

*Why*  
**PRAY?**



**MIKE TUCKER**

 **Pacific Press®**  
Publishing Association

Nampa, Idaho | [www.pacificpress.com](http://www.pacificpress.com)

# CONTENTS

Foreword	7
<b>Part I—The Why and Who of Prayer</b>	
Chapter 1: Disappointment	11
<b>Part II—Finding the Heart of the Father</b>	
Chapter 2: Who is God?	25
Chapter 3: The Heart of the Father	35
<b>Part III—Biblical Prayers</b>	
Chapter 4: The Model Prayer	51
Chapter 5: A Prayer of David	63
<b>Part IV—Worship</b>	
Chapter 6: High and Lifted Up	81
<b>Part V—The Practice of Prayer</b>	
Chapter 7: Keep It Simple	91
Chapter 8: Let It Go!	97
Chapter 9: Refocusing Your Prayers	103
Chapter 10: Fasting and Prayer	112

**Part VI—Prayer Stories**

Chapter 11: Answered, Unanswered, and Partially Answered	119
Chapter 12: Prayers with Immediate Answers, Guaranteed!	133
Final Thoughts	138

## CHAPTER 1

# DISAPPOINTMENT

**A**fter spending eight years ministering as a Bible teacher in Christian schools, I transitioned into my first pastorate. I loved those years of youth ministry but now had been placed in a new setting. I was now responsible for the spiritual well-being of not just children and young people, but of adults of all ages! It was overwhelming and intimidating.

Among my parishioners was a young family I had known for some time. There were, in that congregation, several married couples who had been classmates of mine. Now our relationship was shifting from that of peers to a pastor/parishioner relationship. This change added to the challenges associated with pastoral ministry.

Among these young families was a couple who had become very dear to me. He was a physician, and his wife, a talented and well-educated woman, had chosen to be a stay-at-home mom. They had two beautiful children, a boy and a girl. The girl, Ashley, was the younger of the two children. Her smile was infectious, and her personality bubbly. And yet Ashley exhibited what some might call an old soul. In matters spiritual and relational, this child was wise beyond her years.

Not long after I became her pastor, Ashley became ill. She

## WHY PRAY?

was eventually diagnosed with leukemia. Immediately, the entire church went into prayer-warrior mode. Through the months of treatments and hospitalizations, we anointed Ashley and prayed for her daily.

Ashley's faith never wavered. She often seemed more concerned for her visitors than herself. Instead of focusing on her illness and pain, this eight-year-old commiserated with the adults who were praying for her. She asked how they were doing, took an interest in their concerns, and demonstrated incredible empathy. Every visit left me feeling as though I was the one who had benefitted from Ashley's ministry!

Despite our prayers, every treatment failed to yield any positive result. Finally, doctors decided to try a final form of treatment. A bone-marrow transplant was the only hope for this child.

Plans were made and a date was set. Before that date, the entire congregation prayed. Ashley was anointed again, and we all expressed great faith in God's healing powers.

A few days after the transplant procedure, I visited Ashley and her family in the hospital. Ashley said she was cold, so her father and I went in search of a blanket. Our search led us to a supply room where we rummaged through cabinets in search of a suitable blanket.

While we were there, Ashley's oncologist walked into the room and said, "They said I might find you here. I wanted to tell you out of Ashley's hearing that the transplant didn't work. I'm afraid we are out of options. I'm very sorry, but there are no other treatments available."

After a brief conversation, the oncologist left. My friend and I stood in silence in that hospital linen closet. The atmosphere was heavy with disappointment, confusion, and perhaps even anger. Then, as reality began to sink in, Ashley's dad flattened his back against the wall and began to weep. Slowly, he slid down the wall to the floor. Seeing his agony, I did the only thing I could think

## DISAPPOINTMENT

of doing. I hugged him and slid to the floor with him where both of us cried inconsolably.

I don't remember how long we sat in that closet. When we left, we did so without comment. Blanket in hand, we returned and shared the news with Ashley, her mother, and the rest of the family.

Weeks later, I conducted Ashley's funeral. Just before the service started, a "saint" approached Ashley's father and informed him that the reason his daughter had died was that he didn't have enough faith.

