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GIVE ME SUCCESS TODAY:

The Prayer of Eliezer

GENESIS 24:12

Are you due for some success? If so, the prayer of Eliezer is a good place to start.

The story begins with Abraham, a recent widower, arriving at the ripe old age of 140 years. Abraham seriously wanted his son, Isaac, to marry and give him a grandson. Isaac was already forty years old and hopelessly single. So Abraham took action.

Abraham called his chief servant, Eliezer, and sent him on an ancient version of Mission Impossible. He would have to travel 450 rigorous miles by camel to the area where Abraham grew up. There he was to select a suitable bride for Isaac. She would have to be from among Abraham's distant relatives (the custom was to marry a first cousin). After finding such a girl, he would then have to convince her to return with him to marry Isaac, a man she had never met. This would be no walk in the park.

Eliezer gathered a small caravan and made the lengthy trek to Abraham's homeland. His plan was to find the right girl at the central meeting place for desert communities—the well. As he approached the town, he offered a simple prayer:

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“O LORD, God of my master Abraham, give me success today, and show kindness to my master Abraham. See, I am standing beside this spring, and the daughters of the townspeople are coming out to draw water. May it be that when I say to a girl, ‘Please let down your jar that I may have a drink,’ and she says, ‘Drink, and I’ll water your camels too’—let her be the one you have chosen for your servant Isaac. By this I will know that you have shown kindness to my master.”

GENESIS 24:12–14

Give me success today.

Notice the core of his prayer: “Give me success today.” This request was simple, specific, and definite in reference to time. He asked God to direct him to the right girl and do it right away. After all, Isaac was not getting any younger. In order to know which girl would be the right one, Eliezer added to his request that she not merely offer to get him a drink but also volunteer to water his camels.

“Give me success today” was a wee, little prayer. Yet it immediately reaped a stupendous, prodigious answer! Look at the glorious results:

Before he had finished praying, Rebekah came out with her jar on her shoulder. She was the daughter of Bethuel son of Milcah, who was the wife of Abraham’s brother Nabor. The girl was very beautiful, a virgin; no man had ever lain with her. She went down to the spring, filled her jar and came up again. The servant hurried to meet her and said, “Please give me a little water from your jar.” “Drink, my lord,” she said, and quickly lowered the jar

The Prayer of Eliezer

to her hands and gave him a drink. After she had given him a drink, she said, "I'll draw water for your camels too, until they have finished drinking."

GENESIS 24:15-19

Bingo! God hit the target. He answered Eliezer's prayer and then some. *Before he had finished praying*, God sent the right girl. Rebekah, as it turned out, was a distant relative of Abraham, which meant she was qualified. Not insignificantly, she also happened to be a very beautiful and unattached virgin. To top it off, she not only gave Eliezer a drink, but she also offered to water his camels!

And that's not all. Later we read that Rebekah was willing to leave her family and her home immediately to make the return trip with Eliezer (24:58). The story even has a happy ending—when Isaac met her, he loved her (24:67).

God did not merely answer Eliezer's request with a timid, little "Yes." His answer was a robust, overwhelming "YES!" Yes, a girl offered to give Eliezer water. Yes, she asked to water his camels as well. Yes, she was related to Abraham. Yes, she was beautiful. Yes, she was an available virgin. Yes, she was willing to travel with him all the way back to marry Isaac. And for the two of them, yes, it was love at first sight.

Furthermore, God's "Yes" blessed everyone involved. Abraham had the good fortune of gaining a non-Canaanite daughter-in-law to be the mother of his grandson. Rebekah became an essential part of God's promise to Abraham that he would become the father of many nations. For Rebekah, she received a husband who loved her and a place in the royal line of the Messiah. She moved from a pagan family to a God-fearing one. Isaac's life was changed because he received a very beautiful

bride. Rebekah would be the woman he would love and who would bear his sons.

But the greatest windfall came to Eliezer. Prior to this event, Eliezer viewed God solely as Abraham's God. Instead of a personal relationship with the Lord, he had more of a secondhand relationship. But after he experienced the loving and powerful way God answered his prayer, he became a man who worshiped God for himself (Genesis 24:26–27).

