



TRANSFORMING
PRAYER

*Everything Changes
When You Seek God's Face*

by DANIEL HENDERSON



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Transforming Prayer

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to D. JUSTIN HENDERSON

. . . my firstborn son, treasured friend,
and colleague in ministry.
Thank you for your help with this project.

to PASTOR PETER LORD

. . . whose teaching first inspired my heart
with a vision to seek God's face.



About the Author

As a pastor for more than twenty-five years, Daniel Henderson brought prayer-based revitalization to several large churches and is now dedicating most of his energy to help congregations across the United States experience renewal and turnaround. He is president of Strategic Renewal, which exists to ignite the heart of the church through personal renewal, congregational revival, and leadership restoration for Christ's glory. In that role he travels extensively, leading churches in renewal experiences, equipping church leaders, and speaking at conferences. He models his renewal focus as Pastor of Prayer and Renewal at Thomas Road Baptist Church and teaches at Liberty University in the areas of prayer, Christian living, and church leadership.

The author of several books, Daniel was on the editorial review team for *Pray!* magazine and serves on the board of the National Association of Evangelicals. He and his wife, Rosemary, have three grown children and live near Lynchburg, Virginia.

For more information, visit www.strategicrenewal.com.

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Foreword

At this critical point in church history, there is little time for Christians to be distracted over secondary issues. The challenges of a growing secularization that disparages the gospel of Christ are all too evident to every believer. The Christian church must be stirred to arise and live out the calling Jesus gave us as salt and light.

But how can we see a radical change in the spiritual landscape without a radical return to prayer and the Word by the body of Christ? Human resources and church growth novelties that lead us away from these essentials always prove ineffective at best—and spiritually destructive at worst. Only something sent from heaven itself will overcome the darkness around us so Christ can be seen as the world’s only hope.

Every believer knows that the Bible is clear about prayer. God’s house will be called a house of prayer. Preaching is essential. Praise, worship, and fellowship are important component parts of the work of the Lord, but His house will be called a house of prayer. Why? Because when believers come to the throne of grace and start seeking God with all their hearts, God has promised—and He can never fail this promise. He has said, “When you call I will answer. Ask and you will receive, seek and you will find, knock and the door will be opened to you.” When this happens we are going to see God come and give a

renewal of the spirit of prayer, the burden of prayer, and strategies so that all our churches can be houses of prayer.

Then something excellent happens in our lives, our families, and our congregations. Suddenly people are drawn into our churches and needing the Lord. There is a new sense of God in the services, which make them more edifying. And this is always going to happen when people pray.

Every time I set my face to seeking God in a fresh way, God begins to change my heart, my mind, my preaching, and my leadership skills. When any believer commits his or her heart to seeking the Lord, everything is going to change.

It is to be remembered that all revivals in the history of the Christian church that have shaken towns, cities, and countries have all begun with people saying, “We can’t take the status quo anymore. We must seek God for something fresh. Let’s pray.” And then He answers.

Daniel Henderson has been commissioned by God to inspire pastors and churches across the nation to reconsider and commit to Acts 6:4: “But we will devote ourselves to prayer and to the ministry of the word” (ESV). God is wonderfully using Daniel to bring believers together around the country, across denominational lines, to pray for one another and to encourage prayer in our individual churches. This is one of those vital things happening in the body of Christ that is going to bring more of God’s blessing in our lives and that will mean the name of Christ will be glorified more than ever before.

As you read *Transforming Prayer*, open your heart to God’s voice. You will be both encouraged and inspired to believe again that with God, nothing is impossible.

Jim Cymbala
The Brooklyn Tabernacle Church



A NOTE

For more inspiration related to this book, please go to *www.transformingprayerbook.com* where you will find video introductions to each chapter and many additional resources.

For additional information on Daniel Henderson's renewal ministry, visit *www.strategicrenewal.com*.



