

Keys to the Kingdom

5 Doors That Prayer Opens

By Dr. Alvin VanderGriend



A few years ago, I went on a research trip to visit churches with strong prayer ministries. At each church, I looked at the prayer ministries, interviewed key prayer leaders, spent time with the staff, and sought to discern the effect prayer had on the church's overall ministry. By the time I had visited the fifth church, something dawned on me: Every church I had visited was spiritually healthy, impacting its community for Christ, and growing through evangelism. Prayer, it seemed, was key to the health and vitality of these congregations.

The staff members of these churches agreed. One pastor said that "surprising supernatural serendipities" had occurred since their church had begun to focus on prayer. Another told me that prayer had brought about revival, and there were new commitments to Christ every Sunday. The pastor of a large church in Houston, Texas, summarized the experience of his church, which had quintupled in 12 years, by saying, "What we have learned is that when we work, we work, but when we pray, God works."

I was surprised by what I had discovered. But I shouldn't have been. The Bible makes it clear that prayer is important to the work of the church. Prayer enables the church to do what it cannot do in its own strength: build the kingdom of God and proclaim the good news. Let's examine five themes from Scripture that confirm the key place of prayer in the body of Christ.

1. Prayer is the key that unlocks the storehouse of God's power (Jas. 5:16).

"Prayer," said C. Samuel Storms in *Reaching God's Ear*, "in and of itself possesses no power." I was astounded to read that, and I didn't understand it until I read what he said next: "Prayer is powerful because God is powerful, and prayer is the means through which that divine power is released and channeled into our lives." In other words, all the power in prayer is really God's power activated by prayer.

When you pray for another person, nothing flows from you to him—no vibes, no force, no energy. Instead, your prayers go heavenward, and the power of God moves from Him to the ones you pray for.

When the Bible says, "Prayer . . . is powerful and effective" (Jas. 5:16), it means that God acts powerfully and effectively through the prayers of His people. Prayer is the instrument by which God has chosen to have His power directed in the universe.

Ole Hallesby provides something of a mental picture of how this works. In his classic book, *Prayer*, he says, "This power is so rich and so mobile that all we have to do when we pray is to point to the persons or things to which we desire to have this power applied, and He, the Lord of this power, will direct the necessary power to the desired place at once." What a surprising arrangement—God partnering with human beings to accomplish His purposes.

R. A. Torrey, enthralled by the enormity of this power, states in *The Power of Prayer* that “prayer is the key that unlocks all the storehouses of God’s infinite grace and power. All that God is, and all that God has, is at the disposal of prayer. Prayer can do anything that God can do, and as God can do anything, prayer is omnipotent.”

That means prayer can do what political action cannot, what education cannot, what military might cannot, and what planning committees cannot. All these are impotent by comparison.

Prayer can move mountains. It can change human hearts. It can change families, neighborhoods, cities, and nations. It’s the ultimate source of power, because it is the power of almighty God.

This power is available to the humblest Christian. It was “a man just like us [who] prayed earnestly that it would not rain” (Jas. 5:17)—and God stopped the rain in Israel for three and a half years.

2. Prayer is key to possessing the riches of God’s grace (1 Jn. 5:14-15).

The Apostle John urged believers to pray with confidence, knowing that “if we ask anything according to [God’s] will, he hears us. And if we know that he hears us—whatever we ask—we know that we have what we asked of him” (1 Jn. 5:14-15). Imagine approaching God in prayer and receiving from Him anything and everything we asked for. I’m sure we’d do a lot more asking if that were the case.

Well, God doesn’t promise to give us anything and everything we ask for. But He does make an incredible promise to prayers, which I think is even better. He promises to give us whatever we ask that is “according to his will.”

To ask for what is according to God's will is to ask for the very things He wants for us. These are the things He knows we need, the things that are truly good for us, the riches of His grace that He wants us to have. When we ask for ourselves, in accord with His will, we have a 100 percent guarantee. We will receive what we ask of Him.

When I first understood this principle and wanted to pray in accord with God's will, the Holy Spirit took me to Ro. 8:29 and reminded me that God wants me "to be conformed to the likeness of his Son." Then I did a simple thing. I said, "God, please conform me to the image of Your Son." That was the very first prayer I consciously prayed in accord with God's will. God heard me and began in me the process that answered that prayer. He's still working at it today.

After that, I found many things to ask for that were in accord with God's will for me. I asked for wisdom, faith, virtue, love, joy, godliness, prayerfulness, Spirit-filledness, and much more. I know God heard those prayers. I began to see the difference it made in me. What I usually observed was a gradual but definite change in the right direction.

If you want to grow spiritually, and to claim the riches God has for you and your church, simply ask for those things in accord with God's will. He will hear, and you will receive what you asked of Him. He has promised it.

3. Prayer is the key to successful ministry (Jn. 14:12-14).

Shortly before He was arrested and crucified, Jesus told His disciples that He would be leaving them. This news left them confused and fearful—confused about the future of the work and fearful that they wouldn't be adequate. To allay their fears, Jesus said, "I tell you the truth, anyone who has faith in me will do what I have been doing. He will do even greater things

than these, because I am going to the Father. And I will do whatever you ask in my name, so that the Son may bring glory to the Father” (Jn. 14:12-13).

