

CHAPTER 7

PRAYER: THE PROVING GROUND

"Have faith in God. Truly I say to you, anyone who says to this mountain, 'Be taken up and thrown into the sea,' and doesn't doubt in his heart, but has faith that what he says is going to happen, it will be done." (Mark 11:22-23)



There is one way to determine if you have really heard the message of *The Derakim*, and here it is—has it radically affected the way you pray? Do you believe that there is outrageous hope in virtually any and every circumstance in life? Do you assume that, as a rule, God wants to save, deliver, and heal when you pray? Do you believe that God is good, and "good" simply means "good?" (The word "good" doesn't die the death of a thousand qualifications when you apply it to God.) Have you learned to dig out the promises from God's Word and bring them before Him in confident expectation?

For anyone who really knows *The Derakim*, the answer to all these questions should be a resounding, "Yes!"

In this chapter we will not only be making our case from Scripture. We will also be listening to the testimonies of some of the greatest mountain-movers in history, like George Mueller, Andrew Murray, R. A. Torrey, and Brother Andrew. When we look at the evidence, it becomes pretty clear that biblical prayer is primarily about talking to a kind and responsive Person, figuring out the good that He wants in a given situation, and holding on in faith until mountains move. **"So I say to you, all things that you pray for and ask for, have faith that you have received them, and they will be done for you."** (Mark 11:24) This is what the New Testament calls "praying in faith." But Jesus Himself wondered if anyone would know how to do this when He returned.

**Now will not God set things right for His
chosen ones who cry to Him day and night?
I tell you that He will set them right and He
will do it quickly. However, when the Son of
Man returns, will He find any faith on earth?**
(Luke 18:7-8)

7.2 HOW NOT TO DO IT

I was in my late twenties, and God was in the process of dismantling and reconstructing my religious views. Our Baptist church called for an emergency prayer meeting for a desperate situation. A beautiful little toddler in our con-

gregation was losing her battle with leukemia. The prognosis was impossibly bleak. The scene that evening was beyond heart-wrenching. We all watched helplessly as the grieving parents carried this tiny little wisp to the front of the sanctuary. Most of her blonde hair had dwindled from chemotherapy. I can still see her terrified little eyes peering over the adult-sized medical mask she wore to protect her from airborne pathogens.

It was excruciating. We all desperately wanted to do something, but felt helpless. Several people made attempts at prayer, but their requests sounded so hollow. All they could muster was something like, "Lord, if it be Thy will ..." or "Help us to accept whatever Your will may be." What all this really meant was, "Lord, Your plan is already set in stone, so we submit to whatever—healing or affliction, life or death."

Let's take a little aside here to clarify something. When we say "God's will" in the sense above, what do we mean? In the Greek of the New Testament, the word for "will" (*thelema*) is not a technical theological word reserved for God. It's a word that can also be applied to people like you and me, and in virtually every case it can be replaced by English words like "desire" or "pleasure"—i.e., *what someone wants*.¹ So in essence, when we prayed, "If it be Thy will," we were assuming that God may very well "want" this little baby to die. (And most of us were pretty certain that was exactly what was going to happen.)

At the time, something inside me was screaming, "Isn't there a better way to pray?!" I have since learned from Scripture, and from mountain-movers down through Christian history, that there is absolutely a better way to pray. Our problem

back in that prayer meeting was that no one had taught us how to engage God as He revealed Himself to Moses in *The Derakim*. No one had taught us how to engage the One who is simply **"compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, and great in lovingkindness and faithfulness."** What we are talking about here, of course, is the Person ultimately revealed in Jesus Christ. We had all been taught to try and pray to God in His infinite mode, the God who can't be seen or comprehended by the human mind.

News flash. No one in Scripture prays, "If it be Thy will," as so many of us were taught to do. The great intercessors in Christian history don't encourage us to pray that way, either. (Anyone who thinks that this is what Jesus was doing in Gethsemane has not studied the passage out.²) The great intercessors talk to a responsive Person with real emotion, real preferences, a Person who can really be moved.

What will the One who is the Father of mercies and God of all comforts do (cf. 2 Corinthians 1:3)? Will He not ... heed the tears and groans of His children crying out for themselves, since He very specifically invites and exhorts us to do this? (John Calvin)³

7.3 HOW TO DO IT

Brother Andrew (1928-2022) is one of the most amazing Christians of the previous generation. Millions became aware of his exploits through the book *God's Smuggler*,

first published in 1967 (with over 10 million copies in print, and translated into 35 languages.)⁴ His life of radical faith and obedience was fueled by his love for the millions trapped behind the Iron Curtain (the harsh political boundary that divided Europe for over forty years, beginning in 1945).⁵ One of Brother Andrew's core beliefs was that his prayers literally moved God to action, from the smallest things—like providing daily bread, to the largest things—like taking down anti-God, anti-Christ governments.

One of Brother Andrew's most well-known prayers was offered the first time he approached the barbed-wire border of a closed communist country. He knew that if the spiritual contraband in his car was discovered, he could be arrested, imprisoned, or worse. He also knew that God wanted the good news of Jesus to get past the barbed wire, concrete, and gun towers. What was his strategy? This audacious man of faith knew that if prayer could open blind eyes, it could also make seeing eyes blind. So he prayed to God,

“When You were on earth, You made blind eyes see. Now, I pray, make seeing eyes blind. Do not let the guards see those things You do not want them to see.”⁶

With the seats of his Volkswagen piled high with illegal Bibles and Christian literature, he passed through safely to the other side. He would repeat this same prayer many times, and experience the same outrageous answer again and again.

