



Don't Give Up!

Billy Lambert

Prayer is not simply a means to an end. Prayer is your chance to speak one-on-one with God. He knows all, hears all, and loves all. So, when you are in crisis, when you have questions that no one can answer, why not turn to Him for guidance?

God knows what is best for you, no matter what trials you face. People are stubborn, and often want to do things on their own, forgetting that God is in control. It is common to go knocking on the wrong doors asking for help, even when it is obvious that knocking on God's door is the solution to your problems.

When you pray, it is an admission of imperfection, like a child seeking the help of their father. Sometimes you are unsure of what is best for you, but your Father sees the big picture. You are revealing yourself as one who does not know everything and saying you are willing to trust God's plan.

Although everyone can pray, it is not always easy. People are filled with doubts. Does God hear my prayers? Will my prayers be answered? Do I ask too much of God? These are normal questions, but they stem from a lack of understanding of the power of prayer, and the wondrous opportunity that prayer affords you. "Therefore I tell you, whatever you ask for in prayer, believe that you have received it, and it will be yours" (Mark 11:24).

DOES GOD HEAR MY PRAYERS?

The answer may seem obvious, but many people struggle with this question every day. When you pray, you have certain expectations. More often than not, you want a direct answer to your prayer, and you want it immediately. However, this is not always how God's plan works.

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Defeating Satan

A Study of Revelation 12:7-12

Andy Erwin



“And war broke out in heaven: Michael and his angels fought with the dragon; and the dragon and his angels fought, but they did not prevail, nor was a place found for them in heaven any longer. So the great dragon was cast out, that serpent of old, called the Devil and Satan, who deceives the whole world; he was cast to the earth, and his angels were cast out with him” (Revelation 12:7-9).

John’s vision here expands from earth to include heaven. The vision corresponds to Daniel where Michael plays a prominent role in protecting the people of God (Daniel 10:13; 12:2 ff.). In Revelation Michael is once again seen fighting against and defeating the devil and his forces. Keeping in mind the nature of apocalyptic literature, it is difficult to determine if these are actual events or symbolic of a spiritual message.

We must realize that the war we are fighting against evil on earth is also being fought in heavenly places (cf. Luke 10:18; Ephesians 6:12). We too must know that just as the devil cannot prevail in heaven against Michael and his angels, he cannot triumph over us on earth. Moreover, just as the devil is cast from heaven, he will again be “cast into the lake of fire and brimstone...to be tormented day and night forever and ever” (Revelation 20:10, KJV).

Especially of note is that the devil’s work is to deceive the whole world. While Satan’s defeat was made known at the resurrection of Christ, it will be completed in the final judgment. For now, the whole world is under his sway (1 John 5:19). He works to blind men’s eyes (2 Corinthians 4:4) and deceives them to the point of rejecting the truth (2 Thessalonians 2:9-10). The war being waged is one

of truth versus deception, good versus evil, right versus wrong, the Lamb versus the dragon.

“Then I heard a loud voice saying in heaven, ‘Now salvation, and strength, and the kingdom of our God, and the power of His Christ have come, for the accuser of our brethren, who accused them before our God day and night, has been cast down. And they overcame him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony, and they did not love their lives to the death. Therefore rejoice, O heavens, and you who dwell in them! Woe to the inhabitants of the earth and the sea! For the devil has come down to you, having great wrath, because he knows that he has a short time’” (vv.10-12).

Satan was cast down and his power over death was defeated by the resurrection of Christ (1 Corinthians 15:54 ff; Hebrews 2:14 ff). The kingdom of God – the church of Christ – was established on His resurrection, the death He endured could not prevail against Him (cf. Matthew 16:18-19). Saints can now overcome the accuser “by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony, and they did not love their lives to the death.”

Satan accuses: “Your sins are too great to be forgiven.” “You are not worthy to become a child of God.” “You can never measure up to living the Christian life.” Christ intercedes (1 John 2:1-2). We are redeemed by the precious blood of the Lamb (1 Peter 1:18-19), and by the precious love of the Lamb (Revelation 1:5-6; Romans 5:8).

Satan deceives (John 8:44; Revelation 12:9): “You are just fine just like you are.” “God does not exist.” “Jesus was just a man.” “All religions are the same.” Christ gives truth (John 8:31-32). “For the law was given by Moses, but grace and truth came by Jesus Christ” (John 1:17). Jesus came into the world to “bear witness to the truth” (John 18:37). We purify our souls by obeying the truth (1 Peter 1:22, 25). The gospel is the Christian’s word of testimony.

Satan offers the world and its kingdoms (Matthew 4:8) – but it is a world which will vanish away (1 John 2:15-17). Satan can offer temporary riches and fame (Hebrews 11:25; Romans 6:21). Satan can offer fleeting wealth and power. Christ offers life everlasting (Matthew 10:28-30; John 14:1-3; Revelation 22:14, 17).

To “love not their life” is to be “faithful unto (even to the point of) death” (Revelation 2:10). These saints were not living merely for the here and now. Christians of every age should have the same mindset, for we are fighting to overcome the same adversary. “*Shall we be carried to the skies on flowery beds of ease, when others fought to win the prize and sail the stormy seas?*”

The Best Way to Understand Scripture

Barry Jones

In my Critical Introduction to the New Testament Class, I was taught that the scholar must learn what the scripture says and what most of the scholars thought it said to be able to choose the best interpretation. This required a great deal of study. After 40 years of study, I don't believe this to be the best method. The best method is called-First-Reader Interpretation.

This is how you do it. Every epistle for instance has an occasion. There is a specific reason that the writer writes his letter. The Holy Spirit prompts him to write for a purpose. God always acts purposefully. After reading the letter, write down what scriptures indicate what the purpose is. If the writer mentions a messenger bringing some questions to him, there is a source of information that the writer is reacting to. (If you were studying 1 Corinthians, look through 1:11; 4:17; 7:1; 8:1; 11:18; 16:15-18.)

Try to develop a picture in your mind of how and why the writer writes his letter to the recipients. Try also to understand who the intended readers were of this letter. Sometimes this is called an audience analysis. What problems were they having? How was this letter addressing those problems? From the letter itself (called internal evidence) develop a picture of how the words were addressed to specific problems.

