| 7. I have an intensified desire to do God's will. ____ | 8.2 |
| 8. I get helpful insights and new ideas that help me. ____ | 6.8 |
| 9. I am more able to overcome temptations in my life. ____ | 6.9 |
| 10. I have a deepening desire to spend more time with God. ____ | 7.8 |

These are the results of the Questionnaire: "My Personal Prayer Life With God" at the beginning of the first session of "Fresh Fire" on February 14, 2009. –Pastor Bob Mix

APPENDIX C

Survey Results From the Last Afternoon Seminar

Date Questionnaire administered: 10-17-2009 8 Informed Consent Forms were returned and 8 Questionnaires

Male _3_ Female _5_ Age: (18-30)=(2) (31-45)=(0) (46-60)=(4) (61+)=(1) (One did not check age group)

I feel closest to God when: (Check as many as apply)

- 7 - checked "I pray"
- 8 - checked "I study the Bible"
- 6 - checked "I am in quiet contemplation"
- 6 - checked "I am in nature"
- 5 - checked "I participate with others in corporate worship"
- 4 - checked "I sing"
- 6 - checked "I serve others"
- 0 - checked "I don't really feel close to God *most* of the time"
- 2 - checked "Other (please specify)" one wrote: "When I look at pictures of family."
The other wrote: "I have a mindset of Jesus/God most of the time. This mindset has developed to a stage where it's part of my nature."

My personal prayer life:

Circle the one number that most accurately reflects your feelings about your personal prayer life most of the time:

Very unsatisfied = 1=(0) 2=(0) 3=(0) 4=(0) 5=(1) 6=(1) 7=(1) 8=(1) 9=(2) 10=(2) = Very satisfied

My personal prayer life consists of how many **minutes per day**?

(Circle the most consistently honest answer) (*minutes*)

0-1 (0) 1-5 (1) 5-15 (0) 15-30 (4) 30-60 (0) 1 hour + (3)

Ten statements about my personal prayer life:

(Rate each statement below by writing a **number** from 1 to 10 that most honestly reflects your prayer experience)

(Never True = 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 = Always True)

Because of my personal prayer life with God:

- | | Score average: |
|---|----------------|
| 1. I feel at peace in my overall relationship with God. ____ | 7.8 |
| 2. I feel confident in talking to others about God. ____ | 7.9 |
| 3. I sense deeply God's love for me personally. ____ | 8.2 |
| 4. I have courage to face the duties of the day. ____ | 8.7 |
| 5. I know that my spiritual strength is increased. ____ | 8.5 |
| 6. I am filled with faith in Him. ____ | 8.8 |
| 7. I have an intensified desire to do God's will. ____ | 8.8 |
| 8. I get helpful insights and new ideas that help me. ____ | 8.2 |
| 9. I am more able to overcome temptations in my life. ____ | 8.4 |
| 10. I have a deepening desire to spend more time with God. ____ | 9.3 |

These are the results of the Questionnaire: "My Personal Prayer Life With God" at the end of the last session of "Fresh Fire" on October 17, 2009. -Pastor Bob Mix

APPENDIX D

Comparative Results of Questionnaire: “My Personal Prayer Life With God”

Dates Questionnaire administered: on February 14, 2009 and on **October 17, 2009**

2/14/09 there were 20 Informed Consent Forms returned and 19 Questionnaires filled out (Results in non-bold)
10/17/09 there were 8 Informed Consent Forms returned and 8 Questionnaires filled out (Results in bold)

Male 8/3 Female 11/5 Age: (18-30)=(2/2) (31-45)=(2/0) (46-60)=(9/4) (61+)=(5/1)
 (One did not check age group)/(One did not check age group)

I feel closest to God when: (Check as many as apply)

17/7 - checked “I pray”

13/8 - checked “I study the Bible”

12/6 - checked “I am in quiet contemplation”

12/6 - checked “I am in nature”

4/5 - checked “I participate with others in corporate worship”

8/4 - checked “I sing”

13/6 - checked “I serve others”

0/0 - checked “I don’t really feel close to God *most* of the time”

1/2 - checked “Other (please specify)” the one wrote: “Small group studies”

One wrote: “When I look at pictures of family.”