Brother Andrew was so committed to the idea that prayer accomplishes the impossible that in 1983 (years after the publication of the book *God's Smuggler*), he organized a seven-year prayer vigil to move something a lot bigger than a mountain. He wanted to tear down the Iron Curtain, the physical/political border keeping millions in spiritual darkness. Did it work? All evidence is that the wall came down right on schedule. It was on November 9, 1989, that cheering throngs tore down the most visible symbol of the Iron Curtain in Europe—the Berlin Wall. Brother Andrew joyfully recounted, "(A)fter more than thirty years of smuggling Bibles ... not a single Christian leader remains in a prison or concentration camp in the Soviet Union for his faith!"⁷

7.4 AFFLICTED WITH CHRISTIAN FATALISM

Later in life, Brother Andrew wrote a little book about prayer titled, *And God Changed His Mind*. It was written as a clarion call to Christians, pleading with them to wake up and re-examine how they are praying. Brother Andrew believed that a spiritual malady called "Christian fatalism" was crippling the Body of Christ. What was he talking about? The view of millions of Western Christians, based on faulty theological logic, that prayer doesn't actually affect real change on planet earth.

Fatalism is a paralyzing disease that has invaded the body of Christ with disastrous consequences. It infects its victims with complacency and apathy that immobilize their will to

resist evil while eroding their determination to accomplish the great work of Christ.⁸

Getting right to the point, Brother Andrew was talking about those whose prayers are controlled by the idea that everything that happens is inevitably "God's will." Brother Andrew says, "Coming at prayer like that is a sure way to destroy its effectiveness."⁹ I have found that virtually all the great pray-ers in history would agree with him (even John Calvin¹⁰). When you read their works, the powerful intercessors are not attempting to engage God as a metaphysical mystery. They have learned to engage Him as a simple, kind, interactive Person. (It's worth noting that Brother Andrew's book, *And God Changed His Mind*, makes much of what God said about Himself in Exodus 34:6, but we will hold off on that for now. First, we will discuss "Christian fatalism" a little more.)

7.5 WHY DO WE DO THAT?

"Christian fatalism" is the result of a little mental game we were trained to play. It becomes so ingrained in our thinking that we do it unconsciously. It flows from the premise that we understand (see) the One who cannot be seen—God in His infinite mode. This then leads us to believe that we understand how this infinite God controls the universe—He forces every little detail to conform to some predetermined script called "His will" (theologians like to call this His hidden counsel). This mental process then dictates how we pray—"If it be Thy will," which of course means that whatever happens is de facto exactly what was supposed to happen. Life or

death, healing or sickness, salvation or damnation, everything inevitably turns out just as God "wants" it to.

When we pray, "If it be Thy will," we are affirming a couple of things. First, we are saying, "God, I don't have a clue what You want to do in this situation." We are also saying, "I submit to whatever happens and will assume that whatever comes to pass is what You wanted all along." From this perspective, when the baby dies, that is understood to be "God's will." When terrorists in the Middle East cut off the heads of dozens of women and children (which literally happened just days before I wrote this¹¹), this horrific event only took place because it was ultimately what God wanted (or "willed"). Brother Andrew illustrates how this thinking works by recounting an actual conversation he heard between two Christian women during a different hostage crisis:

"I feel sorry for those poor men and their families ... but really, this is God's problem, not ours. We have to remember that He has already decided how their stories are going to turn out." The other woman sighed, "Yes," she said, "but it's frustrating! It seems we're all being held hostage by the evil people of this world" The first woman then patted her friend's arm. "Well, that's how it looks," she said comfortingly, "but we know God has His reasons for these things. Even when we don't understand those reasons, we can be sure that nothing happens outside His will."¹²

Again, this is all the result of human logic attempting to ascend to the heavens and understand things the Bible tells us are too awesome for us. One of the main points of this book is to emphasize the fact that God in His infinite mode is beyond our ability to understand, much less pray to. **"No one can see Me and live."** Anyone who really hopes to experience the miraculous in prayer needs to resist the temptation to try to figure out infinite God. In spite of how logically compelling this may seem, it will never move a mountain, or a wall, or heal a baby.

We need to learn how to vigorously engage God on the channel He has given us—God in a human form, the God revealed in the words of *The Derakim* and the Person of Jesus Christ. How this relates to God in His uncreated, infinite mode is none of our business. Leave it alone. We can't do the math, decipher the code, or understand the physics (see Chapter 2). This is precisely why God had to come down to us and take on a human form. Is this all there is to Him? Of course not, but it's more than enough for us to deal with. **"The fulness of deity dwells in bodily form"** (Colossians 2:9). But we have such a hard time accepting the fact that we can't ascend to the heavens and search out the infinite with our finite intellect. So humor me as I use yet another example to prove how limited our little brains are. If the human intellect has cracked the God code ... then I am faster than Usain Bolt.

7.6 I'M FASTER THAN USAIN BOLT (?)

About 500 years before Jesus was born, there was a Greek philosopher named Zeno who liked to mess with people's minds by creating unsolvable logical puzzles. In one of them,

commonly referred to as "Zeno's paradox," he uses iron-clad logic that "proves" that an out-of-shape, middle-aged pastor—me—can beat the fastest sprinter in the world in his prime—that would be Usain Bolt. I only need Mr. Bolt to give me a slight head start. The logic is flawless, and in 2500 years no one has solved the puzzle. (This may all seem irrelevant to the topic of prayer, but just hang in there.)

Here is how the impenetrable logic of Zeno's paradox works. Suppose that Mr. Bolt is twice as fast as I am. If he gives me a 20-meter head start, by the time he reaches my original starting point, I have gone 10 additional meters. (The math here isn't hard. He is twice as fast as I am.) When he covers that additional 10 meters, I have then gone an additional 5 meters. When he covers that 5, then I have gone 2.5. The increments will continually get smaller, but according to the logic he will never catch me. Ever. The race could be 100 meters or 1 million miles. I will forever be in front of him. (This puzzle works with any mathematical variable you choose. It's just cleaner with $2x$ as fast.)

The only problem with Zeno's paradox is that the logic doesn't pan out in the real world. Usain Bolt will always win, 100 times out of 100. The exact same thing can be said of so many people's "logic" concerning prayer. "If it be Thy will" prayer may seem to be the result of iron-clad theological logic. The only problem is that it just doesn't line up with what the great intercessors say happens in the real world, and it doesn't look anything like the prayers found in Scripture. Only a deluded person would tenaciously hold to Zeno's logic and "bet the farm" on me over Mr. Bolt. In the same way, only a theologically deluded person (who thinks

they can "see what can't be seen") will doggedly hold to Christian fatalism over mountain-moving prayer.

