
FROM PRAYER ACTIVITIES TO RECEPTIVE PRAYER: GODLY LOVE AND THE KNOWLEDGE THAT SURPASSES UNDERSTANDING

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Research on prayer, even when using measures beyond simple prayer frequency to create typologies, has ignored the dynamic relationship between God as a “divine other” in interaction with the pray-er. Using statistics from surveys on prayer as a backdrop, qualitative accounts that demonstrate the relational nature of prayer are explored through the lenses of the Godly love model. Based on data collected as part of the Flame of Love project, prayer is conceptualized as integrating *active* and *receptive* streams, with tributaries of *prophetic* and *mystical* prayer experiences. Taken together these dimensions of prayer play an important role in describing what the Apostle Paul calls “knowing the love that surpasses understanding” and are confirmed by multi-variate analysis of new survey data. Although active prayer has received much scholarly attention, our findings suggest that a closer look at the receptive forms would provide a more complete picture of what people actually do when they pray.

For this reason I kneel before the Father, from whom his whole family in heaven and on earth derives its name. I pray that out of his glorious riches he may strengthen you with power through his Spirit in your inner being, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith. And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, may have power, together with all the saints, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, and to know this love that surpasses knowledge—that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God (Ephes. 3:14-19, NIV).

Despite the plethora of theological and philosophical articles and books on love, the topic has failed to capture the imagination

of most social scientists. The brilliant pioneering work of sociologist Pitirim Sorokin (1954/2002) in the 1950s that explored the power of love in moral transformation was overshadowed at the time by positivistic empiricism that was regarded as the key to “real” science. Even after positivism lost its stronghold on American sociology and new social philosophies (including social constructionism and post-modernism) opened the door for taking seriously non-material factors in human behavior, love remains a largely forgotten topic. It is only within the past decade that a new reprint of Sorokin’s work on love was made available, bringing with it a renewed interest in this important but complex topic. The interdisciplinary Flame of Love Project in which this article is grounded is one important example of a concerted effort to study self-giving love, especially as it is related to God’s unlimited love.¹

Prayer also has been subject to a similar pattern of neglect and seeming indifference in social science research. Little progress has been made in unpacking a practice that psychologists Meadow and Kahoe (1984, p.120) once dismissed as “remain(ing) outside the domain of science,” and sociologist Ian Robertson (1981) used to describe social deviance, stances that are still widely held. Fueled by conflicting and

¹The Flame of Love Project is a four-year a larger interdisciplinary effort that centered around a fundamental question: “To what extent can emotionally powerful experiences of a ‘divine flame of love’ move us beyond our ordinary self-interests and help us express unconditional, unlimited love for all others, especially when our human capacities seem to reach their limits?” (see Lee and Poloma 2009). This project, a joint venture of The University of Akron and the Institute for Research on Unlimited Love, was made possible through a generous grant from the John Templeton Foundation and the active involvement of a team of scholars in a variety of social science and theological traditions.

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inconclusive results from clinical studies of healing prayer,² many scholars continue to assume that prayer cannot be researched or that it is simply an illustration of irrational behavior. Although survey data collected over six decades has consistently shown that nearly nine out of ten Americans engage in prayer, little is known beyond these reported frequencies about what people actually do when they pray.³ Even less is known about what people may experience when they pray or how prayer and its attendant experiences affect their lives.

Inspired by Paul's prayer for the Ephesians in the epigraph of this paper and made possible through a John Templeton Foundation funded interdisciplinary four-year project on The Flame of Love (FOL), these two widely neglected topics—namely, prayer and love—are here brought together for discussion. Our guiding thesis explores the relationship between divine love and prayer, considering the effects of reported divine-human encounters on human behavior and attitudes. The relationship between God and pray-ers is explored through a model of “Godly love,” a process defined as *the dynamic interaction between divine and human love that enlivens and expands benevolence* (see Lee and Poloma 2009; Poloma and Hood 2008; Poloma and Green 2010). In biblical terms, Godly love is basically the Great Commandment to love God and love neighbor as self, what theologian Frank Macchia calls the “most important aspect of religious devotion by far (the greatest according to the Christian New Testament)” (Lee and Poloma 2009, p.150).

²See, for example, the well-publicized “STEP” (Study of the Therapeutic Effects of Intercessory Prayer) article, published in *The American Heart Journal* in 2006) using an experimental design to study the effects of distance prayer for coronary artery bypass surgery. For a review of similar studies see Roberts, Ahmend, Hall and Davison, “Intercessory prayer for the alleviation of ill health.” <http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/19370557>

³Ninety percent of those surveyed for a Gallup Report in 1948 acknowledged that they prayed; thirty years later in 1978, a nearly identical proportion (89 percent) reported that they prayed to God. In 1988, the year of the Gallup Survey for a groundbreaking book on prayer by Poloma and Gallup (1991), 88 percent of all respondents acknowledged that they prayed to God. The decline over the next twenty years has been negligible. The 2008 Baylor Survey reports 87 percent of Americans pray at least once in a while, with an identical figure found in the 2009 Godly Love National Survey. Furthermore, a clear majority – 68 percent – of all GLNS respondents say they pray at least once a day, a figure that is identical to the figure reported by the 2007 U.S. Religious Landscape Survey conducted by the Pew Research Center's Forum on Religion and Public Life.