HIMSELF

Once it was the blessing,
Now it is the Lord;
Once it was the feeling,
Now it is His Word.
Once His gifts I wanted,
Now the Giver own;
Once I sought for healing,
Now Himself alone.

Once 'twas painful trying,
Now 'tis perfect trust;
Once a half salvation,
Now the uttermost.
Once 'twas ceaseless holding,
Now He holds me fast;
Once 'twas constant drifting,
Now my anchor's cast.

Once 'twas busy planning,
Now 'tis trustful prayer;
Once 'twas anxious caring,
Now He has the care.
Once 'twas what I wanted
Now what Jesus says;
Once 'twas constant asking,
Now 'tis ceaseless praise.

Once it was my working,
His it hence shall be;
Once I tried to use Him,
Now He uses me.
Once the power I wanted,
Now the Mighty One;
Once for self I labored,
Now for Him alone.

Once I hoped in Jesus,
Now I know He's mine;
Once my lamps were dying,
Now they brightly shine.
Once for death I waited,
Now His coming hail;
And my hopes are anchored
Safe within the veil.¹

—A. B. SIMPSON

Introduction: The Road to Real Change

*Man is at his greatest and highest
when upon his knees
he comes face to face with God.*

D. MARTYN LLOYD-JONES

*So the Lord spoke to Moses face to face,
as a man speaks to his friend.*

EXODUS 33:11

Praying Christians never forget the first time they sought the face of God and experienced the power of a transforming spiritual intimacy. For me, it occurred during my college years. It was a Friday night. I was alone in my dorm room, which was highly unusual as I was typically busy in school activities and dating.

Looking back, I realize the Holy Spirit had been preparing my heart for this moment, as is the case for most believers. The account of Moses speaking to God in deep intimacy “face to face, as a man speaks to his friend” (Exodus 33:11) had recently captivated my heart. One of my professors had been speaking of those times in his life when the presence of God felt so real that if he had opened his eyes it seemed he would be staring God in the face. Honestly, I had never experienced that kind of moment.

I began to thumb through a journal I had maintained over the past year, reading various entries that spoke of my struggles

and victories. I reflected on Bible verses that had moved my heart and answers to prayer that were apparent along the way. I was meditating specifically on Philippians 3:7–10 and the message of counting all things as loss in order to know Christ.

That night, as I sat in my simple dorm room, these realities converged as the Holy Spirit stirred my heart with a strange and new spiritual hunger. Without calculation, I found myself flat on my face, pouring out my passionate gratitude and worship to the Savior who knew me, walked with me, guided me, taught me, and loved me with a tender and attentive heart. In those moments, the presence, provision, and power of God in my life became real. Truly, I felt that if I had opened my eyes, I would have been looking at the Holy One . . . face to face.

When I finally got up from the tearstained carpet, over an hour had passed. I had experienced something of His presence and grace that changed me. My heart treasured Christ as never before. A “new normal” had occurred and my soul was re-calibrated to move beyond perfunctory prayer lists and to set my heart to seek His face.

Since this simple encounter I have known the grace of similar intimacy, not only in my personal prayer life but in corporate settings as well. I wish I could say it is a daily experience. One thing I know—once you have tasted this kind of prayer experience, nothing else satisfies and everything else is seen in a new light. But like a caterpillar trying to break out of its cocoon to discover the flight of a butterfly, our goal to make this kind of experience the normal reality of our prayer life does not come easily.

My Confessional

Even though I am writing this book on prayer, I need to confess up front that I am not a natural “prayer guy.” I have met plenty of those folks. They come across very spiritual, contemplative, and apparently quite deep. It seems they have emerged from their denominational monastery and should be wearing a robe, swinging an incense censer, and glowing in the dark

with the glory of the Almighty. My response to them is a mix of admiration, intimidation, and mystery.

That is not me. You see, prayer is essentially depending on God—and I am a fiercely independent personality. My friends tell me I could be stranded on a deserted island for a week and never realize I am the only one there. Completely absorbed in collecting coconuts, building huts, fishing during the day, playing with fire at night—I would suddenly realize, days later, that no one else was around.