7.7 THAT'S CRAZY

In many Christian circles, the very suggestion that we strike the phrase "if it be Thy will" from our prayers is beyond offensive, bordering on the blasphemous. The first time I heard someone attack "if it be Thy will" praying, I too was in shock. Why? Because it has been so deeply ingrained in us. We really believe that it is the epitome of proper Christian prayer. Praise God that years ago He tore down this stronghold in my mind. (I virtually never pray, "If it be Thy will," any more). A person bound by Christian fatalism will simply not be experiencing the fullness of God's blessings and power. In fact, this perspective can utterly wreck them.

"Christian fatalists" down through the centuries love to quote that famous poem by William Cowper (1731-1800), one of England's greatest poets. Cowper's overarching message is this: Whatever happens—good or bad, life or death, deliverance or disaster—it is inevitably what God wants to happen, "His will." Just submit. Don't fight it. Trust, smile, and keep praying, "If it be Thy will."

God moves in a mysterious way—His wonders to perform—
 He plants His footsteps in the sea—
 And rides upon the storm. Deep in unfathomable mines—
 of never failing skill—He treasures up His bright designs—
 And works His sovereign will. Ye fearful saints, fresh courage

take-The clouds ye so much dread-Are big
 with mercy, and shall break-In blessings on
 your head. Judge not the Lord by feeble
 sense-But trust Him for his grace-Behind a
 frowning providence-He hides a smiling face.
 His purposes will ripen fast-Unfolding ev'ry
 hour-The bud may have a bitter taste-But
 sweet will be the flow'r. Blind unbelief is sure
 to err-And scan His work in vain-God is His
 own interpreter-And He will make it plain.¹³

Allow me to let you in on a little secret. William Cowper, the author of the famous poem above, literally lost his mind. He repeatedly attempted suicide, and died completely insane. Some defenders of his theology will chalk up his inner chaos to something else, but I have simply found too many similar cases down through history. Calmly submitting to horrific things—like terrorism, sexual abuse, genocide, and childhood cancer—is psychologically and spiritually crippling.

Praying, "If it be Thy will," as if evil things are somehow what God "wants," turns the idea of "God's goodness" and "God's love" into a hash. (As we said in the last chapter, this also makes Him impossible to imitate.) On the other hand, walking with God as He revealed Himself in Jesus Christ and in the words of *The Derakim* is a completely different story. "Good" simply means "good," and God is good. As a rule, He doesn't like babies dying, people trapped in spiritual darkness, cancer, poverty, homelessness, etc. Why? Because such things are "bad." Here is a general rule to follow, with few exceptions—He wants us to pray for good things, and fight against bad things. This is "His will" in prayer.

7.8 JESUS WALKS IN THE ROOM

Let's play a little imagination game to cut right to the heart of the matter. Return with me to that tragic prayer meeting I mentioned above. We are all looking helplessly at a little baby succumbing to the ravages of cancer. No one knows what to do ... but just then Jesus Christ somehow miraculously manifests in our midst. Jesus is in the pew right next to me, looking at that terrified child sitting in her parents' arms and peering out above the over-sized surgical mask. What will He do, the One who is the perfect fulfillment of these words—**"compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, and great in lovingkindness and faithfulness"**? What is "God's will" now?

Everyone knows exactly what Jesus, *The Derakim* with skin on, will do. We can read about dozens of similar situations in the Gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. While all of His confused disciples are fumbling around trying to figure out what "God's will" is, Jesus will stride right up to the front of the sanctuary and take that little baby in His arms. Then He will say something like, **"I am willing, be cleansed"** (Matthew 8:3). Or maybe He will lay His hands upon the precious little child and say, **"Talitha kum!" (which translated means, 'Little girl, I say to you, arise!')** (Mark 5:41). Or perhaps Jesus will really mess with our scientific Western sensibilities and cast a demon of infirmity out. Then He will explain to all of us (disciples), who were all so fuzzy on just what "God's will" means, why we couldn't get God's business done.

Then the disciples came to Jesus privately and said, "Why could we not cast it out?" And He said to them, "Because of the littleness of your faith. I tell you truly that if you have faith as big as a mustard seed, you will say to this mountain, 'Move from here to there,' and it will move; and nothing will be impossible for you." (Matthew 17:19-20)

Over a quarter-century after that tragic prayer meeting, I still feel a tightness in my chest when I think about it. It's beyond frustrating to sit helplessly by while a baby dies, and think, *Maybe this is what God wants*. Where does that frustration come from? It comes from the fact that we are made in the image of God. Something deep within us finds evil things revolting, and the idea that we should just submit to them is also revolting. What my soul was yearning to cry out that night was this—"God, I refuse to quietly submit to a baby dying of cancer, or to poverty, or to mental illness, or to the eternal damnation of a single soul, and I am going to rage against them all ... because this is Your will." (Sounds sort of like Brother Andrew.)

7.9 DELVING DEEPER INTO HISTORY

Brother Andrew types are pretty uncommon today, so it's tempting to think that he was some sort of strange historical anomaly. Nothing could be further from the truth. He was walking in lockstep with the greatest kingdom-movers and shakers who ever lived, the men and women who shook nations. We just don't pass around their books anymore.

In preparation for writing this chapter, I perused many of the greatest works on prayer ever penned. As I did this, three books in particular rose to the top of the heap. All of them were written over a century ago. What qualifies these three books as the best of the best? Among other things, the authors were widely respected Christian leaders, and their books had world-shaking impact.

The finalists are George Mueller's massive *Life of Trust* (1878),¹⁴ Andrew Murray's *With Christ in the School of Prayer* (1885),¹⁵ and R. A. Torrey's *How to Pray* (1900).¹⁶ These three authors lived on different continents and had different theological backgrounds, but they had massive overlap in their understanding of how prayer works. They were all among the most influential Christians in their day, and they all saw God move in ways virtually unknown in our time. The most famous among them was George Mueller. He was world-renowned for the jaw-dropping miracles that were always happening around him. At times he could pray and even change the weather. It's worth noting that Mueller's goal in life was to put himself on display so that Christians everywhere would know what is possible through prayer.

