

# PRAYER

The Highest Calling

KJELL AXEL JOHANSON



# PRAYER

The Highest Calling

**KJELL AXEL JOHANSON**



# Table of Contents

A Note .....	vii
A Rather Long and Philosophical Introduction .....	1
<b>Chapter 1:</b> A View of Prayer That Blows Our Minds .....	19
<b>Chapter 2:</b> Praying for Christian Leaders .....	35
<b>Chapter 3:</b> Pray for Workers for the Harvest .....	45
<b>Chapter 4:</b> Paul Prays for His People .....	53
<b>Chapter 5:</b> The God to Whom We Pray .....	63



# A Note

This material is designed to be read over several weeks. Therefore, some repetition is necessary, allowing readers the time to contemplate and process the ideas presented.

Prayer is much grander than we often realize. When we pray in alignment with God's will, it not only grants our requests but transforms our entire being, reshaping our identity and influencing what we project to the world.

Blessings on you as you put these thoughts into practice.

*Kjell Axel Johanson*





# A Rather Long and Philosophical Introduction

## A. Prayer is for Real

### HOW GOD CARED FOR A CHILDREN'S TREASURE HUNT

Before we look into some biblical teachings on prayer, I want to share a few personal experiences that illustrate the profound reality of prayer. These stories are not intended to serve as a guide on how to pray; rather, they remind us that prayer is a tangible and significant part of our lives. Jesus takes His promises regarding answers to prayer even further than the examples I will share. He demonstrates that He intervenes when we pray, but there are times when the answer may be “no” or “wait.” However, He offers us other, even greater things to pray for, and in those instances He has promised to respond affirmatively every time. Let's start with some personal experiences.

The first example comes from a church retreat I taught at just outside of London, England. A friend of mine was leading the first non-territorial church planting initiative within the Anglican Church in England. I was invited to teach on the topic of prayer during one of the new church's retreats. The final gathering took place just before lunchtime on Saturday. Prior to lunch, the organizers of the children's activities had planned a treasure hunt in the park adjacent to the building where we were meeting. It had rained continuously throughout Friday and into Saturday morning. As we concluded our teaching on prayer, one of the staff members quietly entered the room with a note that read: “Please pray for a break in the rain from 12:00 to 12:30.” Mike, the pastor, called us all to gather in front of the window to pray. “It's noon now!” When we finished praying, I distinctly heard Mike declare loud and clear, “In Jesus' name, I command the rain to stop between 12:00 and 12:30.” My immediate thought was, “Mike, don't put me in this position.” Such was the level of my, the teacher's, faith at that moment!

However, as we looked out the window, we noticed the clouds beginning to part. Initially, there was just a small hole in the clouds right over the park, but soon that hole widened until it was completely rain-free, allowing us to see the delighted children rushing out for their treasure hunt for a full thirty minutes before lunch. After that thirty-minute window, the clouds began to regroup, and the rain resumed. It wasn't a crisis, of course, but our experience has shown that God consistently provides children with experiences that demonstrate His care for them and His delight in surprising them with blessings. A "stickler for order" might have objections to such occurrences, but it appears that God prioritizes the needs of children to learn the most important lessons in life over the opinions of so-called experts. This is reminiscent of the time when the disciples wanted to send the children away, but Jesus embraced them and blessed them instead.

#### HOW GOD CARED FOR POOR STUDENTS

The second example comes from our family's time in Wheaton, Illinois, just outside of Chicago. I was studying at Wheaton Graduate School, and during that period, my wife Vivi-Ann and I were living quite frugally—we were poor like church mice. I was translating a book while Vivi-Ann took care of a couple of boys, aged two and four, as a way to earn a little income. One evening, we decided to invite their single father over for dinner the following Wednesday night. This father was not a Christian, and we felt it was important to invite him into our home to give him an opportunity to connect with the family caring for his children. As Tuesday arrived, we found ourselves completely out of money—not a single dollar to our name—and we were at a loss for what to do. We could have called him to explain that we simply couldn't afford to buy food. What kind of introduction to this foreign family and their faith would that have been? Our only option left was to pray. So, we gathered our two little daughters around the kitchen table, explained our situation, and prayed to God for help. No one else in the world knew about our predicament. It was just the four of us and God.

After a brief time, there was a knock at the door, and when we opened it, we found a young man standing there. We were taking the same theological course, but we hadn't spoken to each other before; we didn't know each other at all. He told us that he had received a scholarship that he really didn't need and that God had instructed him to give it to us. We invited him in for tea and toast and shared how God had sent him at the perfect moment. Just imagine the story we had to share about God's faithfulness with the father who came over for dinner the next evening!

### HOW GOD CARED FOR OUR FAMILY

The third example revolves around our son-in-law, Henrik. Both Henrik and I found ourselves facing the daunting challenge of cancer in the same year. He was hospitalized in London with aggressive leukaemia while I was in Örebro, Sweden, with lung cancer. To combat Henrik's cancer, he required a stem cell transplant. The healthcare system in the UK managed to find a donor in another European country, and the initial treatment appeared to be successful. However, after the initial expected immune reactions, 6 months later, Henrik's newly transplanted immune system began to turn against his own organs, red blood cells and muscles. His condition deteriorated, and eventually doctors had exhausted all possible avenues of treatment. There was nothing more they could do.

At this point, Henrik's legs were swollen, he was turning yellow, he was in constant pain and his health metrics were catastrophic. Inger, Henrik's wife, felt compelled to organize a final prayer meeting on his behalf. Friends gathered to pray, and I, lying in my hospital bed, joined them in spirit. Vivi-Ann, was at home praying fervently, while friends from around the globe dedicated the hour between 8 and 9 PM to intercede on Henrik's behalf. After the prayer meeting concluded, Henrik did not initially feel any improvement. He went to bed and fell asleep, but when he woke up the next morning, he was astonished to find that the swelling in his legs had gone down. Not only that, his pain had decreased significantly. He was still weak but something had definitely

changed. In fact, he was so well the next day that he took their daughter Harriet to the women's tennis final at Wimbledon.

When Henrik returned to his oncologist for a follow-up appointment a few days later, before he had time to say a word, she looked at him in disbelief and asked, "Henrik, what has happened to you?" His response was simple: "Well, my wife organized this prayer meeting..." Tests showed his metrics had gone back to normal. Once he regained muscle strength, Henrik returned to his previous job and he is now completely healthy to the astonishment of doctors who still cannot understand how he's been restored so perfectly.

### THIS IS FOR REAL

The reason I have chosen these three examples is that they were all verifiable events. No one manipulated the circumstances, and there were no "normal" human conditions that could have facilitated solutions to the problems we faced. We have witnessed many more instances of how God answers prayers. Our experience has shown us that the answers to prayers do not stem from trying to create a religious "atmosphere of faith," but rather from earnestly seeking God's assistance when all human alternatives have been exhausted. For us, faith has been akin to the woman who stealthily approached Jesus and touched the hem of His garment, believing, "This is my only chance."

### ROLE MODELS

Several individuals have significantly influenced my perspective on prayer. One of the most notable figures is George Müller, a man whom God used to aid thousands of street children in Bristol by providing them with shelter, food and education. His mission was to demonstrate to the world that God cares for the poor and marginalized, which is why he structured his entire operation on the principle that he never asked anyone for money to support his work. Instead, he prayed in every shilling needed, and rather than soliciting funds for himself, he provided financial support to other Christian workers. I strongly recommend reading *The Autobiography of George Müller*. There have been doc-

toral dissertations written on the miraculous events that unfolded over several decades through his ministry.

Another role model, John Wesley, once remarked, “Give me one hundred preachers who fear nothing but sin and desire nothing but God, and I care not a whit whether they be clergymen or laymen; such alone will shake the gates of hell and set up the kingdom of heaven upon the earth. God does nothing except in response to prayer.” Wesley was a pivotal figure in what is often regarded as one of the greatest revivals in England’s history. During his youth, he dedicated four hours a day to prayer, and in his later years, this commitment intensified to as much as eight hours daily. The impact of the Wesleyan revival led to profound spiritual, social and economic changes throughout the nation. This legacy is chronicled in *The Journal of John Wesley*.

### ***Discuss***

*Please share three or four experiences of distinct answers to prayer.*

*Do you know of people who seem to have a calling to intercession?*

*Does the issue of prayer cause expectation or disappointment in you?*

## **B. Secularization, Chaos and Prayer**

Prayer, however, works very differently than we expect. It must be based on God’s eternal principles rather than our own quick-fix expectations for us to experience the real power that prayer embodies.

### THE EXAMPLE OF JESUS

Jesus hardly ever did what the pundits expected Him to do. He did what He did by trusting in the word of God. When He entered Jerusalem as the King of Israel, He did not confront the occupying Roman power directly, as His disciples

and some religious experts expected. Instead, He undertook three astonishing actions: first, He cleansed the Temple of merchants—those “religious” individuals profiting off the vulnerable. Then, He healed the sick, demonstrating the transformative presence of God within the Temple. Finally, in a move that bewildered many, He allowed Himself to be crucified and to die for the sins of the world. Rather than taking on the Romans directly, He seemed to momentarily ignore them, ultimately leading to the collapse of their system over time. Jesus had far more significant and pressing matters to address than even the deeply unrighteous Roman occupiers—namely, sin itself, the fundamental issue plaguing humanity. That was a much bigger fish to fry! On the cross in Jerusalem, He triumphed over the very power that caused all the suffering and sin in the world—the devil. This concept may be utterly incomprehensible to those who view the world through a secular lens, yet it is profoundly powerful and radical for those who believe in Jesus.

#### THE FOOLISHNESS OF THE CROSS AND PRAYER

Jesus’ approach was based on a deeper understanding of what makes the world so dysfunctional. The Apostle Paul once stated, “The message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved, it is the power of God” (1 Corinthians 1:18, NIV). To the Romans, the crucifixion of Jesus was merely one of countless such events in their history. To think that a man treated as a criminal was, in fact, God—the One who created everything—was beyond comprehension. Compare this to how the secular elite of our time would value you going to a prayer meeting, rather than following their example.

I can only imagine how the Romans and the religious elite likely viewed Jesus: “What are we to do about this man who poses the greatest threat to our current social order? If we wish to maintain the status quo, despite the suffering and oppression around us, Jesus must be eliminated. He has healed so many, performed countless miracles, and even raised the dead, attracting a significant following. Therefore, we cannot resort to stoning Him, our traditional method for dealing with religious dissenters, as that could incite a riot. Imprisoning

Him, as Herod did with John the Baptist, would be futile; He would simply walk out of prison. The situation has become increasingly urgent since Jesus raised Lazarus from the dead.”

A relative of the Apostle John recounted the discussions among the elite:

*“What are we going to do? This man performs many signs. If we let him continue this way, everyone will believe in him, and then the Romans will come and take away both our temple and our nation.” One of them, Caiaphas, who was the high priest that year, admonished them: “You know nothing at all. Do you not realize that it is better for you that one man should die for the people than that the whole nation should perish?” (John 11:48-50, ESV)*

The only remaining option was to collaborate with the despised Roman occupiers. For once, the religious elite could use the Romans to further their own agenda, armed with a compelling argument.

Jesus represented an equal threat to both Rome and the religious elite in Jerusalem. The Romans had a preferred method for dealing with unwanted non-Romans—one that not only executed them but also humiliated and tortured them, allowing them to die a slow and agonizing death while vultures awaited their next meal. After such a public humiliation, no one would care about them.

The Romans did not hesitate to crucify individuals if they thought that it served their purposes. In 73 BC, General Crassus ordered the crucifixion of 6,000 slaves along the Appian Way, a major road in Italy. According to the historian Eusebius, General Varus crucified 2,000 Jews in 4 BC. There were numerous examples of mass crucifixions from this era, and the concept of human rights was nonexistent.

As if the act of crucifixion itself wasn’t already a deeply humiliating form of punishment, it was often preceded by severe torture and mockery at the hands of soldiers. Victims were compelled to carry their patibulum, the horizontal beam of the cross, to the execution site. Crucifixion was designed to be a public spectacle that sent a clear message to everyone: if you dare to rebel

against Roman authority, this is the fate that awaits you. Those who witnessed a crucifixion were unlikely to forget it—and that was precisely the intention behind the brutal display.

The Jewish-Roman historian Josephus noted, “Christ was crucified under the pretext that he incited rebellion against Rome, much like the Zealots and other political activists of his time.” This may explain why Pontius Pilate ordered the inscription, “Jesus of Nazareth, King of the Jews,” to be placed above Jesus during His crucifixion—a way to further mock Him as the supposed king of the Jews.

Crucifixion was such a horrific punishment that it was considered too cruel to be used against Roman citizens. The Romans often shied away from even discussing it, and it was ultimately abolished by Emperor Constantine. The very idea of crucifixion became so distasteful that it took nearly three hundred years before Christians began to adopt the cross as a religious symbol. Over time, the cross has been sanitized and is now revered by many. Today, many people view crucifixion as a unique method of execution, but in reality, it was not uncommon in the Roman Empire that had crucified hundreds of thousands.

#### GOD’S PLAN AND SECULAR RULERS’ IGNORANCE

Emperor Tiberius was likely completely unaware that Jesus had been crucified in Jerusalem; after all, it was just one of many similar events that had occurred.

Interestingly, this ignorance of the really important events was also evident at the time of Jesus’ birth. God used the census decreed by Emperor Augustus to guide Joseph and Mary to Bethlehem. Augustus himself likely thought he was simply implementing a clever idea. The only ones who truly understood the significance of these events were some relatively unknown, yet devout individuals: Eastern Gentiles and impoverished Israelites.

However, the attempt to eliminate Jesus through humiliation ultimately failed for a crucial reason: the Resurrection! If Jesus had remained in the grave, then the plan to discredit Him would have succeeded. Who could believe that the Messiah promised by God would die in such a disgraceful manner, like



one of the thousands crucified by the Romans? The Bible makes it abundantly clear that even Jesus' closest disciples had given up hope. "We had hoped that He was the one who was going to redeem Israel" (Luke 24:21, NIV)—they lamented in the past tense, highlighting their despair. The very real Resurrection changed their outlook completely. God acted in a way that they had not expected.

