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KEY FOUR: GOD-MOVING PRAYER

How do I pray in a way that actually works?

What the Church needs today is not more machinery or better, not new organizations or more and novel methods, but men whom the Holy Ghost can use—men of prayer, men mighty in prayer. The Holy Ghost does not flow through methods but through men. He does not come on machinery but on men. He does not anoint plans, but men—men of prayer. —E.M. Bounds (1835-1913)¹

GOD WILL SAVE THE DAY

As old schooler R.A. Torrey put it, *Prayer can do anything God can do.*² I have come to believe deeply that God not only has all the power to help us, but He is also more than willing to break in and rescue us if we would only pray

¹ E.M. Bounds, *Power Through Prayer* (London: Marshall Brothers Ltd., 1912), 10.

² *Prayer can do anything God can do; for the arm of God responds to the touch of prayer. All the infinite resources of God are at the command of prayer.* R.A. Torrey, *How to Obtain Fullness of Power* (New York: Fleming H. Revell, 1897), 83. See also his books *How to Pray*, and *The Power of Prayer and the Prayer of Power*.

rightly. The fact is that I am still not all that good at praying, but I would be lying if I said I have not seen God smash in and save the day on numerous occasions—provision, guidance, peace, power, healing, salvations, victory over sin, deliverance, etc.³ For example ...

KEVIN’S COCAINE ADDICTION

My friend Kevin grew up in a hellish home. As a little boy, he lived in perpetual terror that his mentally unstable dad was going to murder him. Imagine being a little kid and wondering if this is the day when dad chokes the life out of you or beats it out of you. When Kevin was a teenager, he discovered marijuana and said it was sweet relief—a little vacation from his psychotic father. You can probably guess where the story goes from here. It wasn’t long before his “sweet relief” had morphed into a full-blown battle with cocaine.

Kevin and I became fast friends when he was living in a Christian halfway house, a place for recovering addicts to reacclimate to society. I went there to teach weekly Bible studies, and Kevin and I hit it off. He soon prayed to surrender to Jesus, and I had the privilege of baptizing him. But that cocaine thing kept coming up again and again. It was like some evil parasite that we just couldn’t extract. I knew he was saved, and I knew he wanted to do God’s will, but this addiction seemed too powerful to overcome.

I was praying by myself one day, and my thoughts turned to Kevin. I began to see this addiction as Satan’s strategy to

³As a young Christian, a little book that got me started in a life of prayer, and introduced me to many of the old schoolers, was Dick Eastman’s *No Easy Road* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1971). This is usually the first book on prayer I recommend to young disciples.

humiliate one of God's beloved children and spit in God's face. I started to get mad ... no, I got downright furious. I prayed like I seldom have before or since. A strange confidence rose up inside me (the old schoolers called it faith). I demanded—yes, *demanded*—that God the Father do what any good father would do in a situation like this—*GO AND RESCUE YOUR SON!* I wasn't being disrespectful, and I wasn't complaining. I was just stating what seemed crystal clear to me at the time.

If you, then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give what is good to those who ask Him? (Matthew 7:11)

A good father has a responsibility to step in and rescue his son, so I yelled, I cried, and I demanded ... and God moved (just like the Bible says He will). *Call on Me in the day of trouble; I will rescue you, and you will honor Me (Psalm 50:15).*

The next day I saw Kevin at church. He ran up to me and said, *You will never believe what happened to me last night.* He continued, *I was at the AA house playing cards, and the glory of God came down over me. He just ripped the desire to do crack right out of me.* Kevin went on to tell me that a Christian lady who was there that night could even see it and asked, *What's happening to you?*

I said to Kevin, *Let me tell you what I was doing last night.* I shared with him about my time of intense prayer about his addiction, and we both just stood there dumbfounded, shaking our heads. To this day, years later, we still talk about it—*Remember that time?* (Anyone who wants confirmation of this story, I would be happy to give you Kevin's phone number.)

I believe that if the coming generation rediscovered the biblical teaching on faith and prayer, there would be a lot more “Kevin stories” in our churches.⁴ As I said, I’m not even that good at prayer, but over the years, I have seen some wild and amazing things. The Bible teaches us that God gave us prayer so we could invite Him into our troubles ... so we could move His hand.

MOVING GOD’S HAND

From the very outset, we need to get some clarity. What are we talking about when we refer to the idea of prayer? What does it mean, biblically speaking? Plain and simple, when the idea of prayer is referred to in Scripture, it is almost always talking about this—MOVING GOD TO ACTION, or in biblical terms, MOVING GOD’S HAND.

*Stretch out Your hand to heal, and let signs and wonders take place through the name of your holy servant Jesus.
(Acts 4:30)*

In the Gospel of Luke, Jesus expresses concern that a time will come when people will forget how to pray effectively. He tells a parable about how to move God and then concludes by basically asking, *When I come back at the end of time, will anyone really know how to do this?*

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

⁴ One of the great praying churches in the United States is The Brooklyn Tabernacle in New York. For a life-changing sermon on the subject, listen online to Pastor Jim Cymbala’s “House of Prayer” (<https://youtu.be/U79YOKje2zU>).

Son of Man returns, will He find any faith on earth? (Luke 18:7-8)

Over the last 100 years or so, Jesus's concern has become a reality in many parts of God's church. Few churches even have prayer meetings anymore. Not so long ago, Christians like John Hyde, George Müller, E.M. Bounds, D.L. Moody, Hudson Taylor, Andrew Murray, and many others knew how to do it. If the next generation would only listen to them and look again with fresh eyes at the Scripture, this world would shake.

