

Principles for Stability in Your Christian Life Pt 5

Phil 4:1-7

Therefore, my beloved and longed-for brethren, my joy and crown, so stand fast in the Lord, beloved.

² I implore Euodia and I implore Syntyche to be of the same mind in the Lord. ³ And I urge you also, true companion, help these women who labored with me in the gospel, with Clement also, and the rest of my fellow workers, whose names *are* in the Book of Life.

⁴ Rejoice in the Lord always. Again I will say, rejoice!

⁵ Let your gentleness be known to all men. The Lord *is* at hand.

⁶ Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God; ⁷ and the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus

Introduction:

One person in the world dies by suicide every 40 seconds, according to the [first ever comprehensive report on the issue from the World Health Organisation](#), which talks of a massive toll of tragic and preventable deaths.

Suicide rates vary enormously from one country to another around the world – influenced by the cultural, social, religious and economic environments in which people live and sometimes want to stop living. Some of the worst affected countries have more than 40 times more suicides than the least affected areas. But the

pressures that cause extreme emotional distress are similar everywhere

Overall, the Geneva-based UN body estimates that there are at least 800,000 suicides a year

Suicide is the second leading cause of death among young people aged 15-29, but otherwise suicide rates increase in people older than 50. It is more common in men than in women, although the disparity is greater in rich countries than in poorer ones. Three-quarters of suicides occur in low- and middle-income countries,

For every death, there are many more people who try to kill themselves.

Most suicides take place in the early morning, perhaps after a sleepless night and before there is anybody around to talk to, or late at night when alcohol may play a part. Nearly one third of people who kill themselves use agricultural pesticides. These are usually farmers in low-income rural areas, who may be facing a loan they cannot repay after a bad harvest. They may have pesticide in a bottle on a shelf in the kitchen.

Review:

I. Pursue Harmony and Peace

II. Maintain a Spirit of Joy

III. Cultivate Humility

IV. Trust God

Lesson:

I. The Practice Thankful Prayer

but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God;

Everything (whatever the matter) (**pas**) means everything without exception! Not just those "crisis" prayers. No time, no subject, no place is off limits for prayer. In everything; in each emergency, little or great, as it arises, pray; cultivate the habit of referring all things, great or small, to God in prayer.

Prayer (4335) (**proseuche** from **pros** = toward or immediately before + **euchomai** = to pray or vow) is the more general word for prayer and is used only of prayer to God. The prefix **pros** would convey the sense of being immediately before Him and hence the ideas of adoration, devotion, and worship. The basic idea is to bring something, and in prayer this pertains to bringing up prayer requests. In early Greek culture an offering was brought with a prayer that it be accepted.

Matt 21:13 And He said to them, "It is written, 'My house shall be called a **house of prayer**'; but you are making it a robbers' den."

Comment: Where is His house today? Yes the local church building, but where else? Paul says our physical body is a temple of the Holy Spirit. How might Jesus' exhortation regarding His house, the

Temple in Jerusalem, relate to believers in the NT?
Are you as convicted as I am? Notice this is one of those passages that is repeated in all 3 synoptic gospels, which makes it even more convicting.

Matthew 21:22 "And all things you ask in **prayer**, believing, you shall receive."

Comment: *All things* in the will of God, not our whims!

Mark 9:29 And He said to them, "This kind (of unclean spirit ~ demon) cannot come out by anything but **prayer**."

Mark 11:17 And He began to teach and say to them, "Is it not written, 'My house shall be called a **house of prayer** for all the nations '? But you have made it a robbers' den."

Luke 6:12 And it was at this time that He went off to the mountain to pray, and He spent the whole night in **prayer** to God.

Comment: This prayer was just before He chose His 12 disciples.

Luke 19:46 saying to them, "It is written, 'And My house shall be a **house of prayer**,' but you have made it a robbers' den."

Luke 22:45 And when He rose from **prayer**, He came to the disciples and found them sleeping from sorrow,

Comment: This prayer was just before He was taken captive by the Romans, falsely tried and Crucified.

Acts 1:14 These all with one mind were continually devoting themselves to **prayer**, along with the women, and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with His brothers.