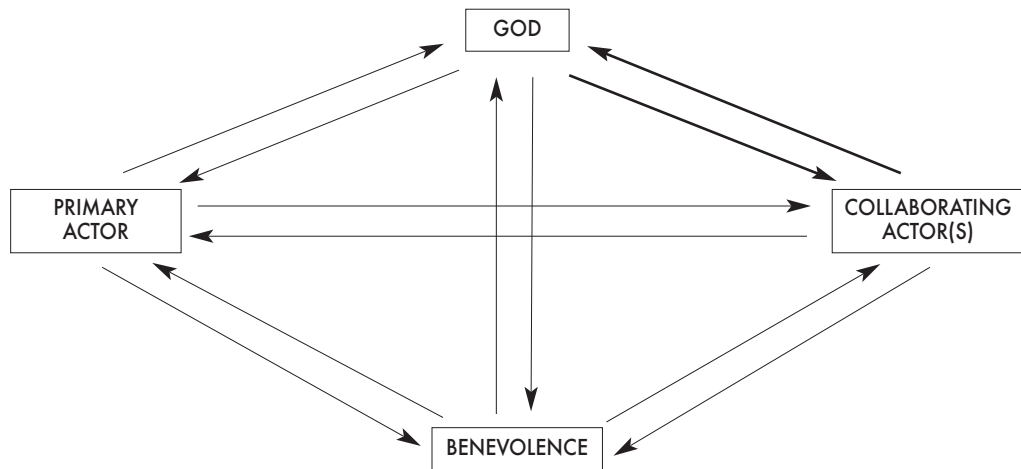
PRAYER AND GODLY LOVE

To help visualize the process of Godly love, we present Figure 1, the basic diamond-shaped model (d-model) with labels of interaction components and arrows designating various relationships used to guide empirical research and theological reflection in the Flame of Love Project (see Lee and Poloma 2009; also www.godlyloveproject.org). The bottom half of the figure presents a simple model of human interaction that is basic to social science involving two actors affecting an outcome measure. [In the case of the FOL project, “benevolence” is the outcome measure, but psychological variables (including subjective perceptions of well-being) could also serve as outcomes.]

The top half of the d-model represents a largely unrecognized dimension, namely God as a “significant other” (Pollner 1989; see also Stark 1965) who is theoretically conceptualized as being in interaction with humans through prayer. Obviously no empirical data can be collected from a divine other, but data can be collected about God from persons who perceive that they do indeed interact with God. Our decision to allow reported interaction with God a place in the d-model is in accord with the commonly-accepted Thomas Theorem in social psychology, that states “if people define situations as real, they are real in their consequences” (Thomas and Thomas, 1928, pp. 571-72). The majority of Americans do define interaction with the divine to be a reality in their lives, and the d-model allows for testing for effects of this perceived reality. The boxes featured in the middle section of the figure to the left and right respectively are labeled “primary actor” and “collaborating actor(s)” to designate human interaction that, as we will see, also impacts different forms of prayer.

The full d-model has been used for guiding empirical analysis in several book length monographs (c.f. Poloma and Hood 2008; Lee and Poloma 2009; Poloma and Green 2010; and Lee, Poloma and Post, in process). While human perceptions of interaction with God in prayer has been found to have significant effects on human benevolence in FOL research, other findings have demonstrated psychological benefits derived from prayer. We present the entire model for heuristic purposes, but our focus is less on final outcomes than on the interactive processes in the top half of the model—particularly between “God” and the “primary actor” in which love is the medium and the message.

Figure 1



Conceptualization and Typologies

When nearly nine out of ten Americans are said to engage in prayer at least on occasion—with a sizable majority (68 percent) claiming to pray at least once daily—it is not surprising that not all are involved in the same activity or enjoying the same experiences. Yet when prayer measures have been included in surveys, Whittington and Scher (2010, p.59) observe that, “the majority of current research views prayer as an undifferentiated concept.” Several typologies of prayer, however, have been created to “differentiate” the concept with taxonomies of prayer activities.⁴ Recently a psychometric evaluation has been done on typologies created by Poloma and Pendleton and by Spilka and Ladd (Breslin, Lewis and Shevlin, 2010) as scholars attempt to move measurement of prayer beyond the single measure of prayer frequency. After defining prayer as “an attempt to create a meaningful relationship with a deity,” Whittington and Scher (2010, p.59) present the research demonstrating that “prayer plays an important role in both physical and psychological well-being” and comment how “little attention has been paid to the differing psychological experiences that people attempt to create for themselves during prayer.” While Whittington and Scher have provided a new typology of active prayer that builds on earlier

research and presents a clearer picture of how these prayer types relate to well-being, their survey results have little to say about religious experience. Theirs is a comprehensive taxonomy of prayer activities that “highlights the complex, multidimensional nature of religion,” as it demonstrates that various prayer types “have different effects on psychological well-being” (ibid, p.66) with a potential to explore prayer beyond Christianity, but it fails to capture religious experiences during prayer.

Poloma and Gallup (1991) and Poloma and Pendleton (1990, 1991a, 1991b) were the first to develop a prayer activity typology based on empirical data, a typology that has been proved reliable, although its optimal fit has been questioned (Breslin, Lewis, and Shevlin 2010). Other typologies have provided additional clarity for understanding what people do when they pray (c.f. Ladd and Spilka, 2002). It is worthy of note, however, that Poloma and her colleagues regarded prayer activities as but one dimension of prayer, and perhaps not even the most interesting one. They also related prayer activities to prayer experiences, a fact that has been largely overlooked.⁵ Poloma and Gallup (1991, p.65) conclude their chapter on prayer experiences as follows:

⁵The “prayer experience” scale included the following items: experiencing a deep sense of peace and well-being,” “the strong presence of God,” “receiving a definite answer to a specific prayer request,” “receiving a deeper insight into a spiritual or biblical truth,” and “felt divinely inspired or ‘led by God’ to perform some specific action.”

