

Praying the Prayers of Scripture

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Unless otherwise specified, all Scriptural citations are taken from the New American Standard Bible (NASB).

Praying the Prayers of Scripture

An Introduction

Of the many passages in Scripture that touch on the topic of prayer, perhaps none is more instructive than 1 John 5:14-15, which says, in part:

... If we ask anything according to His will, He hears us. And if we know that He hears us in whatever we ask, we know that we have the requests which we have asked from Him.¹

According to this passage, there are several conditions for answered prayer. One implied condition is actually praying (“... *If we ask* ...”). James 4:2 says: “You do not have because you do not ask.” The poet (source unknown) said it this way:

Life without purpose is barren indeed;
There can't be a harvest unless you plant seed.

If we send no ships out, no ships will come in.
Unless there's a contest, nobody can win,

For games can't be won unless they are played,
And prayers can't be answered unless they are prayed.

Another implied condition for answered prayer according to this passage is the person praying (“... *If we ask* ...”). The “we” is the apostle John and his Christian readers. By extension, the prayer promise of this passage applies to any person who is a Christian (and presumably living Christianly). Psalm 34:15 and 1 Peter 3:12 say that the Lord's ears are open unto the prayers of the righteous (cf. Proverbs 15:29b). According to James 5:16, it is the prayer of a righteous man that accomplishes much. First John 3:22 says: “And whatever we ask we receive from Him, because we keep His commandments and do the things that are pleasing in His sight.” Conversely, Psalm 66:18 says that the Lord will not hear the prayers of the wicked (cf. Proverbs 15:29b, 28:9, Isaiah 1:15 and 59:2b, Micah 3:4, and 1 Peter 3:7).

Yet a third implied condition for answered prayer according to this passage is the persistence of the prayer (“... *If we ask* ...”). The Greek verb translated “ask” is in the present tense; therefore, it can literally read: “... If we are **asking** ...” That persistence is a condition for answered prayer is seen in Matthew 7:7-8//Luke 11:9-10, where the Greek verbs used, translated “ask,” “seek,” and “knock,” are in the present tense; so, “keep asking,” “keep seeking,” and “keep knocking.” Persistence in prayer is prescribed directly in such passages as Romans 12:12, Ephesians 6:18, Colossians 4:2, and 1 Thessalonians 5:17 and indirectly in such passages as Luke 11:5-8 and 18:1-5. It is also

¹ Unless otherwise indicated, all Scriptural references in this series are taken from the New American Standard Bible (NASB).

patterened by the church of Jerusalem in Acts 2:42; by Paul in Romans 1:9, Colossians 1:3 and 9, 1 Thessalonians 3:10, 2 Thessalonians 1:11, and 2 Timothy 1:3; and by Epaphras in Colossians 4:12.

While 1 John 5:14-15 gives several implicit conditions for answered prayer (praying, the person praying, and the persistence of the prayer),² its main point is to give one explicit condition for answered prayer, which pertains to the prayer itself. It is: "... *If we ask anything according to His will ...*" The key, then, to answered prayer is praying according to God's will. Jesus, in John 14:13-14, essentially said the same, when He said: "Whatever you ask in My name, that will I do ... If you ask Me anything in My name, I will do *it*" (cf. John 15:16b and 16:23-24). Prayer is not about getting our will done in Heaven (James 4:3); rather, it is about getting God's will done on earth (Matthew 6:10b, Matthew 26:39//Mark 14:36//Luke 22:42, and Matthew 26:42). As D. Edmond Hiebert has written (*The Epistles of John*, p. 256): "Prayer is not a device for imposing our will upon God, but rather the bending of our will to His in the desire that His good will may be done." W. Bingham Hunter (*The God Who Hears*, p. 12; emphasis his) adds: "... I passionately disagree with the notion that prayer is a way to get from God what we want. Christian prayer, as explained in Scripture, seems something else entirely: *Prayer is a means God uses to give us what he wants.*"

This, of course, begs the question: How can we know God's will and, therefore, pray according to it? If the only way to know God's will is through His Word (the Reformation principle of *sola Scriptura*; the Baptist distinctive of the Bible as the only rule of faith and practice; the doctrine of the sufficiency of Scripture—2 Timothy 3:17 and 2 Peter 1:3-4; the cessation of all other means of special revelation with the completion of the canon of Scripture at the end of the first century A.D.—1 Corinthians 13:8-10), then the key to answered prayer is praying according to God's will as revealed in Scripture.³ This is why Jesus can say in John 15:7: "If you abide in Me, **and My**

² Other conditions for answered prayer include praying fervently (Luke 22:44, Romans 15:30, Colossians 4:12, and James 5:17) and praying in faith (Matthew 21:22//Mark 11:24, Hebrews 11:6, and James 1:5-7).

³ W. Bingham Hunter, in his book on prayer entitled, *The God Who Hears* (p. 104), writes: "Effectiveness in prayer will always be coupled with regular reading, memorizing of and meditating on Scripture. I see almost no potential to become a so-called prayer warrior where systematic Bible reading and study are absent. The Bible is the only divinely inspired guidebook to the will and thought of God. And learning to pray effectively boils down largely to learning to think like God and understand His will. Read the Book." D. Edmond Hiebert (*Working with God Through Intercessory Prayer*, p. 108) writes regarding George Mueller, who, according to Donald Whitney (*Praying the Bible*, p. 82), had over 50,000 specific answers to prayer recorded in his journals: "We must learn to use the Bible as the guide for our praying. Prayer nourished and guided by the Word of God will be effective. George Mueller, a noted man of prayer, used this secret. For some years he had followed the custom of praying first and then reading the Bible, with no special connection between the two. Then he was led to turn

words abide in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you.” Commenting on this verse, Edwin Blum (“John,” in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary*, 2:326) states: “Christ’s words condition and control such a believer’s mind so that his prayers conform to the Father’s will. Since his prayer is in accord with God’s will, the results are certain.”

And, so, D. A. Carson (*A Call to Spiritual Reformation*, pp. 32-33) counsels: “...[O]ne of the most important elements in intercession is to think through, in the light of Scripture, what it is God wants us to ask for.”

Practically, this means praying specifically for what the Bible explicitly reveals to be the will of God, which includes:

- The salvation of sinners (1 Timothy 2:4 and 2 Peter 3:9; cf. Ezekiel 18:23, 32, and 33:11), as did Paul in Romans 10:1
- The sanctification of saints (1 Thessalonians 4:3), as did Jesus (Luke 22:32 and John 17:17) and as did Paul (as shall be seen by an examination of his prayers in this series)

This also means praying specifically for what the Bible explicitly says we ought to be praying for, which would include such things as:

- Our enemies (Matthew 5:44//Luke 6:28)
- Laborers for the harvest (Matthew 9:38)
- Political leaders (1 Timothy 2:1-2)
- Other believers (Ephesians 6:18 and James 5:16)

This also means perusing the prayers of Scripture, with the purpose of patterning our prayers after them, which is what this series on “Praying the Prayers of Scripture” is all about. The goals of this series include:

- 1) Teach through some of the many prayers recorded in Scripture
- 2) Take time to pray each Wednesday night according to the prayer taught that particular night

and thereby

the process completely around; after a word of invocation to have the Spirit’s teaching, he now spent hours pouring over the Word, filling himself with the living Word of God; after this, in the very mind of Christ which he had thus received, he poured out praise, prayer, and supplication in great fullness and assurance.” Donald Whitney (in his *Praying the Bible*, p. 7) mentions how God used one R. F. Gates “in ways neither of us could have ever imagined in that moment on March 1, 1985, when [he] held up the Bible and said, ‘When you pray, use the prayer book!’”

- 3) Train us to habitually pray according to the will of God as revealed in Scripture in order to make us more effective in our praying by having more of our prayers answered

Here is an initial list of some of the prayers of Scripture⁴, which will serve as a repertoire from which this series will draw its topics:

The prayer of Abraham for Sodom (Genesis 18:23-33)

The prayer of Jacob when Esau was coming to meet him (Genesis 32:9-12)

The prayers of Moses for Israel (Exodus 32:11-14 and Numbers 14:13-20)

The prayer of Jabez (1 Chronicles 4:9-10)

The prayers of Hannah (1 Samuel 1:10-20 and 2:1-10)

The prayers of David

- After receiving the Davidic covenant (2 Samuel 7:18-29//1 Chronicles 17:16-27)
- After receiving the offering for the rebuilding of the temple (1 Chronicles 29:10-19)
- In the Psalms (51, 86, 139, et. al.)

The prayers of Solomon

- For wisdom (1 Kings 3:5-14//2 Chronicles 1:7-12)
- At the dedication of the rebuilt temple (1 Kings 8:22f)

The prayers of Elijah

- On Mount Carmel when contending with the prophets of Baal (1 Kings 18:36-37)
- For no rain and rain in the days of Ahab (James 5:16b-18)

The prayer of Hezekiah when threatened by Sennacherib of Assyria (2 Kings 19:14-20//Isaiah 37:14-20)

The prayer of Ezra over Israel's sin of intermarrying with pagans (Ezra 9:5-15)

The prayer of Nehemiah upon hearing of the condition of Jerusalem (Nehemiah 1:4-11)

The prayer of the Levites at the renewal of the covenant (Nehemiah 9:4-38)

The prayer of Job (Job 42:1-6)

The prayer of Jeremiah (Jeremiah 32:16-25)

⁴ For a more extensive list of such prayers, one may consult the appendix entitled "Scriptures on Prayer" in W. Bingham Hunter's *The God Who Hears* (pp. 201-207).

The prayer of Daniel for the end of the Babylonian captivity (Daniel 9:1-19)

The prayer of Jonah in the belly of the whale (Jonah 2)

The prayers of Christ

- The Model Prayer (Matthew 6:9-13//Luke 11:2-4)
- His high priestly prayer (John 17)
- In the Garden of Gethsemane (Matthew 26:36-44//Mark 14:32-39//Luke 22:39-46)

The prayer of the church of Jerusalem for boldness in the midst of persecution (Acts 4:24-31)

The prayers of Paul⁵

- For the Romans (Romans 1:9-13)
- For the Ephesians (Ephesians 1:15-23 and 3:14-19)
- For the Philippians (Philippians 1:9-11)
- For the Colossians (Colossians 1:9-14)
- For the Thessalonians (1 Thessalonians 3:9-13, 2 Thessalonians 1:11-12, and 2:16-17)
- For Philemon (Philemon 4-7)

Prayers for Paul

- By the Romans (Romans 15:30-32)
- By the Ephesians (Ephesians 6:18-20)
- By the Colossians (Colossians 4:2-4)
- By the Thessalonians (2 Thessalonians 3:1-2)

The prayer of Epaphras for the Colossians (Colossians 4:12)

Also to be added to this list are the various doxologies in Scripture.

⁵ A highly-recommended resource on the prayers of Paul is D. A. Carson's *A Call to Spiritual Reformation: Priorities from Paul and His Prayers*.

Praying the Prayers of Scripture

The “Model Prayer”⁶ Matthew 6:9-13//Luke 11:2-4

If we are to learn to pray according to God’s will as revealed in Scripture, what better way to begin than by praying according to the model prayer presented by our Master.

Of the many topics that Jesus touched on in His Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5-7//Luke 6:20-49), prayer was a prominent one (Matthew 6:5-15//Luke 11:2-4 and Matthew 7:7-11//Luke 11:9-13). After teaching us how **not** to pray (Matthew 6:5-8⁷), Jesus teaches us how **to** pray, in Matthew 6:9-13 (cf. Luke 11:2-4), saying:

“Pray, then, in this way: “Our Father who is in heaven, Hallowed be Your name. “Your kingdom come. Your will be done, On earth as it is in heaven. “Give us this day our daily bread. “And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. “And do not lead us into temptation, but deliver us from evil. [For Yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen.”]”⁸

Contrary to the impression given by the ritualistic way in which this prayer is recited by so many today, Jesus is not requiring us to pray these words verbatim. Notice that He does not say, “Pray this”; rather, He says, “*Pray ...in this way.*” In other words, pray **like** this. Though we may not necessarily use the exact words Jesus used, we are to pray according to the concepts communicated by the words that He used.

⁶ This prayer has traditionally been referred to as “the Lord’s Prayer.” However, it may be preferable to refer to it as the “Model Prayer,” while referring to Jesus’ prayer in John 17 as “the Lord’s Prayer.”

⁷ One’s purpose for praying should not be to be praised by people (Matthew 6:5-6). Nor should one’s praying be ritualistically repetitious (Matthew 6:7-8). It seems ironic that, after Jesus teaches us not to be ritualistically repetitious in prayer (Matthew 6:7-8), He teaches a prayer (Matthew 6:9-13) that today tends to be ritualistically recited more than being actually prayed.

⁸ One will notice that the NASB places brackets around the concluding words of its translation of these verses. It does so because these words are not found in what are generally considered to be the most accurate Greek manuscripts of this text (those closest in time to the original). For this same reason, these words are not found in the text of the ESV or NIV, though they are mentioned by way of footnote. As with all other such textual (and, thus, translational) discrepancies between such English versions, this is a matter of disagreement over the genuine reading of a particular text, not a matter of denial of biblical truth.

Before identifying what these concepts are, notice that this prayer is directed to God the Father (“*our Father who is in heaven*”). While there are occasions in Scripture that we find prayer addressed to God the Son (for example, Acts 8:59-60 and 2 Thessalonians 2:16), typically it is addressed to God the Father. This is not to suggest, however, that the other members of the Godhead are not involved, as such prayer is to be to the Father, through the Son (John 14:6, Ephesians 3:12, 1 Timothy 2:5, and Hebrews 10:19), and by the Holy Spirit (Ephesians 6:18 and Jude 20).⁹ See especially Ephesians 2:18.

The concepts communicated by Christ in the Model Prayer that are to be part of our praying include, first of all¹⁰, those that concern God’s glory. More specifically, they include prayer for:

- God to be number one (“*Hallowed be Your name*”). While God’s very name is to be treated as sacred (see Exodus 20:7//Deuteronomy 5:11, the Third of the Ten Commandments), in Jewish thought, “name” stands for the person named. So, this is a prayer that God Himself would be revered, both in our lives and in the lives of others. So, our first and foremost concern in prayer should be that God would be first and foremost. This is seen by prayers that begin with praise for God’s person, such as Hannah’s prayer in 1 Samuel 2:1f and David’s prayer in 1 Chronicles 29:10f. The acronym for prayer, A (Adoration) C (Confession) T (Thanksgiving) S (Supplication) reminds us of this. This is also seen by prayers that ultimately ask for an answer that will glorify God¹¹, such as David’s prayer in 2 Samuel 7:18f//1 Chronicles 17:16f (see especially 2 Samuel 7:25-26a//1 Chronicles 17:23-24a), Elijah’s prayer in 1 Kings 18:36-37 (see especially verse 37), Hezekiah’s prayer in 2 Kings 19:14f//Isaiah 37:14f (see especially 2 Kings

⁹ Bruce Ware, in his book, *Father, Son, and Holy Spirit: Relationships, Roles, and Relevance*, writes (p. 18): “If Jesus taught us to pray to the Father, then we ought to do this. For one reason or another, we sometimes follow a different practice. We may encourage our children, especially, to open their prayers with, ‘Dear Jesus,’ despite the fact that Jesus said to pray ‘Our Father in heaven ...’ Perhaps we do not think about prayer as we should because we do not understand the doctrine of the Trinity. As Jesus taught us, we should pray to the Father through the Son. Jesus Christ is the mediator. He is the one through whom we address the Father. He is the one who brings us access to the Father. Our prayers bring spiritual benefit only when we pray in his name. And prayers that bring fruit in the kingdom are those offered in the power of the Spirit. We pray as the Spirit prompts and urges us to pray. So prayer rightly understood—Christian prayer—is prayer to the Father, through the Son, in the power of the Spirit.”

¹⁰ Notice that the initial focus of the prayer is on God (“... **Your name. Your kingdom ... Your will ...**”), with only the subsequent focus being on us (“... **our daily bread ... our debts ...**,” etc.).

¹¹ D.A. Carson (*A Call to Spiritual Reformation*, p. 203) asks: “Has God become so central to all our thoughts and pursuits, and thus to our praying, that we cannot easily imagine asking for anything without consciously longing that the answer bring glory to God?”

19:19//Isaiah 37:20), and Jesus' prayer in John 17:1f (see especially verse 1). See also John 14:13.

- God's kingdom to come ("*Your kingdom come*"). God's kingdom on earth will come when Christ comes again to earth to rule over it during the Millennium. That the second coming of Christ is something for which believers are to be praying is seen by 1 Corinthians 16:22's "Maranatha," an Aramaic word meaning "Our Lord come" (so NIV), and by the last prayer request recorded in the Bible, Revelation 22:20's "Come, Lord Jesus." Could it be that we are not praying for this as we should because we are not pining for it as we should (as Romans 8:19, 23, 25, 1 Corinthians 1:7, Galatians 5:5, Philipians 3:20, and Titus 2:13 says we should be)?
- God's will to be done ("*Your will be done, On earth as it is in heaven*"). The point has already been made (see the introductory lesson to this series) that prayer is not about getting our will done in heaven, but about getting God's will done on earth (see also Matthew 26:39//Mark 14:36//Luke 22:42, Matthew 26:42, and 1 John 5:14-15). Thus, we should be continually seeking to increase our knowledge of His will by continually increasing our knowledge of Scripture. While praying according to God's revealed/declared will ("the things revealed," Deuteronomy 29:29), we should be prepared to accept God's secret/decreed will ("the secret things," Deuteronomy 29:29) once it comes to pass.

The concepts communicated by Christ in the Model Prayer that are to be part of our praying not only include those that concern God's glory, but also those that concern our good. That God wants to use prayer as a means for our good is seen in Matthew 7:7-11//Luke 11:9-13. These good things include prayer for:

- Food ("*Give us this day our daily bread*"). Though we do not live in a "daily bread" culture, as did those to whom Jesus originally spoke these words, a culture in which earning money to buy food, purchasing food, and consuming food typically occurred on the same day, we are just as dependent on God for the food that sustains our lives (see Psalm 145:15 and Acts 14:17). Do our prayer lives reflect this belief, particularly our mealtime prayers? Based on what is said in Psalm 37:25, we can pray this prayer with confidence, provided we are abiding by the means mandated in 2 Thessalonians 3:10.
- Forgiveness ("*And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors*"). The idea of "debts" here is sins. While all the sins of the believer have already been judicially/positionally forgiven (Colossians 2:13; cf. 1 John 1:7 and 9) due to their being imputed to Christ (2 Corinthians 5:21; cf. Ephesians 1:7, Colossians 1:14, 1 John 1:7, and Revelation 1:5), the believer's practice is to match his position. Thus, a true believer is one who will be regularly confessing his sins/asking forgiveness for them (1 John 1:9). A true believer is also one who will be regularly forgiving those who sin against him. One who is unwilling to

forgive others, however, shows himself to be unforgiven/an unbeliever (Matthew 6:14-15//Mark 11:25-26 and 18:21-35).

- Freedom from sin (“*And do not lead us into temptation, but deliver us from evil*”). Jesus also spoke of this in the Garden of Gethsemane (see Matthew 26:41//Mark 14:38//Luke 22:40 and Luke 22:46). This is not to be understood as if God would ever tempt us to sin (James 1:13). Rather, it is to be understood as a prayer for His help in keeping Satan from successfully tempting us to sin. Jesus prays this way for the believer in John 17:15. This is a prayer God is pleased to answer (2 Thessalonians 3:3), provided we avail ourselves of the means God has provided, such as fleeing (1 Timothy 6:11 and 2 Timothy 2:22; cf. Genesis 39:12). As Elisabeth Eliot has said (*Quest for Love*, p. 189): “It is no good praying, ‘Lead us not into temptation’ and then deliberately walking straight into it.”

Praying the Prayers of Scripture

The Praying of Epaphras¹² Colossians 4:12-13

As Paul typically does when concluding his letters, so when concluding his letter to the church at Colossae, he sends greetings to the church from various individuals who are with him. With Paul in Rome when he wrote Colossians were his Jewish companions: Aristarchus; Mark; and Jesus, or Justus (Colossians 4:10-11). His Gentile companions included Epaphras, Luke, and Demas (Colossians 4:12-14). When speaking of Epaphras, Paul writes in verses 12-13:

Epaphras, who is one of your number, a bonds slave of Jesus Christ, sends you his greetings, always laboring earnestly for you in his prayers, that you may stand perfect and fully assured in all the will of God. For I testify for him that he has a deep concern for you and for those who are in Laodicea and Hierapolis.

What do we know about this man? We know that:

1. He was a planter. According to Colossians 1:5b-7a, Epaphras was apparently the one God used to give birth to the body of believers in Colossae. This would likely have been in the mid-50s A.D. According to what Paul says at the end of Colossians 4:13, Epaphras may have also given birth to the churches in the neighboring cities of Laodicea (cf. Colossians 2:1, 4:15-16, and Revelation 3:14-22) and Hierapolis. This would explain his deep concern for the Colossians (Colossians 4:13).
2. He was a pastor. Not only does it appear as though Epaphras was the “obstetrician” of the church of Colossae, but also its “pediatrician” (see Colossians 1:7b and the start of 4:12). This would further explain his deep concern for the Colossians (Colossians 4:13).
3. He was a prisoner. Apparently, Epaphras journeyed from Colossae to Rome to visit Paul in his imprisonment and, in so doing, became a fellow prisoner with Paul (see especially Philemon 23; cf. Colossians 1:7’s “our beloved fellow bond-servant” and 4:12’s “*a bonds slave of Jesus Christ*”). Consequently, Epaphras was unable to be the one to carry the letter of Colossians to the Colossian church, a task that fell to a man named Tychicus (Colossians 4:7-8). Also as a result of Epaphras’ imprisonment, a man named Archippus became the interim pastor (Colossians 4:17 and Philemon 2). Though Epaphras could not personally pastor the Colossians, he could pray for them.

¹² For more on the praying of Epaphras, one may consult chapter 7 (pp. 69-79) of D. Edmond Hiebert’s *Working With God Through Intercessory Prayer*.

4. He was a prayer warrior. In Colossians 4:12-13, we see how he prayed and what he prayed for the church at Colossae
- How Epaphras prayed
 - He prayed for others. While we presume that Epaphras took time to pray about his predicament of imprisonment, his predicament did not prevent him from praying for his parishioners. While Jesus prayed for His predicament (see His praying in the Garden of Gethsemane in Matthew 26:39//Mark 14:36//Luke 22:42), He also prayed for others in the midst of it (see His praying in John 17 and His prayer on the Cross in Luke 23:34). Stephen likewise prayed for others in the midst of his predicament (see Acts 7:60).
 - He prayed frequently. Colossians 4:12 says that he prayed “*always*.” This same verse describes his praying in the plural (“*prayers*”). Frequency in prayer is also found in Psalm 55:17, Daniel 6:10, Matthew 7:7-8//Luke 11:9-10, Luke 11:5-8, 18:1-5, Acts 2:42, Romans 1:9, 12:12, Ephesians 6:18, Colossians 1:3, 9, 4:2, 1 Thessalonians 3:10, 5:17, 2 Thessalonians 1:11, and 2 Timothy 1:3.
 - He prayed fervently. Colossians 4:12 says that he was “*laboring earnestly*” in his prayers (NIV: “wrestling in prayer”). The Greek word is *agonizomai*, from which we get our English word, agony.¹³ So, not only was their breadth to Epaphras’ praying, but also depth; not only quantity, but also quality; not only length, but also strength. Fervency in prayer is also found in Luke 22:44 (cf. Hebrews 5:7), Romans 15:30, and James 5:17. Well has it been said by the legendary late 18th/early 19th century missionary to the Muslims, Samuel Zwemer, that prayer is “the gymnasium of the soul.”
 - He prayed fondly. Colossians 4:13 mentions Epaphras’ deep concern for the Colossians (the word translated “*concern*” is literally “*pain*”), a concern clearly proven by his prayers for them. Care is seen by prayer. See Romans 10:1. Conversely, prayer will increase care.
 - What Epaphras prayed
 - He prayed for their firmness in the faith. According to Colossians 4:12, Epaphras prayed that the Colossians would “*stand*.” In the historical context of the book of Colossians, this is a prayer for

¹³ D. Edmond Hiebert (*Working With God Through Intercessory Prayer*, p. 75) says that “the term comes from the athletic arena and pictures the intense effort and energy of the athlete in contending for a prize, like a wrestler grappling in all earnestness with his opponent.”

perseverance in the faith, as the faith of the Colossians was being threatened by false teachers in Colossae (see Colossians 1:23 and 2:7; cf. Ephesians 4:13-14). Well has it been said by J. Oswald Sanders: “It was Epaphras’ kneeling that kept the Colossians standing.”

- He prayed for the full assurance of their fullness. According to Colossians 4:12, Epaphras prayed that the Colossians would stand “*perfect and fully assured in all the will of God*.” The Colossian heretics were trying to convince the Colossians that they were incomplete. Paul, however, counters by making the case that they were complete by virtue of their connection to the One who is complete, Christ (see Colossians 1:19, 28, and especially 2:9-10). Epaphras prays that the Colossians might be convinced that they are indeed complete in Christ and would, therefore, not seek sufficiency or satisfaction in anything or anyone other than Him.

Praying the Prayers of Scripture

Paul's Prayer for the Philippians¹⁴ Philippians 1:9-11

One of the most prominent people of prayer in the Bible is the apostle Paul. When we examine the New Testament, we find the following points about his praying:

- Paul prayed.
 - He prayed with others. We see him doing so with the Ephesian elders in Miletus in Acts 20:36, as well as with the believers of Tyre in Acts 21:5. Other examples of believers praying with one another are found in Acts 1:14, 24, 4:24f, 6:6, 12:12, and 13:3. Christianity, from its very commencement, was communal.¹⁵
 - He prayed for others. Others for whom Paul prayed included:
 - The church at Rome (Romans 1:9-13)
 - The church at Ephesus (Ephesians 1:15-23 and 3:14-19)
 - The church at Philippi (Philippians 1:4 and 9-11)
 - The church at Colossae (Colossians 1:3 and 9-14)
 - The church at Thessalonica (1 Thessalonians 1:2, 3:9-13, 2 Thessalonians 1:11-12, and 2:16-17)
 - Timothy (2 Timothy 1:3)
 - Philemon (Philemon 4-7)

The Bible calls upon believers to pray for one another (Ephesians 6:18 and James 5:16).

¹⁴ An excellent resource on Paul's prayers is D.A. Carson's *A Call to Spiritual Reformation: Priorities from Paul and His Prayers*. Chapter 8 of this work examines his Philippians 1:9-11 prayer.

¹⁵ "The hallmark of Western civilization has been rugged individualism. Because of our philosophy of life, we are used to the personal pronouns I and my and me. We have not been taught to think in terms of we and ours and us. Consequently we 'individualize' many references to corporate experience in the New Testament, thus often emphasizing personal prayer, personal Bible study, personal evangelism, and personal Christian maturity and growth. The facts are that more is said in the Book of Acts and the Epistles about corporate prayer, corporate learning of biblical truth, corporate evangelism, and corporate Christian maturity and growth than about the personal aspects of these Christian disciplines" (Gene Getz).

- Paul prayed persistently. He prayed unceasingly (Romans 1:9, Colossians 1:9, 1 Thessalonians 1:3, and 2 Timothy 1:3), or always (Romans 1:9, Colossians 1:3, and 2 Thessalonians 1:11), or night and day (1 Thessalonians 3:10 and 2 Timothy 1:3). We, too, are to persist in prayer (see Luke 11:5-8, 18:1-5, Acts 2:42, Romans 12:12, Ephesians 6:18, Colossians 4:2, and 1 Thessalonians 5:17).
- Paul made his praying public. Paul let others know that he was praying for them, including the church in Rome (in Romans 1:8), the church in Corinth (in 1 Corinthians 1:4), the church in Ephesus (in Ephesians 1:16 and 3:14 and 16), the church in Philippi (in Philippians 1:4), the church in Colossae (in Colossians 1:3), the church in Thessalonica (in 1 Thessalonians 1:2 and 2 Thessalonians 1:3), Timothy (in 2 Timothy 1:3), and Philemon (in Philemon 4). The point is not seeking to pray in public to be seen of men (as Jesus prohibited in Matthew 6:5-6), but to let those for whom you are praying know that you are praying for them, which serves as an encouragement and as an example.
- Paul particularly prayed for the purity and perseverance of God's people. Paul certainly prayed for the salvation of sinners (Romans 10:1), as should every believer, for we are to pray according to God's will, and God desires the salvation of sinners (1 Timothy 2:4 and 2 Peter 3:9; cf. Ezekiel 18:23, 32, and 33:11). Most of the praying of Paul found in Scripture, however, is for believers, particularly for their purity/sanctification and perseverance in the faith and in faithfulness. This is also God's will (1 Thessalonians 4:3). Jesus prayed this way (Luke 22:32 and John 17:17). While it is absolutely certain that the souls of saints are secure (John 10:28-29), God uses the prayers of his people as a means to this end (see 1 Thessalonians 5:23-24 and Jude 20-21). This same dynamic is at play in the prayer that is the focus of this lesson, Paul's prayer for the church at Philippi, which includes prayer for their purity (Philippians 1:10b), something which God had promised (Philippians 1:6).
- Paul made a practice of praising God for God's people. We see him thanking God for the Romans (in Romans 1:8), the Corinthians (in 1 Corinthians 1:4), the Ephesians (in Ephesians 1:16), the Philippians (in Philippians 1:3), the Colossians (in Colossians 1:3), the Thessalonians (in 1 Thessalonians 1:2 and 2 Thessalonians 1:3), Timothy (in 2 Timothy 1:3), and Philemon (in Philemon 4). In most of these instances, Paul is praising God for His sanctifying grace in the lives of His people, evidenced by their faith in God (Romans 1:8, Ephesians 1:15, Colossians 1:4, 2 Thessalonians 1:3, 2 Timothy 1:5, and Philemon 5) and love for God's people (Colossians 1:4, 2 Thessalonians 1:3, and Philemon 5). Giving God the glory for such things is only fitting, since God is the One who ultimately brings them about (Philippians 1:6, 2:13, and Hebrews 13:21). Paul's practice is a reminder to be on the lookout for the good God is doing in the lives of other believers, rather than always bellyaching about the bad. It also brings to this writer's mind what D.A. Carson (*A Call to Spiritual Reformation*, p. 29) has said: "All of us would be wiser if we would resolve never to put people down, except

on our prayer lists.” And, when we put them down on our prayer lists, to praise God for them.

Having considered several points about the praying of Paul, let us now consider the first of several of his prayers that will be examined in this series, his prayer to the church of Philippi, in Philippians 1:9-11:

And this I pray, that your love may abound still more and more in real knowledge and all discernment, so that you may approve the things that are excellent, in order to be sincere and blameless until the day of Christ; having been filled with the fruit of righteousness which comes through Jesus Christ, to the glory and praise of God.

- The Request: The *Agape*¹⁶ of God’s People to Grow Greatly (“*that your love may abound still more and more,*” verse 9). Paul does not specify the object of the love for which he prays. There are four legitimate options as to what it might be: 1) love for God, which is the First Great Command (Matthew 22:37-38//Mark 12:30); 2) love for others, which is the Second Great Command (Matthew 22:39//Mark 12:31a) and for which Paul prays for the Thessalonians (1 Thessalonians 3:12); 3) love for the gospel, a prominent theme in the book of Philippians¹⁷; and 4) love for God’s Word. Though all four can certainly be included, the fourth seems to be the one most in keeping with the immediate context.
- The Realm: Revelation (“*in real knowledge and all discernment,*” v. 9). Discernment is the ability to differentiate or distinguish between the diverse parts of something. Such ability comes with a deepening knowledge of Scripture (see Hebrews 5:12-14).
- The Results
 - Proving so as to approve and practice what is proper (“*so that you may approve the things that are excellent,*” v. 10). The word translated “*approve*” has the idea of putting something to the test/proving it so as to approve it/prove it is proper. Once having passed the test, such things are to then be practiced. Discerning what is proper by means of Scripture includes both distinguishing between what is good and bad (see 1 Thessalonians 5:21-22; cf. Ephesians 5:10), as well as between what is good and best, what is “*excellent.*”
 - Being a pure and unproblematic person (“*in order to be sincere and blameless*”). The word translated “*sincere*” has the idea of being genuine

¹⁶ *Agape* is the Greek word for love that Paul uses in verse 9.

¹⁷ The frequency of the word, gospel is greater in the book of Philippians than in any other book in the Bible.

or not hypocritical. The word translated “*blameless*” has the idea of not being the cause of another person’s stumbling or sinning.

- The Reason: God’s People to Do Gobs (“*filled*”) of Good so God Would be Greatly Glorified (“*having been filled with the fruit of righteousness which comes through Jesus Christ, to the glory and praise of God, v. 11*”)
 - The means. The words, “*having been filled*” is in the passive voice, indicative of the fact that Someone else is doing the filling. That Someone is the Son (“*through Jesus Christ*”). God’s people are able to be good because of their connection to Christ (see John 15:4-5).
 - The motive. God’s glory is the ultimate end for everything (1 Corinthians 10:31), including for the answers to our prayers (see David’s prayer in 2 Samuel 7:18f//1 Chronicles 17:16f, especially 2 Samuel 7:25-26a//1 Chronicles 17:23-24a; Elijah’s prayer in 1 Kings 18:36-37, especially verse 37; Hezekiah’s prayer in 2 Kings 19:14f//Isaiah 37:14f, especially 2 Kings 19:19//Isaiah 37:20; Jesus’ prayer in John 17:1f, especially verse 1; and John 14:13). We are to do good for the glory of God (see also Matthew 5:16, John 15:8, and 1 Peter 2:12).

Praying the Prayers of Scripture

The Prayer of Jabez 1 Chronicles 4:9-10

Even for the most mature believer, reading the genealogical portions of Scripture can be a tedious task. One such portion of Scripture is the first nine chapters of the book of 1 Chronicles, in which Ezra gives a genealogical history of Israel, from the time of Adam to the time following the return of the southern kingdom of Judah from its Babylonian exile. In the midst of this genealogical journey, in 4:9-10, one finds a gem¹⁸:

Jabez was more honorable than his brothers, and his mother named him Jabez saying, "Because I bore him with pain." Now Jabez called on the God of Israel, saying, "Oh that You would bless me indeed and enlarge my border, and that Your hand might be with me, and that You would keep me from harm that it may not pain me!" And God granted him what he requested.

The easy-to-overlook¹⁹ prayer of Jabez contained in these verses became part of the collective consciousness of the Christian world in the year 2000 with the publication of Bruce Wilkinson's *New York Times* bestseller²⁰, *The Prayer of Jabez: Breaking Through to the Blessed Life*. While a good deal of what Wilkinson says in his book is debatable²¹, God has providentially used its publication to give prominence to a prayer of the past that can be a pattern for our praying in the present.

The Person Who Prayed. This text is the only mention of Jabez in Scripture. Consequently, relatively little is known about him.

¹⁸ D. Edmond Hiebert (*Working with God Through Intercessory Prayer*, p. 59) says that 1 Chronicles 4:9-10 "draw us like a refreshing oasis in the midst of a desert of strange and unpronounceable names." Layton Talbert (in a book review in *Frontline*, September/October 2001, p. 21) calls Jabez's prayer "a delightful gem, secreted away in an often-overlooked genealogical roll call in 1 Chronicles 4." Bruce Wilkinson (*The Prayer of Jabez*, p. 12) writes: "Something about this man caused the historian to pause, clear his throat, and switch tactics."

¹⁹ Bruce Wilkinson (*The Prayer of Jabez*, p. 12) says that you will find Jabez "hiding in the least-read section of one of the least-read books of the Bible."

²⁰ According to Richard Schultz ("Bless Me and Enlarge My Territory," *Bible Study Magazine*, date unknown, p. 34), *The Prayer of Jabez* became the fastest selling book of all time, with over 9 million copies sold.

