

Christian

Psychology for Everyday Life

Carried by God + Carrying Others = A Meaningful Life

Current Topic:
Healing of

the Personal Prayer Biography

1 | 2024



“I have so much work that I cannot manage without devoting at least three hours of my best time every day to prayer.”

Martin Luther, (1483 - 1546), German reformer

Editorial

Christian Psychology not only contains insights for psychologists, therapists or counselors, but also a treasure for everyone who cares about following Jesus. I as the editor welcome you to this first edition of Christian Psychology for Everyday Life, with the possibility that many more can come.

At this point, I, Werner May, as a German editor, have to admit that it is easy for me to speak of “many subsequent issues” because I have been publishing the German-language *gehaltvoll.magazine* since 2016, from which we are now working together on various topics to transform them for the English editions and supplement with some new contributions.

The current topic of the first number, “Healing of the Personal Prayer Biography”, began for me with an impression during prayer: “If you knew what prayer can achieve, then you would only pray!”

What did this thought make you feel? “Just one more time?”: Of course our actions are also in demand and valuable. So it’s better to “pray more often” or “pray first of all”.

The Bible also often tells us that we should pray and what we should pray

for, that it is one of the most important things in our lives, because prayer is, first and foremost, communion with God.

A “healing of our prayer biography” can clear the way to pray anew and with faith where we have stopped praying, or to rediscover the value of forgotten forms of prayer and become open to new forms.

We all need a healing of our prayer biography.

Werner May,
Christian Psychologist,
Germany



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Prayer

is not a human invention God calls us to do it

We humans did not come up with prayer to provide an anchor in our helplessness and weakness: rather, God “invented” it, it is his idea.

We should become like children (Matt. 18:3) and pray with child-like, innocent trust that we can tell our Father in heaven everything and he will hear us.

Through prayer he wants to work with us and deepen our relationship.

Luke 6:12

Now it came to pass at that time that he went up into a mountain to pray; and he stayed overnight in prayer to God.

Philippians 4:6

Do not worry about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God.

1 Thessalonians 5:17

Pray without ceasing.

Mark 11:24

Therefore I say to you, whatever you ask in prayer, believe only that you will receive it, and it will be yours.

1 Timothy 2:1

So I now urge that, above all, one should do petition, prayer, intercession and thanksgiving for all people

Luke 11:9

And I also say to you, ask, and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and it will be opened to you.

Matthew 18:19

I say to you further, that wherever two of you agree as to what they want to ask, it will be done for them by my Father in heaven.

Questionable prayer wisdom

Not everything we have heard about praying from childhood is what God wants to give us through it. For example, I know the following “wisdom” that I don’t want to adopt directly, that require additions and corrections.

■ **“First help yourself, then God will help you!”** This phrase makes one believe that the person who prays avoids their own effort or failure and instead wants to be helped by God.

This is certainly a danger. But it's not about an alternative - pray or act. Rather, we should do both: pray and act. Without God we can't do anything anyway (John 15:5). The real fruit in our lives that remains comes from where we live out of prayer. It's about finding and taking the next steps based on prayer. And then to pray again. This is the path of fruit-bearing that I have learned and want to maintain.

■ **“Praying is a woman’s task!”** Such a saying discourages not only men from praying, but also modern women. It suggests that prayer is a weakness or only for the weak.

In reality we are all weak, we all need God. It is better to admit this weakness and pray and act from prayer than to act from perceived strength without God. I don't want to do anything without prayer – or at least anything outside a relationship with God.

■ **“Necessity teaches you to pray.”** There is also a false message hidden in this – often true – statement, namely that a life without hardship does not need prayer.

Unfortunately, it is often like this: When we are doing well, we pray less. But prayer is not just asking for help. It's about fellowship with God and God wants to have fellowship with us even when we're doing well. Besides, things could be better for us, things could work out better, or we could cause less damage. This is why we should pray even in good times.



A survey:

What explanations do we find for unanswered prayers?

The impression that God doesn't hear or answer my prayers easily leads to praying less or not praying at all.

In a simple survey we asked some friends:

If your prayer is not answered, how much do any of the response options presented here apply to you?

Please enter your rating with a number from 0 to 6:

0 = does not apply to me at all.

1

2

3 = moderately

4

5

6 = often applies to me.

The options were:

- 1.** I deny or suppress the fact that I have prayed.
- 2.** I am looking for an explanation as to why my prayer was not answered. I'm looking for God.
- 3.** "It's the devil's fault."
- 4.** I didn't have enough faith, I doubted.
- 5.** I adapt reality to my prayer wish, come to terms with it somehow.
- 6.** I am discouraged, resigned, feel rejected by God.
- 7.** I change my prayer request. "God has better plans and thoughts."
- 8.** I am angry with God and turn away.
- 9.** I no longer pray in the area where prayers went unanswered.
- 10.** I don't pray at all anymore.

And what came of it?

These were the most frequently chosen answers:

"No. 2 I seek an explanation as to why my prayer was not answered. I'm looking for God", followed by:

"No.5 I adapt reality to my prayer wish, come to terms with it somehow", and

"No.7 I change my prayer request. "God has better plans and thoughts."

The answers "It's the devil's fault" and "I don't pray at all anymore" mostly received zero ratings.

Of course, you can imagine even more possible reactions than those given, such as "I hold on to my prayer and will not be discouraged." Or: "I trust that God follows all paths and has good paths for me, even if I don't yet see." Or: "I praise and thank God for who he is and how he is, and not because of anything he does for me."

“How do you deal with unanswered prayers?”

Two friends responded in detail to my inquiry about how they deal with unanswered prayers. What makes me particularly happy is that they are still praying, so they have found help.

Mary H.

