

Chapter 1

Discovering the Real X-Factor

In This Chapter

- ▶ Defining prayer
 - ▶ Recognizing the benefits of prayer
 - ▶ Looking at examples of the power of prayer throughout history
 - ▶ Praying with the right attitude
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Can you go anywhere these days without seeing someone talking on a cell phone? Take a look around, and you'll see happy "cellulites" walking down the street, driving a car, or watching a movie. Even the church is not immune — on more than one occasion I've heard a cell phone ring in the middle of a service!

In this age of wireless communication, there are virtually no barriers to chatting with a friend on the phone, no matter where you are or what you're doing. In fact, during a recent car trip across the United States, I was amazed to find my cell phone fully usable in the most remote and barren spots of the Nevada desert.

Prayer has many similarities to this wireless revolution; you can dial up God and talk as long as you like anytime, anywhere. At some point, nearly everyone turns to prayer in such a way — from the most devoted believers to the wildest prodigals. Some do so at the top of each morning, while others wait until they're at the top of a cliff, perilously close to the edge.

Prayer is the most universal practice in all of religion. A Christian, a Hindu, a Muslim, and a Buddhist may not agree on the purpose of prayer or to whom one should pray, but they do all agree on the need for prayer. The reason for this instinctive drive to pray must be that, in creating humans, God embedded something like a cellular phone in you and me that is equipped with an unlimited calling plan to him (weekends and nights free, of course). Just as I naturally turn to my wireless device to call my wife in times of need and joy on the road, so do I intuitively turn to God during key times in my life.

The vast majority of both adults and teens in the United States pray during a typical week and believe that their prayers have an impact on what happens in their lives (Barna Research). However, although most Americans practice prayer, they're not necessarily confident about how to pray or how prayer works. What's more, don't go asking one of them to pray in public, because you're likely to get an evasive answer or see them sprinting frantically in the other direction. (See Chapter 15 for more on praying in public.)

If you're in their camp and prayer remains somewhat elusive to you, be assured that you're in good company. Even the most saintly of people, be it evangelist Billy Graham, the pope, or my mother, never have it fully mastered. In fact, prayer is something akin to a greased pig at a county fair — often pursued, but rarely grasped.

As you read *Christian Prayer For Dummies*, think of this book as your lasso for that hard-to-catch concept. In these pages, you discover how to throw the rope and harness prayer: You find out what prayer is and isn't and how prayer can benefit, challenge, equip, and, above all, transform your life. However, a word of caution: After you lasso it, I can't promise that prayer won't still pull you along for a ride as you hold on for dear life. But such is the nature of this wonderfully mysterious thing called prayer.

Having a Chat with God



Prayer is simply communicating with God. There's nothing magical at all about Christian prayer; it's matter of fact. This book covers dozens of prayer methods and techniques, but don't confuse these with the basic truth that prayer is simply an open invitation to talk to God.

However, Christian prayer is more than just telling God your list of requests and expecting him to answer your prayers like he's some kind of cosmic vending machine. Yes, prayer is a way to share with God what's on your mind. But even more important, it's a way to get to know God and what he wants to do in your life and in the world. (Chapters 16, 17, and 18, which together form the heart of this book, focus on these critical issues.)

When you study the Bible, you find people praying left and right, but the subject of prayer itself is actually rarely addressed. I suppose that's not too surprising when you consider that *Basketball For Dummies* probably doesn't spend too much time talking about pumping up the ball with air. A filled ball is essential to playing basketball, but it's also so obvious that nothing need be said about it. In the same way, prayer, or talking with God, is so natural that it's a given in the Bible.



Statistically speaking

Surveys of U.S. adults and teenagers by Barna Research Ltd. from 1991–2001 revealed the following statistics about people's prayer habits:

Who prays?

- ✔ 82 percent of adults and 89 percent of teenagers pray in a normal week.
- ✔ 88 percent of women and 75 percent of men pray in a typical week.
- ✔ People living in the South and Midwest pray more than those living in the West and Northeast (around 86 percent to 76 percent, respectively).
- ✔ 96 percent of born-again Christians pray weekly, while 72 percent of people not describing themselves as born again pray on a weekly basis.

