

# Con versa tion with God

*The Power of Prevailing Prayer*

Brian T. Sutton

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**Conversation with God: *The Power of Prevailing Prayer***

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This work is dedicated to my late brother, William Jason Sutton. He left this life on January 9, 2015. Jason was quite possibly the funniest person I've ever known. I can easily close my eyes and see him gushing with a loud laugh as he slapped his leg. His heart was drawn to those who were downtrodden and cast away by others. May we all strive to live in the love of Jesus that reaches to the "least of these" around us.

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## Foreword

It does not necessarily concern satan when the church announces a board meeting, a leadership conference, or another spectacular event. He has repeatedly watched these happen without doing much harm to his work on the earth. However, when satan hears that the church is going to develop a lifestyle of conversation with God through prevailing prayer, he knows that we are engaging in a realm of power that causes him and his imps to tremble. Through the power of prayer, satan has been defeated in every confrontation, beginning when he was an archangel who challenged the rule of God.

Unfortunately, among many Christians today, prayer is more assumed than achieved; it is more preached than practiced. Prayer is too often reserved for crises, rather than done in the sphere of everyday life. Many churches today have been duped into believing that plans, programs, organizations, personal skills, or charisma may be substituted for prayer. Not so! There is no substitute for prayer.

Brian Sutton is perfectly clear in his call for prevailing prayer. To *prevail* means to prove superior in strength, power, or influence. In this matter, Pastor Sutton is in full agreement with the apostle Paul who said in 2 Corinthians 2:5, “we are not sufficient of ourselves to think any thing as of ourselves; but our sufficiency is of God” (KJV).

Acknowledging our irrefutable human deficiencies through prevailing prayer, we call upon the strength, power, and influence of the one who said that “this battle is not yours, but mine.” Jesus Christ, our Advocate, made it possible for us to “come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need” (Hebrews 4:16 KJV).

In this book, Pastor Sutton does not present warmed-over clichés regarding prayer but probes deeply into the biblical definition of prayer, with special emphasis on how Jesus taught his disciples that prayer was more than an event—it was entering a conversation with God. Is it possible that these Jewish men whom Christ chose as disciples did not know how to pray? Not hardly. Their Jewish faith taught them to pray at least five times a day. But they wanted to know Jesus’ way of praying.

Jesus’ way of praying was so much more personal than what they had been taught by the rabbis. Jesus’ way of praying sounded more like a child having an intimate conversation with his father, and the disciples could relate to that. Interestingly, the disciples never asked Jesus to teach them to preach, teach, or lead, but they asked him to teach them to pray. Jesus taught them that prayer was to be perpetual and ongoing communication with God.

Multiple hours are spent in teaching Christians many things, but little to no time is spent teaching us how to communicate with God. Pastor Sutton makes an extraordinary appeal to correct that. My hope and prayer is that we will take notice.

*Conversation with God: The Power of Prevailing Prayer* focuses on prayer as communication. Communication is a two-way street. In prayer, we not only speak to God, but we endeavor to hear God

speak. Scripture tells us in Exodus 33:11, “And the LORD spake unto Moses face to face, as a man speaketh unto his friend” (KJV). How incredible is that? We are in a relationship with God that involves give and take. The act of sincere prayer emboldens us to see ourselves as God sees us—as sons and daughters, members of his family who are privileged to have regular conversation with our Father. Prayer is a natural outcome of our relationship with God.

Let us never forget that it is not good works that God honors; it is a relationship. It is prayer, not good works, that drive toward a rightful relationship with God and with fellow humans. The casualties of the spiritual life may be traced back to the point of one’s failure to establish effective communication with God through prevailing prayer.

Our culture has so filled our ears with the excess of human noises that the voice of God is too often obscured. So much of life is so artificial that we attempt to cover it with entertainment and special effects. How much longer can we stay in touch with the inner-spirit when the demons of our busy world are making so much noise? The answer lies in the theme of this book. God desires us to move beyond mere survival and artificial living. He is calling us to an overcoming and victorious life through prayer.

The highest achievement of the Christian life is prayer and conversation with God, because it means that we are in God’s company and in union with him. Unquestionably, this is greatly illustrated by Pastor Sutton when he calls for a lifestyle of conversation with God. Although he emphasizes the importance of specific acts of prayer, he reminds us that, above all else, prayer

is the desire for God, and that is much more than a programmed event.

