

Ron Meyers, PhD



A Publisher Driven by Vision and Purpose

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Meyers, Ron, PhD

Rise to Seek Him / Ron Meyers, PhD

p. cm.

ISBN-10: 0-9771403-6-9

ISBN-13: 978-0-9771403-6-7

1. Religion. 2. Self-improvement. 3. Theology. I. Title

Library of Congress Control Number 2007930271

Copyright © 2007 by Ron Meyers, PhD, All rights reserved. No part of this book may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopying, recording, or by any information storage and retrieval system, without written permission from the author, except for the inclusion of brief quotations in a review.

“The names and characterizations in this book (with the exception of the author’s wife, sons, and other authors referred to in the text) are drawn from the author’s personal experience and rendered pseudonymously and as fictional composites. Any similarity between the names and characterizations of these individuals and real people is unintended and purely coincidental.”

Scripture texts used in this work, unless otherwise indicated, are taken from the *New International Version*; copyright © 1978 by the New York International Bible Society.

First Edition

Published by

Soar with Eagles

1200 North Mallard Lane, Rogers, AR 72756, USA

<http://www.soarhigher.com>

Interior design and illustration by Carrie Perrien Smith

Cover design by T.J. Pike

Edited by Jana Wegner and Michelle Crissup

Illustrations by Matthew McDaniel

Printed in the United States of America

Contents

Introduction	vii
God's Surprise Agenda	1
The Power and Danger of Prayer	11
The Roller Coaster Ride	27
How to Do the Impossible	45
On the Edge of the Experiment.....	65
Better Than Silver and Gold	77
How to Persevere in Prayer	89
Intimacy with Our Heavenly Father	101
The Making of an Intercessor	115
The Motivation of an Intercessor	129
Where Are the Elijahs of the Lord God?	143
The Centerpiece of Ministry	161
Acknowledge God	181
Full Circle Back to Africa	199
Acknowledgements	209

Introduction

On June 14, 2002, my wife, Char, and I departed from Tulsa embarking on a six-month sabbatical/mission trip. It included four cities in South Africa and 74 cities or villages in nine different states in India. We conducted 50 seminars plus numerous other one-time speaking engagements during that period. Half of them dealt with marriage and family studies and the other half with pastoral and Christian leadership training. Even though I had been in professional Christian ministry 37 years at the time, those six months led to new patterns of ministry that are so much more fruitful than previous years that I do not want to go back to the old patterns.

I am compelled to share the experiment with you. I want to tell you how it has brought me into a new dimension of ministry. I am the same person I was before — I still wrestle with all the vices and challenges every Christian faces. Yet, because I am doing one thing differently, I am more fruitful; have more insight; and feel stronger in my spirit. I am amazed that I have more doors of ministry over which I personally have no control open to me, and my sense of partnership with God is keener than I ever imagined possible. Here is what has made the difference — I am praying more!

Much of what educators learn, we gain from books. Nevertheless, most of what I have learned during that sabbatical/mission trip and since, I learned from experience — not books. In *Habits of Highly Effective Christians*, I argued for the legitimacy of learning from experience. *Rise to Seek Him* assumes that legitimacy and carries the discussion forward with a pointed life illustration of how to learn by purposeful experimentation and intentional observation.

Briefly, here are some of the things I learned.

- **Learn from experiments.** Experiments, even in spiritual matters, are a legitimate way to learn. We will never know what God might do through us if we were to pray more unless we experiment. In experimenting with increased amounts of prayer, we are not testing God. Rather, we are attempting to learn about prayer.
- **Pray more.** We never deserve the answers to our prayers, and God is better at answering than we are at

praying. Nevertheless, there is something of a *quid pro quo* element in prayer — God works when we pray. Likewise, there are things He does not do when we do not pray.

- **Change.** Change *is* possible later in life. We are not limited to past ministry patterns if we are willing to try something new. We may unknowingly plateau in our growth and development. If a major spiritual growth spurt, discovery, or new dimension in ministry has not occurred for a while in your life, do something different.
- **Ask.** He is “able to do immeasurably more than we can ask or imagine.” If our lives or careers do not have more happening in them than only what we have asked for or imagined, we are not experiencing all God has for us. If He is not doing “immeasurably more” than we can ask or imagine, we are living beneath our privileges.
- **Pursue God.** The intercessor should be as disciplined, punctual, and diligent in the pursuit of God as any other professional who rises early in pursuit of his vocation.
- **Unlock the Word through prayer.** Nothing is as important to effective Christians — whether full-time ministers or non-professional Christian workers — as prayer and Bible reading or study. People who listen to preachers want to hear from God. Moreover, Christians called to other vocations need the presence and blessing of God on their work and ministries just as much as professional preachers do on theirs.

Too many times, we stop growing too soon. When we reach a mature age and make fewer mistakes, we should remember that our best years are yet ahead of us. Whether it is beginning to run marathons as I did at age 55, discovering ways to make prayer more effective and efficient at age 58, or committing to pray more, new discoveries can lead to new fruitfulness in life.

I have had major life-changing experiences concerning my walk with God at ages 6, 19, 35, and more recently when I was 58. Jesus said the Gardener wants fruitful branches to bear more fruit — he is willing to prune us so we can. God can help even older people learn new things. Personal development has little to do with age and much to do with eagerness or willingness to learn. After 37 years of public ministry, I was about to discover that all over again. You, too, could easily experience a remarkable change.

I am a full-time minister and write from my experience of prayer in my professional career. Yet the principles I learned and present in this book are equally applicable to any Christian who wants God to be more involved in his or her career or business. Full-time Christian ministers are not the only ones God uses greatly and neither are they the only ones who are eager to seek God with their whole hearts. It will not require much of a struggle for you to apply the same ideas to your situation. Prayer helps each one of us have greater success. Increased and better prayer will add much to what God accomplishes through your life.

CHAPTER ONE

God's Surprise Agenda

*"Do not merely listen to the word,
and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says."*

James 1:22

I was a professor of Missions. After six years of teaching in the United States, I applied for and received a sabbatical leave — a break from classroom responsibilities in order to stay abreast of developments in my field.

Several students of mine in the School of Theology and Missions, a graduate school at Oral Roberts University (ORU), had returned to India after graduation. They had given me long-standing invitations to join them in ministry. I made plans to visit three of these students on my sabbatical.

To prepare, I designed questions that would allow me to determine how much of their American educations were applicable in India and what aspects had been the most helpful. My three student-friends are involved in indigenous Indian organizations in which future pastors are being trained for Christian ministry. The invitations to participate in their ministries provided ideal opportunities to research my areas of interest.

The Original Research Intent

One of the more important subjects taught in the Master of Arts in Missions curriculum is Contextualized Theology. In this course, international students are often eager to know what liberty they have to develop a theology that relates to important issues in their cultures better than American theology does. American students, on the other hand, are often surprised to learn that they need to tailor their theologies to address different issues in non-Western cultures.

