



THE PRAYER CLOSET

*Transforming Lives Through Intercessory
Prayer And Fasting*

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PERSEVERANCE IN PRAYER

Have you ever felt like a failure in prayer? Or does it appear to you that your prayer life is stuck in neutral? You've been a Christian for years. You've been in church. You've done numerous Bible studies. You've read all the recommended books on prayer. Yet, your praying seems powerless and useless. You just don't seem to have the spectacular answers that others receive. Maybe you're wondering if you will ever grow and mature in prayer.

Chuck Swindoll authored a book entitled *Three Steps Forward, Two Steps Back*. In this book, he writes about persevering through the pressures of life. He admits that there will be setbacks in your walk with God. Yet, the key is to persevere through the setbacks.

That title can be applied to our prayer lives. However it might be more appropriate to title our prayer lives, "*One Step Forward, Four Steps Back*." Every believer experiences times of dryness in prayer. Answers do not come and you find yourself growing impatient with God. You don't sense God's presence or power. You question if God is even listening. You wonder if you should keep praying. You think, "I've been a Christian for all these years. Yet, prayer is still a struggle." Times like these are inevitable. If you've never experienced times like this, you are blessed. Or perhaps your time has not come yet.

What do you do when you deem yourself a failure in prayer? How do you respond when suspect that your prayer life is stagnant? The answer to both questions is to persevere in prayer.

You don't quit; you don't give up. You keep praying.

The prayer life of Joshua provides you with an example of persevering in prayer. His example teaches you to relentlessly pursue God no matter what. No matter how you feel, stand firm in faith, continuing to call on God. No matter how weak your praying seems, keep praying. Even when your praying is inconsistent, do not yield any more ground to prayerlessness.

The book of Joshua contains four examples from Joshua's prayer life. These examples show that you must keep on praying regardless of your feelings or your circumstances. There are four truths concerning Joshua's prayer life that demand your attention.

Joshua surrendered to God in prayer (Joshua 5)

The first account of Joshua in conversation with the Lord is recorded in **Joshua 5**. Joshua is looking around the city of Jericho. He is scouting the walled city, planning his offensive against it. He suddenly encounters a man with a drawn sword, "And it came to pass, when Joshua was by Jericho, that he lifted his eyes and looked, and behold, a Man stood opposite him with His sword drawn in his hand" (**Joshua 5:13a**). He did not realize it yet, but this man was God in human form. It was Jesus Christ in a pre-incarnate manifestation.

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Since this man had a drawn sword, Joshua wanted to know who he was for—what side he would be fighting on, “And Joshua went to Him and said to Him, ‘Are You for us or for our adversaries?’” (**Joshua 5:13b**). He receives a definite and stunning answer, “So He said, ‘No, but as Commander of the army of the LORD I have now come’” (**Joshua 5:14**). Jesus states that He has come to take charge. He is the Commander of the army of the Lord. Joshua is under His leadership. He must follow the orders of this Commander.

Jesus Christ delivered a startling answer to Joshua. He also offered a stunning challenge to Him. Joshua needed to submit Himself to the true Commander. Joshua’s response reveals his surrender in prayer, “And Joshua fell on his face to the earth and worshiped, and said to Him, ‘What does my LORD say to His servant?’” (**Joshua 5:14b**). Joshua submits his will to the direction of the Commander, Jesus Christ.

One of the most significant lessons that you can ever learn about prayer is surrender in prayer. How each believer needs to exhibit the same attitude as Joshua. Each believer needs to declare as he or she enters God’s presence, “What does my Lord say to His servant?” This must be the continual cry of the child of God. Our wills must be ready to surrender to God as we pray.

The child of God is to share the needs and the desires of his or her heart with God. Jesus instructs you to do this, “Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you” (**Matthew 7:7**). The Bible also declares, “Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God” (**Philippians 4:6**). The apostle Peter adds, “Casting all your care upon Him, for He cares for you” (**1 Peter 5:7**).

However this has to be balanced with submission with God’s will. Bring your requests to God. Pour out your heart to Him about your needs and your desires. God is your heavenly Father. He delights in you expressing your needs and desires to Him. He honors and blesses this. Yet, at the same time, you must be willing to change your desires, to allow your requests to be shaped by His holy purpose.

