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E. JAMES BAESLER, GUEST EDITOR

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The Journal of Communication and Religion

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EDITOR'S INTRODUCTION

An Introduction to Prayer Research in Communication: Functions, Contexts, and Possibilities

E. James Baesler*

This special issue begins by reviewing the historical context of prayer and defining prayer. Next, the contextual and functional dialectics of prayer are elaborated for each of the articles in this volume. Finally, the methodology, interdisciplinaity, and uniqueness of each article is described followed by possibilities for future prayer research in the field of religious/spiritual communication.

Prayer is evident in every culture with a recorded history. Pre-historic archeological evidence of prayers for the dead date back to Neanderthal burial practices at Shanidar in Iraq and La Chapelle aux Saints in France (50,000 B.C.E., Zaleski & Zaleski, 2005). Some of the first recorded petitionary prayers are etched on cuneiform tablets by pre-Egyptian Sumerians (3,000 B.C.E., Kramer, 1959). Since the time of Sumer, our conceptual understanding of prayer evolved into a multitude of forms and functions described in the sacred texts of world religions (e.g., the *Bible*, *Qur'an*, *Tanakh*, and the *Vedas*). This historical lineage of prayer, from Neanderthal to Sumer, to major world religions, continues evolving in the era of modern social scientific prayer research. Some of this early prayer research is represented by Sir Francis Galton's (1872) statistical analysis of petitionary prayers, and William James' (1902) psychological and empirical writings on prayer. In more recent times, collections of prayer research have been published in the fields of psychology (e.g., edited volumes by Brown, 1994, and Francis & Astley, 2001) and sociology (e.g., a special issue of *Poetics* reports eleven empirical studies edited by Wuthnow, 2008), but there is no comparable collection represented in the field of communication--until now. Moreover, an analysis of academic prayer research publication trends for the fields of communication, psychology, and sociology from 1960-2010 show modest publication increases through 1990, and then a doubling of academic publications over the next two decades in all three disciplines (Baesler, 2012). With the increase of scholarly interest in the social scientific study of prayer, it is appropriate that the field of communication contribute to the interdisciplinary field of prayer research by introducing a collection of essays with a distinctly communication focus in this special issue of the *Journal of Communication and Religion.*

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Prayer is generally defined as spiritual communication with God (Baesler, 2003). [1] Prayers are talked, chanted, sung, listened, meditated, contemplated, journaled (e.g., Foster, 1992), and expressed in art forms like music (Paul, 2006), dance (DeSola, 1986; Roth, 1997), color (MacBeth, 2007), poetry (Aitken, 1992), and film (McNulty, 2001). One conceptual framework for understanding the variety of prayers is the system's perspective (Von Bertalanffy, 1969; Baesler, Lindvall, & Lauricella, 2011). Forms and functions of prayer are the core processes in a system of prayer that is influenced by a matrix of input variables (e.g., age, gender, religious/spiritual affiliation, and culture) and yields a variety of outcomes (e.g., spiritual, psychological, and physical health for the persons praying, and various types of pro-social and religious/spiritual attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors).

Inherent in the system's perspective of prayer are dialectical relationships. Dialectics are pairs of concepts representing endpoints of an underlying continuum with a theoretically infinite number of fuzzy concepts situated between the polar anchors (Kosko, 1993). Dialectical relationships are embedded within prayer processes (e.g., private and public, active and receptive, inward and outward), and between prayer processes and input/outcome variables. An example of a prayer "process and outcome dialectic" is "contemplation-action" where contemplation is a prayer process and action is a behavioral outcome.[2] Two of many possible dialectical relationships are described in the next section as a way to introduce the collection of prayer essays in this special issue.

Prayer operates in a contextual dialectic, embedded in particular *communication contexts* (e.g., Baesler & Ladd, 2009) that range from a single individual to a global community.[3] The essays in this special issue represent a range of communicative prayer contexts: individual prayer at different stages in the life-cycle (Lauricella), partners seeking forgiveness in the dyadic context (Kelley), cognitive and affective experiences during individual prayer (Ladd, Vreugdenhil, Ladd, & Cook), individual, interpersonal, and group prayer during times of illness (Kreps), and prophetic prayer in individual and group contexts (Poloma & Lee). Conceptually, there are additional prayer contexts situated between the poles of the individual-global dialectic that one might imagine: individuals silently praying for different needs during a prayer service, posting on-line prayer requests to a website, praying for someone using a mobile phone, multiple people praying for a specific intention in an internet chat room, and so forth.

In addition to the contextual prayer dialectic, prayers can also be situated along a functional dialectic. That is, prayers serve a variety of *functions* (e.g., Bade & Cook, 2008) from the heart-felt petitionary prayer of need to silent mystical contemplation. The essays in this volume address a number of prayer functions: petitionary prayers for health during times of illness (Kreps), prayers of forgiveness (Kelley), prophetic prayers for guidance and discernment (Poloma & Lee), prayers of connection (Ladd et. al.), and functions of prayer that are unique to different stages of the lifespan (e.g., identity in young adulthood, and coping with declining physical health in elderhood, Lauricella). Additional functions of prayer located along the petitionary-contemplative dialectic include two clusters: adoration, praise, and worship, and mystical prayers of rapture, ecstasy, and union.

Just as there are many functions and contexts of prayer, there are many prayer research methods. This collection of essays represents a diversity of *methodological approaches* to scholarly prayer research. Both Lauricella's lifespan review and Kreps's health review of prayer research are critical/interpretive reviews of a breadth of quantitative and qualitative studies. In contrast, Poloma and Lee's study of prophetic prayer, and Kelley's work on relational forgiveness and prayer, provide a more focused review, and critical interpretation of, specific types of prayer. Finally, Ladd et. al.'s study of interpersonal prayer, and Poloma and Lee's prophetic prayer, represent empirical data based prayer research methodologies. In addition to methodological pluralism, these essays have an interdisciplinary flavor, with both review pieces (Lauricella, and Kreps) spanning the disciplines of communication, medicine, psychology, and sociology. Kelley's work on forgiveness, and Ladd et. al.'s research, draw heavily from the disciplines of psychology and communication. Finally, Poloma and Lee's research on prophetic prayer uses communication, psychology, and sociological resources to support their arguments.

While interdisciplinary in nature, the central theme that binds these essays together is their focus on prayer as spiritual communication. Within this theme, there are *unique* aspects of each study highlighted in this section. Poloma and Lee develop a continuum of prayer (from devotional to mystical) and focus on describing mid-range prophetic prayers. Their national survey data reveal that all three prayers predict a multidimensional measure of love, and data from qualitative interviews illustrate the dynamics of prophetic prayer for discernment in decision making. Turning from types of prayer, Ladd et. al. focus on the private prayer context by asking: how is prayer like a human conversation? Using a survey based method, language content and connectivity functions of prayer are compared with human conversations, and the nature of attachment as a relational component of prayer is explored as correspondence and compensation. Within the context of private and interpersonal prayers, Kelly describes prayer within the Kelly and Waldron model of relational forgiveness. Within this forgiveness framework, prayer is related to: emotion, sense-making, altruistic action, and reconciliation. The prayer of forgiveness may lead to relationship healing, and healing is a common theme in the prayer and health literature. Kreps' review of prayer and health suggests that prayer can function in a number of ways to impact health in a holistic sense, especially as a means of coping with illness (e.g., worry, fear, isolation), and providing relational support. The role of prayer and health in a variety of relationships are discussed including: friends, family, doctors, nurses, and chaplains. Finally, Lauricella's extensive review of prayer across the lifespan covers the life stages of children, adolescents, undergraduates, adults and elders with special attention to the psychological and cognitive development in the early stages of the lifespan, and coping, health, and aging in the later stages of the lifespan.

Collectively, the essays in this special issue introduce communication scholars to the contexts, functions, and topics of communication-focused prayer research. As with any introduction, only a limited number of prayer research topics are represented in this volume. To provide a broader vision of prayer research

possibilities, a cornucopia of topics and questions *not* covered in this special are described in the following section.

First, “googling” the search term "prayer" reveals images of individuals with eyes closed, heads bowed, and hands folded. How representative are these images of the *nonverbal characteristics* of everyday private and public prayer? More broadly, what nonverbal characteristics describe the prayerful face, posture, voice, and environment? How might these characteristics compare across religious/spiritual traditions? Second, there is a need for careful descriptive work mapping the *phenomenological experience* of prayer in the context of everyday life. How much can individuals accurately report about their own prayer experiences? It may be that some prayer experiences are so mysterious that they are difficult to communicate. For instance, in some forms of contemplative prayer, the experience is described as being in a "cloud of unknowing" (Johnston, 1973), a place where the person praying is aware of "being" but cannot name specific cognitive content. In such cases, how can individuals respond to specific queries about the content of their prayer experience? Across a number of experiments, Gladwell (2002) notes that when researchers ask for information in the participant's "black box," individuals tend to fabricate stories beyond their ability to accurately tell. The cognitive and linguistic limits of what individuals can report about their prayer experience is debatable.[4] Perhaps a combination of methods, like experience sampling with mobile phone devices, and creative auto ethnographic studies, could provide further insights into the phenomenological experience of some types of prayer. Third, with the rise of new media technologies, early adopter personality types may translate some of their face-to-face prayer activities into the digital environment, or perhaps invent new types of digital prayer. To begin mapping the social media landscape of prayer, research might investigate petitionary prayers offered *for* others, and requests for prayer *from* others, by comparing frequency of prayer for different types of media like: mobile phone, Facebook, Twitter, traditional e-mail, and posts to prayer websites. Finally, research could explore prayer-action linkages more systematically, beginning with the relationship between daily prayer disciplines/practices and, for example, positivity (Fredrickson, 2009), mindfulness (Feldman, Hayes, Kumar, Greeson, & Laurenceau, 2006), and character strengths (Peterson & Seligman, 2004).

I am deeply grateful to Calvin Troup for his willingness to sponsor this special issue on prayer research, and to all of the authors, and anonymous reviewers, who contributed to the prayer scholarship in this volume. My hope is that this special issue on prayer will educate and inspire others to consider prayer scholarship as a viable and emerging area in the field of religious/spiritual communication.

Notes

[1] In this definition of prayer, "God" can refer to the monotheistic God of Judaism and Islam, the Trinitarian God of Christianity, the Gods of Hinduism, the Creator of Native Religions, Ultimate Reality, Ground of Being, Higher Self, and so forth, depending on the language of the specific religious/spiritual tradition (see Beversluis, 2000). A broader definition of prayer as spiritual communication would encompass other

"spiritual entities/beings" like angels, spirits, human ancestors, and "spiritual forces/energies" like those in the natural world (e.g., earth, air, fire, and water). In this special issue on prayer research, most authors have implicitly adopted the definition of prayer as spiritual communication with "God."

[2] A complete system of prayer accounts for the relationship between contemplative prayer (ontological being) and action (empirical doing) as an ongoing and necessary dynamic tension between an internal religious/spiritual phenomenological reality and an external empirically verifiable reality. There are several ways of managing the "contemplative-action" dialectic including segmentation, cycling, and integration. The process of managing prayer dialectics is similar to the process of managing interpersonal dialectics as described in relational dialectics theory (Baxter & Montgomery, 1996; Baxter, 2011). For example, "segmenting" might involve devoting specific times of the day to contemplative prayer and other times of the day to active ministry. In a "cyclical" approach, there may still be specific times devoted to prayer and action, but the periods of time are no longer experienced in isolation. Instead, each activity (prayer or ministry) informs the other in a reflexive loop. For instance, prayer may be used to discern appropriate actions in ministry, and the activities of ministry might be brought back into the next period of prayer in an on-going cycle. Finally, in the "integration" approach, contemplation and action co-exist *at the same time*. Three examples of this type of integration follow. Thomas Merton (1949, p. 59), in describing this dualistic state of contemplative action, says that the believer discovers: "...act without motion, labor that is profound repose, vision in obscurity, and beyond all desire, a fulfillment whose limits extend to infinity." Dubay (1989, p. 106), interpreting the work of St. Therese of Avila, writes "A person is able to attend to the indwelling presence of the Trinity and yet carry on the ordinary business of everyday life." Finally, Brother Lawrence (Herman, n.d.) is reported to have attained this state of dual awareness by maintaining a sense of God's presence while engaged in ordinary tasks like washing dishes. Further examples of "contemplative practices in action" and "integrated contemplative practice systems" among different religious/spiritual traditions are described in Plante's (2010) edited volume.

[3] Labeling the endpoint of the contextual dialectic "global community" is somewhat controversial because praying as a global community may be considered a rare event or an impractical ideal. Consequently, the majority of prayer researchers use the more frequent and practical label "large group" to represent one endpoint of the contextual dialectic. However, even global prayer may not be broad enough to encompass some religious/spiritual beliefs about prayer with "ancestors", "heavenly hosts", and/or "nature" as each of these terms imply communication with someone or something beyond human life on earth. In addition to the controversy over labeling the macro endpoint for the contextual dialectic, many of the communicative contexts for this dialectic intersect with the geography of prayer. For example, the context of individual prayer may occur in a naturalistic setting like a mountaintop, or in a bedroom closet, while large group prayer may take place in a traditional domed cathedral or under an outdoor canopy.

[4] Often mystics of world religions describe their prayer experiences in the language of poetry (Easwaran, 1991; Teasdale, 2001) perhaps because poetry is the best linguistic approximation of their lived prayer experience. Culturally sensitive linguistic content analyses of these poems may provide one window into prayer experiences like the "cloud of unknowing." Another approach into "black box" prayer phenomenon

describes brain activity during prayer using functional magnetic resonance imaging (fMRI) (e.g., Ladd, Andreasen, Smith, & Baesler, 2006; Newberg, D'Aquili, and Rause, 2001; Wallace, 2007). This technique places individuals in a large machine that measures and maps blood flow to different parts of the brain while individuals are engaged in prayer. Proponents of fMRI argue that the observer can directly "see into the black box" and discover brain functions correlated with prayer experiences that are outside the conscious awareness of the person praying. This method increases our descriptive understanding of brain function during prayer, but it does not necessarily imply an *explanation* of prayer phenomenon.

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The Lifetime of Prayer: A Review of Literature on Prayer Throughout the Life Course

Sharon Lauricella·

Abstract: This critical literature review considers how prayer is practiced throughout the course of life, why it is practiced, and the influences upon prayer behaviors throughout different life stages. Specific age groups considered include children, adolescents, undergraduates, adults, and elders. Comparisons and contrasts in prayer behaviors are made amongst all of the life stages. Issues of particular import include coping, health, psychological development, learning, and familial influences. It is specifically suggested that the development of one's prayer life is not necessarily linear, and that a variety of factors contribute to the how and why of prayer throughout the life course. Future research for each life stage is suggested. *Keywords*: prayer, life course, spirituality

Introduction and Rationale

Etymology of the word "goodbye" shows that this everyday expression is perhaps the most pervasive prayer or blessing in the English language. A contraction of "God be with you [ye]," the expression evolved to "God be way," later "Good b'wy," and finally took modern form with "goodbye." While most English speakers are familiar with the secularized version of the word, its spiritual origins indicate prayer, blessing, and protection or guidance. Whether it is a young child waving a dimpled hand at a playmate or an elder in the final moments of earthly life, bidding one goodbye could be considered one of the most accepted and versatile expressions in English. Much like the use of this one-word blessing, formal prayer, too, as a communicative practice (Baesler, 1997, 1999, 2003), is used in a variety of contexts, and is nearly as pervasive in that nearly 75% of the American population claims to pray at least weekly (Pew Forum, 2010, p. 13). If prayer is an "attempt to create a meaningful relationship with a deity" (Whittington & Scher, 2010, p. 59), then an examination of how, when, and why people use prayer throughout the life course can help us to understand prayer as a function of spiritual communication. Like learning to speak and building one's vocabulary, the communicative nature of prayer grows and changes in accordance with development and context in one's life. This paper considers literature relative to prayer at different times in one's life, and critically reviews how prayer as a form of communication is practiced (or not practiced) throughout the lifetime.

