

# Loving Unity

## The Way to Breakthrough Praying

By John Robb



In John 17, in which Jesus prayed for the last time with His disciples before the crucifixion, He had every right to focus on His impending suffering, which would be terrible beyond belief. However, true to His nature, He rose above His own human fears to think about the welfare of His disciples and His followers of future generations. What was it He prayed for?

Unity—that we might be one as He and the Father are one. Wow!

Of course, such unity is a supernatural thing, only possible by the presence and enabling of the Holy Spirit. We humans tend to divide at the drop of a hat, dwelling on what our differences are. We compare ourselves and can split off from one another because of pride and feelings of superiority, thinking our doctrinal adherence or ministry practice surpasses that of other organizations and churches. Personality splits also exacerbate this phenomenon of division that has resulted in tens of thousands of separate denominations around the world.

I was recently blessed by Gaylord Enns's book, *Love Revolution*, that he gave the participants at the Transform USA

Prayer Summit. Enns maintains that Jesus' primary command gets lost in our effort to have the right beliefs about Him. That command is, "Love one another as I have loved you" (John 13:34). That kind of love enables us to have real unity. Also, humility, realizing our many flaws and that we need each other, also enables such unity.

We, as the Apostle Paul so brilliantly teaches, are part of the organism called the Body of Christ, and each of us has particular gifts that are meant to benefit one another. Unless we exercise those gifts with the love and humility that comes out of the grace and power of the Holy Spirit, we are all impoverished, incomplete, and lacking. Only in that way of loving service to one another can we become One Body rather than remaining a deformed or handicapped body.

Such loving unity is fostered through prayer together. The early church quickly developed a culture of prayer at the command of Jesus that they should wait in Jerusalem. Acts 1:14 describes how they "all joined constantly together in prayer." Great breakthroughs came out of this culture of prayer as can be clearly traced throughout the book of Acts. The history of revivals and mission advances bear similar witness to the power of united prayer. Too often, we succumb to the mistaken idea that our activism is what will transform the world. Mission is a supernatural thing. It requires God's mighty moving to change hearts and societies that are in the grip of the prince of this world through enslaving spiritual forces of darkness and deceptive ideologies that bind and hinder humankind.

Over the last couple of decades, colleagues and I have found ourselves facilitating special prayer initiatives in the midst of awful, hopeless conflicts, especially in Africa of which there were 19 such conflicts raging in the mid-1990s and early years of this century. Over and over again, we witnessed the Lord graciously bring about peace breakthroughs and the ending of these wars as His people confessed corporate sin, got

reconciled with one another, and then prayed unitedly. Remarkably, it was often the next day or in a few days that we felt the atmosphere shift and a peace process was begun by the politicians and diplomats. In addition, spiritual revival or advances for the Gospel often also attended such amazing changes.

The re-establishment or beginning of new unity among His people was invariably the crucial thing that the Spirit of the Lord was seeking to bring about. After repentance for corporate sins and splits between church leaders were confessed with reconciliation and unity being reestablished, the participants could ask virtually anything and the Lord would grant it, even impossible things humanly like the ending of these hopeless ethnic conflicts that had gone on for many years, in some cases decades.

During a national prayer initiative for Germany and Berlin in 1997, significant division among leading pastors arose even though many were rejoicing that about 500 intercessors from 78 cities had come together, a real triumph for His church in the nation. I was wondering what to do and finally while on stage asked the participants to say this simple sentence to each other, which exemplifies the Spirit of Christ: "I want you to succeed more than myself."

This helped among other things to defuse the divisive, competitive atmosphere. Humility and love that is more concerned for the success of others comes out of the realization that the most important thing is not our individual accomplishments but rather our united functioning as members of His Body. It is that unity in prayer and the loving service that flows out of such praying that will bring His transformation to our world.

Let's therefore pray accordingly for ourselves and for the international prayer movement:

1. That we and other ministry leaders will maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace and that Satan, the diabolos or one who divides, would be bound.

2. That we and others in Christ's Church will love one another as He has loved us. May we all experience a baptism or rebaptism of love in the Body of Christ.

3. That increasingly pastors and other ministry leaders will pray together across denominational boundaries for their cities and communities in every nation.

4. That this unity of the Spirit in prayer will result in the greatest and most pervasive global spiritual revival ever along with the fulfillment of the Great Commission—to reach the remaining 5500 unreached people groups still without movements to Christ and very little access to the Gospel.