The other two authors I chose had absolutely amazing lives, as well (and both of them loved and respected Mueller¹⁷). What do I mean by "amazing lives?" Not too long after Torrey's book was published (1900), for instance, "the great global awakening" erupted. This was a decade of God's power that swept through entire nations. The match was first struck in Australia in 1903 under the preaching of Torrey. At its peak, out of a population of 1 million in the Melbourne region, 250,000 were attending meetings. This move of God soon spread like wildfire around the globe—Wales, the Unit-

ed States, England, Scotland, China, India, etc. Millions of lives were transformed by the gospel.¹⁸

One thing we can say with certainty is that all three of these great pray-ers were definitely not "Christian fatalists." If they were with us today, they would all agree with Brother Andrew and say, "Stop submitting to anything and everything that happens and calling it 'God's will.'" They would then tell us that we must learn how to discover God's will, and then hold fast to it in faith until mountains move.

7.10 SO WHAT IS GOD'S WILL?

In all the greatest books on prayer, discerning "God's will" is not overly complicated. There is a little more to it, but a massive part of it is learning how to dig God's promises out of the Scripture and then apply them to the circumstances of life. (It has nothing to do with thinking about "God's secret counsel" or "His hidden will.")

All through Scripture there are dozens of definite things that God says He will do for us if we will only ask in faith. It's all pretty "cut and dried," as they say. Simply believe that He will do what He said He will do. For instance, if a Christian needs wisdom they claim the promise found in James 1:5: **"If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask God ... and it will be given."** If they need supernatural power for service, a clear promise is found in Luke 11:13: **"... How much more will God give the Holy Spirit to those who ask?"** If they need cleansing and restoration, 1 John 1:9 says, **"If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and**

cleanses us from all unrighteousness." If a Christian lacks inner peace, they can claim Philippians 4:6-7:

Don't be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let God know your requests. And God's peace, which is beyond all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.

Allow me to qualify this a little bit. Of course, we need to pray in the name of Jesus and be in a right relationship with God. Only a born-again Christian has free access to God's throne room (Hebrews 4:16), but unconfessed sin can hinder the process (e.g., 1 Peter 3:7; Psalm 15:1-3, 66:18; et al.). But if all other things are in order, all we need to do is take the biblical promises to the bank of heaven and cash them.

Mueller refers to this process of claiming God's promises as "the grace of faith," and says it is available to all born-again Christians at all times. This was Mueller's main source of spiritual fuel. He was so committed to this process that he spent hours daily praying over an open Bible, searching for new promises He might have overlooked.

7.11 1 JOHN 5:14-15

Mountain-movers down through history make much of 1 John 5:14-15, because it is arguably the clearest biblical statement on the subject of "God's will" as it relates to prayer. The verses not only tell us that God's will can be known, they

also tell us that once it is discovered an answer from God is guaranteed.

This is the confidence which we have before Him, that if we ask anything according to His will, He hears us. And if we know that He hears us *in* what we ask, we know that we have the requests which we have asked from Him.

Torrey argues that this is actually one of the most abused passages in the Bible. Christian fatalists try to use it to encourage submission to whatever comes. "Oftentimes when one waxes confident in prayer, some cautious brother will come and say: 'Now, don't be too confident ... You should put in, "If it be Thy will."'"" Torrey argues that this passage teaches the exact opposite:

(T)his passage was not put into the Bible in order that we might introduce "ifs" into all our prayers, but in order that we might throw our "ifs" to the wind, and have "confidence" and "know that we have the petitions which we have asked of Him."¹⁹

Murray also makes much of the certainty spoken of in 1 John 5:14-15, and says,

If no answer comes, we are not to sit down in the sloth that calls itself resignation, and suppose that it is not God's will to give an answer. No, there must be something in the prayer that is not as God would have it. Child-like and believing, we must seek for grace to pray so that the answer may come.... It is one of the terrible marks of the diseased state of Christian life in these days, that there are so many who rest content without the distinct experience of answer to prayer. They pray daily, they ask many things, and trust that some of them will be heard, but know little of direct definite answer to prayer as the rule of daily life.²⁰

This is how all the greatest intercessors in history viewed prayer—Mueller, Murray, Torrey, Brother Andrew, and a host of others. There is a little more to it (I would encourage anyone interested to start pushing into the great prayer literature for themselves), but the fact is that in terms of their overarching understanding of prayer, this is how it works.

7.12 CAN WE ALWAYS KNOW GOD'S WILL?

This will inevitably raise the question, "Can we always know what God wants in a specific situation?" The common answer among the great intercessors is, "Not always, but" They would be quick to emphasize the fact that you can know God's specific will in many, if not most, of the important situations of life. Over his lifetime, Mueller recorded over

50,000 specific answers to prayer, and he has a very helpful way of breaking this all down.

Mueller makes a distinction between what he calls the "grace of faith" and the "gift of faith." The first category of faith is what was talked about above—it's largely a matter of finding God's promises in Scripture, and standing upon them. "The grace of faith" is like cashing a check. We just need to take the time to find all the promises.

Mueller also talked about another category of faith, when a definite promise in Scripture cannot be found, when there is no clear statement in the Bible saying, "If you ask for 'X,' God will give it." In these situations, Mueller said that a person needs to seek a special "gift of faith." Basically, this is when God speaks to a believer through a combination of things, letting them know what He wants (or wills) in a situation. This latter category is sort of "next level" stuff, and takes a lot more practice and maturity to discern. (I would suggest that all interested disciples go sit at Mueller's feet and learn here.²¹) His overall thinking, however, is pretty straightforward. Mueller gives an example: "The grace of faith is needed to believe that the Lord will give me the necessities of life ... for there is a promise to that effect." But there are some things, like healing, that God has given us no standing promises for. Mueller states, "The gift of faith would be needed to believe that a sick person should be restored again ... for there is no promise to that effect."²² (In Scripture, it's clear that God has a preference for healing. But unlike things such as forgiveness, wisdom, and provision, there are no biblical promises that guarantee it one hundred percent of the time.)