It is fortunate for that "saint" that I was out of earshot at the time she delivered her spiritual assessment of the family's faith and Ashley's death. I shudder to think what I might have said to this self-righteous woman in the heat of that emotion-charged moment. I recoiled at her implied suggestion that there was a magical formula to getting answers to prayer, and a part of that formula was having a set, quantifiable supply of faith. How much faith was enough for prayers to be answered remained a mystery to everyone but her. But if you possessed that level of faith, prayer worked like some marvelous vending machine, giving you everything you asked. Such a view of prayer and faith is, in my view, a lie that crawls off the floor of hell and smells like smoke! (I'm not very good at hiding opinions or emotions, am I?)

Not quite a year after Ashley's passing, her mother was diagnosed with breast cancer. Again, prayer warriors were enlisted, the patient anointed, and full faith in the healing powers of God was expressed. And yet, the result was the same as it had been for Ashley.

These were not the only tragedies that befell this family during their time of trouble. Nor were these experiences the only ones I encountered as the pastor of that congregation that left me in doubt about prayer's efficacy.

While my faith in God was not shattered, it was shaken.

## WHY PRAY?

I emerged from these challenges and many more that I faced as a pastor with more questions about prayer than answers.

During the ensuing years, I have witnessed fantastic, even miraculous, answers to prayers. Many of these stories I will tell later in this book. But for each miraculous answer, I have at least two disappointing answers or seemingly non-answers to my prayers. Among these stories is the story of my wife, Gayle, and her death from pancreatic cancer. We anointed, we prayed, we believed, and then we grieved when she died.

Some preachers have presented formulas for praying. Steps to a successful prayer life are outlined and supported by scriptural passages, but when I've applied those steps to my own prayer life, the results were anything but spectacular. In general, formulaic religion of any sort is always dangerous in that it tempts us to believe that if we know the right formula, we can convince God to do just about anything we want. In effect, it offers us the opportunity to play God, which is a variation of the original temptation the serpent offered to Eve in the garden, "You will be like God."

So, again I ask, why pray?

I cannot but believe that many who read this book are nodding their heads in agreement. No doubt many of you have had similar experiences and have struggled with similar doubts.

Why do you pray? Why should anyone pray? Clichés aside, what do you expect from your prayers, what do you get from your prayers, and what do your prayers do for you or anyone else? What is prayer all about?

I hope this book causes all of us to reexamine our preconceived notions about prayer. Perhaps it will help us all see prayer in a way that's different than we have before. And even though I will question some of the assumptions we may have made about prayer, I hope ultimately that the result will be that we will place an even greater value on prayer than we have before.

## DISAPPOINTMENT

Here is one place to start. At times I have been almost obsessed with “answered prayer.” I pray for “\_\_\_\_\_,” and God answers by giving me the thing I prayed for. For me, prayers for healing should be answered with vibrant health, prayers for financial needs should be answered with abundance, and prayers for broken relationships should be answered with reconciliation. You get the picture. If I pray correctly, the result should be the expected answer to my prayer.

While I and many others have indeed received amazing answers to prayers, I contend that *the true measure of prayer should not rest entirely on whether or not we get what we ask for*. There is, in my view, a deeper, more meaningful measure of prayer’s value.

What then, are we to make of prayer? What value does it possess?

After many years of praying for myself and others, I have noted something undeniable. Over time, almost imperceptibly, prayer has changed me. When I prayed regularly to a God I viewed as loving, kind, and compassionate, *my prayers changed me*. When I prayed about the pain and concerns of others, something undeniable took place in my cold heart. I’ll tell you about it later in this book.

I believe that, among other things, *prayer is the tool Heaven has given us so that we may seek to know the heart of God, and then, as His Spirit moves mysteriously in those who pray, prayer replicates the heart of the Father in us*.

Many of us have viewed prayer as a means of getting things: a better job, a better marriage, more money in our bank account, a safe journey, a good parking spot close to the front door (or under a shady tree if you are in Texas during the summer), healing, and the list goes on. We’ve practiced formulas in hopes of finding the key that unlocks heaven’s storehouse, believing that the things we perceive we need are contained inside.



## WHY PRAY?

But is it possible that we've misidentified the riches of the storehouse? I'm not saying that we shouldn't pray for the aforementioned items. I believe we should pray about everything. We should bring every need, large or small, to God in prayer. There is absolutely nothing wrong with asking for our list of needs.

