

THE POWER OF PRAYER

IN MEN'S LIVES, CHARACTER AND LEADERSHIP

Inspired thought-leadership from these and many others:



Pastor Dave Brown



Dr. Tony Evans



Dr. Eric Mason



Rabbi Daniel Lapin



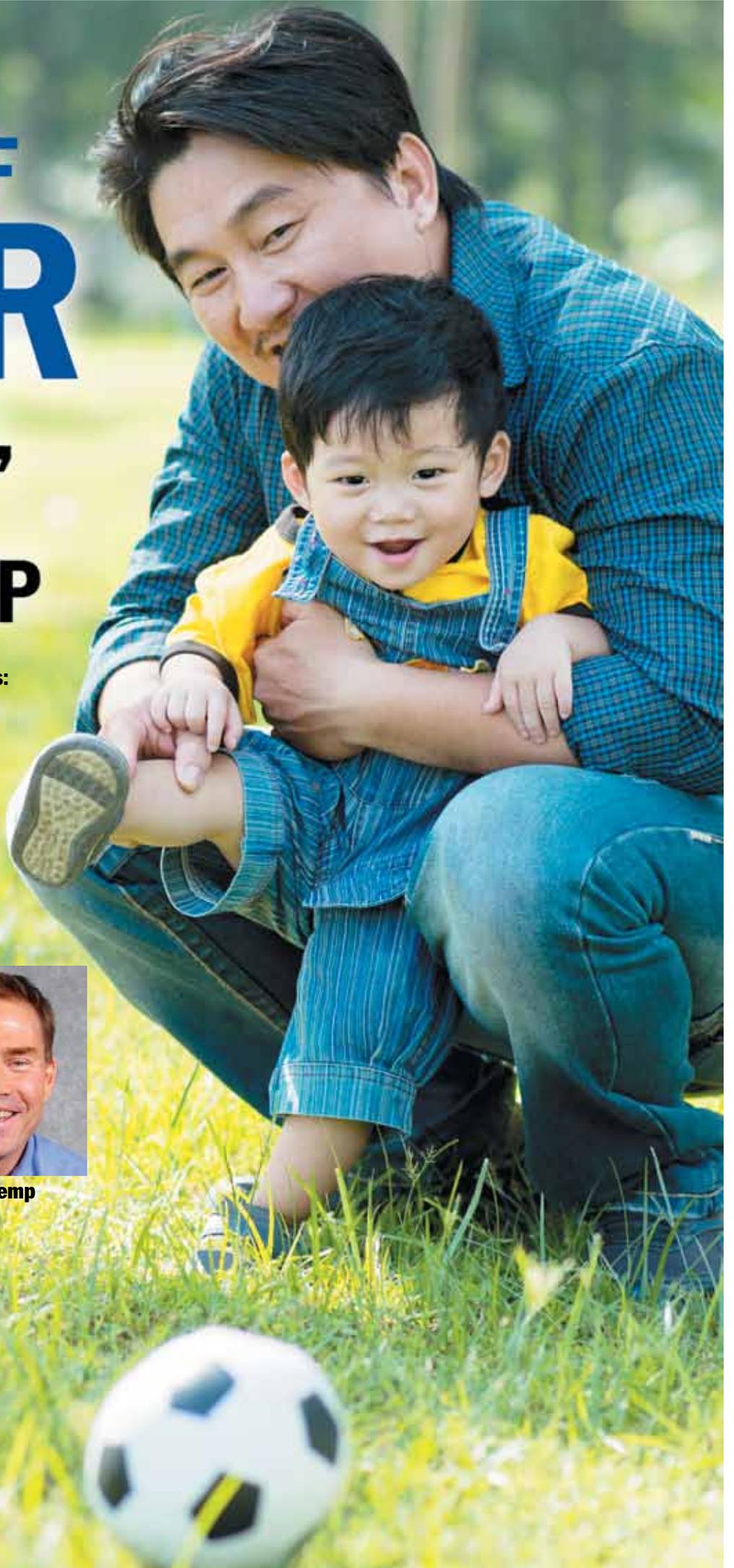
Jeff Kemp



**Deacon
Harold Burke-Sivers**



Jim DeMint



A lesson in how ‘childlike’ faith need never be ‘outgrown’



By Dr. Tony Evans

I’ll never forget when the kids were younger and Lois and I took them to visit the Grand Canyon. We’d driven all day in order to save on travel expenses, and by the time we got there, it was pretty late. We arrived tired and ready to head to our hotel room to go to sleep. Yet there was one fairly major problem: I had forgotten to reserve us a room.

Keep in mind, this was 30 or so years ago. No cellphones. No internet.

And no other hotels within an hour or so. We had made it to the Grand Canyon and the official hotel on site. But it was already full. The hotel manager even told me that there was a waiting list in case any rooms came available. The situation looked bleak.

Worn out, hungry and frustrated, I decided we would sit down as a family and have a meal before making the long drive to try and find another hotel. When we sat down to dinner, Priscilla — a small child at the time — asked, “Daddy, didn’t you teach us that God will provide all of our needs?”

Trust me, I was in no mood to have one of my children point out what daddy had preached on a Sunday. So I gave her one of those daddy looks that said, “Priscilla, be quiet and get ready to eat your meal.”

But Priscilla continued, “Daddy, if God is going to provide all of our needs and all we need to do is ask him, then why don’t you pray?” She looked at me with an innocence in her eyes that was touching. It was one of those moments when, as a father, you want to crawl under the table because your child is being more spiritual

than you are. It was also one of those moments when I didn’t feel at all like praying, so I told her, “You pray, Priscilla.” She did. Loud enough for the people around us also eating dinner to hear.

After Priscilla’s prayer, I started thinking about what I was going to have to say to her to explain how God doesn’t always instantly come through when we pray. But things never got that far because not long after Priscilla’s prayer, the hotel manager came to our table and asked me if we still needed a room. I nodded yes.

“Well,” he said, “one of our guests just had a medical emergency and had to leave — and the next family on the waiting list has already left. So we have a room for you if you want it.”

Priscilla smiled a huge smile. I just shook my head and said, “Wow.”

Prayer is a powerful tool because prayer is communicating with the all-powerful God who longs to execute his authority to and through us, but only as we give him permission to do so through prayer. Unfortunately, many of us have simply “outgrown” it. More precisely, we have outgrown the

childlike faith that believes God will do what he says he will.

One key to prayer is having faith like a child — as Priscilla modeled for me so many years ago. As most of you probably know, the Lord would go on to later use Priscilla in a movie on prayer that has truly transformed the landscape of homes and marriages all across this nation, “War Room.” Witnessing the impact of that film has not surprised me at all, because I will always remember the faith she had as a child, and continues to have to this day.

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Pastor Tony Evans, Th.D., is founder of Oak Cliff Bible Fellowship in Dallas and president of The Urban Alternative, a national broadcast ministry designed to take the word of God to a world in need. He is the best-selling author of “Kingdom Men: Every Man’s Destiny, Every Woman’s Dream,” and his much anticipated book, “Kingdom Prayer: Touching Heaven to Change Earth,” will release in October. More information is at TonyEvans.org.

The many benefits of praying daily with our wives



By Deacon Harold Burke-Sivers

Prayer is both a gift of grace and a response to God’s invitation to life-giving communion. As a husband, prayer allows me to walk humbly before God in the obedience of faith with my wife; it is listening to the voice of God, and allowing that voice to change my life and shape my marriage. Prayer draws me deeply into God’s heart, so that every day I can recommit myself to maintaining a personal relationship of love and intimacy with him.

The real cross of prayer is to believe that Jesus Christ is Lord of every

single situation in our lives. There are a number of different situations and circumstances that arise throughout the course of marriage that are challenging, which may lead to conflict and discord between spouses. These include, among others, not praying together as a couple.

Many couples have a problem with prayer because they believe that going to church together on Sunday, praying before meals or maintaining a personal prayer life is enough. Many men do not know how to pray with their wives, or find the experience of praying together uncomfortable or awkward. This was also my experience, given the fact that my wife and I have two very disparate expressions of prayer. I love very formal, structured prayer, while my wife prefers a more relaxed, free-flowing, “from the heart” prayer style. How did we reconcile these seemingly incompatible ways of praying?

The key is to keep it simple. In the morning, before getting out of bed, I take the initiative by holding my wife close to me and saying, “Lord, I thank you for the gift of my wife. I thank you for our 20 years together. I thank you for our beautiful children and for the life we have built together. Lord,

please help me to be the husband and father that I need to be for them today. Amen.”

How simple is that? If men are serious about keeping God at the center of their married lives, we cannot make excuses for not praying with our spouses every day. In a week that has 168 hours, husbands and wives can and must spend at least a few minutes together in daily prayer. We make time for those things in our lives that are important to us, and there is nothing more important in marriage than putting Christ first.

The benefits I experienced as a result of praying with my wife include:

- A natural deepening and strengthening of our relationship.
- Showing more affection, reverence and esteem toward my wife.
- Building honesty, trust and respect.
- Developing loving habits that became part of my everyday life.
- Rekindling love, joy and passion in our relationship.
- No longer taking her for granted.

As we were cleaning the house, my wife and I came across our wedding video and decided to watch it. As I looked back on that amazing day, I thought of the vows that I made — words that the Lord has kept alive in

our marriage all these years later: “I promise to cherish and support you so that you may always grow in God’s love, so that we may grow in love together. I promise to love and treasure you all the days of your life.”

Prayer helps me to keep Christ at the heart and center of my marriage as I continually strive to be holy — to be the man, husband and father that God created and calls me to be. Prayer brings into clear relief that the Lord will lead us from sorrow to joy, from despair to hope, and from death to everlasting life.

Praying with my wife has reminded me that God is the fountain from which we will receive the strength, power and grace that we need to help each other get to heaven.

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Deacon Harold Burke-Sivers is the founder and director of DynamicDeacon.com, a Christian evangelization and apologetics organization dedicated to the promotion of Catholic values, principles and teaching. He is the author of the best-selling book, “Behold the Man: A Catholic Vision of Male Spirituality,” published by Ignatius Press.