What do people pray about?

- ✔ 95 percent of adults thank God for what he has done in their lives.
- ✔ 76 percent ask for forgiveness for specific sins.
- ✔ 67 percent spend time in prayer worshipping God by praising his superior attributes.

- ✔ 61 percent ask for help for specific needs.
- ✔ 47 percent are silent during prayer to listen for God.

What do people believe?

- ✔ 89 percent of adults believe "there is a god who watches over you and answers your prayers."
- ✔ 82 percent of people believe that prayer can change what happens in a person's life.

When and how much do people pray?

- ✔ An average prayer lasts just under five minutes.
- ✔ 52 percent of people who pray do so several times a day.
- ✔ 37 percent of people say they pray once a day.
- ✔ 21 percent have extended prayer time with other family members (25 percent among Protestants and 13 percent among Catholics).
- ✔ 33 percent of adults regularly participate in a prayer group or other meeting that has a focus on prayer.

Although the Bible doesn't talk specifically about prayer methods, you do notice that the manner in which people prayed changed through the ages. In the earliest of times, people like Adam, Noah, and Abraham prayed in a very familiar and direct manner to God and tended to focus on the practicalities of life. But from the time of Moses through the rest of the Old Testament period, prayers tended to be more formal and focus less on personal needs and more on national issues related to the Israelites.



Christian prayer has its origins in the prayers of Jesus, particularly the Lord's Prayer (which I cover in detail in Chapter 5). Christian prayer in the New Testament becomes more focused on the spiritual needs of individuals, such as the cleansing of sins, physical healing, and equipping of individuals with spiritual qualities to live like Christ. Prayer in the New Testament is also quite intimate and even goes so far as to tell you to call God your Daddy. (See Chapter 3 for details on this topic.)

Nowhere does the Bible list any specific rules on how to pray. Protestant, Catholic, and Orthodox Christians each have their own distinct traditions of prayer. The refreshing and liberating fact is that God is not much concerned with how you pray; he's more interested in what you pray about and what your attitude is while you pray (see Chapter 6).

Realizing What's So Good about Prayer Anyway

Our society is a no-nonsense one — just give me the facts. So before diving into how to pray, I want to discuss why prayer is advantageous and how it can benefit you.



Having prayer in your life offers five distinct advantages:

- ✓ **Prayer changes your circumstances.** Certainly the most obvious benefit to prayer is that prayer changes things. After all, if prayer never made any difference, why do it? The Bible makes it clear that when you pray, things change: “Everyone who asks receives,” said Jesus in Matthew 7:8, while James 4:2 adds the contrary message as well: “You don't have, because you don't ask.”

The more I discover about God, the more I agree with Scottish pastor and author Oswald Chambers, who said, “We have a God who engineers circumstances.” God is engaged and involved in the world, even when you and I relegate his interventions to being mere “coincidences.”



Sadly, one of the biggest hindrances to believing that prayer changes circumstances is your short-term memory. Even after people see God answer a prayer definitively, they tend to forget about his work the next time they have a pressing need. One way to combat this attention deficit is to write down your prayer requests and answers, a topic I talk about further in Chapter 9.

- ✔ **Prayer mends relationships.** You can look at prayer as the following:
- **A healing salve that you can apply to the wounds of torn and broken relationships:** When you pray, you open yourself up to God and allow him to work in the situation you're praying about. (See Chapter 13 to find out how prayer can strengthen family and marriage relationships.)
 - **A pride buster:** You humble yourself to God when you pray, saying in effect, "I need your help because I can't solve the situation by myself." This attitude of humility can then spill over and make it easier to deal with the other party and be open to a resolution.
 - **Something that pulls people together as they mutually submit to a higher authority:** So if you and the other party are willing to pray together about the situation, the two of you can take a big step toward breaking down a major barrier to resolving the problem.

Finally, even when the other party has hardened his heart about coming to a resolution, prayer gives you a listener who knows all about your situation and your frustration and can empathize with you.

