

# Prayerful Intimacy

BY D. LESLIE HOLLON

**Prayerfully yielding to the Spirit means the Spirit is free to instruct our minds, inspire our hearts, empower our spirits, and embolden our bodies. As we desire, receive, and obey, the Spirit grows us from the inside out. When we conclude praying, we find ourselves saying “Amen” with joy.**

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**R**ecently, I made a major life decision. Prayer was an essential resource for me to make the right decision. Actually the decision involved many people. God provided prayer for all of us to discern and discuss so that each of us could uncover the best way forward. Prayer has always been a heavenly link for earthly living.

We sense prayer's power since the stories of Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden, Abraham and Sarah on pilgrimage, Moses and Joshua in the wilderness, David and Nathan in the king's palace, Jeremiah and Baruch in exile, Jesus and the disciples in the Garden, Paul and his companions outside Macedonia, and John and the angel during exile on Patmos. Prayer is God's invitation for us to be in communion with him. If we ask, we will receive intimacy; if we seek, we will find insight; if we knock, the door for courageous involvement opens (Matthew 7:7).

Knowing this promise to be true from past experiences, I trusted that prayer's promise would hold true for my present situation. When the Pastor Search Team of San Antonio's Trinity Baptist Church was talking with me about the possibility of becoming their Senior Pastor, I knew I needed to pray "big time." I recalled Phillips Brooks's insight that "Prayer is not overcoming God's reluctance but laying hold of his willingness." Aligning our

will to a prayerful awareness of God's will becomes the key for successful decision-making. As our human will seeks alignment with God through prayerful intimacy, our lives are altered by the prayerful insights received and by the involvement we offer after saying "Amen."

Jesus embodied this truth. He promised that when we pray in his name, our prayers would be accomplished. While praying in a full awareness of Christ's presence, the "what" and "how" of our praying becomes purified. During our prayerfulness, we are changed. What we pray in the end may be very different than our prayer's beginning. Jesus modeled this for us in the Garden of Gethsemane (Matthew 26:39). At first he prayed for what he most wanted: "This cup to pass from me." Then he yielded his will to the Father's purposefulness: "Not my will, but your will be done." Then when Jesus prayed for the third time, he concluded with an "Amen" that prepared him for the cross.

As I prayed during a six-month period about whether or not to move, I felt my will being aligned with God's larger purposefulness for all our lives. When I prayed for openness to the move, I sensed the Spirit saying, "Feel the freedom to not be afraid." When I prayed to withdraw from the possibility of moving, I felt as though I had stepped on the warning tracks of "bruising the Spirit." When I knelt to pray, I felt like I was kneeling into the prayers of other people who were also praying about the same matter. When I prayed about moving from one level of commitment to the next level of going forward, I sensed the Spirit saying, "Trust me. Just trust me. I will lead you." After accepting the call, and as I was driving the nearly twelve hundred miles from Louisville, Kentucky, to San Antonio, I sensed the Spirit calming me with the clarity, "Trust Me and I will provide what you will need to fulfill my vision." The clarity I received from these prayerful experiences give me the ongoing clarity that I now need as Trinity's Senior Pastor.

## **DESIRE FOR INTIMACY WITH GOD**

My desire for intimacy with God is a common desire. Augustine said, "Our hearts are restless until we find rest in thee" (*Confessions* 1.1). We hunger to live intimately with God. Prayer enables us to know more of God and to know that we are known by God. Prayer enables us to walk with, talk to, and listen to God. With revolutionary equality, prayer is available to everyone, everywhere, any time because God loves us equally and desires for each of us to know his love.

Since we are a diverse people with sixteen personality types who live in diverse circumstances, we need various ways to commune with God. Consequently there are more than a hundred ways to pray. We can pray with or without words, early in the morning or late at night, and whether we are happy or sad, glad or mad, tired or rested. We can pray with eyes open or closed, kneeling or standing, with hands folded, lifted high, or

holding a hoe. We can pray when confused or clear, with prepared words or spontaneous expression. We just need to pray humbly and through the Spirit of Christ.

During a recent Wednesday's press, I was inspired by the tenacious desire of people to live intimately with God, others, and themselves. The day began with a pre-dawn breakfast with a group of men – all accomplished in their differing vocations – who wanted to pray with one another and talk meaningfully about life lessons learned. Each event of the day followed the other in prayer: a visit with a man whose wife who had recently died; a gathering of women who meet weekly to pray, sing, study, and share; a meeting with a university leader who cast a prayerful vision; a prayerful staff meeting to discern ministry needs; a large conversational luncheon for people to meet and greet meaningfully; a funeral service that became a worship experience guided by prayer; a graveside service that ended with a crescendo of prayer; an evening meal that became a resting place for a tearful young woman who wanted to connect with her church family; the faith family at a midweek worship service, praying prayers of adoration, confession, thanksgiving, and supplication; a Bible study which opened with Paul's admonition for Christians earnestly and lovingly to pray for the knowledge and use of their spiritual gifts (1 Corinthians 14:1); talking with a family who was deciding to join the congregation; meeting with a man in preparation for his baptism; loving, laughing, and praying with my wife; texting a prayer to a man whose wife had just suffered a miscarriage; reviewing the day's experiences; prayerfully writing; and falling asleep in renewed awareness of God's goodness and graciousness.

## **THE SPIRIT OF PRAYER**

Several years ago I returned to my home place in Boerne, Texas, for a catch-up visit with Dad and Mother. As our sharing progressed through the night, Mother contentedly fell asleep in her den chair. While Dad and I continued, I explained to him that I was learning about God's leadership in our lives. "God will show us the vision we are to pursue," I said. "However, God will only give us the specific signs to follow as we need them. I call this 'confirming signs of the Spirit.'" Dad smiled and said, "We will call it C.S.S." Subsequently when we talked, we asked each other for C.S.S. updates. When he passed away, I changed my license plate to C.S.S.

Jesus explained that the Holy Spirit counsels, comforts, and confronts us. Through each of the Spirit's actions we are given a C.S.S. We are responsible for our response to the Spirit. If the Spirit *confronts* our conscience, then we are to examine ourselves and get realigned to God's best intentions. If we are confused about what to do next, we are to pursue the Spirit's *counsel* and to act on the wisdom we receive. If we are anxious, we are to allow the Spirit's *comfort* to bring our disease into ease.

After my freshman year at Baylor University, I worked as a summer missionary in Oregon. My primary responsibilities were to pastor a house church, preach in revivals and camps, and serve the community in a logging village. My real objective was to “get the Holy Spirit.” I wanted to live the Spirit-filled life. To satisfy this yearning, I filled my suitcases with books about the Holy Spirit. By summer’s end, I had learned more about the Spirit but I did not have more of the Spirit.

My yearning and questing continued until I learned the secret. God had never intended it to be a secret. A gift? Yes, which is why spiritual gifts are called “grace gifts.” A second blessing? Yes, if we understand that there are continuous blessings of transformation that the Spirit ushers into our lives. What then is the secret I learned? *Yielding*.

Prayerfully yielding to the Spirit means the Spirit is free to instruct our minds, inspire our hearts, empower our spirits, and embolden our bodies. Since at birth we are made in God’s image, we have the Spirit with us in the beginning. Since our belief in Christ, we have the Spirit helping us to believe. But the Spirit has much more for us, and this more unfolds as we continually yield our will into God’s will. As we desire, receive, and obey, the Spirit grows us from the inside out. When we conclude praying, we find ourselves saying “Amen” with joy.



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