The personal experiences of Pastor Sutton relating to the power of prayer and its impact on his life add an indisputable value to this book. He shares examples of family and others who have influenced his prayer life, which provides us with great insight as to why Pastor Sutton is so committed to this vital subject. It is my sincere hope and prayer that this book will bring each of us into a dramatic awakening of the spiritual life through fervent, effectual, and persistent prayer.

Lamar Vest

*Former President and CEO of American Bible Society*



# How to Use This Resource

**D**o you ever wish for more closeness in your relationship with Jesus? *Conversation with God* is a perfect resource for personal and small-group study. Do you ever long to see God's people ministering to the Lord in first-century power? *Conversation with God* can be effectively used as a church-wide devotional guide. Do you ever sense a burden to see a reclaiming of God's church as a house of prayer? *Conversation with God* is ideal for prayer summits, prayer retreats, pastoral prayer teams, or beginning an intercessory prayer ministry.

*Conversation with God* is unique. It is unlike any of the resources you've likely read before, because the exercises in each chapter were written with the specific goal of engaging you in conversations with God. These exercises were created to move you beyond seeking to simply know about God to moving toward experiencing and relating to him. Why is this important? Because it's only an experiential, Spirit-empowered faith that can live out our ultimate calling. The *Conversation with God* resource is designed to foster this kind of faith.

*Conversation with God* has a specific focus on ministering to the Lord through more deeply loving him with all our heart, mind, soul, and strength (see Acts 13:2; Matthew 22:37). The ultimate

goal of our faith journey is not acquiring more facts or learning more doctrine; our faith is about a person. It's this relational perspective on loving the Lord that produces Christlikeness and a faith that is marked by the Spirit's power.

Ten specific "Loving the Lord" discipleship outcomes are listed and fully described in the Appendices of this resource. Within the text, these outcomes are labeled as L1–L10. You'll find the outcomes within the devotional exercises throughout *Conversation with God*. (An entire framework for spiritual growth has been drawn from a cluster analysis of several Greek and Hebrew words that declare that Christ's followers are to be equipped for works of ministry or service. See the Appendices.)

Next, imagine this: You've just begun a journey. It's as if you're going for a walk. As you read through *Conversation with God*, we invite you to walk in the light of God's Son (see John 8:12), in the light of God's Word (see Psalm 119:105), and in the light of God's people (see Matthew 5:14). The devotional exercises contained in this resource are designed around these three sources of light. When you come to an exercise, we recommend that you pause right then and have a conversation with God.

We're delighted that you've decided to take this walk with God. Be encouraged. God's Word reminds us that it's vitally important to walk in the light. In fact, Jesus told his disciples, "Walk while you have the light" (John 12:35).

The Great Commandment Network has developed the devotional exercises in this resource, the Spirit-empowered discipleship framework, and, in collaboration with others, the Spirit-empowered outcomes that are included. The Great Commandment Network's

deepest desire it to serve our friend, Brian Sutton, and the cause of Spirit-empowered discipleship.



The Great Commandment Network is an international collaborative network of strategic, kingdom leaders from the faith community, marketplace, education, and caregiving fields who prioritize the powerful simplicity of the words of Jesus to love God, live his Word, love people, and live his mission.

## Chapter 1



# Prayer Is Conversation with God

**M**y grandfather, Paul Sutton, was not a preacher; he was a farmer, but he taught me much about God. He wore denim overalls practically every day, other than on Sundays when he went to church. I learned much about prayer as conversation with God from listening to my grandfather pray.

I was one of many grandchildren in the Sutton family, sixteen, to be exact. At one time, many of us attended the same church in rural Lawrence County, Alabama. It was wonderful to be raised in that small church with a big family.

All the grandkids loved to spend the night at Granddaddy and Grandmother's house. It was a small, white house situated on a farm, but it miraculously swelled to accommodate all the grandchildren whenever we wanted to spend the night.

