

April 25th, 2021 "Prayer Misfires!"

Partners in Prayer: "Everything We Need!"

Study of Gideon- "We may be small, but God is mighty!"

Dear Partners in Prayer Team,

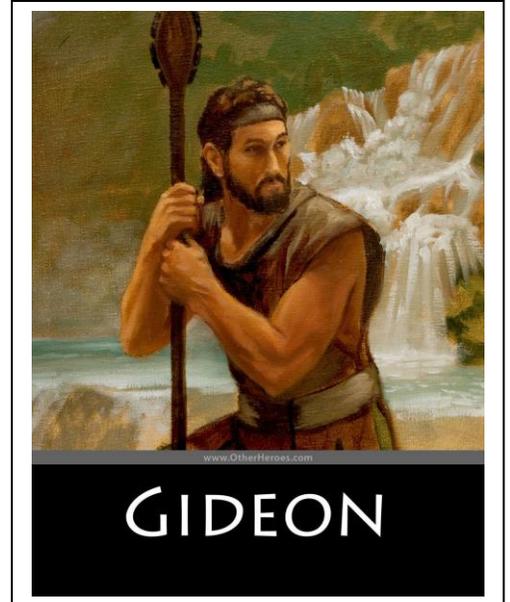
"One day Jesus was praying in a certain place. When He finished, one of His disciples said to Him, 'Lord, teach us to pray, just as John taught his disciples.'"

Luke 11:1 (NKJV)

"O Lord, You have examined my heart and know everything about me. You know when I sit or stand. When far away You know my every thought. You chart the path ahead of me and tell me where to stop and rest. Every moment You know where I am. You know what I am going to say before I even say it."

Psalm 139:1-4 (The Living Bible)

"Then the Lord turned to Gideon and said, 'I will make you strong! Go and save Israel from the Midianites! I am sending you!' ...When Gideon realized that it had indeed been the Angel of the Lord, he cried out, 'Alas, O Lord God, for I have seen the Angel of the Lord face-to-face!'" **Judge 6:14, 22**



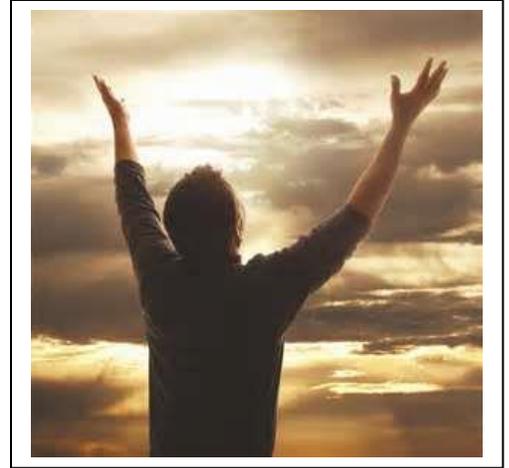
Why do we think that our prayers must sound perfect? Have you ever had someone say: "I love listening to you pray, I wish I could pray like that?" Maybe you've wished to hear that, but instead you're discouraged by your prayer life. Do you want to know the secret? Just spend time praying with others. When you pray with others, you learn and catch their phrases and ability to put your prayers together. There really isn't anything wrong with that. Jesus did it for His disciples when they asked: "Lord, teach us to pray, just as John taught his disciples." (Luke 1:11). Just stop a moment, and look at their question. They knew that the only way to grow and improve in their prayers was by learning. They knew that the only way anyone could learn to pray better was by example. The examples come when you get on your knees with others on a regular basis. One of the wonderful changes that Covid-19 has done is the hour of prayer before church each Sunday. You don't know how wonderful and encouraging it is. As we grow and pray together, my heart and soul is warmed and encouraged. I learn to pray better when I listen to your prayers. So, during these days as we continue to look at the life of Gideon, let's keep growing and learning to pray.

In my early years of ministry, I tended to lead prayer gatherings based on what I had seen others do. I basically imitated some traditional approaches without evaluating the biblical basis for these methods. Soon, I learned they were not

effective for life-giving experiences. Eventually I stopped using these methods in exchange for the preferred ideal of Scripture-fed, Spirit-led, worship-based prayer. Yet, today I occasionally encounter settings where these three prayer “misfires” are still common. Perhaps it would be helpful to examine each and explain a better way.

Misfire #1 – “Does anyone have any prayer requests?”

We’ve all been in prayer times that started with this question, typically followed by 30 minutes of detailed descriptions of a vast array of human needs ranging from slipped discs, to the financial problems of third cousins, to the destructive impact of liberal politics, to the emotional trauma of a lost dog.



Clearly, our Father knows our needs, cares deeply for us, and wants to work in our lives for our good and His glory. However, this request-based approach to prayer presents several problems, and I know you are going to remind me, “Ah... Pastor Corvin, every Sunday before we pray you just ask us that.” But I want to point out that we don’t get stuck there. In days’ past I’ve watched groups start with talking about the requests, but then they talk so much, that there isn’t any more prayer time.