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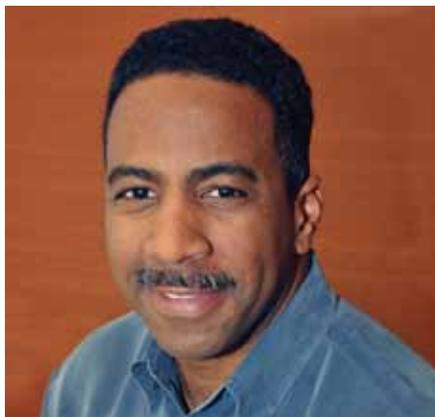
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A godly grandfather's compelling example



By Roland C. Warren

I grew up without my father for most of my life. Looking back, I realize how thirsty his absence made me for a committed male role model to walk alongside me on my journey from boyhood to manhood.

But in my young life, receiving sustained, positive male attention was much like trying to quench your thirst by sticking your tongue out in a rain shower. Rain is fleeting and sporadic, so you will often be left wanting and

parched.

So, it's not surprising that I lacked a good and godly male example who would nurture my spiritual development and guide me in the way that I should go on a daily basis. Indeed, it's difficult to be what you didn't see. And I was in a bit of a crisis.

My mother probably sensed this deficit in my life, so when I was about 13 years old, she gave me a special assignment. Once a week, I was tasked with spending the night with my maternal grandfather. You see, my grandfather had a unique special need. When he was in his mid-40s, his muscles began to atrophy to the point that he eventually lost his ability to walk and control his limbs. So he spent his days in a big recliner that was elevated on a platform in the living room of his home. And since my grandmother worked nights, people took overnight shifts to care for him.

Now, my grandfather was a godly man of prayer who had been a Christian pastor before he was disabled. But since he was chair-bound for my entire young life and we lived far apart, I rarely got

to spend private time with him. So, this "assignment" from my mother was really a special time for me.

Indeed, after just a few overnights with him, it became clear to me that there was something extraordinary about him. You see, despite his difficult circumstances, he had a joy that gave him an abiding peace and patience in the midst of his physical weakness. And this joy was evident in how he treated others and me. In fact, I was amazed that he never spoke harshly or grew frustrated when he had difficulty doing mundane tasks, like feeding himself. Moreover, he never complained about his condition, even though folks would understand if he did.

In 2 Corinthians 12:1-10, the Apostle Paul wrote about having "a thorn" in his flesh, a weakness. Now, we don't know the nature of this weakness, but it is clear that he believed it hindered him from accomplishing his ministry work. And so, he pleaded with God three times to remove this weakness. But God did not. In fact, Paul was told, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness."

As a result, Paul began to delight in his weakness and he considered it his most cherished strength. Indeed, God does not waste weakness.

I suspect that my grandfather knew this passage of scripture well and, no doubt, he pleaded to be healed, much like Paul did. And, like Paul, he determined that his crippling weakness, in the hand of Almighty God, was a strength perfected that God would use to impact and inspire many, including his grandson. Indeed, he was a compelling example for me at a critical time when I needed one.

You see, rather than "cursing the darkness" of his weakness, he chose to light a candle of faith that still flickers brightly in my heart and soul today.

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Roland C. Warren is president and chief executive of Care Net. Founded in 1975, Care Net (care-net.org) offers compassion, hope and help to anyone considering abortion by presenting them with realistic alternatives and Christ-centered support through its life-affirming network of pregnancy centers, organizations and individuals.

Don't wait to bless your children



By Pastor Steve Warman

The following scenario repeats in our media outlets — sharing the same sad story, but with different characters each time. Every few years, our newsfeeds are bombarded with the all-too-familiar report of another child of inherited wealth and privilege not prospering with their sudden inheritance. Many, after losing all within a short period of time, find themselves in severe and nearly irreparable financial debt.

Those of us without large trust funds shake our heads and say, "Wow, what a waste," somehow believing we would do so much more if afforded the same opportunity. Because this situation frequently occurs, many have come to see inheritance of great wealth in a disparaging light.

Some of the superwealthy agree that leaving all of their wealth to their children is not necessarily a good idea. In fact, many of today's notable billionaires are choosing to distribute their wealth in multifaceted strategies rather than leave it all to their children. One billionaire of considerable fame — Warren Buffett — wrote in a letter to the Gates Foundation, "I want to give my kids just enough so that they would feel that they could do anything, but not so much that they would feel like doing nothing."

I would like to propose that there is a blessing one can give to their children that stretches beyond the benefits of financial inheritance. The Genesis account of Jacob blessing his 12 sons just prior to his death intrigues me, especially the blessing of Joseph (Chapter 49).

Filled with beautiful description, my mind's ear can nearly hear the poetic, faith-filled blessing the aged Jacob delivered to his beloved son:

"Joseph is a fruitful vine, a fruitful vine near a spring, whose branches climb over a wall. With bitterness archers attacked him; they shot at him with hostility. But his bow remained steady, his strong arms stayed limber because of the hand of the Mighty One of Jacob, because of the Shepherd, the Rock of Israel, because of your father's God, who helps you, because of the Almighty, who blesses you with blessings of the

skies above, blessings of the deep springs below, blessings of the breast and womb. Your father's blessings are greater than the blessings of the ancient mountains, than the bounty of the age-old hills. Let all these rest on the head of Joseph, on the brow of the prince among his brothers. (Genesis 49:22-26 NIV)

As Jacob prayed this, he was not only speaking of Joseph's history, he was also proclaiming what Jacob's future would hold. As fathers, this is a pattern to form our prayers for our own children today. We should bless our children with the words of our mouth: The words we speak to them, over them, and to God about them will have more impact on their lives than we could ever imagine.

Jacob, understanding this spiritual concept, prayed that Joseph would be productive, strong and blessed by the Almighty God; he prayed that blessings would flow directly to Joseph; he prayed for blessings from above, below and within; and then, to substantiate the importance of these proclamations, Jacob concluded by stating that the father's blessings are greater than any other blessings. Jacob knew the power of a father's blessing from his own father's and grandfather's model: As each of his ancestors blessed the next generation, they heaped God's favor and direction upon their children. Abraham spoke his blessing to Isaac; Isaac spoke a blessing to his son, Jacob; and now we find Jacob

passing it on to Joseph.

This Father's Day, let us, the dads, give a gift to our dear children. Let Father's Day 2016 be about praying a blessing on our children and speaking life-giving words into their world. Pray that they will be productive and experience the joy and satisfaction of earning and producing for themselves. Pray that they will be strong in mind, body and spirit — stronger than the challenges they will face, with strength that allows them to make worthy decisions and persevere.

Finally, pray that our children will live the kind of life that draws blessings to them; namely, a life of giving and showing honor to others that allows the blessings of God to flow upon them. I can think of no greater Father's Day gift than that our children, both yours and mine, experience God's blessings, flowing from every direction into their lives. Don't wait until death to bless your children — go ahead and start today.

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Pastor Steve Warman and his wife Renee have been lead pastors for 14 years at The Apostolic Church of Auburn Hills in Michigan (theapostolicchurch.com). He is author of "The Second Try: Your Best is Yet to Come" and "Walking on Dragons: Your Authority Over Adversity." They have four children.

A Father's Son



By Pastor Dave Brown

The word “Father” is perhaps the most significant name of the God of the Bible. It occurs 1,488 times and sets Christianity apart from all other religions.

God could have called himself anything but He chose to reveal himself as Father. It was Jesus’ favorite term for addressing God the Father. He prayed “Abba” — papa, daddy — a word of endearment, affection and intimacy. That was something unprecedented in Judaism and in world history. Amazingly, God invites us to call him “Abba, Father.” As a dad and grandfather, I’m humbled to think I have been bestowed with a

title that God claimed for himself.

For this Father’s Day, let us remember that human fatherhood is patterned after divine fatherhood. Every one of us human fathers is an imperfect reflection of our perfectly loving, heavenly Father. Yet the foremost call of every father in this life is to live in such a way that his children glimpse what God the Father is like.

For many of us, Father’s Day is not easy because we had or have a difficult relationship with our earthly father. Growing up, we may not have really known him, even if we lived with him. I know something about that. My dad wasn’t there for me. He was absent, and we were estranged for much of my life.

My dad and I never played catch, or hunted or fished together. We never worked on cars, hugged or just hung out. He never saw me play ball, learn to swim or ride a bike, or graduate from high school and college, or get married. We never really talked about sports, sex or much of anything else.

He never told me what it means to be a man, or about God and the things of God. I never heard the words, “I’m proud of you, son,” “You have what it takes” or “I love you, son.”

For most of my life, my father was not there. Many of you know the wound of an absent dad. A man’s deepest wounds are not physical but wounds of the soul that render an orphan heart. They often come from the most important man in our lives.

God commands us fathers to care for our children as our Father in heaven lavishly cares for us, and to teach them about and live lives of truth, honor and unconditional, sacrificial love.

Thirty-seven years ago at age 33, I came to faith in Jesus Christ and discovered “the greater love of the Father” that no earthly father can give. I read in Psalm 68:4-6 that He is “a father to the fatherless” and realized that I was not fatherless. My real Father is my Heavenly Father — the one we call “Our father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name.” He is Abba Father! Poppa — Daddy!

In time, by God’s grace, I came to see my need to forgive my father for his absence. I also came to see his sin and brokenness. I began to pray for his soul. As his health deteriorated, my dad confessed and repented before the Lord. Then before drawing his last breath 22 years ago, he made things right with me

and the rest of my family.

My dad died in faith, and because of that, this one thing I know for sure: My dad will be a bigger part of my future than he ever was of my past!

If you’re a father, you can reclaim the damaged relationship with your children and others through Christ. You can commit to leaving a legacy to your children of a father who loves them and their mother with the unconditional, sacrificial love of God.

Likewise, God can reconcile you to an absent dad. In Malachi 4:6, we read that God “will turn the hearts of the fathers to their children, and the hearts of the children to their fathers ...” That’s exactly what God the Father did for me and my dad! The God of all comfort can fill your aching void and reconcile your broken relationships.

