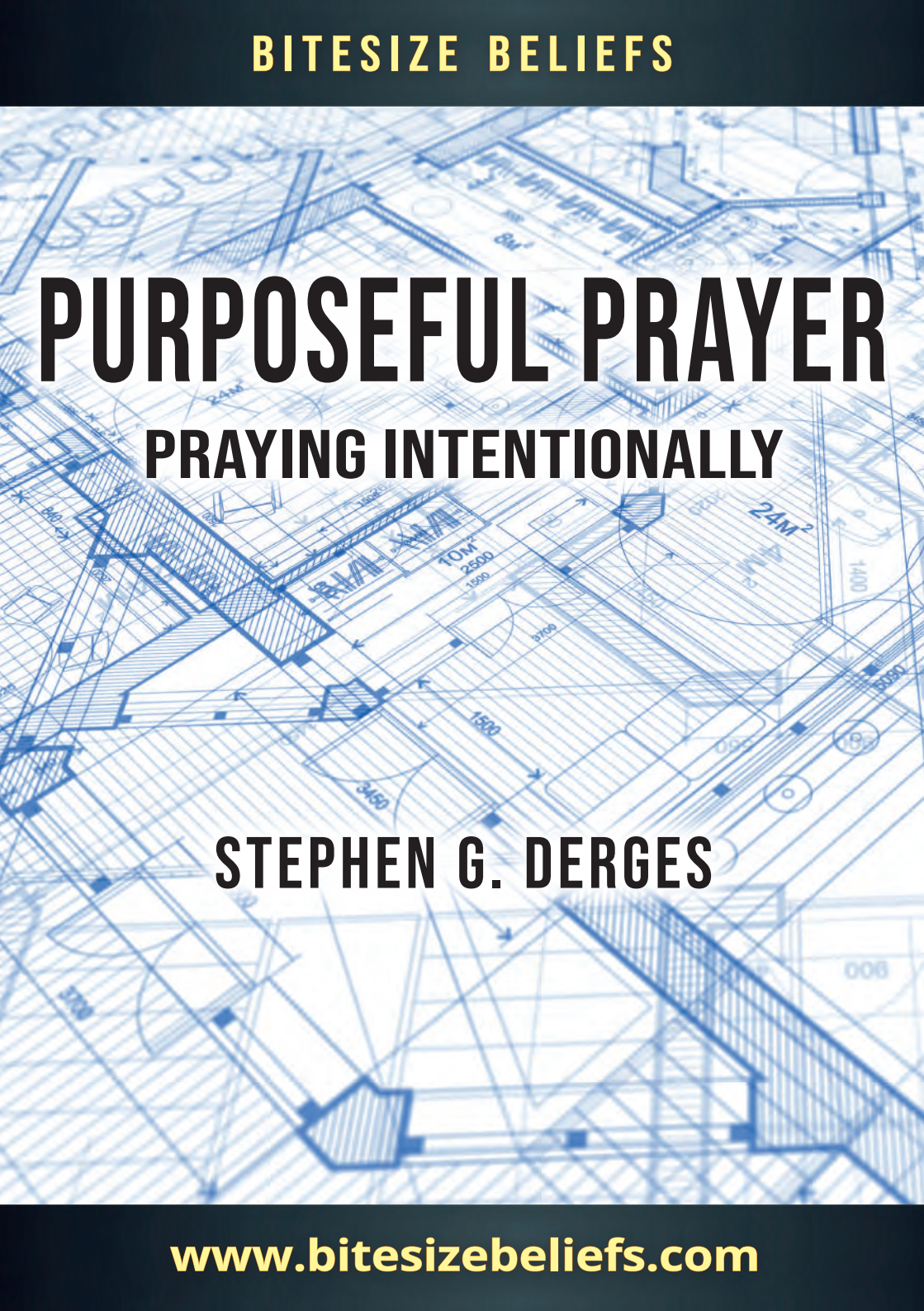


BITESIZE BELIEFS

The background of the entire cover is a detailed architectural blueprint. It features a complex network of lines, including straight lines, arcs, and circles, representing a building's floor plan. Various dimensions and measurements are scattered throughout the drawing, such as '24M', '10M', '2500', '1500', '3450', '1800', '1400', '1900', and '5000'. Some areas are shaded with diagonal hatching. The blueprint is rendered in a light blue color on a white background.

PURPOSEFUL PRAYER

PRAYING INTENTIONALLY

STEPHEN G. DERGES

www.bitesizebeliefs.com

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BITESIZE BELIEFS

PURPOSEFUL PRAYER

PRAYING INTENTIONALLY





Dedication

The whole **'BITESIZE BELIEFS'** series is dedicated to my wonderful wife Rosalyn – thank you for believing in me, trusting in me and loving me. I know that I'm a better man with you than I would have been without you.

Acknowledgements

Many people have had a profound influence on my life and it's not possible to list everyone here. So, apologies if you are not specifically singled out – your reward will be in heaven!

Countless leaders, speakers, authors – many of whom I've not met personally – have inspired me and helped me develop and I'm profoundly grateful for the books, video and audio recordings and other materials they have shared.

I'm especially indebted to Carl Brettle, CEO of Neighbourhood Prayer Network (NPN), and his wife Rebekah who had the vision for NPN and launched the ministry in 2013 at Wembley Stadium.

Carl was the catalyst for me to re-edit the original editions of **'BITESIZE BELIEFS'** and make this publication a reality – I appreciate your advice and faith in me. Do check out NPN's vision and ministry

www.neighbourhoodprayer.net

Introduction

"**PURPOSEFUL PRAYER**" is one of a series of 'pamphlet type' books I've written over the years, to help people grow spiritually. It's not very long, not because I haven't much to say, but in an age of 'soundbites' and 'instant makeovers', I thought short, easy-to-read books would be more accessible. I have too many books on my shelves that I've started but not finished, so I've kept '**BITESIZE BELIEFS**' condensed, because I want them to be read.

