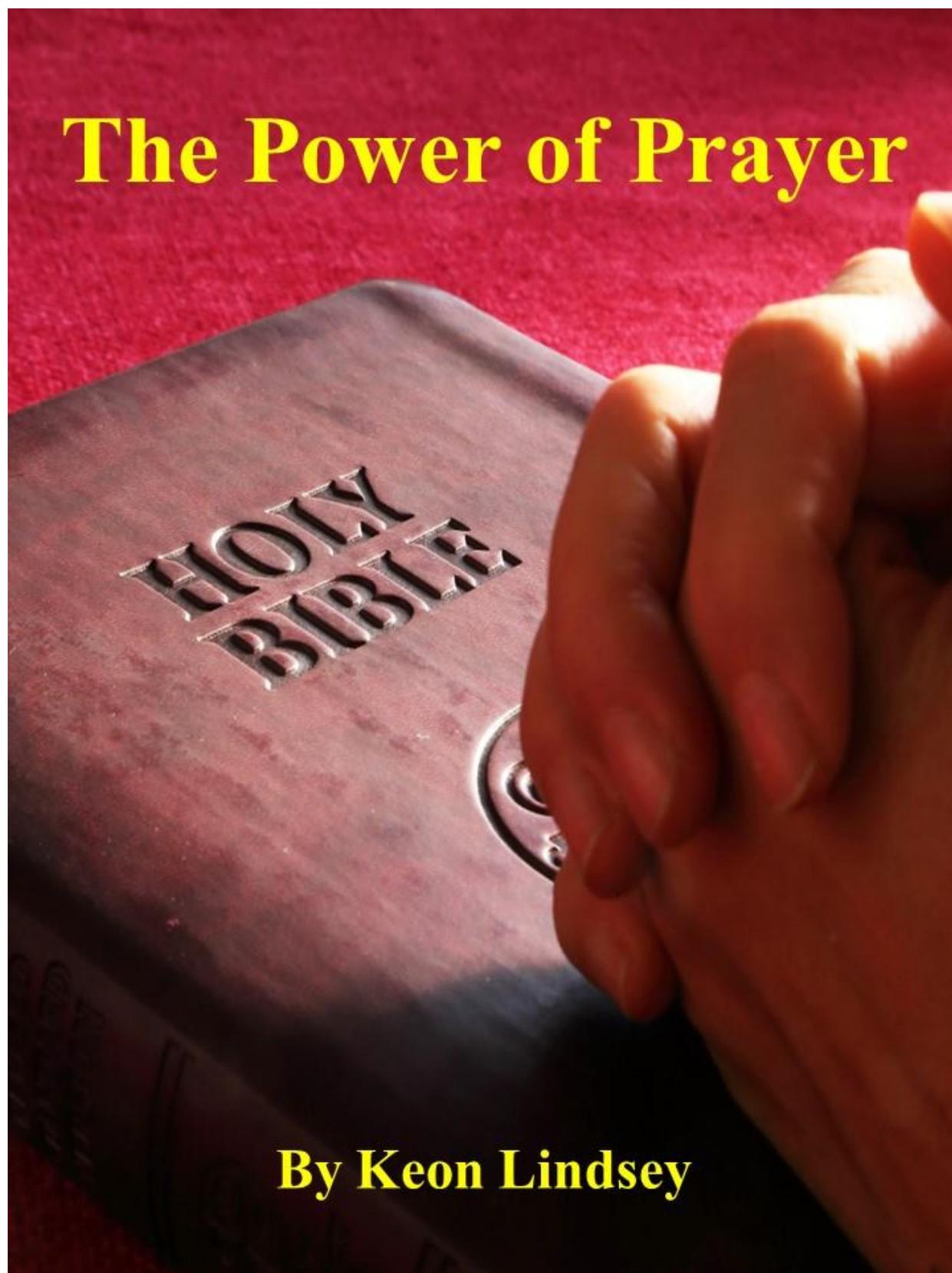


The Power of Prayer



By Keon Lindsey

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Introduction

Where do you turn when times are tough? What is your reaction to great news? What do you do when things go wrong? When you have a good day, what do you do? Many people will turn to a friend or loved one right away, but the Bible tells us what our first reaction should be:

