

## CHAPTER 5

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# Pray Kingdom Prayers

I've always been drawn to reading Christian classics. Since I started seriously pursuing God, I have read people like George Muller, Andrew Murray, A.B. Simpson, D.L. Moody, Charles Finney, John Wesley, Smith Wigglesworth, Jonathan Edwards, and many others. I love reading about people who have been involved in significant God-happenings. One of the reasons I read them is because I noticed that they encountered God in ways no one around me was encountering God. They saw extraordinary happenings. Answers to prayer. They saw Heaven invade earth. They witnessed the things that I had only read about in the Bible, and I longed to see.

This is how the disciples felt when they watched Jesus' life. When Jesus prayed, things happened. Heaven invaded earth. Sick people were healed. Dead people came back to life. Demons scattered. Lives were changed. When Jesus prayed, He had an intimacy with the Father like no one else ever had. The disciples spent much time with Jesus; they saw his prayer life in action. It moved them.

That's why, one day, they said to him, "Lord, teach us how to pray" (Luke 11:1). They had witnessed a person powerful in prayer, and it mo-

tivated them to learn. That's when Jesus taught his disciples what we call "the Lord's prayer." He laid down for them a pattern of prayer. Right at the center of that prayer is a critically important phrase. Jesus tells them to pray: "Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven." That sums up kingdom praying, which is the fifth pathway we will look at.

## The Kingdom of God

Jesus' central message was about the Kingdom of God. It was the first thing He said when He initiated his public ministry: "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near" (Matthew 4:17). It was the last thing He spoke about with his disciples before He ascended: "After his suffering, he presented himself to them and gave many convincing proofs that he was alive. He appeared to them over a period of forty days and spoke about the kingdom of God" (Acts 1:3). And it was the essential theme of all his teachings and redemptive actions in between. We cannot understand Jesus' ministry without a growing understanding about his central message, the Kingdom of God.

What should kingdom prayers look like? What can we learn from Jesus' response to the disciples' question, "How should we pray?" Let me give you three thoughts on the content of kingdom prayers.

First, kingdom prayers focus on God, developing an intimate relationship with Him and increasing more of God's presence in our lives. When Jesus teaches the disciples about prayer, He starts with a simple phrase: "Our Father." We pray this prayer, and we know this phrase so well, that it no longer shocks us. But in Jesus' day, no one called God "Father." Remember, Jesus came from a religious tradition where God's name, Yahweh, was never *pronounced*. You didn't approach God and say, "Father." But when Jesus taught his disciples to pray, He didn't just teach them to pray "Father," which is shocking enough; he taught them to pray "Abba, Father." "Papa." "Daddy." There was an intimacy in Jesus' praying that absolutely horrified the religious leaders of his day. They didn't think you could approach God like this. But Jesus did, and He welcomed us to, as well.

Jesus modeled intimate kingdom praying. Luke 2:52 tells us that Jesus grew in wisdom and favor with God and with people. I am never surprised that Jesus grew in favor with people, but the thing that's shocking about

that verse is that He increased in favor with God. He is the sinless Son of God. How did He increase in favor with God?

There is a difference between God's love and God's favor. God loves you. He loves you all the time. There's nothing you can do to make God love you more; there's nothing you can do to make God love you less. God will always love you, because God is love. But *favor* . . . favor rises and falls. Jesus lived his life praying with such intimacy with the Father that the favor of the Father kept increasing in his life, according to this passage. That means you and I can experience an increase in favor as well. Let me give you an idea of what favor looks like. When I go to the monastery, I don't get a cell phone signal. One of the reasons why I've chosen the monastery that I go to is *because* I don't get a cell phone signal. I don't answer the phone. I don't respond to email. I don't text. If, by chance, a signal does come in, and a text or an email or a phone call comes through, I ignore it, because I am there to meet with God.

One day recently I was at the monastery, and a phone call came through. The call was from my house. Now that is a call I answer. I picked it up, and it was Courtney, my daughter, and she said, "Dad? Can I talk to you?" I knew the signal wouldn't last, so I used the landline at the monastery, called her back, and I talked to her for twenty minutes. Why? Because she's my daughter. That's favor. If any other call came in, I would not have picked up. I'd return the call when I was home. But when your daughter calls, you answer.