It is absolutely most important that you read and reread your letter. Avoid "cheating" by looking into handbooks and commentaries for the time being. Try to dig out the information yourself.

Don't concern yourself with what others say about these passages... what do you think? Pretend you are about to teach a small class yourself... how would you present this material? Would you talk about the author? Certainly. How about the destination? Surely. What about the occasion for the writing and the time period? Yes! Would you gather up clues about what was going on and how the author was trying to help them straighten out their thinking? Absolutely.

Before you know it, you are going to know a lot about this book. You will start wondering if "you were there" how you would react if an apostle wrote to your congregation. And this is a major point. When a letter was written to a congregation, it was usually delivered personally by a spokesman of the writer and read to the congregation. They were expected to understand the letter immediately without a lot of study. Some of the members of the congregation could understand spoken language

but could not read or write. Do you think they stopped during the reading of the letter and took out a Greek dictionary and studied the meaning of a word? Or maybe compared this letter with another letter written by the same author but maybe to another congregation?

I do believe the simple reading and understanding of a letter or epistle needs to be completed before our scholars begin comparing and contrasting other scriptures with it. Our God wants to be understood and I don't think we need to complicate the process of Bible study.

So, next time you read the Bible, ask yourself... what did the original readers understand this letter to mean? You will be truly happy as you develop your skills in this method.





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I Want to Be More Like Jesus

Raymond Elliott

In the hymn, "More Like Jesus", the first stanza lyrics are, "I want to be more like Jesus, And follow Him day by day; I want to be true and faithful, And every command obey." Our beloved Savior is worthy of our imitation. After all, He is the perfect example. Peter wrote in 1 Peter 2:21, "For to this you have been called, because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example, so that you might follow in his steps." The apostle Paul encouraged the Christians in Corinth to "Imitate me, just as I also imitate Christ" (1 Corinthians 11:1). Here are some of the characteristics of Jesus we should instill within our lives.

Jesus was submissive to the will of God His Father. Jesus stated in John 8:28, "I have not come of Myself, but He who sent Me is true..." The eternal Word was willing to leave heaven to be made lower than angels and to suffer on Calvary for our sins so we could be saved (Hebrews 2:7; Philippians 2:5-8). And, near to the ending of His life on this earth, He prayed, "O My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from me; nevertheless, not as I will, but as You will" (Matthew 26:36). So, from eternity to His death on the cross, Jesus was submissive to the will of His Father.

He came to this world to be a servant. "Just as the Son of Man did not come to be served but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many"

(Matthew 20:28). Our Lord also said, "If anyone serves me, he must follow me; and where I am, there will my servant be also. If anyone serves me, the Father will honor him" (John 12:26). Therefore, Christians should have a 'servant heart.' The apostle Peter wrote, "As each has received a gift, use it to serve one another, as good stewards of God's varied grace" (1 Peter 4:10).



Jesus came to seek and save the lost. "For the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost" (Luke 19:10). We know that God desires all men to be saved (2 Peter 3:9). It is the mission of the church to preach the gospel to all the world, beginning where we are (Matthew 28:19,10). The church of our Lord is the "pillar and ground of the truth" (1 Timothy 3:15).

We can teach the word publicly and from house to house as Paul did (Acts 20:20). We can support mission work in foreign lands; and preach and teach the gospel of Christ by every expedient

method to reach the lost in every country.

Our Lord and Savior had compassion on people. "But when He saw the multitudes, He was moved with compassion for them, because they were weary and scattered, like sheep having no shepherd" (Matthew 9:36). Jesus had compassion on the "four thousand men, beside women and children" who followed Him and fed them (Matthew 15:32,38); and the "five thousand men besides the women and children" who had followed Him, and He also healed their sick (Matthew 14:13-21). The apostle Paul wrote in Colossians 3:12,13, that Christians should "Put on then, as God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, compassionate hearts, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience, bearing with one another..." True compassion is not just to 'feel sorry' for someone but to make an effort to help the person who is in need.

Jesus Christ was often in prayer to His Father in heaven. Here are a few times when Jesus prayed: "Now when all the people were baptized, and when Jesus also had been baptized and was praying, the heavens were opened, and the Holy Spirit descended on him in bodily form, like a dove; and a voice came from heaven, 'You are my beloved Son; with you I am well pleased'" (Luke 3:21). Jesus "often withdrew to lonely places and prayed" (Luke 5:16).

Jesus prayed before choosing twelve of the disciples to be apostles: "In these days he went out to the mountain to pray, and all night he continued in prayer to God" (Luke 6:12).

Of course, there is the prayer of Jesus when in the garden of Gethsemane as recorded in John 17. In Matthew 26:39, Jesus prayed, "saying, "O my Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from Me; nevertheless, not as I will, but as You will."

While Jesus was on the cross he prayed, "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do" as they cast lots to divide his garments (Luke 23:34).

We are to "Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God" (Philippians 4:6). Also, we are to "pray without ceasing" (1 Thess. 5:17). We should "Continue earnestly in prayer." (Colossians 4:2).

Jesus possessed a forgiving heart. Jesus was indeed merciful and forgiving. He told the paralytic, "Child, your sins are forgiven" (Mark 2:5). When a sinful woman bathed the feet of Jesus with her tears and wiped them with her hair. Jesus said, "Your sins are forgiven" (Luke 7:48).

Even more compelling is the way that Jesus forgave those who sinned against him directly. For Jesus, forgiveness was intentional and a conscious choice.

After the Roman soldiers had scourged and nailed him, Jesus prayed, "Father, forgive them" (Luke 23:34). Jesus taught His disciples to pray: "For if you forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses" (Matt. 6:14,15).

As Christians, we are to be forgiving. "And be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God in Christ forgave you" (Ephesians 4:32).

Jesus loved us so much that He gave His life for us. We can never love as our Lord Jesus Christ loved while on this earth. It is expressly stated that Jesus loved Mary, Martha, and Lazarus (John 11:3,5); the rich young ruler (Mark 10:21); and His disciples (John 13:1;15:9,12). Though not explicitly stated, it is believed to have been the apostle John whom the Lord Loved (John 13:23;19:26;20:2;21:7,20).