When Mueller had a definite biblical promise to stand on, he would simply believe until the answer came. When there was no definite promise, he would seek God for that special "gift of faith." In such cases powerful answers would often come because he would receive "the gift" ... but not always. For instance, when Mueller's elderly wife was dying, he did not feel he had any definite promise in Scripture to stand on. He had seen God heal many people through the years, but this time the special "gift of faith" for healing was not given. Why? It was his wife's time to depart and be with Christ (she was 73 years old). Since Mueller had no definite ground of faith to stand on, he could not pray for her healing with absolute confidence.²³

The main thing to note here is that Mueller was always seeking to know one definite thing when he prayed—"God's will." He was not (like so many of us have been taught to do) submitting to the inevitable. This is one of the great keys to his life of mountain-moving prayer—finding God's definite will in a given situation. **"Faith is the assurance of what we hope for, the conviction of what we do not see"** (Hebrews 11:1).

The above is one of the great keys to intercession that has been lost in our time. But there is another key that is even more fundamental to effective praying—deeply knowing the God who made the promises.

7.13 "HALLOWED BE YOUR NAME"

The most well-known prayer among Christians of all stripes is The Lord's Prayer (Matthew 6:9-13). It begins, "Our

Father Who is in heaven, hallowed be Your name." What is Jesus's point? Ultimately, what we're talking about here is God's true identity. In biblical times, to say you knew someone's name meant that you *really* knew them. What Jesus is telling us is that if we are going to pray effectively, it's of utmost importance that we get our vision of God straight. Just who is it we are talking to? We have to get this first piece right—His name—or the whole prayer train can quickly derail.

It's only after Jesus challenges us to think about who God really is, His name, that He transitions to the idea of making requests for specific things. **"Your kingdom come, Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven."** We will truly have confidence in all of God's promises and stand firm in "His will" once we see clearly who He is—i.e., know His name. Enter *The Derakim*.

Right before God spoke *The Derakim* to Moses, He said that He knew Moses's name. **"For you have found favor in My sight, and I have known you by name"** (Exodus 33:17). This means that God saw deeply into Moses's heart, his person, and He liked what He saw.

God then turns around and says something absolutely astonishing. He is now going to let Moses see deeply into His heart, His Person. **"I Myself will make all My goodness pass before you, and I will proclaim the name of the LORD before you"** (Exodus 33:19). God says this right before He defines Himself in Exodus 34:6. What this means is that *The Derakim* is not just a string of random adjectives about God. It's a revelation of His name, a stunning look into His Person, His heart.²⁴ In fact, *The Derakim* is God's longest

name, and until Jesus comes it is also the deepest and most revealing. It truly tells us who "HE IS."²⁵ In the minds of the biblical authors, *The Derakim* is what should come to our minds when we say the word "God."

This means that millions around the world are quoting The Lord's Prayer, yet failing to honor its meaning. They don't really know God's name (in the biblical sense of "know"), and because of this they can have no confidence about the sorts of things He wants to do for them. If we are praying to the God described by *The Derakim*, the God revealed in Jesus, we are simply expecting a kind and compassionate friend to keep His promises to us.

Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. Because everyone who asks will receive, and he who seeks will find, and to the one who knocks it will be opened. ... If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father who is in heaven give what is good to those who ask Him? (Matthew 7:7-11)

7.14 THE FOUNDATION OF INTERCESSION

Priests, prophets, and psalmists in the Bible constantly refer back to *The Derakim*. They know that because of what God said about Himself there is always hope, and all His promises can be trusted. The first time we see this sort of appeal

to *The Derakim* is by Moses himself, about one year after he first heard the words. Here we find Moses in a situation that looks a lot like Exodus 32. Israel is once again on the brink of total annihilation. Why? The people have once again seemingly pushed God to His limit. He says, "**How long will this people spurn Me? ... I am going to strike them down and take away their possession**" (Numbers 14:11-12). Moses doesn't say, "Spare them ... if it be Thy will." Since Moses now has a much clearer understanding of who God is, he knows *The Derakim*, he prays with a new confidence.

"But now, I pray, let the power of the LORD be great, just as You have declared, 'The LORD is slow to anger and great in lovingkindness ...' Pardon, I pray, the iniquity of this people according to the greatness of Your lovingkindness." (Numbers 14:17-19)

Moses is clearly referring back to that amazing revelation of God's glory, His ways, and His name—*The Derakim*. How does God respond? "**So the LORD said, 'I have pardoned them according to your word'**" (Numbers 14:20).

From this point on in Scripture we find prophets, psalmists, and saints pointing back to the words of *The Derakim*, the name of God, as the foundation for faith-filled prayer. Listen, for example, to how the prophet Joel (centuries after Moses) encourages God's people during a season of rebellion. The nation is beginning to "reap what they have sown," but Joel reminds them that because of *The Derakim*, everything can still turn around in a heartbeat.

“Yet even now,” declares the LORD, “Return to Me with all your heart, and with fasting, weeping and mourning; and let your hearts be ripped, and not just your clothes.” Now return to the LORD your God, because He is gracious and compassionate, slow to anger, great in lovingkindness ... (Joel 2:12-13)

We also find the words of *The Derakim* frequently in prayers throughout the book of Psalms. An example of this that has already been noted is Psalm 51, which David penned after committing adultery and murder. (The notation on the Psalm reads, "For the music director. A Psalm of David, when the prophet Nathan went to him, after he slept with Bathsheba.") David deserves death, but in this seemingly hopeless situation he knows there is always hope in the words that God spoke to Moses. The connection here is easy to miss for English speakers, but in the first line alone, David mentions three of the five attributes of *The Derakim*. "Be gracious to me, God, according to Your lovingkindness. According to the greatness of Your compassion, wipe out my transgression" (Psalm 51:1).

