

**REVELATIONS  
OF  
EFFECTIVE PRAYER**

by  
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and  
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A COMPASSbook from BIBLE READING FELLOWSHIP

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Revelations of Effective Prayer

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# REVELATIONS OF EFFECTIVE PRAYER

## INTRODUCTION

Years ago that great woman of prayer Helen Shoemaker wrote an immensely popular book called *The Secret of Effective Prayer*. The only criticism of the book was its name. “There is no *secret* concerning prayer;” one man said. “God wants us to discover all of the things about prayer we can, and He is not hiding them from us.” That, perhaps, is what Helen Shoemaker was trying to say by way of the book’s title: as we truly live the life of prayer, we do discover things that might be helpful to others. And, by way of her book, she shared the discoveries she had made.

The authors of this COMPASSbook had the privilege, over a period of some 15 years, of being successors to Helen Shoemaker’s prayer ministry, the Anglican Fellowship of Prayer. During that time we too made some discoveries and were able to share them with others. Subsequently, we have made other discoveries that seem worth sharing. We have resisted the temptation to call this “Secrets of Effective Prayer” and have settled for the word “Revelations.” By the grace of God, some things have been revealed to us that we hope will be helpful to you.

Please forgive the fact that what follows will be very personal, but what we will be trying to do is to share with you some very personal experiences of prayer. Soon after Harry Griffith succeeded Don Hultstrand as the director of the Anglican Fellowship of Prayer, he wrote the following, which he called his prayer prayer: “Lord, teach me to pray, and build within me the conviction that everyone needs to know more and more about prayer. Show me, through experiences with you, the many facets of prayer—that I may share them with others. Give me a burning desire within my heart to tell others about prayer. Amen.”

Perhaps that prayer tells us what this COMPASSbook is all about. The first five chapters are by Harry Griffith, the second five by Don Hultstrand.

### BEGINNING THE DAY

The best way to get each day off to the right start is to turn ourselves over to God as soon as we awaken in the morning. There are many ways to do that. I say, “I commit myself into your hands this day, Lord, body, mind and spirit.” Others say, “This is the day the Lord has made; I will rejoice and be glad in it.” But even if we do no more than say, “Good morning, Lord,” we are acknowledging Him and our dependence on Him as the day begins.

I then “put on the whole armor of God” (Ephesians 6:10-18). People today sometimes have a problem with the militaristic language that Scripture often employs. What we have to realize in order to understand this wording is that we Christians are in a spiritual battle. There are forces of evil arrayed against us (Ephesians 6:12), whether we believe in the supernatural existence of evil (as the Bible certainly does) or just the sinful nature of people. What God wants to provide is protection against those forces.

The helmet of salvation is assurance that we belong to Christ; by accepting and following him, we will live with him eternally. The helmet of salvation helps us remember that Jesus died on the cross to save us from sin. St. Paul said, “I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes” (Romans 1:16).

There is another aspect of salvation that many people overlook to their detriment. The word *salvation* really means wholeness in a sense. And it is a process that God has provided for the Christian. We are not only saved from sin that we might live with Christ; we are provided a process of growth into wholeness (sometimes called sanctification). By putting on the helmet of salvation, we are not only claiming our kinship with Christ and the eternal benefit of it, but a willingness to grow into the wholeness of life that God has for us.

Next, we fasten on the breastplate of righteousness. The breastplate of righteousness reminds us that we are to be in a right relationship with God. That is what righteousness is, and when we fall

out of relationship by way of our own waywardness (known as sin), we can ask forgiveness and be reinstated.

Many people have a problem with the word *righteousness* because they automatically think of it as self-righteousness. Self-righteousness, though, is claiming for ourselves something we will never truly have this side of heaven: a perfect relationship with God.

Righteousness is one of those anomalies of the Christian faith: something we are to have, but will not perfectly obtain until we are with the Lord. There is no question that God calls us to righteousness (Psalms 5:12, 34:15, 55:22; Matthew 13:43; Romans 1:17). The Bible also tells us that our righteousness is as filthy rags (Isaiah 64:6) and “there is no one righteous, not even one” (Romans 3:10). Yet, Scripture assures us, “Though your sins are scarlet, they may become white as snow; though they be crimson, they may be like wool” (Isaiah 1:18). Thus, righteousness is something we strive for and will, one day, have.

When we put on the breastplate of righteousness, then, we are not being self-righteous; we are saying that we wholeheartedly seek a right relationship with God.

We then put on the girdle of truth (men may prefer to use the term *belt* of truth). Truth is ultimate reality as revealed to us in Christ. There are many today, including Christians, who no longer believe in ultimate truth. Yet, Psalm 119 tells us that God’s law is true (v. 142), that all His commands are true (v. 151) and all His words are true (v. 160). In the Gospel of John, Jesus says of himself, “I am the way, the truth and the life” (14:6).

We can know the truth through Scripture. The words and ways of God are truth. Satan, on the other hand, is a liar (John 8:44). He constantly seeks to confuse us by distorting the word of God or tempting us to follow some other way than the truth. His favorite attack on Christians is by way of false accusations (Revelation 12:10). Yet Paul tells us “there is now no condemnation for those in Christ Jesus” (Romans 8:1). When we put on the girdle/belt of truth, we are reminding ourselves that we are in Christ, that we seek God’s truth and stand in that truth against the accusations of Satan.

Next, we slip on the shoes of the gospel of peace. They equip us to be Christ's ambassadors of reconciliation in a world filled with strife and disharmony. As someone has said, if God wanted us to stay in green pastures beside still waters, we wouldn't need shoes. But, in fact, He calls us into the world, that the world might be led to Him. There are sharp stones, thorns and potholes along the pathways of the world, and we need to be equipped for them.

It is too easy for us to stay where we are safe and comfortable, but that won't move us in the directions the Lord would have us go. Thus, God equips us with the shoes of the gospel of peace to go out into the world and not only speak God's message, but be God's message.

Then there is the shield of faith. It protects us from both the assaults and temptations of the worldly way by reminding us that we trust God and want to live according to His will for us. The shield of faith is specifically to allow us to "extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one" (Ephesians 6:16). The large Roman shield of Paul's day was covered with leather that could be soaked in water and used to put out flame-tipped arrows. The devil lurks around us seeking to find ways to penetrate our faith in Christ by little darts of evil desire, trying to seduce us back into the old patterns of life.

The shield of faith is a barrier Satan cannot break through, so long as we hold it up by our prayer. Our faith has been built up, not by human wisdom but by the power of God (1 Corinthians 2:5). This piece of equipment, like the others, is given us by God to protect us that we might better love and serve Him.

Finally, there is the sword of the Spirit. The sword of the Spirit is the word of God, showing us how we are to live. Hebrews tells us, "For the word of God is living and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart" (4:12).

The *Life Application Bible* says this about Hebrews 4:12: "The word of God is not simply a collection of words from God, a vehicle for communicating ideas; it is living, life-changing, and dynamic as it works in us. With the incisiveness of a surgeon's knife, God's word reveals who we are and what we are not. It penetrates the core of our

moral and spiritual life. It discerns what is within us, both good and evil. The demands of God's word require decisions. We must not only listen to the word; we must also let it shape our lives." Taking up the sword of the Spirit means getting into Scripture that we may know God's will for our lives.

There is nothing "magic" about putting on the whole armor of God as a way to start our day as Christians. It is provided for us in Scripture. Each "piece of armor" we put on has, as we have seen, its own particular purpose and significance. If we want to go forth into each day equipped as God's person, an excellent way of doing that is prayerfully putting on the whole armor of God.

*Doing the Word, individually:* For the next week, begin each day in the manner suggested above.

*Doing the Word in a group:* Share openly with each other the methods that have worked for you in beginning the day by giving it over to the Lord. Specifically discuss whether you have "put on the whole armor of God" and how you feel about that.