Prayer is such a huge subject with countless sermons, books, articles and podcasts delving into its nuances, distinctions and the reasons we should pray. My experience as a church leader, is that very few people ask, '*why, or even when, should I pray?*', but rather, '*how, and for what, do I pray?*'"

I don't claim to be a prayer guru or an intercessory prayer warrior. Yes, I've battled over personal issues and had the privilege of sharing and ministering to many people. I've attended and contributed to numerous prayer initiatives, led an annual county-wide prayer breakfast and initiated and co-ordinated a weekly prayer in a local newspaper for over 13 years. And of course, I aim to spend time in personal prayer every day, although the length and quality of these times doesn't always match up to my intentions!

This book isn't intended to be the final authority on prayer – merely a starter to get us thinking and to put into practice Biblically-based principles.

Because I've found using Scripture as a basis for prayer a huge benefit, the primary focus of this short book is just that – how Scripture can be used to pray specifically, objectively, deliberately, effectively for practical, day-to-day life scenarios. Please have a Bible or Bible App – preferably with various translations – to hand to look up in full the verses.

And I have one request. Please don't just read this book – take the time to actually pray! To rephrase James 1:22 – "***Do not merely listen to*** (in this case 'read') ***the word... Do what it says***", i.e. put it into practice.

It's time to find a comfortable chair and sit back, with a cup of tea (or a favourite beverage). I hope we'll be stimulated to pray more – consistently and constantly – and so understand and implement God's purposes in our lives, for His glory.

Stephen G. Derges

PURPOSEFUL PRAYER

As we start, I'd like to provoke (in a good way) our understanding of prayer by sharing a few potentially challenging observations.

Firstly, let's recognise prayer doesn't change anything – it's the God of prayer Who transforms situations and people. When our prayers are aligned with His will, He is ***“able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us”***¹.

Secondly, our Heavenly Father already knows what we're going to pray about. Psalm 139:4 declares He's aware of our words before we speak or think them and even when we don't know what or how to pray, the Holy Spirit is able to intercede on our behalf.²

Thirdly, prayer evokes various emotions – guilt, if we feel we don't give our prayer-life the time and attention we believe it deserves; elation when we see prayer resulting in the positive outcome we desired, plus all the permutations in between. And please don't take anything I've written as being critical – my personal observations and experiences are designed to encourage us, not evoke a 'guilt-trip'.

Fourthly, why do we believe God only answers our prayers when we receive what we want? God always answers prayer in one of four ways: yes, no, wait, or there's a better, alternative, plan. One church leader, in a slightly different order, put it this way: No, Slow, Grow, Go.

All the above lead some people to ask, *‘why bother to pray?’* If God already has a plan and knows what we're going to ask, what's the point?

My response is simple: it's not about the words we pray or the process of prayer, it's about having a relationship with the God of the universe.

In any relationship there will be times of communication – both speaking and listening. The Bible's primary objective is recounting the incredible love-story of a passionate Heavenly Father's desire to have an intimate relationship with every person that has ever lived – for eternity.

Being in His presence is an amazing privilege and prayer is how we commune with God. He delights to share His heart with us as we share ours with Him. Because of what Jesus has done for us through His sacrificial death and resurrection, plus the imparting of His Holy Spirit, we're able to enter His presence ***“with confidence.”***³

And here's another important factor we need to consider.

Jeremiah 33:3 has been referred to as *‘God's telephone number’* or even *‘the emergency helpline’*. But let's not minimise prayer to one dimension.

The verse says:

“Call to me and I will answer you and tell you great and unsearchable things you do not know.”


Permit me to make two observations:

- Our Heavenly Father invites us to bring our concerns to Him – and promises a response when we're in trouble or an

¹ Ephesians 3:20

² Romans 8:6

³ Hebrews 10:19-20



Ephesians 3:20
*Now to him who
is able to do
immeasurably
more than all we
ask or imagine,
according to his
power that is at
work within us*

emergency arises. Probably many of us – like me – have uttered many ‘help’ prayers.

- In addition, He will enlighten us – give us wisdom and discernment – and reveal hidden truths. The Amplified Version talks about “**confined**” aspects that we “**cannot distinguish**”.

Often the problem is we don’t know what we don’t know. But, unlike us, God knows the future we don’t yet know and assures His insight is available when we seek Him and His purposes.

I briefly mentioned Psalm 139 earlier – do take a moment to read this seminal Scripture – and marvel that our days are known to God (verse 16). He’s aware of all we’re going through because He is with us, constantly.

KEEP ON PRAYING

Most Christians would undoubtedly agree it’s essential to incorporate prayer into our daily lives – it’s an intentional choice on our part.

1 Thessalonians 5:17, one of the shortest verses in the Bible, provides a succinct instruction: “**pray continually**”, but is that even possible? How can we pray if we’re engaged in another, valid, activity or even when we’re physically asleep?

Naturally, we need to concentrate on legitimate activities when we’re at work for example. But let’s not restrict our understanding of prayer as being a special activity, on special occasions or in prescribed venues.

I believe, Paul’s instruction is more about having a resolute commitment to prayer than following a legalistic or even

ritualistic approach. It's recognising we're in God's presence all the time, appreciating that He wants to have a dynamic, two-way relationship with us.

When I was employed in a financial services company, as I walked through the revolving doors into the office building, I would commit my day to the Lord. Even before I arrived, on my commute in the car, I'd ask the Holy Spirit to help me in my activities, speech and actions, that I'd be an ambassador for Him during the day. Naturally I didn't kneel whilst driving and I kept my eyes open as I prayed!

This wasn't just about speaking words, but of listening too, and on several occasions, I believe I *'heard from the Lord'* and received wisdom for the day ahead. What about prayer when we're asleep?

On five occasions in the first two chapters of Matthew's Gospel, we read about revelations people received whilst sleeping. Joseph received confirmation of Mary's Holy Spirit inspired conception and was warned to escape danger and where to live three times. The Magi also had a dream not to return to Jerusalem.

In other passages in the Bible, we read Peter, at Pentecost⁴, referred to the Joel 2:28 prophesy of *"old men dreaming dreams"*, plus a host of Old Testament and New Testament characters had dreams – Abraham; Jacob; Joseph; Daniel; Peter and Paul to name a few. I believe the Holy Spirit can *'speak'* to us through dreams when our eyes are closed, and in visions when our eyes are open.