As I pondered this question, the first thing that occurred to me was this: My prayers have changed over time. Where I used to pray very specifically for something, today my prayers are more expansive. I think because my trust in God's goodness has increased. At the beginning of my relationship with God, I might have prayed, “Lord, please, we urgently need a new home” . . . and without saying it, my heart would have added, “It's best right now and exactly as I imagine.” Over time I have learned to express more what is going on in my heart. This has led to my prayers being more conversations with God. This has the advantage that it can change my heart through being together. But also that I become calmer, resting in the fact that he has heard me, that he knows what he is doing, that I can trust him and that it will be okay - even if it most likely won't be exactly as I imagined. When I used to pray for health, that was all I focused on. Today it would also be important to me (perhaps even more so) to pray first for the health of the heart and for trust in the process. Today I still expect

God to hear and answer my prayers, but I find it easier to deal with it when it doesn't happen the way I thought it would. Easier doesn't mean it isn't sometimes difficult to endure. This year in June, a young woman who was very, very close to my heart died - at the age of 27, after the birth of her second child, suddenly from a cerebral hemorrhage. We prayed and hoped for her for several weeks and then she was just gone. It's still hard to understand today and it hurts. But what is easy is to stay with God. I may not understand the situation, but I know he knows better. And that gives me peace so that I can find comfort in him for my “unanswered” prayer.

Charles L.

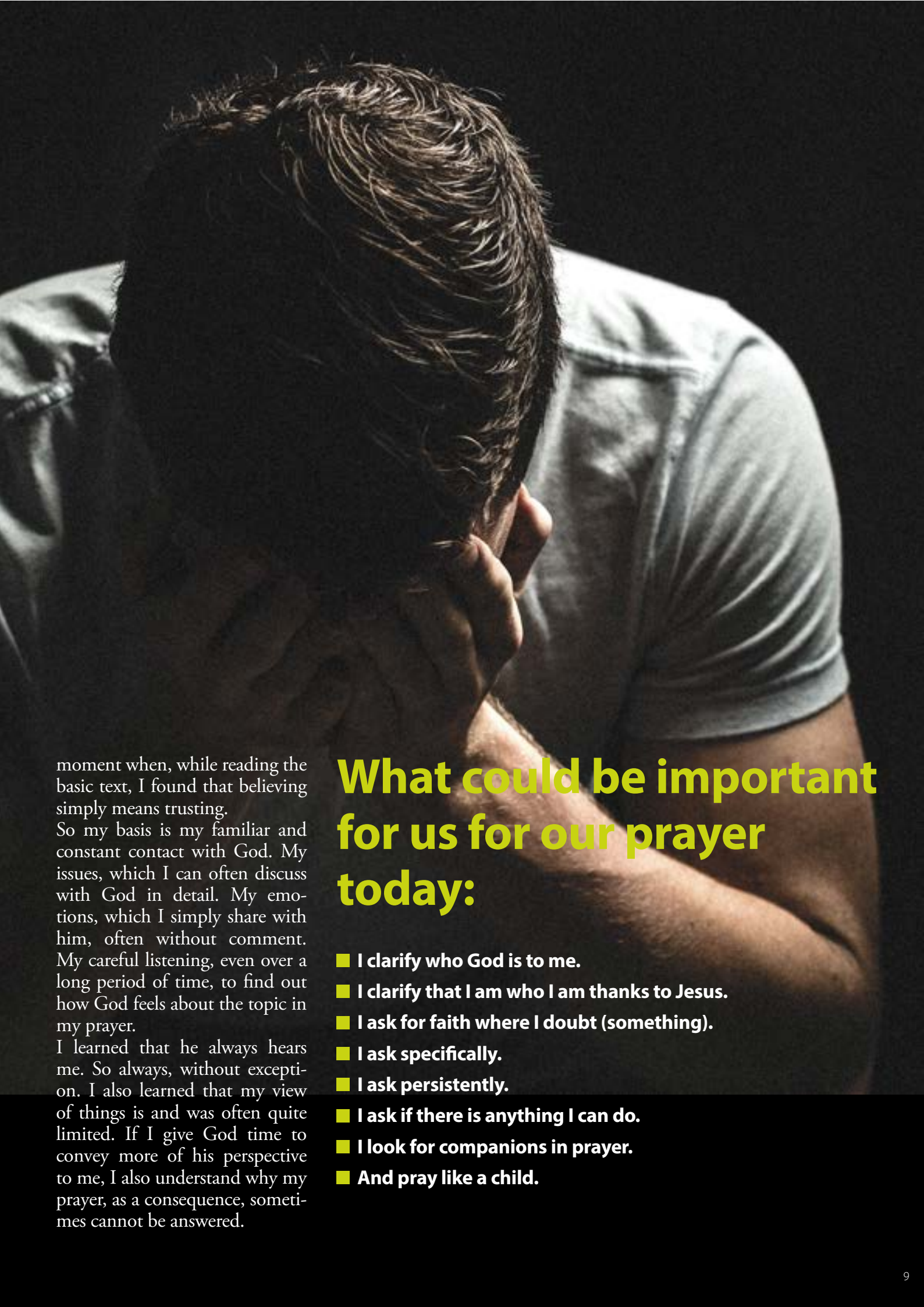
Do I know that some prayers that I have addressed to God have not been answered? It's clear. I have been living with God for over 40 years now, so it would be amazing if I said anything different. I have often thought about this over the years. Over the years, however, dealing with it became easier and easier. Why? Because I have entered into a dialogue with God about it. A dialogue that has developed little by little over the years. During this dialogue I learned to understand a lot of things better. On the one hand, who and what God is like and, on the other hand, a lot about me.

So why can I be so calm today about God not answering all my prayers?

First of all, I have learned it, not just heard it, have understood and “saved” it, but also learned step by step that “answering” first requires “hearing”. So I had to grapple with whether I trust that God will hear all my prayers, literally every one of them, in the first place. So also the ones that were just said mentally in my head every now and then.