My grandmother, Beatrice, was a fantastic cook. We were often awakened in the morning by the smell of her biscuits, thick chocolate gravy (a Southern breakfast dish), and various meats

being fried from the livestock Granddaddy raised. For me, those times spent with cousins at my grandparents' house were precious. They were grand for many reasons, but perhaps the grandest of reasons was the opportunity I had to listen to Granddaddy pray.

Every night at bedtime, Granddaddy would turn off the television, stop all activity, and gather all of us into the living room. He would then ask us to find a place to pray, and we would all kneel. Granddaddy's small living room would be filled with tiny Sutton kids on our knees beside Granddaddy and Grandmother. All ages were represented. We all said our dutiful prayers for our parents, siblings, Sunday school teachers, pets, football teams, "Bear" Bryant, or whatever else was on our young hearts. Eventually the room would grow still as our little voices faded off and got quiet. We'd slowly stop praying, one by one, and wander off to our beds. But whenever our prayers ceased, Granddaddy's didn't. He always continued to pray even after we were all finished.

He would talk to God like he was talking to his friend. And I distinctly remember one specific line from Granddaddy—I've never heard anyone say it quite like him—"Lord, bless all those that it is our duty to pray for." When we heard him pray, we knew Granddaddy was listening to God. But perhaps even more so, when we heard him pray, we knew God was listening to Granddaddy. It was a conversation between heaven and earth. Hearing Granddaddy's prayers helped me realize early on that prayer is simply a conversation with God. We speak and we listen. We talk and we hear. God wants us to converse with him, much like speaking with a friend.

Jeremiah 33:3 says, "Call to me and I will answer you and tell

you great and unsearchable things you do not know.” These are powerful words indeed—a promise from God. Why then would we *not* pray? The truth is that we have many reasons. And even when we pray, prayer can become just another option for us, something to pick up and put down for our own purposes. But it can and should be so much more than that.

The truth is that prayer is a mighty vehicle for us. It is something we use to carry out the purposes of God in our lives. We know prayer can increase the effectiveness of our ministry; we know prayer will boost our ability to reach the harvest. We pray so we can lead; we pray so we can work; and we pray so we can preach. We pray so we can accomplish what God wants us to accomplish. We pray so we can talk to God. And we pray so we can hear from God.

Prayer and the life of prayer are spiritual practices. I cannot explain them to you; rather, they must be experienced. I’ve seen a myriad of T-shirts and bumper stickers that say, “Prayer changes things.” But prayer does not change things. Prayer has no power whatsoever in and of itself. If simply being enthusiastic about prayer as a powerful vehicle were enough, I could pray to anything and receive an answer. No, prayer doesn’t change things; it is God who changes things! I’ll say it again: It is not prayer or even a life of prayer that brings us power; it is the God to whom we pray who has all power.

Paul said in 1 Thessalonians 5:16–18, “Rejoice always, pray continually, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is God’s will for you in Christ Jesus.” The church has been called to pray continually. You and I have been called to pray continually, pray without

stopping. It is a vital part of the life of a Christian. Whatever has gone on in the past, you can decide today that you're going to be a person who prays—a person who maintains a lifestyle of prayer. I've made the decision—I will pray.

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*It's not prayer itself that has the power; rather,  
it is the God we pray to who has the power.*

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### MAKE THE DECISION: AN EXPERIENCE OF SCRIPTURE

Jesus replied: "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind."  
(Matthew 22:37)

Make the decision to pray by first learning to love God and making him your priority. Since the greatest of all the commandments is to love God, let's pause to consider the question: "How is it that we really love God?" Often our response indicates that we believe that loving God is equal to doing things *for* God. All the while, he is simply longing for us to *relate* to him.

If God needed something done, then he could enlist the angels for perfect execution and without complaint. We, as his created image bearers, have the privilege of intimacy with him. Our journey with God in prayer provides this unique opportunity.

As we approach him in prayer, where do we begin? The psalmist declares:

Worship the LORD with gladness;  
come before him with joyful songs.

Know that the LORD is God.

It is he who made us, and we are his;  
we are his people, the sheep of his pasture.