While theories relative to one's psychological (Kirkpatrick & Shaver, 1990), cognitive (Fowler, 1981), and religious (Dillon & Wink, 2007) development are

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plentiful, this review also identifies studies which emphasize context – or personal circumstances – which contribute to a change, shift, or development in one's prayer life (for example, Jackson et al, 2010). It appears logical to conduct a review of literature beginning with attention to children and how and why they pray, then continue the analysis through the life course to adults and elders. However, the human reality is such that circumstances change, crises occur, and one's development is quite often far from linear. Issues such as the desire to listen to God (Halpin, 1984), or crises such as health challenges (Ai, Peterson & Huang, 2003) or emotional distress (Roff, Durkin, Sun & Klemmack, 2007) can contribute to sudden religious and spiritual changes (Miller & C'De Baca, 2001). Given the variety of influences on one's spiritual and religious life, Sommer (1989) suggests that "the spiritual needs of children are no different than the spiritual needs of older people" (p. 230). This paper will address the differences in how and why individuals pray throughout their lifetimes, with attention to the differences in prayer behavior throughout different ages and stages. However, it also highlights the similarities amongst prayer lives of individuals of all ages. While bearing in mind that linear development is not necessarily the norm, it is helpful to consider the notion of religious and spiritual development beginning with attention to childhood development in order that thematic similarities and differences can be drawn with progressively older age groups.

Children

Psychological and Cognitive Development

Psychological and cognitive development literature contributes to some of the current knowledge about children and their prayer lives. Long, Elkin and Spilka (1967) made one of the more significant additions to the understanding of children's religious and spiritual development. Their analysis of a sample of 160 children between the ages of 5 and 12 incorporated Piagetian developmental psychology (1976) to describe the development of children's understanding and practice of prayer. The authors argue that while children between the ages of 5 and 7 had a vague understanding of the concept of prayer, and children ages 7 to 9 recognized the communicative nature of prayer in that it involved verbal activity, it was only between the ages of 9-12 that children understood prayer as a personal, internal practice which involved communication between the child and what the child considered Divine. Following the same developmental theory, Woolley and Phelps (2000) found that their sample of 99 children aged 3-8 showed a similar (though significantly earlier) developmental pattern whereby children in the 5-7 age group showed a more accelerated developmental pattern than those in Long, Elkin and Spilka's sample. Children in Woolley and Phelps's age 5-7 group had awareness of the mental aspects of prayer, had specific beliefs about how prayer works, and believed that "knowledge of God was critical to the process of praying" (p. 155).

While the precise age at which the understanding of prayer being a mental activity is still being debated, the notion of the understanding of God and the

mentalistic nature of prayer is a notable concept in cognitive development. Bamford and Lagatutta (2010) found that even though four-year-olds recognized that "God can know what you are thinking," these four-year-olds did not appear to be aware that people can "pray in their heads." This study argues that at age six, the mental aspect of prayer becomes evident, as children considered prayer a type of communication with God which could be done as a mental activity. Bamford and Lagatutta therefore argue that children must understand "God concepts" first, and then can move along to understanding how prayer can function in a communicative context and as a means of coping. Similarly, Fowler (1981) also proposes that the development of children's faith occurs in stages related to Piaget's theory of cognitive development (1976) and Kohlberg (1973) and Erikson's (1950) theories of moral development. Fowler suggests that within a developmental framework, as children mature, they can understand more and more abstract concepts as they relate to God, religiosity, and spirituality.

Caveats of Developmental Theories

Although the link between psychological development and religious development is valuable to the study of religiosity and spiritual growth, such theories of religious development should not be inextricably tied to one's prayer development for several reasons. First, prayer (as a practice) is different from religiosity (as a quality), and may develop at a different rate and/or for different reasons than religiosity. In their survey of empirical studies relating to Christian prayer, Francis and Evans (1995) note that a much higher proportion of people pray privately than attend public places of worship; therefore prayer may often be practiced by non-churchgoers or the "non-religious." Furthermore, it cannot be assumed that an increase in church attendance or even an increase in prayer frequency would necessarily result in greater intimacy with God. Baesler, Lindvall and Lauricella (2011) suggest that while increased prayer may lead to increased intimacy with God, it may not apply in any given case. Perhaps the most poignant illustration of this limitation is that even Mother Theresa (2010) experienced periods in which she felt unconnected to God. If even a beatified religious figure can express distance from God despite a highly spiritual and religious life, so too could anyone who attends church regularly or maintains daily communicative contact with God through prayer. In short, while models of psychological and religious development can be helpful in understanding a variety of stages, such models should not be considered a proxy for the frequency, growth, or meaningfulness of one's prayer life.

In psychological development models, children are perceived to be developmentally immature, and not able to understand spiritual concepts in an intellectual or reflective manner. In such cases, children's prayers are paralleled to "magical wishes" which cannot directly affect physical reality (Woolley, 2000). These models have recently come under scrutiny for being too stage-specific, cognitive, and lacking cultural diversity. Hart (2006), for example, argues that there is a growing understanding that children already have a spiritual life characterized

by wisdom and wonder, that they struggle with questions of existence, morality, and meaning, and that children have a "deep sense of compassion" (p. 175). The "spiritual child" movement focuses on promoting the notion that children have an inherent, biological ability to experience a variety of meaningful, rich experiences which contribute to their religious, ethical, and spiritual growth (Scarlett, 2006).

Spiritual practitioners such as Keating (2006) suggest that children inherently trust God and understand the Divine; he notes that it is adults who all too often quash children's spiritual development. Keating offers a wonderful anecdote in which Cardinal Basil Hume describes how he was forbidden to take cookies from his household cookie jar as a child, because "God is always watching you" (p. 38). Hume, after joining the Benedictine Order, describes that this punitive God described by his mother was very unlike the kind and benevolent God that he would have known before this incident, later came to know in adulthood, and who would have encouraged him to take not only one but even more cookies from the jar. In keeping with Keating's notion of recognizing and nurturing children's inherent sense of divinity, Hay (2007) suggests that children have an inherent quality which allows them to identify themselves relative to an interdependence with all other living things, and that this "relational consciousness," while evident in young childhood, becomes suppressed between ages 7-9. As further research in children's spirituality develops, researchers and practitioners alike would be well advised to consider *protecting*, and not simply *analyzing*, children's understanding of the Divine.

Coping

The importance of understanding the "spiritual child" can be seen in literature relative to how children use prayer – or direct communication with God – during times of personal distress or discomfort. There is a wide body of literature around the notion that religion, and particularly a perceived relationship with God, serves as a haven in times of crisis or distress (Kirkpatrick, & Shaver, 1990). Children have reported using prayer to cope with nighttime fears (Mooney, Graziano & Katz, 2001), or "bad or tragic things happening" (Jackson et al, 2010). Pargament (1997) suggests that religious/spiritual (r/s) coping is more likely to occur as the seriousness of a situation increases (pp. 138-142), and results from studies on children's health supports this claim. Kamper, Van Cleve and Savedra (2010) found, in their work on children with advanced cancer, that the majority of children sought out God and/or a higher power by praying for or requesting to feel better, to get out of the hospital, and for God to take care of family and friends. In this study of spiritual wellbeing at a time of illness, 88% of the 8-12 year-olds and 77% of the 13-17 year-olds stated that prayer "helps" (p. 305). Ebmeier, Lough, Huth and Autio (1991) also found that children cope with their own hospitalization using spirituality and Spilka and Zwartjes (1991) reported that children use spirituality to cope with terminal illness and dying. Despite the overall frequency of children using spirituality to cope with challenge, an understanding of the process of prayer and coping for children remains elusive. Kamper, Van Cleve and Savedra (2010) found

that even though the majority of children in their sample used prayer to cope with their illnesses and their effects, they were surprised to learn that many parents in the study were unaware of their children's spiritual beliefs and/or practices. Given that children have been shown to use prayer (and other r/s means of coping such as reading the Bible and/or going to church) in times of challenge – and even do so independently of their parents – it is difficult to deny that children possess some element of inherent spirituality. Contextual issues – nighttime fears, illness, death, and using prayer as an "aid" in life (Mountain, 2005) – show that developmental models cannot be the exclusive method for explaining how and why children pray. Sudden challenges, changes, or issues clearly have an effect on children's prayer lives, and developmental models would do well to make room for such significant events.

Studies on children, prayer, and coping can help to guide and even encourage parents, caregivers and medical professionals in assisting children with challenges by using prayer during times of serious challenge. Barnes, Plotnikoff, Fox and Pendleton (2000) emphasize that professionals, such as nurses and pediatricians, should remain open to the spiritual needs of both parents and children during illness so as to re-establish the harmony of children's minds, bodies and spirits during times of ill health. However, Oman and Thoresen (2006) note the dearth of research on religious and spiritual factors and their interplay with childhood health, and argue that research in the area of children, health, and coping is "urgently needed" to study issues such as asthma, ADHD, sexually transmitted diseases, weight, and other health outcomes.

Learning and Influences

The "spiritual child" movement indicates that children have an inherent sense of spirituality and connection to the Divine. However, like learning other communicative practices, such as speaking, reading, and writing, children benefit from guidance and instruction. One of the most meaningful ways of learning the practice of prayer is by observation, or having models in one's life from whom a child may learn. The idea that prayer is a learned process is not dissimilar to the argument that religiosity is a learned practice, for research has shown that one of the strongest predictors of religiousness is the religiousness of one's parents (Argyle & Beit-Hallahmi, 1975). Francis and Brown (1990), in their examination of the social influence on prayer and the attitudinal predisposition to pray, concluded that amongst eleven year-olds who prayed, they were more likely to do so as a result of being taught or by following the example of their family or church community rather than as a result of passing through a developmental need or dynamic.

If being taught is essential in the development of prayer practices, and also for overall religious and spiritual development, then it is important to understand who or what instructs or teaches prayer. Boyatzis, Dollahite and Marks's (2006) review of literature on the family and its role in religious and spiritual development showed that the family is the most potent influence on children's spiritual and religious development, with children and youth indicating that their parents' teaching,

example, and discussion about spiritual/religious issues was influential in their spiritual and religious development. While prayer instruction is important, McMahon and Cummings (2005) suggest that when parents model prayer, they must genuinely "walk the talk" whereby adults are able to genuinely practice and teach children. Similarly, Halpin (1984) makes it clear that parents need to be attentive to their own prayer in order to instill a meaningful prayer practice for children. While academic literature is beginning to quantify the logical notion that that the family is important to religious and spiritual development, Boyatzis, Dollahite and Marks (2006) note that we still have a great deal to learn about the teaching and learning of prayer practices. Future research in this area could address how attentive parents may be to their own modeling practices, how children believe they learn about prayer, and how adults (retrospectively) believe that they learned about prayer as children.

Analyses of families and religious/spiritual development have shown that mothers (Dillon & Wink, 2007) as well as grandmothers (Baesler, Lindvall & Lauricella, 2011) are particularly critical to children's r/s development because they are not only more involved than fathers in parent-child communication, but maternal figures are also typically the primary religious socializer (Boyatzis & Janicki, 2003). Interestingly, however, parents are not exclusively the teachers and transmitters of prayer or religious education to children. Parent-child communicative studies show that children ask questions and share information, and that children often help adults to identify and engage in their own prayer practices and religious development (Boyatzis & Janicki, 2003).

While parents may be assumed the primary teachers and exemplars of adult pray-ers, grandparents (King, Burgess, Akinyela, Counts-Spriggs & Parker, 2006) have also been identified as integral to the modeling of religious behavior and prayer. Baquedano-Lopez (2008) found that private school teachers can help students understand the depth and context of prayer, and bring present challenges to light so that students can reflect upon the meaning of prayers as they apply to everyday life. Popular media also contributes to the development of prayer for children; there is no shortage of books designed for parents and children to share together (for example, Jelenek & Boyajian, 2007; Piper & Lewis, 2010). Sekeres (2008) examined children's books from Christian, Muslim and Jewish traditions, and found that all books showed prayer as a way of coping with emotions and were part of everyday life in each religious tradition. Broadcast has also contributed to the development of prayer practices; between the mid 1940's and 1961, the BBC broadcast "The Children's Hour Prayers" as an appendage to "The Children's Hour" radio program (Parker, 2010).

In short, modeling has been shown to be important in religious/spiritual development, and particularly in the development of the practice of prayer. A personal approach can be helpful to this development; Halpin (1984) suggests that prayer is greatly helped when children are able to model and pray with someone, whether this is a teacher, parent, or member of the r/s community or friend.

This may not be simply because children can copy what adults do, but the notion of strength and comfort in the presence of others (Halpin, 1984) may be important to the development of one's prayer life.

Adolescents

Again, while a linear progression of the development of the practice, purpose and meaning of one's prayer practices is not to be expected throughout one's life, an examination of thematic areas similar to those found in the literature on childhood is helpful to a fuller understanding of the similarities and differences in prayer during a variety of life stages. Literature on prayer during adolescence does not follow the same thematic areas as those found in childhood literature; a greater emphasis is found on both psychological and physical health during adolescence, and there is decreased emphasis on psychological or cognitive development. The communicative nature of prayer in adolescence is nevertheless evident, for prayer is still considered the vehicle for direct communication with God (Williams & Lindsey, 2006).

Psychological and Cognitive Development

A similar debate regarding psychological development in children characterizes research on prayer and the r/s lives of adolescents. Scarlett and Perriello (1991) outline a variety of different developmental theories of prayer and the benefits of interpretation of each explanation; such explanations include those emphasizing development of one's image of oneself and of others, the development of responsibility, and the development of meaning in one's life. While not a psychological or cognitive developmental study per se, Brown (1966) found in an analysis of children aged 12-17 in the US, Australia and New Zealand, that there was a consistent age-related trend away from the belief in the effectiveness of petitionary prayer. Brown argues that adolescents undergo a "decentering" psychological process whereby it may still be considered appropriate to pray in a variety of situations, though there is less expectation, as age increases, that such petitionary prayers will be effective. Brown notes that not all adolescents will have undergone this process by age 18, thus lending more support to the need for flexibility in developmental theories as they relate to prayer and religion/spirituality. More recently, Schwartz (2006) created a developmental model of adolescent r/s based on a sample of 4,000 Christian adolescents. In this study, three main influential sources upon adolescent religious beliefs and practices were identified: transmission processes (such as parental church attendance), transactional processes (like discussions about faith), and transformational processes (such as support from friends).

Learning and Influences

The only developmental explanation rejected by Scarlett and Perriello (1991) is the notion of prayer being learned by means of imitation and reinforcement; rather, they "take it as a given" (p. 67) that mature prayer is a developmental process of communication between oneself and God. While the communicative nature of prayer is evident, other scholars do not flatly reject the notion of "learned" prayer. Family – and parents in particular – have been identified as highly influential in one's prayer life (and, more generally, in r/s development). In Smith, Faris, Denton and Regnerus's (2003) sample of American 12th graders, about 67% of the participants reported that their religious beliefs are similar to those of their parents. Kieren and Munro (1987) researched adolescent church attendance and affirmed the central influence of the parental example, which is consistent with Francis and Brown's (1991) conclusion that the influence of both parents on children's religiosity is stronger than the influence of either mother or father alone. It may be that Scarlett and Perriello consider prayer "learned" from others to be shallow and impersonal, though they do not state this clearly. It is evident that other scholars of r/s development consider prayer a personal practice rather than a superficial, imitative act.