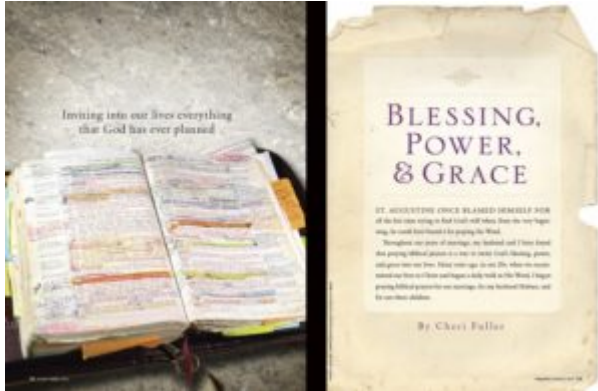
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## **Blessing, Power, and Grace**

# Inviting into Our Lives Everything that God Has Ever Planned

By Cheri Fuller



St. Augustine once blamed himself for all the lost time trying to find God's will when, from the very beginning, he could have found it by praying the Word.

Throughout our years of marriage, my husband and I have found that praying biblical prayers is a way to invite God's blessing, power, and grace into our lives. Many years ago, in our 20s, when we recommitted our lives to Christ and began a daily walk in His Word, I began praying biblical prayers for our marriage, for my husband Holmes, and for our three children.

Daily as I would read the Bible, I'd notice a special verse and I'd put a date by it—"For Holmes 5/88" or "For our marriage, 10/95." Then I'd write the verse on my current index prayer card or in a journal and pray it, often many times.

One of the first passages God led me to—as if He took a big highlighter and said, "This is what I want for Holmes"—was Psalm 1. So I wrote his name by it, and over the years I have prayed it scores of times for him: "Lord, may Holmes be a man who delights in your Word and meditates on it day and night—so he will be like a tree planted along the riverbank, bearing fruit in every season of his life. May his leaves never wither, and may he prosper in all he does" (see vs. 1-3).

A few years later, in a search at the library to find the meaning of his name, I discovered Holmes means “from the river” or “with roots going into the river.” I didn’t know this at the time I began praying Psalm 1, but God knew my husband was going to go through very trying times in his business life—and He wanted his roots to sink deep into the soil of Christ’s love, feed on the truth of Scripture, and drink from the River of Life. When Holmes later suffered through several years of serious depression and seasons of financial drought as a builder, I continued to pray these verses for him. I’ve seen the fruits of those prayers and God’s faithfulness.

## **God Knows Our Children**

God can show us how to target our children’s needs with just the right Scripture, even when they live away—on campus or across the world. I had prayed and prayed for our college son Chris (second oldest), but needed new direction from the Lord. So I asked Him to reveal a special verse that would be right in line with His heart toward our son.

One night soon after, I had a dream. In it, Chris was standing beside me, holding a Bible and pointing out a verse as if to say, “That’s me, Mom.” The verse was Acts 17:28: “For in him we live and move and have our being.” I sensed the Spirit saying that this is the truth about our son and I should pray that he would realize who he is in Christ. For many years since, I’ve prayed Acts 17:28 for Chris—when he was in medical school, serving in Iraq as a battalion surgeon saving Marines’ lives, and as a father and husband in medical practice. As the Spirit continues to point me back to this verse, He reminds me to remember that He is the One who began a good work in Chris and He will complete it (Phil. 1:6)!

I’ve never run out of scriptural prayers to pray—especially

when praying our three children through childhood and adolescence, college years, marriage, and now praying for their children. A verse I prayed continually during my seven-year journey of prayer for our oldest son was Ephesians 1:17-18: Lord, open the eyes of his heart and give him spiritual wisdom and understanding so he will grow in the knowledge of You. I pray that his heart will be flooded with light so he can understand the wonderful future You have for him.

Justin did not appear to be walking in the light at the time nor did he seem spiritually inclined. In fact, he was enamored with the world and all it had to offer from high school through his first two years of college. As I continued praying Ephesians 1:17-18 and other verses for him, I gathered other mothers, concerned about their teens, to pray in agreement together each week. When my spirits flagged, God seemed to say, "Persevere in prayer and trust Me."

Then one summer day after his sophomore year at University of Oklahoma, when I was driving him across the city to get his overheated car stuck on the highway, he turned to me and said, "You know, Mom, I've been feeling so empty and lonely, being so far from God and trying to do everything on my own. I know that God hasn't moved; I have. But what I want more than anything is to have an intimate relationship with Christ, to really know Him."