This may also be a contentious question, but what difference would it make to



PRAY USING SCRIPTURE

our understanding of God's ways and purposes if, just before we go to sleep, we asked the Holy Spirit to speak to us subconsciously through our dreams? Remember, prayer involves a two-way conversation and dreams enable us to listen without speaking!

It's time for a **'SELAH MOMENT'**. We don't exactly know what **'Selah'** means but it's often used in the Psalms – maybe as a musical interlude – but as we don't know the melody, we'll use the Amplified Bible's translation: ***"pause and calmly realise what that means!"***

Let's take a moment to reflect on the following pertinent, and personal, questions:

• **How blinkered am I in my approach to prayer?**

Is it merely ritualistic and formal, or dynamic and an active part of daily life?

• **What preconceived ideas do I have about how to pray?**

Is prayer an optional extra, or an absolute necessity? Is prayer for everyone, or a selected few?

• **When do I pray?**

Is it in emergency situations only, or a constant interaction with God?

• **Why do I believe answered prayer only occurs when what I pray for actually happens?**

How would my understanding of prayer change if I realised every prayer is answered in some way, and that no prayer is ever wasted?

Do take some time to consider these questions before moving on.

God's Word isn't just a source of inspiration, it's also a *'manual and toolbox'* for Christian living. It provides instruction and guidance, motivating and enabling us to both understand and apply God's principles and values.

Over the years, using specific Bible passages has enabled me to focus my prayer-life on God's purposes rather than my personal desires. Declaring the Bible's Holy Spirit inspired promises and assurances invariably provides the confidence our prayers can be aligned to God's will.

I'd like to make four suggestions.

1. Literally pray prayers recorded in the Bible

Firstly, The Lord's Prayer recorded in Matthew 6:9-13, probably the most famous prayer in the Bible, has been prayed on millions of occasions in various scenarios by Christians plus those with no active faith.

Many commentators observe the words and phrases spoken by Jesus were intended to be a *'model prayer'* for His followers to adapt and use rather than being recited by rote.

The Lord's Prayer follows a specific order:

• Praising the Father's awesome majesty and declaring His greatness – ***"hallowed be Your name"***

• Inviting Him to achieve His purposes and plans – ***"Your Kingdom come, Your will done"***

• A section focusing on our needs and requests requesting daily sustenance and protection from temptation and evil

- A concluding declaration of His authority proclaiming the Kingdom's rule power and glory is eternal.

Whether used verbatim or adapted as a template for prayer, I'd encourage us to use it – regularly.

But if this is the only passage of the Bible we pray over ourselves or other people, we're missing out – even misusing – a huge resource. There's a wealth of ideas and approaches for scripturally based prayers we can use. A quick glance at the first chapter of the Apostle Paul's letter to the Philippians demonstrates his approach.

- It commences with Paul's normal greeting extending '*grace and peace*' to his readers – verse 2
- He tells them it's with joy that he remembers them – verse 3
- He commends them for being partners with him in the gospel and assures them God will enable their work to continue – verses 4-6
- He prays their love will grow and develop; their knowledge, insight and discernment will deepen; and will increasingly become pure and blameless, filled with the fruit of righteousness – verses 9-11.

It's an amazing prayer which, if we regularly prayed over one another, would make a huge difference to church relationships.

Secondly, we can pray Scripture using '*doxologies*' – the closing verses of some Epistles, e.g. 2 Corinthians 13:14 is often used as a benediction, as is Jude 24-25.

Thirdly, there are other Biblical prayers we can use, such as:

- **The priestly blessing given to Aaron and his descendants** – Numbers 6:24-26 – that is spoken over congregations or individuals.

- **Habakkuk's prayer for revival** – Habakkuk 3:2 – requesting God to act sovereignly.

- **Daniel's prayer of confession for his nation** – Daniel 9:3-19 – is suitable in times of uncertainty for nations in turmoil.

- **The prayer of Jabez** – 1 Chronicles 4:10 – invokes personal blessing and protection.

- **Paul's amazing prayer for the church at Ephesus** – Ephesians 3:14-21 – involves all three members of the Trinity

- Strengthened with power through the Holy Spirit
- Christ living in us by faith
- Filled to all the fullness of God the Father.

I've used these verses as a prayer of blessing in services as well as when ministering to individuals or couples, especially in a marriage or pre-marriage setting.

2. Find a 'life verse' to claim

Ask the Holy Spirit to illuminate a passage of Scripture that will have a special meaning.

I have two verses I regularly pray over my life:

- Philippians 3:16, "***Only let us live up to what we have already attained***" is one of the famous '*3:16*' verses of the Bible reminding me how much God has invested in me. I don't assume I'm a finished product – there's plenty of



'developmental potential' – yet praying this verse, I believe the Holy Spirit takes me at my word and empowers me to live with purpose and intentionality.

- The second half of Galatians 5:6 – ***“The only thing that counts is faith expressing itself in love”*** is a powerful reminder love is both a choice I make, and an action I take, which validates my desire to be a positive influence in every situation.

Faith without love is a derisory advertisement for Christianity, but so is love without faith – we need both. Jesus said we declare we’re His disciples as we exhibit love⁵ – to God and other people⁶.

3. Focus on specific Scriptural promises

Some theologians and scholars argue every promise in the Bible is appropriate for every believer throughout all time. Using Hebrews 13:8 – ***“Jesus Christ is***

the same yesterday and today and for ever” – as a proof text, backed up with 2 Corinthians 1:20, ***“For no matter how many promises God has made, they are ‘Yes’ in Christ”***, the logic is Paul only had Old Testament promises in mind (because he was still writing most of the New Testament) so everything already promised by God came to fulfilment in Jesus.

But it’s vital to consider Scripture in context – historically and culturally. Some verses are specific to a situation, person or people group or a precise time and place.

One specific promise is 1 Kings 9:5 where God confirms to Solomon the pledge He made to his father David, that his descendants would inherit the throne of Israel. It’s a conditional promise – verse 4 requires Solomon to faithfully follow



God's commands to walk in integrity and righteousness. Conditional promises usually contain the word 'if'.

Other promises are valid for everyone, everywhere at any time, although some of them could be conditional too.

Here are a few:

- ***"...the Lord is faithful, and he will strengthen you and protect you from the evil one"*** – 2 Thessalonians 3:3.