Many teachings out there tell us that prayer is about everything BUT moving God's hand—*being still before God, refocusing our mind, or submitting to God's mysterious will*. As pious as all this may sound, it just doesn't line up with the testimony of Scripture (check it out for yourself). I don't deny that prayer can involve other things—like praise, thanksgiving, and confession. But from Genesis to Revelation, most prayers are attempts to move God to action. They are cries for God to break in and save the day—guide, provide, protect, defeat the enemy, heal, etc. Let's check out some of the heaviest hitters in the Bible and see how and why they prayed. (*So, what if a person's theology stands in the way of praying like this? Answer: They should humbly ask God if they have been duped.*)

BIBLICAL EVIDENCE

There is arguably no Old Testament hero of greater stature than Moses. Do we have any accounts of him praying? Yes, and as a rule, his prayers are attempts to move God to action. He prays to stop plagues (*Exodus 8:8-13, Numbers 11:2*). He prays for food (*Numbers 11:11-32*). He

prays to heal his sister Miriam from leprosy (*Numbers 12:13-14*). He prays for God to reveal Himself (*Exodus 33:13*). On two occasions, Moses's prayer keeps the sinful nation of Israel from total annihilation (*Exodus 32:11-14; Numbers 14:17-20*). The inescapable conclusion? Moses prays to move God.

What about other heavy hitters like Elijah, one of the most famous of all God's prophets in the Old Testament? What does the evidence show? His prayers move God. The dead are raised when he prays (*1 Kings 17:17-24*). God changes the weather when Elijah prays. After a three-and-a-half-year drought, for instance, he convinces God to cut loose the rain, and God does it (*1 Kings 18:41-46*).

Elijah may be best known for his battle on Mount Carmel with the 450 false prophets of Baal. His prayer in that "heaven versus hell" power struggle is worth quoting here. What is he doing? He is moving God to action, moving God's hand.

O LORD, God of Abraham, Isaac, and Israel, today let it be known that You are God in Israel, and that I am Your servant, and that I have done all these things at Your word. Answer me, LORD, answer me, so that this people may know that You, LORD, are God and that you have turned their heart back again. (1 Kings 18:36b-37)

What does God do in response to Elijah? *Then the fire of the LORD fell (1 Kings 18:38)*, and God's people turned back to Him again.

One of my favorite accounts of prayer in the entire Bible happens when the godly king Hezekiah joins forces with the prophet Isaiah in prayer. The world superpower Assyria was surrounding Jerusalem, mocking God and His people (*2 Chronicles 32:13*). Humanly speaking, the case was

hopeless, but they knew how to pray, and they moved God to action:

But King Hezekiah and Isaiah the prophet, the son of Amoz, prayed about this and cried out to heaven. And the LORD sent an angel who destroyed every mighty warrior, commander, and officer in the camp of the king of Assyria. (2 Chronicles 32:20-21)

Why did God leave so many accounts like this in our Bible? So that we would be inspired to move His hand, too—to *save, heal, guide, provide, and protect.*

I could spend pages and pages reviewing the biblical evidence, but I recommend you do this for yourself. Study the life of great men like Abraham and David, or great women like Hannah and Anna, and you will see that their prayers move God. In one of the great prayers of the Bible, the prophet Daniel cries, *O Lord, listen! O Lord, forgive! O Lord, hear and move! (Daniel 9:19).* Prayer moves God.

The basic thrust does not change at all when we come to the New Testament—*people pray to move God.* Jesus’s teaching on prayer only reaffirms again and again what the Old Testament says (*Luke 11:5-10; 18:1-8*). In fact, the New Testament tells us to look back to that great “God-mover” Elijah as our model for prayer (*James 5:16-18*).

Because prayer moves God to action, the New Testament letters are filled with admonitions to pray. They tell us to be devoted to prayer (*Colossians 4:2*), to be clear-headed for the purpose of prayer (*1 Peter 4:7*). They tell us to pray without ceasing (*1 Thessalonians 5:17*) and *pray at all times in the Spirit ... with all perseverance and petition for all the saints (Ephesians 6:18).* The Bible makes it clear that lack of prayer will lead to lack of blessing (*James 4:2*), and it tells us that if we do it right, amazing things will happen.

Therefore, confess your sins to one another and pray for each other so that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous person is powerful and effective. (James 5:16)

It's no surprise that Jesus's early followers always seemed to be praying. Whenever they got together, they prayed (*Acts 1:14; 2:42*). When they needed wisdom for major decisions, they prayed (*Acts 1:24-25*). When they needed God to break one of their leaders out of prison, they prayed (*Acts 12:1-19*). When they needed power and courage to fulfill their mission ... you get the picture.

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 God's word with boldness. (Acts 4:31)

Why did the early church have all-night prayer meetings? Why did the most powerful Christians in history pray for hours every day? The simple answer is that they believed what the Scriptures teach about prayer—it moves God.

