

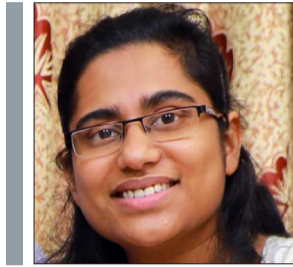
"True prayer is a way of life, not just for use in cases of emergency. Make it a habit, and when the need arises you will be in practice."

Billy Graham

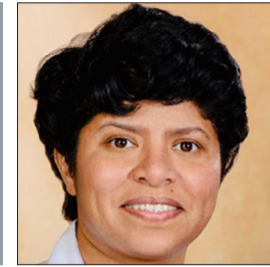
BROKEN BREAD Page 04



DEVOTIONAL Page 08



Health **Corner** Page 10



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WHEN PRAYER MERGES WITH THE REST OF LIFE

Prayer is not a matter of theory. Of course, we can theorise about it! To some extent, we must learn the theory (doctrine). However, unless you pray, learning the theory is of little value. What value is there in learning the intricate theories of the science and biology of breathing unless you breathe?

Growing up, I was always intrigued by Apostle Paul's exhortation to "pray without ceasing." "Is it even possible?" I used to think. Was He giving us a high and lofty ideal, unreachable, neverthe-less inspiring to aim for the star in the hope of at least attaining a low-orbit existence? Then in my late teens, I came across the

Continue on Page 12



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**"TRUE PRAYER IS
NEITHER A MERE MENTAL
EXERCISE NOR A VOCAL
PERFORMANCE. IT IS FAR
DEEPER THAN THAT - IT IS
SPIRITUAL TRANSACTION
WITH THE CREATOR OF
HEAVEN AND EARTH."**

Charles Spurgeon

FROM THE
editor



PRAYER AS AN INTIMATE, CONVERSATION

Prayer is a significant religious activity common among all major religions and is considered a very ancient practice. While every religion agrees on its fundamental purpose, they drastically differ in their understanding and application. All religious traditions agree it is a spontaneous activity conversing with a higher power, the supernatural, largely for existential matters: courage, healing, decision making, protection, and deliverance. Some pray for meditative purposes. Prayer in a religious framework involves many ritualistic elements unique to every tradition, and many of these elements are grounded in their understanding of prayer. While those who follow polytheistic religions, like Hinduism, pray to multiple gods, the adherents of monotheistic religions, like Islam, Judaism or Christianity, pray to one God. Even among the monotheistic religious traditions, they fundamentally differ in their understanding and practice.

The gospel writers present how Jesus revolutionised the understanding of prayer by extricating it from the ritualistic, religious framework to an intimate, relational communication model with the God of the universe. In the Sermon on the Mount, Matthew has included a section on Jesus' teaching on prayer, where Jesus prohibits the public display of hypocritical prayer (Mt 6:5); prayer with many words as pagans do (Mt 6:7) instead, encourages his followers to pray to the Father in private, which assures them a reward (Mt 6:5-8). Jesus instructed his disciples to "close the doors and pray to the Father" in contrast to Daniel, who opened the windows of his upper room towards Jerusalem and prayed while he was in exile (Dan 6:10). Jesus teaching the disciples to address God as "our Father" is a major difference from the way the Old Testament saints like Moses, David, and the prophets addressed God. They opened their prayers by say-

"Prayer is a major aspect of the Christian life practised not as a religious requirement, demand or for a display to impress others but from deep faith and a loving relationship."

ing, for instance, "O Lord" (Ex 34:9) " O Sovereign Lord" (2 Sam 7:18), and "O Lord, God of Abraham" (1 Kg 18:36). None of them dared to call God "our Father." The significant change in how God is addressed in prayer underscores the radical change in the understanding of prayer. It is no more a communication with a transcendent, distant being remotely listening to us, but it can be like a child's communication with his/her father in a closed room. The author of Hebrews substantiates this by writing, "let us draw near with confidence to the throne of grace." In the new era of grace, prayer emerges from a loving relationship with God the Father. It does not involve any hint of frightening demands of the religion, nor pretension or formalism required as He knows what we need before we ask (Mt 6:8) and also knows who we are (John 10:14). Thus, prayer is a regular, continuous practice of normal communication that takes place in any intimate relationship.

In short, Christian prayer is unique because it is rooted in an intimate relationship. It involves requests, supplication, complaints, petitions, gratitude, adoration, and blessing. Intercessory prayer is a powerful resource that enables one to serve others in any situation that invites God's presence, which brings deliverance and healing. Prayer is a major aspect of the Christian life practised not as a religious requirement, demand or for a display to impress others but from deep faith and a loving relationship.



MISSIONAL PRAYER: THREE DIMENSIONAL ASPECTS

Prayer is an integral and indispensable part of the Christian mission. Although the priority of prayer and the subsequent result of mission expansion was evident in the life of early Christians, it is one of the most neglected and misunderstood realities today. We seem to be more interested in mission efforts based on human expertise but failed to understand the prayer dimensions involved in the mission. Reflecting on Matthew 9:35-38, this article attempts to show the interconnected threefold dimension of prayer in mission initiatives.