Justin has never looked back and has been following the Lord ever since. Watching this devoted husband and father of two, who now also prays God's Word for his own children, I have been constantly encouraged by the Lord's faithfulness and grace in Justin's life and family.

As I discovered more of the treasures of God's Word and promises, one of my favorite prayers is based in 1 Peter 5:7: "Lord, thank You for inviting me to cast all of my cares upon You! Here's what I am burdened and worried about today . . .

.” And then I roll my concerns, workload, and anxieties upon the Lord. Praying this verse on countless days has brought more peace into my heart than anything else I can think of—and certainly more than any stress relief the world might offer.

## **Breathing the Life of Jesus**

In his book *Pierced by the Word*, John Piper said that our general prayers “become powerful when they are filled up with concrete, radical biblical goals for the people we are praying for.”

We just celebrated 42 years of marriage and can look back on praying hundreds and hundreds of biblical prayers, not only for ourselves and our children, but also for friends, family, and sisters and brothers in Christ that we’ve had the opportunity to pray for in healing services, conferences in other countries and in our own community. Each time, I’ve been filled with faith and hope, in the best of times and the worst of times.

Praying God’s Word transformed my spiritual life and did something else: It got my focus off the problems or situations and onto the One who could help us, transform us, and—when needed—restore us. I knew praying Scripture wasn’t an overnight quick fix, but my confidence in the Lord increased as I grew to trust Him to fulfill His promises in His way and time. And I was assured—even when the answers were long in coming—that He who said He is able to keep safe what we entrust to Him will do more than we can ask, think, or imagine, because of His riches in glory in Christ Jesus (Eph. 3:20-21).

You, too, can find the blessing of praying God’s Word for your family and personal life. When we pray God’s words and then love those around us through prayer, we breathe life—the life of Jesus, the living Word—into them and into our hearts. Who



among us doesn't need more of Christ in our lives and His blessing in our family?

## **It Takes a Little Practice**

While it may not come naturally for you to pray biblical prayers, it takes only a little practice to become comfortable with using God's Word as a powerful prayer prompt. For instance:

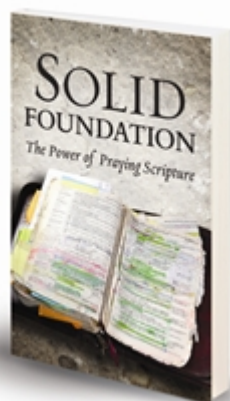
- Take the verse in which Jesus said, "I am leaving you with a gift—peace of mind and heart. And the peace I give is a gift the world cannot give. So don't be troubled or afraid" (John 14:27, nlt). Then pray it back to God in your own words and from the sincerity of your heart. For example, "Thank You, Jesus, for Your matchless gift of peace. I receive Your peace in my mind and in my heart so I won't be troubled or afraid."
- When we pray for someone who is suffering or in need, the Bible is full of compassionate prayers. Recently I was struck by reading Psalm 79:8 when a friend had major surgery and I prayed it right back to God on her behalf: "Let your tenderhearted mercies quickly meet Janet's need, Lord." I sent that prayer to her via text message in the hospital, and she received it when she got out of the recovery room. That prayer for God's tenderhearted mercies echoes from my spirit whenever anyone I know is in the ER, in personal distress, or in physical pain.
- Pray God's attributes. A verse such as Psalm 46:1 assures us that God will be our "refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble" (NKJV). We can call upon God's very nature and character when we pray it back to Him: "Lord, You said You will be our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble. I ask You to let me experience Your sustaining grace, strength, and power so that problems won't weigh me down."

## His Word Upholds the Universe

How incredible it is that through Jesus' sacrifice on the cross, heaven's windows are opened and each of us is given access to Almighty God, who hung the stars and moon in the sky and upholds the entire universe by His very Word!

What a marvelous gift God has given us in the treasure of His Word to guide and shape our prayers. In it we can discover His will for our marriages, families, ministries, and all areas of our lives. Even more, when we pray His Word, we are asking that all He's planned in heaven will come into our lives on earth!

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**NOTE:** This article is available, along with all the theme articles of this issue of *Prayer Connect*, in a little booklet format that makes it easy to purchase copies for your small group, Sunday school class or entire congregation. For more information, [click here](#).

# Christians Rise Up in Venezuela

Venezuelan President Nicolas Maduro insists he will hold an assembly to rewrite the country's constitution—despite a vote where 98 percent of more than seven million voters rejected making constitutional changes.