First, the prayer time begins with a man-ward focus rather than a God-ward focus. This is in stark contradiction to the pattern Jesus gave us in the model prayer, which instructs us to start in worship of our Father in Heaven and the grandeur and holiness of His character. Remember... “Our Father in heaven!”

Second, it is difficult to be an “equal opportunity provider.” Once Aunt Matilda gets her five minutes of time to talk about family problems and physical ailments, brother Charlie, sister Jennifer, and everyone else in the room wants to have their turn to describe their grocery list of needs as well. Sometimes I used to call this the “organ recital!” Why? Because all that Fred talked about was all his ailments and how his liver and other organs didn’t work and he would just go down the list. (Drum roll!)

Third, actual prayer time becomes marginalized because we have spent an inordinate amount of time in the extended and detailed descriptions of our needs and the needs of many others who may, or may not, have wanted us to discuss their issues. So nobody really prayed. Often, we run out of time and are forced to offer a flurry of “bless” and “be with” prayers that are rushed and superficial.

Fourth, this format can easily downgrade into gossip about situations and people. Although well-intended, the discussion can spark questions about

others that may eventually reveal details that are not necessary or edifying. If you are praying for someone, do pray. Not just “say.”

Fifth, this is seldom a good use of valuable time as we spend time talking about concerns, then circle back to pray about the concerns. In fact, we could have verbalized these needs by simply praying about them at the appropriate moment, usually with more measured words and in a more edifying fashion. That actually is always better than “complaining” or talking about our disappointments. Just “airing” our feelings by talking about them doesn’t do us as much good as when we pray about our feelings to the Lord. When you look at some of the Psalms, you see the psalmist finding his feelings healed because he prayed the issues and opened his heart before the Lord. “I lift my soul unto You, Lord” (Psalm 25:1).

Given these concerns, people still wonder, “How do we keep track of a prayer request list?” One option is to have someone write down the needs as they are articulated in prayer so a list can be created afterwards. Another option is to collect these needs from the group in writing, then distribute the list later via e-mail or a printed handout at the next gathering. Sometimes you even see me jotting prayer needs down as the group is praying, because as I listen, I hear something I need to remember to pray. So, misfire #1 is: “Be careful you don’t ‘talk’ about requests more than you pray!” We can fix this by keeping the share time down to a minimum.

Misfire #2 – “Let’s all just pray as we feel led.”

This opening instruction is common and often assumes that everyone is automatically “led by the Holy Spirit” as he or she starts praying.

Unfortunately, many in the group are instinctively “led” by personal agendas, troubling world events, irritating political issues, surface relational conflicts, or even the medicine they have forgotten to take during the last week. As I listened to a pastor friend of mine this week, he shared that he lost a couple from his church because they were all about praying their political agendas. They constantly “bashed” people through their prayers. He asked them to stop, and they left. I thought about how focused they were on their “own agenda” instead of remembering that the real privilege of prayer is to intercede and help brothers and sisters in Christ who have needs.

In fact, we should pray “as we feel led” once we have worshiped well (“Our Father in heaven, holy is Your name”) and surrendered our agendas to the Holy Spirit (“Your kingdom come, Your will be done”). I have learned that we don’t really know what we should pray about, or how to pray about it, until we have first given quality time to seeking His face and yielding our will to God’s. We must never forget who our prayers are focused to: God Himself! If we are praying big “flowery” words, then we are just worried about how those around us hear our own words, and we are not just authentically praying to our Heavenly Father! Make it your goal to not just pray in a way that others will

think we prayed well. If I am praying and make a mistake or forget what I need to say, I actually pray my mistake to God. I remember a deacon from our first church who was constantly praying “Lord, I can’t say it any better than brother Jim, so I ditto His prayer, Amen!” I actually admired his authenticity. I think before God, God also admired his sincerity. We must be thinking of who we are praying to, not how it sounds to others. So be careful you don’t pull prayer misfires because you are so worried about how others will hear your prayers. So, never apologize or feel upset if you make mistakes as you pray. Before prayer starts, just glance down at your prayer list and just tick off only two or three things to keep in prayer about. If someone already prays that, don’t change it unless God prompts your heart. God doesn’t care if you pray about the same topic or the same person a couple times in a row. We all have our own concerns to add. Also make sure we are not just praying for some agenda, as if we are trying to preach a message to someone. That keeps us from falling out of true prayer.

Now, here is the last: Misfire #3 – “Let’s just pray around the circle.”