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Dave Brown is director and pastor-at-large of the Washington Area Coalition of Men’s Ministries (wacmm.org), a nonprofit, nondenominational organization that helps pastors, church staff and men’s leaders across the region in their ministry to men. He also pastors at Covenant Life Church in Gaithersburg, MD.

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Prayer bearing spiritual fruit



By Peter Sprigg

Prayer — my own and that of others — has played a crucial role in my spiritual development.

My parents were missionaries before I was born. My father served as a pastor and a denominational executive while I was growing up. I am sure that my parents prayed for me, including for my spiritual life. Ironically, those prayers did not bear their fullest fruit until I was in my mid-20s — my mother had died, my father was again serving overseas and I was living alone.

My passion growing up was not for my faith, but for politics. After receiving my degree in political science and economics, I got a job with my congressman. When that job ended because he did not seek re-election, I decided to

take the plunge and run for office myself. At 24, I ran for the school committee in my hometown in Massachusetts.

My dreams were dashed, however, by a decisive defeat. That loss started me on a period of soul-searching — first in terms of my career goals, but eventually in a more literal, spiritual sense. Over a period of several months, a number of key events led me to a turning point in my life.

One of those events took place at my church, where I remained a regular visitor. One Sunday, two men did a dramatic reading about the Lord's Prayer — the one taught by Jesus to his disciples. One repeated the memorized words — while the other, off-stage with a microphone, played the voice of God, actually answering. The man would say, "Our father, who art in heaven ..." — and the voice answered, "Yes, what can I do for you?" Startled, the man continues, "Hallowed be thy name." The voice asks, "What do you mean by that?"

Continuing in the same vein, this short, humorous reading made me realize how easy it is to go through the motions of religion without thinking about it. I went home from church that day and began to pray and read my Bible daily — disciplines I had never before adopted.

Another event came when my pastor

invited me to a special gathering. The Billy Graham Crusade was coming to Boston, and his team was working to mobilize pastors and churches to support it. My pastor knew of my interest in politics and invited me to an event where the guest speaker was someone with political experience — Charles Colson, a former aide to President Nixon. Colson had spent time in prison as a result of his involvement in the fringes of the Watergate scandal, had come to Christ, wrote his story in the book "Born Again" and then founded the ministry Prison Fellowship after his release. At the time, I found his politics distasteful but his testimony compelling.

At the same event, we were urged to pray and were given something to help us. It was a small round sticker to place on our watches. The challenge was to "pray on the spot when you see the dot" — in other words, every time you look at your watch.

Thus, my relatively new habit of daily prayer became one of nearly constant prayer throughout the day. Sometimes I would pray for Billy Graham, sometimes for loved ones and sometimes just, "Lord, be with me." And he was — as I became increasingly aware.

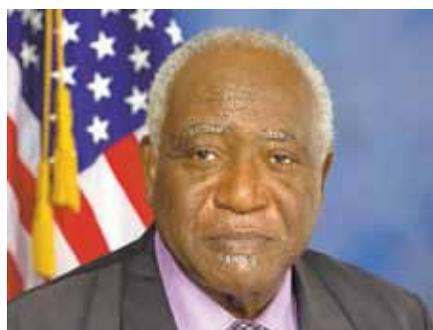
All of this climaxed for me when I attended the Billy Graham Crusade with

others from my church in June 1982. Although I was hesitant about going forward — having attended church all my life — those doubts were eliminated by Rev. Graham's invitation, which directly addressed people like me. I went forward, giving my life to Jesus Christ in a decision that has shaped the remainder of my life.

A year or two later, I visited an aunt and uncle who lived far across the country from me and shared with them my testimony. It turned out that my aunt was a longtime supporter of Billy Graham's ministry and subscriber to his Decision magazine. In 1982, when she saw that a Crusade was scheduled for Boston, knowing my location (but not my spiritual state), she began praying for me.

I will always be grateful that her prayers — and mine — were answered.
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Peter Sprigg is senior fellow for policy studies at the Family Research Council in Washington. He received his master of divinity degree from Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary. He is an ordained Baptist minister and former pastor of Clifton Park Center Baptist Church in Clifton Park, New York. He is married and the father of one son who is in college.

Connecting fathers with families, despite prison bars



By THE WASHINGTON TIMES

On June 11, Rep. Danny K. Davis, Illinois Democrat, hosted the 2016 Family Reconnection Program, an annual event in which children are welcomed to visit their incarcerated fathers in honor of Father's Day. Some 60 children and 35 families, including mothers, grandmothers and sisters, filled two buses to participate in the "Love for Our Fathers" event in Sheridan, Illinois, about 90 minutes southwest of Chicago.

"As part of our fatherhood initiative, every year in honor of Father's Day, we help children visit with their fathers in the Sheridan Correctional Center," Mr. Davis told a reporter with Chicago TV station,

ABC-7 WLS.

"We want to thank the Illinois Department of Corrections for working with us to make this happen," Mr. Davis said. "Children get a chance to visit with their fathers. We all get a chance to talk about Father's Day and fatherhood, and it's one of the most exciting things that we do.

"I just thank all the mothers who brought their children out, all the grandmothers who brought their children out so they could go and get a chance to visit with their fathers on Father's Day," said Mr. Davis, a deacon of the New Galilee M.B. Church.

Dr. Phalese Binion, CEO of Westside Ministers Coalition, one of 13 partners who assist Mr. Davis' office with the annual event, thanked him and others for giving children a chance to spend a few hours with their fathers at the men's correctional facility.

Mr. Davis later addressed the men on fatherhood, parenting, mentoring and "second chance" family engagement initiatives. His office said as many as 2.7 million children under age 18 have a parent in prison or jail, and that these children



Rep. Danny K. Davis, Illinois Democrat, gathered June 11 with more than 60 children and their families to take them by bus to see their incarcerated fathers in honor of Father's Day. Mr. Davis is a longtime champion of legislation to promote strong families and "second chance" programs to reduce recidivism. (Images courtesy of Rep. Danny K. Davis' legislative office.)

often experience adverse psychological and social effects as a result of separation and shame of the parents' imprisonment.
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Rep. Danny K. Davis, D-Illinois, represents the 7th District in Illinois. He and D.C. Delegate Eleanor Holmes Norton

hosted a Capitol Hill forum June 15 with the Congressional Caucus on Black Men and Boys, called "Making Young Black Men in the Prime Early Adulthood Years (16-24 years old) Visible and Strong; Years of the Most to Gain and the Most to Lose."

The deep bonds of a 10-man prayer quorum



By Rabbi Daniel Lapin

If you acquired a new car recently, you probably drove it happily for a while without even cracking open the operating manual in the glove box.

After all, you know how to drive and most cars are fairly standard. You switch it from P to D, press on one pedal to go fast and press the other one to slow down.

Maybe the first time you opened the manual was when it began to rain. At first glance, you needed an advanced engineering degree to operate the wiper system, but the index quickly took you to page 72, which helped you master the 17 modes for clearing raindrops from your

windshield. The option for automatic operation whenever it senses raindrops is cool and makes you smile.

Later, while parked and waiting for someone, you page through the manual and discover that your car can sense whether you or your wife is driving and will automatically adjust the seat position to each driver's preference.

These and other discoveries of just how brilliant the car's designers are reaffirm how smart you are to have purchased this particular vehicle.

That's my relationship with Judaism and the incandescent brilliance of its Designer. I continually discover "features" in the instruction manual that reaffirm my love affair with God and his book.

For instance, look at prayer.

Though praying alone is certainly preferable to not praying at all, praying along as part of a group of at least 10 men is the ideal and is strongly encouraged.

I might have thought that praying all alone, outside in some spectacular site of natural beauty, would be most appropriate. I could have my own cathedral in a canyon or my own synagogue in a lake-shore forest. But no; I please God more by praying with at least nine other men in a Brooklyn basement. It doesn't have to be in Brooklyn; the important thing is the prayer quorum called a "minyan."

I have held prayer services on camping trips in canyons and in beautiful rainforests, but it was always as part of a group of 10 men.

One of the benefits was driven home for me on a recent gloomy afternoon at the cemetery, where we were laying my father-in-law to rest.

For all of his many good qualities, he was not a sociable man. The main features of his life were his work, his family and his synagogue.

To my astonishment, many men I did not know arrived for the funeral. At the conclusion of the ceremony, I inquired of each stranger, and they all told the same story. "We've prayed with Jack at the same minyan every morning for years."

In general, women form and maintain social relationships far more reliably than men do. If you're not sure of this, consider who takes care of birthday cards, holiday greetings and so on in your family. If the man is not engaged in any sports, as either player or fan, maintaining the discipline of a daily worship service in the company of other men does build relationships.

In the spring of 2014, Naval Adm. William H. McRaven addressed the students of the University of Texas at Austin, telling them the 10 lessons he learned from becoming a Navy SEAL.

The first lesson was to make your bed

every morning. He explained that doing so means that you have accomplished one task before your day begins. It may not be a big task, but it leads to the successful completion of many other tasks.

This is even more true for a regular morning prayer discipline. Before I start my day, I have had a private conversation with my Creator, and nobody else expects more from me than he does. Because of this, I start my day with enthusiasm and passion rather than with lethargy.

Finally, women are said to like a man in uniform. If this is true, it would be because a man in uniform has shown himself able to accept authority and to be a man whom other men trust. It is good for a marriage if a wife feels this way about her husband.

Climbing out of bed early enough to make a prayer service each morning is the equivalent of a uniform. It shows that one is able to accept a higher authority and present oneself for duty on a regular and reliable basis.

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Rabbi Daniel Lapin, radio and television host, speaker and author, is president of the American Alliance of Jews and Christians. His website is RabbiDanielLapin.com.



Loving a community to life with prayer walks and action



By Dr. Eric Mason

As a pastor in the inner city, you can have the life sapped out of you in a matter of moments — fatherlessness, single-parent homes, shootings, crime, vandalism, anger toward the church or just feeling the weight of the condition of minorities in the urban core.

If there is no encouragement or sight of the evidences of the grace of God in one's view in the midst of daily life, throwing in the towel would seem to be a viable option.