Let's put all the pieces together. According to Scripture, mountain-moving intercession is about finding the definite will of God in a situation. To do this we should first be honoring God's name—focusing on who He really is. He is a kind, compassionate Father who wants to do good for us. He is the God of *The Derakim*. Then we should be ransacking the Bible (like George Mueller did) to find all the promises

He has made to us. If our hands are clean and our hearts are pure, and we are coming in the name of Jesus, we can bring these promises before God in the same way we cash a check at the bank. "God said it. I believe it. That settles it!" Then all we need to do is hold fast until the answer comes.

7.15 A BETTER PRAYER MEETING

Right around the time of that tragic prayer meeting mentioned above, the Sunday School class I was teaching was facing a similar crisis. Before each teaching session, we would have a brief time of prayer. On this particular Sunday we received tragic news. A young woman in our class named Lisa was in the hospital, and things looked bleak. She was pregnant with twins and they were coming way too early. All medical evidence indicated that they wouldn't make it. A few members of the class offered up the typical prayers of submission, "If it be Thy will." Then my wife, who was pregnant at the time with our third son, surprised us all by manifesting a bit of real New Testament faith.

My wife is not the most outspoken person, and she definitely doesn't like drawing attention to herself. But on this occasion, a fire I had never seen before rose up in her. First, she lovingly rebuked the whole class by saying something like, "What if that were you in the hospital and those were your babies? How would you want people to pray for you?" Then she really shocked us by saying, "We know it's not God's will that those babies die." She then proceeded to offer heartfelt, pleading prayers for God to intervene.

I was just getting my theology readjusted at the time, so I wrestled with what my wife was saying. Could we really be certain of "God's will" in this situation? I prayed to God and said, "Please confirm what Susan is saying with Your Word." Immediately my mind flashed to the Scripture, "**I don't delight in the death of anyone who dies,' says the LORD**" (Ezekiel 18:32). This verse hit me with a new power and light I had not seen before. I thought to myself, *That's good enough for me. I'm going to believe with her.* Long story short, my wife pressed into prayer all that day. Today those babies are healthy young women in their mid-twenties.

7.16 TWO TYPES OF PRAY-ERS

Throughout Christian history, we find two radically different types of pray-ers. The first type are those who think that, technically speaking, prayer changes nothing at all. These folks would nod approvingly at the words of one of the most influential religious figures of the last century, who said, "I used to believe that prayer changes things, but now I know that prayer changes us."²⁶ Whether these folks realize it or not, when they pray like this they are not thinking about God as He described Himself in *The Derakim*. They are not thinking about God in the way He revealed Himself in the Person of Jesus Christ. They are attempting to see what cannot be seen. This has led them to conclude that prayer must be for some other purpose than to actually change outcomes. For them, prayer is largely about submission to some mysterious master plan of God. As one well-known theologian said,

Prayer is a coming to God, telling Him my need
... committing my way unto the Lord, and then
leaving Him to deal with the case as seems best
to Him.²⁷

The second group sees things very differently. These are the mountain-movers. When you read their books and biographies, you find them pleading and wrestling with God like Moses and Elijah in Scripture.²⁸ They believe that their prayers really heal the sick, raise the dead, open blind eyes, and even change the weather. They aren't so concerned with all the mechanics and metaphysics of prayer, they just know that it moves things around. They pray as if the following statement is true, plainly and simply, without any caveat or qualification—**"The fervent prayer of the righteous can accomplish great things"** (James 5:16).

What type of pray-er are you? Those in category one are trying to engage an immovable, all-controlling God (the one philosophical theologians like to talk about). Those in category two are keeping it simple (K.I.S.S.) and talking to the God who stooped down to us in human form—the God who revealed Himself in the man Jesus Christ.

The two types of pray-ers mentioned above have radically different notions of what "God's will" means when it comes to prayer. The first group believes that "God's will" refers to an unknowable, set-in-stone plan or script that cannot be altered or changed (what theologians down through history have called "God's secret counsel"). The second group understands God's will in a very different way. It's something that needs to be discovered, and then fought for in prayer. The

first group believes "God's will" inspires submission to the inevitable. The second group believes "God's will" inspires "constant, persistent, sleepless, overcoming prayer."²⁹

Therefore, let us confidently draw near to the throne of grace, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in *our* time of need. (Hebrews 4:16)

7:17 THE PROVING GROUND

Biblically speaking, prayer is where "the theological rubber meets the road." Prayer is where a person's religious claims are tested out in the real world. If you are putting the pieces together right, what do you get? Definite answers to prayer. At least, this is what the Bible says. From Genesis to Revelation, those who are doing things right have their prayers answered.

"If anyone is God-fearing and does His will, He hears him. Since the beginning of time it has never been heard that anyone opened the eyes of a person born blind. If this man were not from God, He could do nothing." (John 9:31-33)

Those who are doing things wrong have no answers to prayer. Don't complicate it. This isn't rocket science.

Pay attention! The Lord's hand isn't too short to save you; He isn't hard of hearing, and can't hear. It's your sins that have made a separation between you and your God, and your sins have hidden His face from you so He doesn't hear. (Isaiah 59:1-2)

Go search through the Bible from start to finish. For the patriarchs, apostles, and prophets, God is an interactive Person who listens and *actually* answers. God has real emotion, real deliberation, real response. They never pray, "If it be Thy will." Prayer is not superfluous. Far from it—prayer can change virtually any situation. It can even reverse a pronouncement of God. **"And God changed His mind"** (Exodus 32:14).

Not that long ago, Bible-believing, born-again Christians (from a multitude of denominations) experienced the power and glory of God in ways similar to the biblical apostles and prophets. **"Who by faith conquered kingdoms, performed acts of righteousness, obtained promises, shut the mouths of lions, etc"** (Hebrews 11:33). Unfortunately, today we are largely ignoring their testimonies, and for all intents and purposes we have thrown these books into the sea of forgetfulness.