The country's evangelical Christians are speaking out, asking God to restore unity and prosperity to the nation. Opposition parties say a constitutional assembly is just an attempt by the socialist president to impose a dictatorship in Venezuela. Many are at a breaking point after suffering for months from food shortages and heavy-handed government control.

The crisis has motivated Venezuela's churches to action. Leading up to the vote, public plazas around the nation echoed with the prayers of Christians.

"I believe the church has awakened to how difficult the Venezuelan situation is, and that each of us Christians needs to become active in this process of change," explains Hugo Diaz of the Movement for the Defense of the Constitution. Many Venezuelan Christians believe their country will prosper only as people look to God, not politicians, for solutions.

"We have been fasting before the Lord, asking Him to turn the heart of the people to Him. We had this idea to participate in

this activity because it's not a matter of giving support to any political party," says Pastor Jose Rivero of Alliance Youth Leadership. He says the government should submit to the authority of God and the constitution.

With possible economic sanctions and more hardship ahead, Christians are stepping into the conflict to pray and shine a light of hope in the midst of economic and political upheaval. Evangelical Council of Venezuela spokesman Juan Maraver urged Venezuelans to take heart.

"This is your hour. This is your time," he said. "While many are seeing chaos, while many are seeing that Venezuela has no solutions, that restoration will take a long time. God says: 'I will raise you up. I will bless you!'"

—Reprinted from CBN News.

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# Freedom from Bitterness

## When You Can't Get Past the Hurt

By Linda Graf



I was moments away from losing everything—my job, my church family, and most of my friends. As I awaited the decision, I honestly didn't know what I hoped

for the outcome. Perhaps it would be better just to sever ties and move on from my employment. It certainly would be easier.

As the mediator of our meeting brought it to conclusion, he asked my boss (who was also my pastor), "Can you continue to work with Linda?"

After a long pause, my boss answered, "I'm willing to try."

At the time, I was trapped in patterns of sinful behaviors. I was unhappy with my life and lashed out at those I blamed for my circumstances. Painful childhood wounds and insecurities resulted in multiple strained relationships. I was angry most of the time and generally miserable.

That not-so-enthusiastic response of my boss crushed my heart. I didn't see how our relationship could ever be repaired. What could God ever do in this mess?

## **Identifying Bitterness**

I knew God felt far away, and I didn't have the hope and joy and love I was supposed to have as a child of God. But I didn't identify the bitterness that had taken over my life. I just thought there was something wrong with me. I was a product of my upbringing and the hurts and wounds of the past. I blamed my circumstances and the failures of others. And because I believed that most Christians had not been through the depth of my struggles and difficulties, self-pity consumed me.

The problem with this mindset is that it removes God from the equation. I was suffering from a profound lack of faith in what God could do within me. I settled into a victim mentality and didn't leave room for Him to work in my life.

Paul writes, "We all . . . are being transformed into his image with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord,

who is the Spirit” (2 Cor. 3:18). This is God’s promise that He is working to transform us through the Holy Spirit.

All of us who are believers in Christ have the Holy Spirit within us—and He wants to transform us! Regardless of the wounds we’ve suffered or the hard things we’ve experienced, God is ready to do His restoring work if we believe He can and if we ask Him for His help.

## Checking the Heart

How do we identify bitterness? Here is a description of the stages I’ve discovered lead to full-blown bitterness:

**Step 1. Anger.** This is a common emotion. We all have felt anger flare up when people do something to harm us or fail to do something we expect of them.

However, Scripture speaks abundantly about how dangerous this emotion is and about the need to take care of it quickly. This is the key to stopping the progression toward bitterness. Paul says, “‘In your anger do not sin’: Do not let the sun go down while you are still angry, and do not give the devil a foothold” (Eph. 4:26–27). Satan takes advantage when we hold on to our anger. James says that “human anger does not produce the righteousness that God desires” (1:20).

**Step 2. Rehearsing the wrong done to us.** We relive the moment over and over again in our minds. We are quick to remind ourselves of the unfairness of it all. This creates resentment, which keeps the offense alive and painful. It causes us continual hurt, which grows and hardens us.

**Step 3. Bitterness.** Bitterness is the firmly held belief that things are the way you’ve perceived and determined them to be, so now you have a worldview that cannot be changed or reasoned away.

It might sound like this: “My father never loved me.” “That boss sabotaged my advancement in that job.” “Those people are out to get me.” “My sister will never change.” “This is just the way I am.”

People who embrace bitterness—either knowingly or unknowingly—tend to be angry, unhappy, and full of self-pity. We all need a “heart check” to see if bitterness resides in us.