I say often that prayerlessness is our declaration of independence from God. I get that. It is very easy for me to forge ahead on Christian autopilot, relying on the reserves of previous learning and last week's worship, and not abiding in Christ in a constant, moment-by-moment reliance. Beyond this, it is easy to ignore the opportunities for community prayer, thinking I do not need it, or viewing it as a gathering of folks who have nothing else more productive to do with their time.

Longing for More

There must be a lot of people out there sharing my struggle. One of the greater surprises from my almost thirty years of pastoral ministry is how secretly discouraged most Christians are with prayer. We look around church and assume everyone else must be praying more and better than we are. With rare exception, they are not. We hear inspiring sermons from the pulpit on the magnificence of prayer and assume our pastors and church staff members must enjoy extraordinary experiences of prayer together. With rare exception, they do not. We see extensive lists of prayer needs pouring in from broken and desperate people, assuming that someone will engage the power of God in intercessory support for those needs. Too often, they will not.

According to George Barna, the majority of born-again Christians admit that their bi-weekly attendance at worship services is generally the only time they worship God. Eight out of ten believers do not feel they have entered into the presence of God or experienced a connection with Him during the worship service. Half of all believers say they do not

feel they have entered the presence of God or experienced a genuine connection with Him in the past year.¹ Whether we are in a church service or going about our weekly routines, it seems that our longings for transformation in Christ's presence remain unsatisfied.

In spite of our common environment of spiritual superficiality, religious routines, and massive distraction, I am convinced that true believers carry an

*Deep within we know
there is another
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living beyond a cultural
faith that simply checks
in with God at church
or in times of crisis.*

unquenchable appetite for legitimate life change. We hunger for worship encounters with His holy presence that mark us and make us more like Jesus. Deep within we know there is another dimension of Christian living beyond a cultural faith that simply checks in with God at church or in times of crisis. We are tired of feeling bored, inept, confused, frustrated, or weary, in any sense, with the idea of prayer. We envision

the power of the living Christ and His gospel inflaming our hearts to serve as agents of real transformation in this society. We yearn for real change but know that somehow it must begin within us.

Testimony, Teaching, and Trophy Case

I admit much has been written on prayer—perhaps too much. On one hand, I feel a bit convicted by adding more information to the pile of prayer material that is already available, whether through great devotional classics, contemporary authors, or online resources. However, I am passionate about helping you discover what I have seen thousands experience as they have learned the power of an approach to prayer that is truly transformational.

As a result, this book is part testimony, part teaching, and part trophy case. You will experience the power of testimony because this subject, other than the truth of the gospel, has

transformed my life more than any other in my four decades of following Christ. You will enjoy helpful teaching as biblical truth unfolds in order to transform your own prayer life. You will find yourself exploring a trophy case of changed lives as I share the stories of those who have also experienced a fresh approach to prayer.

As I write, I can imagine a Spirit-instigated tidal wave of engaging and enduring prayer that changes our lives as “times of refreshing” come from the presence of the Lord. I hope you will imagine with me as we journey together into a renewed understanding of the power of Christ who can still transform our lives and our world through the reality of prayer.

PART ONE



THE VISION *for a*
TRANSFORMED LIFE



CHAPTER 1

Beyond a “Grocery List” of Needs

*Prayer [is] intimacy with God
that leads to the fulfillment of his purposes.*

ALVIN REID

*And when you pray, do not use vain repetitions as the heathen do.
For they think that they will be heard for their many words.*

JESUS—MATTHEW 6:7

My dad taught me how to play golf. He was the classic old duffer. I am not sure he ever took lessons—but growing up, golf gave us quality time together, so we played quite often, just not well. Today, I am advancing my father’s legacy of mediocre golf. It is what I learned from his example.