If these giants of the faith were here today, they would tell us that praying rightly is the key to their astonishing lives. The preface to George Mueller's book calls prayer "a transcendent power, accomplishing what no other power can, overruling all other agencies, and rendering them subservient to

its own wonderful efficiency."³⁰ R. A. Torrey says, "Prayer is God's appointed way for obtaining things, and the great secret of all lack in our experience in our life and in our work is neglect of prayer."³¹ Andrew Murray states,

It is the very essence of true religion, the channel of all blessings, the secret of power and life. Not only for ourselves, but for others, for the Church, for the world, it is to prayer that God has given the right to take hold of Him and His strength. It is on prayer that the promises wait for their fulfillment, the kingdom for its coming, the glory of God for its full revelation. And for this blessed work, how slothful and unfit we are.³²

But is this all really such a big deal? Can't we just chalk up our differing opinions on prayer to "different strokes for different folks?" No, this issue is vital. What it really comes down to is that one group of Christians down through history prays, expects virtually nothing, and gets virtually nothing, while another group of Christians expects mountains to move and sees mountains move.

The clarifying question is this—Who/What are you praying to? Are you praying to: 1. God who cannot be seen, some philosophical notion of an ultimate being, or 2. God who can be seen, the Person ultimately revealed in Jesus Christ? Sadly, millions of Christians today would have to answer, "Option 1." There is one quick litmus test you can take. Are your prayers punctuated by the statement, "If it be Thy

will"? If so, this means that (whether you know it or not) you have been taken captive by philosophical theology. Down deep, what you really believe is that there is no use asking God for anything; all the decisions have already been made. This, I humbly suggest, is not some secondary theological issue. It is a demonic stronghold that is keeping millions from the riches of their spiritual inheritance.

See to it that no one takes you captive through philosophy and empty deception, according to the tradition of men, according to the elementary principles of the world, rather than according to Christ. For in Him all the fullness of Deity dwells in bodily form. (Colossians 2:8-9)

7:18 SO MUCH MORE TO LEARN

In closing, allow me to give you a little "heads up" here. This is in no way a comprehensive study on how to pray. This is just a bird's eye view of how it works. *Pray to the God described by the words of The Derakim, and tenaciously hold to His word until mountains move.* If you start down this track today, you are not going to be George Mueller by next week. There is so much more to say about the subject. My suggestion would be to go sit at the feet of the Muellers, Murrays, and Torreys of Christian history. You will learn that, although there is a clear pattern to how it all works, there are some rare exceptions. Sometimes God is up to bigger things than we understand at the time. What we are

talking about are those one-in-a-hundred occasions when God doesn't do the obvious good that we might expect (e.g., the death of David's infant son in 2 Samuel 12:15-18, Jesus's refusal to go and heal His friend Lazarus in John 11:1-45, or Paul's "thorn in the flesh" in 2 Corinthians 12:7-9). But remember, these are called exceptions. The rule is still the rule. You should begin with the assumption that God wants to do good things—save, deliver, and heal.

The long and short of it all is that to become an effective intercessor will take a lifetime of study and practice, hit and miss, trial and error. Remember that even Jesus's disciples couldn't pull off the whole faith thing at times. But if you never start on this track, and you get stuck in the "if it be Thy will" rut of the Christian fatalist, I can tell you on good authority that you will never see a mountain moved.

The great intercessors of history have a very simple way of engaging God. Check the literature for yourself. We need to listen to these amazing men and women of faith. I will conclude this chapter with a quote from Amy Carmichael, another heroic mountain-mover from the past that you should get to know.

More and more as we go on, and learn our utter inability to move a single pebble by ourselves, and the mighty power of God to upturn mountains with a touch, we realize how infinitely important it is to know how to pray. ... (S)ome of us must learn deeper things than we know yet about the solemn secret of prevailing prayer.³³

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1. The word *thelema* is often used of God, but it can be used of anyone, including those whose desires are contrary to God's. For instance, Jesus was given over to the *thelama* of the wicked crowd. "**And he (Pilate) delivered Jesus to their will (*thelema*)**" (Luke 23:25).
 2. See discussion on "Thy will be done" in Chapter 6, Section 8.
 3. *Institutes* 3.20.37 (Battles translation [London: Westminster Press, 1960]).
 4. Brother Andrew's *God's Smuggler* was ranked number 37 on the *Christianity Today* "Top 50 books that have shaped Evangelicalism." (October, 2006)
 5. Countries on the "closed" (east) side of the Iron Curtain included the U.S.S.R., Poland, East Germany, Czechoslovakia, Hungary, Romania, Bulgaria, Yugoslavia, and Albania.
 6. Brother Andrew, John Sherrill, Elizabeth Sherrill, *God's Smuggler* (Grand Rapids MI:Fleming H. Revell Company, 1967), 100.
 7. Brother Andrew, *And God Changed His Mind* (Fountain Valley, CA: Chosen Books, 1990), 17.
 8. *Ibid.*, 22.
 9. *Ibid.*, 54.

10. I have never met a "Calvinist" who has much to say about the Reformer's writings on prayer, one of the longest chapters in *Institutes* (book 3, chapter 20). This is undoubtedly because Calvin says so many things that today's "Calvinists" find so un-Calvinistic. In the first place, Calvin never encourages people to pray, "If it be Thy will." Why not? Anyone who has carefully read this book up to this point should be able to answer this question. Saying, "If it be Thy will," is an appeal to God in His incomprehensible mode of existence.
11. I was finishing this chapter up at the outbreak of the 2023 Israel-Hamas war. Reports that the terror organization Hamas was decapitating women and children were widespread.
12. *And God Changed His Mind*, 11-12.
13. This poem was penned in 1773 and originally titled, "Light Shining out of Darkness."

