

Statement: **DP803**

THE PRAYER OF JESUS

A Discussion Between Hank Hanegraaff and Lee Strobel

*Hank Hanegraaff's best-selling new book, *The Prayer of Jesus* (Word, 2001), has been widely praised for bringing a solid biblical perspective to the current popular interest in prayer. Rather than print an excerpt from the book, we determined an informal interview with Hank would be of greater value to our readers. We could have conducted an interview special to the JOURNAL, but we could hardly improve on Lee Strobel's 21–22 August 2001 Bible Answer Man interview of Hank. Here is an edited version of that dynamic discussion.*

Lee Strobel: Let me ask you about this book, and let's go back to the beginning. What was it that prompted you to write *The Prayer of Jesus*? And by the way, I love the subtitle: *Secrets to Real Intimacy with God*.

Hank Hanegraaff: Well, as you yourself write in the foreword to *The Prayer of Jesus*, Amazon.com lists over 8,000 books on the subject of prayer. Yet while people's appetites have been whetted when it comes to prayer, I fear that people often misunderstand the main point of prayer. Multitudes view prayer as an instant formula when the essence of prayer is found in intimate fellowship — and that, ultimately, is what *The Prayer of Jesus* is all about. If supplication is seen as the sole sum and substance of prayer then we have missed the main point.

L. S.: In other words, what I can get from God, what I'm going to ask for, what I'm going to seek to have happen in my life in terms of God bringing me what I pray for and desire.

H. H.: Yes, that's right. And prayer is much more than that. For Christians, prayer should be its own reward. It is not a magic formula to get things from God — communing with God is half the prize. In fact, that is precisely what we look forward to in eternity. We're going to experience something that not even Adam and Eve experienced. We're going to have the privilege of touching, of talking to and experiencing, the resurrected Christ throughout eternity.

L. S.: It strikes me, Hank — and studies have shown this — the percentage of people who pray is huge. It's a virtually universal phenomenon. In fact, I saw one study that showed that a significant percentage of atheists pray, which shocked me. I don't know what they're praying to, but it seems to be an almost universal experience that people seek to commune with God. And yet, I think if you ask the average person, "Do you feel fulfilled in your prayer life? Do you feel like you really have an intimate experience with God?" most people, if they're really candid, would say "No." And I think the reason is, few people have been taught how to pray, and what we have in Scripture is the disciples asking that very question, and Jesus gave an answer. [See Matt. 6:9–13; Luke 11:1–4.]

H. H.: You could probably, if you were there, see the urgency sketched on the faces of the disciples. Perhaps Peter, as usual, served as a spokesman. He didn't say "Lord, teach us how to pray." He said, "Lord, teach us now to pray." He had seen the serenity that Jesus Christ exuded in the aftermath of prayer. He didn't know what caused Christ's face to seem as though it glowed, but one thing he was certain — whatever it was, he wanted it, and he wanted it now.

That day the Lord could have drawn their attention to all kinds of biblical prayers. He might have highlighted the astonishing prayer of Solomon. Remember that story? Solomon was given the opportunity to ask for whatever he wanted. Imagine that: "Just name it and it's yours." I can imagine myself blurting out, "Lord, give me a better swing than even Tiger Woods so that I can win the Master's Golf Tournament for Your glory." But not Solomon. He humbly asked for wisdom and understanding instead. The Bible says that God was so pleased with his prayer that He not only made Solomon the wisest man who ever lived, but He blessed him with riches, wealth, and honor. Talk about a formula for success. Or Jesus might have pointed His disciples to the prayers of Joshua, Jephtha, or, yes, Jabez. But that's not what Jesus did, because He knew what every good teacher knows, and that is that examples of prayer must first be understood in light of principles of prayer. That's precisely why He gave us the Lord's Prayer — the prayer of Jesus.

L. S.: If we're going to ask anybody about prayer, who would we want to ask other than Jesus? And here, as you say, when Jesus is asked "How now do we pray?" with that sense of urgency and desire on the part of the disciples, He didn't give them a stone. In other words, He answered their request, and He laid out for us a pattern, principles that we can draw upon. But it is through this process of prayer that God changes us. You talk about this in the book, that it is the process of praying that is its own reward in many senses.