Enter his gates with thanksgiving  
and his courts with praise;  
give thanks to him and praise his name.  
(Psalm 100:2–4)

Imagine that you're a parent and one of your teenagers initiates this conversation: "Mom/Dad, I'd like to take this time to share the gratefulness I feel for all the ways you have loved me so well!" What an absolute miracle that would be, right? But wouldn't you agree that kind of heartfelt expression of gratitude communicates love? Likewise, you and I express our love to the Lord in many relational ways, and one of the most important is through our gratitude.

*Prayer is a journey into deepened love with the Lord. "Rejoice always, pray continually, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus" (1 Thessalonians 5:16–18). Pause now to pray a prayer of thanksgiving and serve God with a glad heart:*

*Father, as I reflect on the countless ways you have loved me well, my heart overflows with thanksgiving. I'm especially grateful for how you have blessed me with \_\_\_\_\_, and how you have sustained me through \_\_\_\_\_. I praise you for your generosity and grace. Receive my thanksgiving and praise as a small expression of my deep love. Amen.*



L1. Practicing thanksgiving in all things.



In 1 John 5:14, we read, “This is the confidence we have in approaching God: that if we ask anything according to his will, he hears us.” Prayer is a conversation with the one who is always there. It allows us access through Jesus Christ into a conversation with God. The Father is always seeking a conversation with us; he greatly desires to communicate with us.

My wife, Renee, and I recently did some redecorating in our upstairs bathroom. We took down some wallpaper, spackled a few holes, and repainted the walls. She purchased some new decorations and pictures. Of course, she wanted me to hang these pictures on the walls.

So I went into my garage, reached into my black tool bag, pulled out my hammer, and grabbed some nails from my old plastic ice-cream bucket. I took my hammer and used it to drive in every one of those nails in the exact location where Renee wanted the pictures hung.

When I finished, I hung the pictures and headed back into my garage. I opened my black tool bag once again, placed my hammer back inside, and zipped up the bag. Finished! Right now, as I’m writing this, my hammer is put away. I know where it will be the next time I need to drive in a few nails or hang up more pictures. That’s using my hammer as the tool for which it was intended.

We might as well admit it: We often use prayer in our lives and in the church as a tool from a tool bag. When we need God to do something for us, when we need something in ministry, when we desire to have something accomplished, we go to the spiritual tool bag because we know that prayer is what we should use. We

pick up prayer, we pray the prayer, and then we put prayer back in the bag until we need it again. But prayer is intended to be so much more than this!

What if prayer was not simply a vehicle to take us somewhere? What if prayer was not just a tool to get God to move when we wanted him to? What if we could participate in prayer in a completely different—and much more valuable—manner?

So often we use prayer as a vehicle to get us to a desired destination. We need provision, so we pray. We need anointing, so we pray. We need healing or deliverance, or cleansing, so we pray. But what if prayer is not the vehicle that brings us *to* our destination? Rather, what if it *is the destination*?

Prayer is not simply a step of the journey; prayer *is the journey*. When we realize this, we will understand prayer as a continual conversation with God. And as I think back, I'm pretty sure this is a truth my grandfather fully grasped.

In Genesis, we read about the garden of Eden. Adam and Eve had committed a sin—they had eaten the forbidden fruit—and now their eyes were open. The imagery the Word of God painted here is that in the cool of the day, God comes walking through the garden, seeking to talk with them. Can you imagine what that would look like? In the garden of Eden, in the cool of the day, maybe in the afternoon, God comes walking along. Why is he taking a walk in the garden? He's looking for Adam and Eve so he can have a conversation with them.

As God walks, he asks, "Where are you?" God, who is omnipresent—everywhere at every time—and omniscient—all-knowing—asks Adam and Eve, "Where are you?" He knew

where they were, obviously, but they were hiding. They were avoiding this conversation with their Creator. Their sin had led them to avoid God; their disobedience had brought separation. In our lives, sin also separates us from God. Nonetheless, the powerful question God asks them still remains for us to answer, “Where are you?”

Do you think God didn’t know where Adam and Eve were? Do you think God didn’t know the exact pinpoint location, without a GPS, where Adam and Eve were hiding? Have you ever stood in a room that was full or sat at a table with other people and felt completely ignored? Though the room was full, no one was paying attention to you. Have you ever attended an event one day and then the following day you ran into someone who said, “I saw you there,” and you said, “I didn’t see you there”? It is easy to ignore and be ignored.

