

Chapter III

Prayer -- The World's Most Powerful Alternative Medicine

Some 30 or 40 years ago we believed that "Scientific Medicine" would wipe out all disease. New antibiotics and tranquilizers were discovered, new surgical procedures were devised and space age diagnostic techniques were perfected. For a while it seemed that if we could all live just a few more years, new discoveries would make us immune to death itself.

About 10 to 15 years ago the party mood turned sour. What we had was a mere joy ride of more and more doctoring:

- Antibiotics were prescribed for the sniffles.
- Tranquilizers dulled the effects of all stress.
- X-rays were ordered for trivial reasons.
- Surgery was performed when not required.

Real harm was done. All drugs, we learned, had unwanted, undesirable effects. Needless x-rays exposed us to radiation. Many operations were ineffective or unnecessary or both.

But that's only half of what we learned from this self-analysis. Even when done correctly, even when done with care and compassion, the medical approach to disease is incomplete. Wonderful at times, but not the whole answer.

What orthodox medical treatment ignores is the body's ability to heal itself through:

- Strengthening the immune system through nutrition.
- Reducing stress.
- Developing a more active daily life.
- Dietary improvements.
- Lifestyle changes.
- The effects of prayer.

Some people reacted against overdoctoring by rejecting the technological advances almost completely, relying on untested herbs, untested diets, and unscientific procedures to prevent or treat all illness.

But there is no need to reject all of modern medicine because of its occasional excesses. You can take advantage of the best technological medical care and use the proven ways of prevention as dictated by good sense, and enjoy the best of two worlds.

Doctors today are becoming more aware of the alternative approaches to health but prayer is still rarely on the list. Millions of people, however, believe prayer has the power to heal. Doctors are more likely to say, "It won't hurt but can't help much either." The idea of "action from afar" seems so illogical that the best scientific minds reject it immediately.

However, in perhaps the most rigidly controlled scientific study ever done on the effects of prayer Cardiologist Randolph Byrd, formerly a University of California Professor, has shown that prayer works and that it can be a powerful force in healing.

Dr. Byrd designed his study as "a scientific evaluation of what God is doing."

"After much prayer", he states, "the idea of what to do came to me."

The study lasted 10 months. As patients with heart attacks were admitted to the coronary care unit at San Francisco General Hospital, a computer assigned 192 patients to a group that was prayed for by home prayer groups. 201 patients with heart attacks were in groups not remembered in prayer.

The study was designed according to the most rigid criteria that can be used in clinical studies in medicine, meaning that it was a randomized, prospective, double blind experiment in which neither the patient, nurses, nor doctors knew which group the patients were in.

Dr. Byrd recruited Roman Catholic and Protestant groups around the country to pray for those patients in the group to be prayed for. The prayer groups were given the names of their patients, were told specifics about their conditions, and were asked to pray each day but were not told how to pray.

"Each person prayed for many different patients and each patient in the experiment had between five and seven persons praying for him or her," Dr. Byrd explained.

The results were striking. The prayed-for patients differed remarkably in these four areas:

1. They were five times less likely to require antibiotics,
2. They were three times less likely to develop heart failure.
3. No patient in the prayed-for group required a ventilator
4. Fewer patients in the prayed-for group died.

If the results of this study had come from a new drug or a new surgical procedure instead of prayer, the news media would have heralded it as a "breakthrough." Even

so, a hard-boiled skeptic, Dr. William Nolen, who has written a book debunking faith healing, said this, "It sounds like the study will stand up to scrutiny . maybe we doctors ought to be writing on our order sheets, pray three times a day. If it works, it works."

If prayer works, and now there is, even scientific evidence that it does, can you use prayer when yeti are sick and expect it to help you recover, stand the pain, cope with the frustrations, and so on. Of course you can, but you must learn the fundamentals.

Consider prayer as the way you enhance the freshness, vitality and power of your faith. Dr. Alexis Carrel, Nobel Prize winning physician, said this about the power of faith:

"When a person discovers the extent of his or her power, by the conscious and correct use of faith and belief, he or she finds that there has been introduced an entirely new set of laws into his experience."

A law is a settled rule of action; a principle that works in an orderly fashion. There is one set of natural laws for the physical world. But Jesus reversed natural laws through his use of spiritual laws, producing impossible cures and miraculous hearings.