You are Daddy's daughter. You are Daddy's son. When you pick up the line and talk to your Daddy—your Abba Father—He answers. There is favor to be found in the Father's presence when we understand who we are and who He is. The disciples followed this example, and they, too, pursued more of God, more of this intimate relationship, more of this favor with the Father.

In Acts chapters 1 and 2, the Spirit of God is poured out, but what precedes that is Acts 1:14: "They all joined together constantly in prayer." They were claiming the promises of God. And then the Spirit was poured out. Kingdom prayer starts and ends with pursuing deeper intimacy with God the Father and more of his presence in our lives. The early disciples learned this from Jesus, and they prayed like Him.

## Redemptive Suffering

Growing in intimacy with the Father is where kingdom praying begins, and it leads us to a place where we can trust Him in times of suffering. When we do that, it increases our ability to sustain more of God's presence. To see how this works, look at the way Paul prays for the Ephesians. Ephesians 3:16-17:

*I pray that out of his glorious riches he may strengthen you with power through his Spirit in your inner being, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith.*

Paul is asking for the Holy Spirit to dwell in their hearts through faith. But they are already Christians. He is praying for *more* of the reality of the Spirit's presence in their lives. But watch what he prays first: he prays for strength in their inner being.

Think of your soul again like a container. If the walls of your soul are only a little bit thick—say a quarter of an inch—all the presence of God you can hold is that which can be sustained by a quarter-of-an-inch thickness. If you want to have more of God, you must thicken your souls. That's where suffering comes in. Redeemed suffering thickens your soul, which gives you more capacity for more of God. Some of you pray for more of God and then resist the redemption of suffering that could increase your capacity for God. Don't do that. If you want more of God, be willing to suffer. Only those who suffer in redemptive ways can experience more of the presence of God.

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Paul goes on to pray in verses 17-19:

*And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, may have power, together with all the Lord's people, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, and to know this love that surpasses knowledge—that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God.*

He's praying that the walls of your soul would grow thicker, so you could have more of God's presence and the fullness of God's love bursting inside of you. If God landed on you with all of his fullness, and your walls were a quarter of an inch thick, He would blow out the walls of your soul. He's too merciful to do that. So what He brings into your life are times of testing, which strengthen your walls.

Oftentimes when we pray for more of God, and the hardships come, we resist them, and we pray for God to take hardship away. We pray like this: "Oh, give me comfort." "Oh, Great Comforter." "You surely do not want me to suffer." We pray in these ways to the One who died on a cross, the One who has invited us to share in the fellowship of his suffering! But the strength and effectiveness of our prayers will never rise above our connection with the Father. If you want favor, thick walls are necessary, and you have to pray for more of God. That is kingdom praying.

We too often pray for more comfort, convenience, and ease in our lives. These aren't the prayers of kingdom warriors; these are the prayers of people of leisure. These aren't kingdom prayers, they are prayers about me; they are prayers of a pampered people living in a pampered society. God wants us to pray for more of Him. Too often our prayers are weak, anemic. It is because we don't know our Father. Too often our prayers are about what God can give us, when the thing we really need is God Himself. If we knew Him, we would pray much differently. If we had a greater grip on eternity, our prayers wouldn't be so bound by the temporary. Our prayers would be less self-centered and more God-centered.

They would be more kingdom-centered. They would be less wimpy and more bold. They would be less earthly-centered and more centered on bringing God's kingdom to interrupt earth. They would be less focused on material concerns and more focused on eternal matters. They would be less concerned with comfort, and more concerned with character formation. But it all starts with more of *God*. The closer we get to the Father, the more we pray kingdom prayers.

In my own journey, I have changed the way I pray in the last couple of

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years. I still pray for wisdom. I've always prayed for wisdom. I've said for many years that the number one job of a spiritual leader is to find the mind of Christ, and do it. I still believe that and often seek God for his wisdom. Every decision I make, my one goal is to try to find and do the mind of Christ. I still intercede for people for all kinds of different things, like I always did. The big change in my prayer approach has been I have spent more and more time seeking after God in prayer, where before, most of my prayer time was spent on seeking God's wisdom, seeking God's help, seeking God's interceding. "God, help me with this problem. Fix this problem. Make this better." Don't get me wrong: God wants us to come to Him with our needs. And God doesn't take any sick pleasure in our pain. So, I still pray some of those prayers. But I have radically increased my prayers for more of God. I have spent far more time just being with God, not merely asking God to bless my 'doings' for Him.