²¹ See, for example, the review by Layton Talbert in the September/October edition of *Frontline* (pp. 21-22). See also Richard Schultz's article, "Bless Me and Enlarge My Territory" in *Bible Study Magazine* (date unknown, pp. 34-35).

- His notoriety. First Chronicles 2:55 mentions a city called Jabez, perhaps named after this gem of a Jew. This would be consistent with the statement that starts verse 9: “*Jabez was more honorable than his brothers.*”²² Clearly, Jabez was a person of some prominence.²³ Many believe that the thing that propelled him to prominence was his prayer and its answer.
- His name. Ancient Near Eastern names often had revelatory significance, revealing something about the person named, sometimes revealing something about his or her birth (see, for example, Esau in Genesis 25:25; Jacob in Genesis 25:26; and Benjamin, who was originally named Benoni, in Genesis 35:18). Such was the case with Jabez, whose name meant “pain” (“*his mother named him Jabez saying, ‘Because I bore him with pain,’*” v. 9). While every birth is painful, as a consequence of the Fall (Genesis 3:16a), the birth of Jabez was perhaps particularly painful.

The Prayer. Several things may be noted regarding the prayer of Jabez:

- The Person to whom he prayed. Jabez prayed to “*the God of Israel*” (v. 10). Jabez was certainly talking to the right person, for He is the God who answers prayer and the One to whom all are to come (Psalm 65:2). By coming to the God of Israel, Jabez was coming to the One who had made a covenant commitment to Jews such as Jabez. Jabez could, therefore, come with confidence (cf. Matthew 6:9, 7:7-11, Hebrews 4:16, 1 John 3:21-22, and 5:13-15).
- The passion of his prayer. The passion of Jabez’s prayer is reflected in various ways: 1) by the NIV rendering of the verb in verse 10: “Jabez **cried out** to the God of Israel”; 2) by the “*Oh*” (v. 10) that begins his prayer; 3) by the word, “*indeed*” (v. 10) in his first petition²⁴; and 4) by the exclamation point with which his prayer ends (supplied by the NASB translators in v. 10). Fervency in

²² In Genesis 34:19, a man named Shechem is described in similar fashion, as being “more respected than all the household of his father.” However, Shechem was the one who violated Dinah. So, such terminology, in and of itself, does not necessarily indicate moral honor. What is said of Jabez in 1 Chronicles 4:9-10, however, seems to indicate that he was indeed morally honorable. In 1 Chronicles 11:20-25, such terminology is used to describe those who did extraordinary military exploits.

²³ According to Jewish tradition (likely based on the fact that the families of the scribes dwelt at Jabez, 1 Chronicles 2:55), Jabez had a phenomenal knowledge of Scripture and started a rabbinical school in the city of Jabez.

²⁴ Bruce Wilkinson (*The Prayer of Jabez*, p. 22) writes: “In Hebrew, adding ‘indeed’ to this prayer was like adding five exclamation points, or writing the request in capital letters and underlining it.”

prayer is taught in Luke 22:44 (cf. Hebrews 5:7), Romans 15:30, Colossians 4:12, and James 5:17.

- The petitions of his prayer. While some see four separate petitions in Jabez's prayer, it is best to see two.
 - Prosperity. Because Jabez was a Jew praying to the God of the Jews (v. 9's "*the God of Israel*"), his prayer for God's blessing by means of a bigger border, or territory (so NIV) ("*Oh that You would bless me indeed and enlarge my border,*" v. 10) was in keeping with the Abrahamic covenant's promise to bless Abraham and his descendants (Genesis 12:2), which blessing included the provision of the Promised Land (Genesis 12:1; cf. Exodus 34:24a and Deuteronomy 12:20a). According to Joshua 13:1f, the Conquest was not yet complete, as parts of the Promised Land remained to be conquered. Jabez is perhaps praying that God would enable him to conquer the full portion of the Land allotted to his clan.
 - Protection from Pain. In a play on words with the meaning of his name ("pain"), Jabez prays that God would by His powerful presence ("*that Your hand might be with me,*" v. 10, "*hand*" being representative of God's power, Joshua 4:24a) protect him ("*that You would keep me,*" v. 10) from pain ("*from harm that it may not pain me!,*" v. 10). See also Ezra 8:31. Perhaps Jabez is specifically asking for physical protection when he attempts to conquer the full portion of the Land allotted to his clan. Praying that God would keep us from spiritual harm is in keeping with His declared/revealed will (see Matthew 6:13a). Praying that God would keep us from physical harm must be prayed in keeping with His decreed/secret will (i.e., "if it be Thy will"). Sometimes God decrees to permit pain in our lives for our good (see, for example, 2 Corinthians 12:7-10, assuming Paul's "thorn in the flesh" was a physical phenomenon).

Clearly, Jabez's prayer was in keeping with the will of God, for the end of verse 10 tells us that "*God granted him what he requested.*"

As has been mentioned, 1 Chronicles 4:9-10 are the only words in Scripture recorded about Jabez. They are the only summation of his life that we have. When the summation of your life is written, may the same be said about you. And about me.

Praying the Prayers of Scripture

The Prayer of Jacob Genesis 32:9-12

When the matriarch, Rebekah gave birth to twin sons, she and her husband, Isaac named the youngest, Jacob (Genesis 25:26), literally meaning “heel” and figuratively meaning one who takes by the heel, trips up, defrauds, deceives, or supplants (Genesis 27:36). Jacob would live up (or perhaps we should say down) to his name by supplanting his twin brother, Esau on two occasions, both in regards to the family birthright²⁵ (Genesis 25:29-34) and in regards to the family blessing²⁶ (Genesis 27:1-40, especially verse 36). As a result of the second, Jacob had to flee from Esau for his life (Genesis 27:41f), leaving the Promised Land in the process and spending the next two decades of his life in asylum at the home of his uncle, Laban in Haran. At the end of this time, God told Jacob to return to the Promised Land (Genesis 31:3; cf. Genesis 31:13). So, Jacob left Laban to go to Canaan (Genesis 31:17-21). After making it past his father-in-law, Laban (Genesis 31:22-55), Jacob faced a more formidable foe.

The problem that prompted his prayer. In order to go the 400 miles south and a bit west from Haran to Canaan, Jacob had to pass through the land of his twin brother, Esau, the land of Edom/Seir²⁷ (Genesis 32:3, 36:1, and 8-9). Sensing that Esau still might be incensed over the supplanting of twenty years earlier, Jacob sent some servants to Esau to essentially say he was sorry and to seek permission to pass through his property (Genesis 32:3-5). Esau’s response to Jacob’s request appeared to be one of revenge rather than reconciliation (Genesis 32:6). So, Jacob put into place a partial protection plan (Genesis 32:7-8), then prayed for protection, praying:

“O God of my father Abraham and God of my father Isaac, O LORD, who said to me, ‘Return to your country and to your relatives, and I will prosper you,’ I am unworthy of all the lovingkindness and of all the faithfulness which You have shown to Your servant;

²⁵ The birthright consisted of the rights that went along with being the firstborn child, which included a double portion of the inheritance. While Scripture directly places the blame for Jacob’s buying Esau’s birthright on Esau, who “despised his birthright” (Genesis 25:34; cf. Genesis 25:32 and Hebrews 12:16), Jacob may also have been to blame. Allen Ross (*Creation & Blessing*, p. 452) suggests that it was a set-up on Jacob’s part.

²⁶ The blessing was a last will and testament of sorts, the legal mechanism whereby the birthright became official.

²⁷ The name, Edom comes from a Hebrew word that means red, *admoni*, descriptive of Esau at his birth (Genesis 25:25). The name, Seir comes from a Hebrew word that means hairy, *se’ar*, also descriptive of Esau at his birth (Genesis 25:25). The name, Esau likely comes from this word.

for with my staff only I crossed this Jordan, and now I have become two companies. Deliver me, I pray, from the hand of my brother, from the hand of Esau; for I fear him, that he will come and attack me and the mothers with the children. For You said, 'I will surely prosper you and make your descendants as the sand of the sea, which is too great to be numbered.'"

The Person to whom he prayed (“*O God of my father Abraham and God of my father Isaac ...*,” v. 9). By praying to the God of his forefathers (his grandfather, Abraham and his father, Isaac), Jacob was praying to the God who had made a covenant commitment to his clan, the Abrahamic covenant. This covenant included the promise of a place (“to the land which I will show you,” Genesis 12:1), a people (“I will make you a great nation,” Genesis 12:2), prosperity (“I will bless you,” Genesis 12:3), and prominence (“And make your name great,” Genesis 12:3). It is because of His person that God performs His promises; it is because of His character that He keeps His commitments. Accordingly, Jacob goes on to praise God for His person/to confess His character, speaking of His “*lovingkindness*” (v. 10; His *hesed*, or loyal love/covenant compassion) and “*faithfulness*” (v. 10).

The promises that he pointed to in his prayer. Jacob’s prayer is “bookended” by two promises that God had previously made to him. In verse 9, he prays: “*O LORD, who said to me, ‘Return to your country and to your relatives, and I will prosper you.’*”” Jacob is praying back to God the promise that God had made to him in Genesis 31:3: “Then the LORD said to Jacob, ‘Return to the land of your fathers and to your relatives, and I will be with you.’” This particular promise was a product of the place and prosperity promises of the Abrahamic covenant. In verse 12, Jacob prays: “*For You said, ‘I will surely prosper you and make your descendants as the sand of the sea, which is too great to be numbered.’*”” Here Jacob is praying back to God the promise that God had made to him in Genesis 28:14: “Your descendants will also be like the dust of the earth, and you will spread out to the west and to the east and to the north and to the south; and in you and in your descendants shall all the families of the earth be blessed.” This particular promise was a product of the people and prosperity promises of the Abrahamic covenant. In other words, Jacob is praying according to the revealed will of God, the key to answered prayer (1 John 5:14-15).

His praise of God’s person and prosperity in his prayer. Praise of God ought to be preeminent in our praying (1 Samuel 2:1-2, 1 Chronicles 29:10-13, and Matthew 6:9). In his prayer, Jacob praises God for His person, particularly His love and loyalty (“*lovingkindness*” and “*faithfulness*,” v. 10). Jacob also praises God for prospering him (“*for with my staff only I crossed this Jordan, and now I have become two companies*,” v. 10). Such prosperity was the product of God’s person, for it was the product of the people and prosperity promises of the Abrahamic covenant, and it is because God is who He is that He performs His promises to His people. The only right response to God’s prosperity is humility (“*I am unworthy*”²⁸, v. 10; cf. 1 Chronicles 29:14).

²⁸ The Hebrew words translated “I am unworthy” are literally “I am little.” According to Victor Hamilton (*The Book of Genesis*, 2:323), “to be ‘little’ describes one who lacks

His petition for protection. Based on the past (Genesis 27:41) and the present (Genesis 32:6), Jacob had legitimate cause for concern (“*for I fear him, that he will come and attack me and the mothers with the children,*” v. 11). And, so, he prays: “*Deliver me, I pray, from the hand of my brother, from the hand of Esau*” (v. 11). His petition is in keeping with God’s promises (see especially Genesis 28:15). It is in keeping with the people promise of the Abrahamic covenant (made to Jacob in Genesis 28:14), for if Esau kills the entire clan, it is literally and figuratively the “end of the line.” However, God had promised that the line would not only be perpetuated, but eventually proliferate. It is in keeping with the place promise of the Abrahamic covenant (made to Jacob in Genesis 28:13 and 15), for if Esau kills the entire clan, they will never make it to the Promised Land. And it is in keeping with the prosperity and prominence promises of the Abrahamic covenant, for if Esau kills the entire clan, such prosperity and prominence will not take place.

His protection. Though Jacob would proceed to put a plan in place to appease Esau with a present (Genesis 32:13-21a), in the end “it was not Jacob’s plan that succeeded but his prayer” (John Sailhamer, “Genesis,” in *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary*, 2:209; so also R. Kent Hughes, *Genesis*, p. 399 and Allen Ross, *Creation and Blessing*, p. 537), as reconciliation was the result of his request (Genesis 33:4). Praying that God would keep us from spiritual harm is in keeping with His declared/revealed will (see Matthew 6:13a). Praying that God would keep us from physical harm must be prayed in keeping with His decreed/secret will (i.e., “if it be Thy will”). Sometimes God decrees to permit pain in our lives for our good (see, for example, 2 Corinthians 12:7-10, assuming Paul’s “thorn in the flesh” was a physical phenomenon).

God’s praise. Whenever God protects His people in answer to their prayers, they should praise Him. As Asaph said in Psalm 50:15: “Call upon Me in the day of trouble; I shall rescue you, and you will honor Me.”

legal credentials to make a claim for himself, or a person who is totally dependent on another for his welfare.”

Praying the Prayers of Scripture

The Prayer of Jonah Jonah 2:1-9

Of all the prayers of Scripture, perhaps none is more peculiar than the prayer of a prophet who made his wish from the belly of a fish. We find his prayer in Jonah 2:1-9:

Then Jonah prayed to the LORD his God from the stomach of the fish, and he said, "I called out of my distress to the LORD, And He answered me. I cried for help from the depth of Sheol; You heard my voice. "For You had cast me into the deep, Into the heart of the seas, And the current engulfed me. All Your breakers and billows passed over me. "So I said, 'I have been expelled from Your sight. Nevertheless I will look again toward Your holy temple.' "Water encompassed me to the point of death. The great deep engulfed me, Weeds were wrapped around my head. "I descended to the roots of the mountains. The earth with its bars was around me forever, But You have brought up my life from the pit, O LORD my God. "While I was fainting away, I remembered the LORD, And my prayer came to You, Into Your holy temple. "Those who regard vain idols Forsake their faithfulness, But I will sacrifice to You With the voice of thanksgiving. That which I have vowed I will pay. Salvation is from the LORD."

The following can be pointed out from his prayer:

Jonah prayed ("*Then Jonah prayed,*" v. 1). Prior to this point in the story, Jonah had not prayed, even though the (presumably) unsaved sailors did (Jonah 1:5 and 14), and even though the (presumably) unconverted captain of the ship called upon Jonah to call upon his God (Jonah 1:6). Those who do not obey (like Jonah, Jonah 1:3) find it difficult to pray. God had to bring Jonah through some deep waters in order to get him to repent (verses 4 and 7) and request (verse 7b).

The Person to whom Jonah prayed ("*Jonah prayed to the LORD his God,*" v. 1; cf. v. 2's "*to the LORD*" and v. 7's "*to You*"). To whom one prays makes all the difference, as it did in the showdown between Elijah and the prophets of Baal (1 Kings 18:19-40). The gods to whom the unsaved sailors first prayed (Jonah 1:5) were "*vain idols*" (v. 8), false and fake, while the One to whom Jonah prayed was Yahweh²⁹ ("*the LORD*"), the true and living God (Jeremiah 10:10 and 1 Thessalonians 1:9), authentic and alive.

The peculiar place from which Jonah prayed ("*Jonah prayed ... from the stomach of the fish,*" v. 1). God's people can pray from any place, whether from the belly of a ship (which Jonah apparently did not, Jonah 1:5-6) or from the belly of a fish. Even though

²⁹ The Hebrew name for God, *Yahweh*, is His personal name (Exodus 3:13-15 and Isaiah 42:8a). It comes from the Hebrew verb of being, *hayah*. This name emphasizes God's eternity, self-existence, and immutability. God simply is.

Jonah had descended to the deepest depths³⁰, he could still look up. Though in tremendous trouble, he (as an Old Testament believer) could still look to God's temple ("I will look again toward Your holy temple," v. 4 and "my prayer came to You, Into Your holy temple," v. 7; cf. Daniel 6:10). Because Jonah looked up, God brought him up ("But You have brought up my life from the pit, O LORD my God," v. 6; cf. Jonah 2:10).

The predicament that prompted Jonah's prayer to be spared ("I called out of my distress," v. 2). Jonah was certainly in distress—he was drowning to death (verses 2, 3, 5, 6, and 7). Though his prayer to be spared is not inscripturated, it can be surmised from what is said. It appears to have been a prayer of repentance (verses 4 and 7a) and a plea for rescue (verse 2).

The purposes Jonah purposed in his prayer

- He purposed to praise ("I will sacrifice to You With the voice of thanksgiving," v. 9). This very prayer is proof of this purpose. It is an application of such passages as Psalm 50:15 and Hebrews 13:15.
- He purposed to preach ("That which I have vowed I will pay," v. 9). It may be implied that Jonah, who previously ran from God's plan (Jonah 1:3 and 10), now promised to perform it (Jonah 3:1-3a).

The perspective of Jonah's prayer. Though from a human viewpoint, the sailors cast Jonah into the sea (Jonah 1:15), from Jonah's viewpoint God did ("For **You** had cast me into the deep, Into the heart of the seas," v. 3). This is in keeping with the emphasis on the sovereign supremacy of God throughout the book of Jonah (see 1:4, 9, 14, 17, 2:10, 4:6, 7, and 8), as well as elsewhere in Jonah's prayer ("All **Your** breakers and billows passed over me," v. 3).

What permeated Jonah's prayer. Some have considered Jonah's prayer to actually be a psalm. Why? Because what Jonah says is saturated by citations from the Psalms:

- Verse 2: "I called out of my distress to the LORD, And He answered me. I cried for help from the depth of Sheol; You heard my voice"
 - Psalm 18:6: "In my distress I called upon the LORD, And cried to my God for help; He heard my voice out of His temple, And my cry for help before Him came into His ears."
 - Psalm 31:22b: "Nevertheless You heard the voice of my supplications When I cried to You."

³⁰ Note Jonah's downward progression: down to Joppa (Jonah 1:3), then down into the ship (Jonah 1:3 and 5), then down into the deep (Jonah 2:2, 3, 5, and 6), then down into the belly of the fish (Jonah 1:17).

- Psalm 118:5: “From *my* distress I called upon the LORD; The LORD answered me *and set me* in a large place.”
- Psalm 120:1: “In my trouble I cried to the LORD, And He answered me.”
- Verse 3: “*All Your breakers and billows passed over me*”
 - Psalm 42:7b: “All Your breakers and Your waves have rolled over me.”
- Verse 4: “*”I have been expelled from Your sight”*”
 - Psalm 31:22a: “As for me, I said in my alarm, ‘I am cut off from before Your eyes.’”
- Verse 5: “*Water encompassed me to the point of death*”
 - Psalm 69:1: “Save me, O God, For the waters have threatened my life.”
- Verse 7: “*And my prayer came to You, Into Your holy temple*”
 - Psalm 18:6b: “He heard my voice out of His temple, And my cry for help before Him came into His ears.”
- Verse 9: “*Salvation is from the LORD*”
 - Psalm 3:8a: “Salvation belongs to the LORD.”
 - Psalm 37:39a: “But the salvation of the righteous is from the LORD.”

Perhaps it is for this reason especially that the prayer of Jonah has been called a “whale of a prayer.”

Praying the Prayers of Scripture

The Prayer of Jesus in Gethsemane Matthew 26:36-44//Mark 14:32-39//Luke 22:39-46

While this series on the prayers of Scripture has presented (Epaphras, Paul, Jabez, Jacob, and Jonah) and will continue to present people who are prominent patterns for prayer, the preeminent pattern is the One who is the perfect pattern for all things that are proper, the Lord Jesus Christ.³¹ When we examine the New Testament, we find the following particulars about his praying:

- Jesus prayed. We find Him praying for others (for little children in Matthew 19:13//Mark 10:16; for Peter in Luke 22:31-32; for those who crucified Him in Luke 23:34; for His disciples in Luke 24:50; and for present and future followers in John 17) and with others (such as in the Garden of Gethsemane, as we shall see). If Christ found it necessary to so pray, then such prayer ought to be practiced by every Christian.
- The points in the day Jesus prayed. Like any good Jew, Jesus would have prayed in the morning, at midday, and in the evening (see Psalm 55:17 and Daniel 6:10). More specifically, we see Him praying “in the early morning, while it was still dark” (Mark 1:35); into the evening (Matthew 14:23); and, on one occasion, all night long (Luke 6:12). His prayer in the Garden of Gethsemane, as well as His high priestly prayer (in John 17), likely took place between midnight and 2 in the morning. Every day and any time of day is a good time to pray.³²
- The places Jesus prayed. According to Luke 5:16, Jesus often withdrew into the wilderness to pray (cf. Mark 1:35). At other times, He prayed on mountains (see Matthew 14:23, Luke 6:12, and 9:28). He apparently prayed His high priestly prayer (in John 17) while walking from the Upper Room to the Garden of Gethsemane. His prayer in Gethsemane (which means “oil press”) was in a grove of olive trees (what the Garden of Gethsemane was) on the Mount of Olives. While anywhere is a good place for prayer, perhaps the best place is a private

³¹ Specific areas in which the New Testament instructs us to imitate Christ include: His love (John 13:34, 15:12, Ephesians 5:2, 25, and 1 John 3:16); His servant’s spirit (John 13:14-15); His purity (1 John 3:3); His humility (Philippians 2:5-8); His righteousness (1 John 3:7); His suffering (1 Peter 2:21); His receiving or accepting of others (Romans 15:7); His pleasing others (Romans 15:2-3); His endurance (Hebrews 12:1-3); and His forgiveness (Ephesians 4:32 and Colossians 3:13).

³² The partially-deaf, late 19th century American missionary to India, John “Praying” Hyde was known to occasionally pray all day, as well as every few hours throughout the night. His praying has been considered the human cause of the revival that occurred in India in the early 20th century.

place, as Jesus did when He prayed in the wilderness (see Luke 5:16's "slip away") and on mountains (see especially Matthew 14:23; compare also Luke 9:28's "to pray" with Matthew 17:1's//Mark 9:2's "by themselves"). See also Luke 9:18, as well as Matthew 6:6's prayer closet (cf. Daniel's roof chamber in Daniel 6:10). Such privacy is perhaps part of the reason Jesus prayed before sunrise (Mark 1:35), into the evening (Matthew 14:23), and all night (Luke 6:12).

- The people with whom Jesus prayed. While there were times Jesus prayed alone (Matthew 14:22-23, Mark 1:35-37, Luke 6:12-13, and 9:18), there were other times He prayed with, or in close proximity to, His disciples (see Luke 9:18). One such occasion was on the Mount of Transfiguration with Peter, James, and John (Luke 9:28). His praying in Gethsemane was another such occasion (Matthew 26:37//Mark 14:33//Luke 22:41). While it is good to pray privately, it is also good to pray with other people. As with Jesus and His disciples, such prayer times can be occasions for discipleship.
- The posture of Jesus in prayer. When praying in Gethsemane, Jesus assumed several postures in prayer. He kneeled (Luke 22:41; cf. 1 Kings 8:54, Ezra 9:5, Acts 7:60, 9:40, 21:5, and Ephesians 3:14). He also fell on His face (Matthew 26:39; cf. Mark 14:35, as well as Numbers 16:22). Other postures He assumed in prayer included looking to heaven, presumably while standing (John 11:41 and 17:1), and lifting up His hands, also presumably while standing (Luke 24:50; cf. 1 Timothy 2:8). Standing in prayer is found in 1 Kings 8:22, Mark 11:25, Luke 18:11, and 13. Sitting in prayer is found in 2 Samuel 7:18. The point is not so much the position, but the disposition that prompts the position, a disposition of submission, humility, reverence, dependence, etc. The following poem by Sam Walter Foss humorously makes the point that posture in prayer is a relatively minor matter:

The proper way for a man to pray, Says Deacon Lemuel Keys,
And the only proper attitude Is down upon his knees.

No, I should say the way to pray, Says Reverend Doctor Wise
Is standing straight with outstretched arms And rapt and upturned eyes.

Oh, no, no, no, said Elmer Slow. Such posture is too proud.
A man should pray with eyes fast closed And head contritely bowed.

It seems to me his hands should be Austerely clasped in front.
Both hands pointing toward the ground, Said Reverend Doctor Blunt.

Last year I fell in Hitchkins' well, Head first, said Cyrus Brown.
And both my heels were stickin' up, And my head was pointing down.

And I made a prayer right then and there, The best prayer I ever said.
The prayin'est prayer I ever prayed Was standin' on my head.

Having considered several points about the praying of Jesus, let us now consider the first of two of His prayers that will be examined in this series, His prayer in the Garden of Gethsemane. This prayer is found in all three of the Synoptic Gospels.³³ Luke's account in Luke 22:39-46 reads:

And He came out and proceeded as was His custom to the Mount of Olives; and the disciples also followed Him. When He arrived at the place, He said to them, "Pray that you may not enter into temptation." And He withdrew from them about a stone's throw, and He knelt down and began to pray, saying, "Father, if You are willing, remove this cup from Me; yet not My will, but Yours be done." Now an angel from heaven appeared to Him, strengthening Him. And being in agony He was praying very fervently; and His sweat became like drops of blood, falling down upon the ground. When He rose from prayer, He came to the disciples and found them sleeping from sorrow, and said to them, "Why are you sleeping? Get up and pray that you may not enter into temptation."

In this passage, we see:

- The prescription to pray that preceded the prayer. In verse 40, Jesus commanded Peter, James, and John: "*Pray that you may not enter into temptation.*" And again in verse 46: "*Get up and pray that you may not enter into temptation*" (cf. Matthew 26:41 and Mark 14:38). The particular temptation they were about to face was the temptation to apostatize, to fully and finally turn away from the faith. However, they did not because Jesus prayed that they would not (as He did for Peter in Luke 22:31-32; it may be assumed that He prayed the same for the others; see also John 17:15). Believers ought to be praying for their own perseverance (see Matthew 6:13), as well as for the perseverance of other believers.
- The Person to whom Jesus prayed ("*Father, ...*," v. 42; cf. Matthew 26:39, 42, and Mark 14:36, as well as Luke 10:21, 23:34, John 11:41, 12:28, 17:1, 5, 11, 21, 24, and 25). In praying to God the Father, Jesus practiced what He preached (Matthew 6:9). In Mark 14:36, Jesus prays to His "Abba, Father," indicative of the intimate relationship between the Father and the Son. Though the relationship between the Christian and God the Father is not precisely the same as that between Christ and God the Father, Christians also have an intimate relationship with the Father (see Romans 8:15 and Galatians 4:6) and can, therefore, pray accordingly (see Matthew 7:9-11//Luke 11:11-13).
- The petitions of the prayer
 - In His humanity, Jesus prayed for the avoidance of Calvary's hill ("*remove this cup from Me,*" v. 42; cf. Matthew 26:39, 42, and Mark

³³ The word, "synoptic" literally means to see together. The Gospels of Matthew, Mark, and Luke are called such because their content is quite similar.

14:35-36). Being fully human (while also being fully divine), Jesus naturally dreaded the death He was about to die, which not only included one of the most excruciating forms, if not the most excruciating form, of physical death ever devised, but also spiritual death, being separated for a time from the Father (Matthew 27:46//Mark 15:34). As did Jesus (and as did Paul, assuming his “thorn in the flesh” was a physical problem, 2 Corinthians 12:8), it is permissible to pray for the prevention of pain.

- In His humility, Jesus prayed for the accomplishment of the Father’s will (“*if You are willing, remove this cup from Me; yet not My will, but Yours be done,*” v. 42; cf. Matthew 26:39, 42, and Mark 14:36). In spite of the cost of the Cross, a cost of which He was fully conscious, Christ courageously committed to keeping the Father’s will, even though it meant He would be killed.³⁴ This desire (cf. Psalm 40:8) qualified His first petition and was the content of the second. In praying this way, Jesus once again practiced what He preached (see Matthew 6:10).

Such a spirit of submission is seen in the words of the 19th century Scottish minister and hymn writer, Horatius Bonar, five of whose children died while they were young:

Thy way, not mine, O Lord, however dark it be;
Lead me by Thine own hand; choose out the path for me;
Smooth let it be, or rough, it will be still the best;
Winding or straight, it leads right onward to Thy rest.

I dare not choose my lot; I would not if I might;
Choose Thou for me, my God, so I shall walk aright.
Take Thou my cup, and it with joy or sorrow fill,
As best to Thee may seem, choose Thou my good and ill.

Choose Thou for me my friends, my sickness, or my health;
Choose Thou my cares for me, my poverty or wealth.
Not mine, not mine the choice in things both great and small;
Be Thou my Guide, my Strength, my Wisdom, and my all.

- The pain that prompted the prayer. Verse 44 says that Jesus was “*in agony*” in the Garden. The parallel passage of Matthew 26 says that He was “grieved and distressed” (v. 37) and “deeply grieved, to the point of death” (v. 38). The parallel passage of Mark 14 likewise says that He was “very distressed and troubled” (v. 33) and “deeply grieved to the point of death” (v. 34). Clearly, the weight of the world’s wickedness, which was about to be placed upon Him, was

³⁴ “The highest bravery may consist in being fully cognizant of impending and agonizing death and yet to embrace it voluntarily” (Walter Liefeld, “Luke,” in *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary*, 8:1032).

weighing heavily upon His heart. So profound was His pain at this point that He needed angelic aid as He prayed (“*an angel from heaven appeared to Him, strengthening Him,*” v. 43).

- The passion of the prayer (“*He was praying very fervently,*” v. 44; cf. Hebrews 5:7). So passionate was His prayer that “*His sweat became like drops of blood, falling down upon the ground*” (v. 44). Dr. Luke is evidently describing a rare medical condition called hematidrosis, which Warren Wiersbe (“*Luke,*” in *The Bible Exposition Commentary*, 1:269) describes as what happens “when under great emotional stress, the tiny blood vessels rupture in the sweat glands and produce a mixture of blood and sweat.” While such a degree of fervency is not the norm (the passion with which He prayed was unprecedented because the pain He was starting to undergo was unprecedented), praying should be with fervency (see Romans 15:30, Colossians 4:12, and James 5:17).
- The persistence of the prayer. Matthew’s account of this prayer points to its persistence, as the petitions were repeated a second time (see Matthew 26:39 and 42), then a third, “saying the same words” (Matthew 26:44). Prayer is to be persistent (see Luke 11:5-8, 18:1-5, Acts 2:42, Romans 1:9, Ephesians 6:18, Colossians 1:3, 9, 4:2, 1 Thessalonians 1:3, 3:10, 5:17, 2 Thessalonians 1:11, and 2 Timothy 1:3).

Praying the Prayers of Scripture

The Prayer of Nehemiah Nehemiah 1:4-11

When Judah's 70-year captivity in Babylon came to a close, God used several men to lead His people back to their land and back to their Lord. First, in 536 B.C. God used Zerubbabel, appointed governor of Judah by the Persian king, Darius, along with the prophets, Haggai and Zechariah and the high priest, Joshua, to lead the first group of returnees to rebuild the temple in Jerusalem (Ezra chapters 1-6). In 458 B.C. God used Ezra the priest, under the auspices of the Persian king, Artaxerxes, to lead a second group of returnees to rebuild the worship of God in Jerusalem (Ezra chapters 7-10). Then in 445 B.C. God used a man named Nehemiah to lead a third and final group of returnees to rebuild the walls of Jerusalem (Nehemiah chapters 1-6).

When Nehemiah appears in Scripture, he is in Persia, serving as the cupbearer of the Persian king, Artaxerxes (Nehemiah 1:11), who reigned from 464-423 B.C. To be a cupbearer was to be in a position of prominence. Layton Talbert (*Frontline*, May/June 2007, p. 30) writes: “[Nehemiah] was the royal cupbearer, the king's personal butler. If there was anyone you'd better know and trust, it was the one who could slip something into your goblet or be bribed to do so. In later Persian times, the cupbearer wielded more influence with the king than the military commanders.” The *Nelson's Complete Book of Bible Maps & Charts* (p. 159) adds: “This [the position of cupbearer to Artaxerxes] was evidently more akin to being a personal advisor than merely something like a butler.” In time Nehemiah would be appointed governor of Judah by Artaxerxes (Nehemiah 5:14).

As the book of Nehemiah opens, Nehemiah learns from his Jewish brethren that the Jews who had already returned to the land were in distress and disgrace and that Jerusalem itself was defenseless, its walls broken down (Nehemiah 1:2-3), perhaps the result of the destruction of Jerusalem by the Babylonian king, Nebuchadnezzar some 140 years earlier, in 586 B.C. (2 Chronicles 36:19), or perhaps the result of a thwarted effort to rebuild the walls earlier in the reign of Artaxerxes (Ezra 4:7-23). As a result of this news, Nehemiah responded with ancient near eastern expressions of sorrow (the start of Nehemiah 1:4), then prayed (the end of Nehemiah 1:4), saying in Nehemiah 1:5-11:

“I beseech You, O LORD God of heaven, the great and awesome God, who preserves the covenant and lovingkindness for those who love Him and keep His commandments, let Your ear now be attentive and Your eyes open to hear the prayer of Your servant which I am praying before You now, day and night, on behalf of the sons of Israel Your servants, confessing the sins of the sons of Israel which we have sinned against You; I and my father's house have sinned. We have acted very corruptly against You and have not kept the commandments, nor the statutes, nor the ordinances which You commanded Your servant Moses. Remember the word which You commanded Your servant Moses, saying, ‘If you are unfaithful I will scatter you among the peoples; but if you return to Me and keep My commandments and do them, though those of you who have been scattered

were in the most remote part of the heavens, I will gather them from there and will bring them to the place where I have chosen to cause My name to dwell.' They are Your servants and Your people whom You redeemed by Your great power and by Your strong hand. O Lord, I beseech You, may Your ear be attentive to the prayer of Your servant and the prayer of Your servants who delight to revere Your name, and make Your servant successful today and grant him compassion before this man."

Several things can be pointed out about this particular prayer:

- Nehemiah prayed. This is not surprising, for Nehemiah is found praying at numerous points throughout the book of Nehemiah (see also, for example, 2:4, 4:4-5, 9, 5:19, 6:9, 14, 13:14, 22, 29, and 31).
- The Person to whom he prayed.
 - To the God who is great (“*O LORD God of heaven, the great and awesome God,*” v. 5; cf. v. 4, 2:4, and Daniel 2:18-19). In beginning his prayer this way, Nehemiah is doing what Christ taught in the Model Prayer (see Matthew 6:9), that before petitioning God in prayer we should praise Him in prayer. By calling God the “*God of heaven,*” Nehemiah is acknowledging God’s sovereignty, that He is the One who rules not only in heaven, but also (by implication) everywhere beneath it. Later in his prayer (in v. 10), Nehemiah will speak of God’s “*great power*” and “*strong hand.*” Accordingly, Nehemiah also addresses God (in v. 5) by His name, Elohim, which signifies His power. God is powerful enough to do what we ask, and even more (Ephesians 3:20).
 - To the God who is good
 - He is loyal to His promises (“*who preserves the covenant,*” v. 5). God had promised to His people a particular place, the Promised Land, and that they would remain in that place provided they did what was right. However, they did what was wrong and were, therefore, removed. However, they could return if they repented of their wrong and resumed doing right. Nehemiah appeals to such promises later in his prayer (see vs. 8 and 9; cf. Leviticus 26:33, Deuteronomy 28:64, 30:1-5, and Jeremiah 29:10-14), thus praying according to the revealed will of God, the key to answered prayer (1 John 5:14-15).³⁵

³⁵ Mervin Breneman (“Ezra, Nehemiah, Esther,” in *The New American Commentary*, 10:173) writes: “Nehemiah’s prayer shows a profound understanding and faith in what God had promised in His Word. Nehemiah challenges us to prayer based on an understanding of God’s purposes and will as found in His Word.”