One of the greatest missionaries of all time, John Hyde (1865-1912), was in the habit of praying for hours every day for lost souls. He was also in the habit of leading an average of four souls to Christ every single day. There was no question in his mind that his success at winning souls was directly tied to his praying. He knew that he could move God. This is how he prayed:

But near the closet of John Hyde, we are permitted to hear the sighing and the groaning and to see the tears coursing down his dear face, to see his frame weakened by foodless

*days and sleepless nights, shaken with sobs as he pleads,
“O God, give me souls or I die.”*⁵

Our Bible-believing, born-again forebears, those people I call the old schoolers, knew many things that today’s Christians have lost sight of. For one thing, they knew how to move God. This is precisely why they were willing to put the same sort of blood, sweat, and tears into their prayers that Jesus and His apostles did. *He offered up both prayers and supplications with loud crying and tears (Hebrews 5:7)*. But make special note of this: It’s not just about praying or praying more, it’s about praying *right*.

PRAYING RIGHT

*As long as we look on prayer chiefly as the means of maintaining our own Christian life, we shall not know fully what it is meant to be. But when we learn to regard it as the highest part of the work entrusted to us, the root and strength of all other work, we shall see that there is nothing that we so need to study and practice as the art of praying aright.
—Andrew Murray (1828-1917)*⁶

Virtually everyone on earth prays, but very few people today can move God as Elijah did. The simple fact is that if we aren’t praying to move God’s hand, we will never see any miracles. If we are only praying “to be still before God” or “to surrender to God’s mysterious plan,” we will not see God *rip the heavens open and come down (Isaiah 64:1)*.

⁵ Francis McGaw, *Praying Hyde* (Minneapolis: Bethany Fellowship, 1970), 16.

⁶ Andrew Murray, *With Christ in the School of Prayer* (Toronto: A.G. Watson, 1885), vi.

We really need to focus on what the Bible says about praying correctly from here on out. We can't cover the subject comprehensively, but two absolutely vital principles will be addressed below: 1. praying in faith, and 2. praying in purity. Without these two pillars in place, our prayers will go nowhere.

RECOVERING THE BIBLICAL NOTION OF “FAITH”

And without faith, it is impossible to please God, for the one who comes to Him must believe that He is and that He is a rewarder of those who seek Him. (Hebrews 11:6)

One principle that has arguably been abused, misused, and misunderstood more than almost any in our time is the New Testament notion of *faith*. Getting ahold of this is essential for anyone who wants to see God move in power. This is a subject that the biblical heroes understood but that has been “lost in the sauce” of bad teaching today. To be blunt, without this awesome, mysterious, powerful thing called *faith*, our prayer efforts go nowhere. Again, this is what the Bible says:

But let him ask in faith without any doubting. Because the one who doubts is like the surf of the sea, blown around by the wind. Don't let that person expect to receive anything from the Lord, being doubleminded, unstable in all their ways. (James 1:6)

In the Bible, faith (Gk. *pístis*) usually just means belief. When it is placed in the right thing, like a promise from God, faith sets off His supernatural power. Believe it, and you receive it. It's like lighting a fuse. On the flipside, the Bible

says that without faith, we can expect no miracles from God. If you don't believe it, you won't receive it. There is so much biblical support for this idea that it is a wonder anyone misses it, but they do. Let's check some of the evidence.

On one occasion, Jesus's disciples were stuck. There was a kid with massive demonic problems, and they just couldn't figure out how to help him. Jesus eventually shows up on the scene and the boy's father fills Jesus in on the details. *I brought him to your disciples, and they could not cure him (Matthew 17:16).*

Jesus seems to be more than a bit exasperated at the whole situation. Why? The text makes it perfectly clear—the disciples failed because their faith failed. Read on. Jesus says, *O faithless and perverted generation, how long will I be with you? How long will I put up with you? Bring him here to Me (Matthew 17:17).* Jesus proceeds to heal the boy and then tells the disciples why they couldn't get it done. The explanation couldn't be much clearer—they didn't have faith. (They evidently didn't fully believe what Jesus told them in *Matthew 10:1.*)

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; for truly I say to you, if you have faith the size of 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)

For some reason, many Christians today are offended by this notion that miracles simply won't happen, that God won't act if people don't believe (have faith). What I have discovered over the years is that many (most?) of these offended folks had a similar experience—at some point in

their life, they hit a horrible tragedy. They tried to pray in faith, and nothing happened—no healing, no deliverance, or provision. They lost the job, the house, or the spouse. This disappointment then led them to conclude that *faith* doesn't always deliver.

The hard truth is that no matter what sort of heartache or failure we may have gone through in our past, our experience does not get to trump the clear teaching of Scripture ... and the Bible is pretty clear about how this all works. In the Bible, God *always* responds to right belief (faith), and there is not one single occasion in the New Testament where it says that a person has faith and does not get what they are seeking. On the flip side, the Bible repeatedly says a lack of faith short circuits the power of God. Again, check this out for yourself. There is really no good biblical evidence to the contrary. Anyone willing to do the research will find that this notion of faith runs all the way through the Scripture.

In the Gospels, Jesus wasn't able to do miracles in His hometown. Why? It wasn't because He didn't want to. It was because they didn't believe (have faith). *And He did not do many miracles there because of their lack of faith (Matthew 13:58)*. Do you remember when Peter walked on water? It worked perfectly until his faith gave out. After Jesus rescues him, He says, *O you of little faith, why did you doubt? (Matthew 14:31)*. When miracles happen in Jesus's ministry, He says things like this, *O woman, your faith is great, let the thing you want be done for you (Matthew 15:28)*.