- 1 Corinthians 10:13 assures us God will stand by us, and be with us, through any, and every, situation. The Message Version provides this helpful interpretation, ***"... he'll (God) never let you be pushed past your limit; he'll always be there to help you come through it"***.

- 1 John 1:9 declares we can be released from the consequences of sin, ***"If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness"***.

- 2 Corinthians 9:8 confirms, ***"God is able to bless you abundantly, so that in all things at all times, having all that you need, you will abound in every good work"***.

- Isaiah 26:3 proclaims we can find inner peace when in turmoil because, ***"You will keep in perfect peace those whose minds are steadfast because they trust in you."***

It's vital though to distinguish between **Biblical promises** and **Biblical principles**. Proverbs 22:6 is a wise Biblical principle, not a cast-iron guarantee the children of Christian parents will automatically become Jesus-followers. Yes, it is

imperative Christian parents pray for their children but everyone, whatever age they are, has the liberty (free will) to choose how, when and what to believe.

And let's be careful about our **motives in prayer**. James 4:2b reminds us that we don't receive because we don't ask God, but the first part of James 4:3 says, ***"When you ask, you do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives"***.

Rather than pandering to our needs and wants, our focus should be on God's desires. Simply praying the same way as Jesus did in Gethsemane, ***"... not my will, but yours be done"*** (Luke 22:42), is a good starting point.

And finally, the second half of Psalm 91:4 (NLT) says, ***"His faithful promises are your armour and protection"*** – claim them!

Let's take another **'SELAH MOMENT'** here. These aren't just thought-provoking questions; they're designed to help us assess how knowing what the Bible says helps us pray strategically.

- **Has my prayer life been restricted by not using Scripture?**

What Bible verses have we prayed over our life or for other people? Which promises have I *'taken hold of'* and claimed? It may be in the areas of personal direction, relationships, health, finances or seeking God's will for others. The Bible has plenty of promises and principles in these aspects.

- **Which 'life verse(s)' have directed my personal spiritual growth?**

Spend some time asking the Holy Spirit to illuminate a relevant verse or passage of Scripture. Remember the authors of the Bible were inspired by the Holy Spirit and He can spotlight a specific section of His Word to impact, direct and motivate us.

5 John 13:35

6 Matthew 22:37-40

- **Praying Scripture is an essential spiritual weapon!**

Let's face it – we're in a battle.

Satan will use every tactic he has at his disposal to deflect, deter and defeat us from our God-given destiny. During the temptation in the wilderness (Matthew 4 and Luke 4) Jesus quoted Scripture to counter the enticements put to Him, yet Satan responded using Psalm 91 to try and outmanoeuvre (unsuccessfully) Jesus. Satan knows Scripture and his minions are described as being *“ferocious wolves”*⁷ disguised as sheep who *“...also masquerade as servants of righteousness”*⁸.

We need to be on our guard. Knowing the content and context of Scripture is vital as Paul affirms to his mentee Timothy, *“Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a worker who does not need to be ashamed and who correctly handles the word of truth”*⁹.

Ephesians 6:10-18 instructs us to be *“strong in the Lord and His mighty power”* and outlines the armour available to us to stand against the Devil's schemes and evil spiritual forces.

Verse 18 says, *“...pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests. With this in mind, be alert and always keep on praying for all the Lord's people.”*

If we want to live victoriously and positively impact those around us, we need to know and apply God Word to every aspect of our lives.

Moving on, here's the final way I want to

mention to pray Scripture:

4. Have an 'aide memoire'

One example is to use the nine letters of the word 'scripture' as an acrostic in praying to develop personal qualities such as:

Self-discipline: *“For God did not give us a spirit of timidity, but a spirit of power, of love and of self-discipline”* – 2 Timothy 1:7.

Compassion: *“As a father has compassion on his children, so the LORD has compassion on those who fear him”* – Psalm 103:13.

Righteousness: *“God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God”* – 2 Corinthians 5:21.

Integrity: *“May integrity and honesty protect me, for I put my hope in you”* – Psalm 25:21 (NLT).

Patience: *“Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love”* – Ephesians 4:2.

Thankfulness: *“Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, since as members of one body you were called to peace. And be thankful”* – Colossians 3:15.

Unity: *“Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace”* – Ephesians 4:3.

Revelation: *“I keep asking that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the glorious Father, may give you the Spirit of wisdom and revelation, so that you may know him better”* – Ephesians 1:17.

Endurance: pray for the ability to *“run with perseverance the race marked out for us”* – Hebrews 12:2.