During my sabbatical, I intended to research the usefulness of the principles I had taught in my Contextualized Theology class. I teach that we should strive for Christian truth that is applicable in the local contexts, so our theologies are both true to the Bible and relevant to the local culture. I wanted to know if I had succeeded.

As in any discipline, there are “arm-chair theorists” and practical field researchers. I wanted to be one of the latter. To grasp the important issues facing today’s missionaries, this meant I should be involved in field work again — the ministry of training pastors in another cultural context.

I heartily accepted my Indian students’ invitations. Through extensive e-mail exchanges from January to May of 2002, we planned schedules, curricula, lectures, pastors’ conferences, and guest teaching commitments.

Happily, my wife Char, at the time a candidate for the Doctor of Education degree at Oral Roberts University, was eager to join me on the trip. She accepted invitations to use her newly acquired educational expertise in the area of Educational Leadership. She was also invited to teach Christian education subjects — her long-standing favorites.

We also responded to another long-standing invitation from Mount Carmel Ministry (MCM) of Johannesburg. They had asked me to return to South Africa for ministry among Bible College students and pastoral staff members. With Char as my traveling companion and ministry partner, it was easy to agree to add a two-month ministry visit in South Africa to the four-month sabbatical/mission trip planned for India.

Teaching on Prayer

On June 24, after being in South Africa for eight days, I began a five-week course on Pastoral Leadership. I presented a lecture on the subject of “The Pastor’s Prayer Life.” In my teaching that day, I challenged the participants to actually increase their own prayer times. Before they could effectively encourage their future congregations to pray, they needed to know how to pray themselves. As they learned to pray, they in turn could say to others, “This is how I pray. Follow my example.”

This is much preferred to saying, “We should pray more.” Teaching by example is more effective than saying we all ought to do something different than we are willing to do ourselves. Platitudes or “must-dos” are weak teaching instruments — they only produce guilt.

With this in mind and as an illustration of teaching by example, I told my students that I spent the first two hours of every day alone with God in prayer. I explained that this was enough time for me personally, and recommended they consider increasing their amount of prayer time according to how they felt God was leading them.

I shared that I use the Lord’s Prayer as an outline. This use of the Lord’s Prayer begins with praise, advances to inviting His Kingdom and will to earth, deals with daily provisions, forgiveness, and confrontation with evil spiritual forces and concludes with praise. Everything I need to pray about can be inserted in this comprehensive outline.

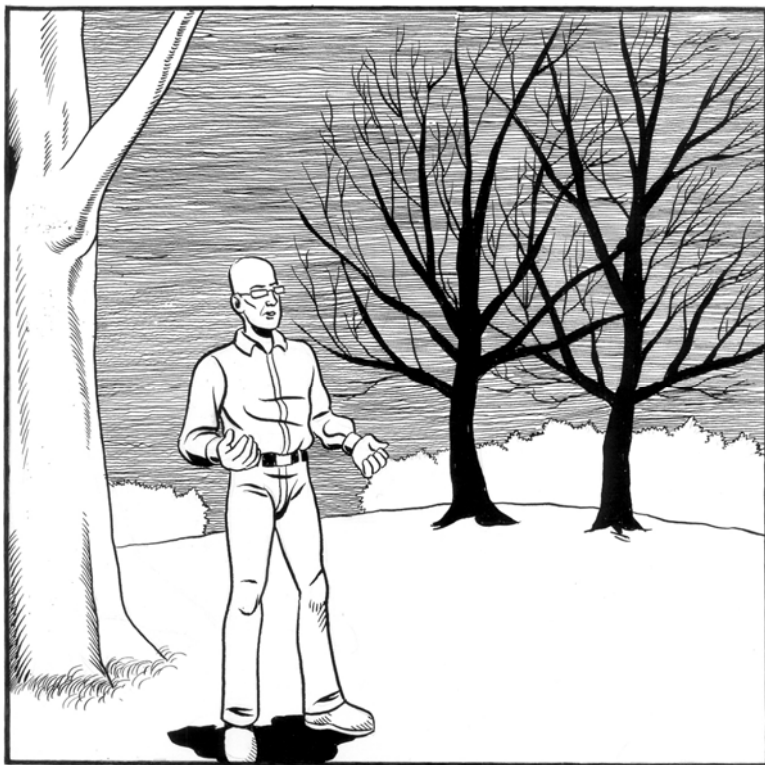
The Beginning of an Experiment in Prayer

About that same time, during my first week working with Mount Carmel Ministry, I had noticed a book called *God’s Generals* by Roberts Liardon in the library of a pastoral staff member. I asked if I could borrow it and began reading this inspiring book. Chapter after chapter, I was impressed by how much time fruitful men and women of God with gifts of miracles and healing spent in prayer. It provided me with a greater challenge than many of the things I had read over the years *about* prayer.

By the second week of teaching Pastoral Leadership — just eight days after telling my class that I thought I was praying enough — I decided to conduct an experiment:

What would happen if a person with a teaching gift began to pray with the same intensity and commitment to intercession demonstrated by the men and women in *God's Generals*?

On July 9, 2002, I made the announcement to Char and the host pastor and his wife with whom we were staying — I would begin spending more time out on the hillside near their home where I was comfortable praying alone. I urged them not to worry about me. I was just conducting an experiment in prayer and would be out four hours each day instead of just two.



That very evening, I was told I had been invited to speak at a Sunday morning service at Grace Bible Church, the largest and most dynamic church in Soweto. Soweto, originally an acronym for Southwest Township, is well-known as the hotbed of racial unrest during the *apartheid* period. The Holy Spirit whispered to me that He was already at work and that this invitation was in response to my experiment in increased prayer. I had already heard of Pastor Mosa Sono and the very powerful work being done at Grace. In fact, when I was speaking previously at

another smaller church in Soweto, I experienced a twinge of disappointment over not being scheduled at Grace Bible Church. O wretched ambition!

By the time I spoke at Grace, I had already preached the message of “The Power and Danger of Prayer” three times in South Africa. The sermon was well received, and I was becoming familiar with the right way to express each thought. However, I was in no way prepared for what happened at Grace.

Char ministered in music with an uplifting segment of worship music. Once she finished, I was introduced and I walked to the pulpit. Almost without looking at my sermon notes and certainly with no bondage to them, I began to teach the lessons in my message. Like most preachers, there have been times when I spoke with greater liberty. However, this time was intensely different. Never in my 37 years of public speaking and preaching had I delivered God’s Word with such authority, precision, conciseness, and power.

Char, seated on the front row, immediately recognized the new freedom with which I spoke. She later told me she laughed in her spirit all the way through the sermon. It is true that the 2,000 plus attendees were responsive, but I knew that much more than human response had added energy to the message that day.