INFORMATIVE DIMENSION
Jesus went through the cities and villages and engaged in various ministries, including teaching, preaching, and exercising charismata to deliver people from their afflicted situations. The information drawn through the exposure to the mission field generated missional prayer and finally resulted in the commissioning and sending out of labourers beyond the Twelve for the mission. Sincere and grassroots level experience in the mission field will provide authentic missional information, a crucial dimension of missional prayer. Mission statistics and information are often limited as fancy additions for mission classes, seminars, and presentations but fail in the primary purpose of serving as fuel for missional prayer.

INSTINCTIVE DIMENSION
His first-hand information of the mission fields enabled Jesus to see the real need of people and consequently aroused His compassion. Genuine exposure to the mission field will boost our compassion for the people, and it is vital to make our prayer effective. Prayer not rooted in this instinctive dimension can be a monotonous ritual and a lip service. Such prayers may remain as part of a program of church services or a daily routine but do not serve the purpose of life saving missional engagements. They may become dry and compulsory exercises rather than an enjoyable and living spiritual reality which will be resulted in missional initiatives.

INTERCESSORY DIMENSION
The compassion in Jesus encouraged the disciples to be on their knees, asking the Lord of the harvest to send labourers. Instead of sending them suddenly to the mission field, Jesus wanted the disciples to acknowledge the true source of the mission. This intercessory dimension shows that only a total dependence upon the fountain of mission can bring genuine results in the mission. This dimension also emphasises the fundamental truth that mission belongs to God (*missio dei*), for He is the Lord of the harvest. Only in prayer can we be truly enlightened to realise that God is both the owner and manager of the mission, and He employs labourers to harvest the crop.

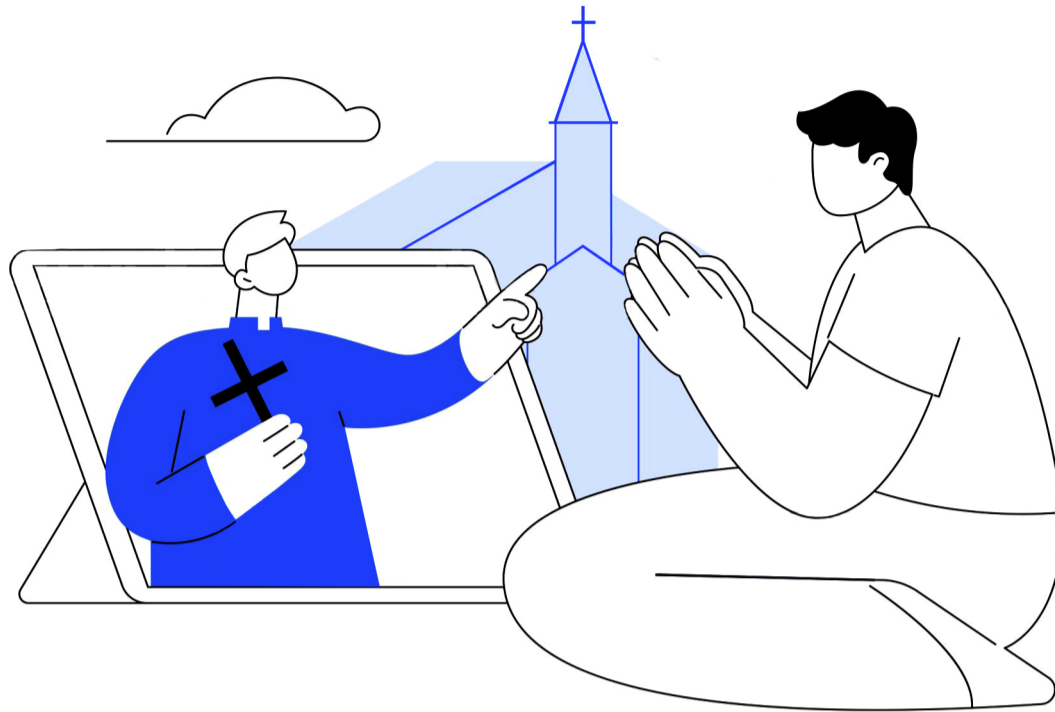
"Through sincere exposure to the mission field, the informational dimension may arouse the instinctive dimension of compassion that encourages us to engage in an intercessory dimension to depend upon the Lord of the mission."

CONCLUSION
Reinstating the role of the missionary payer's three dimensions is a crucial mission needed today. Through sincere exposure to the mission field, the informational dimension may arouse the instinctive dimension of compassion that encourages us to engage in an intercessory dimension to depend upon the Lord of the mission. This genuine missional prayer will consequently result in workers being sent beyond the Twelve.



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EMBRACING AN AUTHENTIC PRAYER LIFE: MOVING BEYOND ACTS OF PIETY

AS MATERIALISM AND SELF-CENTEREDNESS INCREASINGLY INFILTRATE THE CHURCH, SPIRITUALITY IS OFTEN REDUCED TO A MEANS OF BECOMING PROSPEROUS AND EXPERIENCING SELF SATISFACTION. SO RATHER THAN BECOMING COMPLACENT, IT IS TIME TO EMBRACE A DEEPER UNDERSTANDING OF PRAYER AND STRENGTHEN PRAYER LIFE.