On the other hand, when people don't believe, it frustrates Jesus, as if it ties His hands.⁷ In the Gospel of

⁷ *How is it possible that God Almighty can have His hands tied? Can't He do anything He wants to? Absolutely. And this is what He wanted to*

Mark, lack of faith stymied Jesus's ability to help people, and the text says, *He was amazed at their lack of faith (Mark 6:6)*. When Jesus teaches on prayer, He drives home the vital importance of real faith.

Believe in God! Truly I say to you, whoever 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 for him. So I say to you, all the things you pray for and ask, believe that you have received them, and they will be given to you. (Mark 11:22-24)

This may not be a popular teaching today, but anyone who ever hopes to see miracles needs to hammer through the biblical evidence and learn what faith really is and how to uncork the supernatural with it. (Remember Jesus's concern in Luke 18—*Will anyone know how to do this when He returns?*) The apostle Paul speaks of religion in the last days—*holding to a form of religion, although they have denied its power (2 Timothy 3:5)*. Any religion that loses sight of how faith really works will certainly find itself in this sad state.

HOW DOES IT WORK?

There is a lot of misguided teaching out there today about what faith is and what it isn't. I'm sure this is because the devil knows that faith is one of the church's greatest weapons. Some biblical teachers today say that faith is resignation to whatever happens, and so people should always tack the phrase *if it be Thy will* onto their requests.

do—create a world where people cooperate with Him, and invite Him in with their faith.

One of the great Christians of the last century, Brother Andrew, disparagingly refers to this error as “Christian fatalism.”⁸

Another group of teachers says that faith is a force we need to harness and that it allows us to pretty much get whatever we want from God. This is often referred to as “name it and claim it.” Both views are out of step with the Bible and what the greats of Christian history believed. My advice to anyone interested in getting real answers is this—set aside all the modern books and sermons on the subject and start by going through the New Testament with a fine-toothed comb.

CLEARING UP THE FOG

There is a quick way to get clarity on this whole faith thing. How? Just think about our salvation for a moment. If we focus on how faith works with respect to salvation, we can apply it “across the board,” so to speak. All evidence in Scripture is that faith works the same way for every blessing available to us from God, whether it’s salvation, peace of mind, or rent money.

How does a person get saved? Almost anyone in a good Bible-believing church should be able to answer this. You must have absolute confidence (faith/belief) in what the Bible says about the Person and work of Jesus Christ (see Chapter 1).

For God so loved the world, that He gave His one and only Son, that whoever believes/has faith in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life. (John 3:16)

⁸ See Brother Andrew, *And God Changed His Mind* (Grand Rapids: Chosen Books, 1999).

The idea that simple faith is all that is necessary for salvation is one of the revolutionary principles rediscovered in the Protestant Reformation of the sixteenth century. It is referred to as *sola fide* (faith alone), and in a nutshell, it says, *Just believe it, and you will receive it*. As I said, nobody in any good Bible-believing church will argue about this.

*Have faith in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved.
(Acts 16:30-31)*

There is no fuzziness about it. No mystery, no hidden contingencies. All a person needs to do is believe/have faith in what the Bible says about Jesus—that He is the Son of God who died on the cross for our sins and rose again—and they are saved. *By grace, you are saved through faith (Ephesians 2:8)*. This is said so many times and in so many ways in the Bible that a person has to be spiritually blind to miss it:

If you confess with your mouth Jesus as Lord and believe/have faith in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved. (Romans 10:9)

So here is what has me flummoxed. Why is it that we are so clear about the nature of faith when we are talking about salvation—*just believe it, and you will receive it*—but all clarity seems to go right out the window when we bring up any other spiritual topic? Ask some properly trained twenty-first century Christian, *Can I know that I am saved?* They will say, *Absolutely. No doubt about it*. But if you ask them if you can have any certainty about, for example, provision, protection, guidance, or power for ministry, they will probably give you some sort of, *God's will is mysterious* speech.

It's as if many Christians today have two categories of faith: 1. The absolute certainty they are supposed to have when it comes to salvation, and 2. The ambiguous hope/wish sort of faith that applies to everything else they want or need from God. In the Bible, however, faith is faith. It doesn't matter if we are praying for salvation, daily bread, or deliverance from depression. When we pray in faith, miracles happen. When we don't, all bets are off. *Let not that man expect to receive anything from the Lord (James 1:7)*. Where does it come from? Do we just work it up ourselves? Do we grit our teeth and try to hope really hard? What is the source of real, God-moving faith?

FAITH IS BASED ON GOD'S WORD

Faith comes by hearing and hearing by the word of Christ. (Romans 10:17)

In the very simplest terms, we are saved because God offered us something, and we took it. How did He offer it to us? He presented salvation to us via a stack of promises in His Word, the Bible. All those times it tells us, *If you believe in Jesus, He will save you*. Everyone who is truly saved/born again took a look at one or more of those promises and said, *I am going to believe that!* And that's all there was to it—the miracle of salvation took place. This is how we are all born again. *Everyone who has faith in Him ... has eternal life (John 3:16)*.

All we do is simply transfer this process—*believe and receive*—to the rest of the Bible. We look for clear promises that tell us what God wants to do for us, and we believe them—**WE HAVE FAITH!** What sort of promises? Basically, God has given you promises for absolutely

everything you will ever need on this side of heaven. The book of *2 Peter* tells us that through *God's precious and magnificent promises*, He has given us *everything we need for life and godliness (2 Peter 1:3-4)*.