I told you I've had a lot of physical problems these last couple of years. I'm at the place now, where I can sincerely pray before God, that if I could have healing for all my pains or have more of God, I'd rather have more of God. Now I still pray for healing, because I believe Jesus is our healer, but if I had to choose, I'd rather have more of God's presence in my life. If I had to choose between more people attending our church, or more of God, I'd ask for more of God. Now I want more people to attend, because I want everyone to know Jesus. But what I came to realize was that there was a hunger inside my soul that only God could satisfy. No amount of success, no amount of sensual pleasure, no amount of monetary blessing was going to get it done. I just needed more of God. The more of God I found, the more I wanted.

What I came to realize was that the only way to accomplish the impossible kingdom assignment that God had given me, which was to see revival in New England, was to have more of God in my life. God is the only one capable of doing the impossible. So, I chased harder. I don't want to mislead you: I'm not there all the time, but I'm there more often now than ever before. I want God more than anything. That's how Jesus told us to pray.

Often people come to me in need. I've come to realize that most of the time, I don't have any answers. I can't help them. People are depressed. Some come to me after their spouse has left them for another lover. Another one comes to me after they have been told they have cancer. Someone

else comes to tell me they are suffering from panic attacks. I can't change those things. All I can do is carry the presence of God to them. But that is the best I can offer, because only God can do the impossible.

The more I carry God's presence, the more they get helped. Twice recently, I prayed for people who had very difficult situations. They were experiencing extremely painful dilemmas in their life. They faced impossible situations, and I had no answers to offer them. There was nothing I could do to take away their pain or fix their problem. I couldn't wave a magic wand. I couldn't change their circumstances. But as I have been pursuing more of God, I have more confidence than ever before when I pray. The more of God I see in my own life, the more of God I believe for your life. So I simply prayed.

In both cases, God did something impossible. He imparted gifts, peace, and love to these people. He gave them that which I could not give. I had been with Him, and as I prayed, He gave them the gift of Himself. That's what Jesus had that his disciples longed for—He had increasing favor with God, and the more of God's favor He experienced, the more He could pray and see God's favor come on others. Pursue God first. It's the first order of kingdom business.

## God's Kingdom for God's Glory

Kingdom prayers are about more of God's kingdom on earth for his glory. This is the centerpiece of the prayer in Matthew 6. Jesus told us to pray, "Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven" (verse 10). He taught his disciples to pray that Heaven would invade earth. In Heaven, there isn't going to be any sickness. In Heaven, there isn't going to be any sin. In Heaven, there isn't going to be any broken relationships, nor are there going to be any heart wounds or soul wounds. There aren't going to be any demons, and there aren't go-

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The kingdom of Heaven is the reversal of everything that went wrong with the world when sin entered the world; it is the establishment of God's rule in our reality. It is the restoration of the way things ought to be. Pray for Heaven to invade earth. That's kingdom praying. When we pray with more of God's presence, and more of the favor of God on our lives, because we are pursuing more of God, then we'll see more of Heaven invade earth when we pray. That's the point.

When Jesus sent out the twelve in Matthew chapter 10, He told them how to bring God's kingdom to earth: "As you go, proclaim this message: 'The kingdom of heaven has come near.' Heal the sick, raise the dead, cleanse those who have leprosy, drive out demons" (verses 7, 8).

We tend to read this passage and think, *Yes! Heal the sick, raise the dead, cleanse the lepers, drive out demons. Amen.* But when is the last time you raised a dead person? Are you willing to say there is a gap in your soul between what Jesus taught and what you are experiencing? According to Jesus, I should be raising dead people. I have a gap. Now you can read that passage and reinterpret it if you want to and dumb it down so you don't feel a gap anymore. That will make you feel better, but you'll never see dead people raised. Or, you can say there's a gap, and I'd like to spend the rest of my life seeking to close it. And I am willing to pay whatever price is necessary. That is kingdom praying. I want to close that gap, and I want to see Heaven invade earth.

## Salvation

Part of kingdom praying as Jesus taught is praying for salvation. God wishes that none should perish. 2 Peter 3:9 says, "The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. Instead he is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance." When it comes to church growth there is only one number that God is concerned about: zero. He wishes that none should perish. Want to know why God is "slow" in sending Jesus back to earth and putting an end to sin? It is because He wishes that none should perish. He waits for people to come to Him.