I might have been inclined to believe that the experience at Grace Bible Church was an isolated case. Perhaps it was the result of the mature zeal that this congregation has for God and His Word. I do not claim to always speak with the same power evident that morning; but I can say that the increased authority and anointing has continued since doubling the time I spend in daily prayer.

Does God anoint according to the amount of time spent in prayer? Are quid pro quo exchanges with God possible? Does God work as a **payment of** or in **exchange for** our prayer; or does His sovereignty have more control than my puny efforts?

I can’t answer all those questions yet, but I do know that the experiment — doubling my prayer time in order to see what would happen if someone with the teaching gift were to be more serious about prayer — began right away to produce something new in me.

The Legitimacy of Experimentation in Spiritual Matters

God invites us to reason with him.

“‘Come now, let us reason together,’ says the Lord”
(Isaiah 1:18).

Job 33:14 says, “For God does speak — now one way, now another — though man may not perceive it.”

Proverbs 25:2 says, “It is the glory of God to conceal a matter; to search out a matter is the glory of kings.”

It seems like God invites experimentation and discovery by concealing some of his treasured ideas. Experiments, motivated by an honest inquiring mind, are one way God communicates with us.

A prayer experiment is a solid way to discover how to increase your effectiveness in the special gifts that God gave you. Anyone can experiment with prayer. Spending hours in prayer each day has long been largely limited to the Christian ministries of deliverance, miracles, healing, and evangelism. Nevertheless, to have an effective teaching ministry, a teacher also needs the strong touch of the Spirit of God. No longer do I wistfully observe that miracle workers and healing evangelists seem to have a more dramatic or interesting ministry. My own experiment with increased prayer gives evidence that a teacher too can exercise powerful influence with his gifts. I suspect this is also true for you regardless of what gifts God has given you.

Sometimes words seem trite or meaningless. At other times or with other speakers, words are authoritative and convincing. What is the difference? Because of my experiment, it seems evident that words have added weight, value, and persuasive power over listeners when the Holy Spirit bears witness to them in answer to serious prayer. I had prayed my two hours a day, fasted regularly, and spent hours with God over the previous 37 years of ministry. However, I had never experienced the consistent and continuing touch of the Spirit of God on my teaching, lectures, preaching, and study of God’s Word as I have since July 9, 2002.

God does not reject a person who wants to increase in fruitfulness. Don’t you want to be even more fruitful regardless of the degree of fruitfulness you are experiencing currently when using your gifts?

You, too, can conduct your own experiment with increased time spent in prayer to see what greater things God might do through you in the exercise of your gifts. Conduct the test and see if more time in prayer produces more fruit or not. Prayer releases, enhances, facilitates, and expands the use of anyone's gifts. Prayer does not make us become someone we are not, but rather brings out new fullness in the use of natural and spiritual gifts — existing or dormant. Prayer may not change your unique combination of gifts, but it will more fully release the gifts you have.

When we see the conditions under which God blesses and compare them with the circumstances under which His blessings are not so evident, should we not attempt to learn to duplicate the state of affairs under which He blesses? We certainly must!

Should I Share My Experiences?

I do not know if other ministers who spend hours in prayer talk about it or not — there are specific scriptural instructions not to brag about how much we pray. I'm inclined not say anything about my personal prayer life. However, I have a strong need to share this discovery with other pastors, missionaries, and Christians. I want them to know increasing prayer time will allow them to experience greater authority in teaching, preaching, and counseling. It will allow them to receive greater wisdom in pursuit of any God-given career.

When we see the conditions under which God blesses and compare them with the circumstances under which His blessings are not so evident, should we not attempt to learn to duplicate the state of affairs under which He blesses? We certainly must!

For my experiment to benefit others, I *must* share it. To me, as a trainer of Christian leaders, sharing is the way I can challenge others in my efforts to lead by example just as Paul did by sharing his experiences and then inviting others to follow him.

The Biblical Basis of Teaching by Example

Jesus taught by example. “I have set for you an example that you should do as I have done” (John 13:15). He also taught us to, “... let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven (Matthew 5:16). The Bible teaches us to watch for good examples and imitate them. “Remember your leaders ... consider the outcome of their way of life and imitate their faith” (Hebrews 13:7). The New Testament tells us that we are to learn from the examples in the Old Testament. “These things happened to them as examples ...” (1 Corinthians 10:11).

Paul repeatedly encouraged his readers to imitate his example. His motive in asking his disciples to follow his example was not pride. Instead, he was using an effective and trusted teaching method — teaching by example. “Follow my example, as I follow the example of Christ (1 Corinthians 11:1). “Therefore I urge you to imitate me” (1 Corinthians 4:16). “Join with others in following my example, brothers, and take note of those who live according to the pattern we gave you” (Philippians 3:17). “... our gospel came to you not simply with words ... you became imitators of us and of the Lord ... you became a model to all the believers in Macedonia and Achaia. (1 Thessalonians 1:5-7). He said he did some things deliberately “... in order to offer ourselves as a model for you to imitate (2 Thessalonians 3:9). Paul also taught others, in turn, to teach by example. “Set an example for the believers in speech, in conduct, in love, in faith, and in purity (1 Timothy 4:12). “In everything, set them an example by doing what is good (Titus 2:7).

It is no coincidence that the apostle who invited his readers to follow his example numerous times is also the only New Testament writer to write extensively about his own life experiences, hardships, prayers, faithfulness, and attitudes in actual ministry. This was planned. He writes about his own life and encourages us to follow his example. It’s an effective way to invite others to do it too. The problem with teaching by example, however, is that you have to be good at whatever you are teaching to teach by example. This automatically reduces the number of effective teachers, but then again, who would want to learn to do something from someone who was not very good at doing it?

Only Jesus is an example to follow on all points. The rest of us have only limited promising strengths that we can draw on as

we challenge others to follow our example. Also, we all have weaknesses. Learn to share those pitfalls with others while at the same time prayerfully working to overcome them. The best we humans can do is selective modeling by inviting duplication of only the good things in our lives. There are things about me I hope you will not copy, but for the sake of challenging you, I am willing, as Paul did, to invite you to imitate me on this point. If an ordinary person like me can more than double his effectiveness and influence for Jesus by doubling his prayer time, you can too.

If an ordinary person like me can more than double his effectiveness and influence for Jesus by doubling his prayer time, you can too.

In this book, I submit to you, “This is what I do. Follow my example.” If we want to increase our effectiveness in service to our Lord, then our purpose is to pray more, strive to be more humble, and be a more obedient tool for the answer if God chooses to use us. I invite you to join me in praying more. God will show you how much.

Hunger for God

Since I am now spending more time seeking God, it amazes me to find so many Scriptures that encourage me to continue the pursuit. It is as though God was waiting all the time for me to begin to pursue Him more earnestly — more tenaciously. The challenge was there all along.

