



THE **PRIORITY** OF PRAYER

By **Frances King Abrams**

The first time I prayed, *really* prayed,
my prayer was simple and desperate: "Help me, God!"
Growing up in church, I had not yet encountered
a personal God who cared about me.

voiced that desperate prayer in the Prayer Garden at Ridgecrest Baptist Assembly in North Carolina. I struggled with typical, though real, teenage distresses: relationships, fear of the future, and my life's direction. Although I didn't yet know saving faith, I knew God was present, and I hoped He would hear me. The following year, my high school senior year, I thought little about God or my desperate prayer. But, behind the scenes of my life, God was at work. The next summer I joined a college Sunday School class, where our teacher explained salvation as a "new birth" (John 3). She also emphasized from 1 John 5:13 that if I trusted in the Son of God, I could KNOW I had eternal life. That truth was new to me and unsettling.

In my room, alone, I prayed, "Jesus, I've been trying to live a Christian life on my terms (good deeds outweighing the bad), and that is not working. I want to do this Your way, so please forgive me, come into my life, and make me a new person." 2 Corinthians 5:17 promises, "Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creature; old things have passed away; behold, new things have come" (NASB).

God had answered that first "Help me!" prayer according to His will, in His time. He had used a godly teacher and Scripture memory verses from childhood like John 3:16 to prepare me for that pivotal moment. The transformation God initiated after my second heartfelt prayer eventually led to 40 years as a pastor's wife and a lifetime journey of prayer.

I am thankful that we worship a God who is true to His promises and hears our prayers. As I continue exploring the vastness of our all-knowing God, I am amazed that He hears and answers the prayers of millions of believers who are praying simultaneously. I do not know how He does that, but I need only to know that He is God, our Father, and His heart is big enough for all of us.

The Bible has no shortage of teachings on prayer and examples to follow. Dawson's Theological Vision includes these verses under *Prayer Is Our Priority*:

John 15:5, Acts 2:42, Philippians 4:6, Psalm 145:18, 1 Thessalonians 5:16-18, and Hebrews 4:16. The familiar Model Prayer (The Lord's Prayer) in Matthew 6:9-14 teaches us *priorities* to include: hallowing God's Name (worship), God's will to be done on earth as in Heaven, trusting Him for our daily needs, and forgiving transgressors.

HIGH PRIESTLY PRAYER

We can learn about Jesus' priorities for believers from His High Priestly Prayer in John 17, during which He prayed for His followers, their character, and their future. His prayer came immediately before His betrayal and arrest leading to His crucifixion. In the latter portions of this prayer, Jesus poured out His heart to the Father for His disciples and for those who would believe in Him through their witness. Those disciples include us! So, how did Jesus pray for His followers?

Verse 11: that God would keep them in His name, that they would be one, even as God the Father and the Son are one.

Verse 13: that His joy would fill them.

Verse 15: that God would keep them from the evil one.

Verse 17: that God would sanctify His disciples with His truth, His word.

Then, in verses 20-21, 23, Jesus prayed for future believers when He again asked the Father for our unity. (I am sure that Jesus knew His followers would be prone to squabbling. He had already seen this in His disciples.)

In verse 24, Jesus prayed, "Father, I desire that they also, whom You have given me, be where I am, so that they may see My glory which You have given Me, for You loved me before the foundation of the world."

Though Jesus prayed for His followers to join Him in Heaven, sometimes we hold too tightly to this world. Eternity is incomprehensible to us, but Heaven is real. Jesus desires our presence there when we complete our work on earth. That is why this verse comforted me once I understood that it was not God's will to heal my husband, Jerome, of brain cancer. Realizing that Jesus

prayed for us to be where He is affirms that our mortal bodies were meant to be temporary.

In verse 26, Jesus emphasized that He had made His name known to His disciples, so that the love of His Father would remain in them. He cares not only for our physical needs but also the spiritual growth of His followers, our unity, love, and victory over Satan as we live obedient lives.

FROM THE APOSTLE PAUL

In Ephesians 3:14-19, the Apostle Paul prayed that the Ephesian believers would: 1. be strengthened with power through His Spirit in the inner man; 2. that Christ would dwell in their hearts through faith; 3. that they would be rooted and grounded in love; 4. that they would comprehend the breadth and length and height and depth of His love; 5. that they would know the love of Christ which surpasses knowledge, and; 6. that they would be filled up to all the fullness of God.

Our Life Group has a prayer ministry through which emails with current prayer requests, collected each Sunday and throughout the week, are sent to members. Each request includes the email address of the member making the request, so members can send notes of encouragement.

Praying individually or corporately, we can apply the ACTS principle: Adoration, Confession, Thanksgiving, and Supplication. When the prayers voiced by Jesus and the Apostle Paul in the passages above are our models for intercessory prayer, we are living testimonies that prayer is our priority. We can rest assured that our Heavenly Father hears and answers according to His will.



Frances King Abrams has previously worked as a newspaper journalist and freelance writer. She has authored two books, *The Widow's Song*, a devotional for widows, and *A Frog Named Abraham* for children. She has been a Dawson member since 2014 and is active in the Sanctuary Choir, Dawsonaires, Byrd Life Group, and recently, the Sanctuary Orchestra.