Again, in the last days, God wants to pour out his Spirit on all people,

so that his church can rise up in the power of the Spirit and be a force on this planet. He wants the church to carry his presence to our world so He can reap a great harvest, because He wishes that *none* should perish. He takes no pleasure in the death of the wicked, God says in Ezekiel 33:11. Jesus said that the Father so loved the world that He gave his only Son, that whoever believes in Him will not perish but have eternal life (John 3:16). We need to pray for people to come to know Jesus. The heart of God is that no one should be found outside of the family of God. No one should be lost in his sins. God has made provision—through the death of his very Son—so that none should perish. We pray for more of God in our lives, so we can carry more of Jesus to the lives of those around us.

Our world is undergoing a cataclysmic shift. It is what I call the “Scooby Doo Theory.” Some of you grew up watching *Scooby Doo*, like I did, in the 1970s. In the ‘70s, behind every ghost on *Scooby Doo*, there was a just a bad guy dressed up like a ghost. There was always a natural explanation to every apparent supernatural phenomenon.

But, one day I was over a friend’s house watching Scooby with his child of the 1990s, and I saw something that surprised me. Scooby encountered a real ghost. There was no villain behind the ghost. It was not a hoax. It was a real ghost. That day I realized our world was under a dramatic shift. A new generation of children was growing up with a supernatural worldview. We are teaching a new generation that behind an apparent supernatural phenomena was an actual supernatural being.

I saw a statistic recently that the fastest growing religion among the younger generation in the United States was Wiccan, a combination of witchcraft and paganology. Thirty years ago in our society, you couldn’t find a card reader shop or a medium. Now they are commonplace in my community. The world has changed. When I teach at seminary, I often tell the students that if the church does not understand the Kingdom of God and the power of God in the next twenty years, it will become completely irrelevant. The only people we will have to minister to will be the Pharisees among us.

We need to pray kingdom prayers with kingdom power and authority. Many have turned to the supernatural power of the enemy, just as in the New Testament era, but God has all power and authority. The Church needs to rise up in her kingdom authority and love and pray for the king-

dom to invade earth, and for salvation to come to our communities.

## Deliverance: Freedom and Maturity

Another part of kingdom praying is to pray for freedom and deliverance. We pray for deliverance from sin, from temptation, and from the strongholds of Satan. We pray for deliverance for people from demonic spirits, and deliverance from addiction, and deliverance from the sin patterns that enslave us. There are times we've prayed for people on a Sunday morning after church, that God would deliver them from alcohol or drugs, and we've seen God miraculously deliver someone on the spot, so that they no longer desired drugs or alcohol. Other times, I've seen where the person had to fight and labor, and there was a long process with much prayer, and inner healing, and deliverance, but eventually, freedom came.

This much is certain: Jesus came to set the captives free. So we pray for freedom. But this is often not the way we pray. The greatest example of this is when we pray for our kids. Often we pray that our kids will be safe. "God, keep them from being sick." "God, keep them safe on their trips." "God, help them not to get injured playing sports." "God, keep them from all the evils of the world." Those are good things. But God wants our kids to be warriors fighting the great dragon, Satan, and battling against the kingdom of darkness. You don't get to become a warrior by sitting on the sidelines. If you're going to become a warrior, then you have to get out to the front lines.

The problem with the front lines is that you get shot at. There is real potential for casualty. The Bible often uses battle language to talk about the confrontation between the Kingdom of God and the kingdom of darkness. It's a battle between good and evil. And the battle is real, and the casualties are real, too.

For years in my life, I used to pray those "safe prayers" for my kids. I've stopped praying those kinds of prayers and started praying stuff like this for my kids: "Oh God, no matter what it takes, make them mighty warriors. And help me not to stop what You're doing in their life if You are trying to make them a mighty warrior." I pray that God would deliver them from temptation, and I pray they would take risks, and I pray that God would make them mighty warriors. I don't want them to be nice, safe, good

little moral Christians. I want them to be mighty warriors who slay the great dragon who battles against people's souls. I want them to be men and women of God who advance his kingdom. I pray for discernment that they would know right from wrong and truth from lies. And I pray for boldness and courage that they would stand for what is right and true, even when they take hits for Jesus.