Spending four hours daily at anything requires a great deal of organization and prioritization. A day still has only 24 hours — this forces me to schedule my priorities carefully. I decided to eliminate some activities (such as the longer training runs and marathons) so that I can do more of what is really important. The following verses help me to know that I am on a good path. They encourage me to continue in prayer, and they mirror my own passion for God. These verses are now a part of the décor on the walls of our garage where I regularly go to pray alone.

- “... seek first His kingdom and His righteousness ...”
Matthew 6:33.
- “Come near to God and He will come near to you.”
James 4:8.

- “Love the Lord your God with all your heart ... soul ... strength ... mind.” Luke 10:27.
- “He rewards those who earnestly seek Him.” Hebrews 11:6.
- “Do not be afraid ... I am your shield, your very great reward.” Genesis 15:1.

God’s Surprise Agenda

I thought the centerpiece of my learning experience on the sabbatical/mission trip would be the Contextualized Theology curriculum and its usefulness in non-Western nations. Indeed, I did see how effective they had been. However, God had a higher agenda — He wanted me to learn of the increased fruitfulness possible with increased time spent with Him. This lesson will certainly apply in any cross-cultural ministry or any career situation. One lesson God wanted this professor to relearn on his sabbatical was the power of prayer — and the increase of power that is possible through even more prayer.

I am told that in industry, manufacturers should discover what product they produce most profitably and focus on finding better ways to produce more of that product. In successful businesses, smart

businessmen identify what works best for them and concentrate on that. I have long said and felt that prayer was the most important thing I do in any given day. So, when I realized my amount of time spent in prayer did not match my belief, I knew I needed to change either my belief or behavior. If prayer was really the most important thing I did, I needed to do it more than anything else I did.

If prayer was really the most important thing I did, I needed to do it more than anything else I did.

Being 58 and at that stage of my career, I thought I knew what ministry fruitfulness was, but I discovered it was possible for an older person to still make a new breakthrough. I learned that I could pray more, become more fruitful, teach with more authority, and that there were increased quantities and qualities of service opportunities available.

What increased fruitfulness awaits you and your career?

CHAPTER TWO

The Power and Danger of Prayer

*“So he gave them what they asked for,
but sent a wasting disease upon them.”*

Psalms 106:15

You probably have never read — nor have I — a message or lesson referring to the danger of prayer. Yet, something even as wonderful as prayer can have negative consequences if used unwisely.

We incorrectly assume that God automatically cancels wrong prayers. Well-intentioned Christians believe that whatever they receive as an answer to prayer must be God’s will for them.

What you are about to read can revolutionize the way you feel about prayer. Without question, God has used this lesson more than any other lesson I have shared.

The Meat was Great, but the Plague was Horrible

Chapter 11 of the book of Numbers records the story of Israel’s request for meat in the wilderness. The entire chapter tells the story, but Numbers 11:33 says, “But while the meat was still between their teeth, and before it could be consumed, the anger of the Lord burned against the people, and he struck them with a severe plague.”

What went wrong? With the meat still between their teeth, why did God strike them with a severe plague? Were they not only eating what God Himself had provided?

While the historical record in Numbers leaves these questions unanswered, Psalm 106:13-15 provides some answers. This is a good illustration of how the Bible interprets the Bible — a clearer passage helps us understand an obscure passage.

In these most sobering verses, three noteworthy things are found. The Israelites: (1) did not wait for God's counsel, (2) were motivated by their own craving, and (3) received the answer to their prayer, but it was not good for them.

“But they soon forgot what he had done and did not wait for his counsel. In the desert, they gave in to their craving; in the wasteland, they put God to the test. So he gave them what they asked for, but sent a wasting disease upon them” (Psalm 106:13-15).

Psalm 106 makes it clear that sometimes God gives us what we want even though it is not good for us. It is far safer to pray in sincere submission that God would answer only if it is His will. We cannot assume God will automatically cancel wrong requests; we are not safe to pray carelessly.

In the wilderness, the Israelites did not pray for meat with a submissive attitude. They were motivated by their own cravings. They willfully sought and obtained an answer to prayer that was not good for them. Israel's mistaken prayer and its tragic consequences warn us to be careful when we pray.

We all know people who are living with the mistakes of their past. In some cases, they are living with the consequences of their own wrong praying. Some have, in answer to prayer, married a wrong spouse, pursued the wrong college major, worked in an incorrect vocation, bought houses they should not, attended churches they should not, or have mistakenly done any number of other things. In many cases, we have not analyzed our situations carefully enough to realize we are living with the consequences of our own wrong praying.

Many mistakes could have been avoided by praying right. Our answers are supposedly justified by the knowledge that we received what we asked God for. We reason, therefore, it must have been God's will. Such careless reasoning, however, is not consistent with Scripture.

Praying, and then sincerely adding the safety clause — if it is your will — is safer than careless praying. Nevertheless, there is an even more efficient way to pray.

Your Partnership with God in Prayer

Prayer, correctly understood, is an opportunity for you to partner with God in bringing His Kingdom and His will to earth. Prayer is your participation in a continual cycle where God and you cooperate. Ideally, prayer begins in God's heart as seen in Step 1 in Figure 2-1. Through the Holy Spirit, He lets you know what or how you should pray. When you pray that kind of prayer, God and you cooperate to fulfill his purposes. Through the name of Jesus — literally through Jesus in whose name we pray — the prayer goes back to the Father who, upon hearing your prayer (originally His idea), says, "I like it." God grants the request by working through His Holy Spirit in the affairs of men. He often (but not always) answers through the same person who prayed the prayer.

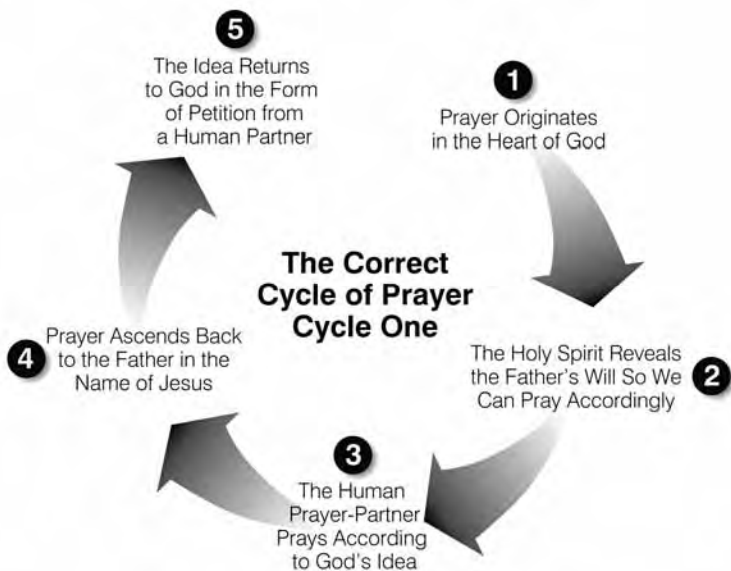


Figure 2-1. The first cycle of the correct cycle of prayer.