### THE PRIORITY PRAYER

After I have committed my life into the Lord's hands and put on the whole armor of God each morning, the first thing I then pray for (though it may be later when I have some "quiet time" with the Lord) is the priority prayer in my life at the time. Let me give you some background on what I mean by the priority prayer.

If we will take the time to think about it, there is something on our hearts that outweighs (perhaps far outweighs) the other concerns that we are facing in life. It may be one of our children who seems to have gone astray or the health of a loved one. It may be a financial crisis or a vocational one. There are many things it could be, but we recognize it by the pain we feel deep within ourselves when we think about the matter. This is our spiritual priority, and we should be praying about it.

I started dealing with the issue of the priority prayer when I came to realize that such priorities did exist in my life from time to time, and that I did not feel that my prayers were adequate to deal with them. I began to search Scripture for guidance in how to pray as effectively as I could for the concern that was most on my heart at the time. I was led to 1 Chronicles 16:11 ("Look to the Lord for his strength; seek his face always") and then to Genesis 18:22-33 as an example of boldness in prayer.

In the process of following such leads, I came upon a footnote in the NIV Bible I was using that told me this: to be effective in prayer, we must pray in humility, in honesty, in faith, in confidence, in Jesus' name and in accordance with God's will. Also, God wants us to be persistent in prayer, and He wants us to accompany prayer with action. From the first, I was firmly convinced that those conclusions were correct ones. They verified all that I had learned about prayer over the years and set the information together more succinctly and in better order than I had previously noticed. I took the liberty, however, of adding one more element: thanksgiving to God for caring more about the person or matter about which we pray than we do ourselves.



With this background, I developed the pattern for my priority prayer. I recommend this to you as the prayer for the matter that is your priority right now, noting that you must be willing to keep on praying this prayer every day until it is answered or until God gives you a higher priority or a different understanding of the matter about which you are praying. Remember, *persistence* is a crucial element of this prayer. Begin by being specific about the matter you are bringing before the Lord, and then follow these steps:

1. Humility. This involves recognizing that there is nothing we can really do about the matter, but that God can and will. “Lord, I can’t do it; You can.”

2. Honesty. God wants us to be honest with Him in prayer. He knows what we are thinking and feeling, but He’s not sure that we do! It is only as we are willing to “spill our guts” that we are being honest with God, and it is only then that He can most effectively reach us with the help we need. With the matter that is my priority prayer at present, I am sometimes brought to tears praying about it. As agonizing as that is, once I have prayed my priority prayer, I don’t have recurring pain about the situation during the day; I have turned it over to the Lord as best I can, and I sense His peace that passes all understanding. “Lord, You know how desperate I am about \_\_\_\_\_ and the grief and pain it is causing me.”

3. Faith. I wouldn’t be praying this prayer as a priority every day if I didn’t have faith in God. I know He hears, and I know He cares. He wants to know how much I care and how much faith I have. “Lord, I have faith that you hear my prayer and that you want to help in ways that are greater than I can fathom.”

4. Confidence. Not only do I have the faith in God that causes me to pray this prayer, I have confidence that He will answer it. Maybe it won’t be in the way I want it answered (in my limited knowledge, or perhaps sheer ignorance) and perhaps not within the time I would desire, but He will answer it in the best way in the best time. “Lord, I know You will.”

5. Jesus’ Name. There is something very special about the name of Jesus. He died for us, and he intercedes for us before the Father. When we pray in Jesus’ name, we are identifying with him as our Lord

and Savior. It is *because* of Jesus that we can approach God in the manner we do, and we pray the way (toward the purpose) we think Jesus would pray. “Lord, I pray this in Jesus’ name.”

6. Accordance with God’s Will. We cannot positively know God’s will concerning the matter about which we pray, but it is God’s will that we be seeking His will and praying within it as best we can. From Scripture and from our relationship with God, we should certainly be learning some things about His will. We seek to understand God’s will and are shaped in our prayer by the best understanding we have. Then we can have some confidence that what we want is what God wants. (If we know that what we are praying for is contrary to God’s will we might as well forget this whole process; we had best pray, instead, for a better mind and heart). “Lord, I believe this concern I have is Your concern as well; I pray in accordance with Your will.”

7. Persistence. God wants us to persist in our prayer. It is by persistence that He knows how important the matter is to us. Yet I recognize that it is only by His grace that I can be willing to come back to Him day after day with the same prayer. “Lord, by Your grace, I will plead this case as long as I can.”

8. Accompanying Action. Despite what was said in the first step about the fact that we cannot solve the matter about which we pray and only God can, there are some things He may expect us to do. (I’m reminded of the woman who came to her pastor to ask him to pray about the loneliness of her neighbor, to which the pastor replied in astonishment, “But what are you doing about her loneliness other than asking me to pray about it?”). Caution is needed here. Things I have set out to “fix” rather than turning them over to God haven’t turned out too well. Likewise, when I have truly come to God for help but have been unwilling to do my part, they haven’t come out well either. Let God guide you in what He would have you do, but be willing to do it. “Lord, I am willing to do what You would have me do as You reveal that to me.”

9. Thanksgiving. We conclude by thanking God for what He is doing and will do about the situation. “Lord, You care more about

\_\_\_\_\_ than I do, and I am grateful for Your love and Your caring.”

One other thing should be said before concluding this teaching of the Priority Prayer. It has to do with step 2, honesty. The prayer object that might be our priority at any given time might be of such seriousness that we experience deep anxiety. As we get really honest about the person or matter we are praying about, the emotion that motivates us may, at least to some extent, be fear.

If this is the case, it is important to remember that one of the main things said to us in Scripture is “fear not.” Our prayer is a prayer of faith. The great enemy of faith is fear. The Bible says, “For God hath not given us the spirit of fear; but of power, and of love, and of a sound mind” (2 Timothy 1:7). If we focus on the fear, we will be fearful, and that fear may be transmitted to the person or situation for which we pray. Instead, we focus on God’s power and love, and on soundness of mind.

Well, that’s it. I wish I could say that this method of praying is so effective that it gets instant results. It doesn’t. I suspect it was with even more effective praying that Monica continued to come to God about her son Augustine. It took a long time for the results to come in on that one, but once they did what results they were! Augustine became one of the great saints of the Church.

What I can say is that this method of prayer has left me feeling that I am doing all that I can do, and there is great peace and contentment in that, even when results I can see are long in coming. It is the best way I have found to take the priority in my life at any given time to the Lord in prayer. I hope it will be helpful to you.

*Doing the Word, individually:* Determine what is the priority prayer in your life, and use the method suggested above for at least a week.

*Doing the Word in a group:* Give each person the opportunity to discuss one particularly pressing issue he or she is dealing with and what way of praying about it is being used. Share “successes” (and failures) with priority concerns that have been prayed for in the past.

### THE BLESSING

“The Lord bless you and keep you; the Lord make His face to shine upon you and be gracious to you; the Lord lift up His countenance upon you, and give you peace” (Numbers 6:24-26).

This ancient blessing of God’s people in the Old Testament became very popular in Christian churches following the Reformation. Particularly significant is the reference to God’s “face.” The face of God is the source of light. While turning His face away from someone would be a sign of God’s displeasure, His face (and His countenance, which means the same thing) toward someone is a sign of God’s pleasure in the company of the one on whom it shines. Likewise, the “peace” of God as used in this passage means the very best for that person in this life and the life to come.

Perhaps it is not surprising, then, that Gary Smalley and others who write and speak about Christian family life have been placing a lot of importance on this blessing (and appropriate adaptations of it) lately. It is a way for parents to bless their children daily. It is also a way for married couples to ask the Lord’s blessing on each other.

This method of blessing has become a very important part of my prayer life. Such a blessing is a specific and demonstrative way to speak God’s favor, power and protection into someone’s life, and is often accompanied by the laying on of hands. It is the kind of blessing spoken by Isaac to his son Jacob, and in turn by Jacob to his sons (Genesis 48:8—49:27). It is the type of blessing Jesus gave to his disciples (Luke 24:50) and to children (Mark 10:16).