Marks (2006) outlines the variety of influences on family members' religious development, including the influence of mothers, fathers, and church community; for adolescents, the importance of parent-child and parent-adolescent communication in faith development and religious experience is emphasized. This parent-adolescent communication may be more significant for mothers and teens. Bao, Whitbeck, Hoyt and Conger (1999) found that mothers in more positive mother/child relationships were more likely to transmit their religious beliefs to their adolescent children. This maternal transmission of religiosity to adolescents – and, importantly, adolescent congruence with such maternal religiosity – may protect against depression (Miller, Warner, Wickramaratne & Weissman, 1987). It would be meaningful to dedicate future research to the role of mothers in children's spiritual development; this work could examine whether mothers self-appoint themselves as the parent responsible for the spiritual development of their children, or if there are other issues (such as resistance to such responsibilities on the part of fathers, or specific time constraints on either parent) which facilitate mothers and grandmothers as spiritual teachers to the children in their families.

Literature on frequency and purpose of prayer amongst adolescents is inconclusive. Denomination is one area which has been explored, though such exploration has not been conducted in ways in which comparisons can be easily made. Smith (2003) found that teenagers in more theologically conservative, Pentecostal and sectarian traditions prayed more frequently, while Jewish, mainline Protestant, and Catholic youth prayed somewhat less frequently (p. 119). Francis, Robbins, Lewis and Barnes (2008) found that amongst 16-18 year-olds in Northern Ireland, more Catholic students prayed on their own daily or sometimes than students in Protestant schools. Only 16% of students in Catholic schools had never prayed on their own, while 31% of Protestant pupils had never prayed on their own.

Such studies address *frequency* of prayer, though the specific issues addressed, such as denomination, are defined differently.

Gender is another area in which research is promising and deserving. Smith's (2003) study of American adolescents found that 10% more girls than boys pray daily and 6% more teenage boys than girls never pray. Similarly, Bussing, Foller-Mancini, Gidley and Husser (2010) found that more adolescent girls than boys prayed for others, and more girls prayed for themselves than did boys. The study of adolescent girls would be an area deserving of future research, for if, as literature suggests, women as mothers are highly influential to their children, it would be interesting to discover more about the nature, causes, and effects of prayer amongst females of different ages. It would also be helpful to identify the circumstances or forces that take boys away from prayer. Francis and Brown (1991) called for additional research on the variety of "levels of family and church support on what children and adolescents pray for, the contexts in which they pray, the forms of prayer used, and the justifications advanced for prayer" (p. 121). Literature suggests that this call should be expanded to examine more thoroughly questions such as denomination, gender, and race. As research progresses in this area, it is important to note that one variable does not make up the whole explanation for an individual or group. Yet a more thorough understanding of the parts that make up the whole plays a vital part in understanding the multifaceted practice that is prayer.

Acceptance and Rejection of Prayer Behaviors

Although literature shows that the family is a highly influential factor in adolescent prayer behavior, research suggests that prayer takes on a very personal quality during the teen years. Good, Willoughby and Busseri (2011) found that prayer for adolescents was primarily a "personal means of connection with the sacred" (p. 547) despite low levels of religious involvement. The notion of adolescents rejecting organized religion or spirituality is not surprising, as it goes hand-in-hand with the adolescent search for freedom and self-reliance. Hout and Greeley (1987) argue "young people strive to put some social distance between themselves and their religious roots" (p. 331). Similarly, Wilson and Sandomirsky (1991) argue that for many children of devout parents, the adolescent search for autonomy and independence almost inevitably includes a rejection of religious practices, beliefs, and affiliation.

Other studies of adolescent prayer behavior and r/s activity, by contrast, do not reveal a drop in adolescent religiosity, spirituality, or prayer. For example, Smith, Faris, Denton and Regnerus (2003) used Monitoring the Future data and found that the overall pattern of teenage prayer and the reported importance of faith suggest an overall stable pattern. Data in this study suggest that teens' reported importance of faith changes little over the four years between 8th and 12th grade, and that while the frequency of teenage prayer does decline somewhat between ages 13-18, the decline is not pronounced. The authors conclude that the majority of older American youth (particularly those in grade 12) "do not appear to be disillusioned with or estranged from institutional religion in the US" (p. 126). These results are curiously different

from Good, Willoughby and Busseri's (2011) study of youth in Canada, where a higher proportion of non-Christians may have been present in the sample.

Similar to the Monitoring the Future data, Dorman's (2002) study of over 1,000 Australian students showed significant differences between 12-15 year olds and 19-28 year olds whereby adolescents had more positive attitudes about prayer, God, Jesus and Christian practice than did young adults. Further, Dillon and Wink (2007), in their rare longitudinal study, found that the overall pattern of change in religiosity over time is best described as a shallow U-turn, characterized by high levels of religiousness in adolescence and then in late adulthood, and a dip in religiousness during the middle adult years. These studies do not support the notion that the adolescent years are characterized by the rejection of religious practices, including prayer.

The Practice of Prayer

Studies focusing upon religiosity and attitudes to r/s issues are available, as above, though fewer studies address how and why adolescents pray. Scarlett (1991) found that 7th graders' prayers were primarily petitionary in nature (asking God to heal a friend or take care of someone), and 9th graders also prayed to request something, though such requests were related more to feelings and the struggle to understand what is true or best in one's life. Williams and Lindsey's (2006) study of homeless youth found that some prayed daily and others prayed on a sporadic basis when in need of help; prayer in both cases was characterized by a sense of reverence, supplication, and putting oneself in the care of God. Like children (and indeed like all age groups), adolescents were found to embrace prayer and religiosity/spirituality when in crisis or in a coping situation. Kirkpatrick and Shaver (1990) found that teen converts to religion described family problems and poor relationships with parents as the cause of their conversion. This data is in concert with that of results in studies of childhood prayer, indicating that a meaningful motivation to pray is coping or crisis.

Health

Studies of the prayer lives of adolescents are closely linked to meaningful issues or concerns relative to the teenage years. Adolescence is a time in which many young people experiment with substances (Shedler & Block, 1990), sexuality (Netting, 1992), or both (Staton, et al, 1999), and the overall health of adolescents is of concern to issues in public health. Several studies encompassing prayer and religiosity have addressed these issues. For example, Corwyn and Bender's (2000) study on religiosity and hard drug use showed that private prayer, Bible study, and attempts to convert someone into a personal relationship with God had a negative correlation with the use of hard drugs, while church attendance did not have the same effect. Results from Nonnemaker, McNeely and Blum's (2003) study of over 16,000 youth support the notion that religiosity – in this case, both public and private religiosity – is protective for a number of adolescent health concerns

including the use of cigarettes, alcohol, and marijuana. However, some aspects of spirituality (for example, Rastafarianism) promote the belief that drug use is acceptable, and Sussman, Skara, Rodriguez and Pokhrel (2006), not surprisingly, found that drug-use-specific spirituality was found to have a positive association with drug use. Therefore spiritual traditions, depending upon their main tenets, can either discourage or promote drug use, particularly amongst adolescents. Overall, however, studies show that mainstream spiritual traditions, including Judeo-Christian traditions, have been found to have a negative impact on drug use.

Physical and emotional health are also important issues during the teen years, and in general, data shows that prayer can aid in promoting one's health in both of these areas. Stern, Canda and Doershuk (1992) conducted a study of patients with cystic fibrosis, and of the 70% in the sample who sought nonmedical therapy, 60% used religious treatments such as prayer, 65% reported frequent use and 92% reported perceived benefits. Francis, Robbins, Lewis and Barnes (2008) concluded that after considering both religious and non-religious respondents in studies of religiosity and psychology, a higher frequency of prayer can be associated with better levels of psychological health. Gunnoe and Beversluis (2009) also found that teens with a higher frequency of prayer had a heightened sense of belonging; the authors posit that in adolescence, identity is a central issue, and participation in religious/spiritual activities served to build up one's identity, and as such, their of belonging in a r/s community.

Also related to health issues for adolescents is the importance of sexual health. Fehring, Cheever, German and Philpot (1998) concluded that organized religious activity (in the form of prayer services and church attendance) followed by the importance of prayer seem to be the religious variables most associated with less sexual activity on the part of adolescents. These results are consistent with previous studies (Dunne, Edwards, Lucke & Raphael, 1994; Nicholas & Durrheim, 1995) on the preventative impact, which the importance of religion and prayer can have upon sexual activity amongst adolescents.

Future directions in research on adolescents' prayer and religious/spiritual behaviors holds great promise for not only understanding, but also for helping young people, their friends, and their families. As above, literature suggests that adolescence is a time in which young people sometimes reject r/s behaviors such as prayer and church attendance. However, many churches incorporate youth groups into their program offerings for young people. It would be helpful to conduct systematic investigations of youth groups in order to learn more about best practices, and how such groups can serve to assist young people with identity and foster a sense of belonging, which are two issues central to adolescent psychological development. Given that adolescence can also be a time in which many young people are "wonderers" (Good, Willoughby & Bussieri, 2011), it would be helpful to learn how best to serve such wonderers, and how best to answer their questions. Such investigations should not attempt to find the best ways to "convert" young people; rather, as with children, such studies should endeavor to both protect and nurture young people's spirituality and spiritual development.

Undergraduates

The undergraduate years, typically between the ages of 18 and 22, bridge the gap between adolescence and young adulthood. In this analysis of literature relative to prayer in the life span, it is practical to examine undergraduates as an independent group for several reasons. First, the undergraduate years bring unique issues and challenges that are not always similar to either adolescence or adulthood in terms of emotional, social, or health concerns which individuals face. Second, the undergraduate years are often times of exploration, during which both social and religious identities can be formed. Finally, undergraduates can be examined as a unique age group in terms of religious (and in this case, prayer) development given the issue of research methodology. Undergraduates can be incorporated into faculty research as a means of convenience sampling; students can be offered extra credit or incentives to participate in academic research. Studies therefore exist which examine undergraduates as a specific age group. While extant research on undergraduates is not entirely cohesive in terms of issues addressed or methods of inquiry, a consideration of this body of work as a separate category in terms of a general area in the lifetime of prayer is meaningful and warranted.

Communication and Prayer

Studies addressing the nature of one's relationship with the Divine show that the communicative aspect of prayer is evident for undergraduates with a prayer life. Kane and Jacobs (2010) found that most respondents in their study of 204 university students perceived of the interpersonal nature of prayer and religious/spiritual behavior. Participants in this sample were likely to view r/s behaviors as an attempt to commune with a supreme being rather than as a non-personal relationship with a cosmic power or a search for enlightenment. When asking for help, offering thanks, or seeking forgiveness, these activities were perceived as important and were "directed toward a Supreme Being" (Kane & Jacobs, 2010, p. 64). In McKinney & McKinney's (1999) study, many (no percentages are reported) undergraduates related to God as a "Lord," or a distant amorphous Being; others saw God as a close friend or confidant and still others prayed to God as a parental figure. Within the McKinney study "the intimacy of the relationship [varied] as much as the intensity" (p. 288). While one's relationship with God was described differently, and the degree of intimacy in the relationship was not always consistent, the communicative nature of prayer is clearly described in this literature. These studies lend support to Baesler's (2003) theory that prayer is a communicative activity and bears resemblance to human interpersonal relations.

Identity

The theme of identity is evident in literature on the religious/spiritual lives of undergraduates. Scarlett and Perriello (1991) found that undergraduate students showed signs of search, struggle, and doubt. In this sample, while petitionary prayer

was still evident, the prayer lives of undergraduate students were characterized more by an attempt to determine the meaning of situations and a more intimate kind of praying, though percentages are at best vaguely reported in this study. McKinney and McKinney (1999) found that the prayer lives of undergraduates were characterized by personal concerns, such as achievement of goals and success in personal relationships, yet such personal concerns were not always entirely selfish, for students prayed for being better trained or being better able to help others. This study included analysis of students' 7-day prayer diaries, whereby they kept logs of their prayer activities, whether formal or spontaneous. This very personal and intimate analysis found that while undergraduates used petitionary prayer by requesting things in their immediate future, their prayers of thanksgiving and reparation reveal regret for things that they had done in the past and gratitude for blessings in their lives.

The interplay between prayer, gratitude, and coping is apparent when considering the body of literature on prayer, particularly for undergraduates. Prayer and gratitude are inter-related, according to Lambert, Fincham, Braithwaite, Graham and Beach's (2009) investigation of over 3,000 undergraduates. This study, which included variables of prayer frequency and keeping journals, showed that prayer increases gratitude. An increase in gratitude can be advantageous to one's emotional health and interpersonal relationships; Emmons and McCullough's (2003) study of 192 undergraduates found that increased gratitude (by keeping daily or weekly gratitude "journals" for 3 weeks) resulted in a heightened sense of well-being. The authors also suggest that a conscious focus on gratitude can have benefits such as additional strategies to cope with life's challenges. Although their study is not limited to undergraduates, Bade and Cook (2008) recruited participants from Christian university centers and found that the most effective prayer functions included seeking guidance and expressing gratitude. Thus, the relationships between prayer, gratitude, and coping is clear; extant literature shows that prayer increases gratitude, and gratitude (by means of prayer) is an effective way to cope with one's challenges. Further research in the area of adolescent/young adult coping could include more specific analyses of gratitude, as gratitude has been shown to be an effective method of perceiving and dealing with emotional and interpersonal issues.

The undergraduate years may be times in which religious identity wanes, or they may be a time in which religious identity is developed. Context is therefore important in considering religious identity during the college years. For example, Kneipp, Kelly and Dubois's (2011) study found that students at a private, religious college were significantly more intrinsically religious than students at a public, nonreligious college. These results suggest that being in the company of like-minded peers and having increased opportunity for religious activities at the religious college would reinforce a student's level of religiosity as well as spirituality.

Influences Upon Prayer

Another important issue to consider, particularly in the context of research on undergraduates, is what influences one to engage in prayer. In comparison to literature on children and adolescents, there is significantly less literature addressing the influences on undergraduate prayer behavior. Baesler, Lindvall and Lauricella (2011) considered how mediated sources (such as television and film) together with interpersonal sources (such as family members and clergy) influenced prayer and found that both interpersonal and mediated communication sources predicted increases in prayer. While this study was primarily comprised of undergraduates, participants provided retrospective reports of their prayer influences; they reported on particular television programming and interpersonal influences (such as parents and grandparents) and the impact that such sources had on their prayer lives. Therefore such answers are not necessarily indicative of what influences undergraduates *during* the undergraduate years.

Like other broad age categories, including children, adolescents, adults and elders, university students cite coping as a reason for engaging in prayer. Again, however, literature on religious coping, with specific attention to prayer, is less plentiful as it relates to adolescents and undergraduates than for any other broad age group. Nevertheless, Kane and Jacobs (2010) found that most of the undergraduate participants in their study agreed that they pray or meditate over a personal problem, and generally believed that spirituality/religion would allow them to overcome health and psychological challenges. Eliassen, Taylor and Lloyd (2005) suggest that while established patterns of religious coping can routinely mitigate distress for young adults, heightened stress exposure may bring about increased prayer among those who are less religious. In a study of 596 university students, MacGeorge et al (2007) examined the influence of denomination, religiosity and perceptions of God on 12 types of prayers. Results showed that there were modest differences in how different denominations approach prayer during times of personal distress, that those with higher religiosity (belief in God and religion being a central part of one's life) used multiple prayer behaviors during times of distress, and that those who perceived God as loving were associated with nearly all types of prayer behaviors. This study is helpful in that it suggests to clergy that if they wish to encourage prayer during times of personal challenge (which is, according to literature on undergraduates, a helpful tool in coping), they would do well to help people to perceive God as a loving entity. This is in keeping with Keating's anecdote about Cardinal Basil Hume; a loving and benevolent God is perceived to be helpful and generous. Future research on coping in the undergraduate prayer community could pay particular attention to the role of one's concept of God. Such research would be helpful in an applied context, whereby prayer could be incorporated into coping situations (such as counseling) for those open to the practice.