As followers of Christ, prayer is essential to our spiritual journey. The extensive attention given to prayer in the Bible is a testament to its importance, and, indeed, God is near to those who earnestly seek His face in prayer. Through prayer, a personal, deeper relationship with God is accomplished. Moreover, it reinforces our dependence on Him rather than solely on our abilities. Numerous examples of prayerful lives are found throughout the Bible. For instance, prayer was highly significant for the apostle Paul, who was renowned for his missionary work, leadership, and profound theological understanding. Three distinct principles can be drawn from Paul's life.

First, Paul's steadfast trust in the Triune God was the foundation of his prayer life. Reflection on prayer must begin with reflecting on God's nature. Because prayer without faith is futile, a person must reflect on God's nature before praying. Paul's understanding of the Triune God comes from his

life experience of transformation from a persecutor to a preacher of the gospel. For him, it is the outcome of the grace of God (1 Tim 1: 14), revealed through the death of Jesus on the cross (1 Cor 15:3), and the empowerment of the Holy Spirit to live a transformed life (Gal 5:16). These spiritual insights were at the heart of his prayer life, and were reflected in his prayers for the churches. His understanding, shaped by the great love of the Triune God, gave him an appropriate approach to prayer.

Second, Paul perceived prayer as an opportunity to listen to and obey God. Despite the widespread perception among Christians that prayer is merely a means to share their needs, Paul exemplified how prayer becomes a conversation to discern God's will and then respond in obedience. Tuning into the Holy Spirit's direction, in the setting of worship and fasting, Paul and Barnabas chose to commit to missionary work, departing from an established church in Antioch (Acts 13: 2-3). It illustrates that a disciple of Jesus prioritizes accomplishing God's purpose over

satisfying personal desires. True prayer leads us to surrender self-centered motives and obey God's voice.

Third, Paul held prayer as a continual, meaningful fellowship with God. Many adherents tend to construe prayer as a mere ritualistic activity or a mandatory act of piety instead of recognizing its potential for spiritual intimacy. Irrespective of situations, whether joyful or painful, Paul sought God's companionship through prayer (Phil 4: 6). His exhortation to "pray without ceasing" (1 Thess. 5:17) demonstrates his own spiritual discipline. He was passionate about this fellowship, as it encompasses interceding for others. Of his own volition, he would intercede for the spiritual growth of believers (Phil 1: 4) and urge others to pray for every one (1 Tim 2:1). Such a perspective and practice are indispensable for making prayer an integral part of our spiritual existence.

As materialism and self centeredness increasingly infiltrate the church, spirituality is often reduced to a means of becoming

prosperous and experiencing self satisfaction. So rather than becoming complacent, it is time to embrace a deeper understanding of prayer and strengthen prayer life. A prayer life embedded with the right approach, a humble heart, and love for others would make our prayers pleasing and acceptable before God.



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PRAYER AND ACTION



PRAYER WITHOUT ACTION IS NOTHING MORE THAN NOISE;
WITHOUT ACTION, IT IS MEANINGLESS.

Those who believe in God will always pray to Him. We believe that God provides everything, and whatever needs we have will be met by Him. The question is whether it is based on our needs or greed. No one is satisfied with their material life. The scripture reiterates that if our prayer is to satisfy our basic material or spiritual needs, God will provide it. However, most of our requirements are not based on our needs but on our greed. Moreover, prayer life has a psychological benefit. Prayer can increase attentiveness and prevent excessive worry.

Those who lead a prayerful life will have the right vision and a transformation in their material and spiritual life. Further, they will have a staunch belief in God. No one can influence their life. Their actions will also have perfection. Prayer becomes powerful if it exposes the hardened heart to the Scripture's teaching of righteousness and compassion. Confession and repentance are vital for prayer to become fruitful. Prayer is effective only if it is not used as an excuse to justify oneself.

The life of Prophet Daniel was the best example of a prayer life. It is believed that he had a prayer chamber with the windows permanently opened towards Jerusalem. It was an act of faith, and during this time, he was in Babylon in exile and prayed on his knees thrice intermittently every day. His prayer life consisted of asking God and thanking God for everything He had done.

Prayer without action is nothing more than noise; without action, it is meaningless. The prayer comes from our faith. It is something

like seeking from God or like supplication and thanksgiving. Jesus, our Lord Himself, said prayer is a private time between God and the worshiper. It should be sincere and with the right motives. When you build such a relationship with our Lord Jesus, we must maintain that prayer life. We should be sincere and thankful, show mercy to others, be upright and love from the bottom of our hearts, and hate evil.

The amount of time we spend with Jesus meditating on His Word and His majesty, seeking his face establishes our fruitfulness in the kingdom." The famous quote from Charles Stanley reiterates the need for a prayerful life not to get material things in life but to lead a fruitful life for the kingdom of God.



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LEADERS MUST BE RELEASED FROM THE IDEA THAT THEY MUST BE GREAT PRAYER WARRIORS BEFORE THEY CAN BEGIN TO CALL OTHERS TO PRAYER.

David Bryan



TO PRAY IS TO

TRANSFORM

The concept of prayer is shared by all faiths. There are many sorts of prayer, but the fundamental sense of prayer is to communicate with God. This communication involves supplication, admiration, confession, thanksgiving, etc. It can be corporal or individual. When we think of prayer, above all, as communication with God, it helps us to understand that He is a personal God to whom we can speak freely. Jesus invites us to call on God as our Father in the Lord's Prayer. As a child speaks to his or her father, we can speak to God without hesitation. It allows us to consider prayer more relationally than religiously. For communication to mean anything, it needs to be a dialogue, not a monologue. In other words, in prayer, we must wait until God speaks to us of his heart and desires. If the communication is persistent, it establishes a strong connection between those who participate in the communication. This means that good communication leads to relationships. Therefore, God wants us to pray so that we will have a relationship with him.