Here is just a sampling of some of the things we can claim by faith: We can have total peace of mind (*Philippians 4:7-8*), a light and easy yoke (*Matthew 11:25-30*), victory over Satan (*Romans 16:19-20 and James 4:7*), power for Christian service (*Acts 1:8; Luke 11:13*), provision for all our needs (*Matthew 6:26-33; Philippians 4:19*), protection (*Psalms 91*), guidance (*Proverbs 3:5-6*), wisdom whenever we need it (*James 1:5*), escape from all temptation (*2 Corinthians 10:13*), continual forgiveness (*1 John 1:9*), and many, many, many more.

We take these promises before God (just like we took the promises regarding salvation), and we insist that God do what He said He would do. This isn't rocket science, it's simply not being taught much today. I will say that on occasion, things are a bit more complicated (for example, see *2 Corinthians 12:7-10*), but it's usually just this simple. Find a promise, or two, or ten, that applies to your situation and pray it until you believe it ... and you will receive. Of course, if we don't know the Word of God, we are up a creek here because we can't have faith in promises we are ignorant of. A massive part of being an effective prayer is being a serious student of the Bible.

Even when we find a clear promise, it may take us a little time to get our minds to where we can really have faith, because our brains are so full of arguments and excuses. This is why sometimes we have to travail and wrestle in prayer. A major part of the process of prayer (the reason it sometimes takes hours, days, weeks) is removing all

obstacles to faith and lining our minds up with God's. The devil will be fighting you tooth and nail here, but once you really get to that place of faith, it's as good as money in the bank (and sometimes it is literally money in the bank). This is unabashedly what the Bible teaches, and this is what the old schoolers did. We will look at some of them in a moment.

And this is the confidence we have before Him. If we ask anything according to His will, He hears us, and we know that if He hears us, we have the request. (1 John 5:14-15)

When we do this—insist that God do what He said he would—we aren't being uppity or irreverent, we are being obedient children. All evidence says that God loves this sort of fervent, insistent praying. The mightiest prayer warriors in history and many of the greatest prayer books in history love to refer to that Old Testament account where the patriarch Jacob wrestles with God. Jacob has the audacity to say to God, *I won't let You go until You bless me!* (Genesis 32:26). God seems to delight in this sort of confidence. It's like He wants us to really push in until we obtain.

The great reformer John Calvin actually encourages this kind of praying in his magnum opus, *The Institutes of the Christian Religion*. In fact, one of the longest chapters in this 3 volume work is devoted to prayer (although I have found almost no one, Calvinists included, who have ever studied this section). Calvin refers to prayer as a kind of God-approved "presumption"—and he says everyone who ever prayed rightly understood how to do it. God wants us to wrestle until we really, really believe ... and then receive.

We must therefore hold fast with both hands if we would pray to any advantage. The only prayer acceptable to God is that which springs, if I may so express it, from the

presumption of faith and is founded on full assurance of hope.⁹

Jesus repeatedly tells us to pray in this way—to have faith and not give up until we get what we are after. *He told this parable so that they would pray at all times and not lose heart (Luke 18:1)*. Remember Elijah, the biblical model of faith? He wouldn't take no for an answer. When he was praying for rain, the Bible tells us he prayed, and prayed, and prayed, and prayed, and prayed, and prayed until he got what he wanted (*1 Kings 18:41-46*). Elijah knew he had the right to do this because what he was praying for lined up perfectly with God's word (*1 Kings 18:1*). This is how it has always been done. *Faith comes by hearing and hearing by the word of Christ (Romans 10:17)*.

What happens to a person who will not pray this way? The promises of God will do them no good! The book of *Hebrews* tells us that *the word that was preached to them did not profit them because it was not united to faith in those who heard (Hebrews 4:2)*. In short, if we won't claim the promise, we should expect no miracle. I know this may sting ... but let it sting.

This is why so many of God's kids have such a weak, anemic prayer life. They never see the supernatural because: 1. They have never taken the time to find God's promises—they don't know the Bible, or 2. They know the promises of God, but they won't claim them with audacious faith. In both cases, the promises of God are of no benefit to them. How sad! This is one of the most important keys that the next

⁹ *Institutes* 3.20.12. Many find it surprising to learn that John Calvin had such a very dynamic understanding of prayer, as did many of history's greatest Calvinists (Edwards, Whitefield, Brainerd, Spurgeon, Hyde).

generation needs to rediscover to see God move in power. Biblical praying is not primarily about *surrendering to God's mysterious will* or *being quiet in His presence*. It's about finding God's will and moving His hand.

But faith isn't the only key to effective praying. There is something else that anyone who would move God's hand needs to be aware of—willful sin short circuits the whole process. We may have dozens of promises to claim, but if our *hands are not clean* and our *hearts are not pure*, we can pray all day and nothing will happen.

SIN SHUTS EVERYTHING DOWN

*If I treasure sin in my heart, God will not hear me.
(Psalm 66:18)*

There are many great examples in the Old Testament to understand how faith works. One helpful place to turn is the book of *Joshua*. This book is named after the great military man who took over the leadership of Israel after Moses died. Moses is the one who led the people out of their bondage in Egypt and brought them right up to the land God had promised, *a land flowing with milk and honey*. Joshua's job was to lead the people into the Promised Land.

The only problem was that it was full of wicked giants. But not to worry. Joshua was a man of faith, and God gave him a whole stack of promises to bank on. In the first place, God told Joshua and company very clearly that no one would ever be able to defeat them.