⁷ Matthew 7:15

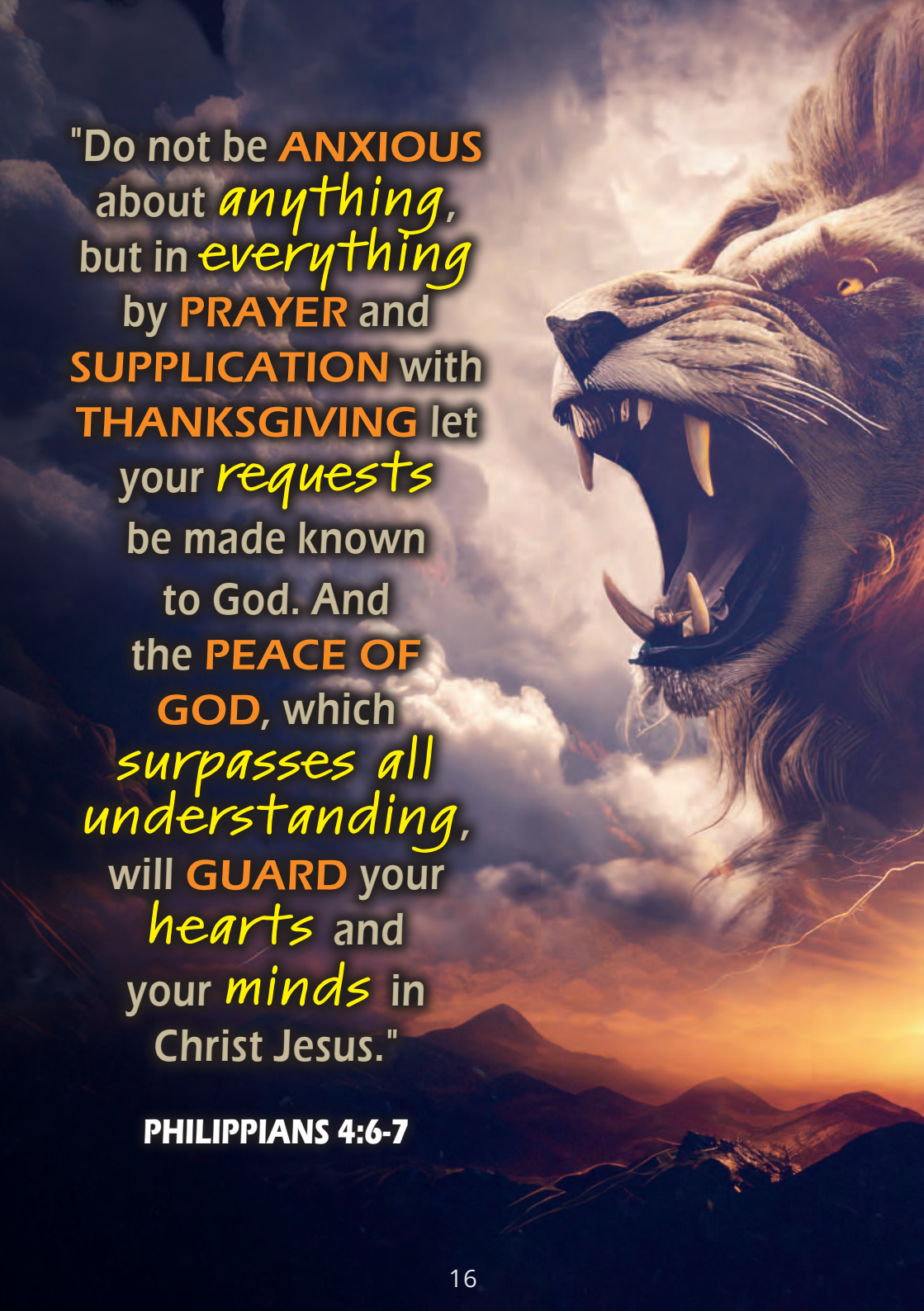
⁸ 2 Corinthians 11:14-15

⁹ 2 Timothy 2:15

...continued on page 18...

SCRIPTURE





"Do not be **ANXIOUS**
about *anything*,
but in *everything*
by **PRAYER** and
SUPPLICATION with
THANKSGIVING let
your *requests*
be made known
to God. And
the **PEACE OF**
GOD, which
surpasses all
understanding,
will **GUARD** your
hearts and
your *minds* in
Christ Jesus."

PHILIPPIANS 4:6-7



As appropriate, include someone's personal name or change 'we' to 'I', 'us' to 'me' or 'your' to 'our' etc.

Be inventive and try it – you'll find it will make a positive difference to your prayer life!

PRAY IN, AND WITH, FAITH

Most of us have probably experienced other people tell us when God is seemingly deaf to our petitions that all we need is '*more faith*', but that just leads me to ask even more questions such as:

- How can you have '*more faith*' when Jesus said all that's required to move a mountain is an amount the size of a mustard seed¹⁰?
- What different types of '*more faith*' are there?
- Whose '*more faith*' is necessary?

- And what's the difference between faith and wishful thinking?

There's not enough space to answer these questions here, but I'd like to share three '*prayer faith keys*'.

1. Faith and Obedience are imperative

Personally, I don't believe God is vindictive – ever! Yes, He's just, He's righteous and He's holy, but He doesn't sulk and refuse to listen to our prayers even when we deliberately disobey Him through wilful sin or independence. However, we know righteousness is God's '*gold standard*' – that's why obedience to His word is essential.

When we read in James 5:16 "***confess our sins to one another***", it's essential we take note and obey. The verse also goes on to say, "***the prayer of a righteous person is powerful and effective***".

The preceding verse, James 5:15, says

Matthew 17:20





prayer *"offered in faith"* will restore those who are ill, so I'd like to highlight a few thoughts about confession.

It's imperative that we acknowledge and admit the error of our ways. As soon as we are aware we've committed a sin – of omission or commission – it's essential to put it right with God and with the person(s) concerned as soon as practicable.

Psalm 51 contains some extremely powerful verses. Following his adultery with Bathsheba and the subsequent assassination of her husband Uriah, the prophet Nathan takes King David to task.

David responds in Psalm 51:1-2, praying: *"Have mercy on me, O God, according to your unfailing love; according to*

your great compassion blot out my transgressions. Wash away all my iniquity and cleanse me from my sin."

In verse 4 he continues: *"Against you, you only, have I sinned and done what is evil in your sight."* I don't believe David is minimising the wrong caused to Bathsheba – and especially to Uriah. He's recognising that ultimately God forgives our sins. But, and here's the difficult part, according to James we need to confess our sins to *"one another"*.

If we want to restore relationships and effect reconciliation, two-dimensional confession is required – vertically to God and horizontally to anyone we've hurt.

Now that's fine when the individual we need to confess to is available – we can go direct in repentance and apologise in person as Jesus instructed in Matthew 5:23-24.

However, sometimes it's not possible to

¹⁰ Matthew 17:20

confess personally, e.g. when somebody has passed away. However, it may still be appropriate to 'come clean' to a relative of the person concerned or to someone totally unconnected.

But a couple of words of warning.

- Firstly, someone related, e.g. a spouse or child, may become distraught if a bombshell is dropped in their lap. Any approach should be handled with extreme care.
- Secondly, if involving someone else outside of the situation, ensure they are totally trustworthy. Too many people have been damaged by trusting someone who divulges (or is that gossips?) details that weren't for public consumption. Always choose someone who can bring insight and wisdom.

Ultimately though, we need to confess to our Heavenly Father, so let's remind ourselves again of 1 John 1:9 - *"If we*



confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness."

Let's allow the truth of these words settle for a moment and wash over us.

Another verse is particularly pertinent to husbands.

In 1 Peter 3:7, the apostle instructs husbands to treat their wives considerately, with respect, so that nothing will hinder their prayers.