Prayer and faith in today's society seem to be apathetic dispositions to many, but these "twins" uphold the character and integrity that fuel a heart for remaining committed to a life of love and truth (2 Timothy 2). I can't tell you how much has come by way of ministry in my line of work just by virtue of showing up (faithful life) and prayer.

I have been prayer-walking North Philly for over a decade. Of course, it could seem weird for someone to walk down the street, seemingly perceived as talking to himself, as one walks past people. At first, people tended to view it cynically or feel uncomfortable. As our church began, we continued this tradition as a group. If you think my North Philly neighbors looked at me funny alone, imagine 50-plus people walking the neighborhood doing the same.

There was a split in reaction: Some people would distance themselves from us, and we would on occasion get cursed out. On the other hand, people would have a general curiosity about a church finally coming on the block. More than that, to see men with their sons and families praying for the neighborhood was shocking yet encouraging.

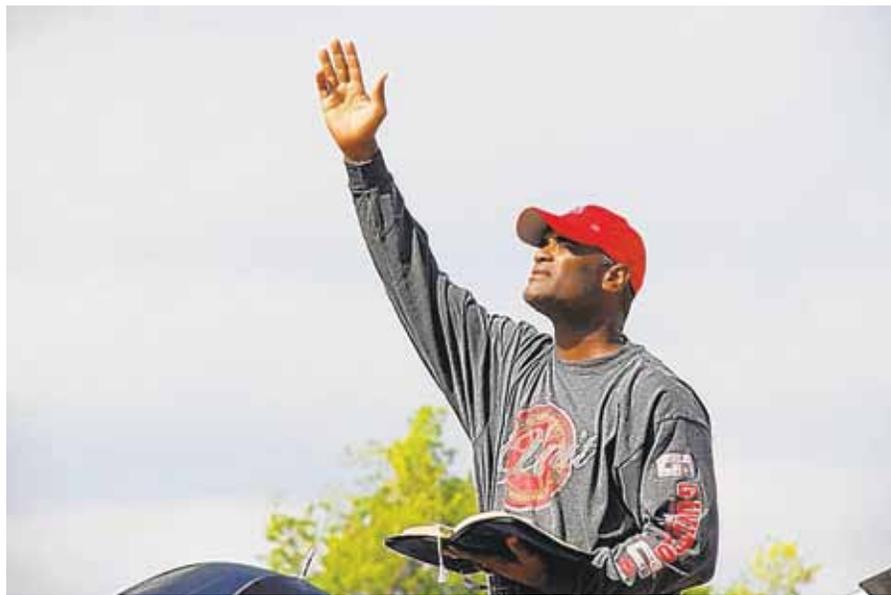
Soon afterward, many began to ask for us to pray for them. Others would say, "Don't stop doing this; our city and neighborhood need this."

Out of this came many ministries of the church. Five local schools acknowledged their need for help. One school had no dictionaries for the entire school, so we took an offering at our church and purchased them. They had no sports program for the

school, so we opened our doors for hundreds of kids to use our gym for our annual basketball league sponsored by the church. This program became the sports program of the school. In

addition, we worked with another school, with mentoring time weekly with a considerable group from the school.

There were two significant ways the



community wanted us to serve. One was a playground. So by way of prayer, we had a state-of-the-art playground installed for free on our property that services the neighborhood, as well as several schools and day cares in the community. As of recent, we ended up partnering with a local university to start a technology institute to teach youths skills that could prove viable in entrepreneurialism and give them a competitive competency later in life. They will learn coding, graphic design, app development, studio engineering and production, business plan development and much more.

All of this came through the tunnel of God being faithful to cause us to be faithful and being constant in prayer as the Scripture commands. Now we have transitioned the name from prayer walk to action walk. It still contains prayer, yet it adds elements of learning our community, building relationships and sharing the Good News about Jesus Christ.

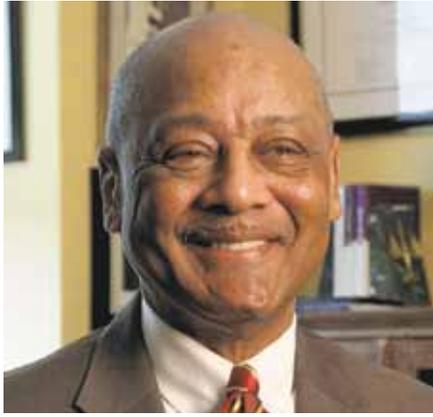
We asked several questions in our learning process: What are the three greatest influences in our neighborhood? What are the top three needs? What is your perception of the churches in this neighborhood's impact on those three needs? Finally we asked, when you hear the name Jesus Christ, what words come to mind?

This has been an eye-opening experience for our congregation as we consistently commit ourselves to exeging the city.

We took one Wednesday night and looked at edited video of the action walk. We are using what we have learned to shape our strategy of loving our community to life through the Good News about Jesus Christ. In laying this out, this is my personal journey of prayer and faith in my workplace, as we want to meet pressing needs so that we may not be found unfruitful (Titus 3:14).

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Eric Mason, aka "Pastor E," is the founder and pastor of Epiphany Fellowship in Philadelphia. He is married to Yvette and has three sons, Immanuel, Nehemiah, Ephraim and one living daughter, Amalyah. Dr. Mason is known for church-planting and an unquenchable passion to see the glory of Jesus Christ robustly and relevantly engaged in broken cities with the comprehensive Gospel. He is founder and president of Thriving, an urban resource organization committed to developing leaders for ministry in the urban context, and author of "Manhood Restored: How the Gospel Makes Men Whole," "Beat God to the Punch: Because Jesus Demands Your Life" and "Unleashed: Being Conformed to the Image of Christ."

From agony to peace



By Robert L. Woodson, Sr.

My understanding and embrace of the power of prayer was deepened in the course of a 50-year career in pursuit of the calling I felt to truly help those among us who have the least. That lifetime journey took me through a spectrum of associations and institutions ranging from civil rights organizations to conservative think tanks and, finally, to the launch of my own Center for Neighborhood Enterprise.

Throughout that trek, I have had the honor to come to know and love and learn from hundreds of humble grassroots leaders who had exhibited an incredible power to transform the lives of the people they served — those who were once deemed beyond hope. The outreach of each of these individuals was marked by 24/7, long-term, face-to-face commitment to those they served — often at the cost of personal sacrifice. I witnessed hard-core addicts and alcoholics emerge as loving spouses, caring parents, responsible employees and even successful entrepreneurs. I saw young men who were once caught in a web of gang violence and warfare transform to become peer mentors and ambassadors for peace in their neighborhood.

I looked to these proven community healers as the true experts in redemption and revitalization, and eagerly convened forums throughout the country to ask them, “What Works and Why.” In their testimonies, person after person declared that they simply offered themselves as a vehicle for God’s transformative power. Among these was Freddie Garcia, a

former heroin addict whose personal moment of grace and redemption took place in a gas station bathroom where he was shooting up while his baby daughter laid by his side. Freddie and his wife Ninfa went on to launch the Victory Fellowship ministry that has now touched and changed the lives of thousands of hardcore addicts and alcoholics. Freddie became my steadfast friend and brother in faith.

My middle son, Rob, followed a career path that eventually brought him to work by my side at CNE. He shared the same passion for and commitment to those

apparent, and working with him was the greatest fulfillment of my life. Then, in 2003, tragedy struck.

My three sons and their families had gathered at our home for a birthday celebration. Rob and his younger brother Jamal headed to a nearby store on an errand. Within minutes, I received a desperate call from Jamal. “Dad!” he cried. “The car turned over and we are trapped!” He kept calling Rob’s name over and over. My wife Ellen and I arrived at the scene in minutes and watched the medics lift Rob’s lifeless body into the ambulance.

Rob’s death, Freddie arrived at my side and embraced me with his presence. He said, “I cannot help you, but I can connect you with the one who can — the Comforter.” Then Freddie shared something with me that helped me through that difficult time and serves me to this day.

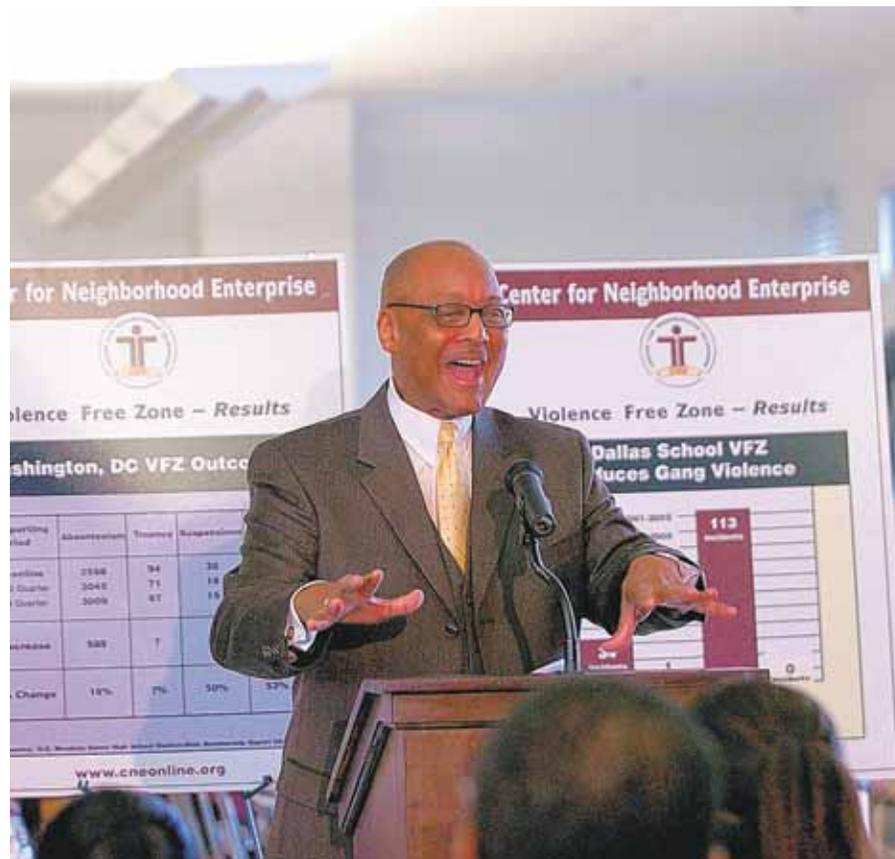
He told me that he had lost two of his own children, a son and daughter, who had been shot at close range. When he learned of his daughter’s death, he threw himself down in despair. In agony, he cried out in prayer, “Lord, I know that it is through you that my life was salvaged from addiction and all I am and have and have done is through you. But the devil is mocking me, saying ‘After all the lives you have helped, this is how your God rewards you?’ The devil wants me to rebel against you, Lord, but I choose not to rebel because I know what you have brought me from. All I’m asking you, Lord Jesus, is to help me through this.” At that moment, he felt embraced by the love of the Holy Spirit and that taunting mockery was gone forever. He was at peace.