- He is loyal to His people (“*who preserves ... lovingkindness,*” v. 5; cf. Nehemiah’s use of God’s covenant name, Yahweh, translated “*LORD*” in v. 5; cf. also Nehemiah’s appeal at the start of v. 10 and his “*Your servants*” in v. 6). “*Lovingkindness*” is a translation of the Hebrew word, *hesed*, God’s covenant compassion or loyal love. God is loyal to His people even when they are disloyal to Him (as Nehemiah confessed in vs. 6 and 7).
- He listens to His people (“*let Your ear now be attentive and Your eyes open to hear the prayer of Your servant,*” v. 6 and “*may Your ear be attentive to the prayer of Your servant,*” v. 11). Because God is loyal to His promises and loyally loves His people, He listens to their prayers. See, for example, Exodus 2:23-24 and 6:5.
- The persistence with which he prayed (“*the prayer ... which I am praying before You now, day and night,*” v. 6). Persistence in prayer is taught elsewhere in Scripture in Matthew 26:44, Luke 11:5-8, 18:1-5, Acts 2:42, Romans 1:9, Ephesians 6:18, Colossians 1:3, 9, 4:2, 1 Thessalonians 1:3, 3:10, 5:17, 2 Thessalonians 1:11, and 2 Timothy 1:3.
- The perspective with which he prayed
 - He prayed as a submissive servant. Nehemiah comes to God as a beggar (“*I beseech You*” vs. 5 and 11) with a submissive spirit (“*hear the prayer of Your servant,*” v. 6; cf. “*the prayer of Your servant and the prayer of Your servants,*” v. 11, and “*make Your servant successful today,*” v. 11)
 - As a sinner interceding for other sinners. Nehemiah was sensitive to his own sin and the sin of his people (“*confessing the sins of the sons of Israel which we have sinned against You; I and my father’s house have sinned. We have acted very corruptly against You and have not kept the commandments, nor the statutes, nor the ordinances which You commanded Your servant Moses,*” vs. 6-7; cf. the prayers of Ezra in Ezra 9:5-15 and Daniel in Daniel 9:4-19). Notice how Nehemiah senses the significance of such sin, saying it is against God (“*which we have sinned against You,*” v. 6 and “*We have acted very corruptly against You,*” v. 7; cf. Genesis 39:9, Psalm 51:4, and Luke 15:18).
- The purpose with which he prayed (“*who delight to revere Your name,*” v. 11). Like others in Scripture (David in 2 Samuel 7:18f//1 Chronicles 17:16f, especially 2 Samuel 7:25-26a//1 Chronicles 17:23-24a; Elijah in 1 Kings 18:36-37, especially verse 37; Hezekiah in 2 Kings 19:14f//Isaiah 37:14f, especially 2 Kings 19:19//Isaiah 37:20; and Jesus in John 17:1f, especially verse 1), Nehemiah prayed what he prayed so that God would be praised.

- The plan that was a product of his prayer. It is clear, both by the end of his prayer (“*and make Your servant successful today and grant him compassion before this man,*” v. 11) and by what follows it (in Nehemiah 2:1-8), that the primary petition of Nehemiah’s prayer is that Artaxerxes would approve Nehemiah’s request to return to Jerusalem to rebuild its walls and that Nehemiah had already devised a particular plan for doing so. While there is no doubt that Nehemiah depended upon God to accomplish this (see Nehemiah 1:11, 2:4, and 8), such dependence, rather than having prevented Nehemiah from coming up with an action plan in keeping with this petition, appears to have propelled him to have proactively produced such a plan.

Praying the Prayers of Scripture

A Prayer of the Early Church Acts 4:24-31

Even a cursory reading of the book of Acts reveals that the first century church experienced extraordinary gospel growth and that a primary reason for its progress was prayer. The story of the book of Acts may be summarized as the progress of the church by the Spirit-empowered proclamation of God’s Word produced by prayer. D. Edmond Hiebert (*Working With God Through Intercessory Prayer*, p. 10) writes in this regard: “We may marvel at the spiritual power and glorious victories of the early apostolic Church, but we often forget that its constant prayer life was the secret of its strength ... Almost every chapter in the book of Acts contains a reference to or a record of some prayer uttered.” William Larkin (*Acts*, p. 17) says that “throughout Acts prayer is the church’s very life-breath.” Gerald Priest adds: “Luke includes prayer at critical moments in his history of the church; this reveals that he and the early church considered prayer to have been an important means by which God sovereignly guided His people in the church’s expansion. The course of the church is shaped by God through prayer.” Just as the book of Judges has a cycle (sin, servitude, supplication, salvation), so also does the book of Acts (see Stewart Custer, *Witness to Christ*, p. 9): prayer, power, proclamation, progress, persecution, more prayer.

The prayers of the early church included the following:

- Those who would become part of the nucleus of the church (including the Eleven, as well as Jesus’ biological family) prayed in an upper room as they awaited the Day of Pentecost (Acts 1:13-14). These “with one mind were continually devoting themselves to prayer” (verse 14). Here we see them praying cohesively (“with one mind,” as in Acts 4:24; most likely for the bestowal of the Spirit promised in Luke 24:49//Acts 1:8 and the power He would produce), “continually,” and committedly (“devoting”).
- In Acts 1:24, this group prays for God’s leading in replacing Judas Iscariot as the twelfth disciple.
- In Acts 2:42, when the Jerusalem church was birthed, its members were, among other things, “continually devoting themselves to ... prayer [literally: “the prayers”].” Once again, we see them praying “continually” and committedly (“devoting”).
- In Acts 3:1, we find Peter and John going to the temple to pray at the 3 p.m. “hour of prayer” (cf. Peter going up to the housetop to pray at noon in Acts 10:9 and Paul and Silas “going to the place of prayer” in Acts 16:16).

- In Acts 6:4, we see the apostles devoting themselves to prayer, as well as the ministry of the Word. Once again, we see commitment (“devoting”).
- In Acts 6:6, prayer is made by the Jerusalem church for the first deacons.
- In Acts 7:59-60, Stephen, the church’s first martyr, prays for his persecutors (cf. Matthew 5:44), which included a young man named Saul (Acts 7:58, 8:1, and 22:20). God would use this prayer as a means of saving Saul and profoundly impacting the history of the church from its very inception. Also in Stephen’s prayer, we see an example of one praying directly to God the Son.
- In Acts 9:11, we find the newly-converted Saul praying, most likely praying for whatever it was the Lord wanted him to do (Acts 9:6), a prayer the Lord answered by sending Ananias to tell him (Acts 9:10f).
- In Acts 12:5, we find the church of Jerusalem praying “fervently” for the imprisoned Peter, including “many” praying in the home of Mary, the mother of John Mark (Acts 12:12).
- In Acts 13:3, prayer is made by the Syrian Antioch church for the first missionaries, Paul and Barnabas.
- In Acts 14:23, the first missionary team prays for newly-appointed elders.
- In Acts 16:25, Paul and Silas are praying while imprisoned, likely, like Stephen before them (in Acts 7:59-60), praying for their persecutors, a prayer God would answer by saving the Philippian jailor and his household (Acts 16:29-34).

There is at least one other prayer prayed by the early church that is worthy of notice. Peter and John had gone to the temple to pray (Acts 3:1). While there, they were used of God to heal a lame man (Acts 3:2-10), a miracle that resulted in an open opportunity to preach the gospel (Acts 3:11-26). This the Jewish religious leaders did not appreciate, arresting Peter and John and placing them on trial (Acts 4:1-7), a trial during which Peter preached the gospel to his accusers (Acts 4:8-12). After deliberating, the leaders decided to prohibit Peter and John from preaching Christ (Acts 4:13-22). After being released, Peter and John reported to their fellow believers what had happened (Acts 4:23), which led to the following prayer in Acts 4:24-30:

And when they heard this, they lifted their voices to God with one accord and said, “O Lord, it is You who MADE THE HEAVEN AND THE EARTH AND THE SEA, AND ALL THAT IS IN THEM, who by the Holy Spirit, through the mouth of our father David Your servant, said, ‘WHY DID THE GENTILES RAGE, AND THE PEOPLES DEVISE FUTILE THINGS? ‘THE KINGS OF THE EARTH TOOK THEIR STAND, AND THE RULERS WERE GATHERED TOGETHER AGAINST THE LORD AND AGAINST HIS CHRIST.’ For truly in this city there were gathered together against Your holy servant Jesus, whom You anointed, both Herod and Pontius Pilate, along with the Gentiles and the peoples of Israel, to do whatever Your hand and Your

purpose predestined to occur. And now, Lord, take note of their threats, and grant that Your bond-servants may speak Your word with all confidence, while You extend Your hand to heal, and signs and wonders take place through the name of Your holy servant Jesus.”

In this passage, we see:

- The people with whom they prayed. Peter and John prayed with “their own companions” (Acts 4:23), who “had gathered together” (Acts 4:31). Such corporate prayer is the norm in the book of Acts (see Acts 1:14, 24, 4:24f, 6:6, 12:12, 13:3, 20:36, and 21:5) and should be a normal part of our praying.³⁶ Once again (as in Acts 1:14; cf. Acts 2:46 and 4:32), we see the cohesiveness of their praying (“*with one accord*,” v. 24). Such solidarity is essential because those who oppose are united in their opposition (“*THE RULERS WERE GATHERED TOGETHER AGAINST THE LORD AND AGAINST HIS CHRIST.*’ For truly in this city there were ***gathered together*** against Your holy servant Jesus, whom You anointed, both Herod and Pontius Pilate, along with the Gentiles and the peoples of Israel,” vs. 26b-27, with v. 26b being a citation of Psalm 2:2).
- The Person to whom they prayed. They prayed to the One who is preeminent, the One who is powerful enough to answer any prayer (Ephesians 3:20). Notice how they address Him as “*Lord*” (v. 24; cf. v. 29), meaning He is sovereign (NIV: “Sovereign Lord”), the “absolute ruler” (Homer Kent, *Jerusalem to Rome: Studies in Acts*, p. 48), the “Absolute Master” (Stewart Custer, *Witness to Christ*, p. 52). He is the God “*who MADE THE HEAVEN AND THE EARTH AND THE SEA, AND ALL THAT IS IN THEM*” (v. 24b, a citation of Exodus 20:11; cf. the start of Hezekiah’s prayer in 2 Kings 19:15//Isaiah 37:16). He is the One who by His decree determines before time what will come to pass within time (“*to do whatever Your hand and Your purpose predestined to occur*,” v. 28; cf. Luke 22:22a and Acts 2:23a, as well as Acts 3:18) and providentially brings His plans to pass, even though they include man’s freely-chosen sinful choices (“*THE KINGS OF THE EARTH TOOK THEIR STAND, AND THE RULERS WERE GATHERED TOGETHER AGAINST THE LORD AND*

³⁶ “The hallmark of Western civilization has been rugged individualism. Because of our philosophy of life, we are used to the personal pronouns I and my and me. We have not been taught to think in terms of we and ours and us. Consequently we ‘individualize’ many references to corporate experience in the New Testament, thus often emphasizing personal prayer, personal Bible study, personal evangelism, and personal Christian maturity and growth. The facts are that more is said in the Book of Acts and the Epistles about corporate prayer, corporate learning of biblical truth, corporate evangelism, and corporate Christian maturity and growth than about the personal aspects of these Christian disciplines” (Gene Getz). “When God is about to do some great work, He usually lays it upon the heart of His people to pray for it. And while the sincere importunate prayer of a single saint gains entrance into the throne of the Almighty, the entreaties of many believers bombarding the gates of Heaven often prove more effective in accomplishing God’s purposes” (Gerald Priest).

AGAINST HIS CHRIST.” For truly in this city there were gathered together against Your holy servant Jesus, whom You anointed, both Herod and Pontius Pilate, along with the Gentiles and the peoples of Israel,” vs. 26-27, v. 26 being a citation of Psalm 2:2; cf. Luke 22:22b and Acts 2:23b), which He has decreed to permit.

- The perspective with which they prayed. In keeping with the Person to whom they were praying, the Lord, they saw themselves as “*bond-servants*” (v. 29).
- The petition they made (“*grant that Your bond-servants may speak Your word with all confidence,*” v. 29). Paul asked the Ephesians to pray the same for him (see Ephesians 6:19-20). It is interesting to note that they did not primarily pray for the prevention of the persecution (though this may be implied from v. 29’s “*And now, Lord, take note of their threats*”), but for the power to persist in proclaiming God’s Word, the very thing that produced the persecution in the first place.
- The power their prayer produced. Acts 4:31 says: “And when they had prayed, the place where they had gathered together was shaken, and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and *began* to speak the word of God with boldness.” Such shaking in response to supplication is also seen in Acts 16:25-26. Such Spirit-prompted power to proclaim God’s Word is seen elsewhere in Acts in 4:8, 13, 33, 9:27, 29, 13:46, 14:3, 18:26, 28, and 19:8. The early church preacher, Chrysostom once said that the place was shaken, but they became more unshaken.
- What permeated their prayer. As seen by the ALL CAPS in the NASB text of the prayer, their prayer was permeated with Scripture.

Praying the Prayers of Scripture

Paul's Prayer for the Colossians³⁷ Colossians 1:9-14

An earlier lesson in this series, on Paul's prayer for the Philippians in Philippians 1:9-11, pointed out the following points about the praying of the apostle Paul:

- Paul prayed, both with and for other believers
- Paul prayed persistently
- Paul made it publicly known that he was praying by letting those to whom he was writing know that he was praying for them
- Paul particularly prayed for the purity and perseverance of God's people
- Paul made a practice of praising God for God's people

One of the many prayers of Paul recorded in Scripture³⁸ is the one he prayed for the church in Colossae, found in Colossians 1:9-14:

For this reason also, since the day we heard of it, we have not ceased to pray for you and to ask that you may be filled with the knowledge of His will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding, so that you will walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, to please Him in all respects, bearing fruit in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God; strengthened with all power, according to His glorious might, for the attaining of all steadfastness and patience; joyously giving thanks to the Father, who has qualified us to share in the inheritance of the saints in Light. For He rescued us from the domain of darkness, and transferred us to the kingdom of His beloved Son, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.

In this passage, we see:

- The reason for which Paul prayed (“*For this reason also,*” v. 9). The immediately preceding context gives the reason: the Colossian believers’ fruitfulness (verse 6), seen by their faith in Christ (verse 4a) and their fondness for their fellow Christians (verse 4b).³⁹ Their faith would not only have included

³⁷ An excellent resource on Paul's prayers is D.A. Carson's *A Call to Spiritual Reformation: Priorities from Paul and His Prayers*. Chapter 6 of this work examines his Colossians 1:9-14 prayer.

³⁸ Others may be found in Romans 1:9-13, Ephesians 1:15-23, 3:14-19, Philippians 1:9-11, 1 Thessalonians 3:9-13, 2 Thessalonians 1:11-12, 2:16-17, and Philemon 4-7.

³⁹ The two, faith in Christ and fondness for fellow Christians, go hand-in-hand, the second being a fruit of the first, as seen by such passages as John 13:35, 1 John 2:9-11, 3:10b, 14-15, 17, 19, 4:7-8, 12, and 16b.

their belief/faith, but also their behavior/faithfulness (verse 2a), with the evangelism (verse 7a) and example (verse 7b) of their pastor, Epaphras being one of the reasons for it. Their faith (end of verse 6) and fondness (verse 8; cf. Galatians 5:22) were divinely-derived; therefore, Paul gives God the glory for them (verse 3; cf. verse 12). It is interesting to note that, though the Colossians were doing well spiritually, Paul prayed for them. Their former fruitfulness did not prevent him from praying for their future fruitfulness. While we should certainly pray for those who are not doing well spiritually, we should also pray for those who are, because prayer is a means of their further fruitfulness.

- The regularity with which Paul prayed (“*we have not ceased to pray for you and to ask,*” v. 9; cf. verse 3). Elsewhere, we read of Paul praying unceasingly (Romans 1:9, 1 Thessalonians 1:3, and 2 Timothy 1:3), always (Romans 1:9 and 2 Thessalonians 1:11), and night and day (1 Thessalonians 3:10 and 2 Timothy 1:3). We, too, are to persist in prayer (see Luke 11:5-8, 18:1-5, Acts 2:42, Romans 12:12, Ephesians 6:18, Colossians 4:2, 12, and 1 Thessalonians 5:17).
- The request Paul makes (“*that you may be filled with the knowledge of His will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding,*” v. 9; cf. the very similar request of Epaphras for the Colossians in Colossians 4:12).
 - For the Colossians to be complete and controlled (“*that you may be filled,*” v. 9). A cursory reading of the book of Colossians makes it clear that the Colossian believers were being confronted with a false teaching (the so-called “Colossian heresy”) that claimed to make one complete. Paul corrected this corruption by pointing out 1) that this false teaching was actually “empty” (Colossians 2:8) and, therefore, could not make one complete and 2) that it is Christ alone who can make one complete (Colossians 1:19 and 2:9-10a). Also, to be filled with something is to be controlled by it (see Luke 6:11, John 16:6, and Ephesians 5:18).
 - The content of the completion and control (“*with the knowledge of His will,*” v. 9). The way to be complete and controlled (compare Ephesians 5:18f with Colossians 3:16f) is by knowing God’s will. The only way to know God’s will today is by knowing God’s Word (the Reformation principle of *sola Scriptura*; the Baptist distinctive of the Bible as the only rule of faith and practice; the doctrine of the sufficiency of Scripture—2 Timothy 3:17 and 2 Peter 1:3-4; the cessation of all other means of special revelation with the completion of the canon of Scripture at the end of the first century A.D.—1 Corinthians 13:8-10).
 - The conviction of the content (“*in all spiritual wisdom and understanding,*” v. 9). Here Paul is praying for the Holy Spirit’s work of illumination upon the minds of the Colossians, a work that would convince the Colossians of the certainty and significance of God’s Word (cf. other prayers for the same in Psalm 119:18 and Ephesians 1:17-18a).

- The results of the request. Word (verse 9) leads to walk (verses 10f). Belief to behavior. Doctrine to deeds.
 - Generally
 - Doing deeds deserving of the divine (“*so that you will walk in a manner worthy of the Lord,*” v. 10; cf. 1 Thessalonians 2:12 and 3 John 6). To live in a manner worthy of the Lord is to live in a manner that is worthy of His worth, to have conduct that is commensurate with His character, to have behavior that befits His being. Believers are also to walk worthy of their calling (Ephesians 4:1) and of the gospel (Philippians 1:27).
 - Doing deeds that will delight the divine (“*to please Him in all respects,*” v. 10). To make God glad was Paul’s goal (2 Corinthians 5:9) and should be ours, as well (1 Thessalonians 4:1). This is what Jesus always did (John 8:29).
 - Specifically
 - Being fruitful (“*bearing fruit in every good work,*” v. 10). The Colossians were already doing so (v. 6). Paul prays that they would do so even more. This is in keeping with the revealed will of God (John 15:16 and Ephesians 2:10).
 - Being relational (“*increasing in the knowledge of God,*” v. 10). The Colossians already knew God/had a personal relationship with Him. Paul prays that their relationship with God would grow (cf. 2 Peter 3:18), that they would not just know about God, but know God.
 - Being powerful (“*strengthened with all power, according to His glorious might, for the attaining of all steadfastness and patience; joyously,*” v. 11). The verb translated “*strengthened*” is passive in voice, indicating that Someone else is doing the strengthening. Paul prays the same for the Ephesian believers in Ephesians 1:19-20 and 3:16. As a result of such empowering, God’s people can persevere through problems (“*steadfastness*”) and put up with problem people (“*patience*”). And do both “*joyously.*” Pray, like Paul, that such problems and problem people would make a fellow believer joyful, rather than jaded.
 - Being thankful (“*giving thanks to the Father,* v. 12; cf. Colossians 1:3 and 3:17)

- For inheritance (“*who has qualified us to share in the inheritance of the saints in Light,*” v. 12). Our inheritance is our heavenly home.
- For deliverance (“*For He rescued us from the domain of darkness,*” v. 13a). Before we were saved we were enslaved by sin (John 8:34, Romans 6:17a, Titus 3:3, and 2 Peter 2:19) and Satan (2 Timothy 2:26). Now we have been rescued and released (John 8:32, 36, Romans 6:18, and 22).
- For transference (“*and transferred us to the kingdom of His beloved Son, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins,*” vs. 13b-14; cf. Ephesians 5:8 and 1 Peter 2:9).

Praying the Prayers of Scripture

The Colossians' Prayer for Paul Colossians 4:2-4

Previous lessons in this series have examined some of Paul's prayers for others (his prayer for the Philippians in 1:9-11 and his prayer for the Colossians in Colossians 1:9-14). Not only did Paul pray for those to whom he was writing, but he also asked those to whom he was writing to pray for him. For example, we see Paul praying for the Romans (in Romans 1:9-13), and asking the Romans to pray for him (in Romans 15:30-32). We see Paul praying for the Ephesians (in Ephesians 1:15-23 and 3:14-19), and asking the Ephesians to pray for him (in Ephesians 6:18-20). We see Paul praying for the Thessalonians (in 1 Thessalonians 3:9-13 and in 2 Thessalonians 1:11-12 and 2:16-17), and asking the Thessalonians to pray for him (in 1 Thessalonians 5:25 and 2 Thessalonians 3:1-2). The previous lesson in this series examined Paul's prayer for the Colossians (in Colossians 1:9-14). This lesson will examine the Colossians' prayer for Paul, found in Colossians 4:2-4.

A superficial examination of the prayers of others for Paul reveals that they included the following elements:

- Persistence (Romans 15:30's "prayers"; Ephesians 6:18's "at all times" and "with all perseverance"; Colossians 4:2's "devote yourselves to"; and 1 Thessalonians 5:25's "pray," which is more literally "be praying")
- Preparedness (Ephesians 6:18's "be on the alert"; and Colossians 4:2's "keeping alert in it")
- Petition for protection (Romans 15:31's "that I may be rescued from those who are disobedient in Judea"; and 2 Thessalonians 3:2's "that we will be rescued from perverse and evil men")
- Petition for proclamation (Ephesians 6:19's "utterance" and "boldness"; Ephesians 6:20's "boldly"; Colossians 4:3's "a door for the word"; Colossians 4:4's "that I may make it clear"; and 2 Thessalonians 3:1's "that the word of the Lord will spread rapidly and be glorified")

The Colossians' prayer for Paul in Colossians 4:2-4 reads:

Devote yourselves to prayer, keeping alert in it with an attitude of thanksgiving; praying at the same time for us as well, that God will open up to us a door for the word, so that we may speak forth the mystery of Christ, for which I have also been imprisoned; that I may make it clear in the way I ought to speak

In this passage, we see:

- Some requirements
 - Persistence (“*Devote yourselves to prayer,*” v. 2). The ESV translates this: “continue steadfastly in prayer.” The verb translated “*devote*” is a present tense verb (so, literally, it is: “be devoting yourselves to prayer”). The verb is *proskartereo*, which is an intensified verb. The root verb is *kartereo*, which itself means to be strong, to be steadfast, to hold out, to endure, to persevere. This root is intensified by the prepositional prefix, *pros*. So, the resultant verb means something like: adhere strongly to, stick with, be obstinately persistent in, have a dogged determination. Persistence in prayer is taught elsewhere in Scripture in Matthew 26:44, Luke 11:5-8, 18:1-5, Acts 1:14, 2:42, 6:4, Romans 1:9, 12:12, Ephesians 6:18, Colossians 1:3, 9, 4:2, 1 Thessalonians 1:3, 3:10, 5:17, 2 Thessalonians 1:11, and 2 Timothy 1:3.
 - Preparedness (“*keeping alert in it,*” v. 2). Believers are in a spiritual war, with prayer being one of their primary weapons (see Ephesians 6:18-20, the culmination of the armor of God passage of Ephesians 6:11f). They should pray as if they were participants in a war, because they are. Specifically, they should pray to be protected from the enticements of the enemy (see Matthew 6:13, 26:41//Mark 14:38//Luke 22:40, Luke 22:46, and John 17:15). Believers should always be prepared by prayer (cf. Mark 13:33//Luke 21:36, Ephesians 6:18, and 1 Peter 4:7) because the opponent is always prepared to pounce (1 Peter 5:8).
 - Proper perspective (“*with an attitude of thanksgiving,*” v. 2). The acrostic, A-doration, C-onfession, T-hanksgiving, S-upplication helps remind us that giving thanks to God is to be a regular part of our praying (cf. Philippians 4:6, Colossians 4:2, and 1 Timothy 2:1), as it was with Jesus (see, for example, Matthew 11:25//Luke 10:21 and John 11:41). Paul practiced what he here preaches, as giving thanks to God was a regular part of his praying (see Romans 1:8, 1 Corinthians 1:4, Ephesians 1:16, Philippians 1:3, Colossians 1:3, 1 Thessalonians 1:2, 3:9-10, 2 Thessalonians 1:3, 2 Timothy 1:3, and Philemon 4).
- Some requests
 - Communication that is not closed (“*that God will open up to us a door for the word, so that we may speak forth the mystery of Christ,*” v. 3). Paul essentially asked the Thessalonians to pray the same for him in 2 Thessalonians 3:1 (“that the word of the Lord will spread rapidly and be glorified”). Even though Paul was restricted (“*for which I have also been imprisoned,*” v. 3), being under house arrest in Rome, when he made this request in Colossians 4:3, he knew that the gospel need not be (cf. 2 Timothy 2:9). Therefore, he requested its release. From what Paul says in Acts 28:30-31, as well as what he says in the book of Philippians (in 1:12-

18 and 4:22), another of his “Prison Epistles,” this prayer was apparently answered. We see God opening the door elsewhere in 1 Corinthians 16:8-9 and 2 Corinthians 2:12.

- Communication that is clear (“*that I may make it clear in the way I ought to speak,*” v. 4). Clear communication of the gospel was not an option for Paul (“*the way I ought to speak*”); rather, it was an obligation (Romans 1:14 and 1 Corinthians 9:16).

Praying the Prayers of Scripture

Summary Sheet 1

Now that we are approximately a third of the way through our study of the prayers of Scripture, this is a good point to briefly summarize the passages that have been studied by pointing out from these passages various principles on prayer and particular petitions to pray.

1 John 5:14-15

- Pray
- Be saved and sanctified
- Persevere in prayer
- Pray according to God's will as revealed in Scripture
 - Pray for the salvation of sinners
 - Pray for the sanctification of saints
 - Pray for your enemies, laborers for the harvest, political leaders, and other believers

Matthew 6:9-13 (The "Model Prayer")

- Pray for God's glory
 - For God to be number one
 - For God's kingdom to come
 - For God's will to be done
- Pray for your good
 - For food
 - For forgiveness
 - For freedom from sin

Colossians 4:12-13 (the prayer of Epaphras)

- Pray for others
- Pray frequently
- Pray fervently
- Pray fondly
- Pray for believers to be firm in their faith
- Pray for believers to have the full assurance of their fullness

Philippians 1:9-11 (Paul's prayer for the Philippians)

- Pray with other believers
- Pray for other believers
- Pray persistently

- Let other believers know you are praying for them
- Pray for the purity and perseverance of other believers
- Praise God for other believers
- Pray for believers' love for God's Word to grow greatly
- Pray for believers to approve and practice what is proper
- Pray for believers to be pure and unproblematic people
- Pray for believers to do lots of good so that God would be glorified

1 Chronicles 4:9-10 (the prayer of Jabez)

- Pray to the right Person
- Pray passionately
- Pray for prosperity
- Pray for protection from pain

Genesis 32:9-12 (the prayer of Jacob)

- Pray to the right Person
- Pray according to God's promises to you
- Praise God for His person and for prospering you
- Pray for protection
- Praise God for protecting you

Jonah 2:1-9 (the prayer of Jonah)

- Pray
- Pray to the right Person
- Pray from any place
- Pray to be delivered from death
- Permeate your prayers with Scripture

Luke 22:39-46 (Jesus' prayer in Gethsemane)

- Pray
- Pray at any point in time
- Pray from any place, particularly a private place
- Pray privately and with other people
- Pray with a posture that is proper
- Pray for believers to be prevented from apostatizing/to persevere in the faith
- Pray for the prevention of pain
- Pray for the performance of God's will
- Pray passionately
- Pray persistently

Nehemiah 1:4-11 (the prayer of Nehemiah)

- Pray
- Pray to the right Person
 - The God who is great
 - The God who is good (loyal and loving)
- Ask God to listen to your prayer
- Pray persistently
- Pray with a submissive, servant-like spirit
- Confess sin, both personal and collective
- Make God's praise the purpose of your praying
- Make plans that pertain to your prayer

Acts 4:24-31 (a prayer of the early church)

- Pray cohesively
- Pray continually
- Pray committedly
- Pray for God's guidance
- Pray for church leaders (deacons, missionaries, pastors)
- Pray for those who persecute you
- Pray to the right Person (the One who is sovereign)
- Pray with a submissive, servant-like spirit
- Pray for boldness to speak God's Word

Colossians 1:9-14 (Paul's prayer for the Colossians)

- Pray for those who are doing well spiritually
- Pray regularly
- Pray for believers to be complete and controlled by God's Word by being convinced of It
- Pray for believers to do deeds deserving of God and delightful to God
- Pray for believers to be fruitful, to have a growing relationship with God, to be powerful (by joyously persevering through problems and joyously putting up with problem people), and to be thankful (for their inheritance, deliverance, and transference)

Colossians 4:2-4 (the Colossians' prayer for Paul)

- Pray persistently for other believers
- Be prepared by praying
- Pray for the protection of those proclaiming God's Word
- Pray for the proclamation of God's Word
- Give thanks to God in prayer
- Pray for communication of God's Word that is not closed and that is clear

Praying the Prayers of Scripture

The Prayer of Elijah on Mount Carmel 1 Kings 18:36b-37

One of the most memorable men of the Old Testament was the man, Elijah, a 9th century B.C. prophet to the northern kingdom of Israel for two decades during the reigns of the wicked Israeli kings, Ahab and Ahaziah. Elijah's ministry is chronicled in 1 Kings 17-22 and 2 Kings 1-2. While Elijah was known for his peculiar appearance (see 2 Kings 1:8) and even more so for his powerful performances (such as causing a widow's food supply to not fail/1 Kings 17:16; raising a boy from the dead/1 Kings 17:22; and calling down fire from heaven/1 Kings 18:38 and 2 Kings 1:10-12), he is also known for his praying. We find Elijah praying for the resurrection of the deceased son of the widow of Zarephath in 1 Kings 17:20-21; for rain and no rain in the days of Ahab in 1 Kings 17:42 (cf. James 5:17-18); and on Mount Carmel against the prophets of Baal and Asherah in 1 Kings 18:36-37, the prayer that is the focus of this study.

The Prelude to the Prayer

All of the kings of the northern kingdom of Israel were notoriously bad, none more so than Ahab (1 Kings 16:30). Along with his wicked wife, Jezebel, Ahab further pushed Israel into Baal worship⁴⁰ (1 Kings 16:31-33 and 18:18), in particular the worship of Baal Melqart, a god thought by its adherents to be the god of nature. Because Israel did not keep the commands of the covenant, God brought drought, in keeping with the curses of the covenant (Leviticus 26:19 and Deuteronomy 28:23-24). In doing so, God was also showing His superiority over Baal Melqart, and on Baal Melqart's "home turf," not only by stopping the rain for three-and-a-half years (Luke 4:25 and James 5:17), resulting in a severe famine (1 Kings 18:2), but also by sustaining His prophet, first by a brook and by birds (1 Kings 17:2-6), then by a widow (1 Kings 17:7-16). So, a battle was already brewing, and God was beating Baal.

No doubt buoyed by God's besting of Baal, Elijah challenged the prophets of Baal to a showdown on Mount Carmel (1 Kings 18:19), a place where the power of Baal Melqart was, according to its adherents, particularly potent. Though the numerical odds were against Elijah (850⁴¹-1, 1 Kings 18:19; cf. 1 Kings 18:22), the true and living God was with Elijah (1 Kings 17:1 and 18:15; cf. 1 Kings 17:12 and 18:10). As did Joshua before him (in Joshua 24:15), so Elijah threw down the proverbial gauntlet to his people (1 Kings 18:21), then issued his challenge (1 Kings 18:23-24), allowing the "home" team to bat first (1 Kings 18:25). After Baal's ball team struck out in its first at-bat (1 Kings 18:26), Elijah talked some trash (1 Kings 18:27). Baal's ball team stepped to the plate a

⁴⁰ According to 1 Kings 18:19, Ahab and Jezebel went so far as to give state support to these prophets.

⁴¹ The 850 included 450 prophets of Baal and 400 prophets of Asherah, who was considered the partner of Baal.

second time, but once again struck out (1 Kings 18:28-29). Elijah then stepped to the plate, asked his people to approach (1 Kings 18:30a), repaired the altar (1 Kings 18:30b-32a), upped the ante (1 Kings 18:32b-35), and approached the Lord in prayer (1 Kings 18:36a).

The Prayer (1 Kings 18:36b-37)

“O LORD, the God of Abraham, Isaac and Israel, today let it be known that You are God in Israel and that I am Your servant and I have done all these things at Your word. Answer me, O LORD, answer me, that this people may know that You, O LORD, are God, and that You have turned their heart back again.”

The following points can be made from this prayer:

- The Person to whom Elijah prayed (“*O LORD, the God of Abraham, Isaac and Israel,*” v. 36b; “*O LORD,*” twice in v. 37). Elijah prayed to Yahweh (“*O LORD,*” v. 36b and twice in v. 37), the name that emphasizes God’s personality (Yahweh being God’s personal name, Isaiah 42:8a) and perpetuity (Yahweh comes from the Hebrew verb for being; cf. Exodus 3:14), both the polar opposite of Baal. Elijah prayed to Elohim (“*God,*” v. 36b), the name that emphasizes God’s power, power that was about to be impressively pictured. Elijah prayed to “*the God of Abraham, Isaac and Israel,*” v. 36b), a reminder (along with the name, Yahweh) that God continued to be committed to the people of His covenant, in spite of their lack of commitment to Him. The prophets of Baal certainly prayed persistently and passionately. The problem was they prayed to the wrong “person.”
- The perspective with which Elijah prayed (“*I am your servant and have done all these things at Your word,*” v. 36b). Elijah’s supplicated with a servant’s spirit (cf. the prayer of Nehemiah in Nehemiah 1:4-11 and the prayer of the early church in Acts 4:29) and in submission to what God said.
- The purposes for which Elijah prayed
 - That God would be recognized and revered (“*today let it be known that You are God in Israel,*” v. 36b; “*Answer me, O LORD, answer me, that this people may know that You, O LORD, are God,*” v. 37). The passion of Elijah’s prayer was that the person of God would be perceived both by pagans and by his people and that such perception would produce praise for His person. Interestingly, this is in keeping with the very meaning of Elijah’s name: “Yahweh is God.” This is also in keeping with what Jesus taught in the Model Prayer (in Matthew 6:9), that God’s praise should be the primary petition of our prayers. God’s praise should also be the primary purpose for our prayers (see David’s prayer in 2 Samuel 7:18f//1 Chronicles 17:16f, especially 2 Samuel 7:25-26a//1 Chronicles 17:23-24a; Hezekiah’s prayer in 2 Kings 19:14f//Isaiah 37:14f, especially 2 Kings 19:19//Isaiah 37:20; Nehemiah’s prayer in Nehemiah 1:11; Jesus’

prayer in John 17:1f, especially verse 1; and Paul's prayer in Philippians 1:11; see also John 14:13).⁴²

- That God's people would repent (“*and that You have turned their heart back again,*” v. 37). Implied in this petition is that repentance is ultimately divinely-derived (cf. Acts 3:26, 5:31, 11:18, and 2 Timothy 2:25).

The Postlude to the Prayer

- God's power is revealed (1 Kings 18:38). God steps to the plate and hits a home run that is a “no doubter.”
- God's person is recognized and revered (1 Kings 18:39)
- The ungodly prophets are removed (1 Kings 18:40)

⁴² D.A. Carson (*A Call to Spiritual Reformation*, p. 203) asks: “Has God become so central to all our thoughts and pursuits, and thus to our praying, that we cannot easily imagine asking for anything without consciously longing that the answer bring glory to God?”