Is anyone among you suffering? Let him pray. Is anyone cheerful? Let him sing psalms. Is anyone among you sick? Let him call for the elders of the church, and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord. And the prayer of faith will save the sick, and the Lord will raise him up. And if he has committed sins, he will be forgiven. (James 5:13-15)

In all seasons of life, the good and the bad, we should turn to God first. Do you have problems? Pray. Are you happy? Sing to God. Are you sick? Pray, because the prayer of faith will rescue the sick and find forgiveness for sin.

We are encouraged many times to pray. Jesus endorsed it.

Then He spoke a parable to them, that men always ought to pray and not lose heart. (Luke 18:1)

Paul encouraged us to pray all the time and not just for ourselves, but

praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, being watchful to this end with all perseverance and supplication for all the saints. (Ephesians 6:18)

Such encouragements help us conclude prayer is very important. However, the question is, why?

Why Do We Need to Pray?

Prayer shows that you know the Creator is bigger than you, your problems, and blessings. Prayer shows humility and that you depend on God. He said,

If My people who are called by My name will *humble themselves*, and pray... (2 Chronicles 7:14) *emphasis added*

Prayer is part of turning away from wrong and turning to the Lord.

If My people who are called by My name will humble themselves, and pray and seek My face, and *turn from their wicked ways*... (2 Chronicles 7:14) *emphasis added*

Prayer is part of communion with God that prepares us to receive blessings.

If My people who are called by My name will humble themselves, and pray and seek My face, and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin and heal their land. (2 Chronicles 7:14) *emphasis added*

Prayer allows you to commune or share with God, just as you would with someone who loves you and has your best interest at heart. If you want to get close to God, because He cares about you, you must spend time with Him in prayer.

What Should We Pray About?

You can talk to God about any and everything. The apostle Peter said,

Casting all your care upon Him, for He cares for you. (1 Peter 5:7)

You share details of your life with friends, why not share them with God? The Lord wants us to talk with Him about the issues we face. In fact, the Bible says,

Let us therefore come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need. (Hebrews 4:16)

Jesus willingly brings our needs to God the Father because He can sympathize with our human condition (Hebrews 4:15). As humans, we usually think of praying for physical needs, so here is an example of how to pray for spiritual needs that Paul gave us. He prayed,

That the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give to you the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of Him, the eyes of your understanding being enlightened; that you may know what is the hope of His calling, what are the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints, and what is the exceeding greatness of His power toward us who believe, according to the working of His mighty power. (Ephesians 1:17-19)

Now that's a prayer! But what did he say? Paul prayed that God would give his friends 1) the spirit of wisdom so they could know God better, and 2) knowledge of the hope of God's calling, inheritance, and power toward them. These are incredible blessings that a pastor could spend a whole sermon trying to explain individually. But for our purposes, you should realize that God is willing to grant spiritual blessings and growth, so we should pray for them.

Does Prayer Really Change Things?

Now we know that we should pray, what to pray for, and how often to pray. But does prayer really change things? James gives an illustration of a righteous person's prayer power.

Elijah was a man with a nature like ours, and he prayed earnestly that it would not rain; and it did not rain on the land for three years and six months. And he prayed again, and the heaven gave rain, and the earth produced its fruit. (James 5:17-18)

Elijah was a human, just like you – he had to eat, sleep, breathe, etc. He had times of weakness and uncertainty. However, he prayed earnestly, seriously, and with conviction that it would not rain. It did not rain for three and a half years! Elijah prayed again that it would rain and it did. He prayed these things to teach the people that they should believe in and serve the one true God. The Lord heard and answered these prayers from a righteous person for a righteous cause. You can read the whole story in 1 Kings 17-18.