Believers often pray the opposite of what Joshua prayed. Joshua asks God what He wanted done. We often turn this around. Believers declare to God, “Here’s what I want you to do.” Joshua

may have had his military strategies and plans. Yet, these had to be submitted to the Commander. The same is true for you. You have needs and desires. You are to declare these to your Father. You are to plead for Him to meet those needs and grant those desires. As you do this, you must be submitted to His will. You must be willing to shape and mold your requests to His own good and perfect will as He directs you.

The first account of Joshua’s prayer life reveals that he gets off to a great start. He learns a significant lesson. Yet, the next account of his prayer life shows us a setback. Even though he had a great start, he faltered.

Joshua wavers in prayer to God. (Joshua 7)

The next episode in Joshua’s prayer life is recorded in **Joshua 7**. Israel has just suffered a humiliating defeat by the people of Ai. Israel conquered mighty Jericho, but is crushed by the small, weak army of Ai. Israel is thrown into confusion and despair by this unexpected defeat.

Joshua responds by praying, “Alas, Lord God, why have You brought this people over the Jordan at all—to deliver us into the hand of the Amorites, to destroy us? Oh, that we had been content, and dwelt on the other side of the Jordan” (**Joshua 7:7**). This sounds like the people whom Joshua had opposed at one time (**Numbers 14:2-3**). What an amazing statement of unbelief! This man who had surrendered in prayer is now wavering in prayer. In a moment of weakness, Joshua failed to trust in the Lord. Joshua blamed God for Israel’s problems, accusing the Lord of bringing them into the Promised Land so that their enemies could destroy them.

This is a powerful example of how quickly the believer can move from faith to unbelief. It is unfortunate and tragic. Yet, it is a struggle that every believer must face. A believer can exercise great faith in God one moment and then exhibit unbelief and bitterness the next. Too many times a fall into unbelief often follows a powerful exercise of faith. Joshua exhibits irreverence toward God. His bitterness towards God boils over into the words of verse 7.

Joshua’s prayer continues in **verses 8 and 9**, “O Lord, what shall I say when Israel turns its back

before its enemies? For the Canaanites and all the inhabitants of the land will hear of it, and surround us, and cut off our name from the earth. Then what will You do for Your great name?" Joshua is concerned about the Israelites being destroyed by the Canaanites. He was dwelling mainly on his feelings and the safety of the people. He did ask God to protect the reputation of His name. Yet, it was only after he asked God to protect Israel's name.

You imitate Joshua when you nurse bitterness toward God. It could be that you love and serve God, but trouble plagues your life. Perhaps God didn't answer your prayer request the way that you desired. Maybe God didn't answer in your time. Possibly God seemed silent when you felt that you needed Him the most. At times like this, a believer's faith and surrender seems to melt. You can fall into the trap of unbelief regardless of your past spiritual victories.

God did reveal the reason for Israel's defeat. In the battle of Jericho, the Lord had commanded the people not to take for themselves the spoils after the victory. The plunder was to be reserved for God and God alone. Yet, a man by the name of Achan disregarded the divine command and took some of the spoil for himself. He secretly committed this sin, but the Lord saw it. Because of this disobedience, the army of Israel suffered a miserable defeat (**Joshua 7:10-11**).

Sometimes God will reveal the reason for unanswered prayer. There are times when God is pleased to do this. Yet, there will be times when He will not do this. At this point, you must trust God. Your surrender to the Lord must continue even when you don't have answers or victories. Your willingness to submit to Him must endure when heaven seems silent or God's answers do not line up with your reasoning or your desires. You must persevere in prayer, trusting God's love, goodness, and wisdom.

Joshua wavered in prayer and it cost him. It led to a giant step back in his walk with God. This can happen to every child of God. Past victories and previous surrenders do not protect you from wavering in prayer. You must persist in prayer and in your surrender to God. It must be the continual experience of the child of God.

Joshua neglects prayer to God (Joshua 9)

The third account of Joshua's prayer life is recorded in **Joshua 9**. Israel has dealt with the sin of Achan. They claimed their second victory, defeating and destroying the people of Ai. The people of Gibeon hear of this and are terrified of Israel's military might.