I couldn’t imagine living life without my beloved son, but I followed Freddie’s advice and stilled my heart to let the Holy Spirit speak. What happened next is difficult to explain and even more difficult to share. It had been a fitful, sleepless night and I lay staring into the darkness. Suddenly I saw Rob appear in a mist. He smiled and told me: “Dad, I am alright. I am OK.” Rob and the mist faded away, and I felt at peace.

Months later, I had a dream about Rob. When I relayed it to my daughter Tanya who called from college, she was shocked. She had experienced the identical dream. Rob was wearing a long brown coat. He was standing at an open door. He was silent and his face was slightly blurry, but a light was shining on him and we knew that it was him. From the look on his face, we felt that he was in transition and was moving on.

Encircled by the love of God and the prayers of friends, I had the power to as well.

Robert L. Woodson, Sr., is founder and president of the Center for Neighborhood Enterprise (cneonline.org). Portions of this reflection have been adapted from his forthcoming memoir, “Discovering America’s Source of Renewal: A Life’s Journey.”



“Young people that may have eyes and ears closed to advice have hearts open to example,” said Robert L. Woodson, Sr., president of the Center for Neighborhood Enterprise. His center created the Violence-Free Zone Initiative, a mentoring program that has been shown to reduce violence in schools and achieve peace in the community. (Barbara L. Salisbury/The Washington Times)

who lived at the margins of society. But he also had a capacity to understand and draft public policy that would facilitate the life-salvaging efforts that we supported. People dubbed Rob as my heir

In my darkest times, I reached out to Freddie Garcia to help me make sense of what had happened. My faith in God was shaken and overwhelmed with doubt. As I railed against the pain and injustice of

The power of a praying dad: How ‘ordinary’ is ‘extraordinary’



By Owen Strachan

The best dads are usually the ordinary ones. They may not set land-speed records or have media outlets cover their exploits, but they love their wives, they play catch with their sons and they protect their little girls.

Nothing fancy. Nothing unusual. But still: extraordinary.

I saw this in my own father. Dad is very intelligent, but he didn't seek to make a name for himself. Like so many great dads, he gave generously of his time to others. He showed up to all of my basketball games. He taught my sister and me how to ride a bike. The simple stuff.

Beyond the basic good stuff, Dad was unusually committed to God and to prayer. One of my foremost childhood memories is of Dad eating a quick dinner on Wednesday nights. We were small-church Baptists on the coast of Maine, and as such we had a weekly prayer meeting. Dad always went. This prayer meeting wasn't anything fancy. The pastor led a short study of a biblical teaching. The men and women would then separate and talk through prayer requests. Then they would pray for about 30 minutes. The whole event lasted roughly an hour.

But unlike today's society, which runs a perpetual hurry-up offense, there was no countdown clock. My father and the few other men gathered took their time collecting their thoughts. They prayed with feeling and care for the small church they served. They did not offer superfast McDonald's value-menu petitions. They addressed the Lord of heaven and earth with sobriety. They understood that they were not asking God for a mere handout. They knew they were needy sinners — sinners saved by the blood of Jesus — and they depended on Almighty God for everything: health, bread on the table, happy kids.

Years later, I am a father of three children. By God's grace, I too love the Lord. But I have realized how few young men

had what I had. On average, only one of every six American men go to church. Roughly 25 percent of women who go to church go without their husbands. These statistics make sense of the sad plight of the modern American man. More young men now live with their parents than with wives. Men commit roughly 90 percent of the violent crimes in America. By almost any metric, men are struggling. They are disengaged, frustrated and lost.

Though some cheer “the end of men,” women and children are dramatically affected by this sorry situation. Committed fathers are as rare as exotic birds in many American communities. Women must do it all, and at heavy cost. The rising generation is in increasing measure a fatherless generation with terrible fallout. Children are 32 times more likely to run away from home if they don't have a dad.

Many men are hesitant about taking first steps to address their challenges. But here is the good news about Christianity: It is a faith for losers. Utter losers. Christians are those who admit we cannot save ourselves. God requires perfect holiness to admit us to heaven, and none of us — religious or otherwise — possesses it, hard as we try.

This is why God sent his son, Jesus. Jesus' death in our place and Resurrection

for our sake show us that the solution comes from him, not us. When we turn from our sins and give our lives to Jesus, he begins the process of making all things new. This is true for struggling fathers, abandoned children, exhausted mothers, venture capitalists, pipe-fitters, high-flown politicians and everyone else.

My father's quiet spiritual leadership left a mark on me. It was not fancy. It was not front-page news. But it had an effect, showing me that God was real, that prayer was powerful and that the local church is precious.

So many American dads teach their sons about winning. They want to raise all-stars.

My dad taught me about praying. He wanted to raise a Christian.

It was nothing fancy, but still — Dad's example was extraordinary.

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Owen Strachan is president of the Council on Biblical Manhood & Womanhood (cbmw.org) and associate professor of Christian Theology at Midwestern Seminary in Kansas City, Missouri. He is married and the father of three children. He co-wrote “The Grand Design: Male and Female He Made Them,” released in April, to help men and women understand who God made them to be.

A father's prayer



By Jim DeMint

My father left my mother and four children when I was very young. As a boy growing up without a dad, I found it hard to imagine a father in heaven who really loved me and would never leave. And while my mother was persistent about taking us all to church, I disliked religion and believed churchgoers to be mostly hypocrites. It wasn't until I graduated college, got married

and began my career that I began to sense a deep need to be connected to both my father on earth and the one in heaven.

I did connect with my earthly father, who lived in Arkansas with his wife and children. He explained that he had tried to stay in touch with me, my two brothers and sister. My mother had blocked him at every turn and even threw away the Christmas gifts he sent. We had never known about the attempted visits or the presents.

My stepfather, who was tasked by my mother to throw away the Christmas gifts, confirmed my dad's story. Life is complicated, and as a flawed husband and dad myself, I've learned not to judge others too harshly. Marriage is difficult, and being a parent is even harder. My mother and father have both passed away; I still love them and am grateful for having them in my life.

My experience with my dad helped me realize that God had always been there for me, but that His access had been blocked. In my case, I was the one

who had done the blocking.

I always knew there was a God. Even as a kid I was smart enough to know that this infinite universe and the myriad variations of complex life forms could not have happened by accident. But I didn't think God could be trusted to hang around when I wasn't following all of His rules. Moreover, His rules would ruin all my fun. My plan was to wait and do business with God when I was too old to have fun. Until then, I wanted to be free!

Unfortunately, my plan gave me a lot of pain, regret and guilt, but very little freedom. Through it all, God was faithful even though I was not. He, in His own quiet and loving way, finally backed me into a corner where the only way out was up.

In my searching, I came across a Bible verse where Jesus said, “Jim, I have been standing at the door of your heart knocking for many years; if you'll just open the door I will come in” (my paraphrase of Revelation 3:20). I opened that door and prayed that Jesus would come in. My life has not been

the same since.

Not long after I opened that door, a business friend offered to take me through a discipleship program called Operation Timothy. One of the lessons was about how to communicate with God. It was about prayer. I learned how to stay in constant touch with the God who loves me and will never leave.

Now I regularly pray that God will make my marriage stronger, to prosper and protect my four children, and to thank Him for the joy of seeing my children's children — my four wonderful grandchildren!

On Father's Day, I am grateful to be a father and to have known my father on earth, and to be able to talk to my heavenly father ... and to know beyond a shadow of a doubt that he will never leave me.

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A former U.S. senator from South Carolina, Jim DeMint is president of The Heritage Foundation.



Seeing fatherhood clearly



By Pastor Tim Throckmorton

As told in the Gospel of Mark, the air that day was thick with emotion and excitement ... excitement because of what had just occurred before the eyes of the crowd, emotion so strong no one dared speak as word came to the father that his young daughter had just died.

Such a contrast of jubilation and sorrow. The woman standing before the rabbi had just been healed completely of a disease she had long battled, even to the point of destitution.

The father, a religious elder no less, stood helpless and hopeless as his

future and his hopes were dashed to pieces as the messenger's words took hold of his heart: "Your daughter is dead."

As the father steadied himself and his eyes met the rabbi's, he heard some people say, "Let's not trouble the rabbi any longer."

And before he could even respond, the comforting words of the Nazarene landed clearly in his heart ... "Do not be afraid; only believe." (Mark 5:36)

For dads past, present and future, we each know the challenges, fears and overwhelming concerns we have for our children and their futures.

We would fight — even die, if necessary — for their safety and well-being, and yet at times we struggle to know how to do it right, how to make the right choices, and how to be the fatherly influence we need to be.

Then those words of the Rabbi speak through the ages to us all ... "Do not be afraid; only believe."

The father's name was Jarius, the rabbi's name, Jesus.

We are not privy to the little girl's name, nor are we told what kind of a girl, woman or mother she grew up to be, but what we do know is this: She

did grow up because Jesus came to her home and healed her. And more importantly for us dads, we know a few more key pieces of information: We know what she saw when she came to and looked into the face of her father. *When she opened her eyes and looked at her daddy, she saw that he was not ashamed to seek out Jesus.*

Dads, let your babies know there are some things you cannot do ... but show them that you have faith in the one you say you serve, faith in the one you go to church to worship and sing about. Let them hear you calling out on the name of the Lord, and not just in church! As a father, I must be a seeker of Him ... a seeker of God's wisdom, strength and guidance.