If you pray like that, your kids will likely turn out alright, but it may look like hell before it starts to smell like Heaven. When we play it safe with our prayers, they are often more fear-based than faith-filled. We have to stop being afraid and start being men and women of God, and we have to pray kingdom prayers. We need a generation of mighty warriors, not safe little kids who live at home in sheltered environments. Pray bold, kingdom prayers.

## Healing

In kingdom praying, we pray for miraculous healing. We ought to pray for miracles. This is part of the New Testament. A.B. Simpson, the founder of my denomination, the Christian and Missionary Alliance, talked about Christ our Healer. It was part of what he called the Fourfold Gospel—Christ our Savior, Sanctifier, Healer, and Coming King. (I think he could have added a fifth fold—Christ our Empowerer, or Baptizer, to emphasize the need to be filled with the Spirit.) Simpson understood that healing was part of the Gospel of the kingdom, and he built it right into the CMA's DNA. Jesus is our healer. This is part of our inheritance in our denomination that most of our churches haven't experienced nearly enough, and God is calling us to return to our roots.

Too many churches espouse the doctrine that God heals, but they don't pursue God's miraculous healing power. We need to do so. Healing, deliverance, and miracles are a huge part of the New Testament story in the Gospels and in Acts. But we have to pay a price to see the reality of Heaven invade our darkened earthly realm. We have a woman in our church who was a new believer. This whole concept of healing was very new to her. Her daughter was about to start kindergarten, but she had a very bad case of warts. The mom was getting concerned that people might make fun of her daughter when she went to school. She set an appointment to see a

specialist, because the warts weren't going away; they were getting worse. Then one day it occurred to her that she should pray and ask God to heal her daughter. She and her daughter prayed together that night for healing. The next day, the warts started to disappear. The daughter had these from birth. They were getting worse. But, within a few days of that prayer, the warts were completely gone.

She called the doctor, cancelled the appointment, and told him that God had healed her daughter. She told everyone and anyone who would listen that God healed her daughter. Miracles demonstrate the power of the Kingdom of God. They confirm the message of the gospel of the kingdom. Paul said, "For the kingdom of God is not a matter of talk but of power" (1 Corinthians 4:20). We need all of God's people to step into their destiny as a kingdom of priests and carry his healing presence and power to our world.

## Kingdom Prayers with Kingdom Motives

We need to pray these kingdom prayers with kingdom motives. James has a very important statement when he says, "You do not have, because you do not ask God. When you ask, you do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives, that you may spend what you get on your pleasures" (James 4:2, 3, NIV 1984). There are two kingdom motives that I want to address.

First, we have to pray for God's glory, not ours. This isn't about me or you. This isn't about people taking notice of us or thinking we are more spiritual. Jesus warned us not to pray like the hypocrites who prayed to be noticed by others (Matthew 6:5). We don't want to pray to be seen; we want to pray so God is seen.

I always have to guard against self-centered motives. Let me give you an example. Let's say that you were sitting around a small group and someone asked for prayer for a bad back. You gathered around and were praying with the rest of the people in your group. Everyone laid their hands on the person with the backache. Then the person said, "Who has their hand on my right shoulder? Don't move it. I feel heat coming from your hand."

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You catch yourself thinking, *What about me? I'm praying. No heat under my hand?* You can see self-centered motives creep in when you feel envy, because God is using someone's prayer for a sick person, but nothing apparently happened when you prayed. That's self-centered; confess it to God and ask Him to purify your motives. I have to be able to rejoice when God answers someone else's prayers, not mine—because I'm praying that God will be seen, not me.

Another thing that shows you're not praying for God's glory is when you start to take offense at unanswered prayers. When you start taking offense when people don't get healed—and you think, *This doesn't work, so I'm not going to pray like this anymore*—then you aren't praying for God's glory. You're praying for yours. Stop it. Call it sin, repent of it, and start praying with gratitude no matter what. And if you are absolutely relentless about praying for healing, then healing will begin to flow—if you pray with the right motives. You have to persist with the right motives, and eventually God delivers.