H. H.: Very much so. In fact, Jesus Christ actually started His teaching on prayer in the Sermon on the Mount with that very principle. He not only taught His disciples that prayer was the spiritual life reduced to its barest essence, but that the secret to prayer is secret prayer.

Hypocrites pray to be seen by men. Thus they have everything they're ever going to get: their prayer's worth and nothing more. The tragedy of contemporary Christianity is that we measure success of prayer by the size and scope of our accomplishments, rather than the strength of our relationship with God. All too frequently we are fixated on our outward pleasures, while God is focused on our inward peace. Sadly, the spiritual apathy of our souls all too often leaves us vulnerable to the appetites of the flesh. The American sentiment that "bigger is better" has invaded our Christian subculture and seduced us to seek instant success through formulas. A cacaphony of voices promises us quick fixes and instant cures when in reality there are none — the secret to prayer is not found in instant formulas, but in intimate fellowship with the lover of our souls.

L. S.: Have you found, Hank, that there are a lot of people out there who have misperceptions, misunderstandings about prayer?

H. H.: So many people see prayer as merely a means of bringing our requests, but prayer is much more than that. Prayer is an opportunity to build a relationship. The moment we make the paradigm shift from seeing prayer as merely a means of bringing our requests to a means of building a relationship, our prayer lives will be transformed.

L. S.: It's a paradigm shift right there, a completely different mindset.

H. H.: Yes, because everything flows out of building that relationship. Often we treat our heavenly Father no better than we treat our families. We want a relationship without the investment of quality time. I can promise you that my wife Kathy would not be flattered by a request for physical intimacy apart from a relationship. In much the same way God is not flattered when we bring Him our requests without building our relationships. I think that if we are brutally honest with ourselves, we will acknowledge that for the most part we have learned to pray backwards. We rush into God's presence with a laundry list of requests. And before our knees have ever touched the ground we are already thinking about getting back to our frenzied schedules. The bottom line is this: relationships, whether human or divine, never grow apart from the investment of quality time.

Pascal once said, and he hit the nail on the head, that there is a God-shaped vacuum in our lives that only God can fill. If, in fact, we fill that vacuum with a relationship with God, life works. When we don't, it doesn't work. A host of consuming appetites fill up our better intentions. So we need to grasp the significance that the real experience in life is communing with God. Once we've understood that, prayer begins to work. If we don't, we're always going to fall for formulas that overpromise and underperform. We're going to think for a moment we've found the solution, but in the end it's going to be another fad. Too frequently we are infatuated with fads and formulas rather than with the real deal, which is building a relationship with the only one who can fill our inner vacuum.

L. S.: There certainly is a trend in our culture right now in the direction of prayer, and of course, *The Prayer of Jabez* really elevated this to the New York Times best-seller list and a lot of discussion on talk shows and so forth. It really seems to have raised the interest in prayer, and I'm sure, given your position as the Bible Answer Man at the Christian Research Institute, you've gotten a lot of questions about what your take is on that particular approach. How do you assess that and how much is your book kind of a response to that particular approach?

H. H.: It's not a direct response to *The Prayer of Jabez*. I'm just happy that *The Prayer of Jabez* in a sense has whetted people's appetites for prayer. I think what I've tried to do is say, "Look, examples of prayer need to be understood in light of principles of prayer, and that's exactly why the Lord Jesus Christ gives us the prayer of Jesus."

But I would say this: we ought to be cautious about taking narrative passages in Scripture and building didactic teaching principles on them. As R. C. Sproul once put it: It's a very dangerous thing to ask, "What would Jesus do?" In other words, a better question would be, "What would Jesus have me do?" Jesus is the Lord of the church. He can go to the temple and drive out the money changers with a whip. I am not the Lord of the church; therefore I dare not make that my practice. It's a very dangerous practice to build a doctrine on what someone thought, did, or even prayed. As with establishing any doctrine or practice, it is really important that we follow, rather, the teaching principles given in Scripture with regard to prayer rather than trying to base our prayer on what Jephtha, Judah, Solomon, or even Jabez prayed. I mean, if you wanted a formula for success, the prayer of Solomon would be it. But that's not what Jesus gave us. He didn't point us to those examples of prayer. Rather, He gave us the principles of prayer, the pattern of prayer.

L. S.: Let's talk a bit about that prayer pattern that He set forth for us and this request from the disciples to teach us now to pray. One thing that Jesus made clear is the Father already knows what we need. Well, why then do we pray for what we need?