The greatest manifestation of the love of our Lord Jesus Christ, however, was at Calvary when He shed His precious blood for the sins of the world. "Greater love has no one than this, that someone lay down his life for his friends" (John 15:13).

"But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were sinners, Christ died for us (Romans 5:8)."

"But we see Jesus, who was made a little lower than the angels, for the suffering of death crowned with glory and honor, that He, by the grace of God, might taste death for everyone" (Hebrews 2:9).

Our Lord shed His blood for all of mankind and His desire is that all would believe in Him and obey the gospel of Christ so the blood could wash away their sins. Therefore, we should love God with all our heart, soul, and mind and love our neighbors as

ourselves (Matthew 22:37, 38). We are to love our Savior who died for us: "If you don't love Jesus, you won't have Jesus."

Paul says: "He who does not love the Lord, let him be accursed. O Lord come!" (1 Corinthians 16:22).

We are to love our brothers and sisters in Christ. Jesus said, "A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; as I have loved you, that you also love one another. By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another" (John 13:34,35). Therefore, "Let brotherly love continue" (Hebrews 13:1).

Jesus taught that we should love our enemies and even those who would persecute us (Matthew 5:43,44). Though we cannot attain the degree of Jesus' love; nevertheless, we should strive to be: "More and more like Jesus, I would ever be, More and more like Jesus, My Savior who died for me."

A circular graphic with a world map background, serving as a backdrop for the text.

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Choice, Genetics, or Culture

Johnny O. Trail

It is all over the television. We see it on social media platforms. It is in print and at the movies. The way that homosexuality and other orientations are being presented, one might think that every other person is LGBTQ+. While the numbers of those who identify as having some sexual orientation or gender preference that is not in the “norm,” it seems that more is going on than a generation of people who all the sudden identify as “something else.”

A poll published by *USA Today* offered the following statistics regarding the growth of people identifying as LGBTQ.

The Gallup survey of 2022 data also shows that the number of U.S. adults who identified as LGBTQ, 7.2% has more than doubled in a decade: In 2012, Gallup found that 3.5% of U.S. adults said they were LGBTQ. That number surged to 7.1% in 2021 before holding steady last year.¹

When one examines these statistics, the question emerges, “What is fueling this increase in numbers of individuals identifying as LGBTQ+?”

Despite what many have alleged, the idea of a “gay gene” has been debunked by research conducted on the human genome.² In an effort to add legitimacy to the myriad of sexual orientations that have been posited, those who identify as homosexual have tried

to argue that they were “born that way.” Science does not really support this view. Even if it did, God would not shackle one with a sin that he could not cease from committing.

Some have argued that it is a “lifestyle choice” that one makes. That is, a conscious decision to practice a LGBTQ+ manner of living. Regardless of what conclusions one reaches on the matter, it is evident that people in God’s word repented of living various immoral lifestyles (I Corinthians 6.9ff).

Social contagion might be contributing to some of the increases that we see regarding the number of people who are identified as transgendered. Social contagion is defined as the “spread of phenomena (e.g., behaviors, beliefs, and attitudes) across network ties.”³ These findings are supported in a recent study of teen females who struggled with gender dysphoria. The study says,

Parents who contributed to the study claimed that clinicians pressured them to affirm their children’s transitions and reported that their children’s mental health issues — including gender dysphoria, anxiety, and depression — all worsened after transition.

Among girls featured in the study, 60.9 percent reported having another friend coming out as transgender “around the same time.” Having friends

come out as transgender was heavily correlated with the decision of girls to socially transition. According to the study, 77.3 percent of females with transgender friends “had taken steps toward social transition, compared with 54 percent without such friends; for males, respective figures were 39.5% and 21.7%.”⁴

There are some elements of social contagion that need to be considered in this treatise. The four mechanisms of social contagion are peer contagion, deviancy training, co-rumination, and social media. Each of these plays a significant role in the idea that one is not the right gender.

Peer contagion is defined as “a process of reciprocal influence to engage in behaviors occurring in a peer dyad/group.”⁵ The person influenced by this element of social contagion feels obligated to engage in the same activities as others in the group. They adopt the same political views and engage in behaviors to feel closer to other people within the group. If one has peers that are gender confused, they adopt the same type of mentality about their own gender and seek answers from the peer group.

Deviancy training is “A process whereby deviant attitudes and

¹ Miller, Susan (2023). “Gen Z is Driving LGBTQ Identity.” *USA Today*. February 24-26, 1A.

² McInotsh, Bennett (2019). Harvard Magazine. There’s (Still) No Gay Gene | Harvard Magazine “THERE IS NO ONE GENE FOR BEING GAY, and though genes seem to play a role in determining sexual orientation

and same-sex behavior, it’s small, complex, and anything but deterministic.”

³ Kenny, Dianna (2023). “An Open Secret: Social Contagion is Driving the Astronomic Rise in Teen Gender Dysphoria (Adults are not Immune Either),” *MercatorNet*. An open secret: social contagion is driving the astronomical rise in teen gender dysphoria | MercatorNet

⁴ Corey, Walker (2023). “New Study Supports Social Contagion Theory of Gender Dysphoria Among Teen Girls,” *The Daily Caller*. [New Study Supports Social Contagion Theory Of Gender Dysphoria Among Teen Girls \(msn.com\)](https://www.dailycaller.com/news/new-study-supports-social-contagion-theory-of-gender-dysphoria-among-teen-girls/)

⁵ Kenny

behaviors are rewarded by the peer group.”⁶ Those within a particular group promoting acceptance or forced participation reward people within their own peer groups by reinforcing behaviors that promote the agenda or types of change that are desirable. If one complies with the wishes of the group, they are complimented or given recognition for their actions. Social media platforms are rife for this type of reinforcement.

Co-rumination is characterized as “A process of repetitive discussion, rehearsal, and speculation about a problematic issue within the peer dyad or peer group that underlies peer influence.”⁷ That is peers continually discuss problems and feelings with others who are sympathetic to their issues. This happens with relatively little problem solving being achieved in the peer group. Co-rumination does not include any dissenting opinions or real dialogue about the desired change with people who are not in agreement.

