

EFFECTUAL FERVENT PRAYER

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This is the confidence we have in approaching God: that if we ask anything according to his will, he hears us. And if we know that he hears us—whatever we ask—we know that we have what we asked of him. 1 John 5:14-15

When I was still in my 20's, I was once asked to come and spend an afternoon teaching a Bible lesson to some children at a Christian school. After asking the Lord what He would have me deliver to these inquisitive young ones (and after having Him reprove me for saying, "Are You sure You want *me* to do this?"), I began studying and preparing a lesson about the "whole armor of God" as outlined in Ephesians chapter 6. I'm not sure how much those children learned from the nervous ramblings of this somewhat inexperienced teacher, but that simple children's lesson had an impact on me *personally*, and would forever change I would pray over myself each day. From that time on, when I prayed in the mornings, I could clearly see my makeshift cartoon boy in the King Arthur suit of armor, and I would mentally strap on all those pieces as I confessed the Word over myself.

Now more than ever, it's of increasing importance that we know the Word and know how to apply it. It's vital to know how to pray the Word over one's circumstances. If you're still relatively new to this concept, it's not a difficult thing to learn. We should all seek to become masters of the art of prayer...it's an area in which we spend our entire lifetime growing and learning.

1. Read the Word every day, and when you come to passages that apply to you, read them out loud as a prayer confession over yourself. For instance, when I wrestle with worry, shyness, a lack of self-confidence, or fear, I go to the verse "*For God did not give us a spirit of timidity (of cowardice, of craven and cringing and fawning fear), but [He has given us a spirit] of power and of love and of calm and well-balanced mind and discipline and self-control.*" 2 Timothy 1:7 (*Amplified*). I then say out loud, "Father, I confess today that You have not given me a spirit of fear and timidity. Spirits of fear and timidity are not from You, so I resist them in Jesus' name! I declare out loud with the words of my mouth that I am driven by faith in Your perfect Word and *not* by my emotions and feelings. Therefore I possess power, love, and a sound, calm, well-balanced mind as well as discipline and self-control, and I possess them *now*. I walk in them *now*."

2. Adopt a prayer warrior as a role model. You can learn a great deal by listening to a champion of prayer. I can name a half a dozen right off the bat, starting with my Grandma! How I've learned from just listening to them pray. You can tell an intercessor the moment he or she engages in prayer...no faltering, no fumbling, no plying through uncharted waters. It seems like intercessors are *in the zone* as soon as they hit their knees. Truth is, they're in their element of talking to their Father because they do it *often*!

I'm not ashamed to admit that I have taken notes listening to effective people pray! When I must travel, my mind instantly grabs onto the memory of a missionary friend asking for protection over "dangers seen and unseen." When I'm sick or have a nuisance affliction, I remember my Sunday School teacher declaring over an injured arm to "to function in the perfection in which You created it to function." These are words, sure, but we're not introducing them into our prayer vocabulary as some magic "rabbit out of a hat" mysticism; no, in doing so, we're merely learning to pray intelligently, to pray with *real power*. Does God hear the simple "Help me Jesus!" cry? Absolutely! Do I still pray those prayers? Yes! But when I can pray with understanding, with a little more depth as it lines up with the Word, I feel like I can, as the Psalmist said, "run through a troop and leap over a wall."

3. Create for yourself a library of prayer media. The saying may be true that "prayer is often

caught rather than taught,” but you can both learn *and* catch the spirit of prayer if you’ll only desire to go there. When the supermarket tabloid, covered with its dirt and debauchery (and pictures of fictional space creatures!) gets passed up for a booklet on spiritual enrichment, you’re headed in the right direction. Blessed is the man who walks not in the counsel of the ungodly! (Psalm 1) Get creative! The Bible on CD or cassette is a great way to feed your spirit while you’re traveling to and from work, winding down before going to sleep, etc. There are even audio albums of prayer scriptures. And if you’ve never considered this, I highly recommend a series of books by Germaine Copeland called “Prayers That Avail Much.” I use these all the time to help me to focus on specific prayer needs. Don’t feel as if using these types of aids means you’re spiritually limping. If you mean what you’re praying, even when it’s a written prayer, it’s by no means just “vain repetition.” That’s why He instructs us *to ask according to His will*...He already knows we sometimes need help getting it right!

4. Practice makes perfect. The more often you pray, the better you’ll do it. It’s just that simple. Prayer is exercising your spiritual muscles. In these last days, we simply can’t afford to be spiritually flabby! If you’re in the habit of consulting your Father throughout the day (beginning with first thing in the morning), you will save yourself many disappointments, heartaches and entanglements. You’ll become better at recognizing the voice of the Good Shepherd, and yes, He does speak if we’ll only listen.