## **Praying for Release**

If you suspect bitterness is affecting your life, here are a few ways to pray:

**1. Pray that your eyes will be opened.** You may be harboring anger and bitterness against others or even God Himself. Ask God to reveal your sin and any areas of unforgiveness you are hiding or denying. We can feel far from God when we have unconfessed sin. Ask Him to shine a spotlight on the far corners of your heart. Psalm 66:18 says, “If I had cherished sin in my heart, the Lord would not have listened.”

**2. Pray for a deeper love for God.** Jesus tells us to love God *first* and *wholly* and to love our neighbors as we love ourselves (Matt. 22:37–39). Ask the Lord to help you grow in love for Him and others. Invite Him to heal your wounds and repair anything that keeps you from loving Him or others fully. God assures us that it is His will that we grow in holiness and sanctification (1 Thess. 4:3–5). Seek to purify your heart and mind and increase your desire and capacity to love.

**3. Pray for a heart that feels remorse and sorrow.** It’s easy to focus on what has been done to us and forget that we have often wounded people. Ask God to show you how your unkind words and actions have hurt others. Pray that Psalm 51:17 will

be true of your own heart: "My sacrifice, O God, is a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart you, God, will not despise."

**4. Pray, believingly, for forgiveness.** Our Father has compassion on His children, but He also remembers that He made us out of dust! (Ps. 103:13–14). It is because of His kindness that we can come to a place of repentance (Rom. 2:4). Ask God to forgive you for your sins of anger, revenge, or bitterness. Be encouraged that He is always faithful to forgive when we ask (1 John 1:9). Thank Him for His great love and the gift of forgiveness.

**5. Pray for an obedient heart that turns away from sin.** Ask God for a heart that chooses to forgive and submits to Him in obedience. If you have been bitter or angry with God, confess it and declare that you want His will in your life, whatever that looks like. Ask Him to bring beauty from the ashes as He promised in Isaiah 61:3.

**6. Pray for the ability to forgive those who have deeply wounded you.** God is not a harsh Father who commands us to do something we absolutely cannot do. As a popular worship song title puts it, He's a "Good, Good Father." And He has given us everything we need for "life and godliness" (2 Cor. 4:7, kjv). Paul says we are as "jars of clay" so that God's power and glory will be evident in us (2 Cor. 4:7), and God's power will be made perfect in our weakness (2 Cor. 12:9). Choosing to forgive is difficult, but nothing is impossible with God's power.

**7. Pray for those you seek to forgive.** If they are not believers, pray for mercy that they will be brought to salvation. If they are believers, pray for their growth in holiness and sanctification. If they are no longer living, pray that you will speak well of them. Jesus tells us to love our enemies and pray for those who persecute us (Matt. 5:44).



**8. Pray for a transformed mind in right thinking.** We need to believe truth and take our thoughts captive to Christ. After we have taken the steps of repenting of our sin of bitterness and then forgiving those who have hurt us, God wants us to seek to transform our minds (Rom. 12:2). Otherwise we can easily slip back into the same patterns of taking offense, wallowing in self-pity, and harboring anger. When we recognize the battle, we can rely on God to help us overcome: “The weapons we fight with are not the weapons of the world. On the contrary, they have divine power to demolish strongholds. We demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God, and we take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ” (2 Cor. 10:4–5).

**9. Pray for strength to put others first and avoid selfishness.** Human beings are by nature consumed with ourselves. I am often most concerned about my to-do list, my feelings, and my desires for each day. But Jesus said, “Anyone who wants to be first must be the very last, and the servant of all” (Mark 9:35). Paul follows up on that, instructing us, “Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. Rather, in humility, value others above yourselves, not looking to your own interests but each of you to the interests of the others” (Phil. 2:3–4).

For me, the battle against bitterness has often been one of self-pity. When I am feeling sorry for myself and concentrating on the disappointments, hurts, and injustices done to me, my focus is not on Jesus or His Kingdom. I have no thoughts of loving others or how I might please and glorify God. This is a trap God wants all of us to avoid. Through the power of the Holy Spirit, we can think of God and others first.

**10. Pray for a thankful heart.** It’s God’s will for us to grow in gratitude (1 Thess. 5:18). Paul warns us about the progression of sin as seen in godless and wicked people: “Although they knew God, they neither glorified him as God nor

gave thanks to him, but their thinking became futile and their foolish hearts were darkened” (Rom. 1:21).