Okay, I know that I’m going to hear, “Pastor, you are always having us pray around the circle every Sunday, so what’s with this misfire? You are being really hypocritical!” Often, when it comes time to pray in a small group, we obligate participants to pray “in turn” as we go around the circle. It is okay, if we change things up and break into people of two to pray. And sometimes when we pray in a circle because we have so many people who want to pray, that if we sit and wait till we all go around, we lose momentum because some people prayed for a really long time, and others don’t get time to pray. So the problem with this is that all the participants are then required to say something just because they are next in the big prayer circle, rather than as they are prompted by the Lord in some specific fashion. Again, some feel like they have to pray even when they feel no specific or spiritual compulsion to do so. If you are the last person in the circle, you often feel the need to either repeat what has already been said or to come up with something different simply because it is your turn. But let me say: “It is alright, if when prayer comes around to you, and if you have no prompting, to just let prayer pass by you.” How? Just tap the person next to you, or simply say quietly, “Could you take it please?” It is not wrong to ask a skip if things are not right in your heart, or if you don’t have anything to say that you feel is prompted by God’s Spirit. It isn’t more “unspiritual” to just let pray bypass you when you don’t feel the need to pray anything. Sometimes, people are afraid to come to prayer with the group on Sundays because they are feeling the stress that they will be on the spot. Know that we don’t want to keep people from coming to pray, if they feel obligated to formulate a “fine sounding prayer” than actually addressing the Father to whom the prayer is going.

Let me just give you a few surefire starting places for prayer. I have learned that the best way to start at prayer time is looking down in my Bible. Here are eight reasons why the Bible is the best starting place for prayer times:

First, the Scriptures reveal to us the character, names, and works of God — turning our thoughts God-ward rather than man-ward. So, opening with, “Father, I praise you because...” is one of the best ways to start prayer. Even if you don’t have any prayer requests, just pray a thanksgiving or praise to God, and just doing that opens our hearts to worship.

Second, as we follow the pattern Jesus gave us (Lord’s prayer Matt 6:9-13; Luke 11:2), the Bible provides endless insights about our Father in Heaven and the holiness of His name. Always pray to bring more glory to God. Imagine He is sitting next to you and you are talking from your heart freely. Keep directing your prayer towards Him.

Third, the Bible also gives us language for our prayers that is according to the will of God, since His Word is His will. It is sometimes the most freeing prayer to just look at a verse in the Bible, and say: “Lord, here is Your Word” and just read the verse as a prayer. The more you do that, the more vocabulary will come for your prayers.

Fourth, the Bible is living, active, and penetrating and reveals the real needs of our hearts and lives, taking us beyond surface prayers about circumstances and people (Hebrews 4:12). This leads to authentic confession and trust.

Fifth, the Bible unites those who pray as every heart and mind is aligned with God and His Word. It is often very acceptable to say out loud: “Yes, Lord.” Or “Mmmm... amen, Jesus!” along with others as they are praying. It gives encouragement if you verbally make agreement. It sometimes pulls the mind away from wandering as someone else prays. It forms a unity in the heart and spirit as we find ourselves praying with others. Try at least one time through a prayer time with another person, to make a verbal agreement out loud as he or she is praying. Make sure it is a genuine expression. Some even reach and squeeze the hand of the person next to him or her to show agreement in prayer. When we do that, not in an attention drawing way, it excites prayer together.

Sixth, the Bible empowers us to pray in faith since faith comes by hearing and hearing by the Word of God (Romans 10:17). So always fall back on praying Biblical things. Let me give you a really easy one that God gave me this week. When I started praying with a friend, I said: “Lord, I’ve seen around us the farmers are digging up the fields. Lord, this is planting season!” Just praying a simple observation from my everyday life added fuel to the group. We all started praying for God to work in hearts like a farmer works a field. Someone prayed, “Lord, You need to break up some hard soil in my life.” Another person prayed, “Lord, help us to remember we are working in Your field today, and every time I pass one, I want to pray for God’s work here.” Again, faith grows by God’s Word. That is just a simple example of learning to pray.

Seventh, as the Bible inspires faith, our prayer time is pleasing to God because we are coming to Him in the truth of who He is, confident that He is a rewarder of those that diligently seek Him (Hebrews 11:6). My whole goal in prayer is to get myself and anyone with me face-to-face with God. Remember how life changing that was for Gideon? Gideon was awakened to the reality that he had a personal encounter with God. Sometimes we pray and help others to connect with that same encounter through prayer together. I don't want people drawn to me- an imperfect follower of the Master. I don't want my prayers to satisfy me, but I do want them to draw people to God! When we close the Lord's Prayer, we give honor to God, recognizing His kingdom, power, and glory. Did you know that the best Greek manuscripts that make up our Bibles don't actually contain that familiar ending of the prayer? There is no harm in praying that way, of course. That phrase: "For Thine is the kingdom, and power, and glory" actually can be found in Psalm 103:19; and 1 Chronicles 29:11. But that added closing to our prayers as exemplified by the "Lord's Prayer" reminds us to focus on God's glory for everything we are praying about. God is the great reality of all our praying. We must learn to declare to heaven as we submit our hearts to God's greatness in Jesus. When our hearts bow joyfully to the King, then, and only then, will our prayers have any impact. The Master calls us to know Him, and our prayers are the means of knowing Him more. When our prayers are filled with the sense of the amazement about the grace that is ours in Christ, others start seeking it for themselves. We really can make Christ our treasure when life is painful, as much as when life is exciting. To Him be the glory, forever.