Some people will say, of course God answered Elijah’s prayer because he was a prophet. However, James informs us that this is wrong thinking. He said, “Elijah was a man,” in fact, just a regular man. James did not say, “Elijah was a prophet.” The only difference between you and Elijah is that he chose to be serious about believing God. So, can a “regular” person have prayers answered?

At a church youth camp in 2011 my students put the power of prayer to the test. It had been raining off and on for several days, but the day we were to leave there was a steady rain. The prospect of having to make a few hundred kids haul their luggage some distance through the rain to the buses and then ride home three hours soaking wet was not pleasant. Therefore, we prayed the rain would stop so we could load the buses. The rain stopped when it was time to load up and we rode home dry—God provided for our need and answered our request!

Can Prayer Be Limited?

So, prayer is powerful, but can anything limit its potential? Looking back at our opening passage from James, you’ll notice that sin and sickness are related two times in two verses.

And the prayer of faith will save the sick, and the Lord will raise him up. And if he has committed sins, he will be forgiven. Confess your trespasses to one another, and pray for one another, that you may be healed. The effective, fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much. (James 5:15-16)

At first glance it appears to say confess your sins and be healed, so by implication, you are sick because you have sinned. Now before you go and tell someone if they had not sinned they would not be sick, remember that is not always the case. When the disciples assumed a man was born blind because he or his parents had sinned, Jesus shocked them by saying no one had sinned. Instead, the man was blind to bring God glory (John 9:1-3).

So we must not interpret James 5:16 based on our human value system of deserving to be sick or not. Instead, go to the meaning at the spiritual level – confess your sins so God will hear your prayers! How can we be sure this is the certain meaning? Because James’ example in the same verse is the “prayer of a righteous man avails much” or a righteous person’s prayer is powerful

with God (v.16). If you are sinning, you are pushing God away from you. So, don't expect Him to answer your prayers until you confess your sin and come close to Him.

Jesus reminded us of this when He said to be reconciled with those you have wronged before bringing gifts to God (Matthew 5:23-24). Peter also gave a practical example saying,

Husbands, likewise, dwell with them with understanding, giving honor to the wife, as to the weaker vessel, and as being heirs together of the grace of life, that your prayers may not be hindered. (1 Peter 3:7) *emphasis added*

He states simply, if a husband does not treat his wife properly, that man should not expect God to answer his prayers. Wow! Yes, sin and sinful living will block your prayers. So, if we want our prayers to be heard, what can we do?

Let Prayer Change You

This brings us to the most important thing prayer can change – you. It will help you leave your sin and come back to God. The Lord will always hear the prayer of confession.

If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. (1 John 1:9)

We are also told,

Draw near to God and He will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, you sinners; and purify your hearts...Humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord, and He will lift you up. (James 4:8,10)

Get close to God and leave sinful ways behind. Of course, this is a consistent theme in the Bible. For example, Jesus said, abide in Me, then ask as you pray in John 15:7. Abiding in Jesus is as close as you can get!

Now that you're growing in your interest in and resolve to pray, you may have a big question.

Can I Ask God for Anything?

It's great to know that we can pray about everything, but does that mean we can ask for anything? The Gospel of John records three important instances where Jesus discussed asking: John 14:12-14, 15:7, and 16:23-24. We'll examine these individually, and then, collectively.

- A. **Most assuredly, I say to you, he who believes in Me, the works that I do he will do also; and greater works than these he will do, because I go to My Father. And whatever you ask in My name, that I will do, that the Father**

**may be glorified in the Son. If you ask anything in My name, I will do it.
(John 14:12-14)**

In this passage Jesus was comforting the disciples concerning His departure. Since He was leaving, Jesus told the disciples if they believed on Him, they would carry on His ministry doing the same amazing works that Jesus did. This was possible because Jesus was going to send the Holy Spirit (John 14:16-17) who would live in His followers. He would empower the followers to do great things in Jesus name, as they shared the Gospel in Acts 1:8.