What I am suggesting is that the value of *our prayer life should not be measured by the number of things we get but by the spiritual growth we experience*. A safe trip is important, and a good thing. Better yet is a heart that resonates with God's heart. It is better to love as God loves than it is to have the job of our dreams. It is better to live a life of compassion toward all than it is to be healed of cancer.

Do you remember the man called Simon the Leper? This man invited Jesus to his home for a meal. To be invited to anyone's home for a meal was a really big thing in those days. It was viewed as an invitation to intimacy. And since Jesus had healed Simon of the dreaded disease of leprosy, it could easily be assumed that the invitation was a way of thanking Jesus for the gift of healing. Simon's life had been saved! The healing allowed him to return to his family, to his friends, to worship in the temple, and much, much more. So certainly, this was a means of saying thank you to Jesus!

But as things progressed, it was obvious that such was not the case. Jesus was presented with insults from the moment He walked through the door: He was not greeted with a kiss. No water or towel was supplied so that He might wash, and no oil was given to refresh Himself. The omission of these expected courtesies was a huge insult that normally would result in the guest angrily leaving the house. Since there were other guests present who did not angrily storm out, it is safe to assume that they had been provided with a kiss of greeting as well as water, a towel, and oil. Jesus had been intentionally singled out. Yet, He ignored the insult and stayed for the meal.

## DISAPPOINTMENT

During the meal, a woman anointed Jesus with costly perfume. Luke, in his account of this story, identifies the woman as “a sinner.” That is a euphemism for prostitutes. She had, no doubt, heard Jesus’ message of love and forgiveness, even for prostitutes. In those days, the rabbis taught that prostitution was an unforgivable sin since, to be forgiven, one must make restitution. This was impossible for a prostitute to accomplish. But Jesus’ message had given her hope! She was forgiven and redeemed!

Out of a heart of gratitude, she used her tears to wet Jesus’ feet and let down her hair to dry them. This reversed the insult paid to Jesus when no water or towel was provided. She kissed His feet, a shockingly erotic gesture for the day! This reversed the insult that Jesus experienced when no kiss of greeting was provided. And then she anointed Jesus with costly perfume, thus reversing the insult of the refusal to provide oil when Jesus entered the house.

The entire diner party was stunned into horrified, awkward silence. According to Luke, Simon thought to himself that this proved that Jesus was not a prophet. No self-respecting prophet would allow such a woman to touch him in any fashion.

Jesus then spoke to Simon:

And Jesus answered him, “Simon, I have something to say to you.” And he replied, “Say it, Teacher.” “A moneylender had two debtors: one owed five hundred denarii, and the other fifty. When they were unable to repay, he graciously forgave them both. So which of them will love him more?” Simon answered and said, “I suppose the one whom he forgave more.” And He said to him, “You have judged correctly.” Turning toward the woman, He said to Simon, “Do you see this woman? I entered your house; you gave Me no water for My feet, but she has wet My feet with her tears and wiped them with her hair. You gave Me no kiss; but she, since the

## WHY PRAY?

time I came in, has not ceased to kiss My feet. You did not anoint My head with oil, but she anointed My feet with perfume. For this reason I say to you, her sins, which are many, have been forgiven, for she loved much; but he who is forgiven little, loves little.” Then He said to her, “Your sins have been forgiven” (Luke 7:40–48).

Jesus contrasted the responses of Simon and the woman who anointed His feet. This woman is often identified as Mary, the sister of Martha and Lazarus. Simon had been healed, his life spared, and his fortunes restored. Although Mary had been forgiven, her reputation had not been restored. She was still an outcast to society, and was still referred to as “a sinner.” Yet Simon’s response to Jesus’ gift was very different than Mary’s. Simon insulted Jesus to “test” him. Mary was willing to publicly humiliate herself to reverse Simon’s intentional insults. She gave an extravagant gift to Jesus.

Why the contrast? Jesus told Simon that the gift of forgiveness was greater than the gift of healing. That’s the gist of the story of the moneylender and two debtors. Mary may have owed the greater debt but had certainly received the greater gift.

It seems to me that most of my life has been spent asking for lesser gifts. Instead of asking for spiritual treasures, I’ve asked only for financial assistance, safe journeys, deliverance from difficulties, and improved health. My focus should have been on the larger gifts. I should have craved spiritual growth more than physical health and comfort.