⁴For illustration and further discussion of typologies created by M. Poloma and G. Gallup, R. Foster, and T. Csordas, see Wilkinson and Althouse (2010).

Based on the data presented in this chapter we can state with some confidence that Americans are not only having religious experiences but that these experiences are at the heart of their relationship with God. Religious ritual and belief may commonly accompany or precede these experiences, but the experiences themselves may be regarded as the vital link between pray-ers and the God to whom they pray.

In sum, through such preliminary research we now have a better understanding of what people do when they pray—prayer activities that include adoration, thanksgiving, supplication, confession, reception, and obligation (Whittington and Scher, 2010)—all entailing human activity. But prayer is more than human activity, although active prayer most probably is the first step of an ongoing process. We suggest there are two primary dimensions of prayer that are familiar to spiritual directors and to many pray-ers but remain largely unnoted by those doing research on prayer. There is clearly an “active” dimension involving human activity reflected in the prayer typologies, but there is second dimension that often permeates active prayer that we call “receptive” (Poloma 2009; Poloma and Green, 2010). The receptive dimension allows prayer to move from soliloquy to dialogue with the divine and beyond to mystical union, a dimension that is reflected in Poloma and colleagues’ later works (c.f., Poloma 2003; Poloma and Hood 2008; Poloma and Green 2010). We are able to explore these dimensions of prayer—*active* with its human activity directed toward the divine and *receptive* prayer, including prophetic and mystical tributaries—through qualitative and quantitative data collected by the FOL project. The FOL national survey included items and scales to measure prayer activity, receptive prayer (mystical and prophetic), and a scale that taps experiences of divine love.⁶ Fleshing out the bare bones of statistics provided by the survey are interviews lasting from one hour to three hours with nearly 120 exemplars of Godly love, men and women of differing age, race, ethnicity, religious denominations, educational level, and occupations who were known in their communities for their leadership and benevolent activities. Most respondents eagerly shared their sometimes difficult and uncertain spiritual journeys, including intimate details of their prayer life and their relationship with God, providing thick descriptions of their spiritual lives. Interviews were

recorded and transcribed, giving us the material to develop a metanarrative on prayer.

Pathways to Receptive Prayer

Nearly all pray-ers engage in multiple types of prayer activities. For example, using Whittington and Scher’s 2010 recent typology of adoration, thanksgiving, supplication, confession, and reception, we see the following in the FOL survey results: 95% of pray-ers indicated that they “worship and adore God” (adoration); 98% said they “thank God for God’s blessings” (thanksgiving); 89% “ask God for things,” 89% “ask God for guidance in decision making” and 89% “pray for the needs of others” (supplication); 88% said that they “spend time quietly being in the presence of God” (receptive).⁷ In their pioneering national survey on prayer, Poloma and Gallup (1991, p.30) found that 95% of pray-ers “talked to God” in their own words, but fewer heard back from God as they noted the following:

Like ritual prayer, conversational prayer may be a monologue rather than a dialogue. It may involve perceived dialogue with God or it may be set and routine. For example, although 91 percent of the respondents requested divine guidance for decision making, nearly half (43%) had never experienced God’s leading them to perform a specific action, and a little over a quarter (28%) reported they had never received an answer from God to a specific prayer request.

The existing prayer typologies demonstrate important types of prayer activities that move beyond the simplistic single item measure of prayer frequency, but these typologies are but the tip of the iceberg. Prayer is more than an activity; it involves a relationship with the divine that includes two other dimensions that we call “prophetic dialogue” and “divine communion.”

Although there are exceptions (as in the case of Greg’s narrative that follows), active prayer marks the start of a prayer journey that begins in childhood. With parents leading them in “now I lay me down to sleep,” teaching them the “Our Father,” or encouraging them to talk to God in their own words, children are urged to reach out to the divine in prayer. Socialization theorists have noted that the generalization

⁶The national telephone survey, conducted in English and Spanish, collected a random sample of 1208 adults in the fall of 2009 (with a margin of error of plus or minus 2.9 percentage points and a response rate of 36 percent).

⁷Whittington and Scher’s (2010) sixth category, obligatory prayer, was not taped in the FOL survey, but it has overlap with what Poloma and Gallup (1991) termed “ritual prayer.” In the Gallup survey, 21% “read from a book of prayers” and 50% “recited prayers they had memorized.” Whittington and Scher’s purposive sample suggests that “obligatory prayer” is less likely practiced by Christians (especially Protestants) than by Jews and Muslims.

that “religious families tend to produce religious children” is largely true (Hood, Hill, and Spilka, 2009). Families undoubtedly play an important role in the process for most children. A corollary that prayerful parents produce prayerful children is also likely, especially in light of the narratives shared by our interviewees.⁸ We began our interviews with a simple invitation: “Can you share with us a few events that shaped who you are today.” Interviewees, including the ones whose stories we selected for presentation here, nearly always began with an account from their childhood that centered on a spiritual experience. The five accounts that we present in some detail represent a range of experiences and backgrounds. They include a Hispanic (male) minister and university professor; a former Amish now evangelical businesswoman; an African-American (female) who leads a prison ministry; a Bulgarian immigrant revival speaker and musician; and a white (male) non-denominational church pastor. Each account contributes to our understanding of the streams and tributaries of prayer and the importance of prayer for the Godly love model.