Then, Jesus said that whatever was asked in His name would be done so that God the Father would be glorified in the Son. He repeated this showing how important the concept is. What can we ask in Jesus name? Does it mean ask simply for anything or is it anything that will bring God glory? In context, this should refer to the same types of works that Jesus did (from verse 12). Matthew Henry gave a nice explanation of asking, and so, answers these questions for us:

"1. In what way [were the disciples] to keep up communion with, and derive power from him [Jesus], when he was gone to the Father – by prayer... Here is, (1.) Humility prescribed: You shall ask... (2.) Liberty allowed: "Ask any thing, that is good and proper for you; any thing, provided you know what you ask, you may ask; you may ask for assistance in your work, for a mouth and wisdom, for preservation out of the hands of your enemies, for power to work miracles when there is occasion, for the success of the ministry in the conversion of souls; ask to be informed, directed, vindicated."

"2. In what name they were to present their petitions: Ask in my name. To ask in Christ's name is, (1.) To plead his merit and intercession, and to depend upon that plea... (2.) It is to aim at his glory and to seek this as our highest end in all our prayers..."

"4. For what reason their prayers should speed so well: That the Father may be glorified in the Son."¹

The sum then is, to ask whatever will allow us to do the works of Christ and so bring Him glory. God will certainly give us all that is required to do His work (2 Corinthians 9:8).

B. I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit; for without Me you can do nothing. If anyone does not abide in Me, he is cast out as a branch and is withered; and they gather them and throw them into the fire, and they are burned. If you abide in Me, and My words abide in you, you will ask what you desire, and it shall be done for you. By this My Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit; so you will be My disciples. (John 15:5-8)

¹ *Matthew Henry's Commentary*, Vol. 5 "The Gospel According To Saint John" p.898-899, Hendrickson Publishers, Inc., Peabody, Massachusetts 1991.

Here we see that if we abide in Jesus and His words abide in us, we can ask what we want, and it will be done. How can we know what this means? Look at the text around it for context. This is part of a section discussing abiding in or living in Jesus. It provides the example of a branch, which cannot live and be fruitful unless it is attached to a tree. The tree provides support and life-giving water to the branch. Just like a branch, we are to be attached to Jesus and draw life and nourishment from Him so we can produce fruit for God. Our purpose and job is to be fruitful as described in Romans 7:4, Philippians 1:11, and Colossians 1:10. We are to produce spiritual fruits including love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, etc. (Galatians 5:22).

Yet, we are powerless to produce without Jesus. Be sure to notice the connection between your desires and living in Jesus. “If you abide in Me...you will ask what you desire.” Surely if you are properly connected to Jesus, your desires will be pleasing to God and in line with His wishes. Thus, asking in the above section from John is in connection with producing fruit for God so that He is glorified.

To summarize, the way to bring God glory is to bear fruit. The way to bear fruit is to abide in Jesus and ask for it. So, John 15:7 helps us understand our ability to ask found in John 14:13-14. We can and should ask for anything in Jesus name that will allow or help us do those works or produce spiritual fruit that will glorify God!

C. And in that day you will ask Me nothing. Most assuredly, I say to you, whatever you ask the Father in My name He will give you. Until now you have asked nothing in My name. Ask, and you will receive, that your joy may be full. (John 16:23-24)

In this third passage on asking, Jesus said whatever we ask for will be given so that our joy may be full. The context (John 16:19-28) was a conversation about Jesus not being seen by the disciples for a little while and them having sorrow because of His death on the cross. However, He comforted them saying they would see Him again. In the middle of this discussion, Jesus said, whatever you ask God in My name will be given so that you will be joyful. Prior to this, the disciples had not asked anything in the name of Jesus because He was there in person, but when He left, they were to pray to God in His name.

At first this may seem a bit different from the other two passages where we are to ask for the purpose of doing God’s work. Here it seems to say, ask for what you want. However, the context is, ask so that you will have joy or comfort in your sorrow because you miss Jesus. In this instance, you are to ask because of your deep love for Jesus. What would bring you joy while you waited to see someone that you loved? Perhaps, doing something for that person or getting ready to see the individual?

What About My Needs?