That's easy, you think? Well, check it out for yourself. If I'm honest with myself, I wasn't really convinced. Mentally maybe yes, but emotionally not always really. Answered prayer is repeatedly linked to faith in the Word of God. Here, too, was the “aha”





moment when, while reading the basic text, I found that believing simply means trusting.

So my basis is my familiar and constant contact with God. My issues, which I can often discuss with God in detail. My emotions, which I simply share with him, often without comment. My careful listening, even over a long period of time, to find out how God feels about the topic in my prayer.

I learned that he always hears me. So always, without exception. I also learned that my view of things is and was often quite limited. If I give God time to convey more of his perspective to me, I also understand why my prayer, as a consequence, sometimes cannot be answered.

What could be important for us for our prayer today:

- I clarify who God is to me.
- I clarify that I am who I am thanks to Jesus.
- I ask for faith where I doubt (something).
- I ask specifically.
- I ask persistently.
- I ask if there is anything I can do.
- I look for companions in prayer.
- And pray like a child.



What, me? Yes, you! What does that mean? I want to tell you about two such millionaires: In the mid-seventies I had to reorient myself professionally and decided to become a special education nurse. So I visited a center for the mentally handicapped. One of the community service workers there showed me around the center. When I told him about my decision, he shook his head and said that there was no longer any need for special education nurses. I asked him what they needed now – I have no idea why I thought he was competent. But he answered briefly: psychologists. – And I realized: I’m studying psychology. I thought about it carefully and sought advice, but the worker gave me the first impulse. And the strangeness of the journey continued: I had a consultation appointment at the employment office. The advisor explained that studying psychology was more statistics than practical training. Then

he asked me if I was still interested in hearing his personal opinion. I said yes, and he told me that he used to be a Jesuit priest. He wanted to give me a statement by the order's founder, Ignatius of Loyola: “We have to do what is in our hearts.” At that moment the sky opened up for me and the gray clouds were blown away. Before, I was depressed because I didn't know what I could do with myself. But suddenly the old strength came back, hope and determination to dare to return to the university again.

The “nameless” community service worker certainly had no idea what he had caused with his remark. And the career counselor probably doesn't know what the fruit came of his advice. Nevertheless, the “fruit account” of both has grown.

You too are a millionaire with good fruits, most of which you don't even know about. They remain in-

visible, all these impulses that you have already given, with their effects. You can trust that. I would like to make a “statistical extrapolation”: Without knowing you, I would expect you to make four “immature” comments a day, like those of the community service worker, and six “mature” ones, like those of the career counselor. That would result in ten impulses per day, 3,650 per year and, extrapolated over ten years, 36,500 impulses. Wow! Still a long way to becoming a millionaire. OK, what does Jesus say about that? Some fell on good land and bore fruit, some a hundredfold, some sixtyfold, some thirtyfold (Matthew 13:8, Luther Version 1984). In other words, our lives are blessed; at least thirtyfold. Then we have already reached over 1 million: $36,500 \times 30 = 1,095,000!$ With more than ten years and more than thirtyfold blessings, we would be on our way to becoming a fruit billionaire.



But that is not all!

Network research according to Christakis/Fowler describes the law of three steps; putting it simply: What we tell our friends, they tell their friends, and they in turn tell their friends. Only then does a message sink in.

If we don't notice our direct fruits, how much less those of the second and third rows of friends?

And it's true! We ask God for his blessing every day.

Surely he has to listen to such requests? Or just once or twice a year?

He will do it! You want to make a difference in life. This is why God created us, as co-creators.

When I was teaching this a few years ago, a man came up to me: Over 25 years ago, I had shared with him a prayer impression that God wanted to give him a house with an archway. And a few years later he found this house and was still living there.

He had also just finished his studies at the time and I had given him a tip for a job where he was still happy.

I had no idea about any of this; Two of my millions of invisible fruits had become visible.

I mentioned this a few weeks later in another seminar and the next fruit came along.

A woman heard from me nearly three decades ago that I had scared away a threatening dog in Jesus' name. She had never forgotten that.

Five years ago, as an instructor in Albania, she was walking in the hills with her students. They had already been warned about the wild dogs there.

And, sure enough, one of these came running towards her.

Her Albanian students quickly got to safety and she was now all alone and confronted the dog. Then she commanded the dog to move away in Jesus' name. He immediately turned around and tried to escape.

You rarely find out about your own "invisible fruits".

But I'm starting to think I'm a millionaire of invisible fruit, and I hope I've encouraged you to do the same.

Why do I believe this for us?

- Because you want to do something good.
- Because you ask God for blessings.
- Because you are a Christian from whom flow rivers of living water.
- "He who abides in me, and I in him, bears much fruit..." (John 15.5).
- Because God is faithful.

Don't stumble over these three typical stumbling blocks in one's prayer biography

A healing of our personal history with prayer, our prayer biography, is always necessary. There are some typical experiences that we find difficult to cope with and process and that will place a greater or lesser burden on our future prayer. What can we do?

1

I'm disappointed. God doesn't answer my prayer.

Prayer requests that seem to go unanswered must not come between us and God. Prayer is one of the most important things in our life. God knows us much better than we know ourselves. The result of this knowledge is trust and devotion: God knows better than I do what I need! Because he understands me better and loves me more.

My "solution": God gives the right thing. I have learned, experienced and am convinced that God answers all prayers, even if not in the way I imagine, but he always gives the right thing. Right not just for me, but for everyone and for everything! He is God. Nothing is impossible for him.

Let us ask God for forgiveness in general but also specifically for the fact that unanswered prayers have put a strain on our relationship with God.

2

The answer takes too long:

A common mistake is that we impose on God our time expectations and then give up too soon. In our instant society, everything always has to happen very quickly. But God may send us a tortoise as an answer to our prayers, not a rocket! Prayer is a part of the journey together with God and not pressing the "yes" button on a divine computer.