The people of Gibeon then devised a plan to trick the Israelites into a treaty with them. A treaty would deliver them from destruction and move Israel to help them whenever another army attacked them. They decided to deceive Joshua into thinking that they were from a distant land, posing no threat to him and the people of Israel. Once Joshua made a treaty with them, it would be morally impossible for him to exterminate them.

The deceitful plan of the Gibeonites worked perfectly. They brought out worn-out clothes, sandals, wineskins, and sacks to give the impression that they had traveled from a distant land. They even presented Joshua with stale bread, giving the impression that it was fresh when they had left home. It all looked convincing.

Joshua and the leaders took the bait and fell to the Gibeonites' deception. They believed their story. They made a treaty with them, disobeying God's command to destroy the Canaanites. Why did Joshua fall into this trap? **Joshua 9:14** provides the ominous answer, "Then the men of Israel took some of their provisions; but they did not ask counsel of the LORD." Joshua neglected to pray about this matter and experienced a spiritual setback. His lack of prayer led him to spiritual defeat.

Joshua believed that this was an open-and-shut case. If he had prayed, God would have revealed the Gibeonites' deception to him. Yet, he didn't think that this situation required prayer. His presumption created an irreversible mistake that cost Israel for generations to come. Joshua and the army of Israel later had to take time out to fight the Gibeonites' enemies. Yet, even more damaging than this, God had set apart Israel as a holy people. Now they were intermingled with people who would be a hindrance and not a help to their relationship to God and their obedience to Him.

When you neglect prayer, you are headed for spiritual defeat. No believer is exempt from this spiritual principle. No matter how mature you are in the faith, if you neglect prayer, it will cost you dearly. No matter how long a person has walked with God, neglecting prayer is a tragic and expensive sin. On your worst day, you need God's grace, power, and guidance. Yet, on your best day, you still stand in need of these things. There will never come a day when you are not dependent on God.

Neglecting prayer can lead you to irreversible mistakes that will affect you and your relationship to God. It always results in a step back in your relationship with God. Prayerlessness is a sin that insults God and leaves you spiritually weakened and depleted. It has been said, "Heaven must be full of answers to prayer for which no one has ever bothered to ask." When you do not pray, you are cutting yourself off from God's guidance and blessings. Your relationship to God will begin a downhill slide if you neglect prayer.

Neglecting prayer is a violation of **Proverbs 3:5-6**, "Trust in the LORD with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways acknowledge Him, and He shall direct your paths." Prayer is the believer's way of expressing dependence on God. God wants to guide you and bless you. Yet, He has determined that you will receive from Him through prayer (**James 4:2**). As you pray, God makes you sensitive to His guidance. He pours out His blessings on your life. This requires that you pray and commit the details of your life to God. No matters are too small or insignificant to God. As you depend on God through prayer, He grants what is needed for your life and circumstances.

This chapter reveals another setback in Joshua's prayer life. He failed to pray and he paid the consequences. This truth stands true for Christians of every generation, including our own.

Joshua succeeds in prayer. (Joshua 10)

The final account of Joshua's prayer life is found in **Joshua 10**. In this chapter, Joshua and the Israelite army are engaged in a battle against the Amorites. The day is wearing long. Joshua fears that the enemy is going to escape because of

nightfall. Because of this, Joshua prays, "Sun, stand still over Gibeon; and Moon, in the Valley of Aijalon" (**Joshua 10:12**). We know that the sun is already still; it doesn't move. But the Bible is speaking in common, every day terms. The Lord prolonged the day so that Joshua could have complete victory over the Amorites, "So the sun stood still in the midst of heaven, and did not hasten to go down for about a whole day" (**Joshua 10:13**). God worked a miracle in answer to Joshua's prayer. Joshua and the army of Israel experienced complete victory over the Amorites.