Adults

While it is helpful to consider how prayer is similar or different amongst a variety of age groups, as has been done in broad terms in this review, literature on prayer throughout the lifetime indicates that it is beneficial to take into account the entire life course rather than taking a phase-by-phase analytical approach to an analysis of prayer behavior and/or purposes. The importance of considering the life course as a whole is particularly apparent in the context of literature on adult prayer. This approach is of particular importance given the comparative lack of research on middle adult years in comparison to childhood, youth, young adulthood and late adulthood. Dillon and Wink (2007) offer an important contribution to our understanding of adult prayer and religiousness given the longitudinal nature of their work. Their data show that adult years are characterized by slight changes toward and away from prayer and religiousness rather than abrupt changes in religious commitment. Such changes included low participation in religion and prayer in the middle adult years, primarily due to newly emerging pressures and responsibilities with children, followed by an increase in religiosity and behaviors such as prayer when individuals progressed from their fifties to their seventies. Religiousness, according to this study, follows a relatively similar pattern for men and women, though such patterns are affected by having school-age children (and thus being concerned with their religious upbringing), age of the parents, and their marital status. Similarly, spiritual seeking, while following a similar pattern for women and men, increases notably in late-middle adulthood; so much so that the authors contend that spiritual seeking is "largely a post-midlife phenomenon" (p. 126). It is therefore essential to consider how and why one engages in religious behaviors such as prayer, and to consider the variety of pressures and challenges that one faces given one's own unique life situation.

Results from Baesler's (2002) study suggest that as individuals age, they tend to pray more frequently, report that prayer had more positive effects, and they "rate their relationship with God higher on several items associated with intimacy" (p. 63). Baesler also suggests that as Christian adults mature, they will engage in less ego-focused prayers (such as petitionary prayer, or asking God to intervene) and will, rather, focus more on receptive prayers (such as prayers of surrender, meditative, or contemplative prayer). Baesler emphasizes the communicative nature of prayer, such that intimacy with God is akin to building human friendships, whereby the relationship develops in breadth and depth. While this model is entirely feasible for Christians as they mature in prayer and religious life, it should be noted that it is quite possible that an individual may come to Christianity as an adult, and at this life stage would not be at the mature Christian relationship stage that Baesler describes. Books and guides that encourage or assist adults in engaging in prayer, such as Hybels (2008) demonstrate that not all adults are at a stage in which they are ready to engage in contemplative or meditative prayer. Therefore, it becomes very difficult to generalize "adult prayer," for some individuals may come to prayer in their thirties, forties or fifties. It is unknown whether such individuals may launch directly into mature, contemplative prayer, or whether such persons will go through

a condensed or complete r/s development and how long such development may take. If we combine the findings of Baesler (2002) with the U-shaped curve that Dillon and Wink (2007) describe, then the mid 40's – 50's represents the life stage during which contemplative prayer begins for many individuals. While systematic research suggests that this is the case, recall that Halpin (1984) would disagree, as her experience showed that even young children are capable of contemplative prayer.

Influences on Adult Prayer Life

Family: As described above, Dillon and Wink (2007) found an increase in religiosity when adults were raising children, as they sought to provide their children with a religious/spiritual background. In this case, parents served as models to their children, and Dillon and Wink emphasize the role that parents play in the religious socialization of children, and how such socialization increases the participation of mothers, in particular. Halpin (1984) similarly suggests that parents are models and need to be attentive to their own prayer, for adults have the opportunity to grow in their own relationship with God in order that they may be examples to their children. According to Wilson and Sandomirsky (1991), the "family" can be considered to embrace three generations (grandparents, parents/children, and children/grandchildren) and the interdependence amongst these generations is enough to influence each to affiliate with the church, even if it is delayed until the children have offspring of their own (grandchildren).

Coping: Just as all broad age groups have been noted to incorporate prayer into coping strategies, so too do adults. Baesler (2002) suggests that critical life events (illness, financial challenge, divorce, etc.) may bring one to prayer with greater frequency and, in addition to the common response of active prayers of petition, may lead one to engage in more receptive prayers of surrender or meditation. Baesler's argument is supported by peripheral literature on prayer in adulthood. While Bade and Cook's (2008) study analyzed a small (n=36) sample of women and men, the researchers used a concept map to show prayer functions (including seeking direction, putting faith and trust in God) to analyze how prayer is used to deal with a variety of personal problems. Again, in this small sample (mean age=35), results showed that seeking guidance and expressing gratitude were the most effective coping strategies relative to prayer. Prayer was also an element in Pargament, Smith, Koenig and Perez's (1998) study of religious coping methods; the authors introduced a 14-item measure of both positive and negative patterns, and examined their implications for health and adjustment. The study showed similar results across three different groups of people who experienced very different challenges, and revealed that, not surprisingly, people incorporated positive religious coping methods (such as seeking spiritual support, religious forgiveness) more often than negative methods (spiritual discontent, punishing God reappraisals). However, the authors suggest that future research should nevertheless consider negative coping methods because such methods can result in a unique set of health-related repercussions (Pargament et al, 1998).

Religious coping, and prayer in particular, can be helpful to adult mental health issues including anxiety, depression, and other psychological issues, just as prayer can be helpful to such issues for others in a variety of age groups. Prayer has been shown to be successfully incorporated into psychotherapy for adults, and clients can be encouraged to engage in prayer in whichever way(s) are most meaningful to them (Pargament, 2007). Whittington and Scher's (2010) study of different types of prayer and their effects on wellbeing confirmed the well-established finding that prayer can have positive effects on psychological well-being. However, this study found that only *some* kinds of prayer have positive effects on wellbeing, while others had negative effects. Prayers such as adoration, thanksgiving, and reception had positive effects on wellbeing (p. 64). By contrast, prayers such as confession, supplication, and obligation affected psychological outcomes in a negative way.

Middle Adulthood

As literature on adults is considered in context with other age groups, it is clear that children, adolescents, young adults and more mature adults undergo similar changes, growth, and challenges; all such circumstances can lead to an increase in prayer frequency and/or more mature ways of engaging in prayer. It is notable that literature on prayer in middle adulthood is less plentiful than studies on any other age group. Dillon and Wink (2007) note that comparatively little is known of religiousness in middle adulthood, and even less is known about prayer during this time. This lack of scholarly attention to middle adulthood could be addressed by examining how and why adults come to prayer, how they grow in prayer, and how prayer is used as a coping tool given the myriad issues that middle adults face.

Elders

Elder years are, anecdotally, perceived to be highly religious and frequently attend religious services. This perception is supported by academic literature on religiosity. Since as early as 1939, survey research and public opinion polls have consistently found that elder adults (those over age 65) were highest on measures of religion and spirituality, with the occasional exception of reduced attendance at religious services among the "oldest old," who may have mobility issues (Moberg, 2005). In a survey of research on aging and religiousness, Moberg (2005) concluded that "there is a general tendency for individuals to become more interested in spiritual interests and practices as they grow older" (p. 16). The importance of prayer, in particular, is notable for those in the elder age category. Arcury, Quandt, McDonald and Bell (2000) found that prayer and other religious activities were not limited to one specific purpose, such as coping with health, aging challenges, and other difficulties; prayer was described as the foundation for all parts of one's life. For example, one respondent in this study said of prayer, "I couldn't make it without it" (p. 65).

Communicative Prayer and Modeling

The importance of prayer in elders' lives may be due in part to the relational and communicative nature in which they perceive prayer. Qualitative literature supports Baesler's (2002) suggestion that receptive or contemplative prayer would bring about greater intimacy with God. For example, Tausch et al's (2011) study of coping with the destructive hurricanes in Louisiana in 2005 showed that prayer was a way in which individuals sought to maintain a relationship and connection with God. In this study, one 93 year-old woman reported that her concept of God was so tangible that she could "hold on to him" (p. 245). In the same study, one 93-year old man stated that he had a "relationship with God" (p. 250) and that, for him, prayer was not a rote "practice" but a time to express profound, relational gratitude to a God that had given him many blessings. Black (1999) studied elderly African-American women, and emphasized the relational nature of prayer for these subjects; for these elderly women, God is considered a personal friend who knows each woman intimately and cares for her individually. Women interviewed in this study were active pray-ers who listened and responded "to a God they believe listens and responds to them" (p. 273). One elderly subject in Arcury, Quandt, McDonald and Bell's (2000) study remarked on talking to God: "there's no medicine any better, the way I look at it" (p. 68).

The elder years are not a time of "arrival" at the conclusion of a prayer journey which has a finish line or final goal. Rather, prayer amongst elders can be seen as a time of continued development, and a time in which one can become "spiritually radiant, physically vital, and socially responsible 'elders of the tribe'" (Schachter-Shalomi & Miller, 1995). As one reaches his/her elder years, then, he or she may reflect thoughtfully on his or her life, or may come to a stage in which he or she is prepared to serve as a model for others in prayer and religious or spiritual involvement. Bryan (2008) suggests that growth in prayer increases as elder adults spend more time in which they are focused on praying for others, giving blessings and encouragement, and guiding others in the practice of prayer. While elders may serve as models to others as they learn and grow in prayer, Bryan also suggests that elders can recognize models from whom to learn and grow even at a later stage in their lives. Moses, Joshua, Buddha, and, more recently, Desmond Tutu, Sri Sri Ravi Shankar and Mother Theresa are all adult leaders who practice(d) prayer, faith, and service and are individuals to whom elders can look in order to grow and develop even at advanced ages.

Coping

Not surprisingly, coping has been recognized as a notable element in prayer amongst elders. Praying to God, particularly for aged individuals, "gives peace of mind and the confidence to face or escape the vicissitudes of life" (Bagheri-Nesami, Rafii & Oskouie, 2010, p. 586). Manfredi and Pickett (1987) found that the elderly were more inclined to use inspirational strategies such as prayer, together with other optimistic attitudes such as believing things could be worse, looking for the silver

lining, and maintaining pride. Prayer has been identified as a strategy for coping with difficulties such as issues associated with aging, loss of control, and mental and physical health. Prayer is clearly not the exclusive means of coping with elders' challenges, though it is clearly a primary element in a suite of coping strategies that are helpful to elders as they face new and/or ongoing challenges as they age.

Age-related challenges: As one ages, a variety of challenges emerge and are resolved, and prayer has been shown to be an effective coping tool in dealing with aging and its associated issues. Hunter and Gillen (2009) found that elders in nursing homes cited prayer as one of the top three coping responses in dealing with age-related challenges; other equally mentioned strategies included reading, television, music, and talking to friends and family. In their study of elderly Iranian women, Bagheri-Nesami, Rafii and Oskouie (2010) found that participants believed in the power of prayer, and that spiritual matters were important in coping with age-related changes such as forgetfulness. Black's (1999) study of elderly African-American women showed that women's faith in God was helpful in dealing with hardship and for enhancing self-esteem. A fuller understanding of prayer amongst the elder population could emerge if future research included analyses of prayer types (as in MacGeorge, et al, 2007 or Pargament, Smith, Koenig & Perez, 1998).

Relinquishing control: Lack of control is another reason that elders look to prayer in order to cope, for relinquishing control to God is a kind of prayer which is not entirely petitionary, but is also contemplative and trusting. Manfredi & Pickett (1987) found that "those who perceive little control over their own destiny may turn to a higher power for assistance" (p. 107). In their study of cardiac surgery patients, Ai, Dunkle, Peterson and Bolling (1998) found that younger patients – like elders – also turn to religious/spiritual coping when they identified that they were not in control of their own personal situation(s). It is not yet known the extent of the petitionary element of prayer when one relinquishes control to God; in other words, allowing God to control a situation may still involve some element of asking for something tangible or for a result or situation to change. It would be interesting for future research to focus on the interplay between asking and letting go in elders' (and, indeed all other age groups') prayers. We do know, however, that many elders believe that God and prayer work in concert with medical treatment to help or cure one's health challenges (Arcury, Quandt, McDonald & Bell, 2000).

Health challenges: Given that health challenges are a common issue in the aged population, it is not surprising that literature on elders' prayer lives includes a variety of studies on coping with physical and mental health concerns. For example, medical stressors were most commonly reported amongst participants in Hunter and Gillen's (2009) study on coping behaviors in nursing homes, and prayer was one of the top three methods of coping. Payman, George and Ryburn (2008) also considered medical illness amongst the elderly, and posit that increased levels of disability amongst the elderly will lead to increased use of private religious behavior such as prayer as a way of coping. Krause (2004) takes the analysis of prayer further by investigating elders' prayer beliefs and expectancies. In this study of over 1,000 people over age 66 in the US, Krause found that those who endorsed trust-based expectancies – that God knows the best way and the best time to answer prayers –

had more feelings of self-worth than those who did not endorse such trust-based expectancies. Interestingly, this study also found that older African-Americans were more likely to endorse trust-based expectancies than were older whites. Similar results were found in Krause and Chatters's (2005) study, in which data collected from 1,500 older adults in the US shows that "older blacks are more deeply involved in prayer than older whites" (p. 39). This discussion of race is helpful to a clearer understanding of prayer behaviors; additional research on race in all different stages of the life course would be valuable.

Other innovative studies which address the management of one's health through prayer consider the *kind* of prayer in which one engages when faced with a health challenge. Ai, Dunkle, Peterson and Bolling (1998) found that most participants in their sample of cardiac surgery patients used private prayer and other spiritual or religious practices to cope with problems following surgery. However, the authors note that they did not know whether the individuals employed prayers of petition, thanksgiving, confession, contemplation or some other kind of prayer. Therefore Ai, Tice, Huang, Rodgers and Bolling (2008) subsequently considered how different prayer types affect psychological outcomes after open heart surgery. In their study of post-operative coping they found that petitionary prayers (prayers asking for a specific outcome) predicted optimism and well-being, whereas conversational prayers predicted higher levels of stress. According to the authors, this surprising contradiction can be explained by the "life altering nature of open-heart surgery" (p. 143). In cases of such significant surgery, many patients may, for the first time, face their own mortality, and/or may be forced to consider other concerns such as financial challenges or the wellbeing of other living family members. The authors explain that when patients lose confidence in their own personal control over their surgery or health, trusting in God can offer a sense of hope. Therefore petitionary prayer offers patients hope when they acknowledge that they themselves may not have a great deal of control over their health and other related situations. Additional studies addressing the role that specific kinds of prayer play in one's physical and emotional wellbeing in the elder years, and in particular when dealing with health challenges, would be a valuable addition to literature on prayer in any age group.

Mental health is another important issue in the elderly population, and several studies have considered the role of prayer in emotional wellbeing. Meisenhelder and Chandler (2002) found that while frequency of prayer, importance of faith, and reliance on religion for coping correlated strongly with positive mental health, it is one's *attitude* to issues of faith that is more important to mental health than are one's behaviors. Prayer, meditation and reading the Bible were coping behaviors in 37% of an Australian sample of depressed elderly patients (Payman, George & Ryburn 2008). This study suggested that religious coping helps in a hospital setting, and that it "probably can help depressed elderly in the community" (p. 20). Next steps for research on mental health and prayer as coping should consider attitudes toward religion, purposes of prayer, and spiritual measures to gain a fuller understanding of how they relate to mental health (Meisenhelder & Chandler, 2002).