3

Injuries caused by others during prayer:

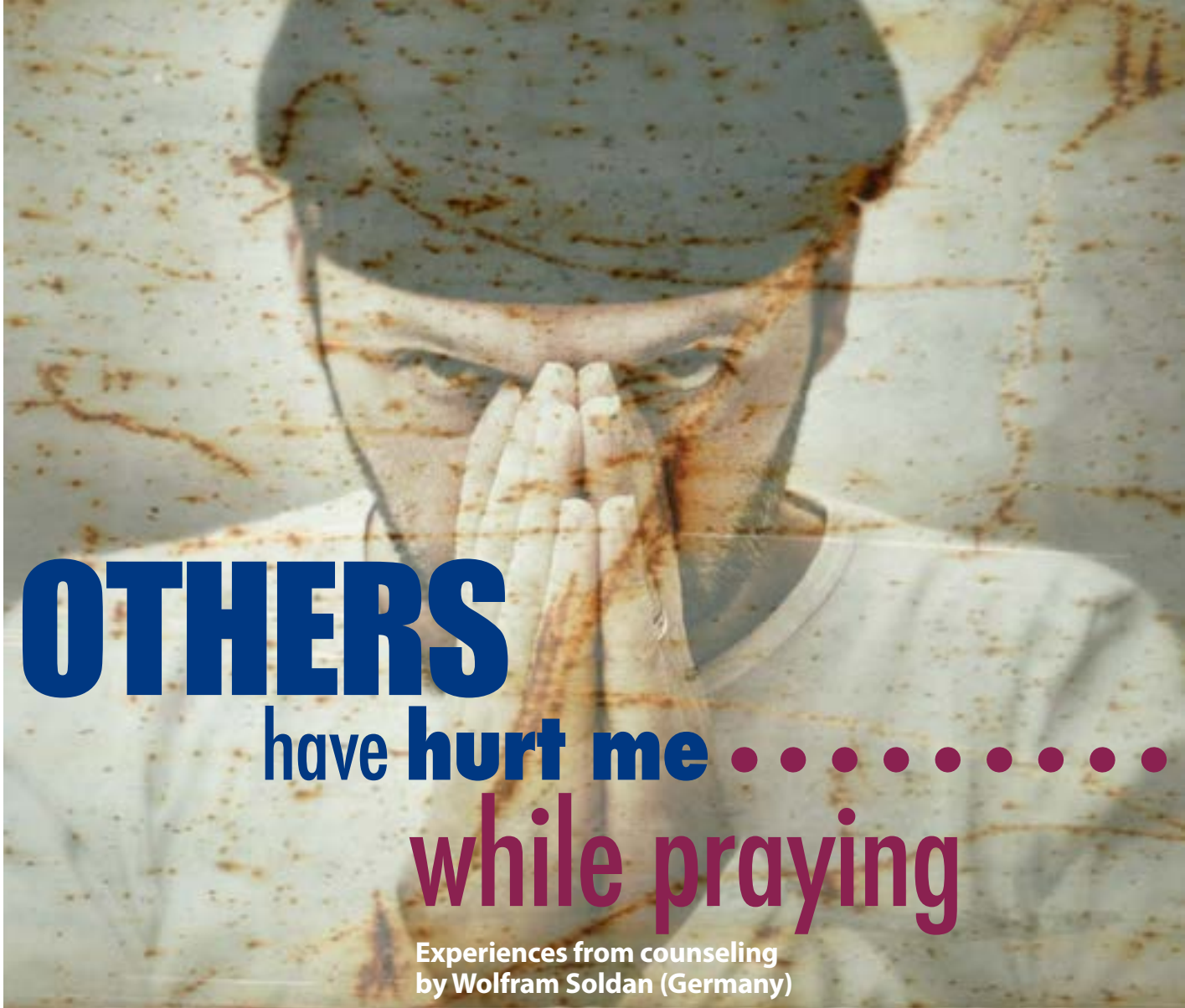
But it's not just what our prayer did or didn't accomplish that can dampen our prayer life, but also what experiences we've had with others while praying.

Was pressure put on us, did we put others under pressure, did rejection and unkindness accompany some prayer experiences, or did we have to do something while praying that caused us stress?

In a nutshell: Have we been hurt by others while praying?

It is time, and we should take time, to honestly face these questions and forgive - and courage to seek discussion about them.

(Of course, it can also happen to us that we have hurt others. If we become aware of this, we should also seek conversation and ask for forgiveness.)



OTHERS

have hurt me

while praying

Experiences from counseling
by Wolfram Soldan (Germany)

There are injuries that are obvious and those that occur imperceptibly, those that others inflict on me and those that I inflict on myself, and those in which I subjectively perceive God as the perpetrator. These take various forms and can combine.

All these forms can be described as injuries because they affect my prayer life. I describe six frequently occurring variants and provide a realistic but - for reasons of confidentiality - "composite" case vignette.

Six "injury variants"

Variant: If it doesn't help, it's your fault

A usually obvious variant. "All things are possible for those who

believe" (Mark 9:23) and similar biblical statements are understood to mean that if one prays with enough conviction, one is guaranteed what one asks for.

The at least implicit logic is that the absence of answers is caused by a lack of faith, and therefore one must pray with more faith. Whose fault is it if I still don't get healed, for example? Due to me and my lack of faith.

• **Case vignette:** Vera had asked for much prayer for her husband, who had cancer, and prayed herself. Nevertheless, he eventually succumbed to his illness, leaving behind his wife and two children, ages 7 and 8. The Christians who had prayed so much were unable to deal well with the absence of healing and were no longer able

to help Vera in her time of need. They retreated discreetly. Both Vera and the children, in addition to their grief, have an underlying feeling of having failed in prayer and have lost their spontaneous, natural access to God in prayer.