Even if our prayers are not answered immediately, we come closer to God every time we pray. If prayer brings us closer to God, what more do we want? If communication leads to a relationship, an enduring relationship helps us get to know each other better. When we pray, we connect to God and get to know Him better. Often we think that when we pray, God comes to know what we need and want. But the Bible clearly tells us that God knows what we want before asking. Hence, the advantage of a meaningful prayer is that we learn about who God is and what God wants from us. Knowing

God – who he is and what he desires transforms us inside and outside. Prayer is not so much focused on answers but on transforming who prays. As such, the final outcome of prayers is our transformation. Any prayer that does not lead to transformation is not at all authentic. It is impossible for us to pray genuinely without being changed. God desires to change us before changing the situations for which we pray. He wants to meet us before he meets our needs. To sum up, prayer is communication with God. It brings about a strong relationship between God and us. As the relationship grows stronger, we learn to know God fully. Finally, knowing God changes us drastically. To pray is to transform.



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"Prayer is communication with God. It brings about a strong relationship between God and us. As the relationship grows stronger, we learn to know God fully. Knowing God changes us drastically. To pray is to transform."



Hannah - PRAYERS AND A PROMISE FULFILLED

Hannah, more than being known as Elkanah's wife or Samuel's mother, she was known for being a barren woman. The one whose worth was determined by what she was unable to do. She spent years crying and depressed and constantly evaluating her worth. The shame and taunts she faced came not just from society, but from her immediate family — especially from her husband's other wife, Peninnah, who took joy in provoking her. No matter what she did, Hannah could not escape the fact that she was childless. Even the family's annual pilgrimage to Shiloh to worship the Lord Almighty was a bitter reminder of her greatest failure as a wife. Yet, the interesting thing about Hannah is that despite her personal struggles and immense grief, she always accompanied the family to Shiloh. She never responded to those who taunted her or blamed God for not blessing her womb.

During one such trip to Shiloh, a broken Hannah cries out to the Lord. The nature of her wordless prayer causes Eli, the priest observing her, to accuse her of being inebriated. She explains to Eli that she is simply "a woman who is deeply troubled ... and was pouring out [her] soul to the Lord" (1 Samuel 1:15). We know that Eli blesses her, and Hannah leaves from Shiloh rejuvenated and hopeful. However, her prayer that day and her actions following a promise fulfilled teaches us a few powerful lessons.

- Hannah never responds to those who hurt her or provoke her. Instead, she recognizes her privilege in taking her pain and grief to God in prayer and letting Him work on her behalf.
- Even after years of having her prayer go unanswered, Hannah knows that no one else could answer her prayer for a child but God.
- Her prayer carried no words but came from the depth of her heart. She surrenders her-

"Hannah symbolizes what God expects of us when we do not know what to do, when we have no one to turn to, and whether our prayers are answered or not answered as quickly as we would like."

self fully and is confident that God knows her thoughts and will listen to her heart.

- Her prayer is specific. She asks God for one thing and one thing only. She asks for a child. She does not ask for vengeance or that God right all the wrongs done to her.
- Hannah operates on faith. She truly believes that God will give her what she asks for, perhaps not in her time, but in His time. So she continues to pray year after year for the same request sincerely. It was God that had closed her womb, and it was He who opened her womb at the right time. Samuel, her precious child, was born exactly when he was destined to be born to execute God's will and designate the chosen King.
- When Samuel is born, she remembers God's faithfulness and promise to Him and dedicates the child to God. This self-sacrifice requires her to give up what matters most to her, but she does it knowing that her child is the evidence of an answered prayer. In doing this, Hannah proves that she is a woman of her word who did not forget her circumstances or what it took to get to a place of joy.
- After Hannah dedicates Samuel to God and before departing from Shiloh, she says a prayer of praise that is acknowledged by biblical historians as a prophetic psalm. In this Psalm, born of her trials and tribulations, she extensively exalts her God.

It is also worth noting that this prayer of praise comes when Hannah is well aware that this child she cried and prayed for will not be returning home with her. It is very easy to praise God during moments of happiness, but to do it during difficult moments speaks volumes about Hannah's faith.

Hannah symbolizes what God expects of us when we do not know what to do, when we have no one to turn to, and whether our prayers are answered or not answered as quickly as we would like. She is who we should aspire to be at our highest and lowest - persistent, patient, faithful, and grateful to the Lord God almighty.



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BUT WAIT FOR GOD'S PERFECT TIME

"Waiting on the Lord is tough, but the Bible teaches us that He will never forsake us and that God's plan is better than ours. So let us continue to wait on the Lord."

We have prayed earnestly in difficult times but felt that God is not answering our prayers. In times of suffering, David said, "Wait for the Lord; be strong, and let your heart take courage; wait for the Lord!" (Psalm 27:14). What does waiting mean? How long do we wait? Let me share a short story that I read helped me better understand the above verse.

