



Encounters  
with God  
through  
Prayer

Brad  
Simon

# *Encounters with God through Prayer*

Discover the transforming Power of Prayer  
in the lives of the Apostles

3 Devotional Vignettes

Published by:



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*“It is my sincere desire and prayer that through these Biblical narratives you will discover the transforming power prayer can bring to the Christian life and will encourage you to experience life with God more deeply.”*  
- Brad Simon

## *Dedication*

This book is dedicated to Debbie Simon, my best friend, my sweetheart, and my wife. She has provided me with loving support throughout my adult life and has been a valuable asset in my teaching ministry.

A Special Thanks to Beebe and Katy Kauffman at Lighthouse Bible Studies. Their encouragement, coaching, and training have made me a better writer.

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# *Teach Us to Pray*

Luke 11:1-13, Matthew 6:5-14

They grew up in the synagogue and had heard their local rabbi pray many times. They had heard the long self-edifying prayers of the Pharisees. No doubt their father had taught them the Shema as they said their morning prayers. Following Jewish custom, they prayed three times every day, morning prayers at sunrise, afternoon prayers at 3 pm (the time of the evening sacrifice in Jerusalem), and evening prayers at nightfall. They had studied the scriptures and knew the prayers of the prophets and could recite many of the prayers of King David from the Psalms. But no one had ever prayed like this man.

The teaching of Jesus amazed the disciples, for no one explained the scriptures as He did. They were in awe of the miracles He performed. But as they spent time with Him and listened to Him, as they watched what He did, they were impressed by His prayers. On one occasion when He had finished praying, His disciples asked, “*Lord, teach us to pray*” (Luke 11:1).

Nowhere is it recorded that the disciples ever ask Jesus to teach them to preach or minister more effectively. Scripture never mentions they ask how to study the Bible or tell parables imparting spiritual wisdom. But they asked him to teach them to pray.

Our Lord was a Man of Prayer. He made prayer a priority, and the disciples saw Him praying often. Like many of us today, the

disciples realized that the spiritual discipline they struggled with the most was prayer, and they wanted to learn from Jesus this secret of spiritual power and wisdom.

Jesus begins by giving them an example of prayer that we know as the Lord's Prayer. Here in Luke, the wording is a little different from the more familiar version that is recorded in Matthew, which was a year or two earlier in Jesus' ministry. However, the outline of the prayer is the same.

When we pray, we are to include:

➤ **Praise to God.**

*Our Father in heaven, Hallowed be Your name* (Luke 11:2a NKJV).

➤ **Pray for His ministry work to be done.**

*Your kingdom come. Your will be done. On earth as it is in heaven* (v2b NKJV).

➤ **We are to make request for ourselves and others.**

*Give us day by day our daily bread* (v3 NKJV).

➤ **We're to confess our sins.**

*And forgive us our sins* (v4a NKJV).

➤ **We are to seek His guidance and protection.**

*And do not lead us into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one* (v4b NKJV).

Jesus then tells them this parable of the persistent friend:

*“Suppose one of you has a friend and goes to him at midnight and says to him, ‘Friend, lend me three loaves of bread, because a friend of mine on a journey has come to me, and I don’t have anything to offer him.’ Then he will answer from inside and say, ‘Don’t bother me! The door is already locked, and my children and I have gone to bed. I can’t get up to give you anything.’ I tell you, even though he won’t get up and give him anything because he is his friend, yet because of his friend’s shameless boldness, he will get up and give him as much as he needs. (Luke 11:5-8)*

This parable is a wonderful reminder for our persistence in prayer. If an unrighteous man will give good gifts, how much more will our loving Father in heaven give us when we persistently asked. When we pray, we are to ask and keep on asking, to seek and keep on seeking. We are to knock and keep on knocking (v 9-10). We are to keep in constant communication with our Father in Heaven. The Apostle Paul exhorted us to *pray constantly* (1 Thessalonians 5:17).

However, as important as the lesson on persistence in prayer is, we dare not miss the fundamental truth Jesus was teaching. Did you notice who was with the man in the parable? Jesus said, *then he will answer from inside and say, “Don’t bother me! The door is already locked, and my children and I have gone to bed. I can’t get up to give you anything (v7).*

The man was a father and was inside with his children. Do you think the man would have told one of his children to go away if they

woke up during the night and asked for food or drink? Of course not!