On the face of it, this seems like a preposterous thing for Jesus to say. After all, He had preached great sermons, attracted large crowds, spoken wonderful words of wisdom, walked on water, stilled a storm, healed the sick, and raised the dead. How could the disciples possibly do such things?

But Jesus then explains that such things will be possible because He is going to the Father, and they will be able to ask in His name for what they need to do the work. Going to the Father meant that Jesus would be given all power in heaven and on earth. Thus empowered, He would continue His work on earth in a different way—through them. By asking in His name, they would be linked to Him. Through prayer, His power would be at their disposal as they carried on the ministry. He would supply the power—they would do the work.

What a powerful combination. Christ on the throne of the universe. We, His disciples, here on earth to build His kingdom. We ask and He acts, and the work gets done, all to the glory of God the Father.

4. Prayer is the key to effective evangelism (1 Tim. 2:1-4).

The Bible clearly instructs us to pray for the lost. In 1 Timothy 2 , we are reminded that “God . . . wants all [persons] to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth” (vs. 3-4). That’s the desired end. The means is prayer. “I urge, then, first of all, that requests, prayers, intercession, and thanksgiving be made for everyone” (v. 1), says Paul. Such prayer “is good, and pleases God our Savior” (v. 3).

In God's eyes, this kind of praying is serious business. "I urge," says Paul, pressing us into action. "First of all," he adds, making it a top priority. Then he's thorough about what follows. Requests prompts us to pray for specific felt needs. Prayers encourages us to ask for the very blessings God desires to give. Intercession reminds us that we have free access to the throne when we intercede. Thanksgiving suggests the attitude of heart we bring to prayer.

In Prayer, Dr. Hallesby grasps the heart of Paul's concern: "It is our Lord's will that we who have received access to these powers through prayer should go through this world transmitting heavenly power to every corner of the world which needs it sorely. Our lives should be, according to our Lord's plans, quiet but steadily flowing streams of blessing, which through our prayers and intercessions should reach our whole environment."

5. Prayer is key to defeating dark powers (Lk. 22:31-32 ; Ex. 17:8-13).

There are two powerful forces at work in the world today—the power of God and the power of Satan. We can be affected by either one or both. Satan, bent on our destruction, goes about like a roaring lion seeking whom he may devour (1 Pet. 5:8). God, bent on our salvation, promises to supply everything we need for life and godliness (2 Pet. 1:3).

Prayer is the means by which God's power is brought to our defense so that we are able to stand up against the devil's schemes. When Peter was severely tested by Satan, Jesus came to his defense with prayer. He said, "I prayed for you, Simon, that your faith may not fail" (Lk. 22:32).

When Israel, on its way to the Promised Land, faced a serious military threat from the Amalekites, Joshua and the army went out to fight, but Moses went up to the hilltop to pray. When

Moses' praying hands were up, Israel was winning. But when they were down, the enemy was winning (Ex. 17:8-11).

As church leaders and faithful Christians "lift up holy hands in prayer" (1 Tim. 2:8), the church grows strong and is able to break down the gates of hell. When believers in neighborhoods and workplaces lift up praying hands over those around them, the powers of darkness are pushed back. But when prayers are weak or absent, the progress of the church is halting.

In Kneeling Christian, a mighty prayer warrior once said, "Do you realize that there is nothing the devil dreads so much as prayer? His great concern is to keep us from praying. He loves to see us 'up to our eyes' in work—provided we do not pray. He does not fear if we are eager Bible students—provided we are little in prayer. Someone has wisely said, 'Satan laughs at our toiling, mocks at our wisdom, but trembles when we pray.'"

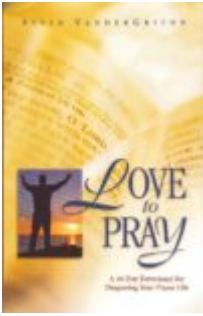
What we need most in our world is not more money, more education, or more ideas, books, or strategies. We need hands lifted up in prayer. "We can accomplish far more by our prayers than by our work," says the Kneeling Christian. "Prayer... can do anything God can do! When we pray, God works."

I hope and pray that God will be able to work powerfully to build His kingdom through your prayers.

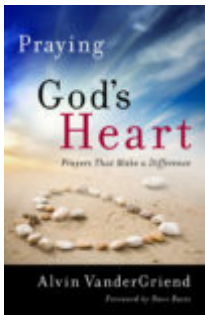
About the Author

Dr. Alvin VanderGriend is currently the Prayer Evangelism Associate for Harvest Prayer Ministries. He has authored several books on prayer, including Love to Pray, and co-authored The Praying Church Sourcebook. He is the co-founder of the Denominational Prayer Leaders Network and serves on America's National Prayer Committee.

Alvin Recommends:



Love to Pray is a 40-day devotional that includes a simple, but thorough, theology of prayer. It will fire up the user to desire to pray more.



Praying God's Heart is an easy-to-understand book on intercessory prayer. If you want to get better at praying for others, this is the resource you need.