

THE ESSENTIAL GUIDE TO PRAYER

HOW TO PRAY WITH POWER
AND EFFECTIVENESS

DUTCH SHEETS



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1

THE PRIORITY OF INTERCESSION

I recall what it was like when I was courting my wife, Ceci. I was so in love with her that interest in everything else paled in comparison. I thought of her in the morning when I awakened, and she was on my mind when I went to sleep at night.

When we were separated by distance, I was miserable and wrote to her nearly every day. When the time of separation ended and we were together again, I wanted her to always be at my side. Her company was—and remains—my greatest earthly joy.

I like to think of my prayer times as courting God. Sometimes I refer to them as prayer visits—conversing with God as I would with a close family member or friend. I no doubt spend more time doing this than I do making requests. The famous verse in Proverbs that says, “In all your ways acknowledge Him and He will direct your paths” (Proverbs 3:6 NKJV) could be translated, “In all your courting, seek intimacy with Him first.” In other

words, we are to court God ahead of people, money, success, or any other thing we might seek. As we do, this becomes our greatest motivation for prayer.

The following is a striking example of the motivating power of love:

Alvin Straight, a 73-year-old man from Laurens, Iowa, wanted to visit his 80-year-old brother in Blue River, Wisconsin, who had recently suffered a stroke. The only problem was Alvin didn't have a driver's license due to his poor eyesight. Evidently not willing to take a bus, train, or plane, he had to come up with another solution. Out of determination to see his brother in 1994, Alvin climbed aboard his 1966 John Deere tractor/lawn mower and drove it several hundred miles, a journey of many weeks, to Blue River, Wisconsin.¹

What a demonstration of the power of love!

Mr. Straight's motivation for such a journey was found in his love for his brother. We, too, are beginning a journey, one of learning to intercede. Our motivation for prayer will also be found in the power of love. As believers in Jesus Christ, we have been invited into a loving relationship with God as Father and Friend. This relationship is *the first priority of intercession*, and our journey must begin here.

All of our Christian endeavors, including prayer, should be born out of intimacy with Him. Paul said to the Corinthians, "But I am afraid, lest as the serpent deceived Eve by his craftiness, your minds should be led astray from the simplicity and purity of devotion to Christ" (2 Corinthians 11:3).

Devotion—our relationship with Christ—doesn't need to be complex. Life itself can be a bit overwhelming, and the last thing we need is a complicated walk with God. Relationship with Jesus must be kept pure and simple. Introducing you to any facet of prayer without making this clear would set you up

for frustration and eventual failure. Our motivation for prayer must be relationship—communing with God.

I emphasize this not only because it's true, but also because our human tendencies and needs sometimes cause us to miss this critical starting place in prayer. We are so often “cart before the horse” people. Of the three possible motives and starting points for prayer—communing with God, our needs, and the needs of others—we often begin with the second or third.

However, when Jesus was asked to teach His disciples to pray, He didn't begin with “Our Provider, who art in heaven, generous be Thy name.” Nor did He encourage us to start with, “Our Master, who art in heaven, assignment-giver be Thy name.” No, Jesus settled the matter once and for all in the only model prayer He ever gave us when He instructed us to begin this way: “Our *Father*” (see Matthew 6:9).

Why is this so important? Because no relationship built around “using” another person becomes lasting and meaningful. On the other hand, loving relationships built around true communion and the pleasure of friendship always result in the serving of one another. Paul said his *love* for God, not duty or reward, constrained him to serve God (see 2 Corinthians 5:14 kjv).

A wonderful story is told of a couple who shared a great love:

Married for over half a century, this couple played their own special game from the time they met. The goal was to write “shmily” in a surprise place for the other to find.

“Shmily” was outlined in the sugar and flour, traced in the dew on windows, and written in the steam left on the mirror after a hot shower, where it would reappear bath after bath. At one point, the woman even unrolled an entire roll of toilet paper to leave “shmily” on the very last sheet. Little notes with “shmily” were found on dashboards, car seats, and steering wheels. They were stuffed inside shoes and left under pillows. “Shmily” was written in the dust upon the mantel and traced

in the ashes of the fireplace. This mysterious word was as much a part of their house as the furniture.

This couple shared a true love that was pure and enduring. More than just a flirtatious game, their deep love was a way of life whose unmatched beauty could hardly be fathomed. Their relationship was based on a devotion and passionate affection that not everyone experiences. What was the message they shared?

S-h-m-i-1-y: See How Much I Love You.²

My daughter Hannah came to me the other day and said, "I love you, Dad."

"Okay, what do you want?" I jokingly replied.

"Nothing," she said. "I just wanted to tell you I love you."