Every place on which the sole of your foot treads, I have given it to you ... No man will be able to stand before you all the days of your life ... Be strong and courageous, for

you shall give this people possession of the land which I swore to their fathers. (Joshua 1:3-6)

Joshua's army was a veritable juggernaut, an unstoppable force. Its military record was perfect—almost. There was that one glitch—the battle at a little town called Ai. What happened is instructive for anyone who would venture into the exciting and supernatural world of living and praying in faith. From this historical account, we vividly see that vital truth about faith and how it works—*sin can short circuit the whole operation*. God may give someone like Joshua (or you, or me) amazing, mind-blowing promises that He wants them to experience, but flagrant disobedience to His will negates them. Until they get right—*repent*—the blessing will remain out of reach.

The nation of Israel was promised that they would never lose a battle, and they started off with a bang. The first battle was at the mighty city of Jericho, which was surrounded by massive, impenetrable walls. You can read about it yourself in *Joshua 6*. The God-given battle plan was pretty outrageous, but it worked perfectly. Joshua and the people simply listened to God's word and believed, and God showed up in power. Israel absolutely crushed Jericho.¹⁰

Feeling pretty good about themselves, Joshua and his army then headed for the little podunk town of Ai. After the overwhelming victory at Jericho, they figured they could relax and send in a smaller force. The outcome was so

¹⁰ Why would God ask Israel to wipe out the people living in the land? This goes beyond the scope of this study, but the long and the short of it is that those people were incredibly sick and twisted. Incest, pedophilia, bestiality, and infant sacrifice were all a normal part of their daily lives. They were so far gone, according to the Bible, that the land needed to vomit them out (*Leviticus 18:25*). God had given them more than enough time to repent. They just wouldn't.

unexpected that it left Joshua reeling—Israel was totally humiliated. Many of Joshua’s men lost their lives. For some strange reason, it seemed that all of God’s amazing promises had fallen to the ground. When Joshua hears of the defeat, he falls on his face and essentially cries, *WHY, WHY, WHY?!!!*

God’s response would be almost comical if the circumstances were not so tragic. He simply tells the weeping, blubbing Joshua, *Get up. Why have you fallen on your face? Israel sinned (Joshua 7:10-11)*. It was no mystery to God. The rules have always been the same—when God’s people sin, it short circuits God’s blessings. It’s really quite simple. To “cash in” on the promises of God, you need to be walking in holiness. This is stated again and again and again in Scripture. When God gave Joshua the initial promises, He made this clear:

Be careful to do according to all the law which Moses My servant commanded you; do not turn from it to the right or the left, so that you may have success wherever you go. (Joshua 1:7)

You and I and Joshua cannot claim any of the promises of God if we are violating God’s clear commands. The problem was obvious, and so was the solution—REPENT! Once Joshua and the people cleaned up the situation, they were back on track—victory after victory after victory. They never lost another battle. In the end, after all their major battles, the final victory/defeat tally was: Israel 12, Wicked Giants 1.

Why did God leave that story in the Bible for us? What are the implications? We always need to keep in mind that willful sin puts the whole blessing thing on pause. There is

so much God wants to give us, but we must come to Him with *clean hands and a pure heart*. If there is known sin in our lives, we will not be able to claim anything from God until we make it right.

Behold, the LORD's hand is not so short that it cannot save; and His ear is not so dull that it cannot hear. But your sins have made a separation between you and your God. (Isaiah 59:1-2)

If My people who are called by My name humble themselves and pray and seek My face and turn away from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven and forgive their sins and heal their land. (2 Chronicles 7:14)

Wash your hands, you sinners, and cleanse your hearts, you doubleminded. Be miserable and mourn and weep. Turn your laughter into mourning and your joy to misery. Humble yourself in the Lord's presence, and He will exalt you. (James 4:8-10)

LET'S HEAR FROM THE OLD SCHOOLERS

What is being said in this chapter about faith may seem radical and new to a lot of twenty-first-century Christians, but it is pretty typical stuff in the writings of the old schoolers. I became convinced of this perspective years ago, not only because it is clearly taught in Scripture, but because of the testimonies of virtually everyone I admired in church history. This chapter is just a quick introduction, but if you really want to go to school in the subject, read classics by people like Andrew Murray, E.M. Bounds, R.A. Torrey, Charles Finney, A.T. Pierson, Charles Spurgeon, etc. (One little volume that absolutely every serious Christian should read is the classic *Praying Hyde* by Francis McGaw.)

Anyone familiar with the old schoolers knows that when it comes to faith, there is one name that stands out above all the others—George Müller (1805-98). For an introduction to his amazing life, the book written by his dear friend and admirer A.T. Pierson is a good starting point.¹¹ Quite literally, the eyes of the world were on him and his miracle-working faith. It was said that his death had such a global impact that it could only be measured in latitude and longitude.

*Such a departure ... produced a worldwide sensation ... Not in Bristol, or in Britain alone, but across the mighty waters toward the sunrise and sunset was felt the responsive pulse-beat of a deep sympathy. Hearts bled all over the globe when it was announced, by telegraph wire and ocean cable, that George Müller was dead.*¹²

He was such a phenomenon that the factories and shops in Bristol, England, closed as thousands were compelled to honor this man with their presence. Nobility and royalty made special efforts to attend, but the most memorable testimony to his life was the hundreds of weeping orphans lining the streets. Through his incredible faith, he had been a father to them all. He prayed in the equivalent of millions of dollars for his Ashley Downs orphan homes and cared for over 10,000 children in his lifetime.