### THE CHANGE THAT TOOK PLACE

It can be challenging for us humans to imagine that history can be altered from the ground up, simply by placing our complete trust in God to the extent that we allow ourselves to be humiliated to the utmost—yet not for the purpose of remaining in that state. The events of the Crucifixion, the Resurrection, the Ascension of Jesus and Pentecost form an incredible continuum of miracles. Each event is intricately linked to the others in a profound way. If Jesus had not risen from the dead and not sent the Holy Spirit upon His disciples, the Christian church as we know it would never have existed. Instead, Jesus would have faded into obscurity.

Can you see how this relates to our prayers that look unimpressive to the world, but that God uses to change things from the ground up?

### A TAKEAWAY

There are two main ways of living in this world. One is to live as if the material world is the only one, to follow the cultural and value changes that come and go by necessity, and to hope for the best. The other alternative is to follow the examples of God-fearing individuals throughout history, live in a way that might surprise those around us, and pray for our nation in a manner that aligns with what God has revealed to be His will—even though many might view prayer as a pious escape mechanism. However, as we delve deeper into the issue of prayer, we may find ourselves pleasantly surprised. Taking the same path as Jesus, the Apostles and the early Christians and praying like never before will look weird to the pundits—but it is the way to change the world. Which they did!

## THE WORLD TODAY – “WE MADE IT OUR WAY”

The planet on which we live is currently experiencing the deepest and most extensive crisis it has faced since World War II. Those of us who grew up shortly after the war can recall the overwhelming sense of hope and anticipation that filled the air. It was a kind of euphoria, and we believed we had every reason to feel that way: we were determined to build a more democratic world, to ensure that war would never again darken our skies, and through scientific advancements, we believed we held the potential to create a better society. Much of this ambition indeed materialized, and the period from 1945 until just a few years ago stands out as a remarkable historical phenomenon. No other generation has enjoyed such a high standard of living anywhere in the world. However, alongside this miracle are some serious and deeply worrying questions. What was actually happening was a buildup to global catastrophe. What was seen as progress has ended in a fear of extinction.

Anyone who has studied a bit of history knows that eras rise and fall, and there is little we can do to alter those cycles. Each generation feeds the next with the hope that they will inherit and carry forward a legacy of great values. Yet, this often does not happen. The younger generation tends to feel that their predecessors did not succeed particularly well and decides to do things differently and better. This pattern has been consistent throughout history. Aristotle, in the 4th century BC, observed this and lamented the behavior of “the youth who had not yet been humbled by the challenges of life.” His point was that the older generation was wiser. Similarly, Horace in the 1st century BC wrote about “the beardless youth... who does not foresee what is useful, squandering his money.”

Well, this “beardless” generation will one day lead the nation and may not always be terribly impressed by the achievements of their predecessors.

As we reflect on our current situation, it becomes evident that we are once again at a crossroads, facing significant challenges that test our resilience and our values. The optimism that once permeated society has been overshadowed by uncertainty and disillusionment. Political strife, social unrest, wars and

environmental crises are just a few of the issues that weigh heavily on our collective conscience today.

The lessons of the past remind us that while we can aspire to greatness, we must also confront the realities of our circumstances. Yet, we are unable to fully understand our situation while blinded by what appears to be great success. The current generation, witnessing the complexities of the world, feels disenchanted and skeptical about the promises made by those who came before them. They are tasked with navigating an ever-changing landscape, one that requires not only critical thinking and innovation but also an understanding of all potential unintended consequences.

For example, there is the very real threat of nuclear war, which, according to some studies, could start and finish in as little as two to three hours. Then it's all over. The concept of MAD—mutually assured destruction—along with climate change (whatever its cause) and ecological collapse, echo in the minds of the next generation.

#### WHEN THE WICKED RULE

By now humanity on its own has tried all other alternatives. And it does not look appealing in the least.

Take Russia as an example. Before the rise of communism, the Tsarist regime ruled in an autocratic and religious manner characterized by repression and even persecution. Evangelical Christian believers who did not fit the approved mold were suppressed. All this created such deep dissatisfaction among the populace that it laid the groundwork for the uprising that eventually led to the Communists seizing power through a coup. The Communists were careful to proclaim that during their rule, it was “the people” who held the power. However, everyone knew, both within the Soviet Union and around the world, that it was authoritarian leaders like Lenin and Stalin who were truly in control. They continued the tradition of being secular tsars and persecuted any dissenters and also people of faith.

After the collapse of communism, Vladimir Putin eventually rose to power, and today Russia finds itself back at square one. They are once again under the

thumb of a secular/religious autocratic regime, supported by the state church, much like during the tsarist era. Numerous analysts (like I. M. Bochenski) have pointed out that even during the communist era, Soviet politics was as much a product of ancient Russian leadership styles as it was of communism itself. This truth resonates across all cultures. Old cultural norms and practices continually resurface, whether in China, North Korea, Argentina, USA or Sweden.

We witness transformative changes in society, where individuals are treated differently based on how readily they conform to the “new” system. The suffering experienced by many is immense; yet the “leaders” remain convinced that they can create a utopia. They believe that all they need to do is to silence their critics and buy themselves a little more time. Regardless of their religious beliefs, these leaders operate from their limited perspectives, convinced that they alone possess the solutions to guide their nations away from impending disaster. Unfortunately, this impending disaster is inevitable, as they attempt to navigate an incredibly complex world with a narrowly conceived and misguided approach.

In their quest for control and stability, they overlook the rich tapestry of human experience described in the Bible and the diverse perspectives that could contribute to a more balanced and equitable society. Instead of fostering dialogue and understanding, they resort to authoritarian measures that stifle creativity, dissent and ultimately, progress. The cycle of oppression continues, as does the yearning for genuine leadership that empowers rather than suppresses.

#### ENTERING A NEW ERA IN HUMAN HISTORY

So we need to ask ourselves how do we confront the complexities of an uncertain future? As we said, there are essentially two approaches we can take. The first is a determined effort to address these pressing issues based on secular principles, and many will undoubtedly strive to do so. Whether from a secular/religious perspective as in Russia, or a thorough secular perspective as in the West. This approach is the only one that seems familiar, leading to the mantra of “listen to science”—encompassing natural sciences, psychology, sociology and economics. In our contemporary world, many are so captivated by the

scientific advancements that have been achieved that they believe we can now manipulate the entirety of human experience. This impression is certainly being conveyed by our political and ideological leaders. However, it is essential to recognize that scientific expertise, while significant and a gift from God, is not synonymous with wisdom. Science has not only provided us with numerous beneficial inventions; it has also equipped us with incredibly powerful nuclear weapons, to the point where the President of Russia threatens to contribute to the collapse of civilization if he deems it necessary.

Moreover, while we in the West strive to cultivate a fossil-free environment, China is simultaneously expanding its coal power infrastructure at an alarming rate—essentially building two coal power plants each week. One does not need to possess a particularly high IQ to understand that the mantra of “just listen to science” could lead us toward total disaster. Yet, if there are no other viable options, what alternative can one offer?

#### THE APPROACH THAT LEADS TO BLESSING: LESSONS FROM THE PROPHET DANIEL

There is another perspective we must take seriously because it could actually save our lives. That is the spiritual realities that we read about in the account of Daniel. Daniel was told that four mighty kingdoms would rise and fall, but the fourth kingdom would collapse due to divine intervention. But a final, different kind of kingdom appeared—insignificant at first, yet it would grow to encompass the entire earth and endure forever.

This tells us that behind all the events unfolding in history, there exists a plan that remains largely invisible to many—whether they are secular or religious. This plan is fundamentally about saving those among humanity who wish to be saved. It is not secretive or hidden; rather, many choose to ignore the clear and irrefutable reality of what is transpiring. Jesus refers to such individuals as blind. Nonetheless, there are many who see, comprehend, and act based on their understanding. For reasons that might be described as a mystery, the faith of these individuals in God, their lifestyle choices and their prayers

profoundly influence the events occurring beneath the surface of the media's cacophony.

Daniel reminds us that in times of crisis, people tend to pray with a deeper motivation than usual. Currently, we find ourselves in an enormous crisis, and we must learn from the early believers about how to pray when confronted with such immense challenges as we are experiencing.

When we try to learn what prayer truly is, we soon discover a vast world of thoughts stemming from both the Bible and the experiences of others. Prayer is a grand and multifaceted practice, and many believers possess profound personal experiences that shape their understanding of it. Numerous excellent books have been written about prayer, some of which have deeply impacted my own life. However, it is important to acknowledge that maintaining a consistent prayer life year after year is often a mental and spiritual discipline. Therefore, we need to remind one another that while regular prayer to God is immensely beneficial for us as individuals and communities, prayer is also much richer, more complex and ultimately more significant for the world at large than we have expected.

Prayer often involves worship, where one expresses admiration for God, engages in personal devotion, conveys gratitude, seeks protection during difficult times and intercedes for friends, family and nations. Sometimes, it is a cry for help, much like when Peter attempted to walk on water and cried out for help as he began to sink, or when King David penned certain psalms, pleading for forgiveness, seeking help or thanking God for His protection when his life was in jeopardy. At its core, prayer is one of the expressions of our relationship with God, and as such, it will manifest differently for each person. In this book, we will explore how the early Christians prayed for their nations. But first, we must address the critical question of whether we can expect clear answers to prayer when we pray as God teaches us to do.

## A CHRISTIAN PERSPECTIVE ON THE WORLD

Imagine all the letters on this page as individual dots that are an image of the universe, as it looks many millions of light-years away from Earth. Each dot

represents a galaxy similar to our Milky Way. Each galaxy contains billions of stars, more or less like our sun. Yet, remember that this page only represents a fraction of the universe. There are countless billions of galaxies. We reside on a planet orbiting one of the billions of suns in one of the universe's galaxies. In light of this perspective, who is doing the most important work: the leader of one of the world's superpowers on this extra-little dot or the individual who, through faith in Jesus and in prayer, connects with the Lord of the entire universe? Think about this—who was more significant at the time of Jesus' birth: Emperor Augustus or the elderly Anna in the Temple in Jerusalem? Who was most important when Jesus was crucified: the crucified Jesus Himself or Emperor Tiberius? Who is doing the most critical work today: world leaders or a twenty-four-year-old woman named Charmaine from Zimbabwe who now lives in England and wakes up every morning at five to pray for England? Who will be the most strategic person in the USA?

If there is to be a profound transformation that leads the Western world back to God and begins to find solutions to our problems, it is essential that there are individuals who turn to God and pray. The resolution to the world's issues will not emerge from Washington, Brussels or Stockholm, but rather through the followers of Jesus who practice prayer in the manner that Jesus and the Apostles have taught us.

I find it incredibly surprising that so many Christians in Europe and the USA fail to see that as the West has become more secular, the depth of its problems has also intensified. It's easier to understand why secular individuals might miss these connections. If someone doesn't believe in, and therefore doesn't acknowledge the idea that values and lifestyle choices have a significant impact on their surroundings, they simply cannot perceive the obvious links between these issues. Whenever someone attempts to bring up the concept of God in public contexts, they are quickly met with backlash from both the media and politicians. Challenges are mounting on various fronts—militarily, ecologically, economically and politically—but we are left with no credible options for resolving them.

We find ourselves ensnared in an impossible dilemma. It all began when both theology and philosophy declared that there is no such thing as objective truth. Then we were told that all religions ultimately lead to God, each in its own unique way. Many individuals who championed this notion in Europe were simultaneously leaders in the national church, which, according to the secular mindset, must be separated from the state. Today many leaders think that if most people would adopt historic Christianity, it would inevitably lead to the establishment of a new state-sanctioned religion, which would once again jeopardize the freedom of religion. We would face a so-called human theocracy governed by a religious hierarchy. We are all too familiar with what that has looked like in European countries and how it currently manifests in places like Iran. Rather than calling individuals to believe in God and follow Him while allowing others to practice their beliefs in different ways, we have pushed secularization to such absurd extremes that even mentioning God is deemed unacceptable. This reflects a similar lack of logic seen when individuals misunderstand the scientific method and invoke the concept of science to advocate for a secular worldview.

Amidst all crises, secularization among many community leaders is on the rise. This trend is likely not due to a genuine desire for secularism but rather because they feel trapped within their systems, unable to envision any alternatives. Gradually, they have become ideologically conditioned to accept this prevailing mindset.

However, there is hope in the hundreds of thousands of individual Christians who feel akin to Simeon and Anna in the Temple of Jerusalem—small, seemingly insignificant figures whom God loves and listens to. This book is dedicated to you, the faithful who strive to uphold your beliefs in a world that often seems indifferent or hostile to you. Your voices and actions matter, and it is through your steadfast faith that we may find a pathway toward understanding and addressing the challenges we face today.



### ***Discuss***

*Read Daniel chapter 9 before the Life Group meeting.*

*In view of Jesus' example and Daniel's prayer, how should we pray for ourselves and our nations?*

*What are we to expect as a result of our prayer?*



## Chapter 1

# **A View of Prayer That Blows Our Minds**

It is high time we pray to God, both for the sake of the gospel and its impact on humanity. To prioritize this, we need spiritual courage and character. A national response to the gospel would lead to enormous changes in our nations, like the Great revivals and the Wesleyan revival. We must pray for our nations not just for our own sake but also for the future of our children and grandchildren. If we feel that we are living in tough times we need to remind ourselves that the world is getting tougher and tougher, and the future does not look all that good. We (humanity) have tried all of the alternatives we can come up with at this point, haven't we? We have worked tirelessly for peace, climate balance, justice, economic equality and, most importantly, the threat to freedom of thought and freedom of religion; yet how impressive have the results truly been? Ideally, we want our nation to become a leader, a role model that other countries will look to emulate, "the city on a hill" that Tocqueville and the early settlers talked about. However, that alone is not enough.

An example: there was a time when Sweden began to disarm, aiming to set an example for others to follow suit. They went so far as to outlaw toy guns for children, to instill non-violence. The argument was that if Sweden could take this bold step, other nations would inevitably follow. (I belong to the generation who remembers this well.) If Sweden disarmed and others followed, we could eliminate the threat of war altogether. But, in retrospect, that strategy may not have been as effective as people hoped for, wouldn't you agree? Similarly, a new arms buildup will not bring about peace, especially as long as madness exists in the world—and madness certainly seems to be thriving. Humanity was created to represent God, under His blessings and guidance. Without God's leadership and blessings, we inevitably lead creation into even greater chaos. No one but those who have a personal relationship with God can

initiate the kind of positive change we so desperately need. But this relates to how we pray and how we raise our families as well.