As Christians, it is our responsibility to encourage a deep love of God within our homes. It is especially important to be able to convey to our children that which is primary in our lives, namely our love of God. One of the simplest and most effective ways to help our children know and love God is to pray a blessing on them daily with the laying on of hands. This gives them a regular and concrete encounter with God’s power and protection.

Each night before bedtime is an opportunity for parents to lay their hands on the heads of their children and pray the blessing from Numbers 6:24-26, adding the child's name and any special ways in which they want that child blessed at that time. If the child has been having trouble sleeping, is facing an exam at school the next day, or whatever, seeking God's blessing in that particular matter is an appropriate addition to the prayer.

It has been the common experience of parents who have used this method of blessing their children that the children seek the blessing if it is not otherwise forthcoming. A child who is going to bed early, for instance, will come to the parent and ask for a blessing. Or if the father is going on a business trip the child might ask for a blessing to last until his return, or request that dad call each night to give his blessing.

With all of the distractions that exist in the world today, it is extremely important to keep ourselves and our families focused on God and His providence in our behalf. It was a common failing of the Jewish people throughout the Old Testament that they would simply forget about God and their obligations to Him, and Christian people seem to fall into the same trap in our day. Blessings regularly given and received within the family can help offset this problem.

God is a God of blessings. He wants the best for us, and He blesses us in a great many ways each day, even when we are caught up in our own problems and fail to see His blessings. As Christians, as His people in the world today, we are to pass His blessings on to others, especially to those within our family.

When we ridicule our spouse or children, we are cursing them rather than blessing them. "Reckless words pierce like a sword, but the tongue of the wise brings healing" (Proverbs 12:18). We have a daily choice of speaking words of blessing or curse to our loved ones.

What a privilege it is to speak words of blessing. I would not think of leaving home in the mornings without praying a blessing on my wife and receiving one back from her. Nor would I want to part from a visit with our children and grandchildren without a prayer blessing them.

But I have also found that the blessing has become my primary prayer for members of the family on a daily basis even though I am separated from them by great distances. Some years ago a friend told of how he prayed for his grown children and grandchildren. “I don’t really ask God to do anything for or about my children any more; I just visualize myself holding each of them up to the Lord for his blessing.” In a similar way, I now envision myself laying hands on each of them after praying the blessing of Numbers 6. Of course, if any of them is going through a particular crisis or need, I pray about that as well; but the blessing is my daily prayer for each of them.”

What a blessing it is to pass God’s blessing on to others!

*Doing the Word, individually:* For the next week, put into practice what has been said above about the blessing, to the extent that it would work within your particular situation.

*Doing the Word in a group:* Discuss the ways in which you pray daily for members of your family. In what ways might the blessing be worked into that routine?

### PRAYER FOR THE NEIGHBORHOOD

The subject of “prayerwalking” as it is called today has captured the imagination of many Christians and is an exciting movement. Teams of people go about their neighborhoods praying for the homes and the people in very specific ways. Books have been written on the subject, and it is a worldwide movement.

Without that background, I began doing something similar years ago. It was during a time when I was running in my neighborhood in the evenings as a means of exercise. Because we had been living in our neighborhood for some years, we knew the people and many of their specific needs and concerns. Most of all, I wanted them to be committed Christians. So, as I would run by each house, I would pray for the people who lived there.

Some years later, a friend named Theresa Newell came to stay in our home while we were away. Theresa, at the time, was the director of the Breakthrough prayer ministry that had been started by Catherine Marshall and her husband Leonard LeSourd. We had left instructions that a neighbor across the street had information that could help Theresa if she had any particular needs. What a surprise when she found that the husband of the household was a former neighbor of hers in Virginia, one she had prayed for when she and a friend did prayerwalking in their neighborhood!

That coincidence (or “God-incident,” if you prefer) led to our getting Theresa to tell us about her efforts to pray for the people in her neighborhood. As I recall it now, she said that she and her prayer partner would simply walk around the neighborhood, stopping in front of each house and praying aloud for the particular concerns they had about the neighborhood and about the people in the house. As she talked about this, I reflected on and marveled at all the good things that had happened in our neighborhood in the years following my “prayer-running.”

Praying for our neighborhoods is something we can all do in whatever manner best suits us. We can do it as couples when we have

our early morning or evening walks. We can do it individually when we run or walk for exercise around the area where we live. Or we can do it intentionally as ministry: that is, go out walking while we pray or praying while we walk.

The worldwide ministry now known as prayerwalking involves such things as this and more. Christian groups conduct major prayerwalking efforts in distressed neighborhoods in the cities in which they live. Some even travel as teams to trouble spots around the world to prayerwalk the area.

God may not be calling you into a ministry of prayerwalking to other neighborhoods than your own, but would He not have you walk around your own neighborhood from time to time, praying for those people who live around you?

A recent variation of prayerwalking was particularly meaningful to my wife and me. A friend who is a schoolteacher in a local public school felt that the school needed special prayers. A team of four of us met at the school one Sunday afternoon. We were the only ones on the school grounds during that time and were able to move easily from one classroom to the next for our prayers.

We went to each classroom and prayed specifically for the teacher and the special needs and opportunities there. We asked for strengthening and increased faith for those teachers who were Christians, prayed for open hearts and conversion for those who were not. In praying for the first graders, we asked that their school experience get off to a good start; we especially prayed for classes where the children were physically or emotionally disabled.

I can't report to you that, as a result of our praying, the school no longer has any problems; but those of us who prayed have confidence that God blessed the effort and we would be delighted to have other opportunities to do the same thing for other schools in our area.

Here is a special way God can use each one of us. Whether we "prayerwalk" our neighborhood or serve on a team to bring God's blessing into some other type of situation, if we believe in prayer, we know that God will use our effort for good.



*Doing the Word, individually:* Ask God to show you how He would use you to pray for others in your neighborhood.

*Doing the Word in a group:* Organize and carry out a “prayerwalk” or variation of this method of teaming up to carry the love of God, through prayer, to meet some special need.

### SOAKING PRAYER

I first discovered “soaking prayer” in Francis MacNutt’s book, *The Power to Heal*. I then had the privilege of hearing him teach about it and demonstrate the method at an annual conference of the Anglican Fellowship of Prayer.

The idea of soaking prayer appealed to me from the first. Rather than simply laying hands on a person and briefly praying for that person’s healing of body, mind and spirit, soaking prayer takes a commitment of time. Ideally, this method of prayer involves a team of people praying for another with laying on of hands for perhaps an hour at a time, once a week, or for even a longer period of time (up to several hours) if only on a one-time basis. An alternative is to pray for the individual several times a week but for short periods (5-15 minutes) each time. The particular situation, the desires of the person to be prayed for and the availability and flexibility of the praying team determines which method will work best.

Here is why soaking prayer appealed to me. I believe that God wants all of His people involved in ministry. I think that is the main thing that Christians are supposed to be doing. Most of us can do ministry all day long by the loving attention we give to our family, friends and fellow employees. But God also calls us to more than that. There are other areas of ministry He would have us involved in, and there are as many potential ministries as there are needs in the world.

And I believe that God wants us to show our commitment to Him not only by being willing to minister but to sacrifice the time necessary to do it right. Soaking prayer seldom results in instant miracles of healing, except the miracle of love that is obvious because a team of two or more people are willing to come together to pray for someone in need no matter how many times or for how long they will need to pray.

But soaking prayer also results in healing of body, mind and spirit. According to MacNutt, it is particularly effective in dealing with someone with arthritis or joint problems. He asks the people being

prayed for if they are experiencing a relief from pain and/or a greater mobility as the prayers progress.