An unthankful heart is the first step on the slippery slope to ruin. By giving Jesus thanks for His many blessings to us, we can fight sin and bitterness (1 Thess. 5:18).

## **Finding Healing: God’s Mighty Work**

My story has a happy ending. The Lord graciously revealed my sins of anger and bitterness and the damage I had inflicted on others. As I embarked on a journey of prayer and repentance, along the way I found healing. I received forgiveness and was reconciled to my pastor. I still work for him today, years later. We even wrote a book together!

It took a mighty work of God in my life to accomplish this—and to restore hope and joy to my heart. But I praise Him that I believed Him for healing. I know now that He can do His work in us if we step out in faith and ask Him.

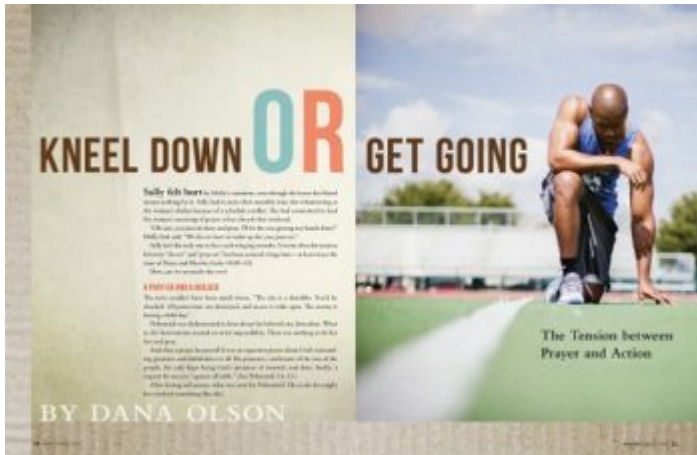
**LINDA GRAF** is the author of *Bitter Truth: My Story of Bitterness, Grace and Repentance*. She has been on staff at Front Range Alliance Church in Colorado Springs, CO, as worship ministries director since 1999. She blogs at [lindagraf.org](http://lindagraf.org).

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## **Kneel Down or Get Going**

# The Tension Between Prayer and Action

By Dana Olson



Sally felt hurt by Molly's comment, even though she knew her friend meant nothing by it. Sally had to miss their monthly time slot volunteering at the women's shelter because of a schedule conflict. She had committed to lead the women's morning of prayer at her church that weekend.

"Oh sure, you just sit there and pray. I'll be the one getting my hands dirty!" Molly had said. "We do-ers have to make up for you pray-ers."

Sally isn't the only one to face such stinging remarks. It seems that the tension between "do-ers" and "pray-ers" has been around a long time—at least since the time of Mary and Martha (Luke 10:38–42).

How can we reconcile the two?

## A Pray-er and a Builder

The news couldn't have been much worse. "The city is a shambles. You'd be shocked. All protections are destroyed, and access is wide open. The enemy is having a field day."

Nehemiah was disheartened to hear about his beloved city,

Jerusalem. What to do? Intervention seemed an utter impossibility. There was nothing to do but fast and pray.

And what a prayer he prayed! It was an expansive prayer about God's astounding greatness and faithfulness to all His promises, confession of the sins of the people, the only hope being God's promises of renewal, and then, finally, a request for success "against all odds." (See Nehemiah 1:4–11.)

After fasting and prayer, what was next for Nehemiah? His to-do list might have looked something like this:

- Get a leave of absence from work.
- Ask the boss to pay for everything.
- Travel back home.
- Survey the job that needs to be done and make a plan.
- Inspire the "home folks" to overcome their fear and get working.
- Split everyone into teams to get the job done.
- Fend off doubters, skeptics, opponents, and detractors.
- Finish in record time.
- Celebrate.

And the miracle happened: every item on that list got done—in record time. A city was saved from its enemies.

Nehemiah's story has moved generations of Christians to pray and work, work and pray. So imagine Nehemiah, during his days of fasting and prayer—crying out to God on behalf of his people—yet being accused with, "All you do is pray. Get up off your face and do something!"

Or imagine Nehemiah checking the "wall work," dealing with problems, and reassigning workers for greatest effect, then being confronted with, "Work, work, work. You should pray more. Why don't you stop what you're doing and call upon the Lord?"

## The Myth of a Tension Between Praying and Doing

Both Scripture and church history are filled with examples of Nehemiah-like, godly people who both pray and “work, for the night is coming.”<sup>1</sup> On occasion, those who love to pray are accused of being so heavenly minded that they are of no earthly good. But is that valid?