### BACK TO DANIEL

The first chapter of the Book of Daniel stands as a striking testament to the unwavering faith of a group of young men who resolved to remain true to their beliefs amid a backdrop of chaos and despair. This narrative, set in a time of great upheaval, reveals how Daniel and his three friends courageously chose to follow God, even when faced with the dire consequences that could cost them their lives.

These young men found themselves in Babylon, far removed from their homeland of Judah, which had succumbed to a devastating rebellion against God. The people had turned to pagan practices, engaging in rituals that included human sacrifices and sacrifices that defied their faith. As the nation spiraled into moral decay, many of the leaders also abandoned the worship of the one true God in favor of worshiping idols. This spiritual decline culminated in the invasion of the Babylonian army, which laid waste to Judah, destroyed the sacred Temple, and resulted in the deaths of countless individuals. Those who survived, particularly the aristocracy, were taken captive and exiled to Babylon, where they faced an uncertain future.

The prophet Jeremiah had forewarned the people of Judah about the impending calamities, calling them to repentance and faithfulness. Unfortunately, his warnings went largely unheeded, and the result was a complete cultural collapse that echoes the challenges faced by many societies today. In such an environment, it would have been easy for the young people of that time to abandon their biblical faith, surrendering to despair and the allure of the surrounding pagan culture. Yet, Daniel and his friends made a resolute choice to stay faithful to God, despite the overwhelming odds stacked against them.

Remarkably, these young men were largely alone in their beliefs. With their families either killed in the chaos or taken captive, they were left to navigate this perilous new world without the support of their parents or their communities. They encountered numerous trials and tribulations throughout their lives,

yet their story does not end in defeat. Rather, it concludes with Daniel, now an aged man, reflecting on the promises conveyed through Jeremiah's prophecies, which spoke of a future restoration for the people after a period of seventy years in exile.

In his later years, Daniel devoted himself to prayer and intercession, calling upon the prophetic assurances that had been given to his people. His life serves as a powerful reminder and encouragement to all who strive to maintain their faith in God, regardless of the circumstances surrounding them. The prayers of Daniel during his childhood played a crucial role in shaping his destiny and, by extension, the unfolding of God's plan for salvation in the world. We know that he continued to pray throughout his life and was ready to pay any price to do so.

In a time when faith often can feel like a solitary journey, Daniel's story is a beacon of hope and resilience. It challenges us to pray for the youth of today to remain steadfast in their beliefs, inspiring them to look beyond their current struggles and to trust in the promises of God.

We will take this lesson seriously even though we have learned that any positive change may be temporary, a mere stopgap while we await the new world that is promised to us. Prayer holds immense significance for those who are alive during the years of blessing that it produces. Unfortunately, at this moment, the West is blinded by its success in making a significant portion of the world richer and more comfortable, all the while forgetting that we have simultaneously made it far more terrifying. Recently, the mathematician Erik Weinstein stated that humanity's only hope for the future lies in relocating from Earth to another place in the universe, and the world famous cosmologist Stephen Hawking wrote humanity must prepare to leave planet earth before the year 2600. Little do they realize how accurate the assessment is—the rap-  
ture of believers.

Both the Old and New Testaments of the Bible illuminate the path forward, and those who have taken the Scriptures seriously possess something invaluable to share. They prioritize what is most essential: care for their families, peace, justice and a genuine connection to God. It is crucial that we acknowl-

edge the wisdom found in these texts, for they offer guidance that transcends time and speaks directly to the challenges we face today. In a world filled with uncertainty and fear, it is this ancient wisdom that can provide a foundation for meaningful change. As we strive to create a better future, we must look to these teachings not just for inspiration, but as a blueprint for our actions. The need for leadership rooted in faith and compassion has never been more pressing.

#### A CALL TO PRAYER FOR ALL PEOPLE AND THEIR LEADERS

If you think that most internationally known politicians really don't know what they are doing, you are right. Without guidance from God there is no way to make important decisions that don't have disastrous unforeseen consequences in the end. Political leadership is dealing with an ever changing and ultra-complex reality, while all of us who are not into politics just want to live and die in peace while trying to guide and protect our children, lead decent lives and pay our bills. There are obviously those who believe that there have been better times before but stop to think and wish to reverse time to when everything was better. But, and it is a big "but," if our history has led us to where we are today, on the brink of the planet's destruction—were the earlier decisions that great? And an even more important question: what can we do about it right now?

The Bible tells us clearly that this present world will come to an end. It also tells us that not one person on this planet knows when that will take place. We are also told that followers of Christ will be ridiculed, mocked, persecuted and sometimes killed for their commitment to Him. Nevertheless we are called to act out our faith and, like the Jews in captivity, to pray for the cities where we live, so that it may go well with us and the people around us. There are some very noble examples to follow, men who felt the responsibility given to them and at the same time the need to live in a right relationship to God. They were not one hundred percent perfect human beings, but they knew at least one good thing—turn to God who is our only hope.

The British king George VI gave a speech on D-Day when, among other things, he said:

*... I desire solemnly to call my people to prayer and dedication. We are not unmindful of our own shortcomings, past and present. We shall ask not that God may do our will, but that we may be enabled to do the will of God: and we dare to believe that God has used our Nation and Empire as an instrument for fulfilling His high purpose.*

Furthermore, read and ponder over this prayer by George Washington:

*...Increase my faith in the sweet promises of the gospel; give me repentance from dead works; pardon my wanderings, and direct my thoughts unto Thyself, the God of my salvation; teach me how to live in Thy fear, labor in Thy service, and ever to run in the ways of Thy commandments; make me always watchful over my heart, that neither the terrors of conscience, the loathing of holy duties, the love of sin, nor an unwillingness to depart this life, may cast me into a spiritual slumber, but daily frame me more and more into the likeness of Thy son Jesus Christ, that living in Thy fear, and dying in Thy favor, I may in Thy appointed time attain the resurrection of the just unto eternal life... bless my family, friends, and kindred.*

Consider Apostle Paul's admonition:

*First of all, I urge that petitions, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgivings be made for all people, for kings and all those in authority, that we may live peaceful and quiet lives in all godliness and holiness. This is good, and pleases God our Savior, who wants all people to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth. (1 Timothy 2:1-4, NIV)*

When we read the Apostle's words with only a surface-level understanding, it is easy to be taken aback. He instructs us not only to pray for all people but also to give thanks for them. Many of us can easily think of individuals we feel little motivation to be thankful for. However, when we consider that every person is created in the image of God and plays a role, whether consciously or

unconsciously, in His plan for salvation, we are encouraged to adopt a more profound perspective—a perspective we will explore in this chapter.

The Apostle goes on to emphasize that Christians should pray and give thanks not only for ordinary individuals but also for kings and all those in positions of power. This exhortation feels particularly surprising when we remember that during this time, Nero was the emperor of Rome—a figure notorious for his cruelty and bizarre antics. Nero epitomizes the saying that absolute power corrupts absolutely, and he went to great lengths to demonstrate this truth to everyone around him. Under Nero's reign, both Paul and Peter faced execution. And yet, they were called to thank and pray for him! How does this align with the belief that God answers prayer? This is a valid question, especially if one forgets that the Apostles never prayed to be spared from persecution.

#### THE APOSTOLIC PERSPECTIVE: A CALL TO PRAYER AND FAITH AMIDST SUFFERING

In the early Christian Era, the Apostle Paul possessed a profound understanding of the suffering he would endure for the sake of the gospel. This awareness was not merely a personal revelation; it was imparted to him through the faithful Ananias right from the beginning of his ministry. Paul himself articulated the sentiment that it was a privilege to share in the sufferings of Jesus Christ. Consequently, the cruelty exhibited by Emperor Nero did not catch him off guard. Paul recognized that his life and death were ultimately within the divine will of God, who would utilize every circumstance to further the reach of the gospel message. It was through His suffering and death that Jesus defeated the powers of darkness, and it surely looks like Paul teaches that something similar is true of us. Suffering and persecution does more than meets the eye. It at least telegraphs to everybody, men and spiritual powers alike, that as the world hated and persecuted Jesus so it hates and persecutes His followers. But the victory of enduring Christians is as sure as was Jesus' victory.



Think about what Paul wrote in Philippians 3:10-11:

*...that I may know him and the power of his resurrection, and may share his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, that by any means possible I may attain the resurrection from the dead. (ESV)*

A few days after the Resurrection of Jesus Christ, we find Peter and the other Apostles encountering a miraculous catch of fish on the shore. It was during this transformative moment that Peter learned of his own destined martyrdom. In his second letter, he poignantly noted that the time had come for that prophetic truth to manifest. This incident served not only as a reminder of his calling but also as a signal to the Christians of the era about the central tenets of their faith, indicating that persecution was an expected reality for some among them.

This perspective starkly contrasts with the typical Western inclination to reshape historical narratives through a more therapeutic lens. Instead, it aligns seamlessly with the apostolic conviction that God orchestrates history to rescue those who place their faith in Him from the consequences of humanity's original fall. This divine plan culminates in the awaited return of Jesus Christ, a day when sin's tumult will be eradicated forever.

Paul's exhortation to pray for humanity and its leaders therefore carries monumental significance—one that stretches beyond our conventional understanding. To truly grasp Paul's perspective, it is essential to delve into his worldview, which differs sharply from the secularized viewpoints prevalent in the West. This worldview is deeply rooted in the collective experiences of faithful individuals who have endured trials and tribulations throughout the ages, making it a perspective worthy of our contemplation.

In Acts chapter 4, we encounter a pivotal moment when the Apostles were forbidden to preach about Jesus. The aftermath of their release is particularly telling:

*After they were released, they went to their own people and reported everything the chief priests and the elders had said to them. When they heard this, they raised their voices together to God and said, "Sovereign Lord,*

*you made the heavens and the earth and the sea and everything in them.  
You spoke by the Holy Spirit through the mouth of our father David, your  
servant:*

*“Why do the nations rage  
and the peoples plot in vain?  
The kings of the earth rise up  
and the rulers band together  
against the Lord and against His  
anointed one.”*

*Indeed, Herod and Pontius Pilate met together with the Gentiles and the  
people of Israel in this city to conspire against your holy servant Jesus, whom  
you anointed. They did what your power and will had decided beforehand  
should happen. Now, Lord, consider their threats and enable your servants  
to speak your word with great boldness. Stretch out your hand to heal and  
perform signs and wonders through the name of your holy servant Jesus.  
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 4:23-31, ESV)*

These early Christians commenced their prayers by affirming their unwavering faith in God's omnipotent authority over all creation. After quoting Psalm 2, they boldly proclaimed that Herod and Pilate had unwittingly fulfilled God's predetermined plan through their actions. Their prayers echoed the foundational tenets of the Apostolic Creed: "We believe in God the Father, Almighty, Creator of heaven and earth." Following this declaration of faith, they sought courage and fortitude to carry out God's will, imploring Him to perform miraculous signs and wonders in the name of Jesus. Notice that they did not pray for God to ease the persecution. They never imagined that the Christian life would be an easy vacation trip to heaven. No, they instead prayed that God would give them more of the very things that had brought them into trouble. Notice also that they don't show a hint of feeling sorry for themselves. They have the time of their lives because they experienced and manifested

the power of God that was at work in them. The response to their prayer was nothing short of miraculous, as the ground shook beneath them, and they were empowered by the Holy Spirit to proclaim the gospel with renewed boldness.

A team from Open Doors (a Christian organization that supports persecuted Christians) asked an Egyptian pastor how Western Christians could pray for our brothers and sisters in Egypt. The pastor responded by saying, “Please don’t pray for us. Please pray with us.” A little confused by his answer, an Open Doors worker asked him what he meant by this. He continued,

*If you pray for us, you will pray for the wrong things. You will pray that the church will be safe. You will pray for persecution to cease. We are not praying for these things. We ask God for the salvation of Egypt. We ask that He draw millions of Muslims to Christ. We ask that we will be bold and clear in sharing our faith with Muslims. And we pray that when the inevitable persecution comes... that we will not run away, that we will be faithful in that persecution even if it costs us our lives.*

The political leaders of the time of the early Christians, like many today, often made regrettable decisions. Yet, as we see in the unfolding narrative, they were still instruments of God’s divine plan. In the Scripture, it is evident that while these leaders believed they were acting shrewdly by crucifying Jesus, they were, in fact, participating in the disarming of the very powers that corrupt the world—powers that underpinned their own authority. So, for Christians, it is vital to pray for divine guidance over “kings and all in authority,” recognizing that God can work through even the most unlikely of circumstances.

When the early Christians prayed, they exhibited a faith that transcended mere rhetoric, embracing a deep understanding of God’s overarching plan for humanity. They were keenly aware that their prayers were not in vain but rather part of a divine tapestry woven throughout history. Their call to pray for all people—including those in positions of power—serves as a poignant reminder that our supplications can influence not only our personal lives but also the

broader narrative of faith and salvation in a world that often appears chaotic and tumultuous.

#### HOW AUGUSTUS CAME TO SERVE GOD

Throughout the Bible, we find numerous examples of how God directed pagan rulers to fulfill His will. One notable instance is Emperor Augustus, who believed he had devised a brilliant plan to register the entire world for more efficient tax collection. However, this seemingly secular initiative inadvertently set the stage for the fulfillment of God's promise, illustrating how divine providence can work through human ambition and oversight. It led to Joseph's and Mary's trip to Bethlehem, where they just planned to show good citizenship, but where Jesus the Messiah was born, as God had foretold.

#### HOW CYRUS CAME TO SERVE GOD'S PURPOSES

In the amazing narrative of Isaiah 44:28, God underscores a powerful message to the nation of Israel: there exists only one true God—Yahweh—and He rules over all nations and all of history. The chapter draws attention to the Persian king Cyrus, characterized by God as His shepherd, tasked with fulfilling divine wishes. God's promise is clear: Jerusalem shall be rebuilt, and the temple's foundation shall be laid. As the scripture unfolds in Isaiah 45:1-6, Cyrus is even bestowed with the title of "anointed one" or "Messiah." The text promises Cyrus remarkable divine assistance: "I will go before you and level the mountains, shatter the bronze doors, and cut through the iron bars. I will give you hidden treasures and secret riches... For the sake of my servant Jacob, and Israel my chosen, I call you by your name; I give you a title of honor even though you do not know me."