The second thing I want you to notice: *The young daughter saw that her father was not ashamed to express his love toward her.* He loved his little girl, and this love said, "I do what I have to do, go where I have to go to see that you're made whole."

We don't know how long she lived, but I do believe that there was not a day that went by that this girl didn't know or think, "I'm alive today because of my daddy's love for me!"

For our family, a moment of truth came nine years ago, on June 30th, as I recall, and a Saturday, to be exact. The moment of truth was the moment she had been waiting for all her life. As the chapel doors swung open wide before us, to the sound of the Wedding March, my precious Stephanie looked at me and said, "Daddy, I want my marriage to be just like yours and Mommy's."

We've have our ups and downs like everybody, but we always loved the Lord together and each other, and you know what? Stephanie was watching. My wife Terri and I didn't always agree ... but Stephanie was watching.

We faced heartache and loss, we laughed and cried, we did our best to honor God and each other; that was our vow before God ... and she was watching. *They all are!*

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Pastor Tim Throckmorton leads Crossroads Church in Circleville, Ohio, and is an official on several ministry and civic boards, including the board of directors of the Family Policy Council of Ohio. A writer and radio commentator, he released a DVD project in 2010 called, "Lest We Forget," a study of America's godly heritage.

'Tears and fears Godward are powerful prayers'



By George R. Grange

"Jesus, if you're really Lord, I need a job." That was my first prayer after a very curious experience at the DAR Constitution Hall earlier that Sunday evening.

I was 20. Just completed my second year at the University of Virginia. Was supposed to begin my summer job at a D.C. brokerage firm Monday. But there was a letter waiting for me. The market had tanked. Regular brokers were being laid off. Sorry, no job.

My younger sister sought to console me (I thought) with free movie tickets. Only en route did I learn that it was a Billy Graham movie. Though raised as a churchgoer, my two years in Charlottesville had me quickly drifting into agnosticism along with most of my fraternity brothers. My sister's beautiful others-focus and a seemingly rock-solid faith in what she described as the "resurrected Jesus" was a lighthouse that marked my drifting.

I had increasingly mocked her faith as anti-intellectual, but I deeply respected her. So I resolved to make the most of this bait and switch. I would use the movie to collect more ammunition for exposing the intellectual contradictions of this religious crutch.

My debates following the movie at Constitution Hall were more like cross-examinations — first, I did battle with a recovering alcoholic businessman, then a recovering workaholic lawyer and finally a banker who was the president of the Christian organization sponsoring the movie. I was smugly confident that my big questions were crushing these sincere but misguided witnesses. They had no satisfactory answers for the incompatibility of a loving God allowing suffering, or presumed scientific disproofs of key claims of the Bible, or the multiplicity of world religions casting huge doubt on the full truth of any of them, etc.

Sure, Jesus may have been up there with Confucius, Krishna, Buddha and Mohammed as a great moral teacher, but no other founder of a world religion was claiming to be God. They all seemed to be teaching people how to be good enough to be accepted by God. They were teaching truth, not claiming to be "the truth."

Yet almost on a parallel track from my cross-examination, it felt like someone was cross-examining me. A big question rose from a much deeper part of me: "If Jesus really is who he allegedly claimed to be, how can I, with rational integrity, continue to ignore that claim?" I was already pretty convinced by the evidence that Jesus was an unparalleled moral teacher and philosopher, who lived briefly in Galilee two millennia ago and died a martyr after being caught up in the power struggle between the Jewish leaders and their Roman captors. But what if he really was the incarnate God, the visible expression of the invisible God? What if the creator of all really did unfathomably humble himself to become a man to make a way for self-serving humans to be forgiven and restored to right relationship with God, as the Bible had him claiming?

And, if he was there, why not just ask him? If he was listening, and if he really

was no epic light show, but I do remember being surprised by a quiet yet pervasive peace. It reminded me that for the past day, I had been increasingly upset that my carefully arranged summer job had been pulled out from under me, and was stewing about how, at this late date, I would find employment.

One of the men I spoke with after the movie had prayed with me and encouraged me to start reading my Bible and asking God to show himself to me. It was late when I got home, so I did neither, but I did pray the "job prayer." It was prayed with more challenge than faith. Yet the next thing I remember is my mom knocking early at my bedroom door and saying there was a man on the phone who said he met me last night. It was the banker. What was I doing for the summer? Nothing yet. So get dressed and meet him at his office at 9. Following a 20-minute interview, he shook my hand and showed me to my

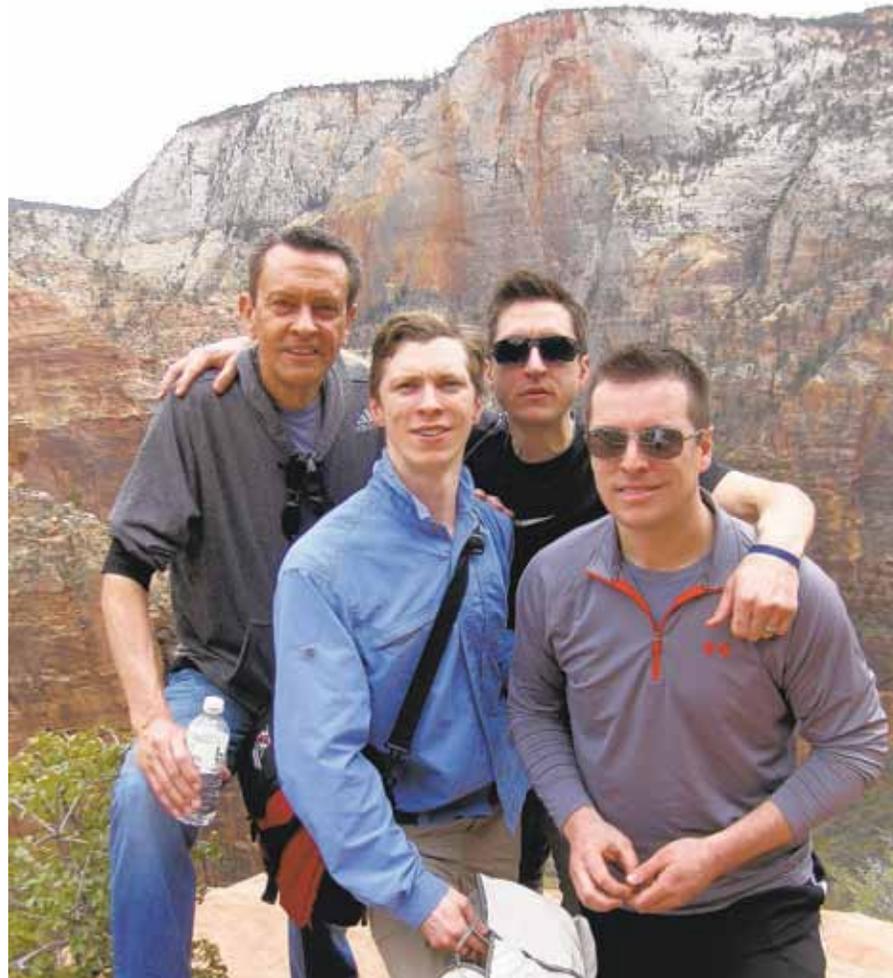
we ask not; and even when we do ask, we ask amiss?

Jesus taught his disciples that the work of God is believing in him (John 6:29). This seems to be the heart of God honoring prayer: Believe him. Sounds like this should be easy for a "believer," but we know it's not. This work of believing prayer requires heavy lifting. We must learn to glance at the wounds of this fallen creation while we gaze upon the physician whose wounds bring our healing. It's hard work to face the messes of our lives, our family, our neighbors. It's easier to turn away. They evoke tears and fears. Yet tears and fears Godward are powerful prayers.

This journey of seeking to know God through the work of prayer led to forming a weekly prayer and Bible study group of fellow students when at Yale Divinity School, then at Harvard Law School. It has led to morning prayer groups with one or two other attorneys, and a noon, officewide lunch and prayer time every Tuesday at our Tysons Corner law firm. This prayer path has led to a classroom of prayer every Wednesday evening at our local church and morning prayer with 10 to 20 men in our family room every Saturday from 7 a.m. to 8:30 a.m. for the past three decades. I think my wife and I would both say that this journey of prayer through 45 years has been a vital — though still mysterious — work developing the muscle of covenant-keeping and preferring the other in love.

So after this man of little faith challenged his new boss to provide a job, he did that and much more. My Father knew the real job I needed. Far more than a summer job in banking, he has given the lifetime work of believing him. It's not just a job for me. It's a call to all. To offer ourselves back to the God who made us in his image to be his servants every day and in every place. To do the hard work of believing him as we face and touch the bad, ugly and broken in our paths. To serve and pray, expecting to see more of the goodness of God's love and reign coming to our homes, offices and communities. This is the work and joy of prayer. That's a full-time job.

George R. "Chip" Grange II is co-founder and director of Gammon & Grange P.C., a law practice in McLean, Virginia, that serves businesses, individuals, nonprofits, churches and many national and international faith-based ministries and other NGOs. He currently serves as general counsel or special counsel to numerous nonprofit and business entities, and has served on the national boards and executive committees of ECFA (Evangelical Council for Financial Accountability), Christian Legal Society and Christian Leadership Alliance. He is married and has four grown children and nine grandchildren.



was the rightful Lord of all creation, why not permit him to somehow convince me that it was true?

So, shocking myself, my knees bent to the marbled tiles and my tongue asked this Jesus if he really was God, to convince me. If he was Lord of all, then rule my life as well. If he would do that, I would stop being my own boss.

I had prayed many give-me prayers previously, but this was the first time I remember offering myself to God. There

desk. I was beginning my summer job in banking the same Monday morning I had been scheduled to begin at a firm that was laying off brokers only two blocks away.

Few of my prayers since have been answered as quickly or dramatically. But that experience was a powerful catapult to launch what has been a five-decade journey seeking to learn and experience the work of prayer. What does it mean to pray without ceasing? To pray always? About everything? That we have not because

Prayers of a football coach: How giving thanks changed my life



By Coach Joe Kennedy

I've found that as seasons of life change, so do my prayers. My fights with God as a troubled teenager were far different from the prayers I've uttered recently as a high school football coach, fired for the very act of praying.