All the emotional bells and whistles went off in my heart. Like any good parent, I love to please my family by providing for them, but nothing compares to being told I'm loved for no other reason than just because I'm loved.

As I jokingly accused Hannah, if our first motivation in prayer is to get our needs met, prayer will simply become a way of "using" God. He will be a convenience, like the store on the corner. Prayer will be a survival technique, a heavenly 9-1-1. This will never result in a consistent, meaningful life of prayer. Just as a human relationship with a "what's in it for me" foundation and motivation will ultimately fail, so, too, will our relationship with God, if it is founded on such a mind-set.

Similarly, if my primary motivation for prayer becomes interceding for others, this, too, will ultimately fail as a motivator. This desire to meet God's need for intercessors, as well as to meet the need others have for intercession, is noble. But whereas the first motivation deteriorates into "using" God, this one will eventually result in a motivation-killing sense of feeling "used." It will lead to a performance-based relationship, or,

worse yet, a legalistic religious exercise, neither of which are positive motivators.

If this is our starting point, prayer becomes an *obligation*. We feel like hirelings, working our way to heaven through our sacrificial payment of dues as obedient Christians. This promotes the mistaken belief that the only “well done” we’ll ever hear, and the only pleasure we’ll ever receive, will be in the “sweet by and by.” This is not what our heavenly Father wants. Prayer and intercession should be all about friendship, relationship and partnering with our wonderful Father. Every one of us would rather be a partner than a hired hand.

Jesus, just days before the disciples would receive their greatest commission from Him—“Go into all the world and preach the good news to all creation” (Mark 16:15 NIV)—established the working relationship He wanted with them. “I no longer call you servants . . . but friends,” He said in John 15:15 (NIV).

He reminded His followers that the greatest commandment of God was to love Him, then to love our neighbors as ourselves (see Matthew 22:37–39). This isn’t because God is so egotistical and selfish that He just has to be first. Rather, it is to assure us that He wants a loving relationship with us more than He wants our good works. Also, it reminds us that all success and pleasure in life must flow from relationship with our life-giving Creator.

On another occasion, Christ reminded a follower and friend, Martha, that communing with Him was more important than serving Him. While Martha was in the kitchen preparing Him a meal, Mary, her sister, had chosen the more important or, as the NIV says, “better” activity of sitting at His feet, listening to Him (see Luke 10:38–42). The following story about a mother busy in her kitchen gives a similar modern-day illustration of this:

A young mother was trying to get her work done as her little girl, Tracy, watched her. The mother had bread dough on her

hands; the daughter had time on her hands. Tracy was out of ideas for entertaining herself and was now relying on her mother for entertainment. The young mother decided to take this opportunity to tell Tracy a Bible story. By doing so, she could continue to knead her bread dough. Her intention was to serve fresh, hot cinnamon bread for dinner. She chose the Bible story of Mary and Martha as found in Luke 10:38–42. “Mary and Martha and their brother, Lazarus, invited Jesus to their home for dinner,” she began as she continued to make cinnamon bread. She looked down and clearly realized that what her daughter really wanted was her undivided attention. She wanted eye-to-eye contact. She wanted her mother to hold her. As she stopped kneading, Tracy looked up at her. “The better part—that’s what you want of me, isn’t it?” she asked. Tracy nodded.³

Oftentimes, we become so focused on completing a specific task that we forget what is really important: to prioritize our relationship with God, first of all, and then with those we love. Through the apostle John, Jesus gently reprimanded the group of believers living in Ephesus (see Revelation 2:1–7). After commending them for their faithfulness and good works, He reminded them that their love relationship with Him was preeminent. They had “left their first love” and were in danger of the inevitable results—disillusionment and lowered motivation. “Remember,” I believe He was saying to them, “these good works must flow *out of* relationship with Me, not *define* or *take the place of* it.”

Abraham, spoken of in Scripture as a “friend of God” (see 2 Chronicles 20:7; Isaiah 41:8; James 2:23), was a powerful intercessor, the first intercessor mentioned in the Bible. He wasn’t God’s friend because he was an intercessor; he was an intercessor because he was God’s friend. The difference may be subtle, but I assure you it isn’t small. He was quite bold in

his intercession, by the way, asking God questions like, “Shall not the judge of all the earth do right?” (see Genesis 18:25).

Intimate relationships produce this kind of boldness: not an arrogant irreverence, but a confident boldness that eliminates the fear of rejection or being misunderstood. When I need a favor, I ask a friend or family member, not a stranger. If it’s in that person’s power to help me, he or she does. God wants us to be on such intimate terms with Him that it produces bold, confident and effective intercession. I desperately desire that you may experience this type of intimacy in your relationship with God.