The laws Dr. Carrel mentions are truths that have intrigued thinkers who search continually for an under- standing of "how things work." So the laws aren't new, your way of understanding them is. This leads to the first fundamental:

I. Your faith has great power — learn to use it.

Dr. Carrel also believed that much disease was self- inflicted through wrong thoughts, opinions, and beliefs. "Envy hate, and fear, when these sentiments are habitual, are capable of starting organic changes and genuine disease," he said.

This tells us that our attitudes can cause sickness as well as set us free from disease. What, specifically, will prayer do, you might ask. If you regard your attitudes as being the motivation for what habits you'll adopt and which ones you'll give up, you can *see* the specific use of prayer. It tells you which direction to take. This poem illustrates the point:

*One she drives east and another she drives west
With the selfsame winds that blow,
Tis the set of the sails and not the gale,
Which tells us the way to go.*

The second fundamental is this:

II. Prayer sets the sail for the believer.

What, specifically, will prayer do? When you steer your sailboat you have choices to make. Shall you go east, west, north, south, onto the rocks, or into a safe harbor. The wind doesn't care. It blows all the same. You are the one steering.

The Bible promises that prayer will promote your personal growth into the likeness of Jesus. And, the more you're like Jesus, the better will be your steering, the more sure will be the set of your sail. Two things only can promote movement of your life to be more like Jesus:

1. Prayer.
2. Study of the Bible.

The third and fourth fundamentals are these:

III. There is no true prayer without Bible study.

IV. There is no true Bible study without prayer.

Other things being equal, what must you contribute in order to capitalize on the promises you've been given? Two things:

1. Time.
2. Your heart.

The contribution of heart is the more important for if

you pray with heart you will accomplish vastly more in a short time than you can over a longer time without heart, as God himself promised in Jeremiah 29:13.

"You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart."

The fifth and sixth fundamentals are these:

V. You must devote time to fulfill fundamentals III and IV.

VI. You must seek God with all your heart.

The Essence of Christian Health

You've undoubtedly heard the saying, "you become what you eat." It's true to a point but there's a step that precedes the lifting of a filled fork; it's the thought of the food. So, a more accurate statement would be, "you become what you think about most of the time."

It's food, you become what food produces.

Sometimes the thought proceeds to the act of eating. Sometimes not. Eating is often impulsive and casual, going with the crowd, so to speak. What we're going to eat is always worthy of thought.

As a Christian you have been told that your body is a temple. Temples cost something, thereby they're worth something. Your body and your health have great value. What safeguards have we been given through our faith to protect our temples?

In Ephesians 1:3 we are told that God has given us every spiritual blessing in Christ. This is to say, when Jesus died and was resurrected, he obtained every spiritual blessing there was for you and me. Can spiritual blessings protect your health? Absolutely.

- The Lord can search your heart and have you tell yourself through your conscience whether your acts are right, wrong, intelligent, stupid, and so on.
- The Lord deciphers your thoughts. This is a great

preventive move, when merged with the next spiritual blessing.

- The Lord can bring planned sins to light before the act by deciphering our intentions. Sometimes we slip. Sometimes we fall. We're human.
- The Lord delivers us from our sins when we are more human than divine.
How does prayer have the power to keep us healthy?
- Prayer can cleanse our hearts from secret faults.
- Prayer can keep us away from temptations.
- Prayer can replace arrogance with humbleness.
- Prayer makes our meditations acceptable to God.
- Prayer delivers us from the power of evil.
- Prayer gives us access to the Holy Spirit.
- Prayer guides us in his truth to his path for our lives.

So added together, the powers of prayer are impressive.

The quest for power in today's society is everywhere, but nowhere is the promise made as clear as in Isaiah 40:28-31. Notice how the words begin:

Do you not know?

Have you not heard?

The Lord is the everlasting God,

The creator of the ends of the earth.

He will not grow tired or weary,

And his understanding no one can fathom.

He gives strength to the weary

And increases the power of the weak.

Even youths grow tired and weary,

And young men stumble and fall;

But those who hope in the Lord

Will renew their strength.

They will soar on wings like eagles;

They will run and not grow weary,

They will walk and not faint.

Isaiah makes clear that you can live your life in God's strong way rather than through your way if you put your hope in God. This brings up fundamental number seven.