Recommendations

Studies on religious coping, health issues, and the elderly point to recommendations for health professionals and centers. Although the study considered a small sample of hospitalized elderly patients, Ross (1997), found that patients reported that their spiritual needs could have been better met if, for example, a quiet room for reflection or prayer had been available and if they had been told about hospital church services and provided with transport to attend. Several patients in this pilot study mentioned trying to pray at night with their faces turned to the wall while pretending to sleep. These reports suggest that the level of peace, quiet and privacy in hospital is questionable (Ross, 1997, p. 713). Overall, prayer is an oft-cited coping practice for elders in a variety of different challenging situations. It would therefore be helpful and respectful for health professionals to be cognizant of the role of prayer and how they can assist elders in their religious, spiritual, and health challenges and goals.

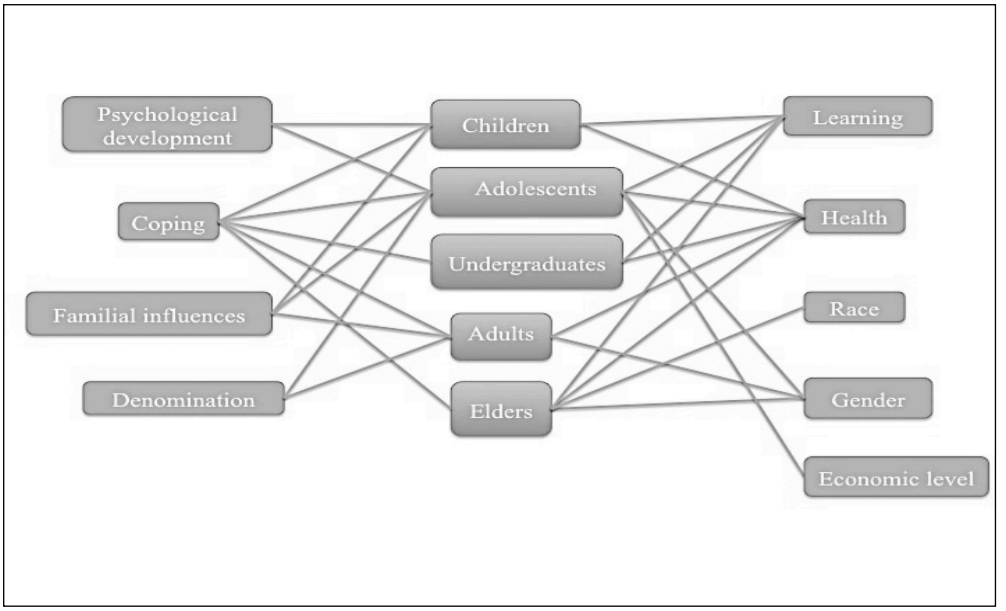
Conclusion

This critical literature review considered how prayer is exhibited throughout the life course. The notion of considering a person's life as a whole is important to an analysis of how prayer evolves, grows, and changes as individuals move through their lives. It may seem reasonable to assume that as one grows older, one's prayer life becomes more mature and deepens with increased intimacy with God. However, this review recognizes that the nature of the human life experience is not always linear, and that particular life challenges, such as hardships including health, relationships or simple busy-ness with children or other non-life threatening challenges may occur. Therefore, one's prayer life might ebb and flow, or shift in importance depending upon one's personal circumstance and response to it. It is therefore difficult to compartmentalize prayer behavior by age group; this review considered broad age ranges so as to integrate a variety of studies addressing myriad unique circumstances relative to prayer.

Krause (2009) argues that considering the life course as a whole is essential in analyzing the role that prayer plays in one's life, for events or circumstances that affect one's perception or decisions do not generally disappear as one progresses through the life course. Similarly, Dillon and Wink (2007) argue that a longitudinal analysis of prayer is essential for life circumstances such as bringing children to religiosity or when children leave the home. These life circumstance variables impact one's religious involvement and, subsequently, one's prayer life. It is therefore important to consider specific circumstances, challenges, changes and choices that individuals make. Figure 1 shows the life stages considered in this review, together with issues analyzed in extant literature, represented by lines connecting the life stage with the issues considered. It can be seen that in some age groups (such as for children), literature addresses a wide variety of influences, while in others (such as undergraduates and elders) literature is less comprehensive. This figure visually represents the extent of the existing literature, and also shows the

gaps in literature and opportunities to address additional themes relative to each age group. It illustrates the complicated web of influences on each life stage, and reminds scholars and practitioners that it is a *collection* of experiences and influences that work in concert to influence one's prayer life.

Figure 1. The web of influences on prayer throughout the lifetime



Regardless of the frequency of prayer, motivations to pray, or the kinds of prayer in which one engages, the communicative nature of prayer is evident in all life stages. The Most Venerable Thich Nhat Hanh (2006) notes that prayer involves the establishment of a relationship between oneself and the being to which one prays. Evidence of this relationship is visible in all life stages – children, adolescents, undergraduates, adults and elders all note the relational aspects of prayer. God or a Higher Power may be perceived as a confidant, a distant amorphous figure, or a close friend. However one perceives the Divine, this perception includes the notion of a relationship that has been maintained and grown via direct communication in prayer.

Future directions of research on prayer have been addressed in this review; such directions include a broader consideration of the context of prayer, what kinds of prayer are most helpful (and when), a call to consider protecting and nurturing spiritual practices at a variety of life stages, and a more careful consideration of recommendations for how health-related institutions and religious communities can support individuals in their prayer development and/or during specific challenges such as physical or mental health. Whatever the direction of future prayer research, it is recommended that those considering prayer treat this communicative practice with great respect, for individuals participating in prayer research – regardless of their age or developmental stage – allow researchers access to very private and personal thoughts and behaviors. Researchers are privileged to be able to participate

in understanding prayer, for it reveals one's innermost "thoughts, fears, embarrassments, hopes, and vulnerabilities" (McKinney, & McKinney, 1999, p. 288).

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The Role of Prayer in Promoting Health and Well Being

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Abstract: Prayer is examined as a powerful form of spiritual communication for individuals who are confronting challenging health issues. Prayer has the potential to promote personal reflection and adaptation to health threats. It is a particularly useful form of communication for helping health care consumers and providers cope with the symbolic demands of confronting health challenges. Relevant literature examining the role of prayer on health outcomes is reviewed to summarize current knowledge about prayer and health. Directions are suggested for future research and intervention concerning the use of prayer to promote health and well-being. *Keywords*: prayer, health communication, coping, health outcomes, social support

Introduction

Almost every one of us can probably recall a time when we invoked spiritual help or asked for Godly intervention to help us cope with a difficult health situation. Perhaps while experiencing excruciating pain you may have moaned something like, "Oh my God! Oh my God! Make it stop!" Perhaps when receiving a serious and frightening diagnosis you prayed for the diagnosis to be incorrect. Perhaps when being prepared for a surgical procedure you prayed for the surgery to be quick, painless, and successful. You might also recall times when you prayed for improved health for your loved ones who were confronting serious health problems. Prayer is a common part of the way many of us have learned to cope with health and illness. The critical question examined here is really not whether we use prayer to help us confront illness. We most certainly do! The burning question is whether praying for health outcomes actually makes a difference (Levin, 2001; O'Hara, 2002; Udermann, 2000).

Prayer has developed as an important and frequent form of human communication (Baesler & Ladd, 2009; Davis, Eisenberg, Legedza, McCaffrey, & Phillips, 2004). We communicate intrapersonally when we silently pray alone and we engage in interpersonal and group communication when we pray silently or aloud with others. Prayer is a complex form of human interaction that can include formalized religious rituals, informal reflections, and meditative practices (Levin, 2001; Plante, 2010). As a powerful form of human communication, prayer can help us cope with complex and challenging situations, including helping us respond to complex health care situations (Baesler & Ladd, 2009).

A large body of literature underscores the importance of human communication in providing health care consumers and providers with relevant information needed for making informed decisions to promote health and well-being, as well as to help

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them cope with the stresses of confronting challenging health threats (for reviews of this literature see: Kreps, 2003; Kreps & O'Hair, 1995; Kreps, O'Hair, & Clowers Hart, 1994). For example, effective health communication has been shown to provide relevant information for helping health care consumers and providers make sense of the many complexities of confronting serious health issues (Kreps, 2001; 2003; 1993a). Communication is also essential for building cooperative health promoting relationships, and to access needed support across the continuum of health care (from prevention, through detection, diagnosis, treatment, survivorship, and end of life) (Kreps, 2001; 2003; 1993a).

Many prayers take the form of health communication that is often used to help people cope with illness, make sense of illness, and provide them with support in making health-related decisions (Baesler, Derlega, Winstead, & Barbee, 2003; Baesler & Ladd, 2009). There are clearly psychological benefits to the use of prayer concerning difficult health issues, but are there also physiological benefits to the use of prayer to confront serious health problems (Ross, Hall, Fairley, Taylor, & Howard, 2008). This review paper encompasses a large body of relevant empirical literature examining the influences of prayer on health outcomes and suggests directions for fruitful future research and intervention in this area to promote health and well-being.

The Functions of Health Communication

Health communication needs are often very complex, challenging, and multifaceted (Kreps, 2009). To be effective in helping health care participants adapt to the complexities of health care, communication must provide individuals with relevant health information. Relevant health information is one of the most powerful commodities in health care (Kreps, 1988). Access to relevant health information can help answer key questions for health care participants, preparing them to make important health-related decisions.

Sometimes the health information most needed by health care participants is content information concerning health science and treatment options, and there is often a strong content focus in health communication between health care professionals and patients (Kreps & Kunimoto, 1994). This content-related information helps to demystify the many complexities of diagnosis and treatment. There appears to be relatively little content-information benefit to prayer, since praying is unlikely to provide information about health science or treatments. However, often the kind of information most needed by those confronting serious health problems is relational information to help address worries, fears, and feelings of isolation. Relational information can help provide needed social support, encourage faith in treatment, and promote reassurance about health outcomes. This information helps participants cope with psychological concerns and fears about health and illness (Kreps, 2004; Kreps & Kunimoto, 1994). Prayer appears to be an ideal form of communication for helping promote adaptation to psychological concerns by providing relational, emotional, and social support to those confronting serious health challenges.

To be responsive to both the psychological and physiological dimensions of health and illness, health communication must help individuals make sense of challenging health conditions, guide informed health care decision making, and build personal resilience (Kreps, 2001; 1993a). Baesler and Ladd (2009) explain, "health is more than the absence of physical, mental, or social disease. Health involves the whole person: body, mind, and spirit" (p. 349). Effective health communication helps consumers cope with the holistic aspects of health and illness, providing them with both content information about the nature of complex health issues and relational information about the personal and emotional implications of challenging health threats (Kreps & Kunimoto, 1994; Marks, 2005).

Unfortunately, communication within the health care system is not always optimally effective. There are many reports of problematic communication within modern health care systems (Kreps, 2001; 2003). For example, patient-provider communication in the delivery of care does not always provide consumers with all the information they need since it does not often focus on the whole person (Kreps, 1993b). Patient communication with health care professionals is often focused on instrumental care-giving activities (the physiological dimensions of health), with less emphasis on the symbolic and emotional aspects of illness (Kreps, 1993b; Kreps & Kunimoto, 1994). However it is just as important to use health communication to help consumers make sense of the psychological aspects of their health and health care activities, as it is to provide patients with detailed information about disease prevention and treatments (Kreps, 1988). Could the use of prayer be a way to help provide consumers with needed psychological and emotional support?

Prayer as Health Communication

The use of prayer appears to have the potential to serve as a powerful mode of spiritual human communication to addresses many important psycho-social health issues, complementing the dominant physiological nature of formalized health communication, and helping consumers make sense of the psychological dimensions of health and health care (Egbert, Sparks, Kreps, & Du Pré, 2008; Jantos, & Kiat, 2007; Koenig, McCullough, & Larson, 2011; Marks, 2005). There are many personal accounts in the literature about how health care consumers have used prayer to cope with the stresses of serious health threats and achieve desired health outcomes (Alexander, 2003; Chang, 2000; Ross, Hall, Fairley, Taylor, & Howard, 2008). However, evidence about the physiological influences of prayer on health outcomes is less clear than the psychological effects of prayer (Masters & Spielmans, 2007; Udermann, 2000).

Prayer is often used to help health care participants cope personally with serious and challenging health issues (Baesler & Ladd, 2009; Dunn, & Horgas, 2011; Miller & Rubin, 2011; O'Hara, 2002). For example, one national US survey found that 35% of the respondents reported that they used prayer for dealing with health concerns; 75% of these individuals prayed for wellness, and 22% prayed for specific medical outcomes (McCaffrey, Eisenberg, Legedza, Davis, & Phillips, 2004). In this survey, 69% of the respondents who reported praying for specific

medical conditions found prayer to be very helpful in coping with their health issues. Another national US survey, drawn from the 2002 National Health Interview Survey and Alternative Health Supplement, found that 45% of the American adults surveyed reported that they engaged in some form of prayer for responding to health issues (Bell, Suerken, Quandt, Grywacs, Lang, & Acury, 2005). Interestingly, in this study, respondents' use of prayer for coping with health issues was associated with increased age, ethnic minority status, lower socioeconomic status, and residence in the Southern and Midwestern sections of the US (Bell, Suerken, Quandt, Grywacs, Lang, & Acury, 2005). Although these surveys were U.S. based, praying in response to health issues is an international phenomenon. For example, a European survey found strong correlations between the frequency of engaging in prayer and the incidences of ill-health among adults 50 years of age and older in nine different European countries (Hank & Schaan, 2008). Evidence suggests that prayer is frequently used to cope with health issues in other parts of the world as well (Dhalla, Chan, Montaner, & Hogg, 2006; Furler, Einarson, Walmsley, Millson, & Bendayan, 2003; Koen, 2009; Mills, Cooper, & Kanfer, 2005; Thomas, Lam, Piterman, Mijch, & Komesaroff, 2007; Wiwanitkit, 2003).

A recent national US survey by Wachholtz and Sambamoorthi (2011) showed that the use of prayer for responding to health concerns increased between 2001 and 2007. In particular, the authors found a positive association between the use of prayer for coping with pain, which is a particularly challenging and stressful health issue for many consumers (Kreps, 2004; Wachholtz & Sambamoorthi, 2011). The typical health care system response to pain management too often relies primarily on the use of pharmacological agents that are often addictive and can cause other negative side effects for users (Kreps, in-press; 2004). The use of prayer and other forms of communication intervention can serve as a non-invasive supplement, or even alternative, to the overuse of pain medications (Kreps, 2012a; Neumann, Edelhäuser, Kreps, Scheffer, Lutz, Tauschel, & Visser, 2010). Baesler, Derlega, Winstead, and Barbee (2009) also reported that prayer was used as a primary interpersonal coping strategy for mothers diagnosed with HIV to achieve important outcomes such as social support, positive attitude/affect, and peace.

The Complexities of Prayer and Praying

There are many different aspects to the use of prayer as a potentially powerful form of health communication. Prayer is not just used by individuals as a personal response for coping with their health threats. Prayer occurs on multiple levels, for many purposes, and by a variety of different participants. Baesler and Ladd (2009) describe the use of prayer in personal, interpersonal (Baesler, 2008), small, and large group contexts. Individuals confronting serious health problems often use personal praying to help them cope with the stresses of illness and to petition a higher being for improved outcomes. There are also many instances when individuals pray for the well-being of others, using prayer to help promote improved health outcomes for other individuals and groups. For example, entire congregations are often coordinated to pray for another congregant facing serious health threats, or

to pray for at-risk groups facing health threats from floods, hurricanes, epidemics, or other dire problems. This use of prayer to help others is sometimes referred to as intercessory prayer (Benson, Dusek, Sherwood, Lam, Bethea, & Hibberd, 2006; Carron, & Naumann, 2006; Chibnall, Jeral, & Cerrullo, 2001). While there is relatively strong evidence (discussed later in this paper) that personal prayer often provides strong psychological benefits to consumers who pray, there is mixed evidence about the influences of intercessory prayer on the health outcomes of those who are prayed for.