Eliezer now had his own story to tell. He eagerly told Rebekah's older brother all that the Lord had done for him (see Genesis 24:34–48). Because of this answered prayer, he had his own testimony to share of how God had worked on his behalf.

Now the way I figure it, if God would do that for Eliezer when he prayed, "Give me success," He might be willing to do the same for me, and for you.

Making It Personal

One tiny prayer had a tremendous impact on many lives. As we read the story of this ancient prayer, we find several lessons for our lives today.

1. *Prayer is for everyone.* Although we assume the servant was Eliezer, we do not know for sure. Chapter 24 simply calls him "the chief servant of Abraham."¹ But nothing in the Word of God is written the way it is by accident. Eliezer may be intentionally unnamed to remind us that answered prayer is not the privileged domain of the big-name, spiritual elite. It is the heritage of all who call upon the Lord.

2. *God answered a selfish-sounding prayer.* Eliezer prayed, "Give *me* success today"—and God answered in the affirmative. While we may have been convinced it is wrong to pray

The Prayer of Eliezer

selfish-sounding prayers, as a result, we are missing many of the blessings God intended.

In the biblical record, God answered some selfish-sounding prayers when they were offered with legitimate motives and for beneficial things. Eliezer's request, while appearing selfish, was also *selfless*, in that he wanted God to answer in order to ultimately serve his master. He was not praying about his own bride but a bride for another man, Isaac. And, if the unnamed servant is indeed Eliezer, then this request was especially unselfish, as Eliezer was sent to get a bride for the man who took his place as Abraham's heir (Genesis 15:2)!

3. *God is very eager to answer prayer.* Notice those first four words in Genesis 24:15: "Before he finished praying." God was already answering *before* Eliezer was finished praying! Rebekah came out with her jar on her shoulder *before* Eliezer had even completed his petition. When we ask for good things with worthy motives, God may respond quickly.

Often we have the misconception that God is reluctant to answer prayer. We think that He must be begged or manipulated or argued into answering. I have come to assume that when it comes to asking in prayer, I have nothing to lose. If mine is not the right request offered at the right time, or if my motives are not quite right, what is the worst that can happen? God can say "No."

But if my request is something to which God can say "Yes," then by asking I may receive a blessing I would not have obtained otherwise. I would rather go to my grave being guilty of asking for more than I received than for missing answers because I did not ask.

4. *When you pray for success, give God a specific target.* Eliezer asked that a very special girl would not only be willing to give

him a drink, but that she would also offer to water his camels (24:14). Too often we get vague blessings because we pray vague prayers. If we want specific answers, we need to make specific requests.

I learned the power of specific prayer as a sophomore at a rather strict college. I needed a haircut or I would be in violation of the school hair code. One evening my resident assistant gave me twenty-four hours to get a haircut. I had absolutely no money and no hope of getting a decent haircut for free. (My three roommates had proven to be notorious “butchers” who no sane person would trust with a pair of scissors.)

Later that night I was reading in Luke 11 where Jesus told the story of the persistent friend. The passage encourages specific prayer as the man asks for *three* loaves. So I gave God a specific threefold target: I asked Him for (1) a good haircut, (2) before the next evening ended, and (3) for free. As I prayed, I received a wonderful sense of peace. Soon I dozed off to sleep.

The next day I overslept and ran out to class, forgetting all about my need for a haircut. But God didn’t forget. That evening at the dinner table a friend introduced me to a girl I had never met. As we talked, she said that she had graduated from beauty school and her dad had made her attend a liberal arts college for a semester. She said that she really missed cutting hair and was thinking of starting her own business on the side. Then she looked at me and said, “You have a nice head of hair. Hmm, I miss cutting hair so much, I would cut yours for free.”

After dinner I could not help but smile as I sat in a chair listening to her whistle and watching the hair drop around my feet. God had heard my simple, specific prayer. He had given me a great haircut, in less than twenty-four hours, for free.