VII. God's power is supernatural and delivered through the Holy Spirit.

The religion of Jesus Christ is a supernatural religion from start to finish. This makes supernatural power available to you through the Holy Spirit. This power is available only through prayer, but it is available. This is the crucial point. What we must now do is learn how to pray to get what we ask.

How to Pray to Get What You Ask

"The prayer of a righteous man is powerful and effective."

James 5:16 NIV

Tens of thousands of people have tested the Bible on the point and found it to be absolutely true in their own experience. If we know how they prayed, then we can pray the same way and get what we ask for. The example of what earnest praying can accomplish is taken from Acts 12:5, when Peter was in prison and escaped miraculously through the prayers of the church. From this passage we have four steps that assure we'll get what we pray for.

Step #1. Pray to God.

This means that when you're engaged in the process of prayer, be there. Don't be off with your boss, your income tax or your family life, letting them crowd your mind. During prayer, remove your everyday frustrations from your attention.

Of course, there are events that must have preceded your wish to be at prayer.

First, you can't come to God through any merit on your own. God only wants to communicate with us after

we've met his son, Jesus, and dealt with him.

Second, since the power of prayer is delivered through the spirit of God, having the spirit means believing, that Jesus died for our sins. Then, the spirit can take us by the hand and introduce us to God, making sure the relationship is made.

To sum it up: we need God to pray to, Jesus to pray through and the Holy Spirit to pray in.

Step #2. Pray with intense earnestness.

This means to put some heart into your prayer, some passion, as suggested in Jeremiah 29:13, "you will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart." If there's no heart in your prayer, should God pay attention?

R. A. Torrey, in "The Power of Prayer," says that there are two sides to the attitude you should have as you pray.

First, be humble, like a child, praying trustfully for what you want.

Second, treat prayer like a wrestling match, where your opponent is the satanic forces of evil which are quick to go against you as you pray. A lot of heart, a lot of passion, and persistence until you "breakthrough" makes intense earnestness come alive.

This isn't to say you should foam at the mouth, shout, pound the floor, and scream. It is to say, as suggested by Dr. Torrey, that real, heart-stirring, God-moving earnestness in prayer can occur from our own convictions or, when we don't know how to pray, can occur as the Holy Spirit intercedes in our behalf. When the heart is right the spirit creates the earnestness,

Step #3. Enlist others in your church to pray for you.

Dr. Torrey says that God particularly delights in answering united prayer. The power of one can be multiplied when two pray and gains additional power when others are added.

Jesus himself taught the truth in Matthew 18:19-20, *"Again I say to you, that if two of you shall agree on earth as touching any thing that they shall ask, it shall be done for them of my father who is in heaven. For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them."*

So, when God, through his Holy Spirit, puts the same burdens on two hearts and they, in the power of the spirit, pray, there is no power on earth or hell to keep them from getting what they ask for. That's what God promises.

Step #4. Have a clear picture of who or what you're praying for.

Vague prayers can be pretty and charmingly worded but when they ask for no definite specific thing, there can be no definite specific answer.

To reiterate, here's the process:

We depend on the Holy Spirit in all praying if we expect answers. The Holy Spirit leads us into the presence of God and makes God real to us.

The Holy Spirit endows our prayers with intense earnestness.

The Holy Spirit brings us into unity with others to get more power from prayer.

The Holy Spirit shows us the definite things for which we should definitely pray.

What does God require of you before answering your prayer? In 1 John 3:22 we have fundamental number eight.

VIII. God answers prayer when we reciprocate. This is the Law of Reciprocity:

You are strongly motivated to pay people back for aim-thing they do to or for you.

Could this law be God's law about answering prayer? The scripture of 1 John 3:22 suggests so:

... And receive anything from him we ask because we obey his commands and do what pleases him."

Whenever you find "because" in the Bible, the reason of things always follows. So, if our prayers are answered because we obey God's commands, how will we know whether we're on target or not?

It's another process:

- Study the Bible every day to find God's will for whatever you're praying for.
- When you discover God's will, do it.

By the Law of Reciprocity, God demands that we listen to his word before he listens to our prayer.

Self-discipline toward Bible study on your part assures you of a sharp ear on God's part for your prayers. A deaf ear on your part assures a deaf ear from God. If we do what God bids, God will do what we ask.

The second part of reciprocating with God is this:

God answers prayers for those who do things pleasing for him.

What pleases God?