Here’s the truth: prayer and Kingdom-minded effort are both absolutely necessary and needed. Often the same people do both.

There are exceptions. I think of a grand “do-er”—or activist—named Dale, who was legendary in the movement of churches I grew up in. Dale and his wife and children served the Lord in Asia, devoted to the Great Commission. Later, Dale became a leader in the headquarters of our mission. Far too young (to our way of reckoning), a medical diagnosis of ALS (commonly referred to as Lou Gehrig’s disease) brought a premature end to Dale’s days as a do-er. But Dale’s Kingdom-minded determination kicked in, and he became legendary for his prayer life. He interceded across America and around the world from the wheelchair to which he was confined.

Jim is another example. From the time I met him in seminary, I felt deeply for his predicament of living with a permanent, debilitating disability. Yet Jim, like Dale, welcomed prayer requests and devoted himself to what he could do—intercessory prayer. Hundreds of missionaries, pastors, and faithful workers benefited from Jim’s prayer life.

Disability is not the only exception. Some of God’s people sense a special urgency to pray. They love to pray. They consider intercession their unique calling. Often some special circumstance has led them into a life of earnest, effectual prayer. They may have a specific focus or passion—for lost loved ones, for missions (even a specific part of the world or people group), for those suffering from illness, or for

revival and spiritual awakening. At times these intercessors feel misunderstood and underutilized by their church family.

## **Activists, Too, Meet with God**

Few people have achieved such evident Kingdom success as Bill and Vonette Bright did. As founders of Campus Crusade for Christ (now CRU), their passion for a Los Angeles campus student ministry in the 1950s led to one of the largest Christian ministries throughout the world today. What was the key to this growth? Both Bill and Vonette attributed it to a mighty prayer-hearing and prayer-answering God. Before her death in 2015, Vonette wrote:

*Bill and I recruited everyone we could think of to serve as prayer partners. Dividing each day into 96 segments of 15 minutes each, we worked to fill every slot and have around-the-clock prayer. We wanted to know that someone, somewhere was uniting in prayer for this ministry.*

*We knew that Scripture said to pray without ceasing. We were depending on the Holy Spirit to guide every step we took and work in students' lives, in response to prayer. Campus Crusade was born in prayer, and prayer will always be our lifeline.<sup>2</sup>*

George Mueller founded orphanages and ran them “by prayer.” Hudson Taylor had a “spiritual secret”—prayer—and founded the China Inland Mission. The Korean Church rises early in the morning for daily prayer and has sent thousands of workers around the world to plant churches.

Prayer and Kingdom work go together, which is no surprise since the Bible is full of praying activists, including several apostles. Peter, John, and Paul come to mind. And Jesus Christ Himself was the ultimate praying activist. Jesus

prayed through the night before choosing the twelve (Luke 6:12–13). And Jesus would heal multitudes and then withdraw to pray (Luke 5:15–16).

How do we manage this occasional tension between the do-ers and the pray-ers? By reminding ourselves of several biblical realities:

**1. It is by God's Spirit.** God is the One who moves His people to pray by His Spirit. And He is the One who moves the hands and feet of gifted people to get His work accomplished. Sometimes the two are the same group: those who pray, also do something. (Nehemiah is a great example.)

But not always. The Apostle Paul wrote in 1 Corinthians 3:6, “I planted the seed, Apollos watered it, but God has been making it grow.” Sometimes God uses prayer-watering saints to intercede for a situation where they will never, and could never, be hands and feet. I have prayed for many years for gospel outreach to the Fulani people of Africa. Once I even had the privilege to visit the work there and pray for God's hand to move. But I do not live there and likely never will. I don't speak the Fulfulde language, but I do speak the language of prayer.

**2. God, use me!** When we pray for God to work in a specific situation, we certainly want to be open to His leading us to be an answer to our prayers. Neither Dale nor Jim were able, literally, to lend a hand due to severe limitations, so they became focused intercessors. Yet most of us have the capability to enter into the work in one way or another.

Many are the missionaries and Christian workers who, growing in their hunger and thirst for God and desire to see God's Kingdom spread, began to pray in earnest “your kingdom come, your will be done” (Matt. 6:10), only to sense God's call on their lives to go and make disciples of the nations.

**3. Proceed with caution.** A caution is due here, however. In

our desire to “be the answer to our own prayers,” we can try to “fix things” and fool ourselves into disobedience. Remember Abram and Sarai? In Genesis 15:4, the Lord told Abram that his very own son would be his heir. But instead of waiting patiently for the hand of God, Sarai pressed her servant Hagar upon Abram, and he foolishly submitted. Ishmael was the result, but Isaac was still to come.

