

DEVELOPING AN INTERCESSORY PRAYER MINISTRY TO
SUPPORT PERSONAL EVANGELISM AT FIRST BAPTIST
CHURCH, ROANOKE, TEXAS

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APPROVAL SHEET

DEVELOPING AN INTERCESSORY PRAYER MINISTRY TO
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To Lisa,

the love worth waiting thirty-six years to find.

Lisa, without your patience and support this challenge
would not have been completed. I love you!

To Josh and Cydney,

who are incredible blessings from the loving hand of God:

God is your portion and strength, trust Him.

To my parents, Dr. Richard and Jean Barber,
both always highly valued education and relentlessly
encouraged me to start and complete this degree.

Thank you to the four churches God has allowed me
the privilege of serving: First Baptist Church, Euless, Texas;

First Baptist Church, Brunswick, Georgia;

Lakeview Christian Fellowship, Jacksonville, Florida;

and First Baptist Church, Roanoke, Texas.

My prayer is this project will be used in the local church
to bring in the lost for the glory of God Almighty!

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
PREFACE	vii
Chapter	
1. INTRODUCTION	1
Purpose	1
Goals	1
Context	2
Rationale	10
Definitions and Limitations	11
Research Methodology	12
Conclusion	13
2. A BIBLICAL BASIS FOR DEVELOPING AN INTERCESSORY PRAYER MINISTRY TO SUPPORT EVANGELISM IN THE LOCAL CHURCH	15
God’s Worldwide Plan of Evangelism from the Old Testament	16
Developing an Intercessory Prayer Ministry to Support Evangelism in the New Testament Church	28
Conclusion	54
3. ALPHA-OMEGA PRAYER AS A FOUNDATION FOR EFFECTIVE EVANGELISTIC INTERCESSION	56
Untangling the Enigma of Prayer	57
The Sovereignty of God and Prayer	61
Alpha-Omega Prayer	71
Benefits of Alpha-Omega Prayer	87

Chapter	Page
Conclusion	96
4. DEVELOPING AN INTERCESSORY PRAYER MINISTRY TO SUPPORT EVANGELISM	103
Promoting the Project and Enlisting Volunteers	107
The Research Instruments, Pre-Seminar	108
Five-Part Sermon Series	114
Eight Prayer Equipping Seminars	118
The Research Instruments, Post-Seminar	126
Developing the Intercessory Prayer Ministry	130
Personal Interview Questions	131
Conclusion	134
5. EVALUATION AND CONCLUSION	136
Introduction	136
Evaluation of the Project's Purpose	137
Evaluation of the Project's Goals	138
Strengths of the Project	140
Weaknesses of the Project	141
What I Would Do Differently	141
Theological Reflections	143
Personal Reflections	144
Conclusion	145
Appendix	
1. RESEARCH INSTRUMENTS: AGREEMENT TO PARTICIPATE	147
2. RESEARCH INSTRUMENTS: INSTRUCTIONS AND IDENTIFICATION	148
3. RESEARCH INSTRUMENTS: INTERCESSORY PRAYER SURVEY	149

4. RESEARCH INSTRUMENTS: PERSONAL INTERVIEW QUESTIONS	154
5. A SERIES OF FIVE SERMON OUTLINES ON PRAYER: FOUNDATION FOR EFFECTIVE EVANGLEISM, MINISTRY, AND LIFE	155
6. ZECHARIAH 8:20-23, SERMON MANUSCRIPT	158
7. EIGHTEEN REASONS FOR UNANSWERED PRAYER	164
8. INTERCESSOR’S PRAYER REQUESTS FOR PASTOR	166
9. WHY PRAY FOR THE LOST?	167
10. TEACHING NOTES FOR EIGHT PRAYER SEMINARS	168
BIBLIOGRAPHY	176

PREFACE

Few people know that in May 1989, as God was sending me to prepare for ministry, I could not afford to pay the required insurance to attend Florida Baptist Theological College. Always the one with a giving heart, my big brother, Christopher Matthews Barber, stepped in and paid the insurance. Astonishingly, ten weeks later (August 11, 1989), Chris went home to be with the Lord. I often think of Chris while serving the Lord because He was my first “partner” in ministry; thus, everything God accomplishes through this servant’s ministry will surely be a crown for him, too. Twenty- two years later, Chris is deeply loved and *terribly* missed!

I am humbled and grateful for family and friends who prayed for me during this challenging project. I am thankful for the prayers of my siblings: Rick, Chet, and Sherri. I am also thankful for two godly men who invested their time to teach me how to be a passionate Christian and minister: Ron Proctor (Field Ministry Strategist, Southern Baptists of Texas Convention) and Dr. John S. Connell (Chair, Christian Studies, Shorter University, Rome, Georgia). I also deeply thank Rev. Don Shirey and K. D. Woolsey for their personal and earnest prayer support during this spiritual challenge.

I particularly thank the professors who taught our cohort group: Dr. Thom Rainer, Dr. Chuck Lawless, and Dr. Timothy K Beougher. I am especially grateful for Dr. Lawless’s and Dr. Beougher’s help, grace, and mercy during the process of completing this project. What a privilege to have studied under these men of God, and I pray their passion and faithfulness is the fire that God uses to ignite every church in the

Southern Baptist Convention to rediscover and pay the price to fulfill the Great Commission.

Finally, I give all praise, honor, and glory to God the Father through our Lord Jesus Christ. I still stand in awe of why Jesus revealed Himself to me (“What is man, that Thou art mindful of Him?” Ps 8:4), but I will surrender and submit to the Spirit’s leading in order that I may live in a manner worthy of His gospel and so that others will be drawn to know the living Lord of heaven. Whether my life is short or long, may the Lord’s holy light burn bright and consume me for His glory!

Bruce Allen Barber

Roanoke, Texas

May 2011

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Prayer is not a burden to be borne, an obligation to be fulfilled, something that is due to God and must be paid. Prayer is a privilege Prayer is the soul of religion.¹

Purpose

The purpose of this project was to develop an intercessory prayer ministry that supports and encourages personal evangelism at First Baptist Church, Roanoke, Texas.

Goals

This project sought to accomplish four goals. These goals served as the criteria for evaluating the effectiveness of this project. The first goal was a knowledge goal: to teach Christians their spiritual responsibility to fulfill the Great Commission as proclaimed by Jesus Christ in Matthew 28:18-20.² The objective of the first goal was accomplished by teaching believers they are called by God and sent with Christ's authority into our world to evangelize and disciple the lost.

The second goal was a knowledge goal: to teach believers the connection between intercessory prayer and evangelism. Believers learned that consistent

¹Harry Emerson Fosdick, *The Meaning of Prayer* (New York: Abingdon, 1915), 25, xi.

²Unless otherwise noted, all biblical citations will be from the New King James Version.

intercessory prayer empowers and supports the church's ministry of evangelism. The objective of the second goal was attained by guiding believers to approach intercessory prayer with the confidence that God will answer their prayers which desire the lost to receive salvation.

The third goal was a skills goal: to equip intercessors to participate in both personal and group intercessory prayer that supports evangelism. The church's evangelism ministry is on the front line of the spiritual battle and needs intercessory prayer to provide both spiritual protection and physical vitality to reach the lost.

The fourth and final goal of this project was to strengthen my personal intercessory prayer ministry on behalf of evangelizers and the lost. The objective of this skills goal was to create a plan that develops my intercessory prayer skills for the church's faithful evangelizers and for the lost they will visit. This plan included increasing time set aside to both pray for and pray with evangelizers. Through prayer, I am seeking the Lord to instill in me an unquenchable attitude of intercessory prayer that engenders urgency for the lost. The attitude of the church will not move beyond the attitude of its pastoral leadership. The fourth goal reflects my obedience to the Holy Spirit's leading to be a man committed to evangelistically-centered intercessory prayer.

Context

In 1847, twenty settlers and their families settled near Denton Creek in a town called Garden City, two miles north of the present location of Roanoke.³ In 1874, a colony of Baptist settlers from Louisiana moved into the area and soon thereafter

³"City History," City of Roanoke [on-line]; accessed 22 July 2008; available from <http://www.roanoketexas.com/ContentTemplate.aspx?MenuID=13>; Internet.

organized the Old Colony Baptist Church. After severe floods, the settlers made the decision to move the city to a safer location. The higher ground chosen by the settlers was already “laid out” by the railroad for new train tracks. Because the railroad was an instrumental part of the town’s development, one of the railroad surveyors was allowed to name the city after his hometown of Roanoke, Virginia.

In 1881, a school house was built close to the business district, and the Old Colony Baptist Church moved into it and changed its name to Roanoke Baptist Church. In 1891, different denominations worked together to build and then share what was called the Union Church. After sharing the same church building for nineteen years, in 1910 the Baptists “moved into a meeting house of their own.”⁴ The cornerstone from the 1910 church building remains affixed to the northeast corner of First Baptist Church Roanoke’s current sanctuary built in 1961.

First Baptist Church uses one-third of its nearly two acres of property, which is considered prime, downtown real estate. The sanctuary has a 125 person seating capacity. Until recently, Roanoke consisted mostly of old businesses and homes, but in the last three years the old homes are being replaced with new, expensive homes.

Roanoke is a suburban area located twenty miles north of Fort Worth, Texas, just three miles off Interstate 35W. Interstate 35W runs through downtown Fort Worth, and it is one of only two interstate highways that allow traffic to move quickly north-south through the Dallas-Fort Worth metroplex. Roanoke is twenty-seven miles north of Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary. Due to its close proximity to the

⁴*A History of the First Baptist Church of Roanoke, Texas* (Roanoke, TX: The History Committee of First Baptist Church Roanoke, Texas, 1990), 3.

seminary, the church has a century-long history of employing the seminary's faculty and students part-time. I was called as pastor in August 2005, but I am only the second full-time, non-student pastor in the history of First Baptist Church. In the past, the church had been content to remain cloistered and small, but the church has renewed its commitment to reach the lost by investing in the leadership of a full-time pastor. Hiring a full-time pastor has been a much-needed philosophical change while also being a financial adjustment for First Baptist Church.

In the early 1970s, First Baptist Church went through turbulent times. Although there is disagreement among members why some members left the church, a group of members did leave and form another Baptist church three miles away. This church is still in existence today, but both churches struggle to maintain growth.

From 1998 to 2007, the decadal growth rate for First Baptist Church was -11.3 percent. According to anecdotal evidence gleaned from conversations with long tenured church members, the church has a history of approaching 130 in worship attendance, only to fall back around 70 in attendance. Currently, the church is once again approaching the 130 barrier, and my desire is to lead it forward to greater evangelistic and ministry effectiveness. Though no member proffered this possibility, one reason for the variations in attendance may be the church's hiring seminary students as part-time pastors. History has shown that the student-pastors have quickly moved on to other ministry opportunities after graduation; the turnover has created a repetitive pastoral leadership vacuum in the church. Since 1881, the church has had *51 pastors*. Only seven pastors have served five years or longer, and no pastor has stayed more than seven years. The average pastoral tenure has been 2.6 years. I am in the middle of my sixth year of ministry.

In the twentieth century, Roanoke grew slowly while nearby cities were commercially and residentially developed. Roanoke was proud to maintain its simple life of farming. Since 2000, massive transformation and rapid population growth have advanced upon the city. Older couples are dying or moving away to be near their children and relatives. The dwindling senior adult population over sixty-five years of age comprises only 6.7 percent of Roanoke's population, whereas every other age bracket, excluding 20-24 years of age, has more than double the seniors' percentage of population.⁵ Downtown, many of the dilapidated homes from the 1930s are replaced with opulent, quarter-million dollar homes.

The result is that younger affluent families are moving in. The demographic change in Roanoke is confirmed in the U.S. MOSAIC Profile of 2005 that shows within a three mile radius of the church, 59.34 percent of the households are labeled as "Affluent Suburbia."⁶ An Affluent Suburbia household is one that "outranks all other Mosaic Types in terms of household income, home value and educational achievement With their managerial and executive positions paying six-figure-plus incomes, they enjoy the good life in fashionable houses outfitted with the latest technology."⁷

Unfortunately, to this point, First Baptist Church has been unable to retain Affluent Suburbia households. During visitation, I have been told by literally hundreds of first time Affluent Suburbia guests that they liked the friendliness of our church and

⁵The demographic report is a ScanUS-MapFacts[®] document from Denton Baptist Association, Denton, TX, March 2007.

⁶The demographic report is a ScanUS-Experian Applied Geographic Solutions document from Denton Baptist Association, Denton, TX, March 2007.

⁷Experian Applied Geographic Solutions [on-line]; accessed 23 July 2008; available from <http://www.appliedgeographic.com/MosaicUSA.pdf>, page 9; Internet.

enjoyed the contemporary worship, but they are looking for a church that “is just a little bigger.” These Affluent Suburbanites informed me they were seeking larger programs for their children and themselves.

Encroaching rapid growth is occurring on the northwest side of Roanoke. Despite the housing downturn around the country, developers are rapidly building housing communities that will add nearly 5,000 homes within three miles of the church. The coming expansion presents First Baptist Roanoke an astounding opportunity for ministry and reaching the lost with the gospel of Jesus Christ. Intercessory prayers for discernment, wisdom, Great Commission faithfulness, and gospel workers with a heart for the lost are critical to the future of First Baptist Church.

The southwest side of Roanoke has become a major business hub. The business growth is due to the city being triangularly surrounded by heavily travelled highways connecting the Texas Motor Speedway, Alliance Airport, and Dallas-Fort Worth International Airport. The city’s prime location coupled with its exemplary corporate business park draws large, international, high-tech companies that employ thousands of workers. Unfortunately, First Baptist Church did not purchase nor was donated land adjacent to any one of these three major highways to position it for the future with a highly visible presence in the community.

Based on the 2000 census, there were 3,339 people within a one-mile radius of Roanoke. One-half of these people are between the ages of 25-54. Children ten years old and younger are the second largest demographic group at 16.5 percent.⁸ Interestingly,

⁸The demographic report is a 2005 ScanUS-Estimate, Demographic Comparison, Document from Denton Baptist Association, Denton Texas, March 2007.

Roanoke is nearly bereft of adults aged 20-24; this group comprises only 5 percent of the population. Roanoke's 2010 projected population of 4,421 was already eclipsed in 2005.⁹ Roanoke's population is 83.6 percent White, while persons of Hispanic or Latino origin comprise the next largest demographic group at 11.8 percent.¹⁰ An interesting insight is gained when one looks at the household income in the area. Within a one-mile radius of First Baptist Church, 17 percent of the households earn more than \$100,000, whereas within one to three miles of the church, 36 percent of the households earn more than \$100,000. Opportunities for growth are literally coming to the church's front door.

First Baptist Church has experienced growth in worship attendance during the past three years. The church has two Sunday morning worship services. In the fall of 2005, worship attendance averaged 77, but now worship attendance is averaging 125. The contemporary service has experienced 40 percent growth, whereas the traditional service is in decline. In 2005, the membership of the church was 250, but today the membership is 309.¹¹ What we have not witnessed yet is the corresponding growth in the Sunday School.

Professions of faith have accounted for one-third of the church's growth during the last five years, but the church's growth rate has not matched the population increase. First Baptist needs prayers for workers to go into the harvest (Matt 9:38) and faithfully seek conversion growth. Prayer will be the avenue by which God revives our hearts and empowers our obedience to reach the lost with the gospel of Jesus Christ.

⁹City of Roanoke State Highway 114 road sign states the population at 5,545.

¹⁰US Census Bureau, State and County Quick Facts [on-line]; accessed 29 July 2008; available from <http://quickfacts.census.gov/qfd/states/48/48121.html>; Internet.

¹¹First Baptist Church, Roanoke, TX, Business Meeting Agenda, 19 October 2008.

The demographic composition of First Baptist Church's membership is 90 percent White, with a large majority being blue-collar workers. Tex Sample's works classify the church as culturally right, with the membership predominantly comprised of "Respectables." Cultural-right people are "territorially rooted . . . people whose frame of reference is the local community The cultural right is made up of the lower middle class, the working class, and the poor."¹² "Respectables" are the largest subgroup on the cultural right. "Respectables" are,

The great bulk of the lower middle class, a significant number of blue-collar people, and those poor people who struggle hard to be loyal to standards of respectability. [They] are profoundly family-oriented . . . deeply devoted to traditional values . . . intensely patriotic and provide the shock troops for most churches They are sentimental and tough with an abiding stability and strength.¹³

Fewer than 5 percent of First Baptist Church's membership is in the cultural middle's "Successful" category. Sample describes the "Successful" as "upper-middle class and business and professional people in society."¹⁴ The prayerful challenge facing First Baptist Church will be to reach out effectively to Affluent Suburbia with a church mostly comprised of cultural middle Respectables. We need God to guide our prayers and ministry efforts so our growth reflects the city's changing demographics. Using David Roozen's mission orientations, the congregation's typology is a "sanctuary" church that is moving towards becoming an "evangelistic" church.¹⁵

¹²Tex Sample, *U.S. Lifestyles and Mainline Churches* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1990), 59.

¹³*Ibid.*, 59-60.

¹⁴*Ibid.*, 103.

¹⁵David A. Roozen, William McKinney, and Jackson W. Carroll, *Varieties of Religious Presence* (New York: Pilgrim, 1994), 87.

The church body is learning that correct biblical understanding results in faithfulness to Jesus' Great Commission in Matthew 28:18-20 to "go" to the lost. In line with being a sanctuary church, which is committed to biblical doctrine, James Hopewell would list the worldview of First Baptist Church as "canonic." A "canonic" worldview allows one to identify his or her essential life through "an authoritative interpretation of God's revealed word or will."¹⁶

Dudley and Johnson would describe First Baptist primarily as a "Pillar church." A pillar church is "anchored in its geographic community Like the building, the members are pillars of the community, good citizens individually and corporately . . . who walk with its people."¹⁷ First Baptist Church has family roots that go back to the early days of the City of Roanoke. The respect the church receives is due both to its tenure in the community and its willingness to serve the poor and needy in Jesus' name. In fact, the church consistently works with city and social entities to meet the needs of Roanoke residents.

My predominant leadership style is what I would call "Team Ministry Style." God has gifted First Baptist with wise men and women, and I constantly learn from these Spirit-led people. First Baptist Church also trusts and expects the pastor to have insight and direction on nearly every issue. I lead by gathering the necessary information and then framing the direction of the discussion on the important issues facing the church. So far, pastoral authority and team ministry work harmoniously and seamlessly together. In

¹⁶James F. Hopewell, *Congregation* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1987), 69.

¹⁷Carl Dudley and Sally A. Johnson, *Energizing the Congregation* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1993), 4-6.

the Team Ministry concept, the pastor builds up and equips the saints for the work of the ministry (Eph 4:11-13). The pastor is primarily a shepherd under the Lordship of Jesus Christ who encourages, equips, loves, and motivates his flock to seek the kingdom of God first (Matt 6:33).

Rationale

At this time, First Baptist Church has neither an organized evangelistic ministry nor an organized prayer ministry. Through prayer, the church will learn God's priorities and be infused with His desire and His power to evangelize the lost. Only through intercessory prayer will the church capture into its consciousness the enormity of fulfilling The Great Commission. The Apostle Paul admitted his powerlessness when he commanded the Colossian church in Colossians 4:2-4 to pray that opportunities for sharing the gospel would open up. The priority and necessity of prayer are paramount to the church's ability to fulfill its call to be light to all nations and people groups.

First Baptist Church loves God with a passion that is both encouraging and exhilarating. Prayer is a critical pathway by which God guides believers to maturity and peace. Therefore, maturing Christian love for God needs to be practically expressed through a commitment to prayer seeking God's power to fulfill the Great Commission. Prayer is vital because the body of Christ experiences consistent spiritual attack from Satan (Eph 6:10-20).

God has also provided prayer as a potent, offensive spiritual weapon. Satan's plan is to keep the lost blinded in spiritual darkness without hope (2 Cor 4:3-4), but God sovereignly calls believers and churches to pray for and evangelize the lost. Prayer provides the power to reach out, influence, and ultimately lead the lost to salvation. In

order for First Baptist Church to fulfill the Great Commission, the church must commit to developing an intercessory prayer ministry that will intercede for the salvation of the lost while sending evangelizers to share the gospel with the lost.

Definitions and Limitations

In this project, *prayer* is defined as “an ongoing and growing love relationship with God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.”¹⁸ As our love grows for God, so will our desire to please Him by intentionally reaching the lost as we fulfill the Great Commission. In this project, *evangelism* is defined as “proclaiming the splendid news concerning Jesus Christ with such power that the speaker brings Christ into human experience and confronts men and women at the point of decision.”¹⁹ Prayer is indispensable for effective personal evangelism. In fact, “prayer evangelism is talking to God about our neighbors before we talk to our neighbors about God.”²⁰

The project had one limitation: its length. The project lasted fifteen weeks: one week of preparation, a five-week sermon series on prayer, an eight-week seminar that will equip believers to support personal evangelism through prayer, and one week to administer the concluding questionnaire and interviews for the purpose of ascertaining the benefits of prayer supporting personal evangelism. Due to the time limitation, long-term results of the project cannot be known.

¹⁸Richard Foster, *Prayer: Finding the Heart's True Home* (San Francisco: Harper, 1992), 13.

¹⁹John Connell, “Closing the Deal” (sermon preached 4 April 2008, Calvary in Savannah, GA), 150.

²⁰Ed Silvano, *Prayer Evangelism: How to Change the Spiritual Climate over Your Home, Neighborhood, and City* (Ventura, CA: Regal, 2000), 35.

Research Methodology

The principal purpose of this project was to develop an intercessory prayer ministry that supports personal evangelism. I sought to have at least eight members participate and complete this project. After members committed to participate, the project began with them filling out a pre-project questionnaire that sought to gain insight into their understanding of prayer and evangelism. After the pre-project questionnaire was returned, the participants were personally interviewed and asked to answer six open-ended questions about their understanding of prayer and evangelism. Then, I preached a five-week sermon series that explained prayer's empowerment of the church to evangelize the lost and fulfill the Great Commission. The five-part sermon series was entitled *Prayer: Foundation for Effective Evangelism, Ministry, and Life*.

Next, I developed an eight-week seminar to teach participants how to support evangelism through prayer. The first two weeks taught the intimate connection between prayer and evangelism. The final seven weeks of the seminar equipped intercessors to support evangelism through intercessory prayer. Intercessors were taught biblical and theological principles to guide and develop their proficiency in different types of prayer for the purpose of supporting evangelism.²¹

The final goal of this project was to strengthen my personal intercessory prayer ministry on behalf of the participant-evangelizers and the lost. The sixth personal interview question, "How can I pray for you?" was included to maintain acute awareness of the specific needs of each intercessor during this project. I strengthened my prayer ministry skills by staying informed of the needs of participants and the lost, dedicating

²¹Confession, Adoration, Thanksgiving, Supplication (Petition), Intercession.

one hour in prayer each day for the participants and the lost, and keeping a detailed prayer journal listing both requests and answers to the intercessory prayers lifted up to the Lord. My desire was to inform and enhance my ability to pray for the participants so they would become the foundation of our church becoming committed to evangelistically-oriented intercessory prayer.

The evaluation of the project was based on the volunteers' answers to research instruments and six open-ended personal interview questions. Using participants' pre-project responses to the questionnaire and personal interview questions, I developed training seminars that enhanced participants' intercessory prayer skills. After the training seminars, I administered the same questionnaire and interview questions to measure the change in participants' understanding and beliefs about intercessory prayer and evangelism. My desire was to guide First Baptist Roanoke to develop an intercessory prayer ministry for the purpose of supporting evangelistic effectiveness.

Conclusion

Prayer forms the foundation of a born-again, overcoming life with God. The privilege of prayer proves God desires His children to know and do His will. God's will is that His loving plan of salvation be taken to the spiritually lost. Interestingly, prayer also provides opportunities and empowerment for evangelism. This ministry project sought to enhance the church's understanding of the necessity of prayer to support the evangelistic outreach in the local church. Though members constantly are taught in Sunday School, Discipleship Training, and from the pulpit that they are to pray and practice evangelism in their life, such prayer did not occur on a frequent basis. Perhaps the reluctance to pray and evangelize was due to the lack of training.

This project sought to fill the knowledge and skills goal to equip members to pray and participate in personal evangelism. As pastor, I take full responsibility for the church body's unpreparedness. To address this deficit, we now teach the importance of prayer and evangelism in our New Member's class. The next step for First Baptist Church Roanoke, Texas, is to equip long-term members with evangelism skills and the importance of prayer. We must move from being an *evangelism minded* church to being an *evangelistically active* church! In general, the church body does not need any further evangelistic emphasis—we need boots-on-the-ground *action*! Incorporating intercessory prayer as a support of personal evangelism ministry in First Baptist will be a long-term process. Nonetheless, we will prayerfully walk together with the Lord Jesus to share the gospel and fulfill the Great Commission to the glory of God the Father.

CHAPTER 2

A BIBLICAL BASIS FOR DEVELOPING AN INTERCESSORY PRAYER MINISTRY TO SUPPORT EVANGELISM IN THE LOCAL CHURCH

The purpose of this chapter is to establish a biblical rationale for developing an intercessory prayer ministry to support evangelism in the local church. First, this task will be accomplished by establishing the biblical basis from the Old Testament that God called Israel to evangelize the Gentile nations. A prayer from King David along with one proclamation each from Isaiah and Zechariah will show that God speaks to and hears His people as He guides them to take His loving plan of salvation to the world. Second, this task will be accomplished by establishing a biblical basis from selected New Testament teachings of Jesus and the Apostle Paul. Jesus is the Messiah prophesied in the Old Testament. As Messiah, He fulfills the role of true Israel and sends the church to evangelize the Gentile nations. Numerous biblical passages describe both Jesus and Paul's dependence upon prayer. Through prayer, believers come to know God more intimately, discover His will, and receive power to obey that revealed will.

Since the coming of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost, Jesus authoritatively sends His disciples with the gospel to evangelize the world. The prayers of the righteous are a powerful and effective weapon that supports evangelizers. This study will demonstrate that an intercessory prayer ministry is critical to the local church's evangelistic efforts to fulfill the Great Commission.

God's Worldwide Plan of Evangelism from the Old Testament

The Old Testament reveals Yahweh as the Creator who loves and interacts with humanity. Unfortunately, the sin of Adam and Eve led to the punishment of separation from God and spiritual death. In the Protoevangelium (Gen 3:15), God provided a glimpse into His worldwide plan of salvation which ultimately was fulfilled in the seed of Abraham, Jesus Christ, the Messiah. The Old Testament is replete with Yahweh believers who knew the importance of prayer. King David, Isaiah, and Zechariah were chosen for this project because they prayerfully interceded and prophetically proclaimed God's love of Israel and God's command that Israel take His salvation to the Gentile nations. From day one, Israel was to exemplify and take God's glorious salvation to the nations.

A Light to the Gentiles

Listen, O coastlands, to Me, And take heed, you peoples from afar! The LORD has called Me from the womb; From the matrix of My mother He has made mention of My name. And He has made My mouth like a sharp sword; In the shadow of His hand He has hidden Me, And made Me a polished shaft; In His quiver He has hidden Me. "And He said to me, 'You are My servant, O Israel, In whom I will be glorified.' Then I said, 'I have labored in vain, I have spent my strength for nothing and in vain; Yet surely my just reward is with the LORD, And my work with my God.'" And now the LORD says, Who formed Me from the womb to be His Servant, To bring Jacob back to Him, So that Israel is gathered to Him (For I shall be glorious in the eyes of the LORD, And My God shall be My strength), Indeed He says, 'It is too small a thing that You should be My Servant To raise up the tribes of Jacob, And to restore the preserved ones of Israel; I will also give You as a light to the Gentiles, That You should be My salvation to the ends of the earth.' (Isa 49:1-6)

Isaiah was an eighth-century prophet during the reign of Judah's kings Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz and Hezekiah. Isaiah's name means "Yahweh is salvation, and with his focus on God's worldwide offer of salvation through the Servant, Isaiah is considered the

center of evangelistic Old Testament theology.”¹ “He is by general consent the greatest of all Hebrew writers, and so fully does he describe the Person and offices of the Messiah . . . he has been known as the evangelical prophet.”²

Israel’s divine call (49:1-4). Israel was called by God to be a light to all the nations (Isa 42:6-7). Israel’s call was sovereign and irrevocable. God blessed Israel so that Israel, in turn, would be a blessing to others (Gen 12:3). However, Israel refused to cooperate with God’s divine purposes; thus, Israel was punished with deportation and captivity in foreign lands. Isaiah’s prophetic ministry was a clarion call for captive Israel to repent of its idolatry and return to its covenant God. In 41:8-10, Isaiah breathes hope into a captive and dejected nation that believes their covenant God has disowned them:

But you, Israel, are My servant, Jacob whom I have chosen, The descendants of Abraham My friend. You whom I have taken from the ends of the earth, And called from its farthest regions, And said to you, “You are My servant, I have chosen you and have not cast you away: Fear not, for I am with you; Be not dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you, Yes, I will help you, I will uphold you with My righteous right hand.”

God’s love and glory are revealed in His merciful forgiveness, salvation, and restoration of Israel (44:23). Chapter 49 commands foreign peoples to listen as Servant Israel is described, both faithful individual and obedient community, as one bearing a commission that extends beyond its borders to reach out to the nations of the earth.³

¹John D. Davis and Henry Snyder Gehman, *Westminster Dictionary of the Bible* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1944), s.v. “Isaiah”; Carl E. Armerding, “Images for Today: Word from the Prophets,” in *Studies in Old Testament Theology: Historical and Contemporary Images of God and God’s People*, ed. Robert L. Hubbard Jr., Robert K. Johnson, and Robert P. Meye (Dallas: Word, 1992), 177.

²R. K. Harrison, Howard F. Vos, and Cyril J. Barber, eds., *The New Unger’s Bible Dictionary*, rev. Merrill F. Unger (Chicago: Moody, 1988), s.v. “Isaiah.”

³Paul D. Hanson, *Isaiah 40-66*, Interpretation (Louisville: John Knox, 1995), 126, 128.

Israel's evangelistic mission (49:5-6). Isaiah calls all Israel to return to Yahweh and be His light to the Gentiles. In a divine twist of irony, Judah's Babylonian Captivity provided decades of opportunity to offer God's salvation in the dominant world power's territory—something Judah refused to do while free in the Promised Land. Israel's most devastating and humiliating experience became their greatest evangelistic opportunity to share God's salvation.

Israel, who was pining away in exile, complaining about her fate, was supposed to be presenting her credentials as God's royal representative to the far-off lands. She was supposed to be glorifying God and showing off his royal splendor to the nations. The exile had not narrowed the scope of servant Israel's commission. Rather, it presented opportunity for widening that scope. It should have been evident in exile that the major task of servant Israel was to revive Israel, but this was too small a thing for God's servant. He needed new responsibilities. What a shock when the prophet revealed what the new responsibilities meant: Israel was to be a light for the Gentiles.⁴

God's salvation through Servant Israel is multivalent in meaning.⁵ First, God's salvation is particular to the nation of Israel. The word "servant" occurs twenty times in Isaiah 40-55. Servant is a corporate term that embodies "at one and the same time a reference to the One, who is the representation of the whole, and the whole group that belong to the One."⁶ God's deliverance of Israel is a powerful testimony that His salvation is offered to all humanity.

For Isaiah, salvation is an immediate, present action of God to bring help to His exiled people in order to bring them back to Jerusalem and righteousness, justice, and peace But this is also where Isaiah stunned Israel. Through him God

⁴Trent C. Butler, *Isaiah*, Holman Old Testament Commentary (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2002), 269.

⁵Hanson, *Isaiah 40-66*, 128.

⁶Walter C. Kaiser, Jr., *Mission in the Old Testament: Israel as A Light to the Nations* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2000), 56.

issued a universal invitation: “Turn to me and be saved, all you ends of the earth” (45:22).⁷

Salvation begins with Israel, but it is to be taken to every people group. John Goldingay is mistaken in at least two ways when he states, “There is no implication here that the people or prophet have to go out on a mission to bring God’s salvation to the world.”⁸ One, the prophet specifically writes that God will give Israel “as a light to the Gentiles, That You should be My salvation to the *ends* of the earth” (49:6). God demands His glory cover the earth as the waters cover the sea (Isa 11:9); His people cannot carry salvation to the nations with a “y’all come,” non-missionary mindset. Two, God declares in Isaiah 66:19, “I will set a sign among them; and those among them who escape I will *send* (emphasis mine) to the nations . . . [and] to the coastlands afar off who have not heard My fame nor seen My glory. And they shall declare My glory among the Gentiles.” From Abram to the coming of Jesus the Messiah, God has called and sent His people to declare salvation *among* the nations for the glory of His holy name.

Second, God’s salvation through His Servant is multivalent in meaning because it also refers to the coming Messiah, Jesus Christ. As Servant, Jesus is the faithful Israel that God always desired.

His servant-hood will make possible theirs—and ours. And he becomes the means of Israel’s restoration to God, he makes them the prototype for the restoration of all the world The Messiah will be “Israel” as Israel was meant to be. He will display the Lord’s splendor (49:3) as an obedient Israel might have done, and in so doing, He will be the One “who restores the tribes of Jacob” to the Lord.⁹

⁷Butler, *Isaiah*, 276.

⁸John Goldingay, *Isaiah*, New International Biblical Commentary (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2001), 283.

⁹John N. Oswalt, *Isaiah*, NIV Application Commentary (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2003), 546.

God called Israel to be a light to the gentiles, but they incessantly refused to obey. Therefore, God raised up from within Israel the Messiah, Jesus Christ. Now, the resurrected and glorified Christ sends His disciples as faithful Israel to take the gospel to the world. God's plan is a universal plan, and the community that responds in obedience to God's call becomes a part of a redemptive process that embraces all peoples.¹⁰ The gospel moves forward not only in God's power but also at His direction. Prayer is the means by which believers communicate with God, discover His will, and receive Holy Spirit empowerment to obey those directions.

God Hears Prayer

O You who hear prayer, To You all flesh will come. (Ps 65:2)

David, son of Jesse, was a simple shepherd boy from Bethlehem. God chose him to replace disobedient King Saul because David was a man after God's own heart (1 Sam 13:14). King David trusted in Yahweh's promises to Israel because he believed in a personal God, not a mere idea or abstraction.¹¹ David's numerous psalms reflect his passionate love for God. David breaks into the magnificent and mysterious heavenly realms with praise and prayer; His songs and prayers resound with the intimate affection and mutual dialogue one enjoys with a close, personal friend. David's delight was that his covenant God "listens to prayer in such a way as to answer it."¹² The psalms are known for their lofty worship, refreshing honesty, and authentic depiction of the

¹⁰Hanson, *Isaiah 40-66*, 127.

¹¹C. H. Spurgeon, *Psalms 58-87*, in vol. 2 of *The Treasury of David* (McLean, VA: MacDonald, 1900), 90.

¹²John Goldingay, *Psalms 42-89*, Baker Commentary on the Old Testament, vol. 2 (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2007), 275.

devastation of sin in contrast with the glorious forgiveness and salvation of God. Recognizing sin's destructive nature, David encourages all to seek the prayer-hearing God who offers forgiveness, salvation, and protection. The intricate depth, abject humility, and inspiration found in the Psalms still mystifies unbelievers as much as it emboldens believers to humbly pray to the One True God of Israel.