- ✔ **Prayer helps you physically.** Prayer can make a tangible difference in your physical health. The Bible offers many examples of God's healing of people's physical ailments when people prayed, and I often hear of present-day stories of healing. Over the past 20 years, these accounts are being backed up with medical research studies on the effectiveness of prayer on physical healing, suggesting that prayer can indeed have a positive impact on those people who are being prayed for. (See Chapter 20 for more on physical healing prayer.)

What if?

Don't you wonder why God doesn't answer 100 percent of the prayers in the manner you and I expect? After all, wouldn't that take all the "ifs" away about God, causing everyone to believe? Ironically, even if the Lord answered everyone's prayers in spectacular and miraculous ways, it probably wouldn't change most people's minds

about God. In Jesus' day, for example, when he performed miracles, those supernatural events tended to make his followers more committed to him and those against him angrier at him. Check out Chapter 18 for more about prayers that aren't answered like you expect.



Show me the data

Once viewed skeptically by doctors, prayer is becoming more valued by many in the medical community. Several scientific studies over the past two decades give credence to what Christians have been saying for 2,000 years: God heals people. Here are a few noteworthy examples:

- ✔ Two studies on heart patients showed impressive results. In the first, patients who received an angioplasty procedure and were prayed for suffered much fewer complications than those who were not. In the second, prayed-for heart patients had fewer problems and shorter hospital stays. (For more information about these studies, see the November 2001 issue of *American Heart Journal* and the May 1999 issue of *Internal Medicine*.)
- ✔ A fertilization study found a doubling of in vitro pregnancies among women who were prayed for by others. The women involved didn't know that they were being prayed for, so the results can't be attributed to psychological factors. (The September 2001 issue of *The Journal of Reproductive Medicine* has more on this study.)
- ✔ Perhaps the best-known study was one conducted in the late 1980s by Dr. Randolph Byrd, who looked at the impact of Judeo-Christian prayer on nearly 400 heart attack patients. Half of those patients were prayed for by groups around the country, resulting in fewer deaths, faster recovery, and fewer complications. However, other aspects of

the study were far less clear, because not all factors were statistically different, allowing critics to question the true effectiveness of the study. (You can read about this in the July 1988 issue of *Southern Medical Journal*.)

However, when you hear about scientific studies on the effectiveness of prayer, take them with a grain of salt, for two reasons:

- ✔ Prayer isn't a simple cause-and-effect equation. Because God does answer prayers, healing may take place as a result of the prayers in these studies, but it will not be the case 100 percent of the time. Your own experiences bear that out—sometimes God heals, but sometimes he chooses not to answer your prayers in that way. As you discover in Chapter 18 and 20, God has reasons that go beyond that particular person's well-being when it comes to healing or choosing not to heal someone.
- ✔ God is not a pawn to be manipulated. I'm sure that he must laugh at some of the attempts humans make in measuring his involvement in the world. God can do what he pleases and so can influence the results of the research as much or as little as he pleases.

However, in spite of these caveats, the studies being conducted by researchers today continue to indicate that prayer makes a difference in the physical recovery of the patients being prayed for.

- ✔ **Prayer helps you emotionally.** When you think of healing, physical healing may be the first thing that comes to mind. But the Gospels give many examples of Jesus' emotional and spiritual healing of people.

Many people today live with painful memories from the past that can enslave and rule their lives, even in ways that they don't consciously

realize. Through prayer, God can free you from the bondage of memories and past sin and provide a release in such a way that they no longer become a dominating force in your life. (See Chapter 12 for ways around emotional and spiritual barriers to prayer.)

- ✓ **Prayer changes you.** Perhaps the greatest irony of prayer is that when you're truly open to God's answer, you — not the circumstance — are often what changes. Just as I'm discovering that God does engineer circumstances, he also uses circumstances to change me. Although this discovery may be a surprise, it really shouldn't be that unexpected. The God of the Bible makes it clear that he is most interested in how people are being transformed on the inside, because those changes are eternal.

Seeing How Prayer Works: Past, Present, and Future

Although “X-factor” is technically a term that describes an arcane economic principle, it has become a popular way to describe the hidden key or mysterious ingredient that, when added to the mix, makes a difference. A quick search on the Web shows you that so many people use the term X-factor these days to describe what they're doing, whether it's a golf swing, a diet plan, a software product, or a comic book character. Indeed, the expression is a great marketing device: People yearn for a missing piece that will help solve their problems.