Finally, the role of social media’s impact on social contagion cannot be underestimated. A recent researcher quipped, “The problem is it appears that it has become some kind of fad, driven by social media to tell young girls that it’s cool to be transgender and changing your gender is a cake walk.”⁸ It is described as the propagation of information (true or false) from their social media contacts. This serves to amplify the spread of information throughout various social media platforms.⁹ This formulates static arguments with no real examination of the facts of God’s word. Regardless of one’s feelings about social media, it has become a

tremendous platform for the advancement of ideas—good and bad.

For this reason, parents are strongly cautioned about allowing their children to have access to social media platforms. Parents need to occasionally check their children’s phones to monitor the interactions that they might be having with friends who parrot the cadence of liberal social causes such as the LGBTQ+ movement.

In an age where people lack the ability to reason and research various topics it seems that many consumers of social media articles do very little to check the veracity of certain positions and comments. It is not difficult to find people who endorse views that are beyond a doubt biblically wrong. However, no real study is done to thwart such ungodly, immoral positions. In an age of biblically illiterate people, it does not take much to lead a person astray.

When it comes to matters of morality and God’s word, Christians need to examine all things against the

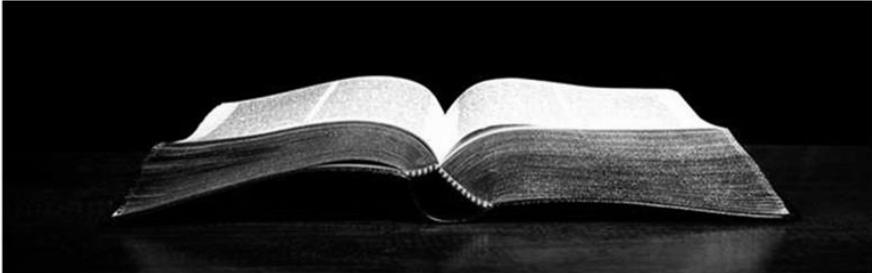
Truth and never compromise. 2 Timothy 3:16-17 says, “All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work.”



Middle Tennessee School of Preaching

Evening Classes ~ Seven Locations





⁶ Ibid

⁷ Ibid

⁸ Kaur, Jasmine (2023). Transgenderism is Becoming a Dangerous Fad; Especially Among Young Girls, The Independent News.

[Transgenderism is becoming a dangerous fad, especially among young girls \(msn.com\)](https://www.msn.com)

⁹ Kenny

Divine or Artificial Intelligence?

John T. Polk, II

In our age of digital remastering of photos and artifacts, “artificial intelligence” (AI) is being hyped as an ability to reconstruct human thoughts and actions.

Artificial Intelligence defined according to the *Cambridge Dictionary*:

Intelligence: “*The ability to learn, understand, and make judgments or have opinions that are based on reason*”

Artificial: “*Made by people, often as a copy of something natural*”

Artificial Intelligence: “*produce machines that have some of the qualities that the human mind has, such as the ability to understand language, recognize pictures, solve problems, and learn.*”

An axiom of computers has always been, “garbage in, garbage out” (“gigo”), which means computer applications (apps) and algorithms cannot produce results beyond what can be drawn from the data provided to them. Human limitations are reflected in computer production.

“Artificial Intelligence” (AI) cannot know more than what is programmed into its “knowledge.” Who determines what media information is programmed into the computers? Simply put, how objective is “news” today, so how objectively complete will the AI computers be?

Bible Intelligence Explored

The only New Testament use of the word “intelligent” was in Acts 13:7. On the island of Cyprus, Apostles found:

“the proconsul, Sergius Paulus, an intelligent man. This man called for Barnabas and Saul and sought to hear the word of God.” His desire to “hear the word of God” showed a quest for truth that should be expected of an “intelligent man.”

It may be because of this man that Saul of Tarsus took the name “Paul” for himself from then on. An intelligent man will admit the following: “There are many plans in a man's heart, Nevertheless the LORD'S counsel-that will stand” (Proverbs 19:21).

“A man's steps are of the LORD; How then can a man understand his own way?” (Proverbs 20:24).

“O LORD, I know the way of man is not in himself; It is not in man who walks to direct his own steps” (Jeremiah 10:23).

This acknowledges that humans do not know everything, while “God ...knows all things” (1 John 3:20). Truly, “The wise men are ashamed, They are dismayed and taken. Behold, they have rejected the word of the LORD; So what wisdom do they have?” (Jeremiah 8:9).

Since God created humans “in the image of God” (Genesis 1:26-27), humans are unable to demonstrate wisdom beyond their Creator. “For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God. For it is written: ‘I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, And bring to nothing the understanding of the prudent.’ Where *is* the wise? Where *is* the scribe?

Where *is* the disputer of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of this world? For since, in the wisdom of God, the world through wisdom did not know God, it pleased God through the foolishness of the message preached to save those who believe” (1 Corinthians 1:18-21).

Excluding Jesus Christ, who was God in the flesh, nothing humanity has produced has ever matched, let alone exceeded, God's wisdom. To idolaters, the Apostles pointed to the living God: and saying: “We also are men with the same nature as you, and preach to you that you [1] should turn from these useless things to the living God, who made the heaven, the earth, the sea, and all things that are in them, who in bygone generations allowed all nations to walk in their own ways. [2] Nevertheless He did not leave Himself without witness, in that He did good, gave us rain from heaven and fruitful seasons, [3] filling our hearts with food and gladness” (Acts 14:15-17).

AI Cannot BE A HUMAN MIND!

[1] *AI cannot have Conscience*: “Eat whatever is sold in the meat market, asking no questions for conscience' sake” (1 Corinthians 10:25). Since “conscience” is an inner awareness of a moral choice between “good and evil,” AI might be able to combine information and look for patterns, but it is not able to make a decision based on a godly moral choice. “Pause and wonder! Blind yourselves and be blind!” (Isaiah 29:9). NO AI COMPUTER

WILL EVER "turn from these useless things to the living God."

[2] *AI cannot Believe* – that Earth's orderly seasons prove the existence of the orderly, powerful God of Creation. AI has no "heart" to "believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you will be saved" (Romans 10:9).

[3] *AI cannot do Good Works* – "those who have believed in God should be careful to maintain good works" (Titus 3:8). The proclivity to choose a work with the moral quality "good" attached to it is beyond the capability of cold computers.