The picture conveyed here is that of a father laying down a few action-principles which in his superior wisdom he knows to be best and which he values because they show obedience to authority.

But, God is no health cop and morals policeman. He expects us to seek a relationship close enough that we can at all times sense through our conscience and intuition, what is and what is not pleasing to him.

The cost of ignorance of the Law of Reciprocity as it pertains to this bit of Biblical wisdom, is very high. God has covered a lot of preventive health rules through this

one scripture. Now it doesn't say: Don't smoke, don't drink, do exercise, do eat right, don't overeat, and so on. Science now claims that 70 - 80% of all causes of chronic disease and early death can *be* prevented by getting rid of bad health habit and picking up good ones. A lot of good people have become chronically ill and disabled *or* died because they ignored this scripture.

Let's reiterate the principle:

If, as a Christian, you're trying to *be* as healthy as you can in order to get the best life and the greatest benefits and power from your belief in Christ, you will become thoroughly acquainted with God through Bible study and prayer.

Then, you will know instinctively what will please God and what will displease God. You will thereby seek to do the thing that pleases God in every action and in every choice, whether it pleases others or not. And you will not do things that displease God, no matter who else does it.

Prayer, Faith, Healing, Health

1 John 5:14-15

"This is the confidence we have in approaching God: that if we ask anything according to his will, he hears us. And if we know that he hears us — whatever we ask — we know that we have what we asked of him."

This remarkable passage tells us of the power and expectancy we can have when we pray about our own health or the health of others.

1b whom is the promise made?

Verse 13 tells us:

"Those who believe in the name of the son of God have the promise."

John himself interprets the meaning of this. When you and I *receive* the son of God to be to us what he promises to be, he becomes:

- Personal savior who bore our sins in his own body on the cross.
- Lord and master to whom we surrender absolute control of our thoughts, our will and our conduct.

This point is very clear. The promise of power in prayer is made to those who have made an absolute surrender to Jesus Christ, the Son of God. The promise is made to no one else. And, no one else has the least right to claim it.

This is why the Christian has the secret to health that the non-Christian cannot have.

If you haven't made absolute surrender to Christ you can see by the evidence that your behavior, your conduct and your habits are yours to handle as you will. And, habits, lack of self-discipline, and casualness with regard to crucial health questions such as how to eat and how to exercise create a lot of illness. As you can see, having a cause to live for makes a lot of difference in the choices you make.

How to Pray the Prayer of Faith

Jesus talked of the range of faith, from none to that powerful enough to move a mountain. Is this level of faith available to us today? Here's what Jesus said in Mark 11:22-24:

"Have faith in God, I tell you the truth, if anyone says to this mountain, 'Go, throw yourself into the sea' and does not doubt in his heart but believes that what he says will happen, it will be done for him. Therefore I tell you, whatever you ask for in prayer, believe that you have received it and it will be yours."

James backs up Jesus' words, talking about doubt in James 1:5-7.

"He who doubts is like a wave of the sea, blown and tossed by the wind. That man should not think he will receive anything from the Lord; he is a double-minded man, unstable in all he does."

So, how can you tap into faith this powerful, faith that will heal your sickness and bring you many other blessings?

- Reduced stress at work.
- A new job.
- Recovery after financial reversal, and so on.

And bring other blessings about things dear to the heart of all Christians:

- Salvation for the lost.
- Strong churches.
- Revival for our country.

Actually, the process seems to be the same.

- Study what the Bible says about your specific questions. Only Bible study can lead to intelligent faith.
- Build your prayer on the promises of God.
- Find the will of God for your question.
- If the Bible makes no specific connections to your problems or if it does, invoke the Holy Spirit to make things crystal clear, definite and specific.

Then,

- Pray in confidence.

The Fundamentals Revisited

Fundamental #1: Your faith has great power learn to use it.

Fundamental #2: Prayer sets the sail for the believer.

Fundamental #3: There is no true prayer without study of the Bible.

Fundamental #4: There is no true study of the Bible.

without prayer.

Fundamental #5: You must devote time for true prayer and Bible study.

Fundamental #6: You must have heart when you seek God.

Fundamental #7: God's power is supernatural and delivered through the Holy Spirit.

Fundamental #8: God answers prayer when we reciprocate by obeying his commands and pleasing him.

Preventing Disease Through Prayer and Action.

