

Dear Friends,

Thank you for your correspondence to the Al Denson Show and for tuning in every week to our program. My prayer for you is to be encouraged in your daily walk with God through the words of this booklet. Our hope is that in turn you will tell others of what God is doing through our ministry to youth and parents on TV. I am convinced you will not find another program on any network anywhere that deals with issues today's youth and their parents are facing, and provides answers from a Godly perspective.

Please help us with your donation. Your support will not only keep this program on the air, but will allow us to continue providing these materials on a weekly basis to thousands of people as a gift of encouragement. We need YOU to partner with us. All gifts are tax deductible. Please make your gift payable to Celebration Ministries.

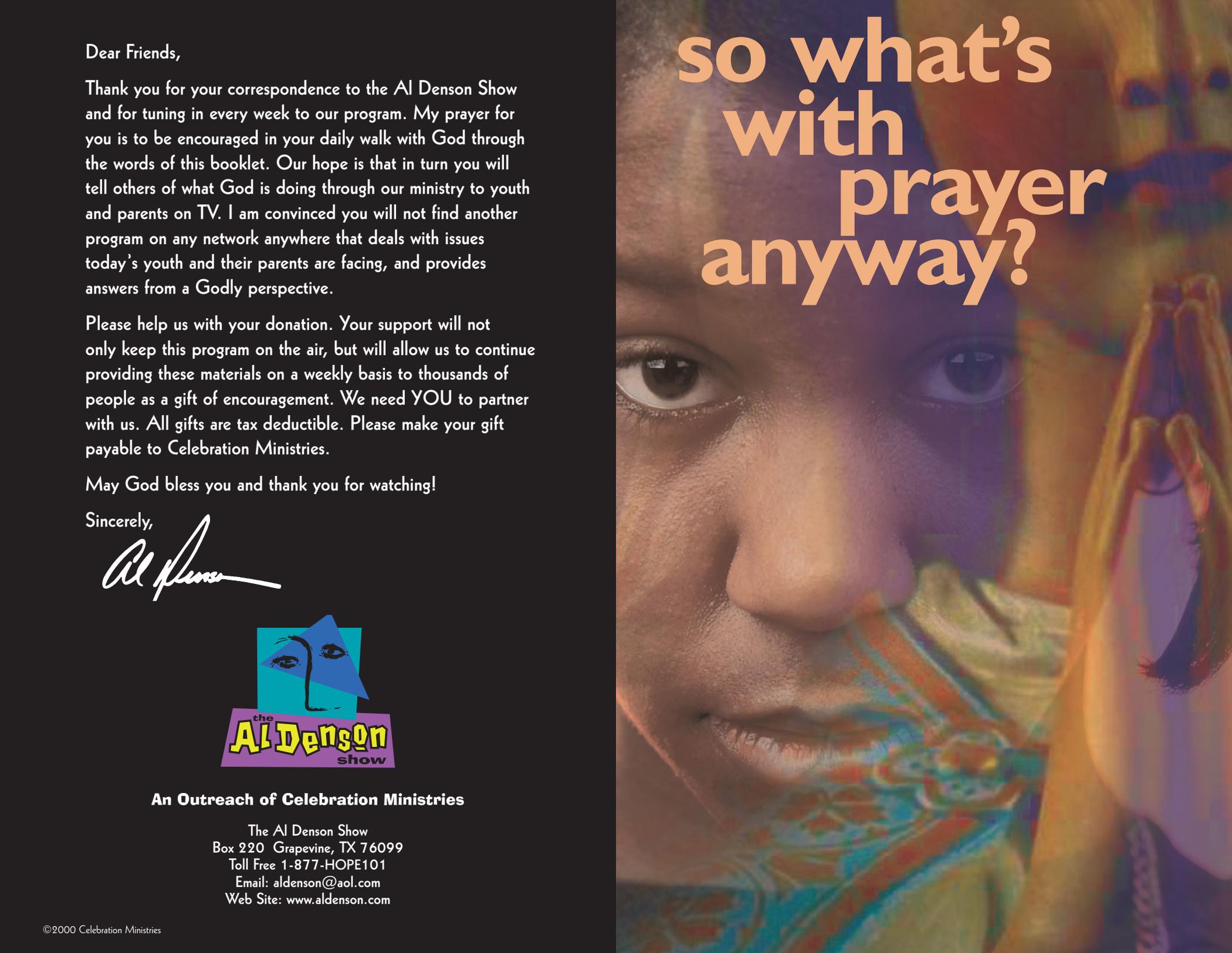
May God bless you and thank you for watching!