My son Jordan is a worship pastor, and very good at what he does. His skills in worship did not occur because he was standing under a tree one day and a “worship apple” fell on his head, causing him to suddenly start singing Chris Tomlin songs. He learned to worship through observing others. He was exposed to some great worship pastors and profound worship experiences in his early years. He went on to earn his degree in worship ministries. Much of what he does today is a result of those personal and corporate models that he experienced growing up.

We all learn many of the essential skills of life through the

model of others we love and respect. Some skills allow us to excel and become contributors to others. However, we can also learn ineptitude through the repetition of mindless tradition or dysfunction.

This leads to a core inquiry. Who taught you to pray? Has anyone provided a positive and life-changing model of prayer for you? Do you feel that you even know how to pray effectively? What is the purpose behind your praying? Is it working for you? Are you sure it is a biblical approach? On the other hand, are you simply doing what you have seen others do, wondering if there might be more to the reality of prayer than you have experienced so far in your life?

Unlearning Prayer

Theologian D. A. Carson makes the observation: “Christians learn to pray by listening to those around them.”¹ I must admit that I had to unlearn prayer. While I was grateful for some of the faithful Christians I knew during my early years, I am not sure their model of prayer really hit the mark or made much of a difference in helping me learn a biblical, life-transforming way to pray.

The earliest memories of my struggle with prayer go back to my elementary school days. I had a serious “drug problem.” My parents drug me to the old-fashioned Wednesday night prayer meeting almost every week—especially when I had misbehaved. Perhaps they viewed it as a tool to reform me. To me, it was punishment.

Every Wednesday evening at seven, very sincere and devoted (mostly senior) saints would gather. The song leader would try to stir the group with some familiar hymns—four or five meaty verses each. Eventually, another man would share a devotion of sorts. Seldom did it relate to prayer, and I suspected he threw it together on the way to the prayer meeting in his pickup truck.

Then the leader would ask the dreaded question: “Does anyone have any prayer requests?” On cue, almost everyone pulled out their yellow pads and blue Bic pens to capture the finer details of each request. They were fully devoted to this

ritual with good hearts and a genuine willingness to intercede for one another.

Unfortunately, for me, it seemed like everyone in the country must have had an ingrown toenail, a slipped disc, a cousin with cancer, or a friend in financial crisis. The requests went on and on. I got more depressed and sleepy as this part of the meeting dragged out, often for forty-five minutes or more.

Occasionally, some juicy gossip made its way into the conversation. Someone would suggest an “unspoken prayer request” for Deacon Charlie. Upon further review, we discovered that Charlie had separated from his wife, Matilda. Soon the discussion uncovered the shocking news that Matilda was having an affair with the piano player’s husband. The piano player was on the verge of suicide (another prayer request). No surprise, Charlie and Matilda were struggling—because we then learned that their oldest son was a drug addict, their daughter was pregnant out of wedlock, and a third cousin on Charlie’s side was a convicted car thief. Someone even suggested that their dog had rabies.

The exhaustive requests continued until someone happened to glance at their watch and exclaim, “Oh, we’re almost out of time! We’d better pray.” Hurriedly, we would slide our folding chairs into smaller circles, yellow pads in hand, and start praying for the myriad of documented needs.

Beyond “Bless” and “Be With”

I hate to say it, but it seemed to me that if you took the words *bless* and *be with* out of their prayer vocabulary, no one would have had anything to say. The prayers commenced in systematic fashion as we went down the list: “Bless this, bless that—be with him, be with her. . . .” And they seemed to pick up the pace as the final minutes of the allotted time ticked away.

As we finished this flurry of *blesses* and *be withs*, the group

It seemed like everyone in the country must have had an ingrown toenail, a slipped disc, a cousin with cancer, or a friend in financial crisis. The requests went on and on.

would break out in a rousing round of “Sweet Hour of Prayer.” Today I love this classic hymn, but back then it sounded like a sanctified version of “Ninety-Nine Bottles of Beer on the Wall”—and seemed to drag on just as long.