A man who survived a shipwreck was washed up by the waves and reached a small deserted island. For many days he prayed to God to rescue him, and every day he looked at the sea for help, but no help ever came. Many months passed, but the man still prayed and maintained his faith in the Lord. In the meantime, he also managed to build a small hut. It wasn't big or strong, but at least it would give him some protection from the bad weather and a place to rest. The hut was made of palm leaves and some wood. But then, one day, when he arrived home after searching for food on the island, he was shocked to find his little hut in flames, everything burned, and the smoke rising up to the sky. It was the worst thing that could happen to him. The only thing he had for himself was all gone up in flames. Now he had absolutely nothing. Not only was the hut gone, but also the little bit of food he had managed to gather.

He wept bitterly and lost his hope of staying alive. He was shattered in spirit and began cursing God in anger and grief. He was tired and laid down on the ground and slept. Very early the next morning, he was awakened by the sound of a ship lying just a few hundred yards from the beach. There was also a large row boat coming towards him. They had come to rescue him! As the men in the boat arrived on the beach, he jumped with joy and asked his rescuers, "How did you know I was here? How did you find me?" "We saw your smoke signal", they replied. The smoke from the burning hut informed the ship that someone on the island needed help.

Dear friends, the Bible says: "For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways," declares the LORD (Isaiah 55:8). In all circumstances, remember that God is at work, and He is answering our prayer even when we feel He is quiet. Waiting on the Lord is tough, but the Bible teaches us that He will never forsake us and that God's plan is better than ours. So let us continue to wait on the Lord.



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Nothing tends more to cement the hearts of Christians than praying together. Never do they love one another so well as when they witness the outpouring of each other's hearts in prayer.

Charles Finney



THE SINGING *Bird*

Ever woken up in the morning to the sound of birds singing? If you have, you may have mistaken it for a group of birds greeting each other in the morning. There are several precise reasons why birds sing in the morning. Singing in the early morning allows a male bird to share his song when there is little noise. It is simpler to achieve this goal very early in the day for a male bird who wants to be the focus of attention!

Birds sing before the day's work begins. Most of the time, birds either maintain their nests or search for insects. It is too dark to find food or prepare their nest before dawn, so in some ways, the early morning is the best time for male birds to sing. The first and most important lesson birds teach us is that we should pray before we start our day, before we start working, just as birds sing before they work. Let our conversation begin with God before we converse with anyone else so he may guide us in our daily interactions and tasks.

Another reason male birds sing in the morning is to defend their territory and their young. They signal nearby males that they are not welcome by piping a loud tune. Our prayers limit Satan when we pray consistently and persistently. He cannot work in an environment where God's power is constantly at work.

Songs may be more pleasant to hear, but birds occasionally make calls that have many

meanings. Birds respond to a variety of threats with 'alarm calls,' and the young make 'begging calls,' which sound like 'feed me' noises. When we pray infrequently or only when we have difficulties, we stumble when we run into problems, much like the birds that make alarm calls or young ones that make begging calls just to get food and their parent's attention.

Prayer should be our lifestyle. Since the day we were born of the Spirit, we can communicate with God the Father through the Spirit, through Jesus Christ, our mediator. We can overcome the flesh by consistently and persistently praying in the Spirit. "Rejoice always, pray continually, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus." (1 Thessalonians 5:16-18 NIV) Nothing beats the satisfaction of doing God's will. Many internal conflicts could be avoided if we called on God rather than keeping it in our minds and instead experiencing the peace of God that surpasses all understanding.



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"Prayer should be our lifestyle. Since the day we were born of the Spirit, we can communicate with God the Father through the Spirit, through Jesus Christ, our mediator. We can overcome the flesh by consistently and persistently praying in the Spirit."



COPING WITH HOLIDAY STRESS

"Waiting on the Lord is tough, but the Bible teaches us that He will never forsake us and that God's plan is better than ours. So let us continue to wait on the Lord."

Holidays are something most of us look forward to. But it also can be the most stressful time of the year for some. Holiday stress is not uncommon. It could be due to various reasons such as holiday shopping, meal preparations, family gatherings, high expectations, financial burden, over-commercialization of the season, loneliness, grief or loss of dear ones, underlying mental health issues, and the list goes on. However, overwhelming stress can lead to distress and affect our physical and mental well-being. Therefore, recognising the triggers and symptoms of stress and anxiety is very important.

SYMPTOMS OF HOLIDAY STRESS AND ANXIETY

The stress is real, although the intensity can vary. Sometimes it can feel draining and exhausting and can manifest as vague symptoms. Some common symptoms of holiday stress and anxiety are:

- Sleep disturbances
- Fatigue and feeling tired.

- Feeling depressed, down and hopeless
- Feeling overwhelmed and out of control
- Social withdrawal or avoiding parties and getting together.
- Unexplainable physical symptoms such as vague aches, stomach issues or appetite changes
- Practical remedies for holiday stress management
- **Stop over expectations:** Holidays are about spending time with friends and family. It doesn't have to be perfect. Be realistic and flexible with holiday traditions. Discuss with your loved ones and decide what you can do realistically to make the holidays a memo-rable and enjoyable time for everyone.
- Plan ahead, communicate clearly and involve everyone in making the holiday special. Take some time to think through your priorities and plan your holiday season ahead of time. Ensure you don't



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overcommit yourself so that you can spend quality time with your loved ones and family. Clear communication can lead to more realistic expectations and less stress. Don't be hard on yourself; don't hesitate to ask for help.