Acts 2:42 And they were continually devoting themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to **prayer**.

Acts 3:1 Now Peter and John were going up to the temple at the ninth hour, the hour of **prayer**.

Acts 6:4 "But we will devote ourselves to **prayer**, and to the ministry of the word."

Acts 10:4 And fixing his gaze upon him and being much alarmed, he said, "What is it, Lord?" And he said to him, "Your **prayers** and alms have ascended as a memorial before God....**31** and he said, 'Cornelius, your **prayer** has been heard and your alms have been remembered before God.

Acts 12:5 So Peter was kept in the prison, but **prayer** for him was being made fervently (from a verb picturing one laying or stretching out!) by the church to God.

Acts 16:13 And on the Sabbath day we went outside the gate to a riverside, where we were supposing that there would be a place of **prayer**; and we sat down and began speaking to the women who had assembled... **16** And it happened that as we were going to the place of **prayer**, a certain slave-girl having a spirit of divination met us, who was bringing her masters much profit by fortunetelling.

Romans 1:10 (note) always in my **prayers** making request, if perhaps now at last by the will of God I may succeed in coming to you.

Comment: Note how Paul "qualifies" his prayer request.

Romans 12:12 (note) rejoicing in hope, persevering in tribulation, devoted to **prayer**,

Romans 15:30 (note) Now I urge you, brethren, by our Lord Jesus Christ and by the love of the Spirit, to strive together (sun + agonizomai) with me in your **prayers** to God for me

Comment: Strive indicates prayer is agonizing hard work...but you knew that didn't you!

1 Corinthians 7:5 Stop depriving one another, except by agreement for a time that you may devote yourselves to **prayer**, and come together again lest Satan tempt you because of your lack of self-control.

Ephesians 1:16 (note) do not cease giving thanks for you, while making mention of you in my **prayers**;

Ephesians 6:18 (note) With all **prayer** and petition pray at all times in the Spirit, and with this in view, be on the alert with all perseverance and petition for all the saints,

Philippians 4:6 Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by **prayer** and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God.

Colossians 4:2 (note) **Devote** (present imperative = make this your habitual practice!) yourselves to **prayer**, keeping alert in it with an attitude of thanksgiving... 12

Epaphras, who is one of your number, a bonds slave of Jesus Christ, sends you his greetings, always laboring earnestly for you in his **prayers**, that you may stand perfect and fully assured in all the will of God.

1 Thessalonians 1:2 (note) We give thanks to God always for all of you, making mention of you in our **prayers**;

1 Timothy 2:1 First of all, then, I urge that entreaties and **prayers**, petitions and thanksgivings, be made on behalf of all men,

1 Timothy 5:5 Now she who is a widow indeed, and who has been left alone has fixed her hope on God, and continues in entreaties and **prayers** night and day.

Philemon 1:4 I thank my God always, making mention of you in my **prayers**... 22 And at the same time also prepare me a lodging; for I hope that through your **prayers** I shall be given to you.

James 5:17 Elijah was a man with a nature like ours, and he prayed earnestly (proseuche - literally "*he prayed prayer*") that it might not rain; and it did not rain on the earth for three years and six months.

1 Peter 3:7 (note) You husbands likewise, live with your wives in an understanding way, as with a weaker vessel, since she is a woman; and grant her honor as a fellow heir of the grace of life, so that your **prayers** may not be hindered.

1 Peter 4:7 (note) The end of all things is at hand; therefore, be of sound judgment and sober spirit for the purpose of **prayer**.

Revelation 5:8 (note) And when He had taken the book, the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders fell down before the Lamb, having each one a harp, and golden bowls full of incense, which are the prayers of the saints.

Revelation 8:3 (note) And another angel came and stood at the altar, holding a golden censer; and much incense was given to him, that he might add it to the **prayers** of all the saints upon the golden altar which was before the throne. **8:4** And the smoke of the incense, with the prayers of the saints, went up before God out of the angel's hand.

Spurgeon goes on to exhort us...