"The LORD looks down from heaven upon the children of men, To see if there are any who understand, who seek God" (Psalm 14:2). Based on this, we look for Intelligent Design in God's:

1. Creation - "Through wisdom a house is built, And by understanding it is established; By knowledge the rooms are filled With all precious and pleasant riches" (Proverbs 24:3-4).

Every house shows the intelligent design by which it is built, kept up, and adorned. Common sense demands that we see intelligence in every building around us. "For every house is built by someone, but He who built all things is God" (Hebrews 3:4). It takes someone with uncommon ignorance to say, "There is no intelligent design in the Created World."

2. Bible - There are many, it seems, who either do not, or cannot, see the intelligent design throughout the Inspired Word of God. "But those things which God foretold by the mouth of all His prophets, that the Christ would suffer, He has thus fulfilled" (Acts 3:18).

Even unbelievers carried out God's will, "For those who dwell in

Jerusalem, and their rulers, because they did not know Him, nor even the voices of the Prophets which are read every Sabbath, have fulfilled them in condemning Him" (Acts 13:27). If "wise men" "have rejected the word of the LORD; What wisdom do they have?" (Jeremiah 8:9). An ignorant opinion is still ignorance!

3. Gospel - Some people seem to believe that the church of Christ is a temporary "stand-in" for an earthly kingdom. God's Inspired Word says: "now the manifold wisdom of God might be made known by the church to the principalities and powers in the heavenly places, according to the eternal purpose which He accomplished in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Ephesians 3:10-11).

The church is not a course correction from God's original plan; it is God's original plan from the beginning. Paul wrote, "But we speak the wisdom of God in a mystery, the hidden *wisdom* which God ordained before the ages for our glory" (1 Corinthians 2:7).

4. Christian Life - Many cannot see the "intelligent design" in living a Christian life. "Who is wise and understanding among you? Let him show by good conduct that his works are done in the meekness of wisdom" (James 3:13).

To bring order to "every creature" in the world, Jesus said, "He who believes and is baptized will be saved; but he who does not believe will be condemned" (Mark 16:16).

A Christian may wrongly decide to walk "disorderly and not according to the tradition which he received from us" (2 Thessalonians 3:6). To them, Paul wrote: "we command and exhort through our Lord Jesus Christ that they work in quietness and eat their own bread" (2 Thessalonians 3:12).

5. Christian Love - The Christian attitude is: "Be of the same mind

toward one another. Do not set your mind on high things, but associate with the humble. Do not be wise in your own opinion. Repay no one evil for evil. Have regard for good things in the sight of all men" (Romans 12:16-17).

1.) Treat all men alike. Being a Christian is not so much to elevate ourselves as it is to help others see that they also matter to God! Among Christians, there is to be no such thing as "Black Lives Matter," "White Supremacy," "bullying," or "belittling."

"For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus" (Galatians 3:27-28).

2.) Payback with kindness. Jesus gave His life so the hateful can see how it should be done! "Repay no one evil for evil. Have regard for good things in the sight of all men" (Romans 12:17).

AI may have its place serving human interest, if that involves statistical analysis, summarizing enormous data sets, or performing endlessly repetitive tasks, and all of these admittedly faster than a human could. But AI can never grow past human intelligence, nor can it supersede human intelligence to obtain godlike wisdom.

"Then Job answered and said: 'No doubt you are the people, And wisdom will die with you! But I have understanding as well as you; I am not inferior to you. Indeed, who does not know such things as these?'" (Job 12:1-3).

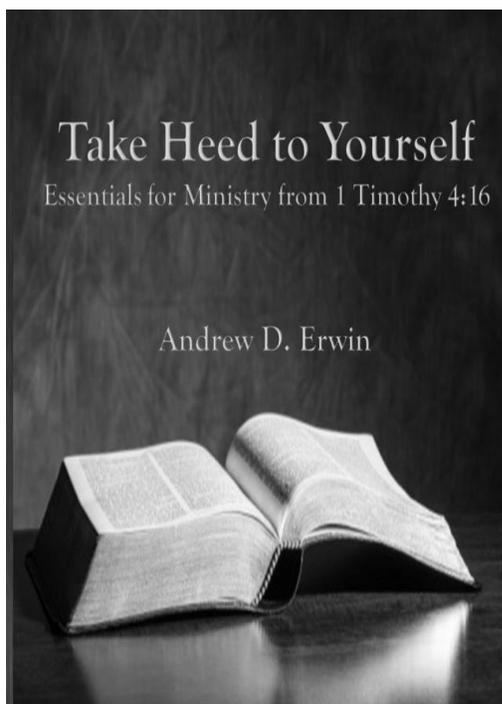
God "desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth" (1 Timothy 2:4). All wise men today desire the same.



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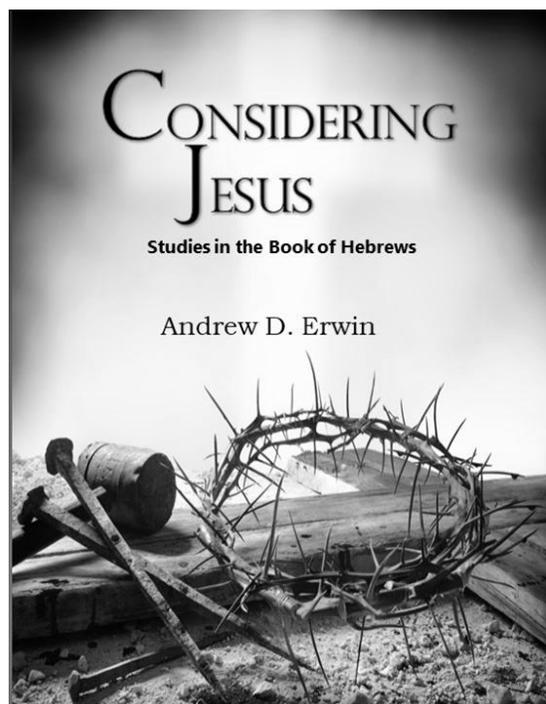
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THREE KINDS of WORSHIP

John 4:23, 24

Introduction

1. The word “worship” in its various forms appears 191 times in the Bible. The sum of the sense of the word is to humble oneself in adoration, reverence, and religious service, with piety and honor toward another.
2. It could be directed toward that which is false, or true. Matthew 4:9,10; Acts 12:20-23; Acts 10:25, 26; Revelation 19:10; 22:8,9.
3. There are three kinds of worship men offer unto God.