In our haste to “get God’s will done for Him,” we can commit grave errors of judgment. This combination of prayer and action requires discernment, patience, and a commitment to wait upon the Lord.

**4. Pray before, during, and after.** God’s Kingdom work will not be accomplished apart from prayer. The hands-on activists who want their lives to count will do well to remember that God’s work done in God’s way will always have a prayer component.

The well-worn illustration of the lumberjack who never bothered to stop and sharpen his axe is well worn for a reason—it hits home. Hard Kingdom work can result in little fruit when it’s approached in a prayerless way.

Why not stop to pray first, then take a breather to pray during your work, and finally conclude the work with prayer as well? Why not recruit “those who love to pray” to cover your efforts before you even begin? This kind of dynamic teamwork between gospel activists and gospel intercessors yields tremendous fruit for the harvest.

Years ago I heard a quote that is attributed to the most aptly named missionary in all history, Jonathan Goforth (1859–1936). He said, concerning a time of harvest and revival in Asia, “When God came, he produced more fruit in half a day than we could have achieved in six months of hard labor.”

## **Together—for His Kingdom**

So, activists, remember that whatever we do for God is God’s



work and must be done in God's way, by prayer. Respect, appreciate, and love the pray-ers in your life. Put them to effective use in the accomplishments of the Kingdom.

Intercessors, be thankful for the hardworking activists who love to stake out new territories and reach the lost. Commit to supporting them "by prayer" so that their labor is not in vain.

In other words, Sally and Molly, you need each other! Appreciate what each of you brings to the Kingdom banquet table. Celebrate your opportunity. Kneel down and get going!

<sup>1</sup>In the words of the Annie L. Coghill hymn, based on John 9:4.

<sup>2</sup>From the article "Born in Prayer" by Vonette Bright, pray2020.org.

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## Prayer or Panic?



I enjoy Facebook. Over the years that I've had a personal page, I have reconnected with dozens of friends from my childhood and college days. It has been great. I also like the political and spiritual banter that takes place in my news feed, though I admit the posts often get out of line and people are hurt by the short, snide comments. It is difficult to talk about sensitive areas of disagreement when you are not conversing face to face.

I've also noticed that on Facebook people have a tendency to display their emotions without a filter. They often say things they might not say in a personal conversation. I am not sure why, but somehow people have fewer inhibitions on the Internet.

One recent disturbing trend relates to the alarming perspectives shared about current events—and people's attempts to relate them to the need for prayer. With both the ISIS situation and the Ebola scare last fall, I was stunned by how panicked many believers were—even some leaders who should know better—and how openly they displayed that panic on Facebook.

We are living in tough times, and I sense they could keep getting worse. But as people of prayer, how should we respond with a biblical perspective? Maybe I am an odd person spiritually, or maybe it is due to my upbringing in a denomination that focuses strongly on the second coming of Christ, but I look at what is going on with interest—and even awe. No one will convince me that we are not living in the last days before Christ's return. (Yes, I understand that others thought the same thing thousands of years ago as well.)

Personally I think we are fewer than 20 years away. That's not a prediction, just my gut feeling.

So I watch and pray with interest. What is Satan doing in various places? What is God doing to bring people to Himself? What is God doing to set up history for the final days? I watch with awe because we are seeing more and more clearly the battle is "not against flesh and blood" (Eph. 6:12). You only have to look at the absurd anti-Semitism that is rising around the world—even in our government—to realize that Satan is controlling the minds of many people.

No matter what rapture position you hold, the tribulation will not suddenly come upon us with an overnight change in tough situations in the world. Even if believers are raptured away prior to the tribulation, evil will be running amok well before it—perhaps as evil is doing now, and worse. I don't want to panic about any of it. Instead, I want to pray. Pray for what? Mercy, certainly. Peace and comfort for suffering believers, yes. But I plan to spend more time praying for Jesus Christ to be glorified in the midst of all this turmoil. As evil tries to take the upper hand, God is going to bring many souls into His Kingdom before His return.

Therefore, I am guarded in how much I try to "pray away" hard times. Many revivals came during times of economic and social desperation. In these last days imagine what God could do with a Church that rises up and prays, "Maranatha! Come, Lord Jesus," instead of, "Help, get us out of this, Lord."

Maybe we should pray for more trouble, not less!

—Jonathan Graf is the publisher of Prayer Connect.