

## LEVELS OF PRAYER

Wesley Duewel spoke about Levels of Prayer at a Men's Prayer Advance in the early nineties. The levels he spoke of referred to deepening stages of intensity and desperation in prayer. His message was based on Matthew 7:7-8: "Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you: For every one that asketh receiveth; and he that seeketh findeth; and to him that knocketh it shall be opened." Let's look at four levels of prayer: Asking, Seeking, Knocking, and Fasting.

**LEVEL #1—ASKING.** This the most basic form of prayer. Intercession always begins at this level. Asking is the foundation for prevailing prayer, and it is always the right time to ask God. Jesus repeatedly encouraged us to ask. "And all things, whatsoever ye shall ask in prayer, believing, ye shall receive" (Matt. 21:22). Again in John 14:13-14 He said, "And whatsoever ye shall ask in my name, that will I do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son. If ye shall ask any thing in my name, I will do *it*."

- Abraham petitioned God for a son (Gen. 15:2).
- Elijah asked God to send fire from heaven (1 Kings 18:36-38).
- Peter asked for the Samaritan converts to be filled with the Holy Spirit (Acts 8:15-17).

John Rice wrote a book titled "Prayer: Asking and Receiving". This title unveils a glorious truth, but there is much more to prayer than asking

**LEVEL #2—SEEKING.** The idea of seeking suggests increased perseverance, greater earnestness, and a deeper yearning for the answer. Duewel says, "Seeking is prayer that is willing to hold on in intercession until the answer comes." Seeking prayer moves beyond a request to repeated asking. Seeking is concentrated and focused. It is a persistent, laser-like petition that longs for fulfilment. Jeremiah 29:13 states, "And ye shall seek me, and find *me*, when ye shall search for me with all your heart."

- Nehemiah sought God until God allowed him to rebuild Jerusalem (Neh. 1:4-11).

- Daniel employed seeking prayer for the restoration of Israel and the return of the exiles (Dan. 9:1-23; 10:2-14).
- Pentecost was preceded by ten days of pursuing prayer in the upper room.

There are times when “Asking” secures the blessing. At other times “Seeking” is required. Still, there remain further levels of prayer.

**LEVEL #3—KNOCKING.** After asking and seeking, comes a more intense form of intercession—Knocking at heaven’s door. When the answer remains unrealized, the pain in your soul may be heightened to the point of soul agony. Your longing cries out to God for consolation. In Gethsemane, Jesus knelt and gasped out his prayer, “Father, if thou be willing, remove this cup from me: nevertheless not my will, but thine, be done... And being in an agony he prayed more earnestly: and his sweat was as it were great drops of blood falling down to the ground (Luke 22:42, 44). He is crying out in holy desperation. Strong crying and tears were not isolated events in Jesus’ prayer life (Heb. 5:7). He had knocked on other occasions. If God’s Son had cause for more serious times of prayer, then how much more do we as His redeemed children?

- Moses throws himself between God’s anger and Israel. Boldly he prayed, ‘Please forgive their sin—but if not, then blot me out of the book you have written’ (Ex. 32:32).
- Elijah’s mantle had fallen on Elisha. “And he took the mantle of Elijah that fell from him, and smote the waters, and said, Where *is* the LORD God of Elijah? and when he also had smitten the waters, they parted hither and thither: and Elisha went over” (2 Kings 2:14). He struck the waters repeatedly—he was knocking.

Asking, Seeking, and Knocking are the first three levels of prayer, but there is another level.

**LEVEL #4—FASTING.** Arthur Wallis wrote a classic book, “God’s Chosen Fast.” I heartily recommend it. The Bible is full of examples pertaining to fasting, and history is replete with instances of powerful breakthroughs that came about as a result of prayer and fasting. Jesus expects us to fast. He gave Himself to a

forty-day fast after His baptism. The early Christians put emphasis on fasting prayer. Epiphanius noted that Christians throughout the world observed Wednesday and Friday as days for fasting. The Moravians, Hussites, Waldensians, Huguenots, and the Scottish Covenanters practiced this discipline. John Knox, Cranmer, Ridley, and Latimer were all known for regular fasting.