There’s a lot we can learn about prayer just by comparing it to physical exercise. Most people don’t become heavyweights immediately; you grow in your ability to go long distance in prayer. While you’re still working your way up, don’t think that a short prayer is an ineffective prayer! If your prayer lines up with God’s Word and you believe that God honors His Word, it can be a crayon drawing instead of a Rembrandt and still pack a major punch. Remember, He’s not grading you on finesse, just on your *willingness to engage*. One reason why a lot of folks shy away from a life of prayer is because they’ve tried to take the short cut to building up their most holy faith! Ever get all motivated to get back in shape, then overdo it on the track or in the gym on the very first day? That two hour workout that left you sore and dreading the “E” word, well, a little of the same wisdom can be used in building one’s prayer life. Start where you are. If you do it daily, and if you will consciously begin to speak to the Lord throughout the day on even the small matters, it will become something you do eagerly and willingly.

5. Take time to listen as well as to speak. If you’ll give Him ample time, He’ll reveal His very heart to you! The Word says, “*Call to Me and I will answer you and show you great and mighty things, fenced in and hidden, which you do not know (do not distinguish and recognize, have knowledge of and understand).*” *Jeremiah 33:3(Amplified)*. How valuable is that to you? And not just the wonderful mysteries of the universe, mind you, but the hard warnings you need to rescue you or your family from danger, death or ruin. Would you like a prompting from the Holy Spirit not to journey down a certain road at a certain time, if it meant that you would avoid a serious automobile accident? He occasionally says, “Wait.” Or, “Don’t.” Or He’ll even prompt you to pray for someone else at a critical time. I’ve heard story after story of saints of God who fell on their knees at the first sense of urgency, only to find out later that at that exact moment, a loved one was in peril and in need of rescue. Seek His voice. You’ll hear Him if you ask. If you take the time in daily prayer and fellowship with your Father, *you’ll know that voice*, and it won’t be muffled by the mob of fleshly passions crying out for you to do what God knows is not the *best* for you. It doesn’t mean that prayer will eliminate the possibility of any future difficulties in your life, but there are truly many situations we can avoid altogether just by waiting for the Lord’s best timing.

So how do we explain when we’ve prayed and bad things occur anyway? Prayer is a type of giving! Once we commit something into God’s hands, we don’t coach Him play-by-play about how to do His job—we allow Him full custody of what we’ve committed to Him, to work His will without us becoming back seat driver. When bad things occur even after we’ve prayed, and indeed it happens

sometimes, they're usually not to the severity they might have been had we not covered our situation in prayer. It's not necessarily a sign that we have too little faith, and it's certainly *not* an indication that God's Word is not always true. But these are times we have to trust Him to stand good on His promise of Romans 8:28. When we've entrusted our lives into His hands, He takes even the seemingly disastrous and works it for our eventual good, if we'll but, as that old song says, "trust and obey."

I remember one time Dana and I had our tour pack loaded down with a weekend's worth of stuff, about to light out on that motorcycle to a great destination with some precious, godly friends. We pray before we make these journeys, so I'm confident that He will take care of us. Anyway, in spite of all conditions seeming favorable, I couldn't get peace about this trip, one we'd made a dozen times before. I asked God to reveal to us if there was any reason He did not will for us to make the trip. Dana had already warmed up the motor, and I was standing there with my helmet in my hand. I said, "Honey, I've got this feeling—" He cut me short with, "You know, I've been feeling the same thing. That's all the convincing I need!" And with that, he shut off the engine and we went back in the house. We'll never know what reason God had for not wanting us to make that journey, but it wasn't for us to know, just to *trust*. We didn't even feel disappointed—and He blessed us with a wonderful weekend anyway, at home. Several times He's warned us of deer and other hazards. And oh the times He's delivered us from danger, and we passed by completely unaware of angelic intervention! I'm telling you, friends, I don't want to be outside of the ark of safety for *one single second!*

6. Finally, allow the Holy Spirit to pray *through* you. If you are not yet a Spirit-filled believer, ask God to fill you today. When mere words lack the ability to pray the will of God, His Spirit can speak the mysteries that we humans in our frailty cannot utter. His comfort, His guidance are invaluable in our Christian walk; oh, how we need the sweet presence of the Holy Spirit to counsel and direct. His is that still small voice, that sudden boldness, that power for service. He's the Element that transformed Peter from a coward who had denied his faith to a *champion* of the faith. He can change us too, when we ask Him to abide in us.