Sincerely,



An Outreach of Celebration Ministries

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so what's
with
prayer
anyway?



When Al Denson speaks to students—more than 2,000,000 face to face — he comes with his own story of struggle and tragedy. In December 1994,

Al's much publicized, near-death experience in the crash of a small aircraft led him to a rare insight about the tenuous nature of earthly life.

With eight albums behind him and a string of #1 songs and awards that includes a Dove for "Best Praise Album of the Year", Denson's songs and messages to students from junior high through college continue to touch an ever-widening audience. In addition to his own performances, Al has been featured at crusades for Dr. Billy Graham, Franklin Graham, Ralph Bell, and Dawson McAllister. His new TV show, "The Al Denson Show", is seen by millions across America. The program targets and involves youth and the issues they face every day.

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so what's with prayer anyway?

Every Christian knows that prayer is important, right? Most of us know that the Bible commands us to pray and that even Jesus prayed. But, if you were really, really, REALLY honest, would you have to admit that prayer is something you have a lot of questions about? Questions like, how do I pray? Why doesn't God always answer my prayers? What is prayer anyway?

Well, if you will stay with me, I'll try to help make sense of this thing called prayer for you.

There are a couple of verses in the Old Testament that need to be our starting point. God says in Jeremiah 9:23-24, "Let not the wise man boast of his wisdom, and let not the mighty man boast of his might, let not a rich man boast of his riches; but let him who boasts boast of this, that he understands and knows Me, that I am the Lord who exercises loving kindness, justice and righteousness on earth; for I delight in these things, declares the Lord."

This is an incredible and awesome passage of scripture. Just think — the God of all the universe, the Lord of all Lords, and the King of all Kings is delighted when you and I get to know and understand Him. Imagine that! We can literally bring delight to the heart of God. How important we must be to Him!

But how are we going to get to know and understand Him? In the same way we would get to know and understand anyone with whom we have a special love relationship. The way you do that is through communication.

Most marriage counselors will tell you that when they ask their clients to name the number one thing they believe could improve their

marriage above everything else, without exception they say, "better communication." You see, good communication is the key to what all of us want, which is to be understood. This is one of the deepest needs that humans have because to be understood is to be valued and to be loved unconditionally. It is to feel safe in sharing our deepest feelings and needs. Communication is the key to having a successful relationship with someone you love

because it is the way you get to know and understand the other person.

The same is absolutely true in our relationship with God. If we are going to really get to know and understand Him, then we will have to spend time communicating with Him on a daily basis. He calls this PRAYER. Prayer is nothing more than communicating: talking and listening to God.

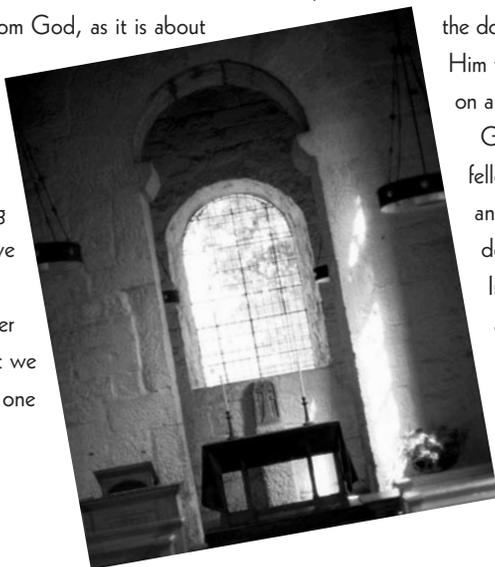
Good communication is the key to what all of us want, which is to be understood.

“Here I am! I stand at the door and knock...”

It is sharing our deepest feelings with Him, letting Him into our needs, and giving Him permission to put His power to work in our lives.

Prayer is not only talking to God, but it is listening to Him as well. For any relationship to be healthy, conversation must be balanced. If one person does all the talking and none of the listening, you will have a one-sided relationship. You need to learn to spend as much time listening to God as you do talking to God. You also need to make sure that He has your undivided attention. Think how it makes you feel when you are trying to communicate with someone you really care about and don't have their undivided attention. This is just as important to God as it is to you, and He deserves your full attention. Too many times the focus of our praying is on what we want God to do for us. Prayer is not so much about what we think we need or can get from God, as it is about developing a relationship with God.