The other wrote: “I have a mindset of Jesus/God most of the time. This mindset has developed to a stage where it’s part of my nature.”

My personal prayer life:

Circle the one number that most accurately reflects your feelings about your personal prayer life most of the time:

One (1) = Very Unsatisfied

Ten (10) = Very Satisfied

1=(0/0) 2=(2/0) 3=(0/0) 4=(5/0) 5=(2/1) 6=(5/1) 7=(1/1) 8=(4/1) 9=(0/2) 10=(0/2)

My personal prayer life consists of how many **minutes** per **day**?

0-1 (1/0) 1-5 (5/1) 5-15 (6/0) 15-30 (4/4) 30-60 (3/0) 1 hour + (0/3)

Ten statements about my personal prayer life:

(Rate each statement below by writing a **number** from 1 to 10 that most honestly reflects your prayer experience)

(Never True = 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 = Always True)

Because of my personal prayer life with God: Score average: 2/14/09/10/17/09

- | | |
|---|---------|
| 1. I feel at peace in my overall relationship with God. ____ | 6.4/7.8 |
| 2. I feel confident in talking to others about God. ____ | 7.2/7.9 |
| 3. I sense deeply God’s love for me personally. ____ | 8.2/8.2 |
| 4. I have courage to face the duties of the day. ____ | 7.5/8.7 |
| 5. I know that my spiritual strength is increased. ____ | 6.6/8.5 |
| 6. I am filled with faith in Him. ____ | 7.3/8.8 |
| 7. I have an intensified desire to do God’s will. ____ | 8.2/8.8 |
| 8. I get helpful insights and new ideas that help me. ____ | 6.8/8.2 |
| 9. I am more able to overcome temptations in my life. ____ | 6.9/8.4 |
| 10. I have a deepening desire to spend more time with God. ____ | 7.8/9.3 |

This is a comparison of the results of the Questionnaire: “My Personal Prayer Life With God” at the beginning of the first session of “Fresh Fire” on February 14, 2009 and at end of the last session on October 17, 2009. –Pastor Bob Mix

APPENDIX E

Email From Participant

Sent on February 18, 2009

Dear Pastor Mix:

I would like to start by saying that I commend you for desiring to enhance the personal prayer life of the church members. Prayer is something that I have struggled with for a long time, partly because it wasn't something my family did growing up and partly because talking into the air is a struggle.

While I commend what you are doing, I feel that I need to be honest with you. I have to say that I feel like I am your biggest skeptic in all of this. (Part of me wants to say you can't do it) Not that you can't do it, I do believe that prayer life can be enhanced, but for how long? I went to prayer conferences, bible camps, and even leadership camps every year as a high school day academy student. I've ridden the roller coaster for way too long and I'm tired of it.

Maybe this is a challenge; maybe it's a cry for help. I've seen a lot in my short life.

I've sensed the Great Controversy taking place in the middle of meetings. God has at times given me the ability to sense an understanding of the war that is waging for each and every soul each time His people gather together--yes, it's real, I know it, I've seen it and I believe it.

I've come face to face with a person who had a form of "split personality"; she passed out and came back as someone else and would pass out and come back as herself, multiple times. After I became aware of what was taking place and notified the deans, I planted myself on the floor to wait for help to arrive. It was then that the second personality looked straight at me for the first time that evening and told me not to worry that she had no intention of killing me.

I've seen lives changed by the accepting mercy and the grace of God.

And despite all that I've seen, despite all that I know, despite my longing desire to understand more completely, I struggle to maintain a steady relationship with God.

Prayer is one of my biggest battles in maintaining a relationship with God. Yes I know it's supposed to bring me to the throne of God, but instead it's like talking to a blank wall or better yet, willing my prayers upwards towards heaven, only to have them seem to hit the ceiling fan and get slapped back in my face.