Variant: "Prayer Sermon"

Prayers spoken aloud are unavoidably communicatively addressed not only to God, but also to those listening. There is a temptation as a praying person to choose the words I pray so as to tell those listening something that they would find it difficult to disagree with, since it is difficult to say anything against a prayer. This can happen imperceptibly - even unintentionally - in small doses or as a downright manipulative "prayer sermon".

Others have hurt me while praying

• **Case vignette:** Klaus has been in a home group for a year and is someone who likes to contradict things and also expresses his doubts freely. On the one hand, you deal with him with understanding and patience, on the other hand, during the prayer group meeting, the house group leader prays repeatedly for those who are rebellious in their hearts and cannot yet commit to Jesus with all their heart. Klaus experiences the prayers as an indirect accusation against himself. He was never able to successfully defend himself against indirect accusations from his father. That's why he found it liberating to be able to freely express his doubts and differing opinions here.

He is now holding back out of an underlying fear of losing favor and acceptance. He only prays out loud what he expects no one will be offended by. Since he fears that God might also judge him as rebellious, he also becomes more cautious and "piously adjusted" towards God in silent prayer. Praying is increasingly becoming a strenuous chore.

Variant: Much sighing, little experience and expectation

In my family, community, home group, etc., I repeatedly experience prayers that complain to God about personal suffering and/or the suffering of the world, perhaps also in general about the extent of sinfulness, and perhaps in quite some detail. Joyful, grateful and confident prayer occurs too briefly or only in a ritualized form that doesn't sound joyful at all.

• **Case vignette:** Holger grows up with parents in whose lives faith

plays no role and who work a lot. His grandmother takes care of him. She is pious and prays often, strongly expressing her fears and worries before God and repeatedly asking him for forgiveness for her shortcomings. Holger loves his grandmother very much, but has little use for God because he finds "talking to HIM", which he only knows from his grandmother, to be exhausting and depressing.

Variant: Flash in the pan

At congresses or in church services I experience intensive prayer times, inspiring praise, great testimonies of hearing and also impressive answers to my own prayers.

Over time, however, sobering experiences and disappointments arise that I cannot constructively incorporate into my world of faith. People I ask about this don't have convincing answers. The one-sided world of a feel-good gospel is crumbling.

• **Case vignette:** Karin attends one charismatic congress after another, is enthusiastic, but cannot find stability in her "relationship chaos," as she calls it (many short partnerships that break up again). She often has headaches and repeatedly experiences sudden healing, but the headaches keep coming back. Gradually she loses the motivation to pray and her faith weakens, she expects less and less from God.

Variant: Lots of well-placed words

I only experience prayers as well-placed, well-formulated senten-

ces. Everything spontaneous, unplanned and emotional is left out. So I'm learning to pray like that and even think in my personal prayer life that prayer works the same way.

• **Case vignette:** Claudia is a pastor's daughter and experiences prayer at home and in the community either in pre-formulated prayers or in selected forms that are very different from everyday language. She hears about God as father, brother and friend in the Bible, but the language people use to talk to God doesn't match that. Because of this perceived incongruity, prayer plays no role in her life. When she hears a friend talking to God spontaneously and on a daily basis, she is at first disconcerted, but then a process of release gradually begins in her encounters with God.

Variant: Not heard

Unanswered prayers are always a challenge for my relationship with God and my prayer life. If my understanding of a God who is (and must be) near and far, touchable and incomprehensible, familiar and foreign grows through persistence, good conversations with siblings and insights from the Bible, my prayer life will also mature. If I only find "answers" that are too short-sighted, simplistic, and leave me feeling let down, my connection to God becomes ever thinner and my prayer life becomes impoverished or even dies out.

• **Case vignette:** Norbert repeatedly asks God for the right partner. Several relationships fail at an early stage, while Norbert sees "how it works" in others' lives. He beco-

Others have hurt me while praying

mes bitter and envious and becomes more and more obsessed with this question of life. This is exactly what intuitively turns off the women in question. But he cannot see this vicious circle. Norbert is increasingly convinced that God is treating him unfairly and disadvantages him; in his family, his two sisters were already favored by their father. He alternately thinks that it must be because of his sins, feels unworthy and inhibited from praying, or is so angry with God that he doesn't want to pray ("beg anymore"). Only when he sees, in a dream, Jesus beckoning to him in a friendly way, but then repeatedly a tall, attractive woman interposes herself in an intimidating and distracting way, does the scales fall from his eyes when he wakes up: women have become his God. A letting-go and healing process begins.

Steps in Healing a Prayer Biography – A Condensed Summary

Basically, healing in a prayer biography is always about forgiveness processes. On the one hand, I have to identify the people who have "shaped" my emotionally effective ideas about prayer through their example and/or the statements they have made. It is important that I take a holistic view of how the "damage" (imprinting) worked. In the forgiveness process; this phase is called "settling accounts" (derived from Mt 18:23). I can only really let go and forgive what I have previously "got hold of" (accounted for).

Often a theologically paradoxical path is also necessary, one which can be called "forgiving God". In our disappointment we consider God to be the culprit and accuse HIM more or less covertly. This can and must be disclosed. I may (see Psalms, Job, Jeremiah) accuse God, but openly to my face, so that I can finally hear HIS answer. I settle accounts with God, so to speak, and at some point I realize that he is not the culprit after all, when HIS, always very individual, answer finally gives me peace.

Additionally, I may need forgiveness myself because I realize that I have let myself get caught up in my bitterness, perhaps dragging others into it, or continually avoiding God even though I can see that He was building bridges for me.

This often includes what is called "forgiving yourself": theologically this is a deeper, more understanding reception of forgiveness, but psychologically it often actually happens in such a way that I understand the accusations against myself and finally drop them.

Where self-accusations have been implanted by others, it is important to forgive them too.

Since it is sometimes not so easy to untangle the web of negative influences on my prayer life, I must not put myself under pressure. The whole thing takes time and it is not a sign of weakness to seek pastoral help. It is easier to unravel things from the outside than if I am in it myself.