Some years ago when I was traveling for the Anglican Fellowship of Prayer, over a period of a few months I ran into three classic cases for the use of soaking prayer. In each instance, however, I was just passing through the area and could not participate in putting together and being a part of a soaking prayer team. I did what I thought was the next-best thing: I found someone who believed in healing prayer, gave them the MacNutt book marked at the section on soaking prayer, and asked them to follow through. To my frustration, it did not happen in any of the three instances. So, when my constant traveling days were over, I was very open to being a part of a soaking prayer team.

My wife and I have been on soaking prayer teams for some time now and find it one of the most rewarding ministries in which we have ever been involved. We have been praying for people with cancer and other life-threatening conditions. There are usually from two to six members of the praying teams we have worked with. How many people pray, for how long, and how often depends on the particular need, the person being prayed for and the availability and flexibility of the team members.

There is no special technique for praying, except that we all lay a hand or hands on the person being prayed for. If physical healing of a non-sensitive part of the body is to be prayed for, at least one person will have his or her hands on that spot. People pray as they are led, most of them praying aloud so that the others may be a part of their prayers. But there are often long periods of silence as people pray silently and simply let their hands of healing love represent the touch that Christ would provide if he were physically present.

The idea of being part of a soaking prayer team will be scary for some. We are reluctant to commit ourselves for such long periods of time or to be locked into a certain time frame week after week. Perhaps we are not comfortable with praying out loud, or we are concerned that our efforts won't "work" and the person prayed for will not get any better. Often the problem is that the person who needs the prayers cannot admit the need sufficiently to ask for help.

I can only tell you that there are people in your church and neighborhood who need soaking prayer. I can also tell you that it is a joy to be a part of a soaking prayer team. I can further tell you that there is always a miracle of healing; not that the disability prayed for is always healed in the way we would like for it to be (although sometimes it is), but that the person prayed for knows he or she is loved in a way never known before because God's love has been seen in action by the touch of faithful Christian hands.

*Doing the Word, individually:* Seek the Lord's guidance concerning whether you are being called to start or be a part of the healing ministry in your church.

*Doing the Word as a group:* Find someone in the group who is willing to be prayed for in the manner described above, and put "soaking prayer" into practice for the benefit of that person at least for the amount of time that your group would normally be meeting.

### PRAYING THE NAME

The root significance of Christian baptism is identification with Christ. We put on Christ. This has everything to do with prayer. We discover the meaning of praying the name of Jesus.

By baptism we acquire a new name: we are “Christened.” We have the name and the personal presence of Christ himself. “Baptize” means “to plunge into”; it is a “plunging into” union with Christ. In New Testament times, following the Resurrection and Pentecost, the new Christians were immersed in water, and when they emerged, they put on new clothing. It showed that they were new persons in Christ. “Putting on Christ” is described in Colossians 3:10: “Put on the new nature, which is being renewed in knowledge after the image of its creator,” or in Ephesians 4:24: “Put on the new nature, created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness.”

We are clothed with Christ. We could say that we have the mantle of Christ. Elisha took on a new life and prophetic ministry after he had put on the mantle of Elijah. Our mantle is more than a cloak; it is union with Christ!

As a new person we have a new name. “What’s in a name?” For the Christian the name is not only an identification, it evokes the inner-most part of a person’s being or identity. When someone calls you by name, you do not respond with the thought, “Isn’t that interesting. My name is being spoken.” No, you respond with your whole being, everything that is “you.” So even on a human level the calling of a name has power. Think then of the power if you are calling on the name of Jesus!

As a praying people we cannot emphasize too strongly that by baptism we share in the most precious gift of Christ, the gift of the Holy Spirit. Through the Holy Spirit we are in the constant presence of Jesus Christ. We can say with St. Paul (Galatians 2:20), “No longer I, but Christ who lives in me.” When we call his name, it is not a long-distance call. He is immediately present. He is in us and we are in him. We say “Jesus” and it is not simply a matter of nomenclature; it is a

recalling of the total, loving, living Savior who is God of God, Light of Light, Emmanuel, “God with us.”

Now we see the significance of Jesus’ saying, “If you ask anything in my *name*,” or “where two or three are gathered in my *name* there am I in the midst of them.” Or take St. Paul’s teaching, “Whatever you do, whether in speech or action, do it in the *name* of the Lord Jesus” (Colossians 3:17).

I began to understand this more clearly some years ago when I met Mother Alexandra. She had taken on this new name when she became a religious of the Rumanian Orthodox Church. She was Princess Ileana, daughter of King Carol of Rumania, and great-granddaughter of Queen Victoria of England. We sat in Sam Shoemaker’s home near the fireplace where he had done so much of his writing. It was a place called Burnside in rural Maryland.

Mother Alexandra took me aside and asked me what I knew about the Jesus Prayer. I admitted that I had barely heard of it. I knew that it had something to do with the repetition of the name of Jesus. I may have been leery of it for that reason, remembering Christ’s admonition against using “vain repetitions” when you prayed. Actually at that period of time I can hardly be blamed for knowing little about the Jesus Prayer because, amazingly, it was very late in coming to America. It was first mentioned in American literature in, of all places, J.D. Salinger’s “Franny and Zooey” (1961).

Mother Alexandra introduced me to some pamphlets from the Eastern Orthodox Church about the Jesus Prayer. One was about the “prayer of aspiration,” that is the prayer of the breath. On the intake of your breath you would pray, “Lord Jesus Christ Son of God,” and on the output of the breath you would pray, “have mercy on me a sinner.” Mother Alexandra said that one would pray in this manner repeatedly until the Jesus Prayer became a part of your breathing. A sudden inspiration came to me (the word “inspiration” is well-chosen because it means “in the Spirit”). The Greek word for “Spirit,” *pneuma*, is also the word for “breath.” In fact there are three words which come from *pneuma*—Spirit, breath and life. When you breathe in the name of Jesus, you are in his Spirit (*Pneuma Hagion*, the Holy Spirit), and his Spirit is life indeed!

From that evening on I began to pray the Jesus prayer, a prayer that is often found in the Gospels, as in Luke 18:38, when the blind beggar called upon Jesus. How had I ever lived without it? What a gift of prayer: to call on his name and to know that he is immediately present! The prayer should become so much a part of your breathing that after a time it would simply be there, a permanent ongoing part of your being, even when you were not consciously aware of it. I became joyfully convinced of this spiritual truth when I would wake up in the middle of the night and find that this prayer would still be “going.” Even as I slept, there was a breathing of his Holy name.

As years went by “praying the name” became at times less formal than saying the entire Jesus Prayer. Often it would simply be the name of Jesus. “Jesus, Jesus, Jesus,” with the intake of each breath. Then I began to exercise what I facetiously called my spiritual pump. That is, after breathing in the name of Jesus I would, on the outtake of each breath, expel something which was inside of me which did not belong in his holy company. It would go like this: Intake, “Jesus”—output, “financial concerns.” Intake, “Jesus”—output, “discouragement.” And on and on until every negative thought, every burden, every sin, has been breathed out. Then it is purely Jesus coming in.

Jesus said, “If you ask anything in my name, I will do it” (John 14:13). Some have thought that this was a wonderful saying because it told you that you could have anything you wanted—your wish is granted! However, they had not observed that the essential qualifier is “in my name.” As a matter of fact, this makes the saying vastly more wonderful. It’s not just a saying; it’s a divine promise. On the one hand, if you got everything you personally desired but it was not “in his name,” it would most probably be ruinous to yourself and to everyone around you. On the other hand, if you pray for anything “in his name,” it means that you are possessed by the Spirit of Christ. “In his name” is “in his personality”—what Christ wills in complete conformity with the will of the Godhead. Yes, if you ask anything in his name, you will receive it because it could not be anything less than that which is in complete accord with God’s way and God’s will! He, indeed, wants you to have that!

The exciting part of this is that we can be certain that our prayer life in the name of Jesus is anything but restraining ourselves, so that we will utter only a minimal number of timid requests. No, he wants us to pray all the more, and all the more boldly, for the things of God. The things of God are infinite, endless, full measure, pressed down, and running over!