I have a hungering for God. God is the one that carried me through the horrible teenage years when I was expected to call family home or home family... neither ever was, nor is. Then, God was real, in spite of my family God was my family. He held me in His arms as I cried myself to sleep each night through my high school years. I thrived on my relationship with God while I was being verbally abused at home. I used the verbal abuse

as fuel to give me energy to serve my fellow high school students in an effort to keep my mind occupied and my physical body busy. God became my center, my focus, my all in all... As long as I lived and breathed God, life remained worth living, otherwise my life would have ended years ago.

I know that the Christian life is a roller coaster ride of sorts, but I'm tired of the ups and downs. I'm tired of crawling out of one pit to continue climbing for a time, gathering the broken pieces, only to fall, harder and farther and deeper into the next pit, and it takes me longer and takes that much more energy to climb out over and over again, it gets harder and farther and deeper with each fall. I know I don't want to do this anymore, but why should I want out if I'm only going to fall further and harder next time? It's inevitable that I'm going to fall.

I know it doesn't make sense, but I have to say it. If it's inevitable that I'm going to fall again (because I always do it's a part of being human), why not stay where I am currently? At least I'm better off now than falling further the next time around.

I know and believe that God is real and that He exists--I would have walked away a long time ago otherwise. I know and believe that God has a purpose for my life, as I am still a living breathing soul.

I'm not sure why I wrote all this down, but I felt like I needed to share some input. Maybe it can help your research. Maybe you have some answers. Maybe I just needed an outlet to process some information. Whatever the case may be, again I admire you for challenging this subject and hope that the Lord blesses this study.

-Name Withheld

APPENDIX F

Email From Participant,

Sent on July 25, 2010

Pastor Mix,

Before we had our study on “Fresh Fire” I had often wonder why we were urged to pray earnestly with promise of wonderful results and then God chose not to respond with a joyful answer. As we dug through our studies of “Fresh Fire,” I learned that prayer does not guarantee us a life free from pain and struggles. What prayer is, is acknowledging God for his power and trusting that his answer, whether expected or unexpected will bring greater things for us. (Isaiah 46:10).

If God answer no or delay his answer to our prayer, we must not let it dishearten us. God will never grant requests contrary to his will. He answers yes or no according to his will. I need to remember always that Jesus himself agonized over events before his death, and he was the Son of God. But his prayer was not my will father, but your will. Our faith needs to grow like the faith of Jesus.

Another thing I learned was to choose a special place to pray, far away from distractions so that I concentrate on the Lord as I pray. I am learning to quietly listen for God’s words to come back to me. I now keep a prayer list that includes prayer for the sick, our church, events, family, home, government, etc. My evening prayer is somewhat the same, only with much more thanks for Gods care for the day.

I’ve also learned to pray daily for God to make changes in my life as he sees fit. I am learning that this is not a one time prayer but something that I must do each and every day in order to become more like Jesus, and to live like Jesus, this has made me more caring than I’ve been in the past.

-Name Withheld

APPENDIX G

Sermon Topics: “Developing Intimacy With God”

- 1). “Jesus’ Habit of Prayer” (Mark 1 – one day in Christ’s life and the importance of prayer for our Savior).
- 2). “Jesus’ Invitation to Pray” (John 14-16 – the 7-fold command/invitation to pray – why it’s important for our survival).
- 3). “The Master’s Personal Prayer” (John 17 – analyzing the content of this amazing prayer of Jesus).
- 4). “Lord Teach Us to Pray” (Luke 11 – the method Jesus taught His disciples gives key insights for His followers today).
- 5). “Prayer in the Early Church” (Journey through Acts to note how often the early church sought the Lord through prayer).
- 6). “Paul’s Life of Prayer” (Ephesians 1, Philippians 1, Colossians 1, 1 Thessalonians 1, 2 Timothy 1 – where Paul gives insight into his life of prayer and how the Holy Spirit directed him).
- 7). “Praying With Power” (Ephesians 3 – analyzing the content of a master prayer).
- 8). “Living a Life of Prayer” (Colossians 1 & 4 – where the followers of Paul “wrestle” in pray for others, includes Moses’ intercession and Paul’s counsel to “pray without ceasing” and praying with an attitude of gratitude).
- 9). “The Most Difficult Prayer of All” (Gethsemane and the prayer of surrender. Discusses Jacob’s wrestling – where self is surrendered fully to God).

