



# 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.

Dr. Kevin Meador, 595 Stratton Road, Decatur, MS 39327 (601) 635-2180

EMAIL: [prayercloset\\_1998@yahoo.com](mailto:prayercloset_1998@yahoo.com) WEB PAGE - [www.prayerclosetministries.org](http://www.prayerclosetministries.org)

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.