

Teacher's Guide

The Believer's Prayer Manual

A Classical Study on Prayer

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Gary D. Mitchell

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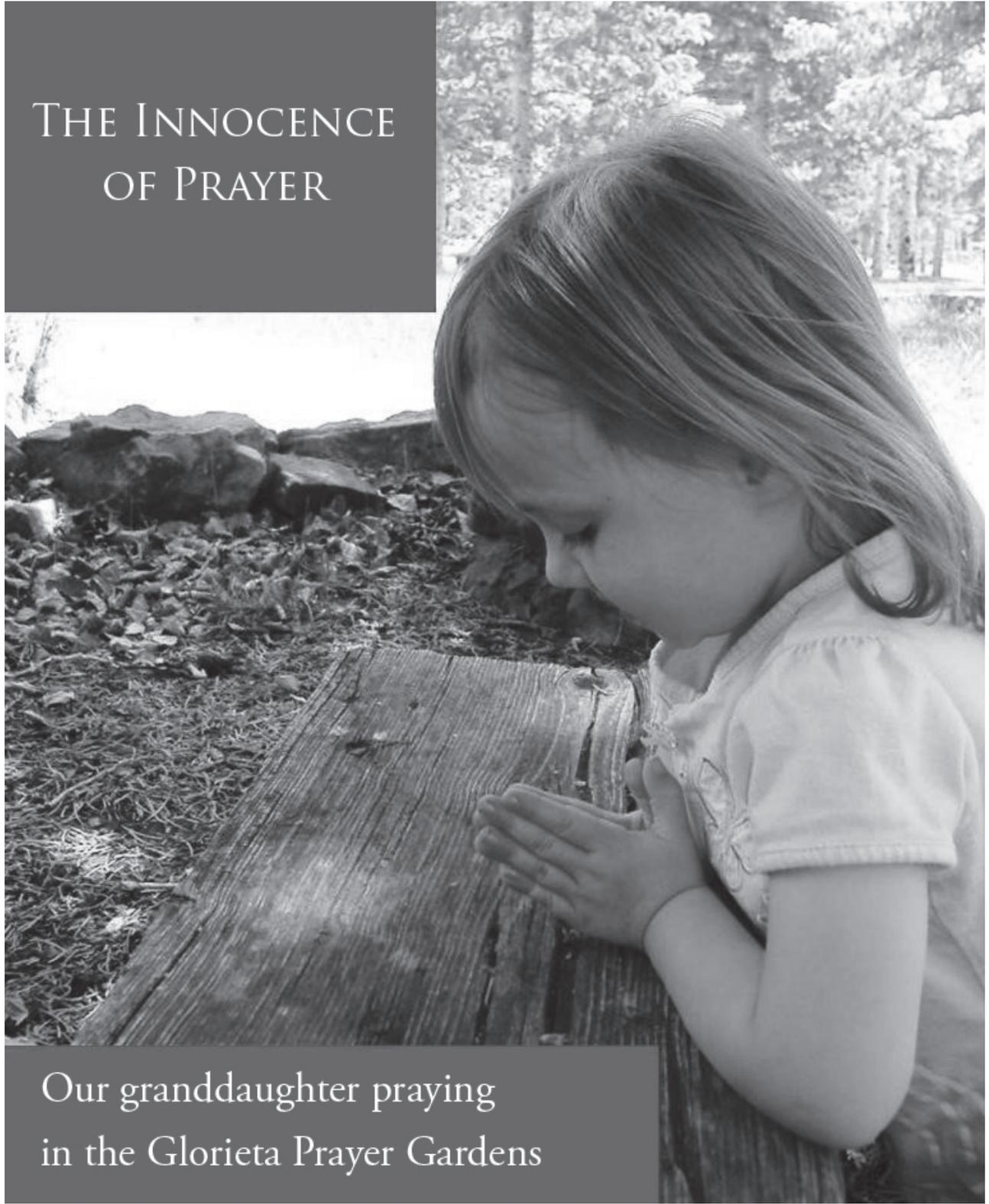
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THE INNOCENCE
OF PRAYER



Our granddaughter praying
in the Glorieta Prayer Gardens

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PREFACE

A General Word about Purpose

Perhaps the one thing that the world needs now more than anything is prayer. In all probability, what it does *not* need is another book on prayer. But, despite all appearances, there is a definitive purpose for this manual.

While researching the vast sea of resources on prayer, I discovered what I felt to be a critical need in this area. That need certainly was not just another book about prayer. It seemed as though anybody who was anybody in Christendom had written a book on prayer. For the most part, these books tended to deal with specific areas of prayer—not with prayer generally. (There are, of course, several notable exceptions.) Whole books treat the matter of intercession, for example. Others discuss primarily the prayers of Jesus, or the teachings of Jesus on prayer, or Bible men and women of prayer. Still others delve exclusively into such areas as fasting, praise, conversational prayer, praying in small groups, or creative meditation, and so on—and justly so, because there is much to be learned.

Even the well-developed books that treat the subject of prayer generally tend to be written from a particular theological vantage point and quite often do not even acknowledge other works on the various aspects of prayer. Some aspects are totally ignored (such as fasting, meditation, men and women of prayer, extended times of prayer).