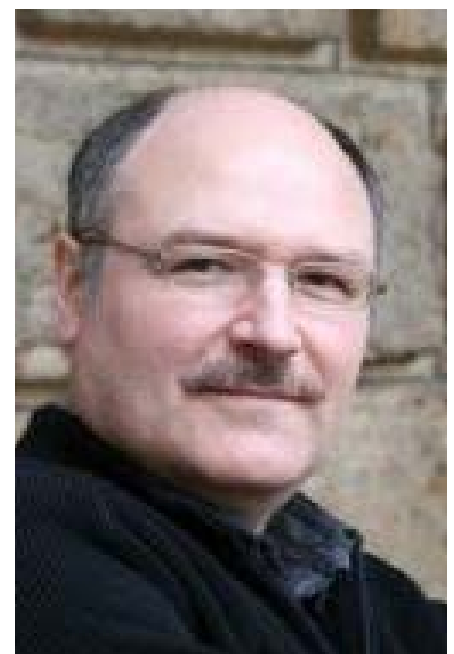
It is very helpful in this process to look for new prayer experiences, different from the previous ones, i.e. unencumbered, effortless prayer experiences, and to surround


yourself with people who radiate a lively, natural and relaxed prayer life.

Wolfram Soldan

Physician, psychotherapist, Christian therapist (IGNIS), supervisor (ACC)

Current tasks: teaching in training in Christian counseling, project manager of the Emotional Logic Team, therapy and counseling sessions, supervision





How God answers prayers: a communication process

When we ask God for something, we can make a common communication error: We believe that it is only the content of our words that reaches him. But communication is more. We also hear and see the facial expressions, the gestures and the tone of voice and we react to this whole message.

The four-ear model by Schulz von Thun ("Talking to each other 1+2", Rowohlt 1989) is very well known. When we say something, we always send four messages, as I said, not just with words, and the other person always hears four messages, but they are not necessarily the same as mine: who I am, who he is in my eyes, what it is about, and what I expect.

God also hears - after all, he created the "four ears" - the four messages I always send:

- Who I am or want to be in front of him.
- What I think of him and what I entrust to him.
- The content, i.e. what I ask for.
- What I actually expect him to do.

Unlike us humans, God understands exactly what messages I am actually sending. And, of course,

God then reacts to these four messages and not just to the objective meaning of the words formulated. If that is the case - and that sounds pretty obvious, doesn't it? - couldn't this be a reason why we sometimes believe that God doesn't answer our prayers? Because he doesn't just respond to the content, but to all four aspects at the same time, which we do not realize?

For example, if one says in prayer, "Please Lord, give me a bicycle, my old one is broken!", how will God respond?

He could give a motor scooter as a gift because he heard that this was the actual wish, but the person praying did not dare to ask for it.

He could also send instructions for repairing the old bicycle to the praying person because he feels that the person praying is too lazy or feels too unskilled to repair the old bicycle.

Perhaps he will also give a new job so that the praying person can put aside enough money for a new bicycle.

Or he sends someone to give the praying person a bicycle, used or new.

God knows us much better than we know ourselves. The result of this knowledge is trust and devotion: God knows better than me what I need because he understands and loves me better.

Answered prayer as an invitation for a joint process

Most of the time we would like a complete "yes" to our prayer, but often God gives a beginning and then it is our job to move on with God's help.

If someone urgently needs a new apartment and prays for it on Saturday evening, they may have different expectations. It would perhaps be typical for a fiery young Christian to expect someone to sit next to him in church on Sunday morning and then ask at the end if he knew of anyone who was looking for an apartment. Sometimes it really can happen like that. But perhaps the answer to prayer looks completely different.

Maybe the person, let's call him Peter, will look through the apartment ads in the daily newspaper or search the Internet for the next week, but he won't find a suitable offer. On Friday Peter meets an



old school friend after years. Just as they are about to part, he feels compelled by the Spirit of God to ask his school friend if he knows of any available apartments. And indeed, after some thought, he is able to give Peter the address of a friend who is about to move out. But Peter cannot reach this friend by phone. When he is about to give up, he prays again and then it finally works. He likes the apartment and it suits him perfectly. But the landlord already has several applicants. Again it's time to pray. And finally Peter gets the apartment.

God sometimes gives a beginning in answer to our prayer and sometimes everything. He takes a step, sometimes big, sometimes small, then we take ours, then he takes another one and so on and in the end, as in the example, we have our apartment.

Above all, God longs for us to get to know him and ourselves better. This also happens in the example, alongside getting the apartment.

Praying with balancing acts

To make the ancient treasure of prayer sparkle like a gem, it is necessary to pray more modestly and

more effectively, and with two basic attitudes:

First of all, to pray very specifically, and to do so with my entire existence, seriously, trustingly, learning, looking for further implications.

Then it means accepting everything as God leads it in detail, with my entire existence, seriously, trustingly, learning, because in his love he understands me better than I do myself and because he not only loves me, but also all the people around me, who are not just puppets, but also with the capacity for a loving relationship with God, with their own freedom.

God gives the right thing

God always gives the right thing, not just for me, but for everyone and for everything! He is God. Nothing is impossible for him.

Let's take the example of the bicycle again. Maybe God heard that I actually wanted a motor scooter but didn't dare say it. In his greatness and love, he would gladly give this to me, but at the same time he also knows that the neighbors are praying that the noise pollution on our street will diminish, and God

also knows about the fine particle pollution in our city. What now?

God knows me through and through, better than I know myself, and He knows that my desire for a motor scooter is an old desire, dating from my youth, when I marveled at the scooters in Italy and admired the attitude to life there. In other words, my actual wish is for this youthful attitude to life. And fulfilling this does not contradict the prayers of the neighbors and the fine dust in our city.