Another motive I want to address is compassion. Our prayers need to be motivated by compassion. Take note of how many times in the New Testament it says, "Jesus was moved with compassion"—and then he performs a miracle. Compassion motivated Jesus to come and die so we could be free. We need to be moved with the heart of the Father. And the more we pursue God, the more we'll have the Father's heart. The more we pursue God, the more we will have the Father's favor. The more we have his heart of compassion, and the more we carry his favor and presence, the more we'll pray with kingdom motives and see kingdom results.

## The Right Tool for the Job

We looked at what we pray when we pray kingdom prayers, and now let's turn to the tools we can use for kingdom praying. If you are doing a job around the house, it really helps to have the right tool for the job. Not too long ago my two youngest children were out building a fort in the yard. They wanted to cut through a piece of wood, so they came inside and asked if they could use a little handheld ax. Jen wasn't so keen on the idea, but Darcy said to me, "Dad, I'm 11." It seemed reasonable to me, and besides, I'm trying to train warriors! So, I taught her how to swing the little ax with-

out cutting her fingers, toes, legs, or any other necessary appendages off. Then, I turned her loose.

I checked on their progress, and, not to my surprise, I could see they were having a hard time. Darcy, who was disappointed and frustrated, sighed sadly, “I can’t do it.” I said, “Well, sweetie, I think the problem is you have the wrong tool.” She looked at me curiously.

We went into the garage together, and I pulled out a little handsaw. I started sawing the piece of wood they had. I showed them how to do it, and we cut through the wood together. We made short work of the project, and they built their fort. I had a pretty cool teepee in my front yard for weeks afterwards. It’s amazing how the right tool can really speed up a job and make you more effective. It’s true in praying, too. There are tools that we can use that make our kingdom prayers more powerful and effective.

## The Cosmic Battlefield

Before we look at some of the tools of kingdom praying, we need to realize that we are entering a cosmic battlefield when we pray kingdom prayers. Paul picked up on this, and in 2 Corinthians 10:3-5 Paul writes:

*For though we live in the world, we do not wage war as the world does. The weapons we fight with are not the weapons of the world. On the contrary, they have divine power to demolish strongholds. We demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God, and we take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ.*

Paul recognizes that we are in a cosmic conflict between good and evil. We live in this world, but the battle that we are fighting is otherworldly. Here is the spiritual reality: Every time I go to pray some kingdom prayer, I face a spiritual battle. If I am praying for someone to come to Christ, I enter a battle, for the god of this age, Satan, has blinded the minds of unbelievers, and he does not want them to see the light of the gospel (2 Corinthians 4:4).

If I am praying for someone to break free from an addiction, the enemy is working against me to enslave that person. If I am praying for a sick person to be healed, or depression to be lifted, there is resistance. Every time we

engage in praying for the kingdom to come on earth as it is in Heaven, we are going to meet cosmic resistance. There is going to be a push back from the dark side. Every time we go to pray a kingdom prayer for someone's salvation, for someone's freedom, for someone to experience an outpouring of the Holy Spirit, or for someone's healing, we are stepping onto a cosmic battlefield, because we are praying for the kingdom to come.

Paul said in Ephesians 6:12: "For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms." When you seek to do good and to see God's rule come to earth, you will be met with resistance. There is a real spiritual enemy out there. Jesus said that the devil, Satan, came to kill, steal, and destroy. But Jesus came to destroy the work of the devil.

There are all of these props and pretensions that the enemy sets up, trying to tear down the knowledge of God. All of these are done in our minds. He can't bring a fortress against God and win. The only place he wins the battle is in your mind. He gets you to stop believing, and he has won. So all of these arguments and pretensions that the enemy is setting up are against the knowledge of God in your mind and heart—not against God's actual powers and abilities. Paul says we have to take every thought captive to make it obedient to Christ. We have to knock down these pretensions and lies of the enemy with the relentless renewing of our minds.

When we engage in kingdom praying, we will be met with resistance, but we shouldn't get hung up on this spiritual reality. It shouldn't be our focus, nor should we let the enemy intimidate us. Don't be afraid, but do be aware. Too often, Christians pray for something, meet resistance from the enemy, and take offense that God isn't answering their prayers. Don't take offense at God. God is good all the time. God sent his Son to die for you. Paul says in Romans 8 that if God didn't spare his own Son, he isn't holding back on us. We can trust God.