What seemed to be needed was a manual on prayer that acknowledges and pools together as many of these resources as possible for the layman (and scholar) who wants to delve into the study and practice of prayer. What is presented here is neither an exhaustive nor totally comprehensive work on prayer. Such a task would require several volumes of material. Hopefully, it is a step in the direction of putting together in one manual for church study as many resources and aspects of prayer as is functionally practical.

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A More Personal Word

Since undertaking this endeavor, I have become acutely aware of my own need to “tarry longer in the school of prayer before writing about such a holy exercise” (as Dr. Herbert Lockyer appropriately states in his preface to *The Power of Prayer*).¹ I am by no means an expert in prayer—only a learner in process, a sojourner on his way. If this manual in some way helps another pilgrim on his or her way or stimulates greater desire to pray, it will have accomplished its simple purpose.

¹ Herbert Lockyer, *The Power of Prayer* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1982), 9.

CHAPTER ONE

Introduction: The Biblical Basis and Command to Pray

Simply stated, God's Word commands us to pray.

Seek the Lord and his strength, seek his face continually. (1 Chronicles 16:11)

When thou saidst, Seek ye my face: my heart said unto thee, Thy face, Lord, will I seek.
(Psalm 27:8)

Seek ye the Lord while he may be found, call ye upon him while he is near. (Isaiah 55:6)

Call unto me, and I will answer thee, and shew thee great and mighty things which thou knowest not. (Jeremiah 33:3)

Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you. (Matthew 7:7)

Men ought always to pray, and not to faint. (Luke 18:1)

Praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, and watching thereunto with all perseverance and supplication for all saints. (Ephesians 6:18)

Continue in prayer, and watch in the same with thanksgiving. (Colossians 4:2)

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Pray without ceasing. In every thing give thanks: for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning you. (1 Thessalonians 5:17–18)

I will therefore that men pray every where, lifting up holy hands, without wrath and doubting. (1 Timothy 2:8)

Why Study Prayer?

And when thou prayest, thou shalt not be as the hypocrites are. (Matthew 6:5)

One of his disciples said unto him, Lord, teach us to pray. (Luke 11:1)

Quite often, there tend to be two kinds of reactions to the study of prayer. One reaction is: “Why study about prayer? What is there to know about it? Isn't it just talking to God? Don't confuse me with complicated theories and formulas about prayer.”

The other reaction is: “After looking at all the material available on prayer, I see I really don't know anything at all about prayer. In fact, I don't even know where to start—and besides that, I'm not sure that I want to.” Both reactions are extreme and are designed by Satan to destroy the prayer life of the believer.

There is a tremendous amount of material on the subject of prayer. For example, in Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary's library alone, there are approximately five hundred to six hundred books on prayer (not including prayer books and devotional material). A person could spend nearly a lifetime researching various aspects of prayer, and it would, no doubt, be a worthwhile and rewarding enterprise. But one somehow senses that he would never quite be able to plumb the deepest depths nor explore the inexhaustible mysteries of the simple act of prayer (or of its tremendous power).

That, however, should not cause us to negate the study of prayer nor abandon its practice. On the contrary, it should stimulate us to further study, to plunge us into greater prayer depths, and to spur us on to that special intimacy with our Lord that comes only to those seeking the secrecy of the prayer closet.

A danger, though, befalls the study of prayer. There is a tendency for a person to get so caught up in the study of prayer that he/she neglects the doing of it. Much more important than the study of prayer is the practice of prayer.

G. Campbell Morgan once observed: “Any discussion of the doctrine of prayer which does not issue in the practice of prayer was not only not helpful, it is dangerous.”²

An anonymous writer (quoted by Peter Lord in his *2959 Plan*) advised: “While we are encouraged to come before the throne of grace boldly, we are never encouraged to come thoughtlessly, or lightly, or unprepared. As surely as the priests of Moses' day needed careful preparation for Divine service, so we should be careful to be certain that we come as prepared as we are bold.”³

S. D. Gordon wrote:

The greatest thing anyone can do for God and for man is to pray. It is not the only thing.

² G. Campbell Morgan, *The Practice of Prayer* (Alexandria, LA: Lamplighter Publications, n.d.), 11.

³ Peter Lord, *The 2959 Plan: A Guide to Communion with God* (Titusville, FL: Park Avenue Agape Ministries, 1976), 5.

Introduction: The Biblical Basis and Command to Pray

But it is the chief thing. . . . The great people of the earth today are the people who pray. I do not mean those who talk about prayer; nor those who can explain about prayer; but I mean these people who take time and pray.⁴³

INSTRUCTOR: Encourage a time of group sharing by giving a personal testimony of what prayer means to you and sharing some of your experiences in the study and practice of prayer. Encourage others to share as time permits.

What Is Prayer?

INSTRUCTOR: While still in the sharing time, point out to the group the following definitions of prayer. Divide the group into smaller groups of three or four in each group. Encourage them to discuss the definitions, choose the most agreeable to their understanding (or create their own definition), share why, and have them write it down in their student workbook.