Carry your desires to the Lord of your life, the guardian of your soul. Go to Him with two portions of prayer and one of fragrant praise. Do not pray doubtfully but thankfully. Consider that you have your petitions, and, therefore, thank God for His grace.

Supplication (1162) (**deesis** from **deomai** = to want, to beg, to pray) refers to making known of one's specific needs, even conveying a sense of an urgent request to meet that need.

Deesis is used in the NT for prayer for particular benefits and gives prominence to one's personal needs. **Deesis** emphasizes the fact that the suppliant is in need of the thing ask for. Webster says that to **supplicate** (from Latin supplic-, supplex = entreating for mercy) means to make humble entreaty. Practical Theology of Prayer

Thanksgiving (2169) (**eucharista** from **eú** = well, + **charizomai** = to grant, give freely; English = Eucharist as related to Lord's Supper) is the expression of thanks or gratitude for favor and mercy shown. Thankfulness from one conscious of benefit received.

MacArthur explains that God's promises support the reasonableness of saints always praying with **thanksgiving** irregardless of the circumstances for God

has promised that no trial believers face will be too difficult for them to handle ([1Co10:13](#)). He has also promised to use everything that happens in believers' lives for their ultimate good ([Ro 8:28](#))...People become worried, anxious, and fearful because they do not trust in God's wisdom, power, or goodness. They fear that God is not wise enough, strong enough, or good enough to prevent disaster. It may be that this sinful doubt is because their knowledge of Him is faulty, or that sin in their lives has crippled their faith. Thankful prayer brings release from fear and worry, because it affirms God's sovereign control over every circumstance, and that His purpose is the believer's good (cf [Ge 50:20](#)).

Requests (155) (**aitema** from **aitéo** = ask for with urgency to the point of demanding, even as demanding one's share) are petitions that in general are from one who is in a lesser position than the one to whom the petition is made. Vincent says that **aitema** refer to the specific details of supplication.

Be made known (Let God know what is troubling you) (**gnorizo**) is a command (**imperative**) in the **present tense** (continually do this, make it the habit of your life). In other words keep praying and don't lose heart. Jesus gave a similar exhortation to His disciples

Great example of Thankful Prayer

2 Then Jonah prayed to the Lord his God from the fish's belly.

2 And he said:

“I cried out to the Lord because of my affliction,
And He answered me.

“Out of the belly of Sheol I cried,
And You heard my voice.

3 For You cast me into the deep,
Into the heart of the seas,
And the floods surrounded me;
All Your billows and Your waves passed over me.

4 Then I said, ‘I have been cast out of Your sight;
Yet I will look again toward Your holy temple.’

5 The waters surrounded me, *even* to my soul;
The deep closed around me;
Weeds were wrapped around my head.

6 I went down to the moorings of the mountains;
The earth with its bars *closed* behind me forever;
Yet You have brought up my life from the pit,
O Lord, my God.

7 “When my soul fainted within me,
I remembered the Lord;
And my prayer went *up* to You,
Into Your holy temple.

8 “Those who regard worthless idols
Forsake their own Mercy.

9 But I will sacrifice to You
With the voice of thanksgiving;
I will pay what I have vowed.

Salvation *is* of the Lord.”

¹⁰ So the Lord spoke to the fish, and it vomited Jonah onto dry *land*.

II. The Peaceful Thought of Prayer

⁷ and the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus

And (kai) connects the previous truth with the present result. It might be paraphrased “and then,” or “and so”, which connects following promise with the preceding precepts on prayer. And so we see that by the practice of the precepts one is enabled to obtain the promise. Have you experienced this promise?

Peace (1515) (**eirene** from **eiro** = to joining or binding or joining together what is broken or divided) means to set at one again, a meaning convey by the common expression of one “having it all together”.

Pulpit Commentary - God's Peace

I. What it is. God’s own peace; that which he himself possesses. It is the peace which our Lord had and which he promised to his disciples: “My peace I give unto you.”

It is, therefore, no mere superficial freedom from external troubles, but a deep-seated harmony with God the Source of all peace. Thus it transcends human understanding and human expression.

II. What prevents our possessing it? Over-anxiety and worry. These are a kind of practical atheism, since they prevent us from leaving all things to Him Who is supreme over all circumstances.