The leader would then announce, “Thanks for coming. We’ll see you next week!” In my immature, confused, and quite bored mind, I thought, *No thanks, I hope to stay home and watch Hogan’s Heroes.*

Sincere but Stuck

In spite of my skewed view of these old-fashioned prayer times, I know these dear saints were sincere and committed. At least they were at a prayer meeting. Most of the flock was at the softball league, the PTA meetings, out to eat at the local Mexican restaurant, or home watching *Hogan’s Heroes*.

This praying minority would seldom miss a week. As much as I did not appreciate their pattern of prayer, I loved their hearts and willingness to persevere. These prayer warriors really did make prayer a priority. They saw some wonderful answers to prayer and were careful to thank the Lord for it all. It did seem, however, that they were inadvertently stuck in a long, deep prayer rut.

Of course, our prayer requests are a vital part of prayer. The Bible is clear about the need to ask God for things and share our burdens with one another. The rut occurs when we allow requests to serve as the foundation of our praying: focusing on our problems rather than actually engaging with God in a multifaceted biblical prayer experience.

Clearly, the request-based approach just did not work for me. I have learned that it has not worked for many seeking Christians. This dissatisfaction led me to a growing and life-changing understanding of what I call worship-based prayer. It was not a new discovery but a simple revelation of what is clear in the Scriptures as a positive alternative to “grocery-list” praying. This approach has transformed my life and the lives of thousands I have encountered who have made this vital discovery.

What Is Worship-Based Prayer?

Worship is the response of all we are to the revelation of all God is. J. Oswald Sanders describes worship as “the loving ascription of praise to God for what He is, both in Himself and in His ways. It is the bowing of the innermost spirit in deep humility and reverence before Him.”²

Worship-based prayer seeks the face of God before the hand of God. God’s face is the essence of who He is. God’s hand is the blessing of what He does. God’s face represents His person and presence. God’s hand expresses His provision for needs in our lives. I have learned that if all we ever do is seek God’s hand, we may miss His face; but if we seek His face, He will be glad to open His hand and satisfy the deepest desires of our hearts.

If all we ever do is seek God’s hand, we may miss His face; but if we seek His face, He will be glad to open His hand and satisfy the deepest desires of our hearts.

This approach to prayer always begins with a focus on biblical, Spirit-empowered worship. It is distinctively different from the traditional approach that emphasizes prayer requests and long lists of needs as the foundation of prayer. Christ taught a worship-based approach to prayer. It is modeled by many biblical personalities. It is fueled by scriptural truth in every case. Worship-based prayer ignites a desire for spiritual intimacy and personal transformation. In the discovery of these realities, a Christian is then empowered and enlightened to pray about issues and needs in a whole new way.

What Worship-Based Prayer Is Not

As you prepare for this journey of discovery about the principles and practices of worship-based prayer, let me tell you what worship-based prayer is NOT.

- **It is not a new method of prayer.** While the discovery has been fresh for many in this generation, it is an approach to prayer that is as old as the Scriptures.

- **It is not worship-ONLY prayer.** Biblical, balanced prayer has many expressions. This is not about restricting your prayer life only to worship, but about rekindling your prayer life from a foundation of worship to more fully enjoy and experience confession, requests, intercession, and warfare prayers.
- **It does not eliminate requests.** Our Father commands and compels us to call on Him—and He promises to answer. Requests are a vital part of prayer. However, requests without the proper foundation and framework can miss the mark. Worship-based prayer helps us understand the context, conditions, and ultimate conclusion of all our prayer requests.
- **It is not complicated.** While the term may sound a bit different, the approach is not difficult. Ultimately, it is as pure as opening the Scriptures and your soul in Spirit-led communion with Christ and allowing Him to set the agenda for every prayer time you enjoy. By the time you finish this book, I hope to inspire and equip you to experience the power of seeking God’s face in ways that will truly transform your prayers and your life.