In contrast to these imitators, prayer has been the *real* X-factor throughout history, from Adam's first breath down through this digital, high-tech age. Because of prayer, God has gotten many a person out of a fix or saved them from certain danger. For reasons I explain in Chapter 16, God does not *always* choose to answer prayers in the way you or I may want or expect. However, you can find countless examples of times when God's explicit response to a specific prayer proved to be the critical agent of change used to turn circumstances on a dime. Consider a handful of remarkable examples from Biblical, historical, and modern times. (See Chapter 20 for more real-life examples of physical healing and turn to Chapter 18 for stories of when God chooses not to answer prayers in the manner that you or I expect.)

A vintage Hollywood story: How Esther saved the Israelites

The Book of Esther in the Old Testament tells the gripping story of how a young Jewish girl named Esther came to marry King Xerxes and then served as queen of Persia. Like something out of a Hollywood movie, Esther's charmed life as a queen turned sour when Haman, a power-hungry advisor to the king, felt that Esther's father, Mordecai, had slighted him. Turning a personal

vendetta into an ethnic-cleansing scheme, Haman decided to trick Xerxes into doing away with all the Jewish people in the kingdom. But before Haman could carry out this evil plan, Mordecai learned of it and promptly appealed to Esther to stop the impending massacre.

Esther's ability to change the situation, however, was easier said than done. You see, Persia wasn't exactly a politically correct society at that time, as evidenced by the fact that the queen wasn't permitted to approach the king without his sending for her first. Esther found herself in a catch-22 situation: If she appealed to the king, he would likely take offense at her initiative and kill her on the spot, but if she didn't, the Jews (and she too if the king finds out that she is Jewish) would meet a certain doom.

In the midst of this quandary, Esther intuitively turned to the Lord in prayer and asked for his intervention in the situation. She commanded all Jewish people to *fast* (pray and go without food, a topic you can read more about in Chapter 10) for three days; after that time, she went and saw the king.

Esther's X-factor proved to be that prayer. Not only did the king not get angry at her, but Haman was eventually exposed for his true sinister self. In the end, Esther, Mordecai, and all the Jewish people were saved because God answered their earnest prayers.

The absent-minded doctor

Even from his teenage years, Hudson Taylor had a lifelong passion to become a Christian missionary to inland China, and not just because he liked Kung Pao chicken. Although you can find many stories of answered prayer in his decades of work in 19th century China, one of the most fascinating occurred before he ever left the shores of his native England.

Resolved that he needed medical training before leaving for the mission field, Hudson started working as a doctor's apprentice when he was 20 years old. While working in that job, however, Hudson began wondering whether he had the kind of rock-solid faith that he needed to make it as a missionary: Was he trusting in the Lord to supply his needs or relying on himself? (See Chapters 16 and 17.)

Hudson decided to find out. After much prayer, he concluded that he'd start relying on God for his paycheck rather than on himself. You see, he was paid a salary and boarding allowance every four months, but in those days before direct deposit, he didn't always get paid when he was supposed to. Without a daily planner or personal digital assistant, the kindly but forgetful doctor for whom Hudson worked needed regular reminding about payday. In the past, Hudson had prompted him, but he resolved from that point on to let God do the prompting instead. When the next payday rolled around, Hudson found himself without a paycheck.

He watched his wallet growing ever thinner as day after day went by. After three weeks had passed, Hudson was in dire straits: He'd just given his last coin to a needy family and eaten the last of his food, and his rent was due the next morning. Hudson began questioning why God hadn't answered his prayer yet, and he wondered whether his whole scheme was a mark of obedience or just plain foolishness.

As he awoke the next morning, he knew it was time to face the music. Yet as he prayed, the postman came and delivered an unsigned letter containing a single pair of gloves and a sovereign coin — worth four times as much as the half crown he'd given away the day before!