## Authority

Paul says the weapons we fight with are not the weapons of the world. On the contrary, they have divine power to demolish strongholds. There are many weapons that we could address. We could talk about worship,

fasting, truth, or praying God's Word. We could address the armor of God, which we'll look at in Chapter 8. But let me deal with three other weapons now: authority, faith, and persistence.

First, if we are going to pray effective kingdom prayers that push back the darkness, we need to pray with authority. Paul says, "The weapons we fight with are not the weapons of the world. On the contrary, they have divine power to demolish strongholds. We demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God." The enemy of our souls seeks to enslave people, and his approach is to try to feed people lies that they will believe.

Whatever you believe has power in your life. For example, let's say you are struggling with feeling lovable. Maybe you grew up in a home where you didn't feel very special to your parents, or maybe you were abused. You feel like God wants to speak to other people, but He doesn't want to speak to you. He wants other people to know his love, but not you. He answers other people's prayers, but not yours. The enemy is dropping those thoughts like seeds into your mind.

If you allow those seeds to take root there, they'll bear fruit in your life. Your mind is fertile soil for ideas to take root and bear fruit—what you believe will bear its fruit in your life. If you allow these thoughts to take root in your mind, you'll feel forgotten or abandoned by God. You'll be hurt and disappointed. You'll take offense at God. It might lead you to rebellion. The moment you don't think God is good, you stop giving God thanks. You are one step away from meeting your own needs in sinful and selfish ways, because you think God won't meet your needs, so you take matters into your own hands.

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But we don't have to give these lies power in our lives. Paul says we have spiritual weapons that carry real authority. We can demolish these arguments of the enemy. How? Recognize the lie, and pray the truth into your life. So, in our example, you are struggling with feeling loved by God. Pray the truth—pray that passage we looked at earlier in Ephesians 3:14-21. Pray that God would strengthen your inner being, strengthen the walls

of your soul, so that you would have more capacity to know the love of God. When you pray Scripture against the lies the enemy is feeding you, it tears down his strongholds.

There are three things you have to understand about your authority: You have to understand who your Father is, you have to understand who you are, and you have to understand who your enemy is. First, you have to understand that your Father is in Heaven. He has all power and authority. He loves you so much He sent his Son to die for you. He is good all the time, and He has no evil to bring into your life. He has no competitor for his throne room. He is God, and there is no other.

You have to understand who you are. You have to keep personalizing your identity in Christ. You are loved by God. You are adopted into the family of God. You are a key-carrying member of the family of God. You have been adopted into firstborn status. You can live beneath that privilege if you believe the lies of the enemy. But you don't have to.

You have to understand who your enemy is. He is evil. He hates God, and he hates you. He has come to kill, steal, and destroy. But he is a defeated foe. Colossians 2:15 says that Jesus, "having disarmed the powers and authorities . . . made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them by the cross." 1 John 3:8: "The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the devil's work." You are a key-carrying family member, with an all-powerful, all-loving Father—and a defeated enemy.

God has given you authority in this cosmic battle that you are engaged in. Jesus said, "I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven" (Matthew 16:19). We have the keys. We aren't beggars who come to God's door trying to convince him for a hand-out. We are key-carrying family members.

Keys come with privilege. Keys come with authority. Imagine I give you the key to my house and the key to my car and the key to my motorcycle, and I say you are welcome to live here and to drive my vehicles. You are a full key-carrying member of my family. You can access my stuff, my toys, my home, my food—everything but my iPhone! You have access to it all. By giving you the keys, I am giving you the right to use them. I am giving you permission and access. But if you don't use them, what good are they? If you doubt it, and think, *Did he really mean that?*, then you will hold the

keys, but you won't use the keys. The Father has given you the keys to the kingdom. You have the right to access his kingdom. We have too many Christians who have the keys but don't know what to do with them. Turn the keys. Pray with authority.

## Faith

If we're going to pray effective kingdom prayers and push back the darkness, we need to pray with authority, and we also need to pray with faith. Right after Jesus explains to the disciples that they are key-carrying members of the family, they run into a problem. They meet a boy in Matthew 17 who has a demon, and they can't cast the thing out.

Jesus shows up, and the dad says, "I brought this boy to your disciples, but they couldn't cast it out." Jesus says, "You unbelieving and perverse generation, how long shall I stay with you?" He expects them to get it by now. He's been with them for a while, training them, and so He rebukes them. Then He casts out the spirit. The boy is made well.