Let us visualize this by assuming God is at the top of the circle of events and we are at the bottom. *God initiates the idea* and reveals it to us by the Holy Spirit so we can pray according to His idea. As the idea from *God* becomes a prayer in our mouths, it moves

from *us* back up to *God*. As we pray in Jesus' name, the prayer moves back to where it started at the top of the circle. The first cycle is then complete — from God to us and back to God.

The second cycle (Figure 2-2) begins as the *answer* proceeds from God and around the circle down to us. *We* receive the answer to the prayer *God* placed in our hearts. However, the second cycle does not end with us because *praise, glory, and thanks* for the good answer ascend back to the Father.

The prayer began with God and the cycle is only complete when God's idea re-crosses His desk twice — the second time as *your* request and then finally when it arrives as *praise from you*, God's human prayer-partner. Having fully gone around twice, it ends where it began — with God. This is a wonderful cycle. One of our goals as God's partners should be to repeat this process often. The more we do, the more fully the Kingdom of God comes to earth and the will of God is done on earth as it is in heaven. It is not about you; it is about Him, both beginning and ending with Him. We are just the human partner praying ideas that come from God which — when fulfilled — bring glory to God.



Figure 2-2. The second cycle of the correct cycle of prayer.

The problem is that sometimes prayer begins in *our* hearts, not *God's*. *We* have an idea of what *we* would like to do. Some of these well-intended ideas concern what we want to do even for

God. While good things can come from the hearts of good people, humans, nevertheless, are not as smart as God is.

If we are only praying our ideas — not God's — without concern for negative consequences, our prayers cannot possibly be as rich or unconditionally good as God's can. Prayers, based on our ideas, are simply not as good or far-reaching as those that begin with God.

God said, "As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts" (Isaiah 55:9). In addition, Paul writes that He "is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine" (Ephesians 3:20). A prayer originating in *our* hearts — not *God's* — can be illustrated by starting the prayer process at the bottom — in our hearts — rather than at the top in God's heart where the best ideas originate. When the cycle goes from our heart to God and back to us as seen in Figure 2-3, the answer merely ends with us where it started, but little or no glory, honor, or praise goes to the Father. The prayer, though answered, neither brought great glory to the Father nor fulfilled His plan. Our ideas may even be good, but God's prayer ideas are still far superior.



Figure 2-3. The incorrect cycle of prayer.

Israel's prayer in the wilderness illustrates no partnership or, at best, poor partnership with God in prayer. It certainly was not a part of any cycle of partnership with God for God's glory. Yet,

there is another often misunderstood and even more pointed illustration in the Bible — someone who asked for and received something that was not good for him or his kingdom.

One day, my wife, Char, told me she thought she saw a message in the story of Hezekiah that is different from the usual one emphasizing the power of Hezekiah's prayer for healing. I followed her hunch. After rereading the text, I was forced by the story line to agree with her. Therefore, I include the story of Hezekiah in my list of biblical evidences of the need for caution in prayer. Hezekiah's case in Israel's history, recorded in II Kings 20, bears witness to this central truth: We should find out what God wants to do and pray accordingly; otherwise, we suffer the consequences of our own error.

A King's Prayers, Both Good and Selfish, are Answered!

This second example is both subtle and compelling. In his earlier years, Hezekiah was faithful to God and succeeded spiritually, administratively, politically, and militarily. Sennacherib, King of Assyria, sent a threatening letter to Hezekiah (II Kings 19:15-19) insulting God. Hezekiah promptly took the letter to the temple and spread it out before God.

His intercession is a wonderful prayer concerning God's reputation and Israel's precarious military situation. Hezekiah's lofty and noble petition reveals that he was concerned primarily for the honor of God among the nations. There is no indication of selfishness in this earlier prayer for his concern was rightly and entirely for God's glory.

“O Lord, God of Israel, enthroned between the cherubim, you alone are God over all the kingdoms of the earth. You have made heaven and earth. Give ear, O Lord, and hear; open your eyes, O Lord, and see; listen to the words Sennacherib has sent to insult the living God. It is true, O Lord, that the Assyrian kings have laid waste these nations and their lands. They have thrown their gods into the fire and destroyed them, for they were not gods but only wood and stone, fashioned by men's hands. Now, O Lord our God, deliver us from his hand, so that all kingdoms on earth may know that you alone, O Lord, are God” (II Kings 19:15-19).

This glorious, God-centered prayer illustrates highly effective cooperation with God in prayer. It brought great glory to God when the answer came to earth — God’s Kingdom came and His will was done.

Subsequent to God’s wonderful answer to that prayer with a great and miraculous deliverance from Sennacherib, Hezekiah became ill. The prophet Isaiah informed him to put his things in order and prepare to die (II Kings 20:1). God was evidently finished using Hezekiah.

You may have heard lessons from this text to the effect that if you will pray as Hezekiah prayed, you too will receive your healing. I agree that if you pray as Hezekiah prayed you, too, might receive your healing. However, I will also argue that it may be neither God’s will nor good for you. Reasoning from the results of Hezekiah’s prayer, it is easy to see that Hezekiah’s prayer was similar to the prayers of Israel in the wilderness. It was not the prayer he should have prayed, and the results were not good for Hezekiah or Israel.

My analysis of Hezekiah’s prayer prayed toward the end of his years contradicts the interpretations of some well-known preachers. The records of Hezekiah’s behavior reveal that his attitude during the last 15 years of his life was remarkably different from his attitude during his godly, former years. What he *said* in his prayer of thanksgiving when he was healed (Isaiah 38:9-20) seems to indicate he was humble and grateful to God. Yet, how he *behaved* in subsequent years, indicate that he was prideful (Isaiah 39 and II Kings 20). How he *behaved* is more of an indication of his attitude than what he *said* — actions speak louder than words.

Furthermore, in II Chronicles 32:31, the history record states, “... God left him to test him and to know everything that was in his heart.” Evidently, his pride and self-sufficiency led him to pray according to his own desires rather than seek or submit to God’s plan. Notice this in the passages and paragraphs that follow.

“In those days, Hezekiah became ill and was at the point of death. The prophet Isaiah, son of Amoz, went to him and said, ‘This is what the Lord says: Put your house in order, because you are going to die; you will not recover.’ Hezekiah turned his face to the wall and prayed to the Lord, ‘Remember, O Lord, how I have walked before you faithfully and with whole-hearted devotion and have done what is good in your eyes.’ And Hezekiah wept bitterly.

Before Isaiah had left the middle court, the word of the Lord came to him: 'Go back and tell Hezekiah, the leader of my people, 'This is what the Lord, the God of your father David, says: I have heard your prayer and seen your tears; I will heal you. On the third day from now, you will go up to the temple of the Lord. I will add fifteen years to your life'' (II Kings 20:1-6a).

