



September 2018

Dear CWR/PTM Friend and Partner,

*Brad Jersak is a scholar, with an earned PhD, an exceptional teacher who can be understood by people like you and me! He is your friend and mine, a co-laborer, teacher, editor and author—and he's fine with all of us calling him "Brad" instead of "Doctor." I've asked him to write this month's letter and lead us in a discussion about prayer. Brad edits our blog, records videos, writes articles and books (including his award-winning *A More Christlike God* published by CWRpress), works with other authors we publish, answers questions and of course serves as the Editor-in-Chief of *CWR magazine*. Brad is a fellow Christ-follower, a deeply devoted and humble man of God, with an incredible gift of teaching...so as Ed McMahon used to introduce Johnny Carson on the Tonight Show, "Here's Brad."*
—Greg Albrecht

Why pray if God already knows? Is prayer like bargaining with God? Can I change God's mind? How long must I pray and what words and terms should I use? Is there one and only one way to pray? I have one whole shelf of books devoted only to prayer. But that's not where I learned to pray. I learned from my mother. Mom taught me to worry and she taught me to pray...often at the same time. Eventually, those lessons opened my eyes to some truths and some errors about prayer.

For example, my Mom served at a Bible camp one summer. I was there too. An alarm was raised when the cook's child—just a toddler—found and drank poisonous cleaning fluid. This young child was rushed away in an ambulance, his life hanging in the balance. The whole camp gathered to pray. I remember Mom "praying up a storm"—with passion and tears, faith and desperation, citing Bible promises and pouring her heart out.

I found this kind of prayer and the stress that accompanied it exhausting. At that time of my life, this kind of prayer seemed like striving and cajoling and tons of effort to get God to do something. My mother was asking God to save the child—would he? I could not face the pain and potential of disappointment. I simply retreated behind the shield of cold-hearted fatalism. I concluded, at that stage of my life, *whatever will be will be*. I didn't truly surrender the child to God—I abandoned him to fate. The child's life was spared. Maybe Mom's prayers helped. I know mine didn't.

There are many misunderstandings about prayer, and many ways in which we can "fall into a ditch"—perceiving prayer in an unbalanced way. **Expectant Prayer** and **Contemplative Prayer** are just two of the many types of prayer I will discuss in this letter.

Expectant Prayer

Some more charismatic Christ-followers emphasize Christ's calls for expectant faith in the Gospels. *Expectant prayer* places a spotlight on our activity in prayer. And Jesus does speak of prayer as activity, as he makes bold claims and demands for faith. For example,

Matthew 21:22—"If you believe, you will receive whatever you ask for in prayer."

Mark 11:23-24—“Truly I tell you that if anyone says to this mountain, ‘Be lifted up and thrown into the sea,’ and has no doubt in his heart but believes that it will happen, it will be done for him. Therefore, I tell you, whatever you ask in prayer, believe that you have received it, and it will be yours.”

In these texts, “faith” has something to do with believing God is a loving Father who cares about us and is actively involved in our lives. It is absolutely biblical to look with hope to the kindness of our heavenly Father as a foundational core of Christ-centered prayer. And such a hopeful faith includes active expectancy. But in many cases, the idea of *expectant prayer* becomes unbalanced. There’s a perception that faith is about psyching ourselves up into a state of mind (called “faith in faith”). When *expectant prayer* becomes more about what we say, how we say it and how often we express it, such a prayer is far more about us than it is about our loving heavenly Father.

For many, the idea of *expectant prayer* becomes all about their self-will. *Expectant prayer* can become reduced to prayers demanding an answer from God, specifically “the answer” that the person wishes. In this ditch of misunderstanding prayer, people may feel that prayer is all about revving up their emotions, following a prescribed formula, asserting one’s own will, demanding God keep his promises, and ultimately blaming others for their lack of faith. But self-will is not faith, no matter how one spiritualizes it.

Jesus encourages us to present our needs to God, rather than stubbornly asserting our self-sufficiency. I assure you that we don’t know perfectly how prayer works. But we know this: Jesus commands us to *ask, seek and knock*. Jesus says that askers receive, seekers find, and that when we knock doors are opened (Matthew 7:7). That is a challenge for me, knowing I don’t always receive my requests and I’m terrified of disappointment. But just because I might be disappointed with the kind of answer I receive or my inability to recognize any answer God gives, I realize I cannot *not pray*—I must not retreat into a fatalistic, what’s the use, *whatever will be, will be*.

Contemplative Prayer

Contemplative prayer differs from *expectant prayer*. Rather than asking for something *from* God, *contemplative prayer* gives something over *to* God. Yes, those who favor *contemplative prayer* believe that we must still heed the words of Jesus, “*ask, seek, knock*.” But any *receiving from* begins by *giving to*. We cast our cares on him, believing he cares for us (1 Peter 5:7). So far, so good...the upside of *contemplative prayer* is that we don’t slip into groveling, begging, manipulating or demanding. Contemplative prayer helps us realize that it is not up to us, it is up to God. We are children in his arms, not beggars at his door. Our prayers need only welcome and give thanks for what is already ours to receive: daily bread (our needs) provided by a loving Father.

However, many who favor *contemplative (passive) prayer* over *expectant (active) prayer* can fall into their own ditch. They can fatalistically conclude, as I did at Bible camp, *whatever will be will be*. One person bragged to me about composing prayers that never disappointed him. Why not? Because his prayers required no faith and involved no asking. He had become as fatalistic as I was in my camp story. “*God knows anyway. My prayers change nothing—they only change me.*”

This conclusion (erroneous, I believe) gave him peace, probably because he’d worn himself out with self-seeking, striving prayer. But the cost of such prayer, or non-prayer if you like, is high. He had negated all of Jesus’ instructions on prayer and rejected Jesus’ call to faith. We are instructed to ask. Asking risks disappointment. We are instructed to seek, which involves grieving what is lost. We are instructed to knock, because some doors (including our own!) don’t open until we do.