Our friendship with God is pictured in the Scriptures by a famous mountain in Israel. Its name, Hebron, actually means “friendship, fellowship or communion.” Abraham, God’s interceding friend, was associated with this mountain. As an epitaph of sorts, he is buried there with his wife, Sarah. Fittingly, the symbolism associated with this biblical mountain tells us much about friendship with God and what it produces for the intercessor. As you see these wonderful pictures, you, too, will want to live at this “Mountain of Friendship.”

First, being *the highest point in Israel, Hebron teaches us that the highlight of the Christian life and the pinnacle from which all else should flow is friendship with the Almighty*. It is only from there, as we look down on all of life, that the correct perspective can be obtained. The psalmist David was confused about the prosperity of wicked people until he saw things from God’s point of view:

For I was envious at the foolish, when I saw the prosperity of the wicked. . . . Behold, these are the ungodly, who prosper in the world; they increase in riches. . . . When I pondered to understand this, it was troublesome in my sight.

Psalm 73:3, 12 KJV; v. 16 NASB

David then went on to explain what eliminated his confusion:

Until I came into the sanctuary of God; then I perceived their end. . . . For, behold, those who are far from Thee will perish; thou hast destroyed all those who are unfaithful to Thee. But as for me, the nearness of God is my good; I have made the Lord God my refuge, that I may tell of all Thy works.

Psalm 73:17, 27–28

Like David, we must take our perspective on life from God's viewpoint. One of the most important things you'll learn as God's friend is to intercede from His perspective. Living at Hebron, the high place of friendship, makes this possible. As you spend time with God, you'll begin to think like Him, which will allow you to pray according to His heart and will. This agreement with God is a key element of intercession, and guarantees success. Many people spend much of their prayer time asking for their wants, never thinking about God's heart. Yet as I have stated, this isn't true relationship. As you live at Hebron, you will increasingly care about what is on God's heart, just as He cares about what is on yours. This partnership is glorious.

Second, Hebron became the home of Caleb, one of the greatest warriors of Israel. *Friendship with our Father makes us powerful overcomers*. Caleb, the faith-filled spy and great Israeli conqueror, asked God for Hebron, the "mountain of friendship," as his inheritance. God granted his request, and Hebron, the place of friendship, became the "mountain of the conquering warrior." A warrior heart and a tender heart aren't conflicting. To the contrary, I believe Caleb was a great warrior *because of his relationship with God*. God, your Father and Friend, wants you, also, to be a conquering intercessor living at Hebron. Out of your relationship with Him, you, too, will be a great overcomer.

Ken and Barbara Gaub learned to overcome financial lack through their relationship with God:

Desperately needing a break from their missions work in Kentucky, the Gaubs headed for their parents' home in Washington. Traveling in below-zero weather was challenging—especially with a baby and a partially working car heater. Upon reaching Colorado, they had only a little bit of change left, so Ken pulled into a parking lot to discuss with Barbara what they should do about their critical financial situation.

In amazement Barbara said, “We do what we preach. We believe the Lord and pray.” Bowing their heads, they asked the Lord to send help for them. When finished praying, they drove to a service station and sat there, wondering what step to take next.

Another car pulled in behind them, and a lady got out and came up to their window. Very excitedly, she remarked, “I saw you parked back by the grocery store with your heads bowed. I told my husband that I believed you were Christians and that you were praying for financial assistance. I want to help you.” Reaching in the window, she placed money in their hands.

Overwhelmed at the miracle they held, they thanked her and praised God for His provision.⁴

This is an example of overcoming through relationship with God. It is a demonstration of faith that God will give us victory in every situation as we partner with Him.

Third, *intimacy with God—living at Hebron—will cause your intercession to defeat the giants in your life and others' lives*. Hebron was formerly ruled by Arba, the greatest of all the giants in the land of Canaan, and had been named after him. Caleb defeated this giant, took the mountain, and renamed it Hebron (see Joshua 14:14–15). Your Father wants you to be an overcoming intercessor, able to defeat every giant that comes your way. Like Caleb, you, too, can live on this mountain

representing dead giants, fulfilled destinies and friendship with God.

Fourth, *a Hebron lifestyle will give you the ability to walk in great authority*. King David was anointed to be king over Judah at Hebron, and he ruled from there for seven years.

Satan, sin, our flesh, and negative circumstances want to rule our lives, but God wants *us* to rule over these things. Romans 5:17 says, “For if by the transgression of the one, death reigned through the one, much more those who receive the abundance of grace and of the gift of righteousness will reign in life through the One, Jesus Christ.” God wants to crown us, like David, with the authority to rule in ungodly situations. Intercessors rule from Hebron.