III. How to obtain it. By prayer, which rests upon Him for all things; by supplication, which brings our own special causes for anxiety into His presence; by thanksgiving, which recognizes that His will must be full of blessing. By thus turning our cares into prayers we throw them upon him who gives us in return His peace.

IV. What it does for us. It keeps our hearts and minds, preserving them from undue anxiety, and making them realize the strength of the peace which Christ bestows. How do these words come home with sublime force at the end of our Communion Service! Having received him who is our Peace ([Eph 2:14](#)), we have entered into and taken possession of the peace of God which passeth all understanding.—V. W. H.

Like a River Glorious

Stayed upon Jehovah,
Hearts are fully blessed;
Finding, as He promised,
Perfect peace and rest.

Surpasses (5242) (**huperecho** from **hupér** = above, over + **écho** = have) means literally to hold above and in context means to transcend the reach of man's ability to comprehend. This word speaks of that which is superior to or of surpassing and exceptional value.

Huperecho - 5v in NT - [Rom. 13:1](#); [Phil. 2:3](#); [3:8](#); [4:7](#); [1 Pet. 2:13](#). NAS renders - governing(1), in authority(1), more important(1), surpasses(1), surpassing value(1).

Huperecho is in the **present tense** which signifies that this peace is continually a peace that baffles men's futile attempts to explain it or rationalize it. Why? Because it is supernatural peace. God's peace continually stands out and is superior and more excelling than the world's peace or any so called peace we might be able to well up because of "positive thinking" etc. It is beyond our ability to produce it by our own intellect.

Shall guard (5432) (**phroureo** from **phrouros** = sentinel) (click for more discussion of **phroureo**) means to pay attention to something, this definition giving us a clear picture of the action involved in guarding or protecting. The root word **phrouros** (sentinel) is derived from **pro** = before, toward + **horao** = behold, take special notice of, stare at more.

Phroureo - 4v in NT - [2 Co. 11:32](#); [Gal. 3:23](#); [Phil. 4:7](#); [1 Pet. 1:5](#). NAS renders - guard(1), guarding(1), kept in custody(1), protected(1).

Phroureo has three primary nuances:

(1) to maintain a watch, guard (like guarding the city gates from within as a control on all who went out),

(2) to hold in custody, detain, confine as in Galatians where Paul explained that...

"before faith came, we were **kept in custody** (phroureo) under the law, being shut up to the faith which was later to be revealed."

This meaning in fact was The terminology is consistent w. the Roman use of prisons principally for holding of prisoners until disposition of their cases, just as the Law did until we could place our faith in Christ.

(3) to provide security, guard, protect, keep, this being the primary meaning in the present context.

Phroureo means to be a watcher in advance, to mount guard as a sentinel (post spies at gates) and figuratively to hem in and to protect.

John MacArthur adds that the saints in Philippi

"knew what a sentry was, what a guard was, what a garrison was...a protector. And what Paul says...if you know your God and you know your God is near and you confidently trust your God in the midst of any trial, knowing that it is effecting His purpose, and then being thankful in the midst of that for the purpose of God even in the difficulty, you are granted the peace of God, that peace will guard you and protect you from anxiety, difficulty, distress, dissatisfaction, discontent, doubt."

Spurgeon gives this advice on letting your requests be known to God:

"Cast your troubles where you have cast your sins; you have cast your sins into the depth of the sea, there cast your troubles also. Never keep a trouble half an hour on your own mind before you tell it to God. As soon as the trouble comes, quick, the first thing, tell it to your Father. Remember, that the longer you take telling your trouble to God. the more your peace will be impaired. The longer the frost lasts, the more thick the ponds will be frozen. Your frost will last till you go to the sun; and when you go to God — the sun, then your frost will soon become a thaw, and your troubles will melt away. But do not be long, because the longer you are in waiting, the longer will your trouble be in thawing afterwards. Wait a long while till your trouble gets frozen thick and firm, and it will take many a day of prayer to get your trouble thawed again. Away to the throne as quick as ever you can. Do as the child did, when he ran and told his mother as soon as his little trouble happened to him; run and tell your Father the first moment you are in affliction. Do this in everything, in every little thing... take them all to God; pour them all out at once. And so by an obedient practice of this command in everything making known your wants unto God, you shall preserve that peace "which shall keep your heart and mind through Jesus Christ."