H. H.: The very fact that people ask that question belies the fact that they do not understand what prayer is all about. Prayer is not simply about getting our needs met in terms of things, provisions, and so forth. As we've said, prayer is about building a relationship with God, a relationship God Himself has initiated through His Word. Even beyond that, though, we can answer that question by saying we pray because we're commanded to pray; and nothing lies outside the reach of prayer but that which lies outside the will of God.

So we go to our Heavenly Father humbly. It starts with a humble faith in the love and resources of our heavenly Father. Thus prayer becomes a means through which we learn to lean more heavily upon Him and less heavily upon ourselves. That humble faith inevitably leads to adoration as we express our heartfelt love and longing for God. The more we get to know Him in the fullness of His majesty, the more we are inclined to confess our unworthiness and to thank Him not only for His saving and sanctifying grace, but for His goodness in supplying all our needs. It is in the context of that kind of relationship that God desires that His children bring Him their requests with thankful hearts. Ultimately, the purpose of supplication is not to pressure God into providing us with promises, but rather to conform us to His purposes.

I'll be frank with you: the more you learn about building a relationship with God, the more your personal requests pale into insignificance, because the one thing you start to learn about God is that you don't have to have a formula for Him to bless you and to give you what you need. It's very much like you are with your children, Lee, or I am with my children. We long to give them what they need. We don't expect them to have the right formula that's going to unlock our hearts and move us to give them something. We give them things they never ask for and we withhold things they do ask for because we love them and know what is best for them.

L. S.: I remember when I was a new Christian I asked, "Well, why would I even pray to God? He already knows everything. So I'm not going to tell Him anything new." And I loved the answer. The guy said, "Well, in that case you can feel confident that you can pour out everything to God, because if He already knows it, there's no reason for you not to be able to tell Him your emotions and your feelings and to be totally honest and to be forthright and to be intimate in what you share with Him." It really is an unleashing of our desire for intimacy with God to know we can relate to Him because of His omniscience. We can relate on this incredibly deep level and have total confidence that as we interact with Him and speak with Him and get to know Him better, there's nothing we cannot share, and there is a change that happens in us as a result of praying. Talk to me about what changes you've seen in yourself as a result of building your relationship with God through prayer.

H. H.: You have this humble reliance on Him. You learn how to hold your life, as it were, with an open hand, so that God can move you where He wants to move you, take things out of your hand when He wants to, put other things in your hand when He wants to. What you ultimately learn is that the One Who created you now has access to your heart, because what you've done is said, "I no longer want to hold onto my heart, my time, my talent, or my treasure. It's Yours to use as you see fit." And the minute you do that your life opens like a beautiful flower, because

now God can water and nurture it, He can cultivate it, and you can be everything that you were designed to be.

L. S.: I just picture a child. When my children were little, I knew a lot of times what they wanted when they came to me and they were seeking something or they wanted to spend time with me, and the desire as a father is to just pull them up on your lap and to hug them and to help them. You have an experience with them that goes beyond just a conversation, and I picture Jesus here saying, God wants to know you intimately. He wants you to have the confidence to come into His presence and know He's going to pull you up onto His lap, and He's going to put His arm around you, and He's not going to be some stern disciplinarian who's going to be challenging you as you try to say the right words to magically unlock His heart, but He has this desire to pour out His love and His grace on you. I think that's just a wonderful picture of God.

H. H.: It really is. I was thinking just this morning how my son Paul — he's going to be seven on Friday — always comes into the bedroom really early in the morning, and what he likes to do is cuddle up as close as he can to me. He puts his head on my neck, and I rub the back of his head, and he doesn't say anything, and I don't say anything, but just being together is enough. He knows I love him. The touch says it all. I know he loves me so much, and that intimacy and relationship is a faint reflection of what we can have with the Lord as we cuddle up next to Him, as He puts His arms around us, so to speak, and loves us and lets us know that He has every detail of our lives under control. There's not a single maverick molecule running around loose anywhere in the universe. He holds the next few moments, the next few days and months. All the days ordained for us are written in His book before even one of them came to be [Psalm 139:16], and nothing can happen to us unless it first passes through the filter of His love [Rom. 8:28, 35–39].