THE FLOW FROM ACTIVE TO RECEPTIVE PRAYER: FIVE NARRATIVES

Javier: Hispanic Catholic to Pentecostal

Growing up Catholic in Puerto Rico did not prepare Javier to become a devout Catholic as socialization theory might have predicted. He describes his childhood as follows:

It was very religious, a lot of guilt. I don't have to elaborate on that. Anybody that knows Catholicism in Puerto Rico knows how this works. The thing is that at age 14, I hated going to church; I had been forced by my mother, she was very tough. She would beat me when I first quit, but then she gave up.

It may be of interest to note that Javier had an unusual experience when he was about five or six years old—unusual even for a child of a devout Puerto Rican family. He had a vision of Our Lady of Guadalupe (Mary, the mother of Jesus, and the patron of Mexico) while sitting in the back of a house where a family party was in process. He shared his vision with his mother, and although she discouraged him from

sharing it with anyone else, “my mother knew that it was something I actually saw; she knew that I was not inventing it.” Fifty years later as an ordained minister in an Evangelical denomination where a vision of Mary might be likely to be regarded as demonic, Javier still recalled the experience with reverence and awe—a “very real and positive experience.” He seemed to struggle in the interview as he struggled to find for the appropriate biblical context in which to place the vision: “So I would not deny that it may have actually been the mother of Jesus who somehow revealed herself to me—just as angels sometimes appeared or just like Elijah and Moses appeared in the mountain many years after they were dead.”

Although he never again had a vision of Mary, Javier reported going to a Pentecostal prayer meeting some 30 years later where encountered another unusual mystical experience, this time an “angelic visitation”:

I was already ordained and was invited to this prayer meeting conducted by a minister from Guatemala as “a man of God who knew the Word (Bible).” And I had this angelic visitation. I felt a touch right here (Javier pointed to his back), and I almost exploded. Then I told the angel, “That’s enough.” (laughter) That’s true; my wife is my witness. And the angel just went by. It was so strong—the presence—that I just didn’t want any more. And that was an angel! Can you imagine the Holy Spirit?

These two incidents are illustrative of experiences of receptive prayer and, more specifically, mystical prayer. His childhood socialization was grounded in active forms of obligatory prayer associated with Catholic rituals. Javier takes some pride in his photographic memory; and if he had chosen his own path rather than what he perceives to be his divine call to ministry and earning a Ph.D. in sociology, he would have liked to have become a Christian apologist. He laughingly stated that God’s “messing” with his life—through unexpected, receptive prayer experiences and changed circumstances—took him from being an atheist Marxist with a passion for radical politics and professional basketball to his calling as minister and a sociology professor.

Javier began studying at the university when he was 17, where he would become a self-described “evangelist” for atheistic Marxism. However, after some serious disappointments and major crises in his early 20s, Javier began to suffer severe bouts of depression that he believed caused him to question his atheism. One of his biggest frustrations came from his work with the Puerto Rican independence party:

⁸Yet when examined in light of empirical data, this generalization is not as simple as it first appears. The “preparedness model,” in which children are assumed to have a natural tendency to be prepared to accept religious ideas, “may have some truth to it. But as Hood et al (2009:90) point out socialization theories “offers little insight as to *why* they are true.

They talk about independence, but they were not very free themselves. I really wanted to help the nation, but the leaders were no better than the pro-American 'other guys.' They were married, had women—you can imagine. I said to myself, 'They speak about freedom, and they themselves are slaves of sex and other things.'

Javier began to read prolifically as he sought philosophical answers for his interior turmoil, and he was especially impressed by the writings of the non-Christian Cuban philosopher Jose Marti and those of the French author Tocqueville. Although philosophy did not lessen his depression or his desire to die, he looked upon this time of intense study as his "pre-evangelist period" that moved him "from atheistic materialism to philosophical idealism." He credits his period of pre-evangelism and Marti's writings with leading him to abandon Marxist materialism and with preparing him to become open to the realm of the supernatural and the worldview of Christianity: "For Marti the essence of reality was love, idea, freedom, all those things that are not material. He was the opposite of Marx. If Marx said that material relations is the essence of reality, Martin said that idea, words, spirit is the essence of life."

Although Javier gave up on Marxism and radical politics, his dream of becoming a professional basketball player still provided hope. This hope was fueled with a successful tournament after which his future looked bright. Javier added, "But then God started, in my opinion, to mess up my life" (laughter). Just before the next game, he had an automobile accident in which he hit another car. He was not injured, but the game went very badly. That began the downward spiral where his only hope at the time—basketball—was dashed:

The next game, I developed asthma and for the first time in my life, I could not breathe. Finally, I played so bad the next three games that they practically told me 'you should retire.' I mean it was horrible. And then I found myself without basketball, sick, frustrated with women, frustrated with politics. My education was a mess because I didn't go to classes. Then I found myself absolutely depressed and alone. For three days I didn't leave my room, didn't eat, didn't drink. Three days in my mother's home. My mother was a wise woman, she left me there.

Javier insisted that no one converted him; it was "God bringing himself to me." He was reading the New Testament during this self-imposed period of isolation when he "realized that Christ was special and that he was God and I knew that I wanted to convert to him." Receptive prayer, in this case prophetic prayer, began for him out of active reading in isolation where God seemed to speak to him

through the scriptures. Feeling a need to make a public profession of his newly found faith but unwilling because of his radical politics to go to a traditional church, he happened upon a group of hippies in a nearby park who were part of the neo-Pentecostal Jesus Movement of the 1970s. It was a sense of God that came through obligatory prayer—reading the Bible and fasting—combined with receptive prayer experiences that provided the catalyst for Javier to move from intellectual inquiry to heart-felt faith. Regular experiences of God have marked his spiritual journey ever since.