The disciples saw this kid coming along, and the spirits start manifesting themselves. They throw the kid down to the ground, and he is growling and snarling, and his eyes roll up in his head, and it wigs the disciples out. It rattles them. They see the power display of these spirits, and their confidence, their trust in what Jesus has told them, is shaken.

But the reality of Heaven has not changed. They are, in heavenly fact, key-carrying members of the family of God. Whether they accept it or not doesn't change the truth. But they can't turn the keys of the kingdom, because they no longer believe that they are holding the keys, or they no longer believe their set of keys will turn this kind of lock. They know the truth in their heads, but they can't live it, because they don't believe it. They don't have faith, so there is no power in their lives.

After Jesus did cast out the spirit, they asked him, "Why couldn't we drive it out?" This is what Jesus says: "Because you have so little faith. Truly I tell you, if you have faith as small as a mustard seed, you can say to this mountain, 'Move from here to there,' and it will move. Nothing will be impossible for you" (Matthew 17:20).

They want to know why, and Jesus says the key is faith. They lack faith. They have bought into the defeatist lies of the enemy; they saw his power

display, and they lost their grip on heavenly reality. They have authority, but they fail to use it. *It takes faith to exercise authority.* It takes faith to turn the keys and use the authority we have been given.

IT TAKES FAITH  
TO EXERCISE  
AUTHORITY.

## Persistence

Finally, if we're going to pray effective kingdom prayers that push back the darkness, we need to pray with persistence. We will look at persistence in detail in Chapter 8, but it's important to mention here, too. Jesus taught his disciples to persist in prayer. In Matthew 7:7, 8 Jesus said, "Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives; those who seek find; and to those who knock, the door will be opened."

We have to keep praying kingdom prayers with kingdom motives, with authority and with faith, until the kingdom comes. Don't quit. Persistent, faith-filled prayer can appropriate the victory of Christ.

Years ago, one of my friends, Martin Sanders, had Chronic Fatigue Syndrome. He was so exhausted that he could only work about 10 hours a week. It was crippling. Many people were praying for Martin. People at the seminary prayed and anointed him with oil. But he did not recover. Friends gathered and prayed in faith for his healing. But he remained sick. He went up front at church for prayer and anointing with oil. But he didn't get any better. He was prayed for about seven times like this, not counting all of the people who prayed for him regularly in their private prayer times.

He didn't get better—but neither did he quit. He kept coming. He kept praying, and so did others. Finally, after a long time, he came forward one day, received prayer, and God touched him. Instantly, he was delivered from the chronic fatigue. That week he went back to work full-time, and he never looked back. But he had to persist in prayer to win the battle. The enemy is real, and he is reluctant to give up his territory. We have to be willing to engage in the fight for our victory.

Too often we don't see answers come because we quit. We start praying, but when the answer seems slow in coming, we quit. We get discouraged. We run out of faith, and we quit praying. Sadly, often we chalk it up to the sovereignty of God when really it is just a lack of persistent faith on our

part. Recently, I was meditating on Jesus' death. I was thinking about his conversation with his disciples in the Garden of Gethsemane. It is his darkest hour, and He invites his disciples to come and pray with Him. He wants them to pray with Him through this temptation—Jesus is being tempted to avoid the cross.

He goes off and prays by Himself for a bit, and when He comes back, Jesus' disciples are asleep. He asks them a profound question that really struck me. He asks, "Could you not watch and pray with me for one hour?" Jesus expected his disciples to be at the place in their spiritual journey where they could watch and pray for an hour on one issue. He wasn't saying, "Bring your long prayer list, and pray for all the people on your list." No. He was asking them to watch and pray on this *one issue* for *one hour*. He wanted them to pray through the issue. But too often, we pray for five minutes, and we run out of things to say. We don't know how to pray through.

We need to persist in prayer, and our prayers need to be kingdom prayers. Let us not pray selfish or weak or wimpy prayers that bring us comfort, convenience, and safety. The apostles viewed their lives in a greater context. They saw themselves on the stage of history, making a dent in the darkness of the universe. Their prayers were for the effectiveness of their assignment, for their kingdom work, and for the boldness they needed to continue their God-given kingdom assignments—and our prayers should be the same. Let us pray kingdom prayers and bring God's kingdom to earth—until it comes!