Discussion

I. Worship In Spirit and In Truth.

- A. The meaning of these expressions.
 1. “Spirit”- comes from the inner man as opposed to the outer.
 2. “Truth”- not after shadows but substance.
- B. The avenues of expression in Christian worship.
 1. Reading. Colossians 4:16; I Thessalonians 5:27
 2. Exhortation. I Timothy 4:13; Acts 11:23
 3. Doctrine (teaching). I Timothy 4:13; Acts 2:42; 20:7.
 4. Lord’s Supper. Acts 2:42; 20:7; I Corinthians 11:17-33
 5. Prayer. Acts 2:42; Philippians 4:6
 6. Fellowship (giving) Acts 2:42; I Corinthians 16:1, 2
 7. Singing: Ephesians 5:19; Colossians. 3:16.
- C. The worship time was ordained of God edify the members. Hebrews 10:25

II. Worship In Truth but Not In Spirit.

- A. We need to understand what worship is NOT. It is not the totality of one’s life. It is not an accident.
- B. How to have the outward without the inward: just sing the words; pray without faith; eat the supper with an impenitent heart; give, but not as prospered; daydream.
- C. God abhors hypocrisy. Let us keep it out of the worship assembly. Mark 7:6

III. Worship In Spirit but Not In Truth.

- A. The law of worship is clearly stated. II Corinthians 5:7.
 1. The rule is faith. Romans 10:17. Beyond this is speculation and opinion.
 2. The rule to determine when it is in vain. Matthew 15:9. (May be morally right but religiously wrong.)
 3. The divine rule that enjoins the true forbids the false. Revelation 22:18,19
- B. Many people insist on doing things they cannot read one word about in the New Testament. (Incense, images, humming, instruments, clapping, etc.)
- C. We should know the difference between the holy and profane. Ezekiel 22:26; 44:23; (The authorized and the unauthorized. Leviticus 10).

Conclusion

1. The assembly is to feed the lambs, not amuse the goats.
2. Col. 1:18. Are you a worshipper of God. If so, how do you do it?
3. Think about these things. Let us seek to please God, and not ourselves in what we do.

-Mike Kiser

Exploring the Bible Lands

Garry L. Hill

I was able and privileged to travel back to Israel, last year after being frustrated because COVID has kept me from following my passion to “understand the Biblical times and help me share the gospel to this generation,” my ministry motto. I was able to finish my doctorate on the historical evidence of the Bible stories and was itching to return. After numerous trips in the past and being a participant on three different archaeological sites I was ready to go back to the “lands of the Bible” and continue to research and explore more concerning the times and plan of our Heavenly Father, in this great land.

I was able to travel with Scott Harp, a preacher and historian who preaches in Kentucky. Mike Greene and his wife Mary were also with us. Mike is the Director of the Nashville School of Preaching, and we teach there together.

We were able to research and explore some sites that have not been available to us in the past. One such site is Tel Jezreel around where Jezebel was killed, and Jehu was crowned king. We had an extensive tour of the Jezreel Valley and climbed the slopes of Mt. Carmel where Elijah fought the 450 prophets of Baal.

Another outstanding day to me personally was the amazing exploration of the ruins of Shiloh, where the ark was for over 300 years. The archaeologist there knew I had archaeological training and opened the museum for our group because of our kindred interest. I was able to lecture to our group on the dig history of Jericho, as we explored those ruins, which was another amazing experience.

Later while spending most of a day at Caesarea Philippi, I was asked to lecture on pottery at the museum there. The other brothers delivered heartfelt and biblical relevant lectures at the sights and our worship service Sunday morning on a boat on the Sea of Galilee was awe inspiring and moving.

The highlight of any trip to the Holy Land is the exploration of the Old City of Jerusalem. We started at the temple mount where Abraham offered Isaac, Solomon built the temple and where the temple was rebuilt during the time of the return from Babylonian captivity. We explored numerous ruins of the city during Jesus’ life.

We followed the actual journey of our Lord’s last week from his entrance in triumph to his trial, death, and resurrection. We then went to the Mount of Olives where he ascended back to heaven with the promise to all of us to come again (John 14:1-3). A special part of the trip was to be where the church of our Lord was established on the Day of Pentecost (Acts 2) and walk where Jesus and the early Christians walked and lived.

We got up bright and early to begin our last day in Israel. It was somewhat bittersweet as we ate breakfast, typical Israeli fare, (eggs great thick whole wheat bread, fresh vegetables and yogurt and natural honey), knowing we would be headed home.

We spent the whole day studying in the Museum of Israel. We studied the David, Tel Dan Inscription which shows David had a dynasty. We saw an inscription which shows the governor of Judea was Pontius Pilate and a

picture which showed the “Tree of Life” Motif was common in the Ancient Near East. Statues of Pharaoh, Caesar’s gods and goddesses were seen showing the historical background of the Biblical World.

We saw the Dead Sea Scrolls today, in the museum where they are housed and on display. These finds of the Judaean desert where we have been on this trip, show the accuracy and care given in producing those copies of the Word of God, and how they were viewed as sacred by the scribes who produced them. So, we close with a thought. How can one not believe with an amazing amount of evidence for the biblical story? The Bible story is true and verifiable. It is the story of our salvation. The story shows truly God loves us. I John 4:9-10

“In this the love of God was made manifest among us, that God sent his only Son into the world, so that we might live through him. In this is love, not that we have loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins.”



Book Excerpt

Take Heed to Yourself: Essentials for Ministry from 1 Timothy 4:16

Andy Erwin

The Christian ministry cannot be entered like a common profession. As with Moses, Jeremiah, and Paul, the spirit of a reformer only lives within those preachers who minister from a place of necessity, and they cannot do otherwise. The desire to help and render everlasting good to his fellowman in the service of God must motivate the preacher, if he is to be effective and faithful in his work.