Don’t misunderstand. I still pray for health, financial issues, safe journeys, and many of the daily needs I have. It is not wrong to do this. We must continue to do these things. But it is of far greater importance that I place more emphasis on my prayers that God would give me a new heart—a heart like His.

*To know God and to have His heart replicated in us are the primary*

## DISAPPOINTMENT

*objectives of all religious experience.* If these things are accomplished by the believer, little else will matter.

God's great heart of love is bigger and stronger than anyone has ever dared dream possible. God loves us immensely and He longs for us to know Him intimately.

The focus of my prayer life, my worship, and my study life should be to search for God. I am to seek to know God and to have His heart replicated in me! I am to be involved in a never-ending search to know God intimately.

Can God be found? Can He be known? Proverbs 8:17 records God saying, "I love those who love me; And those who diligently seek me will find me."

This passage has always felt awkward to me. It appears to suggest that God will love us only if we love Him first. "If you love me, then I will love you." But I don't believe that is what the verse is telling us.

The Hebrew word used for "love" used here is *'ahav*. This word comes from a Semitic root that alludes to a heart that is full and satisfied. It pictures God as filling your heart with His presence. It could be translated as "I will fill with My presence the hearts of those who love Me." Translated that way, the passage does not suggest a conditional component to God's love. Instead, it says that as we fall in love with God, He promises to fill our hearts with His presence.

Then the passage continues, "and those that seek me early shall find me." The word "find" is *matsa*, which suggests the idea of discovering hidden or secret knowledge. It means that they will be caused to find God.

So, the verse says that God is promising to fill our hearts with His presence (His hidden secrets) as we grow to love Him.

But what are the hidden secrets of God? How can they be described?

## WHY PRAY?

Some scholars share that rabbinic literature compares the hidden secrets of God to the taste of food. How do you accurately describe the taste of a particular food to someone who has never tried it? Descriptors like sweet, savory, or salty could be used, or someone might say that it is similar to other foods, but none of these things accurately describe the taste of a new food. The only way to discover how some item of food tastes is to eat it! Likewise, we may read about God's character in Scripture or hear someone teach about it, but the mystery remains hidden until we experience it. Only after God fills you with His presence will you understand His hidden mystery.

God's presence is of far greater importance than most of the things we pray for. *Knowing God's hidden secrets is the true treasure.* Knowing and replicating His great heart is a gift of unspeakable value.

Now we are left with the word "early," in "and those that seek me early shall find me." Is God telling us that we must get up very early in the morning to seek Him? I don't think so.

Again, in ancient rabbinic writings, God is portrayed as calling His people to draw closer. It's like the story of a king who called some of his subjects to a meeting with him every morning. In these meetings, the king wanted to share his heart with his people. So representatives from every part of the kingdom were invited to meet with the king early in the morning.

One of the guests arrived at the place of the meeting quite early. He was surprised to find the king already there, awaiting the arrival of his subjects. The king was overjoyed that this man had chosen to arrive early, so the king sat down and shared with this man, in intimate detail, that which was on his heart. When the others arrived, the king shifted into a more formal presentation.

Each day this one man arrived early and received an intimate presentation before the arrival of the rest of the group who received

## DISAPPOINTMENT

only the more formal presentation. Eventually, the man began to love his king more deeply. He longed to serve his king. The king realized the eagerness of this particular subject and his deep affection for his sovereign. So the king opened up to this one man and shared things he would not share with the others.

This parable helps explain what Solomon was teaching in Proverbs 8:17. Solomon was not so much concerned with a particular time but with a spirit of eagerness and anticipation. Those who seek God in eagerness will be filled with His presence and know a new and deeper level of intimacy with God.

I believe this to be the primary focus of prayer. We are to eagerly, and lovingly, seek to be in the presence of our Sovereign so that we might serve Him. God uses this as an opportunity to fill us with His presence. That abiding presence cannot help but instruct us and change us.

No doubt you've heard the adage, "Prayer changes things." While that's true, I believe a deeper truth is to be found in another adage: "Prayer changes me!"

As we seek the Father in prayer, God reveals His heart to us. The more He shares, the more we love Him. Daily, He draws us into greater intimacy. Slowly, God's heart is reflected in our hearts. By beholding Him, we become like Him. Prayer changes us!