Praying the Prayers of Scripture

The Praying of Elijah in the Days of Ahab James 5:16-18

The previous lesson in our study of the prayers of Scripture focused on the praying of Elijah, particularly his prayer on Mount Carmel in 1 Kings 18. Another of Elijah's prayers, and the focus of this lesson, is the prayers he prayed for no rain and for rain in the days of the wicked Israeli king, Ahab.

As pointed out in the previous lesson, one of the curses for not keeping the covenant was drought (Leviticus 26:19 and Deuteronomy 28:23-24). Because the northern kingdom of Israel did not keep the covenant in the days of Ahab, God brought drought, apparently revealing it ahead of time to His prophet to the northern kingdom, Elijah (see 1 Kings 17:1). The drought lasted for three-and-a-half years (Luke 4:25 and James 5:17). Then, God revealed to Elijah that the drought would end (1 Kings 18:1). After his dramatic and decisive victory over the prophets of Baal and Asherah (1 Kings 18:20-40), Elijah told Ahab what God had revealed (1 Kings 18:41), then prayed accordingly (1 Kings 18:42), resulting in the end of the drought (1 Kings 18:45).

The apostle James uses this story as a pattern for prayer for his previous parishioners, writing in James 5:16-18:

Therefore, confess your sins to one another, and pray for one another so that you may be healed. The effective prayer of a righteous man can accomplish much. Elijah was a man with a nature like ours, and he prayed earnestly that it would not rain, and it did not rain on the earth for three years and six months. Then he prayed again, and the sky poured rain and the earth produced its fruit.

From this passage, as well as from the passages from which it is derived (in 1 Kings), we can perceive the following points:

Elijah prayed as one who was finite and fallen ("*Elijah was a man with a nature like ours,*" v. 17). Yes, Elijah was a prophet, but he had his problems (see 1 Kings 19:1f). Elijah himself confessed that he was no better than his ancestors (1 Kings 19:4). Nor, according to James, was he constitutionally any better than his descendants. It has been said that Elijah actually put his tunic on one sleeve at a time. James' point is that if Elijah could pray the way he did, then so can we.

Elijah prayed as one who was faithful ("*prayer of a righteous man,*" v. 16). Though Elijah was a sinner, he was sorry for his sin and for the sin of his fellow citizens, evidently confessing such sin, as did Ezra (in Ezra 9:3-10:1), the Levites (in Nehemiah 9:32-37), and Daniel (in Daniel 9:3-20), resulting in the return of rain ("*confess your sins to one another, and pray for one another so that you may be healed,*" v. 16). Psalm 34:15 and 1 Peter 3:12 say that the Lord's ears are open unto the prayers of the righteous

(cf. Proverbs 15:29b). First John 3:22 says: “And whatever we ask we receive from Him, because we keep His commandments and do the things that are pleasing in His sight.” Conversely, Psalm 66:18 says that the Lord will not hear the prayers of the wicked (cf. Proverbs 1:28-30, 15:29b, 28:9, Isaiah 1:15, 59:2b, Micah 3:4, and 1 Peter 3:7).

Elijah prayed frequently. The implication of 1 Kings 18:43 is that Elijah persisted in his prayer for rain. Persistence in prayer is taught elsewhere in Scripture in Nehemiah 1:6, Psalm 55:17, Daniel 6:10, Matthew 7:7-8/Luke 11:9-10, Matthew 26:44, Luke 11:5-8, 18:1-5, Acts 1:14, 2:42, 6:4, Romans 1:9, 12:12, Ephesians 6:18, Colossians 1:3, 9, 4:2, 12, 1 Thessalonians 1:3, 3:10, 5:17, 2 Thessalonians 1:11, and 2 Timothy 1:3.

Elijah prayed fervently (“*he prayed earnestly*,” v. 17). The passion with which he prayed may be seen in his prayer posture (“and he crouched down on the earth and put his face between his knees,” 1 Kings 18:42). Passion in prayer is also taught in 1 Chronicles 4:10, Luke 22:44 (cf. Hebrews 5:7), Romans 15:30, and Colossians 4:12.

Elijah prayed effectively (“*The effective prayer of a righteous man can accomplish much*,” v. 16). The passive voice participle translated, “*effective*,” has the idea of being made effective. The One who energized⁴³ Elijah’s prayer, the One who made it effective, the One who made it accomplish much, resulting in no rain (v. 17; cf. 1 Kings 18:2), then rain (v. 18; cf. 1 Kings 18:45), is God. The reason why God made Elijah’s prayer effective is that it was prayed in accordance with His revealed will (see especially 1 Kings 18:1), the key to the effectiveness of any prayer (see 1 John 5:14-15). Notice how knowledge of God’s will did not inhibit Elijah’s prayer, but rather ignited it.

⁴³ The Greek participle translated “effective” comes from the verb, *energeo*, from which we get our English word, energy.

Praying the Prayers of Scripture

Paul's Prayer for the Romans⁴⁴ Romans 1:8-13

An earlier lesson in this series, on Paul's prayer for the Philippians in Philippians 1:9-11, pointed out the following points about the praying of the apostle Paul:

- Paul prayed, both with and for other believers
- Paul prayed persistently
- Paul made it publicly known that he was praying by letting those to whom he was writing know that he was praying for them
- Paul particularly prayed for the purity and perseverance of God's people
- Paul made a practice of praising God for God's people

One of the many prayers of Paul recorded in Scripture⁴⁵ is the one he prayed for the church in Rome, found in Romans 1:8-13:

First, I thank my God through Jesus Christ for you all, because your faith is being proclaimed throughout the whole world. For God, whom I serve in my spirit in the preaching of the gospel of His Son, is my witness as to how unceasingly I make mention of you, always in my prayers making request, if perhaps now at last by the will of God I may succeed in coming to you. For I long to see you so that I may impart some spiritual gift to you, that you may be established; that is, that I may be encouraged together with you while among you, each of us by the other's faith, both yours and mine. I do not want you to be unaware, brethren, that often I have planned to come to you (and have been prevented so far) so that I may obtain some fruit among you also, even as among the rest of the Gentiles.

In the passage, we see:

The praise in Paul's prayer ("*First, I thank my God through Jesus Christ for you all, because your faith is being proclaimed throughout the whole world,*" v. 8). As was mentioned above, Paul made a practice of praising God for God's people, and letting them know that he was doing so. Here, he praises God for the faith of the Romans (he praises God for the faith of others in Ephesians 1:15-16, Colossians 1:3-4, 1 Thessalonians 1:2-3, 2 Thessalonians 1:3, 2 Timothy 1:3-5, and Philemon 4-5), a faith that was famous (as was the faith of the Thessalonians, 1 Thessalonians 1:8). Notice that praise to God is the first part of Paul's prayer ("*First ...*," v. 8), in keeping with the

⁴⁴ An excellent resource on Paul's prayers is D.A. Carson's *A Call to Spiritual Reformation: Priorities from Paul and His Prayers*.

⁴⁵ Others may be found in Ephesians 1:15-23, 3:14-19, Philippians 1:9-11, Colossians 1:9-14, 1 Thessalonians 3:9-13, 2 Thessalonians 1:11-12, 2:16-17, and Philemon 4-7.

Model Prayer of Matthew 6:9f. Notice also that Paul does not thank the Romans, but rather thanks **God** for the Romans (“*I thank my God ... for you,*” v. 8). This is because God is the One who grants faith (Acts 14:27, Ephesians 2:8, Philippians 1:29). Therefore, God is the One who gets the glory.

The persistence of Paul’s praying. This persistence is seen in the words, “*how unceasingly I make mention of you*” (v. 9); the word, “*always*” (v. 9); and in the plural, “*prayers*” (v. 9). The persistence of Paul’s praying is also seen in Colossians 1:3, 9, 1 Thessalonians 1:3, 3:10, 2 Thessalonians 1:11, and 2 Timothy 1:3. Persistence in prayer is taught elsewhere in Scripture in 1 Kings 18:43, Nehemiah 1:6, Psalm 55:17, Daniel 6:10, Matthew 7:7-8//Luke 11:9-10, Matthew 26:44, Luke 11:5-8, 18:1-5, Acts 1:14, 2:42, 6:4, Ephesians 6:18, Colossians 4:2, 12, and 1 Thessalonians 5:17.

The petition of Paul’s prayer (“*if perhaps now at last by the will of God I may succeed in coming to you,*” v. 10). Paul prays that he might be able to be personally present in Rome, a prayer that he also asks the Romans to pray (Romans 15:32; cf. his prayer for the Thessalonians in 1 Thessalonians 3:10-11).

The perspective of Paul’s prayer (“*perhaps ... by the will of God,*” v. 10). Submission to the secret, sovereign will of God permeated Paul’s perspective (see Acts 18:21, 1 Corinthians 4:19, 16:7, Philippians 2:19, and 24; cf. Hebrews 6:3 and James 4:15), including his prayers (cf. Romans 15:32). Jesus, in the Model Prayer, taught us to pray with this perspective (Matthew 6:10) and practiced what He preached (Matthew 26:39//Mark 14:36//Luke 22:42 and Matthew 26:42). Paul’s prayer was a request (v. 10’s “*making request*”), not a requirement. Though, as he himself says in verse 13 (“*I do not want you to be unaware, brethren, that often I have planned to come to you (and have been prevented so far)*”), Paul had been prevented⁴⁶ from being personally present in Rome up to this point, God ultimately answered his prayer, but did so in a way that was undoubtedly far different than what he had imagined, as Paul evidently did not arrive in Rome until several years later and as a prisoner of the Roman Empire.

The purpose of Paul’s prayer. Why did Paul want God to answer his prayer to be personally present in Rome?

- The edification of the saved (“*For I long to see you so that I may impart some spiritual gift to you, that you may be established; that is, that I may be encouraged together with you while among you, each of us by the other’s faith, both yours and mine,*” vs. 11-12; cf. his prayer for the Thessalonians in 1 Thessalonians 3:10). Paul wanted to use his spiritual strengths (“*impart some spiritual gift to you,*” v. 11) to strengthen these saints (“*that you may be*

⁴⁶ What prevented Paul from being personally present in Rome at that point in time? Satan in some way (1 Thessalonians 2:18)? The Spirit of God (Acts 16:6-7)? The most likely answer is the spread of the gospel, as his work in the eastern half of the Roman Empire was not yet complete (see Romans 15:19b-24, especially verse 22, along with the end of 1:13).

established,” v. 11; cf. v. 12’s “*encouraged,*” as well as 1 Corinthians 12:7). Not only would Paul’s personal presence in Rome result in the edification of the Romans, but also in the edification of Paul (“*that I may be encouraged together with you while among you, each of us by the other’s faith,*” v. 12; cf. Romans 15:32, as well as Proverbs 27:17). Since this purpose was in keeping with the will of God (see 2 Thessalonians 3:3), God would be pleased to answer Paul’s prayer to be personally present in Rome so that he could pursue this purpose, resulting in the edification of the Roman believers (see, for example, Philippians 1:14). Like Paul (see 1 Thessalonians 3:13 and 2 Thessalonians 2:17) and Peter (see 1 Peter 5:10), let us pray for the spiritual strengthening of the saved. And let us pray that God will give us opportunities to be the ones to bring it about.

- The evangelization of sinners (“*so that I may obtain some fruit among you also, even as among the rest of the Gentiles,*” v. 13; cf. v. 15). Since this purpose was also in keeping with the will of God (see Ezekiel 18:23, 32, 1 Timothy 2:4 and 2 Peter 3:9), God would be pleased to answer Paul’s prayer to be personally present in Rome so that he could pursue this purpose, resulting in the evangelization of Romans unbelievers (see, for example, Philippians 1:12-13 and 4:22). Let us, like Paul (see Romans 10:1), also pray for the salvation of sinners. And let us pray that God will give us opportunities to be the ones to bring it about.

Praying the Prayers of Scripture

The Romans' Prayer for Paul Romans 15:30-32

Previous lessons in this series have examined some of Paul's prayers for others (his prayer for the Philippians in 1:9-11, his prayer for the Colossians in Colossians 1:9-14, and his prayer for the Romans in Romans 1:8-13). Not only did Paul pray for those to whom he was writing, but he also asked those to whom he was writing to pray for him. For example, we see Paul praying for the Ephesians (in Ephesians 1:15-23 and 3:14-19), and asking the Ephesians to pray for him (in Ephesians 6:18-20). We see Paul praying for the Colossians (in Colossians 1:9-14), and asking the Colossians to pray for him (in Colossians 4:2-4). We see Paul praying for the Thessalonians (in 1 Thessalonians 3:9-13 and in 2 Thessalonians 1:11-12 and 2:16-17), and asking the Thessalonians to pray for him (in 1 Thessalonians 5:25 and 2 Thessalonians 3:1-2). The previous lesson in this series examined Paul's prayer for the Romans (in Romans 1:8-13). This lesson will examine the Romans' prayer for Paul, found in Romans 15:30-32.

A superficial examination of the prayers of others for Paul reveals that they included the following elements:

- Persistence (Romans 15:30's "prayers"; Ephesians 6:18's "at all times" and "with all perseverance"; Colossians 4:2's "devote yourselves to"; and 1 Thessalonians 5:25's "pray," which is more literally "be praying")
- Preparedness (Ephesians 6:18's "be on the alert"; and Colossians 4:2's "keeping alert in it")
- Petition for protection (Romans 15:31's "that I may be rescued from those who are disobedient in Judea"; and 2 Thessalonians 3:2's "that we will be rescued from perverse and evil men")
- Petition for proclamation (Ephesians 6:19's "utterance" and "boldness"; Ephesians 6:20's "boldly"; Colossians 4:3's "a door for the word"; Colossians 4:4's "that I may make it clear"; and 2 Thessalonians 3:1's "that the word of the Lord will spread rapidly and be glorified")

The Romans' prayer for Paul in Romans 15:30-32 reads:

Now I urge you, brethren, by our Lord Jesus Christ and by the love of the Spirit, to strive together with me in your prayers to God for me, that I may be rescued from those who are disobedient in Judea, and that my service for Jerusalem may prove acceptable to the saints; so that I may come to you in joy by the will of God and find refreshing rest in your company.

In this passage, we see:

Paul's plea (“*Now I urge you, brethren, by our Lord Jesus Christ and by the love of the Spirit, to strive together with me in your prayers to God for me,*” v. 30)

- The passion of the plea (“*I urge you,*” v. 30). This shows the intensity of Paul's interest in the intercession of others.
- A plea for prayer (“*to strive together with me in your prayers to God for me,*” v. 30)
 - For passionate prayer (“*strive,*” v. 30; NIV: “struggle”). Warren Wiersbe (“Romans,” in *The Bible Exposition Commentary*, 1:565) says that the words translated “strive together” in this verse “suggest an athlete giving his best in the contest” and that “we should put as much fervor into our praying as a wrestler does into his wrestling!” A similar verb is translated “laboring fervently” to describe the praying of Epaphras in Colossians 4:12. Passion in prayer is taught elsewhere in Scripture in 1 Chronicles 4:10, Luke 22:44 (cf. Hebrews 5:7), and James 5:17.
 - For partnership in prayer (“*together with me,*” v. 30). Paul did not ask others to do for him what he was unwilling to do for himself. Thus, the Romans could say that they were praying with Paul, not just for him.
 - For persevering prayer (“*in your prayers,*” v. 30). Perseverance in prayer is also seen in 1 Kings 18:43, Nehemiah 1:6, Psalm 55:17, Daniel 6:10, Matthew 7:7-8//Luke 11:9-10, Matthew 26:44, Luke 11:5-8, 18:1-5, Acts 1:14, 2:42, 6:4, Romans 1:9, Ephesians 6:18, Colossians 1:3, 9, 4:2, 12, 1 Thessalonians 1:3, 3:10, 5:17, 2 Thessalonians 1:11, and 2 Timothy 1:3.
- What prompts the prayer (“*by our Lord Jesus Christ and by the love of the Spirit,*” v. 30)
 - A common connection to Christ and His cause (“*by our Lord Jesus Christ,*” v. 30)
 - A Spirit-created concern for Christians (“*and by the love of the Spirit,*” v. 30). The first of the fruits of the Spirit listed in Galatians 5:22-23 is love. If you truly love someone, you will pray for him.

The petitions of the prayer for which Paul pleads (“*that I may be rescued from those who are disobedient in Judea, and that my service for Jerusalem may prove acceptable to the saints,*” v. 31)

- Rescue from sinners (“*that I may be rescued from those who are disobedient*⁴⁷ *in Judea,*” v. 31). Paul makes a similar request in 2 Thessalonians 3:2 (cf. 2 Corinthians 1:10-11). In our increasingly secular culture, with its resurgent antagonistic atheism, we need to be praying this frequently for fellow believers. It is interesting to note how God answered this prayer of Paul, as Paul was rescued from imminent death when he made it to Jerusalem (see Acts 21:31f; cf. Acts 23:12f).
- Reception of service (“*and that my service for Jerusalem may prove acceptable to the saints,*” v. 31). The specific service of which Paul speaks is his delivering of a love offering from Gentile churches to the church in Jerusalem (see Romans 15:25-26).

The product of the prayer (“*so that I may come to you in joy by the will of God and find refreshing rest in your company,*” v. 32)

- The product: to be personally present with God’s people (“*so that I may come to you,*” v. 32). This is the same thing for which Paul himself was praying (see Romans 1:10; cf. 1 Thessalonians 3:10-11).
- The perspective: if God permits (“*by the will of God,*” v. 32). This perspective was typical of Paul, as seen by Acts 18:21, 1 Corinthians 4:19, 16:7, Philippians 2:19, and 24 (cf. Hebrews 6:3 and James 4:15), including his prayers (cf. Romans 1:10). Jesus, in the Model Prayer, taught us to pray with this perspective (Matthew 6:10) and practiced what He preached (Matthew 26:39//Mark 14:36//Luke 22:42 and Matthew 26:42). Though Paul had been prevented from being personally present in Rome up to this point (see Romans 1:13), God ultimately answered his prayer, but did so in a way that was undoubtedly far different than what he had imagined, as Paul evidently did not arrive in Rome until several years later and as a prisoner of the Roman Empire.
- The purpose: to be replenished by God’s people (“*and find refreshing rest in your company,*” v. 32). Whereas elsewhere Paul prayed that he might be present with God’s people in order to minister unto them (see Romans 1:11 and 1 Thessalonians 3:10), here he prays that he might be so in order to be ministered unto by them (see also Romans 1:12). Believers in Scripture who had a refreshing effect upon other believers include Stephanas, Fortunatus, and Achaicus (1 Corinthians 16:17-18); the Corinthians (2 Corinthians 7:13);

⁴⁷ D.A. Carson (*A Call to Spiritual Reformation: Priorities from Paul and His Prayers*, p. 215) rightly reminds us: “Not to trust [Jesus Christ] totally is not merely a question of religious preference, not a matter of ‘unbelief’ in the modern sense, but willful disobedience, moral rebellion.” The gospel must be obeyed (Romans 10:16, 2 Thessalonians 1:8, 1 Peter 4:17, and 1 John 3:23). Saving faith is an obedient faith (Acts 6:7, Romans 1:5, 6:17, and 16:26).

Onesiphorus (2 Timothy 1:16); and Philemon (Philemon 7). When Paul finally did make it to Rome, he was refreshed by the Roman believers (see Acts 28:15).

Praying the Prayers of Scripture

Christ's High Priestly Prayer John 17

So far in this study, numerous examples of prayer have been given, including the examples of Epaphras (Colossians 4:12-13), Paul (Philippians 1:9-11, Colossians 1:9-14, and Romans 1:8-13), Jabez (1 Chronicles 4:9-10), Jacob (Genesis 32:9-12), Jonah (Jonah 2:1-9), Nehemiah (Nehemiah 1:4-11), the church in Jerusalem (Acts 4:24-31), the church in Colossae (Colossians 4:2-4), Elijah (1 Kings 18:36b-37 and James 5:16-18), and the church in Rome (Romans 15:30-32). Our ultimate example in regards to prayer, however, as in all other areas, is the example of our Lord, Jesus Christ. A previous lesson in this series focused on His prayer in the Garden of Gethsemane (in Matthew 26:36-44//Mark 14:32-39//Luke 22:39-46). This lesson will focus on the prayer that He prayed in John 17 on the way to the Garden of Gethsemane, a prayer for His disciples and for all those who would later believe on Him, a prayer that could be called the “Lord’s Prayer” (rather than the prayer of Matthew 6:9-13//Luke 11:2-4, which could rather be called the “Model Prayer”) and one that is often called His high priestly prayer.

Before specifically looking at this particular prayer, it is advisable to once again consider (as did the previous lesson in this series on Christ’s prayer in the Garden of Gethsemane) the overall praying of Christ, which yields the following points:

- Jesus prayed. We find Him praying for others (for little children in Matthew 19:13//Mark 10:16; for Peter in Luke 22:31-32; for those who crucified Him in Luke 23:34; for His disciples in Luke 24:50; and for present and future followers in John 17) and with others (such as in the Garden of Gethsemane). If Christ found it necessary to so pray, then such prayer ought to be practiced by every Christian.
- The points in the day Jesus prayed. Like any good Jew, Jesus would have prayed in the morning, at midday, and in the evening (see Psalm 55:17 and Daniel 6:10). More specifically, we see Him praying “in the early morning, while it was still dark” (Mark 1:35); into the evening (Matthew 14:23); and, on one occasion, all night long (Luke 6:12). His prayer in the Garden of Gethsemane, as well as His high priestly prayer (in John 17), likely took place between midnight and 2 in the morning. Every day and any time of day is a good time to pray.⁴⁸
- The places Jesus prayed. According to Luke 5:16, Jesus often withdrew into the wilderness to pray (cf. Mark 1:35). At other times, He prayed on mountains (see

⁴⁸ The partially-deaf, late 19th century American missionary to India, John “Praying” Hyde was known to occasionally pray all day, as well as every few hours throughout the night. His praying has been considered the human cause of the revival that occurred in India in the early 20th century.

Matthew 14:23, Luke 6:12, and 9:28). He apparently prayed His high priestly prayer (in John 17) while walking from the Upper Room to the Garden of Gethsemane. His prayer in Gethsemane (which means “oil press”) was in a grove of olive trees (what the Garden of Gethsemane was) on the Mount of Olives. While anywhere is a good place for prayer, perhaps the best place is a private place, as Jesus did when He prayed in the wilderness (see Luke 5:16’s “slip away”) and on mountains (see especially Matthew 14:23; compare also Luke 9:28’s “to pray” with Matthew 17:1’s//Mark 9:2’s “by themselves”). See also Luke 9:18, as well as Matthew 6:6’s prayer closet (cf. Daniel’s roof chamber in Daniel 6:10). Such privacy is perhaps part of the reason Jesus prayed before sunrise (Mark 1:35), into the evening (Matthew 14:23), and all night (Luke 6:12).

- The people with whom Jesus prayed. While there were times Jesus prayed alone (Matthew 14:22-23, Mark 1:35-37, Luke 6:12-13, and 9:18), there were other times He prayed with, or in close proximity to, His disciples (see Luke 9:18). One such occasion was on the Mount of Transfiguration with Peter, James, and John (Luke 9:28). His praying in Gethsemane was another such occasion (Matthew 26:37//Mark 14:33//Luke 22:41). While it is good to pray privately, it is also good to pray with other people. As with Jesus and His disciples, such prayer times can be occasions for discipleship.
- The posture of Jesus in prayer. When praying in Gethsemane, Jesus assumed several postures in prayer. He knelt (Luke 22:41; cf. 1 Kings 8:54, Ezra 9:5, Acts 7:60, 9:40, 21:5, and Ephesians 3:14). He also fell on His face (Matthew 26:39; cf. Mark 14:35, as well as Numbers 16:22). Other postures He assumed in prayer included looking to heaven, presumably while standing (John 11:41 and 17:1), and lifting up His hands, also presumably while standing (Luke 24:50; cf. 1 Timothy 2:8). Standing in prayer is found in 1 Kings 8:22, Mark 11:25, Luke 18:11, and 13. Sitting in prayer is found in 2 Samuel 7:18. The point is not so much the position, but the disposition that prompts the position, a disposition of submission, humility, reverence, dependence, etc.

Having considered several points about the praying of Jesus, let us now consider His high priestly prayer in John 17, in which Jesus prays in regards to Himself (verses 1-5), His disciples (verses 6-19), and the church (verses 20-26):

¹Jesus spoke these things; and lifting up His eyes to heaven, He said, “Father, the hour has come; glorify Your Son, that the Son may glorify You, ²even as You gave Him authority over all flesh, that to all whom You have given Him, He may give eternal life. ³This is eternal life, that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent. ⁴I glorified You on the earth, having accomplished the work which You have given Me to do. ⁵Now, Father, glorify Me together with Yourself, with the glory which I had with You before the world was. ⁶“I have manifested Your name to the men whom You gave Me out of the world; they were Yours and You gave them to Me, and they have kept Your word. ⁷Now they have come to know that everything You have given Me is from You; ⁸for the words which You gave Me I have given to them; and they

received them and truly understood that I came forth from You, and they believed that You sent Me. ⁹I ask on their behalf; I do not ask on behalf of the world, but of those whom You have given Me; for they are Yours; ¹⁰and all things that are Mine are Yours, and Yours are Mine; and I have been glorified in them. ¹¹I am no longer in the world; and yet they themselves are in the world, and I come to You. Holy Father, keep them in Your name, the name which You have given Me, that they may be one even as We are. ¹²While I was with them, I was keeping them in Your name which You have given Me; and I guarded them and not one of them perished but the son of perdition, so that the Scripture would be fulfilled. ¹³But now I come to You; and these things I speak in the world so that they may have My joy made full in themselves. ¹⁴I have given them Your word; and the world has hated them, because they are not of the world, even as I am not of the world. ¹⁵I do not ask You to take them out of the world, but to keep them from the evil one. ¹⁶They are not of the world, even as I am not of the world. ¹⁷Sanctify them in the truth; Your word is truth. ¹⁸As You sent Me into the world, I also have sent them into the world. ¹⁹For their sakes I sanctify Myself, that they themselves also may be sanctified in truth. ²⁰“I do not ask on behalf of these alone, but for those also who believe in Me through their word; ²¹that they may all be one; even as You, Father, are in Me and I in You, that they also may be in Us, so that the world may believe that You sent Me. ²²The glory which You have given Me I have given to them, that they may be one, just as We are one; ²³I in them and You in Me, that they may be perfected in unity, so that the world may know that You sent Me, and loved them, even as You have loved Me. ²⁴Father, I desire that they also, whom You have given Me, be with Me where I am, so that they may see My glory which You have given Me, for You loved Me before the foundation of the world. ²⁵“O righteous Father, although the world has not known You, yet I have known You; and these have known that You sent Me; ²⁶and I have made Your name known to them, and will make it known, so that the love with which You loved Me may be in them, and I in them.”

In this prayer, we see:

- His posture (“*lifting up His eyes to heaven,*” v. 1). It is presumed that Jesus was standing while so doing. He assumed the same posture in prayer in John 11:41. For more on Jesus’ postures in prayer, see the previous paragraph in this lesson on the same.
- The Person to whom He prayed (“*Father,*” vs. 1, 5, 21, and 24; “*Holy Father,*” v. 11; “*righteous Father,*” v. 25; cf. Matthew 26:39, 42, Mark 14:36, Luke 10:21, 22:42, 23:34, John 11:41, and 12:28). In praying to God the Father, Jesus practiced what He preached (Matthew 6:9). In Mark 14:36, Jesus prayed to His “*Abba, Father,*” indicative of the intimate relationship between the Father and the Son. Though the relationship between the Christian and God the Father is not precisely the same as that between Christ and God the Father, Christians also have an intimate relationship with the Father (see Romans 8:15 and Galatians 4:6) and can, therefore, pray accordingly (see Matthew 7:9-11//Luke 11:11-13). By calling His Father “*Holy*” (v. 11) and “*righteous*” (v. 25) Jesus is implicitly praising while praying, once again practicing what He preached (Matthew 6:9).

- His petitions
 - The glory of God. God’s glory ought to be the primary purpose for our prayers (Matthew 6:9; cf. David’s prayer in 2 Samuel 7:18f//1 Chronicles 17:16f, especially 2 Samuel 7:25-26a//1 Chronicles 17:23-24a; Elijah’s prayer in 1 Kings 18:36b-37, especially verse 37; Hezekiah’s prayer in 2 Kings 19:14f//Isaiah 37:14f, especially 2 Kings 19:19//Isaiah 37:20; Nehemiah’ prayer in Nehemiah 1:11; and Paul’s prayer in Philippians 1:11; see also John 14:13).⁴⁹
 - The glorification of God the Son
 - By God the Father (“*glorify Your Son,*” v. 1; “*glorify Me,*” v. 5). Jesus asks the Father to glorify Him by His upcoming exaltation (Philippians 2:9-11), which would include His crucifixion (John 3:14, 8:28, 12:32, and 12:34), resurrection (Acts 2:36, Romans 1:4, and 1 Peter 1:21), and ascension/session (Ephesians 1:20-22).
 - By God’s people. Just as Jesus had been glorified by His disciples on earth (“*I have been glorified in them,*” v. 10), so He prayed that He would continue to be so glorified by them in Heaven (“*I desire that they also, whom You have given Me, be with Me where I am, so that they may see My glory which You have given Me,*” v. 24). When we get to Heaven, we will see perfectly what we now only see partially (1 Corinthians 13:12), the glory of God the Son (2 Corinthians 3:18), a gaze that will glorify us (1 John 3:2) and enable us to give glory to God the Son fully and forever.

The Son is glorified when He is seen and savored for who He really is. Though to unenlightened eyes it may seem improper to pray for one’s own glorification, when one is God (as Jesus is, being preexistent, v. 5; one with the Father, v. 11), such a prayer is perfectly appropriate.

- The glorification of God the Father. In asking that the Father glorify Him Jesus also asked that the Father be glorified thereby (“*glorify Your Son, that the Son may glorify You,*” v. 1; “*glorify Me together with Yourself,*” v. 5). Just as Jesus had glorified the

⁴⁹ D.A. Carson (*A Call to Spiritual Reformation*, p. 203) asks: “Has God become so central to all our thoughts and pursuits, and thus to our praying, that we cannot easily imagine asking for anything without consciously longing that the answer bring glory to God?”

Father to that point (“*I glorified You on the earth, having accomplished the work which You have given Me to do,*” v. 4), so He prayed that He would continue to do so (by, for example, His death, showing thereby that the Father is worth serving, even at the cost of one’s earthly life).

- The good of God’s people. As the previous point implied, God’s glory and our good are not exclusive. God being glorified is for our good. So, it is not surprising that Jesus not only prays for the glory of God, but also for the good of God’s people.
 - Their security (“*keep them in Your name,*” v. 11; “*keep them from the evil one,*” v. 15). Jesus taught us to pray this way (see the end of Matthew 6:13). Another time Jesus prayed such a prayer was when he prayed for Peter in Luke 22:31-32 (cf. Romans 8:34 and Hebrews 7:25). Such protection is not only prayed for (cf. 1 Thessalonians 5:23), but also promised (John 10:28-29, 1 Corinthians 1:8-9, Philippians 1:6, 1 Thessalonians 5:24, 2 Thessalonians 3:3, 2 Timothy 4:18, 1 Peter 1:5, 1 John 5:18, and Jude 24; cf. v. 12’s “*While I was with them, I was keeping them in Your name which You have given Me; and I guarded them and not one of them perished*”), implying that such promises should not prevent prayer, but rather produce it. It is also not without our participation (1 John 5:21 and Jude 21).
 - Their purity (“*Sanctify them,*” v. 17). The sanctification of believers is part of the will of God (1 Thessalonians 4:3), so should be a primary part of our prayers (1 John 5:14). Praying for the sanctification of believers is spoken of elsewhere in Ephesians 3:16, Philippians 1:10b-11, Colossians 1:10, 4:12, 1 Thessalonians 5:23, 2 Thessalonians 2:17, and Jude 20. One of the means of the believer’s sanctification is the Word of God (“*Sanctify them in the truth; Your word is truth,*” v. 17; cf. “*sanctified in truth,*” v. 19; cf. also Psalm 1:1-3, 119:9, 11, John 15:3, Acts 20:32, 2 Corinthians 3:18 (the “mirror”; cf. James 1:21-25), Ephesians 5:26, James 1:21, and 1 Peter 2:2), so praying for the ministry of God’s Word to those who are saved should be a regular part of our praying.
 - Their unity (“*that they may all be one,*” v. 21; cf. v. 11’s “*keep them ... that they may be one*”; v. 22’s “*that they may be one,*”; and v. 23’s “*that they may be perfected in unity*”). A close consideration of the context yields the conclusion that Jesus is not necessarily speaking of an organizational or ecumenical unity, but of an organic or essential unity, the same kind of unity that exists between the Father and the Son (“*that they may be one even as*

We are,” v. 11; “that they may all be one; even as You, Father, are in Me and I in You, that they also may be in Us,” v. 21; “that they may be one, just as We are one,” v. 22; and “I in them and You in Me, that they may be perfected in unity,” v. 23). Such unity is in connection with a common commitment to truth (see vs. 17 and 19 and especially vs. 20b-21a). Without such a common commitment, unity is unattainable (see, for example, 2 Thessalonians 3:6).

Praying the Prayers of Scripture

The Prayer of Hezekiah 2 Kings 19:14-20//Isaiah 37:14-20

In the middle of the 19th century, Irishman Joseph Scriven wrote the song, “What a Friend We Have in Jesus,” in which he reminds the believer to “take it to the Lord in prayer.”⁵⁰ There is perhaps no better biblical example of someone who did just this⁵¹ than the 8th century B.C. king of Judah, Hezekiah.

Early in the 8th century B.C., the Assyrian king, Sennacherib was on the prowl, conquering kingdom after kingdom and setting his sights on the kingdom of Judah. After taking some Judean cities (2 Kings 18:13), then taxing Hezekiah (2 Kings 18:14-16), Sennacherib began to attack the capital city of Judah, Jerusalem (2 Kings 18:17) in an attempt to conquer the kingdom.

After the representatives of Sennacherib verbally taunted Hezekiah and the people of Judah (2 Kings 18:19-35), Sennacherib’s messengers followed up with a letter saying essentially the same (2 King 19:9b-13). The next part of the story, 2 Kings 19:14-20 tells what Hezekiah did:

Then Hezekiah took the letter from the hand of the messengers and read it, and he went up to the house of the LORD and spread it out before the LORD. Hezekiah prayed before the LORD and said, “O LORD, the God of Israel, who are enthroned above the cherubim, You are the God, You alone, of all the kingdoms of the earth. You have made heaven and earth. Incline Your ear, O LORD, and hear; open Your eyes, O LORD, and see; and listen to the words of Sennacherib, which he has sent to reproach the living God. Truly, O LORD, the kings of Assyria have devastated the nations and their lands and have cast their gods into the fire, for they were not gods but the work of men’s hands, wood and stone. So they have destroyed them. Now, O LORD our God, I pray, deliver us from his hand that all the kingdoms of the earth may know that You alone, O LORD, are God.” Then Isaiah the son of Amoz sent to Hezekiah saying, “Thus says the LORD, the God of Israel, ‘Because you have prayed to Me about Sennacherib king of Assyria, I have heard you.’”

In the passage, we see:

⁵⁰ Scriven wrote “What a Friend We Have in Jesus” for the benefit of his ill mother back in Ireland. He knew from experience what it was like to take his troubles to the Lord in prayer, as the first woman he was engaged to marry died by drowning the night before their wedding in 1845 and the second woman he was engaged to marry died of pneumonia shortly before their wedding in 1860.

⁵¹ Others who did this in Scripture include Daniel (in Daniel 2 and 6) and the church of Jerusalem (in Acts 4).