This gift kept him solvent for another two weeks, but eventually he found himself in the same situation as before — without any money or food and the rent due the following day. On a Saturday evening, the doctor and Hudson were talking after the last patient had gone, when, lo and behold, the absent-minded doctor finally remembered to pay Hudson. However, because it was a Saturday night, the doctor couldn't do anything about paying Hudson until Monday when the banks opened. Taylor was torn up inside: He was relieved that the doctor finally remembered but desperate that no solution seemed possible until Monday.

The doctor went home and left Hudson to close the office. After uttering a final prayer for help, Hudson was preparing to leave the office at 10 p.m. when the doctor burst through the door laughing. After catching his breath, the doctor told Hudson the strange story of what had just transpired. As the doctor was preparing to go to bed around 9 p.m., one of his wealthy patients came to his house to pay his bill. And instead of paying with a check as he usually did, he paid in cash. With a smile, the doctor handed over the cash to Hudson — enabling him to pay the rent on time and to buy breakfast the next day.

Hudson's story is a reminder that even though his prayers proved to be the X-factor, God's timing (see Chapter 16) is not exactly our own. God didn't make it easy for Hudson for those many weeks, but look at the result: Hudson was changed in a way that he wouldn't have been had God answered on that first payday. And that trust proved critical to his missionary success in China years later.

Elijah Jones and the altars of Carmel



Elijah was an Old Testament *prophet*, a special messenger representing God to the people of the day. I think of Elijah as something like the Indiana Jones of the Bible. He was bold, energetic, and zealous and always seemed to find himself in the midst of the action.

Prayer to Elijah was like Indiana Jones's whip, making him one not to be messed with. His prayers caused a multiyear drought in Israel to start and end and brought back a young boy from death. However, Elijah's defining moment came at a big showdown with the evil King Ahab concerning which god — Elijah's or King Ahab's — was real.

To determine who was the real god, Elijah challenged King Ahab and his 450 prophets to the first ever battle of the gods between the God of Israel and their god of Baal. The challenge: Whose god could light an *altar* (a table that serves as the centerpiece for a religious ceremony) on Mount Carmel?

The Baal prophets went first. With Elijah smiling all the while, they worked all day, dancing and prancing, crying out to Baal but having no luck. And when that didn't work, they pulled a trick you'd expect to see in *The Temple of Doom*, getting so desperate that they started cutting themselves with swords and knives to get their god to listen. Unsuccessful, they finally gave up and gave Elijah his turn.

But in true Indiana Jones fashion, Elijah wasn't simply content to pray for God to light a dry altar. Instead, he made it more interesting by having his altar doused with water several times beforehand. He then thundered out a prayer (from 1 Kings 18:36–37):

[Lord], the God of Abraham, of Isaac, and of Israel, let it be known this day that you are God in Israel, and that I am your servant, and that I have done all these things at your word. Hear me, [Lord], hear me, that this people may know that you are God, and that you have turned their heart back again."

You can guess what happens next: God answered his prayer in a big and mighty way — sending fire to burn up the sacrifice and everything around it. Indiana Jones would have been proud!

Elijah discovered on that day that God does indeed answer prayers in visible and tangible ways (see Chapter 17).

Elijah's experience on Mount Carmel could have given him the impression that God's way of working in the world was always through lightning and thunder, but if you read on later in 1 Kings, you find out that God also responds to Elijah in more subtle ways with a "still small voice." See Chapter 19 for more details on how God communicates.

Putting your faith where your mouth is



Prayer warrior is a term often used to describe someone who is especially diligent in prayer. George Müller, who established a series of orphanages in 19th century England, is perhaps my favorite prayer warrior of all time. He started out with a single house to care for a handful of orphans, but by the time he died, George had fed, clothed, and taught over 10,000 orphans.

Although the philanthropic work he performed over his lifetime is remarkable, what is truly extraordinary is *how* George did it. He let prayer be the centerpiece of his life's work. In reading Psalms 81:10 ("Open your mouth wide, and I will fill it."), he believed that this passage meant that God would do as he promised and provide for the needs of the orphans and his family. So, instead of doing the expected fundraising gigs in churches and Rotary Clubs and appearing on late-night TV commercials, he simply prayed for God to prompt people to give money to them. In all his years of caring for thousands of orphans, he never once asked a person for a dime!