*Doing the Word, individually:* Over the next week, use the Jesus Prayer or some variation of it that works for you.

*Doing the Word in a group:* Discuss experiences you have had with the Jesus Prayer or breath prayers. What does “praying in the name of Jesus” mean to you? How do you pray in the name of Jesus?



### PRAY AS THE CHILDREN OF GOD

Jesus commends childlikeness in our faith. This means that he also commends childlikeness in our prayers. In Matthew 19:13 we read, “Then children were brought to him that he might lay his hands on them and pray.” The disciples rebuked the people; but Jesus said, “Let the children come to me, and do not hinder them; for to such belongs the kingdom of heaven.” And in Luke 18:17 we read, “Truly, I say to you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God like a child shall not enter it.” When we pray, we are not simply spouting words—we are entering the Kingdom, and he tells us that the best way to enter the Kingdom is in a childlike way. “The Kingdom of God belongs to such as these!”

When I was rector of St. Paul’s, Duluth, Minnesota, I entered that great edifice from the rear one weekday. It may help to envision this church: a Gothic revival church designed by Ralph Adams Cram, of stone, vaulted arches and beautiful stained glass. It had a long aisle, down which I was now looking, that daunted the knees of many a nervous bride as she began her wedding procession (I make a point of this because of the person in this story who had the nerve to walk down this same aisle). As I stood there looking at the distant altar, I noticed something incongruous placed in the middle of it. I couldn’t tell from that distance what it was, but I sensed that it was a bit unusual. When I got up to the altar, I knew what it was—a gum wrapper. I picked it up and saw that it had handwriting on the inside of it, the scrawl of a little child. This is what it said: “Dear God, forgive me for stealing a stick of Susie’s gum.” A child’s prayer! But what made it all the more profound is that placed on the altar next to the note was a full, new package of gum—an offering!

Do you grasp the significance of this? In childlike faith the child had walked the long aisle of this dignified church, right up to the sanctuary, the Holy of Holies, and had placed this prayer for forgiveness there. Profound and touching in itself. But, in addition, there was the offering! I doubt that this child had ever read the

scripture, “Leave your gift there before the altar and go; first be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift” (Matthew 5:24). There was a childlike spiritual instinct that led the child to do what Christ had said should be done—reconciliation and offering. “The Kingdom of God belongs to such as these.” This gum was so consecrated upon the altar I knew not what to do with it except to place it in the vault in the sacristy along with other sacred objects. I’m sure the Altar Guild must have wondered about it.

What is it that makes childlike prayer so commendable? For one thing a child is malleable. What does this mean? It means “moldable,” i.e., it is flexible, still soft enough to be formed. The child has not become hardened in mind and heart and spirit. To be a child of the King means to be malleable in the hands of the Creator, attuned to the voice of the Son, and gently led by the Holy Spirit. Romans 8:14, “For all who are led by the Spirit of God are the sons of God.” Romans 8:16, “It is the Spirit himself bearing witness with our spirit that we are the Children of God.” The children of God are led by the Spirit of God because they are malleable and therefore leadable.

There is that old hymn, “Have thine own way, Lord, have thine own way. Thou art the potter, I am the clay.” God is making us over in his own image. That molding is not happening if we are hardened against the things of the Spirit. This is where our prayer life comes in. We need to pray, “Lord, take away the encrustations and barnacles I have allowed to form around my spiritual life. Make me like a child again, yielding to your touch.” John Donne, 17th Century Dean of St. Paul’s, London, felt he needed major surgery. “Batter my heart, three personed God; for You as yet but knock, breathe, shine, and seek to mend; that I may rise and stand, o’erthrow me, and bend Your force to break, blow, burn, and make me new.”

Pray that God may find a softened soul, pulverized on the anvil of surrender, that you may be reshaped by his hands.

Not only is childlike prayer commended by our Lord because a child is malleable but also because a child has not lost a sense of wonder. A child wonders about everything: the forms of great animals in the clouds, the purr of a kitten, the strength of his father, the warmth of his mother, the amazing ability of the legs to skip and jump. The

child goes from one wonder to another all day long. This wonder also relates the child to God in an exciting way.

In my first parish I became aware as I worked in my office that someone came into the church about four o'clock every weekday. I checked my curiosity so as not to disturb this person who undoubtedly came for quiet prayer. Then, one day, I happened to be at the altar marking the missal and the door opened. I saw a six year old girl come in and kneel in the back pew. Even in a glance you could see the fervor and expectation in her face. Obviously prayer had become a wonderful experience for her. No one made her come. She came out of her own joy of communion with the Lord.

If one could only have heard the words that silently came forth from her spirit! I knew the family. Her mother was faithful but the father was an irritable atheist. Yet in a couple of years he also was a devout believer. It is hard to resist the thought that this change of heart came as a result of the earnest prayers of a little child.

We pray in the Baptismal office (p. 308), "Give them an inquiring and discerning heart, the courage to will and to persevere, a spirit to know and to love you, and the gift of joy and wonder in all your works." We pray for ourselves as we renew the gift of the indwelling Christ, remembering his promise that he is with us always.

How dry our prayer life would be if our relationship with God were only intellectual, philosophical and confined within the measure of our minds. When I was a child in Minnesota, I would go out with my friends in midwinter to slide down the hill on my sled. It would be almost dark when I came home, stiff as an icicle with snow jammed up my sleeves and into the tops of my overshoes. Mother would always be there at the door to come to my rescue. But imagine what it would be like if only "the idea of motherhood" would be there. Perhaps you could get an IBM card printout of a machine on the back porch which spelled out the description of "a mother." There would be no comfort in this.

No, the "idea of motherhood" would not be sufficient for a child. A real mother brought you into the room, helped you off with your icy clothes, dunked you in a warm tub, and then brought you a cookie with some milk. A child would never be satisfied with "the idea

of God.” It is the real God that he wants. He wants to be in his presence and to be warmed by his love. This is the way a child prays. This is the way Christ asks us all to pray.

Another reason that Christ commends childlike prayer is because a child sets no limits upon God. As adults we have likely fallen into the slump of assuming that God could not do this or that. After all, we are people of scientific minds. It would not even be respectable amongst our rational friends to suggest that God could speak to you, could heal diseases, intervene in the matters of the world, rescue you from peril, or change your life. More and more limitations are placed upon what God can do, and then, of course, prayer life becomes sterile. Christ came back to Nazareth, but he could do no miracles there because they did not believe in him. But away from there, where he encountered child-like minds, he did great wonders.

When we speak of childlike prayer, we are not speaking of being “childish.” Christ in commending childlike prayer was not referring to petulance, pouting, or fancy. Paradoxically, he was speaking of the way to maturity. Maturity does not come from distancing yourself from God but by entering into him eagerly, softly, suppliantly, wonderingly and trustingly.

*Doing the Word, individually:* Write an earnest, childlike prayer of your own and use it for a week.

*Doing the Word as a group:* Discuss: (1) What are your first memories of praying as a child? (2) Recall the most meaningful prayer you have heard one of your children (or someone else’s child) pray. (3) What do you understand Jesus to have meant when he said that we are to receive the Kingdom of God like a child?

### THE CROSS OF PRAYER

I always assume that “The Cross of Prayer” is a way of praying that is familiar to everyone. Perhaps this is because it is so familiar to me, having used it for so many years. Yet, when I talk about it to groups here and there, I find out that it is entirely new to them. They are as excited about this discovery as I was nearly forty years ago when I heard it described by Bishop Everett Jones of West Texas.

You can pray the Cross of Prayer anywhere: while driving your car, flying in a plane, walking, sitting in a quiet place (or even a noisy place), or in your bed. First you visualize the most sacred emblem of Christianity, the cross. The imagery of the cross etches the way of prayer into your mind in an indelible way. You can visualize the cross instantaneously. But the cross which you see is not a piece of jewelry; it is the real cross upon which our savior Jesus Christ gave his life for us. This is what makes this prayer so powerful. Why did he die for us? Out of love—God so loved us that he gave his only begotten Son.

