

**Bible Study: Deepening Your Prayer Life, Approach God with Boldness, Charles Stanley**

**Lesson 3: Praying with Authority**

Lesson Objectives: Who gives us authority to pray in the first place?

Growing: Where does the power of prayer come from?

The prophet Elijah and King Ahab had been in conflict over idolatry and false worship in Israel. Then Elijah declared a showdown. He commanded the king to call the Israelites to Mount Carmel and summon the prophets of Baal and Asherah, who were supported by Queen Jezebel. When all parties were assembled, Elijah said to the people, "How long will you falter between two opinions? If the LORD is God, follow Him; but if Baal, follow him" (1 Kings 18:21).

The people did not respond, so Elijah challenged the prophets of Baal and Asherah to a sort of duel. The prophets and Elijah were each given a bull to sacrifice. Elijah said, "You call on the name of your gods, and I will call on the name of the Lord; and the God who answers by fire, He is God" (verse 24). The prophets agreed to this plan. They spent all day crying out to Baal, leaping about and cutting themselves with knives, but to no avail.

Meanwhile, Elijah took 12 stones and made an altar. He surrounded the altar with a trench and then soaked the firewood and the sacrificial bull with water until the trench was also filled with water. In fact, he soaked the wood and sacrifice with water three times! At the time of the evening sacrifice, Elijah prayed, "Lord God of Abraham, Isaac, and Israel, let it be known this day that You are God in Israel and I am Your servant, and that I have done all these things at Your word. Hear me, O Lord, hear me that this people may know that You have turned their hearts back to You again" (verses 36-37).

When Elijah had finished, the fire of the Lord fell and consumed the sacrifice, wood, stones, the dust and all the water in the trench. When the people saw what had happened, they fell on their faces and said, "The Lord, He is God!" (verse 39). What a wonderful example of praying with boldness and authority! Elijah didn't pray in secret, off in some corner where nobody could see him. He prayed openly and publicly. There was nothing tricky or shady about what he did. There was no doubt about what he said.

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A man once said to me, “I feel that when I come into the throne room of God, I just tiptoe around. I’m afraid of what God may say or do.” I believe his behavior is that of many Christians. However, God tells us to come boldly into His presence. He grants us the privilege to come before Him with authority because of our position in Christ Jesus. We are to be bold in believing that God is going to do what he says He will do in our lives.

- 1. “We do not have a High Priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but was in all points tempted as we are, yet without sin. Let us therefore come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need” (Hebrews 4:15-16).**

**What is the connection between the fact that Jesus was tempted and the boldness with which you can enter God’s presence?**

- 2. Why is it comforting to know that Jesus was tempted in the same ways that you are? How does this help Him to sympathize with our weaknesses?**

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**OUR POSITION BEFORE GOD**

In another story told in the Bible, we read about an assault launched against King Jehoshaphat and the people of Israel. Jehoshaphat was afraid, but rather than cower in fear, he “set himself to seek the Lord” (2 Chronicles 20:3). He proclaimed a fast and called the people to join him in seeking the Lord. He stood before them and prayed, “O Lord God of our fathers, are you not God in heaven, and do You not rule over all the kingdoms of the nations, and in Your hand is there not power and might so that no one is able to withstand You?” (verse 6).

Jehoshaphat was not doubting the power of God... rather, he was affirming his belief in the Lord. He was declaring that he was putting all of his trust in the God of unlimited power. He went on to state in his prayer that he was standing in a position of humility and weakness before the Lord. He told God that He was the one who had given the land to the Israelites and had allowed them to dwell there and build a sanctuary in it. He said that God had told them to cry out to Him in their affliction – and that He would save them.

Jehoshaphat also told God that He was the one who had instructed them to spare these enemy people when they first came to occupy this land and that he was the only One capable of judging these enemies – they had no power and no plan (see verses 7 – 12). He concluded by stating the eyes of the Israelites were squarely on the Lord and no other god.

Jehoshaphat was saying, “Lord if You do not exercise Your authority in this matter, we are all doomed. So we are putting our entire trust and confidence in You and You alone.” There was no trace of egotism in Jehoshaphat. He claimed no authority in himself and also no power for himself.

- 3. Why did Jehoshaphat remind the Lord of the things that He had done for Israel in the past? How can you do the same by quoting Scripture in prayer?**
  
- 4. What did Jehoshaphat mean when he said, “Our eyes are upon You”? How can you imitate this attitude in prayer?**

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**OUR AUTHORITY AND POWER IN PRAYER**

Jesus gave the following instructions to His disciples in what is known as the great Commission:

*All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always; even to the end of the age (Matthew 28:18-20).*

The word *power* in this passage refers to the ability to bring about, execute or act with hindrances removed. It refers to a divine capacity – a divine right or privilege. Jesus was declaring He had the authority to send out His own disciples.

In Acts 1:8, the word *power* is translated from the Greek word *dunamis*: “But you shall receive power [*dunamis*] when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.” This word refers to the *dynamic ability* that will be given to the disciples so that they can be witnesses. This is an enabling and highly effective power.

Jesus was not turning over the fullness of His authority to His disciples – He retains His authority as Savior and Lord always. What He was imparting to His disciples (through the Holy Spirit) was the ability to do whatever he authorized them to do. His disciples would receive the power through the Holy Spirit to carry out the mission that Jesus was sending them on. Jesus is the one Who possesses the authority and imparts the ability through the Holy Spirit.

This is a critical distinction for us to make. As Christians, we do not have authority in ourselves. All authority resides in Jesus our Savior and Lord. But we have been given power to carry out Jesus’ commandments on earth. Furthermore, we do not have this power in ourselves apart from the Holy Spirit. It is a power that is given to us by Jesus, and which we must actively receive from the Spirit.