He meticulously documented over 50,000 specific answers to prayer, and friends and associates testified to Müller's ability to even change the weather with his prayers.

¹¹ A.T. Pierson, *George Müller of Bristol* (New York: The Baker and Taylor Co., 1899).

¹² *Ibid*, 285.

Most significantly, he prayed tens of thousands of souls into the kingdom. Müller believed that when he cried out for a person's salvation, God was obliged to answer—based upon His Word. He claimed that in all his years of ministry, God had never failed him on this count. Toward the end of his life, he said, *Thousands of souls have been saved in answer to my prayers ... I shall meet tens of thousands of them in heaven.*¹³

Many people do not know the following fact about Müller. He purposely put his life on public display. He made his life a global spectacle for one very specific reason. These were his own words:

*I have joyfully dedicated my whole life to the object of exemplifying how much may be accomplished by prayer and faith.*¹⁴

He desired to show every Christian what is possible if they would simply learn to move God's hand through believing prayer. These are some of the last recorded words of that amazing man of faith:

The great point is to never give up until the answer comes. I have been praying every day for fifty-two years for two men, sons of a friend of my youth. They are not converted yet, but they will be! How can it be otherwise? There is the unchanging promise of Jehovah, and on that, I rest. The great fault of the children of God is that they do not continue in prayer; they do not go on praying; they do not

¹³ This quote is from the last interview Müller ever gave. Charles R. Parsons, *An Hour with George Müller, The Man of Faith to Whom God Gave Millions*, ed. A. Sims (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1939).

¹⁴ *George Müller of Bristol*, 327.

persevere. If they desire anything for God's glory, they should pray until they get it.

Oh, how good, kind, gracious, and condescending is the One with whom we have to do! He has given me, unworthy as I am, immeasurably above all I have asked or thought! I am only a poor, frail, sinful man, but He has heard my prayers tens of thousands of times and used me as the means of bringing tens of thousands of souls into the way of truth, in this and other lands. These unworthy lips have proclaimed salvation to great multitudes, and very many people have believed unto eternal life.¹⁵

Anyone interested in learning about prayer should study the Scriptures with a completely open heart, and also look to men like Müller, Murray, Hyde, and a host of others from a previous generation, who *though dead, still speak*. If God is going to move again in power, it will come in answer to the prayer of faith.

PRACTICAL SUGGESTIONS FROM JAMES

To wrap up, we turn to the little book of James. This may be the very earliest New Testament writing in our Bible, and it is just chock full of practical advice for hungry believers. The author, Jesus's half-brother, was famous throughout the early church for his powerful prayer life. He spent so much time on his knees in prayer that he was nicknamed "Camel Knees." James lets his readers in on the powerful prayer principles he lived by. Very specifically, five major points found in this epistle serve as a helpful guide for anyone interested in learning the art of moving God's hand.

¹⁵ *An Hour with George Müller.*

1. Just do it: *You do not have because you do not ask. (4:2)*

James makes a brief statement that every Christian should have tattooed on their souls—*You do not have because you do not ask*. The obvious point is this: If you don't make an effort to ask God for things, don't be surprised if you don't get them. Expanding the principle a little, the Christian who doesn't prioritize prayer and set aside time every day for it will never see much.

God has set up His universe so that praying is the way we receive all the good stuff. *Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and the door will be opened to you (Matthew 7:7)*. All the great saints in history like Müller, Hyde, Murray, and Moody confirm this. They gave God the very best hours of their day. If you and I want to be blessed like they were blessed, we need to do the same.

At some point, we must determine that prayer is going to be one of the top priorities in our life. (*I suggest making it #2 behind knowing the Word.*) We need to then order our life around it and cut out one, two, or three prime hours every day. In this respect, we will be following the example of Jesus: *Very early in the morning, while it was still dark, Jesus arose, left the house, and went off to a lonely place and prayed (Mark 1:35)*. There are haves and have-nots in God's kingdom. Anyone who won't pray will *de facto* be one of the latter. So just do it!

2. Get rid of all known sin: *Draw near to God, and He will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, you sinners, purify your hearts, you doubleminded. (4:8)*

The early Christians to whom James was writing had stymied their spiritual lives. What was wrong? Sin! Before God could rain down blessings on them, James tells them

that they need to repent. There is simply no use trying to claim the promises of God if we have unconfessed sin—like bitterness, lust, envy, resentment, and pride. God is always willing to forgive us, and repentance keeps the channel of blessing flowing clean and clear. So we should all strive to keep short accounts. Make sure our lives and actions line up with God’s revealed will. Are we walking in holiness and at peace with those around us? For example, in the book of *1 Peter*, the apostle warns husbands to treat their wives properly *so that your prayers will not be hindered (1 Peter 3:7)*. Like any good father, God delights in doing good for us, but He requires that we receive all His blessings with clean hands. When we do this, we are under an open heaven. *No good thing does He withhold from those who walk uprightly (Psalm 84:11)*.