Although he remains intellectually curious (as demonstrated by his post-conversion Ph.D. earned in sociology), Javier reports life decisions (including enrolling in graduate studies) that he believes were guided by an ongoing interaction with the divine through what we call "prophetic prayer," some rooted in intuition and others in reading seemingly ordinary happenings through the lenses of the divine.

Amy: Amish Community to All-American Businesswoman

Amy's upbringing in an Amish community presents a different portrait of a spiritual journey from active to receptive prayer. Like Javier, she participated in obligatory prayer as a child with Javier attending Catholic mass and Amy attending Amish-Mennonite services held in the home of community members every other week. Amy never abandoned her faith in God, but neither did she experience the warm relationship with Jesus that some of our respondents felt as children. She reported feeling that "God was kind of stern—He was commanding and He was demanding," certainly not someone to chat with. As a young child she carried, as she put it, "this whole burden—like I was this terrible sinner." Yet, Amy was faithful to the active prayers that were so much a part of her Amish culture:

When I prayed I always knelt. I knew I could pray anytime, you know, but I was very disciplined at night praying by my bedside. As I got older, I felt like longer periods were better. I think that had to do with my longing to know God in a deeper way, that started when I was 12, 13, 14. So my relationship with God was going to church every Sunday, reading my Bible every day, praying every night, no matter what. I never went to bed without reading my Bible and praying, never.

Amy had what she regarded as her first religious experience at the age of 12 when, as she reported, "I accepted Christ so I could go to heaven, so I could miss hell. You know a very basic doctrine there ...

Well I had an experience. Oh yes, I did!" When the interviewer requested more details, Amy shared how her family had visited a controversial religious revival ("Amish do not attend revivals," Amy explained) at an Amish-Mennonite church when she was 12 years old. During the meeting she had a feeling to come forward for an altar call, a feeling that "was so intense that I couldn't stop myself; that is when I responded to Christ and gave my life to Him." Amy told us how she went into an adjacent prayer room and one of the older ladies asked her what she wanted. "I said I want to accept Christ into my heart. So we prayed the sinner's prayer and I accepted Christ." Amy continued, "I remember, again, the feeling, I just felt like, this whole burden like I was this terrible sinner and it's just been lifted from me." Evangelical Protestants would say that was the moment Amy had been "born again." Yet Amy still had this image of God as law and judge rather than divine lover. As she put it, "I knew that Jesus died for my sins, but I think my image was more of God who's up there just looking at me. I better behave." Although Amy reported experiencing "a peace that was calming to me" through active prayer, she hungered for more.

The door to receptive prayer swung wide open when Amy became involved in a charismatic prayer group in her early 20s after she had left the Amish community and she experienced the "baptism in the Holy Spirit": "I can only say there was such a, I almost want to say it was almost like an out of body experience. I don't even know if I've ever talked about this. But it was so powerful, it was so powerful." She added:

From that point on, my prayer was more about my time with the Lord than anything else. My communion with Jesus and my times with Christ were just experiences that I can't [she paused, lost for words] I would have to really, you know, go back there and think about how wonderful that was.

Andrea: "Daddy's Little Girl" to Daughter of the Father

Andrea is an older African American woman who was left physically challenged by a stroke some years ago, but that has not prevented her from having an active prison ministry in the community. Life has not been easy for Andrea. When invited to share the events that most shaped who she was today, Andrea immediately responded:

The death of my father, which occurred in 1965. I was 12 years old and it traumatized me for about 7 days during the preparation for his death and the funeral. And when I say 'traumatized

me,' I actually (for no apparent reason) was not able to open my mouth and speak a word for seven days. It just affected me so deeply. You have to understand that I was a daddy's girl.

Her father's untimely death left a gaping hole in her life; her child-like faith was challenged and her school grades plummeted. Understandably the young girl repeatedly asked herself, "Why would a God that's so good and supposed to be so good and so loving and so kind, why would he take my father away from me and away from us, that we would have to fend pretty much on our own?" The question was answered by a religious experience she had at age 14: "I call it an epiphany today." Andrea recounted her experience as follows:

I was in a church and the choir was singing Peace Be Still. And the choir sounded so melodious, so to speak, that I got up out of my seat at the invitation time and I mean I was crying like buckets of tears, just bucket of tears. And I knew that part and parcel of my coming forward at the invitation time was because I had held onto the pain of the absence of my father for two solid years. And so, at the age of 14, I came to Christ. I was crying a bucket of tears, but it was the turnabout in my life that I needed if in fact I was going to survive 'this thing called life'.... I recognized that internally, I was not at peace. There was no peace. I was angry. I was upset. I was bitter. I have to go on record to say I was bitter, and I knew that all of the anger, all of the bitterness, etc., was because I was hurt because I had not received an answer to the question that was in my mind.

Andrea counts this epiphany experience as the first religious experience of many in her life. She adds,

The song, Peace Be Still—I think the song itself, the lyrics to the song, ministered to my heart. Whether or not that was vocal expression of the Lord, we can leave it to imagination, but I believe that the Lord speaks in and through many mediums and I believe the Lord spoke through that song. I really do.

She said that she felt relationally connected to God the father by and through her experiences in the church where she felt she was "a member of a larger family." Andrea added,

Even to this day, even if it's not correct, I associate God the father with the very absence of my father, my physical father. So I took on that, the nuances as it were, of a young lady that depended on God as her father to be able to achieve and to be motivated and to care and to be concerned.