It is because of this amazing love that I am able to pray. I am not begging to a God who is aloof or reluctant. I am encountering Christ whose love will never leave me nor forsake me. What a difference this makes in my prayers. I am praying to the Christ of the Cross, Christus Victor; I cannot help but be victorious with him.

Lift your eyes to the top of the cross. This brings you to the prayer of Adoration. Christ said, “And I, if I be lifted up, will draw all men to me” (John 12:32). How wonderful to approach the Lord seeking nothing except to adore him. To adore him means to say, “Lord, I love you!” In a sense you have already entered the heavenly place because there all your needs are supplied and you can devote yourself to adoration.

Adoration can take many forms. You can recall great phrases: “Holy, holy, holy, Lord God Almighty, which was, and is, and is to come.” “How great thou art; heaven and earth are full of your glory.” “Praise God from whom all blessings flow.” Sometimes I will say the entire Te Deum which I have committed to memory. It begins, “We

praise you O God; we acknowledge you to be the Lord.” Or it can be whatever comes to your heart. One evening at a prayer group in the rectory at Duluth a teenager was so enraptured with the experience (I can still see this young person sitting on the rug by the fireplace) that she declared, “Yea, God!” That was true adoration.

How appropriate it is to begin with adoration. Too often in our prayer life we begin with our complaints. Yes, we will find that there is room in our prayer life even for our complaints, but it is amazing how they shrink when we simply bask in the love of God in adoration. How beautiful it is to reflect upon the visit of the Magi and the shepherds to the infant Jesus. They came only to adore him. When they left, their lives were forever altered. The Wise Men became the first missionaries as they carried the news of Christ to distant lands. The shepherds returned to their flocks. Outwardly their hard jobs were the same, but inwardly the shepherds were changed. So it is with us; the outlook is transformed by the inlook. “O, come let us adore him, Christ, the Lord.”

Now, let your inner eye move to the left arm of the cross. Often we refer to this arm as a transept as in the cruciform church. The cross became the visual symbol for our Christian faith, even to be seen in the layout of a great cathedral. As you worshipped, it was as if you lived with Christ within the cross. So it is that in our inner temple, the temple of the Holy Spirit, we live within the cross of Christ.

On the left transept of the cross you pray the prayer of Repentance. Observe the appropriateness of this. Once you have looked adoringly at the perfection and holiness of God, it makes you more aware of your own imperfection and unholiness. You see the great gap between “the ought” and “the is.” The Christ whom you adore becomes the clear blueprint of what your life is meant to be.

Repentance is, paradoxically, a blessed act of prayer because it is the prelude to true joy. Without repentance we would remain burdened by our guilt. As the burden accumulates, it becomes a problem of where to store these noxious waste products. Soon all available space is filled, and the fumes of this spiritual decay become poisonous to our whole being. We become sick with what could be described as the most lethal sickness, to be sick of yourself.

Kierkegaard, the 19th century theologian, described it as “the sickness unto death.” Someone has to take this burden away. You can’t do it yourself because your “self” is the problem. Dr. Menninger, in *Whatever Became of Sin*, tells how much of counseling failed because it told people that guilt was imagined. No, says Dr. Menninger, guilt is very real and can only be healed by repentance and forgiveness.

Thank God for the privilege of repentance! Christ said of the publican who repented that he was exalted. Christ is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. In my prayer of repentance I can visualize Christ carrying away this accumulated burden of poisonous material. Then, I am cleansed and the house that was once filled with debris is now cleared out so that the fullness of Christ can come in.

The purpose of repentance is neither to wallow in our shame nor to grovel before God. The purpose is to open the way once more to the fullness of communion (union) with Christ which is our baptismal birthright. The saints of old were neither people who dragged around in remorse nor people who were accumulating virtue little by little. The saints were those who didn’t delay for a moment to repent in order that they might have the full flow of the power and love of Christ washing over their lives.

Move now to the right transept of the cross. Here we pray the prayer of Thanksgiving. Again, see the appropriateness. Now that we have repented and received full forgiveness all we want to do is to say, “Thank you, Lord!” What a relief! We are breathing pure spiritual air again. Then we easily recall the many things for which we are thankful: family, friends, food, well-being, guidance, bountifulness, salvation. So often I find myself thanking him for the goodness he has bestowed upon me from the beginning of my life up to this very moment.

Thanksgiving is such a healthy prayer. It is found that grateful people are indeed more healthy in mind, body and spirit, than complaining people. It has everything to do with communing with the Lord. Little wonder that the greatest act of communal prayer in the sacramental life of the Church is called the Eucharist, which means thanksgiving.

Now we go to the center where the transepts meet the upright beam of the cross. In this meeting place we pray the prayer of

Intercession. This is the place where our life meets the lives of others, and we pray the prayer of outgoing love. Intercession is a stumbling block for some people because they can't imagine how their prayers could possibly influence the lives of other people. "Doesn't God know what is best for them without my prayers?" I quickly overcome that mental objection by remembering that God has asked me to pray for others. He would not ask me to pray for others if it were a futile exercise. God would not require that which is foolish or useless.

The assurance is that, indeed, God uses our prayers of intercession. We are like those people who brought the paralytic before the presence of Jesus and even tore open the roof to lower him down before the Great Physician. In intercession we are lifting people into the presence of Christ and, undoubtedly, we are tearing away barriers that may be keeping them from him.

In my intercessions I always pray for members of my family. It's not a case of "God bless Ma, Dad, Sport, and me, and no more," as one child is said to have prayed. It is only a beginning. Yet, if you don't pray for your own family, who else is more likely to do so? Yes, pray fervently for those who are near and dear to you. They have new situations and different needs every day. Then pray for those on your prayer list, whether your list is written on a card or written on your heart. The story of intercession is told over and over again in this way: someone rallies from a serious illness, another comes out of deep grief, yet another receives divine guidance, and it happens just at the moment you were praying for them. Not a "coincidence" but a "God-incidence." Treasure these reports of answered prayer, and use them to build confidence in the power of intercession so that you will pray for others all the more, and all the more expectantly.

Now you come to the foot of the cross for the prayer of Petition—asking for your own answers, your own needs. Some feel too scrupulous about praying for themselves. Isn't it selfish? But look where it is placed in the Cross of Prayer: last. Coming at this place it is very likely to be greatly altered in comparison to having come first. When you have adored him, repented to him, thanked him, and considered the lives of others who have so many problems greater than your own, your petitions become honed down to spare realities. Yet,



don't neglect to pray for yourself. You not only have Christ's permission, you have his encouragement. He appeals to you to ask, seek and knock. Don't let some matter fester in your spirit. Bring it out before him. He knows it's there. If it's unworthy, he'll tell you so, and you will be glad because you wouldn't want the damage of an unworthy request. Even his "no" is the divine "yes." Other times he'll say "not yet" and for a good reason. Then there are times when you will know that the answer is "Yes, my child, immediately!" See what he says in Luke 18:7-8, "And will not God vindicate his elect who cry to him day and night? Will he delay long over them? I tell you, he will vindicate them speedily."

*Doing the Word, individually:* For the next week, pray the Cross of Prayer during your regular quiet time.

*Doing the Word as a group:* Discuss how you pray each of the five facets of prayer mentioned in the chapter: Adoration, Repentance, Thanksgiving, Intercession and Petition.

### POEMS TO GOD

Give wings to my words, Lord;  
Help me to touch at least one soul;  
May these words be meant for someone  
Whose life will never be the same again.

This part of a poem I wrote to God the night before giving a sermon. I find it helpful to speak to God in poetry. The Psalmist spoke to God in poetry. So did Job and Isaiah. Think of the poetic words of Paul, “Now I see through a glass darkly, but then face to face” (1 Corinthians 13:12). It is almost instinctive to turn to poetic phrasing when addressing God. You don’t have to; God loves your commonest expression just the same.