L. S.: I just know that there are people out there who have that image of your son crawling into bed with you and they say, “If I could just have that with God.” There's something in the human spirit that so longs for that and so desires that. And you know what? You can have that kind of rich relationship and those moments when there's just silence between you and the Lord because you're resting in His presence; you're resting in confident assurance of His love for you and His desire for the best for you.

Hank, it strikes me that often people make one or two mistakes with the Lord's prayer. One is, they forget it, as if Jesus never really taught us how to pray, or they just use it as something to repeat — a vain repetition. Those seem to be the two extremes; and yet there is another approach that Jesus intended us to take with this prayer.

H. H.: Yes, absolutely. Jesus made every word He spoke count. The words of the prayer He taught us to pray are like treasures of incalculable value lying deep beneath the waters of a vast ocean. They beckon us to descend into the prayer's glorious depths. There await unfathomed resources that can scarcely be described to those living on the surface.

L. S.: There is no wasted verbiage in here. Every word is important.

H. H.: That's right. As has been well said, the prayer is beautiful and symmetrical, like the most finished work of art. The words are plain and unadorned, yet majestic and so transparent and appropriate that once fixed in the memory no other expressions ever mix themselves up with

them. The thought of substituting other words never enters the mind. Grave and solemn are the petitions; yet the serenity and tranquil confidence, the peace and joy which they breathe, prove attractive to every heart. It is a model prayer because there is meaning, there is depth, there is provision that is encapsulated in every word. What Jesus in essence does is give us a manner of praying that we can mine. We can go into every single word and discover a wealth of meaning, a depth of beauty.

L. S.: I'm going to take you up on that. He begins the prayer by saying "Our Father."

H. H.: Even those two words are just incredible. Of all the things that the disciples had been taught about prayer, this was not one of them. They weren't even allowed to say the name of God out loud, much less address Him as our Father. And yet that is precisely what Jesus taught His disciples to do. But there was a catch. Only those who had been adopted into the family of God could actually pray "Our Father." Jesus made it clear that there are only two kinds of people in the world; those who can address Satan as "our father" and those who may address God as "our Father." And Paul, in Romans chapter 8, makes it clear why that is. It has become appropriate for us because we're no longer illegitimate children. We have been adopted into the family of God because of what Jesus Christ has done for us.

The other thing that comes to mind when I think of "our Father" is the fact that Jesus starts out by teaching us to pray in the plural. It's not "my Father." It is "our Father." We don't come before Him as rugged individualists. We come before Him as part of a community of faith. We are part of a family that stretches throughout history. So as a community of faith we pray, "Our Father."

L. S.: We've been talking about "Our Father" being the way in which the prayer opens. In fact, it begins "Our Father in heaven." And that's significant too, isn't it?

H. H.: It really is. Jesus taught us to qualify the phrase "Our Father" with the words "in heaven." In other words, we can address Him with intimacy, but never impudence. He is the sovereign Creator — we are but sinful creatures. So the qualifying phrase "in heaven" helps us to recognize that we are to address our heavenly Father with the reverence due His name.

L. S.: And then the prayer goes on, "Hallowed be Your name." What's the significance of that?

H. H.: To pray, "Hallowed be Your Name" is putting the emphasis on God first, exactly where it belongs. Our lives should radiate a far greater commitment to God's nature than to our needs. And there's so much wrapped up in the phrase, "Hallowed be Your Name." It is to pray that God be given the unique reverence that His holiness demands, that His Word be preached without corruption, that His churches be led by faithful pastors and be kept from false prophets, that we be kept from language that profanes the Name of God, that our thought lives remain holy, that we cease from seeking honor for ourselves, and seek instead that God's Name be glorified. Our meager attempts at ministry are meaningless unless the name of God is magnified. So when we pray "Our Father in heaven, hallowed be Your Name," it opens up a whole vista of prayer and communication with our heavenly Father.

L. S.: To take these power-packed words that Jesus prescribed for us in terms of a pattern of prayer, and to exegete those and be able to say, “Why did Jesus tell us to pray that, in this order, in this kind of way?” I think is very powerful.

H. H.: But there’s a reason for that: these words are prayer triggers as it were. When I think of the words “Hallowed be Your name,” I’m not praying that as a vain repetition. It’s a trigger for praying all those things I just mentioned regarding the hallowing of God’s name. My thoughts, in terms of prayer, should not be focused primarily on me. It should be focused on Thee, and I’ll tell you, there’s a beauty to it. When you start focusing on God, the things of earth grow strangely dim in the light of His glory and grace.