- Hezekiah prayed (“The Hezekiah ... spread it out before the LORD,” v. 14; “Hezekiah prayed before the LORD ...,” v. 15). Rather than being anxious, Hezekiah asked (cf. Philippians 4:6). While prayer was not Hezekiah’s only response to the problem (he also made proper preparations, see 2 Chronicles 32:3-6), it was his first response (cf. 2 Kings 19:1).
- Hezekiah pursued the prayers of other people, asking Isaiah to also pray for this problem (see 2 Kings 19:2-4).
- Hezekiah praised the Person of God in his prayer.
 - God is King (“*O LORD, the God of Israel, who are enthroned above the cherubim, You are the God, You alone, of all the kingdoms of the earth,*” v. 15). Sennacherib audaciously thought that he was the “great king” (see 2 Kings 18:19 and 28), but would find out otherwise (see 2 Kings 19:28). In the end, however, it was not a matter of, “Thus says the great king, the king of Assyria” (2 Kings 18:19), but rather, “Thus says the LORD concerning the king of Assyria...” (2 Kings 19:32). Like Hezekiah, David also praised God in prayer for being the King (see 1 Chronicles 29:10-13).
 - God is Creator (“*You have made heaven and earth,*” v. 15). God is King because He is Creator. Like Hezekiah, the church in Jerusalem also praised God in prayer for being the Creator (see Acts 4:24).

God’s praise is to be the primary part of our praying (Matthew 6:9; cf. the example of Daniel in Daniel 9:4).

- Hezekiah’s petition was for a primary purpose (“*Now, O LORD our God, I pray, deliver us from his hand that all the kingdoms of the earth may know that You alone, O LORD, are God,*” v. 19). Sennacherib had reproached (see 2 Kings 19:4, 16, 22, and 23), rather than revered, God; blasphemed (see 2 Kings 19:6 and 22), rather than blessed, Him. Hezekiah requested that God retribute such reproach (“*listen to the words of Sennacherib, which he has sent to reproach the living God,*” v. 16; cf. 2 Chronicles 32:19-20). The primary purpose of Hezekiah’s petition was not his own survival, but that God’s supremacy be seen, that the preeminence of God’s Person be perceived by other people. Others who prayed this way include David (in 2 Samuel 7:18f//1 Chronicles 17:16f, especially 2 Samuel 7:25-26a//1 Chronicles 17:23-24a) and Elijah (in 1 Kings 18:36-37).⁵² The aim was the spread of God’s fame.

⁵² D.A. Carson (*A Call to Spiritual Reformation*, p. 203) asks: “Has God become so central to all our thoughts and pursuits, and thus to our praying, that we cannot easily imagine asking for anything without consciously longing that the answer bring glory to God?”

- God was pleased to provide the protection for which Hezekiah prayed (“*Because you have prayed to Me about Sennacherib king of Assyria, I have heard you,*” v. 20; cf. 2 Kings 20:5 and 2 Chronicles 30:20). Why did God hear/answer (1 John 5:15)? Because the primary purpose for which Hezekiah prayed, that God would be praised, was in accordance with the will of God, the kind of prayer that is guaranteed to be granted (1 John 5:14-15). See 2 Kings 19:34 in this regard. Another reason may be because Hezekiah was righteous (see 2 Kings 20:3), and God hears the prayers of such people (see Psalm 34:15, Proverbs 15:29b, James 5:16, 1 Peter 3:12, and 1 John 3:22). Because Hezekiah was righteous, he desired for God to be glorified.

Praying the Prayers of Scripture

Paul's First Prayer for the Thessalonians 1 Thessalonians 3:9-13⁵³

An earlier lesson in this series, on Paul's prayer for the Philippians in Philippians 1:9-11, pointed out the following points about the praying of the apostle Paul:

- Paul prayed, both with and for other believers
- Paul prayed persistently
- Paul made it publicly known that he was praying by letting those to whom he was writing know that he was praying for them
- Paul particularly prayed for the purity and perseverance of God's people
- Paul made a practice of praising God for God's people

One of the many prayers of Paul recorded in Scripture⁵⁴, and one of several that he prayed for the church in Thessalonica (see also 2 Thessalonians 1:11-12 and 2:16-17), is the prayer found in 1 Thessalonians 3:9-13:

For what thanks can we render to God for you in return for all the joy with which we rejoice before our God on your account, as we night and day keep praying most earnestly that we may see your face, and may complete what is lacking in your faith? Now may our God and Father Himself and Jesus our Lord direct our way to you; and may the Lord cause you to increase and abound in love for one another, and for all people, just as we also do for you; so that He may establish your hearts without blame in holiness before our God and Father at the coming of our Lord Jesus with all His saints.

In the passage, we see:

- The praise of Paul's prayer
 - The Person who is praised ("*For what thanks can we render to God ... we rejoice before our God,*" v. 9; cf. 1 Thessalonians 1:2, which is the actual commencement of this prayer in 3:9-13, and 1 Thessalonians 2:13, which is the continuation of it, with 3:9-13 being the culmination of it). Because God is the One who was at work in the Thessalonians believers (see Philippians 1:6, 2:13, and Hebrews 13:21), He gets the glory. God's

⁵³ An excellent resource on Paul's prayers is D.A. Carson's *A Call to Spiritual Reformation: Priorities from Paul and His Prayers*. Chapter 5 of Carson's book specifically deals with Paul's prayer for the Thessalonians in 1 Thessalonians 3:9-13.

⁵⁴ Others may be found in Romans 1:8-13, Ephesians 1:15-23, 3:14-19, Philippians 1:9-11, Colossians 1:9-14, 2 Thessalonians 1:11-12, 2:16-17, and Philemon 4-7.

praise should be our first priority in prayer (see Daniel 9:4 and Matthew 6:9).

- What prompted the praise (“*for you ... on your account,*” v. 9).
 - The Thessalonians’ faith (1 Thessalonians 3:6’s and 3:7’s “faith”; cf. 1 Thessalonians 1:3 and 2 Thessalonians 1:3). Paul often thanked God for the faith of believers (see also Romans 1:8, Ephesians 1:15-16, Colossians 1:3-4, 2 Timothy 1:3-5, and Philemon 4-5). The Thessalonians’ faith was seen by their faithfulness/the firmness of their faith (see 1 Thessalonians 1:3’s “steadfastness” and 1 Thessalonians 3:8’s “stand firm”) in the face of affliction (see 1 Thessalonians 3:3-4).
 - The Thessalonians’ fondness⁵⁵ (1 Thessalonians 3:6’s “love, and that you always think kindly of us, longing to see us”; cf. 1 Thessalonians 1:3 and 2 Thessalonians 1:3). Paul often thanked God for the love of other believers (see also Colossians 1:4 and Philemon 5).
- The persistence of Paul’s praying (“*as we night and day keep praying,*” v. 10; cf. 1 Thessalonians 1:2’s “prayers”). The persistence of Paul’s praying is also seen in Romans 1:9, Colossians 1:3, 9, 2 Thessalonians 1:11, and 2 Timothy 1:3. Persistence in prayer is taught elsewhere in Scripture in 1 Kings 18:43, Nehemiah 1:6, Psalm 55:17, Daniel 6:10, Matthew 7:7-8//Luke 11:9-10, Matthew 26:44, Luke 11:5-8, 18:1-5, Acts 1:14, 2:42, 6:4, Ephesians 6:18, Colossians 4:2, 12, and 1 Thessalonians 5:17.
- The passion of Paul’s praying (“*praying most earnestly,*” v. 10). The particular Greek word that is translated “*earnestly*” is emphatic, being a combination of the Greek word, *perissou*, meaning “abundantly,” prefixed by not just one (*huper*), but two (*ek*), Greek prepositions (*huperekperissou*). Passion in prayer is also taught in 1 Chronicles 4:10, Luke 22:44 (cf. Hebrews 5:7), Romans 15:30, Colossians 4:12, and James 5:17.
- The petitions of Paul’s prayer
 - The furtherance of their faith by the presence of Paul and his partners (“*that we may see your face, and may complete what is lacking in your faith? Now may our God and Father Himself and Jesus our Lord direct our way to you,*” vs. 10b-11). Paul prayed that he and his partners (Silas and Timothy, 1 Thessalonians 1:1) might be present in Thessalonica (“*see*

⁵⁵ Faith in Christ and fondness for fellow Christians go hand-in-hand, the second being a fruit of the first, as seen by such passages as John 13:35, 1 John 2:9-11, 3:10b, 14-15, 17, 19, 4:7-8, 12, and 16b.

your face,” v. 10; *“direct our way to you,”* v. 11) in order that they might be able to furnish what was unfinished in the faith of the Thessalonians (*“may complete what is lacking in your faith,”* v. 10; cf. Paul’s similar prayer for the Romans in Romans 1:11-12). Though the faith of the Thessalonians was firm (1 Thessalonians 3:8), it was unfinished, both in belief (see the end of 1 Thessalonians 4 and the start of 1 Thessalonians 5) and behavior (see the start of 1 Thessalonians 4 and the end of 1 Thessalonians 5). We should pray for the furtherance of the faith of other believers and that God would use us as a means of furthering their faith.

- The furtherance of their fondness in order to be pure when Christ appears (*“and may the Lord cause you to increase and abound in love for one another, and for all people ... so that He may establish your hearts without blame in holiness before our God and Father at the coming of our Lord Jesus with all His saints,* vs. 12-13; cf. 1 Thessalonians 5:23). Though the fondness of the Thessalonians was so (see 1 Thessalonians 3:6 and 4:10a), it still had room to grow (see 1 Thessalonians 4:10b). Paul prayed the same for the Philippians in Philippians 1:9. Paul and his partners not only prayed for this, but also patterned it (*“just as we also do for you,”* v. 12). According to 2 Thessalonians 1:3, Paul’s prayer was answered. Fondness for others affirms our faith, confirming that we are Christians and, therefore, causing us to be confident when we are called to account when Christ comes.
 - Their fondness for saints (*“in love for one another,”* v. 12)
 - Their fondness for sinners (*“and for all people,”* v. 12). The Thessalonians were to love their enemies (Matthew 5:44), those who were persecuting them (see 1 Thessalonians 2:14).

Praying the Prayers of Scripture

Paul's Second Prayer for the Thessalonians 2 Thessalonians 1:11-12⁵⁶

An earlier lesson in this series, on Paul's prayer for the Philippians in Philippians 1:9-11, pointed out the following points about the praying of the apostle Paul:

- Paul prayed, both with and for other believers
- Paul prayed persistently
- Paul made it publicly known that he was praying by letting those to whom he was writing know that he was praying for them
- Paul particularly prayed for the purity and perseverance of God's people
- Paul made a practice of praising God for God's people

One of the many prayers of Paul recorded in Scripture⁵⁷, and one of several that he prayed for the church in Thessalonica (see also 1 Thessalonians 3:9-13 and 2 Thessalonians 2:16-17), is the prayer found in 2 Thessalonians 1:11-12:

To this end also we pray for you always, that our God will count you worthy of your calling, and fulfill every desire for goodness and the work of faith with power, so that the name of our Lord Jesus will be glorified in you, and you in Him, according to the grace of our God and the Lord Jesus Christ.

In the passage, we see:

- Paul's prayer was parallel with God's purposes ("To this end ... we pray," v. 11; NIV: "with this in mind we ... pray"). To what end did Paul pray? What did he have in mind? A comparison of what Paul prays in verse 11 ("that our God will count you worthy of your calling") with what he said a few verses earlier, in verse 5 ("so that you will be considered worthy of the kingdom of God"), and a comparison of what he prays in verse 12 ("so that the name of our Lord Jesus will be glorified in you, and you in Him") with what he said a few verses earlier in verse 10 ("when He comes to be glorified in His saints on that day, and to be marveled at among all who have believed"), results in the realization that what Paul requests is the result of what God had revealed, that he was praying

⁵⁶ An excellent resource on Paul's prayers is D.A. Carson's *A Call to Spiritual Reformation: Priorities from Paul and His Prayers*. Chapters 2 and 3 of Carson's book specifically deal with Paul's prayer for the Thessalonians in 2 Thessalonians 1:11-12.

⁵⁷ Others may be found in Romans 1:8-13, Ephesians 1:15-23, 3:14-19, Philippians 1:9-11, Colossians 1:9-14, 1 Thessalonians 3:9-13, 2 Thessalonians 2:16-17, and Philemon 4-7.

according to the revealed will of God, one of the primary principles of prayer (see 1 John 5:14-15).

- Paul had prayer partners (“*we pray*,” v. 11; cf. some of his other prayers for the Thessalonians in 1 Thessalonians 1:2, 3:9-10, and 2 Thessalonians 1:3). Paul’s prayer partners included the members of his second missionary team, Silas, his senior associate and Timothy, his junior associate (see 2 Thessalonians 1:1). While it is good to pray privately, it is also good to pray with a partner. Who are your prayer partners?
- Paul prayed persistently (“*we pray for you always*,” v. 11). The persistence of Paul’s praying is also seen in Romans 1:9, Colossians 1:3, 9, 1 Thessalonians 3:10, and 2 Timothy 1:3. Persistence in prayer is taught elsewhere in Scripture in 1 Kings 18:43, Nehemiah 1:6, Psalm 55:17, Daniel 6:10, Matthew 7:7-8//Luke 11:9-10, Matthew 26:44, Luke 11:5-8, 18:1-5, Acts 1:14, 2:42, 6:4, Ephesians 6:18, Colossians 4:2, 12, and 1 Thessalonians 5:17.
- The petitions Paul prayed
 - That God would consider the Thessalonians deserving of their destiny (“*that our God will count you worthy of your calling*,” v. 11). The culmination of the Christian’s call to salvation is the kingdom (see 1 Thessalonians 2:12, 2 Thessalonians 1:5, and 2:14; cf. Hebrews 3:1). Being a sinner, no saint is inherently deserving of such a destiny; it is only by grace (see the end of verse 12). Therefore, to be deserving of such a destiny does not mean to merit it, but rather to measure up to it, to be characterized by conduct that is commensurate with such a call (see Ephesians 4:1, 1 Thessalonians 4:7, and 2 Timothy 1:9).⁵⁸
 - That God would complete the Thessalonians’ desires and deeds (“*and fulfill every desire for goodness and the work of faith with power*,” v. 11). Such desiring and doing is ultimately God’s doing (“*with power*”; NIV: “by his power”; cf. Philippians 2:13), so Paul asks God to do this (as does the author of Hebrews, in Hebrews 13:20-21). Such deeds are derived from faith (“*work of faith*”; cf. 1 Thessalonians 1:3; NIV: “every deed prompted by faith”).

⁵⁸ D.A. Carson (*A Call to Spiritual Reformation*, pp. 54-55) challenges us to pray this way: “And so this text asks us: When was the last time you prayed this sort of prayer for your family? for your church? for your children? Do we not spend far more energy praying that our children will pass their exams, or get a good job, or be happy, or not stray too far, than we do praying that they may live lives worthy of what it means to be a Christian? ... From eternity’s perspective, what should be the primary things for which we should pray for our children, for ourselves, for our fellow believers? When was the last time we prayed for such things? When was the last time we prayed that God might count us worthy of his calling?”

- That God would cause the Thessalonians' deeds to be done for divine adoration (“*so that the name of our Lord Jesus will be glorified in you, and you in Him,*” v. 12). The goal of doing good is God’s glory (cf. Matthew 5:16 and 1 Peter 2:9). Paul prays the same for the Philippians (see Philippians 1:11). God’s praise is to be the primary petition (Matthew 6:9 and John 17:1) and the primary purpose of our prayers, as it was for David (in 2 Samuel 7:18f//1 Chronicles 17:16f, especially 2 Samuel 7:25-26a//1 Chronicles 17:23-24a), Elijah (in 1 Kings 18:36-37), and Hezekiah (in 2 Kings 19:14f//Isaiah 37:14f, especially 2 Kings 19:19//Isaiah 37:20). See also John 14:13.⁵⁹
- Paul prayed with the proper perspective (“*according to the grace of our God and the Lord Jesus Christ,*” v. 12). Paul knew that it was only by the grace of God that he was what he was (1 Corinthians 15:10) and that likewise it would only be by the grace of God that the Thessalonians would be what they ought to be.

⁵⁹ D.A. Carson (*A Call to Spiritual Reformation*, p. 203) asks: “Has God become so central to all our thoughts and pursuits, and thus to our praying, that we cannot easily imagine asking for anything without consciously longing that the answer bring glory to God?”

Praying the Prayers of Scripture

Paul's Third Prayer for the Thessalonians 2 Thessalonians 2:16-17⁶⁰

An earlier lesson in this series, on Paul's prayer for the Philippians in Philippians 1:9-11, pointed out the following points about the praying of the apostle Paul:

- Paul prayed, both with and for other believers
- Paul prayed persistently
- Paul made it publicly known that he was praying by letting those to whom he was writing know that he was praying for them
- Paul particularly prayed for the purity and perseverance of God's people
- Paul made a practice of praising God for God's people

One of the many prayers of Paul recorded in Scripture⁶¹, and one of several that he prayed for the church in Thessalonica (see also 1 Thessalonians 3:9-13 and 2 Thessalonians 1:11-12), is the prayer found in 2 Thessalonians 2:16-17:

Now may our Lord Jesus Christ Himself and God our Father, who has loved us and given us eternal comfort and good hope by grace, comfort and strengthen your hearts in every good work and word.

In these words, we see:

- The People to Whom Paul Prays
 - To God the Son ("*Now may our Lord Jesus Christ Himself,*" v. 16). While most prayers in Scripture are addressed solely to God the Father, this is one instance where God the Son is also addressed (an example where God the Son is solely addressed is the prayer of Stephen in Acts 7:59-60).⁶²

⁶⁰ An excellent resource on Paul's prayers is D.A. Carson's *A Call to Spiritual Reformation: Priorities from Paul and His Prayers*.

⁶¹ Others may be found in Romans 1:8-13, Ephesians 1:15-23, 3:14-19, Philippians 1:9-11, Colossians 1:9-14, 1 Thessalonians 3:9-13, 2 Thessalonians 1:11-12, and Philemon 4-7.

⁶² This is not to suggest, however, that the other members of the Godhead are not involved, as prayer is to be to the Father, through the Son (John 14:6, Ephesians 3:12, 1 Timothy 2:5, and Hebrews 10:19), and by the Holy Spirit (Ephesians 6:18 and Jude 20). See especially Ephesians 2:18. Bruce Ware, in his book, *Father, Son, and Holy Spirit: Relationships, Roles, and Relevance*, writes (p. 18): "If Jesus taught us to pray to the Father, then we ought to do this. For one reason or another, we sometimes follow a

That God the Son is also addressed in Paul's prayer is implicit testimony to the Son's deity. In fact, the Son is listed first (a phenomenon that occurs only two other times in the New Testament, in Galatians 1:1 and 2 Corinthians 13:14), perhaps Paul's way of countering the Roman emperor's claim to deity in the Roman city of Thessalonica (see especially Acts 17:7).

- To God the Father (“*and God our Father,*” v. 16).
 - A Father who is caring (“*who has loved us,*” v. 16; cf. v. 13's “beloved by the Lord”). The love of the Father for His child, the believer, is an impetus to prayer (see especially Matthew 7:7-11//Luke 11:9-13).
 - A Father who is sharing (“*and given us eternal comfort and good hope by grace,*” v. 16). Because the Father cares, He shares. Two of the things God graciously⁶³ gives are:
 - Continual encouragement (“*eternal comfort,*” v. 16). God gives such encouragement by means of prayer (see the first petition of verse 17) and people. In the case of the Thessalonians, the people God used to encourage them included Paul and his partners (1 Thessalonians 2:11), such as Timothy (1 Thessalonians 3:2). The Thessalonians also so encouraged Paul (1 Thessalonians 3:7), as well as one another (1 Thessalonians 5:11). May we pray for the encouragement of others and be the answer to our own prayers by providing such encouragement.⁶⁴

different practice. We may encourage our children, especially, to open their prayers with, ‘Dear Jesus,’ despite the fact that Jesus said to pray ‘Our Father in heaven ...’ Perhaps we do not think about prayer as we should because we do not understand the doctrine of the Trinity. As Jesus taught us, we should pray to the Father through the Son. Jesus Christ is the mediator. He is the one through whom we address the Father. He is the one who brings us access to the Father. Our prayers bring spiritual benefit only when we pray in his name. And prayers that bring fruit in the kingdom are those offered in the power of the Spirit. We pray as the Spirit prompts and urges us to pray. So prayer rightly understood—Christian prayer—is prayer to the Father, through the Son, in the power of the Spirit.”

⁶³ Grace may be defined as God giving the believer what he does not deserve.

⁶⁴ An example of providing such encouragement are the words of the 18th century English poet, William Cowper, in his hymn, “God Moves in a Mysterious Way”: “Ye fearful saints, fresh courage take; The clouds ye so much dread Are big with mercy and shall break In blessings on your head.”

- Confidence in what is to come (“*and good hope,*” v. 16). In Scripture, hope is confident expectation, a “know so” rather than a “hope so.” What is to come for the believer is “the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ” (verse 14). Paul prayed that the Ephesians might comprehend such confidence in Ephesians 1:18.
- The Petitions Paul Prays
 - For the Thessalonians’ encouragement (“*comfort,*” v. 17). As mentioned previously, this is something we should not only be praying for other believers, but also providing for other believers.
 - For the Thessalonians’ establishment (“*and strengthen your hearts in every good work and word,*” v. 17). Paul also prayed this for the Thessalonians in 1 Thessalonians 3:13. To strengthen here means to stabilize or make firm. God is powerful enough to do this (Romans 16:25) and has promised to do it (2 Thessalonians 3:3). Our prayers are one of the primary means He uses to do it. So, let us also be praying this for one another, as it is in keeping with the revealed will of God.

Praying the Prayers of Scripture

The Thessalonians' Prayer for Paul 2 Thessalonians 3:1-2

Previous lessons in this series have examined some of Paul's prayers for others (his prayer for the Philippians in 1:9-11, his prayer for the Colossians in Colossians 1:9-14, his prayer for the Romans in Romans 1:8-13, and his prayers for the Thessalonians in 1 Thessalonians 3:9-13, 2 Thessalonians 1:11-12, and 2:16-17). Not only did Paul pray for those to whom he was writing, but he also asked those to whom he was writing to pray for him. For example, we see Paul praying for the Romans (in Romans 1:9-13), and asking the Romans to pray for him (in Romans 15:30-32). We see Paul praying for the Ephesians (in Ephesians 1:15-23 and 3:14-19), and asking the Ephesians to pray for him (in Ephesians 6:18-20). And we see Paul praying for the Colossians (in Colossians 1:9-14), and asking the Colossians to pray for him (in Colossians 4:2-4). The three previous lessons in this series examined Paul's prayers for the Thessalonians (in 1 Thessalonians 3:9-13, 2 Thessalonians 1:11-12, and 2:16-17). This lesson will examine the Thessalonians' prayer for Paul⁶⁵, found in 2 Thessalonians 3:1-2.

A superficial examination of the prayers of others for Paul reveals that they included the following elements:

- Persistence (Romans 15:30's "prayers"; Ephesians 6:18's "at all times" and "with all perseverance"; Colossians 4:2's "devote yourselves to"; and 1 Thessalonians 5:25's "pray," which is more literally "be praying")
- Preparedness (Ephesians 6:18's "be on the alert"; and Colossians 4:2's "keeping alert in it")
- Petition for protection (Romans 15:31's "that I may be rescued from those who are disobedient in Judea"; and 2 Thessalonians 3:2's "that we will be rescued from perverse and evil men")
- Petition for proclamation (Ephesians 6:19's "utterance" and "boldness"; Ephesians 6:20's "boldly"; Colossians 4:3's "a door for the word"; Colossians 4:4's "that I may make it clear"; and 2 Thessalonians 3:1's "that the word of the Lord will spread rapidly and be glorified")

The Thessalonians' prayer for Paul in 2 Thessalonians 3:1-2 reads:

⁶⁵ Though this series will not directly deal with the Thessalonians' prayer for Paul in 1 Thessalonians 5:25, based on the preceding context, the content of the prayer can be surmised as follows: In verse 23, Paul prays for the purity and preservation of the Thessalonians believers, a prayer he can pray with absolute confidence based on God's promise (v. 24; such a promise did not prevent Paul to so pray, but propelled him to do so). Then, in verse 25, Paul pleads for the Thessalonians to pray for him and his partners, presumably for the same things that he was praying for them, their purity and preservation.

Finally, brethren, pray for us that the word of the Lord will spread rapidly and be glorified, just as it did also with you; and that we will be rescued from perverse and evil men; for not all have faith.

In these words, we see:

- The plea that was Paul’s pattern (“pray for us,” v. 1). As just mentioned, Paul was in the practice of pleading for the prayers of others (see also Romans 15:30, Ephesians 6:19, Colossians 4:3, and 1 Thessalonians 5:25). If someone like Paul needed prayer, then we all need prayer. Let us all be in the practice of, like Paul, pleading for the prayers of others.
- The people to whom Paul appealed to pray (“brethren,” v. 1). Paul did not just want the pastors of Thessalonica, whomever they may have been, to pray for him, but all the parishioners (which included the pastors).
- The persistence with which these parishioners were to pray for Paul and his partners. The verb translated “pray” in verse 1 is in the present tense (literally: “be praying”), implying that praying for Paul and his partners (Silas and Timothy) was to be their pattern. Such persistent prayer is the secret to the success of the gospel’s spread.⁶⁶ Persistence in prayer is taught elsewhere in Scripture in 1 Kings 18:43, Nehemiah 1:6, Psalm 55:17, Daniel 6:10, Matthew 7:7-8//Luke 11:9-10, Matthew 26:44, Luke 11:5-8, 18:1-5, Acts 1:14, 2:42, 6:4, Romans 1:9, Ephesians 6:18, Colossians 1:3, 9, 4:2, 12, 1 Thessalonians 3:10, 5:17, and 2 Timothy 1:3.
- The petitions these parishioners were to pray for Paul and his partners
 - For the success of the message
 - For the message to advance (“that the word of the Lord will spread rapidly,” v. 1). The “word of the Lord” is the word about the Lord, Jesus. In other words, it is the gospel. Paul wanted the Thessalonians to pray that the gospel would “run” (a literal translation of the Greek verb translated “spread rapidly”), that it would “speed ahead” (ESV). Pray that the gospel would go, which necessitates praying for God’s people to go (Matthew 28:19), for its message will not advance without messengers (Romans 10:13-15).

⁶⁶ D. A. Carson (*A Call to Spiritual Reformation: Priorities from Paul and His Prayers*, p. 123) writes of how the persistent prayers of William Carey’s bed-ridden sister back in England were key to his success as a missionary in India. D. Edmond Hiebert (*Working With God Through Intercessory Prayer*, pp. 16-17) shares a similar account in regards to the success experienced by a China Inland Mission missionary.

- For the message to be admired (“*and be glorified*,” v. 1). For the message to be “*glorified*” (NIV and ESV: “honored”), it not only has to be advanced, but also admired by those to whom it is advanced. It must be communicated/given, and those to whom it is communicated/given must commit/give themselves to it. This happened in Pisidian Antioch (see Acts 13:48), as well as in Thessalonica (“*just as it did also with you*,” v. 1; cf. 1 Thessalonians 1:5, 2:13, and 2 Thessalonians 1:10). Pray that, as the gospel goes, it would be glorified; that as it moves, it would be magnified/made much of; that as it advances, it would be admired.
 - For the safety of the messengers (“*and that we will be rescued from perverse and evil men; for not all have faith*,” v. 2). This is also what Paul asked the Romans to pray for (in Romans 15:31a; cf. 2 Corinthians 1:10-11). Because those who are unbelieving (“*for not all have faith*”) are bad (“*perverse and evil*”), believers need to be protected from them.⁶⁷ The implication of this passage (and Acts 20:23-24) is that the safety of the messenger is subsidiary to the success of the message, as 1) Paul first asks prayer for the success of the message and 2) the rescue of the messenger would lead to more release of the message.⁶⁸

⁶⁷ Paul encountered such individuals in Pisidian Antioch (Acts 13:50), Iconium (Acts 14:5-6), Lystra (Acts 14:19), Philippi (Acts 16), Thessalonica (Acts 17:1-10a), and Berea (Acts 17:13-14).

⁶⁸ There are times, however, in God’s overruling providence that the absence of safety for the messenger leads to the advance of the message (see, for example, how persecution led to further progress in the book of Acts, as well as Philippians 1:12-18; cf. John 12:24).

Praying the Prayers of Scripture

David's Prayer of Confession Psalm 51

When it comes to remembering the various aspects of prayer, the following acrostic has been suggested by many:

A—Adoration
C—Confession
T—Thanksgiving
S—Supplication

That confession is one aspect of prayer is seen in the words of the Model Prayer of Matthew 6:9-13, specifically verse 12: “And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors.”

Perhaps the most well-known prayer of confession found in Scripture⁶⁹ is that of David, after his sin with Bathsheba (which sin is recorded in 2 Samuel 11), recorded in Psalm 51 (cf. 2 Samuel 12:13):

Be gracious to me, O God, according to Your lovingkindness; According to the greatness of Your compassion blot out my transgressions. Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity And cleanse me from my sin. For I know my transgressions, And my sin is ever before me. Against You, You only, I have sinned And done what is evil in Your sight, So that You are justified when You speak And blameless when You judge. Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity, And in sin my mother conceived me. Behold, You desire truth in the innermost being, And in the hidden part You will make me know wisdom. Purify me with hyssop, and I shall be clean; Wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow. Make me to hear joy and gladness, Let the bones which You have broken rejoice. Hide Your face from my sins And blot out all my iniquities. Create in me a clean heart, O God, And renew a steadfast spirit within me. Do not cast me away from Your presence And do not take Your Holy Spirit from me. Restore to me the joy of Your salvation And sustain me with a willing spirit. Then I will teach transgressors Your ways, And sinners will be converted to You. Deliver me from bloodguiltiness, O God, the God of my salvation; Then my tongue will joyfully sing of Your righteousness. O Lord, open my lips, That my mouth may declare Your praise. For You do not delight in sacrifice, otherwise I would give it; You are not pleased with burnt offering. The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; A broken and a contrite heart, O God, You will not despise. By Your favor do good to Zion; Build the walls of Jerusalem. Then You will delight in righteous sacrifices, In burnt offering and whole burnt offering; Then young bulls will be offered on Your altar.

⁶⁹ Other prayers of confession in Scripture are found in 2 Samuel 24:10, Ezra 9:5-15, Nehemiah 1:4-11, 9:4-38, and Daniel 9:4-19.

In this passage, we see:

- David's repentance
 - Confession. David admitted:
 - That his conduct was corrupt (*"For I know my transgressions, And my sin is ever before me,"* v. 3; cf. Psalm 32:5). David calls his conduct "*transgressions*" (vs. 1 and 3), "*iniquity*" (vs. 2 and 9), and "*sin*" (vs. 2, 3, 4, and 9). He characterizes it as "*evil*" (v. 4). He did not minimize it by calling it a moment of weakness, an error in judgment, a mistake, a mental lapse, a poor choice, etc. Nor did he blameshift (as did Adam and Eve in Genesis 3). David's sins included lust (2 Samuel 11:2; cf. Job 31:1 and Matthew 5:28), adultery (2 Samuel 11:3-4), and murder ("*bloodguiltiness*," v. 14; cf. 2 Samuel 11:14f and 12:9).
 - That his character was corrupt (*"Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity, And in sin my mother conceived me,"* v. 5). David sinned because he was a sinner. His behavior was bad because his very being was bad. He was born bad. See also Job 15:14 and 25:4.
 - That his conduct was contrary to God (*"Against You, You only, I have sinned And done what is evil in Your sight,"* v. 4; cf. Genesis 20:6, 39:9, Numbers 32:23, 1 Samuel 12:23, 2 Samuel 12:13, Luke 15:18, 21, and Acts 5:4). On a horizontal/human, penultimate level, David had certainly sinned against both Uriah and Bathsheba, but on a vertical/heavenly, ultimate level, he had sinned against God. This is what makes sin so serious, especially for those whose sins have not been atoned/paid for by the infinitely-valuable death of Christ. Sin is an infinite debt and, when not atoned, is paid for by the infinite duress and duration of Hell, because it is against the One who is infinite.
 - Contrition. David ached (*"The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; A broken and a contrite heart, O God, You will not despise,"* v. 17).
 - A cry for cleansing. David asked:
 - To have his being cleansed (*"Create in me a clean heart, O God, And renew a steadfast spirit within me,"* v. 10; cf. v. 6's "*Behold, You desire truth in the innermost being, And in the hidden part You will make me know wisdom*").
 - To have his behavior cleansed (*"blot out my transgressions,"* v. 1, cf. Isaiah 43:25; "*Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity*").

And cleanse me from my sin,” v. 2; “Purify me with hyssop,” v. 7; “Wash me,” v. 7; “Hide Your face from my sins And blot out all my iniquities,” v. 9; and “Deliver me from bloodguiltiness,” v. 14).

- David’s restoration
 - The basis of his restoration
 - The character of God (“*Be gracious to me, O God, according to Your lovingkindness; According to the greatness of Your compassion,*” v. 1). The reason the repentant can be restored is the kind and compassionate character of God. See also Exodus 34:6-7.
 - The crucifixion of God’s Son (“*Purify me with hyssop, and I shall be clean,*” v. 7). This is an allusion to the Passover, during which the blood of a sacrificial lamb was applied with the hyssop plant to the doorposts of a Jewish home as a means of atonement (Exodus 12). This lamb pointed to the ultimate sacrificial Lamb, whose applied blood provides forgiveness (see John 1:29, 1 Corinthians 5:7, Ephesians 1:7, and 1 Peter 1:18-19).
 - The benefits of his restoration
 - A restoration of purity (“*I shall be clean,*” v. 7; “*I shall be whiter than snow,*” v. 7, cf. Isaiah 1:18). See also 1 John 1:9.
 - A restoration of pleasure (“*Make me to hear joy and gladness, Let the bones which You have broken rejoice,*” v. 8, cf. Psalm 32:1-4 and 11; *Restore to me the joy of Your salvation And sustain me with a willing spirit,*” v. 12). See also Genesis 4:5-7.
 - A restoration of productivity (“*Do not cast me away from Your presence And do not take Your Holy Spirit from me,*” v. 11; “*Then I will teach transgressors Your ways, And sinners will be converted to You,*” v. 13). Verse 11 has often been misinterpreted to mean that one can lose his or her salvation. David's fear, however, is not the loss of the Holy Spirit's indwelling, but rather the Holy Spirit's "theocratic anointing," the temporary, Spirit-given ability to lead the theocracy (see Numbers 11:17, Deuteronomy 34:9, Judges 3:10, 1 Samuel 10:6, and 16:13-14). David was concerned that God would do to him as He had done to his predecessor, Saul, when he sinned (see 1 Samuel 16:14). As a result of David’s restoration, he was able to teach others sinners how to be restored (the Hebrew verb translated “*converted*” in verse 13 is the same one translated “*restore*” in verse 12), as he does in Psalm 32. While restoration to service

after sin to the same place and position is not always possible, some level of restoration is.

- A restoration of praise (“*Then my tongue will joyfully sing of Your righteousness. O Lord, open my lips, That my mouth may declare Your praise,*” vs. 14-15).

Note: While David was restored to full fellowship with the Lord after confessing and forsaking his sin, he still suffered some severe consequences for it, including the death of the child that was illegitimately conceived through his adulterous relationship with Bathsheba (2 Samuel 12:14f).