III. The Practical Theology of Prayer

Why pray if God is Sovereign

First of all- the way the Question is worded, “If God is Absolutely Sovereign- why pray?” seems to suggest that God may not be Absolutely Sovereign- as though that issue is up for debate.

It isn't. The Bible is crystal clear about this issue- God is Absolutely Sovereign. So a better way to ask the Question might be, “Since God is Absolutely Sovereign- what would be the reasons why we should pray?”

When people make plans, it is not uncommon for those plans to fail or to be thwarted in one way or another. In contrast to His creatures, however, Almighty God always brings about that which He has purposed. In a word, God is Sovereign.

This Truth is perhaps most clearly seen in the words of **Isaiah 46:9-11, where God demonstrated His superiority over the Babylonian idols by declaring:**

9 Remember the former things of old: for I am God, and there is none else; I am God, and there is none like me,

10 Declaring the end from the beginning, and from ancient times the things that are not yet done, saying, My counsel shall stand, and I will do all my pleasure:

11 Calling a ravenous bird from the east, the man that executeth my counsel from a far country: yea, I have spoken it, I will also bring it to pass; I have purposed it, I will also do it.

In this passage, God indicates that He both purposes what He desires to happen and then actually brings those Purposes to pass. In other words- God Providentially brings about in time and history what He has Sovereignly Ordained in eternity past. As the Apostle Paul writes, God

“works all things after the counsel of His will” (Ephesians 1:11).

The Truth of God’s Sovereignty over His Creation is taught throughout

Scripture. The psalmist declares,

Psalms 115:3

But our God is in the heavens: he hath done whatsoever he hath pleased.

Psalms 135:6

Whatsoever the LORD pleased, that did he in heaven, and in earth, in the seas, and all deep places.

Daniel 4:35

And all the inhabitants of the earth are reputed as nothing: and he doeth according to his will in the army of heaven, and among the inhabitants of the earth: and none can stay his hand, or say unto him, What doest thou?

Proverbs 19:21 says,

There are many devices in a man's heart; nevertheless the counsel of the LORD, that shall stand.

And Proverbs 21:1 states,

The king's heart is in the hand of the LORD, as the rivers of water: he turneth it whithersoever he will.

As W. Bingham Hunter (the former dean of Talbot School of Theology) writes,

“From a Biblical perspective, your world-history book should be prefaced with 2 Kings 19:25: ‘Have you not heard? Long ago I

ordained it. In the days of old I planned it; now I have brought it to pass'” (The God Who Hears, 49).

The Grace of Our Sovereign God

John G. Reisinger

Chapter Three

The Sovereignty of God and Prayer

Introduction

“If God has ordained all things that come to pass, then why should I bother to pray?”

This is invariably the first response from someone who either rejects outright the truth of God’s sovereignty or honestly sees it in Scripture but is having difficulty relating sovereignty to prayer. I suspect that every sincere Christian has, at one time or another, struggled with the relationship between the sovereignty of God and prayer. I am also quite positive that every person who has been confronted with the biblical fact of God’s absolute sovereignty has wrestled with this question.

I am sure I need not remind you that our prayer life is one of the clearest barometers of our present spiritual state. It is much easier to preach and write books about prayer than it is to actually pray. There is no discipline in the Christian life over which I have lamented in tears of repentance as much as a cold heart in prayer.

Sam Storms, in the introduction to his excellent book on prayer, describes my own “raincoat” experience. I cannot recommend this book too highly:

My reason for writing this differs considerably from what one might expect. I was motivated largely by guilt. My prayer life simply is not what it should have been. I knew that as far as Scripture is concerned, prayer is a non-negotiable. Yet, I had come to treat prayer like a raincoat, hanging in the closet ready for use if the weather demanded, but hardly something to wear every day. Like my raincoat, prayer seemed unnecessary as long as the sun was shining. I had fallen into the snare of complacency, thinking that since my life was relatively free from discomfort and tragedy, prayer could take a back seat. (Reaching God’s Ear, Dr. Samuel Storms, Tyndale House Publishers, page 7)

A few Basic Truths about Prayer

1. **Prayer never makes God my servant** to give me everything I think I must have in order to make me happy. God is not a

“heavenly bellhop” who carries my suitcase of selfish desires any place I command.