And, over the span of decades, God never failed to provide materially for George — not that he never had any hard times, because he had more than his share. On countless occasions, the orphanage ran completely out of money immediately before a breakfast or dinner. But, each time, the Lord miraculously intervened before anyone missed a meal. Müller was a fanatic at writing down his prayers and their answers and said later that some 5,000 of his prayers had been answered on the day he asked for them. (You can read more about writing down your prayers in Chapter 9.)

Human-sized fishing bait

Why is it that some people become permanently associated with a single event in their lives and, like it or not, they just can't shake it off? Lindberg and Paris, Nixon and Watergate, Bill Buckner and the 1986 World Series, and Gilligan and his three-hour tour. But when it comes to big fish, only one name springs to the mind of most anyone who ever attended Sunday School as a child: Jonah.

Jonah, another Old Testament prophet, was called by God to go to the bustling city of Nineveh and warn the people there of God's impending judgment if they refused to turn from their wicked ways. God may have chosen Jonah for this assignment, but to put it mildly, he wasn't exactly thrilled with the mission. Did Jonah like Nineveh? Well, let me put it this way: He probably would never have volunteered to be a spokesman for the Nineveh Office of Tourism.

Determined not to obey this command, Jonah makes one of the silliest moves in history when he decides to run away from God. Evidently, he played hooky on the day in Prophet School when they learned about God being everywhere!

Jonah set out on a fishing boat in the opposite direction of Nineveh, and sure enough, God caused a great storm to disrupt his plans. Jonah eventually told the boat's crew what he did and begged them to throw him into the sea to save themselves. Though reluctant, they agreed and threw him overboard. Once in the water, Jonah splashed around in the sea, fully expecting a watery grave any moment. To his surprise, however, he was swallowed by a big fish (or whale) and ended up staying inside of it for three smelly days.

Jonah used those 72 hours not only to freshen up on his "God is everywhere" knowledge but also to have a change of heart. After a long prayer thanking God for saving him from drowning, Jonah vowed that he would do whatever the Lord asked of him.

His prayer of thanksgiving proved the X-factor, for the Lord promptly caused the fish to throw up Jonah, letting him wash onto dry land. Then, after taking a nice, long, hot shower and swearing never to eat seafood again, Jonah went to Nineveh and began carrying out God's plan.

Peter's great escape

The Great Escape, the 1962 Steve McQueen classic film about British and American officers escaping from a Nazi prison camp during World War II, has always been one of my favorite movies. The prisoners formulate a grand scheme to tunnel their way out of the camp and then dig for months on end to carry it out.

The Apostle Peter had a great escape of his own, but unlike Steve McQueen, he didn't have to dig a tunnel to get away. He was imprisoned by King Herod after the ruler began cracking down on the early Christian church leaders. Herod killed the Apostle James and intended to have Peter be the next leader put on trial.

Peter's outlook looked bleak. The night before the trial was to begin, Peter was tied up in chains and forced to sleep between two jailers, and sentries stood guard outside the entrance to his cell. Not even Steve McQueen could have gotten out of this tight spot. But unknown to Herod, the church had an X-factor all its own when members prayed diligently for Peter's safety. In the nick of time, God answered their prayers when an angel appeared that night and freed Peter from his prison cell, enabling him to continue his ministry unencumbered.

Don't forget the postage

Les Nimigan was the director of a modern-day, Canadian-based evangelistic ministry reaching out to people in the transportation industry. Several years ago, when he was traveling in Alberta, Canada, the old car he was driving broke down and was beyond repair, leaving Les in dire need of a car to continue his working trip. There was just one problem: The ministry had no money to pay for the expense. So, in true Müller fashion (see the section “Putting your faith where your mouth is,” earlier in this chapter), Les prayed earnestly that God would provide a car.

Les walked into an auto dealership the next day to see what his options were. Les found out that the owner was a Christian, so Les shared some information about his ministry. When the owner learned of his need for a car, the dealer sold him a Chevrolet Nova at dealer cost of \$9,740.20 on the condition that Lee would send him a check for payment when the Lord provided the money. So Les took the car and drove to Toronto.