- **Know your limit and manage your budget:** Holidays can be expensive but it doesn't have to be. Remember, less can be more too. Decide how much you can comfortably spend, make a budget, and stick to it. And more importantly, spend it on creating good memories and living in the moment.
- **Overcoming grief:** The holiday season can be a painful reminder of your loss. The first holiday season without them can be especially hard. Remember that it's OK to feel sad about a loss. Take time out of your day's schedule if you have to. Flip through the photo album, pray, cry, or vent your emotions completely if it helps.
- **Self-care:** It is the time of the year we focus more on making others happy that we tend to forget to take care of ourselves or make ourselves happy. But remember, you need to take care of yourself, too, before you get completely exhausted. Don't be hard on yourself, set healthy boundaries; you may have to say NO to some things and some people, and you may want to spend the holidays alone, and that's okay too. Do what makes you happy

such as calming activities such as reading, meditating gratitude journaling. Get some pampering for yourself, too, maybe a good massage, get enough sleep and rest and eat a healthy diet.

- **Mindfulness:** Mindfulness is the art of living in the moment and not being bound to your memories of the past or your concerns about the future. Prayer and meditation are a way of mindfulness. Christian meditative prayer allows us to practice letting go and being available to the presence of God.

Stress, anxiety, and depression are real emotions, so acknowledge your feelings. However, remaining in those feelings robs our joy. Also, staying involved and connected to dear ones helps release tension in us. In any circumstance, as it says in James 4:8, "Draw near to God and He will draw near to you." our best choice is to draw near to God. May we all find that as this holiday season's true joy and happiness!

**There is a place where thou
canst touch the eyes Of
blinded men to instant,
perfect sight; There is a
place where thou canst say,
"Arise" To dying captives,
bound in chains of night;
There is a place where
thou canst reach the store
Of hoarded gold and free
it for the Lord; There is a
place — upon some distant
shore — Where thou
canst send the worker and
the Word. Where is that
secret place-dost thou ask,
"Where?" O soul, it is the
secret place of prayer!**

Alfred Lord Tennyson

FROM HISTORY

Amazing Answers to Prayer: A Miraculous History

Since the early believers felt the ground shake under their prayer meeting (Acts 4:31), Christians have realised that things happen when they talk to God. The history of prayer certainly has had its ups and downs. No doubt, wars have been fought with both sides seeking divine assistance. We sometimes treat prayer like a magic wand, but God usually refuses to be so manipulated. Sometimes He grants exactly what's requested; and often, He has a better idea. Still, Christian history is packed with earnest prayers and amazing answers.

SOUP STIRRING

Sit with Martin Luther by the sickbed of Philipp Melancthon. The year is 1540. These two men had already engaged in what often looked like a good cop-bad cop routine that changed the face of Europe. "I am rough, stormy, and altogether warlike," Luther once wrote, "but

Master Philippus comes along softly and gently, sowing and watering with joy." Where Luther made brash pro nouncements, Melancthon offered gentle persuasion. But now it looked like Philipp was done for, and Martin prowled his bedside. "O Luther, is this you?" Philipp murmured. "Why don't you let me depart in peace?"

"Because we can't spare you yet, Philipp. We cannot spare you yet." For nearly an hour, Luther knelt in prayer. Rousing from his stupor, Melancthon once again begged his friend to let him die, but Luther kept praying. And he ordered some soup for the dying man. Refusing the soup, Melancthon said a third time, "Luther, why will you not let me go home and be at rest?" "Because we cannot spare you yet, Philipp," came the thundering

Reformer's reply. "Now, take this soup, or else . . . or else. . . ." What leverage did he have? "Or else I will excommunicate you!" The joke worked along with the prayers and the soup. The dying man came back to health. Luther commented later, "God answered my prayer and gave me my brother Melancthon."

The following years were very important for Melancthon as he organised and solidified the gains of the Lutheran movement. Melancthon drafted the Augsburg Confession and tried valiantly to iron out differences between the Calvinists and the Roman Catholics. Luther was right: they couldn't spare him. As it turned out, Philipp would outlive Martin by fourteen years, taking leadership of the Lutheran movement at a crucial time in its history.



Continued from Page 01



WHEN PRAYER MERGES WITH THE REST OF LIFE

book, *“The Practice of the Presence of God”* by a 17th-century monk known as Brother Lawrence, which began to influence my prayer life. At one point, Lawrence says: “That to form a habit of conversing with God continually and referring all we do to Him; we must at first apply to Him with some diligence: but that after a little care, we should find His love inwardly exciting us to it without any difficulty.” Brother Lawrence speaks about being filled with God’s love so fully that “he was pleased when he could take up a straw from the ground for the love of God, seeking Him only, and nothing else, not even His gifts.”