God hears His people's prayers (65:2a). God seeks a loving, personal relationship with every soul. From the Garden of Eden to the Book of Revelation, Yahweh reveals Himself as a compassionate God desiring intimacy with humanity. Prayer elicits intimacy with God. The nation of Israel and the spiritual practice of prayer are inseparable. Kittel expounds upon the connection when he explains,

To write a history of prayer in Israel would be to write a history of the religion of Israel in general Prayer developed in Israel with the unfolding of the religion of revelation [and] The religion of Israel demanded exclusive worship of Yahweh, and therefore all prayer in Israel was necessarily addressed to the one God.¹³

Yahweh is set apart from all idols of the pagan nations because hearing and answering prayer constitutes an abiding part of His name and glory.¹⁴ The Hebrew word used in Psalm 65:2 for “prayer” is *tephillah*. *Tephillah* refers to words offered to God, sung or spoken, in supplication, intercession, or praise. *Tephillah* occurs seventy-seven times in the Old Testament—thirty-two usages in the Psalter.¹⁵ By its very nature of expressing need and powerlessness, prayer places man in the role of humble supplicant asking the

¹³Gerhard Kittel, ed., *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, vol. 2, trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1964), s.v. “Prayer...,” “ευχομαι.”

¹⁴Steven J. Lawson, *Psalms 1-75* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2003), 328; John Calvin, *Commentary on the Book of Psalms*, trans. James Anderson (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1949), 2:452.

¹⁵Marvin E. Tate, *Psalms 51-100*, Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 20 (Dallas: Word, 1990), 140.

benevolent sovereign who “hears” for forgiveness, instruction, and help.

During God’s personal and progressive revelation in the Old Testament, prayer occurred in various forms to meet the communication needs of God and His people.

Prayers could take the form of a conversation with God (Ps 65:2; Job 40:1-7).

Sometimes, prayer was receiving commands from God (Exod 3:7-10; Jer 7:16). Prayer was riddled with adoration, praise, and thanksgiving (Ps 113), but prayer also took on the form of “crying out” in petition (Pss 30:10-12, 39:12), intercession (Gen 18:16-33; Num 14:11-25), and forgiveness of sin (Pss 51, 106). Since prayer in both its personal and corporate understanding is an intimate act of communicating with God, prayer in the Old Testament is synonymous with joyous acts of praise to and worship of holy God. The Old Testament is laden with examples where God not only hears the prayers of His people but answers them as well (Pss 4:3, 6:9; 17:6, 22:24; 34:4-6, 55:17-19; Prov 15:29; Isa 30:18-19; Mic 7:7). Prayer permeated Israel’s worship of the One True God.

God is sovereign (65:2b). God is the sovereign Lord to whom all humanity will bow and give an account of deeds done in the body. God, in His prevenient and providential mercy, provides salvation for the world through Israel. Yahweh foretells His intention to send evangelizers to proclaim His glory among the nations in order to “bring all your brothers, from all the nations, to my holy mountain in Jerusalem” (Isaiah 66:18-23 NIV).

God’s intent from the beginning was for Israel to be a light to the nations, but Israel refused. The Prophet Jonah is just one example of Israel’s obstinate refusal to proclaim God’s forgiveness and salvation to the Gentiles. Ultimately, God sovereignly preempted Israel’s and Jonah’s will and sent them to proclaim His salvation. A nation’s

church's or individual's disobedience to its missionary call will not inhibit God from sending His salvation to the world. As the architect of Solomon's Temple that included the Gentiles court, God clearly communicates His presence and salvation are offered to the world. In Psalm 65:2, we do not see a shift in God's worldwide plan of evangelism, but we do see God as the world's true sovereign.

The shift of focus from a building to the person of God, from a location to the ever-present Yahweh, and this paves the way for an understanding of God's presence that breaks out of the national, political, and geographical limitations of ancient Israel. Yahweh is now the God of the whole Earth (65:5).¹⁶

Yahweh "is far from the wicked, But He hears the prayer of the righteous" (Prov 15:29). One breath-taking example that proves God hears prayer is found in the prophetic ministry of Elijah (1 Kgs 16-18:40). King Ahab is seeking to kill Elijah because of a severe drought he prophesied (17:1). During a bitter conversation, Elijah challenged Ahab's prophets to a truth-test before the nation of Israel on Mount Carmel: Who is the true God? The truth-test was simple: prepare a sacrifice, lay it on the altar, pray to your God—and the God who answers by fire is God (18:19, 23-24).

Baal's prophets go first. After a few hours, Elijah taunts them saying, "Cry aloud, for he is a god; either he is meditating, or he is busy, or he is on a journey, or perhaps he is sleeping and must be awakened" (18:27). Setting the stage to expose the chasmic difference between Yahweh and Baal, the writer of 1 Kings states, "And when midday was past, they [Baal's prophets] prophesied until the time of the offering of the evening sacrifice. But there was no voice; no one answered, no one paid attention" (18:29). This pathetic statement represents the futility of unbelievers who worship and

¹⁶Gerald H. Wilson, *Psalms*, vol. 1, NIV Application Commentary (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2002), 911.

pray to their dead, false gods.

Elijah goes second. While preparing the altar and sacrifice, Elijah proclaims once again to Israel his covenant blessedness: out of all the nations of the earth, God called Israel to be His special possession. Elijah dug a trench around the altar and had the sacrifice saturated with water three times to prove no deception was involved. Elijah then prayed, “LORD God of Abraham, Isaac, and Israel, let it be known this day that You are God in Israel and I am your servant” God heard Elijah’s prayer and immediately answered by completely consuming the sacrifice, the altar, and the standing water in the trenches. “When all the people saw it, they fell on their faces; and they said, ‘The LORD, He is God! The LORD, He is God!’” (18:39).

Scripture, prayer, and the Holy Spirit are the means God uses to interact with His people and guide them to know His will. God’s will is that His salvation be taken to the world. God hears the prayers of broken and contrite hearts—good news for sinners who desire to repent of their sin and receive God’s salvation. Yet not all “prayers” are true prayer (i.e., void prayers of Baal’s prophets). No matter how well intentioned an unbeliever may be in his religious exercises, God rejects illegitimate prayers offered to other gods because they do not recognize Him or glorify His name. Yahweh’s sovereign ability to hear prayer sets Him apart from all other gods—He is the Living and True God who hears prayer and responds! Prayer was prominent in Israel’s worship of Yahweh. Prayer is vital in supporting the church’s efforts to take Jesus’ gospel to the world.

God Draws “Many Peoples” to Himself

Thus says the LORD of hosts: “Peoples shall yet come, Inhabitants of many cities; The inhabitants of one *city* shall go to another, saying, ‘Let us continue to go and pray before the LORD, And seek the LORD of hosts. I myself will go also. Yes,

many peoples and strong nations Shall come to seek the LORD of hosts in Jerusalem, And to pray before the LORD.” Thus says the LORD of hosts: ‘In those days ten men from every language of the nations shall grasp the sleeve of a Jewish man, saying, “Let us go with you, for we have heard *that God is with you.*”’ (Zech 8:20-23)

Zechariah was a sixth-century prophet to the postexilic remnant of Judah that had returned from captivity to their land that now lay in ruins. Zechariah’s ministry was contemporary with the Prophet Haggai’s and the rule of Darius I of Persia (522-486 B.C.). Zechariah’s name fittingly means, “Yahweh remembers.”¹⁷

Humanity seeks its own way (8:20-22). Sin perverts and separates man from holy God. Even God’s covenant people quickly became idolaters while living in the Promised Land He had given them as part of their inheritance (Isa 44:9-20). Thus, God sent Israel and Judah into captivity to punish their wickedness and haughty idolatry. Captivity had two God-ordained results. First, captivity caused Israel to desire to return to the Promised Land and their covenant God. Second, captivity elicited from their repentant hearts a commitment to worship and serve God, alone. F. B. Meyer states, “The captivity altered everything. They entered it deeply imbued with polytheism, and left it the strictest monotheists the world has ever seen.”¹⁸ The fasts in captivity would soon become thanksgiving feasts celebrating Yahweh’s deliverance and safely bringing Israel back home to Palestine (8:18-19). Zechariah is guiding the nation to praise God for His mercy while also clearly proclaiming that God’s salvation will lead people from all nations to worship Him on His holy mountain.

¹⁷Harrison, Vos, and Barber, *The New Unger’s Bible Dictionary*, s.v. “Zechariah.”

¹⁸F. B. Meyer, *The Prophet of Hope: Studies in Zechariah* (Chicago: Revell, 1900), 70.

God is found through His people (8:23). Yahweh expected Israel to be a light that attracted the nations to Him. Having again experienced the goodness and sovereign power of God for themselves, repatriated Israel was to be an ambassador who could testify to the nations about the covenant love and sure salvation of God. Zechariah prophesies, “And it shall come to pass That just as you were a curse among the nations, O house of Judah and house of Israel, So I will save you, and you shall be a blessing” (Zech 8:13). God brought forth His Son out of the lineage of Israel to provide salvation for the world, and in Jesus Christ, God fulfills His promise to Abram and Israel. George Klein writes,

The nations coming back to Jerusalem to worship the Lord refers back to the Abrahamic covenant when God promised the patriarch that “all peoples on earth will be blessed through you” (Gen 12:3). The Abrahamic covenant assured Israel that he will become the channel of blessing between the Lord and the nations of the world.¹⁹

Carol and Eric Meyers agree:

This concluding section has progressively included in its eschatology the Jerusalemites, the Judahites, the neighboring groups, and now the more distant foreign nations. Such an ever broadening circle of people to be accounted for as part of Yahweh’s redemptive scheme makes Zechariah one of the most universalistic of all the prophets.²⁰

Zechariah’s prophecy is “the most Messianic, the most truly apocalyptic and eschatological of all the writings of the OT.”²¹ In Zechariah, there is an “already” but “not yet” component. Physically, God did save Israel and return him home, but

¹⁹George L. Klein, *Zechariah*, New American Commentary, vol. 21B (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2008), 247.

²⁰Carol L. Meyers and Eric M. Meyers, *Haggai, Zechariah 1-8*, Anchor Bible (New York: Doubleday, 1987), 441.

²¹George L. Robinson, “Book of Zechariah,” in *International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, ed. James Orr (Chicago: Howard-Severance, 1915), 3136.

Zechariah's proclamation is also nothing less than an advance promise of the gospel which the New Testament identifies as the coming of Christ.²² Merrill Unger states,

Zechariah contains more allusions to the coming Messiah, both in His first and second advents and future millennial glory, than all the other Minor Prophets combined . . . Chapter 8 gives one of the clearest descriptions of the future restoration of Jerusalem (8:1-5) and the return of Israel to the land (8:6-8), with a remarkable setting forth of the future prosperity of the land and people Israel during the reign of Christ subsequent to His second Advent (8:9-23).²³

Jesus brought salvation to Israel (Matt 15:24) through the shedding of his precious blood on Calvary. Three days later, God resurrected Jesus from the grave. The resurrected and exalted Christ gives the church its evangelistic mission to take God's plan of salvation to the world (Matt 28:18-20). As Richard Phillips succinctly states,

The mission of the church is to lead other people to God . . . Evangelism is personal as we see the picture of ten men coming to one of God's people (Zech 8:23) to follow him in the way of the Lord . . . [because] evangelism takes the eternally attractive and effective message of God to the lost masses (Rom 10:14-15).²⁴

Jesus has commanded His church to *go* to the lost, everywhere. As the local church obeys the command to evangelize their Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and ends of the earth (Acts 1:8), God's presence is manifested and He will supernaturally draw the lost to Himself.

It is interesting that the final voice in the message of Zech 7-8 is a voice of outsiders attracted to God's presence in the midst of his covenant community (8:23). It is a subtle reminder to those of us feasting in the midst of God's community that he has called us to a mission beyond ourselves.²⁵

²²Richard D. Phillips, *Zechariah*, Reformed Expository Commentary (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R, 2007), 181.

²³Harrison, Vos, and Barber, *The New Unger's Bible Dictionary*, s.v. "Zechariah."

²⁴Phillips, *Zechariah*, 187.

²⁵Mark J. Boda, *Haggai, Zechariah*, NIV Application Commentary (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2004), 407.

God's salvation was proclaimed as part of man's judgment in the Garden of Eden (Gen 3:15), but the source of world missionary activity is rooted in God's call to Israel in the Old Testament.²⁶ Taking salvation to the spiritually lost is God's loving plan and driving passion throughout the Old and New Testaments. Walter Kaiser incisively clarifies,

The purpose for Israel as a missionary force originated in the universal scope of the message in Genesis 1-11 and more definitively in Genesis 12:3. But it would achieve its clearest definition in the "Servant of the Lord" passages in Isaiah 42 and 49, where Israel, who was also that "Servant," was appointed to be a light to the nations The nations and Gentiles were envisioned as equal recipients of that same Good News from the very beginning of time along with Israel herself.²⁷

In closing, the church is grafted into Israel through the person and work of the Messiah, Jesus Christ. The church is a living community called to penetrate and evangelize the nations of the world with the gospel. In so doing, the prophecies of Zechariah are fulfilled in the church.²⁸ In his book *The Supremacy of God in Preaching*, John Piper summarizes God's consistent purpose for worldwide evangelism: "Someday the earth will be filled with the glory of the Lord, echoing and reverberating in the white-hot worship of the ransomed church gathered in from every people and tongue and tribe and nation."²⁹

Developing an Intercessory Prayer Ministry to Support Evangelism in the New Testament Church

God calls, saves, and then sends evangelizers into the world. It is the word

²⁶Kaiser, *Mission in the Old Testament*, 9.

²⁷*Ibid.*, 33, 40.

²⁸Boda, *Haggai, Zechariah*, 399.

²⁹John Piper, *The Supremacy of God in Preaching* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1990), 27.

“sending” that lexically links the Old Testament with the New Testament.³⁰ As God’s personal and loving Savior for the world, Jesus did not just bring God’s plan of salvation: He *is* God’s plan of salvation. Jesus Christ, as the embodiment of true Israel, needed the intimacy and strength prayer provides. Jesus often awakened early in the morning to commune with His Father (Mark 1:35, 14:36; Luke 6:11, 23:34, 46; John 11:41, John 17). For three years, Jesus continually modeled a life of prayer as He preached and equipped His disciples to take the gospel to all the nations (Isa 49:6; Matt 10:5-6, 28: 18-20). Jesus’ prayer life was so attractive His Disciples begged Him to show them how to pray as He did (Luke 11:1). Jesus’ prayers are kingdom-based and God-glorifying. Prayer is foundational to obeying Christ’s command to “go.” At the coming of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost, prayer underwent a radical change and became the supernatural dynamism behind the early church’s effective evangelism and ministry (Acts 2:38-47). The Apostle Paul’s New Testament books throb with thanksgiving and prayer. Prayer was such an integral part of Paul’s ministry it seems every breath was an opportunity for worship and praise of Almighty God. Jesus commissioned Paul to take the gospel to the ends of the earth (Acts 9:6, 15). In his epistles, Paul declared his need for intercessors to petition God for supernatural protection and divinely opened doors of evangelistic opportunity. Attempting to share the gospel without prayer support is to step unprepared and unguarded into the spiritual realm where Satan and his minions, like hungry lions, wait to attack and demoralize evangelizers.

Today, prayer is integral for evangelism to reclaim its rightful priority, evangelizers to be effective and for the lost to recognize their need of salvation. Since

³⁰Kaiser, *Mission in the Old Testament*, 11.

the Son of God remained committed to prayer, His disciples must also make intercessory prayer a priority for effective evangelism to occur in the field of souls. This study will examine three passages each from Jesus and the Apostle Paul. Jesus gave His church a Great Commission to seek and save the lost with His gospel. Jesus and Paul lived evangelistic lives passionately committed to prayer. Both men articulate and demonstrate the critical role intercessory prayer plays in supporting evangelism. The local church will experience evangelistic effectiveness when it intercedes for God to send more evangelizers and for the lost to recognize their need to receive Jesus Christ as Savior.

Jesus Seeks and Saves the Lost

Then *Jesus* entered and passed through Jericho. Now behold, *there was* a man named Zacchaeus who was a chief tax collector, and he was rich. And he sought to see who Jesus was, but could not because of the crowd, for he was of short stature. So he ran ahead and climbed up into a sycamore tree to see Him, for He was going to pass that *way*. And when Jesus came to the place, He looked up and saw him, and said to him, “Zacchaeus, make haste and come down, for today I must stay at your house.” So he made haste and came down, and received Him joyfully. But when they saw *it*, they all complained, saying, “He has gone to be a guest with a man who is a sinner.” Then Zacchaeus stood and said to the Lord, “Look, Lord, I give half of my goods to the poor; and if I have taken anything from anyone by false accusation, I restore fourfold.” And Jesus said to him, “Today salvation has come to this house, because he also is a son of Abraham; for the Son of Man has come to seek and to save that which was lost.” (Luke 19:1-10)

The lost seek meaning in life (19:1-4). The Zacchaeus story is indicative of the search for meaning in life every person ultimately confronts. Zacchaeus was a chief tax collector for the Romans in Jericho, and as a tax collector, he was considered a traitorous collaborator with the enemy. Zacchaeus was a rich man, but he had a burning need in his soul the world could not see or its riches satisfy. In his search for peace and meaning in life, Zacchaeus was willing to sacrifice everything he owned. Zacchaeus’

humble and contrite spirit stands in sharp contrast with the rich young ruler who only had to do one thing to inherit eternal life: sell his riches and give them to the poor (Luke 18:18-23).

When Zacchaeus heard that Jesus was passing nearby, he sought to see the amazing rabbi who was “a friend of tax collectors and sinners” (Luke 7:34). Zacchaeus did not know why he had to see Jesus, but he knew He would never be the same. Joel Green writes, “At the outset Zacchaeus is on a quest to see who Jesus is, only to learn in the end that, in accordance with his divine commission, Jesus has been on a quest for Zacchaeus, to bring him salvation.”³¹

Jesus actively seeks the lost (19:5-8). Zacchaeus thought he was the one seeking Jesus, but I. Howard Marshall writes, “All who truly seek Jesus will find him because they will learn, in fact, Jesus has actually been seeking them out, first.”³² Jesus’ work is always prevenient. After noticing Zacchaeus perched in the tree, Jesus called him by name and states His desire to stay with him. Jesus’ “request” is given in terms of a divine necessity: “Zacchaeus, I must stay at your house” (19:5).³³ The New Testament repeatedly shows Jesus taking the initiative in seeking the lost. Darrell Bock perceptively notes,

Jesus’ stay with Zacchaeus is a necessity because it pictures what his ministry is all about—to lead to God those whom others have given up on, to call those who need

³¹Joel B. Green, *The Gospel of Luke*, New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997), 667.

³²I. Howard Marshall, *The Gospel of Luke*, New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1978), 694.

³³Robert H. Stein, *Luke*, New American Commentary, vol. 24 (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1992), 467.

to repent . . . Christ's priority is to associate closely enough with the lost that they may come to know the grace of God.³⁴

Jesus' earthly ministry was specifically ordained to bring the gospel of the kingdom of God "to the lost sheep of Israel" (Matt 15:24). Interestingly, God's plan of salvation in the Old Testament (Gen 12:3; Isa 49:6; Zech 8:18-23) and Christ's salvific mission—all start with Israel. In both, salvation is meant to rapidly move outward to the Gentile nations. Zacchaeus exemplifies the multitudes of lost souls in Israel that elicited Jesus' great compassion "because they were weary and scattered, like sheep having no shepherd" (Matt 9:36; Luke 13:34-35). Only Jesus Christ, "the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world" (John 1:29), has the divine calling and saving power to creatively transform the human situation from one of lost, selfish sinfulness to one of born-again, righteous peace with God.³⁵ Like the Master, evangelizers seek the lost with a passionate compassion.

Jesus brings salvation to the lost (19:9-10). Jesus brings God's salvation to the lost because they cannot extricate themselves from their spiritual enmity with holy God. Zacchaeus' encounter with Jesus resulted in confession, repentance, and salvation. Salvation comes to those who confess and repent of their sin, for salvation is "freedom from guilt and sin through the pardon of Jesus and the restoration of the soul to the favor of God as his child and heir."³⁶ The New Testament teaches that the kingdom of God

³⁴Darrell L. Bock, *Luke*, NIV Application Commentary (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996), 479.

³⁵John Nolland, *Luke 18:35-24:53*, Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 35C (Dallas: Word, 1993), 907.

³⁶Richard C. H. Lenski, *The Interpretation of St. Luke's Gospel* (Columbia, OH: Wartburg, 1946), 944.

and the salvation which it brings belongs to the heirs of Abraham. Ellis argues, “In this regard Christianity is absolutely Jewish and, thus, is the fulfillment of the promise God made to Abraham to make him a blessing to all the families of the earth” (Gen 12:3).³⁷ Luke’s Gospel of grace is joined to repentance; repentance results in the fruit of turning away from sin and to the holy God who set the sinner free. Zacchaeus’ new faith bore immediate fruit. His newfound faith led him to repay anyone he had cheated and to give half of his wealth to the poor. A man formerly obsessed with money and wealth who now gladly rids himself of that wealth for the love of the Savior is truly a transformed man.

The mission and presence of Jesus Christ confronts the sinful hearts of humanity with the unconditional love and eternal salvation of God. Jesus is God’s peace (Luke 2:10-14), but the spiritual battle rages on as the light of the gospel is taken into our dark world where meticulously arrayed forces of wickedness work feverishly to keep sinners enslaved. The story of Zacchaeus epitomizes the unique light the gospel brings in two ways. First, the meaning of life, which the lost are seeking, is found only in the gospel. The deep questions of the heart find their answer and fulfillment in the person of Jesus Christ. The gospel, its purpose, and its power are eternal—those saved by Christ are radically changed from the inside out (2 Cor 5:17). Second, Jesus came to show God’s love by seeking and saving the spiritually lost (John 3:16). During His three-year ministry, Jesus modeled a life that incessantly sowed the gospel in the harvest fields of the lost (John 4:34-38). Likewise, Jesus commands His disciples to offer the gospel

³⁷E. Earle Ellis, *The Gospel of Luke*, New Century Bible Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996), 220.

freely to every person (Matt 28:19; Rom 10:13-15) so they may be saved from sin.

Being reconcilers will include believers praying and sharing the gospel as we “go” about our everyday lives. However, sharing the gospel will also include missions to foreign lands. Zacchaeus’ conversion represents a fulfillment of Jesus’ earthly mission to seek and to save the lost, the shepherd imagery in Ezekiel 34, and the Servant’s call to take God’s salvation to the Gentiles (Isa 49:6).

God Sends Evangelizers When We Pray

Then Jesus went about all the cities and villages, teaching in their synagogues, preaching the gospel of the kingdom, and healing every sickness and every disease among the people. But when He saw the multitudes, He was moved with compassion for them, because they were weary and scattered, like sheep having no shepherd. Then He said to His disciples, “The harvest truly is plentiful, but the laborers are few. Therefore pray the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into His harvest.” (Matt 9:35-38)

Jesus spreads the gospel seed (9:35). Jesus brings the Good News. In Matthew 9:35, the disciples join Jesus as He preaches the gospel throughout Israel. Jesus is modeling biblical evangelism for His disciples. Biblical evangelism involves *taking* the gospel to the lost who need to hear the truth about God’s amazing love in Jesus Christ. During His earthly ministry, Jesus was the primary gospel-sower who used every opportunity to demonstrate and equip His disciples for ministry. R. T. France writes that the disciples soon went from being “the recipients of His ministry . . . [to becoming] its agents, sharing not only in the proclamation of the kingdom of heaven but also in the works of mercy and power which characterized the authority of the Messiah himself.”³⁸

³⁸R. T. France, *The Gospel of Matthew*, New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007), 370.

In the midst of studying Jesus' salvific ministry, we can easily overlook the fact that for three years Jesus preached a gospel that was not yet "finished" (John 19:30). It is a stirring testament to God's sovereign love and power that souls placed their faith in Jesus prior to His resurrection. The writer of Hebrews provides insight into how the lost are supernaturally led by the Holy Spirit to believe in Jesus, "Now faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see" (Heb 11:2 NIV). Jesus is the author of our faith and He is the eternal hope for sinners (Eccl 9:4; John 4:14; Heb 12:2). Jesus' disciples, then and now, follow His model of taking the gospel to the lost. The dual tasks of teaching the Word and proclaiming the gospel are still the primary ministries of the church today.³⁹ Christians authoritatively proclaim the gospel until Jesus returns.

Jesus has compassion for the lost (9:36). The children of Israel were desperate to hear the hope the Scriptures contain. Instead, their teachers emphasized external religious practices to the exclusion of the spirit and truth in worship that God required. During His travels, Jesus faithfully taught the Scriptures. Seeing the weary and scattered multitudes moved Jesus with deep compassion for their distressed spiritual condition. Compassion accurately describes Jesus' earthly ministry. In fact, when used in the Gospels, compassion is always used of Jesus or by Jesus in His parables.⁴⁰ John Nolland writes, "Compassion involves identifying with the situation of others so that one

³⁹John F. MacArthur Jr., *Matthew 8-15*, in *MacArthur New Testament Commentary* (Chicago: Moody, 1987), 105.

⁴⁰Leon Morris, *The Gospel According to Matthew*, Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1992), 239.

is prepared to act for their benefit.”⁴¹ However, compassion is more than preparation to act: Compassion is an attitude toward a person’s need that grows until an action *is* taken for the purpose of meeting that need.⁴²

Jesus is the incarnate love of God found in the Good Shepherd motif in Jeremiah (23:3-5) and Yahweh’s personal shepherding in Ezekiel (34:20-24). Christ’s compassion and salvation are freely offered to all who will by faith call upon the name of the Lord (Acts 2:21; Eph 2:8-9). G. Campbell Morgan wrote, “There is no reason in man that God should save; the need is born of God’s own compassion.”⁴³

The church will return to its days of evangelistic fervor and effectiveness when disciples, in the power of the Holy Spirit, regain the compassion of Christ. Christ-like compassion drives believers to pray even more tirelessly for the desperate spiritual condition of the lost—a powerless position all believers experienced before their conversion. The grace of God supernaturally turns born-again believers into loving, forgiving, and compassionate children of the Almighty King. Jesus’ compassion for the lost has not waned. Through a commitment to intercessory prayer for the lost, Jesus’ disciples will regain the compassion and desire to reach the lost with the gospel, thus, fulfilling the Great Commission. Donald Hagner states, “The great spiritual need of God’s people is what moved Jesus with compassion. The whole gospel is a response to

⁴¹John Nolland, *The Gospel of Matthew*, New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005), 407.

⁴²Stuart K. Weber, *Matthew*, Holman New Testament Commentary (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2000), 130.

⁴³G. Campbell Morgan, *The Gospel According to Matthew* (Old Tappan, NJ: Revell, 1986), 99.

this universal need.”⁴⁴ The love of Jesus and the utter *lostness* of the lost compels believers to pray and take the gospel to the lost with a broken and compassionate heart (John 4:34-38).

Prayer petitions God for workers (9:37-38). Jesus’ short life span, His deep compassion, and the voluminous numbers of lost souls that needed salvation, led Him to teach the disciples to pray for the advancement of the gospel message. The gospel’s advancement comes through disciples’ unremitting prayers to God seeking more workers to sow and reap souls: “Pray the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into His harvest” (9:38). Davies and Allison write,

The harvest is a metaphor for mission, and the disciples of Jesus, with their preaching of the kingdom, are the harvesters. So the eschatological harvest has been moved from the future to the present.⁴⁵

Even as God in the flesh, Jesus did not have the time to share the gospel with every person who needed salvation. Jesus also knew the gospel’s worldwide mission would overwhelm the Disciples. Thus, Jesus intentionally connects the effective evangelization of lost souls directly to the intercessory prayers of believers petitioning God for more workers. In Matthew 9:38, the word for “pray” is δέομαι. Δέομαι occurs 24 times in the New Testament—only here in Matthew. Δέομαι always means “to ask, to seek, and to pray for specific prayers in concrete situations.”⁴⁶ Δέομαι prayer springs

⁴⁴Donald A. Hagner, *Matthew 1-13*, Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 33A (Dallas: Word, 1993), 260.

⁴⁵W. D. Davies and Dale C. Allison, *The Gospel According to Saint Matthew*, vol. 2, International Critical Commentary (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1991), 148.

⁴⁶Gerhard Kittel, ed., *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, vol. 2, trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1964), s.v. “Prayer...,” “δέομαι.”

forth from a sense of dire need, and the need is for more workers in God's harvest to gather it all in. Asking God for more laborers indicates the gospel and its supernatural work of salvation are wholly the word of God's prevenient grace.

Evangelistic intercessory prayer petitions God to send more workers and to make the hearts of the lost receptive to the gospel. Believers in every generation must intercede for more gospel bearers because the harvest requires we send workers into all kind of ministries to meet their needs.⁴⁷ Two things happen when we ask God to send workers into the spiritual harvest. First, God answers our prayers because we are obeying Jesus' command to "pray the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into His harvest." Second, God often leads intercessors to become the answer to their own prayers for workers because their hearts are already on-fire to see the lost born again.

Christians Are Evangelizers

And Jesus came and spoke to them, saying, "All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, *even* to the end of the age." Amen. (Matt 28:18-20)

Jesus authorizes disciples to go (28:18). Jesus Christ is the resurrected Savior who, as the fulfillment of Daniel 7:13-14, has all authority in heaven and on earth. Jesus commands and empowers the disciples to take the gospel to our lost and dying world. The resurrected and ruling Christ emboldens and comforts His disciples. Hagner notes, Christ "uses this experience to reestablish their personal relationship with Himself

⁴⁷Hagner, *Matthew 1-13*, 261; Craig L. Blomberg, *Matthew*, New American Commentary, vol. 22 (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1992), 167.

for the purpose of communicating His comprehensive sovereignty over the whole of the created order” (Matt 9:6, 11:27).⁴⁸

Jesus spent three years training the disciples to sow and reap the gospel. Now, after His resurrection, it is time for Him to entrust the gospel-bearing mission to His disciples (2 Cor 5:14-20). Matthew 28:18-20 is called the “the Great Commission” because it encapsulates Jesus’ command for His disciples to evangelize the world. The Great Commission is founded upon Jesus’ authority, command, and present Lordship.⁴⁹ Obedient disciples deliberately and passionately obey the Master’s call to take the gospel to the lost, worldwide. Salvation is offered freely to all in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ because “there is no other name under heaven among men by which we must be saved” (Acts 4:12). John MacArthur writes,

This passage is a climax and major focal point not only of this gospel but of the entire New Testament. It is not an exaggeration to say that, in its broadest sense, it is the focal point of all Scripture. It is through their participation in God’s redemptive plan the believers themselves most glorify God [because] . . . nothing so much glorifies God as his gracious redemption of the damned, hell-bound sinners. It was for that ultimate purpose that God called Abraham, that in him “all the families of the Earth shall be blessed.” Like [his] Messiah, Israel was to be “a light to the nations so that the Lord’s salvation may reach to the end of the Earth” . . . Christ came into the world that he loved and sought to win sinners to himself for the Father’s glory. As Christ’s representatives, we are sent into the world he loves to bring the lost to him and thereby bring glory and honor to God.⁵⁰

Jesus sends His disciples (28:19). Jesus’ command to take the gospel to all the nations does not reflect a change in God’s loving plan of salvation. Rather, Matthew

⁴⁸Hagner, *Matthew 1-13*, 886.

⁴⁹Douglas R. Hare, *Matthew*, Interpretation (Louisville: John Knox, 1993), 333.

⁵⁰John F. MacArthur, Jr., *Matthew 24-28*, in *MacArthur New Testament Commentary* (Chicago: Moody, 1989), 329, 332.

28:18-20 is the springboard for the fulfillment of God's redemptive purposes for the Gentile nations as prophesied in Psalm 65:2, Isaiah 49:6, and Zechariah 8:20-23. R. T.

France states,

Scholars have pointed out how closely this scene resembles, in its overall sense and content if not in detail, the commissioning narratives which occur throughout the Old Testament where God's often reluctant and inadequate servants are sent out to fulfill his purpose with the assurance of his empowering and his presence to go with them: Abraham, Moses, Joshua, Gideon, Samuel, Isaiah, and Jeremiah.⁵¹

The Great Commission establishes Christianity as primarily a missionary religion, but now its scope is far wider. Christianity is no longer a mission simply to the lost sheep of Israel but to all the nations (Matt 10:6, 15:24, 24:14, 26:13).⁵²

The disciples' mission is to share the gospel and make disciples. Blomberg insightfully notes that making disciples "commands a kind of evangelism that does not stop after someone makes a profession of faith . . . Making disciples involves baptizing them and teaching them obedience to all of Jesus' commandments."⁵³ The mission of sowing and reaping the gospel of Christ with every people group and teaching and equipping them to be disciples will end only at Jesus' triumphant Second Coming (1 Thess 4:13-18). Jesus directly connects sharing the gospel and making disciples with the Parousia when He said, "And this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in the entire world as a witness to all the nations, and then the end will come" (Matt 24:14).

Jesus strengthens His disciples (28:20). Jesus' promise that He will be with

⁵¹France, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 1109.

⁵²John A. Broadus, *Commentary on the Gospel of Matthew* (Philadelphia: The American Baptist Publication Society, 1886), 592, 1108.

⁵³Blomberg, *Matthew*, 431.

disciples unto the end of the age provides peace and security for believers. Jesus' presence strengthens believers for the supernatural task of sowing and reaping the gospel. He is with us as we seek, find, and lead the lost to faith in Jesus Christ. Fulfilling the Great Commission is a supernatural task that requires the intercession and companionship of the Lord Jesus Christ with believers. Christ has entered into a unique partnership with His disciples.

The resurrected Christ, as the incarnate love and compassion of God, is central to the existence and proclamation of the church.⁵⁴ Jesus came to seek and save the lost (Luke 19:10); thus, He constantly took the gospel to new areas for the lost to have an opportunity to be saved. Jesus' lifestyle taught His disciples that prayer is integral for evangelizers to carry the gospel into the great harvest of lost souls (Matt 9:35-38). Believers, in Christ's authority and supported by prayer intercessors, carry the gospel to the lost rightfully expecting God's work of salvation to be accomplished in their hearts. Jesus' presence and the indwelling of the Holy Spirit (John 14:16-17; 1 Cor 3:16) strengthens Christians to be more than conquerors with God's loving gospel (Rom 8:37-39).

The prayer life of Jesus lead to prayer being one of the spiritual foundations of the nascent church. The magnitude of prayer's importance was expressed when the Apostles determined that in the best interest of the young, burgeoning church they must give themselves "continually to prayer and to the ministry of the Word" (Acts 2:42-47; 6:2-4). Faithful preaching of God's Word and prayer empower the church for

⁵⁴Hagner, *Matthew 1-13*, 889.

evangelistic effectiveness because “word and prayer belong together; in the former God speaks to us, in the latter we to Him.”⁵⁵

While Saul was on a zealous mission to persecute the early church, Jesus intervened, spoke to, and blinded Saul (Paul) on the Road to Damascus (Acts 9:1-9). For three days, Paul refused to eat or drink; instead, he prayed and waited on Jesus. After Ananias prayed for him to regain sight, Paul boldly and incessantly preached in the synagogues that Jesus is “the Christ . . . the Son of God” (Acts 9:20-22). When the Jews rejected the gospel, Paul recognized he was called as God’s ambassador to take the gospel of “salvation to the ends of the earth” (Isa 49:6; Acts 13:45-17).

Paul’s missionary journeys and epistles reflect the personal dangers, momentous joys, and unrelenting spiritual struggles that faithful evangelizers encounter. In the midst of his harried apostolic ministry, Paul articulates the direct relation between intercessory prayer and effective evangelism to the churches at Colossae, Ephesus, and his protégé, Timothy. Paul knew evangelizers are successful when supported by faithful Christians committed to intercessory prayer.