Eighth, the Bible prepares us for victory in the spiritual battle. As our prayers are infused with Scripture we are equipped to take the sword of the Spirit, When we pray together especially focusing on God's Word, we are actually in "spiritual sword practice!" God's memorized and spoken word is wielded as a sword in prayer as we confront temptation (just as Jesus did in the wilderness) (Ephesians 6:17; Matthew 4:1-11). So, the next time you pray together, don't misfire. Instead, allow God's Word to work powerfully to bring great blessing and benefit to your prayers. He is worthy of it and we are in need of it.

So, in spite of the perils, be encouraged, my friend. Yes, the world, the flesh, and the devil oppose all attempts to embrace extraordinary prayer. As John Piper says, "Until you know that life is war you cannot know what prayer is for." We must continue to fight the winning fight in the power of the Spirit, through passionate, persevering prayer. He is worthy. We are needy. The single greatest need of the world today is Jesus Christ living through a REVIVED church. Therefore, we must pray.

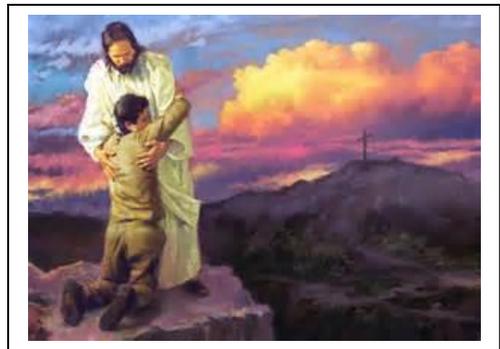
So pray with me now as we commit to contend as warriors of prayer:

"O Lord, God, You are the Fountain of all fullness! We, who are nothing but emptiness, come to You for all strength and supplies. Just as You

found Gideon hidden in a winepress, and called him to be mighty in Your Strength, help us as believers to die to self, take up our prayers, and follow in the way of Gideon. We are all small, and little, and mostly overlooked by men, but we are never forgotten by You! We can pray Psalm 139 and realize the excitement of an All-powerful God who loves and uses and knows all about us. Thank You, Father, for making, and using us! Father, we also want to offer prayer for those who never think of You; who, though created by You, are strangers to You; who though created by You, are living for self, for the world, for Satan, or for sin. Father, wake them! Call them to Jesus! Oh, that we could pour out our souls in prayer for the unconverted! You know where they will all be in a few years! And lastly, Father, refresh every corner of Your vineyard, this church family. Oh, Spirit of God, we seek for the blessing of Your church throughout the world! Will You repair our schisms? Will You repair the breaches that have been made in the lives of brothers and sisters within the family? Remember our land in this time of need. Be pleased by some means to relieve the prevalent distress and fear around us. Lastly, above all, You long-expected Jesus, do come! Do not wait, O Jesus! May Your feet soon stand again on Olivet! This time, You will not have to sweat great drops of blood there, but You will come to proclaim the kingdom. This whole world groans in pain until You come. We, Your church, expect You. We are longing until we are weary for Your coming. So, come quickly, Lord Jesus, come quickly. In Your mighty Name we pray, amen.

**Practicing and praying prayer with you,
Pastor Corvin <><**

Quote: "The wrestling and all-night praying of Jacob made an era never to be forgotten in Jacob's life, brought God to the rescue, changed Esau's attitude and conduct, changed Jacob's character, saved and affected his life and entered into the habits of prayer for a nation. We pray 'with all perseverance.' We hand to our prayers because by them we live. We press our please because we must have them or die. If Jacob had quit praying at decent bedtime he would scarcely have survived the next day's meeting with Esau. Pray and never faint, is the mottle Christ gives us for praying. Praying men must be strong in hope, faith, and prayer. They must know how to wait and to press, to wait on God and be in earnest in our approaches to Him. If Jesus, the royal and divine Son of God cannot be exempted from the rule of praying and asking that He may have, you and I cannot expect the rule to



be relaxed in our favor. If you may have everything by asking, and nothing without asking, I bet you to see how absolutely vital prayer is, and I beseech you to about in it! Men must be in earnest when they kneel at God's footstool. Too often we get faint-hearted and quit praying at the point where we ought to begin." E. M. Bounds, (*Characteristics of True Prayer*, pg. 48)