The first indication that something is amiss in this prayer is that Hezekiah prayed the opposite of God's will that Isaiah revealed to him. In this prayer, there is no mention made of God's glory or reputation among the nations. This contrasts with the earlier prayer in which Hezekiah, fearing the Assyrian army, was very eager for God to glorify Himself "... so that all kingdoms on earth may know that you alone, O Lord, are God" (II Kings 19:19).

Another warning sign about this prayer is Hezekiah's reference to his own former good works as though good works were the basis for God answering our prayers. Hezekiah was bragging. His prayer was both misguided and incorrectly motivated. Whenever we refer to our good works as though they earn the answer to our prayer, it should be a warning to us. Perhaps, subconsciously, we think our petition should be answered because *we* are good. In such cases, our focus is wrong; God answers because *He* is good.

A third indication of error is in the bitterness with which he wept and prayed. Parents know that not all crying of their children is in submission. Sometimes crying can express defiance or anger. "Weeping bitterly, with his face against the wall," is a different picture than the godly prayer warrior who, just a little earlier, had spread the Assyrian's letter out before the Lord in the temple.

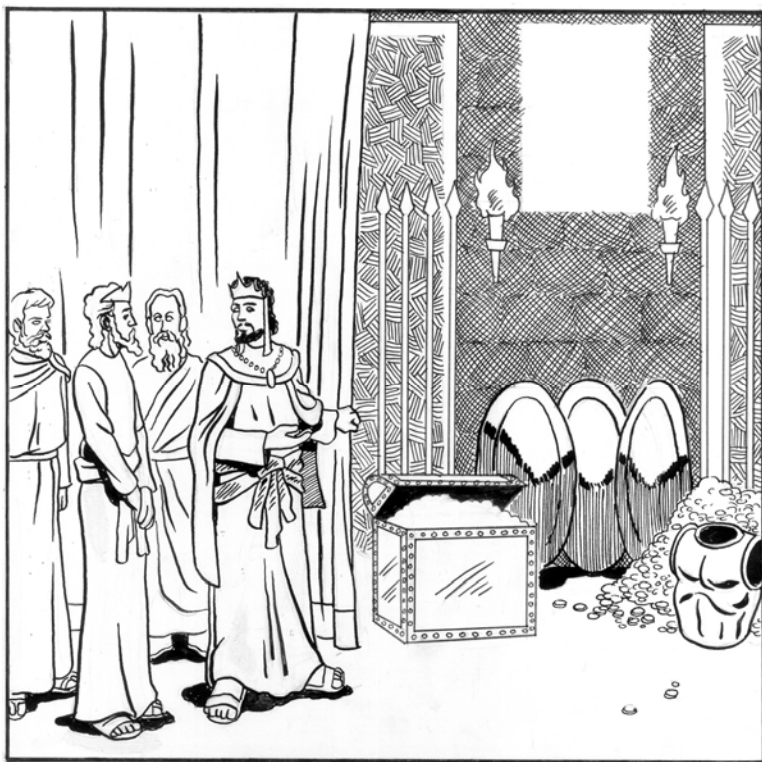
These may be new ideas to you, but please give them a fair reading.

Weeping with bitter resentment toward circumstances or an authority figure is different from a submissive cry of petition, sorrow, or loss. Hezekiah's weeping is no sure sign of any sincerity. He wept bitterly, not in humble or submissive petition, but in annoyance and insubordination. Nevertheless, God granted Hezekiah's prayer and gave him 15 more years of life.

Even though the above three arguments are credible, the most convincing indication that Hezekiah was resisting God and praying amiss is shown by the tragic results to his kingdom as a

consequence of his 15-year life extension. Some time later, visitors arrived from Babylon to congratulate Hezekiah on his recovery.

“At that time, Merodach-Baladan, son of Baladan, king of Babylon, sent Hezekiah letters and a gift because he had heard of Hezekiah’s illness. Hezekiah received the messengers and showed them all that was in his storehouses — the silver, the gold, the spices, and the fine oil — his armory and everything found among his treasures. There was nothing in his palace or in all his kingdom that Hezekiah did not show them” (II Kings 20:12-13).



We talk about things that are important to us. What Hezekiah talked about and showed to his Babylonian visitors indicates to us today the object of his trust and attention. He took them to the armory, showing them the swords, spears, bows, arrows, and other implements of war. He took them to the treasury and showed them the spices, silver, and gold. At this later stage in his life, it seems he trusted military and economic strength, not God. Let’s read on.

“Then Isaiah the prophet went to King Hezekiah and asked, ‘What did those men say, and where did they come from?’ From a distant land,’ Hezekiah replied. ‘They came from Babylon.’ The prophet asked, ‘What did they see in your palace?’ ‘They saw everything in my palace,’ Hezekiah said. ‘There is nothing among my treasures that I did not show them’” (II Kings 20:14, 15).

The state visit of the messengers from Babylon would have been a good opportunity for Hezekiah to take his foreign guests to the temple in Jerusalem and say, “This is where I brought the threatening letter of Sennacherib and laid it out before our mighty God. This is the temple where the Creator — God, Jehovah, El Shaddai, Yahweh, our great God — dwells and receives the prayers and praises of His people. Come with me to see the temple of the great God of all the earth.” He could have pointed out that the God that was worshipped in that temple was the very same one who had delivered Israel and healed him, but he did not.

At the earlier and humbler stage in Hezekiah’s life, when the Assyrians laid siege to Jerusalem, Hezekiah did not go to the armory or treasury; he went to the temple. At this later stage in his life, he instead took his guests to the armory and treasury, not to the temple. The contrast between the former and the latter Hezekiah is quite clear.

There appears to be no mention made of Israel’s real Protector, just boastings of armaments and treasures. At this later stage when the congratulations and accolades were coming his way, he didn’t go to the temple to give God praise. Instead, he went to the armory and treasury to brag.

My main emphasis here is to stress the importance of finding God’s will and praying accordingly, but there is another lesson too. How many times do we run to God in prayer when we have a problem? Then, after He has helped us, we brag about something else other than our true Deliverer?

There’s more. The most revealing exchange between Hezekiah and Isaiah is yet to come.

“Then Isaiah said to Hezekiah, ‘Hear the word of the Lord: the time will surely come when everything in your palace, and all that your fathers have stored up until this day, will be carried off to Babylon. Nothing will be left, says the Lord. And some of your descendants, your own flesh and blood, that will be born to you, will be taken away, and

they will become eunuchs in the palace of the king of Babylon.’ ‘The word of the Lord you have spoken is good,’ Hezekiah replied. For he thought, ‘Will there not be peace and security in my lifetime?’” (II Kings 20:16-18).

Isaiah did not wait long to confront the King. When Hezekiah admitted to Isaiah that he showed the treasures and armaments to the Babylonians, Isaiah delivered a very sad message: those treasures and some of Hezekiah’s own offspring and Israel’s citizens would be carried off to Babylon as slaves.