An intercessory prayer ministry is effective when it takes a three-fold approach. First, an intercessory prayer ministry is effective when it petitions God to provide evangelizers with divinely ordained opportunities and boldness to share the gospel with the lost (Col 4:2-6). Second, an intercessory prayer ministry is effective when it asks God to supply protection for evangelizers as they go and share the gospel with the lost (Eph 6:18-20). Third, as intercessors ask God to open new doors for the

⁵⁵William Hendriksen, *Exposition of Colossians and Philemon*, New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1964), 179.

gospel and for evangelizers' protection, the Holy Spirit supernaturally causes the gospel to shape and affect the lives of the intercessors, evangelizers, and lost (1 Tim 2:2-4). God uniquely acts when intercessors prayerfully support evangelizers seeking to fulfill the Great Commission.

Prayer Leads to Divine Opportunities

Continue earnestly in prayer, being vigilant in it with thanksgiving; meanwhile praying also for us, that God would open to us a door for the word, to speak the mystery of Christ, for which I am also in chains, that I may make it manifest, as I ought to speak. (Col 4:2-4)

Prayer must be vigilant and thankful (4:2). Paul asked the entire congregation at Colossae to pray because the lost are in a perilous spiritual condition. God-centered prayer is integral to the success of the gospel reaching the lost. Christ's command and compassion for the lost are the reasons we pray. Intercession demands painstaking perseverance coupled with a soul-hounding exigency that *must* sow and reap the gospel among the lost. Through prayer, intercessors reach up to God, out to the lost, and vicariously join evangelizers sharing the gospel in the spiritual harvest fields. Intercessory prayer is a rewarding ministry, but believers' earnest petitions and intercessions reflect the dangerous spiritual state of the lost. Though integral to evangelistic success, intercession comes at great personal risk. Prayer is,

[Prayer is] . . . a persistent, courageous struggle from which the believer may come away limping "This is no cosmic teddy bear we are cuddling up to [for] Whoever wrestles with God in prayer puts his whole life at stake."⁵⁶

⁵⁶John F. MacArthur, Jr., *Colossians and Philemon*, in *MacArthur New Testament Commentary* (Chicago: Moody, 1992), 181; Virginia Stem Owens, "Prayer—Into the Lion's Jaws," *Christianity Today* (46): 222-23.

Prayer intercessors realize Satan will fight without pause or mercy to keep the lost bound in darkness. Although the lost do not fully comprehend their hazardous spiritual position, they desperately need intercessors to vigilantly and unrelentingly petition God to convict them of sin and reveal their need to receive God's gracious provision of salvation in Jesus Christ.

Along with sincere earnestness and unrelenting persistence, the Apostle Paul also teaches the importance of intercessory prayers being chock-full of thanksgiving. There are at least three reasons prayers are to be brimming with thanksgiving. First, thanksgiving comes from the intercessor's own salvation experience. God has revealed Jesus Christ as the substitutionary sacrifice that paid for the believer's sin. After receiving Jesus as Savior, an overflowing spirit of love, joy, and gratefulness abounds. Second, thanksgiving and hope break forth because the intercessor trusts the same salvation she has received by faith is still available to the lost. But, as the Apostle Peter wrote, time is running out: "The Lord is not slack concerning His promise, as some count slackness, but is longsuffering toward us, not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance" (2 Pet 3:9). Finally, thanksgiving is the antidote to prayer warriors growing weary. Thanksgiving is the spiritual fuel that uplifts and undergirds intercessors engaged in spiritual warfare as they faithfully pray for effectiveness, open doors, protection for evangelizers, and salvation for the lost. Thanksgiving is the vault that holds the priceless gem of joy. The devil trembles and God revels in the glory when His people pray with a heart full of joyous thanksgiving.

One of the best examples expressing the importance of relentless intercession is the Parable of the Persistent Widow (Luke 18:1-8). While the widow's request to the

judge remained in limbo, she kept pleading with him until he granted her request.

Passionate, unrelenting intercessory prayers on behalf of the lost reflect one's own thankfulness to God for salvation and one's love for their lost neighbor. As intercessors earnestly pray for the salvation of the lost with thanksgiving and praise, God answers those selfless prayers in order to glorify His holy name.

God provides opportunities (4:3). While writing the book of Colossians, Paul remained imprisoned in Rome. His desire to return to the mission field with the gospel burned deeply in his soul, yet his missionary journeys ceased for two years. Instead, God redeemed Paul's time in prison by giving him the strength to author three more epistles: Ephesians, Philippians, and Philemon.

In Colossians 4:3, Paul asks the Colossian church to pray that God would open a door of evangelistic opportunity for him to speak the mystery of Christ. The word used for "pray" in 4:3 is *προσευχόμενοι*, and "it directs our attention to a particular form of petition, that is, intercession The Colossians Christians are to persevere in intercessory prayer."⁵⁷ Prayer, in combination with the reading of God's Word, is the spiritual means whereby believers communicate with God in order to discover and obey His will. Even in prison, Paul was obeying God's will! Petitioning God to create "doors" of evangelistic opportunity is an act of obedience that recognizes His desire that "all men be saved, and come to the knowledge of the truth" (1 Tim 2:1-4).

During imprisonment, Paul more than ever valued the interdependent aspect of intercessory prayer whereby believers identify their primary dependence upon God and

⁵⁷Peter T. O'Brien, *Colossians, Philemon*, Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 44 (Waco: Word, 1982), 237.

each other. Paul recognized the necessity of the Colossian church supporting and collaborating with his ministry through prayer. O'Brien writes,

When they interceded for him it was an actual cooperating with him, an assisting of him in prayer. Paul earnestly desires this prayerful participation in his struggle for the gospel from churches, which he founded. Such intercession is not confined to general matters. It names specific needs and concerns which arise from the missionary work of the moment.⁵⁸

Paul does not ask prayer for his well-being. Instead, he asks them to pray for God to open a door for the gospel because “prayer does not open doors, but the God who answers prayer does” (Acts 14:27).⁵⁹ The gospel Paul is carrying to the world is “completely new, since the Old Testament nowhere declares either the indwelling of Gentiles by the Messiah or the totally equality of Jews and Gentiles in one new body.”⁶⁰

Only God can supply access and opportunity into cities, especially hostile and remote areas. Prayer warriors petition God to send evangelizers to every people group so the lost can be saved (Rom 10:13-14). God cares about the lost to such an extent that even when evangelistic doors seem shut from the human viewpoint, God has proactively been working to open other doors for evangelizers to enter (Acts 16:6-10; Rev 3:7).

Intercessory prayer does not have geographic limitations. Therefore, an intercessory prayer ministry in Roanoke, Texas, can entreat God to give evangelizers divine opportunities locally, nationally, and internationally (Acts 1:8). Although the gospel, like Jesus' parables, remains veiled to the lost, as God sends additional

⁵⁸Ibid., 236.

⁵⁹Robert Gromacki, *Philippians and Colossians: Joy and Completeness in Christ*, Twenty-First Century Biblical Commentary Series (Chattanooga: AMG, 2003), 214.

⁶⁰James P. Sweeney, “The Priority of Prayer in Colossians 4:2-4,” *Bibliotheca Sacra* 159, no. 635 (2002): 331.

intercessors and evangelizers into the field of souls, the lost will have more divinely created opportunities to hear the gospel and respond in faith to Jesus Christ. One of the distinctive privileges of Christianity is that believers can pray with confidence that God will hear their prayers (Ps 65:2).⁶¹ God alone opens doors for the gospel to reach the lost because He desires and expects a response to His Son's sacrifice!

God empowers effectiveness (4:4). Prayer petitions God to work in the local church to mobilize believers for evangelism, give evangelizers victory in their personal conflicts, and prepare the hearts of the lost to be fertile ground for the gospel seed. Paul commanded the believers at Colossae to support his ministry with urgent and vigilant prayers. He recognized God alone provides access and opportunity for the gospel to move forward. Intercessors ask God to empower evangelizers to share the gospel boldly, repetitively, and effectively. Sweeney states, "Clarity, on one hand, and boldness or fearlessness, on the other, were two overlapping prayer concerns in the letters of Colossians and Ephesians, as Paul sought to fulfill the divine commission entrusted to him."⁶²

The more often evangelizers share the gospel, the greater the fierceness of spiritual warfare by Satan and his minions to keep the lost in the dark. The lost need evangelizers imbued with the Spirit of God and compassion of Christ. An intercessory prayer ministry provides support for evangelizers to be effective while also praying that the God who opens the doors for proclamation would surely also open the hearts of those

⁶¹Gerhard Kittel, ed., *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, vol. 2, trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1964), s.v. "Prayer..." "προσευχή, προσεύχομαι."

⁶²Sweeney, "The Priority of Prayer in Colossians 4:2-4," 332.

who hear the gospel.⁶³

Effective evangelism's prerequisite is humble and intensive intercessory prayer (Luke 11:9-10). Intercessors and evangelizers may not personally know the lost who will hear the gospel, but the need of all lost persons to receive salvation remains constant. A simple, but direct, way to pray for the lost is to petition God to cause them to experience great spiritual uneasiness in their soul. Intercessors do not have the luxury of being timid with so many eternal souls at stake. In their book *Famous Conversions*, Kerr and Mulder note that for many the longing for conversion grows out of a deep sense of sin, suffering, and frustration. The agony of soul that desires to begin all over again with Christ often experiences four phases of spiritual illumination: a stab of conscience, a shame of inward uncleanness, deep remorse for sin, and the awareness of being lost and alone.⁶⁴

Intercessors care about the desperate spiritual condition of the lost. Prayers petitioning God to empower evangelizers for evangelistic effectiveness will also include specific requests for the Holy Spirit to continue His unrelenting work in the souls of the lost to convict them “of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment” (John 16:8).

Prayer Is a Supernatural Weapon

Praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, being watchful to this end with all perseverance and supplication for all the saints—and for me, that utterance may be given to me, that I may open my mouth boldly to make known the mystery of the gospel, for which I am an ambassador in chains; that in it I may speak boldly, as I ought to speak. (Eph 6:18-20)

⁶³Marianne Meye Thompson, *Colossians and Philemon*, Two Horizons New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005), 99.

⁶⁴Hugh T. Kerr and John M. Mulder, eds., *Famous Conversions: The Christian Experience* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1983), x.

Prayer is spiritual warfare (6:18). After explaining in 6:12 the wicked and demonic forces arrayed to influence and envelop humanity, Paul exhorts the church at Ephesus to put on the whole armor of God for protection against spiritual attack (6:11, 13-17). The pieces of armor must be embraced with a reverent and prayerful attitude that is respectful of the supernatural work God will accomplish through intercessors. Intercessory prayer is a holy work God has called believers to engage. Verse 18 is unusual in that Paul uses three words for prayer: προσεύχομαι, προσευχή, and δέησις (used twice). Linking the four occurrences of “all” and “prayer,” Paul is expressing that spiritual warfare requires variety, frequency, and copious amounts of prayers offered “in the Spirit” in all kinds of circumstances (Phil 4:6).⁶⁵

The Holy Spirit intercedes to make believers’ prayers line up with God’s will (Rom 8:26-27). Prayer bolsters intercessors and evangelizers to “be strong in the Lord and in the power of His might” (6:10) as they wage spiritual warfare. Markus Barth writes, “The armed stance of the saints in the dark and evil world is identified with their personal involvement and participation in the clear and courageous propagation of the gospel, both in the existing congregations and in the whole world.”⁶⁶ Ernest Best believes there is no prayer here for those outside the church, but his assertion belies Paul’s specific request for prayers to empower his proclamation of the gospel.⁶⁷ Believers do not pray, live, and witness in a vacuum. Prayers for the gospel to have open

⁶⁵Harry Uprichard, *A Study Commentary on Ephesians* (Auburn, MA: Evangelical, 2004), 375; Klyne Snodgrass, *Ephesians*, NIV Application Commentary (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996), 359.

⁶⁶Markus Barth, *Ephesians 4-6*, Anchor Bible (Garden City, NY: Doubleday & Company, 1974), 807.

⁶⁷Ernest Best, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Ephesians*, International Critical Commentary (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1998), 606.

doors is not for the born again to hear the gospel; therefore, prayer is for the forth-telling of the gospel to the lost who need to hear and believe in Jesus Christ.

In Jesus' ministry, we discover the devil's belligerence to keep the lost spiritually blinded and in bondage to sin. Evil forces harass every person who attempts to take the light of the gospel to the lost stumbling and searching in the dark. As foot soldiers in war need air cover, evangelizers need intercessors providing "prayer cover" "in the Spirit" (6:18). The urgency of prayer is due to its strategic effectiveness in the spiritual conflict that evangelizers face.⁶⁸ Intercessory prayer is spiritual warfare that provides support and protection for evangelizers and open doors for the gospel.

Prayer seeks God's provision (6:19). By its very nature, prayer teaches us that we are dependent upon and subservient to God's power and sovereign will. There is security and freedom when we realize God has the devil on a leash. We pray because God has promised to hear our prayers and bring our obedient efforts into alignment with His divine will (Ps 17:6; Prov 15:29). Faithful evangelizers will accomplish what God has ordained.

Paul's request to the Ephesians moves from general prayers for all the saints to the specific request that God empower him to reveal the heretofore "mystery" of the gospel. Paul specifically asks for boldness like that of the Old Testament prophets. Churches and evangelizers are dependent upon God to provide the supernatural power to take His salvation to all nations, and God has called believers to unify for the purpose of evangelizing the world, thus, glorifying His name (Matt 28:18-20). Chuck Lawless

⁶⁸James E. Rosscup, "The Importance of Prayer in Ephesians," *Master's Seminary Journal* 6, no. 1 (1995): 70.

points out that the challenge of world evangelization is so immense that God-centered, Bible-believing Christians must work together to accomplish the task.⁶⁹ Intercessors petition God to call the lost to respond to the gospel because God alone provides the grace that saves through faith (John 6:44; Eph 2:8-9).

Prayer supports evangelizers (6:19-20). The mission of the church is to share Jesus Christ as the sacrifice for sin (1 Cor 2:2). Paul experienced the dangers of proclaiming the gospel. He further understands the gospel is a mystery impossible to communicate without divine revelation and illumination. Those who preach and teach the gospel immediately discover the impotence of human attempts at spiritual persuasiveness, for only the Holy Spirit empowers the gospel to convict a lost person of personal sin and the need to be born again. God's power supernaturally guides and undergirds intercessor's prayers to rescue men, women, and children from the Devil's control.⁷⁰

Paul, as the Apostle to the Gentiles, expresses his connection and dependence upon the prayers of other believers. Paul desires to speak the gospel with boldness and clarity. Faithful evangelizers will experience great struggles against their own sin and against the well-organized forces of spiritual wickedness. Thus, "the life of the church and its members must be an uninterrupted stance of prayer in total involvement in the spreading of the gospel and equipping of disciples: faith, resistance against evil, worship,

⁶⁹Chuck Lawless, "Spiritual Warfare and Missions," *The Southern Baptist Journal of Theology* 9, no. 4 (Winter 2006): 37.

⁷⁰Peter T. O'Brien, *The Letter to the Ephesians*, Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), 486.

and mission are the inseparable marks of the praying and gospel-bearing church.”⁷¹ Jesus has given the church the task of evangelism: “Evangelism is not a task of the church; it is *the* only task, for everything we do is for the sole purpose of sharing and making Jesus Christ known to every people group on earth.”⁷²

Prayer Impacts Recipients, Intercessors

Therefore I exhort first of all that supplications, prayers, intercessions, *and* giving of thanks be made for all men, for kings and all who are in authority, that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and reverence. For this *is* good and acceptable in the sight of God our Savior, who desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth. (1 Tim 2:1-4)

Prayers for all people (2:1-3). God knows who will be born again by the Holy Spirit and who will remain spiritually lost. We do not. Thus, Christians fervently pray for all people, regardless of their social status, race, or nationality. Believers fervently pray for the salvation of all, especially since the Father is delaying Jesus’ Second Coming because He desires “everyone to come to repentance” (2 Pet 3:9). The Great Commission goes “hand in hand with the Great Intercession, so there is prayer for all (2:1-2) because there is an invitation for all (2:4) and a ransom for all (2:6).”⁷³

Intercessors ask the Holy Spirit to convict kings and paupers, and fellow citizens and foreigners of their sin, to confess their lost condition, and to see their need of receiving Christ as Savior while concurrently praying for evangelizers to successfully

⁷¹Barth, *Ephesians 4-6*, 786.

⁷²Snodgrass, *Ephesians*, 360. Emphasis mine.

⁷³Philip Graham Ryken, *1 Timothy*, Reformed Expository Commentary (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R, 2007), 60, 63.

sow and reap the gospel among the lost.⁷⁴ Thus, Paul is exhorting Timothy and the church at Ephesus to look outward as Judah and Israel learned in captivity.

The precedent for the practice of God's people praying for pagan rulers goes back to Israel's exile experience [in Babylonia and Assyria] In exile, Israel's vision had to expand to encompass all the nations, and it is chiefly in the body of literature that emerges from and after this experience that God's universal redemptive intentions become increasingly clear.⁷⁵

Paul's exhortation to Pastor Timothy about the necessity of intercession once again connects prayer to the church's fulfillment of the Great Commission. The words for "prayer" are plurals, and the plurality denotes that Paul desired the whole congregation to be involved in offering all kinds of prayers to God on behalf of others.⁷⁶ Thus, an intercessory prayer ministry equips and develops disciples into becoming committed followers of Christ and prayer warriors able to pray all kinds of prayers for God's kingdom to come.

Intercessors become evangelizers (2:4). Christians must fulfill the Great Commission on the personal and congregational level. Since the coming of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost, prayer has been an indispensable weapon that empowers believers to reach the lost. Prayer supports evangelizers to go, teach, and baptize. God's loving desire for the world to hear and respond to the gospel requires local church members to get on their knees and become His ambassadors, for "all things *are* of God, who has

⁷⁴Henry A. Ironside, *In the Heavens: Practical Expository Addresses on the Epistle to the Ephesians* (New York: Loizeaux Brothers, 1953), 53.

⁷⁵Philip H. Towner, *The Letters to Timothy and Titus*, New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2006), 168.

⁷⁶George W. Knight III, *The Pastoral Epistles*, New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1992), 115.

reconciled us to Himself through Jesus Christ, and has given us the ministry of reconciliation” (2 Cor 5:18-19).

Jesus Christ’s gospel provides new life. Jesus ordained the church as His gospel-bearing bride that is empowered to overcome all cultural obstacles and supernatural struggles with wickedness (Eph 6:12). In Matthew 9:38, Jesus told the disciples to pray for the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into His harvest. Intercessors ask God to send more workers into the harvest. After offering passionate and incessant prayers for the lost to receive salvation, intercessors are often inspired by the Holy Spirit to move from their knees to their neighbor’s doorstep (Jas 1:22), then to mission fields in the world! Ironically, intercessors become the answer to their own zealous intercessory prayers for harvest workers. John Broadus wrote, “The compassion for perishing men will naturally lead to prayer for laborers, and such compassion and prayer will form the best preparation for going forth to be laborers ourselves.”⁷⁷

Conclusion

God is the sovereign who hears prayer. Those who love and obey Him will worship on His holy mountain. The biblical evidence shows that God called Israel to take His salvation to the nations. However, Israel refused. Thus, Yahweh sent the Messiah, Jesus Christ, as true Israel to provide salvation for the world. Jesus Christ came to seek and save the lost, and His ministry on earth showed a radical dependence upon prayer. Prayer is the humble means by which believers speak to God. Prayer is also how God reveals His will to us: God’s will is that none “perish, but everyone to come to

⁷⁷Broadus, *Matthew*, 211.

repentance” (2 Pet 3:9). Therefore, Jesus commands believers to pray for the Lord of the Harvest to send evangelizers into the field of lost souls. Paul teaches that prayers for the lost are to be earnest, vigilant, and full of thanksgiving. When intercessors pray for the salvation of the lost, God hears our prayers and opens evangelistic doors of opportunity, provides protection and provision, and leads intercessors to become evangelizers.

Praying for the salvation of the lost is God’s will. Intercessory prayer supports and enhances evangelizers as they share the gospel of Jesus Christ with the lost.

CHAPTER 3

ALPHA-OMEGA PRAYER AS A FOUNDATION FOR EFFECTIVE EVANGELISTIC INTERCESSION

In chapter 2, the biblical basis for earnest prayer as an integral and supportive component of evangelism is detailed. Clearly, God calls His children to pray! However, for many believers, prayer remains an enigma within “a giant, complicated God puzzle”¹ that is infrequently approached, except in times of desperation. Not only is there confusion about what to pray but also how to pray. Considering the various types of prayer that can be submitted to God, even the most faithful Christian feels like Indiana Jones surrounded by invisible sinister forces while trudging through a harrowing, intertwining maze unsure of the road travelled and its ultimate destination.

The purpose of chapter 3 is to show that prayer is an intimate means God has provided for *all* of His children to know and accomplish His will. God intends prayer to be a maturing, challenging, and joyful process of faith for believers as He walks and talks with them along life’s narrow way. This chapter begins by defining prayer. Then, this chapter will examine the sovereignty of God in prayer. What one believes about God’s sovereignty informs and directly affects his trust in and practice of prayer. The *Alpha-Omega Prayer* will be introduced to help believers return prayer to its rightful

¹Glen Martin and Dian Ginter, *Drawing Closer: A Step-by-Step Guide to Intimacy with God* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1995), 5.

foundation: God. Finally, this chapter will present two benefits Alpha-Omega Prayer provides the local church's intercessory prayer ministry. The church of Jesus Christ will regain her passion to reach the lost, fulfill the Great Commission, and glorify God Almighty as she preaches God's Word and prays in the power of the Holy Spirit for His Kingdom of God to come.

Untangling the Enigma of Prayer

After I received Jesus Christ as my personal Savior (twenty-four years ago), I was constantly urged in worship and discipleship classes to pray "in God's will." My confusion regarding prayer heightened when told the way to learn how to pray in God's will was—to *pray*! This prayer conundrum is surpassed in frustration only by its spiritual debilitation. Many Christians avoid the practice of prayer because it is confusing and hard work, but God intends biblical prayer to grow your faith and be a delightful priority in a believer's spiritual walk with Him. When properly engaged, prayer is one of life's greatest joys as God speaks, acts, and permits the believer to partake in His divine nature (2 Pet 1:2-4). As the obedient Christian experiences continuing intimacy with God, she repeatedly discovers God is faithful to accomplish His Kingdom purposes through her committed and obedient life. Prayer is one of the means by which believers experience what Jesus' blood purchased on the Cross: a personal relationship with God that results in "more and better life than they ever dreamed of" (John 10:10, *The Message*).

What is prayer? John Calvin writes, "Prayer is the chief exercise of piety, that is, the fundamental quality of the human relationship with God when sinners recognize who they are, and who the holy and merciful God is and so they give themselves

completely to God and God's service."² John Newport views prayer as a request "for God to act in the world to accomplish something that the pray-er³ cannot accomplish himself or herself."⁴ Many definitions of prayer reflect humanity's unique privilege of intimate communion and interactive dialogue with God. For instance, Herbert Lockyer believes "Prayer is the desire, opportunity, and privilege of talking with God."⁵ Billy Graham writes prayer is the "place where you meet God in genuine conversation."⁶ "Prayer is," says Samuel Balentine, "an expression of, and a deepening of, the pray-er's relationship with God, who is personal, accessible, loving, powerful and compassionate."⁷ God's intent is to "communicate with us not about mere concepts but about Himself."⁸ Prayer is a dialogical relationship with a personal God that consistently shows believers the bountiful blessings awaiting their cries of desperate need, dependence upon, and desire for Him. "Prayer is nothing more," Richard Foster writes, "than an ongoing and growing love relationship with God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit."⁹ Divine love and interaction begin during our mortal life but last for all eternity.

²John Calvin, *Writings on Pastoral Piety*, The Classics of Western Spirituality, ed. and trans. Elsie Anne McKee (New York: Paulist, 2001), 23.

³"Pray-er" and "prayer" refer to the one praying: the supplicant.

⁴John P. Newport, *Life's Ultimate Questions: A Contemporary Philosophy of Religion* (Ft. Worth: Scripta, 1989; reprint 1994), 161.

⁵Herbert Lockyer, *All the Prayers of the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1959), 17.

⁶Billy Graham, *Hope for the Troubled Heart* (Dallas: Word, 1991), 147.

⁷Samuel E. Balentine, *Prayer in the Hebrew Bible: The Drama of Divine-Human Dialogue* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1993), 265.

⁸Gary M. Burge, *John*, NIV Application Commentary (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2000), 64.

⁹Richard Foster, *Prayer: Finding the Heart's True Home* (San Francisco: HarperCollins, 1992), 13.

God has established prayer to provide believers intimate communication and empowerment to obey His will. God ordains prayer to excite, inform, and support the church's ministry to reach the lost with the gospel of Jesus Christ. Nels Ferré succinctly notes, "The history of the Christian Church is, more than we know, the history of believing prayer."¹⁰ The Holy Spirit uses prayer to inspire and protract the vibrant and earnest prayers of the saints for the salvation of the lost¹¹ and the glory of God. In fact, prayer is submission to the intimate, sustaining action of the Spirit at the deepest level of a believer's soul. Prayer is, writes Michael Green, "allowing the Spirit of Christ to pray in us, to pour into our souls His overflowing life of intercession."¹² Submission and obedience to the guidance of the Holy Spirit is necessary for an effective intercessory prayer ministry to accomplish God's Kingdom goals.

The Saints and spiritual masters tell us that prayer is an ascent of the mind to God. For true prayer is a direct raising of the mind and heart to God, without intermediary. This loving ascent to God, in profound longing and humble surrender . . . is true prayer.¹³

From its definition to its practical implementation, prayer, for far too many Christians, has lost its firm foundation in God and has degenerated into a selfish, human-centered religious exercise. In his book *Bible Doctrine*, Wayne Grudem reflects the man-centered misunderstanding of prayer when he writes, "Prayer is personal communication

¹⁰Nels F. S. Ferré, *A Theology for Christian Prayer* (Nashville: Tidings, 1963), 9.

¹¹David Ewert, *The Holy Spirit in the New Testament* (Scottsdale, PA: Herald, 1983), 253.

¹²Michael Green, *I Believe in the Holy Spirit* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1975), 256.

¹³Johannes Tauler, *Sermons*, *The Classics of Western Spirituality*, trans. Maria Shradly (New York: Paulist, 1985), 89.

from us to God.”¹⁴ Respectfully, determining the initiation and direction of prayer is critical because God initiates and uses the prayers of His saints to fulfill *His* Kingdom purposes. Jonathan Edwards viewed the prayers of God’s people as a means of accomplishing God’s will to reach the lost. In fact, prayer is a byproduct of God’s preceding action to excite and stir up His people to petition Him for divine mercy.

That the people of God receive all of God ’tis because of God’s mercy to them that they are stirred up to pray, ’tis because God intends mercy for them that he gives them a spirit of prayer to seek mercy and so ’tis God’s work to prepare them for the mercy they don’t do that of themselves and when they are prepared still it must be God that bestows. The whole affair in its beginning and end is free from grace.¹⁵

When saints pray in God’s will, He hears and answers.

So [it] is God’s will . . . the prayers of his saints should be one great and principal means of carrying on the designs of Christ’s kingdom in the world. When God has something very great to accomplish for his church, ’tis his will that there should *precede* it the extraordinary prayers of his people And ’tis revealed that when God is about to accomplish great things for his church, he will begin by remarkably pouring out the spirit of grace and supplication God seems now, at this very time, to be waiting for this [prayer] from us. When God is about to bestow some great blessing on his church, it is often his manner, in the first place, so to order things in his providence as to shew his church their great need of it, and to bring ’em into distress for want of it, and so put ’em upon crying earnestly to him for it.¹⁶

Thus, it is imperative to understand that prayer’s conception and foundation is rooted in God’s heart and power, not humanity’s desires or ingenuity. Thankfully, God has promised to reveal Himself when He is sought with all of one’s heart (Jer 29:11-13). In their book, *Drawing Closer*, Martin and Ginter offer a biblically refreshing correction

¹⁴Wayne Grudem, *Bible Doctrine: Essential Teachings of the Christian Faith*, ed. Jeff Purswell (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1999), 158. Emphasis mine.

¹⁵Jonathan Edwards, “God’s Manner Is First to Prepare Men’s Hearts and Then to Answer Their Prayers,” in *The Glory and Honor God*, vol. 2, ed. Michael D. McMullen (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2004), 79.

¹⁶Jonathan Edwards, “Some Thoughts Concerning the Revival,” in *The Great Awakening*, vol. 4 of *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*, ed. C. C. Goen (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1972), 517-18.

that returns prayer to its rightful inception and foundation: God.

True prayer starts in the heart of God. He then, through the Holy Spirit, communicates this to our heart. We feel a need to pray for what he has communicated—often even thinking that what we are praying for originated in our own heart and mind. Then we pray this back to the Father through the name of the Lord Jesus and the right He gives us to access the Father in prayer, thus completing the circle of prayer. As the Father hears our prayer, He then answers it, since we are praying according to His will.¹⁷

Martin and Ginter’s explanation of prayer remains faithful to the Apostle Paul’s explanation of the Holy Spirit’s intercessory work in the life of obedient believers (Rom 8:26-27). In his book *Your Will Be Done*, John Yoder shares an exhilarating insight into the nature of prayer:

Why prayer? Because it lifts man from being an observer in God’s arena to being a participant. He does not idly watch God’s will being done in history; he earnestly seeks it. He asks for each need and praises for each victory In prayer, we see men at their highest pinnacle: bringing fire from heaven, raising the dead, feeding the hungry, winning lost souls, and learning to fellowship with their Maker. In God’s goal of discipling men, nothing is more effective than prayer.¹⁸

To pray fervently, effectively, and expectantly, believers must have an accurate understanding of God’s self-revelation in His Word. How is God able to accomplish His will in heaven and on earth despite the depraved depths of humanity’s sin and unrelenting satanic interference? He is Sovereign. One’s beliefs about God’s sovereignty directly inform and affect his trust in and practice of prayer because intercessory prayer relies upon a holy, sovereign God who has promised to answer the prayers of His children.

The Sovereignty of God and Prayer

What other nation is so great as to have their gods near them the way the LORD our God is near us whenever we pray to him? (Deut 4:7 NIV)

¹⁷Martin and Ginter, *Drawing Closer*, 15.

¹⁸John Yoder, *Your Will Be Done: A Comprehensive Study of Prayer* (n.p., n.d.), 2:301.

The passionate debate over God's sovereignty and man's free will has raged for centuries. It continues, today! I never imagined research on prayer would venture into a heated theological dispute. Further, it was very surprising to discover that "conversion to Christ has many of the same subjective or existential features as the life of prayer."¹⁹ A. W. Tozer writes, "Salvation is from our side a choice, from the divine side it is a seizing upon, an apprehending, a conquest of the Most High God."²⁰ That is, God sovereignly seeks and calls us out for salvation and prayer. Jesus Christ fully reveals God's glory, and the ongoing intercession of the Holy Spirit is proof of Christ's salvific work. Following salvation, the Spirit resides in believers as a Helper and constant reminder of God's intimate and sustaining love.

In order to approach prayer from a biblical standpoint, one must answer a foundational question: "Is God's sovereignty limited or absolute?" This question is not merely an academic exercise because the answer directly shapes one's understanding of "who" God is and "what" God does through believers' prayers. Either, holy God, who sent His only Son to die for sin on the Cross *will* accomplish His foreordained purposes through sovereign intervention in humanity and the world, or, God is exposed as a subservient, reactive potentate that is subject to the whims and caprices of sinful humanity. However, some Christians would argue that God sovereignly limits His sovereignty. For example, Robert Ellis argues,

¹⁹James Leo Garrett, Jr., "A Theology of Prayer," *Southwestern Journal of Theology* 15, no. 2 (Spring 1972): 3.

²⁰A. W. Tozer, *The Pursuit of Man: The Divine Conquest of the Human Heart* (Camp Hill, PA: Christian, 1978), 39.

The organismic model of God-world relations . . . suggests that there is a relationship of reciprocity between God and the world. This model . . . indicates a greater continuity between God and the world that amounts to an intimacy. God and the world are both now seen, *though in different ways*, as dependent on one another; it becomes as true to say now that God is affected by the world, as vice versa; God's sovereignty is qualified in various ways, mostly by creaturely freedom; God's knowledge is spoken of in ways closer to human knowledge. This reciprocity is not of an equal or equivalent kind: God and the world are not affected by one another in the same ways.²¹

The relationship of reciprocity is expressed through divine self-limitation. God chooses to limit the divine power rather than being constrained by necessity external to God's self.²² "In choosing to do this God freely chooses to create a world in which he does not possess all the power there is, and in which he cannot override creatures. In the very act of creating free creatures, God . . . limits God's self."²³

Limited Sovereignty of God

Many well-meaning "Christians" and scholars believe that God's sovereignty is limited. Reading these scholars' works, one quickly discovers points of view that degenerate into fanciful, philosophical musings that incongruously place the limited and finite nature of man upon God, rather than accept God's sovereign, self-revelation in the Bible.²⁴ Man has chopped God down to size and, unfortunately, what remains is an eviscerated God whose character and attributes have been perverted and whose person is

²¹Robert Ellis, *Answering God: Towards A Theology of Intercession*, 112-13. This is a Process Theology view of a dipolar God.

²²Clark Pinnock, "Systematic Theology," in *The Openness of God: A Biblical Challenge to the Traditional Understanding of God* (Carlisle: Paternoster, 1995), 110.

²³Ellis, *Answering God*, 141-42.

²⁴See Clark H. Pinnock, *A Wideness in God's Mercy* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1992); John Sanders, *God Who Risks* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1998); Gregory A Boyd, *God of the Possible: A Biblical Introduction to the Open View of God* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2000).

devoid of the rightful glory and honor due His name. W. Bingham Hunter sardonically adds, “[For many supposed believers] God has become too small to intervene in the world anymore, and we are too sophisticated to ask him anyway.”²⁵

Our impoverished capacity for wonder, for standing in awe, for feeling ourselves in the presence of Mystery too great for our comprehension, leaves us almost powerless to enter into the attitude of adoration toward God, or find appropriate ways for the expression of our reverence and awe.²⁶

The first expression of reverence and awe towards God would be to honor His own sovereign, self-revelation in the Scriptures.²⁷ Karl Barth, one of the most acclaimed theologians in the twentieth century, distorts God’s immutability when he proposes,

[God] . . . is free and immutable as the living God, as the God who wills to converse with the creatures, and to allow himself to be determined by it in this relationship. This opportunity is so great that it embraces both the possibility, and, as it is exercised, the actuality, that the creature can actively be present and cooperative in his over-ruling. There is no creaturely freedom which can limit or compete with the soul sovereignty and efficacy of God. But permitted by God, and indeed willed and created by him, there is the freedom of the friends of God concerning whom he has determined that without abandoning the helm for one moment *he will still allow himself to be determined by them.*²⁸

Clark Pinnock summarizes the *limited* sovereignty position when he writes, “It seems God did not create the world to exercise total control over it.”²⁹ Thus, we are left with two options. First, if God is not in control, then man is. Second, if neither God nor man

²⁵W. Bingham Hunter, *The God Who Hears* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1986), 10-11.

²⁶John L. Casteel, *Rediscovering Prayer* (New York: Association, 1955), 24.

²⁷Psalm 103:19 (NASB), “The LORD has established His throne in the heavens, And His sovereignty rules over all. Psalm 47:2, 8 (KJV) “For the LORD most high is terrible; he is a great King over all the earth God reigneth over the heathen: God sitteth upon the throne of his holiness.”

²⁸Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, vol. 3, *The Doctrine of Creation*, pt. 3, ed. G. W. Bromiley and T. F. Torrance, trans. G. W. Bromiley and R. J. Ehrlich (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1960), 285. Emphasis mine.

²⁹Clark Pinnock, *Most Moved Mover: A Theology of God’s Openness* (Carlisle: Paternoster, 2001), 25.

is in control, the future is chaotic and indeterminate. However, both options contradict God's self-revelation in Scripture where He declares, "I am God, and there is no other; I am God, and there is none like Me, Declaring the end from the beginning, And from ancient times things that are not yet done, Saying, 'My counsel shall stand, And I will do all My pleasure'" (Isa 46:9-10).