But Andrea would have an even more direct encounter with God when she was in her early 20s, after she became involved in what she described as a "lifestyle of drinking, smoking, using marijuana and heavy partying." At one party she tried a drink of scotch:

That was not my drink. And for some unforeseen reason, it sent me into a tizzy, so to speak, to the point where I began to hallucinate, maybe, or was it God? I couldn't figure it out,

okay? Was it a hallucination or was it God? I was kind of like walking around the house, screaming, and hollering at God.

Andrea repeatedly tried phoning an aunt, but the line “stayed busy, busy, busy.” Then she says she hung up the phone and looked up saying, “God, is that you?” She felt the pressure of a hand on her head that forced her to her knees and she became angry, saying “All right, Lord, okay. I know this is you. I am on my knees. What do you want with me?” Andrea said that she heard no voice in response—“just that heavy hand. I felt a literal hand.” She said she then knew what God wanted, and she started talking to him: “Lord, okay, I know I’m wrong. You got me down here on the ground; forgive me. I am still hurting, and I’ve been masking all this time. But Lord, forgive me—forgive me.” After a trip to the hospital, during which tests revealed there was nothing physically wrong with her, Andrea prayed once more, acknowledging that God had indeed spoken to her: “This is you talking. You are trying to get me to straighten out the prodigal daughter type lifestyle that I’m living.” She had begun to recognize the voice of God speaking to her through life’s circumstances as well as intuitively “in her spirit.” The voice of her earthly father was silenced when she was 12, and the church family sought to take his place. But through the incident in her early 20s, she began to see God as her father—a father who protects and provides for her in ways beyond what she could ask or imagine.

Greg: Atheistic Rock Star to Christian Evangelist

Unlike our other interviewees, Greg was raised an atheist in a militantly anti-religious country. Born and raised in communist Bulgaria, he began playing the violin at age 5, but traded symphonies for rock and roll during his teenage years: “Rock music was almost dangerous, like revolutionary. Then the communists shut it down because it was too free for them, too much freedom.” Greg had an unquenchable thirst for freedom—“Just the desire for freedom was overwhelming. I was not able to perform or be what I wanted to be. I can’t even tell you how I made up my mind—it was a sudden thing. [Trying to escape] was a dangerous thing; people got killed. It was totally supernatural.” In retrospect he believes it was God who “came upon me without my knowing [through] this hunger for freedom that came upon me.” As a teenager, he and another friend managed

to escape and “both of us were smuggled into the black market.” Eventually they made their way to the United States, and within a year, they arrived in Los Angeles “in search of the freedom I was supposed to feel, but that I didn’t feel.”

While in line waiting to see the movie “The Exorcist” Greg and his friend were witnessed to by some Jesus People who “were talking to me about the Lord.” Although Greg did not believe in God, he began to wonder:

What if there is something about what they are saying? I need to find out. I just really need to find out for myself. And I will make this one attempt to prove or disprove that there is any existence of anything like they are saying. So I went to the mountain above Ojai where I would park my van. I went alone on a hill. I just wanted to make sure to be totally by myself. I didn’t want any influence of anything. I didn’t know what to say. I said, “God, do you exist?” That was the only thought that came to my mind. Upon breathing out this sentence I was just, something happened. I cannot explain to you how it changed.

At the time, Greg had no grid for this experience—an experience he described as follows:

Everything changed around me. Like someone came near me without me being able to see him, but I could feel a nearness of someone. So I go, ‘what’s going on?’ I began to talk out loud to this nearness of something. Someone is listening to me. And so I began to talk to this listening presence. It was strange. It was so, ... I mean it was just amazing how God revealed His presence to a non-believer, an atheist.

Greg would in time refer to this experience as “getting a revelation of His grace” and “supernatural enablement.”

His new friends saw the difference in him when he came down from the mountain: “The look of faith was on me. They could tell that I had an experience with this invisible God. I actually fell on the mountain and shook for a whole day. It was amazing. I had a powerful, emotional, spiritual encounter.” So then they said, “Well, now you have received faith that God exists and Jesus loves you and died for you. You need to be filled with the Holy Spirit.” Greg expressed some frustration that he felt over the next couple of weeks when no further revelation came. But once again God seemed to break into his world with a fresh experience:

Then I had a vision, first an audio sound of ecstasy and then boom I had like a, a curtain opened and I found myself in the throne room. It was like just as real as I see this. The angels were swirling. And that was this ecstatic sound I heard at first. Then I saw it was coming from these angels who were swirling around God’s throne in ecstasy and pleasure and joy. I mean I’ve never read the Bible. I don’t even know that in

His presence there's joy unspeakable. There's a fullness of joy and pleasure. But I felt it; I saw it. Fire and lightning was coming out of God, and one of those lightning felt like a bolt of fire just came on me and touched me and burned on me. Another was a like a rain of liquid love fell upon me. It felt like love, except too much, too hot. It was too hot—too overwhelming—too much. I didn't know how to respond.... It's so sweet that it almost burns your throat. Too much love. I mean, I was first of all, in flames. The heat of it alone was too much. I ran out of the room to cool off. There was no cooling off, although it was a cool day. (It was a February day and in the mountains of Ojai was cool rainy weather.)

Greg's new friends witnessed his second divine encounter, and they were happy that he was being touched by God. But they did not see or experience the vision for themselves. And then as the fire died down, Greg had another experience:

You know when you fall in love there's an exhilarating experience—a kind of a euphoria. It's like everything was beautiful and happy. I remember even losing my sense of balance. I was like in a daze. I felt like I was in some sort of a high. I thought, 'Wow, now I know what you mean because like this love is amazing!'

Greg then saw a vision of his future in which he was doing worship in a big large meadow filled with people: "When I came out of the vision I was so intoxicated!"