Praying the Prayers of Scripture

The Ephesians' Prayer for Paul Ephesians 6:18-20

Previous lessons in this series have examined some of Paul's prayers for others (his prayer for the Philippians in 1:9-11, his prayer for the Colossians in Colossians 1:9-14, his prayer for the Romans in Romans 1:8-13, and his prayers for the Thessalonians in 1 Thessalonians 3:9-13, 2 Thessalonians 1:11-12, and 2:16-17). Not only did Paul pray for those to whom he was writing, but he also asked those to whom he was writing to pray for him. For example, we see Paul praying for the Romans (in Romans 1:9-13), and asking the Romans to pray for him (in Romans 15:30-32). We see Paul praying for the Ephesians (in Ephesians 1:15-23 and 3:14-19), and asking the Ephesians to pray for him (in Ephesians 6:18-20). We see Paul praying for the Colossians (in Colossians 1:9-14), and asking the Colossians to pray for him (in Colossians 4:2-4). And we see Paul praying for the Thessalonians (in 1 Thessalonians 3:9-13, 2 Thessalonians 1:11-12, and 2:16-17), and asking the Thessalonians to pray for him (in 2 Thessalonians 3:1-2). This lesson will examine the Ephesians' prayer for Paul, found in Ephesians 6:18-20.

A superficial examination of the prayers of others for Paul reveals that they included the following elements:

- Persistence (Romans 15:30's "prayers"; Ephesians 6:18's "at all times" and "with all perseverance"; Colossians 4:2's "devote yourselves to"; and 1 Thessalonians 5:25's "pray," which is more literally "be praying")
- Preparedness (Ephesians 6:18's "be on the alert"; and Colossians 4:2's "keeping alert in it")
- Petition for protection (Romans 15:31's "that I may be rescued from those who are disobedient in Judea"; and 2 Thessalonians 3:2's "that we will be rescued from perverse and evil men")
- Petition for proclamation (Ephesians 6:19's "utterance" and "boldness"; Ephesians 6:20's "boldly"; Colossians 4:3's "a door for the word"; Colossians 4:4's "that I may make it clear"; and 2 Thessalonians 3:1's "that the word of the Lord will spread rapidly and be glorified")

The Ephesians' prayer for Paul in Ephesians 6:18-20 reads:

With all prayer and petition pray at all times in the Spirit, and with this in view, be on the alert with all perseverance and petition for all the saints, and pray on my behalf, that utterance may be given to me in the opening of my mouth, to make known with boldness the mystery of the gospel, for which I am an ambassador in chains; that in proclaiming it I may speak boldly, as I ought to speak.

In this passage, we see:

- What prompts this prayer. These verse are the culmination of a larger section of Scripture, 6:10-20, in which Paul reminds the Ephesian believers (and, by extension, all believers) of the spiritual war they are in (verse 12; cf. 1 Peter 5:8).⁷⁰ Besides all the weapons mentioned previously (in verses 14-17; cf. 2 Corinthians 10:4), and perhaps the most important one, being listed last, is the weapon of prayer.⁷¹ In order to win the spiritual war, the believer must not only stand (“stand firm” in verses 11, 13, and 14), but also kneel.
- The persistence with which we are to pray (“*pray at all times ... with all perseverance,*” v. 18). The Greek verb translated “*pray*” is in the present tense (literally: “be praying”). We are to pray “*at all times*” (or “on all occasions,” NIV), not just (in the words to the hymn, “Sweet Hour of Prayer,”) “in seasons of distress and grief.” Paul practiced what he preached, praying this way (see Romans 1:9, Philippians 1:4, Colossians 1:3, 9, 1 Thessalonians 1:3, 3:10, 2 Thessalonians 1:11, and 2 Timothy 1:3). Persistence in prayer is taught elsewhere in Scripture in 1 Kings 18:43, Nehemiah 1:6, Psalm 55:17, Daniel 6:10, Matthew 7:7-8//Luke 11:9-10, Matthew 26:44, Luke 11:5-8, 18:1-5, Acts 1:14, 2:42, 6:4, 12:5, Romans 12:12, Colossians 4:2, 12, and 1 Thessalonians 5:17. Persistence in prayer is important because of the persistence of our opponent (1 Peter 5:8).
- The petition that is to be part of our praying (“*With all prayer and petition pray ... with all ... petition,*” v. 18). While the Greek noun translated “*prayer*” is a generic term, “*petition*” is a more specific one. While our prayers should certainly include expressions of appreciation to God (prayers of thanksgiving), they can and should also include appeals to God, both for ourselves (prayers of supplication) and for others (prayers of supplication for others, or prayers of intercession), such as “*for all the saints*” (v. 18), including Paul (vs. 19-20). See Philippians 4:6 and 1 Timothy 2:1 for mention of these various types of prayer.
- The power in which we are to pray (“*pray ... in the Spirit,*” v. 18; cf. Jude 20). This means that our praying should be under the power or control of the Holy Spirit, which further means that our praying should be within the parameters of God’s will as revealed in Scripture, for to be controlled by the Spirit is to be controlled by the words of Scripture (compare Ephesians 5:18 with Colossians 3:16), which were mediated by men moved by the Spirit (2 Peter 1:21). Notice also the close connection between Ephesians 6:17’s “sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God” and Ephesians 6:18’s “*pray ... in the Spirit.*”

⁷⁰ The historical circumstance under which Paul penned these words was perhaps what God in His providence used to prompt Paul to write them, as Paul was under house arrest in Rome, chained to a Roman guard (see Acts 28:16, Ephesians 3:1, 4:1, and 6:20) when he wrote them.

⁷¹ One is reminded of the weapon of “All-Prayer” used by Christian in John Bunyan’s *Pilgrim’s Progress*.

- The preparedness that is the partner of prayer (“*be on the alert,*” v. 18). Because the believer is in a spiritual war, and the opponent is always prepared to pounce (1 Peter 5:8’s “prowls around like a roaring lion”), the believer must be always prepared to avoid the adversary’s attack (1 Peter 5:8’s “be on the alert”). Prayer helps the believer to be aware (see also Matthew 26:41//Mark 14:38, Mark 13:33//Luke 21:36, Colossians 4:2, and 1 Peter 4:7).
- The people for whom we are to pray (“*for all the saints,*” v. 18; cf. Philippians 1:4 and James 5:16). The Ephesians were to pray for all, including Paul (vs. 19-20). Christians should pray for all those connected to their congregation.
- The proclamation for which we are to pray (“*and pray on my behalf, that utterance may be given to me in the opening of my mouth, to make known with boldness the mystery of the gospel, for which I am an ambassador in chains; that in proclaiming it I may speak boldly, as I ought to speak,*” vs. 19-20). Though Paul was restricted (“*in chains*”), he was still a representative (“*I am an ambassador*”; cf. 2 Corinthians 5:20), so giving out the gospel (“*the mystery of the gospel,*” or the mystery which is the gospel), whether to guards (Acts 28:16) or to guests (end of Acts 28), was still the goal⁷² (though Paul was bound, the gospel was not to be, 2 Timothy 2:9). Therefore, Paul asks the Ephesians to pray that he might be given:
 - The words to proclaim (“*utterance,*” v. 19)
 - The nerve to proclaim (“*to make known with boldness,*” v. 19; “*that in proclaiming it I may speak boldly,*” v. 20). See also the prayer of the early church for the same in Acts 4:29, a prayer that was powerfully answered in Acts 4:31. Paul’s bold proclamation is seen at many points in his ministry (see Acts 9:27, 29, 13:46, 14:3, 19:8, 26:26, 28:31, and 1 Thessalonians 2:2).

⁷² It is interesting to note that Paul did not ask the Ephesians to pray for his emancipation (though see Philemon 22), but rather for his proclamation; not for his deliverance, but for his deliverance of the gospel. The same is seen in the prayer of the early church in Acts 4:24-31, as they prayed not so much for protection from persecution, but for power for proclamation.

Praying the Prayers of Scripture

Summary Sheet 2

Following is a summation of the passages that have been studied since the previous summation (Summary Sheet 1), summarizing the principles on prayer and petitions to pray from those passages.

1 Kings 18:36b-37 (the prayer of Elijah on Mount Carmel)

- Pray to the right Person
- Pray with a submissive, servant's spirit
- Pray for God to be recognized and revered
- Pray that God's people would repent

James 5:16-18 (the praying of Elijah in the days of Ahab)

- Those who pray are finite and fallen
- Those who pray are to be faithful
- Pray frequently
- Pray fervently
- Pray effectively (according to the revealed will of God)

Romans 1:8-13 (Paul's prayer for the Romans)

- Pray with other believers
- Pray for other believers
- Pray persistently
- Let other believers know you are praying for them
- Pray for the purity and perseverance of other believers
- Praise God for other believers
- Let other believers know you are praising God for them
- Pray in submission to the sovereign, secret will of God
- Pray for the edification of the saved through you
- Pray for the evangelization of sinners through you

Romans 15:30-32 (the Romans' prayer for Paul)

- Pray persistently for other believers
- Be prepared by praying
- Pray for the protection of those proclaiming God's Word
- Pray for the proclamation of God's Word
- Ask others to passionately and perseveringly partner with you in prayer
 - Prompted by a common connection to Christ and His cause
 - Prompted by a Spirit-created concern for Christians

- Pray for rescue from sinners
- Pray for your service to be received by saints
- Pray in submission to the sovereign, secret will of God
- Pray for replenishment through God's people

John 17 (Jesus' High Priestly Prayer)

- Pray
- Pray at any point in time
- Pray from any place, particularly a private place
- Pray privately and with other people
- Pray with a posture that is proper
- Pray to the right Person
- Pray for the glory of God
 - For the glorification of God's Son
 - By God the Father
 - By God's people
 - For the glorification of God the Father
- Pray for the good of God's people
 - Their security
 - Their purity
 - Their unity

2 Kings 19:14-20 (the prayer of Hezekiah)

- Pray about problems (ask, rather than be anxious)
- Pursue the prayers of other people
- Praise God
 - For being King
 - For being the Creator
- Pray for God to be praised

1 Thessalonians 3:9-13 (Paul's first prayer for the Thessalonians)

- Pray with other believers
- Pray for other believers
- Pray persistently
- Let other believers know you are praying for them
- Pray for the purity and perseverance of other believers
- Praise God for other believers
 - For their faith
 - For their fondness
- Pray passionately
- Pray for the furtherance of the faith of other believers through you
- Pray for the furtherance of the fondness of other believers

- Their fondness for saints
- Their fondness for sinners

2 Thessalonians 1:11-12 (Paul's second prayer for the Thessalonians)

- Pray with other believers
- Pray for other believers
- Pray persistently
- Let other believers know you are praying for them
- Pray for the purity and perseverance of other believers
- Praise God for other believers
- Pray according to the revealed will of God
- Pray that God would graciously cause the conduct of other believers to be in keeping with their call
- Pray that God would graciously complete the desires for goodness and the faith-derived deeds of other believers
- Pray that God would graciously cause the deeds of other believers to be done for divine adoration

2 Thessalonians 2:16-17 (Paul's third prayer for the Thessalonians)

- Pray with other believers
- Pray for other believers
- Pray persistently
- Let other believers know you are praying for them
- Pray for the purity and perseverance of other believers
- Praise God for other believers
- Pray to God the Son
- Pray to God the Father
 - One who is caring
 - One who is sharing, sharing with believers continual encouragement and confidence in what is to come for them
- Pray for the encouragement of other believers
- Pray for the establishment of other believers

2 Thessalonians 3:1-2 (the Thessalonians' prayer for Paul)

- Pray persistently for other believers
- Be prepared by praying
- Pray for the protection of those proclaiming God's Word
- Pray for the proclamation of God's Word
- Ask others (not just pastors, but also other parishioners) to persistently pray for you
- Pray for the success of God's message
 - For the gospel to advance

- For the gospel to be admired
- Pray for the safety of God's messengers

Psalm 51 (David's prayer of confession)

- Confess corrupt conduct
- Confess the corrupt character that causes corrupt conduct
- Confess that corrupt conduct is contrary to God
- Be contrite over corrupt conduct
- Cry for cleansing of being and behavior

Ephesians 6:18-20 (the Ephesians' prayer for Paul)

- Pray persistently for other believers
- Be prepared by praying
- Pray for the protection of those proclaiming God's Word
- Pray for the proclamation of God's Word
 - For the words to proclaim
 - For the nerve to proclaim
- Petition God in prayer for yourself and others
- Pray under the power or control of the Spirit (i.e., according to the revealed will of God)

Praying the Prayers of Scripture

Paul's First Prayer for the Ephesians Ephesians 1:15-23⁷³

An earlier lesson in this series, on Paul's prayer for the Philippians in Philippians 1:9-11, pointed out the following points about the praying of the apostle Paul:

- Paul prayed, both with and for other believers
- Paul prayed persistently
- Paul made it publicly known that he was praying by letting those to whom he was writing know that he was praying for them
- Paul particularly prayed for the purity and perseverance of God's people
- Paul made a practice of praising God for God's people

One of the many prayers of Paul recorded in Scripture⁷⁴, and one of two that he prayed for the church in Ephesus (see also Ephesians 3:14-19), is the prayer found in Ephesians 1:15-23:

For this reason I too, having heard of the faith in the Lord Jesus which exists among you and your love for all the saints, do not cease giving thanks for you, while making mention of you in my prayers; that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give to you a spirit of wisdom and of revelation in the knowledge of Him. I pray that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened, so that you will know what is the hope of His calling, what are the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints, and what is the surpassing greatness of His power toward us who believe. These are in accordance with the working of the strength of His might which He brought about in Christ, when He raised Him from the dead and seated Him at His right hand in the heavenly places, far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this age but also in the one to come. And He put all things in subjection under His feet, and gave Him as head over all things to the church, which is His body, the fullness of Him who fills all in all.⁷⁵

⁷³ An excellent resource on Paul's prayers is D.A. Carson's *A Call to Spiritual Reformation: Priorities from Paul and His Prayers*. Carson deals with the prayer of Paul in Ephesians 1:15-23 in chapter 10 of this book.

⁷⁴ Others may be found in Romans 1:8-13, Ephesians 3:14-19, Philippians 1:9-11, Colossians 1:9-14, 1 Thessalonians 3:9-13, 2 Thessalonians 1:11-12, 2:16-17, and Philemon 4-7.

⁷⁵ Though the NASB divides these verses into 3 sentences, in the original it is one, 169-word sentence.

In this passage, we see:

- What prompted Paul's prayer ("*For this reason,*" v. 15). The reason for Paul's prayer that the Ephesian believers realize the spiritual riches that they have (vs. 18-19) is his praise (v. 3's "blessed") for such riches in the preceding passage (1:3-14), which he describes as "every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ" (v. 3). These blessings include those bestowed by God the Father (vs. 3-6), God the Son (vs. 7-11), and God the Holy Spirit (vs. 13-14).
- The praise of the prayer ("*giving thanks for you,*" v. 16). As mentioned above, Paul made a practice of praising God for God's people (and letting God's people know he was doing so). The Ephesians were no exception, as Paul praises God (it is clearly to be assumed that the One Paul is thanking for the Ephesians is God):
 - For the Ephesians' faith in Christ ("*the faith in the Lord Jesus which exists among you,*" v. 15). Paul often thanked God for this quality, which characterized those for whom he was praying (see also Romans 1:8, Colossians 1:4, 1 Thessalonians 1:3, 2 Thessalonians 1:3, 2 Timothy 1:5, and Philemon 5). Paul rightly thanked God for it because it was given by Him (see Acts 14:27, John 6:65, Ephesians 2:8, Philippians 1:29).
 - For the Ephesians' fondness for Christians ("*and your love for all the saints,*" v. 15). Paul also often thanked God for this quality, which also characterized those for whom he was praying (see Colossians 1:4, 1 Thessalonians 1:3, 2 Thessalonians 1:3, and Philemon 5). Paul rightly thanked God for it because it was a fruit of God-given faith, as the two, faith in Christ and fondness for fellow Christians, go hand-in-hand, the second being a fruit of the first, as seen by such passages as John 13:35, 1 John 2:9-11, 3:10b, 14-15, 17, 19, 4:7-8, 12, and 16b.
- The persistence of Paul's prayer ("*do not cease giving thanks for you, while making mention of you in my prayers,*" v. 16). The persistence of Paul's praying for the Ephesians is seen by the fact that his praise for them was unceasing ("*do not cease*") and that his prayer for them was plural ("*prayers*"). Paul's persistence in prayer is seen elsewhere in Romans 1:9, Philippians 1:4, Colossians 1:3, 9, 1 Thessalonians 1:3, 3:10, 2 Thessalonians 1:11, and 2 Timothy 1:3. Persistence in prayer is also taught in 1 Kings 18:43, Nehemiah 1:6, Psalm 55:17, Daniel 6:10, Matthew 7:7-8//Luke 11:9-10, Matthew 26:44, Luke 11:5-8, 18:1-5, Acts 1:14, 2:42, 6:4, 12:5, Romans 12:12, Colossians 4:2, 12, and 1 Thessalonians 5:17.
- The petition that Paul prayed ("*that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give to you a spirit of wisdom and of revelation in the knowledge of Him. I pray that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened, so that you will know,*" vs. 17-18a). In a word, Paul is praying for illumination, the supernatural, Spirit-enabled sight that enables the saint to see that what is said in Scripture is

certain and significant (cf. Luke 24:32, 45, 1 Corinthians 2:6-16, 2 Corinthians 4:3-4, and 6, and 1 Thessalonians 1:5).⁷⁶ Other prayers in Scripture for the same may be found in Psalm 119:18 and Colossians 1:9.

- The products of his petition. What did Paul pray that his prayer would produce in the Ephesian believers? Two things:
 - The perception of how precious was their prospect
 - The conviction of/confidence in the outcome of their calling (“so that you will know what is the hope of His calling,” v. 18; cf. Ephesians 4:4). Hope in Scripture is a confident expectation, a know so, not a “hope so,” as we might think of it. The outcome of the effectual call of the believer to salvation is glorification (see Romans 8:30; cf. Romans 5:2 and Colossians 1:27), so the hope of which Paul speaks is the hope of Heaven (see Colossians 1:5).
 - The awareness of the wealth that was waiting for them (“so that you will know ... what are the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints,” v. 18; cf. Ephesians 1:11 and 14)
 - The perception of how powerful was their present (“so that you will know ... what is the surpassing greatness of His power toward us who believe,” vs. 18-19). The power that God has given the believer to prevail over sin in the present is pronounced. Paul uses four different Greek words in verse 19 to describe it: “power” (the Greek word, *dunamis*, from which we get our English words, dynamite and dynamic), “working” (the Greek word, *energeia*, from which we get our English word, energy), “strength,” and “might.” Paul further emphasizes this power by modifying “power” with the Greek noun *megethos* (“greatness”), from which we get our English prefix, mega, meaning a million; and by modifying “greatness” with the Greek verb, *huperballo* (“surpassing”), which literally means to throw beyond (the Greek verb, *ballo*, meaning to throw + the Greek preposition, *huper*, meaning beyond). If this description of this “divine dynamite” were not enough, Paul goes on to describe it as the same power that raised Christ from the dead (v. 20a; cf. 2 Corinthians 13:4 and Philippians 3:10) and that raised Him to dominion (vs. 20b-23; cf. 1

⁷⁶ D. A. Carson (*A Call to Spiritual Reformation*, p. 174) defines illumination as the “nonnormative experience, the enlightenment of an individual’s mind so that God’s truth and claims, values and norms, are absorbed and embraced.” Illumination is being enlightened to the meaningfulness, not the meaning, of Scripture, the so what, not the what. The meaning and what are learned by diligent study of Scripture (Acts 17:11 and 2 Timothy 2:15). Illumination is the conviction that comes only after correct comprehension. It is given in proportion to the effort expended in interpreting Scripture, as well as in answer to prayer.

Corinthians 15:27 and Philippians 2:9-11). This is the power that is present in the believer (end of Ephesians 3:20; cf. Colossians 1:11a and 2 Peter 1:3) and that, therefore, enables him to indeed “be strong in the Lord and in the strength of His might” (Ephesians 6:10).

Praying the Prayers of Scripture

Paul's Second Prayer for the Ephesians Ephesians 3:14-21⁷⁷

An earlier lesson in this series, on Paul's prayer for the Philippians in Philippians 1:9-11, pointed out the following points about the praying of the apostle Paul:

- Paul prayed, both with and for other believers
- Paul prayed persistently
- Paul made it publicly known that he was praying by letting those to whom he was writing know that he was praying for them
- Paul particularly prayed for the purity and perseverance of God's people
- Paul made a practice of praising God for God's people

One of the many prayers of Paul recorded in Scripture⁷⁸, and one of two that he prayed for the church in Ephesus (see also Ephesians 1:15-23), is the prayer found in Ephesians 3:14-21:

For this reason I bow my knees before the Father, from whom every family in heaven and on earth derives its name, that He would grant you, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with power through His Spirit in the inner man, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith; and that you, being rooted and grounded in love, may be able to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ which surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled up to all the fullness of God. Now to Him who is able to do far more abundantly beyond all that we ask or think, according to the power that works within us, to Him be the glory in the church and in Christ Jesus to all generations forever and ever. Amen.

In this passage, we see:

- What prompted Paul's prayer ("For this reason," v. 14). This particular prayer of Paul for the Ephesians actually began in Ephesians 3:1 ("For this reason ..."), but was "put on hold" until verse 14, as in verses 2-13 Paul digresses into a discussion of his special role as the apostle to the Gentiles, prompted by his mention of his being "the prisoner of Christ Jesus for the sake of you Gentiles" at the end of verse 1. So, in order to perceive what prompted Paul's prayer at this point (in

⁷⁷ An excellent resource on Paul's prayers is D.A. Carson's *A Call to Spiritual Reformation: Priorities from Paul and His Prayers*. Carson deals with the prayer of Paul in Ephesians 3:14-21 in chapter 11 of this book.

⁷⁸ Others may be found in Romans 1:8-13, Ephesians 1:15-23, Philippians 1:9-11, Colossians 1:9-14, 1 Thessalonians 3:9-13, 2 Thessalonians 1:11-12, 2:16-17, and Philemon 4-7.

3:14f), one must go all the way back into chapter 2. The point of prompting may be the equality of access both Jews and Gentiles have to God the Father in prayer (v. 18) due to the reconciling work of Christ (vs. 11-22). It is with this in mind that Paul, the Jew, intercedes for these Gentile Ephesian believers (2:11 and 3:1). More likely, the point of prompting is the words with which Paul ends chapter 2, verse 22's "being built together into a dwelling of God in the Spirit." Because this is becoming so (v. 22) Paul will pray for it to become so (see especially v. 17a). If this is the case, here we have yet another example of a prayer in Scripture that is according to the revealed will of God.

- Paul's posture in prayer ("*I bow my knees,*" v. 14). Kneeling (cf. 1 Kings 8:54, Ezra 9:5, Luke 22:41, Acts 7:60, 9:40, and 21:5) is one of several prayer postures described in Scripture (the Bible describes several prayer postures without appearing to prescribe any one of them). Others include falling on the face/prostration (Numbers 16:22 and Matthew 26:39//Mark 14:35); looking to heaven, presumably while standing (John 11:41 and 17:1); lifting up one's hands, also presumably while standing (Luke 24:50 and 1 Timothy 2:8); standing (1 Kings 8:22, Mark 11:25, Luke 18:11, and 13); and sitting (2 Samuel 7:18). The point is not so much the position, but the disposition that prompts the position, a disposition of submission, humility, reverence, dependence, etc.
- The Person to Whom Paul prays ("*before the Father, from whom every family in heaven and earth derives its name,*" vs. 14-15). With rare exception (such as in Acts 7:59-60 and 2 Thessalonians 2:16), the prayers that are prayed in Scripture are prayed specifically to God the Father.⁷⁹ By referring to God as "*the Father, from whom every family in heaven and earth derives its name,*" Paul is most likely speaking of the fact that God is the spiritual Father of all believers, His

⁷⁹ This is not to suggest, however, that the other members of the Godhead are not involved, as prayer is to be to the Father, through the Son (John 14:6, Ephesians 3:12, 1 Timothy 2:5, and Hebrews 10:19), and by the Holy Spirit (Ephesians 6:18 and Jude 20). See especially Ephesians 2:18. Bruce Ware, in his book, *Father, Son, and Holy Spirit: Relationships, Roles, and Relevance*, writes (p. 18): "If Jesus taught us to pray to the Father, then we ought to do this. For one reason or another, we sometimes follow a different practice. We may encourage our children, especially, to open their prayers with, 'Dear Jesus,' despite the fact that Jesus said to pray 'Our Father in heaven ...' Perhaps we do not think about prayer as we should because we do not understand the doctrine of the Trinity. As Jesus taught us, we should pray to the Father through the Son. Jesus Christ is the mediator. He is the one through whom we address the Father. He is the one who brings us access to the Father. Our prayers bring spiritual benefit only when we pray in his name. And prayers that bring fruit in the kingdom are those offered in the power of the Spirit. We pray as the Spirit prompts and urges us to pray. So prayer rightly understood—Christian prayer—is prayer to the Father, through the Son, in the power of the Spirit."

children, whether such believers are on earth or already in heaven. See Ephesians 2:19 and 4:6.

- The petitions that Paul prayed
 - For the Ephesians to be strengthened in spirit by the Spirit
 - The petition itself (“*that He would grant you, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with power through His Spirit in the inner man,*” v. 16). Earlier in Ephesians, Paul had prayed that the Ephesians would comprehend God’s power (Ephesians 1:19f). Here, he prays that God would confer it (cf. his prayer for the Colossians in Colossians 1:11). In a few verses, he will claim it (Ephesians 3:20). At the end of the epistle, he will command it (Ephesians 6:10). Paul prays that the power (the Greek word is *dunamis*, from which we get our English words, dynamite and dynamic) given would be “*according to the riches of His glory*” (v. 16; cf. Philippians 4:19). Because God’s being is infinitely weighty (in Scripture, glory has the idea of heaviness or weightiness; see, for example, 2 Corinthians 4:17), He is able to bestow infinite wealth. So, there is no limit to the power He can provide.
 - The product of the petition (“*so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith,*” v. 17a). Because the Ephesians were already saved, Christ through His Spirit was already indwelling them (Romans 8:9, 1 Corinthians 6:19, and Galatians 2:20). So, Paul is not praying that Christ would inhabit the Ephesians; rather, he is praying that Christ would feel at home in them. D.A. Carson (*A Call to Spiritual Reformation*, p. 187) writes: “Make no mistake: when Christ first moves into our lives, he finds us in very bad repair. It takes a great deal of power to change us; and that is why Paul prays for power. He asks that God may so strengthen us by his power in our inner being that Christ may genuinely take up residence within us, transforming us into a house that pervasively reflects his own character.” This is analogous to what Paul says in Galatians 4:19, that Christ would be formed in those who are saved. God takes up residency, then renovates.
 - For the Ephesians to more completely comprehend the incredible concern that Christ has for them (“*and that you, being rooted and grounded in love, may be able to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ which surpasses knowledge,*” vs. 17b-19a). Because the Ephesians were already saved, they had already been grounded in God’s love (see Ephesians 1:4-

5, 2:4-5, 5:2, and 25).⁸⁰ So, Paul is not praying for the Ephesians to be given God’s love; rather, he is praying that they would more greatly grasp the love that they had already been given. While God’s love cannot be completely grasped (it “*surpasses*⁸¹ *knowledge*,” v. 19), it can be increasingly grasped. In order to communicate just how incredible the concern of Christ for the Christian is, Paul uses multidimensional terminology (“*the breadth and length and height and depth*,” v. 18; cf. Job 11:8-9). “The apostle is simply telling us that the love of Christ, exemplified in his magnanimity to the Gentiles, is too large to be confined by any geometrical measurements” (A. Skevington Wood, “Ephesians,” in *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary*, 11:52). R. Kent Hughes (*Ephesians: The Mystery of the Body of Christ*, p. 117; emphasis his) puts it this way: “Christ’s love is *wide* enough to embrace the world (John 3:16); *long* enough to last forever (1 Corinthians 13:8); *high* enough to take sinners to Heaven (1 John 3:1-2); and *deep* enough to take Christ to the very depths to reach the lowest sinner (Philippians 2:8).”

- For the Ephesians to be fully filled with God’s fullness (“*that you may be filled up to all the fullness of God*,” v. 19b). Paul is not praying that the Ephesians become divine, for it is only in Christ that “all the fullness of Deity dwells in bodily form” (Colossians 2:9); rather, He is praying that they would be divinely directed, as filling has the idea of controlling (see Ephesians 5:18). Or, to say it another way, Paul is praying that the Ephesians would become in practice what they already were in position (Colossians 2:10). Or, to say it yet another way, Paul is praying that the Ephesians would mature spiritually, becoming increasingly like Christ in their character (Ephesians 4:13b).
- The praise with which Paul ends his prayer (“*Now to Him who is able to do far more abundantly beyond all that we ask or think, according to the power that works within us, to Him be the glory in the church and in Christ Jesus to all generations forever and ever. Amen*,” vs. 20-21). Christ taught that praise is to be a primary part of our praying (see Matthew 6:9). Accordingly, Paul ends his prayer for the Ephesians with a doxology, or word of glory or praise.⁸² This doxology serves not only as a fitting ending to Paul’s prayer, but also as a fitting ending to the first three chapters of Ephesians, which speak of the glorious nature

⁸⁰ “Rooted and grounded” in verse 17 are perfect tense participles in the original. Therefore, we could translate something like: “Already having been and continuing to be rooted and grounded in love.”

⁸¹ The Greek verb translated “surpasses” in verse 19 is *hyperballo*, which literally means “to throw beyond” (the Greek verb, *ballo*, meaning “to throw” + the Greek preposition, *hyper*, meaning “beyond”).

⁸² The word, doxology literally means a word of glory or praise, from the Greek word, *doxa*, meaning “glory” or “praise” + the Greek word, *logos*, meaning “word.”

of God's saving work (see especially 1:3, 6, 12, 14, 2:7, and 3:10; cf. the same phenomenon at the end of Romans 11). Because God's power at work within the believer is so potent (see Ephesians 1:19f), God is indeed "*able to do far more abundantly beyond all that we ask or think,*" v. 20), including answer the petitions for the Ephesians that Paul has prayed in this passage.

Praying the Prayers of Scripture

David's Prayer for Purification Psalm 139

A previous study in this series considered David's prayer of confession in Psalm 51. There are several other great prayers of David recorded in Scripture, including his prayer after receiving the Davidic covenant in 2 Samuel 7:18-29//1 Chronicles 17:16-27; his prayer after receiving the offering for the rebuilding of the temple in 1 Chronicles 29:10-19; and several other prayers in the Psalter, including his prayer for purification in Psalm 139:

O LORD, You have searched me and known me. You know when I sit down and when I rise up; You understand my thought from afar. You scrutinize my path and my lying down, And are intimately acquainted with all my ways. Even before there is a word on my tongue, Behold, O LORD, You know it all. You have enclosed me behind and before, And laid Your hand upon me. Such knowledge is too wonderful for me; It is too high, I cannot attain to it. Where can I go from Your Spirit? Or where can I flee from Your presence? If I ascend to heaven, You are there; If I make my bed in Sheol, behold, You are there. If I take the wings of the dawn, If I dwell in the remotest part of the sea, Even there Your hand will lead me, And Your right hand will lay hold of me. If I say, "Surely the darkness will overwhelm me, And the light around me will be night," Even the darkness is not dark to You, And the night is as bright as the day. Darkness and light are alike to You. For You formed my inward parts; You wove me in my mother's womb. I will give thanks to You, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made; Wonderful are Your works, And my soul knows it very well. My frame was not hidden from You, When I was made in secret, And skillfully wrought in the depths of the earth; Your eyes have seen my unformed substance. And in Your book were all written The days that were ordained for me, When as yet there was not one of them. How precious also are Your thoughts to me, O God! How vast is the sum of them! If I should count them, they would outnumber the sand. When I awake, I am still with You. O that You would slay the wicked, O God; Depart from me, therefore, men of bloodshed. For they speak against You wickedly, And Your enemies take Your name in vain. Do I not hate those who hate You, O LORD? And do I not loathe those who rise up against You? I hate them with the utmost hatred; They have become my enemies. Search me, O God, and know my heart; Try me and know my anxious thoughts; And see if there be any hurtful way in me, And lead me in the everlasting way.

In this passage, we see:

David's Reflection on God's Perfections

- On God's omniscience. To say that God is omniscient is to simply say that He is all-knowing (John 21:17 and 1 John 3:20; cf. Job 37:16 and Psalm 147:5). God knows all things, past, present, and future (Isaiah 42:9 and 46:10a), whether actual

- or potential (1 Samuel 23:10-13 and Matthew 11:20-23), in “one indivisible, simultaneous act of intuition” (Rolland McCune, *A Systematic Theology of Biblical Christianity*, 1:222). “[God] knows all that can be known. And this He knows instantly and with a fullness of perfection that includes every possible item of knowledge concerning everything that exists or could have existed anywhere in the universe at any time in the past or that may exist in the centuries or ages yet unborn (A. W. Tozer, *The Knowledge of the Holy*, p. 56).
- God knows our conduct (“*And are intimately acquainted with all my ways,*” v. 3b; cf. Job 31:4). This includes when we sit down, get up, and everything in between (“*You know when I sit down and when I rise up,*” v. 2a). This also includes when we are active or inactive, and everything in between (“*You scrutinize my path and my lying down,*” v. 3a).⁸³
 - God knows our contemplations (“*You understand my thought from afar,*” v. 2b). God knows what we will think before we even think it (1 Chronicles 28:9, Proverbs 15:11, and Ezekiel 11:5)
 - God knows our conversations (“*Even before there is a word on my tongue, Behold, O LORD, You know it all,*” v. 4). God knows what we will say before we even say it.
 - On God’s omnipresence. To say that God is omnipresent is to simply say that He is all-present, or present everywhere. The entirety of His being fills the entirety of the universe at every moment (Jeremiah 23:24). God is all there everywhere.
 - God is present in every direction.
 - Vertically (“*If I ascend to heaven, You are there; If I make my bed in Sheol, behold, You are there,*” v. 8). To the ancient near eastern Jew, heaven was the highest place above, while Sheol was the lowest place below. God is present in both⁸⁴ and, by implication, everywhere in between (see footnote 83).

⁸³ These are examples of a literary device known as a merism, in which two extremes are mentioned, implying that everything in between the extremes are also to be included. In other words, everything. A common English example is “head to toe.”

⁸⁴ Though God’s presence may be said to be *quantitatively* the same in all places, He is *qualitatively* more present in heaven than anywhere else (see Deuteronomy 26:15, 1 Kings 8:30, Psalm 33:13-14, and Matthew 6:9). Wayne Grudem (*Systematic Theology*, p. 176) says: “God is present in a special way in heaven God manifests his presence more fully in heaven than elsewhere.” John Feinberg (*No One Like Him*, p. 250) says that God is equally present everywhere “ontologically,” but not so “morally,” “spiritually,” or “ethically.”

- Horizontally (“*If I take the wings of the dawn, If I dwell in the remotest part of the sea, Even there Your hand will lead me, And Your right hand will lay hold of me,* vs. 9-10). The “wings of the dawn” (v. 9) is indicative of the eastern extremity of the ancient near eastern Jew’s horizon, while “*the remotest part of the sea*” (v. 9) is indicative of the western extremity of the ancient near eastern Jew’s horizon, the Mediterranean Sea. God is present in the farthest recesses of either and, by implication, everywhere in between (see footnote 83). So, if David was able to go “sunbeam surfing” at the speed of light (186,000 miles per second), he would not be able to surpass God’s presence.
 - God is present in the darkness (“*If I say, ‘Surely the darkness will overwhelm me, And the light around me will be night,’ Even the darkness is not dark to You, And the night is as bright as the day. Darkness and light are alike to You,*” vs. 11-12).
 - On God’s omnipotence (“*For You formed my inward parts; You wove me in my mother’s womb. I will give thanks to You, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made; Wonderful are Your works, And my soul knows it very well. My frame was not hidden from You, When I was made in secret, And skillfully wrought in the depths of the earth; Your eyes have seen my unformed substance. And in Your book were all written The days that were ordained for me, When as yet there was not one of them,*” vs. 13-16). To say that God is omnipotent is to simply say that he is all-powerful. He is able to do anything consistent with His character and will (Job 42:2, Jeremiah 32:17, Matthew 19:26, and Luke 1:37; cf. Genesis 18:14a and Jeremiah 32:27). The particular proof of God’s power that David professes is David’s prenatal development, which he picturesquely describes as being “wove” (v. 13) and “skillfully wrought” (v. 15), indicative of the fact that in the womb David was made on God’s loom.