Jesus concluded His teaching on prayer by saying,

*What father among you, if his son asks for a fish, will give him a snake instead of a fish? Or if he asks for an egg, will give him a scorpion? If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will the heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him? (v11-13).*

As Christians, we are God's children, and we don't have to worry about God turning us away. But how often do we act like the friend who had company drop in on him? We go through our day, seldom speaking to God. Then something unexpected happens in our lives, and in desperation we anxiously run to God, pounding on heaven's door. We feel helpless and alone and our prayers seem hollow. We knock harder and call out louder as if we must wake God up from His sleep. When the door finally opens, we pray, demanding a response from a seemingly reluctant God.

What a misrepresentation of who God is. We are not the desperate friend outside, frantically trying to get God's attention. We are inside, the dearly loved children. He is our loving Heavenly Father and desires to give us wonderful gifts if only we ask. We don't have to beat down heaven's doors. All we need to do is whisper. He is that close to us, and we are that dear to Him.

James, a half-brother of Jesus and early leader in the church at Jerusalem, was nicknamed ‘Old Camel Knees’ because his knees were extremely calloused from kneeling so often in prayer. He wrote: *You do not have because you do not ask. You ask and don’t receive because you ask with wrong motives, so that you may spend it on your pleasures* (James 4:2b-3).

*Prayer:*

Dear Heavenly Father, we humbly come before Your throne in awe of who You are and of all You have done. Yet we are reminded that You are our loving Father, and we are Your children. You desire for us to come to You seeking the good gifts You are longing to give us.

Forgive us for all the times we struggle to pray. Thank You for including this passage in Scripture for us to read and study. So often we feel as the disciples did that our prayer life is so inadequate. Teach us to come to You as a child with outstretched arms, running to their father for comfort. Help us through Your Holy Spirit to learn how to pray. In Christ’s name we pray, Amen.



# *Developing a Consistent Prayer Life*

Matthew 26:36-56

Peter, James, and John were abruptly awakened from their sleep. It had been a long week of teaching and ministering to the people, as well as debating with the Pharisees and other religious leaders. That evening they had a large meal with the other apostles, and now late into the night, slumber filled their eyes. Worse than being awakened was the stinging rebuke that woke them. Words that cut so deep, they never forgot. *So, couldn't you stay awake with me one hour?* (Matthew 26:40).

Following their supper in the upper room, Jesus and His apostles had made their way across the Kidron Valley. There at the base of the Mount of Olives, they entered the peaceful Garden of Gethsemane, a favorite getaway of theirs. On this night, Jesus told eight of His apostles to sit and wait near the garden gate. Peter, James, and John accompanied Jesus into the garden where He told them to watch and pray as He went a little further to talk with His Father alone.

As they entered the garden, the moon shone brightly through the twisted branches of the olive trees, decorating the garden with intertwined silhouettes appearing like a carpet of lace. The torches illuminating the city provided a warm, soft glow to the leaves as they fluttered in the cool, evening breeze. From one side of the garden, you could hear the voice of our Savior praying. But the only sound from the other side was the rhythmic snoring of three

fishermen. The stark contrast of the events that followed stand as a powerful reminder of the necessity of prayer.

When the remaining person from their supper, Judas Iscariot, finally arrived at the garden, it wasn't to join them in prayer. For he was accompanied by the religious leaders and soldiers who came to arrest Jesus. While Jesus willfully submitted to them in accordance with His Father's will, Peter, fearing the crowd, drew a sword. Having no training as a soldier, he swung the sword like a fisherman casting a net. Trying to cut off a man's head, Peter missed so badly he merely clipped his ear (Matt 26:51-56, John 18:10-11).

Earlier that night at supper, Peter had disputed with the Lord (Matt 26:31-35), and then in the garden he disobeyed the Lord's command to pray (Matt 26:40-41). Now he ran ahead of God, not waiting for the Lord's instructions, trusting his sword rather than God.

Jesus remained calm and at peace as the events unfolded throughout that night and early morning. In the garden, the apostles deserted Him, running in fear from the guards. As the night grew long, Peter, fearing the mob, turned on Jesus, denying he even knew Him! (Matt 26:69-74, John 18:15-27). The correlation is obvious. A consistent prayer life is necessary to remain in God's will and remain free of fear and worry.

Before we condemn Peter and the other apostles too harshly, we need to consider our own prayers. How often do we sleep better

than we pray? How often do our minds wander when they should be watching? Certainly, the Lord could say to us as He said to Peter, *stay awake and pray, so that you won't enter into temptation. The spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak* (Matt 26:41).

Pastor Adrian Rogers said, "The greatest privilege we have is prayer. The greatest failure that most of us have is prayer."<sup>1</sup> Regardless of what our prayer life is like, we can all stand to improve.