After such experiences, it may not be surprising that Greg says that he has always loved praying and has no difficulty praying for hours. Over time, however, one thing has changed and that is his perspective on prayer, on the energy and power that flows through pray-ers who are quick to give love away—"all the love is there; all the joy is there and waiting to be experienced. By giving, you get more of it." He went on to illustrate the flow of love that comes through prayer by referring to Jesus' parable of the vine and the branches:

It's like a river, not like a bottle. Bottles have limits. The concept is vines and branches and not independent containers to be filled and then pour it out. A connection to the divine ensures that the juice of the vine will flow and it will produce fruit. The branch doesn't produce fruit as much as carries it. That's where love comes from God, through you. It doesn't come from you but comes through you. And your connection with the vine through personal relationship with the Word ensures that flow. So love carries through us, into us and through us to others. And if we stay connected and we're willing to give it, love will never stop. Joy will never stop. Love will never stop through hard times because it's an inner connection that ensures, because joy is His joy. It's not like we're rejoicing in our own strength. It's His joy giving that strength. You know the difference?

Derrick: Not in Kansas Anymore

In response to our opening question, Derrick, a pastor in a rapidly growing nondenominational church, began the interview by saying:

What primarily shaped me probably was my salvation experience in 1972. I was 15 years old grew up on a farm in Missouri and my sister invited me to a Youth for Christ camp in Edgerton, Kansas. I really didn't want to go, thought it was the Jesus people you know the long hair in the 70s and stuff like that, I was just a farm boy and all of that, but I went and that week I understood for the first time in my life what it meant to have a personal relationship with Jesus.

His epiphany experience as a teenager at summer camp would move Derrick's prayer life from active to receptive. Derrick had grown up in church, went to Sunday school every week, participated in family devotions around the table every night, and believed the Bible, but "on July 3, 1972 I invited Jesus into my life, and it's probably the most dramatic—I mean, I could take you to the place. I could take you to the time it was just dramatic." We invited him to go on with his story, and it was a rendition of being born-again that we had heard from a many other evangelical respondents:

That night a gentleman spoke from John 3:16. I'd heard it I knew the verse I knew the message—"But for God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten son that whosoever would believe in him would not perish but have everlasting life." He explained that believing was more than head knowledge—it meant to really trust and to invite Jesus in as your lord and savior, leader of your life. And it all made sense to me. I just had not had it presented that way before. Obviously the Holy Spirit was drawing me, working in my life. Like I said it was dramatic and I could take you to the place. Just remember, I couldn't raise my hand that morning [Derrick found his arm frozen when he tried to respond to a call for salvation earlier in the day] but that night I knelt, invited Jesus into my life. So I just invited Jesus into my heart, and the gentleman said "do you believe He came in?" I said "yeah"—and it was like a light that went off in my head and I never ever doubted my salvation experience.

Derrick's salvation experience happened in the summer of 1972; in early spring of 1973 Derrick had another experience that he called his "first experience of the manifest presence of God":

I was in my bedroom in the farmhouse and it was cold but I had the habit of reading the bible and praying before I would turn my light off and go to bed and that night I read from the scriptures 2 Timothy: 4:5: "Watch though in all things, endure affliction, do the work of an evangelist, make full proof of your ministry." And that scripture leapt off the page to me and into me heart. I knew it was an experience of God. So I turned the lights off and before I fell asleep the presence of the Lord came into the room in a manifest way and it was a higher experience.

I felt and heard a wind a breeze in the room as though it were abstract or two—I felt, you know, a fire or something touch my head. That experience marked my call into full time ministry. Prior to that, I wanted to be a farmer. I loved farming. I still love farming; I just have an affinity to it. But I *know that I know that* God called me into full time ministry, and it's so real in my life that it has sustained me during even difficult times in the ministry.

Derrick would go to a Bible College, enter ministry, and eventually become known as a pastor of prayer in the congregation he now serves. Derrick marked his early years in ministry as a time when his prayer life took another leap. As a young married man, he was serving as pastor of a small struggling church where finances were very tight: "I learned to really pray. I was so dependent on God for finances, for His anointing, His help, His power! I am an avid reader, and I got the book *The Hour that Changes the World* (by Dick Eastman). In his book he talks about taking a 60-minute hour, divide it into 12 segments of five minutes each. He had twelve different types of prayer—like thanksgiving, confession—I don't even know them all now. And I would do that for an hour each day." Derrick went on to provide several accounts of God dramatically responding to his active prayers of supplication, but he then said to the interviewer: "Now let me fast-forward to 2006. I mean from 1972 to 2006 my life in prayer is mostly this "ask and you shall receive, seek and you shall find, knock and it shall be opened to you."

In 2006, Derrick joined the staff of the International House of Prayer (IHOP) in Kansas City, a neo-Pentecostal ministry founded in Kansas City by Mike Bickle in 1999 that is known for its round the clock prayer with its music and spontaneous worship.

Derrick continued:

It was there that I learned intimacy with Jesus, contemplative prayer, sitting in his presence, being the bride and speaking to the Lord—"You are just awesome, you are beautiful, you are wonderful, there is none like you. What are your thoughts over my life today?"

Derrick reports he was long coming to this stage of prayer, one that fits well with Greg's metaphor of a river:

There are times that I still get on my knees and I ask God to do stuff. But there are more times that I just sit in the chair with worship music on and absolutely say nothing. I just want to be with him. And there are times I just spend time in talking to him but not asking him anything. And so my life of prayer has evolved over the years.