One's reason for entering ministry is more important than any natural abilities or giftedness he may possess. The motivation of the minister will eventually determine the efficacy of the ministry. In this way, the ministry of the word is to be distinguished from other fields of labor; and in this way, it is akin to other fields of service. The ministry of the word is "a service industry." Our Lord set the example by assuring His disciples that He came not to be ministered unto, but to minister and to give His life as a ransom for many. Moreover, He made clear that true greatness in His kingdom comes through service and ministry to others (Mark 10:43-45).

Why Do You Want to Preach?

Why is it that a man decides to preach? We might ask the same of a nurse, wondering "Why is it you have decided to be a nurse?" If the nurse says her decision was made for the money, flexible hours, and benefits, it might cause us to question her sincerity in caring for us when needed. If she says she was motivated by compassion for the sick and a desire to help those in need,

her answer will likely put our hearts at ease. The same is true regarding preachers. Were we to ask a minister, "Why have you decided to preach?" and he were to explain that his decision to preach was motivated by pay, leisurely work, and comfortable hours, in time, he will come to be nothing more than an unfortunate blight on any congregation who upholds him.

If, on the other hand, the preacher provides motivations that are truly spiritual in nature, the church will be much more likely to have found a faithful gospel preacher. The man who is motivated by his love for the Lord, His word, and His kingdom is a man who has had the seed of ministry planted in His heart by God. The man who desires to save souls and please God will see his ministry grow and fruit will be produced from his relationship with his heavenly Father and his desire to honor Him. Such a minister is not a man who chose to preach as a profession, as a man might decide to become a banker, lawyer, or accountant. Preaching chose him. More specifically, God chose him.

The minister we are describing is someone who has had his heart broken by sin and healed by the cross. The message of hope and divine redemption lives and springs forth from his soul. He cannot help but preach. He is compelled – "Woe unto me if I preach not the gospel!" His motivation is blameless. He is willing to "spend and be spent" because of love – love for God, His Son, His church, His word, and the souls of men.

The kind of preacher we are describing is focused on a certain set of goals which produce fruit of everlasting significance. He lives to keep the mission of Christ alive. He yearns to save souls. Heavenly joy is brought to his heart when he sees the church growing. Truly, he hopes to help others realize the change of life that he has experienced and is experiencing daily. In so doing, he seeks to bring glory to God in word and deed through his ministry.

Many preachers may aspire most "to make a name for themselves," taking only the best paying churches with the easiest hours. They strive to become professional pulpiteers. In the spirit of patterning our ministry after the first century church, we must be ready always to do the work we are called to do at any hour. The gospel preacher will be called to make sacrifices of his time, his money, and his energy. If he is fully supported in his ministry by the brethren, he is blessed. If he receives no monetary compensation, he preaches just the same. His inheritance awaits him whether he is compensated fairly or not in this life.

The great preachers of the Restoration Movement sacrificed much for the cause of Christ. Their families did too. They went without many physical comforts so that mankind might have spiritual blessings in Christ. The church grew because of their perseverance and sacrifices. These men were crucified to the world and the world to them. If a revival of biblical preaching is to occur in

the pulpits of the Lord's church, it will be led by men who have consecrated themselves to God and have devoted themselves to laboring together with Him and others of like precious faith for the greatest possible good – the salvation of the world.

Sincere heavenly goals stemming from the heart of a genuinely spiritual man will produce a truly honorable ministry. However, even chosen vessels must be shaped by the Potter's hand. Each of the apostles was selected personally by Christ. Being chosen for ministry did not exclude the necessary preparation for it. Three years were spent preparing the apostles, and still more work was needed.

Peter and John were outstanding evangelists in Jerusalem when the church began. The pair was devoted to speaking those things they had "seen and heard" and worked to "fill Jerusalem" with their teaching. Though threatened, "they did not cease teaching and preaching Jesus the Christ." As a result, "the disciples multiplied greatly in Jerusalem, and a great many of the priests were obedient to the faith" (Acts 6:7).

Would these men have accomplished such great things for the Lord had they not first been prepared? What if John's pride and desire to be great in the kingdom had not been corrected? Would he have been satisfied to allow Peter to take a prominent role in their preaching ministry? What if Peter's cowardice had not been overcome? Would he have looked steadfastly into the eyes of the Sanhedrin and with a straightened backbone said, "We ought to obey God rather than men." What would have become of these men had they not been properly prepared for ministry?

Sometimes a preacher's ministry appears to be nothing more than a little "wood, hay, and straw" loosely constructed upon the foundation laid by Christ and he suffers loss when it is tried by fire. The pain endured through a failing ministry only helps to emphasize the need to be prepared for the work of an evangelist. A minister's life will be filled with triumphs and tragedies and every preacher must "take heed unto himself" so that his heart, soul, mind, and body can endure the inevitable trials and temptations, avoid the pitfalls, and contribute something of lasting significance to the kingdom of God. If we are to have faithful gospel preachers possessing a servant's heart, they must be prepared, molded, and refined by the hand of God.



Paul's Thorn in the Flesh

Steve Hale

Three times, Paul asked the Lord to remove his thorn in the flesh. The Lord responded: "My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness" (2 Cor. 12:9).

What was Paul's thorn in the flesh? The Bible doesn't say, but a good guess would be poor eyesight. Paul often had a scribe or amanuensis to write his letters that he dictated to them. For example, Tertius actually wrote Romans as Paul told him (Rom. 16:22).

He told the Galatians: "See with what large letters I have written to you in my own hand" (Gal. 6:11). Earlier, he recounted the love the brethren of Galatia had for him: "...For I bear

witness that, if possible, you would have plucked out your own eyes and given them to me" (Gal. 4:15). It is likely then that Paul's thorn in the flesh was poor eyesight.

Paul thought like we would. He could work more efficiently, travel more safely, and be more dynamic for God if he could simply see better. God told him he would be gracious to him in that state. Scribes would be provided, like Tertius and Timothy, and his missionary associates would help get where he needed to go.

God could take him in his weakness and magnify it powerfully by His grace. He promises to do the same for us. That's why "in Christ" is such a dynamic Pauline theme! Remember it is not so much what you and I do, but what the Lord does through us!