While reflecting on God’s omnipotence, as seen by David’s prenatal development, David once again reflects on God’s omnipresence, as well as on His omniscience. Just as God is present in the depths of Sheol (v. 8), so He was present (“*My frame was not hidden from You,*” v. 15; “*Your eyes have seen my unformed substance,*” v. 16) in “*the depths of the earth*” (v. 15), in context the womb of David’s mother. Just as God is present in the darkness (v. 12), so He was present in the darkness of the “*secret*” (v. 15) place of that same womb. Just as God knows our contemplations (v. 2b) and our conversations (v. 4) ahead of time, so He knew David’s days (“*And in Your book were all written The days that were ordained for me, When as yet there was not one of them,*” v. 16).

David’s Response to His Reflection on God’s Perfections

- He confessed that it was constraining.

- God's omniscience was constraining ("*You have enclosed me behind and before, And laid Your hand upon me,*" v. 5). Just as David could not escape God's presence (v. 7), so he could not escape God's knowledge.
- God's omnipresence was constraining ("*Where can I go from Your Spirit? Or where can I flee from Your presence?*", v. 7).
- He confessed that he was incapable of completely comprehending it ("*Such knowledge is too wonderful for me; It is too high, I cannot attain to it,*" v. 6; cf. Isaiah 55:8-9 and Romans 11:33).
- He confessed that it communicated God's care.
 - God's omnipresence communicates His care ("*Even there Your hand will lead me, And Your right hand will lay hold of me. If I say, 'Surely the darkness will overwhelm me, And the light around me will be night,' Even the darkness is not dark to You, And the night is as bright as the day. Darkness and light are alike to You,*" vs. 10-12). While God's omnipresence should be cause for concern (Job 34:21-22 and Amos 9:2-4), it should also be cause for comfort. The fact that we cannot get away from God's presence is a good thing, for it is His presence that guides us and guards us (v. 10; cf. Psalm 23:4 and 46:1). Night need not produce fright, for His presence is bright (vs. 11-12). See 2 Chronicles 16:9a.
 - God's omniscience communicates His care ("*How precious also are Your thoughts to me, O God! How vast is the sum of them! If I should count them, they would outnumber the sand,*" vs. 17-18a; cf. Psalm 40:5 and Jeremiah 29:11).
- He confessed that it was commendable ("*I will give thanks to You, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made; Wonderful are Your works, And my soul knows it very well,*" v. 14). God is to be worshipped for His wonderful work in the womb!

David's Requests

- Search me ("*Search me, O God, and know my heart; Try me and know my anxious thoughts,*" v. 23; cf. Psalm 26:2). David had already confessed God's intense scrutiny of him ("*O LORD, You have searched me and known me,*" v. 1; cf. v. 3's "*scrutinize*" and "*intimately acquainted*"). Now he cries out for it.
- Show me.
 - My wrong way ("*And see if there be any hurtful way in me,*" v. 24a)
 - The right way ("*And lead me in the everlasting way,*" v. 24b)

Praying the Prayers of Scripture

Hannah's Supplication for a Son 1 Samuel 1:10-20

The days of the judges were among the darkest, most depraved, and most decadent days in the history of Israel, including the days of one of the last of the judges, Eli. As the book of 1 Samuel begins (approximately 1100 B.C.), Eli and his sons, Hophni and Phinehas, are serving as priests (1 Samuel 1:3), and Eli's sons are sinful, to say the least (see 1 Samuel 2:12-17, 22-25, and 3:11-14). Never was the nation more in need of godly leadership. Enter Samuel, one whom John Davis (*The Birth of a Kingdom: Studies in I-II Samuel and I Kings 1-11*, p. 17) calls "a very capable physician coming to the aid of Israel at a time when her fever was at the highest." However, this boy would not have been were it not for the prayers of the barren woman who prayed for him. Her prayer is found in 1 Samuel 1:10-20:

She [Hannah], greatly distressed, prayed to the LORD and wept bitterly. She made a vow and said, "O LORD of hosts, if You will indeed look on the affliction of Your maidservant and remember me, and not forget Your maidservant, but will give Your maidservant a son, then I will give him to the LORD all the days of his life, and a razor shall never come on his head." Now it came about, as she continued praying before the LORD, that Eli was watching her mouth. As for Hannah, she was speaking in her heart, only her lips were moving, but her voice was not heard. So Eli thought she was drunk. Then Eli said to her, "How long will you make yourself drunk? Put away your wine from you." But Hannah replied, "No, my lord, I am a woman oppressed in spirit; I have drunk neither wine nor strong drink, but I have poured out my soul before the LORD. Do not consider your maidservant as a worthless woman, for I have spoken until now out of my great concern and provocation." Then Eli answered and said, "Go in peace; and may the God of Israel grant your petition that you have asked of Him." She said, "Let your maidservant find favor in your sight." So the woman went her way and ate, and her face was no longer sad. Then they arose early in the morning and worshiped before the LORD, and returned again to their house in Ramah. And Elkanah had relations with Hannah his wife, and the LORD remembered her. It came about in due time, after Hannah had conceived, that she gave birth to a son; and she named him Samuel, saying, "Because I have asked him of the LORD."

In this passage, we see:

The problem that prompted Hannah's prayer. Like many of the most well-known women of the Old Testament (so also Sarah/Genesis 11:30; Rebekah/Genesis 25:21; and Rachel/Genesis 29:31), Hannah was barren (see 1 Samuel 1:2, 5, and 6).

The pain that accompanied Hannah's problem. As if being barren was not bad enough⁸⁵ (see 1 Samuel 1:11's "*affliction*"), Elkanah's other wife, Peninnah bore several children (1 Samuel 1:2 and 4) and berated Hannah for her barrenness (see 1 Samuel 1:6-7). Talk about "adding insult to injury" and pouring the proverbial "salt into the wound"! This caused Hannah much hurt (see 1 Samuel 1:7-8, 10's "*greatly distressed*" and "*wept bitterly*," 15's "*oppressed in spirit*," and 16's "great anguish and grief"—so NIV).

The proper prescription for the problem. Hannah's husband, Elkanah, apparently pursued the wrong prescription for the problem of the barrenness of his wife, Hannah by becoming a polygamist (see 1 Samuel 1:2).⁸⁶ Rather than polygamy, or any other such solution (see, for example, the solution that Abraham and Sarah pursued in Genesis 16 and the solution that Jacob, Rachel, and Leah pursued in Genesis 30), the proper prescription is prayer ("*Hannah* ... *prayed to the LORD*," v. 10; cf. Genesis 20:17-18 and 25:21). When you have a problem, and one that is particularly painful, pray; when afflicted, ask (see James 5:13a)!

The Person to whom Hannah prayed ("*Hannah* ... *prayed to the LORD*," v. 10; cf. v. 17's "*your petition that you have asked of Him*" and v. 20's "*I have asked him of the LORD*"; cf. also 1 Samuel 1:26 and 27). Hannah knew that the One who had closed her womb (see 1 Samuel 1:5-6) was the One and only One who could open it (cf. Genesis 29:31, 30:22, and Ruth 4:13). Accordingly, she addressed Him as "*O LORD of hosts*" (v. 11; NIV: "LORD Almighty").

The persistence of Hannah's prayer ("*she continued praying before the LORD*," v. 12; cf. v. 16's "*I have spoken until now*"). Persistence in prayer is seen elsewhere in Scripture in 1 Kings 18:43, Nehemiah 1:6, Psalm 55:17, Daniel 6:10, Matthew 7:7-8//Luke 11:9-10, Matthew 26:44, Luke 11:5-8, 18:1-5, Acts 1:14, 2:42, 6:4, 12:5, Romans 1:9, 12:12, Ephesians 1:16, Philippians 1:4, Colossians 1:3, 9, 4:2, 12, 1 Thessalonians 1:3, 3:10, 5:17, 2 Thessalonians 1:11, and 2 Timothy 1:3.

The passion of Hannah's prayer ("*I have poured out my soul before the LORD*," v. 12). Passion in prayer is also taught in 1 Chronicles 4:10, Luke 22:44 (cf. Hebrews 5:7), Romans 15:30, Colossians 4:12, 1 Thessalonians 3:10, and James 5:17.

The promise that accompanied Hannah's prayer ("*She made a vow and said, 'O LORD of hosts, if You will indeed look on the affliction of Your maidservant and remember me,*

⁸⁵ For a Jewish wife in the Old Testament era, being barren was particularly problematic, as it was considered to be a curse (see Deuteronomy 28:18).

⁸⁶ The many occurrences of polygamy in the Old Testament are not to imply God's approval of the practice. Remember, Old Testament narrative is descriptive, rather than prescriptive or proscriptive, describing what happened, usually without explicitly approving (prescription) or disapproving (proscription) of what happened. However, the consequences that come with polygamy (see, for example, 1 Samuel 1:6's "rival") appear to imply a proscription of the practice. Furthermore, polygamy is contrary to the prescription of the one man-one woman-one flesh principle of Genesis 2:24.

and not forget Your maidservant, but will give Your maidservant a son, then I will give him to the LORD all the days of his life, and a razor shall never come on his head,” v. 11). Hannah was setting apart any son the Lord would give her to the Lord’s service through what was known as the “Nazarite vow” (Numbers 6:1-8). Though the Nazarite vow was an exclusively Old Testament phenomenon, this is the kind of vow that every prospective (and actual) parent should certainly be willing to make.

The products of Hannah’s prayer

- She was glad (“*So the woman went her way and ate, and her face was no longer sad,*” v. 18). This is one of the beneficial byproducts of praying (cf. Philippians 4:6-7).
- God gave her a son (“*And Elkanah had relations with Hannah his wife, and the LORD remembered her. It came about in due time, after Hannah had conceived, that she gave birth to a son; and she named him Samuel, saying, ‘Because I have asked him of the LORD,’*” vs. 19b-20). The name she gave to her son, Samuel (“asked of the Lord”), was a perpetual reminder that he was the result of what she requested. Note that God gave Hannah a son not only through her prayers, but also through the procreative process that He has prescribed (Genesis 1:28 and 2:24). God would go on to give Hannah five more children (1 Samuel 2:21).
- She gave her son to God. Hannah performed what she promised (see 1 Samuel 1:24-28)
- She gave glory to God. Following her supplication for a son (in 1 Samuel 1), we see her prayer of praise (in 1 Samuel 2). Praise God for such answered prayer (see especially Psalm 113:9).

Praying the Prayers of Scripture

Hannah's Prayer of Praise 1 Samuel 2:1-10

The previous study in this series (on Hannah's supplication for a son, 1 Samuel 1:10-20) ended by pointing out that one of the products of Hannah's prayer was giving glory to God for answering her prayer, which she does with a prayer of praise⁸⁷ in 1 Samuel 2:1-10:

Then Hannah prayed and said, "My heart exults in the LORD; My horn is exalted in the LORD, My mouth speaks boldly against my enemies, Because I rejoice in Your salvation. "There is no one holy like the LORD, Indeed, there is no one besides You, Nor is there any rock like our God. "Boast no more so very proudly, Do not let arrogance come out of your mouth; For the LORD is a God of knowledge, And with Him actions are weighed. "The bows of the mighty are shattered, But the feeble gird on strength. "Those who were full hire themselves out for bread, But those who were hungry cease to hunger. Even the barren gives birth to seven, But she who has many children languishes. "The LORD kills and makes alive; He brings down to Sheol and raises up. "The LORD makes poor and rich; He brings low, He also exalts. "He raises the poor from the dust, He lifts the needy from the ash heap To make them sit with nobles, And inherit a seat of honor; For the pillars of the earth are the LORD'S, And He set the world on them. "He keeps the feet of His godly ones, But the wicked ones are silenced in darkness; For not by might shall a man prevail. "Those who contend with the LORD will be shattered; Against them He will thunder in the heavens, The LORD will judge the ends of the earth; And He will give strength to His king, And will exalt the horn of His anointed."

In this passage, we see:

⁸⁷ This is a reminder that one of the aspects of prayer, reflected by the common ACTS acrostic, is Adoration. Some consider this prayer to have actually been a song (so also the prayer of Jonah in Jonah 2), due to its poetic nature (as reflected by the typeset in many of the more recent translations). If so, it would join the other songs in Scripture, found in Exodus 15:1-21 (the song of Moses and Miriam), Deuteronomy 31:30-32:44 (the song of Moses), Judges 5:1-31 (the song of Deborah and Barak), 2 Samuel 22:1-51 (the song of David, which has many similarities to the song of Hannah in 1 Samuel 2), Luke 1:46-55 (the song of Mary, which also has many similarities to the song of Hannah in 1 Samuel 2), Luke 1:67-79 (the song of Zacharias), Luke 2:13-14, Ephesians 1:3-14, Philippians 2:5-11, Colossians 1:15-20, 1 Timothy 3:16, Revelation 5:9f, and Revelation 15:3-4. Of course, to be added to this list may be the entire Psalter's 150 songs or chapters.

Hannah's exultation

- The fervor of her exultation (“*My heart exults,*” v. 1). Hannah blesses God with her entire being (cf. Psalm 9:1 and 103:1). Passionate praise ought to be a primary part of our praying.
- What her exultation followed. Hannah’s exultation is all the more extraordinary when it is remembered that she prays this as she is parting with the son for whom she had previously prayed (see the end of the previous chapter), apparently only to see him thereafter once a year (see 1 Samuel 2:19). We are exhorted to exult without exception, even when events are not naturally enjoyable (see Psalm 34:1, Habakkuk 3:17-18, Ephesians 5:20, Philippians 4:4, 1 Thessalonians 5:18, and James 1:2), as did Job (see Job 1:21).
- The focus of her exultation
 - God’s being (“*My heart exults in the LORD,*” v. 1). Rejoicing in the Lord is spoken of throughout Scripture (see Psalm 5:11, 9:2, 35:9a, Isaiah 61:10, Habakkuk 3:18, Luke 1:47, Philippians 3:1, 4:4, and possibly Psalm 118:24).
 - His sacredness (“*There is no one holy like the LORD, Indeed, there is no one besides You,*” v. 2). God is not only holy, unique, one-of-a-kind in His behavior (Leviticus 11:44-45, Habakkuk 1:13, 1 Peter 1:15-16, and 1 John 1:5), but also in His being (see also Exodus 15:11, Deuteronomy 4:35, 39, 6:4, 32:39, 2 Samuel 7:22, 1 Kings 8:60, Psalm 71:19, 77:13, 86:8, 89:6-8a, 113:5, Isaiah 40:25, 43:10-11, 44:6, 45:5, 6, 18, 21, 22, 46:9, 1 Corinthians 8:4, and 1 Timothy 2:5; cf. Isaiah 6:3 and Revelation 4:8). God is unparalleled; He has no peer.
 - His stability (“*Nor is there any rock like our God,*” v. 2). The metaphor of a rock signifies that God is strong, stable, steadfast. For this same metaphor, see also Deuteronomy 32:4 and 2 Samuel 22:32.
 - His sovereignty. Throughout her prayer, Hannah speaks of how the lofty are lowered (“*The bows of the mighty are shattered,*” v. 4; “*Those who were full hire themselves out for bread,*” v. 5a; “*But she who has many children languishes*⁸⁸,” v. 5b [cf. Jeremiah 15:9]) and how the lowly are lifted (“*But the feeble gird on strength,*” v. 4; “*But those who were hungry cease to*

⁸⁸ Could this imply that the once-fruitful womb of Peninnah (1 Samuel 1:2 and 4) had now become barren?

hunger,” v. 5a; *“Even the barren gives birth to seven⁸⁹,”* v. 5b). She also identifies the ultimate reason for this reversal: God’s sovereignty. It is the Lord (not man, as the end of verse 9 reminds: *“For not by might shall a man prevail”* [cf. Psalm 33:16-17]) who lifts up the lowly (*“The LORD ... makes alive,”* v. 6a [cf. Deuteronomy 32:39]; *“He ... raises up,”* v. 6b; *“The LORD makes ... rich,”* v. 7a [cf. Deuteronomy 8:17-18a and Proverbs 10:22a]; *“He also exalts,”* v. 7b [cf. v. 1’s *“exalted in the LORD”*]; *“He raises the poor from the dust, He lifts the needy from the ash heap To make them sit with nobles, And inherit a seat of honor,”* v. 8a [cf. Psalm 113:7-8]). And it is the Lord who lowers the lofty (*“The LORD kills [NIV: “The LORD brings death”; cf. Deuteronomy 32:39],”* v. 6a; *“He brings down to Sheol⁹⁰,”* v. 6b; *“The LORD makes poor,”* v. 7a; *“He brings low,”* v. 7b). God’s control comes with His being the Creator (*“For the pillars of the earth are the LORD’S, And He set the world on them,”* v. 8b). Hannah understood that her humiliation was from Him (see the end of 1 Samuel 1:5 and the end of 1 Samuel 1:6; cf. Job 1:21, 2:10, 12:9, 19:21, and 42:11), as was her exaltation (see Genesis 29:31, 30:22, Ruth 4:13, and Psalm 113:9).

- God’s blessing (*“I rejoice in Your salvation,”* v. 1; cf. Psalm 9:14, 13:5, 35:9b, and Isaiah 25:9). In the historical context of this text, the particular “salvation” to which Hannah refers is likely deliverance from her barrenness and the pain that it produced.

Hannah’s exaltation. Her exultation to the Lord was the result of her exaltation by the Lord.

- Prevailing power (*“My horn is exalted in the LORD,”* v. 1; cf. Psalm 89:17, 24, and 112:9). According to Eugene Merrill (“1 Samuel,” in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary*, 1:434), “horns, used by animals for defense and attack, symbolized strength” (cf. verse 10). Warren Wiersbe (*The Bible Exposition Commentary*, 2:211) likewise says that “to have your ‘horn exalted’ meant to receive new strength from God and be especially helped by Him at a time of crisis.”
- Prevailing praise (*“My mouth speaks boldly against my enemies,”* v. 1). It is interesting to contrast the quiet, inaudible words of Hannah’s humiliation (see 1

⁸⁹ The “seven” signifies many (cf. Ruth 4:15 and Jeremiah 15:9). Eugene Merrill (“1 Samuel,” in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary*, 1:434) says that “the expression ‘seven children’ here symbolizes the full granting of her desire for a son.” Interestingly, Hannah would go on to have five more children (1 Samuel 2:21), so the once barren ended up giving birth to six.

⁹⁰ Based on Psalm 30:2-3, Hannah’s words in 1 Samuel 2:6b (*“He brings down to Sheol and raises up”*) are to be understood of the Lord’s control over sickness and health.

Samuel 1:12-13) with the quite audible words of her exaltation. These were not words of pride, but praise, boasting in God's blessing. In light of the historical context of this text, Hannah perhaps has Peninnah primarily in mind when she refers to her enemies.

Hannah's exhortation

- Her exhortation ("*Boast no more so very proudly, Do not let arrogance come out of your mouth,*" v. 3a). Whereas Hannah's boast in verse 1 is of the correct kind, being in the Lord (cf. 1 Corinthians 1:31 and Galatians 6:14), the boast of verse 3 is of the incorrect kind, being produced by pride. In light of the historical context of this text, perhaps Hannah has Peninnah in mind, who not only berated Hannah for Hannah's barrenness (1 Samuel 1:6-7), but perhaps also boasted that she was not, failing to give glory to God for graciously giving her children.
- Her explanation for it ("*For the LORD is a God of knowledge, And with Him actions are weighed,*" v. 3b). Because God is omniscient, or all-knowing, no incorrect boasting escapes His notice. As a result, He will bring all such arrogant actions (and attitudes, Proverbs 16:2) to account (as He did with Belshazzar, Daniel 5:27). See Hebrews 4:13.

Hannah's expectation

- The Lord will continue to lift the lowly ("*He keeps the feet of His godly ones,*" v. 9a [cf. Proverbs 3:26b]; "*And He will give strength to His king, And will exalt the horn of His anointed⁹¹,*" v. 10b). This is in keeping with Luke 14:11b.
- The Lord will continue to lower the lofty ("*But the wicked ones are silenced in darkness,*" v. 9b; "*Those who contend with the LORD will be shattered [cf. Exodus 15:6 and Psalm 2:9]; Against them He will thunder in the heavens [cf. 1 Samuel 7:10], The LORD will judge the ends of the earth,*" v. 10a). This is in keeping with Proverbs 16:18, the end of Daniel 4:37, and Luke 14:11a.

⁹¹ Many see Hannah's prayer of praise ending on a prophetic note, such as Matthew Henry ("An Exposition, With Practical Observations, of the First Book of Samuel," in *Matthew Henry's Commentary*, 2:287): "This crowns the triumph, and is, more than any thing, the matter of her exultation. Her horn is exalted (v. 1) because she foresees the horn of the Messiah will be so."

Praying the Prayers of Scripture

The Prayer of Daniel Daniel 9:1-19

When it comes to the great “prayer warriors” of the Bible, certainly to be considered among them is one whom God greatly loved (Daniel 9:23, 10:11, and 19), the 6th century B.C. prophet and politician⁹², Daniel.

When studying the prayers of Daniel in Scripture, one finds the following concerning his praying:

- Daniel prayed in the midst of predicaments. This included his prayer for God to reveal to him Nebuchadnezzar’s dream and its interpretation when his life and the lives of his fellow wise men were on the line in Daniel 2; his prayer in Daniel 6 when his life was on the line for praying; and his prayer in Daniel 9 while his countrymen were in captivity. While we ought to pray at all times (Ephesians 6:18), we certainly should remember to do so in the midst of the predicaments of life.
- Daniel prayed both privately and with partners. He prayed privately in Daniel 6 and 9 and with partners (his companions, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego) in Daniel 2. Jesus did likewise. There is a place for both.
- Daniel praised God in prayer. This he did after God revealed Nebuchadnezzar’s dream and its interpretation to him (Daniel 2:19b-23). This he also did while praying in Daniel 6:10 (“giving thanks before his God”), even though he was seemingly signing his own death certificate in doing so.
- Daniel had a place where he prayed. In Daniel 2, the place was his house (2:17). In Daniel 6:10, Daniel prayed “in his chamber,” which D. Edmond Hiebert (*Working With God Through Intercessory Prayer*, p. 103) describes as “an apartment raised above the flat roof of his home” and one that was “more removed and less liable to disturbance than his usual living quarters.” While one can pray any place (even the belly of a fish, Jonah 2!), a quiet, private place is a good choice (such as a “prayer closet,” Matthew 6:6; cf. Jesus praying on a mountain in Matthew 14:23 and in the wilderness in Luke 5:16).
- Daniel had an appropriate posture in prayer. Daniel 6:10 indicates that Daniel kneeled in prayer. While this is not the only appropriate prayer posture⁹³, it is

⁹² Daniel served under Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon (Daniel 1-4 and 5:11), Belshazzar of Babylon (Daniel 5:1-30, 7:1, and 8:1), Darius of Medo-Persia (Daniel 5:31-6:28, 9:1, and 11:1), and Cyrus of Medo-Persia (Daniel 6:28 and 10:1).

certainly one that promotes the submissive, humble, reverent, and dependent attitude with which one should pray.

- Daniel prayed persistently. Daniel 6:10 indicates that he prayed three times a day, likely in the morning, at noon, and at night (cf. Psalm 55:17), the three typical times of prayer for an Ancient Near Eastern Jew. So persistent was Daniel's praying that it was predictable, as his political opponents apparently knew what he would be doing (praying), when (the times just noted), and where (the chamber of his house), as seen by Daniel 6:10-11. Daniel's persistence in prayer is also seen in Daniel 10, where he apparently remained in prayer for three weeks (10:2-3 and 12).
- Daniel's praying was part of a bigger picture. After praying in Daniel 10, Daniel was told by an angelic messenger that the answer to his prayer was delayed for three weeks due to an apparent struggle between angelic forces (Daniel 10:12-13 and 20-21). This is a reminder that persevering prayer is an essential weapon in the spiritual war in which the believer is engaged (see Ephesians 6:11f, especially verse 18).

Other particulars concerning Daniel's praying will be pointed out shortly, based on his prayer in Daniel 9:1-19, which has been called "one of the most remarkable [prayers] in the pages of Holy Writ" (Frederick Tatford, cited in John Walvoord, *Daniel: The Key to Prophetic Revelation*, p. 213) and one concerning which Walvoord (p. 213) writes: "...[N]o other portion of the Bible breathes with more pure devotion or has greater spiritual content."

In the first year of Darius the son of Ahasuerus, of Median descent, who was made king over the kingdom of the Chaldeans—in the first year of his reign, I, Daniel, observed in the books the number of the years which was revealed as the word of the LORD to Jeremiah the prophet for the completion of the desolations of Jerusalem, namely, seventy years. So I gave my attention to the Lord God to seek Him by prayer and supplications, with fasting, sackcloth and ashes. I prayed to the LORD my God and confessed and said, "Alas, O Lord, the great and awesome God, who keeps His covenant and lovingkindness for those who love Him and keep His commandments, we have sinned, committed iniquity, acted wickedly and rebelled, even turning aside from Your commandments and ordinances. Moreover, we have not listened to Your servants the prophets, who spoke in Your name to our kings, our princes, our fathers and all the people of the land. "Righteousness belongs to You, O Lord, but to us open shame, as it is this day—to the men of Judah, the inhabitants of Jerusalem and all Israel, those who are nearby and those who are far away in all the countries to which You have driven them, because of their unfaithful deeds which they have committed against You. Open shame

⁹³ Besides kneeling (see also 1 Kings 8:54, Ezra 9:5, Luke 22:41, Acts 7:60, 9:40, 21:5, and Ephesians 3:14), other prayer postures in Scripture include standing (1 Kings 8:22 and Mark 11:25), sitting (2 Samuel 7:18), and prostrate/falling on the face (Numbers 16:22 and Matthew 26:39).

belongs to us, O Lord, to our kings, our princes and our fathers, because we have sinned against You. To the Lord our God belong compassion and forgiveness, for we have rebelled against Him; nor have we obeyed the voice of the LORD our God, to walk in His teachings which He set before us through His servants the prophets. Indeed all Israel has transgressed Your law and turned aside, not obeying Your voice; so the curse has been poured out on us, along with the oath which is written in the law of Moses the servant of God, for we have sinned against Him. Thus He has confirmed His words which He had spoken against us and against our rulers who ruled us, to bring on us great calamity; for under the whole heaven there has not been done anything like what was done to Jerusalem. As it is written in the law of Moses, all this calamity has come on us; yet we have not sought the favor of the LORD our God by turning from our iniquity and giving attention to Your truth. Therefore the LORD has kept the calamity in store and brought it on us; for the LORD our God is righteous with respect to all His deeds which He has done, but we have not obeyed His voice. “And now, O Lord our God, who have brought Your people out of the land of Egypt with a mighty hand and have made a name for Yourself, as it is this day—we have sinned, we have been wicked. O Lord, in accordance with all Your righteous acts, let now Your anger and Your wrath turn away from Your city Jerusalem, Your holy mountain; for because of our sins and the iniquities of our fathers, Jerusalem and Your people have become a reproach to all those around us. So now, our God, listen to the prayer of Your servant and to his supplications, and for Your sake, O Lord, let Your face shine on Your desolate sanctuary. O my God, incline Your ear and hear! Open Your eyes and see our desolations and the city which is called by Your name; for we are not presenting our supplications before You on account of any merits of our own, but on account of Your great compassion. O Lord, hear! O Lord, forgive! O Lord, listen and take action! For Your own sake, O my God, do not delay, because Your city and Your people are called by Your name.”

In this passage, we see:

- The point in time Daniel prayed (“*In the first year of Darius,*” v. 1). This would have been approximately 538 B.C., which was approximately 67 years since Daniel had been taken into exile to Babylon.⁹⁴ Darius was of Median descent (v. 1) and likely served under Cyrus, the Persian in the Medo-Persian Empire that succeeded the Babylonian Empire (see the end of Daniel 5 for the account of the transition from the Babylonian Empire to the Medo-Persian Empire).
- What prompted Daniel’s prayer (“*I, Daniel, observed in the books the number of the years which was revealed as the word of the LORD to Jeremiah the prophet for the completion of the desolations of Jerusalem, namely, seventy years,*” v. 2). Daniel’s prayer was prompted by his perusal of several prophecies found in the book of Jeremiah that 1) indicated that the length of the Babylonian captivity

⁹⁴ The exile of the southern kingdom of Judah to Babylon took place in three phases. Daniel and his companions (Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego) were among the first group, taken in 605 B.C. (see Daniel 1:1-7). A second group was taken in 597 B.C., a third group upon the destruction of Jerusalem in 586 B.C.

would be 70 years (v. 2; cf. Jeremiah 25:11 and 29:10); 2) indicated that the Babylonian captivity would come to a close with the demise of the Babylonian Empire (Jeremiah 25:12); and 3) indicated that the captivity would come to a close as God's people prayed (Jeremiah 29:12-14; cf. Daniel 9:13b). In keeping with what he had read (v. 3's "So"), Daniel prayed that God would bring the captivity to a close. Since the Babylonian Empire had already fallen (a few chapters earlier, at the end of Daniel 5), and since it had been nearly 70 years since the captivity had begun, Daniel knew that it was God's will to soon restore His people to their land. The final condition to be met was the prayer of God's people, which Daniel proceeded to offer.⁹⁵ Daniel's prayer is a reminder of many in Scripture⁹⁶ that one is to pray according to the revealed will of God (see John 15:7 and 1 John 5:14-15).⁹⁷

- The preparation that went into Daniel's prayer ("So I gave my attention to the Lord God," v. 3). John Walvoord (*Daniel: the Key to Prophetic Revelation*, p. 205) describes this as "a formal beginning in which Daniel turns away from other things to concentrate on his prayer to the Lord."

⁹⁵ "This prophecy of Jeremiah 'so far from leading the watchful servant of God to assume that the event will automatically transpire without prayer to heaven, calls him to the more extraordinary engagement in prayer'" (W. C. Stevens, cited in D. Edmond Hiebert, *Working With God Through Intercessory Prayer*, p. 107). Thought the result was assured, it was not automatic.

⁹⁶ Examples include: the praying of Jacob in Genesis 32:9-12, which was in accordance with what God had revealed to him in Genesis 28:14 and 31:3; the praying of David in 2 Samuel 7:18-29, which was in accordance with the Davidic covenant in 2 Samuel 7:4-17; the praying of Solomon in 1 Kings 8:22-53, which was also in accordance with the Davidic covenant; and the praying Elijah in James 5:17-18, which was in accordance with God's revealed will in 1 Kings 17:1, 18:1, and 42-45.

⁹⁷ Prayer prompted by the perusal of Scripture was the pattern followed by the legendary prayer warrior, George Mueller. As D. Edmond Hiebert (*Working With God Through Intercessory Prayer*, p. 108) writes: "We must learn to use the Bible as the guide for our praying. Prayer nourished and guided by the Word of God will be effective. George Mueller, a noted man of prayer, used this secret. For some years he had followed the custom of praying first and then reading the Bible, with no special connection between the two. Then he was led to turn the process completely around; after a word of invocation to have the Spirit's teaching, he now spent hours pouring over the Word, filling himself with the living Word of God; after this, in the very mind of Christ which he had thus received, he poured out praise, prayer, and supplication in great fullness and assurance."

- The prayer itself
 - Affirming
 - God's greatness (“*O Lord, the great and awesome God,*” v. 4). Such adoration ought to be primary in our praying (see Matthew 6:9//Luke 11:2).
 - God's goodness (“*who keeps His covenant and lovingkindness,*” v. 4). God kept His covenant by causing His people to go into captivity in keeping with the curses of the covenant (vs. 7-8 and 11b-14a; cf. Leviticus 26:33-39, Deuteronomy 28:36-37, and 63-68). God would keep His covenant and be loyally loving by causing His people's captivity to come to a close if they confessed.
 - Admitting
 - The Jews' corruption (“*we have sinned, committed iniquity, acted wickedly and rebelled, even turning aside from Your commandments and ordinances. Moreover, we have not listened to Your servants the prophets, who spoke in Your name to our kings, our princes, our fathers and all the people of the land,*” vs. 5-6⁹⁸; “*we have rebelled against Him; nor have we obeyed the voice of the LORD our God, to walk in His teachings which He set before us through His servants the prophets. Indeed all Israel has transgressed Your law and turned aside, not obeying Your voice,*” vs. 9b-11a; “*we have not obeyed His voice,*” v. 14; “*we have sinned, we have been wicked,*” v. 15). Confession ought to be an aspect of our praying, as it was in the prayers of David (in 2 Samuel 24:10 and Psalm 51), Ezra (in Ezra 9:5-15), Nehemiah (in Nehemiah 1:4-11), the Levites (in Nehemiah 9:4-38), Job (in Job 42:1-6), Isaiah (in Isaiah 6:5), Peter (in Luke 5:8), and the publican (in Luke 18:13).
 - Jehovah's character
 - (“*Righteousness belongs to You, O Lord,*” v. 7; “*for the LORD our God is righteous with respect to all His deeds which He has done,*” v. 14; cf. Lamentations 1:18). Daniel recognized that it was right for God to release His wrath

⁹⁸ “The variety of verbs employed here, indicates the design of the speaker to confess all sin of every kind in its full extent” (Moses Stuart, cited in John Walvoord, *Daniel: The Key to Prophetic Revelation*, p. 207).

upon the wrong of His people by allowing them to go into captivity.

- (“*To the Lord our God belong compassion and forgiveness,*” v. 9). Daniel confessed that God is compassionate and, thus, could cleanse his countrymen from their corruption if they would confess.

○ Asking

- The request for restoration (“*let now Your anger and Your wrath turn away from Your city Jerusalem, Your holy mountain,*” v. 16a; “*let Your face shine on Your desolate sanctuary,*” v. 17 [cf. Numbers 6:24-26])

- The reasons for the request

- God’s nature

- (“*O Lord, in accordance with all Your righteous acts, let now Your anger and Your wrath turn away from Your city Jerusalem, Your holy mountain,*” v. 16a). It is right for God to remove His wrath against wrong when there is repentance for the wrong (cf. 1 John 1:9).

- (“*we are not presenting our supplications before You on account of any merits of our own, but on account of Your great compassion,*” v. 18b). God’s compassion is what causes Him to cleanse confessed corruption.

- God’s name (“*for Your sake, O Lord, let Your face shine on Your desolate sanctuary,*” v. 17b; “*For Your own sake, O my God, do not delay, because Your city and Your people are called by Your name,*” v. 19b). Whereas His people’s wrong resulted in shame for God’s name (“*because of our sins and the iniquities of our fathers, Jerusalem and Your people have become a reproach to all those around us,*” v. 16b; cf. v. 16’s “*Your city Jerusalem, Your holy mountain,*” v. 18’s “*the city which is called by Your name,*” and Romans 2:24), their repentance and restoration would result in fame for His name (cf. v. 15a). See Ezekiel 36:19-24. God’s glory ought to be the greatest goal of our prayers (John 14:13), as it was for David (in 2

Samuel 7:25-26), Elijah (in 1 Kings 18:37), and Hezekiah (in 2 Kings 19:19//Isaiah 37:20)

- The product of Daniel's prayer. It would have been relatively soon after Daniel prayed that the Persian king, Cyrus issued a decree (see 2 Chronicles 36:22-23//Ezra 1:1-3 and Isaiah 44:28), permitting the Jews to return to their land and bringing the captivity to a close. This was in keeping with what God had communicated in the covenant, that confession would lead to the conclusion of the captivity (see Leviticus 26:40-42 and Deuteronomy 30:1f; cf. 1 Kings 8:46-53//2 Chronicles 6:36-39 and 2 Chronicles 7:14).