The key that unlocks the secret of such continual communion with God is to give up the notion of prayer as an occasional “activity” and begin to experience prayer as indispensable to life as breathing is to our physical life. The richness of prayers in the book of Psalms showed me that prayer is for all seasons of life (E.g., Psalms 34:1ff). It is, in fact, for every moment of life in our mountains and the valleys, in our laughter and our tears, in our exuberance and our disappointments, in plenty and poverty, in health and in illness, when the sun shines bright and when storm clouds darken the sky, in our youth and old age, and when life flourishes in all its excitement, and when we come to the end of our days! Eternity gets stamped in our eyes by a life of prayer. It leads us to joyful satisfaction in our souls, despite all adversities. Remember the laments of Jeremiah, the weeping prophet. They inspire us to bring our laments to God. He will turn our desperation into hope. Enoch, Abraham, Job, Moses, David, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Daniel, Elijah, Paul, and most of all, Jesus we have a treasure trove of prayers and godly “prayers” to look up to. Prayer is the most important conversation that you will ever hold. Prayer is the means by which the grateful soul pours out its spontaneous praise before the throne of God. Prayer is the voice of the weeping soul calling on the sympathetic high priest in a time of need. Prayer is the cry of intercession for others. Prayer is the simple conversation of the beloved child with the caring Father as they talk of love. Prayer is the atmosphere of God, the calm space in the centre of a churning hurricane.

As Brother Lawrence says: “We would be quite surprised if we knew what the soul sometimes says to God.” Apostle Paul’s recorded prayers always inspire me to aspire for a heavenly vision in my inner man (Ephesians 1:18ff; 3:14-19; Philippians 1:9-11; Colossians 1:9-14). Victory

in every sphere of human existence for a child of God is obtained only through the practice of the presence of God through prayer. Prayer needs holiness, agony and love. Practice these four ways of prayer (1 Timothy 2:1) – supplication (requests), prayer (communion), intercession (for others) & thanksgiving (the answer is on the way). Or the popular Acrostics ACTS (Adoration, Confession, Thanksgiving, & Supplication). I consider the high priestly prayer of Jesus recorded in John 17 as a window to heaven. I turn to it often to hear my Saviour pray, echoing in my

Suddenly I sat up, striking my head on the cross-slats above. Something had pinched my leg “Fleas!” I cried. “Betsie, the place is swarming with them!” We scrambled across the intervening platforms, heads low to avoid another bump, dropped down to the aisle, and edged our way to a patch of light. “Here! And here is another one!” I wailed. “Betsie, how can we live in such a place!” “Show us. Show us how.” It was said so matter of factly it took me a second to realise she was praying. More and more, the distinction between prayer and the rest of life seemed to be vanishing for Betsie.

“Prayer is the most important conversation that you will ever hold; the means by which the grateful soul pours out its spontaneous praise before the throne of God; the voice of the weeping soul calling on the sympathetic high priest in a time of need; the cry of intercession for others. Prayer is the simple conversation of the beloved child with the caring Father as they talk of love. Prayer is the atmosphere of God, the calm space in the centre of a churning hurricane.”

soul the reassurance that He still prays for me, and it should also echo in your soul, helping to draw boldly to the throne of grace for mercy and grace in times of need.

I always wanted to read the book, *“The Hiding Place”*, the true story of Corrie Ten Boom and her sister Betsie, who was sent to a Nazi concentration camp called “Ravensbrück” to help Jews. I finally got to read the book a few weeks ago. Out of the hundreds of thousands sent to this death camp to suffer and die, only a few people came out alive. Corrie was one of those who came. Later she found out that she was released because of a clerical error. Among the inhuman conditions, Corrie and Betsie found the presence of God, which not only kept them going but strengthened them to minister to others. There were many miracles in the book records, including how the guards did not see the Bible they brought even in strip search. Another was how they could have Bible study and prayer every evening with a large group of women in the barracks it was flea infested, and the guards never came in because of the fear of fleas.

Let me quote one particular instance that led me to a new discovery of the way of prayer. Corrie is telling the story:

Wow! Can we hope and pray “that the distinction between prayer and the rest of life” will vanish? Yes! It is possible! Pray always (Colossians 4:2; Ephesians 6:18; 1 Thessalonians 5:17; Luke 21:36; Romans 12:12; Acts 6:4; Acts 10:2).

“THE REALITY IS, MY PRAYERS DON'T CHANGE GOD. BUT, I AM CONVINCED PRAYER CHANGES ME. PRAYING BOLDLY BOOTS ME OUT OF THAT STALE PLACE OF RELIGIOUS HABIT INTO AUTHENTIC CONNECTION WITH GOD HIMSELF.”

Lysa TerKeurst



One of India's trash mountains is on fire again, and residents are choking on its toxic fumes

Firefighters in the southern Indian city of Kochi were toiling Tuesday to control toxic fumes from spreading after a landfill burst into flames five days ago, cloaking the area in a thick haze and choking residents. The towering Brahmapuram landfill in Kerala state is the country's latest trash mountain to catch fire, causing dangerous heat and methane emissions and adding to India's growing climate challenges.

Authorities advised residents in the city of more than 600,000 to remain indoors or wear N95 face masks if they head outside. Officials said schools were forced to close on Monday due to the pollution. The blaze broke out last Thursday, according to Kerala's fire department. The cause has not been established, but landfill fires can be triggered by combustible gases from disintegrating garbage. Images and video released by officials showed workers racing to extinguish the billowing flames that sent thick plumes of toxic smoke rising high into the sky. While the fire has been largely put out, a thick cloud of smoke and methane gas continues to cover the area, reducing visibility and the city's air quality while emitting a lingering, pungent odour. Some firefighters had fainted from the fumes, the fire department said.