The Bible is clear about husbands' responsibilities to their wives:

- Ephesians 5:25, 28 & 33 talk about sacrificial love.
- Ephesians 5:31 and Hebrews 13:4 both give clear instructions about faithfulness.
- The Amplified Version of Colossians 3:19 says: *"Husbands, love your wives [with an affectionate, sympathetic, selfless love that always seeks the best for them] and do not be embittered or resentful toward them."*

Obedience to these Biblical instructions will not only enhance a marriage but will also mean a husband's prayers won't be impeded.

Let's move on to the second 'faith prayer key'.

2. Faith and Confidence are complementary

Hebrews 4:16 instructs us to *"approach God's throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need"* and 1 John 5:14 says, *"This is the confidence we have in approaching God: that if we ask anything according to his will, he hears us"*.

Hebrews 11:1 defines faith for us: *"Faith*



HEBREWS 11:1

*Faith is confidence
in what we hope
for and assurance
about what we do
not see.*

is confidence in what we hope for and assurance about what we do not see."

The Living Bible paraphrases this verse: *"What is faith? It is the confident assurance that something we want is going to happen. It is the certainty that what we hope for is waiting for us, even though we cannot see it up ahead."*

The 'confidence' these verses talk about has nothing to do with our own abilities, talents, position or any other facet of our personality or character. Rather it's knowing:

- Access to our Heavenly Father is

dependent on what Jesus has done for us: *"Now all of us can come to the Father through the same Holy Spirit because of what Christ has done for us"*¹¹

- When we ask in accordance with His will and purposes, all the Father's "good gifts" for us are made available¹²
- In Christ we are loved unconditionally, valued, cherished; we have been forgiven, accepted, made righteous, redeemed.

Our Heavenly Father's plan and purpose for our lives, which His Holy Spirit empowers us to achieve, is released when we're willing to put our faith and trust – our confidence – in Him.

¹¹ Ephesians 2:18 (NLT)

¹² Luke 11:13



"...let us draw near to God with a sincere heart
and with the full assurance that faith brings..."

HEBREWS 10:22

Let's take another 'SELAH MOMENT'.

- How confident are we that we're acceptable to, and accepted by, God?
- What makes us doubt His love and approval?
- Why do we sometimes think we'll never be 'good enough' for God?

As we ponder these questions here are a couple of Scriptures that may assist in building our confidence and which can be used as prayers.

In the context of explaining Jesus has made a way for us to come to God, Hebrews 10:22 says, ***"... let us draw near to God with a sincere heart and with the full assurance that faith brings..."***

There are a couple of conditions here – ***"sincere heart"*** and ***"full assurance"***, i.e. honest, genuine, true, unwavering certainty, total confidence and conviction. We can be assured that, through Jesus, we have the legal right to be in God's presence.

Secondly, the Amplified Version of Philippians 1:6 says: ***"I am convinced and confident of this very thing, that He who has begun a good work in you will [continue to] perfect and complete it until the day of Christ Jesus [the time of His return]."***

As long as we have breath in our bodies, we can be used by the Holy Spirit to accomplish God's purposes. Age shouldn't be a barrier – even at 85 years old, Caleb was still fighting for his allotted inheritance in the Promised Land¹³. Why? In Numbers 14:24 God says, ***"... my servant Caleb has a different spirit and follows me wholeheartedly."***



What an endorsement!

There's no retirement in God's Kingdom – remember we have an eternity to worship and serve Him, as well as rule and reign.

Here's our third 'prayer faith key'...

3. Faith and Doubt are incongruous

Let's take a few moments to explore faith, doubt and prayer.

In a seminal passage, James 1:5-8 reminds us that when we pray, we must ask and believe in faith and not doubt.

It's very possible, even allowing for the Jeremiah 33:3 passage we considered earlier, that we don't always fully understand God's design for our lives. Our 'super spiritual' response is that we want God's will to be done, but sometimes we end up in a potential 'no-win situation' where we begin to doubt whether anything we pray can, or will, happen. This can be where the issue of 'wishful thinking' comes in and James describes the ultimate result as confusion and double mindedness.

We all face storms in our lives and James 1:6 provides a graphic illustration,

¹³ Joshua 14:6-15

portraying doubt to being tossed around by strong winds with huge waves trying to engulf us. Thankfully I've never experienced being on a boat in a 'perfect storm' but I can imagine, and even visualise, how the Disciples must have felt when caught in a storm on the Sea of Galilee whilst Jesus was asleep in the boat. After calming the raging winds and waves, Jesus asks the Disciples, *"Where is your faith?"*¹⁴.

I wonder what the Disciples expected Jesus to do in the circumstances. They probably hoped Jesus would calm the storm but did they honestly believe He would, and could? Was it just 'wishful thinking' – 'a hope and a prayer' situation? Or maybe that should read 'a prayer and a hope'.

There may be a whole host of circumstances where we think, *"I really wish I could believe and not doubt."* But the truth is, we can – it's possible! Our Heavenly Father wouldn't tell us to have faith in Him, to believe and trust Him, if it wasn't possible for us to accomplish it.

So how do we minimise doubt and live in, and by, faith? This is where the choices we make in life are so significant. Do we base the decisions we make on the so-called 'facts' we see around us, or do we trust a sovereign God who is aware of every scenario we're going through?

Here are a couple of Scriptures I hope will help.

Hebrews 11:6 (AMPC) says: *"But without faith it is impossible to [walk with God and] please Him, for whoever comes [near] to God must [necessarily] believe that God exists and that He rewards*

those who [earnestly and diligently] seek Him."

We also read in Romans 10:17 (NKJV): *"Faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God."*

Notice the essential elements of faith involve:

- Believing God exists
- That He rewards everyone who seeks Him
- Faith results from hearing – specifically from God's word.

This is vitally important, which is why knowing Scripture and using it in prayer is paramount. So often our choices are based on our feelings and the emotions surrounding our circumstances – do I feel good or bad today? I don't want to minimise either feelings or emotions, both are important, but faith rests on believing two vital truths:

- God is always on our side working out His purposes for our good (Romans 8:28). Note there are two conditions – that we love God and that we're doing His will.
- We can stand on His promises because He is faithful and true (Psalm 33:4).