3. Heart check: *You ask and don’t receive because you ask with wrong motives. (4:3)*

This principle is closely related to the last one, but it goes deeper. It’s not just about sinful acts but the heart’s motives. Before we offer any request, we should always ask ourselves, *Are my motives pure?* Jesus said, *Seek first God’s kingdom and His righteousness (Matthew 6:33)*. Every prayer we offer to God should reflect His priorities and relate to His kingdom and His cause on earth. If, for instance, I need a new car, it should be so that God’s will can better be accomplished in my life. If I want a new job, I need to come up with good kingdom reasons for it. As we pray, we should always be checking—*Am I seeking to glorify God? Am I seeking the salvation of the lost? Am I seeking to strengthen and bless His people ... or am I just thinking about myself?* Of course, God wants to meet our personal needs, but it will

probably fall flat if a request has nothing to do with God's Kingdom.

4. Pray in faith: *Pray in faith without any doubting. (1:6)*

In the first chapter of *James*, we are given a clear promise. *If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God who gives to all men liberally.* Then we are reminded of one sure way to hinder the blessing—lack of faith. *But let him ask in faith without any doubting.* James goes on to say of the faithless doubter, *Let that man not expect to receive anything from the Lord (1:7).* There will come a day when faith is no longer needed—when we see Jesus face to face—but we sure do need it now. Anyone who wants to experience God's blessing on a regular basis needs to make faith a high priority.

So here it is, one last time—an explanation of how biblical faith works: God has filled His Word, the Bible, with hundreds of promises—all that He wants to do for us. As His blood-bought children, it's our privilege and responsibility to study His Word, find them, and then believe them. If we do this, God will move. *All the promises of God are yes in Christ (2 Corinthians 1:20).* On the other hand, if we are ignorant of the promises (because we don't know the Bible), or if we fail to believe the promises, we get nothing, plain and simple.

5. Keep at it: *Elijah was a man with a nature like ours, and he prayed earnestly. (5:17)*

At the end of the book, James points to Elijah as our model of prayer, and one thing we know about Elijah is that he refused to be refused. We don't need to say a whole lot more about this. Just note how Elijah would lock on to a

request like a pit bull and wouldn't let go of God until he got what he was seeking (see *I Kings 18*). This is how Jesus repeatedly teaches us to pray. We need to ensure that our faith doesn't fail in the waiting period between our asking and receiving. If we don't lock on with tenacity and keep after it, we may find ourselves sinking as Peter did. In His love and compassion, Jesus may still keep us from drowning, but with grief and disappointment, He will say:

O you of little faith, why did you doubt? (Matthew 14:31)

A LITTLE NOTE:

So what are we supposed to do when we feel like we have done everything right and don't get what we are praying for? We thought we heard from God, we thought we were claiming His promises with tenacious faith, we came with clean hands and a pure heart ... and we still didn't obtain. Let's just suppose, for example, that I am praying fervently for someone's healing, and they die. Do I then throw in the towel and say, *That whole faith and prayer thing must just not be the way things work?* NO! NO! A THOUSAND TIMES, NO!

If and when we fail to obtain what we are seeking—*the financial blessing, the reconciliation, the healing, the restoration*—we need to be humble and realize there is still an infinite amount we have to learn. On this side of heaven, I believe all of us will have times when we thought we did things properly and we thought we prayed in faith, but we didn't get what we were seeking (in fact, this just happened to me the other day).

In the first place, according to the Bible, the blame often lies squarely on our shoulders—we simply didn't have the wisdom and faith to make it happen. If this happened to the disciples, it will happen to us, too (*Matthew 17:19-20*). Many people get very offended at this suggestion, but I am personally at peace with it.

At other times, God is making a rare exception for some higher purpose, like the situation with Paul's thorn in the flesh (*2 Corinthians 12*). Of course, it wasn't normal for some demonic force to continually harass someone like Paul, but when God explained why He was allowing it, Paul was okay with it. *Most gladly then, I will boast in my affliction (2 Corinthians 12:9)*.

But sometimes we don't have any idea what is going on. What do we do then?

Years ago, I had a pastor friend who continually inspired me with his great faith. He had seen many miracles in his lifetime—salvations, deliverances, provision, and healing. I went to hear him preach once, and at the time I was really struggling because it seemed like God was not coming through for me in a very specific area. In the sermon, he shared about a crisis of faith he once went through. His wife had been pregnant years before, but the baby growing inside her had serious medical complications. They began praying for the little one, and the more they prayed, the more confident they became that God would do a miracle ... but the baby died.

The way my pastor friend handled the situation has stuck with me and become a pillar in my walk with God. Again, I heard him tell this story at a time in my life when I was struggling with a similar issue. My friend said something like this,

What am I supposed to do with the fact that I thought I was praying in faith and my baby died? What am I supposed to do with the fact that I had seen others healed and fully expected a miracle, and it didn't happen? I HAVE NO IDEA WHAT TO DO WITH THAT, BUT I AM GOING TO KEEP ON BELIEVING AND KEEP ON PREACHING AND KEEP ON PRAYING AS I HAVE ALWAYS DONE.

His words brought immediate healing to my soul. I have found many great saints of God throughout history who faced the same dilemma. There are some things we are just going to have to sort out with God on the other side of eternity when we see Him face to face.

We are small and weak and ignorant (*1 Corinthians 13:12*), and there may be times when everything we think we know seems to fall to the ground. Personally, I just assume the problem is with me—and this usually proves to be true. But even if I can't make any sense of it, just because I fall off the bike once doesn't mean I have never ridden it. I just need to get back up, brush myself off, and soldier on. Just because I lose a battle doesn't mean I have never won one before. I need to refocus, pick up my sword again, and begin swinging.