APPENDIX H

Outline of Seminar Topics: “Fresh Fire”—How to Rekindle the fire of personal prayer

- 1). “Why is Something so Easy, so Hard?” - the challenges, hindrances, and blessings of personal prayer.
- 2). “Do We All Have to Pray the Same Way?” – discuss the variety of approaches to personal prayer and how to make the time commitment necessary.
- 3). “How Can I Keep Focused? – why it’s so easy to get sidetracked in our mind during our time of prayer – includes various ways to keep our focus and explores the use of the acronym: ACTS (adoration, confession, thanksgiving, and supplication).
- 4). “Seven Tips to Improve Your Personal Prayer Life” – here are some basic guidelines to help enhance your prayer life.
- 5). “How Can Meditation Help Me?” – the role of meditating on Scripture in personal prayer.
- 6). “How Can the Holy Spirit Help Me in Personal Prayer?” – both Jesus and the Holy Spirit (Romans 8) – are willing to help us have a more meaningful life of prayer. How can we cooperate with these two divine Agencies in our prayers?
- 7). “Does Ellen White Share any Helpful Insights Into Personal Prayer?” – share helpful insights from this inspired author about personal prayer.
- 8). “Do My Prayers Make Any Real Difference?” – looks behind the scenes of the Great Controversy (Job, etc.) and discusses how intercession can change my world and why God needs intercessors.
- 9). “What is the Real Purpose of Private Prayer?” – it’s not about getting answers, or

feeling good, but about communion, commitment, and connection. This is the deepest level of personal prayer where heart transformation really takes place.

Other topics might include

1. The Silence of God
2. What is God's Purpose for Personal Prayer?
3. Unio Mystica
4. The Secret of the Vine
5. The Power of Intercession
6. Victory Over the Darkness
7. Practicing God's Presence

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VITA

Bob and Loretta Mix

Birthdate: November 14, 1950
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– Bible Worker/Trainer
Guiding Text: Romans 2:4 – the
goodness of God...
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Education: 1976 – BS, Walla Walla College: Major – Elementary Ed. Minors: Psych & Religion
1979 – BA, Walla Walla College: Major – Theology. Minor: Biblical Languages
1982 – MDiv, Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary, Andrews University
Currently – Pursuing a Doctor of Ministry, Seventh-day Adventist Theological
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Work Experience:

2011-Present Pastor of the Forest Grove, Gaston, Laurelwood District, Oregon Conference
2003-2011 Pastor of the Standifer Gap SDA Church, Chattanooga, TN, Georgia-Cumberland
1996-2003 Host of LifeQuest, a daily Christian talk show syndicated on the LifeTalk Radio
Network. Listed in “Who’s Who of American Businessmen and Professionals” in
2003
1989-1996 Pastor, Selah-Fairview SDA Church District, Upper Columbia Conference
Helped establish a local radio station (KSOH), which grew into the LifeTalk Radio
Network
1983-1989 Pastor, Clarkston SDA Church District, Upper Columbia
1982-1983 Associate Pastor, Pendleton-Pilot Rock District, Upper Columbia
1980-1982 Student, SDA Theological Seminary, Andrews University, Berrien Springs, MI
1979-1980 Intern Pastor, Yakima SDA Church District, Upper Columbia
1977-1979 Student, Walla Walla College, College Place, WA
Youth Pastor, Milton-Freewater SDA Church District – Work/study scholarship
1976-1977 Head Teacher, Fairbanks SDA Church School, Alaska Mission
1972-1976 Student, Walla Walla College, College Place, WA
Worked at KGTS under Loren Dickenson as News Director and announcer
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Summary statements:

For the past few years Bob has been working on a doctorate in ministry through the Adventist Theological Seminary at Andrews University. The area of concentration is leadership and his doctoral project is on evaluating and enhancing prayer among the members of his church.

Prior to pastoring in Oregon since 2011, Bob pastored in the Chattanooga, Tennessee area for eight years. Before that he hosted a daily talk show on the LifeTalk Radio Network for many years. Previous to that he pastored in the Upper Columbia Conference since graduating from Walla Walla in 1979.