He is the unchanging God – He's not fazed by variable contexts or conditions – so can be fully trusted. James 1:17 says: *"Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of the heavenly lights, who does not change like shifting shadows."*

The Apostle Peter links these two themes when he repeats inspirational words from Isaiah 40:6-8 and then adds, in 1 Peter 1:25 – *"... the word of the Lord endures for ever. And this is the word that was preached to you."*

¹⁴ Luke 4:25



God's word stands perpetually – He is unchanging, faithful and true therefore He can be trusted and believed.

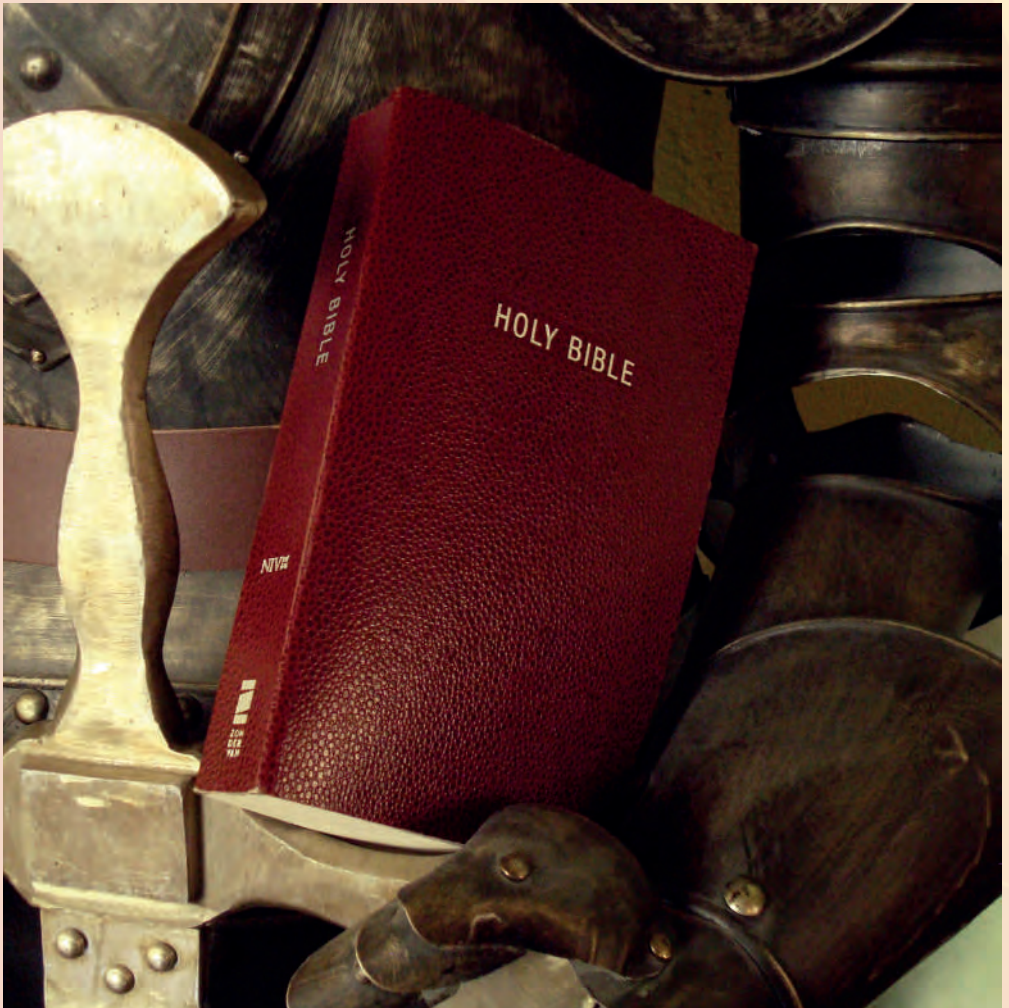
Earlier I asked the question, '*how do we minimise doubt and live in and by faith*'. I used the word '*minimise*' on purpose because I believe there's a place for doubt in our lives.

It's not sinful to question why and what we believe or God's plans for our lives. There are plenty of people in the Bible who did just that. Moses and Gideon did

and even Mary questioned Archangel Gabriel how it could be possible for her, as a virgin, to have a baby.

But, as always, our motives and attitudes are crucial. Once the three characters mentioned above were assured of God's specific will, they were totally obedient in carrying it out.

Faith always involves an element of risk which creates uncertainty when we don't know exactly what is going to happen or how things will turn out. But



the key is not to let our circumstances, our feelings and emotions, even those of other people or our past experiences, limit our belief and trust in a supernatural God who wants to have an intimate relationship with us.

We have the choice to live in faith or succumb to doubt but let's remind ourselves – faith and doubt are incompatible and we are urged to prayer in faith and with confidence.

Before we come to the end of this section, there are a couple of additional Scriptures to consider.

In Ephesians 6:10-18 we're exhorted ***"to put on the full armour of God"*** to enable us to ***"stand firm"***.

I'm not going to focus on each of the pieces of armour and their purposes, but instead concentrate on verse 16: ***"... take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one."***

Doubt is a ***"flaming arrow"*** which will cause severe damage unless we thwart its power. We use the shield of faith to dispel any reservations we may have about the integrity of God's character or His word, and to refute any lies or deception aimed at bringing disunity or conflict.

And please notice the word ***"you"*** – it's up to us to ***"take up"*** and ***"extinguish"*** the attack against us. We have been provided with a ***"shield of faith"*** but it's our choice and responsibility to use it.

Why not take a moment to read the whole of the Ephesians 6:10-18 passage? There's an important link I'd like us to see.

Verse 18 – which focuses on prayer – is in most versions of the Bible separated from the ***"whole armour"*** verses, although the original Greek doesn't have this disconnection.

Prayer undergirds the whole of Paul's case for protecting ourselves against any attack levelled against us. Let's ***"pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests"***.