Therefore, what one believes about God's sovereignty directly affects what one believes God accomplishes through the prayers of His people.

It is in reality almost impossible to separate the questions of "What is God like?" and "How should I pray?" Prayer is in large measure theology moving into action and testing out its own understanding of the divine nature.³⁰

Those who believe God's sovereignty is "limited" not only disregard Scripture's clear teaching but are, at best, left with a hypocritical approach to prayer, or, at worst, left with no reason to pray. On one hand, "limited" sovereignty followers believe humanity has free will and the unabridged, sovereign right of self determination, but, on the other hand, they inexplicably pray for God to intervene in national emergencies and the lives of the lost, backslidden, poor, elderly, hurting, and hungry. The result is what Ellis calls the "problem of prayer."³¹ What an understatement! Further, if God's sovereignty is limited, there are at least two reasons it is inappropriate to intercede on the behalf of others. First, it is unethical to ask God to intervene because His action would violate a person's choices and free will. It is hypocritical and immoral to ask *anyone* to intervene in a person's life when you believe that person has the right of sovereign, self-determination. God's lack of intervention has extraordinary spiritual implications in the

³⁰Ronald E. Clements, *The Prayers of the Bible* (London: SCM, 1986), 3, 7.

³¹Ellis, *Answering God* (Waynesboro, GA: Paternoster, 2005), xi.

salvation of humanity, for sinners cannot be born-again if the Father does not sovereignly draw them to Christ (John 6:44). Second, petitioning God to intervene when you believe He is a “limited” sovereign is an act of spiritual schizophrenia. Simply put, there is no reason to pray to a “god” that cannot accomplish his purposes or answer the prayers of his people whether due to self-limitation or lack of power: he is no god at all!

We are now lead to a poignant question: “Why would *anyone* waste time believing in, much less, praying to a less than absolutely sovereign God?” Intercessors seeking God’s intervention in world events and people’s lives are seeking nothing less than God’s miraculous transformation in those situations; however, God can intervene only because He does have final authority (read: absolute sovereignty). John Reisinger notes the predicament facing those who believe in the limited sovereignty of God: “It is impossible to reconcile . . . the biblical doctrine of God’s sovereignty to a man-centered doctrine of prayer.”³² Regardless of how well they disguise their pontifical ruminations with trimmings of superficial awe and feigned biblical belief, those who believe God’s sovereignty is “limited” worship an impotent, reactive idol, susceptible to error and remade in the image of finite man: their God is *not* the self-revealing God in the Bible.

Jonathan Edwards, the renowned eighteenth-century American pastor-theologian who was the central figure in the First Great Awakening in Northampton, Massachusetts, wrote voluminously about God’s sovereignty and the freedom of humanity’s will. Edwards decried the unbelief of His peers and their disregard for Scripture, and he exposes those who deny God’s absolute sovereignty, though in kind

³²John G. Reisinger, *The Sovereignty of God and Prayer* (Frederick, MD: New Covenant, 2002), 1.

terms, as idolaters and unregenerate who do not believe God's Word. Edwards seems mystified that *supposed* Christians would receive Christ and then declare sovereignty in their own salvation.

The thing is, men have low thoughts of God, or else they would willingly ascribe sovereignty to him They have very mean thoughts of God, and high thoughts of themselves; and therefore they look upon God as having so little right, and themselves so much³³ One would think, it should be wholly needless to enter on such an argument with any that profess themselves Christians: but so it is; God's certain foreknowledge [read: sovereignty] of the free acts of moral agents, is denied by some that *pretend* to believe the Scriptures to be the Word of God.³⁴

The meat of self-reliance combined with the dessert of theological and philosophical discourse has left many "pretenders" filled to the brim with devilish delight. However, Edwards warns, "There are many people who have a mind to go to heaven who yet go to hell with a sweet morsel that they hide under their tongue."³⁵

Ultimately, belief in the limited sovereignty of God is a man-generated philosophy that leads to a man-centered doctrine of prayer that is vacuous and incompatible with the biblical revelation of the holy, covenant God. God clearly reveals Himself as unmitigated sovereign over all creation.

Absolute Sovereignty of God

The fact of prayer's existence humbles humanity. We did not create prayer nor

³³Jonathan Edwards, "The Sole Consideration, That God is God, Sufficient to Still All Objections to His Sovereignty," ed. Jonathan Edwards Center [on-line]; accessed 08 November 2010; available from <http://edwards.yale.edu/archive?path=aHR0cDovL2Vkd2FyZHMueWFsZS5lZHUvY2dpLWJpbi9uZXdwaGlsby9nZXRvYmplY3QucGw/Yy40ODoxMi53amVv, 53>; Internet.

³⁴Jonathan Edwards, *Freedom of the Will*, vol. 1 of *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*, ed. Paul Ramsey (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1957), 239. Emphasis mine.

³⁵Edwards, "God's Manner Is First to Prepare Men's Hearts and Then to Answer Their Prayers," 97.

can we answer prayer. Yet, on a practical level, many pray as if prayer is their personal telephone to the heavenly Bellhop. Those who reject God's absolute sovereignty usually do so because they feel it diminishes humanity's competence and self-determination, eliminates free will, and leads to a predetermined outcome of robotic-like emptiness and lovelessness, thus, making prayer unnecessary. John Koenig rebuts, "[When we pray] the real center of our individual being is not diminished or absorbed into Deity but built up in its integrity."³⁶ That is, God as sovereign has redeemed believers by the blood of the Lamb; now, we are supernaturally empowered to become our fullest, freest, and truest selves in Christ. Everything has happened as part of God's grand design: "History is under God's absolute control, prewritten in eternity past."³⁷

As absolute sovereign, only God could and did intervene in man's helpless situation to provide abundant and eternal life through faith in His Son. It is not advantageous for humanity to be sovereignly, self-determinative all the while remaining dead in sins and trespasses with no hope of salvation for eternity. It was and still is an amazing act of unconditional, gracious love and foreordained mercy that God saves *anyone* from his sin. Yet, eternal life is freely offered to all.

Far from God's absolute sovereignty causing a shackled and meaningless existence for humanity, God's control is the greatest provision and encouragement for us to pray because we know He hears and answers our prayers. In fact, intercessors have confidence in the efficacy of their prayers because Jesus "always lives to make

³⁶John Koenig, *Rediscovering New Testament Prayer: Boldness and Blessing in the Name of Jesus* (New York: HarperCollins, 1992), 31.

³⁷John F. MacArthur, Jr., *John 1-11*, in *MacArthur New Testament Commentary* (Chicago: Moody, 2006), 155.

intercession” for the saints (Heb 7:24-25) and the Holy Spirit intercedes for believers so their prayers are in the will of God (Rom 8:26-27). Christ being “the same yesterday, today, and forever” (Heb 13:8) gives our prayers infinite meaning and importance.

If God encourages us to pray, does it not seem reasonable to suppose that somehow in his eternal planning he made allowance for it? What if God foreordained our prayers and embraced them within his plan as predestinated factors toward the accomplishment of his purposes in the world? In other words, what if God foreordained the means as well as the end? . . . Far from God’s unchangeableness being an objection to prayer, it becomes the sure ground of our confidence in prayer; for so far from it being necessary that God should change his will in order to answer prayer, it becomes absolutely necessary that his will should not be changed.³⁸

Jonathan Edwards wrote extensively on prayer.³⁹ Edwards is the central figure in the First Great Awakening that began in his Northampton, Massachusetts, church in the 1740s. Edwards’ Trinitarian theology of prayer is dependent upon a sovereign God who hears and answers prayer. Edwards’ central principle of thought, writes George Marsden, “was the sovereignty of God. The triune eternally loving God, as revealed in Scripture, created and ruled everything in the universe . . . [for the] very purpose in creation was [glorifying Himself through] the great work of redemption in Christ.”⁴⁰

God is possessed of such perfections of excellencies as to qualify him to be the absolute sovereign of the world. He has infinite wisdom to qualify him. Certainly it is more fit that all things be under the guidance of a perfect, unerring wisdom, than that they should be left to themselves to fall out in confusion, by mere chance, or be

³⁸William Biederwolf, *How Can God Answer Prayer?* (New York: Revell, 1910), 108-09.

³⁹For example, “Hypocrites Deficient in the Duty of Prayer,” “The Most High A Prayer Hearing God,” “Terms of Prayer,” “The Duty of Harkening to God’s Voice,” “Praying for the Spirit,” “The Threefold Work of the Holy Spirit,” “An Humble Attempt,” and “Some Thoughts Concerning the Revival.” Prayer is a theme often included in Edwards’ sermons that are not specifically limited to prayer.

⁴⁰George M. Marsden, *Jonathan Edwards: A Life* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003),

brought to pass by blind causes. Yea it must be more fit that even the behaviour of moral agents, on which their eternal welfare depends, should be over-ruled and ordered by infinite wisdom, than that they should be left to fall out one way or the other, just as shall happen.⁴¹

God's merciful and loving heart finds perfect expression in the person and work of His Son, Jesus Christ. In Christ, God culminates His personal revelation. For the Christian, Daniel Migliore writes, "God is not some-*thing* but *someone* . . . addressed in prayer [who] is not feared as a tyrant but genuinely loved as the sovereign and free God who exercises dominion with astonishing goodness and mercy."⁴² God "is an absolutely and infinitely perfect being," writes Jonathan Edwards, "and it is impossible that he should do amiss. As He is eternal, and receives not his existence from any other, he cannot be limited in his being, or any attribute"⁴³ God shows His loving heart and His sovereign perfection in sending His only begotten Son to die on the Cross to forgive and save all who will call upon the name of the Lord.

The Bible gives an *appearance* of an antinomy, but "divine sovereignty and humanity's free will [are revealed] . . . side-by-side in the strongest and most unambiguous terms as two ultimate facts."⁴⁴ As noted before, the sovereignty versus free will controversy has raged for centuries. God's saving goodness, mercy, and superintendence over our prayers is certain precisely because He is absolute sovereign. God, as prevenient sovereign, is neither reactive to humanity's action nor limited by

⁴¹Edwards, "The Sole Consideration," 46.

⁴²Daniel Migliore, *Faith Seeking Understanding* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991), 179.

⁴³Edwards, "The Sole Consideration," 42.

⁴⁴J. I. Packer, *Evangelism and the Sovereignty of God* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1961), 18-23, 35. An *antinomy* is an appearance of contradiction between conclusions that stand side-by-side, seemingly irreconcilable, yet both undeniable.

humanity's sin and finite will.⁴⁵ A. W. Pink writes, "It is the unchangeableness of God which is our greatest encouragement to pray."⁴⁶ "It is a matter of rejoicing," Reisinger notes, "that God has one great purpose [to glorify Himself] that extends through all ages and embraces all things,"⁴⁷ even the prayers of His children.

God exists "as the God of eternal and self-sustaining self-determination. He simply is and always was and ever will be, working out his will in sovereignty over his world He ordained what is now and ordains what will be."⁴⁸ God's absolute sovereignty is displayed in the answered prayers of the saints.

Alpha-Omega Prayer

Prayer is beyond any question the highest activity of the human soul. Man is at his greatest and highest when, upon his knees, he comes face-to-face with God.⁴⁹

As mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, prayer was both complicated and confusing to me as a new believer. Yet, as I matured in faith, prayer took on a new vitality. This project has led to the realization of prayer's relevance and necessity in the life of church members and their ministry of reconciliation (2 Cor 5:18-19). God's loving heart provided Jesus as the sacrifice to die on the Cross for humanity's sin. Since Pentecost, Christ sends believers to share the Good News of salvation in our Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and ends of the earth (Acts 1:8).

⁴⁵William G. T. Shedd, *Dogmatic Theology*, 3rd ed. (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R, 2003), 318.

⁴⁶A. W. Pink, *The Sovereignty of God* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1965), 113.

⁴⁷Reisinger, *Sovereignty of God and Prayer*, 11.

⁴⁸J. I. Packer and Carolyn Nystrom, *Praying: Finding Our Way through Duty to Delight* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2006), 25.

⁴⁹D. Martin Lloyd-Jones, *The Sermon on the Mount* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1976), 322.

The biblical pattern tells us that God uses His covenant people's prayers to spread His message of salvation and accomplish His will among His people⁵⁰ In fact, God "works in a sort of partnership with man. God does not act if man does not play his part . . . Thus, prayer does not change what [God] has purposed to do [but] it is the means by which He accomplishes His end. It is vital then, that a prayer be uttered, for without it the desired result will not come to pass."⁵¹

If we call upon the Lord, he has promised in his Word to answer, to bring the unsaved to himself, to pour out his Spirit among us. If we don't call upon the Lord, he has promised nothing—nothing at all. It's as simple as that. No matter what I preach or what we claim to believe in our heads, the future will depend upon our *appetite* for God . . . [and] time in prayer.⁵²

John Calvin says that our prayers "are always a response to divine initiative, and as such should 'sum up' God's promises."⁵³ Bruce Epperly adds, "God's Spirit is not praying for us from the outside but praying with us from the inside . . . guiding us intimately and personally rather than abstractly and generically . . . The act of praying and the answers to our prayers reflect a divine-human synergy"⁵⁴ that exalts and glorifies God.

While humanity may regard itself as the center of prayer, God is the beginning, center and end of all prayer. Ellis explains, "In the Johannine writings, and especially in Paul, we see that prayer both begins and ends in God. In Hebrews, Jesus' role as

⁵⁰T. W. Hunt and Claude V. King, *In God's Presence: Your Daily Guide to a Meaningful Prayer Life* (Nashville: LifeWay, 1994), 78.

⁵¹Millard Erickson, *Christian Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1985), 405.

⁵²Jim Cymbala, *Fresh Wind, Fresh Fire: What Happens When God's Spirit Invades the Hearts of His People* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1997), 27-28.

⁵³Ronald S. Wallace, *Calvin's Doctrine of the Christian Life* (Edinburgh: Oliver & Boyd, 1959), 282.

⁵⁴Bruce G. Epperly, "Who Prays? A Process-Relational Reflection on Petitionary Prayer," *Encounter* 69, no. 4 (2008): 17-18.

‘intercessor’ in the believers’ prayers reflects this Texts that speak of the Spirit interceding with sighs too deep for words . . . point to the deep mystery that our prayers may be initiated by God in us.”⁵⁵ God’s initiation of prayer is the basis of Alpha-Omega Prayer: He is the beginning and end of genuine prayer. God moves the believer to pray and then He answers the obedient prayer offered.

He is the Giver not only of the answer, but first of the prayer itself If our prayer reach [sic] or move Him it is because He first reached and moved us to pray Herein is prayer, not that we prayed Him, but that He first prayed us, in giving His Son to be a propitiation for us So we pray because we were made for prayer. God stirs and inspires all prayer which finds and moves in Him.⁵⁶

As the Alpha and Omega, God sovereignly initiates prayer through obedient Christians to exalt the centrality of the Cross so the lost will hear and come to salvation. As God unleashes His love and power for His will to be done, “Intercessions are going on within us and above us according to the will of God . . . bending our will to the divine, not the urging of ours on it.”⁵⁷ That is, Christ is interceding for us in heaven and the Holy Spirit is interceding within us. God, as Jehovah Jireh,⁵⁸ truly provides for *all* of His children’s needs. Someone might claim that prayer is pointless if God has already sovereignly decreed the past, present, and future. John Reisinger strongly disagrees and, instead, claims that God’s sovereignty undergirds believers’ confidence to pray continually in God’s will because His will is always for our best.

⁵⁵Ellis, *Answering God*, 46.

⁵⁶P. T. Forsyth, *The Soul of Prayer* (London: Charles H. Kelly, 1916; reprint, Vancouver, BC: Regent College Publishing, 2002), 11-13, 15.

⁵⁷W. Burrows, *A Homiletical Commentary on the Epistle of St. Paul the Apostle to the Romans* (New York: Funk & Wagnalls, 1896), 280-81.

⁵⁸R. K. Harrison, Howard F. Vos, and Cyril J. Barber, eds., *The New Unger’s Bible Dictionary*, rev. Merrill F. Unger (Chicago: Moody, 1988), s.v. “(The) LORD Will Provide.”

There is no contradiction between the sovereign decrees of God and fervent, believing prayer. [In] Acts 4 . . . the believers were being persecuted because of their faith in Jesus Christ. It was their confidence in the fact that God decrees all things that come to pass which gave those Christians the courage and faith to pray in time of affliction.⁵⁹

The beginning and end is sovereignly determined by God, for God, and thru God—He is the Alpha and the Omega whose will is predetermined from eternity past.

The definition and praxis of prayer has two divergent approaches: genuine (theocentric) prayer or false (anthropocentric) prayer.⁶⁰ That is, not all prayer is prayer to holy God. In his outstanding dissertation on *Jonathan Edwards' Theology of Prayer*, Peter Beck writes,

Man's illegitimate prayers rise up before God and rather than answering them as voiced and bolstering man's defective faith with undue cause for hope, God refuses to answer until that faith and its connected desires are brought into line with his righteous purposes. The problem is not that God lacks the will to answer but that man possesses the wrong will.⁶¹

The Parable of the Pharisee and the Tax Collector (Luke 18:9-14) contains both “false” and “genuine” prayer. False prayer is self-centered, and what leaps out at the reader is how the Holy Spirit inspires Luke to describe the Pharisee's bombastic, self-righteous prayer (18:11): “The Pharisee stood and prayed *thus with himself* . . .” (emphasis mine). False prayer is a dead-end product whose initiator and only hearer is the pray-er, not God. The Bible says, “We know that God does not hear sinners; but if anyone is God-fearing and does His will, He hears him” (John 9:31 NASB). In contrast, the heartfelt

⁵⁹Reisinger, *Sovereignty of God and Prayer*, 25.

⁶⁰I define “genuine prayer” as prayer initiated in the believer by the Holy Spirit for the glory of God. “False prayer” is human-initiated prayer that does not seek God's glory as its primary aim.

⁶¹Peter Beck, “The Voice of Faith: Jonathan Edwards' Theology of Prayer” (Ph.D. diss., The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2007), 63.

brokenness behind the Tax Collector's simple prayer is startling in its simplicity and sincerity (18:13): "And the tax collector, standing afar off, would not so much as raise his eyes to heaven, but beat his breast, saying, 'God, be merciful to me a sinner!'" In the parable, genuine prayer involves the supplicant's conviction of sin by the work of the Holy Spirit. The result is the Tax Collector's confession, repentance, and casting of himself as a sinner dependent upon a loving, merciful, forgiving, and sovereign God.

Louis Colon gives another example of false prayer. Colon's heretical explanation demonstrates how easily prayer is perverted into a veritable spiritual smorgasbord where everyone does what is right in their own eyes.

Prayer is a universal force in that all men make use of it Prayer is addressed not only to God but also to countless beings who can intervene in the dispositions of Divine Providence and collaborate in the work of our sanctification and salvation. To whom do we pray? To God, the angels, the saints, the souls in purgatory, and even to fellow pilgrims. At a word from us, they will give us assistance, perhaps a little shove.⁶²

Contrary to the nature, focus, and efforts of anthropocentric (read: false) prayer, the holy God is the source and sum of all true prayer. As the revealing, covenant God of both the Old and New Testaments, "God emerges [as] . . . one who is personal, accessible, loving, powerful, and compassionate."⁶³ Though God miraculously makes Himself approachable, He is the absolute sovereign who initiates and guides believers' Kingdom prayers. Returning prayer to its rightful inception and foundation in God radically changes believers' prayers from a grudging chore to a time of joyful, intimate celebration with the Father. Friends want to spend time together, but the blissful time

⁶²Louis Colon, *The Meaning of Prayer*, trans. Francis X. Moan (Westminster, MD.: Newman, 1962), 123.

⁶³Balentine, *Prayer in the Hebrew Bible*, 265.

Christians spend with God in conversation is incomparable to all earthly relationships.

The saint hath spiritual joy and pleasure by a kind of effusion of God on the soul. In these things the redeemed have communion with God; that is, they partake with him and of him. The saints have both their spiritual excellency and blessedness by the gift of the Holy Ghost, and his dwelling in them. They are not only caused by the Holy Ghost, but are in him as their principle. The Holy Spirit becoming an inhabitant, is a vital principle in the soul. He, acting in, upon, and with the soul, becomes a fountain of true holiness and joy.⁶⁴

“The paradox here,” Packer and Nystrom write, “is that while prayer is unquestionably natural, necessary and normal for Christian people, it constantly proves in practice to be the very opposite of plain sailing.”⁶⁵ Prayer is a spiritual struggle, but “even in human weakness, prayer is participation in a divine conversation . . . [and] is evidence of God’s [prior] work in believers.”⁶⁶ The Holy Spirit overcomes our weaknesses so we may experience the privilege of interacting with God, be empowered to share the gospel, and participate in His eternal Kingdom’s work. In prayer, God’s loving heart calls us into intimate communion. Ogilvie succinctly writes, “Prayer is a conversation with God. He begins the conversation. The desire to pray is the result of His greater desire to have a deep communication of love with us. When we feel the need to pray it’s because He’s been at work in us. We don’t need to get His attention—He wants our attention! Prayer starts with God.”⁶⁷

⁶⁴Jonathan Edwards, “God Glorified in Man’s Dependence,” in *Sermon and Discourses 1730-1733*, vol. 17 of *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*, ed. Mark Valeri (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1999): 208.

⁶⁵Packer and Nystrom, *Praying*, 9.

⁶⁶James Edwards, *Romans*, New International Bible Commentary (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1992), 216.

⁶⁷Lloyd John Ogilvie, *Conversation with God: Experience the Life Changing Impact of Personal Prayer* (Eugene, OR: Harvest House, 1993), 15.

The saints' Holy Spirit-provided privilege of talking with God in prayer has been purchased by the blood of Jesus Christ. "For Christ being united to the human nature . . . so we, being united to a divine person, can in him have more intimate union and conversation with God the Father, who is only in the divine nature, than otherwise possibly could be."⁶⁸

God Prepares Hearts to Pray

Every person in our busy world is on sensory overload. Besides our harried daily work and family schedules, our five senses (sight, hearing, taste, smell, touch) are constantly bombarded and our minds reel from the overexposure to stimuli. It is amazing anyone has the time, desire, or concentration to pray—but pray we must! When we do commit the time to pray, prayer takes us into a spiritual dimension that is far beyond our finite understanding.

Prayer has always been one of the great mysteries of the spiritual life. We understand that God is listening, but we sense our inadequacy when it comes to knowing how to pray or exactly what we should pray for.⁶⁹

For instance, with billions of potential prayers, “who” or for “what” do we pray? Is prayer a guessing game where God amusingly watches and listens as we blindly grope in the dark? No, it is not! “The blinding or veiling of the mind mentioned in 2 Cor 4:3-4,” writes Lee Thomas, “causes a universal incapacity to comprehend the way of salvation

⁶⁸Jonathan Edwards, “Miscellanies,” no. 571, in *The “Miscellanies,”* vol. 18 of *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*, ed. Ava Chamberlain (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000), 110.

⁶⁹Robert Mounce, *Romans*, New American Commentary, vol. 27 (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1995), 186.

[and prayer].”⁷⁰ As long as prayer is dependent upon humanity, we cannot pray in the will of God nor in the power of the Spirit. Thankfully, God preveniently prepares and infuses within us the desire, discernment, and guidance for our prayers. Spiritual discernment in prayer “is entirely a work of God, initiated by God and directed by Him.”⁷¹ Thomas Chalmers writes that God “often places a desirousness into our hearts before he reveals the truth with distinctiveness unto our understandings.”⁷² Andrew Murray further notes,

God’s intense longing to bless seems in some sense to be graciously limited by His dependence on the intercession that rises from the earth. He seeks to rouse the spirit of intercession that He may be able to bestow His blessing on mankind. God regards intercession as the highest expression of His people’s readiness to receive and to yield themselves wholly to the working of His almighty power.⁷³

In his sermon, *God’s Manner Is First to Prepare Men’s Hearts and Then to Answer Their Prayers*, Jonathan Edwards gives valuable insight into the genesis of prayer. Edwards notes that though the means of prayer is available to all, sin binds us and makes us too helpless to initiate and appropriate prayer for mercy until the Spirit of God first places the desire in our hearts to pray.

God has been pleased to constitute prayer to be an antecedent to his bestowment of mercy and very often is pleased to bestow mercy in consequence of prayers as though he were prevailed on and moved by prayer . . . [However,] the prayer itself is the fruit of God’s mercy as well as the answer to the prayer.⁷⁴

⁷⁰Lee E. Thomas, *Praying Effectively for the Lost* (Milford, OH: John the Baptist, 2003), 41.

⁷¹Burge, *John*, 162.

⁷²Thomas Chalmers, *Lectures on the Epistle of Paul to the Romans* (New York: Robert Clark & Brothers, 1868), 293.

⁷³Andrew Murray, *Andrew Murray on Prayer* (New Kensington, PA: Whitaker, 1998), 602.

⁷⁴Edwards, “God’s Manner Is First to Prepare Men’s Hearts and Then to Answer Their Prayers,” 86.

Believers live in an “already” but “not yet” eschatological stance. We have received Christ as Savior but we await the fulfillment of our faith at the consummation of the age. “The experience of contradiction living [being children of God but unable to communicate properly with God] between the ages is profound. Christians are totally dependent on the help of the Spirit and Christ.”⁷⁵

Why this [encouragement to pray] should be done by Him who before we ask Him knows what things we have need of, might perplex our minds, if we did not understand that the Lord our God requires us to ask not that thereby our wish may be intimated to Him, for to Him it cannot be unknown, but in order that by prayer there may be exercised in us by supplications that desire by which we may receive what He prepares to bestow. His gifts are very great, but we are small and straitened in our capacity of receiving For, in proportion to the simplicity of our faith, the firmness of our hope, and the ardour of our desire, will we more largely receive of that which is immensely great; which eye has not seen, for it is not colour; which the ear has not heard, for it is not sound; and which has not ascended into the heart of man, for the heart of man must ascend to it.⁷⁶

Our prayers do not inform the sovereign God of anything new, but our prayers “serve to make us ready to receive what God has decided to give us Our hearts are prepared for the divine wisdom as soil might be prepared for the seed.”⁷⁷ That is, believers’ hearts are perfectly primed for the Spirit of prayer to take root as part of the mystery and necessity of the divine indwelling for effective intercession.⁷⁸ McDow and Reid explain,

[Jonathan] Edwards clearly believed God’s sovereignty extended to the prompting of prayer among his people: So it is God’s will . . . that the prayers of his saints shall be one great and principal means of carrying on the designs of Christ’s

⁷⁵John E. Toews, *Romans*, Believers Church Bible Commentary (Scottsdale, AZ: Herald, 2004), 226.

⁷⁶Augustine, *To Proba, A Devoted Handmaid of God*, Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, First Series, vol. 1, ed. Philip Schaff, trans. J. G. Cunningham (Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature, 1887), 8.7 [online]; accessed 29 October 2010; available from <http://www.newadvent.org/fathers/1102130.htm>; Internet.

⁷⁷Ellis, *Answering God*, 52.

⁷⁸Biederwolf, *How Can God Answer Prayer?*, 126. Quoting Andrew Murray.

kingdom in the world. When God has something very great to accomplish for his church, it is his will that there should precede it be extraordinary prayer of his people.⁷⁹

God initiates the prayers that precede the great accomplishments of His church.

We may be sure that He has made room in his plan of government for prayer as a factor in the course of events.⁸⁰ That is, God carefully cultivates the hearts of His people so they desire to pray, and then the Spirit superintends believers' prayers to be in His will and for His glory. "When we pray, God not only knew what we were going to pray, but he ordained our prayers as a means of accomplishing his purposes."⁸¹ In the praxis of prayer, believers are incessantly reminded their understanding of the spiritual realm is limited to biblical revelation. Believers need God's help to pray, and "in every particular case, he who is the object of this assistance feels that no distinct words fully express to God the infinite good after which he sighs. This fact proves that the aspiration [to pray] is not his own, but that it is produced in his heart by the Spirit"⁸² for the moving forth of the Kingdom of God in power. Lewis Drummond explains, "Prayer is an essential means God has appointed for the awakening of the church and the carrying of the gospel throughout the world. From the first days of the New Testament church, God uses the fervent, persistent praying of his people to empower their witness in the Spirit, overcome opposition to the Lord's work and open the minds and hearts of those who hear the

⁷⁹Malcolm McDow and Alvin L. Reid, *Firefall: How God has Shaped History through Revivals* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1997), 224-25.

⁸⁰Biederwolf, *How Can God Answer Prayer?*, 76.

⁸¹Norman Geisler, *Systematic Theology*, vol. 2, *God, Creation* (Minneapolis: Bethany House, 2003), 86.

⁸²F. Godet, *Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans*, trans. A. Cusin, rev. and ed. Talbot W. Chambers (New York: Funk & Wagnall's, 1883; reprint, Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1956), 321.

message of Christ (Acts 1:14; 2:42; 4:23-30; 6:4; 12:5).”⁸³

The Christian church is a missionary church that responds obediently to Jesus’ commission. Luke shows how God intervenes at strategic points to give impetus and direction for taking the mission across another cultural threshold or into another geographical region. God in his grace makes sure the mandate is completely fulfilled.⁸⁴

Our ability to influence or affect the spiritual dimension, apart from the Holy Spirit’s empowerment in genuine prayer, is literally, nonexistent.

As with the truth that is preached, prayer has no inherent power in itself. On the contrary, true prayer is bound up with a persuasion of our inability and our complete dependence on God. Prayer, considered as a human activity, whether offered by few or many, can guarantee no results. But prayer that throws believers in heartfelt need on God, with true concern for the salvation of sinners, will not go unanswered. Prayer of this kind precedes blessing . . . because such prayer secures acknowledgment of the true Author of the blessing. And where such a spirit of prayer exists is a sign that God is *already* intervening to advance his cause.⁸⁵

Thankfully, God is patient with intercessors. He will not allow them to thrash around too long as they seek to pray in His will. Intercession confronts and reminds pray-ers of one thing: God is absolute sovereign, and we are not!

God often, instead of clobbering us with his absolute sovereignty . . . will allow us to vent our fears and disagreements to show us how unreasonable we are acting. God patiently listens to us until we begin to see how ridiculous we are in trying to get him to change his mind. As a result, our whole attitude and the content of our prayers are changed.⁸⁶

Prayer changes believers, not God. Prayer changes and prepares intercessors

⁸³Lewis Drummond, *The Evangelist* (Nashville: Word, 2001), 150.

⁸⁴William J. Larkin, Jr., *Acts*, IVP New Testament Commentary Series (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1995), 41.

⁸⁵Iain H. Murray, *Revival and Revivalism: The Making and Marring of American Evangelicalism 1750-1858* (Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth, 1994), 129. Emphasis mine.

⁸⁶Reisinger, *Sovereignty of God and Prayer*, 29.

to be the type of believers through which God gladly accomplishes His will.⁸⁷ Prayer “puts us on the Potter’s wheel, reshaping us to be God’s vessels”⁸⁸ who are “created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand” (Eph 2:10). God allows us the privilege of participating in the divine nature (2 Pet 1:4) and going forth as His ambassadors in the plan of redemption (Matt 28:18-20). However, William Biederwolf goes too far when he states,

Prayer *does* influence God’s actions in our favor. Prayer does move the arm that moves the world. Prayer does have a direct as well as an indirect effect; and the influence it thus exerts with God secures for us blessings both of a spiritual and the physical nature.⁸⁹

Biederwolf is mistaken because God has already given believers His very best: Himself, His Son, and the permanent indwelling of the Holy Spirit. Biederwolf’s words, surely unintentional, come close to resembling the lie the Devil told Adam and Eve in the Garden: God is withholding something good from you (Gen 3:1-5). “The glorious work of the Spirit,” Iain Murray writes, “is that in which he imparts regenerating and sanctifying grace to the soul, revealing Christ’s divine beauty and communicating his nature to the believer.”⁹⁰ God’s love expressed in Jesus Christ and the indwelling of the Holy Spirit in believers’ lives proves that God has withheld *nothing* from believers. Further, God’s plans never need alteration, as if, from our earthly vantage point, we can determine a plan better than God’s. We do not pray to “change the Divine disposition,

⁸⁷Michael A. G. Haykin, *Jonathan Edwards: The Holy Spirit in Revival* (Webster, NY: Evangelical, 2005), 139.

⁸⁸Ronald J. Sider, *Churches that Make a Difference* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2002), 142.

⁸⁹Biederwolf, *How Can God Answer Prayer?*, 73.

⁹⁰Iain H. Murray, *Jonathan Edwards: A New Biography* (Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth Trust, 1987; reprint 2008), 243.

but that we may impetrate that which God has disposed to be fulfilled by our prayers, in other words, ‘that by asking, men may deserve to receive what Almighty God from eternity has disposed to give.’”⁹¹ What God gives fully satisfies the soul.

Since the covenant agreement between Yahweh and Israel, God prepares His children’s hearts to participate in sharing His loving plan of salvation with the world. God requires His loving plan of salvation to be shared with the world so He is glorified. Believers pray knowing God hears and answers prayer. Packer writes,

When we pray for unconverted people, we do so on the assumption that it is in God’s power to bring them to faith This conviction, which animates [our] intercessions, is God’s own truth, written on [our] heart by the Holy Spirit . . . [because] that what makes men turn to God is God’s own gracious work of drawing them to himself.⁹²

Genuine prayers are supernaturally initiated within us by the Holy Spirit; the results of these prayers are superintended by Him as well. The Holy Spirit guards and gives “a general superintendence over their [believers’] minds, and that so far as they will yield themselves to his direction, they shall not be led into error.”⁹³ Believers’ ministry in prayer, then, is one of submission to the Holy Spirit. John Reisinger explains,

A real burden to pray does not begin with us, but with God The Holy Spirit does not move us to pray in vain! God never burdens our hearts to plead for things that are not his will A burdened heart is an indication that God is trying to accomplish his will through us [Thus,] prayer is absolutely necessary . . . because our sovereign God has decreed that he will work through our prayers.⁹⁴

⁹¹Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae* (London: Burns & Oates, 1922), Second Part of the Second Part, Question 83, Article 2, “Whether It Is Becoming to Pray?” [on-line]; accessed 06 May 2010, <http://www.newadvent.org/summa/308302.htm>; internet.

⁹²Packer, *Evangelism and the Sovereignty of God*, 15.

⁹³Alfred Barnes, *Romans, in Barnes Notes on the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Baker, n.d.), 195.

⁹⁴Reisinger, *Sovereignty of God and Prayer*, 39-40, 45.

The Holy Spirit Initiates Prayer

C. H. Dodd argues, “Prayer is the divine in us, appealing to the divine above us.”⁹⁵ Our mind and heart cannot express our need for God, so the Holy Spirit is sent to indwell and intercede for believers. “God’s very Self initiates the process of intercession by sending us the Holy Spirit; this means that the Trinity works simultaneously in our prayers.”⁹⁶ The Holy Spirit overcomes believers’ inability and weakness, while simultaneously showing God’s grace is sufficient (2 Cor 12:9).

In Romans 8:26-27, the Apostle Paul reveals that prayer is *not* a natural reaction to concerns and problems. Rather, genuine prayer is a Holy Spirit-inspired response that has its foundation in the gospel of Jesus Christ and finds its fulfillment in the glory of God the Father. Paul understands all prayer arises from an inarticulate realm that expresses human vulnerability at its depth.⁹⁷ John Calvin writes,

We are blind in our addresses to God . . . [and] our minds are more disturbed and confused than that they can rightly choose what is meet and expedient Our thoughts nevertheless continue oppressed with darkness, until by the secret impulse of His Spirit [God] knocks at our door, and thus opens for himself our hearts.⁹⁸

Believers’ weakness is that they do not have an adequate grasp of what God’s will is when they pray, but the Spirit’s intercession is the counterpart and answer to our

⁹⁵ William Barclay, *The Letter to the Romans*, Daily Bible Study (Edinburgh: The St. Andrew Press, 1957), 111. Quoting C. H. Dodd.