The prophetic narrative does not end there. In 2 Chronicles 36:22 (ESV), we find a significant declaration: "In the first year of King Cyrus of Persia, the Lord stirred up the spirit of King Cyrus so that he sent a proclamation throughout his kingdom... to fulfill the word of the Lord spoken by Jeremiah." This proclamation aligns with earlier prophecies, setting the stage for the events that would follow. Before the realization of these divine promises, another prophet

named Daniel was deeply engaged in seeking God's mercy. He read Jeremiah's prophecy, which foretold Israel's seventy-year exile and subsequent return. In response, Daniel devoted himself to fasting and prayer, confessing the sins of his people and pleading for God's forgiveness and restoration of Jerusalem (Daniel 9:1-19).

Long before the seventy-year prophecy came to fruition, God had already ordained that Cyrus would be the instrument through which Jeremiah's prophecy—and subsequently Daniel's prayer—would be realized. This divine orchestration of historical events serves as a reminder that, even amid political maneuvering and human decisions, God's overarching plan remains intact, steering the course of history in accordance with His divine will. The story does not say that Cyrus became a believer, but that God chooses to use anyone He wants to accomplish what He promised to His people.

#### HOW XERXES CAME TO SERVE GOD'S PURPOSES

The Book of Esther provides another powerful testament to this theme. It recounts the harrowing story of Haman, an Amalekite, who plots to eradicate all the Jews in Persia. At the heart of this tale is Esther, a Jewish girl who ascends to the role of queen under King Xerxes. Her uncle Mordecai, a respected Jewish leader, had earlier uncovered a conspiracy against the king's life. However, he refuses to bow to Haman, the king's assistant, which ignites Haman's fury. This animosity between the Amalekites and the Jews stretches back generations, fueling Haman's diabolical scheme to annihilate the Jewish people.

As Haman's plot thickens, Mordecai learns of his sinister intentions. In response, both he and Esther engage in fervent prayer and fasting, seeking divine intervention. This leads to a pivotal moment in the story: one night, the king struggles to fall asleep and requests that his attendants read the royal chronicles. By a stroke of what looks like fate, they recount Mordecai's earlier act of bravery in uncovering the assassination plot, revealing that he had never been honored for his courageous deed. At that moment, Haman arrives at the palace, only to be commanded by the king to honor Mordecai by dressing him in royal garments, placing him on the king's horse, and parading him through

the city while proclaiming, “This is what is done for the man the king wishes to honor” (Esther 6:9, NIV). Ultimately, Haman’s plots unravel, leading to his downfall and the salvation of the Jewish people from impending doom. Haman was unaware of the fact that God had promised Abraham that his descendants would be a blessing to all nations. Even if it appeared like Haman had the upper hand for a while, God led the king to have him executed.

#### THE TRANSFORMATIVE POWER OF PRAYER: A COMPLEX NARRATIVE OF FAITH AND PROPHECY

Throughout the annals of biblical history, narratives emerge that vividly illustrate the transformative power of prayer when it is in alignment with God’s divine plan. These stories, however, pose significant challenges for modern readers, particularly when it comes to reconciling the intricate complexities of prophecy. For instance, how do we understand God’s declaration through Isaiah that Cyrus would play a pivotal role in facilitating the return of the Jewish people to their homeland for the reconstruction of the temple with the rest of that story? His declaration raises questions, especially when viewed alongside Jeremiah’s prophecy, which foretold a seventy-year period of captivity for the Israelites.

The story of Daniel adds another layer of complexity to this theological puzzle that he based on Jeremiah’s prophecy. Daniel’s passionate prayers for divine intervention not only reflect his deep faith but also highlight the urgency of the situation faced by the Jewish exiles. As readers grapple with these intertwining narratives of prophecy and prayer, we are invited to explore the extraordinary ways in which God interacts with His people.

One particularly illuminating passage can be found in the book of Daniel, specifically in Daniel 9:20-23. Here, we witness a moment where God dispatches a chief angel to convey vital information to Daniel regarding the unfolding events that are to come. This moment is not merely a historical account; it serves as a reminder of the active role that divine communication plays in the lives of believers. The text reveals how a celestial order went forth from heaven, signifying God’s immediate engagement in human affairs. So

Daniel's prayer that he based on Jeremiah's words led to a next level of prophecy—a chief angel informed him about what would take place in the next step of God's plan.

As the angel assures Daniel of God's unwavering love for him, we are reminded of the personal relationship that believers can cultivate with God. This assurance resonates deeply, offering comfort and hope in the midst of uncertainty and turmoil. As we reflect on these verses, the narrative invites us to ponder the profound implications of prayer, prophecy and divine intervention in our own lives.

In essence, the stories woven throughout the scriptures not only demonstrate the power of prayer but also challenge contemporary readers to seek a deeper understanding of God's plans. As we navigate the complexities of faith and prophecy, we are encouraged to trust that, like Daniel, we too can experience the extraordinary ways in which God assures us of His love and guidance.

#### GABRIEL BRINGS AN ANSWER

*While I was speaking and praying, confessing my sin and the sin of my people Israel, and presenting my plea before the LORD my God for the holy hill of my God, while I was speaking in prayer, the man Gabriel, whom I had seen in the vision at the first, came to me in swift flight at the time of the evening sacrifice. He made me understand, speaking with me and saying, "O Daniel, I have now come out to give you insight and understanding. At the beginning of your pleas for mercy a word went out, and I have come to tell it to you, for you are greatly loved. Therefore consider the word and understand the vision." (Daniel 9:20-23, ESV)*

#### UNDERSTANDING WHAT LOOKS LIKE BIBLICAL COMPLEXITY THROUGH A DIVINE LENS

For many who approach the Bible solely as a historical text, the reading of Isaiah's, Jeremiah's and Daniel's complex prophecies can often be a source of confusion and frustration. These issues may lead some to question the reliability and authenticity of the Scriptures. However, if we align our perspective with

that of Jesus—who viewed Scripture as a divine revelation—an entirely new understanding emerges. This shift invites us to take into account the infinite nature of God, who transcends our earthly limitations and temporal concerns. Recognizing this profound truth encourages us to embrace the notion that God’s plans and purposes may extend far beyond human comprehension. As Western Christians, this realization should inspire a healthy dose of humility as we engage with the teachings of the Holy Scriptures.

In conclusion, the overarching messages gleaned from these biblical narratives illuminate a path toward humility before God. They implore individuals to earnestly seek divine guidance through prayer, much like the prophet Daniel did during his time of trial and uncertainty. It is essential to understand that prayer, especially when it aligns with God’s will, possesses immense power and potential. The most transformative changes in our lives and communities often arise from the earnest prayers of those who are attuned to the leading of the Holy Spirit.

#### PRAYER THAT IS SYNCHRONIZED WITH GOD’S PURPOSES

The Scriptures do not encourage a form of prayer that merely mirrors our personal desires; rather, they beckon us toward a deeper synchronization with the divine purpose. In a world frequently engulfed in chaos and uncertainty, the stories of biblical figures such as Isaiah, Daniel and Esther serve as timeless reminders of the enduring strength found within faith and prayer. They inspire us to trust in God’s sovereign plan for humanity—a plan that intricately involves our participation and the authentic expression of our faith through prayer.

Could God fulfill His divine purposes without our prayers? Undoubtedly, He possesses the power to accomplish His will in ways beyond our understanding. However, such an approach would not honor our role as participants in His divine plan. It is through our prayers that we find meaning, purpose and connection to the Almighty, bestowing upon us a sense of honor and dignity in our relationship with Him. Ultimately, the act of prayer not only aligns our



hearts with God's but also affirms our commitment to participating in His purposes for the world.

***Discuss***

*Discuss how the Bible's examples of prayer can change our image of ourselves from beggars to royal representatives.*

*How do the comments of the Egyptian pastor affect you?*

*Reflect on the Apostles' prayer in Acts 4:23-31.*



## Chapter 2

# Praying for Christian Leaders

In a heartfelt plea, the Apostle Paul urges believers to pray not only for one another but specifically for Christian leaders who often find themselves navigating the tumultuous waters of ministry. In his letter to the Ephesians, Paul writes, “Pray also for me, that the words may be given to me in opening my mouth boldly to proclaim the mystery of the gospel, for which I am an ambassador in chains; that I may declare it boldly, as I ought to speak” (Ephesians 6:19-20, ESV).

For many Christian leaders, there is perhaps no experience more disheartening than feeling powerless and defeated in their calling. The role of a leader is frequently accompanied by a sense of isolation and the relentless pressure of self-evaluation, often without the encouragement of supportive voices. Even Paul, a foundational figure in the early church who established numerous congregations, faced these difficult emotions. The psychological and spiritual struggles that accompany leadership can be overwhelming, and while the idea of leadership may seem appealing from the outside, many leaders would hesitate to wish this path upon their own children.

One might assume that a prominent apostle like Paul, known for his travels with companions and devoted disciples, would never experience loneliness. However, during his imprisonment, Paul found himself grappling with intense isolation. As he faced adversaries who seized the moment to amplify their own voices, his closest friends abandoned him, leaving him to confront his trials alone, as recounted in 2 Timothy 4:9-18.

When Paul requests the strength to preach and the courage to do so, it sheds light on the essential qualities that all leaders, especially spiritual ones, require. The challenges of ministry were vividly illustrated during an incident in Ephesus when a riot erupted in response to Paul’s powerful preaching. God had performed remarkable miracles through him, healing the sick simply through the touch of his garments. The impact of the gospel threatened the local re-

ligious order, igniting a furious mob that filled the outdoor arena, adamantly defending their pagan beliefs. In the midst of this chaos, Paul wanted to address the crowd, yet his disciples, recognizing the potential danger, prevented him from entering. This scenario underscores the fact that even an apostle like Paul needed others to pray for him. If Paul, who showed such courage, needed intercession from others, how much more do our own leaders need that?

The call to pray for spiritual leaders in our contemporary context could significantly alter the spiritual landscape, laying a foundation for revitalization and renewal throughout the nation. Paul specifically appeals for prayer concerning two vital aspects: the ability to preach effectively and the courage to do so.

It is essential to recognize that preaching alone does not guarantee results. Those who have taken to the pulpit understand this truth all too well. Even with thorough preparation and heartfelt delivery, the outcomes can often be disappointing. This can feel perplexing, particularly as one might assume that the message should resonate more powerfully. Yet, the connection between the prayers of others and the effectiveness of preaching is a deep mystery that deserves our attention. If Paul, an apostle who fervently sought divine guidance and witnessed miraculous healings, required the prayers of others, it stands to reason that our pastors and spiritual leaders also need this vital support. Historical accounts abound detailing how intercessory prayer can bring about transformative change in various situations.

#### THE UNSUNG HEROES OF REVIVAL: THE POWER OF INTERCESSORY PRAYER IN THE MINISTRY OF CHARLES FINNEY

In the annals of 19th-century American history, few figures shine as brightly as Charles Finney, a prominent evangelist whose impassioned sermons also ignited a wave of significant social movements. Finney played a pivotal role in advancing causes such as the abolition of slavery, women's rights, prison reform and the temperance movement. Yet, his outspoken advocacy for these issues made him a target for considerable backlash, particularly from proponents of slavery. Remarkably, the hostility directed at his ministry reached such extreme

heights that even the local fire department in Rochester, New York, refused to respond when his church caught fire.

Despite the challenges he faced, Finney's influence was undeniable. In areas where he preached, over 100,000 individuals joined various churches within just a single year. The impact of his ministry extended beyond spiritual awakenings; the district attorney in Rochester documented a staggering two-thirds decrease in crime rates in the city, a trend that endured well beyond Finney's active years. His charismatic speaking style, coupled with his profound connection to the Holy Spirit and extensive writings on spiritual experiences, solidified his status as a transformative figure in American religious life. One particularly striking account describes a visit he made to a weaving factory where the palpable presence of God so moved the employees that production ceased. Many found themselves unable to concentrate on their work as they experienced a powerful awakening of faith.

However, it is important to acknowledge that behind these remarkable stories of revival and transformation lie the quiet, unheralded intercessors whose prayers serve as the backbone of such movements. Many of these dedicated individuals prefer to remain anonymous, content in their intimate connection with the Creator. Yet, among these unsung heroes, one figure stands out: Daniel Nash.

Nash, a lesser-known yet crucial player in the history of revivalism, played an instrumental role in supporting Finney's ministry through fervent prayer. His story exemplifies the transformative power of intercessory prayer, reminding us that while charismatic leaders may capture the spotlight, countless others labor diligently in the shadows, lifting them up in prayer. As we reflect on the importance of prayer as outlined in the teachings of the Apostle Paul, let us not forget the vital role of intercessors in bolstering the effectiveness of spiritual leaders.

Before Finney set foot in a town to preach, Nash—affectionately known as Father Nash—would often arrive ahead of him. Renting a modest room or even a basement, he would gather a small group, typically consisting of two or three others, to pray fervently. Among those who joined him was Abel Clary,

a man who shared Nash's calling for intercessory prayer. In an account told by Leonard Ravenhill, an elderly woman shared a story that has resonated deeply with him ever since. She reported how, prior to Finney's arrival in Bolton, two men knocked on her door seeking to rent a room. Although she had only a dark, damp basement available, Nash and Clary rented it for the duration of Finney's preaching engagement. During those two weeks, they dedicated themselves to intense prayer, battling against the spiritual forces of darkness.

On another occasion, Finney himself recounted an experience involving a woman who owned a small hotel. She approached him and inquired, "Do you know Father Nash? He and two others are renting a room in my hotel." She continued, "They haven't eaten a bite in three days since they arrived. I peeked through the door because I heard strange sounds and saw three men on their faces before God. This has been going on for three days. They lie flat on the floor, crying out to God..." The profound impact of Nash's intercessory work became even clearer when he passed away; Finney, recognizing the true source of power behind their ministry, ceased his preaching, fully aware that the transformation of entire communities was rooted in Nash's earnest prayers.

God employs individuals with a kaleidoscope of personalities and gifts to intercede for others, and it's crucial to understand that most of us may not pray in the same manner as Daniel Nash. The focus should not be on the style of prayer but rather on the act of praying itself. Every Christian is called to pray for at least one spiritual leader, recognizing that God has elevated all believers to the role of priests, whose primary duty is to serve Him through prayer and worship. Once we fully embrace this truth, our nations could experience profound transformation.