I can well imagine - in this imaginary example - that God would give me a vacation in Tuscany, where I would zoom through the warm summer evenings on a borrowed Vespa, feeling decades younger and at the same time realizing that it also produced smell and noise, which I can't imagine and don't want at home.

I expect that prayers will be answered in concrete terms, certainly not "superficially", but rather according to their deep sense and for the blessing of all.

God

gives the right thing:

prayer example

As a family with many children, at some point we had to buy our own house. Of course, our children wanted a house on the same street where we already lived. When a house 200 m away went on sale, we spoke to the owner, whom we knew by sight. She immediately agreed to sell us the house, but said she was under contract with an agent, whom we should go to. We didn't want that and came to an agreement with her that we would then buy it when the contract expired in two months.

We prayed like world champions that the agent wouldn't sell the house and then we would get it without agent fees. Time passed and we became more and more confident. You could rely on our God. And then, the night before the contract expired, the agent managed to sell the house to the neighbors. What now? I don't remember exactly how we felt,

but a week or two later we went to this agent to rent it because we had heard the house was for rent. While we were living there, we discovered how many repairs needed to be done that would have been quite overwhelming. And yet, when the new owner died a few years later, we returned to the idea of buying it. Sometimes answered prayers take a little longer, we thought. But then it turned out that this house was too small for us to receive public funding, and so we finally “buried” it.

We had a similar experience with the next house. Intensive prayer, agreement with the owners and then at the notary, shortly before signing, the deal fell through. We have now been living in another house for 30 years, on the same street, almost next door to our first one, and we are very, very happy about it and about the wonderful garden. Every now and

then, when we walk past the other two houses, we are happy that we didn't get them, for example now because there is a long path up the hill to both of them, which could be difficult as we get older.



Don't remain on your own – even when praying

Matthew 18:19:

“Furthermore I say to you that wherever two of you agree in what you request, this shall be done for them by my Father who is in heaven.”

There were times, I admit, when reading this Bible verse I spontaneously thought: “What’s the point? My prayer alone is enough! Jesus says, ‘He who asks receives!’ Then why two or three, and then on top of that having to reach agreement!”

How individualistically I was thinking. Typically Western worldview, strongly centered on the individual. Yes, of course, God intended me to be an individually responsible personality. But he also always sees me as part of a community. Here too, as in Eastern traditions, one can become one-sided, only the family, only the clan; the individual hardly counts.

God sees me both as a personality and as part of a “system”. Yes, we should and may seek support through prayer!

■ The gift of intercessors: For many years I had asked three or four friends to pray for me regularly, even daily if possible. (Every year I looked for new prayer supporters and of course thanked the previous ones for their support.) At the beginning of the week they always received an overview of what was scheduled for the week. This wasn't an organizational stress for me, exactly the opposite: I was able to relax because I knew that people were praying for me.

And today, many years later, I realize much more how much of a blessing that has been for my life, much more than my personal actions!

■ The charisma of prayer partners: Prayer partners are not

“just” other people praying, but they can also have a very special grace.

A charisma is a gift from God, a gift e.g. for a very specific prayer situation. And so my prayer partners can bring in a special gift from God for certain of my prayer requests.

From a Christian psychological perspective, every person is an independent person who can only develop and live this independence in relationships.

Learning to be independent without losing connection with others, learning to be connected without losing your own independence, is a lifelong task for everyone.

One aspect of the blessing of connection is synergy: together we achieve more when we work together in connection and unity.

Conclusion: It is good not to pray alone.



Is GOD omnipotent?

(Werner May)

This question concerns us when we ask God for something and when we wait for His working after prayer. Can He do what we ask?

I see a “limit” to God’s omnipotence and that is the one He gave himself, out of love: our human freedom. He gives us this freedom of choice, He has not pre-programmed us to do only what He wants, but speaks to us as persons who are no doubt expected to do something, but can

also consent (even if we can become guilty because of this freedom, because). Not everything is already predetermined, so our actions will not always be good.)

God pushes or motivates me and others for the best, but without forcing anyone and without disregarding decisions.

For example, if I pray on a friend’s behalf that he will get a job, and because of my request,

God guides events and prepares this job - but in the end my friend says no when he is offered this job because of the daily commute to work is too strenuous...

Theological thoughts on divine omnipotence

by Johannes Grössl
(Germany)

Omnipotence and freedom are not easy to reconcile. If God were omnipotent in the sense that He controls everything that happens, there would be no room for free choices and self-responsibility of creatures. Therefore, it is now the majority view in theology that God limited His omnipotence with regard to creation. This is the only way to adequately address the problem of the existence of evil.

But why did God limit His omnipotence, knowing that creatures will also use their freedom to do evil to one another?

Real love requires freedom! If God wants creatures with whom He can enter into a loving relationship, then He cannot help but give these creatures free will. In doing so, He also takes a risk: the risk that these creatures will decide against fellowship with Him.

The fact that God gives us freedom does not mean that He leaves people completely to themselves. There is nothing to prevent God from working in the world, but because of His self-commitment, He can only do this while preserving human freedom. Theologians have different opinions about how much “leeway” God still has here. Personally, “urging” would for me be too much of a restriction of freedom; “motivating” or “promoting” seems more appropriate to me. In my opinion, two limitations to divine work are important:

Firstly, God must remain suffici-

ently hidden in His actions, because only then is a free decision against God possible.

Secondly, God must respect people saying “no”. If a person does not want God's help, it must not be forced upon him.

Most prayers cannot be easily implemented by God without compromising the freedom of those involved. If I pray for a friend to get a job, God might have to manipulate a company's hiring manager or unfairly diminish a competitor's chances.

But when we can assume that the people involved are themselves believers and present their decisions to God in prayer, we give Him the opportunity to intervene in world events of your own free will.