Joshua 10:14 says, "And there has been no day like that, before or after it, that the LORD heeded the voice of a man; for the LORD fought for Israel." God heard Joshua's plea and answered with a miracle that had never been seen before or since then. The Living Bible sums up the truth of this verse by stating, "The Lord stopped the sun and moon—all because of the prayer of one man." This is a remarkable testimony to God's grace and mercy—He heeds the voice of a man.

God answered Joshua's prayer. He experienced great victory through this prayer. Keep in mind that it was this same man who wavered in prayer. He blamed God and expressed his unbelief in prayer to God. Keep in mind that it was this same man who neglected prayer. He failed to pray at a crucial point and faced severe consequences for it.

But, isn't that the point? Even though he had setbacks and failures in prayer, he kept on praying. He pressed through these things to victory in prayer. Too many Christians give up on prayer or are inconsistent in prayer because they know that they are not perfect in it.

You do not have to be perfect in prayer. Yet, you must persevere in prayer. Remember that Joshua—who stopped the earth on its twenty-four hour rotation through one of his prayers—often failed miserably in his praying. You must be committed to praying for the long haul. You will experience setbacks in your prayer life. There can be times of failure in prayer. However, you can't give up or offer half-hearted attempts at prayer. If you will continue to seek God, you will move through the setbacks and failures to a greater maturity and usefulness in prayer. The only time to lose hope concerning prayer is when you stop praying.

Practical Applications

The following are some practical applications that you can take away from the prayer life of Joshua.

- ◆ *Weaknesses, failures, and mistakes in prayer should not discourage you.* Every believer learns how to pray. No one enters the kingdom of God knowing how to pray. Learning to pray is a process. Over time, as you seek God in prayer, He molds and shapes your prayer life. You learn to pray as you pray. God transforms your prayer life as you seek Him. He takes the weaknesses, the failures, and the mistakes and uses them to deepen your prayer life. If you will continue to pray, God will teach you to pray. He will use your praying. Just don't give in to discouragement.
- ◆ *No one has arrived when it comes to prayer.* Every believer needs to be submissive and teachable in the area of prayer. No one has reached perfection in this matter. Regardless of your maturity level, you must remain submissive and teachable. In prayer conferences, I often encounter believers who see no need to learn about prayer. They feel that they know how to pray and do not need any help in this area. This is a dangerous attitude. The Word of God says that God resists the proud, but gives grace to the humble (**James 4:6**). Pride over your prayer life can bring resistance from God. God will not answer the proud person. Yet, the humble person—the one who remains submissive and teachable—is the one on whom He pours out His grace and blesses with answers to prayer. This is the person whom God will hear and answer.
- ◆ *Past victories in prayer do not guarantee future victories.* Joshua's example teaches that you must remain surrendered to God. He surrendered to God in **Joshua 5**, but was self-centered and unbelieving in **Joshua 7**. You must daily surrender yourself and your prayer requests to God. An attitude of surrender to God should characterize your prayer life. A lack of surrender to God in prayer brings failure.
- ◆ *Prayerlessness is an insult to God.* When we do not pray, we are depending on ourselves. In effect, we are saying to God, "I do not need You or Your help." This always grieves God, insults

His character, and leaves us spiritually weakened and depleted. Prayerlessness also brings weighty consequences into our lives.

- ◆ *God is willing to grant bold requests.* God extended the day because Joshua asked Him. God is pleased when we make bold requests of Him. You pay God a compliment when you ask great things of Him. Do not be afraid or intimidated to ask great things of God. He is a God who is worthy of such requests. He is a God who can do exceedingly abundantly above all that you can ask or think.
- ◆ *God is ready and willing to aid you in your spiritual warfare.* You are engaged in a war like Joshua was. Yet, your war is a spiritual war (**Ephesians 6:12**). God is willing and ready to help you in the midst of this war. Your strength, willpower, and wisdom are no match for Satan and his forces. You must have the wisdom and power of God that is released through prayer. If you will cry out to Him, He desires to help you and give you victory. The war is too great for you, but you have a Lord in heaven that is willing to do whatever is necessary so that you can have victory. If you will seek Him, He will help you in the war against sin, temptation, and the forces of evil.

Does Your Mind Wander When You Pray?