Peter certainly learned his lesson, for later he would write to Christians encouraging them as they suffered persecution and faced an uncertain future. He wrote, *the end of all things is near; therefore, be alert and sober-minded for prayer* (1 Peter 4:7). How similar are Peter's words to those of Jesus. We need to stay awake, be alert in our prayers, and pray with a sound mind.

The commanders of Israel's armies approached the prophet Jeremiah and said, *pray to the Lord your God on our behalf, on behalf of this entire remnant that the Lord your God may tell us the way we should go and the thing we should do* (Jeremiah 42:2-3).

Just like in Jeremiah's day, today we can discern God's plan for *the way we should go and the thing we should do* only when we pray. The more time we spend talking with God in prayer and reading His Word, the easier it is to walk in His ways and remain faithful and obedient to His perfect will.

The more we pray and stay in God’s will, the less we need to worry and fear the events taking place in our lives. God said, *For I know the plans I have for you ... plans for your well-being, not for disaster, to give you a future and a hope* (Jer 29:11). God’s plan for our lives is for our well-being, not for disaster—what do we have to fear? As we continue in prayer, we stay within God’s plan of hope for the future.

Late in his life, while under house arrest chained to Roman guards and uncertain what the future held for him, the Apostle Paul emphasized the key to living a life free of anxiety and worry.

*Don’t worry about anything, but in everything, through prayer and petition with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.* (Philippians 4:6-7)

Paul says we are not to worry about anything. That is only possible if we pray about everything.

Pastor G. Campbell Morgan was once asked by a lady if she should bother God with prayers about all the little things in her life. He responded, “Madam, can you mention anything in your life that is big to God?”<sup>2</sup>

Everything means everything. There is nothing in our lives that is too small for God’s love to be concerned about, and there is nothing too big for God’s power to handle.

When we continually pray to God about everything in our lives, we understand more fully God's will for our lives. When we stay within God's will for our lives, we can experience the peace of God as it guards our hearts and minds.

Even though our world may seem like it is crashing down around us, and others are running in fear, through our prayers we can rise above our circumstances and experience a peace and calmness that surpasses human comprehension and understanding.

### *Prayer:*

Dear Heavenly Father, forgive us for all the times that our minds have wandered, and we have become distracted as we attempt to pray to You. We desire to spend time with You, but as Jesus told His apostles, so often our spirit is willing, but our flesh is weak.

We stand amazed at Christians we know and ones we have read about throughout history that are true prayer warriors and we desire to be like them. May Your Holy Spirit guide us as we develop a more fervent, effectual prayer life. Help us follow the example Jesus provided for us as we strive to improve our time in prayer. In His name, we ask these things, Amen.

<sup>1</sup> Adrian Rogers, "Prayer and the Will of God"  
<https://www.lightsource.com/ministry/love-worth-finding/articles/prayer-and-the-will-of-god-12760.html>

<sup>2</sup> Dr. G. Campbell Morgan, as written in *Thru the Bible*. J. V. McGee. Nashville: Nelson, 1997.

# *Prayer that Rattled the Rafters*

Acts 4:23-31

It was an exciting time for the new church. Despite being barely a few months old and not yet having a regular place to gather for worship, the church had grown rapidly. Because of the message the church preached, every day more people were coming to Jesus Christ and accepting Him as their Lord and Savior. The overwhelming response to their message invigorated the leadership, and they proclaimed the Word of God with boldness. But then it happened.

Two of the leaders were arrested and thrown into prison because they were converting the community away from the established religion of the country. Preaching Christ was not specifically against any law, yet it greatly annoyed the ruling authorities. Finding no cause to arrest them, they ordered the men to not speak or teach about Jesus. After threatening them further and severely warning them to stop, they released the men from prison.

What happened next stands as a marvelous example for all Christians to follow in times of difficulties. The first thing the Apostles Peter and John did upon their release was to gather with other Christians and pray. And God answered in thunderous applause!

*When they had prayed, the place where they were assembled was shaken, and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak the word of God boldly (Acts 4:31).*

The prayer they prayed is one of the greatest prayers recorded in the Bible. Only a few times in Scripture is it recorded that God shook the place where His people prayed. When He does, we would do well to take notice of the prayer. We can learn a great deal about the power of prayer not only from what they prayed that day but also from what they did NOT pray for.

It was a united prayer meeting as *they raised their voices together to God (v.24a)*. The early church was marked by its love and care for one another. God desires for His followers to live in unity. The Father does not want His children to squabble. Division in the church has always hindered our prayers and robs the church of spiritual power.