God can act through people if they want to let Him act through them of their own free will. But even then, I can't assume that what I think is good for my friend is actually what's best for him and for everyone in the long run. Just because I pray for something doesn't mean that God will immediately use all of His opportunities to further that goal.

Only God knows what is good for us in the long term and which path is more conducive to our spiritual salvation. Sometimes this is not the easy path, but rather the rocky one.



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A valuable tip:

the prayer diary

Eileen reported:

As part of my counselor training, we had the “homework” of keeping a prayer diary for three months. There were four sub-topics:

Thanks, intercession, worship, confession of sins.

It has now been five months and writing a prayer diary is an integral part

of my life. Except for 2-3 days, I always wrote something in.

At the beginning I had a lot of fun laying out the individual days artistically, with pictures and beautiful, colorful writing, but now I just write, no matter what it looks like, it's more important to me that it is just there in front of me and I talk to God about it.

I'm amazed that, as time went on, the more lines I wrote down. Sometimes I embedded the prayer notes in jottings about the rest of the day.

What will I do with it one day: lock it up, keep it, throw it away?

And what did I permanently learn from it?

I am happy that my relationship with God has become deeper and deeper. Each day was given more value through writing.

I recognize God's faithfulness

more, but I am also amazed at my “discipline.”

My intercession for other people became more and more continuous.

I am much more grateful because I am more aware of what God has given me.

And above all, I have the feeling that God has been answering more prayers since then, or that answered prayers are becoming more obvious.

Another benefit is that I can read about experiences and recall them again. This makes my life more reflective. Various processes are looked at in much more detail.

And you can always say more to God.

I can hand over burdens better if they are written in the book - I have handed them over to God and no longer need to dwell on them in my thoughts.

I have also learned to deal better with my sin/problems, to bring them to God better and to draw good lessons from them.

I'm looking forward to reading parts of it in a few years, or maybe a few months will be enough - especially to check whether memories have been distorted, whe-

ther I've forgotten things, what has changed in terms of answering prayers, etc.

I find it exciting to discover how I have changed and what beliefs have changed.

And I experience that I “write the problems off my chest”.



Broadening of Horizons

THE VICARIOUS PRAYER FOR CHILDREN

Interceding for others in prayer is practiced in various forms of intercession. We become one with the concerns of an individual (or an entire group) and present their concerns to God on behalf of God - the person concerned can be present or absent. His/her need becomes to some extent our own need.

We read of an example of intercession in the Bible with the prophet Nehemiah, who advocated the return of the Israelites from exile

“Do not close your eyes and ears when I plead with you! Day

and night I pray to you for the lives of the Israelites. You are our Lord. I confess to you that we, including me and my relatives, have sinned against you. We all bear heavy guilt. We did not keep the commandments and instructions that your servant Moses received from you.” (Nehemiah 1:6+7)

Nehemiah's requests in particular make another aspect of vicarious prayer clear: he not only identifies with the plight of the Israelites, but he also specifies their guilt by name and includes himself among those referred to.

Vicarious prayer for children

A prayer on behalf of our children includes the same elements as Nehemiah's prayer:

- advocate for the child's needs
- call the blame by its name and apply it to yourself as well
- ask for forgiveness for this guilt

The needs of our children can be diverse. It is important to identify those situations which cause stress and bring them before God.

The question of who has incurred guilt regarding the child can



this we can also go to God vicariously.

Vicarious prayer should not be viewed as a “mechanical method” or a “cure-all” for all of our children’s difficulties.

Each family is individual and will therefore have their own experiences praying for forgiveness on behalf of their children. Rather, this article would like to encourage us to trust God that He can bring about change in the lives of our children through such prayer: by giving us a new perspective on them and/or by allowing them to be touched by Him themselves

Above all, this intensive prayer experience creates a new relationship between parent/guardian and child. This is also an important prerequisite for all other measures in the upbringing.

involve different people. It may be that outsiders caused him injustice/pain, but it is also possible that we as parents were the ones who hurt the child.

Whether we name the guilt of others in prayer and apply it to ourselves as well, or whether our prayer concerns our own guilt - in both cases we pray for forgiveness on behalf of our children, because they are, due to their stage of development, not yet able to pray about it themselves. It is not about making accusations, either against ourselves or others, or creating false feelings

of guilt. Rather, it is about bringing the things that we ourselves or others have committed against our children, and that we become aware of as guilt, to God on our child's behalf and to ask him for forgiveness. We can do this with the awareness of our own need of salvation and the certainty that we have been forgiven through Jesus.

Because of the injuries inflicted on them, it may also be that our children have developed incorrect attitudes and/or behaviors that we (or others) have responded to in the wrong way. With

Prayer

Heavenly Father, thank you that I don't have to face my life alone. I thank you for helping me, much more than I can imagine, and also for planning for me when we shape our lives with others.

I ask you to help me to see challenges in my everyday life as something normal, something that is simply part of where I can learn and mature.

Please help me so that I don't always immediately think about whether I can do something, but also that I learn to ask who could help me.

Thank you, Lord, that I can be limited and that everyone contributes according to their strength.

Sometimes, Heavenly Father, I don't want to be helped because I overestimate myself or don't want to admit my weakness. Please help me with this.

I read that the unimaginable becomes imaginable, the impossible can become possible! Please show me things in my life that I have avoided or not taken on because I thought I should do them alone.

Open my eyes to people with whom I could do something together, who could give me advice, who need my help or who could help me.

I ask you, Lord, to give me more people to encourage me.

If I'm honest, I'm not always willing to help others without counting what the other person gives or brings. Help me not to hide my gifts but to share them.

Please let me discover, Lord, what it means to become one with another person in prayer.

And then I would like to ask you for one more thing, Lord: Strengthen my trust that you are also my financial provider and that a (perceived) lack of money does not prevent me from taking on challenges.

And finally I ask you to strengthen my confidence in prayer, to teach me to pray.

Thank you. Amen