I asked for success and God answered. I had a need and God

The Prayer of Eliezer

met it. When given a target to hit, God drilled a bull's-eye.²

Need an answer? Can you use some success in a God-directed assignment? Why not give God a target to hit? He might just answer, "Yes!" He might even say, "YES!"

NOTES

¹The servant's name is not stated in Genesis 24:2. He is simply referred to as "the chief servant of Abraham." Scholars assume that this servant was Eliezer, whom Abraham trusted enough to consider making his heir (Genesis 15). For a more detailed discussion, see note for Genesis 24:2 in John MacArthur, *The MacArthur Study Bible* (Nashville, TN: Word Publishing, 1997), p. 46.

²For more on prayer for success, see Dave Earley, *Prayer Odyssey* (Shipensburg, PA: Destiny Image Publishers, 2003), pp. 37–40.

2

BLESS ME:

The Prayer of Jacob

GENESIS 32:26

As they say where I grew up, Jacob was “in a fix.” Years before, he had taken the birthright blessing meant for his older brother, Esau, and Esau had not forgotten. Keep in mind that Esau was a burly, roughhewn, angry man. Not the sort you would want to meet in a dark alley.

Now Esau was bearing down on Jacob with an army of four hundred men. The best plan Jacob could devise was to use Middle Eastern strategy and send Esau a series of carefully selected gifts, even though he had little hope that this would work.

At that point Jacob did what desperate men should do. He prayed (Genesis 32:9–12), but he didn’t sound very sincere, apparently even to himself. Thus, he continued to try and wiggle out of sure disaster (Genesis 32:13–24), and ended up finding himself alone and even more desperate (Genesis 32:24).

A man appeared in the dark to Jacob and a battle began. Arms were twisted, legs were seized, and necks were wrenched. All through the night the wrestling war was waged. When it became clear Jacob could not win, he grabbed hold of the stranger and hung on for dear life. Then he uttered a small prayer: “I will not let you go unless you bless me” (Genesis 32:26).

The Prayer of Jacob

Bless me.

Jacob had taken hold of God—his opponent in the dark—and refused to let go until God had blessed him. Asking for all the blessing he could get was typical of Jacob. He had asked his father to give him the biggest blessing his father could give and now he was asking the same of God.

When I first read this story I was surprised at the boldness, the brashness, and yes, the greediness of Jacob. Come on! I was expecting God to rise up and blast him for making such a request. Instead, God gave Jacob what he asked for. God blessed him with a manifold blessing—one replete with transformation, revelation, direction, protection, and impact.

The man asked him, “What is your name?” “Jacob,” he answered. Then the man said, “Your name will no longer be Jacob, but Israel, because you have struggled with God and with men and have overcome.”

GENESIS 32:27–28

God changed his name from Jacob, meaning “grasper,” to Israel, meaning “prince of God.” The name change indicated a transformation of heart. There is a positive side to Jacob’s personality, and God was obviously impressed with his prevailing perseverance. He had held on, and hung on, until he got what he sought. When he had a chance to get a hold of God, he refused to let go.

Jacob said, “Please tell me your name.” But he replied, “Why do you ask my name?” Then he blessed him there. So Jacob called the place Peniel, saying, “It is because I saw God face to face, and yet my life was spared.” The sun rose

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above him as he passed Peniel, and he was limping because of his hip. Therefore to this day the Israelites do not eat the tendon attached to the socket of the hip, because the socket of Jacob's hip was touched near the tendon.

GENESIS 32:29–32

When Jacob chose the Hebrew word *Peniel*, which means “the face of God,” to commemorate the site, he was clearly aware that he had been given a rare and glorious opportunity. He had a face-to-face encounter with the living God and lived to tell about it. At Peniel, God revealed Himself to Jacob in a life-changing way. God touched his hip and changed the way he walked the rest of his life. More importantly, God touched his heart and changed the way he lived the rest of his life.

Jacob looked up and there was Esau, coming with his four hundred men; so he divided the children among Leah, Rachel and the two maidservants. He put the maidservants and their children in front, Leah and her children next, and Rachel and Joseph in the rear. He himself went on ahead and bowed down to the ground seven times as he approached his brother.