It isn't about moving God to my point of view. It is about giving Him permission to have His way in my life. Remember, if God ever says “no” to a request we make of Him, it is for one



of two reasons: either to protect us from something that would have hurt us, or to provide something better for us later. Psalm 84:11 says, “...no good thing does He withhold from those who love Him.” In other words, if the thing you ask God for is good for you, He will give it to you. If God says no, then you can believe that the thing you asked for would not have been good for you.

Many Christians misunderstand prayer and believe that there is a formula for getting what they want from God. They think that if they assume the right position, or use the right words, or do it in the right place that the right results will follow. But nothing could be further from the truth. We can pray anywhere, anytime and in any position. The only thing that matters when it comes to prayer is the attitude of our heart, and whether or not we are willing to open the door of our life and allow Him to spend time with us on a daily basis.

God made us for fellowship with Himself and that is what He desires above all else. In the Bible there is a little phrase that symbolizes the intimate and joyous

fellowship that God desires with us. It is “sup with” or in more modern translations, “eat with.” This phrase is found in a verse that probably throws more light on prayer than almost any other. Most of the time you will hear this verse directed to unsaved people as an invitation to accept Christ. But if you check out to whom the chapter was addressed, you'll see that it was written to Christians.

Revelations 3:20 is the verse and it says, “Here I (Jesus) am! I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with him, and he with Me.”

You see, Jesus is the one who has initiated the relationship and wants to spend time in fellowship with us. He is the one who invites us to spend time talking and sharing with Him. In fact, He wants to spend time with us so much that He will drive us to pray. This verse proves that. It says, “I stand at the door (of your life) and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door...” Jesus doesn't say, “if anyone hears Me knocking...,” no, He says, “if anyone hears my VOICE” (in the knocking).

What is the knocking in our lives that gets our attention and encourages us to open the door and invite Him in? The knocking is problems in life. These are what drive us to our Father and to pray.

Prayer is a very important, yet often misunderstood part of the Christian life. I'd like to try to clear up some of the confusion that you may have about prayer so let's look at the reasons we should pray, the reasons we don't pray, the roadblocks to prayer, and the results in our lives when we pray.

If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with him, and he with Me.”

When you are talking with God, you are talking with the One who loves you most, understands you the best, and is always available to give you specific directions for your life.

1. Reasons To Pray

A. Because Prayer Changes Us. It does this by making us aware of God's presence in our lives. We know that as Christians we are in Christ and He is in us, so His presence is always with us. Therefore, it isn't the fact of His presence that we need, it is an AWARENESS of His presence that we need. When we begin to "practice the presence" of God on a daily basis we will see our lives begin to change. Prayer does that. It forces us to stop and redirect our attention to Him.

Dudley Hall is an evangelist who tells a true story that happened to him when he was a teenager. He and a group of boys were out behind their church one Saturday digging a ditch. Dudley thought it would be "cool" to tell a dirty joke, so leaning on his shovel and facing the other boys, he began in great detail to tell the joke. He noticed that when he finally finished no one else was laughing. Then with a sinking feeling in his stomach he turned around and there stood his father! Dudley says that his behavior and his language instantly changed that very moment. Was it his father's presence that made the difference? No, his father had been there listening the entire time. It was Dudley's AWARENESS of his father's presence that made the difference in his life!

B. Because Prayer Can Focus God's Power.

You can have all the power of heaven directed toward a specific need in your life through prayer. Let me illustrate this way: The gallbladder is an organ located near the ribcage on the right side of the body. Sometimes this organ can develop stones that can be extremely painful. Years ago when a person had gallstones, the only thing a doctor could do to get rid of them was to make a big incision and remove the gallbladder. This was major surgery. But today, thanks to laser surgery, a small incision can be made through which a tiny instrument can be inserted. Then a laser beam is directed at the stones and smashes them into tiny pieces like a hammer so the gallbladder can easily be removed. Prayer is like that laser beam. It can direct all the power of heaven to zero in on a specific problem or need in your life.

C. Because God Can Direct Us Through Prayer. Prayer is better than talking to the closest, dearest friend you have, because when you are talking with God, you are talking with the One who loves you most, understands you the best, and is always available to give you specific directions for your life. Isaiah 30:21 says, "Whether you turn to the right or the left your ears will hear a voice behind you saying, This is the way, walk in it."