⁹⁶ Koenig, *Rediscovering New Testament Prayer*, 82.

⁹⁷ Robert Jewett, *Romans*, Hermeneia (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2007), 524.

⁹⁸ John Calvin, *Commentaries on the Epistle of Paul the Apostle to the Romans*, trans. and ed. John Owen (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1947), 312-13.

weakness.⁹⁹ “Our failure to know God’s will and consequent inability to petition God specifically and assuredly is met by God’s Spirit, who himself expresses to God those intercessory petitions that perfectly match the will of God.”¹⁰⁰

In language we cannot understand, the Father searches the human heart, the abode of the Spirit, to hear the Spirit’s prayer. When the Father hears his will being prayed by the Spirit, then the Father and Spirit are in perfect harmony for the purpose of God to be accomplished in the believer through the instrument of prayer.¹⁰¹

The interceding help of the Holy Spirit proves “prayer does not originate in us or in our so-called free will. Effectual prayer is the ordained means that God uses to bring the lost to salvation and glorious renown to His holy name. The true motivation for genuine prayer comes from the Holy Spirit of God.”¹⁰² The Holy Spirit motivates believers to pray while also stirring up within them the compassionate action of Christ for those shackled in sin. “When the people of God are stirred up to prayer [and compassionate action] it is the effect of [God’s] intention to show mercy.”¹⁰³ With the Holy Spirit initiating prayer within us that is in the will of God, “Believers should take tremendous encouragement that the will of God is being fulfilled in their lives despite their weakness and inability to know what to pray for.”¹⁰⁴ Believers pray in God’s will because the Holy Spirit preveniently provides the desire and specific prayer to offer up to

⁹⁹Thomas R. Schreiner, *Romans*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1998), 443.

¹⁰⁰Douglas J. Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996), 526.

¹⁰¹Kenneth Boa and William Kruidenier, *Romans*, Holman New Testament Commentary (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2000), 259.

¹⁰²Reisinger, *Sovereignty of God and Prayer*, 4.

¹⁰³Jonathan Edwards, “The Most High a Prayer Hearing God,” in vol. 2 of *The Works of Jonathan Edwards* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1998), 116.

¹⁰⁴Schreiner, *Romans*, 446.

God. In essence, being “in Christ” causes the love and power of God to flow through the believer to such an extent that he partakes in the divine nature and mutual love of the Trinity (2 Pet 1:4).

When the Spirit maketh intercession for us . . . it is by pouring upon that individual, the Spirit of grace and supplication. The man whom he prays for, is in fact the organ of his prayer. The prayer passes, as it were, from the Spirit through him who is the object of it!¹⁰⁵

Having experienced the abundant and abounding love of the Trinity, believers express their love of God and Christ by going into the world with His Good News! The Holy Spirit guides petitions and intercessions within us that are consistent with the divine purposes and blessings sent by God to meet our needs¹⁰⁶ and save the spiritually lost.

Christ calls the Holy Spirit “another advocate” (John 14:26, 15:26, 16:7). We do not know how to pray, but the Spirit teaches us. All true prayer is due to the influence of the Spirit, who not only guides us in the selection of the objects for which to pray, but also gives us the appropriate desires, and works within us that faith without which our prayers are of no avail.¹⁰⁷

E. M. Bounds writes, “The Divine Comforter, the Spirit of Truth, puts into the human heart the burden of earth’s almighty need, and makes the human lips give voice to its mute and unutterable groaning”¹⁰⁸ as we earnestly pray to, trust, and abide in Christ.

To abide in Christ means to utterly renounce all self-dependence and to so abandon ourselves to Christ that He may fill us with His thoughts, and fire us with His emotions and incite us with His purposes so that our desires are really no longer our own but His, and since His life is His Spirit the prayer we now offer is really not our own but the prayer of Christ’s Spirit within us. Thus do we pray in the Spirit If I am to abide in the vine, the constant inflow of the Spirit, which is the life of

¹⁰⁵Chalmers, *Romans*, 292.

¹⁰⁶Charles Hodge, *Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans* (Philadelphia: James S. Claxton, 1864), 440.

¹⁰⁷*Ibid.*, 438.

¹⁰⁸E. M. Bounds, *The Possibilities of Prayer* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1923), 14.

divine, brings into my spiritual being the very desires and purposes of the Spirit, and so the prayer that is formed is not so much my own, though I make it so, as it is the Holy Spirit's Thus, the Spirit is the real author of the prayer, and we can trust God to give us whatever we ask, because we are thus kept from asking amiss.¹⁰⁹

Believers reflect the divine love and glory of God as they abide in Christ and intercede in the power of the Holy Spirit for the lost to receive Jesus Christ as Savior.

Benefits of Alpha-Omega Prayer

Ellis maintains, “Our prayers are God answering God.”¹¹⁰ Pleasing the Father by interceding for lost souls to receive salvation means church members must make prayer a priority. The righteousness of Christ leads faithful believers to an earnest and zealous obedience that undergirds the church’s evangelistic efforts. Rightly understanding the sovereignty of God leads to an intercessory prayer ministry that is powerful and fulfilling because intercessors realize God initiates, hears, and answers prayer. When believers recognize that a divine conversation occurs when petitioning God, prayer becomes an exhilarating, yet humbling, experience. “The creating of communion with God and Christ in prayer was understood by New Testament writers to be the very hallmark of [the] Spirit.”¹¹¹ Communion begins with the repentance of sin and abasement of self, continually. Puritan Theologian John Owen challenges the Christian,

Bring thy lust to the Gospel—not for relief, but for further conviction of its guilt; look on Him whom thou hast pierced, and be in bitterness. Say to thy soul, “What have I done? What love, what mercy, what blood, what grace have I despised and

¹⁰⁹Biederwolf, *How Can God Answer Prayer?*, 158, 162-63.

¹¹⁰Ellis, *Answering God*, 31.

¹¹¹Koenig, *Rediscovering New Testament Prayer*, 29.

trampled on! Is this the return I make to the Father for His love, to the Son for His blood, to the Holy Spirit for His grace?"¹¹²

Martin and Ginter's definition of prayer proclaims God is the foundation and power behind all intercession.

True prayer starts in the heart of God. He then, through the Holy Spirit, communicates this to our heart. We feel a need to pray for what he has communicated—often even thinking that what we are praying for originated in our own heart and mind. Then we pray this back to the Father through the name of the Lord Jesus and the right He gives us to access the Father in prayer, thus completing the circle of prayer. As the Father hears our prayer, He then answers it, since we are praying according to His will.¹¹³

God supernaturally intercedes in the prayers of the saints to communicate and accomplish His divine will that has both a heavenly and earthly impact (Matt 6:9-14).

God's redemptive revelation began with Abram and found fulfillment in the person and work (read: substitutionary atonement) of His Son, Jesus Christ. With the coming of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost, prayer has received a radical injection of Holy Ghost power in believers' lives. God took more than 2,000 years to complete the biblical revelation. Likewise, God works in His own timeframe to illuminate believers' discernment, excite their spiritual appetites, empower, and answer their prayers. We should not be surprised that God does not work on our timetable. We are but a speck of dust in the grand scheme of creation—a beloved speck, nonetheless! Further, God does not give the whole picture to any one of us. Without the Spirit, we are simply at a loss to know how to communicate with God,¹¹⁴ but in the believer's weakness God's strength is

¹¹²John Owen, "Of the Mortification of Sin in Believers," in *The Works of John Owen*, vol. 4, ed. W. H. Goold (Philadelphia: Protestant Episcopal Book Society, 1862), 58.

¹¹³Martin and Ginter, *Drawing Closer*, 15.

¹¹⁴Paul J. Achtemeier, *Romans*, Interpretation (Atlanta: John Knox, 1985), 164.

perfected and His glory becomes even more pronounced.

In his book *The Cycle of Prayer*, Ralph Herring notes that most believers incorrectly view “the profile of prayer [as] that of a line of communication, a sort of Jacob’s ladder, extending vertically from man’s need to God’s supply.”¹¹⁵ In other words, most of us approach prayer as a one-way conversation: *from us to God*. However, Herring corrects such a common misunderstanding when he writes,

The fact that God is “long beforehand” in our praying is of tremendous significance. One of its far-reaching implications is that God answers only the request which he inspires. In other words, whatever there is in prayer that he can honor was put there by him in the first place.¹¹⁶

The Alpha-Omega Prayer is derived from the loving and prevenient action of God in the lives of faithful intercessors (John 15:16; Eph 1:3). The Trinity, accomplice and superintendent in believers’ genuine prayers, sovereignly interjects their power and will to further the Kingdom of God. Humbly, intercessors need to reclaim the ministry of prophets and priests. The need and importance of prayer radically changes when God calls into existence (Rom 4:17) through the obedient intercessor that which previously did not exist: new doors of opportunity opening for the gospel, evangelizers receiving supernatural enablement through the Spirit, and the lost hearing and receiving salvation in Jesus Christ. “Changing our viewpoint of prayer makes us less concerned with the way our prayers are working out and more concerned with what God is working out through them.”¹¹⁷

¹¹⁵Ralph A. Herring, *The Cycle of Prayer* (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1966), 13.

¹¹⁶*Ibid.*, 32.

¹¹⁷*Ibid.*, 13.

God initiating prayer and speaking through prayer intercessors should not be viewed as divine revelation equivalent with Holy Scripture. Revelation ceased with the passing of the Apostles. However, the Old Testament's prophets and priests (kings, too) were temporarily indwelt by the Holy Spirit to serve God and intercede for the nation of Israel. Since Pentecost, the Holy Spirit has taken up full-time residence in every believer. Surely, the Holy Spirit's temporal indwelling of believers in the Old Testament is available to all believers since they are permanently indwelt by the Holy Spirit! In the Great Commission (Matt 28:18-20), Jesus Christ commands the disciples to go into the world as ambassadors and ministers of reconciliation (2 Cor 5:18-20), that is, as prophets and priests of the King. As prophets and priests, Christians are "a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people" (1 Pet 2:9). Therefore, Christians humble themselves and take their mighty mantles of Holy Spirit-empowered prayers into the world to share the love of God in Jesus Christ. "God assigns to his church the doing of that which is impossible to all others. Only with the divine-led resource of prayer is the church a match for her task, and these resources are uniquely hers to employ."¹¹⁸

The Alpha-Omega prayer provides two benefits to the local church's intercessory prayer ministry. Just as God does not reveal His will immediately, these benefits will come only with earnest, incessant prayer coupled with an abiding sacrifice of intercession and compassionate-driven outreach to the lost. God will use the prayers of His people to accomplish His divine will and empower them for service.

¹¹⁸Ibid., 68.

Prophetic Role of Prayer Intercessors

For the prophecy came not in old time by the will of man: but holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost. (2 Pet 1:21)

The Holy Spirit was at work in the lives of men and women in the Old Testament. The prophets reveal God's corrections and direction to the nation of Israel. Israel determined a man was a true prophet when his prophecies happened: "In all the experience of men with God, as described in the Bible, the convenient character of his action is made clear."¹¹⁹ God, using divine discretion and initiative, personally called the nation of Israel into covenant, but He also called prophets to serve as His spokesperson to the nation. The people would petition God and He would answer through the prophets. "According to the Old Testament," writes James Leo Garrett, "Yahweh, the God of the covenant with Israel, is the living and personal Lord of nature and history to whom Israelites prayed The manifestation of the name of Yahweh (Exod 3:13-15) made it possible for Israelites voluntarily to call upon that name."¹²⁰ Further, Yahweh would also call them by name! The worship of a personal, approachable God differentiated the Israelites from those who worshipped ethereal experiences, false-gods, and idols.

Indicative of the pattern of Old Testament piety is the fact that the dominant motives of prayer never included that of losing oneself, through contemplation, in the divine infinity. There was no room in Israel for mystical prayer; the nature of the Mosaic Yahweh with his mighty personal will effectively prevented the development of that type of prayer which seeks to dissolve the individual I in the unbounded One. Just as the God of the Old Testament is no Being reposing in his own beatitude, but reveals himself as the controlling will of the eternal King, so the pious Israelite is no intoxicated, world-denying mystic reveling in the Beyond, but a warrior, who wrestles even in prayer, and looks for the life of power in communion with his

¹¹⁹Casteel, *Rediscovering Prayer*, 15.

¹²⁰Garrett, "A Theology of Prayer," 5.

divine Lord. His goal is not the static concept of the *summum bonum*, but the dynamic fact of the *basileia tou theou*.¹²¹

Thus, “*prophetic prayer* has its roots in ancient Hebrew monotheism In prophetic prayer the one who prays does not so much seek an ontological re-fusion with the Ground of Being as he asks and boldly pleads . . . in the strength and with the aid of God’s own Spirit for God’s will to be done.”¹²² Intercessors engage in prophetic prayer when they are doggedly determined to pray for evangelizers to be effective in sharing the gospel of Jesus Christ. God expects a “return” on His Son’s sacrificial investment.

The Holy Spirit who spoke through the prophets in the Old Testament indwells believers today. Prophecy has both foretelling and forth-telling components. A prophet is “one who is divinely inspired to communicate God’s will to His people and to disclose the future to them.”¹²³ God’s will is that Christians prophetically proclaim and unashamedly take His loving plan of salvation to sinners so they have the opportunity to call on the name of the Lord and receive salvation (Rom 10:13). The prophetic ministry of prayer is on the front line in the spiritual battle for souls. Intercessory prayer petitions God to save the lost, but it also supports and empowers evangelizers’ effectiveness. Christ told His disciples to pray the Lord of the Harvest to send workers into His harvest (Matt 9:38), and as believers petition the Lord for more workers they can rest assured that God hears and answers the prayers He has initiated. Prayer strengthens a believer’s faith and trust in God as the lost are broken and respond to the gospel.

¹²¹Walther Eichrodt, *Theology of the Old Testament*, vol. 2, trans. J. A. Baker (London: SCM, 1967), 125.

¹²²Garrett, “A Theology of Prayer,” 14. Emphasis mine.

¹²³R. K. Harrison, Howard F. Vos, and Cyril J. Barber, eds., *The New Unger’s Bible*

Prayer comprises the interface between human frailty and divine power [Prayer] is God's tool for shaping an individual's will to the divine pattern so the result is a submissive expression of faith.¹²⁴

Intercessors do not know who will be born again, but their zeal for the salvation of souls traces back to the Trinity's prevenient work in their heart. The Father draws the lost to the resurrected Jesus (John 6:44-45) who ever liveth to make intercession for the saints (Heb 7:25) while the Holy Spirit intercedes in the believer praying in God's will (Rom 8:26-27). Harry Uprichard goes on to state, "God's Spirit, not our spirit, is in control and orders our groanings in line with God's will. It is divinely controlled though humanly ordered prayer"¹²⁵ Believers' prayers prophetically petition God to make the blessed reality of Christ's sacrifice intimate and personal so the lost will recognize their perilous spiritual condition and respond by faith to Jesus Christ. "Because Jesus' life before God in his ministry is vindicated by the resurrection, and because the God who raised Jesus graciously unites us with him through the Holy Spirit, [when we pray] we are caught up into nothing less than the dynamism of the Trinity itself."¹²⁶ Christians are partakers of the divine nature for the purpose of boldly praying and publicly proclaiming that God's amazing grace is offered to all sinners. As devoted intercessors prophetically pray for evangelizers effectiveness and the lost's responsiveness, God will cause Christ's sacrifice to reap a bountiful harvest that builds

Dictionary, rev. Merrill F. Unger (Chicago: Moody, 1988), s.v. "Prophet."

¹²⁴David Crump, *Knocking on Heaven's Door: A New Testament Theology of Petitionary Prayer* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2006), 14-15, 38.

¹²⁵Harry Uprichard, *A Study Commentary on Ephesians* (Auburn, MA: Evangelical, 2004), 374. See Acts 9:11 and Eph 6:18.

¹²⁶Koenig, *Rediscovering New Testament Prayer*, 27.

intercessors' faith, grows the Kingdom, and glorifies His holy name.

Priestly Role of Prayer Intercessors

True Christ-like intercession is one of the highest forms of communion with God. The Christian intercessor becomes increasingly unselfish. Losing himself in his love for God and friend, he seeks the treasures of God's own life for others.¹²⁷

Priests represent God to His people and people to their holy God. Priests stand in the gap. A priest's role is different from a prophet's role. Priests had lineage requirements and served in the Temple, yearly. Prophets could be from any tribe and family, and they often roamed Israel's territory. In the Old Testament, God chose the priests to serve before Him. However, in Exodus 19:5-6, God did a startling thing with Israel: He made the whole nation His priests: "Now therefore, if you will indeed obey My voice and keep My covenant, then you shall be a special treasure to Me above all people; for all the earth is Mine. And you shall be to Me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation." Why did God call Israel to serve before Him as priests? Why did God call Israel to be a holy nation? The answer: Israel was to be an intermediary, a light to the Gentile nations displaying the glory and honor of Yahweh (Isa 49:1-6). Israel's relationship to the world was supposed to be a foreshadowing of the Messiah's mediatorial work.

In today's church, it seems the priestly role of the body of Christ has been incorrectly limited to ordained clergy. Tragically, such "limitation" has led most of the body of Christ to become spectators rather than participants in the worship and service of God. The Apostle Peter calls all Christians to a deeper walk with God and greater service to the church and society as he reiterates the words of Exodus 19:5-6,

¹²⁷Edward W. Bauman, *Intercessory Prayer* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1959), 18.

But you are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people, that you may proclaim the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light; who once were not a people but are now the people of God, who had not obtained mercy but now have obtained mercy. (1 Pet 2:9-10)

Intercession and proclamation of the gospel are inseparable. Being members of God's holy priesthood makes believers responsible and accountable for others, especially the lost. The Christian priesthood does not burn sacrifices with physical fire. However, our priesthood is the Holy Spirit-inspired spiritual fire of intercession and petition that blazes with the manifest presence of God. H. B. Swete suggests, "Jesus should be pictured as a throned priest-King, asking what He wills from a Father who always hears and grants His request."¹²⁸ As co-heirs with Jesus Christ, believers' prayers initiated by the Holy Spirit according to the will of God are answered in God's predetermined timeframe.

John the Baptist referred to the fire of the Holy Spirit when he compared his prophetic ministry with that of the coming Messiah: "I indeed baptize you with water unto repentance, but He who is coming after me is mightier than I, whose sandals I am not worthy to carry. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire" (Matt 3:11). "Christ and His priestly ministry," writes Shedd, "is the intercessor in heaven for his people but the Holy Spirit is the *allon parakleton* ('another helper') who intercedes within their souls."¹²⁹ The priestly ministry of prayer is one of great compassion, yet, marked by spiritual warfare. "To act as a representative of the people is a priestly role, and the New Testament affirms that all Christians are priests (1 Pet 2:5)."¹³⁰ Each

¹²⁸H. B. Swete, *The Ascended Christ* (London: A & C Black, 1964), 95.

¹²⁹William G. T. Shedd, *A Critical and Doctrinal Commentary on the Epistle of St. Paul to the Romans* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1879; reprint, Minneapolis: Klock & Klock, 1978), 261.

¹³⁰Ellis, *Answering God*, 10-11.

intercessor takes “prayer seriously [and] is literally flattened beneath his burden. His soul is poured out like water; even his body is prostrate before God.”¹³¹ Prayer grows faith as intercessors experience God’s hearing and answering of their prayers. Jonathan Edwards points out that our spiritual gifts for ministry will never lead us to “new” revelation but will always line up with Scripture and lead to the glorification of God.¹³² Our prayers are powerless without the Spirit’s initiation and supernatural superintendence.

Conclusion

Daniel Migliore explains, “Maturing in prayer . . . means learning that at the beginning, middle, and end of every fruitful human action is prayerful recognition of the prevenient and sustaining grace of God.”¹³³ In this chapter, we discovered the difficulties behind prayer. For some, prayer remains an enigma. For others, prayer has degenerated into a self-absorbed, human-centered, spiritual exercise of dead-end absurdity. Some view God with such “low thoughts” that He no longer resembles His own self-revelation in the Bible and, therefore, is no God at all. Still, others find prayer to be a vibrant and maturing time of rich fellowship with a loving God who hears and answers their prayers. For all, God displays His sovereignty by initiating, giving, and answering prayer within His divinely predetermined timeframe.

In the life of Christian praying we find our lives entered into by God himself seeking . . . us to enter into the wondrous joy of His own life—the spiritual joy that comes only to those who live for others, and forget themselves.¹³⁴

¹³¹Herring, *The Cycle of Prayer*, 45.

¹³²Jonathan Edwards, “Some Thoughts Concerning the Present Revival of Religion in New England,” in vol. 1 of *The Works of Jonathan Edwards* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1998), 404.

¹³³Migliore, *Faith Seeking Understanding*, 180.

¹³⁴Charles Francis, *Teach Us to Pray* (Boston: Pilgrim, 1949), 116.

Francis' understanding is directly applicable to the local church's intercessory prayer ministry: intercessors' intentional prayers support evangelizers but, in reality, intercessors themselves become the "laborers" they have been praying for God to send into His harvest (Matt 9:38).

Prayer founded upon faith in Christ and informed by the Word of God, makes believers more like Christ. P. T. Forsyth rightly notes, "The Bible does not prescribe prayer, but it does more—it inspires it."¹³⁵ Believers that are being made more like Christ by the indwelling Spirit of God have an abiding compulsion and compassion to reach the lost. At the same time evangelizers are taking the gospel into the spiritual harvest, the Father is drawing sinners to faith in Christ (John 6:44) through the Holy Spirit's work of convicting and convincing (John 16:7-15). Since the biblical revelation informs and inspires believers' prayers, it follows that the Holy Spirit who "breathed" the Word through men is also the divine inspiration behind believers' prayers.¹³⁶

What the doctrine of the Trinity articulates and discloses is the profound truth . . . that prayer is God praying to God through God.¹³⁷

Prayer is a means God initiates and uses to accomplish His will in and through believers. This truth is staggering! In fact, the purpose of prayer is to accomplish God's mission of love.¹³⁸ Jesus Christ, Master and Savior, has not charged His church to

¹³⁵Forsyth, *The Soul of Prayer*, 119.

¹³⁶2 Tim 3:16-17, "All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work."

¹³⁷Ellis, *Answering God*, 99.

¹³⁸John Piper, *Desiring God: Meditations of a Christian Hedonist* (Portland, OR: Multnomah, 2003), 177.

accomplish the Great Commission (Matt 28:18-20) in her own power. Jesus did not just bring the Gospel—He *is* the Gospel message! “It is the present reality of Christ, His Lordship, and His presence in the church that fuel the church’s mission and confidence.”¹³⁹ Jesus’ sacrificial, overcoming life is proof that God uses His children to fulfill His purposes and glorify His name. His children reap the joy and benefits of God’s divine beneficence and holy presence. When we pray in the will of God, “we are praying for the success of the gospel, its sway and power; we are praying for the conversion of men and women; we are praying an all-inclusive missionary prayer.”¹⁴⁰ We pray because God hears and answers our prayers. Believers pray in the will of God because the Spirit conveniently intercedes within and guides prayer. Our prayers—like our lives—are not perfect. Karl Barth notes that sin does not hamper God’s will from coming to fruition.

Inevitably, our prayer sometimes will be “impure,” but we must come to God as we are, and God knows well what we are. Because of the “intervention” of Christ and the Spirit in our prayers, we are to understand prayer as a cyclical movement which comes from, and returns to, God We have to realize that hardly any request we make will remain “untouched” by divine cleansing and purifying reception of it.¹⁴¹

Prayer is not wasted time. Our obedient prayers are integral to the purposes and coming of the Kingdom of God. “All prayer and worship is in anticipation of the eternal-time when the open Trinity gathers us up into the divine community.”¹⁴² Christians receive purpose and meaning when they realize God not only has saved them but He will supersede their weaknesses and show His strength in their lives and prayers. Lorraine

¹³⁹Burge, *John*, 61.

¹⁴⁰Lloyd-Jones, *Sermon on the Mount*, 338.

¹⁴¹Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, vol. 3, *The Doctrine of Creation*, pt. 3, ed. G. W. Bromiley and T. F. Torrance, trans. G. W. Bromiley and R. J. Ehrlich (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1960), 101.

¹⁴²Ellis, *Answering God*, 99.

Boettner writes,

When a person sees himself as one of the Lord's chosen and knows that every one of his acts [especially prayers] has an eternal significance, he realizes more clearly how serious life is, and he is fired with a new determination to make his life [and prayers] count for great things.¹⁴³

What one believes about the sovereignty of God directly affects her trust in and practice of intercessory prayer. Simply put: believers pray with fervency, expectancy, and great anticipation because they know the sovereign God promises to hear and answer prayer—something no other god can do. Prayer's existence confirms that God deeply desires to converse with believers to share His will and to hear their concerns. These conversations in prayer are not self-absorbed, ethereal experiences reserved for the spiritually elite. Instead, God has given prayer as a means for *all* of His children to know and do His will. God's will is the lost come to salvation in Christ, thus, glorifying His name.

The doctrine of divine sovereignty would be grossly misapplied if it is used to lessen the urgency, and immediacy, and priority, and binding constraint, of the evangelistic imperative.¹⁴⁴

It is truly an amazing fact that God accomplishes His will *through* believers and their obedient prayers. How much must God love believers! Jonathan Edwards gives a breathtaking insight into the loving relationship between God and the redeemed when he wrote,

In the creature's knowing, esteeming, loving, rejoicing in, and praising God, the glory of God is both exhibited and acknowledged; his fullness is received and returned. Here is both an *emanation* and *remanation*. The refulgence shines upon

¹⁴³Loraine Boettner, *The Reformed Doctrine of Predestination* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1951), 321.

¹⁴⁴Packer, *Evangelism and the Sovereignty of God*, 34.

and into the creature, and is reflected back to the luminary. The beams of glory come from God, and are something of God, and are refunded back again to their original. So that the whole is *of God*, and *in God*, and *to God*; and God is the beginning, middle and end in this affair.¹⁴⁵

Prayers initiated by the Holy Spirit are expressions of the believer's faith. What God has sovereignly sent forth to occur: salvation, sanctification, and glorification occurs and glorifies God. Faith is the substance of our trust in the certainty of God keeping His promises (Heb 11:1-3). "The more certain we are about God's sovereign promises and providence, the more we will plead for the very things that we know belong to us through the provision of his covenant."¹⁴⁶ Believers do not have license to pray for fleshly indulgences. Rather, the greatest blessing in a believer's life is having a personal relationship with God through the sacrifice of His Son, Jesus Christ, and praying the lost into the kingdom.

Carrying the light of the gospel to the lost requires earnest vigilance on the part of intercessors, disciples, and evangelizers. In the local church's intercessory ministry, prayer takes on at least two roles of emphasis: prophetic and priestly. In its prophetic role, prayer has both forth-telling and foretelling aspects. The prayer intercessor is a warrior that submits to the life of power in communion with the Lord . . . [seeking] the *basileia tou theou*.¹⁴⁷ Declaring the promises of God in prayer requires intercessors to be ever mindful that God desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth (1 Tim 2:4), for "whoever calls on the name of the LORD shall be saved" (Acts

¹⁴⁵Jonathan Edwards, "The End for which God Created the World," in *Ethical Writings*, vol. 8 of *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*, ed. Paul Ramsey (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989), 531-32.

¹⁴⁶Reisinger, *The Sovereignty of God and Prayer*, 21.

¹⁴⁷Eichrodt, *Theology of the Old Testament*, 125.

2:21). In its priestly role, the intercessory prayer ministry stands in the gap for the lost who do not recognize their perilous spiritual condition. Believers know the horrible future awaiting the lost and our hearts are filled with the compassion of Christ.

“Compassion involves identifying with the situation of others so that one is prepared to act for their benefit.”¹⁴⁸ However, Jesus’ compassion creates in us an attitude toward a person’s need that grows until an action *is* taken for the purpose of meeting that need.¹⁴⁹

The compassion a Christian has toward the lost is conceived in the heart of God, first. He then, through the Holy Spirit, works and intercedes in our hearts giving us compassion and compelling us to act for His glory.

Believers are to be about the work of the Master. He will give rewards that correspond to our faithfulness. As the Lord Himself says when concluding the book of Revelation, “And behold, I am coming quickly, and My reward is with Me, to give to everyone according to his work. I am the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End, the First and the Last” (Rev 22:13).

God works through believers’ prayers to accomplish His will. Yahweh is the only God who hears and answers prayer. Believers’ prayers are integral to God’s loving plan of salvation reaching every human being. Believers must commit to pray earnestly, fervently, and joyfully in the power of the Holy Spirit.

Seeing we have such a prayer-hearing God as we have heard, let us be much employed in the duty of prayer: let us pray with all prayer and supplication: let us live prayerful lives, continuing instant in prayer, watching thereunto with all

¹⁴⁸John Nolland, *The Gospel of Matthew*, New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005), 407.

¹⁴⁹Stuart K. Weber, *Matthew*, Holman New Testament Commentary (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2000), 130.

perseverance; praying always, without ceasing, earnestly, and not fainting.¹⁵⁰

Believers will pray because their prayers are heard by the sovereign God—and answered. Jonathan Edwards’ sermon that urged his congregation to prayer contains words today’s church would be wise to listen and follow. The lost are dependent upon believers interceding for their souls. God has called intercessors to serve in both prophetic and priestly roles. God will answer prayer when believers obediently pray in His will for lost sinners to receive salvation, because nothing glorifies God like sinners coming to saving faith in His Son, Jesus Christ.

¹⁵⁰Edwards, “The Most High a Prayer Hearing God,” 118.

CHAPTER 4

DEVELOPING AN INTERCESSORY PRAYER MINISTRY TO SUPPORT EVANGELISM

This chapter will explain the wonderful and challenging journey to bring the explosive power of intercessory prayer to the forefront of First Baptist Church's life and ministries. Developing an intercessory prayer ministry to support evangelism at First Baptist Church Roanoke, Texas, will continue to take diligent oversight for it to remain an effective priority.

In the first half of chapter 2, the Old Testament basis for God's worldwide plan of evangelism is established. The writings of two Old Testament prophets and one king are used to reveal how God's loving heart led him to redeem humanity from its sin. Yahweh, the self-revealing, covenant God called Israel to be His light to the Gentile nations (Isa 49:1-6). Prayer is the instrument God uses to talk with and listen to His people as they obediently seek and obey His will; King David assures God's people that He hears their prayers (Ps 65:2). The Prophet Zechariah declares people from every tribe and tongue will seek and find Yahweh through His worshipping community (Zech 8:20-23). By faith, God's holy light radiates through His righteous people and draws the lost to Himself.

In the final half of chapter 2, the New Testament basis for developing an intercessory prayer ministry to support evangelism in the local church is established through the teachings of Jesus and the Apostle Paul. In the story of Zacchaeus (Luke

19:1-10), Jesus actively seeks and brings God's salvation to the lost. In fact, Jesus *is* God's salvation! Jesus' love and compassion are the foundational components of the gospel. Jesus' committed prayer life and compassionate ministry taught the disciples to pray for the Lord of the Harvest to send workers into His spiritual harvest (Matthew 9:35-38). The gospel is the saving message the lost desperately need to hear and believe, and in the Great Commission (Matt 28:18-20) Jesus Christ sends His disciples into the world with His authority and personal, strengthening presence to share the Good News.

The Apostle Paul's life models the *combustible* combination of prayer and evangelism. In the epistle to the Colossians, Paul taught that prayer is to be vigilant and chock full of thanksgiving to the living God who provides evangelistic opportunities for His gospel (Col 4:2-4). God invested His Son's life in the gospel message and He expects and creates opportunities and responses to that precious investment. However, Satan, God's enemy, attacks evangelizers who carry the gospel and the sinners bound in spiritual darkness. Prayer is a means God has given His children so they can effectively share Jesus Christ with the lost. Intercessory prayer is a supernatural weapon (Eph 6:18-20) that believers should utilize to support the forward movement of the gospel and defend evangelizers against the attack and harassment of the Devil and his demons.

Prayer, by its very nature, proves believers are dependent upon God. Especially is our powerlessness and dependence upon God applicable in the ministry of reconciliation and the equipping work He has given us to accomplish—which He does through us! Finally, Paul tells Timothy that voluminous prayers for all of humanity must be offered (1 Tim 2:1-4). Paul bonds evangelistically oriented intercessory prayers for the lost with God's will: "Therefore I exhort first of all that supplications, prayers,

intercessions, *and* giving of thanks be made for all men For this *is* good and acceptable in the sight of God our Savior, who desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth” (1 Tim 2:1, 3-4). Jesus and Paul were men committed to prayer. Not surprisingly, prayer was also one of the pillars of the nascent church (Acts 2:42). Returning prayer to its rightful priority will empower the New Testament church to fulfill the Great Commission.

In chapter 3, the Alpha-Omega Prayer is introduced. Genuine prayer is intimate communion with God, but prayer remains an enigma for many Christians. On the surface, praying in God’s will sounds very easy, but prayer can quickly degenerate into anthropocentric wishes and musings that have nothing to do with God’s divine will. In their book *Drawing Closer*, Martin and Ginter offer a biblically refreshing correction that returns prayer to its rightful inception and foundation: holy God.

True prayer starts in the heart of God. He then, through the Holy Spirit, communicates this to our heart. We feel a need to pray for what he has communicated—often even thinking that what we are praying for originated in our own heart and mind. Then we pray this back to the Father through the name of the Lord Jesus and the right He gives us to access the Father in prayer, thus completing the circle of prayer. As the Father hears our prayer, He then answers it, since we are praying according to His will.¹

By its very nature, prayer confronts believers with their total dependence upon God. The sovereignty of God is paramount in prayer, but there has been disagreement over God’s sovereignty for centuries. Some argue that God’s sovereignty is limited; others contend that God’s sovereignty is absolute. Jonathan Edwards was startled that he had to argue with those who said they believed the Scriptures but denied God’s

¹Glen Martin and Dian Ginter, *Drawing Closer: A Step-by-Step Guide to Intimacy with God* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1995), 15.

sovereignty. Ultimately, all arguments must find their answer in the Holy Spirit-inspired Scriptures of the Living God. King David wrote, “The LORD has established His throne in the heavens, And His sovereignty rules over all” (Ps 103:19 NASB). Isaiah wrote, “Declaring the end from the beginning, And from ancient times things that are not yet done, Saying, ‘My counsel shall stand, And I will do all My pleasure’” (Isa 46:10). In the conclusion of the Book of Revelation, the Apostle John wrote “I am the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End, the First and the Last” (Rev 22:13).

God’s absolute sovereignty is what God ascribes to Himself in His Word. The critical component of the Alpha-Omega prayer is the absolute sovereignty of God: God guides believers to pray the prayers He, through the person of the Holy Spirit, inspires within believers for their benefit, maturity in the faith, and the advancement of His Kingdom. Intercessory prayer has both prophetic and priestly roles, though not on an Old Testament revelatory level. Intercessory prayer’s prophetic and priestly roles are integral to the church reaching the lost and discipling the saved—thus, fulfilling the Great Commission.

The foundation of the project is the research from chapters 2-3, summarized above. The purpose of this project was to develop an intercessory prayer ministry that supports and encourages personal evangelism at First Baptist Church Roanoke, Texas. Pre-seminar research instruments and six personal interview questions were given to all who expressed interest (over 18 years of age) in attending the project. A five-week sermon series entitled, *Prayer: Foundation for Effective Evangelism, Ministry, and Life* was preached. Then, an eight-week seminar on prayer’s impact and relationship to evangelism was developed and taught. Finally, the post-seminar research instruments

and the same six personal interview questions were administered to each volunteer.