GENESIS 33:1–3

God gave Jacob a plan, one that would require something new for Jacob. He would take the path of humility. When Jacob went and faced his brother, he bowed low before him seven times as an inferior would before a highly honored patron.

But Esau ran to meet Jacob and embraced him; he threw his arms around his neck and kissed him. And they wept.

GENESIS 33:4

The Prayer of Jacob

Instead of killing Jacob, Esau embraced him and kissed him. Together they wept. Years of deep bitterness and guilt were erased in a few moments. God had blessed Jacob with protection in the face of sure death.

This little prayer caused lives to be changed! All those with Jacob—his wives, children, servants, and livestock—were spared. Among those was his son, Judah, from whom the Messiah would descend. So, in a sense, Jacob's prayer blessed all of us.

Beyond that, Esau's life was wonderfully altered. He let go of a lifetime of bitterness toward his overly aggressive brother. Instead of killing Jacob, he embraced him.

Yet, the biggest change was seen in the life of Jacob. Jacob not only had a new name, but he had a new heart. Notice how this story ends.

[Esau asked,] "What do you mean by all this company I have met?" And he said, "To find favor in the sight of my lord." But Esau said, "I have plenty, my brother; let what you have be your own." Jacob said, "No, please, if I have found favor in your sight, then take my present from my hand, for I see your face as one sees the face of God, and you have received me favorably. Please take my gift which has been brought to you, because God has dealt graciously with me and because I have plenty." Thus he urged him and he took it.

GENESIS 33:8–11 NASB

Can you imagine Jacob begging Esau to "please take my blessing"? Jacob, the one who previously had stolen the blessing, was now eager to give a blessing. He was a new man. He humbly acknowledged that God had blessed him. Therefore, he desired to bless others.

Making It Personal

1. *God blesses the spiritually aggressive.* The blessing of God does not necessarily rest on the passive or the lax. I think that somewhere along the line we have developed the mistaken notion that Christians are nice, quiet, almost wimpy people.

Nothing could be further from the truth. While we are to be gracious and kind, God wants us to be much more than really nice people. He dreams of His people winning battles, relishing adventures, and enjoying all that He has for us.

One man describes it this way: "Prayer is not a lovely sedan for a sightseeing trip around the city. Prayer is a truck that goes straight to the warehouse, backs up, loads, and comes home with the goods. Too many people rattle their trucks all over town and never back up to the warehouse! They do not go after something when they pray. They do not ask, therefore, they do not receive."¹

I have to admit that I have a quiet, timid streak. My mother was a Quaker and I was raised to cast a skeptical eye on bold, aggressive people. But timidity must not be confused with humility. God blesses humility, not timidity. He also invites boldness in prayer.²

A few years ago we decided to have a special Sunday at our church when everyone would bring unchurched friends to the worship services. The week before that Sunday I had made the bold assertion that I believed if we asked God to bless us, we could see fifty adults giving their hearts to Jesus Christ. Afterward, my wife calmly reminded me how I had stuck my neck out.

In preparation for Sunday, hundreds of our members were fasting and praying. Many of us got alone and wrestled with God. I boldly, and maybe a bit desperately, asked Him to bless us with a record attendance and fifty decisions for Christ.

The Prayer of Jacob

At that time we had three Sunday services. At the conclusion of the first, a handful of people responded to the opportunity to trust Christ as Savior. The second service concluded with a dozen giving their hearts to Jesus. I was very excited for our new brothers and sisters in the faith, but we would need to have thirty-four decisions in the last service to reach fifty.

The third service was packed and everything went well. I gave the invitation to trust Christ and one by one, dozens of people began to respond. After the service ended one of our other pastors grabbed me. “Fifty,” he said with a huge grin. “Can you believe it? I counted a total of fifty adults trusting Christ as Savior today!”

Immediately after that, a handful of men walked up to me with curious looks on their faces. They were the prayer team who had spent the entire service in another part of the building getting hold of God and asking Him to bless that day. They had one question they had to ask: “How many?”

I teased them, “How many what?”

“How many people met Jesus as Savior today?” they asked eagerly. “We felt led to ask God to bless us with fifty,” they said. “So how many were there?”