Stories of Transformation

As a pastor, I have seen firsthand the power of worship-based prayer to bring healing and restoration to hurting congregations. I have watched it reinvent a staid, traditional church into a church-planting, mission-oriented force. Most thrilling is the fact that thousands of believers have experienced a revived love for Christ and a renewed passion for Spirit-empowered ministry.

In October 1995, Lori gave her life to Jesus Christ. A few months later, she signed up to attend a prayer event sponsored by the women of our church. They were going away to pray for three days, with no agenda. This was a big stretch for a baby Christian.

At the time, her song repertoire consisted of the chorus of “Amazing Grace” and “Jesus Loves Me.” She writes, “I wouldn’t have been able to find a book of the Bible other than Genesis

if you’d paid me. And as you might imagine, I would never dream of lifting up my hands as I had seen once in one of those ‘weird churches.’ ”

However, God used that weekend to transform her life. She learned how to open the Bible and worship God as the majestic, sovereign, and mighty One who is worthy of praise. She saw Him take hurting people and give them peace, hope, and joy. After experiencing the deep, deep love of Christ that weekend, her life has never been the same.

In the ensuing years, Lori became the ministry director of Strategic Renewal, the nonprofit organization I founded, teaching the principles of worship-based prayer to hundreds of churches around the nation. Today she leads the prayer ministry at a growing congregation in Northern California. God is using her in profound ways. Blessings continue to pour into her life, family, and ministry all because one day, as a new believer, she stepped into a praying church and encountered a life-transforming moment in His presence.³

Randy, a doctor from California, was intrigued by the idea of learning to pray a new way. Like Lori, he also decided to attend a prayer retreat that would feature extended time with opened Bibles, spontaneous singing, and free-flowing worship. Prior to the retreat, he was asking, “What am I going to talk to God about for three days?” Afterward he noted, “I was asking the wrong question. What I should have said was, ‘What was God going to talk to me about for three days?’ ” Although an established Christian, he learned that prayer is a two-way conversation, and God wanted to start the conversation from His Word, initiating a deep and rich experience of worship as the foundation of prayer. Randy’s prayer life has never been the same.

Dixie was a long-time staff member at her Baptist church. Through teaching, modeling, and her willingness to learn, she moved from a request-based to a worship-based approach to prayer. She elaborates on the first time she made the discovery: “What I experienced was fresh and new to me. I became very aware of the Lord’s presence in the midst of the worship. He filled me so full of himself and loved on me. He caused me to hunger for more of Him. I knew I wanted to be clean in His presence

because He shone light on the places I needed to confess. I gladly gave myself up, and He just continued to pour into me joy, peace, contentment, and eagerness to worship Him more.”

Dixie testifies, “I have not been the same since. My personal and corporate times of worship are much richer and sweeter. I now know the real meaning of a romance with Jesus. I don’t just love Him; I am *in* love with Him. How amazing to know that my worship and praying are pleasing to Him. As I praise Him for who He is, all the concerns and questions of my life are laid to rest.”

Let the Adventure Begin

Peter Lord, one of my personal mentors and a pastor for over five decades, states, “Most Christians pray out of crisis or from a grocery list—period.” His point is that God has much

“Most Christians pray out of crisis or from a grocery list—period.”

more for us in our walk with Him when we learn to seek His face, not just His hand. This is the discovery so many are making today in their relationship with Christ.

Like Lori, Randy, and Dixie, perhaps you are eager to move beyond a grocery-list approach to prayer. Maybe you have felt the stirring of a deep dissatisfaction over your attempts to learn to pray. As you read these pages with an open heart, perhaps your soul resonates with the hope of new possibilities in your walk with God.

Join me as we hear the call of God to our hearts—“Seek My face” (Psalm 27:8)—and readily respond, “Your face, Lord, I will seek.” When this becomes the passion and pattern of our lives, transformation occurs.