This terrible message should have sobered Hezekiah and made him realize that he had just made a horrible spiritual and political mistake. Amazingly, Hezekiah revealed his selfishness, pride, and arrogance, caring not for the future suffering of Israel, but only for his own safety. He said that Isaiah’s message was good because the suffering would take place *after* his life had passed in peace and security. The narrative does not spell out this interpretation, but why else would the writer point out what Hezekiah thought in his heart? “‘The word of the Lord you have spoken is good,’ Hezekiah replied. For he thought, ‘Will there not be peace and security in my lifetime?’” (II Kings 20:18).

After Hezekiah’s 15 years were complete, he died. However, the problems Israel experienced because of Hezekiah’s prayer and the 15-year life extension did not end with Hezekiah’s passing.

“Hezekiah rested with his fathers. And Manasseh, his son, succeeded him as king. Manasseh was twelve years old when he became king, and he reigned in Jerusalem fifty-five years. His mother’s name was Hephzibah. He did evil in the eyes of the Lord, following the detestable practices of the nations the Lord had driven out before the Israelites” (II Kings 20:21 and 21:1-2).

How many years after Hezekiah’s healing did he die and Manasseh begin to reign? — 15. How old was Manasseh when he began to reign? — 12. Then, how many years passed between the healing of Hezekiah and the birth of Manasseh? — 3. Had Hezekiah died when God said he was to die, Manasseh would not have been born. Presumably, there would have been another of David’s descendants who could have preserved David’s line.

II Kings 21:16 says, “Manasseh also shed so much innocent blood that he filled Jerusalem from end to end ...” It is possible Isaiah, the faithful prophet who tried to influence Manasseh’s father towards righteousness, was among those killed by Manasseh. One tradition says that Isaiah was sawed in two and

another says that Manasseh had Isaiah killed. Some believe when Hebrews 11:37 states, "... they were sawed in two ..." it implies that Manasseh killed Isaiah.

It is sad to note that Manasseh led Israel with ungodly influence for 55 years only to be followed by two more years of ungodly leadership by Manasseh's son, Amon. "Amon was 22 years old when he became king, and he reigned in Jerusalem two years ... He did evil in the eyes of the Lord, as his father Manasseh had done" (II Kings 21:19a and 21).

However, had Hezekiah accepted God's Word and died according to His plan; no innocent blood would have been shed. Hezekiah is a sad illustration of the danger of prayer when it is not submitted to the good use for which the privilege of prayer is given to human beings. It was not until the reign of Josiah, Hezekiah's great-grandson, that Israel finally had a godly king once again.

Hezekiah is a sad illustration of the danger of prayer when it is not submitted to the good use for which the privilege of prayer is given to human beings.

On the other hand, Scripture provides us with several equally graphic and beautiful examples of godly persons who sought God's will and prayed accordingly. It is much more enjoyable to reflect on positive illustrations about how prayer is supposed to work — bringing the good results God intends.

The Advantage of Consulting the Lord

David had been Israel's king only a short time when the Philistine army came against Israel. David was the commander-in-chief, a successful military man, a war hero, and a crafty fighter. No one would have thought he was presumptuous had he simply gone out to fight with the Philistines. However, David "inquired of the Lord" (II Samuel 5:19). Only after clear direction from God did he go into battle against the enemy. Israel won a great victory, and God's people benefited because their king cared enough about doing things right that he first inquired of the Lord.

Again, the Philistines came up against Israel. Coasting on the momentum of his former victory and the direction of the Lord to go against the Philistines, David could have understandably

gone, once again, against them in battle and not been presumptuous. Even with all that in his favor, David still did not go into battle without inquiring of the Lord a second time. This time, God said not to make a frontal attack, but rather “circle around behind them” (II Samuel 5:23). With instructions to wait for God’s signal to attack, David and his men circled behind the Philistine army and waited.

When the wind blew — the signal God had given David — the army rose up out of hiding, surprised the enemy from behind, and won another great victory. What a wonderful picture of strength under control — a winning army waiting for God’s signal in the wind! What a fascinating illustration of partnership between God and man! When we

learn to do that, God’s kingdom comes to people, God’s will is done on earth, and God works for His glory and man’s good. God only needs a human co-worker who will wait on Him, receive His direction, and let God work through him. How many victories do we miss because we are unwilling to find out what God wants to do and pray accordingly?

How many victories do we miss because we are unwilling to find out what God wants to do and pray accordingly?

A Strange Thing to Pray

Elijah’s experience in prayer is even more pointed. In his day, there was a great moral and spiritual decline. Ahab was Israel’s ungodly king. His Phoenician queen, Jezebel, was the daughter of a Sidonian monarch and an avid worshipper of Phoenician gods. Largely through her influence, Ahab energetically served and worshiped several Phoenician gods. Asherah was the mother goddess and wife of El. Four hundred of her prophets ate at Jezebel’s table at state expense. Asherah had 70 children including Baal. Ahab created an altar for Baal in a temple he built for him in Samaria. He also erected an Asherah pole that may have actually been an image of her.

According to another tradition, Baal was a Canaanite god and Asherah was his wife. Baal was both the fertility god and the god of rain and thunder. Four hundred fifty of his prophets ate at Jezebel’s table. Clearly, worship of the true God was in a state of decline, but God had an idea about how to arrest Israel’s attention.

If a drought occurred, Baal, the god of rain and thunder, would be the one the people would pray to. In order to defame him, God planned a lengthy famine — an interruption of the natural rainfall in the land flowing with milk and honey. God shared his idea with a human partner — an intercessor.

“Now Elijah the Tishbite, from Tishbe in Gilead, said to Ahab, ‘As the Lord, the God of Israel, lives, whom I serve, there will be neither dew nor rain in the next few years except at my word.’ The word of the Lord came to Elijah: ‘Leave here, turn eastward, and hide in the Kerith Ravine, east of the Jordan. You will drink from the brook, and I have ordered the ravens to feed you there. So he did what the Lord had told him” (I Kings 17:1-5a).

I particularly like that last sentence. Elijah did what the Lord told him to do.

Despite the fact that people usually pray that it will rain, according to James 5:16c-18, it is clear that Elijah actually prayed that it would *not* rain. What kind of a prophet prays that it would not rain? The answer is a prophet who knows the mind of God and prays accordingly.

“The prayer of a righteous man is powerful and effective. Elijah was a man just like us. He prayed earnestly that it would not rain, and it did not rain on the land for three and a half years. Again he prayed, and the heavens gave rain, and the earth produced its crops” (James 5:16c-18).

He prayed according to God’s ideas, not man’s.

If that was not strange enough, note that Elijah later changed his prayer 180 degrees. After praying for three and a half years that it would not rain, he prayed that it would rain. What kind of prophet changes the direction of his prayer to begin to intercede for God to do exactly the opposite of what he just prayed? The answer is a prophet who knows that what God wanted to accomplish in phase one was complete, and now it was time to move to the next phase.