2. **Prayer never allows me to either dictate my will** to God nor to make God in any way change his mind.

3. **God has a fixed plan, and his plan is the best plan**. God is determined to carry out his plan, and neither our sin nor our “believing” prayers are going to derail or in any way change God’s ultimate decrees (cf. Job 23:13).

Spurgeon said it very well:

It is, when properly understood, a matter of unspeakable consolation that God has a plan—for who could honor a God Who had no plan, but Who did everything by haphazard? It is a matter of rejoicing that He has one great purpose that extends through all ages and embraces all things; for then everything falls into its proper place, and has its appropriate bearing on other events. It is a matter of rejoicing that God does execute all His purposes; for as they are all good and wise, is it not desirable that they should be executed? It would be a calamity if a good plan were not executed. Why, then, should men murmur at the purposes or decrees of God? (From a sermon on Job 23:13)

4. **It is impossible to reconcile two doctrines if** one of them is not truly biblical. Many Christians today have a wrong view of both the sovereignty of God and prayer. It would be most foolish to try to relate the truth of God’s sovereignty to the man-centered view of prayer so widely accepted today.

5. **Christians are commanded to pray**, and God has promised to hear and answer our prayers. Any view of the sovereignty of God that does away with the need of prayer or the joy of experiencing real answers to prayer must be biblically wrong (James 4:1-3)

6. **John 16:23 is not a “blank check”** that enables us to fill in whatever we want. The promise is governed by the phrase, “in my name.” Likewise, the “whatsoever we ask” in 1 John 5:14, 15 is controlled by “according to his will.” We will now demonstrate from Scripture some basic principles about prayer as it relates to the sovereignty of God.

Some Basic Facts about Prayer and God’s Sovereignty

BASIC FACT NUMBER ONE:

Believers in both the Old Testament Scriptures and the New Testament Scriptures had no problem believing in both the absolute sovereignty of God and the necessity of prayer.

The first recorded prayer meeting in the early church after the day of Pentecost is a classic illustration of the biblical relationship of the sovereignty of God and prayer. Let us read the text in Acts 4:

And being let go, they went to their own company, and reported all that the chief priests and elders had said unto them. And when they heard that, they lifted up their voice to God with one accord, and said, Lord, thou art God, which hast made heaven, and earth, and the sea, and all that in them is; Who by the mouth of thy servant David hast said, Why did the heathen rage, and the peoples imagine vain things? The kings of the earth stood up, and

the rulers were gathered together against the Lord; and against his Christ. For of a truth against thy holy child Jesus, whom thou hast anointed, both Herod, and Pontius Pilate, with the Gentiles, and the people of Israel, were gathered together, TO DO WHATSOEVER THY HAND AND THY COUNSEL DETERMINED BEFORE TO BE DONE. And now, Lord, behold their threatenings; and grant unto thy servants, that with all boldness they may speak thy word, by stretching forth thine hand to heal; and that signs and wonders may be done by the name of thy holy child, Jesus. And when they had prayed, the place was shaken where they were assembled together; and they were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and they spake the word of God with boldness.
(Acts 4:23-31, emphasis added)

Acts 4:28 is one of those verses that makes me want to shout. Exactly what did all the enemies of Christ do to him? Why were they all brought together into one solid power block? Those early, persecuted believers reminded themselves and their God that those wicked enemies did only “whatsoever thy hand and thy counsel determined before to be done.” The NIV says, “They did what your power and will had decided before should happen.” That, my friend, is confidence in the absolute sovereignty of God. We may talk about the “free will of man” or blame all the bad things on the Devil, but in times of real trial, we will lose our confidence without a grip on a sovereign God. Those besieged Christians saw no conflict between fervent prayer and God’s sovereign decrees. They knew that nothing could have happened to them that had not been decreed by God any more than it could have happened to Christ.