In conclusion, the call to prayer is not merely a formality; it is a heartfelt acknowledgment of the immense challenges faced by spiritual leaders. The weight of responsibility, the burden of souls entrusted to their care, and the urgency of their message can often feel overwhelming. Therefore, when we engage in prayer for our leaders, we do more than provide support; we participate in a divine partnership that can yield extraordinary outcomes. It is imperative that we take this call to prayer seriously, understanding that it has the

potential to foster deep spiritual renewal and impactful ministry throughout our communities. Let us remember that behind every great revival, there are those humble intercessors whose prayers pave the way for transformation and healing.

C. H. Spurgeon, the anointed English preacher that God used to change England, once took a group of visiting pastors on a tour of his church in London. He first took them to the basement of the church where five hundred persons were gathered to pray before and during the service. “This is my boiler room,” said Spurgeon. “This is the source of our power.”

Many have heard of the great Hebrides Revival in the 1950s. If you ever get a chance, listen to the story told by the congregational pastor Duncan Campbell. You can find it on YouTube. He tells how it all began with two old, handicapped ladies, sisters, on the Isle of Lewis praying and pleading earnestly with God to send revival and to renew the dying church. One day after praying a long time they told a church leader to send for Duncan Campbell because God was going to use him to restore the church. The man knew the ladies well enough to take them seriously but had to come back with the information that the preacher was already booked to preach somewhere else. Their answer was calmly, “Now men have spoken, but God has said otherwise. He will be here within two weeks.” Duncan Campbell tells how he was preaching in a church in London when he clearly sensed that God wanted him to stop preaching in the middle of his sermon and go straight to the Isle of Lewis in the Hebrides. He did as he was told and saw how God used him in one of the greatest revival periods in modern time. Even fishermen out on the North Sea, not knowing what was going on at home got under conviction, turned their boats as quickly as they could to get to the island and threw themselves on their knees to ask God for salvation.

#### PRAY ESPECIALLY FOR COURAGE

The Apostle Paul wanted the believers to pray for courage. The opposite of courage is not fear; it is cowardice. When the winds of controversy blow through the realm of opinions, the cowardly tend to hide away. They lack the fortitude

to do what they know is right. It is entirely possible for brave Christians to feel fear; however, they still choose to act according to their convictions because they trust that God will honor their efforts. They understand that even if they face death in the process, their eternal life with God will continue unhindered. These individuals act boldly, despite their fears.

Psychologist Jordan Peterson, while he still had not embraced Christianity, was once asked how he manages to exhibit such courage. He candidly responded, “I am not courageous at all; in fact, I am often very afraid. But I am even more afraid of what might happen to me if I do not voice what I believe to be right.” Courageous individuals confront opposition and suffering with dignity and faith, refusing to abandon their beliefs even when the winds of doubt and adversity are strong. However, it is essential to recognize that people cannot sustain this level of courage on their own.

God does not want us to behave like unreasonable lone wolves, engaging in quarrels merely to affirm our own existence. His role model for us is Jesus Christ, who demonstrated true courage until the very end. Jesus was not afraid to express His anguish about what awaited Him on the cross, and He desired the companionship of His friends during His struggle and was disappointed when they fell asleep while He Himself struggled. Similarly, Paul is unafraid to reveal his reliance on other Christians as he requests prayers for support.

Courage is not the same as recklessness either; rather, it requires maturity and an awareness that we are not alone in our struggles. Thus, we must pray for our spiritual leaders, asking that they teach clearly and powerfully in the strength of the Holy Spirit. We should also seek out leaders who possess spiritual courage—those who uphold the entirety of the Christian message and serve as role models of mature courage for all believers.

In a world where challenges and conflicts are ever-present, the need for such leaders is more pressing than ever. Their example can inspire others to stand firm in their faith, to act justly and to remain steadfast in the face of trials. It is through their courage that many will find the strength to confront their fears and live out their beliefs authentically. As we support and lift up



these leaders in prayer, we contribute to a community that fosters bravery, resilience and unwavering faith.

## THE BOLDNESS OF EARLY CHRISTIAN LEADERS: A LESSON IN TRUE KNOWLEDGE AND CONFIDENCE

The early leaders of the Christian faith stand out not only for their spiritual convictions but also for their remarkable courage—a trait that the English Standard Version (ESV) of the Bible refers to as “boldness.” This boldness was not unfounded; it stemmed from a well grounded understanding of their mission and the divine authority behind it. In a society where the elite prided themselves on their academic accomplishments and social standing, the confident demeanor of these so-called “uneducated” individuals baffled the learned classes.

The societal elite often found themselves ensnared in a web of their own intellectual achievements, clinging to their status as a measure of worth. They struggled to comprehend how individuals without formal education could show such confidence and courage. This misunderstanding highlights a fundamental flaw in their perception of knowledge. True wisdom, as history has shown, is not merely the accumulation of facts or degrees; it is the ability to navigate life’s challenges with insight and an understanding based on God’s revealed Word.

### ONE OF MY FAVORITES IS BISHOP BASIL OF CAESAREA

The emperor at the time, Valens, was an Arian heretic and mercilessly sent into exile any bishop who displeased him. He sent the local prefect Modestus to Saint Basil. He began to threaten the bishop with the confiscation of his property, banishment, beatings and even death.

Basil said,

*If you take away my possessions, you will not enrich yourself, nor will you make me a pauper. You have no need of my old worn-out clothing, nor of my few books, of which the entirety of my wealth is comprised. Exile means nothing to me, since I am bound to no particular place. This place in which*

*I now dwell is not mine, and any place you send me shall be mine. Better to say: every place is God's. Where would I be neither a stranger and sojourner (Psalm 39:12)? Who can torture me? I am so weak, that the very first blow would render me insensible. Death would be a kindness to me, for it will bring me all the sooner to God, for Whom I live and labor, and to Whom I hasten.*

The official was stunned by his answer. “No one has ever spoken so audaciously to me,” he said.

“Perhaps,” the saint remarked, “that is because you’ve never spoken to a bishop before. In all else we are meek, the most humble of all. But when it concerns God, and people rise up against Him, then we, counting everything else as naught, look to Him alone. Then fire, sword, wild beasts and iron rods that rend the body, serve to fill us with joy, rather than fear.”

With leaders like this, the Roman Empire stood no chance in its attempt to root out the Christian faith.

To illustrate this point, consider the hypothetical scenario of a brilliant rocket scientist who finds himself lost in the Sinai Desert. Despite his advanced knowledge of physics, he would find little utility in his expertise when faced with the harsh realities of the desert landscape. In contrast, he would likely be immensely grateful for the guidance of a less formally educated Bedouin, whose intimate understanding of the environment and skills in locating water would be invaluable in such circumstances.

Now, imagine a Jewish man from Galilee—someone who spent three transformative years walking alongside the Creator of the Universe, filled with the Holy Spirit. The boldness of such an individual, rooted in the life and teaching of Jesus Christ, would enable him to carry out God’s calling with unwavering resolve, regardless of the opinions of the societal elite.

This brings us to an essential reflection for contemporary believers: the importance of praying for our pastors and spiritual leaders to embody the qualities of Jesus in their ministries. Such a prayer is not merely a good intention; it is a strategic and vital calling for the church.

As we consider the profound implications of this, let us look closely at the words found in Acts 4:13-14 (ESV): “Now when they saw the boldness of Peter and John, and perceived that they were uneducated, common men, they were astonished. And they recognized that they had been with Jesus. But seeing the man who was healed standing beside them, they had nothing to say in opposition.”

These verses encapsulate the essence of true boldness—an unwavering confidence that stems from a deep relationship with Jesus, coupled with the miraculous evidence of God’s work in their lives. These men had the Old Testament taught to them from childhood and had memorized significant parts of it. Then being taught by Jesus, the Creator of the world, laid a firm foundation for their leadership. As we navigate our own spiritual journeys, we would do well to learn from the boldness of early Christian leaders and foster a similar faith that transcends societal expectations and intellectual limitations.

### ***Discuss***

*How can you make sure that a majority of the church members pray regularly and consciously for the lead pastors and their co-workers?*

*Is Paul’s request for prayers directed to the intercessors or to all believers? Is there a difference in the first place?*

*How can Spurgeon’s “boiler room” challenge the whole church?*



### Chapter 3

## **Pray for Workers for the Harvest** (Matthew 9:36-38, Luke 10:2)

The world around us is changing at an astonishing pace. The risk is that many people do not fully grasp just how swiftly and radically these changes occur. A century ago, there were countless warnings about the end times and the impending tribulations that were to come. Some individuals showcased charts and diagrams filled with increasingly fantastic theories, successfully instilling fear in many. There were also those who even predicted specific dates for the return of Jesus. When someone claims to know more than Jesus and His Apostles, it is only prudent to approach such assertions with skepticism. As a result, leaders from later generations have nearly ceased preparing people for the future. Even more troubling, many who attempted to pull themselves out of one ditch ended up driving straight into another, working to make the church more aligned with societal norms. There is an old saying that goes, “two wrongs don’t make one right.” The essence of Christian faith is about salvation, not religious speculation or conforming to a broken world. While we obviously are nearer to end times, at least because of the stream of time, the church does not seem to prepare much for a final event.

Instead, in the last decade, Hollywood has played a significant role in popularizing various theories about the future. The reason so many apocalyptic films have sold well is that filmmakers have tapped into the pervasive fear regarding the planet’s future that many people share. Moreover, one need only follow the news to realize that the relatively predictable society that has existed since the end of World War II is now a thing of the past. In addition to the upheaval of financial and military stability, attitudes toward the Christian faith are shifting from a state of benign indifference to one of active resistance. The church—particularly the confessing church—will exist under vastly different conditions in twenty years. This is why it is imperative for Christians to pray now for God to send the kinds of workers needed for the harvest, so that there

will be a church capable of conveying the power of the gospel in the Western world. The way to prepare for the future might not necessarily be to overreact and go back to the older mistakes, but to pray for workers for the harvest, because it is people, not anything else, that need to be prepared. Now is the time.

### WHAT DOES JESUS SAY?

Jesus often turns our understanding upside down. In Matthew 9 and Luke 10, we learn that Jesus, who is God Himself, felt compassion for the helplessness and confusion of the people. God empathizes with the broken-hearted and wounded. The problems facing the world are vast, yet He simultaneously declares that the harvest is plentiful. In this context, it seems that Jesus uses the term “harvest” to refer to the great work that lies ahead. Sometimes, the word is used to describe the many people who come to faith, as He did outside the town of Sychar, where nearly the entire population began to believe in Him—much to the astonishment of His disciples. Other times, it is illustrated with the saying “you reap what you sow,” often as encouragement to live a righteous life. The New Testament also teaches us that at the end of time, God’s angels will gather in the harvest. However, in the accounts of Matthew and Luke, the focus is on human suffering and the need for the gospel of God’s kingdom. Given the depth and urgency of these issues, many people are ready to embrace the gospel, but this readiness hinges on God sending out workers who can provide liberation and hope to the people.

To truly understand Jesus’ words, we must remember that He intends for “workers” to be messengers of God’s kingdom, just as He and the Apostles were. This call to action is not merely a suggestion; it is an urgent plea for dedicated individuals who can bridge the gap between God’s truth and the brokenness of our world; and prepare for the future. As we reflect on the state of society, we are reminded of the crucial role each of us plays in this divine mission. The need for laborers in the harvest is not just a theological concept; it is a pressing reality that calls for our immediate attention and fervent prayer.

For those of us living in the Western world, the topic of prayer can feel a bit strange. Throughout our lives, many have been taught to be activists, and

it's natural for us to think that we should encourage more people to engage in religious activity and community work rather than "just praying." We tend to challenge others to step up and then ask God to bless the work we are doing. It is undeniably a delicate balance to strike between the act of praying and taking an activist approach. There is no doubt that God works through passionate individuals and that the diverse array of personalities He has created is a gift to be cherished and nurtured. However, in the passages from Matthew and Luke, we see clearly that Jesus urges us to pray for God to send workers into the harvest field—those who are suffering and lost. In these texts, He describes people as being like sheep without a shepherd (Matthew), and also mentions individuals who find themselves among wolves, or who resemble wolves, while the disciples come as defenseless sheep, equipped with the power to "heal the sick" present there.

#### MINISTERING TO THE POOR

The prayer giants of the evangelical movement have always understood that Christians should share the gospel and rescue the poor. George Müller of Bristol did this, and his example has influenced thousands. During one period, he preached and prayed at the same time as he provided home, food and education for 10,000 orphans during his lifetime. He established 117 schools which offered Christian education to more than 120,000 children. He was actually accused by some for raising the status of the poor above their "natural station" in society. Well, there has always been a difference between how followers of Christ and followers of contemporary culture have looked upon people.

One other example is Charles Spurgeon who preached the gospel in a way that thousands came to faith in Christ. He also prayed for hurting people personally and likely encountered thousands who were healed. He was a prayer warrior, influenced his nation and also built an orphanage that housed hundreds of children. The story goes that Spurgeon went to see George Müller's work in Bristol. Toward the end of the visit Müller invited Spurgeon to speak to the people, but Spurgeon declined because he had "been crying all the while" and went on to found an orphanage himself.

Today there are few major evangelical churches that do not have an active ministry to help the poor. It is ingrained in their identity. One example is our own church, the Woodlands Church outside Houston, Texas. It has identified three main foci which are to reach the lost, to equip the next generation and to minister to the poor. And the church delivers on all three of those focal points.

I love the fact that Samaritans Purse, led by Franklin Graham, makes sure that they do share the gospel clearly at the same time as they prove to be an enormously effective help organization. Is this also generating criticism? You bet it does. Criticism comes from all corners of the earth: secular Westerners, Hindu nationalists, Marxist regimes and so on. Of course serving the poor in the name of Jesus Christ will create opposition. We live in a world that is in rebellion to Christ, so opposition is to be expected. But there is no other way in which to serve Jesus Christ the way He told us to. So when we take Jesus' command seriously and pray for workers to minister to this enormous group of people, things like this might happen.

#### BUT BACK TO BASICS

From both Scripture and my own experiences, I have learned that God carries out His plans in ways that always surpass our limited human perspectives. Yet one thing is abundantly clear: we must pray for the kind of workers that Jesus speaks of in Matthew and Luke. Jesus instructs us to ask for workers who are disciples, filled with spiritual power and insight, yet who may not necessarily come from the "right" organizational structure. There are indications in the early church (Hippolytus) that such individuals did not need formal ordination or official clearing. God sends them at a time and place of His own choosing, like He did with D. L. Moody and Billy Graham to name a couple. To clarify, ordination was crucial in the early centuries to ensure that leaders were taught by someone connected to the Apostles, especially before a widely accepted biblical canon was established. The purpose of ordination was to safeguard fidelity to the apostolic faith that Scripture represents. (However, ordination, when separated from loyalty to the Apostles' teachings, becomes



meaningless and even somewhat silly.) Today, that safeguarding is the Bible that all of us have available.