L. S.: Absolutely. It reorients your whole mind. Your whole attitude, your whole perspective, all of a sudden change. Then the prayer goes on, “Your kingdom come; Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven.”

H. H.: The phrase “Your kingdom come” is gilded with such golden glory I scarcely know where to begin. When you pray “Your kingdom come,” in essence you’re praying that God would expand His rule over the territory of our hearts. In other words, it is to pray that we embrace His kingdom in every aspect of our lives. It’s not about extending our territories, our houses and lands. It’s about extending His rule over the territory of our hearts. We often confess — you and I have talked about this — the fact that there are areas in our hearts that still belong to us. The rooms have not yet been swept clean and what we’re saying, in essence, as we go through the process of sanctification is, “God, take over more and more of my heart.”

But beyond that, to pray “Your kingdom come” is to pray that God would extend His territory in the kingdoms of this world. In other words, that more and more people will come to faith in Jesus Christ, that more and more people will come to embrace His kingdom, the City of God, as it were, rather than the kingdom of Satan.

And then, I think too, it is a recognition that Christ has already won the war. We’re right now sandwiched in between the triumph of the cross and the termination of time, between D-Day and V-Day. D-Day was the first coming of Christ when the enemy, Satan, was decisively defeated. V-Day is the second coming of Christ when the kingdoms of this earth will in fact be the kingdoms of our Lord and He will reign for ever and ever. Of course John on the island of Patmos caught just a little glimpse of this when he saw the New Jerusalem, the holy city, coming down out of heaven, prepared as a bride, beautifully adorned for her husband, and he heard a loud voice from the throne saying, “Now the dwelling of God will be with men, and He will be with them. He’s going to wipe every tear from our eyes. There will be no more death, mourning, crying, nor pain. The old order of things will have passed away, all things will become new” [Rev. 21:1–5].

That’s what we’re looking for: His kingdom to come on this earth. This earth will no longer be dominated by destruction, disease, decay, death, doubt, or discouragement. It will then become a place where there will be no more mourning or crying. Death, all of the scourge of sin, will be wiped away. When I pray “Your kingdom come,” I have this glimpse, this longing for the new heavens and the new earth wherein dwell righteousness. The same is true when we pray “Your will be done.” In the yielded life there is great peace in knowing that God has every detail of our

lives under control. He will not spare us from trial or tribulation but He will use adversity to purge the impurities from our lives.

L. S.: We're at the point now where Jesus said, "Give us today our daily bread." He says we should bring our requests to God. There is an appropriate time, after we've honored God, we've expressed our reverence to Him, and so forth, and we put into context the requests that we're going to make, that we do bring the requests of our heart to the Lord. That's an unbelievable thing, isn't it Hank?

H. H.: It's kind of neat when you look at the Lord's Prayer. It is neatly divided into two sections. The first is building a relationship with God, and so we pray "Our Father in heaven, hallowed be Your name. Your kingdom come, Your will be done." And then there's this transitional phrase that takes the prayer from heaven to earth: "...on earth as it is in heaven." From this point on we pray for ourselves — for our provision, pardon, and protection. In the petition "Give us today our daily bread," we pray for all things belonging to and necessary for the sustenance of the body and life.

I want you to note very carefully the word "necessary." God gives us that which is necessary, not always the niceties of life; He provides for our needs, not our greeds. When we pray "give us today our daily bread," we are praying with Auger, "Give me neither poverty nor riches, but give me only my daily bread. Otherwise, I may become proud and disown You and say 'Who is the Lord?' or I may become poor and steal and so dishonor the name of my God" [Prov. 30:8–9].

Once again, I think it's also important to recognize that we're praying in the plural. We're not only talking about our individual needs; we're talking about the needs of our brothers and sisters around the world who suffer from maladies ranging from droughts to deadly diseases. We watch them on television, but all too often the images quickly fade with the next commercial interruption. With this petition we are reminded daily to pray not only for our needs, but for the needs of others.