People talk a great deal about prayer. Many have quite different conceptions of just exactly what it is. The following are some notable definitions of prayer:

Webster defines “pray” as: “to implore; to ask for by prayer”; and “prayer” as: “the act of praying; an entreaty; supplication; a humble entreaty, as to God.”

Rosalind Rinker quotes Webster as defining prayer as follows: “To address God with adoration, confession, supplication, or thanksgiving (implying spoken or unspoken).”⁵

James Hastings makes this comment:

The lowest and crudest notion concerning prayer is that it consists in asking God for things, and its value consists in getting the things for which we ask. This is the notion with which childhood always begins, and the only one which childhood can entertain. . . . Plainly, the view of prayer simply as a talisman or as a means of getting things is inadequate to experience.⁶

Hastings then goes on to describe prayer as desire, communion, and petition.⁷

John R. Rice, however, strongly disagrees with that view of prayer:

The late Dr. Harry Emerson Fosdick, noted modernist, says in his book, *The Meaning of*

⁴ S. D. Gordon, *Quiet Talks on Prayer* (New York: Fleming H. Revell Co., 1904), 12.

⁵ Rosalind Rinker, *Learning to Pray* (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, Inc., 1981), 15–16.

⁶ James Hastings, ed., *The Christian Doctrine of Prayer* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1915), 21–22.

⁷ Hastings, *Christian Doctrine*, 23–43.

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Prayer: “There are some who still think of prayer in terms of childish supplications to a divine Santa Claus” (p. 22). Again he says, “Many foolish prayers are offered by the well-meaning but unintelligent with the excuse that they are childlike in their simple trust. . . . To pray to God as though He were Santa Claus is childish.” “Childishness in prayer is chiefly evidenced in an overweening desire to beg *things* from God. . . .” (p. 23). Then this unbeliever, who denies that Jesus was the Virgin-born One paying for our sins, denies the veracity of the Bible, prates about prayer as “friendship with God.” To the modernist, prayer is nice, but does not get things from God. Prayer does not change things.⁸

Then Rice gives his own definition of what prayer is and what it is not: “Prayer is not meditation, not adoration, not even communion in the ordinary sense. Prayer is *asking God for something*. . . . Prayer is always *asking*. It is not anything else but asking.”⁹

Jack Taylor cites an illustration of the definition of prayer from an experience of D. L. Moody. While in Scotland at one time in his life, Moody was speaking to a large gathering of children. In order to get their attention, he asked, “What is prayer?” Not really expecting an answer, he was surprised when a number of hands went up. One youngster, apparently quite familiar with the Westminster Shorter Catechism, spoke up quickly and precisely: “Prayer is an offering up of our desires unto God, for things agreeable to His will in the name of Christ, with confession of our sins and thankful acknowledgment of our mercies.” Moody was greatly, though pleasantly, surprised.¹⁰

Peter Lord, in his *2959 Plan*, adds the following definitions:

Most Christians would simply say, “Prayer is asking things from God.” Prayer is not just a way to get things from God but rather a way to get to know God personally, intimately. Prayer is communion with God. . . . Prayer is a sense of God's presence. . . . Prayer is turning the soul to God (Psalm 25:1). . . . Prayer is loving God. . . . Prayer is knowing God.¹¹

Rosalind Rinker describes prayer:

Prayer is conversation between two who love each other. It is an expression of the human heart in conversation with God.

Prayer from the heart is

raising the heart and mind to God

talking with God

listening to God

waiting in his presence

worship . . . adoration

silence, just being there.

⁸ John R. Rice, *Prayer: Asking and Receiving* (Murfreesboro, TN: Sword of the Lord Publishers, 1974), 48.

⁹ Rice, *Prayer*, 48–49.

¹⁰ Jack R. Taylor, *Prayer: Life's Limitless Reach* (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1977), 161.

¹¹ Lord, *The 2959 Plan*, 2.

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Prayer in ministry is

praying for and with each other
aligning ourselves with God's purpose
God at work in and through us, healing us
loving and caring for others.

Praying together should be

simple, honest, direct
one subject at a time
listening to one another
being compassionate
agreeing
giving thanks.

Rev. Edward J. Farrell starts the list with the title of his book:

Prayer is a Hunger,

a stillness
a growing
a response
a relationship
a journey
a risk.

Carlos Carretto simply states it like this:

You don't have time to pray? Do you have time to love? To pray is to love God and to love people.

The real purpose of prayer is to know God and his love for you. Your response should be total commitment to him forever.¹²

Glenn Sheppard, in his *Prayer for Spiritual Awakening Seminar Manual*, defines prayer as: (1) communication with God (both talking and listening to God); (2) a dialogue between two persons in love with each other; (3) a verbalization of our total weakness, insufficiency, and dependence on God concerning all our efforts; (4) the very breath of spiritual life; and (5) the releasing of the power and authority of God (Matthew 18:18).¹³

¹² Rinker, *Learning to Pray*, 16–17.

¹³ Glenn L. Sheppard, *Prayer for Spiritual Awakening Seminar Manual* (Atlanta Home Mission Board, SBC, 1982), 5–8.

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A Personal Definition of Prayer

Prayer, to me, is

Notes: