

A person in a white robe is kneeling on a rocky outcrop, looking out over a vast landscape at sunset. The sky is a warm, golden yellow, and the mountains in the distance are silhouetted against the light. The overall mood is peaceful and contemplative.

EXPERIENCING  
PRAYER *with*

JESUS

THE POWER *of* HIS PRESENCE *and* EXAMPLE

HENRY & NORMAN  
BLACKABY

EXPERIENCING  
PRAYER *with*  
JESUS

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Multnomah Books

EXPERIENCING PRAYER WITH JESUS

published by Multnomah Books

© 2006 by Henry T. Blackaby and Norman C. Blackaby  
International Standard Book Number: 978-1-59052-576-0

Cover design by The DesignWorks Group, Inc.  
Front cover image by Guildhall Art Gallery,  
Corporation of London Bridgeman Art Library, London/Superstock  
Back cover image by Tom Stewart/Corbis

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Published in the United States by WaterBrook Multnomah, an imprint of the Crown Publishing  
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For information:

MULTNOMAH BOOKS

12265 ORACLE BOULEVARD, SUITE 200 • COLORADO SPRINGS, CO 80921

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data  
Blackaby, Henry T., 1935-  
Experiencing prayer with Jesus / Henry Blackaby and Norman Blackaby.  
p. cm.

ISBN 1-59052-770-4

1. Prayer—Christianity. I. Blackaby, Norman C. II. Title.

BV210.3.B54 2006

248.3'2—dc22

2005030043

10 11—10 9 8 7

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## *Introduction*



# FOR A LIFE-CHANGING ENCOUNTER WITH CHRIST

*W*e have opportunity in our ministry to interact with numerous people through conferences, online discipleship classes, Bible study groups, Sunday services, and meetings with business leaders. We encounter so many wonderful believers who have an earnest desire to live a life pleasing to God and effective in His kingdom. Very often they express to us a deep burden to understand and grow particularly in the area of prayer.

These Christians enjoy reading their Bible, serving in their local church or ministry, and sharing their faith, but again and again they tell us that they don't see victory in their prayer life. Even when they spend considerable time in prayer, they often fail to sense that their prayers are vital or effective.

## OUR BURDEN FOR THIS BOOK

As we've heard these longings from God's people, God has placed a burden on our hearts to write this book.

In doing so, our goals are these:

1. To open afresh your mind and heart to the prayer life of Jesus.
2. To help you anticipate and recognize the activity of God in your prayer life as He conforms you to the image of His Son.
3. To exhort you to obey and respond to all of the fullness of God—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—as He develops your prayer life.
4. To help you see the immediate urgency of the hour in which we live, and the impact we can have through our prayers.
5. To show that immediate and thorough obedience is key to your prayer life.

## LOOK TO GOD'S ENABLING

Our desire is that *Experiencing Prayer with Jesus* will not be simply more information about prayer for you, but that it will lead you to a life-changing encounter with Christ...and therefore forever rearrange your prayer life into continuing fellowship with our Lord.

While there are many wonderful examples of prayer

and passages on prayer throughout the Scriptures, we know of no better model and demonstration of what the heavenly Father desires for our prayer life than the life of our Lord Jesus Christ. And at this critical time in history, we don't need simply "more prayer" from God's people; we need specifically the kind of praying exemplified in the life of Christ. Therefore we'll be focusing especially in these pages on closely observing our Savior in prayer.

In any such study, it becomes immediately evident that there's a significant difference between how Jesus prayed and the prayer life of many Christians today. Recognizing this gap, it's easy to feel that His heart of prayer and the dynamic characteristics of His prayer life are things that will never become a part of our own experience.

However, as you become more aware of this gap in your own life, we urge you *not to become discouraged*. Instead, press ahead to ask, "*Why* is there this difference?" and especially, "How can I allow the Holy Spirit to change my prayer life to be more like the Lord's?"

*He Himself often withdrew into the  
wilderness and prayed.*

LUKE 5:16

Be assured that God not only desires that we pray in a Christlike manner, but He also *enables* us to do so. Through His Holy Spirit within us, the Father is working to conform us “to the image of His Son” (Romans 8:29; see also Galatians 2:20), and this transformation will preeminently involve and affect our prayer life.

#### FOR BEING USED BY GOD

When we look at the people God used in the Scriptures as well as those He used throughout Christian history, we see their lives marked by a deep awareness and practice of prayer with their heavenly Father. In most of the biographies and testimonies from people whom God has used in mighty ways in the past, there’s a confession that the key to their work and to the measure in which it honored God is directly linked to prayer that mirrored the prayer experience of Jesus.

We believe this link is needed today as much as ever. There’s an urgent necessity for the requests and supplications of God’s people to reflect the prayer life of Jesus Christ as we see it unfolded in the Scriptures.

## *From Henry: Now It's Our Turn*

Probably no Scripture in recent years has affected me as much as the last verses of Hebrews chapter eleven. Having given us earlier in this chapter a whole catalogue of the great men and women of faith, the chapter concludes, “And all these, having obtained a good testimony through faith, did not receive the promise, God having provided something better for us, *that they should not be made perfect apart from us*” (Hebrews 11:39–40).

There are those who have gone before—and now it's *our* turn. There are those who have carried the torch, who have prayed through the night and wept through the night, praying for revival in our land. However, they did not see what God promised—and now it's up to us. If we don't continue the vigil to pray, we delay even more the completion of what was begun by those who've gone before us.

I've often said to the Lord, “O God, many others have begun and never saw the completion of your promises in their generation. O Lord, help me to be faithful *in my generation* that when I pray, I hear from You...and that when I hear from You, I immediately adjust my life accordingly.”

## *Chapter One*

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# OUR KEY TO LIFE AND MINISTRY

*T*he twelve disciples whom Jesus chose were no doubt men who prayed. They had been raised in a culture that valued and practiced prayer, and each of their hearts must have been prayerfully tender toward God for each man to leave everything and follow after Jesus when He extended His call to them.

And yet, as the disciples went on to closely observe Jesus, they consistently noticed a stark difference between their way of praying and the prayer life of the Lord.

In the presence of these twelve men, Jesus both taught and modeled a radical life of prayer, and it caught their attention. We see this, for example, in Luke 11:1. Jesus “was praying in a certain place,” and when He finished, “one of His disciples said to Him, ‘Lord, teach us to pray.’” They wanted something better than they already had; they wanted the same reality and vitality of prayer that Jesus experienced.

So He taught them. And everything He taught, He also lived out before them.

#### AT THE CENTER OF HIS LIFE

Jesus urged these disciples to always pray and never lose heart (Luke 18:1), to “cry out day and night” to God (18:7), and to keep asking and seeking and knocking with confident assurance of the Father’s loving heart (Matthew 7:7–11). Hearing Jesus say these things, the Twelve could not forget that even while He ministered to “great multitudes” through continual preaching and healing, “He Himself often withdrew into the wilderness and prayed” (Luke 5:16). They had witnessed how the Lord rose “a long while before daylight” and “went out and departed to a solitary place; and there He prayed” (Mark 1:35). They knew their Master as One who “went out to the mountain to pray, and continued all night in prayer to God” (Luke 6:12).

The conclusion was inescapable: Jesus’ prayer life was the key to both His life and ministry.

Throughout the scriptural record of the ministry of our Lord, it’s clear that prayer is one of the most marked characteristics of His life. At each major juncture, at every key decision point, we find Him in prayer.

It was true in the very beginning: At the time of His baptism, it was “while He prayed” that “heaven was

opened” and the Holy Spirit came down upon Him like a dove while the Father audibly assured Him, “You are My beloved Son; in You I am well pleased” (Luke 3:21–22).

And it was true as well at the end, as Jesus continued praying on the cross (Matthew 27:46; Luke 23:34,46).

Every part of our Lord’s life was centered and guided by His continuing communication with the Father.

*And when He had sent the multitudes away,  
He went up on the mountain  
by Himself to pray.  
Now when evening came,  
He was alone there.*

MATTHEW 14:23

## *From Norman: Early Morning Habit*

Watching my parents over the years, I would definitely characterize them as people of prayer. If you asked any of the five children in our family what our dad was doing in the early morning hours, each one would answer, "He's praying and studying his Bible."

To this day when I visit their home, I know that no matter how early I get up in the morning, my father will already be in prayer and the Scriptures in his office.

One night last year our daughter became very ill. Some time after midnight we decided to take her to the hospital, where it was determined that she needed to have an IV put in. Our daughter is very afraid of needles and we knew this would scare her. We immediately wanted to telephone Mom and Dad and ask for their prayers.

By then it was about three o'clock in the morning, and about five o'clock where my parents live. We called them—and they were already awake and ready to pray, just as I expected.

It was such a comfort to me to know I could call at such an early hour and know they would be praying as we walked through a difficult sickness with our daughter.

## IN CHRIST'S HUMANITY

So often, as we read about Jesus, we fail to make the connection between His example and our own experience. From God's perspective, however, the characteristics of His Son's prayer life are to be true for every believer and every church.

We easily dismiss that fact. We tell ourselves, "Jesus was the Son of God; of course His prayer life was outstanding. But I'm only human; I can't be expected to pray as Christ prayed."

There are plenty of Scriptures to counter that argument, and one of them is a profound passage we'll refer to often in this book as we explore it phrase by phrase. For catching the heart of Christ's prayer life in relation to the Father, we know of no passage better than Hebrews 5:7-9, which describes the intense manner and momentous results of the prayers Jesus offered. These verses pull together the entire prayer life of Jesus into a single, powerful statement for our instruction. It teaches us the essence of prayer, so we can more fully experience the intimate fellowship with the heavenly Father that Jesus knew.

We want to draw your attention first to the significant phrase that introduces this passage: "in the days of His flesh." This expression emphasizes the human nature Christ embraced during His earthly ministry. That word

*flesh* identifies Jesus with you and me; we have a Savior who can identify with us because of the human form that He assumed as He emptied Himself of His divine privileges and came to earth as a man (Philippians 2:7–8). As we study His prayer life, we’re seeing Jesus *in His humanity* praying to the Father, just as we pray to Him in our own humanity.

A few verses earlier in Hebrews we read how Jesus, as our High Priest, can “sympathize with our weaknesses” because He “was in all points tempted as we are, yet without sin” (Hebrews 4:15). Whatever weaknesses, failings, and weariness we’ve ever experienced in our prayer life, *Christ understands!* He was tempted in His prayer life as well, and He knows how to help us faithfully resist those temptations in the same way He successfully resisted them.

#### SETTING OUR HEARTS

Our passage in Hebrews goes on to tell us that “in the days of His flesh,” Jesus “offered up prayers and supplications, with vehement cries and tears....” (Hebrews 5:7). *The Amplified Bible* words it this way: “In the days of His flesh [Jesus] offered up definite, special petitions [for that which He not only wanted but needed] and supplications with strong crying and tears.”

The clear emphasis is that the Son of God actively and

consistently *prayed!* And He did so with various kinds of prayer and supplication (strong entreaty and pleading) to His Father.

*Being in agony,  
He prayed more earnestly.*

LUKE 22:44

In the days of His flesh, Jesus understood the seriousness of communicating with His heavenly Father. In the days of His flesh, He chose not to allow anything to discontinue or hamper that fellowship.

What can be said of your life—in the days of *your* flesh? Have you come to understand the importance of maintaining communication with God above everything else? What things have you let distract you from daily communication with the Father?

If Jesus was convinced that His own life and ministry depended upon His prayer life with the Father, we as well must set our hearts to maintain uninterrupted time in prayer with our Lord, for this is the key not only to our ministry but to our very life as God intends it.

## Chapter Two

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### THE HEART OF OUR PRAYER

*W*e've seen how Christ's prayers were expressed "with vehement cries and tears" (Hebrews 5:7). Why was there such strong emotion in His praying?

It was because Jesus knew the Father's *love*—and sought to prevail upon that love in asking the Father to come to His aid. As our Savior acknowledged in prayer, "*You loved Me* before the foundation of the world" (John 17:24).

Jesus loved the Father and was loved by the Father! Therefore He confidently expected the Father to hear and answer His requests from a loving heart. And He knew that any and every answer from the Father would always be an expression of that love. Our Savior understood that everything the Father did in His life was out of a deep expression of love.

## THE TRUE LIFELINE

In the days of His flesh, Jesus fully grasped the importance of this love relationship. The Scriptures reveal that He and His Father were always in loving union and constant fellowship with each other. As Jesus often reminded His disciples, “I am in the Father, and the Father in Me” (John 14:10–11; see also 10:30,38; 14:20).

Jesus was intensely committed to prayer because this loving presence of the Father was *His very life*. He told His disciples, “I *live* because of the Father” (John 6:57)—and prayer was His lifeline. This vital closeness of the Son with the Father is the foremost characteristic of our Savior’s prayer life.

It was a closeness that found expression in His constant time alone with the Father in prayer. Jesus allowed nothing to interfere or distract Him from this intimate fellowship—neither His family, nor His disciples, nor His religious critics and opponents. There was too much at stake.

The people around the Lord frequently didn’t understand this close relationship between the Father and the Son, just as they failed often to grasp what kind of relationship they should have (for example, see Matthew 15:17; 16:9; Mark 8:17; 16:14; Luke 24:25). This is one reason that Jesus so often had to find solitary places and pray alone

with the Father. But Jesus let nothing deter Him from maintaining His love relationship with the Father.

#### THROUGH THE HOLY SPIRIT

Jesus' intimacy with the Father in His prayer life was distinctively linked to the Holy Spirit, because He knew the Spirit's activity was the key to God's anointing and equipping for service in His kingdom.

The first time we see this profound link between Jesus, His prayers, the Holy Spirit, and the closeness of Father and Son is the moment of His baptism in the Jordan River: "It came to pass that Jesus also was baptized; and while He prayed, the heaven was opened. And the Holy Spirit descended in bodily form like a dove upon Him, and a voice came from heaven which said, 'You are My beloved Son; in You I am well pleased'" (Luke 3:21–22).

*"How much more will your heavenly Father  
give the Holy Spirit  
to those who ask Him!"*

LUKE 11:13

As Jesus prayed, the Holy Spirit came upon Him with enabling for the ministry that lay ahead, while the Father confirmed His love for His Son.

#### WHAT ABOUT YOU?

We can study closely this loving closeness between the heavenly Father and the Son, and even strongly admire this relationship—and yet fail to make the connection to our own lives.

What about you? Are you experiencing intimate fellowship with the heavenly Father in the days of your flesh? Throughout each day, as you carry out your responsibilities and activities, are you living in continual fellowship with the Son and with the Father, through the Holy Spirit? Can you say, “I am in Him, and He is in me”?

Have you, in prayer, allowed the Spirit to teach and shape you to the image of Christ so that you can say, “If you’ve seen me, you’ve seen my heavenly Father” as Jesus did (John 14:9)? Have you spent enough time in prayer to know that your words and works are the words and works of the Father, as Jesus did (John 14:10)?

*He departed to the mountain to pray.*

MARK 6:46

As you pursue a closer relationship with God through prayer, are you keeping the Father's love in the forefront of your thinking and experience? When we pray, we must remember that God loves us, has plans for us, and will lay His heart over our hearts as we pray.

Just as Jesus did, we must find regular times of solitary prayer to receive the Father's direction for our lives. We can not allow distractions to interfere. (If you've walked with the Lord for even a short time, you know how easy it can be to get distracted from this priority!) Nor can we become discouraged if others don't understand our closeness with the heavenly Father and all that He is telling us.

#### CONFIDENCE AND JOY

Jesus understood that every Christian needs to maintain this fellowship to be able to serve and honor our Lord in this world. He was so deeply convinced of this that He made the following request on behalf of His followers: "that they all may be one, as You, Father, are in Me, and I in You; *that they also may be one in Us*" (John 17:21).

Many other passages illustrate this unity and fellowship we're to experience with our Lord. In John 15:5, Jesus said, "I am the vine, you are the branches," and He spoke of this close relationship as our "abiding" in Him. He immediately tied this to prayer: "If you abide in Me, and

My words abide in you, you will ask what you desire, and it shall be done for you” (v. 7).

Jesus knew that when we experience this loving relationship with the Lord, it brings confidence into our prayer lives—a confidence that leads to joy: “These things I have spoken to you, that My joy may remain in you, and that your joy may be full” (John 15:11).

#### PRAYER STARTS WITH RELATIONSHIP

When the disciples in Luke 11 asked Jesus, “Lord, teach us to pray” (v. 1), He gave them a brief model or pattern for prayer—what we know as “the Lord’s Prayer.” It’s not some kind of magic formula, but a concise portrayal of the foundational truths that should be in our minds and hearts as we pray individually, as families, and as churches.

Every phrase in this prayer pattern is significant, especially the opening words. Jesus taught His disciples to say, “*Our Father in heaven...*” (Luke 11:2).

Jesus Himself repeatedly addressed God as “Father” (Matthew 11:25; Mark 14:36; Luke 23:46; John 17:1)—and here He encourages the disciples to do the same. He was teaching them that intimacy with God is what we should all experience when we pray. Prayer is not repeating routine words (Matthew 6:7) or trying to impress those around us with our spirituality (Matthew 6:5); prayer is

meant to flow from close and vital fellowship with the heavenly Father.

At the same time, the words “in heaven” teach us that God is holy and that we must approach Him with respect. He is in heaven while we still remain upon the earth.

There’s a wonderful balance in what Jesus teaches here. We intimately call upon God as Father, while those words “in heaven” remind us also of His infinite greatness and the vast realm of His presence and activity. “In heaven” brings to mind as well the immensity of everything He possesses as Sovereign over all things. As we come to God in prayer, we come to our loving Father who remains on His throne with all the resources of heaven and earth at His disposal on our behalf.

Jesus knew that heaven and earth are closely tied together. God is present *here*; His rule on earth is real, personal, and sovereign, and His help can be counted on. And He wants *us* to know this as well.

*And while He prayed...*

*heaven was opened.*

LUKE 3:21

## IT TAKES TIME

How deep is your relationship with the Lord as you pray? Do you pour your heart out to Him with complete confidence and trust in His help, because you've come to know and experience His love?

This isn't something we can start practicing automatically—it takes effort and time, like any relationship. The more you spend time with Him, the more you'll come to understand His ways, His heart, and His will as you pray. There's no substitute for taking time to study the Bible and for allowing the Holy Spirit to teach you how to pray in a way consistent with God's will. Place His Word in your heart and mind...then the Holy Spirit will use those Scriptures as you pray to keep your life on track and consistent with God's nature.