NOTICE CONCERNING THE GOSPEL GLEANER

Dear Readers,

Beginning with the Fall 2023 issue of the *Gospel Gleaner*, and for the foreseeable future, the paper will be published only in digital format. Please do what you can to pass the word along to your fellow readers. We have an electronic mailing list as well as a website. All past issues of the *Gleaner* may be found there dating back to the beginning of the paper. www.gospelgleaner.com

Thank you for your understanding.

Andy Erwin
Editor and Publisher

Adultery: The Poison that Tastes Like Honey

Stephen R. Bradd

The book of Proverbs provides many strong warnings against adultery. Consider some of the following excerpts from chapters 5-7:

- **“The lips of an immoral woman drip honey, and her mouth is sweeter than oil; but in the end she is bitter as wormwood, sharp as a two-edged sword. Her feet go down to death, her steps lay hold of hell”** (5:3-5).
- “Remove your way far from her, and do not go near the door of her house, lest you give your honor to others, and your years to the cruel one; lest aliens be filled with your wealth, and your labors go to the house of a foreigner” (5:8-10).
- “For the commandment is a lamp, and the law a light; reproofs of instruction are the way of life, to keep you from the evil woman, from the flattering tongue of a seductress. Do not lust after her beauty in your heart, nor let her allure you with her eyelids. For by means of a harlot a man is reduced to a crust of bread; and an adulteress will prey upon his precious life. Can a man take fire to his bosom, and his clothes not be burned? Can one walk on hot coals, and his feet not be seared? So is he who goes into his neighbor’s wife; whoever touches her shall not be innocent” (6:23-29).
- “Whoever commits adultery with a woman lacks understanding; he who does so destroys his own soul” (6:32).
- “My son, keep my words, and treasure my commands within you...that they may keep you from the immoral

woman, from the seductress who flatters with her words” (7:1,4).

- “With her enticing speech she caused him to yield, with her flattering lips she seduced him. Immediately he went after her, as an ox goes to the slaughter, or as a fool to the correction of the stocks” (7:21,22).
- “Do not let your heart turn aside to her ways, do not stray into her paths; for she has cast down many wounded, and all who were slain by her were strong men. Her house is the way to hell, descending to the chambers of death” (7:25-27).

Although the beginning of an affair will undoubtedly be exciting and sweet like honey, the end is a bitter poison. A terrible price will be paid for brief moments of forbidden pleasure (ask King David!). **Friends, don’t buy the ticket without first understanding the destination!**

The wise will not buy into the myth of “greener pastures” elsewhere but will invest in their own spouse with zeal and renewed dedication as the marriage bond ages and the circumstances of life turn. One’s rightful marriage bed can perpetually be the sweetest of all honey with continued effort and commitment.

Along with the warnings, Solomon also sets forth the solution for how to avoid adultery:

“Drink water from your own cistern, and running water from your own well. Should your fountains be dispersed abroad, streams of water in the streets? Let them be only your own, and not for strangers with you. Let your fountains be blessed, and rejoice with the wife of your youth. As a loving deer and a graceful

doe, let her breasts satisfy you at all times; and always be **enraptured** with her love. For why should you, my son, be enraptured by an immoral woman, and be embraced in the arms of a seductress?” (5:15-20).

Married love is like drinking clean water from a fresh well whereas pursuing sexual immorality is like drinking polluted water from a sewer. Will you choose purity or pollution? Don’t be a fool; satisfy your thirst wisely!

A married man who drinks “water,” so to speak, from his own well exclusively will rightly become **intoxicated** with his wife. Our faithful and magnificent Lord is still turning water into wine as married love blossoms! What begins as pure water in the infancy of marriage becomes the most satisfying wine as the delights of marriage grow into maturity and unmatched joy.

This is God’s way, dear friends, and the Creator of all certainly knows what is best. God does not forbid adultery (or any form of sexual immorality) to deny us some blessing but to spare us from harm and ruining ourselves! Things are often not what they appear to be on the surface. Run from office flirtations and any type of sexual advances that aren’t coming from your spouse. Too many Christians (even preachers!) have drunk the poison and brought ruin upon themselves. Don’t follow your passions to destruction; follow God’s path to holy satisfaction.



Continued from page 1

Sometimes we have to have faith that the plan is already set in motion, even if we cannot see the results yet. If you are praying sincerely, then you know it is reaching God. Prayer is a direct line to Him, and He does not ignore it. Sometimes prayer is immediate, and other times it is like an investment for the future. Either way, when prayer is approached with honesty, you can be assured that God hears you. "He will respond to the prayer of the destitute; he will not despise their plea." (Psalm 102:12)

MOVING BEYOND YOURSELF

Praying for guidance does not mean you should only focus on your own needs. Praying for others reaps an even greater reward and reflects the principles of Christ. He is our example of selflessness.

Perhaps you have a friend who lacks the strength of faith to pray but still needs God's guidance and love. Or perhaps a family member's health has declined, and you require God's help with their recovery. Asking for God's wisdom affects more than one person. It is communal. Sure, many times you need an answer for yourself, but asking for help for someone else is like giving a gift: Someone else receives the gift, but you feel the benefit of giving all the same. "After Job had prayed for his friends, the Lord restored his fortunes and gave him twice as much as he had before." (Job 42:10)

NEVER GIVE UP

When you let your doubts, fears, and personal concerns cloud your judgment, priorities can get mixed up. Sometimes prayer gets subordinated to other issues, or abandoned entirely, even when it is needed the most.

Prayer is most often abandoned because of frustration and an inability to see past the immediate. God has a plan that involves every last person, and sometimes it is easy to feel lost in the mix. God's plan is so complex and great that it could never be fully understood. This should not discourage you though. Knowing that God's plan is so much greater than yours is a comfort.

Persistence is vital. When you persevere in your prayers and your faith in God, the fruits of your efforts will follow. In the example of Elkanah's wife Hannah, she refused to give in to her situation (1 Samuel 1:2-2:21). She prayed until she was able to bear fruit, and the benefits of her prayer extended beyond anything she could have imagined. Her son Samuel went on to anoint the first king of Israel. So never give up. Never abandon your prayers. "Blessed is the man who remains steadfast under trial, for when he has stood the test he will receive the crown of life, which God has promised to those who love him." (James 1:12)

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