D. Because Prayer Is Our Opportunity To Minister to God Through Praise, Worship And Thanksgiving. The reason that you were created and saved was to glorify God, enjoy and fellowship with Him forever. Through prayers of praise and thanksgiving you can fulfill this, and have the privilege to minister to almighty God. When we praise God we give Him something that nothing else in creation can give which is love and adoration. He made us for Himself and wants to have an intimate relationship with us that will last throughout eternity. Our praise blesses God and makes Him glad. God is worthy of our praise not because of WHAT He does, but because of WHO He is. Praise does not focus on our circumstances or feelings. It is focusing on who and what God is, and thanking Him in spite of our circumstances and feelings for what He has done.

God is sovereign, holy and all powerful. We receive all that we are and have from Him. Praise and thanksgiving keep those truths in perspective for us. God wants us to praise Him not because He needs it, but because giving praise is a need we have. Praise to us is like gasoline to a car.

We were designed to "run" on worship, so praise is actually a gift to us from God that helps us "run" more effectively.

Psalms 22:3 says that God inhabits the praises of His people, that He is "enthroned" upon our praises. God's presence is always in and with us like electricity in a lamp, but praise is the switch that turns on the power of God, and makes us more aware of His working in our lives. When we focus our attention on God through prayers of praise, we acknowledge Him as our power source. We begin to see our problems in the light of His great power. When we compare our problems to His power they immediately seem to shrink before our eyes. Praise speeds up the spiritual maturing process in our lives as we focus on our Father.

Because of Jesus I am now unconditionally loved and accepted by God.

2. Reasons We Don't Pray.

A. We're Too Tired. Most all of us lead very full lives. The demands and pressures of life can leave us drained physically as well as emotionally. All of us are different. Some of us are most alert and feel our best in the morning, while others function better at night. Decide which you are and determine to give God the time of your day when you are at your best. If you have tried to get up early to pray and failed, you may find that either you need to switch your prayer time to the evening, or you need to go to bed earlier. Sometimes it takes more discipline to go to bed at night, than it does to get up in the morning! Whatever the adjustment or sacrifice you need to make, your relationship with God is worth it.

B. We're Too Busy. This is a problem that you will struggle with for the rest of your life. If you think your life is busy and complicated now, believe me it will only get more so as you get older. It is not easy to determine your priorities and plan a schedule you can live with, but you can do it. We always make time for the things that are really important to us. Someone said, "People don't plan to fail, they fail to plan." The same is true with prayer. If you don't plan to pray, you won't.

C. We Don't "Feel" Like It. People who live by their feelings can't live consistently for very long because feelings are highly unreliable and our feelings will lie to us. The Christian who believes that he or she is only to do what they "feel" like doing is a very immature Christian. Obedience to what God has commanded us to do has nothing to do with how we feel.

Praying when you don't feel like it doesn't make you a hypocrite, it makes you a mature, obedient child of God. Anyone can do what they are supposed to when they "feel" like it. Christian teenagers must base their walk with God on the facts and the truth of His Word and not on their feelings. The fact here is that God commands us in His Word to pray. Our circumstances and feelings don't change that fact.

3. Roadblocks To Prayer

A. Unconfessed Sin. The first prayer God hears from a person is, "God forgive me of my sin and save me." That prayer of faith puts us in a right relationship with God and makes us His child. Nothing can ever change that relationship, but allowing unconfessed sin in our lives after we're saved will hurt our "fellowship" with God. Just like nothing you can do will ever change the fact that you are your parent's child, your disobedience can seriously affect your "fellowship" with your parents.

The Bible says in Psalms 66:18, "If there is sin in my heart the Lord will not hear me." This doesn't mean that God can't hear us, it simply means He chooses not to until we deal with what He considers to be more important business, which is our unconfessed sin.

B. Guilt. Many Christians live their lives by this motto, "I feel guilty, therefore I am guilty." We judge how guilty we are by how guilty we feel. As I have already said, feelings are often a lousy barometer of reality. Too many times we feel guilty, when based on what the Bible says, we aren't guilty at all.

In any given week, and sometimes even on any given day, all of us will experience a wide variety of emotions. As our feelings change, the way we feel about our relationship with God often changes, too. This is no way to determine our guilt or innocence before a holy God. Feeling guilty when we aren't guilty at all is called "false guilt." This false guilt comes not because we have violated God's standard, but because we have violated our own.

Even though the scripture promises if we are saved that God's accepts us, not based on what we do or don't do, but on His unconditional love for us and the price that Jesus paid on the cross to redeem us. It still seems more natural to feel condemned and unworthy instead of forgiven and loved by God. As a result,

many of us live our lives every day feeling guilty, afraid, and condemned, so the last thing we want to do is pray.