Both words, *authority* and *power* are recorded in Luke 9:1: “Then He called His twelve disciples together and gave them power and authority over all demons, and

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to cure diseases.” Jesus sent out His twelve disciples to preach the kingdom of God and gave them power and authority for a ministry of healing and deliverance. He imparted to them the capacity for this type of ministry and the power to do this ministry. In other words, He gifted them with both the *can-do* authority and *will-succeed* power.

Jesus expected His disciples to fulfill their mission because they had been equipped to do so. The same is true for us. When God sends us on a mission, He gives us the ability to do it and the power to accomplish it. He gives us the authority to pray and empowers us to pray. He moves in us and through us by the Holy Spirit so that our prayers are effective. The believer who prays in Atlanta can be effective in bringing about spiritual change in Tehran. The believer who prays in southern California can be effective in bringing about God’s blessing on the church in China. There is no distance in prayer. Prayer can affect any situation, alter any circumstance, and bring about any type of change anywhere on earth.

Prayer is both a commandment of God and a mission. God has given us the privilege to call on His name at any place and any time. He has given us the name of Jesus – the greatest name on earth and in heaven – as our authority in which to pray. Nothing allows us any greater potential to affect the state of an individual sinful heart and the state of world affairs. Prayer is the most potent, effective, life-changing force given by God to humankind. It is up to us, therefore, to pray – and to pray boldly and with the full force of our faith in Christ Jesus.

**5. “Whatever we ask we receive from Him, because we keep His commandments and do those things that are pleasing in His sight” (1 John 3:22). What are you required to do if you wish to receive what you ask for from God? Give practical examples.**

**6. What is the implication of this verse if you *don’t* do those things?**

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**OUR OFFENSE AGAINST THE ENEMY**

When you begin to pray with power, the enemy of your soul will come to you and say, “Why do you think you have the right to pray for that? Who do you think you are?” Paul addressed this matter in his letter to the Ephesians. He said they must adopt a posture of boldness in prayer: “Be strong in the Lord and in the power of His might” (6:10). Paul stated their authority and power were imparted by Christ Jesus. They were not bold or powerful in their own right.

He then reminded the Ephesians their ever-present enemy was Satan. You are in mortal conflict with the devil and his demons. You battle against the wiles of the devil and wrestle against principalities, powers, rulers of the darkness of this age, and spiritual hosts of wickedness (see verses 11-12). Whenever you pray, you can expect Satan to put up a fight against your prayers. So, how are you overcome to him?

Paul said that you are to “take up the whole armor of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand (verse 13). He described this armor as (1) the breastplate of righteousness, (2) shoes of the preparation of the gospel of peace, (3) the shield of faith (By which you are able to quench all the fiery darts of the enemy), (4) the helmet of salvation, and (5) the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God (see verses 14-17).

When you put on the whole armor of God, you are putting on the identity of Christ. You are recognizing that Jesus alone is your authority. He is your righteousness and your peace. The Author and Finisher of your faith. He is your Savior and the one who reminds you of the word of God and teaches you the deep meanings of God’s Word. He has the full capacity to defeat the enemy at every turn, and He has imparted to you the capacity to defeat the enemy at specific times and places through your prayers.

Paul closed this illustration by stating you are to pray always “with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, being watchful to this end with all perseverance and supplication for all the saints” (verse 18). Prayer is your offense against the devil’s attacks and against his strongholds. You have the power of the Holy Spirit working in you to make certain you are able to exercise the authority of Christ successfully. Paul declared this to be a winning posture. You will not fail against the devil if you

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recognize the real enemy, put on the armor of Christ, and take on the authority that He alone imparts to you and then pray with persevering faith.

None of us has the authority or the power to stand against the devil on the basis of our own personality, intellect, or gifts. But in Christ, we have His authority and His power to soundly defeat the enemy regardless of what he may launch against us. What a contrast this is to simply wishing and hoping in prayer that God will act! We must understand that God wants bold and assertive action in prayer. He wants us to pray as if we are fighting and defeating the most real of all enemies – not only in our personal lives but also on behalf of other believers.

**7. Consider each of these pieces of armor that Paul lists in Ephesians 6:14-18.**

**What is the purpose of the:**

**a. Breastplate –**

**b. Shoes –**

**c. Shield –**

**d. Helmet –**

**e. Sword –**

**8. What element of your Christian faith is pictured by each of the pieces of armor?**

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**PRAYING WITH PERSEVERANCE**

Paul concluded by admonishing the Ephesians to pray “always... being watchful to this end with all perseverance” (6:18). Jesus repeatedly told His disciples to “watch and pray.” Knowing that we have the authority in Christ and the power to pray successfully means very little if we do not pray. Our command from God is to pray and to do so boldly and consistently, relying totally on Him and exercising the full authority and power given to us by Jesus.

**9. “Praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, being watchful to this end with all perseverance and supplication for all the saints” (Ephesians 6:18). Why is perseverance important in prayer?**

**10. Who are “all the saints”? How can you be praying for all the saints this week?**

**TODAY AND TOMORROW**

*Today:* The Lord has given me the authority to pray through the work of Christ Jesus.

*Tomorrow:* I will spend time each day this week Putting on my armor of Christ.

**CLOSING PRAYER**

*Father, we thank You for loving us and for being patient with us. Continue to teach us today the knowledge of Your Word and instruct us on the incredible authority that we have been given in prayer. Speak to our hearts and help us to see the tremendous potential that is within us if we simply choose to use what is at our fingertips – to apply what You, in Your mercy, have given to us. We thank You for loving us and pray that You will speak to our hearts today.*