Through the ministry of intercessor and speaker Quin Sherrer, a mother was awakened to her God-given authority in Christ. She shared the following testimony with Quin:

When you gave a seminar in our area two years ago, I poured my mother’s heart out to you, and you responded by praying for me and my son. When you autographed a copy of your book, you wrote: “*Keep standing in the gap for Steven—a mighty man of valor!*”

At the time, fifteen-year-old Steven was anything but that. He was deeply involved in pornography, drugs, alcohol, the occult, Hell’s Angels, the Ku Klux Klan, and organized crime, and was also fascinated with death. God saved Steven the day of his sentencing hearing—the day of his greatest rebellion—when he received three and a half times the sentence he expected. In prison, Steven attended Bible studies, and even though it was extremely difficult, he took a stand for the Lord right where he was. He is now out of prison and planning to attend Bible college.

We knew as we surrendered Steven to the Lord before he was arrested that he would never live at home again. But we stood on Isaiah 54:13 and have seen its fulfillment. Steven is being

taught by the Lord, and great is his peace. Yes, God is faithful; He does perform His Word!⁵

Quin has learned to reign from Hebron. She taught Suzanne. You, too, will learn to rule from there.

Last, *this great “mountain of friendship” will also become for you a place of refuge*. Hebron became one of the six cities of refuge in Israel, places to which those who accidentally took another’s life could run and in which they could live without fear of retribution (see Joshua 20). As you become an intercessor and, more important, one who operates on an intimate basis with God, you’ll find this to be a place of great comfort and safety in life.

The following story, which circulated on the Internet, illustrates how concerned intercessors established a place of refuge for hurting children:

Last school year, an elementary school teacher’s classroom was made up of third-graders, every one of whom came from a difficult situation. Some were from single-parent families, some were from dysfunctional families, some were undernourished or uncared for, some lived in abusive homes, and others had been beaten, bruised, or raped by family members. One little girl’s dad had died of AIDS, and the list goes on. The teacher’s heart bled for these kids.

Before the 1999–2000 school year started, she and her husband went to her classroom and prayed over each desk in the room. *They prayed that God would place an angel behind each and every child throughout the coming year, to watch over them and protect them* [emphasis added].

A month or so after the year started, she gave the kids an assignment to write about what they would like to be when they grew up. Each was busy with his or her assignment when “Andrew” raised his hand. When she asked him what he needed, he asked her how to spell “mighty.” After answering his question,

she asked him why he needed to know. Andrew said it was because when he grew up he wanted to be a “mighty man of God.” When he said this, little “Mark,” sitting next to him, asked, “So, what’s a mighty man of God?” The teacher, knowing she could not say anything about this herself in the classroom, told Andrew to go ahead and tell Mark what it was.

Andrew said, “It’s a man who puts on the armor of God and is a soldier for God.” After observing the conversation between Andrew and Mark, the teacher, with a lump in her throat, had begun to walk away when Andrew motioned with his little forefinger for her to come closer. He whispered to her, asking if she believed in angels. She told him yes, she did. Then he asked her if she thought people could see angels, and she said she thought some people probably could. Andrew said that he did, and he could see an angel standing behind each kid in the room.⁶

This classroom became a place of comfort and safety, a true refuge for these children. God allowed this small child—a mighty man of God in the making—to see the answer to the intercessors’ prayers. Their intercession, of course, was born through allowing God’s heart for these kids to become their hearts. These are Hebron intercessors, functioning from their places of friendship with God.

God’s heart is the same for us as it was for Abraham, Caleb and David. As we learn to become intercessors for Him and with Him, He wants us to do this from Hebron, the place of friendship. The results of this relationship will be fulfillment for both God and us, and victories for many people. Intercession will become a passion, not a performance; a lifestyle, not a labor.

Why don’t you pray this important prayer with me?

Precious heavenly Father, thank You for telling me in Your Word that You prioritize me above my service. I want to

do the same with You—I want to be Your friend. Help me, please, to build this kind of relationship with You. Help me to live at Hebron, enjoying the rest, safety and victory found there. I want to be a giant-killer like David, moving in Your authority and power. I now know that this authority flows from the highest place—friendship with You. Thank You. Amen.

Did You Understand?

1. What is the first priority of intercession? Can you substantiate this with a few Scripture references?
2. What mountain in Israel pictures our friendship with God? What does this friendship produce, also pictured by this mountain?
3. What are the three possible motives for prayer? Which one must come first? What happens if the others become our first motivation for prayer?
4. You do know, don't you, that you're a worshiping warrior in the making?