They didn't begin their prayer with the typical "Our Heavenly Father"—they simply addressed God as their Master. They came to God with the attitude that they were God's obedient servants, and He was truly their Lord and Master. Powerful prayers do not come from telling God what we want done but asking God to do His will in and through us. It means getting God's will done on earth, not man's will done in heaven.

They approached God full of confidence in His power *that made the heaven, the earth, and the sea, and everything in them (v.24b)*.

They prayed, knowing God was in control and He alone had the power and authority to do miraculous works.

Their prayer was based solidly on Scripture, and in this case, Psalm 2. The Word of God and prayer must always agree. The early believers applied the message of this psalm to their own situation and identified their adversaries as *Herod and Pontius Pilate, with the Gentiles and the people of Israel* (v.27).

They did not pray to have their enemies removed from office, for new laws to be enacted, nor for their circumstances to change. Instead, they asked God to continue to perform His miraculous work amid their circumstances. They did not pray for protection from their enemies, nor for their personal safety. They only asked that God would strengthen them to speak with boldness despite the opposition, and that God's work of ministry would increase.

*And now, Lord, consider their threats, and grant that your servants may speak your word with all boldness, while you stretch out your hand for healing, and signs and wonders are performed through the name of your holy servant Jesus.* (v.29-30)

Pastor Phillips Brooks said: "Do not pray for easy lives. Pray to be stronger men! Do not pray for tasks equal to your powers. Pray for powers equal to your God-given tasks. Then the doing of your work shall be no miracle. But you shall be a miracle. Every day you shall wonder at yourself, at the richness of life which has come to you by the grace of God."<sup>1</sup>



The early church prayed that God's servant, Jesus Christ, be glorified. It was His name that gave them the power to minister, and His name alone deserved the glory.

They prayed God would continue to manifest His supernatural power, and He stamped an affirmative answer on the request by shaking the place they met with an earthquake. If we today want revival in our churches and see the Spirit of God move in our communities as He did in this first-century church, then we must pray as they prayed. God is still willing to answer in mighty power, if only we are ready and willing to pray.

Civil War chaplain E. M. Bounds wrote about prayer and the church over one hundred years ago, yet his insightful words are as relevant today as ever. Listen carefully as you read what he wrote.

“The church is looking for better methods; God is looking for better men. ... What the church needs today is not more or better machinery, not new organizations or more novel methods. She needs men whom the Holy Spirit can use—men of prayer, men mighty in prayer. The Holy Spirit does not flow through methods, but through men. He does not come on machinery, but on men. He does not anoint plans, but men—men of prayer!”<sup>2</sup>

## Prayer:

Dear Father, we are humbled by the boldness of the Apostles to speak Your Word amid such opposition. Forgive us for all the times we can only think of our personal needs and the physical well-being of those around us and give little to no thought of the spiritual needs of those we meet.

May Your Holy Spirit open our eyes to see the work and ministry You have for us to accomplish. Help us put aside our personal ambitions and be fully committed to the tasks You set before us. Give us the courage to proclaim Your message boldly, so that we can bring honor and glory to Your Son, Jesus Christ. In His authority and power, we pray. Amen.

<sup>1</sup>Phillips Brooks, "Going up to Jerusalem," *Twenty Sermons* (New York, NY: E. P. Dutton & Company, 1886), 330.

<sup>2</sup>E. M. Bounds, "Power Through Prayer," (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker House, 1972), 5.

## *About the Author*

With a unique blend of storytelling and Bible exposition, Brad Simon has shared God's Word for over forty-five years. He is founder and director of Christian Growth Ministry, working to encourage believers to mature in their walk with Christ, grow in their faith, and serve in ministry, all for the glory of God.

Brad Simon is the featured Bible Teacher on Monday Morning Inspiration, a podcast designed to inspire listeners to experience life with God more deeply. He is also a frequent contributor to Refresh Bible Study Magazine and has written devotional articles for book compilations and blogs.

Brad is a retired Master Jeweler. He relies on the God-given creativity that won him several national and international jewelry design awards to craft Biblical Narratives and Life Stories that are engaging and thought-provoking. Once a speaker, author, publisher, and trainer for the jewelry industry, now he is putting those skills to work to promote the beauty and appeal of God's Word.

Originally from Illinois, Brad and his wife Debbie have made Spartanburg, South Carolina, their home for the past twenty-five years. They are proud parents of two sons (one married) and two grandsons. His one guilty pleasure is being an avid fan of St. Louis Cardinals baseball. Discover his Bible Teaching Ministry at:

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