There are many different ways to engage in prayer. Praying is inherent to, and commonly performed, within organized religions. Praying is also a personal activity that is performed independently of participation in formalized religions. Breslin and Lewis (2008) differentiate between several different functions of prayer, ranging from prayers of atonement to the use of petitionary prayers to seek Godly intervention to improve health outcomes. Personal meditation (such as the use of mantra meditation, mindfulness meditation, yoga, tai chi, and qi gong) can also be thought of as a form of prayer and is often encouraged to help patients cope with the stresses, side-effects, and other rigors of health care (Bonadonna, 2003; Kreps, 2012a; Ospina et al, 2007; Plante, 2010; Tacon, 2003). Some people may pray out loud, while others may pray silently. Still others pray with the use of song and music. Some people recite formal prayers, while others may develop their own personally created prayer rituals. Different religions are likely to conceptualize prayer in different ways (Beversluis, 2000), which may also result in differential influences on health outcomes.

Prayer is not just a solitary individual activity. Praying is often conducted as a communal activity where a group of individuals pray together at the same time in the same place. In fact, the use of digital technologies has opened up opportunities for communal praying online via email, Facebook, and mobile phone applications (Larsen, 2001). Communal praying can establish a strong sense of identification and group bonding among participants (Byron, 2008). When praying with others, there are likely to be relational interpersonal influences on the ways prayer is communicated, the ways that prayer is interpreted, and on the outcomes of prayer on health and well-being. For example, participating with others who are engaged in active, spirited prayer can motivate others to engage in reciprocal expressions of prayer. As mentioned earlier, there is also intercessory prayer, where one or more individuals pray for the well-being of others.

Evidence about the Influences of Prayer on Health Outcomes

There are mixed results about the influences of prayer on health outcomes. There appears to be more evidence to support the positive influences of first-person prayer for personal health than for second or third person (intercessory) prayer for improving the health of others. For example, research suggests that prayer can help individuals cope with stress (Ano & Vasconcelles, 2005; Ospina et al, 2007; Ross, Hall, Fairley, Taylor, & Howard, 2008). Ai, Tice, Peterson, and Wang (2005) showed that prayers were helpful in promoting personal coping from the stresses of

the September 11th attacks on the US. A study about rehabilitation from sports injuries showed that prayer, faith, and spirituality had positive influences on injury management and overall recovery (Udermann, 2000). Prayer has also been associated with long term health promotion, managing depression, and coping with serious illnesses (Larson, Larson, & Koenig, 2002). Similarly, a randomized clinical trial of the effects of prayer on depression showed that participants participating in the prayer intervention showed significant improvement of depression and anxiety, as well as increases of daily spiritual experiences and optimism compared to the control group that did not participate in praying (Boelens, Reeves, Replogle, & Koenig, 2009). Masters and Spielmans (2007) in a review of the empirical research on prayer and health suggested that personal prayer can be a powerful coping strategy for individuals. This body of research suggests that engaging in prayer can help promote a positive, optimistic world view, provide meaning and purpose to life, give people hope, enhance motivation, promote empowerment, and increase a sense of personal control.

Prayer has the potential to influence health outcomes through a variety of different communication pathways. While prayer has been reported to have direct effects on health outcomes, such as in spiritual healing events at prayer meetings, many of these claims do not have much strong scientific evidence to back them up (Duffin, 2009). Prayer has also been hypothesized to have an indirect influence on health outcomes as part of the placebo effect (the positive influence of beliefs on health outcomes), or as a needed diversion from health concerns (Coulter, 2003). There is strong empirical evidence about the power of the placebo effect on both psychological and physiological health outcomes (Benedetti, 2009; Benson & Epstein, 1975). Research has shown that communication interventions that reduce stress (such as the use of placebos, meditation, and praying) often promote a relaxation response that can promote healing (Benson, 1997; Benson, Beary, & Carol, 1974). Physiological research has shown that stress reduction can promote resistance to bacterial infection (Rojas, Padgett, Sheridan, & Marucha, 2002), decrease inflammation (Lutgendorf, Logan, Costanzo, Lubaro, 2004), and promote healing (Esch, Fricchione, & Stefano, 2003). If prayer can serve as a way for patients to relieve stress, praying has the potential to help improve physiological health outcomes.

However, the evidence is quite mixed about the benefits of distant intercessory prayer (Masters & Spielmans, 2007). While some earlier studies showed positive influences of intercessory prayer, a recent Cochrane review (part of a well-respected database of systematic reviews and meta-analyses which summarize and interpret the results of health-related research) of the role of intercessory prayer on health outcomes found no significant differences in recovery from illness or death between those who were prayed for and those who were not prayed for (Roberts, Ahmed, Hall, & Davison, 2011). In fact, a large clinical trial that monitored patients undergoing cardiac bypass surgery found that outcomes were worse for patients who received intercessory prayer (Benson, Dusek, Sherwood, Lam, Bethea, & Hibberd, 2006), although this study has been criticized for several methodological problems including the way that prayer was operationalized. A critical

communication factor in intercessory prayer appears to be whether the individual being prayed for knows that others are praying for him or her to get well. Another critical communication factor appears to be the level of religiosity or faith the ill individual has in the value of prayer to influence health outcomes. If an individual knows that others are praying for him or her, it can elicit the placebo effect, especially when that individual has a strong belief in the efficacy of prayer (Coulter, 2003).

Implications for Future Research

Many concerns and criticisms have been raised about the validity of past research about the influences of prayer on health due to a variety of methodological limitations in these studies concerning research designs, controls, and sample selection practices (Breslin & Lewis, 2008; Chibnall, Jeral, & Cerrullo, 2001; Dossey & Hufford, 2005; Halperin, 2001; Sloan & Ramakrishnan, 2006). Specific concerns about prior research concerning prayer and health outcomes have focused on questionable use of unrealistic settings where studies were conducted, claims that studies used biased and unrepresentative subject selection methods, suspicions that researchers exerted undue influences on subjects, claims about limited rigor in research designs and controls, as well as concerns about limited depth of analysis These criticisms mirror similar concerns about the validity, rigor, and comprehensiveness of other health communication and health promotion studies (Kreps, 2011; Neumann, Kreps, & Visser, 2011). Recommendations have been made to use innovative multi-methodological designs to improve the quality of health communication research that can also be fruitfully applied to improving research on the influences of prayer and health outcomes (Kreps, 2011; Neumann, Kreps, & Visser, 2011). For example, much of the research evaluating the use of prayer depends on self-report measures that can be strongly influenced by religious beliefs and social pressure to conform. The use of multiple measures, especially the use of non-reactive measures such as content analysis of documents, utilization records and other archival measures, as well as physiological measures, can increase confidence in the results of research concerning the influences of prayer on health outcomes (Kreps, 2011).

It has been difficult to conduct meaningful meta-analyses of studies about the influences of prayer on health outcomes because of challenges in comparing diverse studies. Many of the studies on prayer and health used small samples that are difficult to generalize from. Few studies use common variables, operationalizations, or measurement instruments, which limits the ability to combine studies meaningfully (Kreps, 2011). It is very difficult to control for the use of diverse religious practices, since individuals pray in many different ways. It is also challenging to establish randomized assignment of subjects to different prayer practice conditions, since religion and prayer are very personal activities for most people and are not subject to research manipulation.

Breslin and Lewis (2008) argue for the need for an agreement among researchers about common systems for classifying and measuring prayer to promote

straightforward comparison of results across studies (meta-analysis). They suggest that researchers should be aware of the many prayer types documented in the literature and should select a measure of prayer appropriate to their specific field of investigation. Additionally, researchers should give consideration to the possible causal mechanisms (such as social norms, interpersonal influence, social learning, and adaptation) that may be underlying the hypotheses they are investigating. Furthermore, they call for more theoretically grounded research concerning prayer and health outcomes to make the research more meaningful.

There is a wide range of different variables concerning prayer and health that have not been well examined by the extant literature. These variables include the kinds of prayer that individuals engage in, the frequency of these different prayers, and the content of prayer. Jantos and Kiat (2007) suggest that since research on the health benefits of prayer is still in its infancy, "future studies need to identify the unique markers that differentiate prayer from other non-spiritual practices. Researchers must also accept that some aspects of prayer may not be transparent to scientific investigation and may go beyond the reach of science" (p. s51). This refers to the "black box" phenomenon concerning examination of internal psychological and spiritual factors that influence the creation of personal meanings and the internal mechanisms that shape the ways individuals respond to communication practices (Kreps, 2011). These psychological aspects of prayer may be examined effectively through the use of qualitative, ethnographic, and phenomenological analyses of individual experiences. In addition, Baesler & Ladd, (2009) suggest that future research should also examine the relational outcomes of prayer, develop an inventory of prayer, and analyze the bi-directional nature of the prayer-health relationship.

Implications for Health Communication Policy and Practices

While the evidence about the influences of prayer on health outcomes is not unanimous, there is little data reported to suggest that prayer is a detriment to achieving health care goals or that engaging in prayer harms consumers who are confronting health challenges. In fact, there is sufficient credible data to warrant the conclusion that prayer can actually help many people respond to health problems, certainly in terms of helping them cope symbolically with health challenges, and in many cases by reducing stress and increasing resistance to health threats such as infection and inflammation, ultimately promoting healing (Benson, 1987; Esch, Fricchione, & Stefano, 2003; Lutgendorf, Logan, Costanzo, Lubaro, 2004; Rojas, Padgett, Sheridan, & Marucha, 2002). On the basis of this past research some scholars have suggested that health care practitioners should integrate prayer into their practices when it is appropriate to do so, speaking with their patients about religious beliefs and practices to determine whether prayer can help these consumers cope with their health issues (Koenig, McCullough, & Larson, 2001; Rosenbaum, 2007; Udermann, 2000). While some evidence suggests that prayer can help achieve health outcomes, Jantos and Kiat (2007) conclude that in the clinical context the primary emphasis must be on medical treatment, with prayer used as an important

secondary "resource for coping with pain and illness and improving health and general wellbeing" (p. s51). Prayer should be considered as an effective supplement to the best health care practices, but certainly not as a substitute for good care (Neumann, Edelhäuser, Kreps, Scheffer, Lutz, Tauschel, & Visser, 2010).

Rosenbaum (2007) suggests that it is imperative for health care providers to carefully examine their patients' needs and receptiveness for engaging in prayer and spirituality related to health issues. However, to accomplish this goal, providers need to communicate effectively with their patients. Providers need to actively engage their patients (as well as involved patient supporters and family members) in meaningful communication to learn about their unique religious/spiritual orientations and specific prayer expectations (Anandarajah & Hight, 2001; Ehman, Ott, Short, Ciampa, & Hansen-Flaschen, 1999). Unfortunately, there is ample evidence about serious communication deficiencies in the information exchanges between providers and consumers that may make it difficult for many health care providers to elicit such personal information about spiritual orientations and needs from their patients (Kreps, 2001; 1993a, 1988). For example, research suggests that providers spend much more time providing information to patients than in eliciting information from their patients (Arora, 2003; Street, 1991; Thompson, 1998; Waitzkin, 1985). In fact, Beckman and Frankel (1984) reported that on average, physicians interrupted their patients' presentation of health complaints on an average after only 18 seconds. Additional research suggests a continuing failure by health care providers to effectively elicit the patient's personal perspective during health care interactions (Rhoades, McFarland, Holmes Finch, & Johnson, 2001). Health care providers need to be trained to communicate sensitively with patients about spiritual issues, listen empathically, and elicit personal information about communication needs and expectations from patients, especially when their patients may want to engage in prayer (Fitchett, 1993; Koenig, 2002; Kreps, 1996).

Some literature on prayer and health has advocated a particularly aggressive strategy for communicating about prayer in the delivery of care, recommending that health care providers should actively encourage their patients to pray about health concerns (Rosenbaum, 2007). Furthermore, it has also been suggested that health care providers should consider praying for their patients and even engage in prayer with their patients (Rosenbaum, 2007). However, there appear to be serious ethical considerations that should guide health care providers' participation in prayer and advocacy for the use of prayer in health care. For example, Post, Puchalski, & Larson (2000) recommend respecting the professional boundaries between health care providers and patients concerning spiritual issues, allowing consumers to identify when and how they might want to engage in prayer. In this way health care providers can avoid infringing on their patients' religious freedom or engaging in religious proselytizing. Careful attention should be paid to the unique spiritual histories and orientations of different consumers, allowing consumers to make their own personal decisions about engaging in prayer (Winslow & Wehtje, 2003).

Doctors and nurses may have rich opportunities to integrate prayer into their most emotionally intense health care interactions with patients and family members who express an interest in engaging in prayer. For example, when delivering

particularly serious diagnoses, terminal prognoses, or introducing the need for palliative and end-of-life care to patients, some patients may feel the need to engage in prayer. Health care providers need to be sensitive to consumers' needs for spiritual support and allow patients and/or family members to initiate their interest in prayer. In this way, the health care provider can be responsive to consumer needs, rather than be seen as engaging in religious proselytizing by enforcing prayer on health care consumers.

Spiritual training for nurses, and for doctors, can help prepare them to help health care consumers use prayer to help cope with pressing health issues and stressors (Fitchett, 1993). In fact, health communication training and support for health care providers can help enhance health care professionals' abilities to communicate in ways that can facilitate meeting consumers' spiritual needs (Rosenbaum, 2007). Such training can help promote providers' development of the unique interpersonal communication competencies needed to gather relevant information from consumers for accurately assessing spiritual orientations and needs, and for working with consumers to effectively address these spiritual needs (DiJoseph & Cavendish, 2005; Puchalski, 2006; 2007; 2010). Armed with relevant information about consumers' spiritual orientations and needs, providers can make informed decisions about the best ways to provide consumers with appropriate spiritual support (Puchalski, 2010).

While doctors are often identified by consumers as their most trusted sources for health information and physicians often engage in sensitive and emotionally intense interactions that might evoke consumer interest in praying, it is often the nurse who has the greatest amount of close interactive contact with patients and family members around the clock in hospitals and clinics (Kreps & Kunimoto, 1994; Heinz, 2004; Hesse, Nelson, Kreps, Croyle, Arora, Rimer, & Viswanath, 2005). Nurses often provide patients and their families with personal attention and support through interpersonal interaction, which might suggest that nurses could perform a central role in helping to facilitate the appropriate use of prayer by patients and family members who express interest in praying (Kreps, 2012b; Narayanasamy & Narayanasamy, 2008). In fact, spiritual education programs have been introduced into nursing curricula to help prepare nurses to communicate effectively with patients and family members about prayer (Keefe, 2005; Lemmer, 2002; Wallace, Campbell, Grossman, Shea, Lange, & Quell, 2008).

Pastoral care providers also appear to be ideally prepared to help assess patients' (and their supporters') receptivity to engaging prayer, as well as to help promote the appropriate use of prayer by those consumers who want to pray (Handzo, 2006). Hospital chaplains serve as the primary pastoral care providers in many hospitals and medical centers. These chaplains are typically professionally trained members of the clergy who know how to support consumers' spiritual needs and can ably serve as spiritual care providers within health care systems (Pesut, Reimer-Kirkham, Sawatzky, Woodland, & Peverall, 2012). Chaplains can be trained to provide patient-centered care and support as part of their professional responsibilities (Berlinger, 2008; Daly, 2006). Similarly, nurses have also been found ideally situated to help patients express their spirituality since they spend so

much time caring for patients (Cavendish, Konecny, Luise, & Lanza, 2004; Holt-Ashley, 2000). Ideally, all members of the health care team should be prepared to help patients use prayer to cope with health stresses and build resilience for meeting health challenges.