BASIC FACT NUMBER TWO:

A belief in the sovereignty of God will not hinder real prayer, but instead it will foster it.

It is a belief in free will that kills biblical prayer. I venture to say that you have never been in a prayer meeting where anyone believed in free will or denied God's sovereignty and prayed accordingly. Isn't it amazing that Christians forget all about man's so-called free will when they get on their knees? Don't we all love the absolute sovereignty of God when we are calling on his name in desperate need?

I will never forget a dear lady in a Bible class I taught in Rochester, NY. I believe she loved the Lord, but she had never been exposed to the truth of sovereign grace. She greatly enjoyed the class in Romans until we came to the doctrine of God's sovereignty. She said, "This class is ruining my prayer life, and I am not coming back." I said, "I do not blame you. However, I would like to know what I said that would have a bad effect on your prayer life." She replied, "This business about free will and the sovereignty of God. If what you say is true, then why should I pray?" I asked her what she had prayed for that morning (always good to check up!), and she opened her purse and got out a worn prayer list. That morning she had pleaded with God on behalf of two nurses in an African country experiencing a civil war. I said, "What did you ask God to do?" Without hesitation, the woman replied, "I asked God to keep my nurse friends safe. I prayed that neither army would hurt their ministry or the workers. I also prayed that none of the bombs or bullets would destroy any of the property." I looked at her in pretended amazement and said, "Did you really ask those things? How could you? All of those soldiers have free wills. Would it not be better to entreat an ambassador to try to intervene with the military in that country? Surely you do not expect God to control a whole war, every soldier, and every bomb

and bullet, just to keep two people safe?” The lady was rather elderly, and I do not think she followed me, but many other people did. That dear saint of God had cried to a sovereign God that morning without questioning his power or thinking about the free will of sinful soldiers. She unconsciously knew God could control every soldier, from the general down to the private, and direct every bullet and piece of shrapnel in answering her prayer and keeping her nurse friends safe. In her heart, that dear lady was talking to the Sovereign God.

It is amazing to me that new converts, especially those converted under the preaching of sovereign grace, have no difficulty with the sovereignty of God and prayer. Shortly after my daughter-in-law was converted, she attended a different church one Sunday when I was away preaching. I phoned that evening and asked her how she had enjoyed the service. Her answer was amusing. She said, “It was strange, Dad. The preacher sounded like he did not agree with you while he was preaching, but when he started to pray, he sounded like he agreed with you one-hundred-percent.” She was right.

BASIC FACT NUMBER THREE:

Prayer is essential because God has ordained it as one of the means to accomplish his decrees.

The question is not “Can God do something without prayer?” but rather, “Has God himself sovereignly decreed that he will use prayer as a means of accomplishing what he has ordained?” A real burden to pray does not begin with us, but with God. If you doubt this, all you need to do is make a decision to have a burden and see if it works. Pick a missionary or any other person, and decide you will have a burden for him and his ministry. Your

burden will last about as long as the dew lasts after the sun comes up. Has it not been your experience that real burdens are often those that you would not particularly choose? Sometimes God lays an individual on your heart with whom you have little relationship. You may not even like the person, or you may have just recently met them. However, the Holy Spirit keeps bringing that person to your mind, and you feel compelled to pray for them.

As A.W. Pink writes,

“God has decreed that certain events shall come to pass, but He has also decreed that these events shall come to pass through the means He has appointed for their accomplishment. God has elected certain ones to be saved, but He has also decreed that these ones shall be saved through the preaching of the Gospel. The Gospel, then, is one of the appointed means for the working out of the eternal counsel of the Lord; and prayer is another. God has decreed the means as well as the end, and among the means is prayer” (Ibid., 171).