14. This book is largely a condensed version of the earlier four volume work, *A Narrative Of Some Of The LORD's Dealings With George Mueller*. The publisher states, "To reproduce the work in its original form was attended with difficulty. The 'Narrative,' in four parts ... would occupy not less than eighteen hundred pages The cost of such a work would greatly limit its circulation and its usefulness, if indeed any publisher should undertake its issue. There seemed no alternative except to abandon the idea of an American edition altogether, or to present it to the public in a condensed form." George Mueller, *Life of Trust* (Boston: Gould and Lincoln, Sheldon and Company, 1868), v.
15. A Dutch Reformed minister, Murray was one of the most influential Christian leaders in his day. He wrote over 70 books on topics ranging from prayer to parenting. He was also friends with the great leaders of the day, like D. L. Moody, A. T. Pierson, and C. H. Spurgeon, and was widely sought out as a teacher. Murray's most impressive credential, however, was not his literary or speaking attainments. His most noteworthy credential is the fact that he regularly saw the power of God move in his ministry. Among other things, he was at the epicenter of a move of God that hit South Africa in 1860-61, sweeping thousands into the kingdom of God.

16. R. A. Torrey's *How to Pray* (1900) has largely been lost and forgotten, perhaps because Christians today are not aware of the astonishing historical circumstances that surrounded it. This little book was written (and circulated around the globe) just prior to one of the greatest moves of God planet earth has ever seen—about ten years of God sweeping millions of people around the world into the kingdom. Torrey not only predicted this astonishing event, he was God's instrument when it first began. See, Geoffrey R. Treloar, "The First Global Revivalist: Reuben Archer Torrey and the 1902 Evangelistic Campaign in Australia," in *Church History* (2021) 90:873-899.
17. Andrew Murray says of George Mueller, "When God wishes anew to teach His Church a truth that is not being understood or practiced, He mostly does so by raising some man to be in word and deed a living witness to its blessedness. And so God has raised up in this nineteenth century, among others, George Mueller to be His witness that He is indeed the Hearer of prayer." Andrew Murray, *With Christ in the School of Prayer* (Toronto: AJ Watson, 1885), 255.
18. For a thorough study of this amazing season of revival around the world, see James Edwin Orr, *The Flaming Tongue: The Impact of 20th Century Revival* (Chicago: Moody, 1973).
19. R. A. Torrey, *How to Pray* (New York: Fleming H. Revell Company, 1900), 56-57.

20. Andrew Murray, *With Christ in the School of Prayer*, 35.
21. (George Mueller's method for determining God's will)
1. I seek to get my heart into such a state that it has no will of its own in a given matter. When we are ready to do the Lord's will—whatever it may be—nine-tenths of the difficulties are overcome.
 2. Having done this, I do not leave the result to feeling or simple impression. If I do so, I make myself liable to great delusions.
 3. I seek the will of the Spirit of God through, or in connection with, God's Word. The Spirit and the Word must be combined. If I look to the Spirit alone without the Word, I lay myself open to great delusions also. If the Holy Spirit guides us, He will do it according to the Scriptures, never contrary to them.
 4. Next I take into account providential circumstances. These often plainly indicate God's will in connection with His Word and Spirit.
 5. I ask God in prayer to reveal His will to me.
 6. Thus, through prayer, the study of the Word and reflection, I come to a deliberate judgment according to the best of my ability and knowledge. If my mind is thus at peace and continues so after two or three more petitions, I proceed accordingly. I have found this method always effective in trivial or important issues. (Appendix C of *Answers to Prayer: from George Mueller's Narratives* [Chicago: Moody Press.]
22. George Mueller, *The Life of Trust*, 93.

23. Someone might point to James 5:14-15. "Is anyone among you sick? He should call for the elders of the church and they should pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord; and the prayer offered in faith will restore the one who is sick, and the Lord will raise him up ..." This passage, however, does not promise healing on every occasion, it simply says that the healing will occur if and when faith for it is present.
24. Again and again, we find the biblical authors connecting the idea of God's "name" (*shem*) to *derakim* attributes like "lovingkindness" (*hesed*). Why? Because to know God's lovingkindness (*hesed*) is what it means to know Him. This is His name. "It's good to give thanks to the LORD, and to sing praises to Your name (*shem*), Most High; To declare Your lovingkindness (*hesed*) in the morning and Your faithfulness by night" (Psalm 92:1-2). "Not to us, O LORD, not to us, but to Your name (*shem*) give glory, because of Your lovingkindness (*hesed*), because of Your faithfulness" (Psalm 115:1). "I will give You thanks with all my heart; I will sing praises to You before the gods. I will bow down toward Your holy temple, and give thanks to Your name (*shem*), because of Your lovingkindness (*hesed*) and Your faithfulness." (Psalm 138:1-2)

25. Someone might point to Exodus 3:13-15 and say, "I thought God's name is '*Yahweh*.'" What needs to be understood is that the name *Yahweh* (translated "LORD" in most English Bibles) is an open-ended name. In Hebrew the word *Yahweh* literally means "He is" This is the most frequently used name of God in the Old Testament (almost 7,000 times). Sometimes *Yahweh* stands by itself, but often it is attached to a word or phrase. Why? The attached phrase further reveals truths about this God named "He is." For instance, "**Yahweh (He is) the God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob**" God then goes on to say, "**This is My memorial name to all generations**" (Exodus 3:15). In another place, God says, "**I am Yahweh (He is) ... a jealous God**" (Exodus 20:5). *The Derakim* follows this same pattern, and is also a further explanation of who "He is." "**Yahweh (He is) a God compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, and great in lovingkindness and faithfulness**" (Exodus 34:6).
26. This famous quote is widely attributed to Mother Teresa of Calcutta, although the idea has been expressed by many down through the ages.
27. Arthur Pink, *The Sovereignty of God* (Swengel, PA: Bible Truth Depot, 1918), 219-220.
28. "Elijah was a person just like us, and he earnestly prayed that it wouldn't rain, and it didn't rain on the earth for three years and six months. Then he prayed again, and rain poured from the sky and the earth produced crops." (James 5:17-18)

29. This phrase "constant, persistent, sleepless, overcoming prayer" is a repeated theme taken from R. A. Torrey's *How to Pray*, 8-31.
30. George Mueller, *The Life of Trust*, xvi.
31. R. A. Torrey, *How to Pray*, 9.
32. Andrew Murray, *With Christ in the School of Prayer*, 2-3.
33. Amy Carmichael, *Lotus Buds* (London: Morgan and Scott Ltd., 1909), 331.