The Greek *poiesis*, from which the word poetry comes, means “a making,” “a creation.” A poem is defined as “a composition designed to convey a vivid and imaginative experience, characterized by the use of condensed language, chosen for its sound and suggestive power as well as its meaning.” Our hymns are sacred poetry. For many, including myself, the words of hymns are powerful forms of silent devotion. Sometimes my mind goes from one great hymn to another as I praise God and supplicate him.

Over the years I have written prayers to God in a poetic form, often in free verse. It is a very special prayer experience. You are in a quiet place. You allow your heart to go out to the Lord, and whatever words are given to you flow from your fingers through pen and paper. Most often your prayer poem consists of that which is most immediate in your life. It is important to “get it out.” God helps you in an amazing way because he wants you to get it out.

Closely akin to this experience is one that I observed at a private Episcopal School where I served as a staff member. The headmaster, a priest, had a unique way of dealing with troubled young people. Perhaps they were misbehaving, or else they were having inexplicable moods. He would send them to a quiet room and ask them to write a

poem. Most had never thought of doing such a thing in all their lives. Yet, as they wrote, they came out with remarkable insights into their own souls. A healing and a calm came out of it.

One time I sat with a sense of blankness, and this is what came out:

When Praying is Difficult

Dear God:

This is one of the days  
When praying is difficult.  
I have the spiritual “blahs.”

The race is long, and I see no end;  
The calendar is numbers stretching into  
A routine future.  
My troubles are chronic and old.

I cannot fool you, for you know where I am.  
What shall I say?  
Answer my formless prayer.

Dear child:

I know your mood.  
Be wise and accept it as it is.  
I did not promise everlasting excitement;

You could not bear it.  
Some days are ordinary, prose instead of poetry,  
Days for work.  
And I am in them;  
Underneath are the everlasting arms.

Bring me your dullness;  
I will make it bright.  
You are mine.

God brought me out of a rut by my admission to him that I was stuck in a rut. Another time I was in an airport. Time can seem so tedious and wasted there. You spend what seems like a disproportionate part of your life waiting, waiting. I wrote this poem to God (it wasn't a quiet place but quiet came within):

### In An Airport

Lord, who was it who said,  
"If man were meant to fly,  
God would have given him wings?"  
Soon I'll be soaring over height-flattened mountains,  
Checkered prairies, and snaking rivers.  
I'll think of the pioneers who carried the Book  
Over like-distances in months of hardship,  
Setting up chapels on the way.

But now I sit and wait, going nowhere  
Until gates open and, like cattle on market-day,  
I'm swept over ramps with lowing masses.  
Meanwhile, time, though ravished in the air,  
Is without motion here, a sterile setting.  
Have we gained time to waste it here?

Dear traveler, my servant, my child.  
Open your eyes and see.  
There is motion everywhere.  
Hearts are beating, blood is coursing.  
Whoever moves by, or sits beside you,  
Is under my eye and needful of your prayer.  
Such urgency as brings my people  
To such haste on heights  
Speaks often of need  
Beyond those in kitchen, street, or shop.  
Pray for them; then fly with me.  
I'll be there before you.

I find it helpful to have a pen and paper ready at any time. You never know when or where a poem to God may want to come out. Sometimes I find myself waking up in the night to write something down. I have learned to have writing equipment in the drawer next to the bed. One time I wrote this prayer poem:

### In the Middle of the Night

Dear Lord, you know I am not an insomniac;

Yet, sometimes, I waken in the middle of the night.

Was it some sound, or change of weather?

Or are you saying something to my spirit when all is still?

I didn't give you much time during the noisy cluttered day.

I might resent this loss of sleep and use old devices to nod off again—

Like counting sheep backward from 30, picturing each number from that one down to zero,

Drawn on a blackboard to be erased one by one until all are wiped out, and then to sleep.

But, better yet, I'll turn to you and ask what it is you woke me to say.

I can hardly say I have no time to listen.

What else have I to do than to try to invent monotony?

It's incredible to know that you are as fully awake now as at noon-day,

And that there is no darkness in you.

How gracious, Lord, to wake me now to share this intimacy when half the world sleeps and have ceased to bombard your doors.

I asked for help on a sermon today and now you are giving it to me.

I won't get up to write it down

Because it will be well remembered at dawn.

Sleep comes softly again.

Since you have no need to share these thoughts with anyone but God, you don't have to worry about perfect phrasing. No one is going to correct your paper and give you an A or an F. Let it flow as it will. The prayer poem may have many uses.

First, you are really concentrating on your relationship with Christ. Everyone has experienced those distracting side-thoughts that shatter your silent prayers. How did I get so far from my prayers? However, in writing, there is a focus that keeps you there. More and more you enter into his presence and continue there until you have completed a spiritual journey.

Second, you are excavating from your soul honest elements of your spiritual state that you may never have realized were in existence. The Holy Spirit, who, after all, is the Spirit of prayer, is plumbing your depths to bring out whatever is needful for a dearer, nearer relationship to God. You are entering into the desire of the Lord, which is to bring you ever closer to him. No, he doesn't want to push you off; he wants you to be with him more and more in complete intimacy.

Third, you will find God answering what at first was a written question on your part. The answer is not always in the form of a graphic, detailed statement, but it becomes just as satisfactory when he comforts you by saying, "You don't need to know all this right now; just know that all is well and that it will be well." In the end God's answer is his presence.

Fourth, you may keep these prayer poems as a form of spiritual diary. Months or years later you may be amazed by what you have written. You may find yourself in similar straits again and be glad to know that you already had God's solution written in a poem. It still fits. Or you may discover that you have developed in new ways in your spiritual journey and that these prayer poems are like landmarks along a road.

In this series I wrote about childlike prayer. I end with a prayer poem that reminds me of this:

### Remembering Childhood

I lost something once,

Though I didn't know it at the time.  
When I was a child  
The air was different;  
Thinner in winter, thicker in summer.

When I smell the earth  
I remember childhood.  
Strange!  
Is it because I walked  
Closer to the earth then?  
In endless days I ranged  
From yard to yard in brief adventures  
Of mud pies and willow trees.  
Then  
There would always be childhood,  
But I slipped over the line.  
When?

You ask me to be a little child,  
But what do you mean?  
Only that I trust in your Fatherhood?

But I remember enchantments  
That had no thought of trust;  
Visions in the clouds,  
The treasures of the sea,  
A friend coming,  
Timelessness.

They belonged to my earliness  
Fresh from the hand of your Creation.  
These things are meant to last,  
But they are plucked away like leaves  
Torn from a tree in a merciless wind.

The leaves must remain and grow,

Let me grow in the first sweet soil  
Watered into new life by thy Spirit.  
Maturity is not to be a gravel pit.

Strong and vital Jesus,  
I would wonder, laugh, and dream.  
I would stay close to earth yet lifted  
Over it by angels,  
Dispel the winds that strip away my childhood.

I would not be a flower child  
In silly, thoughtless chaos;  
But let me not lose the lustre of the freshness of Creation.

*Doing the Word, individually:* Write one or more poems to God.

*Doing the Word as a group:* In preparation for the group meeting, assign each person to write a poem to God. If a person believes he or she will have a problem doing that, ask the person to take a Psalm and re-write it in contemporary language and/or put it into rhyme. At the meeting, have each person who is willing to do so share the poem, and discuss his or her feelings concerning the process and the results.



### PRAYING WITH THE SAINTS

Praying with the saints is especially recommended for prayer in the church, during the act of worship, or when you are in the church alone. You come with the premise and the promise of the Communion of Saints. You take to heart the Preface, “Therefore, with Angels and Archangels and all the Company of Heaven.” You say it, you sing it, and you mean it.