Promoting the Project and Enlisting Volunteers

On August 22, I began a discipleship class in the study of prayer that met 5:00-7:00 pm every Sunday until October 24. The textbook used was *Conversation with God* by Lloyd John Ogilvie.² I chose *Conversation with God* because it is a “how to” course on prayer; it guides believers, step-by-step, through a cycle of prayer. After the class began, I began to realize the *desperate* need for a practical way to help church members catch a passion for prayer. One of the strengths of the book is that Ogilvie almost exclusively uses Scripture for commentary on prayer. During the second night of class, one participant summarized the group’s feelings about the book:

I was trained to pray by some of the best intercessors in Texas. I have been praying for decades, but until I read this book, I never knew God was calling me into a conversation—that He, amazingly, wants to spend time and talk with me. Instead of a burden, prayer is now a joy I look forward to as God calls me to join Him.³

Clearly, Ogilvie’s book and the robust discussions during the duration of the discipleship class met a deep need that was, heretofore, unknown and unspoken. The joy and excitement generated in the discipleship study later infiltrated into the project, itself.

At the conclusion of each *Conversation with God* class, participants were invited to join the upcoming project. However, I also wanted to involve as many members in the project as possible. Therefore, I advertised the project to the entire church body through personal conversations, multiple mass emails, and eight weeks of advertisement in the worship bulletin; the “ads” were read by the Deacon of the Day

²Lloyd John Ogilvie, *Conversation with God: Experience Intimacy with God through Personal Prayer* (Eugene, OR: Harvest House, 1993).

³Anelle Ballew, 19 September 2010. Used with her permission.

during announcements. Members of the discipleship class became the seedbed as well as passionate promoters for my project. As pastor, I must admit it was exciting and humbling to see and hear how God moved through the class' participants with such an infectious fervor for prayer, their pastor, the lost, and the church body. Truthfully, I am in awe of how God is creating excitement and a stronger sense of unity in the church body through the *Conversation with God* class and this project. It seems people are beginning to see the need for prayer, and though they know prayer is serious spiritual work, they are stepping up to kneel down so the lost will come to Christ.

The Research Instruments, Pre-Seminar

The purpose of administering the research instruments before the project began was to identify members' existing attitudes and beliefs about prayer and evangelism's integral place in the church's ability to fulfill the Great Commission. The first part of the Research Instruments contains the Agreement to Participate (see Appendix 1). The second part of the document contains instructions to help volunteer's anonymously answer questions on their demographic information (see Appendix 2). The third part of the research instruments is an Intercessory Prayer Survey that contains fifty-five statements (see Appendix 3). The fourth part includes six open-ended personal interview questions (see Appendix 4) that gave the volunteers opportunity to fill in the gaps a survey instrument cannot measure.

First Baptist Church Roanoke, Texas, has chosen six objectives⁴ to guide us to

⁴Worship, Prayer, Evangelism, Ministry, Discipleship, and Fellowship.

fulfill our purpose statement⁵ and the Great Commission (Matt 28:18-20). The Research Instruments were designed to provide data on the objectives of prayer, worship, evangelism, and ministry objectives; statements about discipleship and fellowship were not included.⁶ During the seminars, I discovered it was a huge oversight to exclude statements on the fellowship objective. First Baptist thrives on its healthy relationships; fellowship may prove to be the engine that drives the intercessory prayer ministry in the future! Three statements were included to discover volunteers' beliefs about the pastor's role in the local church. Finally, two statements were included to determine volunteers' attitudes towards setting church growth goals—these statements hit a raw nerve!

On October 24, 2010, each of the 27 persons expressing interest in participating in the project was given the research instruments to complete and return within three weeks. I received 20 completed instruments by the night of the first seminar. Three turned in their documents three weeks late (these were not included in the pre-seminar percentages or insights), and 4 were not returned. This project's goal was to have at least 8 volunteers; the average attendance was 12. The first two seminars recorded the highest attendance at 18, but 6 volunteers chose to withdraw. Those who withdrew from the seminars were adamant in their desire to take the seminars soon. I will accommodate their desire for training because it will equip more intercessors to support the church's evangelistic efforts to reach the lost.

The data from the pre-seminar instruments in conjunction with the research

⁵First Baptist's Purpose Statement is in the church's Constitution. It read, "We want to glorify God in a way that leads others to a personal relationship with God through Jesus Christ and builds up believers."

⁶One could argue the research instruments themselves are a discipleship tool.

from chapters 2-3 helped me tailor five sermons and eight seminars to the needs of the volunteers and church body. The 20 research instruments returned represent a robust 15 percent sample of the church body's average attendance of 130.

Instructions and Identification

The information gathered from the research instruments are only a snapshot of beliefs and attitudes of the volunteers who participated in this project. The first question provides the information that 50 percent of the volunteers were over 55 years of age (no. 1).⁷ My goal was to have more young adults attend, but it did not happen. Fifty-eight percent of the volunteers were women and 42 percent were men (no. 2). In question no. 3, 87 percent answered “yes” to “I am *not* sure if I have received Jesus Christ as my Savior.” Apparently, the way I worded the question created confusion, because in question no. 4 100 hundred percent of the survey respondents proclaimed, “I am sure I have received Jesus Christ as my Savior.” Seventy-five percent of the class has been a Christian for over 20 years (no. 5); however, 17 percent have been Christians for 10-19 years, and 8 percent for less than 3 years. Everyone in the class is a member of First Baptist Church Roanoke (no. 6). Surprisingly, 41 percent of the volunteers participating in the project joined the church less than 3 years ago (no. 7). I pray the 42 percent of the class that admitted they were either highly or somewhat inactive will be spurred by God to join in prayer and service with the 58 percent who claim to be somewhat or highly active (no. 8). Finally, the entire group agreed to pray at least ten minutes every day for this project to have Kingdom success (no. 9).

⁷The number in parenthesis refers to the statement in the corresponding research instrument.

Intercessory Prayer Survey Results

Statements on intercessory prayer are in numbers 2, 3, 4, 8, 25, 26, 28, 29, 30, 31, 32, 33, 34, 35, 36, 37, 38, 39, 40, 45, 50, 52, 53, and 54. Statements on evangelism are in numbers 12, 13, 14, 19, 22, 23, 24, 27, 41, 42, 46, 47, 48, 49, and 51. Statements on ministry are in numbers 1, 7, 9, 17, 18, 20, 21, 43, and 44. The four statements on church growth goals are in numbers 10, 11, 16, and 55. Finally, three statements on pastoral responsibilities are in numbers 5, 6, and 15. The data gathered led to the following conclusions.

Intercessory prayer. Intercessory prayer involves a time commitment. After volunteers reflected on the time required for intercession, 92 percent admitted there was nothing in their life that should keep them from engaging in intercessory prayer (no. 3). In no. 8, 41 percent were either not sure or did not agree that prayer in our church should focus more upon the needs of the lost; however, in question (no. 9), 92 percent of the respondents agreed or strongly agreed the mission of the church should be to reach the lost of the community with the gospel of Jesus Christ. In no. 28, 75 percent agreed that they need someone to help them learn how to pray; it will be interesting to find out if the project has made a difference. 100 percent of the volunteers agreed the Bible teaches that God hears the prayers of His people; perhaps their agreement is due to the fact the same 100 percent state that God has answered some of their specific prayers (no. 37). Though respondents have witnessed God answering their prayers, only 9 percent believe God is satisfied with their prayer lives (no. 45). While 91 percent of the volunteers admit the Bible enhances their prayer lives (no. 52), just 70 percent confess to praying daily.

Evangelism. It appears the volunteers have conflicted statements when it comes to evangelism. For instance, 58 percent believe our church has an urgency to share the gospel with the community (no. 12), but 66 percent of the respondents are not sure if the church has a strong burden to reach the lost. I would have liked to discuss these two questions in detail with the group. The survey results also point to the fact that the respondents are aware of the church's need to have a weekly visitation program (no. 22) and the call God has upon their lives to participate (nos. 23, 24, 27). While 9 percent were not sure prayer would give the church a sense of urgency to reach the lost, 91 percent agreed prayer will move the church from being evangelism-minded to evangelism-active, thus, fulfilling the Great Commission (nos. 42, 47, 49).

A surprising response occurred during the second seminar while discussing statement no. 48, "I do not feel prepared to witness to lost people." When I asked the participants if they knew they were supposed to share Jesus with others (evangelism), everyone said "yes." When I asked them if they were sharing Jesus, the large majority said "no." My initial thought was they did not know how and needed training. I was wrong. When I asked them why they were not sharing Jesus they answered that they know how but are apprehensive to do so. To summarize the discussion, the volunteers asked for opening phrases that would help them move a conversation to talking about Jesus. I explained that many Christians are apprehensive to share Jesus with the lost, but I also made it clear that their desire to overcome such apprehension to share Jesus with the lost is proof that the Holy Spirit is already working in their hearts. If God is working in your heart, then He who "started this great work in you [will] keep at it and bring it to a flourishing finish on the very day Christ Jesus appears" (Phil 1:6 The Message).

Ministry. The most startling responses to the entire survey are found in question 1. 67 percent of respondents are either not sure or tend to disagree with the statement: “The members of our congregation have a clear sense of the overall mission and purpose of the church.” From January 3 to February 23, 2010, I preached a seven-part sermon series titled *Riding the Waves*.⁸ Furthermore, almost every sermon I preach contains references to our church’s purpose and objectives. I keep these objectives in the forefront of all of our ministry activities. While 42 percent of respondents believe the primary mission of the church is to care for the needs of its members (no. 17), 67 percent do not believe the church has a strong enough emphasis on missions (no. 18). It seems there is a missions “action” misunderstanding stymieing the congregation.

Church growth goals. A growth goal for worship and every ministry area is a well-intentioned, prayerful target, but not a rigid law. The results show that the respondents are conflicted over the idea of setting church growth goals. For instance, 100 percent of the volunteers agree that the growth of the church depends upon prayer (no. 55). Yet, 50 percent disagree on setting membership goals for the church body (no. 10) and 59 percent disagree with setting goals in the Sunday School (no. 11). There may be a hesitancy to set growth goals because the member do not want to appear as salespersons trying to meet monthly sales goal. It could be the members believe it is the responsibility of the Holy Spirit to bring workers into the harvest. Or, it could be church members want to avoid personal accountability.

⁸One introductory sermon along with a sermon for each of the church’s six objectives: Worship, Prayer, Evangelism, Ministry, Discipleship, and Fellowship.

Pastoral responsibilities. An unexpected 50 percent of the respondents tend to agree, agree, or strongly agree that primary responsibility of the pastor is to minister to the needs of the members of our congregation (no. 5). The responses were not what I anticipated. Perhaps their response coincides with the 92 percent who believe the primary role of the pastor is to provide leadership and to equip church members for doing ministry (no. 15). Possibly, the volunteers believe the pastor's greatest investment is in the church body so that, in the end, more souls will receive salvation in the name of Jesus Christ. It is clear the word "primary" obfuscated the intended evangelistic emphasis of the statement. Or, it is possible, the respondents believe the pastor's responsibility is to be mostly inward-looking? I should have worded such an important question more succinctly.

Five-Part Sermon Series

After gathering the initial research instruments data, it was clear church members must discover the integral connection between prayer and evangelism. Thus, I taught the church body the connection between prayer and evangelism through a five-part sermon series entitled: *Prayer: Foundation for Effective Evangelism, Ministry, and Life.*⁹ The goal of the sermon series was to create an understanding and enthusiasm that God desires to spend time with every one of His children. God uses prayer "conversations" to ignite and empower His church to fulfill the Great Commission.

Sermon 1

The title of the first sermon in the series was "Oh Lord, You're Beautiful"

⁹See Appendix 5 for Sermon Series' outlines.

(Zech 8:20-23).¹⁰ The objective of this sermon was to declare that sinful humanity seeks its own rebellious way in direct disobedience of the sovereign God. However, there is hope because God's loving plan of salvation pronounced in the Protoevangelium (Gen 3:15) is fulfilled through the Seed of Abraham (Gen 12:3), Jesus Christ. Jesus, as the embodiment of true Israel, came to seek and save that which was lost: humanity. The sermon demonstrated humanity finds God through the faithful worship and witness of His covenant people. Zechariah's prophecy shows God desires all humanity to seek Him. Since God is with His people, we are called to attract, reach, and bring peoples from all tribes, tongues, and nations to worship Him.

Sermon 2

The title of the second sermon in the series was "Let's Roll!" (Matt 28:18-20). The objective of the sermon was to teach the congregation the resurrected and ruling Christ is the foundation as well as head of the church's Great Commission. This objective was attained by explaining that Jesus authorizes and send His disciples to share the gospel with the lost. Jesus sowed and reaped the spiritual harvest God had intended the nation of Israel to accomplish. For three years, Jesus taught and modeled the type of prayerful evangelism He requires His disciples to continue. Jesus desired the disciples to depend upon God for strength and directions just as He did. As born-again disciples empowered by the Holy Spirit live in a manner worthy of the gospel (Phil 1:27) and "go" in the authority of the Savior (Matt 28:18-19), Christ strengthens us. His strengthening causes us to be a light that directs the lost to holy God.

¹⁰See Appendix 6 for sermon manuscript.

Sermon 3

The title of the third sermon in the series was “Throwin’ Down!” (Eph 6:18-20). The purpose of this sermon was to explain how wicked forces are meticulously arrayed by Satan to keep humanity in bondage to sin. This objective was achieved by explaining spiritual warfare, though, an unpleasant reality, is real. The sermon emphasized how the gospel and Holy Spirit-inspired prayer are the believer’s equipment for spiritual warfare. In prayer, believers find the two postures of God’s provision. The first posture of God’s provision is offensive in nature: stand and take the gospel into the darkness where the lost reside. Paul commands us to “Watch, stand fast in the faith, be brave, be strong” (1 Cor 16:13). James tells believers to “. . . Submit to God. Resist the devil and he will flee from you” (Jas 4:7). In Ephesians 6:10-20, it is significant that the word “stand” occurs four times because standing provides a bulwark for the blessed work of the gospel to move forward. Peter writes,

Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour. Resist him, steadfast in the faith, knowing that the same sufferings are experienced by your brotherhood in the world. (1 Pet 5:8-9)

The second posture of God’s provision is defensive in nature: praying for the protection, safety, and refreshment of evangelizers. In intercessory prayer, intercessors join evangelizers on the front line of spiritual warfare to save souls for the glory of God. Intercessors, because they live in the body, face demonic attacks to distract them from getting on their knees before God. Personal sin is overcome through obedient prayer.

Sermon 4

The title of the fourth sermon in the series was “God’s Divine Design” (Col 4:2-4). The purpose of this sermon was to proclaim God uses the prayers of His people

to open doors for the gospel to reach the lost. Prayer is the means God uses to interact with His children. The sermon focused on how God expects prayer to be chockfull of thanksgiving while also being incessant, earnest, and impassioned for souls to receive Christ's salvation. The sermon achieved its objective by explaining God sovereignly provides divine, evangelistic opportunities when His people intercede for His provision. The objective was further achieved by teaching how God empowers the effectiveness of the gospel witness. The God who sent His only begotten Son to die on the Cross for sinful man is the God who opens doors for proclamation of the gospel—surely He will also open the hearts of those who hear the gospel.¹¹

Sermon 5

The title of the fifth and final sermon in the series was “Impact Zone” (1 Tim 2:1-4). The objective of this sermon was to teach the congregation that prayer impacts both the recipients and intercessors. God is no respecter of persons (Acts 10:34), that is, He demands Christians intercede for the salvation of all people. Prayer is not an exercise in selfishness or self-centeredness. Since Christians do not know who will and who will not receive salvation, intercessory prayers are to be offered for “all men” (read: humanity) to be saved. Yet, something unique occurs when believers intercede for the lost—our hearts become filled with the compassion of Christ. Then, coincidentally, Christ's compassion compels intercessors to become the evangelistic workers in the harvest they have been praying the Lord of the Harvest to send (Matt 9:38).

Following the completion of the five-part sermon series, the eight teaching

¹¹Marianne Meye Thompson, *Colossians and Philemon*, Two Horizons New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005), 99.

seminars began on Sunday nights from 5:00-7:00pm. This time was chosen because it coincided with our discipleship activities and avoided other scheduling conflicts.

Eight Prayer Equipping Seminars

After advertising the projects seminars to the church body for two months, the eight training seminars began on December 12, 2010, and ended on January 30, 2011. The meetings lasted from 5:00-7:00pm. Even though peak attendance twice reached 18, just 12 completed the course. One of the most important decisions made was to create three-person prayer groups (spouses were separated). Each seminar closed with the volunteers gathering into prayer groups to intercede for the needs of the church and each other. There were two consistent assignments each week for the prayer group. First, they were to meet and pray together at least once before we met the following Sunday and, second, they were to turn in the “Intercessor’s Prayer Requests for Pastor” at the beginning of each seminar (see Appendix 8).

It seems the assignment to pray together was one of the key highlights in the entire project. Group members have committed to continue to meet and be the foundation of the intercessory prayer ministry. Finally, as the seminars progressed, volunteers compiled a prayer notebook comprised of the following handouts: teaching notes, research excerpts, and an updated prayer list tracking requests received and answers to prayer. During the seminars, I became aware of how thoroughly the participants knew their growing prayer notebooks: during discussions, participants would return to notes from prior seminars and quote them as reinforcement to the current discussion.

Seminar 1: Introduction of Ministry Project

The purpose of the first seminar was to present the need for an intercessory prayer ministry to support evangelism in the church.¹² At the beginning of class, I received all the volunteers' completed pre-seminar research instruments. I opened the seminar with prayer; then, we read the research handout containing the project's title, purpose, four goals, context, and rationale.¹³ Due to the extended time we had, I was able to guide the attendees to an up-close look at our church's context, something none of them had experienced before. After further reflection, I realize the extra time allowed the need for a prayer ministry to percolate in the hearts of the attendees.

During seminar 1, we identified and discussed seven priorities upon which the prayer intercessors could concentrate.¹⁴ Then, we read an excerpt from chapter 3 titled, "Untangling the Enigma of Prayer" (pp. 57-61). The assignment for next week was to read Isaiah 49:1-6, Psalm 65:2, Romans 8:26-27, and return with their own definition of prayer. The seminar closed with the five prayer groups spending 10 minutes in prayer.

Seminar 2: Definition of Prayer and Evangelism

The second seminar began with a review of the first seminar and the reading and discussion of participants' definitions of prayer. Following the review, I presented simple definitions for prayer and evangelism. *Prayer* is defined as "an ongoing and

¹²See Appendix 10 for the teaching notes from the eight seminars.

¹³The handout in Seminar 1 is the research for chap. 1 in its entirety. Handouts in the seven other seminars contain excerpts from chaps. 2-3 research; these excerpts are identified by section title and page numbers and are not included in appendixes. All other handouts are in separate appendixes.

¹⁴These priorities accurately represent FBC Roanoke's spiritual needs at this time. The priorities are (1) Pastor and Deacons, (2) Revival: brokenness, unworthiness, (3) Outreach, (4) Inreach, (5) All ministries, (6) Servant hearts within membership, and (7) Guests.

growing love relationship with God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.”¹⁵ *Evangelism* is defined as “proclaiming the splendid news concerning Jesus Christ with such power that the speaker brings Christ into human experience and confronts men and women at the point of decision.”¹⁶ The purpose of this seminar was to provide Old Testament support for God’s loving plan of salvation that is offered to all humanity. We studied the research for chapter 2 on Isaiah 49:1-6 where God proclaimed Israel was to be a light to the Gentile nations (pp. 16-20). We also discussed the research on Psalm 65:2, where King David declares that God hears the prayers of His people as they obediently seek to do His will (pp. 20-25). Believers must be informed and constantly reminded that God hears their prayers and is working through them to accomplish His desire that all be saved (1 Tim 2:4).

The second part of seminar 2 began with a discussion of a shocking quote from Leonard Ravenhill: “There is a suffocating indifference in the church to the peril of judgment.”¹⁷ Ravenhill’s blunt quote led to a spirited discussion that we who no longer face judgment must intercede for the salvation of those who still face God’s righteous punishment for rejecting His Son. Then, I read a two-page excerpt from Jonathan Edwards’ *Four-fold Voice of God* in his sermon, “The Duty of Harkening to God’s Voice.” The class was in awe of Edwards’ insights into God’s creating voice, His providential voice, His voice in the Word, and His “voice by His Holy Spirit.”¹⁸ The

¹⁵Richard Foster, *Prayer: Finding the Heart’s True Home* (San Francisco: Harper, 1992), 13.

¹⁶ John Connell, “Closing the Deal” (sermon preached 4 April 2008, Calvary in Savannah, GA), 150.

¹⁷ Leonard Ravenhill, *Revival God’s Way* (Minneapolis: Bethany House, 2006), 80.

¹⁸Jonathan Edwards, “The Duty of Harkening to God’s Voice,” in *Sermons and Discourses*

assignment for next week was to read Luke 19:1-10, Matthew 9:38, and for the prayer groups to pray together at least once before the next seminar. The seminar closed with the prayer groups interceding together for 15 minutes.

Seminar 3: The Biblical Foundation for an Intercessory Prayer Ministry

The seminar began with a review of seminars 1-2. The purpose of this seminar was to take time to study five types of prayer: Adoration, Confession, Thanksgiving, Supplication (Petition), and Intercession. Next, the attendees spent time reading and discussing *18 Reasons for Unanswered Prayer*¹⁹ (see Appendix 7). Then, the group discussed the research from chapter 2 that shows there is biblical support for developing an intercessory prayer ministry in Luke 19:1-10 (pp. 30-34) and Matthew 9:35-38 (pp. 34-38). Jesus seeks the lost and He expects all of His disciples to do the same, for He has called *all* disciples to pray to the Lord of the harvest to send workers into His harvest—we are the workers we have been praying for! The session closed with the prayer groups gathering to pray for 15 minutes. I am gradually increasing the group prayer time by five minutes. My goal is to have the groups praying together for 30 minutes by the end of the eight seminars, without drawing it to their attention. Ultimately, quality time in prayer requires quantity of time in prayer.

Seminar 3 especially stands out because it was the night a prayer coordinator was chosen by the volunteers to lead the nascent intercessory prayer ministry. The

1720-1723, ed. Wilson H. Kinnach, *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*, vol. 10 (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992), 441-42.

¹⁹John Edmiston, *18 Reasons for Unanswered Prayer* [on-line], accessed 27 Jan 2011; available from <http://www.globalchristians.org/articles/unansw1.htm>; Internet.

woman chosen was the same one who had been importunate with me for six months pleading to begin and help our church's prayer ministry. She and I had been discussing the desperate need for a prayer ministry, but I knew we had to get the need of a prayer ministry before the church body to gain its full support. This sweet woman is retired and has been involved in parachurch prayer ministries her entire adult life; however, this was her first experience of leading a prayer ministry on the local church level.

The name "Prayer Central" was chosen as the name of the intercessory prayer ministry for two reasons. First, the intercessors' desire for prayer to be central to every ministry in the church. Second, the intercessors wanted one "central" place where church members can forward all their prayer requests. Each Monday, the prayer coordinator would gather all the prayer requests that come in to the office from the bulletin's prayer request card, church phone calls, and website,²⁰ and then send out the updated prayer list to the intercessors. The last four months' emphasis on the need for intercessory prayer had gotten the congregation's attention that prayer rightfully belongs at the forefront of all we plan and attempt to do as a church body. We cannot accomplish in the flesh for the Kingdom of God what we will accomplish through prayer and trust in the resurrection power of the Holy Spirit.

Seminar 4: The Sovereign and Supernatural Ways of God

The seminar began with a quick review of seminars 1-3. The purpose of the

²⁰On the main page of our church website, www.fbnoke.org, when one hovers the mouse over the "Get In Touch" link, he or she has the option of sending a prayer request into the office. The prayer coordinator compiles these requests in the weekly updates. The actual webpage that receives and forwards the prayer requests is http://www.fbnoke.org/prayer_requests.php. The next step is to let the community know we care for them and want to pray for their needs, too.

seminar was to discuss two more passages that explain the need and form the foundation for an intercessory prayer ministry in the local church. The session began by reading Ephesians 6:18-20 and its corresponding research from chapter 2 (pp. 49-52). Spiritual warfare is a reality all Christians must face. Intercessory prayer places believers on the front lines of the battle, so we must be prepared and on guard for spiritual attack. Next, we read and discussed the research in chapter 2 on Zechariah 8:20-23 (pp. 25-29). The volunteers were reminded that we are all sinners bound to choose our own way, but due to God's prevenient love, humanity can be set free by the blood of Jesus to live in a manner worthy of His name. Further, the born again community is God's witness to the world of His supreme love—sinful humanity is drawn to God by the righteous living and evangelistic fervor of His church. The final study in the seminar was from the chapter 3 excerpt titled, "The Sovereignty of God and Prayer" (pp. 62-68). God's sovereignty is the basis for the trust and reliance believers have in His ability to hear and answer prayer. Though there are equivocations on man's part concerning God's sovereignty, the most trustworthy ascriptions of God's absolute sovereignty come from His Word. The reading assignments for the next week were Colossians 4:2-4 and 1 Timothy 2:1-4. The seminar ended with the prayer groups meeting for 20 minutes of prayer.

Seminar 5: The Apostle Paul's Praxis of Intercessory Prayer and Evangelism

The seminar began with a review of seminars 1-4. The Apostle Paul is an excellent example of the combustible nature of combining prayer and evangelism. The class discussed the effective 3-fold approach to intercessory prayer. First, petitioners must ask God to provide divinely ordained opportunities to share the gospel. Second,

intercessors ask God to supply protection for evangelizers. Third, as intercessors pray for divine opportunities and the protection of the evangelizers, the Holy Spirit causes the gospel to shape and affect the lives of the intercessors, evangelizers, and lost.

Next, we discussed the research in chapter 2 on Colossians 4:2-4 (pp. 43-49). God provides opportunities and empowers evangelizers' effectiveness when intercessory prayers are vigilant, thankful, and earnest. Prayers of thanksgiving remind the believer of her experience with God, elicit trust because of what Jesus has already done in the believer's heart, and are an antidote to prayer warriors growing weary. Then, we discussed 1 Timothy 2:1-4 (pp. 52-55). Prayers are to be made for all people because it pleases God and He wants as many to be saved as possible. Further, often intercessors become the workers in the harvest they have been faithfully praying to come (Matt 9:38). The final document discussed was from the research in chapter 3 concerning the "Absolute Sovereignty of God" (pp. 68-71). The seminar closed with an assignment to read Matthew 28:18-20 and pray at least once together before the next seminar. The prayer groups prayed 20 minutes and then adjourned.

Seminar 6: Alpha-Omega Prayer and Fulfillment of the Great Commission

The seminar began with a quick review of seminars 1-5. Today's passage, the Great Commission, changed the tenor of the seminar's participants. The volunteers seemed to internalize the necessity of their personal "ownership" of the Great Commission if the church is going to fulfill all that God has called her to accomplish. We read the passage in Matthew 28:18-20 and discussed its corresponding research in chapter 2 (pp. 38-42). In the Great Commission, we learn that Jesus has authorized and sent into the lost world His disciples to bear a salvific message of hope from God. As

disciples faithfully and boldly carry God's loving plan of salvation to their world, Jesus Christ strengthens them with His personal presence. Next, we discussed the excerpt entitled, "Alpha-Omega Prayer" from the research in chapter 3 (pp. 71-84). The participants were given an excerpt from chapter 3 titled, "The Holy Spirit Initiates Prayer" (pp. 84-103). The handout was to be taken home and read before the next seminar. Finally, the prayer groups prayed 25 minutes before adjourning.

Seminar 7: The Holy Spirit Initiates Prayer in Believers

The seminar began with a thorough review of seminars 1-6. The participants were reminded that just as Israel had been called to go to the Gentile nations (Isa 49:1-6), the resurrected Savior now sends Christians (Us!) to the lost (Matt 28:18-20). Jesus is our model of unrelenting, holy faithfulness. Next, the class spent time in prayer confessing and repenting to God of our sin of missing the mark of faithfulness in the areas of prayer and evangelism. After those somber moments, and I pray God will set fires of brokenness throughout the church body like we just experienced, I reminded the participants they are not defined by nor in bondage to their past sin, because "if we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness" (1 John 1:9 NIV). Furthermore, the mercies of God are brand new every morning (Lam 3:22). Believers do not have to live in guilt as long as they will humbly and obediently share the gospel of the living Lord Jesus Christ with the lost.

Then, we read and discussed one-half of the excerpt from chapter 3 titled, "The Holy Spirit Initiates Prayer" (pp. 84-103). I was concerned the document might be too long or difficult for the participants to understand, but I was proven wrong. Nearly all of

the volunteers came with notes in the margins of their documents listing meaty questions for me to address. The exercise took almost an hour, but the passion of learning deeper spiritual truths about God bolstered the participants' souls. Apparently, instead of perusing the document—they devoured it! I was truly surprised! The prayer groups met for 25 minutes of intercession to complete the night of training.

Seminar 8: Prophetic and Priestly Roles in the Alpha-Omega Prayer

The seminar began with a rapid review of seminars 1-7. We began the teaching and discussion where we left off in the excerpt from chapter 3 titled, “The Holy Spirit Initiates Prayer.” After listening to the participants' responses for nearly two months, I came to realize the need to give them a simple, clear reason why *they* needed to pray for the lost. I used the prophetic and priestly roles in the Alpha-Omega Prayer (pp. 91-97) to create concise arguments that intercessors' prayers are necessary for the lost to come to faith in Jesus Christ (see Appendix 9). Ultimately, in life and ministry we all have spiritual burdens we must bear as well as carry out. Thankfully, God wants our conversations with Him to be a joy and maturing process—not a burden! Finally, the prayer groups met to intercede for 30 minutes before departing. They agreed to keep meeting together to lay the foundation for the burgeoning intercessory prayer ministry.

The Research Instruments, Post-Seminar

Excluding the Agreement to Participate (Appendix 1), I passed out the same research instruments to those who completed the eight seminars. I used the same research instruments to be able to compare the participants' answers to their original answers. Simply put, I wanted to discover if the eight equipping seminars had made a

noticeable spiritual impact in the lives of the volunteers. The post-seminar intercessory prayer survey was administered on Sunday night, January 20, 2011. The twelve volunteers who finished the equipping seminars also completed the research instruments. The volunteers asked to meet one more time to see the comparative results of the two intercessory prayer surveys. The extra meeting is scheduled for February 13, 2011, at 5:00 pm. There were a few surprises when I compared the results of the pre-seminar intercessory prayer survey with the post-seminar survey. Some of the answers contained pleasant surprises, but some answers left me perplexed. I will address these issues in detail in the following survey results section.

Intercessory Prayer Survey Results

Intercessory prayer. After five sermons and eight seminars on prayer, prayer is muscling its way to the forefront of FBC Roanoke's ministries. My prayer is God will use this project to ignite our congregation to confession, repentance, renewal, and revival in both prayer and evangelism. It is exciting that 83 percent of the volunteers strongly agree that prayer can make a difference in their spiritual lives and the church's worship (nos. 2, 4).²¹ The volunteers learned prayer is a conversation with God that draws us up to Him as much as it sends us out to the lost (no. 8). The volunteers not only believe FBC needs an intercessory prayer ministry (no. 31), the prayer groups have asked to continue meeting as the foundation of the ministry (no. 36). The involvement of these volunteers is even more critical because there was a 41 percent increase in their

²¹The number in parenthesis refers to the statement in the Intercessory Prayer Survey.

commitment to intercessory prayer (no. 39), and 91 percent strongly agree that evangelism is made more effective through intercessory prayer (no. 38).

I am perplexed at the volunteers' answer to statement 45: "I believe God is satisfied with my prayer life." I was expecting their new knowledge and skills to provide them with confidence to pray; however, it seems what they learned led to conviction for the lack of prayer offered in the past. I would like to have had more time to investigate their answers more thoroughly and remind them that we are not defined by our past!

Evangelism. There is a slight positive change in the volunteers' beliefs about our church's urgency to share the gospel with our community (no. 12), but 25 percent were unsure that we were committing the resources necessary to accomplish the task. A striking parallel is in statement 14 where 50 percent are unsure if our church has a strong burden for the lost of its community (60 percent strongly agreed with the statement in the pre-seminar survey, 17 percent believe it now). There is hope, because 100 percent of the volunteers agree or strongly agree that prayer will give the church a sense of urgency (no. 42). Further, the volunteers also believe prayer will make them more aware of the lost (no. 47), and 92 percent believe that prayer coupled with a weekly outreach ministry (no. 41) will lead more people to faith in Jesus Christ (no. 22). However, if the survey's results are accurate, these volunteers will boldly share Jesus Christ with the lost during their daily routines (no. 27).

Ministry. The survey shows the volunteers are aware of the purpose of the church, but they believe 50 percent of church members do not know the purpose of the church (no. 1). They could be right, but it may be their responses state the majority of

members are not helping the church fulfill its purpose. In a disappointing twist, 67 percent believe the primary mission of the church is to care for the needs of its members (no. 17). The response to no. 17 was unexpected because in the pre-seminar only 25 percent answered in this manner. I would have liked more time to discuss the change with the seminar participants. Though I feel the answer is a surprise, a parallel answer occurs in statement 21 where 41 percent of respondents do not agree that the ministries of the church should mainly be for the unbelievers in our community.

Church growth goals. There was a slight increase in the respondents' beliefs that the church (no. 10) and Sunday School (no. 11) need to set goals for membership growth. It is interesting to note a 25 percent increase in the volunteers' agreement that the church needs to place a greater emphasis upon biblical stewardship (no. 16). The word "stewardship" may have confused the volunteers into thinking the statement was a reference to tithing; however, I was referring to one's time, talent, and resources. Biblical stewardship refers to using everything one has to the glory of God: time, spiritual gifts, talents, and resources. There is a disconnect that needs to be addressed between church growth and biblical stewardship.

Pastoral responsibilities. There was a significant shift in the respondents' beliefs about the role of the pastor. The shift was not the direction I had hoped it would turn. The volunteers' responses increased 66 percent more in agreement that the pastor's primary responsibility is to minister to the needs of the members of our congregation (no. 5). As noted earlier in this chapter, it is possible the respondents understand the pastor's equipping of church members for ministry as his primary responsibility. However, I am

not sure my supposition is correct because the word “needs” in statement 5 does not refer to equipping for ministry as clearly as does statement 15.

Developing the Intercessory Prayer Ministry

Developing an Intercessory Prayer Ministry at FBC Roanoke, Texas, meant beginning from the ground up. The lack of participation from church members led us to discontinue the Wednesday Night Prayer Meeting three years ago. Since then we have committed Wednesday nights and invested our monetary and ministry resources into a children’s discipleship program called AWANA. God has blessed the difficult decision with over twenty children receiving salvation and being baptized in the last two years.

However, last fall’s prayer class and this project brought forth requests that we reconstitute the Wednesday Night Prayer Meeting. I view such requests as a very positive sign for the health of the church body. For now, the Intercessory Prayer Ministry’s foundation will be those who completed the seminars. The five three-person prayer groups have committed to meet once each week to intercede for the new prayer requests and seven priorities mentioned earlier (footnote 14, page 120). The five prayer groups have also committed to ask others to join the intercession ministry. The goal within the next year is for me to again teach these eight prayer seminars so we will have ten intercessory prayer groups trained and interceding on behalf of the lost. The prayer ministry has quickly taken on great importance in the life of the church. Prayer’s growing importance is proven through the action of the church body during a regularly scheduled business meeting on January 16, 2011, to establish the Intercessory Prayer Ministry as an official Team. Teams have approved leaders, develop actions plans and budgets, and report directly to the church of their activities. The recognition and

instituting of the intercessory prayer ministry is a key component in the church regaining its evangelistic fervor.