Richard Pratt writes,

“God’s plan is so comprehensive that it not only includes the final destinies of things but also includes the secondary, creaturely processes that work together to accomplish these ends. For instance, God does not simply ordain light to shine on the earth each day; He also employs the sun, the moon, the stars, and countless other things to accomplish that end. God does not merely determine that someone will recover from a disease; He uses doctors and medicine to accomplish the healing. As the playwright of history, God did not simply write an ending for the book of time. He wrote every word on every page so that all

events lead to the grand finale” (Pray With Your Eyes Open, 109-10).

Several examples in Scripture indicate that God has ordained prayer as a means to accomplish His Eternal Plans. First, when Abraham sojourned in Gerar in Genesis 20, he lied and told King Abimelech that Sarah was his sister, at which time Abimelech took Sarah into his harem of wives (v. 2). In response, God closed all the wombs of the household of Abimelech and threatened the king with further judgment if he did not restore Sarah to Abraham (vv. 7, 17). However, at the same time that God warned Abimelech of this judgment, He also told him, “[Abraham] is a prophet, and he will pray for you, and you will live” (v. 7). In other words, God revealed to the king that His Plan was for Abraham to pray and intercede for the King so that Divine Judgment would be withdrawn. Then, in verse 17, God’s Preordained Plan came to fruition: “And Abraham prayed to God; and God healed Abimelech and his wife and his maids, so that they bore children.”

A second example can be found at the end of the Book of Job. God addressed Job’s friend, Eliphaz the Temanite, saying,

I am angry with you and your two friends, because you have not spoken of me what is right, as my servant Job has. So now take seven bulls and seven rams and go to my servant Job and sacrifice a burnt offering for yourselves. My servant Job will pray for you, and I will accept his prayer and not deal with you according to your folly (Job 42:7b-8a; NIV)

Then, as verse 9 reveals, Eliphaz “did what the Lord told them; and the Lord accepted Job’s prayer” (NIV). From this it is clear that God not only ordained that His Wrath toward Eliphaz would be turned aside, but He also ordained that the Means He would

use to accomplish that end would include the Intercessory Prayer of His servant Job.

A third and final example of God's ordination of prayer as a means to accomplish His End can be found in God's Promise to Israel of future restoration in Jeremiah 29. In verse 11a, the Lord told Israel that He knew the Plans that He had for her. In other words, the God Who knew the end from the beginning was not unaware of what He had purposed for Israel's future. He continued by telling Israel that His plans were "for welfare and not for calamity to give you a future and a hope" (v. 11b). What will happen in the future when God's Plan unfolds and He Providentially brings it to pass? He continued:

"Then you will call upon Me and come and pray to Me, and I will listen to you. And you will seek Me and find Me, when you search for Me with all your heart. And I will be found by you," declares the Lord, "and I will restore your fortunes and will gather you from all the nations and from all the places where I have driven you," declares the Lord, "and I will bring you back to the place from where I sent you into exile" (vv. 12-14).

God will restore His people in response to their prayers, but these prayers— rather than being an intrusion into God's Eternal Plan— are actually part of God's Plan. Both the means and the end—the prayers and the restoration—have been ordained by Him and will be brought to pass by Him (cf. Ezekiel 36:37).

Prayers of petition and intercession, then, should not be thought of as attempts to alter the Eternal Purposes of God. **As Pratt writes,**

“Trying to alter the eternal decrees of God through prayer is like trying to reach the moon on a trampoline; it is impossible. Our petitions cannot interrupt God’s plan for the universe anymore than a trampoline can break the power of earth’s gravity” (Pray With Your Eyes Open, 109).

Instead, prayer should be understood as

“one of the many secondary causes through which God fulfills His plan” (Ibid., 110).

So Why Pray

1. Why pray if you are of the Arminian Theology

Prayer is only effective if you believe that God has the Power and the Right to rule in the hearts of men.

No one can be saved and no circumstance can be changed unless God can change it.

2. God Wills all to happen, and wills how all will get done.

Prayer is the Means to get to the end

A.W. Pink wrote

Prayer is not the requesting of God to alter His purpose or for Him to form a new one. Prayer is the taking of an attitude of dependency upon. God, the spreading of our need before Him, the asking for those things which are in accordance with His will, and therefore there is nothing whatever *inconsistent* between Divine sovereignty and Christian prayer.