Andrew Murray said, "Prayer is the one hand with which we grasp the Invisible; fasting the other, with which we let loose and cast away the visible." As the hymn says, "The things of earth grow strangely dim in the light of his glory and grace." It seems I am often caught up with temporal things, but I long to be preoccupied with the eternal. Fasting is a means to re-center our souls in God alone. Sumner Wemp, my professor in Bible College, commented after engaging in a forty-day fast, "I'm seeing everything in light of eternity." Time is fleeting, but eternity is forever. Treasure in heaven is more important than treasure on earth. Listen to Wesley Duewel, "Fasting helps unclutter and unburden your mind from life's activities, problems, responsibilities, and associations. It permits the wind of the Spirit to blow away your mental and spiritual fog, freeing you and, as it were, cleansing you from much of the external world. Then it is easier to be truly alone with God, face-to-face in communion and intercession." O to get in the grip of eternity!

Someone noted that fasting happens when hunger for God becomes greater than hunger for food. The Psalms speak about spiritual hunger and thirst. Our souls are always hungering for something. It is imperative to nurture this longing after God. And fasting is a primary means to shift our focus from earth to heaven. Holy hunger is increased and maintained by practicing this neglected discipline. Fasting intensifies the hunger for God to work.

Fasting is a form of self-denial. It is resisting natural desires. It serves to transcend human nature and helps make our bodies our slaves instead of our masters (1 Cor. 9:27). Yet fasting from food is only one form of self-denial. Andrew Bonar defined fasting as abstaining from anything that hinders prayer. Things like recreation, pleasures, media, internet, and a host of other things might apply. Fasting is a means of devoting our attention to God by

disengaging from worldly things. We can simplify our lives by discarding the unessential.

Fasting is a means to humble ourselves before God. David said, "I humbled my soul with fasting; and my prayer returned into mine own bosom" (Ps. 35:13). Ezra humbled himself by fasting (Ezra 8:21). Towering egos can be brought low by occasionally denying our appetites.

Like Bible study and other spiritual disciplines, we don't need an emotional prompting to fast. You don't need a sign written in the sky to implement this sacred discipline. Begin with simple things. Daniel fasted from choice foods (Dan. 10:3). Fast one or two meals. Give that time to prayer, and invest your resources on the poor. I understand it was common for Jews to fast from 6 p.m. to 6 p.m. the next day.

One of the most helpful texts on fasting is found in Isaiah 58:4-8,

*"Behold, ye fast for strife and debate, and to smite with the fist of wickedness: ye shall not fast as ye do this day, to make your voice to be heard on high.*

*Is it such a fast that I have chosen? a day for a man to afflict his soul? is it to bow down his head as a bulrush, and to spread sackcloth and ashes under him? wilt thou call this a fast, and an acceptable day to the LORD?*

***Is not this the fast that I have chosen? to loose the bands of wickedness, to undo the heavy burdens, and to let the oppressed go free, and that ye break every yoke? (emphasis mine)***

*Is it not to deal thy bread to the hungry, and that thou bring the poor that are cast out to thy house? when thou seest the naked, that thou cover him; and that thou hide not thyself from thine own flesh?*

*Then shall thy light break forth as the morning, and thine health shall spring forth speedily: and thy righteousness shall go before thee; the glory of the LORD shall be thy reward."*

Jonah, the reluctant missionary, called on Ninevah to repent. The king humbled himself and called the entire nation to fasting and prayer. God's wrath was turned and away and 120,000 souls were spared. Fasting grasps the attention of heaven. It may not be popular, or even preached much today, but it is a powerful

discipline. Individual and corporate fasting are tools to restore proper spiritual vision.

I hope this brief and basic teaching on the levels of prayer will inspire you to a deeper prayer relationship with our heavenly Father.

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\*Note: Wesley Duewel's book titled *Mighty Prevailing Prayer* provided seed thoughts and fodder for this article. It delves further into the subject of prayer and yields rare insights.