Do you find yourself struggling to stay focused when you pray? You have the best of intentions. You want to seek the Lord with all your heart. You start well. Yet, as you pray, your mind wanders. You begin to think about everything but God. Your job, your spouse, your kids, your schedule, your bills, your plans, your pain, your day, your night—these things press into your mind as you attempt to pray. When your mind is cluttered or your emotions are out of control, your praying will be scattered and pulled in different directions. It's painful to admit, but this does happen.

The Bible teaches that the believer is to stay focused as he or she prays, "But the end of all things is at hand; therefore be serious and watchful in your prayers" (**1 Peter 4:7**). With so many things on our mind, it is difficult to focus totally on

God as you pray. Yet, there is hope. God understands your struggle and will help you.

The following are some suggestions to help you overcome wandering thoughts in prayer:

- ◆ **Confess your struggle to God (1 Peter 5:7).** Tell God about your wandering thoughts. Lay out your need before Him in this area. Ask Him to help you deal with this problem.
- ◆ **Pray the Scriptures.** Praying the Scriptures can give you words and ideas. By using the Word, you can pray with focus and confidence.
- ◆ **Use prayer lists.** Some people have found that a list of prayer requests or prayer targets have helped them to stay focused. Before you pray, write down the people or the needs that you will talk to God about during your prayer time.
- ◆ **Pray aloud.** Praying aloud requires concentration and can keep your mind from wandering as you pray.
- ◆ **Write your prayers out.** This requires discipline. Yet, if you are really struggling with wandering thoughts, it might help you come to grips with this problem. You might not write out the entire prayer, but sketch an outline of what you are going to say to your Father.
- ◆ **Keep in mind that you are talking with your heavenly Father.** Too many times we make prayer difficult and complex. We focus too much on the vocabulary and form of our praying. When this takes place, our minds will start wandering. Remember that God is your Father and that you are talking with Him. You are coming to a Father who loves you and wants to hear from you. Prayer is a relationship and not a ritual. You are with One who loves you and who wants you to pour your heart out to Him.
- ◆ **Stay focused on God during the day.** In order to help your concentration in prayer, concentrate on God throughout your day. If you do not spend your day thinking of God and focusing on Him, you will have a difficult time doing it when you pray. If you spend 16 hours of your day walking in and thinking of the affairs of the world, and five minutes thinking about God, the world is going to seem 300 times more real to you than God. On a daily basis, labor to think about God and talk to Him through the day. Concentrate on Him through the daily business

of your life. As you go through your day, let your mind wander to God so that when you pray your mind will not wander to the world.

- ◆ **Realize the necessity of your praying.** Your mind will wander when you lose interest in your prayer requests. Ask God to give you understanding of the importance of your praying for people and needs. Pray for Him to give you His heart for intercession. Value how important a task intercession is.
- ◆ **Change the time or the place of your prayer.** Jesus provides an example of this. He varied the times and the places that He prayed in order to get away from distractions (**Matthew 14:23; Mark 1:30; Luke 5:16**). In order to deal with wandering thoughts, you might consider changing the place you pray or the time that you pray.
- ◆ **Don't beat yourself up.** If you are struggling with wandering thoughts in prayer, don't beat yourself up. Don't allow this to keep you from praying. Realize that this is a common problem for believers. Don't let the guilt over your wandering thoughts or lack of concentration make you even more distracted and frustrated. Keep on praying! Don't give up!

Healing Prayer The Healing Of The Leper

In **Matthew 8:1-4**, the Lord Jesus Christ heals a leper. This healing is also recorded in **Mark 1:40-45** and **Luke 5:12-14**. What can we learn about praying from healing from this account? The following are some suggestions that can give you insight and guidance when you pray for healing:

- (1) *When you pray for healing, focus on the Healer.* This may sound simplistic, but it is crucial. This leper focused on Jesus and Jesus alone. He came to him and knelt before Him. He knew that his only hope was the Lord Jesus Christ. When you pray for healing, focus on the Healer. Worship Him. Plead with Him, look to Him and Him alone for the healing. There are secondary causes for healing like medicine and good nutrition. Yet, all healing comes from Him. He must be the focus of Your praying.