Due to the recent growth, First Baptist is currently using every room, twice. Unfortunately, there is not a space to designate as the intercessory prayer room. Nonetheless, since the volunteers thrive on praying with each other, I do not see the lack of a dedicated room as a detriment. As most churches, we will make the best of the situation by encouraging the prayer groups to pray together at the church and at each other's homes. What on the surface looks like a setback can be an asset, if handled appropriately. Appendix 9 was provided to the intercessors as a guide to spur their individual and group prayers for the lost. Intercessors will also be furnished through Prayer Central a weekly prayer update; these prayer needs will include requests for salvation as well as emotional, physical, and other spiritual needs.

Personal Interview Questions

The Personal Interview Questions (see Appendix 4) were asked of each participant before the project began and after the eighth prayer seminar concluded. These questions represent the second method of gathering insight into the affect the project had on its participants. The participants answered these five questions on paper, and then we discussed the answers in a group setting. I give a brief synopsis of the volunteers' answers below.

What Is Your Definition of Prayer?

Before the project began, nearly everyone in the group defined prayer as talking to God. Prayer is talking to God, but it is also much more. One man answered,

with incredulity in his voice, that prayer has taken on a whole new meaning for him. He no longer viewed prayer as talking with a God far out there, but he now understands prayer to be a more personal and intimate conversation with God. The group resoundingly agreed that prayer is no longer a chore but a joy to talk *with* God.

What Do You Understand the Connection to Be between Prayer and Evangelism?

When the group was asked this question, one woman blurted out the answer: “Everything!” Another woman chimed in, “If we don’t pray for the lost, they will not be saved.” Overall, the group now seems to understand the grave, spiritual situation in which the lost currently abide. One man noted how the 1 Timothy 2:1-4 passage connects believers’ prayer with God’s will that all be saved. It was refreshing to hear the pathos in the voices of the group as they heartily agreed, “We must pray for the lost!”

Please Describe What You Believe the Role of Prayer Should Be in the Local Church

The group believes intercessory prayer should be treated equally with the objective of worship. One man explained he assumed many in the church were praying, but group intercessory prayer not only provides accountability but it also supplies encouragement to participating church members. I can best describe the participants’ reaction to the question by stating that they were deeply concerned “how” they could bring prayer to the forefront of all the church’s activities and ministries. The volunteers’ answers to this question indicate they are taking ownership of prayer in their own lives as well as in the church.

What Changes Has This Study of Prayer Made in Your Own Life and Prayer Time?

In my estimation, this was the most important question I asked the volunteers. Thus, I asked every person to share with the group how the project had affected their lives. I asked them to be honest and share both positive and negative thoughts, if any. Without exception, all participants admitted the one thing the sermons, seminars, discussion, and group prayer time made abundantly clear was that they must spend more time in prayer. I believe the Scripture passages confronted the participants with the real danger the lost are facing without Jesus Christ. The participants' facial expressions admitting that they must spend more time in prayer looked like the Holy Spirit was convicting them of sin. I pray the Lord will help us all block off more time for intercessory prayer for the lost.

What Can Be Done to Improve Our Church's Commitment to Prayer?

Some in the group suggested we offer the eight prayer seminars again. Others recommended we announce the beginning of the intercessory prayer ministry so those interested can join. After discussing these two options for a few minutes, the group came to realize that it would take the continued efforts of committed church members to enhance the church's commitment to prayer. One person recognized that the contemporary worship service currently includes fifteen minutes of prayer during its extended invitation. Another person questioned why the same amount of time was not given in the traditional worship service. The church's commitment to prayer rises or falls on the individual Christian's commitment to prayer. The group admitted, "it starts with us!"

How Can I Pray for You?

I used this question as a tool to fulfill the fourth goal of the project: to strengthen my intercessory prayer skills for intercessors and evangelizers. This one question occupied a large amount of time, because once the participants knew they could share with me their most cherished needs and prayer requests, they shared things that were going on in their life of which I was completely unaware. Unquestionably, my intercessory prayer ministry was enhanced by spending extra time during the project reading, privately discussing the details with the participants, and then praying over their needs and requests.

Conclusion

Undoubtedly, the project was ordained by God to occur during this period in the life of the church. I believe prayer will be the foundation for the best days ever at FBC Roanoke. The brutal truth is that First Baptist must spiritually wake up and fulfill its call to reach the lost locally, nationally, and internationally! In October 2010, the church celebrated its 136th anniversary. As wonderful as the Homecoming experience was, my greatest concern is far too many members believe First Baptist has been established so long that it will never shut its doors—I strenuously disagree with this mindset. In fact, we are not a generation away from closing the doors—we are less than a decade away if we do not get on our knees and ask for God for mercy. The lost need us to stop navel-gazing and go into the harvest with the sin-freeing message of the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Despite my moments of trepidation, I am encouraged by the congregation's response to the sermons on prayer and to the dozen volunteers who completed the prayer

seminars. I *shudder* to think that a fledgling, nascent intercessory prayer ministry carries with it the hopes and future of First Baptist Church. Yet, I believe it is true. Intercessory prayer is integral to the church fulfilling the Great Commission, and prayer is also the antidote to weariness and lethargy in the church body. The church exists to reach the lost. Christ is our Savior and strength. He promised to be with us always, and I am confident that He who is reviving His people through prayer will lift our hearts up to Him and send us out to the lost. All the glory is His, forever!

CHAPTER 5
EVALUATION AND CONCLUSION

Introduction

This chapter is designed to evaluate the effectiveness of the project. I believe the project successfully reached its knowledge, attitude, and skills goals. I greedily desire for the four goals of the project to have been perfectly met, but time will be the judge how far-reaching the effects will be within the life of First Baptist Church of Roanoke, Texas. Without question, the project has deeply impacted this pastor and the volunteers who committed to learn how prayer and evangelism are integral to the growth of First Baptist Church. The spiritual impact goes far beyond the knowledge, attitude, and skills goals, as important as they are. The project's impact has led to at least three changes: deeper intimacy with each other, a greater desire to spend time in prayer, and more urgency and resolve to intercede for the salvation of the lost. It is hard to put into words all that has happened, but I have also noticed a change in the confidence of those who completed the seminars—their countenances seem to be more relaxed and confident in holy God's control and in their developing prayer lives. The guilt so evident at the beginning of the seminar has been replaced with a renewed commitment and determination to spend time in prayer, daily. Not only have we learned God's plan of salvation is for all humanity, but we have also discovered He sovereignly initiates, hears, and then answers our prayers according to His will and always in our best interest. My

prayer is that God will use the project to lay the foundation for a spiritually white-hot church infected with the “must needs” desire to fulfill the Great Commission in the power of the Holy Spirit. I am asking God for a radical revival of the church, and myself, for His glory!

Evaluation of the Project’s Purpose

The purpose of this project was to develop an intercessory prayer ministry that supports and encourages personal evangelism at First Baptist Church, Roanoke, Texas. I came to serve as pastor in September 2005 (2.5 years after starting the D.Min. program), and the change of ministry from Georgia to Texas caused both a setback and a reevaluation of the type of project I needed to do.¹ I spent the next two years prayerfully seeking how to meet the greatest needs in First Baptist Roanoke. Ironically, the church’s two greatest needs turned out to be an intercessory prayer ministry and a weekly evangelistic ministry.² Thus, the purpose of the project was specifically tailored to meet critical needs in the church.

The objectives of prayer and evangelism are written in First Baptist’s Constitution as two of six priorities to help the church fulfill the Great Commission. However, words on a document tucked away in a dusty office desk have no relevance, affect, power, or accountability. Ultimately, my desire was to use the project to move the praxis of prayer and evangelism from the faithful few into the church body, at large.

¹My original project was Church Consulting with a church in Brunswick, GA.

²I knew developing an intercessory prayer ministry was needed when I met with the Pastor Search Committee in July 2005. When I asked them who the prayer warriors were in the church, I received blank stares and no answer. I believe that conversation laid the groundwork for this project in both their and my heart.

Twelve church members (representing 8 percent of our weekly worship attendance) are now equipped with knowledge of the critical relationship between prayer and evangelism and the skills to confidently engage in intercessory prayer for others. I look forward to observing the long-term effect the volunteers will have on the church body as they pray for the lost, our church membership, and for the Lord to send more workers into His harvest (Matt 9:38). The group that just completed the eight training seminars told me that if I will teach the seminars again, they will seek and find church members to attend. I will join them searching for more intercessors and evangelizers so we may see more of the lost come to faith in Jesus Christ.

Evaluation of the Project's Goals

This project had four goals. The first goal was to teach Christians their spiritual responsibility to fulfill the Great Commission as proclaimed by Jesus Christ in Matthew 28:18-20. The second goal was to teach believers the connection between intercessory prayer and evangelism. The third goal was to equip intercessors to participate in both personal and group intercessory prayer that supports evangelism, and the fourth and final goal of the project was to strengthen my personal intercessory prayer ministry on behalf of evangelizers and the lost.

An Evaluation of the First Goal

In order to lay a solid evangelistic foundation for the developing intercessory prayer ministry, the first goal of the project was to teach the volunteers their spiritual responsibility to share Jesus with the lost, thereby, seeking to fulfill the Great Commission (Matt 28:18-20) Jesus gave His church before He ascended to Heaven. The

first goal was accomplished by teaching believers they are called by God and sent with Christ's authority and personal presence into the world to evangelize the lost. The Great Commission does not represent a change in God's loving plan of salvation for humanity; rather, it is the fulfillment of it. Believers have the privilege and joy of partnering with God (junior partners, of course) as He fulfills His will.

An Evaluation of the Second Goal

The second goal of the project was to teach believers about the connection between intercessory prayer and evangelism. Believers learned that consistent intercessory prayer empowers and supports the church's ministry of evangelism. The objective of this goal was attained by instructing believers to approach intercessory prayer with the confidence that God will hear and answer their prayers when they are in His will. The second goal changed many of the volunteers' perception of God: He is a God of love, and His love is not abstract—it is intimate and personal.

An Evaluation of the Third Goal

The third goal was to equip intercessors to participate in both personal and group intercessory prayer that supports evangelism. The church's evangelism ministry is on the front line of the spiritual battle, and evangelizers must pray to receive both spiritual protection and vitality to reach the lost and backslidden in Roanoke's rapidly growing population. Though intercessors in the project admitted they have a long way to go to please God in their prayer life, the consensus is that they have begun a journey that will last them a lifetime. I believe we met the third goal by including the dual responsibilities of praying alone and in groups at the end of each seminar.

An Evaluation of the Fourth Goal

The fourth and final goal of the project was to strengthen my personal intercessory prayer ministry on behalf of evangelizers and the lost. I created a plan that challenged my intercessory prayer skills for the church's faithful evangelizers and for the lost they will visit. I set aside one hour every morning to pray for and pray with seminar evangelizers and intercessors. Through prayer, the Lord is instilling in me an unquenchable attitude of intercessory prayer that engenders urgency for the salvation of the lost. The attitude and participation of First Baptist Church in intercessory prayer will not move beyond its pastor's commitment to and praxis of prayer. The fourth goal, though imperfectly met, reflects my obedience to the Holy Spirit to become a man committed to evangelistically-oriented intercessory prayer.

Strengths of the Project

The culmination of the project exposed numerous strengths. The strengths listed below are culled from the post-seminar Intercessor Prayer Survey and the Personal Interview Questions answered during a group discussion. The first strength observed is the newfound awareness of the connection between prayer and evangelism. Although we cannot explain how prayer affects another person's salvation, the Bible communicates prayer really makes a difference (1 Tim 2:1-4; Col 4:2-4; Matt 9:38). Second, instead of the project creating confusion and division, the prayer groups grew closer to each other in purpose and unity. Those who completed the seminars have a much stronger bond with each other than when we started. Another strength observed through the project is the volunteers are praying more and waiting to hear from God rather than moving ahead without His approval. Finally, through the discussions in class, these intercessors are

much more comfortable asking others if they can pray for them. A wholesale change has occurred in the participants: from being impatient and able to pray only very short periods of time, the Holy Spirit has changed the volunteers' hearts to such an extent they now seek prayer requests and spend more time with God.

Weaknesses of the Project

The project also had its weaknesses and limitations. The foremost weakness of the project was time. I am especially glad each prayer seminar lasted two hours, because the extra time provided for in-depth studies that otherwise could not have been done. However, the full impact of the eight sessions on the volunteers and church may not be felt for years to come. Due to the short duration of the research project, I cannot define the results fairly and accurately.

Each of the eight seminars was intense, but it was necessary in order for us to cover all the material and change the volunteers' beliefs and worldviews about prayer. Another weakness of the project is in relation to finding and designating a room to be "Prayer Central." Though God did raise up a mature prayer coordinator who is busy building the prayer ministry, I did not have a list of responsibilities prepared in advance. A final weakness of the project is its fifteen-week duration. Nonetheless, I am confident God will overcome the time restraints and cause His strength to be made perfect in our weakness (2 Cor 12:9) for His glory.

What Would I Do Differently

The first thing I would do differently is administer the 55 Statement Intercessory Prayer survey to the entire church before beginning the sermon series on

Prayer: Foundation for Effective Evangelism, Ministry, and Life. Then, after the sermon series and eight seminars were completed, I would administer the same intercessory prayer survey to both the church body and volunteers who completed the prayer training seminars. Prior to administering the survey, to preserve anonymity, I would discreetly ask volunteers to note at the top of their surveys the word “Volunteer.” The notation would allow me to measure the response differential between the volunteers and the church body, at-large. I would like to know if attitudes and beliefs of the volunteers who completed the eight prayer seminars were more affected than those who did not attend.

Second, I would have liked to stay in one room throughout all eight seminars. All of our facilities are used in multiple ways; I chose a room where we least likely to change, but we did have to change. The change in rooms unsettled the group’s comfort.

The third thing I would do different is work through the Nominating Team to discover, select, and then train a prayer coordinator who could help with the training seminars. The prayer coordinator’s passion for praying for the lost and sick would create interest and galvanize more potential intercessors into commit the intercessory prayer ministry.

Finally, the fourth thing I would do is send a handout home following each seminar that prepared each volunteer for the next seminar. Thus, each volunteer could read the information at their leisure, make notes, and be prepared to ask questions in class. Further, while reading the assignment during each week, I would supplement the volunteers’ growth by having them meet at least once to pray with their prayer groups. Reading information about prayer and then applying what you read is a way to overlap blessings to the volunteer and to the church.

Theological Reflections

Throughout Pastoral Ministries classes at Florida Baptist Theological College and Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, professors kept “preaching” the pastor is the key to the prayer ministry in the local church. *Now* I get it! The project has taught me that prayer is the least utilized ministry in the church, but our past mistakes do not have to control our future choices. The struggle for the church today is that most Christians believe they “know” how to pray. Perhaps most know how to pray, but I am convinced every Christian can improve their knowledge and skills in intercessory prayer.

I believe the project’s efforts to develop an intercessory prayer ministry to support evangelism at First Baptist Church of Roanoke, Texas, has strong theological standing. Isaiah’s prophesy that Israel would be a light to the Gentile nations was fulfilled by Jesus Christ. Jesus came seeking and finding the lost; He shared with them the Heavenly blessing of forgiveness and salvation. Jesus, the Messiah, was not a new plan from God; rather, He was the fulfillment of God’s promise to Abram that “in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed” (Gen 12:3). Now, Jesus sends His disciples out into the world with His message of God’s forgiveness and salvation: Christians are Christ’s ambassadors who carry His gospel ministry of reconciliation to the lost (2 Cor 5:18-21).

I also believe the project is theologically sound because the gospel message we carry is useless unless the Holy Spirit preveniently works in the heart of the hearers. The Holy Spirit works before, during, and after the moment of salvation. Prayer is one of the means God uses to accomplish His will; the lost need our prayers for the gospel to have open doors and reach them. Prayer is central to fulfillment of the Great Commission.

Personal Reflections

The entire time I was researching and writing this project, I was extremely concerned what I believed the Lord was leading me to write would offend brothers and sisters in Christ. Being drawn into the Calvinism or “Openness of God” discussion was not something I relished. However, after completing the research I am greatly assured that the sovereign God who has revealed Himself in Jesus Christ is totally supreme and unrelentingly reliable in His promises to His children.

Even though the project was specifically related to the integral connection between prayer and evangelism, many Doctrine of God questions I had placed on the back burner pushed their way forward and were addressed (see chap. 3). Though I have not found all the answers, the project has brought greater biblical clarity with the following questions:

1. If humanity truly has free will, while lost and in bondage to sin how can we actually make anything close to a free choice?
2. If God is *not* sovereign, who is?
3. If the future is unknown to God, is God lying when He says: “I am God, and there is no other; I am God, and there is none like Me, *Declaring the end from the beginning, And from ancient times things that are not yet done* [italics mine], Saying, ‘My counsel shall stand, And I will do all My pleasure’” (Isa 46:9-10).

Next, I have learned that intercessors must constantly remain on guard against being filled with spiritual pride. God hates arrogance and pride. Close to arrogance and pride is the anthropocentric nature to use prayer as a utilitarian instrument: I am referring to the thought of asking God to grow the church so I will get the glory. The devil works very hard to pervert and lead us to improper use of prayer. Integrity in prayer is difficult, but we know we are lifting up genuine prayers when the answer to the prayers are for His

glory, not for our recognition and pleasure. Prayer, that is, conversation with God, is the means God uses to draw us near Him so He can guide us to know and obey His will.

Prayer is a means to grow and to know God.

Conclusion

The purpose of this project was to develop an intercessory prayer ministry that supports and encourages personal evangelism at First Baptist Church, Roanoke, Texas. In chapter 1, the research project and the church's context are explained in detail. In the first part of chapter 2, a Biblical Basis for God's Worldwide Plan of Evangelism from the Old Testament is explained. In the second part of chapter 2, a Biblical Basis for Developing an Intercessory Prayer Ministry to Support Evangelism in the New Testament Church is provided. In chapter 3, God's sovereignty and the Alpha-Omega Prayer are presented as a foundation for effective evangelistic intercession. Chapter Four contains the details of the project's history, step-by-step.

After all these years, it is now time to put a seal on the project. Though the project is completed, I pray the impact and ramifications of it will continue in the lives of the individuals who attended the seminars and in our church. The story of the project has been the story of my life as a Christian: nothing has come easy. Every word and every line seems to have been contested by an unseen foe. More than ever, I understand the Holy Spirit has been with me, and all that has been accomplished was worth every sacrifice, "pound of flesh", and minute of prayer!

My greatest prayer is the research project, the five sermons, and the eight training seminars lay the foundation for a revival the likes of which First Baptist Church Roanoke, Texas, has never experienced. I believe God has put the desire and the

smoldering need to pray in the hearts of His children in First Baptist Church of Roanoke, Texas. If I am right about God placing the burning desire to intercede in the conscious awareness of the church body, then He is going to move in a mighty way that will upset some, offend others, and bring joy to the hearts of those who have long waited to experience His marvelous power and grace being poured out. But make no mistake, God is moving:

When God has something very great to accomplish for his church, 'tis his will that there should *precede* it the extraordinary prayers of his people And 'tis revealed that when God is about to accomplish great things for his church, he will begin by remarkably pouring out the spirit of grace and supplication God seems now, at this very time, to be waiting for this [prayer] from us. When God is about to bestow some great blessing on his church, it is often his manner, in the first place, so to order things in his providence as to shew his church their great need of it, and to bring 'em into distress for want of it, and so put 'em upon crying earnestly to him for it.³

I want First Baptist Church of Roanoke, Texas, to be the “church” Edwards refers to, though I know he is referring to the church-at-large. I close this project, my life’s greatest personal and spiritual challenge, and blessing, with great excitement and enormous solace in the One True Living God who loves me and gave His Son for me.

I love *You* Lord! Thank You for the privilege of being Your child.

³Jonathan Edwards, “Some Thoughts Concerning the Revival,” in *The Great Awakening*, vol. 4 of *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*, ed. C. C. Goen (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1972), 517-18.

APPENDIX 1

RESEARCH INSTRUMENTS

AGREEMENT TO PARTICIPATE

The research in which you are about to participate is designed to measure your understanding and beliefs about biblical principles of evangelism and prayer. This research is being conducted by Bruce A. Barber for the purpose of implementing his Doctor of Ministry project. In this research, you will be asked to answer a questionnaire and participate in personal interviews before and after the project's implementation. You will also be asked to attend and participate in eight training seminars on intercessory prayer. Any information you provide will be held *strictly confidential*, and at no time will your name be reported, or your name identified with your responses. *Participation in this study is totally voluntary, and you are free to withdraw from the study at any time.*

By your completion of this questionnaire and participation in pre- and post-project interviews, you are giving informed consent for the use of your responses in this research.

APPENDIX 2

RESEARCH INSTRUMENTS

INSTRUCTIONS AND IDENTIFICATION

Instructions: The following questions are designed to assess your understanding and beliefs about intercessory prayer and evangelism in First Baptist Church, Roanoke, Texas. For comparison purposes only, I request that you list the numbers of your home address below (1045 Main Street = 1045; P.O. Box 123 = 123). Thank you for participating in the project and completing the survey.

Identification: _____

1. I am in the following age bracket :
Young adult (18-39): 17% Median adult (40-54): 33% Senior adult (55+): 50%
2. I am:
Male: 42% Female: 58%
3. I am *not* sure if I have received Jesus Christ as my Savior:
Yes: 87% No: 17%
4. I am sure I have received Jesus Christ as my Savior:
Yes: 100%
5. I have been a Christian for this long (in years):
3 or less: 8% 4-9: 0% 10-19: 17% 20⁺: 75%
6. I am a member of First Baptist Church, Roanoke, Texas:
Yes: 100%
7. If a member First Baptist Church, Roanoke, Texas, how many years?:
Under 3: 41% 4-8: 17% 9-15: 17% 16-25: 17% 26⁺: 8%
8. Activity level at First Baptist Church, Roanoke, Texas:
Highly Inactive: 17% Somewhat Inactive: 25% Somewhat Active: 8%
Highly Active: 50%
9. I agree to pray ten minutes every day during this project:
Yes: 100%

APPENDIX 3

RESEARCH INSTRUMENTS

PRE AND POST-SEMINAR INTERCESSORY PRAYER SURVEY RESULTS¹

	SD ²	D	TTD	NS	TTA	A	SA
1) The members of our congregation have a clear sense of the overall mission and purpose of the church.	<u>0%</u> 0%	<u>0%</u> 0%	<u>25%</u> 0%	<u>42%</u> 50%	<u>33%</u> 17%	<u>0%</u> 33%	<u>0%</u> 0%
2) Intercessory prayer can make a difference in my spiritual life.	<u>8%</u> 0%	<u>0%</u> 0%	<u>0%</u> 0%	<u>0%</u> 0%	<u>0%</u> 0%	<u>34%</u> 17%	<u>58%</u> 83%
3) I still have too much to straighten up in my life before I can become involved in intercessory prayer.	<u>42%</u> 58%	<u>42%</u> 25%	<u>8%</u> 0%	<u>8%</u> 0%	<u>0%</u> 0%	<u>0%</u> 17%	<u>0%</u> 0%
4) I think extended prayer time during worship services will help evangelism.	<u>0%</u> 0%	<u>8%</u> 0%	<u>17%</u> 8%	<u>41%</u> 8%	<u>0%</u> 17%	<u>17%</u> 8%	<u>17%</u> 58%
5) I believe the primary responsibility of the pastor is to minister to the needs of the members of our congregation.	<u>8%</u> 0%	<u>25%</u> 8%	<u>17%</u> 8%	<u>0%</u> 25%	<u>33%</u> 33%	<u>8%</u> 25%	<u>9%</u> 0%
6) Evangelism and outreach are the responsibilities of the pastor.	<u>25%</u> 17%	<u>8%</u> 25%	<u>33%</u> 8%	<u>8%</u> 0%	<u>8%</u> 17%	<u>9%</u> 8%	<u>9%</u> 25%

¹The numerator refers to the percentage of responses in the pre-seminar administration of the Intercessory Prayer Survey. The denominator refers to the percentage of responses in the post-seminar administration of the Intercessory Prayer Survey.

²Each of the fifty-five statements had seven possible responses: Strongly Disagree, Disagree, Tend to Disagree, Not Sure, Tend to Agree, Agree, Strongly Agree.

7)	The primary mission of the church is to reach the lost and disciple them.	<u>0%</u> 0%	<u>0%</u> 0%	<u>17%</u> 0%	<u>0%</u> 0%	<u>17%</u> 0%	<u>8%</u> 25%	<u>58%</u> 75%
8)	Prayer in our church should focus more upon the spiritual needs of the lost.	<u>8%</u> 0%	<u>16%</u> 0%	<u>0%</u> 17%	<u>17%</u> 0%	<u>42%</u> 25%	<u>17%</u> 33%	<u>0%</u> 25%
9)	The mission of the church should be to reach the lost of the community with the Gospel of Jesus Christ.	<u>0%</u> 0%	<u>0%</u> 0%	<u>0%</u> 0%	<u>8%</u> 0%	<u>0%</u> 0%	<u>42%</u> 42%	<u>50%</u> 58%
10)	Our church needs to set goals for membership growth.	<u>0%</u> 0%	<u>25%</u> 17%	<u>17%</u> 17%	<u>8%</u> 17%	<u>25%</u> 16%	<u>17%</u> 33%	<u>8%</u> 0%
11)	Each Sunday School class needs to set goals for membership growth.	<u>0%</u> 0%	<u>17%</u> 8%	<u>17%</u> 8%	<u>25%</u> 17%	<u>25%</u> 42%	<u>16%</u> 25%	<u>0%</u> 0%
12)	Our church has an urgency to share the gospel with its community.	<u>0%</u> 0%	<u>17%</u> 8%	<u>17%</u> 0%	<u>8%</u> 25%	<u>17%</u> 33%	<u>25%</u> 17%	<u>16%</u> 17%
13)	Evangelism and outreach are the responsibilities of every church member.	<u>0%</u> 0%	<u>0%</u> 0%	<u>0%</u> 0%	<u>8%</u> 0%	<u>0%</u> 8%	<u>25%</u> 25%	<u>67%</u> 67%
14)	Our church has a strong burden for the lost of its community.	<u>0%</u> 0%	<u>8%</u> 0%	<u>25%</u> 0%	<u>33%</u> 50%	<u>34%</u> 8%	<u>0%</u> 25%	<u>60%</u> 17%
15)	The primary role of the pastor is to provide leadership and to equip church members for doing ministry.	<u>0%</u> 0%	<u>8%</u> 0%	<u>0%</u> 0%	<u>0%</u> 0%	<u>25%</u> 33%	<u>25%</u> 42%	<u>42%</u> 25%
16)	Our church needs to place greater emphasis upon biblical stewardship.	<u>0%</u> 0%	<u>0%</u> 0%	<u>0%</u> 0%	<u>25%</u> 0%	<u>25%</u> 42%	<u>33%</u> 50%	<u>17%</u> 8%
17)	The primary mission of the church is to care for the needs of its members.	<u>8%</u> 0%	<u>17%</u> 8%	<u>33%</u> 25%	<u>17%</u> 0%	<u>8%</u> 33%	<u>8%</u> 26%	<u>9%</u> 8%
18)	Our church has a strong missions emphasis.	<u>0%</u> 0%	<u>8%</u> 0%	<u>42%</u> 8%	<u>17%</u> 25%	<u>17%</u> 42%	<u>0%</u> 8%	<u>16%</u> 17%
19)	The evangelism training of the church should focus on methods and how to present the gospel.	<u>0%</u> 0%	<u>0%</u> 0%	<u>8%</u> 0%	<u>9%</u> 17%	<u>50%</u> 33%	<u>33%</u> 42%	<u>0%</u> 8%

20) Our church needs to place greater emphasis upon mission work.	<u>0%</u> 0%	<u>0%</u> 0%	<u>17%</u> 0%	<u>33%</u> 17%	<u>25%</u> 17%	<u>25%</u> 58%	<u>0%</u> 8%
21) The ministries of the church should mainly be for the unbelievers in our community.	<u>8%</u> 8%	<u>17%</u> 8%	<u>25%</u> 25%	<u>8%</u> 8%	<u>8%</u> 25%	<u>25%</u> 26%	<u>9%</u> 0%
22) I believe the church will lead more people to faith in Jesus Christ if it has a weekly outreach ministry.	<u>0%</u> 0%	<u>0%</u> 0%	<u>8%</u> 0%	<u>33%</u> 8%	<u>8%</u> 25%	<u>42%</u> 17%	<u>9%</u> 50%
23) God has called me to share Jesus Christ with the lost.	<u>0%</u> 0%	<u>0%</u> 0%	<u>0%</u> 9%	<u>8%</u> 0%	<u>8%</u> 0%	<u>9%</u> 18%	<u>75%</u> 73%
24) I pray for God to give me daily witnessing opportunities.	<u>0%</u> 0%	<u>9%</u> 17%	<u>9%</u> 0%	<u>0%</u> 0%	<u>18%</u> 17%	<u>27%</u> 25%	<u>37%</u> 41%
25) Intercessory prayer is a priority in my life.	<u>0%</u> 0%	<u>8%</u> 0%	<u>8%</u> 0%	<u>17%</u> 0%	<u>33%</u> 42%	<u>9%</u> 25%	<u>25%</u> 33%
26) I pray often for my lost friends and family members.	<u>0%</u> 0%	<u>0%</u> 0%	<u>8%</u> 0%	<u>0%</u> 0%	<u>25%</u> 25%	<u>42%</u> 25%	<u>25%</u> 50%
27) I consistently share my faith with the lost.	<u>0%</u> 0%	<u>8%</u> 8%	<u>50%</u> 17%	<u>8%</u> 8%	<u>17%</u> 25%	<u>8%</u> 33%	<u>9%</u> 9%
28) I need someone to help me to learn how to pray more effectively.	<u>0%</u> 0%	<u>0%</u> 0%	<u>17%</u> 36%	<u>8%</u> 18%	<u>33%</u> 0%	<u>33%</u> 37%	<u>9%</u> 9%
29) I pray more than ten minutes per day.	<u>0%</u> 0%	<u>0%</u> 0%	<u>18%</u> 7%	<u>9%</u> 25%	<u>9%</u> 26%	<u>37%</u> 8%	<u>27%</u> 33%
30) The Bible teaches that God responds to the prayers of His people.	<u>0%</u> 0%	<u>0%</u> 0%	<u>0%</u> 0%	<u>0%</u> 0%	<u>8%</u> 0%	<u>9%</u> 9%	<u>83%</u> 91%
31) I believe our church needs an intercessory prayer ministry.	<u>0%</u> 0%	<u>0%</u> 0%	<u>0%</u> 0%	<u>8%</u> 0%	<u>17%</u> 9%	<u>50%</u> 27%	<u>25%</u> 64%
32) I pray less than ten minutes per day.	<u>9%</u> 36%	<u>45%</u> 18%	<u>9%</u> 18%	<u>9%</u> 19%	<u>9%</u> 9%	<u>9%</u> 0%	<u>9%</u> 0%
33) Prayer in our church should focus primarily upon the physical needs of church members.	<u>17%</u> 0%	<u>17%</u> 42%	<u>33%</u> 33%	<u>25%</u> 8%	<u>0%</u> 0%	<u>0%</u> 17%	<u>8%</u> 0%

34) Prayer is a two-way conversation between myself and God.	<u>0%</u> 9%	<u>0%</u> 9%	<u>0%</u> 0%	<u>0%</u> 0%	<u>0%</u> 0%	<u>42%</u> 9%	<u>58%</u> 73%
35) I believe we must pray for the spiritual needs in the Roanoke areas.	<u>0%</u> 0%	<u>0%</u> 0%	<u>0%</u> 0%	<u>0%</u> 8%	<u>0%</u> 0%	<u>58%</u> 33%	<u>42%</u> 59%
36) I will participate in the intercessory prayer ministry of our church.	<u>0%</u> 0%	<u>0%</u> 0%	<u>0%</u> 0%	<u>17%</u> 8%	<u>17%</u> 8%	<u>50%</u> 25%	<u>16%</u> 59%
37) God has answered some of my specific prayers.	<u>0%</u> 0%	<u>0%</u> 0%	<u>0%</u> 8%	<u>0%</u> 0%	<u>8%</u> 0%	<u>25%</u> 17%	<u>67%</u> 75%
38) Evangelism is made more effective through intercessory prayer.	<u>0%</u> 0%	<u>0%</u> 0%	<u>0%</u> 0%	<u>17%</u> 9%	<u>0%</u> 0%	<u>25%</u> 0%	<u>58%</u> 91%
39) I will commit to pray thirty minutes each week in the intercessory prayer room.	<u>0%</u> 0%	<u>0%</u> 9%	<u>0%</u> 0%	<u>42%</u> 9%	<u>25%</u> 27%	<u>17%</u> 18%	<u>16%</u> 37%
40) I regularly pray for the leadership of our church.	<u>0%</u> 0%	<u>0%</u> 0%	<u>10%</u> 0%	<u>0%</u> 0%	<u>10%</u> 8%	<u>40%</u> 67%	<u>40%</u> 25%
41) The evangelism training of the church should include home visitation.	<u>0%</u> 0%	<u>0%</u> 0%	<u>0%</u> 0%	<u>36%</u> 0%	<u>18%</u> 9%	<u>9%</u> 73%	<u>37%</u> 18%
42) I believe prayer will give our church a sense of urgency to reach the lost.	<u>0%</u> 0%	<u>0%</u> 0%	<u>0%</u> 0%	<u>9%</u> 0%	<u>9%</u> 0%	<u>36%</u> 27%	<u>46%</u> 73%
43) Intercessory prayer will help our church fulfill The Great Commission.	<u>0%</u> 0%	<u>0%</u> 0%	<u>0%</u> 0%	<u>0%</u> 0%	<u>0%</u> 0%	<u>45%</u> 27%	<u>55%</u> 73%
44) Worship, evangelism, and prayer must be the foundational priorities of the church.	<u>0%</u> 0%	<u>0%</u> 0%	<u>0%</u> 0%	<u>0%</u> 0%	<u>0%</u> 0%	<u>30%</u> 36%	<u>70%</u> 64%
45) I believe God is satisfied with my prayer life.	<u>9%</u> 9%	<u>27%</u> 9%	<u>37%</u> 18%	<u>18%</u> 36%	<u>0%</u> 18%	<u>9%</u> 10%	<u>0%</u> 0%
46) I believe I should regularly pray for the salvation of the lost.	<u>0%</u> 0%	<u>0%</u> 0%	<u>9%</u> 0%	<u>0%</u> 0%	<u>0%</u> 9%	<u>27%</u> 27%	<u>64%</u> 64%

47) I believe participating in an intercessory prayer ministry will make me more aware of the unchurched and lost.	<u>0%</u> 0%	<u>0%</u> 0%	<u>0%</u> 0%	<u>9%</u> 0%	<u>27%</u> 0%	<u>28%</u> 27%	<u>36%</u> 63%
48) I do not feel prepared to witness to lost people.	<u>0%</u> 10%	<u>0%</u> 20%	<u>40%</u> 40%	<u>20%</u> 10%	<u>20%</u> 10%	<u>10%</u> 0%	<u>10%</u> 10%
49) I believe prayer supports evangelistic effectiveness.	<u>0%</u> 0%	<u>0%</u> 0%	<u>0%</u> 0%	<u>9%</u> 0%	<u>9%</u> 0%	<u>18%</u> 27%	<u>64%</u> 73%
50) Prayer helps me discern the will of God for my life.	<u>0%</u> 0%	<u>0%</u> 0%	<u>0%</u> 0%	<u>9%</u> 0%	<u>0%</u> 9%	<u>18%</u> 36%	<u>73%</u> 55%
51) I have witnessing opportunities on a daily basis.	<u>0%</u> 0%	<u>0%</u> 9%	<u>27%</u> 27%	<u>18%</u> 9%	<u>18%</u> 18%	<u>18%</u> 18%	<u>19%</u> 19%
52) Reading my Bible enhances my prayer life.	<u>0%</u> 0%	<u>0%</u> 0%	<u>0%</u> 0%	<u>9%</u> 0%	<u>0%</u> 18%	<u>27%</u> 18%	<u>64%</u> 64%
53) I have set aside time to pray each day.	<u>0%</u> 0%	<u>0%</u> 9%	<u>20%</u> 9%	<u>10%</u> 0%	<u>10%</u> 18%	<u>20%</u> 9%	<u>40%</u> 55%
54) Prayer will help the church discern the will of God for its ministries.	<u>0%</u> 0%	<u>0%</u> 0%	<u>0%</u> 0%	<u>10%</u> 0%	<u>0%</u> 0%	<u>20%</u> 36%	<u>70%</u> 64%
55) I believe the growth of our church depends upon prayer.	<u>0%</u> 0%	<u>0%</u> 0%	<u>0%</u> 0%	<u>0%</u> 0%	<u>9%</u> 0%	<u>18%</u> 18%	<u>73%</u> 82%

APPENDIX 4

RESEARCH INSTRUMENTS

PERSONAL INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

These open-ended questions are designed to learn in greater detail each participant's understanding and beliefs about evangelism and prayer. These same six questions were asked before and after the project.