L. S.: Talk about "Forgive us our debts as we also have forgiven our debtors."

H. H.: One of the most poignant of all the parables that Jesus ever told was the story of two debtors [Matt. 18:21–35]. The first owed his master more than 20 million dollars, more than he could pay if he lived to be a thousand. The second debtor owed the first debtor less than a measly 20 dollar bill. The master in the story forgives the 20 million dollar debtor every last penny, but instead of being overwhelmed with gratitude he goes back and grabs that second debtor by the throat and drags him off to the debtors' prison. When the master heard all that had happened, his condemnation was swift and severe. The 20 million dollar debtor was thrown into prison until he himself could pay his debt in full, which was a task that he obviously could never accomplish. And then Jesus turns to His disciples and says, "This is how My heavenly Father will treat each of you unless you forgive your brothers and sisters from your heart."

The point that Jesus is making, of course, is transparent. We have been forgiven an infinite debt. Therefore, it is a horrendous evil even to consider withholding forgiveness from those who seek forgiveness from us. That should be a startling revelation to every one of us because we all have people who have wronged us, and we, in both the story and the petition, are reminded that we ought to be ready with an open heart to forgive anyone who asks for our forgiveness. When we

pray “forgive us,” we are reminded daily of the infinite price that was paid so that we might be forgiven. We must ever be mindful that it was God Himself who hung on the cross so that we could be reconciled to Him for time and for eternity.

L. S.: It feels good sometimes to have a grudge and so forth, and if that’s our kind of attitude, then the next words from our mouth to Jesus need to be, “I don’t want my heart to be like that. You have forgiven me. I want to forgive the person who’s hurt me.” We need to not let our obstinate refusal to forgive people in our lives become a barrier between us and God.

H. H.: Not only that, but one of the more liberating things that can ever enter the human heart is, when you pray this prayer, to think in your mind of the one person or the two or three people that you really have an unresolved problem with, and, while you cannot coerce anybody to ask for forgiveness, to start praying for that person. If you can learn to pray for those who spitefully abuse you, you will be the quintessential example of true liberation. You know, it’s easy to pray for those that love us, but not so easy to pray for those who spitefully use us [Matt. 5:44]. If we can but only learn to forgive and pray for them — we will be set free.

L. S.: What about “Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the Evil One?”

H. H.: If, in fact, we put on the full armor of God [Eph. 6:10–18], we will stand against the wiles of the Evil One. If we do not, we lose. We cannot stand firm without the belt of truth buckled around our waist, without the breastplate of righteousness, the helmet of salvation, the shield of faith to extinguish the flaming arrows of the Evil One, the sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God, and praying at all times in the Spirit. So we need to understand what each part of the armor is, and we need to understand what each part of the armor represents, and if we understand those things we are going to learn what true spiritual warfare is all about and how we can prevail. We don’t have to fear the Evil One. The Evil One has to flee from us if, in fact, we understand what it means to put on the full armor of God.

And I’m really trying to make two points, Lee. I’m trying to make the point that we shouldn’t underestimate the power and the province of the Adversary, and we shouldn’t overestimate it either. We shouldn’t underestimate it in the sense that Satan is a malevolent being, the vastness of whose intellect exceeds that of anyone who’s ever lived from Solomon to Socrates. Therefore, a man unaided from above is never going to be a match for a fallen angel. On the other hand, the Bible teaches us that Satan is a lion on a leash, the length of which is determined by our Lord. When I pray this petition, I am reminded that one day Satan will be thrown into the lake of burning sulfur and temptations will be no more. We will enter the golden city with divine assurance that nothing impure will ever enter it, nor will anyone who does what is shameful or deceitful, but only those whose names are written in the Lamb’s Book of Life [Rev. 21:27]. In other words, there is that day on the horizon in which temptations will be no more. So there’s a hope in that petition as well as great counsel for our daily lives here and now.

L. S.: But the key thing is God has given us defenses, and we just need to apply them in our lives.

Hank, you close the book in talking about going deep, really embracing the prayer of Jesus. Not that we just read it and look for principles and ideas and insights and so forth, but we should

really embrace it and apply it in our lives. Could you give us just a sense of how we can go about doing that?

H. H.: In the ninth chapter I talk about stepping into the deep, and I start out by describing a day that I'll never forget. It was the day that my wife read me a story. I was in pain, I could hardly move, and Kathy sensed that she had a captive audience, so she pulled up a chair next to the shallow waters of the tub in which I was soaking and she began to read from a book called *Into the Depth of God*. The words were refreshing and riveting. They washed over me like the balm of Gilead. Within moments I was completely oblivious to my pain, because this was not the stuff of shallow men who splash around in surface things and attempt to write about the deep. This was not the stuff of nonpeakers talking to nonpeakers about peak experiences. These were the words of someone who had escaped the shallowness of his own soul and plunged deep into the ocean of God's immensity.