We often do what God tells us to do — too long.

During a classroom discussion one day, a student of mine completely amazed me with this profound thought: “We often do what God tells us to do — too long.” Ever since then, I realized that what God directs me to do one day or in one phase of my life might change. When God shows us what

to pray or do, sometimes we pray or do it too long. We must learn to stay current.

The sensitive human partner will move through the stages of the unfolding plan, smoothly transitioning from phase to phase with accuracy in both direction and timing. Elijah was such a partner. He knew what God was up to and prayed accordingly. Because God had a willing partner who would pray correctly through each stage, God's kingdom came, God's will was done, Israel saw the power of God, Baal and Asherah were defamed, their prophets were slain, and God was glorified. God just needed a man who would pray according to His plan, not the ordinary kinds of prayers that humans often pray.

The New Testament commentary in James gives us the insight we need to understand that both God and Elijah were actively involved in a wonderful divine-human joint venture. If you will first learn to find the will of God and then pray, you may discover you are praying differently than other people.

If you pray God's thoughts and prayers, you might be out of sync with people, but wouldn't you rather be in sync with God? If God is speaking, and He often does if we will listen, I would rather be God's faithful partner than appear proper in man's eyes.

What kind of bold and creative plans might God have for the difficulties we face in our nations, communities, churches, and families if we learned to first consult Him and then pray? It is the challenge of every generation to discover what God is doing and do it with Him. This is just as true in our generation as it was for past generations.

If you want to increase the effectiveness and efficiency of your prayer life, pay careful attention to how you pray. Effectiveness and efficiency in prayer are both important. Effectiveness has to do with getting the job done. Efficiency has to do with getting the job done with the least amount of wasted effort. Since human resources are limited, life is short, and the need is great, we cannot ignore the issue of an efficient prayer life. Learning to

Knowing what to pray about and how to pray is of greater consequence than exerting force and spinning wheels. Purpose is more critical than activity and direction is more important than speed.

pray according to God's plan increases efficiency, effectiveness, and fruitfulness in prayer.

In order to receive answers to prayer, it is sometimes necessary to get on our face before God, fast, intercede, travail, experience the burden of prayer, persevere, and show disciplined consistency and fervency. After all, Jesus taught us to seek and keep on seeking, knock and keep on knocking, and ask and keep on asking.

To receive the right answers to the right requests requires us to rethink our prayer *content*. It is an extremely important prerequisite to achieve before we focus on the issue of *fervency*. In prayer, the ability to discern the mind of God and pray accordingly is most certainly more important than fervency — unless, of course, fervency is used in prayer to know God's will in the matter at hand before we pray. However, we don't have to choose between fervency and accuracy; both are possible. Nevertheless, the emphasis in this chapter is on accuracy.

Knowing what to pray about and how to pray is of greater consequence than exerting force and spinning wheels. Purpose is more critical than activity and direction is more important than speed.

About the Author

Ron Meyers, PhD



Author Ron Meyers, PhD was born in 1944 and raised in a pioneer pastor's home. In 1965, he began pastoral ministry as a student pastor in a rural community 70 miles from the Bible college he attended in mid-Ohio.

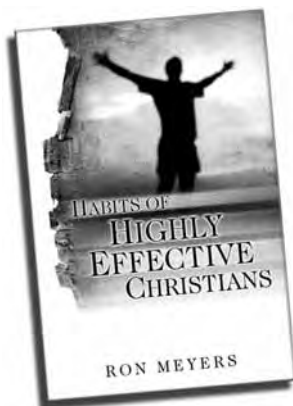
He, with his wife, Char, served more years outside the U.S. as pastors in Canada and missionaries in Korea and China than their years of living in the U.S. While teaching at Oral Roberts University from 1996 through 2006, he served as the Professor of Missions and

Coordinator of the Master of Arts in Missions program in the School of Theology and Missions. During those years, Ron traveled to African, Asian, European, and Middle Eastern nations during his summer breaks from university responsibilities.

He and Char now live in Africa and train pastors in the more than 40 sub-Sahara nations of southern Africa. He and Char have two adult sons, Dan and Joel, a daughter-in-law, Elizabeth, and five grandchildren.

***Habits of Highly Effective Christians* Makes a Great Bible Study Program**

When Ron Meyers followed his passion for international missions work 40 years ago, he never imagined the rich educational curriculum God had in store for him. A lifetime of spiritual challenges groomed him for his role at the School of Theology and Missions at Oral Roberts University in Tulsa, Oklahoma. Then, after 10 years educating Christian ministry candidates at ORU and serving as Coordinator of the Master of Arts in Missions program, he and his wife have moved to Africa where they now train pastors and missionaries throughout the southern African nations.



Meyers wrote his book with life application in mind. He weaves his stories into each habit by providing real-life, insightful, and applicable examples. *Habits of Highly Effective Christians* guides you through biblical resources for creating a rich tapestry with the fibers of your own life.

A Great Tool for Growth and Discussion

Proven to create rich discussions, *Habits of Highly Effective Christians* is perfect for small-group Bible studies or college classroom discussions. Meyers has also written the *Habits of Highly Effective Christians Study Guide*. Together, this study combo will etch biblical principles on every aspect of the lives you encounter.

To order more books or study guides for your Bible studies, contact Soar with Eagles. Quantity discounts apply.



www.soarhigher.com/christianhabits.htm

carrie@soarhigher.com

479.636.7627



A Publisher Driven
by Vision and Purpose

Browse the selection of publications associated with this book at www.soarhigher.com/risetoseekhim.htm. The order form is on the next page.

Four Ways to Order

- Online** Place your order online at
www.soarhigher.com/risetoseekhim.htm
- E-mail** Place your order by e-mailing Soar with Eagles at
carrie@soarhigher.com.
- Telephone** Call us at 479.636.7627 Monday through Friday
8:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. Central Time
- Postal Mail** Send your order to Soar with Eagles
1200 North Mallard Lane, Rogers, AR 72756 USA
Telephone: 479.636.7627

Publications

Please send me the following publications.

- Rise to Seek Him Book* _____ x \$15.95 = _____
- Habits of Highly Effective Christians Book* _____ x \$18.95 = _____
- Habits of Highly Effective Christians* _____ x \$28.40 = _____
- Book and Study Guide Combo

Your Information

Name _____

Address _____

City _____ State _____ Zip _____

Telephone _____

E-mail address _____

Sales Tax

Please add 9.0% for products shipped to Arkansas addresses.

Shipping

USA: Add \$4 for the first book and \$2 for each additional book.

International: \$9 for the first book; \$5 for each additional book.

Payment

☐ Check Credit Card: ☐ Visa ☐ MC ☐ Amex

Card Number _____

Name on Card _____ Exp. Date _____

Signature _____