### HOW JESUS DID IT

Jesus practiced what He preached. Before appointing the Twelve Apostles, He spent an entire night in prayer (Luke 6:12-16). It was essential that the right individuals were chosen because they were to preach, heal and perform miracles. They were also meant to fulfill God's plan to share the gospel with all of humanity. Interestingly, the narrative reveals that Judas Iscariot was appointed as an Apostle, despite ultimately betraying Jesus. The entirety of God's plan would be fulfilled, and what might appear as a mistake or an oddity from the outside was, in fact, a necessary element of that plan. King David, a prophet, had foretold that one who shared the cup with Jesus at the Last Supper would betray Him. So, Jesus chose the right persons, all of them, in order for the Father's plan to be fulfilled. A purely human HR process without prayer would not have chosen Judas, or me, myself for that matter.

If we take the biblical narrative seriously, it becomes clear that we cannot expect spiritually empowered leaders unless we pray for God to send them. We need to exercise patience, even when we do not fully understand God's guidance, so that we can wait for the individuals He has equipped and commissioned. Leaders who come with spiritual power do not automatically lead people to faith or revival. When Jesus cares for the downtrodden by delivering, healing and feeding them, He does so to express the reality of God's kingdom. This was not intended to be a strategy for church growth. In fact, there were no established churches, and hence no church growth, when Jesus performed His miracles. He viewed wonders and signs as expressions of the nearness of God's kingdom—indicating that the kingdom was present through the very presence of the King Himself, the Messiah. Such actions are a natural expressions of the gospel. The fallen world still existed, which was precisely why there were so many difficulties (Jesus had even appointed an apostle who would eventually betray Him)—but now it was possible to receive God's kingdom personally and seek fellowship with others who had also accepted it. The principles of

God's kingdom remain unchanged, as Jesus demonstrated, and that is why we need to pray for workers for the challenging calling that a fallen world presents. It cannot be envisioned any other way. If we take Jesus' words seriously, there will be no such workers without prayerful response. Can we understand how this all fits together? No, of course not! That is not the point—the point is to act in faith and do what God calls us to do.

### THE TAKE AWAY

As an encouragement, Jesus promised His disciples that they would receive everything they asked for in His name— but what does that mean? Anyone who prays regularly knows that this does not mean we can use Jesus' name as a magical incantation. We often conclude our prayers by saying “in Jesus' name,” which is a good practice. In doing so, we likely mean that we do not approach God based on our own merits but rather because Jesus died and rose again to make us children of God, representing us before the Father. We also understand that God frequently answers our prayers with a “yes.” Yet, there are times when He responds with a “no” and other times when He asks us to wait. It is truly a remarkable privilege that things are this way. Often, we find ourselves expressing gratitude that God, who knows far better than we do, sometimes tells us no or asks us to wait. This divine wisdom protects us from praying for things that could lead to tragic outcomes in our lives.

However, when Jesus promises to give us everything we ask for in His name, He means exactly what He says. He expects us to be attentive to His teachings and guidance. To pray in Jesus' name actually means to request those things that align with what He has instructed us to seek. We are called to pray for kings and all those in authority, to pray for our Christian leaders, and to ask for more workers to join us in the harvest. In the Lord's Prayer, Jesus teaches us to pray not only for grand, overarching issues but also for our personal needs, such as spiritual protection and daily sustenance.

Additionally, there are significant matters we should bring before God in prayer—such as interceding for our communities, our spiritual leaders, our political leaders, and for more “workers for the harvest.” These are monumental

concerns, and it can be challenging for us to grasp just how crucial it is to pray about them. We often struggle to understand that our prayers genuinely affect the shape of our world.

It is easy to understand how praying for our daily bread can have an immediate impact, as it connects closely to our everyday lives. But we must come to terms with the importance of our role as “kings and priests” in God’s kingdom. This is a new and true identity that we have as children of God, and it carries with it a responsibility to engage in prayer that reflects our calling and the needs of the world around us. By embracing this identity and the privilege of prayer, we can begin to recognize the profound influence our petitions can have on both our personal lives and the broader society.

### ***Discuss***

*Where is there an immediate need for “workers of the field” in your vicinity?*

*How could you pray strategically and focused for workers in those places?*

*How do we handle unfortunate Judas’ style surprises when (not if) they come?*



## Chapter 4

# Paul Prays for His People (Romans 10)

The Apostle Paul offers us valuable insights into how to pray for our own nations. It's easy to feel a sense of discouragement when we hear about the increasing secularization in the West and the continual decline of churches, even if we may not openly admit our disheartenment. However, our situation is considerably more favorable than that of Paul. He understood that the people of Israel as a nation would not turn to Christ/the Messiah until His return. Yet, despite this knowledge, he still prayed fervently for them (Romans 10:1). In contrast, we are blessed with the promise that all nations will come to believe in Jesus before His return. This is beautifully illustrated in Romans 16:25-27 (NIV):

*Now to him who is able to establish you in accordance with my gospel, the message I proclaim about Jesus Christ, in keeping with the revelation of the mystery hidden for long ages past, but now revealed and made known through the prophetic writings by the command of the eternal God, so that all the Gentiles might come to the obedience that comes from faith—to the only wise God be glory forever through Jesus Christ! Amen.*

Moreover, we have the mission mandate found in Matthew 28:18-20 (NIV):

*Jesus said, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.”*

Our calling is to make disciples of all nations. This implies that a significant number of people in a given country will come to believe in Jesus, to the point

where it can be said that the nation is comprised of disciples. It does not mean that every individual in that country will come to faith. Jesus was very clear in stating that not everyone will believe. Additionally, it does not imply that there will be no resistance or persecution. The reality is that the more followers of Jesus there are in a nation, the stronger the opposition often becomes. China and Iran serve as poignant examples of this dynamic. As the number of Christians in China has increased, the Communist Party's credibility has diminished significantly. This is perceived as an acute threat, even though the vast majority of Chinese Christians have no political ambitions. A similar situation is unfolding in Iran; as the Christian population grows, the Islamic regime's credibility continues to decline, causing it to become increasingly anxious.

However, it is important to recognize that resistance and persecution are not the primary challenges facing the Christian community today. In the Western world, the greater issue tends to be a sense of hopelessness. This is why it is crucial for us to learn how Paul prayed for his people.

#### A PRAYER FROM THE HEART

"I have great sorrow and unceasing anguish in my heart. For I could wish that I myself were accursed and cut off from Christ for the sake of my brothers, my kinsmen according to the flesh" (Romans 9:2-3, ESV). "Brothers, my heart's desire and prayer to God for them is that they may be saved" (Romans 10:1, ESV).

These words are written by someone who genuinely loves his people. God has instilled in us a deep need and tendency to love our communities and nations. One doesn't have to agree with everything that is happening; like Paul, followers of Jesus will often feel anguish over the prevailing circumstances. This feeling resembles the emotions many experience toward their parents—regardless of whether those parents are good or bad, there is a deep desire to love them and to be loved in return. When that need for love is unmet, it creates profound pain, while fulfilling that need brings deep satisfaction.

Paul's love for his people was certainly not reciprocated. From the moment he became a disciple of Jesus, he faced harassment and persecution, just as

Jesus had predicted. Yet, the remarkable surprise is that his love for his people shielded him from bitterness and fueled his desire to pray and share the gospel. This was true for Hans Nielsen Hauge in Norway, John Wesley in England, Jan Huss in Czechia, and countless other believers who faced persecution and many eventually had to emigrate from their homelands. Their prayers led many in their countries to embrace the gospel, and astonishingly, it also resulted in hundreds of thousands of others finding faith in different lands. God achieves far more than we can ever dream of when we begin to take prayer to Him seriously.

In the biblical perspective, the act of prayer holds a profound significance, especially as exemplified by the Apostle Paul. As we saw, despite his understanding that not all of Israel would turn to Jesus as their Messiah before His return, he still prayed fervently for many to come to faith. This reflects a deep conviction that God possesses absolute power to save whom He wills, yet Paul embraced the mystery that God also listens to our prayers.

Paul, the Apostle who opened Europe to the gospel, established numerous churches, healed the sick and even raised the dead, humbly acknowledged the enigmatic dynamic of divine sovereignty and human prayer. It is a mystery we cannot fully rationalize, but we can glean a vital lesson: without prayer, the transformative power of the gospel is less likely to reach and change lives.

Paul was assured that many individual Israelites would find salvation while they awaited the return of Christ. He himself was an Israelite and referenced God's word to Elijah about the seven thousand faithful during the prophet's time to affirm that God would still save many of His people. Therefore, Paul continued to pray for his nation, demonstrating a model for us today.

#### WHAT ABOUT US?

If it was so for the Apostle, how much more should we be motivated to pray for our own people! Our situation is distinct; we are not merely called to pray and share the gospel, but we also have this promise that a significant portion of the population will come to faith.

The early Christians did not pray for the preservation of their destructive cultures; rather, they faced persecution and often death due to these very cultures. In the Book of Daniel, we see the rise and fall of nations, as Daniel was informed about four empires that would dominate until the coming of the Messiah: Babylon, Medo-Persia, Greece and Rome. The precision of Daniel's prophecies led some scholars to argue that the book must have been written after the events. Daniel lived in tumultuous times, having been exiled under King Jehoiakim and serving under four non-Jewish rulers. Yet, amidst these political systems, he was told that there was a kingdom coming that began as a small stone, but that eventually grew into a great mountain that fills the earth—a reminder that God's kingdom surpasses all others.

Thus, we must recognize two essential points: first, we are called to pray for all authorities so that we may live in a way that allows the gospel to reach all people. Second, we should pray for our nations, that many will come to faith, to the point where one could say that successive groups of people are becoming disciples of Jesus—so numerous that it permeates the entire land, even without Christians having political power. While this presents a challenging balance, it is crucial to remain true to the message handed down by the Apostles.

#### THIS KIND OF PRAYER CHANGES THE WORLD, BIG TIME, TODAY.

Amazing news! We are witnessing this unfold in our own time. Not too long ago, a South American evangelist named Luis Bush encouraged believers to pray for the least evangelized countries of the world. These nations, home to the majority of the world's population, were often overlooked, with minimal missionary presence and investment in evangelization. This led to the concept of the "10/40 Window," identifying regions with significant Muslim, Hindu, Buddhist and communist populations, such as North Africa, Iran, India and China—areas often labeled as "hard" areas for evangelism.

Bush's strategy aimed to inform and challenge Christians and missions organizations to focus on the unreached peoples and nations. This initiative significantly altered the perspective of many in the Western world regarding global mission needs. Two specific initiatives played pivotal roles in this shift—



one being the daily prayer calendar from Youth With A Mission, engaging over forty thousand Christians in regular prayer for the world. The second was a book by Patrick Johnson called “Operation World,” first published in the early 1970s. This book, continuously updated, provided millions with insights into global populations, church growth, and socio-political contexts. While not all information was entirely accurate, it inspired countless individuals to pray for the world, demonstrating that God possesses all the necessary knowledge; His knowledge is correct of course, and while we don’t always know how to pray, the Holy Spirit seems to interpret it as perfect prayers to the Father (Romans 8:26-27). Ultimately, it is vital that those in fellowship with God listen to His heart and care for the world around them.

Prayer, as seen through the lens of biblical teachings, is not merely a ritual but a powerful instrument through which God works in the world. It is through our prayers that we can invite divine intervention, hope and transformation in the lives of individuals and communities alike.

It’s truly remarkable to witness the extraordinary movements of faith that are unfolding in regions where traditional methods of evangelism face significant barriers. The accounts highlight not only the resilience of faith in the face of persecution but also the profound ways in which God is working in the lives of individuals.

#### TAKE A LOOK AT IRAN

The growth of the church in Iran, particularly, is a testimony to the power of God’s presence, often manifesting in miraculous ways. The regime might hate both us and Israel, but we need to look beyond the irrational mullahs and ask what God is doing—things that secular media seems to miss. The stories of individuals encountering Jesus directly, such as the lady who watched the Jesus Film, illustrate how divine intervention transcends cultural and geographical boundaries. This lady was watching the Jesus Film when someone rang her doorbell. She opened the door and there was Jesus Himself. Yes, that is her story! She invited Him in and He explained the gospel to her, and she became a Christian right then and there. Jesus then left and she continued to watch the

movie until the end, when there was a phone number presented (to another country) for anyone with questions to call. She called the number and told the stunned counselor on the other side of the line that she had just met Jesus. Well, to most Westerners that means that a person prayed to receive His salvation. So the counselor asked which part of the film had spoken so powerfully to her. It took the Iranian lady quite some effort to convince the counselor that she had met Jesus as a person who came in through the door to talk to her.

Similarly, a good friend's experience of divine protection while smuggling Bibles into a closed country speaks volumes about the spiritual warfare that is often at play in these contexts. It's a vivid reminder that God often works in ways we cannot see, and sometimes through means that defy our understanding of the natural world.

#### SOMEWHERE IN CHINA

There's also this story from somewhere in China. A friend and I were ministering to a leader's conference deep in the countryside, away from prying eyes. We asked the leader of this particular underground church movement how he became a Christian. He told us that he, while not yet a believer, worked at a factory. By accident he fell into a big machine that crushed and killed him. (Yes, I know this sounds unusual to us. My mouth was wide open of surprise when he told this.) After a visit to the hospital where he was declared dead he was taken home for the family to say goodbye before his funeral. But he had a believing aunt who began to pray earnestly that God would raise this dead man, because he was not a Christian and would go to hell. She did not want that to happen. After her intense prayer my friend woke up, was healed on the spot and became a Christian. By the time we met he led a "smaller" house church movement of more than one million members.

These, and the great majority of the Christians along the 10/40 window, are ordinary Christians with no peculiar characteristics. It is just that they choose to follow Christ in places where the political powers try to hinder the gospel.

Such stories not only fuel the faith of believers but also challenge us to consider the depth of God's sovereignty and the lengths He goes to bring people

to Himself, and while doing that He invites all of us to participate in His great plan. We say yes to that generosity by joining in prayer for the nations.

While statistics may be scarce, the estimated 15% annual growth of congregations in regions like Iran and Afghanistan indicates a movement of the Holy Spirit that cannot be ignored. It's a reminder that God's work often flourishes in the most unlikely places. One more thing: did you know that today there probably are more believing Christians in China than there are in all of the Western world? Yes, you read that right!

### THE "CUSTOMS OFFICER"

What about North Africa? The friend I mentioned led a team of young people whose assignment was to bring Bibles into one of the most conservative and oppressive countries in North Africa. Leaving Islam is a capital crime in the country. They prayed for God's guidance and found a ferry that could take them to the one port where people could enter the country without having the luggage checked. But to their surprise and disappointment they discovered that the government had just implemented luggage control there too. The only thing to do in such a situation, when you can't just go back but have to go through luggage control with the backpacks full of Bibles, is to pray. And pray they did—fervently—and then joined the line to the customs control. They divided up so that they would not be seen as a group and my friend, the leader, waited among the first in line. Then a high ranking customs officer turned up—he at least looked like a high ranking officer from all the signs on his uniform. He came and just took over. He pointed to everyone in the team (remember they did not stand together) and told them to follow him. He led them right by the surprised customs staff out through the door and told them to get away from the area. This is just one of many similar experiences that believers have had in that country. Who it was, a man that knew exactly who was a member of the team, is anyone's guess. He surely did not represent the regime of the country.

The point of all this is that God works sovereignly in the 10/40 region. He uses Western supported radio and TV media, He reveals Himself through

dreams and visions, and answers prayer. He works in ways so that the church multiplies faster than anyone has ever experienced before. In other words, He does exactly what He said He would do—He builds His Church.

#### ALL THIS HAD TWO BEGINNINGS

The first is God's decision to bring the gospel of Jesus Christ to all nations, including those in the 10/40 window. This also means that no human government or human activity will be able to hinder Him. He is God, Yahweh, who always does what He has decreed will happen.

The second beginning is a mysterious one. It was when thousands of unknown believers in other countries began to pray for God to move in the 10/40 window. They prayed faithfully day by day, individually, in small groups, in churches and sometimes in prayer conferences, and God heard. It has even reciprocated. I once met a pastor from an Iranian church in Sweden who told me that some of the members of his church had received Christ after a relative of theirs had called them from Iran and told them how they had received Christ and challenged them to do the same.

It is essential for us to continue to pray for and to support these believers who are courageously living out their faith amidst adversity. Their stories serve as both encouragement and a call to action for the global church.

#### MEGACITIES

One more thing: most of the megacities in the world are multicultural, and many of our new neighbors come from areas that are closed, or resistant to the gospel. While the world around interprets this as economically caused, we know that the overarching purpose of history is to bring people from all nations to faith in Christ. And responses in these groups will certainly be a blessing to the Western nations as well.

One of our daughters works in an inner city church in London. They were given two almost unused churches close to the Bank of England complex. They have prayed and worked hard, and God has blessed that. Today they have multiple Sunday services, a number of ministries and happen to have become

one of the most dynamic evangelical churches in London. Europe and Britain surely need that.

Ultimately, these accounts remind us that God is not limited by human constraints. His love knows no bounds, and His desire to reach every heart is unwavering. As believers, we can take heart in the knowledge that even in places of darkness, the light of Christ is breaking through, transforming lives and building His church in profound and miraculous ways.

*Jesus did not teach His disciples how to preach but how to pray.*

(D. L. Moody)

### ***Discuss***

*How would the Apostle Paul pray for the USA if he were here today?*

*What would you expect to see if a similar revival that is in China or Iran happened in the USA?*

*What about Houston? Is there a more strategic place in the country to pray for the world? (That was a leading question, I know.)*



## Chapter 5

# The God to Whom We Pray

### GOD IS LOVE

Let's for a moment consider Whom we are praying to. God is love, and is both willing and able to fulfill our prayers. Therefore, let us take a moment to reflect on how God has chosen to manifest Himself throughout real history.

Both Jesus and the Apostles affirm that God is love. John 3:16, arguably the most well-known verse in the Bible, encapsulates this truth and provides a revolutionary understanding of the nature of divine love: "For God so loved the world that He gave His only Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life" (ESV).

In contrast, pagan "gods" offer no such love for humanity. The Indian deity Brahma shows indifference, while Buddha, often regarded as a god, similarly lacks concern for the individual. Although Allah in Islam may exhibit mercy, the uncertainty of one's eternal fate remains—Paradise or Hell is ultimately determined by Allah's decision, leaving followers to appease Him. Meanwhile, the demons of folk religions require constant appeasement to ensure well-being. However, the one true God, Yahweh, loves you unconditionally and has extended that love even before you were aware of Him.

### TRUE LOVE

In English, we rely on a single word to convey love, whereas the Greek language of the New Testament employs three distinct terms, each appropriate for different contexts. (While there are technically four words, "Eros"—from which we derive the term 'erotic,' signifying sexual love—is notably absent. This omission does not stem from a belief that sexual love within marriage is wrong, but rather from a focus on other matters that necessitate precise language.)

When the Apostles speak of God's love, they utilize the ancient Greek term *agape*. In classical Greek, this term described familial or spousal affection with-

out connoting romantic or erotic love, as there was another word designated for that purpose. In the biblical context, however, *agape* signifies the selfless, unconditional love that God demonstrates by coming to us in Jesus Christ to save us from our sins and to guide us in living with a similar attitude towards others. *Agape* encourages us to prioritize the well-being of others and to seek their highest good.

The Apostle Paul beautifully articulates this sentiment: “No, in all these things (sufferings and tribulations) we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us. For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord” (Romans 8:37-39, ESV).

That understanding of divine love inspires us to reflect that same selflessness in our interactions with others, embodying the essence of *agape* in our lives.

#### THE UNCHANGING LOVE OF GOD: A REFLECTION ON FAITH AND EXISTENCE

The love of God signifies, among many other profound truths, an unwavering commitment to rescue humanity from the dire consequences of sin. It serves to protect those who place their trust in Him through every kind of tribulation. The foundation for this divine action lies in our union with Jesus Christ, who is God incarnate and who sacrificed Himself in our stead for our sins.

This understanding of God’s love is anything but sentimental; it is not a fleeting emotion that ebbs and flows based on our self-perception. Rather, it is steadfast and unchanging. The Apostle Paul writes, “...even as He chose us before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before Him. In love, He predestined us for adoption to Himself as sons through Jesus Christ” (Ephesians 1:4-5, ESV). Such a notion is beyond our comprehension, there is no doubt about that. Personally, I find myself grappling with the fundamental principles of quantum physics or the geometry of space. God, our Father, made all that! If I struggle with these concepts, how can I fully grasp how God could love me even before He created the world? The only response I



can offer is to accept this truth by faith. Yet, as we reflect upon this revelation, the implications are staggering.

For me, this assurance signifies that I possess eternal significance. If God loved me before the inception of creation, then I am not merely a biological accident. Regardless of the circumstances surrounding our conception, if we are united to Jesus by faith, we can be assured that we are eternally cherished by God. As illustrated in Romans 8 and the lives of Apostles like Peter and Paul, being loved by God does not exempt us from encountering difficulties, disappointments or suffering. Anyone who portrays the Christian life as a carefree existence is misleading. Such a claim is false both in the life of the individual making it (a thorough examination will reveal the truth) and in the experiences of others.

Jesus articulated a profound truth that challenges our understanding: "... some of you they will put to death... But not a hair of your head will perish" (Luke 21:16-18, ESV). This statement encapsulates the essence of God's promise: while we may face trials, He will lead, bless, support and protect us through life's adversities. We inhabit a world besieged by the forces of evil, and the Apostle Peter—who ultimately faced martyrdom at the hands of Emperor Nero—reminds us that we are merely guests and pilgrims in this realm. We live with and for Jesus Christ as we await His return to establish His reign. It is no wonder that the world may harbor animosity towards us and our beliefs. And it is no wonder that God listens to our prayers and invites us to join in His grand plan for the world.

### GOD IS OUR FATHER WHO LOVES US

The Bible reminds us that God is a Father to us. In the Lord's Prayer, we pray, "Our Father who is in heaven..." In Romans 8:15-17, we learn that the Holy Spirit within us prays, "Abba! Father!" As a Father, He has compassion for us (Psalm 103:13), and in Hebrews 12, we are reminded:

*It is for discipline that you have to endure. God is treating you as sons. For what son is there whom his father does not discipline? If you are left without discipline, in which all have participated, then you are illegitimate chil-*

*dren and not sons. Besides this, we have had earthly fathers who disciplined us and we respected them. Shall we not much more be subject to the Father of spirits and live? For they disciplined us for a short time as it seemed best to them, but He disciplines us for our good, that we may share His holiness. For the moment all discipline seems painful rather than pleasant, but later it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it. (Hebrews 12:7-11, ESV)*

God acts as a real Father who assures us that we are His children and that we are destined for the great eternal state He is preparing for us.

No wonder, then, why prayer to God is so important. Believers in Jesus are in this world to prepare it for His coming by living the kind of lives that Jesus taught, utilizing the gifts of the Holy Spirit that are given to all followers of Jesus, and consistently praying for His kingdom to come. The Apostle Peter describes Christians as kings and priests who are here to serve God and to be prepared for eternity. This is the privilege and calling we have.

When we take this fundamental biblical teaching into account, it is easier to understand why God wants to answer our prayers and why He is eager to prompt us to pray in a way that affects not only this world but all of eternity. The key is that He does not just want to answer our prayers, but also the prayers of those who will come to believe in Him because of us. They will be kings and priests, ruling with Jesus Christ forever. Isn't that a profound way to influence eternity, and above all, to express our love for our Father.

#### GOD IS ALMIGHTY AND ALL-WISE

God is not just willing to answer our prayers; He is also able to do so. The very concept of Almighty (or Omnipotent, if you prefer a more elaborate term) is easy to articulate but nearly impossible to fully grasp. The early apostolic church certainly held this belief. In Acts 4, we learn how they prayed after being interrogated by the highest leaders of Israel: "Sovereign Lord, who made the heaven and the earth and the sea and everything in them... (Jesus) whom you anointed... to do whatever your hand and your plan had predestined to take place." While they firmly believed this, they simultaneously acknowledged

that individuals like the religious and political elite were responsible for their actions. As usual this theological paradox is something that far exceeds our comprehension.

However, this is just the beginning of describing the all-encompassing power of God. There are billions upon billions of galaxies, with billions upon billions of stars (or suns) in each of these galaxies, all created by God through Jesus. He knows every particle in the entire universe and has created all species on Earth. Think about that! He is not only almighty but also all-wise. He knows precisely what He is doing, and His purposes will endure through time and across the universe. It is unfathomable to imagine that anything could escape God's notice.

This understanding is not merely good theology; it is profoundly reassuring. We begin to comprehend what Jesus meant when He stated that not even a sparrow falls to the ground without our Heavenly Father knowing it. He further emphasizes, "You are worth more than many sparrows" (Matthew 10:31, NIV). In one sense, it does not require much faith to accept that it must be this way; it is the only rational perspective on the world.

Yet, there is a significant caveat: God, the majestic and only wise God, loves us and is determined to fulfill His promises to all who believe in Him—those who dare to trust Him. A deep question we often wrestle with is: why doesn't God simply remove all the problems from our lives? There are two levels to consider in answering that question. First, we must admit that we simply don't know. If God is both all-powerful and all-wise, He sees and knows things that are beyond our understanding. However, as we read in Hebrews 12, He acts as a good, loving Father and treats us as His children. Furthermore, He will judge evil and remove it from the world on the day that He has determined. Christians live with that truth and trust that He is going to do what He promised. The proof that He will do that is the Resurrection of Jesus and that He has sent the Holy Spirit to live within us.

There is often a temptation to rebel against the idea that God disciplines us. Yet, the mere thought of rebelling and turning away from Him brings forth a sobering question: is there truly a better alternative elsewhere? What is the

better choice—to live a life under the disdain of a dysfunctional father (Satan), or under the care of a good, all-wise God, who loves us and prepares us to live with Him and to rule with Christ throughout eternity?

## THE UNCHANGING FAITHFULNESS OF GOD: A REFLECTION ON PRAYER AND HISTORY

In regards to prayer, God, our Father, encourages us to bring forth our desires. We are assured that we can make all our wants known to Him. Time and again, we experience the awe of His responsiveness, prompting us to praise Him. Nevertheless, He also instructs us on how to pray for matters of global significance—promising unequivocally that He will answer. In His boundless grace, He often waits for us to voice our prayers before taking action.

### GOD’S UNWAVERING FAITHFULNESS

God is entirely faithful. He does not change His mind; not that He cannot, but it would be nonsensical and would create profound uncertainty among those He has chosen as His own. Since He knows everything, from the beginning to the end, He does not need to guess or make decisions that need to be revised. Numbers 23:19-20 records the declaration of the false prophet Balaam in his failed attempt to curse the people of Israel:

*God is not human, that He should lie,  
not a human being, that He should change His mind.  
Does He speak and then not act?  
Does He promise and not fulfill?  
... He has blessed, and I cannot change it. (NIV)*

The context of this verse is telling. King Balak had hired the pagan prophet Balaam to curse God’s people, Israel. However, Balaam finds himself unable to do so, as God intervenes and compels him to proclaim what He desires. While Balak’s and Balaam’s story may be tragic, it brings great comfort to Israel and all who follow God. It echoes Paul’s words in Romans 8: “What can separate us from the love of God?” The answer is clear. It is as if Balaam were saying, “Wake up to reality, you guys. God makes it impossible for me to curse Isra-

el.” This theme remains true throughout history; those who attempt to curse, persecute, or even kill believers only find that God’s blessings multiply in their lives.

Consider the case of Jan Hus (1369-1415), a Czech priest and early reformer who followed the teachings of the English reformer John Wycliffe. The Roman Catholic Church sought to silence him, ultimately sentencing him to death by burning. Before his execution, he prophesied (according to Martin Luther), “Today you will roast a meager goose, but in a hundred years a swan will sing all over Europe, and you will not be able to stop him.” The word “Hus” means “goose” in Czech, while the swan symbolized the Luther family. Several centuries later, some of Hus’s followers settled in Herrnhut, Germany, where a significant revival ignited, leading to the birth of the modern evangelical mission movement and influencing the Methodist revival spearheaded by John Wesley. Few individuals have impacted the evangelical church as profoundly as Jan Hus, despite his story being largely forgotten today. Truly, God is absolutely faithful.

When God made His covenant with Abraham, He promised him a son—a promise that took approximately twenty years to fulfill—followed by a nation that emerged after Abraham’s death, the Exodus from Egypt about 400 years later, and a promised land. He also declared that Abraham’s descendants would bless all nations, a promise that would take another 2,000 years to materialize. Throughout history, numerous attempts have been made to obliterate Israel, from an Egyptian Pharaoh to Haman, the Agagite/Ammonite serving under the Persian king Ahasuerus (modern-day Iran), and King Nebuchadnezzar, along with various neighboring adversaries. However, God made a covenant with Abraham two millennia before Christ, and He is not “a human being that He would change His mind.”

#### THE WEIGHT OF PRAYER AND THE MAJESTY OF GOD

As Jesus chose to go to the cross, He carried two seemingly conflicting thoughts with Him. The first was the pain and agony of bearing the sins of the world in His body. In Gethsemane, He cried out to the Father in such deep anxiety

that He sweat blood. Yet, He also possessed absolute assurance that the Father would raise Him again on the third day. Jesus surrendered Himself entirely to the mercy of the Father, confident that He would fulfill His promises.

All globally significant prayers in the Bible and throughout history have emerged from this profound perspective: suffering and faith. The Apostle John, in the book of Revelation (chapter 5), reminds us that the prayers of God's saints—meaning us—remain active in the presence of God. The scene depicts twenty-four elders, likely leaders from both the Old and New Covenants, holding bowls filled with incense, which are described as the prayers of the saints. God perhaps chose to reveal this to remind us of the importance of our prayers.

This is especially significant for us today. When we pray about our personal needs, God hears, cares and will respond in ways that often reflect the nature of earthly fathers. He certainly listens and provides, but His answers can sometimes be surprising. When the Apostle Paul asked God to remove the “thorn in his flesh,” the response was essentially a “no” (the details remain unknown). This answer was not arbitrary; it demonstrated that the miraculous works accomplished through Paul were not due to his own strength but rather the power that operated in spite of his weaknesses. We must realize that God can bless and use us as instruments of blessing, despite our limitations. Thus, the “no” served a purpose—a divine blessing.

The Apostle Peter, who understood the weight of his own impending martyrdom, wrote, “Cast all your anxiety on Him (God) because He cares for you” (1 Peter 5:7, NIV). Nothing that occurs in a believer's life is arbitrary. Back to the Apostle Paul, who fervently prayed for the salvation of his beloved people, Israel, he expressed this sentiment powerfully in Romans 9:1-5:

*I am speaking the truth in Christ—I am not lying; my conscience bears me witness in the Holy Spirit—that I have great sorrow and unceasing anguish in my heart. For I could wish that I myself were accursed and cut off from Christ for the sake of my brothers, my kinsmen according to the flesh. They are Israelites, and to them belong the adoption, the glory, the covenants, the giving of the law, the worship, and the promises. To them*

*belong the patriarchs, and from their race, according to the flesh, is the Christ, who is God over all, blessed forever. Amen. (ESV)*

And a little later, he added: “Brothers, my heart’s desire and prayer to God for the Israelites is that they may be saved” (Romans 10:1, NIV). This was a deeply felt prayer, and Paul knew that God would answer it. However, the answer was, “Yes, but later, when everything is ready.” At that moment, Paul had the extraordinary privilege of opening the gospel to the entire world. He understood that once the rest of the world had been reached and the “fullness of the Gentiles” had believed, then all Israel would be saved. Once again, the “not yet” signified that something greater was destined to happen before the specific prayer was answered. Nevertheless, it would undoubtedly be answered, affirming the efficacy of Paul’s prayers.

### GOD IS HOLY

One of the most majestic passages in the Bible is the account of the prophet Isaiah’s vision of God recorded in Isaiah 6:

*In the year that King Uzziah died I saw the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up; and the train of His robe filled the temple. Above Him stood the seraphim. Each had six wings: with two he covered his face, and with two he covered his feet, and with two he flew. And one called to another and said: “Holy, holy, holy is the LORD of hosts; the whole earth is full of His glory!” And the foundations of the thresholds shook at the voice of him who called, and the house was filled with smoke. And I said: “Woe is me! For I am lost; for I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips; for my eyes have seen the King, the LORD of hosts!” Then one of the seraphim flew to me, having in his hand a burning coal that he had taken with tongs from the altar. And he touched my mouth and said: “Behold, this has touched your lips; your guilt is taken away, and your sin atoned for.” (Isaiah 6:1-7, ESV)*

The Hebrew word for holy, “*kodesh*,” is one of the most intriguing words there is in the Bible. There have been many attempts to explain what it means,

but no one has ever fully been able to convey the meaning. The reason is that it most probably means that God is uniquely and incomprehensibly perfect, mighty and preeminent. Therefore He is worthy of worship, service and obedience. He is the creator of the entire cosmos and upholds every particle and every life in the cosmos. When a human encounters Him as He is it causes an overwhelming awareness of his sin, limitations and woe.

Now that is quite a theological definition, but it is still absolutely impossible to explain what the holiness of God really is. We need to read texts like Isaiah 6, Ezekiel 1:28 and Revelation 1:17 to get a sense of what it means. It is not a theoretical concept. Anyone who has experienced some small aspect of God's presence will never be the same. It is overwhelming, fear evoking and gives an immediate awareness of sin and the need for atonement. I like what some Orthodox churches think: they have two kinds of theologians. The first kind are the ones who study and teach theology. The second type of theologians are the real theologians. They are persons who have encountered God personally and who teach about God from experience.

Thankfully, God has revealed more about Himself, like His eternal love, all-power, all-wisdom and absolute faithfulness. And He has shown us what is in His heart through Jesus Christ, who said: "He who has seen me has seen the Father" (John 14:9, NKJV). Phew! Without Jesus we never stood a chance to stay alive. But we also begin to understand Jesus' warning to those who reject Him. Saying no to the One who is total holiness and who loves us with a perfect, eternal love is a serious matter. Putting one's faith in God is not like choosing from a smorgasbord of competing ideas that makes us persons of faith. It rather means to say yes to the Holy God of the entire cosmos who has come to us in the person of Jesus Christ—God the Son.

In trying to understand the mystery of God's holiness and the need for Jesus Christ the Son of God to be our mediator, we need to understand another great mystery. God is not far away. He actually lives within normal, regular, everyday type of persons who believe in and trust Him. The Bible tells us that we, the believers, are temples of God. The Apostle Paul treats this as a self-evident truth that all Christians should know.



“Do you not know that you are God’s temple and that God’s Spirit dwells in you?” (1 Corinthians 3:16, ESV). This is one of the most revolutionary ideas in the history of mankind. And it must necessarily have consequences for how we live, think and for our self-understanding. The New Testament calls believers “saints,” which means “holy ones” or “sacred ones.” It is introduced in the context of living and serving God responsibly in view of what we are. That is also why believers are called “strangers and exiles on the earth” (Hebrews 11:13, ESV), while the Apostle Peter calls us “sojourners and exiles” who are called to “abstain from the passions of the flesh, which wage war against your soul” (1 Peter 2:11, ESV).

Many of us have probably never had one of those overwhelming experiences of the presence of God, but the reason God has revealed the Isaiah-like experiences is for us to read about them, meditate on them and ask the Holy Spirit to open our hearts and minds to live with this reality and its consequences. The Holy Spirit lives in every believer and He will make us sense what it means to be the Temple of God in ways that are appropriate for each one of us.

An important truth: a sense of the awesome majesty of God is the basis for Christian worship and service. Worship includes a confession of our belief in the Divine attributes, but it is also, and may primarily be, a humble attempt to worship God in words, song and action that reflect what God has shown about Himself. We see something of that in Revelation 4-5 where the description of what John experiences leads all kinds of beings that defy description, including redeemed believers around God’s throne, to fall down, raise their voices and create a symphony of worship.

Being in that kind of state makes it easy to pray for the things that God Himself has called on us to pray for. We will pray with passion, conviction and expectation, and God will be glorified.

#### THE BIBLE, THE WORD OF GOD, IS TRUSTWORTHY

The reason we know who God is, how He sees us, and why and how we can pray to Him is that He has given us the Bible. Jesus calls the Bible the word of God, and as the word of God it trumps any opinion of men. In the Gospel

of Mark we read how Jesus confronted the traditionalist Pharisees and Scribes by saying: "...thus making void the word of God by your tradition that you have handed down." He also said: "For truly, I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not an iota, not a dot, will pass from the Law until all is accomplished" (Matthew 5:18, ESV). Note, that this is Jesus' view of the Bible.

We live in the Western, very secular part of the world and since childhood we have been immersed in a secular worldview, whether we are aware of it or not. For many it has just sneaked up on us, and one of the consequences is that we often have a double-minded view of the Bible. On one hand we surely want the Bible to be fully trustworthy, because we know that it is the only thing that communicates real hope. But on the other hand we want to be seen as people who are contemporary and who hold a "sound" distance to anything that sounds too foreign. Then, in on the scene comes Jesus, God the Son, and gives us no way out from taking a stand. You either follow the traditions of your elders, that is the popular accepted leaders of the day, or you follow the word of God. Now, there is a significant quirk to this: there is a very, very big difference between the contemporary influencers and Jesus.

The influencers come and go and will represent different opinions throughout history. Jesus rose from the dead, which He said would constitute the final proof that He is telling the truth. The thing is, He did not "only" rise from the dead, but He sent the Holy Spirit to continue His work through the Apostles and the believers.

The idea that the extraordinary records of the Bible are impossible, is built on a centuries-old worldview that said that there can be no miracles and prophecies in the world. Our answer then is this: welcome into the worldview of the 21st century where our brains spin around of astonishment over the astounding insights into the mysteries of the created Universe. If the modern science of cosmology and quantum mechanics have taught us some basics, it is that we don't understand much of how the Universe works. The early "liberals" who introduced a "historical critical" view of the Bible had not even heard of quantum mechanics. As usual, a good deal of humility is fitting for all of us who don't know everything. The greatest physicist of our time, Roger Penrose,

has said that quantum physics as we understand it cannot be fully correct. We lack some crucial facts to be able to be fully convinced. My take on this is one cannot be too cocky and still be an aware believer in Jesus!

There will of course be many, many questions about words and events described in the Bible, and no one has all insights that are necessary to explain everything. But as Christians we must build our worldview on the authority of Jesus Christ, whom we confess is the one through whom everything was created and who is the upholder of everything. “For by Him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible...And He is before all things, and in Him all things hold together” (Colossians 1:16-17, ESV).

What we do know about the world is that it is too grand, beautiful and marvelous for us to grasp it fully. Why argue with its Creator then? Astounding still is the fact that He who made all there is, even the things we don't understand, calls us His brothers and sisters.

### HOW GOD SPEAKS AND ACTS

The Bible is a different kind of book than all the competing religious foundational books. According to Jesus and the Apostles, the Bible is the Word of God, given to us through the prophets and Apostles and which tells us what God has said and what He has done, and will be doing. So we are not just reading abstract ideas but something very concrete. God spoke to Adam and Eve, to Noah, Abraham, Moses and to all the prophets and He did and is doing exactly what He said He would do. Jesus, the Son of God, came, preached, did miracles, died, was resurrected and ascended to heaven, as He said He would do and we have very strong reasons to believe that He will return in the same way, because He has shown us who He is.

### WE NEED THE BIBLE

So, if this is true, it is of utmost importance that we build our worldview, our teaching and our actions on the revelation from God. Without it we have nothing that tells us why we live and die, what is right or wrong, and the most important thing of all- how we can find God and live in fellowship with Him.

Without a trustworthy message from God every idea is up for grabs, and at the end of the day we discover that everything is as meaningless as the author of Ecclesiastes warns against.

#### BUT WE DO HAVE THE BIBLE

*And we have the prophetic word more fully confirmed, to which you will do well to pay attention as to a lamp shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts, knowing this first of all, that no prophecy of Scripture comes from someone's own interpretation. For no prophecy was ever produced by the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit. (2 Peter 1:19-21, ESV)*

Look at two of the most powerful examples of persons who took the promises in the Bible very seriously: Charles Spurgeon, London, UK and George Müller, Bristol, UK.

Here is an excerpt from a sermon by Spurgeon from June 16, 1854, long before the Zionist movement had begun in 1897:

*Israel is now blotted out from the map of nations; her sons are scattered far and wide; her daughters mourn beside all the rivers of the earth. Her sacred song is hushed; no king reigns in Jerusalem; she bringeth forth no governors among her tribes. But she is to be restored; she is to be restored "as from the dead." When her own sons have given up all hope of her, then is God to appear for her. She is to be re-organised; her scattered bones are to be brought together. There will be a native government again; there will again be the form of a body politic; a state shall be incorporated, and a king shall reign. Israel has now become alienated from her own land. Her sons, though they can never forget the sacred dust of Palestine, yet die at a hopeless distance from her consecrated shores. But it shall not be so for ever, for her sons shall again rejoice in her: her land shall be called Beulah, for as a young man marrieth a virgin so shall her sons marry her. "I will place you in your own land," is God's promise to them.*

Is this relevant? Watch the evening news.

And from the man of believing prayer, George Müller, who built orphanages for thousands of children through asking God in prayer for the resources:

*I saw more clearly than ever, that the first great and primary business to which I ought to attend every day was, to have my soul happy in the Lord. The first thing to be concerned about was not, how much I might serve the Lord, how I might glorify the Lord; but how I might get my soul into a happy state, and how my inner man may be nourished...I saw that the most important thing I had to do was to give myself to the reading of the Word of God and to meditation on it.*

He continues: “Intimate knowledge of God is possible if we habitually search His Holy Scriptures and translate what we find into obedience.”

They were men who changed the world in their generation! They read the Bible, applied it in their own lives and prayed accordingly.

By praying to the God that reveals Himself in the Bible and in the way He teaches us to pray we are changed. We see how the Creator of the entire universe welcomes us, listens to us and raises us up to act as His Church, His representatives on earth.

### ***Discuss***

*What can we do to keep the biblical vision of God alive in our lives?*

*What can we do to encourage each other to pray for our needs and wait for God's answer?*

*What can we do to encourage each other to pray for the global prayer items that God has absolutely promised to answer?*