Praying the Prayers of Scripture

The Prayer of David After Receiving the Davidic Covenant 2 Samuel 7:18-29//1 Chronicles 17:16-27

Previous studies in this series have considered David's prayer of confession in Psalm 51 and his prayer for purification in Psalm 139. There are several other great prayers of David recorded in Scripture, including his prayer after receiving the offering for the rebuilding of the temple in 1 Chronicles 29:10-19; several other prayers in the Psalter; and his prayer after receiving the Davidic covenant in 2 Samuel 7:18-29, which Ronald Youngblood ("1, 2 Samuel," in *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, 3:896) calls "one of the most moving prayers in Scripture":

Then David the king went in and sat before the LORD, and he said, "Who am I, O Lord GOD, and what is my house, that You have brought me this far? And yet this was insignificant in Your eyes, O Lord GOD, for You have spoken also of the house of Your servant concerning the distant future. And this is the custom of man, O Lord GOD. Again what more can David say to You? For You know Your servant, O Lord GOD! For the sake of Your word, and according to Your own heart, You have done all this greatness to let Your servant know. For this reason You are great, O Lord GOD; for there is none like You, and there is no God besides You, according to all that we have heard with our ears. And what one nation on the earth is like Your people Israel, whom God went to redeem for Himself as a people and to make a name for Himself, and to do a great thing for You and awesome things for Your land, before Your people whom You have redeemed for Yourself from Egypt, from nations and their gods? For You have established for Yourself Your people Israel as Your own people forever, and You, O LORD, have become their God. Now therefore, O LORD God, the word that You have spoken concerning Your servant and his house, confirm it forever, and do as You have spoken, that Your name may be magnified forever, by saying, 'The LORD of hosts is God over Israel'; and may the house of Your servant David be established before You. For You, O LORD of hosts, the God of Israel, have made a revelation to Your servant, saying, 'I will build you a house'; therefore Your servant has found courage to pray this prayer to You. Now, O Lord GOD, You are God, and Your words are truth, and You have promised this good thing to Your servant. Now therefore, may it please You to bless the house of Your servant, that it may continue forever before You. For You, O Lord GOD, have spoken; and with Your blessing may the house of Your servant be blessed forever."

In this passage, we see:

- David's prayer posture ("Then David the king went in and sat before the LORD," v. 18a). Apparently, the place David prays this prayer is in the tent/tabernacle he had set up to house the ark of the covenant after bringing it to Jerusalem (see 2 Samuel 6:17). This may be the only instance in Scripture where it is said that the person praying was seated. Other prayer posture in Scripture include kneeling (1

Kings 8:54, Ezra 9:5, Daniel 6:10, Luke 22:41, Acts 7:60, 9:40, 21:5, and Ephesians 3:14), standing (1 Kings 8:22 and Mark 11:25), and prostrate/falling on the face (Numbers 16:22 and Matthew 26:39). It appears that prayer posture is something that is described in Scripture, without being prescribed, allowing for some level of liberty/leeway. His praying “*before the LORD*” (v. 18a) is a reminder that when one prays, wherever he prays, he is to pray as in the presence of the Lord.

- David’s perspective in prayer (“*and he said, ‘Who am I, O Lord GOD, and what is my house, that You have brought me this far?’*” v. 18b; cf. 1 Samuel 18:18, where David essentially says the same). Though David had notoriety, he knew that he was ultimately a nobody (see Galatians 6:3). He also knew that God was the One who had brought him to his present position as king over all Israel (see Daniel 2:21). In keeping with what God had just told Nathan to tell to David (see 2 Samuel 7:8), David’s prayer was permeated with a servant’s spirit, seen especially by David calling himself God’s servant ten times, in verses 19, 20, 21, 25, 26, 27 (twice), 28, and 29 (twice). This same kind of spirit is seen in other prayers in Scripture, such as the prayer of Jacob in Genesis 32:9-12, the prayer of Elisha in 1 Kings 18:36b-37, the prayer of Nehemiah in Nehemiah 1:4-11 and the prayer of the early church in Acts 4:29. When one realizes who the Person is to whom he is praying, this is the only proper perspective in prayer. Accordingly, David continually refers to God as “*Lord GOD*” (in verses 18, 19 [twice], 20, 22, 25, 28, and 29), “*Lord*” being the Old Testament name for God that emphasizes His sovereign supremacy, lordship, mastership, or ownership (and, thus, translated “*Sovereign LORD*” by the NIV). Though David was the most powerful man on earth at the time, he knew who the real Sovereign was.
- David’s praise in his prayer (“*You are great, O Lord GOD; for there is none like You, and there is no God besides You, according to all that we have heard with our ears,*” v. 22). Praising God in prayer was prescribed by Jesus in the Model Prayer of Matthew 6:9//Luke 11:2 and is practiced in several prayers in Scripture, such as by Hannah (in 1 Samuel 2:2), by Hezekiah (in 2 Kings 19:15//Isaiah 37:16), by David (in 1 Chronicles 29:10-13), by the Levites (in Nehemiah 9:5f), by Jeremiah (in Jeremiah 32:17f), by Daniel (in Daniel 2:19b-23 and 9:4), and by Nebuchadnezzar (in Daniel 4:34-35). Hannah’s praise for God’s holiness of being (in 1 Samuel 2:2) closely approximates David’s praise for the same here in verse 22 (see also the prayer of Hezekiah in 2 Kings 19:15//Isaiah 37:16 and the prayer of the Levites in Nehemiah 9:6; cf. Exodus 15:11, Deuteronomy 4:35, 39, 6:4, 32:39, 1 Kings 8:60, Psalm 71:19, 77:13, 86:8, 89:6-8a, 113:5, Isaiah 40:25, 43:10-11, 44:6, 45:5, 6, 18, 21, 22, 46:9, Hosea 13:4, 1 Corinthians 8:4, and 1 Timothy 2:5; cf. also Isaiah 6:3 and Revelation 4:8). Because there is no Person like God (v. 22), so there was no people like God’s people, Israel (vs. 23-24).
- David’s petition (“*Now therefore, O LORD God, the word that You have spoken concerning Your servant and his house, confirm it forever, and do as You have spoken,*” v. 25; “*and may the house of Your servant David be established before*

You,” v. 26b; *“Now therefore, may it please You to bless the house of Your servant, that it may continue forever before You,”* v. 29a; *“and with Your blessing may the house of Your servant be blessed forever,”* v. 29c). David prayed that God would fulfill the Davidic covenant, His promise to David and his descendants that as long as the Jewish nation existed, David or one of his descendants would be on the throne (see 2 Samuel 23:5, Psalm 89:3-4, 20-37, and Acts 2:30). The Davidic dynasty continued through the reign of Zedekiah, which ended in 586 B.C. with the destruction of Jerusalem, marking the end of the monarchy and theocracy. The ultimate fulfillment of the Davidic covenant will come with the second coming of Christ, “the son of David” (Matthew 1:1; cf. 2 Timothy 2:8) and the establishment of the Millennial Kingdom, followed by the eternal state (see Luke 1:32-33, 69, and Acts 13:23). Thus, we are taught to pray: “Your kingdom come” (Matthew 6:10a).

- What prompted David’s petition (*“You have spoken also of the house of Your servant concerning the distant future,”* v. 19; *“the word that You have spoken concerning Your servant and his house ... and do as You have spoken,”* v. 25; *“For You, O LORD of hosts, the God of Israel, have made a revelation to Your servant, saying, “I will build you a house”; therefore Your servant has found courage to pray this prayer to You,”* v. 27; *“For You, O Lord GOD, have spoken,”* v. 29). David prayed what he prayed just after having received the Davidic covenant from God through the prophet, Nathan (see 2 Samuel 7:11b-17). Therefore, this was one of the many instances in Scripture of someone praying according to the revealed will of God, the key to answered prayer (see 1 John 5:14-15). David prayed this in faith, believing that God’s words are true, that He keeps His promises (*“You are God, and Your words are truth, and You have promised this good thing to Your servant,”* v. 28). David turned God’s promise into prayer, asking God to perform what He had promised.
- The purpose for David’s petition (*“do as You have spoken, that Your name may be magnified forever,”* vs. 25-26). This is one of several examples in Scripture where the purpose for the prayer was for God to be praised. Others included Elijah (in 1 Kings 18:36-37), Hezekiah (in 2 Kings 19:19//Isaiah 37:20), and Jesus (in John 12:28a and 17:1).⁹⁹ The aim was the spread of God’s fame.

⁹⁹ D.A. Carson (*A Call to Spiritual Reformation*, p. 203) asks: “Has God become so central to all our thoughts and pursuits, and thus to our praying, that we cannot easily imagine asking for anything without consciously longing that the answer bring glory to God?”

Praying the Prayers of Scripture

Paul's Prayer for Philemon Philemon 4-7¹⁰⁰

An earlier lesson in this series, on Paul's prayer for the Philippians in Philippians 1:9-11, pointed out the following points about the praying of the apostle Paul:

- Paul prayed, both with and for other believers
- Paul prayed persistently
- Paul made it publicly known that he was praying by letting those to whom he was writing know that he was praying for them
- Paul particularly prayed for the purity and perseverance of God's people
- Paul made a practice of praising God for God's people

One of the many prayers of Paul recorded in Scripture¹⁰¹ is the prayer found in Philemon 4-7:

I thank my God always, making mention of you in my prayers, because I hear of your love and of the faith which you have toward the Lord Jesus and toward all the saints; and I pray that the fellowship of your faith may become effective through the knowledge of every good thing which is in you for Christ's sake. For I have come to have much joy and comfort in your love, because the hearts of the saints have been refreshed through you, brother.

In this passage, we see:

- Paul's praise ("*I thank my God,*" v. 4). As mentioned above, Paul made a practice of praising God for God's people (and letting God's people know he was doing so). Philemon was no exception, as Paul praises God:
 - For Philemon's faith in Christ ("*the faith which you have toward the Lord Jesus,*" v. 5). This likely includes not only Philemon's faith in Christ/belief, but also his faithfulness to Christ/behavior. Paul often thanked God for this quality, which characterized those for whom he was praying (see also Romans 1:8, Ephesians 1:15, Colossians 1:4, 1 Thessalonians 1:3, 2 Thessalonians 1:3, and 2 Timothy 1:5). Paul rightly thanked God for it because it was given by Him (see John 6:65, Acts

¹⁰⁰ An excellent resource on Paul's prayers is D.A. Carson's *A Call to Spiritual Reformation: Priorities from Paul and His Prayers*.

¹⁰¹ Others may be found in Romans 1:8-13, Ephesians 1:15-23, 3:14-21, Philippians 1:9-11, Colossians 1:9-14, 1 Thessalonians 3:9-13, 2 Thessalonians 1:11-12, and 2:16-17.

14:27, Ephesians 2:8, and Philippians 1:29). May others see the same in us and praise God for it!

- For Philemon's fondness for Christians (“*your love ... toward all the saints,*” v. 5; “*For I have come to have much joy and comfort in your love, because the hearts of the saints have been refreshed through you, brother,*” v. 7).¹⁰² Paul also often thanked God for this quality, which also characterized those for whom he was praying (see Ephesians 1:15, Colossians 1:4, 1 Thessalonians 1:3, and 2 Thessalonians 1:3). Paul rightly thanked God for it because it was a fruit of God-given faith, as the two, faith in Christ and fondness for fellow Christians, go hand-in-hand, the second being a fruit of the first, as seen by such passages as John 13:35, Galatians 5:6, 1 John 2:9-11, 3:10b, 14-15, 17, 19, 4:7-8, 12, and 16b. Notice that Philemon's fondness was indiscriminate (“*toward all the saints,*” v. 5). May we, like Philemon, be a blessing to other believers by bringing them joy (Romans 16:19a, 1 Thessalonians 3:9, 2 John 4, and 3 John 3-4), comfort (2 Corinthians 7:6-7 and 1 Thessalonians 3:7), and refreshment (1 Corinthians 16:17-18 and 2 Corinthians 7:13). And, as such expressions of love are evident in us, may others praise God for it!
- The persistence of Paul's prayer (“*I thank my God always, making mention of you in my prayers,*” v. 4). The persistence of Paul's praying for Philemon is seen by the fact that his praise for him was “*always*” and that his prayer for him was plural (“*prayers*”). Paul's persistence in prayer is seen elsewhere in Romans 1:9, Philippians 1:4, Colossians 1:3, 9, 1 Thessalonians 1:3, 3:10, 2 Thessalonians 1:11, and 2 Timothy 1:3.¹⁰³ Persistence in prayer is also taught in 1 Kings 18:43, Nehemiah 1:6, Psalm 55:17, Daniel 6:10, Matthew 7:7-8//Luke 11:9-10, Matthew 26:44, Luke 11:5-8, 18:1-5, Acts 1:14, 2:42, 6:4, 12:5, Romans 12:12, Colossians 4:2, 12, and 1 Thessalonians 5:17.

¹⁰² It is highly likely that in verse 5 Paul is making use of the literary phenomenon known as “chiasmus” (named after the Greek letter, *chi*, which looks like an “x”). In a chiasmus, there are 4 elements, with the 1st and 4th elements corresponding to one another, and the 2nd and 3rd elements corresponding to one another. Thus, in this verse, the 1st element, “*love,*” corresponds to the 4th element, “*toward all the saints,*” while the 2nd element, “*faith,*” corresponds to the 3rd element, “*toward the Lord Jesus.*” The NIV takes it this way by translating: “Because I hear about your love for all his holy people and your faith in the Lord Jesus.” The parallel prayers in two other Prison Epistles (see Ephesians 1:15 and Colossians 1:4) also point in this direction.

¹⁰³ “Paul must have had an extensive prayer list and presumably spent some time each day naming before God all his churches, colleagues, and supporters” (James Dunn, *The Epistles to the Colossians and to Philemon: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, p. 316).

- The petition of Paul’s prayer
 - For Philemon to manifest magnanimity (“*I pray that the fellowship of your faith may become effective,*” v. 6a). Magnanimity is big heartedness. The idea of “*fellowship*” here is sharing (see Galatians 6:6, where the verbal form of the Greek noun here in verse 6 is used to describe sharing), an expression of love. As mentioned previously, such love is a fruit of faith (thus, “*the fellowship of your faith,*” or the fellowship that comes from faith, or that has faith as its source). In the historical context, Paul is praying that the love that Philemon was know to have shown towards other believers (see verse 7) would once again find expression in forgiving and restoring his runaway slave, Onesimus.¹⁰⁴
 - The motive for such magnanimity (“*through the knowledge of every good thing which is in you for Christ’s sake,*” v. 6b). The motive for the magnanimity that Paul wants Philemon to show towards Onesimus is the magnanimity that Christ had shown towards him (see, for example, Ephesians 4:32 and 5:2). As William Hendriksen (“Philippians, Colossians and Philemon,” in *New Testament Commentary*, p. 215) writes: “The more thoroughly Philemon recognizes how greatly he himself has been benefitted, the more inclined will he be to extend mercy and pardon to others, specifically to Onesimus.” This is a reminder that our horizontal relationship towards others is to be based upon and should reflect our vertical relationship to Christ.

¹⁰⁴ D. Edmond Hiebert (*Titus and Philemon*, p. 101) sees Paul’s words in verse 5 (“*your love ... toward all the saints*”) as Paul’s way of encouraging Philemon to show love towards Onesimus, writing: “In this picture of Philemon’s love toward all the saints Paul doubtless intends for him to understand that Onesimus is now included among them. He must allow his love to be operative toward him as well.”

Praying the Prayers of Scripture

The Prayer of Ezra Ezra 9

When Judah's 70-year captivity in Babylon came to a close, God used several men to lead His people back to their land and back to their Lord. First, in 536 B.C. God used Zerubbabel, appointed governor of Judah by the Persian king, Darius, along with the prophets, Haggai and Zechariah and the high priest, Joshua, to lead the first group of returnees to rebuild the temple in Jerusalem (Ezra chapters 1-6). Later, in 445 B.C. God used a man named Nehemiah to lead a third and final group of returnees to rebuild the walls of Jerusalem (Nehemiah chapters 1-6). In between, in 458 B.C., God used a priest and scribe named Ezra (Ezra 7:11, 12, and 21), under the auspices of the Persian king, Artaxerxes, to lead a second group of returnees (a few thousand) to rebuild the worship of God in Jerusalem (Ezra chapters 7-10).

The Problem That Prompted Ezra's Prayer

Shortly after Ezra had returned to the land (within a few months), he was informed of the iniquity of its Jewish inhabitants (Ezra 9:1), iniquity that was ignited by the Jews intermarrying with the Gentiles of the land (Ezra 9:2; cf. Judges 3:5-6a and 1 Kings 11:1; cf. also Psalm 106:35a). Not only had God forbidden such intermarriage (Deuteronomy 7:3, 1 Kings 11:2a, Ezra 9:12a, and 14a), but had also warned that it would result in such iniquity (Exodus 34:16 and Deuteronomy 7:4; cf. Judges 3:6b-7, 1 Kings 11:2b-10, and Psalm 106:35b-39).¹⁰⁵

The Pain That Accompanied Ezra's Prayer

When Ezra was apprised of the problem, he responded with great grief, tearing his clothes (the tunic/undergarment and cloak/outer garment), tearing out his hair (Ezra 9:3), and shedding tears (Ezra 10:1), Ancient Near Eastern expressions of mourning (see Genesis 37:29, 34, Joshua 7:6, Esther 4:1, Job 1:20, and Isaiah 22:12).

The Posture of Ezra in Prayer

According to Ezra 9:5, Ezra fell on his knees and stretched out his hands in prayer. According to Ezra 10:1, he was prostrate, or face down, in prayer.¹⁰⁶ All of these postures were in keeping with the type of prayer that he prayed. He fell on his knees (cf. 1 Kings 8:54, Luke 22:41, Acts 7:60, 9:40, 21:5, and Ephesians 3:14), "the posture of a

¹⁰⁵ This prohibition of intermarriage with Gentiles was not due to race, but to religion. It is for this same reason that the New Testament prohibits Christians from marrying non-Christians (2 Corinthians 6:14)/prescribes that Christians marry Christians (1 Corinthians 7:39; cf. 1 Corinthians 9:5).

¹⁰⁶ The tense of the Hebrew verb used in 10:1 indicates that Ezra kept prostrating himself in prayer (Edwin Yamauchi, "Ezra-Nehemiah," in *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, 4:668).

penitent humbling himself and a petitioner suing [asking] for mercy” (Matthew Henry, “An Exposition, With Practical Observations, of the Book of Ezra,” in *Matthew Henry’s Commentary*, 2:1060). He stretched out his hands, likely with palms turned upward (cf. Exodus 9:29, 1 Kings 8:22, and Isaiah 1:15), “reaching out, as it were, with an earnest expectation, to receive a gracious answer” (Henry, 2:1060). Prostration in prayer is found elsewhere in Numbers 16:22 and Matthew 26:39//Mark 14:35. While the Bible describes prayer postures, without prescribing any one in particular, our posture in prayer should be in keeping with the spirit of submission, humility, reverence, and dependence that approaching God in prayer demands. Thus, the issue is not so much our prayer position, but rather our disposition.

Ezra’s Prayer

Ezra 9:6-15 contains Ezra’s prayer concerning the sin problem of his people, a prayer of intercession and confession:

and I said, “O my God, I am ashamed and embarrassed to lift up my face to You, my God, for our iniquities have risen above our heads and our guilt has grown even to the heavens. Since the days of our fathers to this day we have been in great guilt, and on account of our iniquities we, our kings and our priests have been given into the hand of the kings of the lands, to the sword, to captivity and to plunder and to open shame, as it is this day. But now for a brief moment grace has been shown from the Lord our God, to leave us an escaped remnant and to give us a peg in His holy place, that our God may enlighten our eyes and grant us a little reviving in our bondage. For we are slaves; yet in our bondage our God has not forsaken us, but has extended lovingkindness to us in the sight of the kings of Persia, to give us reviving to raise up the house of our God, to restore its ruins and to give us a wall in Judah and Jerusalem. “Now, our God, what shall we say after this? For we have forsaken Your commandments, which You have commanded by Your servants the prophets, saying, ‘The land which you are entering to possess is an unclean land with the uncleanness of the peoples of the lands, with their abominations which have filled it from end to end and with their impurity. So now do not give your daughters to their sons nor take their daughters to your sons, and never seek their peace or their prosperity, that you may be strong and eat the good things of the land and leave it as an inheritance to your sons forever.’ After all that has come upon us for our evil deeds and our great guilt, since You our God have requited us less than our iniquities deserve, and have given us an escaped remnant as this, shall we again break Your commandments and intermarry with the peoples who commit these abominations? Would You not be angry with us to the point of destruction, until there is no remnant nor any who escape? O Lord God of Israel, You are righteous, for we have been left an escaped remnant, as it is this day; behold, we are before You in our guilt, for no one can stand before You because of this.”

This prayer was:

- A prayer of contrition (“*and I said, ‘O my God, I am ashamed and embarrassed to lift up my face to You, my God,’*” v. 6a). Ezra was so ashamed of the sin problem of his people that, like the tax collector in the parable of the tax collector

and the Pharisee in Luke 18:9-14, he was “unwilling to lift up his eyes to heaven” (Luke 18:13). The natural consequence of being convinced of our corruption is contrition. Contrition is commended by God (Psalm 34:18, 51:17, Isaiah 57:15, and 66:2).

- A prayer of confession
 - They were corrupt (“*our iniquities have risen above our heads,*” v. 6b—their depravity was so deep that they were drowning in it; “*we have forsaken Your commandments,*” v. 10b; cf. v. 13’s “*evil deeds*”).
 - They were condemned (“*our guilt has grown even to the heavens. Since the days of our fathers to this day we have been in great guilt,*” vs. 6b-7a—in keeping with the extent of their corruption was the extent of their condemnation; cf. v. 13’s “*great guilt*” and v. 15’s “*our guilt*”). Because of their corruption, God’s people stood condemned, objectively guilty before God’s bar of justice, legally liable for the sentence for their sin.
 - There were consequences (“*and on account of our iniquities we, our kings and our priests have been given into the hand of the kings of the lands, to the sword, to captivity and to plunder and to open shame, as it is this day,*” v. 7b; cf. v. 13’s “*all that has come upon us for our evil deeds and our great guilt*”). The consequence for their corruption was in keeping with the conditions of the covenant, which including the curse of captivity (Leviticus 26:33-39, Deuteronomy 28:36-37, and 63-68).

Confession ought to be an aspect of our praying, as it was in the prayers of David (in 2 Samuel 24:10 and Psalm 51), Nehemiah (in Nehemiah 1:4-11), the Levites (in Nehemiah 9:4-38), Job (in Job 42:1-6), Isaiah (in Isaiah 6:5), Daniel (in Daniel 9:1-19), Peter (in Luke 5:8), and the publican (in Luke 18:13).

- A prayer of confirmation. In the midst of confessing his people’s corruption, Ezra confirms God’s character.
 - God’s graciousness and lovingkindness (“*But now for a brief moment grace has been shown from the Lord our God, to leave us an escaped remnant and to give us a peg in His holy place, that our God may enlighten our eyes and grant us a little reviving in our bondage. For we are slaves; yet in our bondage our God has not forsaken us, but has extended lovingkindness to us in the sight of the kings of Persia, to give us reviving to raise up the house of our God, to restore its ruins and to give us a wall in Judah and Jerusalem,*” vs. 8-9). For “*a brief moment*” (verse 8), approximately 80 years, from the time of the first return in 536 B.C. to the time of the second return in 458 B.C., God in His grace (verse 8; cf. v. 13’s “*have given us an escaped remnant as this*”) and lovingkindness, or loyal love/covenant compassion (verse 9), had allowed His people to

return and rebuild. Praise God, though our corruption and condemnation is high (v. 6b), God's covenant compassion is just as high (Psalm 36:5 and 108:4)!

- God's mercy ("*You our God have requited us less than our iniquities deserve,*" v. 13b; cf. Job 11:6b and Psalm 103:10). Though God could have extinguished His people (Lamentations 3:22; cf. v. 14b's "*Would You not be angry with us to the point of destruction, until there is no remnant nor any who escape?*"), in mercy He extended them.
- God's righteousness ("*O Lord God of Israel, You are righteous,*" v. 15). Ezra ends his prayer by resting in God's righteousness to do the right thing in response to Ezra's repentance in behalf of the remnant (cf. the end of Genesis 18:25).

The product of Ezra's prayer. The "rest of the story" (Ezra 10) is that God used the prayer (Ezra as priest) and the preaching (Ezra as scribe—see Ezra 7:10) of Ezra to bring about the repentance of the remnant, preserving God's people from further punishment.

Praying the Prayers of Scripture

David's Prayer of Praise for the Offering for the Temple 1 Chronicles 29:10-19

Previous studies in this series have considered David's prayer of confession in Psalm 51, his prayer for purification in Psalm 139, and his prayer after receiving the Davidic covenant in 2 Samuel 7:18-29//1 Chronicles 17:16-27. There are several other great prayers of David recorded in Scripture, including several other prayers in the Psalter, as well as his prayer of praise after receiving the offering for the rebuilding of the temple in 1 Chronicles 29:10-19.

David had expressed a desire to build a temple to replace the tabernacle (2 Samuel 7:1f//1 Chronicles 17:1f, 1 Chronicles 22:7, and 28:2). However, God wanted David's son, Solomon, to do so (2 Samuel 7:12-13//1 Chronicles 17:11-12, 1 Chronicles 22:8-10, and 28:3-6). David, therefore, purposed to prepare for its building by gathering and giving the money and the materials needed (1 Chronicles 22:2-5, 14, 28:14-18, 29:2-5a, and 19), then called upon his fellow Israelites to follow his lead in giving (1 Chronicles 29:5b). After they gave (1 Chronicles 29:6-8), the people and David rejoiced (1 Chronicles 29:9). David then prayed the following prayer of praise:

So David blessed the LORD in the sight of all the assembly; and David said, "Blessed are You, O LORD God of Israel our father, forever and ever. Yours, O LORD, is the greatness and the power and the glory and the victory and the majesty, indeed everything that is in the heavens and the earth; Yours is the dominion, O LORD, and You exalt Yourself as head over all. Both riches and honor come from You, and You rule over all, and in Your hand is power and might; and it lies in Your hand to make great and to strengthen everyone. Now therefore, our God, we thank You, and praise Your glorious name. "But who am I and who are my people that we should be able to offer as generously as this? For all things come from You, and from Your hand we have given You. For we are sojourners before You, and tenants, as all our fathers were; our days on the earth are like a shadow, and there is no hope. O LORD our God, all this abundance that we have provided to build You a house for Your holy name, it is from Your hand, and all is Yours. Since I know, O my God, that You try the heart and delight in uprightness, I, in the integrity of my heart, have willingly offered all these things; so now with joy I have seen Your people, who are present here, make their offerings willingly to You. O LORD, the God of Abraham, Isaac and Israel, our fathers, preserve this forever in the intentions of the heart of Your people, and direct their heart to You; and give to my son Solomon a perfect heart to keep Your commandments, Your testimonies and Your statutes, and to do them all, and to build the temple, for which I have made provision."

In this passage, we see:

- What prompted David's prayer. Verse 10 begins with "So," indicating a connection between the preceding context and the succeeding context. What

followed was David's prayer of praise. What preceded it and, thus, prompted David's prayer of praise was the glad giving of God's people (verse 9; cf. verse 17b's "*I, in the integrity of my heart, have willingly offered all these things; so now with joy I have seen Your people, who are present here, make their offerings willingly to You*" and 2 Corinthians 9:7). May our glad giving to God also be reason for rejoicing and produce praise to God!

- The public place of David's prayer ("*David blessed the LORD in the sight of all the assembly,*" v. 10a). While there is a place for private prayer and praise (Matthew 6:6), there is also a place for public prayer and praise. May we, like David, not be ashamed to publicly proclaim God's fame!
- The praise of David's prayer ("*David blessed the LORD,*" v. 10a; "*and David said, 'Blessed are You, O LORD God of Israel our father,'*" v. 10b; "*Now therefore, our God, we thank You, and praise Your glorious name,*" v. 13)
 - Praying for God to be praised perpetually ("*and David said, 'Blessed are You, O LORD God of Israel our father, forever and ever,'*" v. 10b). Other prayers in Scripture for God to be praised perpetually include those in Daniel 2:20, Romans 11:36, Galatians 1:5, 1 Timothy 1:17, 2 Timothy 4:18, Hebrews 13:21, 1 Peter 5:11, Jude 25, and Revelation 1:6. God is to be eternally exalted/perpetually praised because He is perpetually praiseworthy. It is for this reason that heaven must be everlasting, for only unending adoration can adequately give God His due.
 - Praising God for His perfections. God's perfections are another way of describing His attributes, the words that describe what He is like.
 - For His greatness ("*Yours, O LORD, is the greatness,*" v. 11). Because God is great, He is greatly to be praised (1 Chronicles 16:25, Psalm 48:1, 96:4, and 145:3).
 - For His power ("*Yours, O LORD, is ... the power,*" v. 11; "*in Your hand is power and might,*" v. 12). Other prayers in Scripture that praise God for His power include those in 1 Kings 8:42, Nehemiah 1:10, 9:32, Job 42:2, Jeremiah 32:17-19, 21, Daniel 2:20-21, and 9:15.
 - For His glory ("*Yours, O LORD, is ... the glory,*" v. 11). The Hebrew noun translated "*glory*" has the idea of heavy or weighty. God is eternally worthy of worship because He is infinitely weighty.
 - For His sovereign supremacy ("*Yours, O LORD, is ... the victory and the majesty,*" v. 11; "*Yours is the dominion, O LORD, and You exalt Yourself as head over all,*" v. 11; "*You rule over all,*"

v. 12). Other prayers in Scripture that praise God for His sovereign supremacy include those in 2 Kings 19:15, Daniel 4:34, 1 Timothy 1:17, 6:15, 1 Peter 5:11, and Jude 25.

- Praising God for His possessions (“*Yours, O LORD, is ... indeed everything that is in the heavens and the earth,*” v. 11; “*and all is Yours,*” v. 16). God possesses everything (Deuteronomy 10:14, Job 41:11b, Psalm 50:12b, and 1 Corinthians 10:26) because He produced everything (see Psalm 24:1-2, 89:11, and 95:4b-5). Accordingly, David professes that he and his people were not possessors, but pilgrims (“*For we are sojourners before You, and tenants, as all our fathers were; our days on the earth are like a shadow, and there is no hope,*” v. 15).
- Praising God for His provisions. Since God is the Giver, He is to be given our gratitude for what He has given us (“*Now therefore, our God, we thank You,*” v. 13).
 - Enrichment (“*riches ... come from You,*” v. 12; “*For all things come from You, and from Your hand we have given You,*” v. 14b; “*all this abundance that we have provided to build You a house for Your holy name, it is from Your hand,*” v. 16; cf. Genesis 24:35, Deuteronomy 8:17-18a, 1 Samuel 2:7, 1 Kings 3:13//2 Chronicles 1:12, Proverbs 10:22, Ecclesiastes 5:19, 6:2, and Hosea 2:8). Whenever we give monetarily, we are not only giving to Him, but also from Him.
 - Exaltation (“*honor come[s] from You ... and it lies in Your hand to make great and to strengthen everyone,*” v. 12; cf. 1 Samuel 2:8//Psalm 113:7-8, Psalm 75:6-7, and Luke 1:52b)
- The perspective with which David prayed (“*But who am I and who are my people that we should be able to offer as generously as this?,*” v. 14a; cf. 1 Samuel 18:18 and 2 Samuel 7:18//1 Chronicles 17:16, where David essentially says the same). Though David had notoriety, he knew that he was ultimately a nobody (see Galatians 6:3). When one realizes who the Person is to whom he is praying, this is the only proper perspective in prayer. Though David was the most powerful man on earth at the time, he knew who the real Somebody was.
- The petitions David made in his prayer
 - Continue the devotion of my subjects (“*O LORD, the God of Abraham, Isaac and Israel, our fathers, preserve this forever in the intentions of the heart of Your people, and direct their heart to You,*” v. 18)

- Cause the devotion of my son (“*and give to my son Solomon a perfect heart to keep Your commandments, Your testimonies and Your statutes, and to do them all, and to build the temple, for which I have made provision.*,” v. 19). David not only prayed this for his son, but preached it to him (see 1 Chronicles 28:9-10).

Praying the Prayers of Scripture

Summary Sheet 3

Following is a summation of the passages that have been studied since the previous summation (Summary Sheet 2), summarizing the principles on prayer and petitions to pray from those passages.

Ephesians 1:15-23 (Paul's first prayer for the Ephesians)

- Pray with other believers
- Pray for other believers
- Pray persistently
- Let other believers know you are praying for them
- Pray for the purity and perseverance of other believers
- Praise God for other believers
 - For their faith in Christ
 - For their fondness for Christians
- Let other believers know you are praising God for them
- Pray for illumination
 - To perceive how precious is the believer's prospect
 - To perceive how powerful is the believer's present

Ephesians 3:14-21 (Paul's second prayer for the Ephesians)

- Pray with other believers
- Pray for other believers
- Pray persistently
- Let other believers know you are praying for them
- Pray for the purity and perseverance of other believers
- Praise God for other believers
- Pray according to the revealed will of God
- Pray with a posture that is proper
- Pray to the right Person
- Pray for believers to be strengthened in their spirits by the Spirit
- Pray for believers to more completely comprehend the incredible concern that Christ has for them
- Pray for believers to be fully filled with God's fullness

Psalms 139 (David's prayer for purification)

- Confess God's character
 - His omniscience
 - His omnipresence

- His omnipotence
- Praise God in prayer for His omnipotence as seen by His work in the womb
- Ask God to search your heart
- Ask God to show you your wrong
- Ask God to show you the right way

1 Samuel 1:10-20 (Hannah's supplication for a son)

- Pray when you have a problem, such as barrenness
- Pray to the right Person
- Pray persistently
- Pray passionately
- Give glory to God for answered prayer

1 Samuel 2:1-10 (Hannah's prayer of praise)

- Passionately praise God in prayer
 - For His being
 - His sacredness
 - His stability
 - His sovereignty
 - For His blessings, including exalting us

Daniel 9:1-19 (the prayer of Daniel)

- Pray in the midst of predicaments
- Pray privately and with partners
- Praise God in prayer
- Have a place where you pray
- Have an appropriate posture in prayer
- Pray persistently
- Our prayers are part of the bigger picture of the spiritual war in which we are engaged
- Pray according to the revealed will of God
- Prepare to pray
- Affirm God's character in prayer
- Admit your corruption
- Pray for God to be glorified in answer to prayer

2 Samuel 7:18-29 (David's prayer after receiving the Davidic covenant)

- Prays as one who is in the presence of the Lord
- Pray with the right perspective, that of a servant
- Praise God in prayer, such as for His holiness of being

- Pray for the final fulfillment of the Davidic covenant by praying for God's kingdom to come
- Pray according to the revealed will of God
- Pray for God to be glorified in answer to prayer

Philemon 4-7 (Paul's prayer for Philemon)

- Pray with other believers
- Pray for other believers
- Pray persistently
- Let other believers know you are praying for them
- Pray for the purity and perseverance of other believers
- Praise God for other believers
 - For their faith in Christ
 - For their fondness for Christians
- Let other believers know you are praising God for them
- Pray for believers to manifest magnanimity

Ezra 9 (the prayer of Ezra)

- Have an appropriate posture in prayer
- Contritely confess your corruption
- Confirm God's character
 - His graciousness and lovingkindness
 - His mercy
 - His righteousness

1 Chronicles 29:10-19 (David's prayer of praise for the offering for the temple)

- Praise God publicly in prayer
- Pray for God to be praised perpetually
- Praise God for His perfections
 - His greatness
 - His power
 - His glory
 - His sovereign supremacy
- Praise God for His possessions
- Praise God for His provisions
 - Enrichment
 - Exaltation
- Pray with the proper perspective
- Pray that God would cause and continue devotion to Him in others