But I've found that no matter what I'm going through, there is one kind of prayer that has the power to change everything — the prayer of thanksgiving.

It took me a long time to realize that.

As a child, prayer was something I did in church, but couldn't understand.

As a 13-year-old returning from two years in foster care to find that my family had moved without me, prayer was

falling on my knees, fists in the air, cursing at the God I didn't even know.

Later as a young man in a Christian boys' home, prayer was a constant debate as I tried to reconcile my doubts about God with the unconditional love I saw in those who mentored me.

Though I gave my life to the Lord in that boys' home, I grew distant from God while serving in the Marine Corps. Prayer became only about what I thought I wanted.

It wasn't until after I retired from the military that God really became real to me. It happened when my wife and kids persuaded me to go to church with them. That day, as I stood in church, I knew it was time to get serious about my walk with God, and I did.

Suddenly everything about my prayer life changed. Instead of being desperate, I was grateful. Instead of asking for what I wanted, I thanked God for what I already had.

Through prayers of thanksgiving, my life changed in three important ways.

First, my perspective changed. Going from constantly asking God to constantly thanking God, I realized life isn't all about me. Thanking God made me focus on my blessings instead of my problems. Now I can't help but see God

and his goodness no matter where I look.

Second, giving thanks made me stronger because it forced me to stop worrying about my own capabilities. Instead, I thank God for the grace and power he's already given me through Jesus Christ, knowing that he will help me overcome any obstacle.

Third, praying in thanksgiving gave me a new kind of freedom.

It's like when you dump a jigsaw puzzle out on the table. At first you don't know what to make of all the mismatched pieces in front of you. If you don't have a point of reference for where to start, the uncertainty can be paralyzing.

But when you pray and thank God for what he's already done in your life, things start making sense. You can see where the pieces of your life fit into his big picture. Your life has purpose.

Now I see why I went through what I did as a kid. It prepared me to become Bremerton High School's football coach, where I was called to serve and help a new generation of young men dealing with similar problems. Realizing this has set me free to go where God leads and trust him with the outcome.

But all of this doesn't mean I don't struggle through hard times anymore. Just last fall, I lost that job as a high

school football coach because of my prayers. Specifically, I was suspended midseason and ultimately terminated *because* I chose to give a prayer of thanks as I have done after every game for the past eight years. The experience has been extremely hard for me — but I still give thanks.

I give thanks for the time I did have with my players, even though it was cut short. I thank God for his continued faithfulness throughout this difficult time for my family and me. I thank God for the strength he's given me. And I thank God that this is all part of his greater plan — that even though I don't understand, I am free to follow him, knowing that he has a purpose.

Thanking God in my prayers has become a way of life for me. More importantly, it's changed my life. I'll never stop giving thanks.

.....
Joe Kennedy is a former football coach for Bremerton High School in Bremerton, Washington. He was suspended and later terminated for taking a knee to offer a private prayer at the 50-yard line after football games. Coach Kennedy is represented by First Liberty Institute, a national law firm dedicated to defending religious freedom.

Guided from one 'mission' to another



By David O. Treadwell

Many a Christian college student has earnestly prayed, "Lord, what shall I do with my life?"

As a senior at Wheaton College, I was sitting uncomfortably in our college chapel during our Spiritual Emphasis Week, praying for God's direction after graduation. It was during the days of Vietnam and the draft. I was completing ROTC and awaiting commissioning, and I was anticipating my August wedding.

But I was also terribly insecure as to my real future as an adult. Our speaker, Leighton Ford, perhaps best known to

us students as Billy Graham's brother-in-law, allowed us time for serious prayer during each service. As best I knew how, I prayed. Every night that week, I prayed.

This was a life-changing week for me. Over the course of five days of intense, honest prayer, God outlined my future. At the end of the week, I felt fully assured in plans to serve in the U.S. Army for 20 years, then pursue Christian employment with the security of the Army's excellent retirement plan. Reflecting today, I marvel at how naive I was. Even so, God generously and clearly laid out his plan for my life at that time.

At the 21-year point of a successful military career, I completed the U.S. Army War College and was selected for promotion. My way seemed clear — until a month later when the doors to a different kind of service opened wide: the Christian Legal Society offered me a job as administrator.

While considering the offer, I remembered my college prayer and assurance returned. I requested that my name be removed from the promotion list, and I retired from the Army.

I loved the job at the Christian Legal Society. I learned so much, both in

management and in depending on the Lord for the staff and resources to keep the ministry moving forward. For over 14 years, the Lord used our staff and board attorneys to teach me the proper way to manage a nonprofit.

I thought that for the rest of my life I would be supporting Christian lawyers who were protecting religious freedom. My college prayers seemed fulfilled. Little did I know.

While working at the Christian Legal Society, I accepted a position as a church elder and was assigned to our missions council. One question nagged me: "Why are we sending youths on expensive trips to Ukraine and Jamaica but doing nothing to serve the needs of poor and hurting people in our nation's capital — right next door?"

God used that question when I was given responsibility for expanding our church ministries into the District. As only God could arrange, Central Union Mission seemed to be at every organizational meeting I attended. Soon, I was leading church groups into the city to volunteer at the mission and its Camp Bennett.

In 1997, when the mission was facing

a leadership challenge, I was able to offer some thoughts on Christian conciliation, and the board of directors invited me to join them as a member. Six months later, they invited me to serve Central Union Mission as executive director, challenging me to apply my military, nonprofit and church experiences. God moved me from one "mission" to another.

Eighteen years later, I continue at the mission. God answered my college prayer beyond all I could hope for or imagine. As Isaiah 65:24 promises, "Before they call I will answer; while they are still speaking I will hear."

I challenge you today: Ask him. I'm a witness that he will give you his answer.
.....
Retired Army Lt. Col. David O. Treadwell has been executive director of Central Union Mission since 1998. He is married and has three grown children and three grandchildren. The mission (MissionDC.org) is the District of Columbia's oldest social service agency and serves the disadvantaged people of the city with shelter, training, food, furniture, clothing and the message of Christ's love.

Praying for God's 'best' over our 'best'



By Jeff Kemp

Have you ever wanted something that turned out to be inferior to what God had in mind? I have.

I lost my job and my career on the same August day. I'd had a good 1991 season helping the Seahawks and Eagles win games. I expected to make the Eagles 1992 roster and earn the best salary of my career. Instead, I was the last player cut that summer, and I found myself back home in Seattle without a team or a job. I was talking to God a lot for the first month of the season, asking that any team would need me and sign me up. As it turned out, God wanted something else for me — something better.

I was praying for what I wanted. I

wanted God to fix things; God wanted to fix me. I wanted changed circumstances; God wanted changed character. I wanted a new team; God wanted to take me in a new direction.

After four weeks of praying for my way, I thought I got my answer when the Seahawks quarterback got injured. I called and left a message for the coach, telling him that I was in town, in shape and ready to report. He called back and said the team would be signing a different quarterback. My heart sank. I headed outside my home, slammed the door and sat down on the porch to have a pity party. Grumbling at the unfairness of it all, I told God, "I'm not going to pray. I'm just going to soak in this stinking pain."

My wife, Stacy, walked out to console me. "Jeff, I can't imagine how much this hurts, but I do know that God has taken us through many tough times and he has always been faithful in caring for us."

"I know that," I replied, "but I just want to finish football with some dignity."

She gently countered, "Jeff, when Jesus left this world, he didn't receive any dignity. Maybe you need to let go of that desire."

"And maybe you need to go inside," I said.

As I considered the last days of Jesus' epic life and his self-sacrifice on the cross, I melted in remorse for my attitude. My shallow, greedy desires for more pro football had crowded out the truth that God's love was my greatest treasure. Soon, I was praying again, this time humbling myself, feeling God's love and praising him for his love and forgiveness. Then he planted these words in my heart: "Forget what lies behind and press on to what lies ahead" (Philippians 3:13). With that, God released me from my inferior desire for more NFL football and sent me forward into his much better plans: using my past career as a platform to join him in strengthening men, marriages and families.

I've come to understand that prayer is not just talking, but also listening to God, acknowledging that we don't see life as accurately or as fully as he. Prayer moves our desires to align with God's, to do what he deems best over what we deem best. Prayer is a man's greatest strength, yet our pride often prevents us from diligent prayer. On the other hand, humility compels us in prayer to trust God and to invite his will and his power in life.

Praying has shaped my life, both alone and with teammates. I pray with

Stacy nearly every day. Men experience God's power when they pray at all junctures in life: blitzes and blessings; new experiences; when resolving conflicts; and in all family, career and ministry efforts. Prayer fuels humility that leads to apologies, forgiveness and closeness on your most important team.

A man can talk to his Father in heaven constantly. Daily routines and regular conversations can include prayer — mealtimes, tucking children into bed and especially when a conflict arises in our marriage and family. Even children in college or the military will appreciate your asking how you can privately pray for them.

But remember, men, whenever we pray, let's ask for what God wants over what we want.

.....
Jeff Kemp quarterbacked 11 seasons in the NFL. He has been married 33 years to Stacy; they have four grown sons. He is a vice president at FamilyLife (FamilyLife.com), a national speaker and author of the book "Facing the Blitz." He also hosts a weekly video blog, Facing Your Blitz (FacingTheBlitz.com).

'Does God hear me when I pray?'



By Mark Hancock

Unrest at the youth detention center that evening brought a change in procedure. Instead of speaking to 120 incarcerated boys and girls in one room, our team was asked to split up, with some of us ministering to the few girls allowed to attend the weekly chapel service.

I ended up sitting across the table from a brown-haired, brown-eyed girl of about 14 years old. I knew nothing about her, and protocol dictated that I shouldn't ask.

Picking at a thumbnail, she asked, "What are we supposed to talk about?" "Whatever you want to talk about."

Angry voices echoed down the concrete hall, spilling into the room

and distracting her for a moment. Somewhere a guard blew a whistle and slammed a door. She shook her head. "This place is crazy." And then, peeking from under a furrowed brow, she asked, "Are you kinda like a priest or something?"