Brahmapuram is just one of some 3,000 Indian landfills overflowing with decaying waste and emitting toxic gases. Commissioned in 2008, the landfill is spread across 16 acres, according to a 2020 report from the International Urban Cooperation, a European Union program. The study added that the landfill receives about 100 metric tons of plastic waste daily, of which only about 1% is suitable for recycling. The study said the remaining 99% is dumped as a heap at the site, calling it a "menace for the municipal corporation." "The plastic dump at Brahmapuram is increasing daily," it said. "It has seen several fires over the past few years, thus polluting the air and the environment."

Despite its growing size and threats, the landfill is not India's largest. The Deonar dumping ground in the western coastal city of Mumbai, which stands at some 18 stories high, claims the top spot.

World News



Sri Lanka to announce debt restructuring strategy in April – Central bank chief

The central bank governor told Reuters that Sri Lanka aims to announce a debt-restructuring strategy in April and step-up talks with commercial creditors ahead of an International Monetary Fund review of a bailout package in six months. The crisis-hit island has secured financing assurances from all its major bilateral creditors, including India and China, and so had set the stage for the IMF to approve a \$2.9 billion, four-year bailout package on March 20, the multilateral lender said on Tuesday.

The bailout is the culmination of months of negotiations as Sri Lanka looks to emerge from its worst economic crisis in more than seven decades.

"When you see the staff level agreement published - that will contain our commitment to debt restructuring and that will also reveal medium-term debt targets for us to restore debt sustainability on a long-term basis," central bank Governor P. Nandalal Weerasinghe said. "So somewhere in April, we will announce ... how to meet that medium-to-long-term (debt) targets. That is the next step".

Pakistan 'very close' to signing IMF staff-level agreement -finance minister

Pakistan Finance Minister Ishaq Dar said on Thursday, 9th March, his country was "very close" to signing a staff-level agreement with the International Monetary Fund, a critical lifeline for taming a balance of payment crisis. "We seem to be very close to signing the staff level agreement, hopefully, God willing, in the next few days," Dar said at a seminar in Islamabad.

"My team and I are committed to completing this program to the best of our ability," he said, adding: "We have been in the review, and I think it has taken longer than it should have, in my opinion."

An agreement would release \$1.1 billion to the cash-strapped South Asian economy.

Islamabad has been hosting an IMF mission since early February to negotiate the terms of a deal, including adopting policy measures to manage its fiscal deficit ahead of the annual budget due around June.

The funds are part of a \$6.5 billion bailout package the IMF approved in 2019, which analysts say is critical if Pakistan is to avoid defaulting on external debt obligations.

The deal would unlock other bilateral and multilateral financing avenues for Pakistan to shore up its foreign exchange reserves, which have fallen to a lowly four weeks' worth of import cover.





NASA's Curiosity rover shares a stunning sunset on Mars

The Curiosity rover just sent back a stunning postcard capturing its view of a shimmering sunset on Mars. The NASA rover has been roaming across Mars for more than ten years, searching for answers as to why the red planet went from warm and wet to a frozen desert. It has discovered intriguing rock formations, searched for signs of life and scaled Mount Sharp at the centre of Gale Crater.

But rather than continuing to focus on the near-endless red stretch of rocks and dirt below its wheels, the rover has recently been looking up. On February 2, Curiosity observed rays of sunlight stretching across the horizon and illuminating a bank of clouds as the sun set on Mars. It's the first time the rays, known as crepuscular rays, have been seen so clearly on the red planet.

The rover is surveying twilight clouds on Mars to follow up on its previous observations of night-shining clouds. In 2021, Curiosity used its black and white navigation cameras to watch the structure of those clouds as they moved on Mars.

NATO chief warns Bakhmut may fall 'in coming days'

NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg warned on Mar 8 that the eastern Ukrainian city of Bakhmut might fall to Russia in the coming days following months of intense fighting. His remarks came as Russia's Wagner mercenary group, which has spearheaded the attack on Bakhmut, claimed to have captured the eastern bank of the industrial town, devastated in the longest battle since Moscow invaded.

Wagner chief and Kremlin ally Yevgeny Prigozhin said on social media Wednesday that his forces "have taken all of the eastern parts of Bakhmut", a salt-mining town with a pre-war population of 80,000. The intense fighting around Bakhmut has been the longest and bloodiest in Russia's more than year-long invasion, which has devastated swathes of Ukraine and displaced millions of people.

"What we see is that Russia is throwing more troops, more forces and what Russia lacks in quality, they try to make up in quantity," Stoltenberg told reporters in Stockholm on the sidelines of EU defence ministers meeting.

"We cannot rule out that Bakhmut may eventually fall in the coming days," the head of the US-led military alliance said, adding that "this does not necessarily reflect any turning point of the war".

Clouds provide deeper insight into weather patterns and conditions. Scientists can use information about when and where clouds form on Mars to learn more about the planet's atmospheric composition, temperatures, and wind. On Mars, most clouds are made of frozen ice and float about 37 miles (60 kilometres) above the ground. But Curiosity spotted clouds that reach a higher altitude, as seen in the new photo, leading researchers to believe they are made of frozen carbon dioxide ice — or dry ice. Scientists are still studying them to figure out why this happens.



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