THE EVOLUTION OF PRAYER RESEARCH: SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

Just as Derrick's prayer life evolved over the decades, so is prayer research evolving from a single measure of the frequency of indiscriminate prayer to developing reliable scales of prayer activities and exploring different dimensions of prayer. The qualitative accounts just presented support the thesis that receptive prayer [reflected in the narratives of communication (prophetic prayer) and communion (mystical encounters)] flow together for many prayers and increase their sense of being loved by God. In other words, as these three streams of prayer come together, the pray-er is better able to grasp (in the words of the Apostle Paul) "how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, and to know this love that surpasses knowledge."

In sum, we posit that prayer is the medium through which divine and human love flow together in what sociologist Pitirim Sorokin (1954/02) called "love energy." We also note that although Sorokin's focus was primarily on the love energy produced by interaction among human beings, Sorokin (1954[2002], p.26) did acknowledge the "probable hypothesis" that "an inflow of love comes from an intangible, little-studied, possibly supra-empirical source called 'God,' 'the Godhead,' 'the Soul of the Universe,' 'the Heavenly Father,' 'Truth,' and so on." This love energy then enlivens the benevolent service to others that Sorokin so exhaustively catalogued in his writings and that we have continued to document through the FOL project (cf. Lee and Poloma, 2009). Our focus in this article has been on describing the ongoing process of divine-human interaction represented in the top part of model of Godly love, found in Paul's letter to the Ephesians, and noted in Sorokin's sociological masterpiece. Other works more directly focus on the "fruit of the Spirit" (Post, 2011, especially pp. 127-131; Lee, Poloma, and Post, in process). But a detailed understanding of the movement from active to receptive prayer, as we describe in this article, is essential to fully appreciating the process by which people come to be "exemplars" of Godly love (Lee and Poloma, 2009).

We end this article in a somewhat unusual way. Although we have focused our discussion on qualitative data from our interviews, we present an abridged statistical report to support our conclusions about the multi-dimensional nature of prayer.

Clearly active prayer is a significant dimension, a nearly universal practice that centers on human action directed toward God that may or may not be interactive. It does appear to be foundational for pray-ers who move into receptive prayer postures in which perceived divine interaction occurs. (Those whose prayers are limited to active prayer do report spiritual experiences, but the experience appears likely to be limited to particular felt responses, such as feeling peace or calm, rather than interaction, collaboration or communion with the divine.) Prophetic prayer, a two-way interaction between God and the pray-er in which the pray-er hears from God and responds, is reflected in the survey statement "I have sensed a divine call to perform a specific act," to which 56% of survey respondents responded affirmatively. Prophetic prayer can be a daily experience (5%) where the pray-er is always on the alert for "divine nudges" guiding and directing their actions or it can be as dramatic and lasting as Derrick's call into the ministry or Amy's response to an altar call. Finally, mystical prayer is an experience described well by Greg and tersely described by Amy as "seemingly out of the body."⁹ It was tapped in the survey by items asking about experiences that altered normal consciousness, such as "everything seemed to disappear except the consciousness of God." Only thirty-one (31) percent of pray-ers had never had such an experience. Scales were constructed out of the survey items for the three types of prayer.¹⁰ The survey also collected responses to questions that tapped experiences

of divine love, and these items were used to construct a divine love scale.¹¹

The results of the statistical analysis clearly demonstrated that *all three of the prayer types contributed toward describing the prayer lives of those who scored the highest in professing to know the love of God.*¹² Respondents who seemed most aware of God's love were likely to frequently engage in active prayer, to experience God's direction and to respond in prophetic prayer, and to experience union with God in mystical prayer. The findings from our national survey, when seen in the light of our interviews, provide strong evidence that attention to different types of prayer is essential to understanding Godly love as experienced by a majority of Americans. We suggest that to fully appreciate why people help others that it is not enough to note whether or not they are "religious." Instead, our findings suggest that more attention to receptive prayer would be valuable in its own right, and for understanding religious-based benevolence that is at the heart of the Great Commandment.

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⁹Flame of Love Project team member and psychologist Ralph W. Hood, Jr. (c.f. 2001 and Hood, Hill and Spilka, 2009) has been a pioneer in measuring mysticism. The mysticism scale used by FOL is a short version that draws from his work.

¹⁰The three prayer types were all measured by scales comprised of multiple questions in FOL survey. The *prayer activity scale* (alpha = .96) included six items ("never" to "more than once a day") asking whether they did the following during prayer: sat quietly in the presence of God, asked for things they need, asked for divine guidance, worship and adored, prayed for the needs of others, and thanked God for blessings. The *mysticism scale* (alpha = .86) included three items: everything seemed to disappear except consciousness of God, experience of God that no words could express; and feeling unmistakable presence of God during prayer. The *prophetic scale* (alpha = .87) included five items: direct divine call to perform a specific act, hearing divine direction to do something through another, giving a word from God to another person, receiving revelations from God, and seeing future events in dreams and visions.

¹¹The four questions used to comprise the scale to measure *experiences of God's love* include the following: feeling God's love directly; feeling God's love through others; feeling God's love as the greatest power in the universe; and feeling God's love increasing your compassion for others. The alpha or reliability co-efficient is .93.

¹²The three scales measuring prayer activity, divine-human communication, and mystical communion were used in multiple regression analysis to determine which was best able to account for differences in perceiving divine love. All three of the scales proved to be statistically significant for explaining nearly 80 percent of the variance (adjusted R square = .79) in divine love scores. Those who scored high on experiencing God's love scored high on prayer activity (beta=.42), mysticism (beta=.39), and prophetic conversational prayer (beta=.17).

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