Unfortunately, many health care consumers (and their supporters) often have limited access to pastoral care due to understaffing of pastoral care professionals within many health care systems and suboptimal levels of referral of patients to pastoral care by health care providers (Handzo & Koenig, 2004; VandeCreek, 2010). Health care delivery system administrators can help promote effective use of prayer by consumers by maintaining adequate staffing of pastoral care departments, training health care providers about the benefits of pastoral care for patients (and their supporters), as well as by developing mechanisms for making it easy for health care providers to refer patients for pastoral care. Furthermore, by integrating chaplains (and other representatives of the clergy) into health care teams, health care systems can enhance provider sensitivity to the importance of spirituality and prayer in promoting health and well-being. Including chaplains as members of health care teams can also help enhance health care providers' access to spiritual support to help these health care professionals cope with the many stresses and emotional burnout that can come from the rigors of providing health care (Gunderson, 2001; McCray, Cronholm, Bogner, Gallo, & Neill, 2008).

The Future of Prayer and Health Care

The preponderance of evidence reviewed in this paper suggests that engaging in prayer is an important and useful activity for many people confronting challenging health issues. There is little evidence reported that suggests that engaging in prayer leads to significant risks or harms to consumers of health care. The challenge for the modern health care system, then, is to provide consumers with legitimate, appropriate, and sensitive venues for engaging in prayer when they feel the need for spiritual support. To achieve these goals modern health care delivery systems will have to establish policies to support consumers' use of prayer, train health care personnel to recognize when consumers want to pray and then to support these consumers' needs for prayer. Spiritual guides, such as chaplains, should be made available to support the spiritual needs of patients and family members. Physical facilities (such as chapels, meditation spaces, appropriate furnishings, equipment, and prayer books) should be included in the design and construction of health care delivery systems. Care will also have to be taken to give consumers who are not interested in praying the respect and support they need to follow their non-secular wishes. The health care system of the future should provide needed support and encouragement for those consumers who want to pray, as well as to those consumers who are not interested in prayer. Educational programs for health care providers need to be designed to help these professionals develop the communication skills needed to assess when consumers want to engage in prayer and to help these consumers use prayer as an important coping mechanism. Confronting serious health challenges is difficult and the best health care systems

and health care professionals should provide consumers with all of the tools available to promote health and well-being physically, psychologically, and spiritually. This is what it means to engage in effective holistic health care.

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Prayer and Forgiveness: Communication and Christian Applications

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Abstract: In this essay I explore possible relationships between prayer and interpersonal forgiveness. I conceptualize both prayer and forgiveness as relational processes. Using two teachings of Jesus, I construct a prayer-forgiveness framework. I then make suggestions as to how prayer may help facilitate specific tasks in Waldron and Kelley's (2008) communication-based forgiveness model. Prayer is shown to provide a shift in perspective that influences the experience of negative emotion as well as creates empathic, altruistic responses to an offending relational partner. The essay finishes using the *Jesus Prayer* as an example of how prayer may be integrated into a forgiveness process. *Keywords*: prayer, forgiveness, communication, altruism, empathy.

Introduction

Prayer and forgiveness share a long common history. Prayer and related activities, such as meditation, have been a part of virtually every religion since the dawn of human kind (Baesler, Lindvall, Lauricella, 2011; Zaleski & Zaleski, 2005). Likewise, forgiveness has been encouraged by major world religions for centuries. Forgiveness-like concepts are present in early Hindu writings and also developed in later Jewish, Christian, and Muslim thinking (Rye, Pargament, Ali, Beck, Dorff, & Hallisey, et al., 2000).

For the present discussion, like others before me, I have chosen to conceptualize both prayer and forgiveness as interpersonal processes (Baesler, 2002; Enright, Eastin, Golden, Sarinopoulos, & Freedman, 1992; McCullough, Pargament, & Thoreson, 2000; Pargament, 2007). While there has been debate amongst forgiveness researchers regarding the intra/inter-personal nature of forgiveness, Waldron and I (2008) have focused our research on interpersonal aspects of forgiveness, although we recognize the importance of the psychological components. Other researchers have acknowledged that, at the least, forgiveness typically occurs within an interpersonal context (McCullough, Pargament, & Thoresen, 2000) and, more comprehensively, forgiveness is interpersonal in nature (Enright, Freedman, & Rique, 1998; North, 1998).

At times, the interpersonal aspects of prayer and forgiveness are interrelated as a human being asks the divine prayer) for a merciful response (forgiveness). Early Christian writings extended divine human forgiveness to relationships between people. Jesus reportedly adjures his followers to forgive one another: "Even if they sin against you seven times in a day and seven times come back to you saying 'I repent,' you must forgive them," Luke 17:4. In addition, other teachings of Jesus,

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such as "love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you," can be construed as part of the transformative nature of forgiveness (Kelley, 2011). This perspective is consistent with modern conceptualizations of forgiveness that emphasize altruism (Worthington, 1998, 2001) and demonstrating love toward an offender (Enright, Eastin, Golden, Sarinopoulos, & Freedman, 1992; North, 1998).

In this essay, I begin by developing a prayer-forgiveness framework based on two teachings of Jesus. I follow with an extensive proposal of ways prayer may facilitate the interpersonal process of forgiveness based on Waldron's and my (2008) communicative model of forgiveness. My analysis mostly relies on a broad scope of academic literature regarding prayer, however, I also draw specifically from Christian Scriptures and writings for specific application throughout the essay. I finish by providing a brief example of how one well known Christian prayer can be used to facilitate the forgiveness process.

Prayer-Forgiveness Framework

Prayers of forgiveness are at the core of the Abrahamic faiths (Rye et al., 2000). Here, I focus on perspectives provided by Jesus, first by addressing his Jewish context. Forgiveness has been a hallmark of Abraham's descendants, ever since Abraham forgave Avimelech (Rye et al., 2000). At a personal level, in Psalm 32 (one of the Penitential Psalms) the psalmist describes the process of confession and forgiveness, "I acknowledged my sin to you, and I did not cover my iniquity; I said, 'I will confess my transgressions to the LORD,' and you forgave the iniquity of my sin." At a national level, Israel's leaders prayed asking God's forgiveness for the sins of the people/nation. For example, Moses' prayer that God would not destroy the people for their unfaithfulness (Exodus 32) and King Solomon's prayer when the Ark of the Covenant was brought to the temple (I King 8) demonstrate the deep roots of forgiveness for the Jewish people. Perhaps the clearest picture of prayer and forgiveness in the Hebrew Scriptures is the description that is given us of Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement. Although God is always open to confession, each year on Yom Kippur, Jews confess their sins and repent through the liturgy of atonement; interestingly, emphasis is indirectly placed on human-human forgiveness because God's forgiveness is contingent on each person having been forgiven by those he or she has offended (Rye et al., 2000).

The rich Jewish history of forgiveness sets the tone for forgiveness as it is emphasized in the Christian scriptures. In the book of Acts (8:22), Peter tells the sorcerer, Simon, to pray to the Lord that he might be forgiven. Likewise, James writes that prayer offered in faith can result in physical healing and forgiveness. It can be argued that the Apostle John had prayer in mind as he exhorted his readers to "confess our sins" and we will be forgiven (I John 1:9).

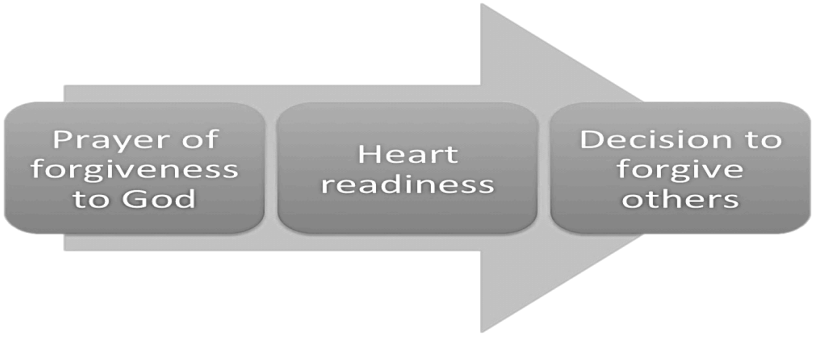
Most significantly, however, Jesus encourages his followers to pray, "Forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors" (Matthew 6:12). In this model, praying for personal forgiveness is directly linked to one's own forgiveness of others (Pargament, 1997). Here, the *prayer of forgiveness* serves as a beginning point for approaching forgiveness with others. Although it may appear that

forgiving others is God's test case in deciding to forgive offenders, the essence of Jesus' teaching is made manifest in later teachings. Jesus sets his model prayer in the context of God's kingdom coming to earth ("Your kingdom come…" Matthew 6:10). Likewise, in Matthew Chapter 18 when Peter asks Jesus about forgiveness, Jesus responds by telling a parable specifically designed to show "what the kingdom of heaven is like." This parable of an unmerciful servant demonstrates that a servant who had been forgiven a debt by his master (God) should have forgiven a fellow servant's debt in like manner. This, then, sets a pattern for the practice of forgiveness—God's forgiveness of one's offenses serves as a template to forgive one's offenders *in like manner*.

This forgiveness process represents a common religious perspective wherein human behavior is to model the divine (Rye et al., 2000). Pargament (1997) states that, in Judaism, it is central to imitate the divine; for example, for one seeking to follow God's ways, forgiving one's enemies is essential to the expression of one's identity. These ideas are echoed in Jesus' own teaching to "be perfect as your heavenly father is perfect," (Matt 5:48) through "lov[ing] your enemies and pray[ing] for those who persecute you" (Matt 5:44).

If one takes the perspective that to forgive is to model the divine, then one moves from legalistic doctrine (if a, then b; if you forgive, then God forgives), to one focused on a changed heart, that is, one's nature becomes like God's nature (a becomes like b; when you become like the divine, then you forgive and God forgives; Wright, 1996). Jesus quotes from the book of Isaiah as he tells his audience that they worship in vain because their hearts are far from God (Matthew 15). Other scriptures also demonstrate this principle: "You therefore must be perfect as your heavenly father is perfect" (Matt. 5:48). Based on this simple exposition of a few texts, I suggest using Jesus' teachings, regarding transformation to be like the divine, as a guide to construct a two-part framework to understand the relationship between forgiveness with God and forgiveness between people:

Part One**:**



Part Two:

In the first part of the model, praying to God for forgiveness both creates and demonstrates one's heart condition, which leads to the decision to imitate the divine through forgiveness. In the second part of the model, the decision to forgive is enacted, in part, through prayer resulting in various forms of peace. It is this second part of the model that is demonstrated below as I provide examples of how prayer may influence various aspects of the forgiveness process. I begin with an overview of Waldron's and my (2008) communicative model of forgiveness. I devote the rest of the essay to demonstrating prayer's role in four different aspects of the model.

A Communicative Model of Forgiveness

In 2008 Vince Waldron and I developed a descriptive model depicting the forgiveness process in daily interaction. Here I provide the definition of interpersonal forgiveness and briefly outline our model of how individuals forgive. Following, I focus on four aspects of the model specifically as they relate to prayer.

Waldron and I (2008) propose the following communication-based definition of forgiveness:

> *Forgiveness is a relational process whereby harmful conduct is acknowledged by one or both partners; the harmed partner extends undeserved mercy to the perceived transgressor; one or both partners experience a transformation from negative to positive psychological states, and the meaning of the relationship is renegotiated, with the possibility of reconciliation* (p. 19).

This definition situates forgiveness within a relational context, although we recognize that forgiveness is not always relationally based (e.g., self-forgiveness) and includes intrapersonal cognitive components. Essential to the definition is the recognition that forgiveness always requires acknowledgement of some type of "harmful" behavior; often the behavior is viewed as a moral transgression of implicit or explicit relationship rules or norms (Kelley, 2012a, 2012c). Forgiveness is a merciful response to the offending partner—that is, the offended party chooses

not to punish or pursue revenge on the offender. However, it should be noted that forgiveness does not nullify the offender experiencing consequences for her/his actions. And, it is transformative in the sense that the forgiver's own behavior, thinking, and/or feelings shift from negative to positive; as well as possible positive effects for the forgiveness receiver. Finally, forgiveness involves renegotiation of the relationship, possibly resulting in reconciliation.

These elements of the forgiveness process are accomplished through engaging various tasks. First, one detects (or reveals) and confronts the transgression. Forgiveness always involves the recognition that a transgression took place. This may involve confession, truth-telling, and recognition of "immoral" behavior. It may also be a time of recognizing previous implicit relational rules. Second, partners must manage the emotion triggered by the transgression. Recognition of the relational transgression results in emotional response and subsequent emotional expression, reciprocation, labeling, and management. Third, the process of sense-making attempts to bring understanding to the transgression event and subsequent emotional experience. Uncertainty management frameworks (Affifi & Weiner, 2004; Berger & Calabrese, 1975) suggest that discrepancies between desired and experienced levels of uncertainty lead to interpretation. In the case of transgression and forgiveness, both offender and offended try to determine why the transgression took place, intentionality, and possible implications for the relationship (Waldron & Kelley, 2008). Individuals also struggle with, and reformulate, perceptions of self and one's partner. Fourth, transgressors may seek/request forgiveness. Most characteristic of this task is confession and apology. The offender may demonstrate empathy and nonverbal demonstrations of remorse or sincerity. Fifth, those offended grant forgiveness. This task may involve saying the words, "I forgive you," discussing the transgression, and signaling forgiveness through nonverbal expressions (e.g., hugs, crying). Sixth, relational partners negotiate values and rules in the relationship and, seventh, monitor and, possibly, maintain the relationship. These final two tasks involve mutual negotiation between the partners to determine the nature of the future relationship, *if* the relationship is to continue.

A few words on reconciliation: Reconciliation is *not* a necessary component of the forgiveness process. However, for those persons who choose to continue the relationship, reconciliation involves a return to relationship behavior characterized by goodwill. However, to reconcile does not necessarily mean a return to original levels of satisfaction or intimacy, although some individuals report an increase in these elements (Kelley, 1998; Kelley & Waldron, 2008). Most characteristic of reconciliation is rebuilding trust (Rusbult, Hannon, Stocker, & Finkel, 2005; Worthington & Drinkard, 2000).

Prayer and the Tasks of Forgiveness

After the recognition of a transgression, prayer has a significant role to play in the process of forgiveness. Significantly, prayer (connection with the divine) may function to help individuals manage internal psychological processes and/or serve as a dyadic process as relational partners join in prayer in order to forgive and move

toward reconciliation. Following, I discuss prayer as it relates to three tasks of forgiveness (managing emotion, sense-making, granting forgiveness/altruistic act) and reconciliation.

Prayer and Managing Emotion

Management of the emotional response to a relational transgression is an essential task for potential forgivers as they seek personal and social peace (Pargament, 1997; Waldron & Kelley, 2008). Prayer can affect this process in three significant ways. First, prayer may impact individuals' ability to manage arousal. Second, prayer may interrupt the cognitive process of rumination. Third, prayer has been associated with one's ability to find personal peace.

Prayer has been identified as a strategy for emotion regulation, especially regarding negative emotion (Beach, Fincham, Hurt, McNair, & Stanley, 2008; Sharp, 2010). Beach, Fincham, Hurt, McNair, and Stanley (2008) propose that prayer may have significant advantages over traditional emotion-regulation techniques as a strategy for use by couples in therapy. For example, for couples that are in the habit of praying, prayer may be easily remembered or turned to during times of high emotion. Because it is a familiar and valued activity (both by the relational partners and within their social community), these couples may also be more willing to engage in prayer that, in turn, may create a positive mindset for the use of other communication skills.