Once back at the ministry headquarters, Les and his staff had a prayer meeting to ask God to send additional funds to pay for their new purchase. The moment they finished praying, the secretary opened the mail and discovered a check from an elderly donor in the amount of \$9,740.42. His secretary was dumbfounded that the check was so close to the price of the car, but she wondered why the amount would be off 22 cents. Les responded, “Why, of course, that’s the amount to cover the postage.”

Transforming Your ABC's into the X

Other than “Which came first: the chicken or the egg?” no issue on the planet is more perplexing than the question of why God intervenes in the world at some times but not others. After all, if he is all powerful, he controls everything. And if he is all-knowing, then he knows everything — including what your prayers will be before you speak them! Given this power and knowledge monopoly, the prayers of mere mortals almost seem like a waste of breath.



The obvious question then is, why bother praying? The answer to this is simple but also profoundly complex: For reasons you and I will never fully comprehend, the Lord *wants* you to pray to him, and by and large, he releases his power in the world and in your life through prayer. Don't make the mistake, however, of thinking that the power is in the prayer itself. The prayers are only messages to the one who holds the power. God's the one who chooses how to act upon them.

Given this, what transforms a simple prayer into an X-factor that can save a nation, free a prisoner, feed thousands of orphans, and pay for a new car? After all, Elijah and the Baal prophets both prayed sincerely, but only Elijah's prayer was effective. Therefore, what was so special about the prayers of Elijah, Esther, George Müller, and the others whom I discuss earlier in this chapter?

One response may be that these groups of people were God's favorites, ones whom he actually listened to. But, if you take the Bible at its word, then this is certainly not true. Scripture makes it abundantly clear that God treats everyone equally. Given that reality, then the way in which they prayed must have proved to be the difference.



Notice that I didn't say X-factor means praying in a certain way, praying the rosary (see Chapter 11), praying in tongues (see Chapter 21), or praying on your knees (see Chapter 6). These are simply techniques people use. God looks past all that and into the heart of the prayer.

Indeed, I see five attitudes that I call the "Five Be's" (which I discuss further in Chapter 18) that you need for an effective prayer life:

- ✓ **Be aware.** The first and foremost quality of effective prayers is a keen awareness of whom you're praying to. Trying to pray without acknowledging God is similar to trying to hold an intelligent conversation with someone who doesn't know who you are or even care to get to know you.
- ✓ **Be real.** Prayer becomes an X-factor when you're earnest. When you pray, God wants nothing more than for you to be genuine. *Real* refers not only to the words you use (not Shakespearean English) but also to what you're praying about. (See Chapters 4 and 15 for more discussion on being real in your prayers.)

We must lay before Him what is in us, not what ought to be in us.

C.S. Lewis

- ✓ **Be repentant.** Sin in your life can be a serious obstacle to your prayers, so you should always approach prayer with a spirit of repentance or willingness to seek forgiveness and abandon sin in the future. (See Chapter 3 for more discussion on sin and repentance.)
- ✓ **Be dogged.** Prayer becomes an X-factor when you're diligent. On occasion, God answers your prayer on the first and only request, such as Elijah's prayer to light the altar. However, more often than not, his timing is longer term than yours and mine, and he wants us to be patient and wait on his timing. Hudson Taylor's paycheck trial (see the section "The absent-minded doctor," earlier in this chapter) serves as a great example

of the need to be tenacious in your prayer life. God answered him, but only after Taylor spent a lot of time in fervent prayer.

The insistent prayer of a righteous person is powerfully effective.

James 5:16

- ✓ **Be expectant.** Prayer becomes an X-factor when you trust God to answer it. George Müller (see the section “Putting your faith where your mouth is,” earlier in this chapter) is a great example of a person who had faith that anticipated God to answer. He had so much confidence in the Lord that he considered his prayer requests as good as answered after he uttered them.



The people of great faith whose stories I tell earlier in this chapter all knew to whom they were praying and were diligent, earnest, and trustful in their prayers. When you combine these factors, you have the X-factor. Therefore, the lynchpin in transforming the ABC's of prayer into the X-factor is not God at all, but you and me. God is always ready and willing to intervene. It's up to you and me to come alongside God and allow him to do his work.