The second Scripture is one which I find absolutely crucial in my life – Romans 8:26-27 (TLB) which says: ***"And in the same way – by our faith – the Holy Spirit helps us with our daily problems and in our praying. For we don't even know what we should pray for nor how to pray as we should, but the Holy Spirit prays for us with such feeling that it cannot be expressed in words. And the Father who knows all hearts knows, of course, what the Spirit is saying as he pleads for us in harmony with God's own will."***

Personally, I find ***'praying in the Spirit'*** especially powerful when I don't know exactly what to ask for. I usually picture the person or situation in my mind and then pour out my heart, believing the Holy Spirit will interpret my desires and intercede on my behalf. By, and in faith, I work on the basis the Holy Spirit always knows what the Father's will is, so when I don't, He will petition on my behalf.

Earlier I mentioned Jesus said a mustard seed sized amount of faith was all that would be required to move a mountain. In Mark's account of this interaction with the Disciples, Jesus tells them to ***"Have faith in God"*** and not ***"...doubt in their heart."***¹⁵

Let's read and study the Bible, learn from the experiences of God's people and how they overcame the same kind

¹⁵ Mark 11:22-23

of issues we face.

And let's apply these three vital *prayer faith keys*:

- Obedience
- Confidence
- Belief – rather than doubt.

As we do our faith will grow and we'll see God's purposes fulfilled.

AND FINALLY

Thanks for getting this far – I'm assuming you haven't skipped the previous pages and just thumbed through to the end!

There are a couple of last points I'd like to make.

Firstly, 2 Peter 1:3 says: ***"His divine power has given us everything we need for life and godliness through our knowledge of him who called us by his own glory and goodness."***

Notice it's ***"divine power"*** – not human power – meaning it's limitless, inexhaustible, infinite and Romans 8:11



tells us it's the same power that raised Jesus from death. Imagine that – God's divine power working in, and through, us!

Secondly, let's remind ourselves of 1 John 5:14: ***"This is the confidence we have in approaching God: that if we ask anything according to his will, he hears us."***

There are two key elements to consider.

1. Prayer depends on understanding God's will and praying in line with it. Hopefully we've explored ways in which this can be achieved.

2. Secondly, it's crucial to recognise there's always strength and security in numbers. I'd like to accentuate prayer is more about *'we'* than *'me'* – its plural not singular. My plea is we ensure we have dependable people around us who will intercede on our behalf and are with us for the long haul. We'll benefit from their wisdom and experience and from the tough times they've been through. As a result, together we'll discern more accurately what the Holy Spirit is saying, enabling us to pray accordingly.

On that basis, I'd like to pray for us all.

"Heavenly Father, help us today to use all You have provided to accomplish the good works You prepared in advance for us to do.¹⁶ Enable us to claim the promises of Your Word, apply them to our lives and be a blessing to others. Reveal to us how every experience and situation we've faced and overcome, can be used to positively benefit the people around us. We ask this for Your glory and honour. Amen."

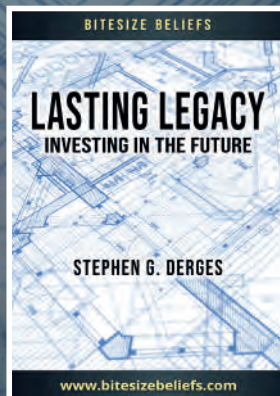
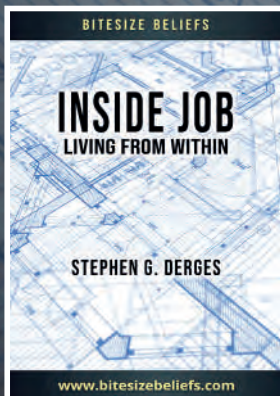
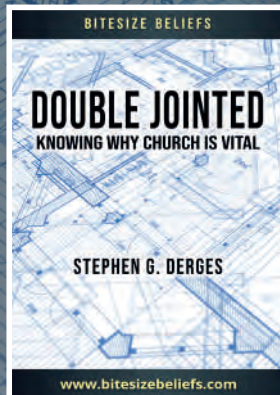
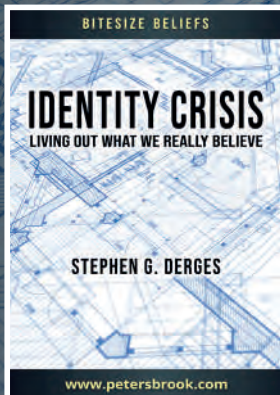
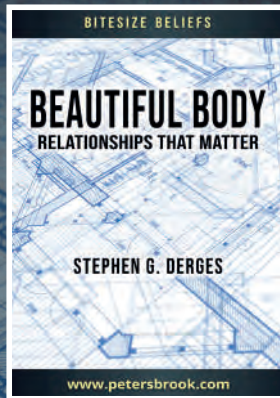
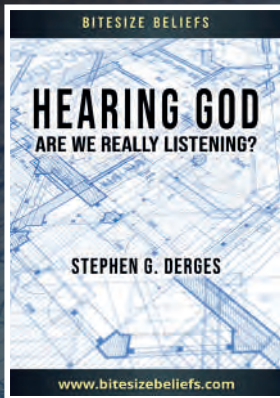
Remember we're instructed to ***"pray continually"*** – let's go for it!

¹⁶ Ephesians 2:10

**“THIS IS THE
CONFIDENCE
WE HAVE IN
APPROACHING
GOD: THAT
IF WE ASK
ANYTHING
ACCORDING TO
HIS WILL, HE
HEARS US.”**

John 5:14

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I guess very few of us would claim our prayer life is as we'd like it to be and many of us have hang-ups about when, where and for how long we should pray.

Prayer isn't a 'blank cheque' – God has ordained certain principles we should take on board. 'PURPOSEFUL PRAYER' isn't designed to be an exposition on why prayer is essential in a Christian's life. Its aim is to provide helpful hints and tips designed to enhance how, and for what, we pray.

This accessible resource looks specifically at how using Scripture in prayer helps navigate life's demanding and ever-changing challenges. There's a massive difference between someone who knows about prayer and someone who actually prays!

Committing our 'ways and days' to God in prayer is an amazing privilege. If we consciously took the time to do so, it would make an amazing difference to our lives and those of the people with whom we interact.



ABOUT THE AUTHOR...

Stephen Derges was previously Pastor of a Baptist Church and now a Trustee focused on leading an Independent Evangelical church in Devon.

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