

# Explorers in Prayer – Lesson Eight Handout

## The Place of Intercession in Prayer - Praying in Faith

Hebrews 11: 1 “Now faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see.”

Matthew 17: 20 “I tell you the truth, if you have faith as small as a mustard seed, you can say to this mountain, ‘Move from here to there’ and it will move. Nothing will be impossible for you.”

In the forward to the book *Fear No Evil*, J.I. Packer wrote “Health and life, I would say, in the full and final sense of those words, are not what we die out of, but what we die into.”

John 14: 12-14 “I tell you the truth, anyone who has faith in me will do what I have been doing. He will do even greater things than these, because I am going to the Father. And I will do whatever you ask in my name, so that the Son may bring glory to the Father. You may ask me for anything in my name, and I will do it.”

Matthew 18:19 “Again, I tell you that if two of you on earth agree about anything you ask for, it will be done for you by my Father in heaven.”

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Pages 214-216 of Philip Yancey’s book *Reaching for the Invisible God*

‘A newborn baby has all the body parts it will ever need, yet it must grow up in order to use them as intended. The same principle applies spiritually in the life of faith. “I could not address you as spiritual but as worldly – mere infants in Christ,” Paul scolded the Corinthians. “I gave you milk, not solid food, for you were not yet ready for it.” Like many young believers, the Corinthians balked at moving past childhood immaturity to a more advanced stage.

On the other hand, Jesus plainly stated that, “unless you change and become like little children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven.” Somehow we must learn to distinguish between appropriate *childlike* behaviour, a prerequisite for the kingdom of heaven, and inappropriate *childish* behaviour, a mark of stunted growth.

Psalm 131, one of the shortest psalms, hints at the difference between childish and childlike trust in God:

I do not concern myself with great matters  
or things too wonderful for me.  
But I have stilled and quieted my soul;  
like a weaned child with its mother,  
like a weaned child is my soul within me.

Arthur Weiser comments that the Christian is, “not like an infant crying loudly for his mother’s breast, but like a weaned child that quietly rests by his mother’s side, happy in being with

her....And just as the child gradually breaks off the habit of regarding his mother only as a means of satisfying his own desire and learns to love her for her own sake, so the worshipper after a struggle has reached an attitude of mind in which he desires God for himself and not as a means of fulfillment of his own wishes. His life's centre of gravity has shifted."

Sometimes I find myself yearning for the glorious self-indulgence of infancy, when the world revolved around me, when a whimper or cry brought attention, when others met my needs with no effort on my part. Sometimes I look back, too, on an early stage in my spiritual pilgrimage when God seemed close and faith seemed easy and irrefutable – a stage before testing and disappointment, a stage before weaning. And then at church or in the supermarket I come across a baby, helpless, immobile, with little comprehension, and I realise anew the wisdom of creation that presses us on toward maturity, our growth fuelled by a diet of solid food, not milk.

While I still bear the scars of growing pains, I am learning to identify and avoid some seductions of childish faith: unrealistic expectations, legalism, and unhealthy dependence. Several times I have alluded to the danger of unrealistic expectations. A child must, at some point, learn to accept the world as it is rather than as he or she wants it to be. "It's not fair!" the foot-stamping lament of a child mellows into "Life's not fair," the wisdom of adulthood. People vary in beauty, family background, athletic skill, intelligence, health, and wealth, and anyone who expects perfect fairness in this world will end up bitterly disappointed. Likewise, a Christian who expects God to solve all family problems, heal all diseases, and thwart baldness, greying, wrinkling, osteoporosis, senility, and other effects of ageing is pursuing childish magic, not mature religion.

J. I. Packer explains that, "God...is very gentle with very young Christians, just as mothers are with very young babies. Often the start of their Christian career is marked by great emotional joy, striking providences, remarkable answers to prayer, and immediate fruitfulness in their first acts of witness; thus God encourages them, and establishes them in "the life." But as they grow stronger, and are able to bear more, He exercises them in a tougher school. He exposes them to as much testing by the pressure of opposed and discouraging influences as they are able to bear –not more, but equally not less. Thus he builds our character, strengthens our faith, and prepares us to help others."

Writing this book, so many times I have wished I could promise more. I wish I could encourage Christians, as some do, to "name it and claim it!" I wish I could raise expectations that God will change the rules on our behalf and make life easier, not harder. Every time I wish that, I face the temptation of childish faith – the very temptation that Jesus resisted in the wilderness.'

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### **So to summarise this week's lesson:**

- 1) We all have faith in something and we choose, consciously or otherwise, what we put our faith in. We need to reflect on whether our choices have been good ones.
- 2) God is pleased when we put our faith in him, and wants us to have the attitude of a child who knows how to trust God like they would a good parent, but we need to get right what it is we are putting our faith in God to do.

3) As we humanly and spiritually mature, so our understanding of who God is and the things that are on his heart for us to desire and pray for will change.

4) We also have to develop our ability to listen and hear what it is that God wants us to pray for in faith, bringing our thinking and our will in line with his. When we have done this, then we can (and should) pray bold prayers.

**Individual Exercise:** Spend the fifteen minutes each day reflecting on what the other person said in the class exercise in your doubles, and pray for what God tells you to pray for. It may be that during the week your prayer for that person will change. Keep a note of this as you will be discussing this with the other person at the beginning of the next lesson.

Read chapters 5 & 18 of the course book.

**Prayer Triplet Exercise:** Discuss in your groups the difference between child-like and childish faith. Then have an open time of prayer for each other that God might lead you into a greater maturity, and wait on him for words of encouragement and knowledge.