So many times, God walks into our lives in the cool of the day, and even though he knows exactly where we are, he asks, “Where are you?” Maybe the question God was asking Adam and Eve was not for him. Maybe it was for them.

## **WHERE ARE YOU? AN ENCOUNTER WITH JESUS**

Consider this question: What was going on in the heart of God when he asked the question: “Where are you?” Was his intention to find Adam and then wipe him off the face of the planet? Did God ask the question because he planned to give Adam the silent treatment and never speak to him again? Or was God’s heart and divine intention to ask the

question that ultimately revealed his plan for redemption and restoration?

There were certainly consequences to Adam's disobedience, but the heart of God was filled with compassion and love. We know this because God's plan is revealed throughout Scripture where he is always reaching out to humanity.

Don't miss this: How we view God's heart toward us determines our pursuit of intimacy with him. Listen as he asks the same question of you: "Where are you?" And remember, his heart's intention isn't to harm you or never speak to you again. Who would want to pursue closeness with that kind of "god"?

Instead, imagine this kind of God. Imagine that you're a parent of a small child. You're in a busy shopping mall during the holidays. Hundreds of people are crowding the aisles, hustling to get to the next store, elbowing their way through the halls, and shoving to keep their place in line. Your preschooler is intrigued and distracted by everything in sight. And then it happens. You're focused on a conversation with the salesperson, you look around and your child is gone. You panic. You retrace your steps. Over and over, you're thinking to yourself, *Where are you?*

Consider the emotions flooding your heart. You may be irritated at your child's impulsiveness and scared about the dangers of being separated, but underneath all that is your heart of compassion. Your irritation is no match for the compassion you feel as you imagine your child alone and afraid. The question, "Where are you?" is motivated by love. Now imagine the relief you feel after being reunited with your child; the joy you would feel when the relationship and security are restored.

Though God never has and never will lose sight of us, perhaps we may fail to see him at times. Reflect again on your view of God, just in case you've seen God in another way. *This* is the real God. This is the God who is longing to love you and to intimately relate with you. This kind of God prompts our pursuit of him.

"Yet the LORD longs to be gracious to you; therefore he will rise up to show you compassion. For the LORD is a God of justice. Blessed are all who wait for him!" (Isaiah 30:18). Pause quietly to meditate on the Lord. Use your imagination to picture Jesus sitting at the Father's right hand. *You* have been the lost child, anxious and uncertain. And now he sees you with joy and excitement. He arises with compassion in his heart to embrace you. Allow your heart to celebrate this kind of Jesus!



L3. *Experiencing God as he really is through deepened intimacy with him.*

When prayer becomes more than an event, more than just a hammer in a tool bag that we grab when we need it; when prayer becomes a constant, ongoing conversation with God, we will begin to recognize the countless times we have ignored him. When prayer becomes conversation, God will ask us, "Where are you?" so we can answer, "I am right here."



I learned a lot about farming from Granddaddy. To feed livestock, a person needs hay, so my grandfather grew hay. We would cut,

## About the Author

**Brian Sutton** serves as the executive director of discipleship and leadership development for the Church of God of Prophecy, a leading Christian movement serving in 135 nations. After having ministered as a senior pastor for twenty-five years, most recently serving as lead pastor of the Peerless Road Church, he accepted his current role to facilitate the spiritual and professional development of the ministry of the Church of God of Prophecy and develop Christian discipleship processes for the movement. Additionally, he serves as the publisher of the denomination's official magazine, *The White Wing Messenger*, and as a member of the movement's corporate board of directors, a position he has held since 2010. He also serves as a member of the Pentecostal/Charismatic Churches of North America Discipleship Commission.

Brian has earned a Bachelor of Science Degree in Organizational Management from Covenant College in Lookout Mountain, Georgia; a Master of Arts degree in Church Ministries from Pentecostal Theological Seminary in Cleveland, Tennessee; and a Master of Arts Degree in Religion from Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary in Boston, Massachusetts. He is currently pursuing his Doctor of Ministry degree in Global Pentecostalism from Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary.

He and his wife, Renee (a breast cancer survivor), have been married since 1990. They have a son (Will), a daughter (Tayler), and son-in-law (Chris). The family resides in Cleveland, Tennessee.