The nave of the church is ideally suited for prayer with the saints because it has been consecrated by the worship of God’s people over the years, sometimes for centuries. It is filled with sacred objects which have been blessed in memory of beloved people. Through the stained glass a spectrum of light illuminates the great saints of old. The vaulted ceiling lifts your soul to heaven. In many churches the sanctuary light is there to remind you of the real and constant presence of our Lord Jesus Christ, the head of the Church.

At the 1988 Lambeth Conference of Bishops of the Anglican Communion, the bishops and their wives were having Evensong in ancient Canterbury Cathedral, the Jerusalem of Anglicanism. The last hymn was sung, and the organist was playing a postlude which echoed around the vaults and arches of this cavernous house of God. Day had turned into night, and as the last tones of the organ faded, the lights inside the cathedral went out. We sat in total darkness and silence. Some spiritual instinct made us all stay in place. No one rushed for the doors. The mystery of praying with the saints was shared by all. Your eyes adjusted as faint light filtered through the stained-glass windows. You could even make out the steps leading up to the altar rail which were now worn smooth by the centuries of people who had come and gone to receive communion. Pilgrims had come here from every part of England. Canterburians had worshipped all their lives here, generation after generation. They were all here now, the company of heaven, with us, with Christ. All alive with him! This is what it is like to pray with the saints.

When I speak of praying with the saints, I am speaking of a kind of quiet prayer which is not necessarily related to the “invocation of the saints,” a popular practice of the old pre-protestant Churches (not discounting the understanding that such may be the piety of many Christians today). Rather, it is a form of meditation which reminds us of the great scope of life, “from here to eternity.” We too easily get a shrunken, truncated spirituality that sees only this world, and very little of that indeed. If the walls close in on us when we pray, it may be that we have forgotten the greatness for which Christ has prepared us, a greatness which is already around us.

Your home church is just as good a place as a cathedral. Here is the intimacy of family and friends that spans the years. Here they were baptized, confirmed, married and departed. They who now are in the company of heaven knelt in this very place. Come early to church and soak up the atmosphere of their presence in the Communion of Saints. In prayer recall them by name, see their faces, commend them to their life of perfect service. Then, when the Eucharist takes place and you come to the altar rail to receive the sacrament, celebrate the closeness which you are assured is there. You know that you are in the presence of Christ and that they are in the presence of Christ. This being so, they cannot be far away.

You may want to go further in praying with the saints as I have. At times my mind goes to the Apostles. Yes, they are there! Peter, James, John, Andrew, and all the rest. What are they up to now in the realms of glory? You know that their apostolic work goes on unhindered by the limitations of the flesh. And there is St. Paul. Can our meditation upon him inspire us to greater zeal in the work of evangelism? There is the first of the saints, Mary. It comes to me that the reason that Mary is so often seen at great shrines like Lourdes or Walsingham is that she introduces us to the Communion of Saints and to him who is adored by them. Healing of mind, body and spirit comes because the Great Physician is joined by the chorus of those who have received the ultimate healing.

At times I meditate upon great witnesses of the Kingdom: Augustine of Hippo, Frances of Assisi, Patrick of Ireland, Anselm of Canterbury, Luther of Germany, William Law of England, Wesley,

Keble, Evelyn Underwood and C. S. Lewis. What a short list this is! Come with your own. It is enough to thrill your soul just to think of the company we keep.

Having a life-long love of music, in my prayers I often think of the great composers whose most exalted works were their sacred choruses. There was Mozart who died at thirty-eight soon after he had composed his Requiem. Amadeus means “lover of God.” A leading conductor recently said, “Outside of God there is no explanation for the great music of Mozart.” He left this world at his prime. What great music is he still composing in the nearer presence of God? Or Schubert, composer of the Ave Maria, dying at age thirty-one; he had only begun to write great songs of praise. Consider the company of Beethoven, who prayed over all his compositions, or Bach, who wrote “to the glory of God” in the top corner of all his works, or Handel, having been healed by God, who composed the “Hallelujah Chorus” in twenty-four hours. Praying with the company of heaven there are times when you seem aware of a higher harmony, the nearness of the angel choir who sang the Gloria in Excelsis at the coming of Christ.

Perhaps this is an appeal for more times of silent prayer in the church. What a pity that most of our churches have had to be locked except at times of services! In former days it was such a common thing for a weary, or confused, or heavy-laden person to come quietly into the church and kneel down (day or night) and then go away lightened and renewed. Such transformation is a true miracle! Is there no way that we could open the churches again? Can we bear to lose so much genuine spirituality? One thinks of the possibility of creating the Guild of the Open Church in which parishioners would pledge themselves to be at the church for certain hours to keep the door open. A double blessing would be obtained as a more constant vigil of prayer could be maintained for the parish. Think what could be brought about by concerted prayer!

The face of Christ was seen on the tabernacle which sat on the altar at Trinity Church, Shamokin, Pennsylvania. At the time we were living in Lancaster, Pennsylvania, and a drive to Shamokin would take only a couple of hours. It became known on a Maundy Thursday when the parishioners were leaving the Eucharist which celebrated the

anniversary of the institution of the communion service by Christ and his disciples. A little girl tugged on her mother's coat and said, "Look, Mommy, there's Jesus." She turned around and saw the face of Christ on the covering of the tabernacle, the cloth over the reserved sacrament. Other parishioners turned and looked also. They were astounded and enraptured by this image. It turned out that the rector had known of this for more than a week. He had told no one because he wanted to avoid creating a public sensation.

Within days pilgrims from near and distant places came to see the face of Christ. It soon got into the news on national TV and in magazines. Now thousands were coming. By the time Helen Shoemaker and I made arrangements to drive there, accompanied by my daughter, Kathy, tens of thousands had been there. I had the nagging feeling as we were approaching Shamokin that I might not be able to see this image. It was reported that some people who came and went quickly out of curiosity didn't see his face. I said within myself, "What if the Executive Director of the Anglican Fellowship of Prayer doesn't see the face of Christ? What would I say?"

Then we were in Trinity Church. I was surprised to find it was large and spacious. Groups of people were gathered here and there. We knelt down in a pew about a third of the way from the front of the nave. I looked up and saw the tabernacle—but no face of Christ! Something within me told me that I should pray for the people on my intercessory list. I closed my eyes and prayed. In a while I opened my eyes and looked at the tabernacle. There was the face of Jesus Christ! It seemed as if Christ had told me, "Pray for my people and then you will see my face." Here truly was more than praying with the saints; it was praying with the founder of all sainthood. The vision was riveting; his eyes looked deeply into your soul, not with judgment but with compassion. Helen Shoemaker and Kathy also saw his face. Later Helen was to sculpt the image, and I did a painting. It was the same face, not an imaginary form as one might see with inkblots.

Accompanying this image were mighty acts of divine grace: healings, conversions, reconciliations, renewals. A log was kept of them. It would be another chapter to tell stories related to me by those who had been personally touched. The purpose here is to relate the

connection with praying the saints. To the people of Trinity the humble answer as to why the face of Christ appeared on the tabernacle is that he is saying, “Behold, I am truly present among you and in you.” How then could kneeling in the church be anything other than a transforming experience?

A fascinating postscript came when we were leaving the church. A Greek Orthodox lady, who was spending every day there, pointed up to a high cliff which overshadowed the church. Since the face appeared, a section of rock had fallen away at the top. The newly exposed rock was golden in color. The form was a perfect sculpture of a winged angel!

“Therefore with angels and archangels and all the company of heaven!”

*Doing the word, individually:* Using the ideas in this chapter, have an experience of “praying with the saints,” and record your thoughts from the experience in your journal or diary.

*Doing the Word in a group:* Discuss: (1) The ideas in this chapter; those that are meaningful to you and those that are not. (2) Your feelings about the “saints,” who and where they are. (3) Your feelings about the experience of the face of Christ on the tabernacle in Shamokin, Pennsylvania.

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