From the passages in John, we see that we are to ask for whatever will help us do God’s work. James also let us know that we can ask for what we need:

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. (James 1:5-7)

James said if you have a need, go to God. He told us to ask for wisdom in faith, expecting to receive. Why do we need to expect to get our answer? Doubt will trump your request. James warned us against doubting, because the one who doubts will not receive. Why should you doubt when it is clear that the Lord is generous? Remember King Solomon, who asked for wisdom to serve God's people and was rewarded beyond his dreams? Solomon's request was in keeping with the principles of Jesus' ask instructions. This example deals with wisdom, but the principle should apply to other needs, as well.

Yet, James also warned us about what not to ask for, or why not to ask.

You ask and do not receive, because you ask amiss, that you may spend it on your pleasures. (James 4:3)

This verse tells us that if we ask with wrong motives, just for selfish pleasures, we will not receive anything. This fits logically with the "asks" that are found in the Gospel of John. Jesus instructed us to ask that we might do good. James tells us do not ask that we may do evil.

In one of his letters, John gave a good summary to answer the question, "Can I ask God for anything?"

Now this is the confidence that we have in Him, that if we ask anything according to His will, He hears us. And if we know that He hears us, whatever we ask, we know that we have the petitions that we have asked of Him. (1 John 5:14-15)

The context, seen in 1 John 5:12-13, is a discussion about knowing that you are God's child because you believe in Jesus. Since you are God's child, you can have confidence in asking for things because you know your Heavenly Father hears you. Here we are told to ask for what is in God's will, that is, what will please the Lord. How do you know what will please the Almighty? We will find that answer if we read the Bible regularly, because that is the one place God has explicitly told us about Himself. If reading the Bible seems too intimidating, or if you don't understand what you read, get some help from these great resources:

The Bible Broadcasting Network – <https://BBNradio.org>
Thru The Bible Radio – <https://TTB.org>

Closing Encouragement

We've seen prayer is powerful and that we are urged to use it continually while on Earth to communicate with our Lord in Heaven. Now we know that sin can block prayers, but we can get around that by turning away from sin and asking for forgiveness. We've also seen that we can pray about everything, because our Creator cares about all our needs. Yet, we saw we are specifically to pray for things that bring Jesus glory and help us do His work.

Now how can you make prayer an important part of your day? Perhaps schedule time to focus on the Lord and talk with Him. Developing the habit of a regular time will be beneficial as you can look forward to it, just as you would look forward to a visit with a dear friend. You may also consider reading the book *Praying the Bible* by Donald S. Whitney. It's a great resource on using the Bible to help you pray meaningful non-repetitive prayers.

As a final thought, why not consider some songs from previous eras where people knew the power of prayer and sang about it? We would do well to remember such music that encourages us to pray and tells of the potency of being able to talk with God. Let the first verse of the forgotten hymn "Sweet Hour of Prayer" by William Walford encourage you.

**Sweet hour of prayer! Sweet hour of prayer!
That calls me from a world of care,
And bids me at my Father's throne
Make all my wants and wishes known.
In seasons of distress and grief,
My soul has often found relief
And oft escaped the tempter's snare
By thy return, sweet hour of prayer!**

About the Author



Keon Lindsey is a Christian Author, former Business Consultant, Project Management Professional, and Navy Veteran with a variety of life experiences. He has earned a Black Belt in American Freestyle Karate, worked for himself, flown small airplanes and large jets, graduated from the U.S. Naval Academy and has a master's degree in Aeronautical Engineering.

Yet, what brings Keon lasting satisfaction is studying and sharing God's Word, the Bible. He is a life-long Bible student and has lead Bible studies for adults and teenagers. He lives with his family in Virginia and enjoys jogging and summer fruits. Keon hopes that his writings inspire you to seek true satisfaction as well. His books include:

Have You Heard from God Lately? 30 Messages from Heaven for You

<https://keonlindsey.com/books/have-you-heard-from-god-lately/>

Seeking the Lord, a 30 Day Start to Your Journey

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