We must build our lives on the truth of the Word of God, which is:

- Because of Jesus I am completely forgiven of all my sin.
- Because of Jesus I am now holy, righteous, blameless, and pure.
- Because of Jesus I am now unconditionally loved and accepted by God.
- Because of Jesus I am pleasing to God and He is not angry with me or disappointed in me.

God loves us and wants to spend time with us. Our needs will never seem small or unimportant to Him. We can trust Him never to reject us or turn us away.

C. Unforgiveness. One of the reasons that some Christians are unable to pray effectively and consistently is because they have unforgiveness in their lives. When a Christian chooses not to be obedient to God and accept the grace to forgive another person, then a root of bitterness begins to grow in his or her life. That root produces many ugly and deadly fruits, one of which is an inability to pray.

The more time you spend developing your relationship with God through prayer, the more like Him you will be.

Unforgiveness in the life of a Christian is serious business and carries with it a high price tag. There are some things about forgiveness we must know:

- 1. Forgiveness is not a feeling.** This is not something you do when you “feel” like it. It is an act of your will, an act of obedience to God and has nothing to do with the person who has offended you.
- 2. Forgiveness is undeserved pardon and an undeserved release.** If you wait until a person asks for forgiveness or until you think that they deserve it, then it is too late because it isn't really forgiveness at all.
- 3. No matter how horribly someone has treated you, it could never compare with how horrible you were to God.** Your sin drove the nails through the hands and feet of His only Son, and yet He forgave you completely while you were still in your sin.
Don't let unforgiveness keep you from being in fellowship with God and from having a consistent, effective prayer life.

4. Results of Prayer

A. We Will Be More Like Him. Acts 4:13 says, “And when they saw the courage of Peter and John and realized that they were unschooled, ordinary men, they took note that these men had been with Jesus.” It is a fact of life that you will become like those with whom you spend the most time. When you make the decision to accept the new life and new beginning offered by Jesus Christ, the Bible says you are a “new creature in Christ.” At the moment of your conversion, in a split second of time, something supernatural took place in your life. The “old” you died and a “new” you was born in your place. This “new” you may look like the “old” you on the outside, but on the inside everything is totally different. All your sins are gone, as if they never happened. Salvation is an instantaneous, one-time experience, but the process of learning to live on the outside, like what God says you already are on the inside, takes a lifetime. The more time you spend developing your relationship with God through prayer, the more like Him you will be.

B. We Will Become Wise. James 1:5 says, “If any of you lack wisdom, he should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault.”

And Jeremiah 33:3 says, “Call to Me and I will answer you and tell you great and unsearchable things you do not know.” Would you like to have wisdom for every situation, every relationship, every problem of life? Would you like to know the benefit in your life of making wise choices? Pray. Ask God for what you need and be willing to listen and learn from the One who is too wise to ever make a mistake.

C. We Will Have Spiritual Deliverance. Psalms 34:4 says, “I sought the Lord and He answered me and delivered me from all my fears.” What is it in your life from which you need to be set free? For some of us, like the Psalmist in this verse, it is fear. For others it may be worry, doubt, resentment, guilt, pride, unforgiveness, bitterness, anger, rejection, insecurity, or immorality. Whatever the thing is in your life that is keeping you from experiencing the peace and joy that Jesus died to give you, make that thing a matter of constant prayer and ask the Lord to set you free. That deliverance may come in one of several ways, but rest assured that however it happens, God wants you to be free.

D. We Will Have Spiritual Power In Our Lives. The Bible says in Hebrews 4:16 that because we are in Christ we can “approach the throne of God

with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need.” This verse is telling us that because of Jesus we have unlimited access to the very throne room of God through prayer. This access to God means that we have all of His power available to us. James 5:16 says, “...The prayer of a righteous man is powerful and effective.” The greatest power ever given to humans is prayer.

Early one morning after His crucifixion and before His resurrection, Jesus appeared on the beach to cook breakfast for some of His disciples. These men had taken up their nets and gone back to fishing. Some were feeling guilty, some were feeling hopeless, and all were sad and confused when Jesus invited them to fellowship with Him beside the fire.

Jesus is still inviting us today to join Him at His fire of fellowship. The noises of your world are people and things, and these will always be competing for your attention. Sometimes these noises will get so loud that they will drown out the voice of Jesus if you are not careful. Prayer is the way we tend that fire of fellowship with Jesus. The table is set and He is waiting for you.

Will you join Him?