I grinned and said, “You should have asked for fifty-one.”

2. *God is willing and able to bless those who ask.* God loves to rain down favors on the lives of His children. He wants to benefit us as much as we can stand. It may not be according to our when, where, or how, but God wants to bless His children! According to Bruce Wilkinson, writing in *The Prayer of Jabez*, “The very nature of God is to have goodness in so much abundance that it overflows into our unworthy lives. If you think about God differently than that, I am asking you to change the way you think. Why not make it a lifelong commitment to ask God every day to bless you—while He’s at it, bless you *a lot*.”³

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3. *God's blessing is big enough to go beyond us to others.* Jacob asked God to bless him, but he was not the only one blessed. His family, his brother, and ultimately through Messiah, all of us were blessed.

4. *Receiving God's blessing should make us the "blessers" of others.* Being the recipients of God's generous grace should make us graciously generous. God is all about others. Everything He does in us and for us is designed to eventually flow through us to others.

5. *God reveals Himself to those who really want to know Him.* God Himself is the ultimate blessing. Jacob's greatest blessing was not that his brother spared him, but that he got to see God, touch God, and hear God. It doesn't get any better than that!

Here's one final thought on Jacob's prayer: There are no miracles without messes and no need for blessing if we have it all already. So, if there is a blessing you really need or want and could use to bless others, and you believe that God would want you to have it, then don't be shy. Go ahead and ask. God is able and, as we saw with Jacob, He blesses the spiritually aggressive.

NOTES

¹ J. R. Rice, *Prayer: Asking and Receiving* (Murfreesboro, TN: Sword of the Lord, 1942), p. 52.

² See Hebrews 4:16.

³ Bruce Wilkinson, *The Prayer of Jabez* (Sisters, OR: Multnomah Publishers, 2000), pp. 28–29.

GO WITH US:

The Prayer of Moses

EXODUS 33:15

Poor guy. Moses faced one of the most difficult leadership challenges in history. He had to lead a million whining slaves out of Egypt, through the desert wilderness, and into the Promised Land. Every time he turned around, his people were either rebelling or griping.

One of the lowest points came when Moses descended from Mount Sinai carrying the Ten Commandments, only to come upon a riotous party at which the people were worshipping dumb idols. God would have annihilated the Hebrew people had Moses not interceded (Exodus 32:9–14).

How was Moses supposed to guide the people safely through the hazards of the desert into the Promised Land without them destroying him or themselves?

In answer, Moses prayed.

Now Moses used to take a tent and pitch it outside the camp some distance away, calling it the “tent of meeting.” . . . As Moses went into the tent, the pillar of cloud would come down and stay at the entrance, while the Lord spoke with Moses. Whenever the people saw the pillar of cloud standing at the entrance to the tent, they all stood

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and worshiped, each at the entrance to his tent. The Lord would speak to Moses face to face, as a man speaks with his friend.

EXODUS 33:7-11

Moses was a man of effective prayer. Moses had a *place* where he met with God—the tent of meeting—far away from the hustle of humanity. When Moses went into the tent to meet God, God came into the tent to meet Moses. Moses understood something we must remember: *God is willing, ready, and available to meet with us when we make time to meet with Him.*

Moses had very personal meetings with God. “The Lord spoke with Moses face to face, as a man speaks with his friend.” Nothing was hidden. It was a dear and daily dialogue, as well as a close and consistent conversation. Moses had developed, probably on the backside of the desert during his forty years of exile, a familiar friendship with God. That is the secret of inner strength, and that is the foundation of effective prayer.

Out of this friendship Moses voiced his complaint.

Moses said to the LORD, “You have been telling me, ‘Lead these people,’ but you have not let me know whom you will send with me.”

EXODUS 33:12

Forty years earlier Moses had tried to deliver Israel in his own strength only to fail miserably. Now he knew that he needed God. Without God, the entire endeavor would be a tragic nightmare. Without God it was hopeless.

Moses needed the presence of God. There was no other way. Yet, he not only recognized his need, he acted on it. Moses