Well, as Kathy read I was brought into the experience of the author and his family as they traveled to the Great Barrier Reef. Calvin Miller, the author, had come to snorkel in the shallow waters above the reef. His son, however, had come to scuba. For the rest of their lives father and son would tell stories about their experiences with the Great Barrier Reef, but only one of them had really come to know it. And that, of course, is an analogy for prayer. Most of us snorkel in surface waters of prayer and succeed only in sunburning our backs. We fail to comprehend that "deep," as Calvin Miller put it, is where the noisy, trashy, surface of the ocean gets quiet and serene. It's where our noisy requests give way to the quiet of a relationship with our Maker.

L. S.: I love that imagery because so many of us are in the baby pool. There is a deep end here and it's in that deep end that we really find trust, that we really find the adventure of knowing Jesus Christ, and we find a level of experience with Him that we can't imagine when we're just splashing around in the shallow.

H. H.: It's interesting that you bring that up, in that I write about that very thing in *The Prayer of Jesus*. That's the experience I went through with each of my children. There was a time when I couldn't get them out of the kiddy pool. The kiddy pool was all there was and ever would be, as far as they were concerned.

L. S.: This was good enough. It doesn't get better than this.

H. H.: That's right; until I led them into an experience with the ocean. Once they experienced the ocean they never went back to the kiddy pool. And that's how it is when we get beyond our noisy askings and gettings and plunge into a deep relationship with the Lover of our souls.

L. S.: Give us some ideas on how somebody goes about doing that.

H. H.: I think the first step into the deep is where we make the paradigm shift from seeing prayer as merely a means of bringing our requests to seeing prayer as a means through which we can build our relationship; that's where the first step into the deep begins. It begins with the realization that there's a whole lot more to prayer than simply our noisy askings and gettings.

L. S.: Then what else? One of the things I think is often overlooked in prayer is the need for confession. That's the part we don't like to do. It's a part we'd rather skim over. And yet, unless

we're really willing to confess our sins to the Lord it creates static in our line with Him, in a sense, doesn't it?

H. H.: There's not a single prayer or example of prayer in Scripture that will "work" without confession. Prayer without confession is like a body without a soul or a car without an engine. It simply will not work. Our prayer, whether it's the prayer of Joshua, Jephtha, or Jabez, is going to bounce right off the ceiling if there is unrepentance in our lives. I would never have the temerity to say this if Jesus had not very clearly communicated this principle on numerous occasions.

L. S.: What else?

H. H.: Well, I think another major step into the deep involves the sounds of silence. I want people to think for a moment about their prayer lives. Could it be that your prayer life is characterized by constant babbling? Could it be that the chatter of your mind is deafening? Could it be that your shallow askings have drowned out the sound of the very One whose voice you so long to hear? Have you ever considered how glorious the sounds of silence might be? God has given us 66 love letters etched in heavenly handwriting and the more we get into the Word of God, the clearer His voice will be in the sounds of our silence. In the book I also encourage believers to discover their "secret place" — a place away from the invasive sounds of this world where they can hear the sounds of another place — another voice. Kathy's secret place is the sauna; mine is walking. The issue is not location, but motivation. We have to find that secret place where we can commune with the living God.

L. S.: That's what I love about it: it's very practical.

H. H.: What I do in the book from a practical standpoint is to take you step-by-step into the deep until we get to the words of the Lord Jesus Christ when He ends the majestic Sermon on the Mount. He says, "Everyone who hears these words of Mine and puts them into practice is like a wise man" [Matt. 7:24]. Wisdom is the application of knowledge. I spread the banquet before you. Now it's a matter of partaking, to eat and make this a part of your life and be revolutionized, not just for time, because our relationship is not a transient relationship. It is a relationship that transcends time and space. It is a relationship we will have with the prayer of Jesus throughout eternity.

Hank Hanegraaff is a best-selling author, the president of the Christian Research Institute, and the host of the Bible Answer Man radio broadcast. Lee Strobel is also a best-selling author and a teaching pastor at Saddleback Valley Community Church in Orange County, California.