(2) *Pray with an unrestrained faith in the power of God to heal.* This man is certain that Jesus Christ can heal Him, "Lord, if You are willing, You can make me clean" (**Matthew 8:2**). His statement reveals an astonishing confidence in Jesus. There is no hesitation or wavering in this leper. His faith in Jesus and His healing power is unrestrained. When you pray for healing, trust that God has the power to heal. Do not rush over this statement. It is one thing to say that you believe that God has the power to heal anyone of anything. It is quite another to have this as the conviction of your heart and to act on this truth with prayer and ministry. Ask God to grant you this certainty; plead until it becomes your overwhelming conviction. Ask God to create this same faith in those for whom you are praying.

(3) *God's compassion is a point that you can use to plead for healing.* The compassion of Jesus shines in this text, "Then Jesus put out His hand and touched him, saying, 'I am willing; be cleansed.' Immediately his leprosy was cleansed" (**Matthew 8:3**). Jesus' compassion moved Him to touch and heal this man. This is a man who was an outcast. No one wanted anything to do with Him, much less touch Him. Yet, Christ has compassion for the man. God has compassion for the sick and the outcast. God's heart is moved when we plead for the sick and outcast. When you pray for healing, plead for the mercy of God on this person. Remind God of His mercy and His promises to have mercy from the Word of God.

(4) *Hopeless cases are no match for the Lord Jesus Christ.* Jesus healed this man of his leprosy by declaring him cleansed. When Jesus spoke, the leprosy departed. Leprosy was no match for Jesus Christ. In biblical times, leprosy sentenced you to a living death. It cut you off from civilization and made you live alone (**Leviticus 13:46**). If you contracted leprosy, it was not a matter of if you were going to die. It was a matter of when you would die and how much you would suffer before you died. According to Jewish belief, cures of lepers were as difficult as resurrections from the dead (**2 Kings 5:7**). Yet, Jesus set this man free from his disease. Jesus specializes in hopeless cases.

He can heal regardless of the disease. His power and authority extends over every illness and disease.

(5) *Healing provides a testimony for the Lord Jesus Christ.* This healing testified to the person and the power of Jesus Christ. It was a testimony to the priests that the Messiah, the Son of God had come. A priest could not cure leprosy; he could only declare if one had it or if one was cured of it. This healing would be a testimony to them that Jesus is the Son of God, the One who had been promised by God. This would testify to the fact that He had now arrived and that one must turn to Him in faith and repentance. This healing also testified to the authority of Jesus' words. The Word of God says, "And so it was, when Jesus had ended these sayings, that the people were astonished at His teaching, for He taught them as one having authority, and not as the scribes" (**Matthew 7:28-29**). Jesus taught with authority. His healings backed up that authority with proof. His healings revealed that He was the Son of God. His miraculous power showed that one must listen to and heed His Word. When you pray for healing, ask that the healing would testify to the Lord Jesus Christ. Pray that the healing will glorify Him and prove His claims and His words.

(6) *Praise Pointers*-When you pray for healing, you can add praise to your pleading. This is important because praise releases the power of God into a person's life and situation. What can you praise God for as you pray for healing? The following are some suggested praise pointers that are derived from this text:

- ◆ Praise and thank Him for His willingness to heal.
- ◆ Praise and thank Him for His power to heal.
- ◆ Adore and thank Him for His compassion and the fact that He loves to show this compassion to the sick and outcast.
- ◆ Praise and thank Him that there are no hopeless cases where He is concerned.
- ◆ Praise and thank Him for loving to glorify His Son through healing.

Tape Of The Month Ministry

The Prayer Closet Ministries, Inc. is beginning a monthly tape ministry. Each month you can receive a tape containing biblical instruction on the subjects of prayer, spiritual warfare, fasting, or healing. Dr. Kevin Meador does the preaching and teaching on these tapes. An individual can use these tapes to encourage and strengthen his or her prayer life. You can pass them on to others. They would also be ideal for your church's prayer ministry. If you would like to receive a tape each month, please contact us with your name and address through one of the ways listed on the front of the newsletter. There is no charge for this tape ministry. We want these tapes available to anyone who is interested. But, donations will be appreciated and will be used to provide this ministry.



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