Three Christ-Centered Examples

A. *Emptiness*: Christ completely emptied himself of self-will. Self-emptying love rather than forceful prayers was the active ingredient in his prayers.

B. *Willingness*: Christ's authority in prayer—his faith—was through complete willingness to be a vessel, moved and empowered by God's love. The Father worked through Jesus' prayers, unobstructed by self-will.

C. *Surrender*: Christ didn't surrender anyone to sickness or death—not even those he left unhealed and dying around the globe when he ascended. Rather, he surrendered those in his care to the Father, whether healthy or sick. We don't surrender to sickness and death. We surrender our lives and our loved ones to the care of God, throughout the whole course of our lives.

Prayer means that God has chosen to work in this world through willing human partners—his own children—you and me—who welcome his care, give thanks for it and seek to further know and understand him through prayer. Why is that?

- 1) Because our willing "yes" matters to God. He doesn't impose himself on us.
- 2) Because our conversations with God nurture our relationship with him.
- 3) Because partnership with God forms us into his likeness. We are the image of God's love to the world—just as Jesus, the perfect image, was a willing channel for the Father's love to us.

So, our prayers should definitely involve an element of expectancy. We are invited to actively make bold requests, without trying to manage or bully God...always remembering that prayer is about him, about his love, not our own self-will. And our prayers should definitely involve some degree of contemplation, so that we surrender our self-will, and embrace God's answers (or lack of an answer as we might see it) without ceasing to present our requests to God (Philippians 4:6).

A Final Reminder

Remember that God (Father, Son and Holy Spirit) meets us and communes with us every time we pray, even if all we have are *wordless groans* (Romans 8:26-27).

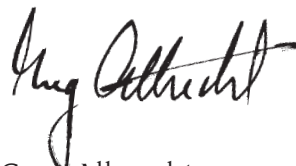
- Remember, the Father of mercies is *the God of all comfort* in our afflictions (2 Corinthians 1:3-4).
- Remember, Jesus is our *advocate*, praying with and for us (1 John 1:2).
- Remember, the Holy Spirit is our *ever-present comforter, helper and guide* (John 14:16, 26).

Thanks to all of you, my brothers and sisters in Christ, co-laborers in the gospel as we proclaim it in and through the many resources and ministries of CWR/PTM. Thanks for your prayers and your support for our collective ministry. We love you all and pray for you!

In Christ's service,



Brad Jersak



Greg Albrecht

CWR/PTM Prayer List—September 2018

These requests for prayer represent just a few of the thousands we receive and pray for. We invite you to join us in praying for these and the others that space does not permit us to include here. Thanks for joining with us as a CWR/PTM Prayer Partner.

A close friend was just diagnosed with a brain tumor. Please pray for my friend and for the surgeons.—Illinois

Please pray that God will restore my relationship with my daughter and my granddaughter. Please also pray for my recovery from cancer, as I have a lot of treatments to endure. Thank you PTM for always being there for me.—Delaware

I am going to have a biopsy on my lymph gland, and I am frightened. Please pray for my thinking and strength.—Maine

Please pray for my upcoming surgery and pray for my brother that he finds happiness in California. Also pray for my best friend in Florida that she finds a more peaceful and less-stressful life.—New York

Please pray for my brother who fell recently and damaged his ribs and stomach.—Indiana

Please pray for my wife and I—we are going through a difficult lawsuit that seems to never end. PTM has helped me understand the grace of God to a level I never thought possible! God bless this ongoing work.—California

Please pray for my grandchildren who are on drugs and my daughter, their mother.—Kentucky

Please pray for me that God will heal me completely of the pain in my spine.—Florida

Please pray for my sister as she recently lost her daughter to cancer. Our family could use some encouragement.—Colorado

Please pray for my friend who continues to recover from a stroke. He is doing better and is progressing.—South Dakota

I am moving at the age of 69. Please pray that I will be able to see my grandson.—Washington

Please keep me in your prayers. I am still struggling with clinical depression and PTSD. —Tennessee

Please pray for my husband as his blood count is very low. He is weak and in a lot of pain.—Alabama

Thank you for your prayers for my friend who had a stroke that left him blind. He recently died but he had peace knowing God's love, mercy and grace.—Pennsylvania

I would like prayers for my son who is going through drug recovery.—Mississippi

My husband recently passed away and I'm left with many financial problems. I also need heart surgery.—Texas

Please pray for my friend who had surgery on her broken ankle.—Idaho

I would like for you to pray for me. I am 90 years young and have a lot of pain in my right shoulder.—Connecticut

I just celebrated my 96th birthday. Please pray for my right hand as it is shaking real bad.—Kentucky

Pray that my son will get a full-time job with insurance coverage so he can live in his own apartment.—North Carolina

Please pray for my arthritic condition and also pray for a friend whose mental health seems to be degenerating.—Ohio

Please pray for my eyes—the left one is blind and the right eye has the potential to become the same way.—Indiana

Please pray for my son who has heart disease. And pray for all the lonely people without family or friends.—North Carolina

Please pray for me as my husband recently died from a massive heart attack. We had been married 55 years.—Alabama

My Parkinson's disease has gotten worse. Please keep me in your prayers.—Virginia

I live alone—my husband died 9 years ago. Many of my family members live out of state.—South Carolina

Our Father in Heaven: We thank you for your grace, mercy and love. You love each of these individuals, and we thank you in advance for the answers you will provide for each request. With thanksgiving for our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, our suffering servant who heals us, in whose name we pray—Amen.