If prayer can *reduce* the severity of a heart attack, there's no reason to believe that it's power can't be called upon to prevent the attack in the first place. Here are thirteen things to pray for to reduce not only the risk of a heart attack, but of cancer, high blood pressure, diabetes, and stroke as well, using the fundamentals we've covered.

Thirteen Prayers to Prevent Life-Threatening Illness

Prayer #1. Pray for self-discipline to plan for health today.

Each of your days is filled with 24 hours. Time passes hourly, daily, weekly, monthly, annually. The question hangs in the air as you look in the mirror, "are you satisfied with the way you're aging?" Time slips and slides along on broken promises, yet, if you could just find 90 minutes to call your own, you could be rid of the nagging feeling that you need to be doing better by your health plan.

Pray for the self-discipline to rise earlier, to start modestly, to bring your mind to heal, to begin, today.

Prayer #2. Pray to become an expert on yourself.

We deal with our own human nature in affairs of health. Check yourself out. Do you always want the easy

way out? Do you want something for nothing? Do you blame others when you don't do what you know is right?

Pray that you will learn your body's strengths and weaknesses. Pray that you won't deny your control over mind and body. Pray to become a specialist in the study of yourself.

Prayer #3. Pray to master procrastination.

Are you always about to live? Are you waiting until you're a little less tired to start an exercise program? Are you waiting until things settle down to change your way of eating? It always seems that some other major event must pass before we begin living.

Pray that you will reject all excuses and that until, until, until . . . will fade from your vocabulary.

Prayer #4. Pray for a successful beginning.

The chief danger of beginning to change yourself is the risk of failing before your plans get going.

Pray for a clear fitness goal. Pray that your physical education will receive as equal time as does other education. Pray to find an activity where movement of body joins movement of the mind and movement of the spirit to the glory of God.

Prayer #5. Pray for a reasonable time budget.

Something has to be let go to allow time to become fit. Pray that you will find an activity that is playful, active, and satisfying. Pray that your daily budget of time will allow new priorities to be set, new perspectives, and a new sense of proportion to take over.

Prayer #6. Pray to know what to eliminate.

Evaluate the role of passive activities in your life: reading the paper, reading novels, watching T.V., going to the movies, idle chatter.

Pray that you can decide wisely which of the good

things you can do without. Pray that you can break the pattern of habit and change course.

Prayer #7. Pray for joyous sleep.

One of the joys of life is sleep. Pray that you can't wait to stretch out tired limbs, put your body at rest and enjoy the workings of your mind until sleep takes over, replenishing the zest and enthusiasm that dwindled away during the day.

Prayer #8. Pray for wisdom about eating.

The newspapers and magazines print claims and counterclaims about what we should eat. International experts take almost opposite positions on almost every issue about food. Controversy is the main dish and dessert of every meeting where diet is the topic. The press has a field day with dispatches from the front lines of the food pyramid.

Pray for wisdom to show "where we are", and "what exactly we do know" and "what we should and should not eat."

Prayer #9. Pray for a reminder to drink more water and fewer soft drinks.

The sugar in soft drinks can benefit marathon runners, otherwise it adds pounds only. The bad effect of using soft drinks like water is obesity. Pray that you will choose fewer soft drinks and more water.

Prayer #10. Pray for less body fat.

We don't have a quick or easy or accurate method to estimate body fat. Pray that you will "know yourself" well enough to sense whether yours is in the 20 - 30% range, which is too high. Then, pray for the antidotes "nothing in excess" and honest sweat.

Prayer #11. Pray for stress control.

Exercise has the effect of defusing anger, fear, and worry. Humor cancels negative emotions. Music

soothes the stressed mind. Meditation moves you closer to God. Pray that you will find your unique combination of ways to control the things that stress you and turn them to your advantage.

Prayer #12. Pray for great legs.

Great legs are a great asset. They help you withstand fatigue, handle stress and get the most out of your physical life. So, pray that you will begin exercising more for strong leg muscles, which will benefit your heart, your lungs, your life, your kidneys and your brain.

Prayer #13. Pray for better ways to deal with any sickness.

Exercise brings you to a more trained state, the ability to work more efficiently. What fitness does for you when you are well, it will also do if you become sick: push back the barriers of fatigue, exhaustion, shortness of breath, pain or whatever it is from the sickness that limits your ability to do. Pray for a move to fitness.