"Kinda."
 She glanced quickly over her shoulder and then breathed a sigh. "Does God hear me when I pray?"

"I believe He does. Why?"
 "I dunno."

I shifted in my metal seat and leaned forward onto my elbows. "Is there something you'd like to pray about?"

She launched into a story about family drug abuse and being taken from her home. Separated from her five siblings, she'd run away from her foster placements multiple times. "Most of my brothers and sisters I see every once in a while. Usually in here." She scanned the room. "But I asked God to let me know how Jason is doing. He's my favorite brother and the only one I haven't seen since we was taken away from Mama."

Eyes reddening, she turned away. "I'm just not sure God hears me. Or even knows who I am."

I extended my hands across the table, careful not to make contact but doing

the best I could to reach this sad little girl. "Judy?"

She'd never told me her name and startled at the sound of it. "What?"

Tears welled up in my eyes. "Jason is fine. He is living in our home. Happy as any 11-year-old boy can be."

Unbeknownst to us, 12 miles away, my wife was putting Jason, our foster son, to bed.

He asked, "Can we pray for Judy?"

"For Judy? Sure. What made you think of her?"

"I dunno. Dad's at the 'tension center. It made me think of her. I wonder how she's doing."

I reflect on this powerful testimony of prayer often. The way God orchestrated things in such a way that I would be the one to talk to Judy. That Jason would choose that moment to pray for her. That Judy would feel safe in sharing enough of her story for me to recognize it and know her name. And that she would come to realize God knew her name, too.

There have been times I could have wondered if He knew me. Like when I was away from home and dead-dog tired running ministry campaigns in Asia, Central America, Europe, South America and Africa. Even though I knew no one at any level within a thousand miles or

more — I knew He knew me.

Every hair. Every thought. Every fear. Every lonely, tired moment.

He knows.

Now, steering the upstart, fast-growing rocket ship that is Trail Life USA, I dig deep and lean hard in my middle-of-the-night struggles with the pressures of living in a culture that seems determined to forget Him. I hug Him tighter and am reminded that there's scant difference between a lonely little girl, a broken little boy, and the CEO of a national ministry. In the quiet and not-so-quiet, we turn to Him and, somehow, everything is OK.

Prayer is much more than the way things change. It's how we can know He knows us.

.....
Mark Hancock, chief executive of Trail Life USA (trailifeusa.com), began his career founding and running a national advertising agency for 15 years before his conversion to Christ led him into ministry. An award-winning writer, he has served as a marriage and family therapist, youth and college pastor, director of a ministry for the homeless, and director of global events for an international ministry. Mr. Hancock lives near Greenville, S.C., with his wife of 27 years and two sons.

Praying continuously on the will of God



By Howie Levin

There was a time in my early years when I perceived God as a hovering surveillance camera in the sky. In a good way, he was a deterrent to my poor behavior and the moral compass of my conscience. As a Jew, I saw God as all-powerful, having created the heavens and earth. He was a stickler for rules and a potential rewarder of good performance. I later learned that I had it all wrong. God was so much more, and I could know him and his will.

Talking with God (praying) was limited to me trying to justify my sins, my unjustifiable thoughts and behaviors, and asking for stuff. Any prayers I prayed of awe and praise were not my own, but rote recitation of words of others

prepared way back in antiquity. My skewed view of God created a barrier to a personal relationship and stymied real transparency and knowledge of his goodness and grace.

This was before Christ grabbed me to reset my life. My relationship with Jesus as the way, the truth and the life and the only way to God the Father changed everything (John 14:6). My faith shifted dramatically from “knowing of” a God to an increasing hunger of “knowing God himself” (Philippians 3:8).

My prayer life has served as a barometer on my relationship with God and spiritual growth. In fits and starts, my prayers grew in frequency and quality. I developed an intimate fellowship with him, sometimes as a father and child and other times as a friend to a friend. I also longed for his wisdom.

Some might think me weird, but I talk with God continuously. Why shouldn't he be my alter ego? After all, the Word of God and my experience tell me that he is ever-present; he knows everything; he is holy, righteous and just; he is faithful to his promises; and he is lovingly and unconditionally committed to my well-being. He is also sovereign over all things and able to exercise his will.

I discovered that knowledge of God's

will was key to bringing him the glory he seeks and aligning myself in the sweet spot of his plans. Two verses I find myself praying often are “... that you may be filled with the knowledge of his will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding, so as to walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing to him, bearing fruit in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God” (Colossians 1:9-10).

I began to truly want to see God's will be done on earth as it is in heaven (Matthew 6:10). If only I could figure out his will and be supernaturally compelled to obey. Prayer empowered me wanting it, discerning it and while doing it.

Wanting it

It's not about us, it's all about God. Prayer helped me understand the folly of being outside God's perfect will.

God showed me my weaknesses and the immensity of his grace (Ephesians 2:7). Even when I squandered it, he kept lavishing it on. I now could fully accept, want and pray for God's will.

Discerning it

God's wisdom is superior to ours (Isaiah 55:8-9), but he gives it freely if we ask (James 1:5). I seek his wisdom beyond my times of heightened need

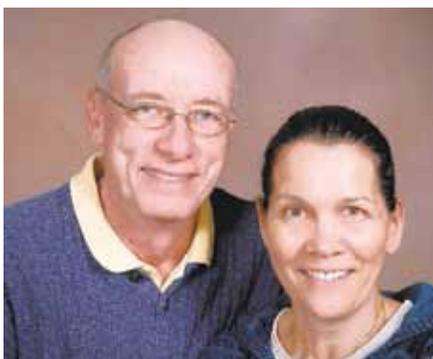
and dependence. I now ask to know his will continuously and learn to patiently wait and observe him moving. God has opened my eyes to a higher level of understanding of the intense warfare going on in the spiritual realms. This clarity has helped me navigate life and mission.

Doing it

Whatever we ask in Jesus' name will happen if it's in accordance with God's will (1 John 5:14-15, John 14:13-14). Along the way, I pray knowing that I can approach God with confidence (Hebrews 4:16). Obeying the will of God is the most effective plan in the universe and surety of reward (Hebrews 11:6).

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Howie Levin, an experienced nonprofit executive and pastor and previously a nuclear safety expert, is the unlikely of candidates to be convening leaders who are shaping a Gospel movement called OneHeartDC in our nation's capital (OneHeartDC.org). Undergirded in prayer, God is uniting hundreds of churches to saturate our region with the good news in word and deed, bringing hope that changes lives here and into eternity. Go to Reset2016.com for details about the July 16 Together 2016 historic gathering on the National Mall.

My spouse's prayers



By Christian Meert

My wife, Christine, and I, were both raised in very Catholic families. We met in college in the 1970s and drifted from the faith quite a lot, since we had an abortion that would scar us for the rest of our lives. We still married in the Catholic Church, with my uncle, a Franciscan priest, presiding.

A few years into our marriage, Christine started going back to church regularly. It was obvious that she enjoyed it. She read and prayed by herself and with the children. She was more at peace.

Little did I know that for over two years, she prayed the Rosary daily just for me, asking the Lord to open my heart so that I would come back to Him.

That's what it took for me to realize that, even though everything was going very well, I was not fully satisfied. So I looked back to when I was a kid and truly enjoyed the beautiful Masses, full churches, the processions of the Blessed Sacrament and for Mary's Feast days, and the bells and smells. But now I was a grown man — hey, 31 or 32 years old — and I thought I didn't need the Church. I thought I could speak directly to God, like I would to a good friend. For me, the Catholic Church was too hard to get. The Mass was complicated and I wasn't sure about the Sacraments or the Saints. Then there was the Virgin Mary. I really didn't understand what She was all about. We didn't have any religious friends and I didn't try to look for answers.

To make it short, I finally agreed to go on a weeklong retreat with Christine.

I told God, “OK, I'll give you my one-week vacation, and you do whatever I should expect you to do.” The second evening I felt something was happening through my whole body. I thought, like Zacchaeus, “Not me, I just came to look.”

Then somebody came to me in a vision. It wasn't God, it was the Virgin Mary, the one I didn't understand. I could see her blue eyes, her lips and her dark hair; she was very young, very

petite and so beautiful. Saint Pio used to call her, “*Abyss of Grace, Incomparable Masterpiece, and Woman Clothed in Light. The Light of God flows into her and she — reflecting like a mirror — sends it back out onto humanity.*”

She had a very sad smile; she didn't say a word, just looked at me. I felt like I had to do something, so I presented to her all my family and friends. This is when she really smiled. Without noticing any changes, I sensed that she was leading me to a spot on my right side. And there I was, in front of a great light, nothing I can begin to describe. It was as Pope Benedict XVI once said, “*When one has the grace to sense a strong experience of God, it is as though seeing something similar to what the disciples experienced during the Transfiguration: for a moment, they experienced ahead of time something that will constitute the happiness of Paradise. In general, it is brief experiences that God grants on occasions, especially in anticipation of harsh trials.*”

Yes, it was beautiful! I knew I was in The Presence of the Source of Light and Love. I was in the presence of God. It felt so good, I was so happy. This was where I belonged; this was where I wanted to spend my eternity. I stayed there in awe. Everything of this world around me had

disappeared and I was crying of happiness, but then, I had to go back!

A few years later, we did what Jesus told the young man to do in Mark 10:21, “*Go, sell everything you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me.*” We joined the Catholic Community of the Beatitudes and spent the next 15 years in France and later in Denver, where we founded the first house of the Community in the United States. Today we remain in Colorado and help engaged couples from around the world prepare to exchange the Sacrament of Matrimony.

The seed was there, my wife's prayer watered it, God did the rest.

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Christian and Christine Meert are French-born U.S. citizens. They are the directors of the Office of Marriage and Family Life for the Catholic Diocese of Colorado Springs, Colorado, led by Bishop Michael J. Sheridan. In 2004, after 15 years as a missionary family, they founded the first and only online, mentor-led, one-on-one Catholic Marriage Preparation program (catholicmarriageprep.com). They have five daughters and 12 grandchildren.

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