1. What is your definition of prayer?
2. What do you understand the connection to be between prayer and evangelism?
3. Please describe what you believe the role of prayer should be in the local church.
4. What changes has this study of prayer made in your own life and prayer time?
5. What can be done to improve our church's commitment to prayer?
6. How can I pray for you?

APPENDIX 5

A SERIES OF FIVE SERMON OUTLINES ON PRAYER: FOUNDATION FOR EFFECTIVE EVANGELISM, MINISTRY, AND LIFE

Sermon 1

Title: Oh Lord, You're Beautiful

Text: Zechariah 8:20-23

- I. Humanity Seeks Its Own Way (Zech 8:20-22)
 - A. Israel's sin led to captivity
 - B. Captivity had two God-ordained results
 - 1. It caused Israel to desire to return to land and Yahweh
 - 2. It elicited Israel's commitment to serve Yahweh, alone
- II. God is Found through His People (Zech 8:23)
 - A. Yahweh called Israel to be a light to the Gentile nations (Isa 49:1-6)
 - B. Jesus Christ is the fulfillment of God's promise to Abraham that "in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed" (Gen 12:3)
 - C. The prophecies of Zechariah are fulfilled in Christ's church

Sermon 2

Title: Let's Roll!

Text: Matthew 28:18-20

- I. Jesus Authorizes Disciples to Go (Matt 28:18)
- II. Jesus Sends His Disciples (Matt 28:19)
 - A. It is a continuation of God's loving plan of salvation
 - B. It establishes Christianity as primarily a missionary religion
- III. Jesus Strengthens His Disciples (Matt 28:20)
 - A. Jesus is central to the church's existence
 - B. Jesus superintends disciples' strength and effectiveness

Sermon 3

Title: Throwin' Down!

Text: Ephesians 6:18-20

- I. Prayer is Spiritual Warfare (Eph 6:18)
 - A. Demonic forces are arrayed and prepared for battle
 - B. All types of prayers are needed for the battle
 - 1. Prayer is defensive in nature
 - 2. Prayer is offensive in nature
 - C. The lost need believers' prayers
- II. Prayer Seeks God's Provision (Eph 6:19)
 - A. Prayer undergirds the gospel moving forward
 - B. Prayer helps evangelizers effectively reveal the mystery of the gospel
 - C. Prayer helps the church unify to fulfill the Great Commission
- III. Prayer Supports Evangelizers (Eph 6:19-20)
 - A. The church must intercede for the lost and evangelizers
 - B. Prayer provides evangelizers necessary boldness and protection

Sermon 4

Title: God's Divine Design

Text: Colossians 4:2-4

- I. Prayer Must Be Vigilant (Col 4:2)
 - A. Prayer is to be chockfull of thanksgiving
 - B. Prayer is to be earnest
 - 1. Importunate Widow (Luke 18:1-8)
 - 2. Importunate Neighbor at Midnight (Luke 11:5-8)
 - B. Prayer is integral to the lost receiving salvation
 - 1. We pray because of Christ's command
 - 2. We pray with Christ's compassion
 - 3. We pray because God is patient and longsuffering (2 Pet 3:9)
- II. God Provides Opportunities (Col 4:3)
 - A. Physical limitations do not hinder God's message
 - B. Geographical barriers do not hinder God's message
 - C. Spiritual conflict does not hinder God's message
- III. God Empowers Effectiveness (Col 4:4)
 - A. Believers rejoice because God is in control
 - B. Believers pray with confidence because God is in control
 - 1. Pray for the lost to experience (Kerr & Mulder)
 - a. A stab of conscience
 - b. A shame of inward uncleanness
 - c. A deep remorse for sin
 - d. An awareness of being lost and alone
 - 2. Pray for the lost to receive Jesus Christ as Savior (John 16:8)

Sermon 5

Title: Impact Zone!

Text: 1 Timothy 2:1-4

- I. All Types of Prayers for All People (1 Tim 2:1-3)
 - A. Intercessory prayers for everyone to be saved (2:1-2)
 - B. Gospel invitation to everyone so everyone may be saved (2:4)
 - C. Sacrificial ransom paid by Christ so everyone can be saved (2:5-6)
- II. Intercessors Become Evangelizers (1 Tim 2:4)
 - A. Participate in the reconciliation ministry (2 Cor 5:18-19)
 - B. Participate in calling workers into the spiritual harvest (Matt 9:38)
 - C. Participate in harvesting the field of souls

APPENDIX 6

“Oh Lord, You’re Beautiful!”

We have studied Old and New Testament texts declaring God’s loving plan of salvation for the *whole* world. **Every person** that *genuinely* repents of their sin and calls upon the name of the Lord Jesus Christ **will be saved!** Intercessory prayer is necessary for evangelizers to be used by God as instruments of reconciliation and for the Gospel to have open doors to move forward and be received by the lost. Earnest and vigilant prayer is one of the means God uses to move His Kingdom forward. When you pray, you are part of this awesome and holy process! We all must pray!

Zechariah was a sixth century B. C. prophet to the postexilic remnant of Judah that had returned from captivity to their land that now lay in ruins. Zechariah’s ministry was contemporary with the Prophet Haggai’s and the rule of Darius I of Persia (522-486 B.C.). Zechariah’s name fittingly means, “*Yahweh remembers.*”¹ In **Zechariah 8:20-23**, we find at least two principles regarding God’s sovereign dealings with humanity.

I. FIRST PRINCIPLE: Humanity Seeks Its Own Way (Zech 8:20-22)

A. Sin perverts and separates man from holy God. God’s covenant people quickly became idolaters while living in the Promised Land given to them as part of their inheritance (Isa 44:9-20). Thus, God sent Israel and Judah into captivity to punish their

¹R. K. Harrison, Howard F. Vos, and Cyril J. Barber, eds., *The New Unger’s Bible Dictionary*, rev. Merrill F. Unger (Chicago: Moody, 1988), s.v. “Zechariah.”

wickedness and haughty idolatry. While God wanted Israel and Judah to take His loving plan of salvation to the ends of the world, Judah and Israel settled for being rebelliously comfortable right where they were.

B. Captivity had two God-ordained results. First, captivity caused Israel to desire to return to the Promised Land AND their covenant God. Second, captivity elicited from their repentant hearts a commitment to worship and serve God, alone. F. B. Meyer states, “The captivity altered everything. They entered it deeply imbued with polytheism, and left it the strictest monotheists the world has ever seen.”² In Zech 8:7-8 and 8:18-19, Yahweh declares He will soon save the House of Judah. The fasts they now endure in captivity will soon become thanksgiving feasts celebrating their deliverance and return home to Palestine (8:18-19). Zechariah is guiding the nation to praise God for His sovereign love and mercy.

II. SECOND PRINCIPLE: God is Found through His People (Zech 8:23)

A. Yahweh expected Israel to be a light that attracted the nations to Him. Having again experienced the goodness and sovereign power of God for themselves, repatriated Israel was to be an ambassador who could testify to the nations about the covenant love and sure salvation of God.

B. Zechariah prophesies, “And it shall come to pass That just as you were a curse among the nations, O house of Judah and house of Israel, So I will save you, and you shall be a blessing” (Zech 8:13). God brought forth His Son out of the lineage of Israel to provide salvation for the world, and in Jesus Christ, God fulfills His promise to Abram

²F. B. Meyer, *The Prophet of Hope: Studies in Zechariah* (Chicago: Revell, 1900), 70.

and Israel. George Klein writes,

The nations coming back to Jerusalem to worship the Lord refers back to the Abrahamic covenant when God promised the patriarch that “all peoples on earth will be blessed through you” (Gen 12:3). The Abrahamic covenant assured Israel that he will become the channel of blessing between the Lord and the nations of the world.³

Carol and Eric Meyers agree:

This concluding section has progressively included in its eschatology the Jerusalemites, the Judahites, the neighboring groups, and now the more distant foreign nations. Such an ever broadening circle of people to be accounted for as part of Yahweh’s redemptive scheme makes Zechariah one of the most universalistic of all the prophets.⁴

Zechariah’s prophecy is “the most Messianic, the most truly apocalyptic and eschatological of all the writings of the OT.”⁵

In Zechariah, there is an “already” but “not yet” component. Physically, God did save Israel and return him home, but Zechariah’s proclamation is also nothing less than an advance promise of the gospel which the New Testament identifies as the coming of Christ.⁶ Merrill Unger states,

Zechariah contains more allusions to the coming Messiah, both in His first and second advents and future millennial glory, than all the other Minor Prophets combined Chapter 8 gives one of the clearest descriptions of the future restoration of Jerusalem (8:1-5) and the return of Israel to the land (8:6-8), with a remarkable setting forth of the future prosperity of the land and people Israel during the reign of Christ subsequent to His second Advent (8:9-23).⁷

³George L. Klein, *Zechariah*, New American Commentary, vol. 21B (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2008), 247.

⁴Carol L. Meyers and Eric M. Meyers, *Haggai, Zechariah 1-8*, Anchor Bible (New York: Doubleday, 1987), 441.

⁵George L. Robinson, “Book of Zechariah,” in *International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, ed. James Orr (Chicago: Howard-Severance, 1915), 3136.

⁶Richard D. Phillips, *Zechariah*, Reformed Expository Commentary (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R, 2007), 181.

⁷Harrison, Vos, and Barber, *The New Unger’s Bible Dictionary*, 1381.

Jesus brought salvation to Israel (Matt 15:24) through the shedding of his precious blood on Calvary. Three days later, God resurrected Jesus from the grave. The resurrected and exalted Christ gives the church its evangelistic mission to take God's plan of salvation to the world (Matt 28:18-20). Richard Phillips succinctly states,

The mission of the church is to lead other people to God Evangelism is personal as we see the picture of ten men coming to one of God's people (Zech 8:23) to follow him in the way of the Lord . . . [because] evangelism takes the eternally attractive and effective message of God to the lost masses (Rom 10:14-15).⁸

Jesus has commanded His church to *go* to the lost, everywhere. As the local church obeys the command to evangelize their Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and ends of the earth (Acts 1:8), God's presence is manifested and He will supernaturally draw the lost to Himself.

It is interesting that the final voice in the message of Zech 7-8 is a voice of outsiders attracted to God's presence in the midst of his covenant community (8:23). It is a subtle reminder to those of us feasting in the midst of God's community that he has called us to a mission beyond ourselves.⁹

God's salvation was proclaimed as part of man's judgment in the Garden of Eden (Gen 3:15), but the source of world missionary activity is rooted in God's call to Israel in the Old Testament.¹⁰ Taking salvation to the spiritually lost is God's loving plan and driving passion throughout the Old and New Testaments. Walter Kaiser incisively writes,

The purpose for Israel as a missionary force originated in the universal scope of the message in Genesis 1-11 and more definitively in Genesis 12:3. But it would achieve its clearest definition in the "Servant of the Lord" passages in Isaiah 42 and

⁸Phillips, *Zechariah*, 187.

⁹Mark J. Boda, *Haggai, Zechariah*, NIV Application Commentary (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2004), 407.

¹⁰Kaiser, *Mission in the Old Testament*, 9.

49, where Israel, who was also that “Servant,” was appointed to be a light to the nations The nations and Gentiles were envisioned as equal recipients of that same Good News from the very beginning of time along with Israel herself.¹¹

C. In closing, the church is grafted into Israel through the person and work of the Messiah, Jesus Christ. The church is a living community called to penetrate and evangelize the nations of the world with the gospel. In so doing, the prophecies of Zechariah are fulfilled in the church.¹² In his book *The Supremacy of God in Preaching*, John Piper summarizes God’s consistent purpose for worldwide evangelism: “Someday the earth will be filled with the glory of the Lord, echoing and reverberating in the white-hot worship of the ransomed church gathered in from every people and tongue and tribe and nation.”¹³

First Baptist Church Roanoke, Texas, your part is to earnestly pray and humbly obey Jesus Christ’s command to reach out to the lost and be the light that draws them to the living God. Let me be honest with you: it will be costly for each one of us to obey the Great Commission. The cost will require our faithful tithes and offerings. However, the cost to fulfill the Great Commission will also be emotional, social, physical, and mental. The devil walks around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour, but greater is He who is in us than He who is in the world. We *can* obey Jesus, and together what God will accomplish through our faithful efforts will be astonishing. We love Christ! We preach Christ! However, each one of us must live in such a way that our lost family members, friends, neighbors, and work associates see Jesus in us and say, “*Oh Lord,*

¹¹Ibid., 33, 40.

¹²Boda, *Haggai, Zechariah*, 399.

¹³John Piper, *The Supremacy of God in Preaching* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1990), 27.

You're Beautiful!" God will see to it that they come, but we all must do your part: Love!

Pray! Go! Win souls for Jesus!

APPENDIX 7

18 REASONS FOR UNANSWERED PRAYER

John Edmiston

James 1:5-8 (NKJV), “If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all liberally and without reproach, and it will be given to him. But let him ask in faith, with no doubting, for he who doubts is like a wave of the sea driven and tossed by the wind. For let not that man suppose that he will receive anything from the Lord; he is a double-minded man, unstable in all his ways.”

There are four basic categories of reasons why your prayers are not answered other than “the sovereignty of God.”

- Spiritual sins - doubt, hypocrisy, pride, flippancy etc
- Poor relationships - rudeness, unforgiveness, malice, anger, wrath, divisiveness.
- Major sin - things categorized as “doing evil” (1 Cor 6:9,10)
- Praying amiss - lack of persistence, not fasting, not using Jesus’ name etc.

James 1:5-8	Doubting God	Deciding to believe what God says and acting on it
James 4:2	Not asking God in the first place but trying to obtain it by quarreling	Ask God in prayer for your needs
James 4:3	Asking wrongly (worldly pleasures, etc.)	A distinct separation from the world/not loving it
1 Peter 3:7	Treating your wife in an inconsiderate manner	Living with her in an understanding way
1 Peter 3:12	Doing evil	Be righteous
1 Peter 4:7	A flippant attitude to holy things	Being serious and watchful
Matthew 6:5,6	Hypocritical attention-seeking	Pray in private to God not publicly for show
Matthew 6:5	Using vain repetition (Buddhist prayer wheels, etc.)	Pray concisely knowing that God is hearing and knows your needs
Matthew 18:19	Lack of unity especially among Christian leaders	Agreement & fellowship

Mark 9:29	Some situations need fasting as well	Spiritual discernment and a disciplined life
Mark 11:25,26	Unforgiveness	Forgive whoever has offended you from the heart
Luke 18:1ff	Lack of persistence	Do not lose heart/give up
Luke 18:10 ff	Spiritual pride	Humble yourself before God
1 Timothy 2:8	Wrath/anger	Live peaceably in prayer
1 John 5:14	Not according to God's will (God's broad moral will is meant here)	Ask within the bounds of Scripture
John 15:7	An erratic life that seldom "abides" in God.	Abide in Jesus words and let them abide in you
John 14:13,14	Not asking "in Jesus' name" (asking in the will and clear purposes of Jesus and with His designated authority)	Ask in Jesus' will for God's purposes with a sense that the authority comes from God not you
John 16:26,27	Not believing in Jesus.	The Father loves those who believe in his Son and will answer their prayers as a result.

You will probably find two or three of the above in your own life. Write them down and write down a plan for doing something about them. Start with asking God for forgiveness for those things and appeal to Him to hear and answer your prayers.

Prayer. "Lord we are so weak in many ways. Forgive us our sins and clear us of guilt in our praying. If it was not for Jesus we would not be heard at all. Teach us to pray in ways that are good and acceptable so that we may be heard before Your throne and be answered swiftly. Amen."

APPENDIX 8

INTERCESSOR'S PRAYER REQUESTS FOR PASTOR

NAME: _____

DATE: _____

PERSONAL REQUESTS:

MINISTRY REQUESTS:

SALVATION REQUESTS:

APPENDIX 9

WHY PRAY FOR THE LOST?

To understand how desperately dependent the lost are upon intercessor's earnest and vigilant intercessory prayers, the following questions are offered to prompt intercessors to have the compassion of Jesus Christ for the lost who are "weary and scattered, like sheep having no shepherd" (Matt 9:36).

1. How much has sin affected humanity's ability to . . .
 - a. Know right from wrong
 - b. Do good instead of bad
 - c. Know God
 - d. Know God loves me
 - e. Be born again
2. Can a lost person break free from the bondage of sin?
3. Where does the conviction of sin and the need for forgiveness come from?
4. How does a sinner receive forgiveness and come to faith in Jesus Christ?
5. How imperative is it that I pray for the lost?
6. What should I specifically pray for the lost to come to salvation?¹
 - a. A stab of conscience
 - b. A shame of inward uncleanness
 - c. A Deep remorse for sin
 - d. A heightened awareness of being lost and alone

¹Hugh T. Kerr and John M. Mulder, eds., *Famous Conversions: The Christian Experience* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1983), x.

APPENDIX 10

TEACHING NOTES FOR EIGHT PRAYER SEMINARS

Seminar 1

The purpose of this seminar is to familiarize the volunteers with this project. This project is attempting to meet the dire need of prayer support for evangelistic outreach.

- I. Welcome, Open with Prayer
- II. Introduction to the Project
 - History behind the project. The volunteers have heard snippets of what we are doing and why we are doing it, but they need to personally “own” why we need an intercessory prayer ministry.
 - A. Title of the Project
 - “Developing an Intercessory Prayer Ministry to Support Personal Evangelism at First Baptist Church Roanoke, Texas.”
 - B. Purpose of the Project
 - To develop an intercessory prayer ministry that will support and encourage evangelism at First Baptist Church Roanoke, Texas.
 - C. Four Goals of the Project
 - 1. The first goal is to teach Christians their spiritual responsibility to fulfill the Great Commission (Matt 28:18-20). It is a knowledge goal.
 - 2. The second goal is to teach believers the connection between intercessory prayer and evangelism. This is also a knowledge goal.
 - 3. The third goal is to equip intercessors to participate in both personal and group intercessory prayer that supports evangelism. This is a skills goal.
 - 4. The fourth goal is to strengthen my personal intercessory ministry on behalf of evangelizers and the lost. In this goal, my intimate knowledge of intercessors and evangelizers lives helps me hone my skills as an intercessor.
 - D. Church and Community Context
 - 1. History of church
 - 2. Location of church
 - 3. Demographic realities and challenges
 - 4. Typology of Church
 - 5. Pastoral leadership style
 - E. Rational for the Project
 - F. Definitions and Limitations

1. Evangelism: “Proclaiming the splendid news concerning Jesus Christ with such power that the speaker brings Christ into human experience and confronts men and women at the point of decision.”¹
 2. Prayer: “An ongoing and growing love relationship with God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.”²
- III. Priorities for FBC Roanoke Intercessors
- A. Pastor and Deacons
 - B. Revival (brokenness, unworthiness)
 - C. Outreach
 - D. In-reach
 - E. All Ministries
 - F. Servants hearts of membership
 - G. Guests, Prospects
- IV. Theological Discussion
- A. Untangling the Enigma of Prayer (Excerpt, Ch. 3, 57-61)
 1. Prayer is difficult to understand and practice, appropriately
 2. Prayer accomplishes God’s specific purposes
 3. Martin and Ginter’s refreshing definition of prayer:

“True prayer starts in the heart of God. He then, through the Holy Spirit, communicates this to our heart. We feel a need to pray for what he has communicated—often even thinking that what we are praying for originated in our own heart and mind. Then we pray this back to the Father through the name of the Lord Jesus and the right He gives us to access the Father in prayer, thus completing the circle of prayer. As the Father hears our prayer, He then answers it, since we are praying according to His will.”³
 - B. This discussion lays the groundwork for intercessors to begin comprehending that God is preveniently active in prayer
- V. Prayer Groups: 10 minutes of intercession
- VI. Assignments
- A. Bring personal prayer requests for pastor
 - B. Bring personal definition of prayer
 - C. Read Isaiah 49:1-6, Psalm 65, Romans 8:26-27
 - D. Prayer Groups pray together once before next Sunday’s seminar
- VII. Close the seminar in prayer

¹ John Connell, “Closing the Deal” (sermon preached 4 April 2008, Calvary in Savannah, GA), 150.

²Richard Foster, *Prayer: Finding the Heart’s True Home* (San Francisco: Harper, 1992), 13.

³ Glen Martin and Dian Ginter, *Drawing Closer: A Step-by-Step Guide to Intimacy with God* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1995), 15.

Seminar 2

- I. Open with Prayer
- II. Review Seminar 1 and its assignments. Turn in personal prayer requests to pastor.
 - A. Read and discuss volunteers' definitions of prayer
 - B. Read and discuss significance of Romans 8:26-27
- III. Leonard Ravenhill, "There is a suffocating indifference in the church to the peril of judgment."⁴
 - A. The lost are in peril because believers are not interceding for them
 - B. Intercessory prayer gives the church a renewed sense of urgency for the perilous condition of the lost
- IV. A Biblical Basis for God's Worldwide Plan of Evangelism from the Old Testament
 - A. Israel a light to the Gentile nations (Isa 49:1-6)
 1. Israel's divine call (Isa 49:1-4)
 2. Israel's evangelistic mission (Isa 49:5-6)
 - B. God Hears Prayer
 1. God Hears His People's Prayers (Ps 65:2a)
 2. God is sovereign (Ps 65:2b)
 - C. Four-fold Voice of God⁵ (Excerpt, not a handout)
 1. Creating voice
 2. Providential voice
 3. Voice of God in His Word
 4. God's voice by the Holy Spirit
- V. Prayer Groups: fifteen minutes of intercession
- VI. Assignments
 - A. Bring personal prayer requests for pastor
 - B. Prayer Groups pray together once before next Sunday's seminar
 - C. Read Luke 19:1-10, Matthew 9:35-38
- VII. Close the seminar in prayer

Seminar 3

- I. Open with Prayer
- II. Review Seminars 1-2 and its assignments. Turn in personal prayer requests to pastor.
- III. Read and Discuss Seven Priorities for Church Intercessors
 - A. Pastor and Deacons

⁴Leonard Ravenhill, *Revival God's Way* (Minneapolis: Bethany House, 2006), 80.

⁵Jonathan Edwards, "The Duty of Harkening to God's Voice," in *Sermons and Discourses 1720-1723*, ed. Wilson H. Kinnach, *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*, vol. 10 (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992), 441-42.

- B. Revival (Brokenness, unworthiness)
- C. Outreach (Evangelism)
- D. In-reach (Church flock)
- E. All ministries (Children, AWANA, Youth, FrontLine, Young/Senior Adults)
- F. Servant hearts within membership
- G. Guests (will spiritually sense the holy presence of God)
- IV. Theological Discussion
 - A. Five Types of Prayer
 1. Adoration (admiration, praise, and devotion to God)
 2. Confession (admission and repentance of sin against holy God)
 3. Thanksgiving (expressing gratitude and appreciation to God)
 4. Supplication/Petition (praying for needs of self and sometimes for others)
 5. Intercession (asking for others; standing in the gap with/for them)
 - B. Eighteen Reasons for Unanswered Prayer (see Appendix 7)
 1. Satan fights those who seek to reach the lost
 2. Satan exploits intercessors and evangelizers' weaknesses to keep them from reaching the lost
- V. A Biblical Basis for Developing an Intercessory Prayer Ministry to Support Evangelism in the New Testament Church
 - A. Jesus Seeks and Saves the Lost (Luke 19:1-10)
 1. The Lost Seek Meaning in Life (Luke 19:1-4)
 2. Jesus Actively Seeks the Lost (Luke 19:5-8)
 3. Jesus Brings Salvation to the Lost (Luke 19:9-10)
 - B. God Sends Evangelizers When We Pray (Matthew 9:35-38)
 1. Jesus Spreads the Gospel Seed (Matthew 9:35)
 2. Jesus Has Compassion for the Lost (Matthew 9:36)
 3. Prayer Petitions God for More Workers (Matthew 9:35-38)
- VI. Discuss Intercessory Prayer Ministry
 - A. Does our church have a need to start an intercessory prayer ministry?
 - B. Will the church establish this ministry as a bonafide Ministry Team?
 - C. Is the Holy Spirit calling a person to be the prayer coordinator?
 - D. Is there a person mature enough in the faith to be the prayer coordinator?
 - E. What are the responsibilities of the prayer coordinator?
 - F. What is the name of the intercessory prayer ministry? "Prayer Central"
- VII. Prayer Groups: fifteen minutes of intercession
- VIII. Assignments
 - A. Bring personal prayer requests for pastor
 - B. Prayer Groups pray together once before next Sunday's seminar
 - C. Read Ephesians 6:18, Zechariah 8:20-23
 - D. Read Limited Sovereignty of God (Excerpt, Ch. 3 62-68)
- VIII. Close the seminar in prayer

Seminar 4

- I. Open with Prayer
- II. Review Seminars 1-3 and its assignments. Turn in personal prayer requests to pastor.
- III. A Biblical Basis for Developing an Intercessory Prayer Ministry (cont...)
 - A. Prayer is a Supernatural Weapon (Ephesians 6:18-20)
 - 1. Prayer is Spiritual Warfare (Ephesians 6:18)
 - 2. Prayer Seeks God's Provision (Ephesians 6:19)
 - 3. Prayer Supports Evangelizers (Ephesians 6:19-20)
 - B. God Draws "Many Peoples" to Himself (Zechariah 8:20-23)
 - 1. Humanity Seeks Its Own Way (Zechariah 8:20-22)
 - 2. God *Is* Found Through His People (Zechariah 8:23)
- IV. Theological Discussion
 - A. The Sovereignty of God and Prayer
 - 1. Discuss Limited Sovereignty of God (Excerpt, Ch. 62-68)
 - 2. Discuss agreements or objections
- V. Prayer Groups: twenty minutes of intercession
- VI. Assignments:
 - A. Bring personal prayer requests for pastor
 - B. Prayer Groups pray together once before next Sunday's seminar
 - C. Read Colossians 4:2-4, 1 Timothy 2:1-4
 - D. Read Absolute Sovereignty of God (Excerpt, Ch. 3, 68-71)
- VII. Close the seminar in prayer

Seminar 5

- I. Open with Prayer
- II. Review Seminars 1-4 and its assignments. Turn in personal prayer requests to pastor.
- III. A Biblical Basis for Developing an Intercessory Prayer Ministry (cont...)
 - A. Effective three-fold approach to Intercessory Prayer
 - 1. Petition God to provide evangelizers with divinely ordained opportunities and boldness to share the gospel with the lost (Colossians 4:2-6)
 - 2. Asks God to supply protection for evangelizers as they go and share the gospel with the lost (Ephesians 6:18-20)
 - 3. As intercessors ask God to open new doors for the gospel and for evangelizers' protection, the Holy Spirit supernaturally causes the gospel to shape and affect the lives of the intercessors, evangelizers, and lost (1 Timothy 2:2-4)
 - B. Prayer Leads to Divine Opportunities (Colossians 4:2-4)
 - 1. Prayer must be Vigilant and Thankful (Colossians 4:2)
 - a. 3 Reasons Prayers Must be Full of Thanksgiving
 - 1) Thanksgiving comes from the intercessor's own joyful salvation experience with God

- 2) Intercessors trust the same salvation she has received by faith is still available to the lost
- 3) Thanksgiving is the antidote to prayer warriors growing weary
- 2. God Provides Opportunities (Colossians 4:3)
- 3. God Empowers effectiveness (Colossians 4:4)
- C. Prayer Impacts Recipients and Intercessors (1 Timothy 2:1-4)
 - 1. Prayers for All People (1 Timothy 2:1-3)
 - 2. Intercessors Become Evangelizers (1 Timothy 2:4)
 - a. 2 Corinthians 5:18-19
 - b. James 1:22
 - 3. John Broadus, “The compassion for perishing men will naturally lead to prayer for laborers, and such compassion and prayer will form the best preparation for going forth to be laborers ourselves.”⁶
- IV. Theological Discussion
 - A. The Sovereignty of God and Prayer (cont...)
 - 1. Review Limited Sovereignty of God (Excerpt, Ch. 3 62-68)
 - 2. Discuss Absolute Sovereignty of God (Excerpt, Ch. 3 68-71)
- V. Prayer Groups: twenty minutes of intercession
- VI. Assignments:
 - A. Bring personal prayer requests for pastor
 - B. Prayer Groups pray together once before next Sunday’s seminar
 - C. Read Matthew 28:18-20
 - D. Read Alpha-Omega Prayer (Excerpt, Ch 3. 71-84)
- VII. Close the seminar in prayer

Seminar 6

- I. Open with Prayer
- II. Review Seminars 1-5 and its assignments. Turn in personal prayer requests to pastor.
- III. A Biblical Basis for Developing an Intercessory Prayer Ministry (cont...)
 - A. Christians are Evangelizers (Matthew 28:18-20)
 - 1. Jesus Authorizes Disciples to God (Matthew 28:18)
 - 2. Jesus Sends His Disciples (Matthew 28:19)
 - 3. Jesus Strengthens His Disciples (Matthew 28:20)
- IV. Theological Discussion
 - A. Discuss Alpha-Omega Prayer (Excerpt, Ch. 3 71-84)
 - 1. God Prepares Hearts to Pray
 - 2. How does God prepare believers’ hearts to pray?
- V. Prayer Groups: twenty five minutes of intercession
- VI. Assignments:

⁶John A. Broadus, *Commentary on the Gospel of Matthew* (Philadelphia: The American Baptist Publication Society, 1886), 211.

- A. Bring personal prayer requests for pastor
 - B. Prayer Groups pray together once before next Sunday's seminar
 - C. Read "The Holy Spirit Initiates Prayer" (Excerpt, Ch. 3 84-103)
- VII. Close the seminar in prayer

Seminar 7

- I. Open with Prayer
- II. Review Seminars 1-6 and its assignments. Turn in personal prayer requests to pastor.
- III. Theological Discussion
 - A. God's loving plan of salvation still remains
 - 1. Israel's call to be a light to the Gentile nations was fulfilled in Jesus Christ's life, death, burial, and resurrection
 - 2. Christians are called by Christ to go to the lost.
 - 3. God's original plan of salvation has not changed—He is still seeking to be reconciled with sinful humanity. Now, because of Christ's sacrifice, all who call upon the name of the Lord will be saved.
 - B. "The Holy Spirit Initiates Prayer" (Excerpt, Ch. 3 84-103)
 - 1. Read and discuss Romans 8:26-27
 - 2. Discuss agreements or objections
- IV. Prayer Groups: twenty five minutes of intercession
- V. Assignments:
 - A. Bring personal prayer requests for pastor
 - B. Prayer Groups pray together once before next Sunday's seminar
 - C. Review "The Holy Spirit Initiates Prayer" (Excerpt, Ch. 3 84-103)
- VI. Close the seminar in prayer

Seminar 8

- I. Open with Prayer
- II. Review Seminars 1-7 and its assignments. Turn in personal prayer requests to pastor.
- III. Theological Discussion (cont...)
 - A. "The Holy Spirit Initiates Prayer" (Excerpt, Ch. 3 84-103)
- IV. Prayer Groups: thirty minutes of prayer
- V. Post Seminar Research Objects Administered
 - A. Administered the post-seminar Intercessory Prayer Survey (55 questions)
 - B. Group shared answers to the six Personal Interview Questions. The outcome to this point is the group is realizing the quality time in prayer with God means they must also commit to put in a great quantity of time in prayer. Nothing in life worthy having is easy!
- VI. Close the seminar in prayer
- VII. Conclusion.

- A. The volunteers have made it *very* clear that “we will” continue meeting to pray and study together so the intercessory prayer ministry will strengthen and grow.
- B. The group will take a one-week break to enjoy the Super Bowl on Feb 6, 2011. They have communicated to me they want to return and commit a great quantity of prayer seeking God’s will for our church.
- C. The tenacity of this group has surprised and invigorated me. God is definitely moving in our hearts. I pray God none of this is in the flesh and that God will send His Holy Spirit to renew and revive our hearts to be His light to the world—all for His glory!

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ABSTRACT

DEVELOPING AN INTERCESSORY PRAYER MINISTRY TO SUPPORT PERSONAL EVANGELISM AT FIRST BAPTIST CHURCH, ROANOKE, TEXAS

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This project developed an intercessory prayer ministry to begin and support an evangelism ministry in a local church. Chapter 1 introduces this project by identifying its goals, context, rationale, and definitions and limitations. First Baptist Church Roanoke, Texas, is in a critical position that is far beyond the church's current conscious understanding. The neighborhood surrounding the church is radically changing, and the church must get on its knees and ask God for guidance and power to reach the Affluent Suburbia households that are unlike it educationally and financially.

Chapter 2 provides the biblical foundations for this project. The first half of this chapter reveals there is an Old Testament basis for God's worldwide plan of evangelism. The prophet Isaiah declares God gave Israel a divine call and an evangelistic mission to be a light to the Gentiles. King David discloses that God is sovereign and he hears and answers the prayers of his people as they seek to obey His revealed will. The Prophet Zechariah declares humanity finds God through His people—for God is with his people. The second half of this chapter reveals the New Testament basis for developing an evangelistic intercessory prayer ministry. The apostle Paul and Jesus taught and

modeled the interrelatedness of intercessory prayer and evangelism. Through earnest, consistent, and compassionate prayer, Christians, in the power of the Holy Spirit, will fulfill the Great Commission.

Chapter 3 addresses the potentially confusing nature of prayer. Deciding upon the absolute sovereignty of God is the first step to clarification and power in prayer. Alpha-Omega Prayer operates with the understanding that the Father calls and prepares hearts to pray while the Holy Spirit initiates prayer within the believer. The benefits of Alpha-Omega Prayer in the local church are its prophetic and priestly roles for intercessors. Alpha-Omega Prayer returns prayer to its rightful foundation, God, and it is a refreshing correction to the current anthropocentric nature of prayer.

Chapter 4 presents a detailed account of preparing the church to develop an intercessory prayer ministry to support the ministry of evangelism. A ten-week in the Discipleship Training class using Ogilvie's *Conversation with God*, a pre-test, a five-part sermon series, eight training seminars, and a post-test were used to equip volunteers and discover the project's affect on those volunteers.

Chapter 5 is an evaluation of the project's effectiveness in reaching its four goals. The project attempted to measure, inform, and positively enhance the volunteers' behavior, feelings, and beliefs about evangelism's dependence upon prayer. Finally, it also shares the paradigm shift this project caused within this writers personal life and ministry. Prayer will never be approached the same!

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