Sharp (2010) suggests that individuals manage emotion through prayer by expressing negative emotions to God. Many of his respondents reported that prayer provides a means of venting to a significant other; for example, Chakira remarked, "[Praying] helps to release a lot of tension and stress, 'cause when I pray I can kinda get things off my chest" (p. 425). Sharp suggests that venting in this way helps resolve negative emotion as it inhibits the mental and physical energy needed to suppress anger.

Prayer may also be used to regulate emotion by interrupting the process of rumination by redirecting it toward more positive processes. Rumination has been identified by forgiveness scholars as working in opposition to forgiveness (Berry, Worthington, O'Connor, Parrott, & Wade, 2005; Palaeri, Camillo, & Fincham, 2005). Dwelling on the transgression event, or questions germinated from the event (e.g., "How could he have done this to me?" "How can I trust her again?"), may inhibit one's ability to engage other forgiveness skills. For example, vengeful rumination may be negatively related to empathic response (Berry et al., 2005). Beach et al. (2008) suggest that prayer, "can help to disrupt persistent cycles of negative cognition" (p. 649), such as formulating angry replies or rehearsing one's relationship grievances. Similarly, Sharp (2010) described respondents as "zoning out" through prayer. "Zoning out," in this context, describes the process whereby prayer keeps negative stimuli from entering one's cognitive awareness, thus limiting the experience of negative emotion, expression of negative emotion, and rumination on negative events. In addition, it has been argued that prayer, as repetition of a 'holy name,' may not only limit the effects of negative stimuli, but also actually

transform negative effects into something positive (Baesler, 2001). In fact, Bormann's (2009) work with HIV-positive persons has shown use of a mantra is related to increases in positive reappraisal coping.

Prayer may also affect emotion management by facilitating personal peace. Several studies have linked prayer to feelings of peace or personal well-being. Bade and Cook (2008) identified one of the functions of prayer as gaining a sense of calm and focus. Their respondents reported that they specifically asked God for peace. Baesler, Derlega, Winstead, and Barbee (2003) found mothers with HIV reported experiencing peace after active prayer. Interestingly, Sharp's (2010) respondents found that venting to God reduced the amount of energy needed to deal with one's anger and, as such, resulted in increased feelings of comfort and subjective well-being. Theoretical work by Baesler (1999) indicates that receptive forms of prayer may lead to personal peace. In this light, Rajski (2003) has found that contemplative prayer during therapy brings clients a sense of inner peace and calm. Likewise, Beach et al. (2008) suggest that meditative prayer may be used to reduce high arousal levels:

> Couples may be encouraged to meditate on transcendent aspects of a higher being, contemplate being in the presence of God, or engage in quiet, meditative reading of holy texts in order to induce a quieting response that lets them recover their sense of composure" (p. 649).

This is consistent with early work by Poloma and Pendleton (1989) that indicates that meditative prayer is positively associated with existential well-being. It should be noted, however, that the process of moving to peace is not necessarily direct or linear. For example, Keating (1986) describes a process of oscillation between peace and an energy that often involves the experience of intense negative emotions.

Evidently, whether experiencing peace or negatively charged emotions, those who pray meditatively experience transformation partly because they believe they have purpose and a meaningful life. Smith (2007) argues that Christianity provides meaning because, "The experiences of each life, no matter how happy or dreadful, can be fraught with ultimate import because they are connected to God's creation, providence, redemption, growth, salvation, and healing" (p. 169-170). This resultant sense of direction may help forgivers to contextualize the transgression. For example, forgiveness respondents reported that they would minimize transgressions as a way of moving toward forgiveness (Kelley, 1998; Waldron & Kelley, 2005). This re-contextualization of the transgression can occur through prayer when one's sense of the divine puts the transgression in perspective. Likely this process provides a sense of internal well-being or peace to the offended partner. The complexity of this process is fertile ground for future researchers.

Prayer and Sense Making

Transgressions disrupt individuals' worldviews. Gordon, Baucom, and Snyder (2005) define a traumatic event as one that "violates basic assumptions about how the world and people operate" (p. 1394). In a similar vein, Flannigan (1998), based on work by Janoff-Bulman (1992), suggests that transgressions experienced as trauma (e.g., rape) shatter a victim's worldview. Specific worldview assumptions that are disrupted may include the following: one's personal control, basic goodness of others, justness of the world, and worthiness of the "self."

The disruptive nature of transgressions, particularly those that are severe, confront the one offended with the task of rebuilding his or her worldview. For example, Rye et al. (2000) suggest that religion can provide a means of shifting one's worldview toward a perceived offender. Waldron and I (2008) conceptualize this aspect of the forgiveness process as one of sense making. That is, one must evaluate the transgression and possible relationship implications within one's worldview. For example, one might ask, "How do I view my partner or the relationship after the transgression?" or "Is it possible to forgive such an act?"

For many, prayer may play a significant role in this forgiveness task. For example, Sharp (2010) suggests that prayer can facilitate the process of understanding. His data demonstrated that while expressing anger to God, individuals came to an understanding of their situation, which eventually helped them deal with their negative emotion. Such reframed accounts, of what is originally perceived to be a negative situation, have the possibility to become cognitively and emotionally satisfying. In my early forgiveness work I found similar effects as individuals reported being motivated to forgive when they were able to reframe the relational transgressions (Kelley, 1998).

Increased understanding can lead to the development of empathy. Malcolm, Warwar, and Breenberg (2005) suggest that the ability to empathize is dependent upon cognitive perspective taking. They found that before experiencing empathy for one's injurer, the injured party must face their own pain. Having the strength to "own and express" the emotion associated with a transgression, the injured individual may then imagine that the offender could have the strength to hear and take responsibility for harm done. This process may be facilitated by meditative prayer as individuals confront their own experience by expressing their hurt and frustration to the divine. Kelcourse (2001) refers to prayer as the "dialogue that heals" (p. 236). Beach et al. (2008) also conjecture that prayer could be associated with enhanced perspective taking (increased understanding) and, as such, empathy. Being able to empathize with one's partner may facilitate the interruption of negative emergent goals (e.g., punishment, revenge). The increased sense of well-being (discussed previously) coupled with empathy could result in a shift of perspective and desire for mercy and a relationship based on justice, rather than a focus on balancing past wrongs. For example, if prayer could be shown to impact perspective taking, a reduction in negative reciprocity (a predictor of marital discord and dissatisfaction; Gottman, 1994; Kelley, 2012c) may also be observed.

Empathizing may also be viewed as an emotion-based or affective response. Batson et al. (1988) define empathy as, "an other-oriented emotional response congruent with the perceived welfare of another person" (p. 52). Malcolm et al. (2005) propose that affective empathy can be understood as using one's imagination to understand what another person may have been feeling during a transgression event. This may include imagining the sequence of events leading up to the transgression. Eidenmuller & Honeycutt (2010) note that prayer is closely linked to such imagined interactions. As such, empathy and prayer allow one to see one's self as not wholly injured or the perpetrator as not wholly bad or evil, resulting in one's self and one's perpetrator becoming 'human' again. As Nouwen (1979) states, "Compassion is born when we discover in the center of our own existence not only that God is God and man is man, but also that our neighbor is really our fellow man" (p. 41). Pargament (1997) suggests that this fundamental shift in orientation is inherent to forgiveness.

Re-humanizing of self and other can be facilitated through prayer. As discussed previously, the sense of well-being provided through meditative prayer (Baesler, 1999; Poloma & Gallup, 1991) can instill a sense of worth in the hurt individual. Likewise, loving and praying for one's enemies circumvents the tendency to dehumanize those who have hurt us (Montville, 2001; Shriver, 2001) and, as such lead one to act altruistically toward one's offender. In essence, then, prayer, especially meditative prayer, may lead to increased perspective taking and empathy, resulting in altruistic acts toward others. In addition to love, prayer and meditation may be instrumental in cultivating a number of other virtues like kindness, joy, peace, wisdom, and generosity (Walsh, 1999).

Prayer and Forgiveness as Altruistic Acts

The empathy-altruism hypothesis posits that empathy can lead one individual to help another (Batson et al., 1988). There is some debate as to the motivation of these beneficent acts, but considerable research suggests that empathy can lead to altruistic behavior (Batson et al., 1988; Batson & Oleson, 1991; Post, 2003).

One form of altruism is forgiveness (Worthington, 1998, 2001). Worthington's forgiveness model is based on empathy, which he believes leads people to use forgiveness to overcome un-forgiveness (Worthington, 2001). Worthington's studies demonstrate that use of empathy-based forgiveness, as opposed to self-benefit based forgiveness, allows one to forgive more deeply and longer. In essence, feeling empathy for one's perpetrator is related to being able to forgive more fully. As such, Worthington posits a forgiveness model wherein empathy leads to *the altruistic gift of forgiveness*. However, empathy alone doesn't ensure altruism. Worthington also suggests that humility and gratitude must work in tandem with empathy. Acting altruistically to one's transgressor involves recognizing, in humility, that one has also harmed others, and being thankful for the freedom one experienced through receiving no-strings-attached forgiveness.

Not only does empathy lead to forgiveness, but prayer, when imitating 'divine' behavior, may result in the altruistic gift of forgiveness. Rye et al. (2000) point out

that theistic religions are characterized by a desire to imitate the divine. This is demonstrated in Sharp's (2010) work that suggests individuals use their relationship with God as a model of forgiving others. Specifically, participants mentioned prayer as motivating forgiveness. As one respondent shared, "Praying and knowing that God is a forgiving God, and realizing that I should do the same" (p. 432). As such, prayer facilitates a 'view of God' that allows for modeling altruism as demonstrated through forgiveness.

Prayer may lead to forgiveness by facilitating a change of perspective (e.g., empathy) and acting with another person's best interest in mind, but prayer may also be an altruistic act in and of itself. For example, Jesus specifically instructs his followers to think and act altruistically by loving their enemies and praying for those who persecute them (Matthew 5). As those who research, or are in engaged in, long-term relationships readily know, one's 'enemy' is not always a stranger—sometimes it is the person who shares one's bed. In this light, Beach et al. (2008) suggest prayer may encourage the forgiver to reassess the offending partner and the relationship and act in a prosocial manner toward each:

> Used as a response to conflictual interactions with the partner, prayer that requests positive outcomes for the partner and the relationship directs individuals to affirm the core values that are most likely to support long-term investment in the marriage: love, compassion, and understanding. Such prayer encourages individuals to think about the depth of the connection they have to each other, leading them to affirm the relationship's value (p. 648).

As such, prayer serves an altruistic function in long-term relationships. Prayer can refocus individuals on their long-term relational goals of love and connection. It also can result in specific altruistic acts, such as reduced negative reciprocity and increased positive marital behaviors (Beach et al., 2008). In this sense, prayer may be conceptualized as a form of self-sacrifice (which has been associated with positive marital functioning; Stanley, Whitton, Sadberry, Clements, & Markman, 2006), wherein one lays aside one's perceived right to revenge (Waldron & Kelley, 2008).

Prayer and Reconciliation

As previously argued, prayer and religion provide a means by which to model prosocial behavior (Rye et al., 2000; Sharp 2010) and move toward possible reconciliation. Movement toward reconciliation may occur through three prayer-focused processes. First, individuals move toward reconciliation as they model the divine. Second, prayer sets the stage for reconciliation through personal and relationship healing. Third, prayer may become an active part of reconciliation through joint prayer between relational partners.

Prayer: The divine template

Baesler (2010) suggests that prayer is spiritual communication and overviews interdisciplinary work that emphasizes prayer as central to establishing a relationship with the divine. As discussed previously, a basic assumption is that the divine relationship provides a model for creating and maintaining human relationships (Rye et al., 2000; Sharp, 2010). In this same vein, Greeley (1995) suggests that, "One's relationship to the transcendent (or if one wishes the The Transcendent) is a template for other relationships" (p. 158) Certain images, such as judge/lover, emphasize the relationship dialectics of acceptance/judgment and mercy/justice. Reconciliation requires a balance of mercy (forgiveness/acceptance) and justice (judgment). In order to reconcile, individuals must deal with past transgressions and set new guidelines for a just future (Kelley, in press; Waldron & Kelley, 2008).

Prayer: Setting the stage for reconciliation

In a recent chapter displaying forgiveness as a form of positive communication, I argue that forgiveness is a redemptive response to relational hurt that is able to heal and transform individuals and relationships, while providing an enlightened sense of relational justice (Kelley, 2012a). That is, past hurt is dealt with through the healing process of forgiveness. Individuals' relationships are transformed through setting effective relationship boundaries that hope for justice (equity, fairness) in the future. As discussed above, these elements are central to the divine-human relationship (e.g., "We love because he first loved us" I John 4:19). The story of Jesus and the woman caught in adultery illustrates this relationship: "Neither do I condemn you. Go and sin no more" (John 8:11). There is grace for the past, and a just future built on new boundaries.

Critical to establishing new boundaries in damaged relationships is rebuilding trust (Rusbult et al., 2005; Worthingon, 2001; Worthington & Drinkard, 2000). Individuals may experience personal injury when partners violate trust through violation of implicit or explicit relationship rules (Kelley, 2012b; Kelley, 2012c); as such, individuals may be motivated to forgive in order to restore trust (Kelley, 1988). Worthington and Drinkard (2000) emphasize rebuilding trust through the continual enactment of trustworthy behavior. However, demonstrating commitment may also develop trust (Kelley, 2012b). As Hannah Arendt (1972) states, "Promises are the uniquely human way of ordering the future, making it predictable and reliable to the extent that this is humanly possible" (p. 92).

Prayer can provide relationship trust from an alternate perspective. When one decides to move toward reconciliation after a transgression, the decision is made before complete trust is regained; that is, trust of one's relational partner only develops over time and is often not fully developed as partners renegotiate the future of the relationship. Prayer may facilitate this process by individuals trusting the divine, while trust in their partner develops. Sharp's (2010) research with abused women indicates that individuals trusted positive self-appraisals that came from

prayer with God, over negative self-appraisals from their abusive partners. Centering prayer can result in individuals increasing in their trust in God and as a result, developing willingness to, "relinquish control and let God be 'in charge'" (Blanton, 2011, p. 145). Blanton (2011) has found couples who use centering prayer to be calmer and more accepting with their spouse—both characteristics that may facilitate reconstruction of the relationship (Waldron & Kelley, 2008).

Prayer may also create conditions for successful reconciliation by providing social support. Baesler et al. (2003) found that, through the use of active (dialogic) prayer, mothers with HIV experienced a sense of interpersonal support that helped them cope with their illness. Beach et al. (2008) suggest that colloquial prayer may provide social support when a relational partner feels the need to continue a conversation, even though such dialogue with the partner is no longer productive. In this way, an individual may continue to vent or find emotional release while respecting the partner's need for a "time out." On the flipside, when partners feel emotionally spent, prayer may provide the necessary emotional support to stay engaged in dialogue.

In addition, prayer for one's partner may facilitate reconciliation. Fincham et al. (2008) discovered petitionary prayer for one's relationship partner to be positively related to relationship satisfaction. Prayer for one's partner's needs is also strongly related to joint prayer as discussed in the following section.

Prayer as Reconciliation

Prayer not only sets conditions for reconciliation, it is a means of reconciliation. Relational partners who pray together may reap many benefits (Beach et al., 2008) including gaining new perspective, renegotiating the relationship, developing intimacy, and restoring trust. For instance, Fincham et al. (2008) found joint prayer to be significantly associated with petitionary prayer for one's partner, commitment, managing conflict, and relationship satisfaction.

Gaining perspective (and as such, possibly, empathy) occurs through joint prayer as partners 'eavesdrop' on one another's communication to God. Prayer becomes a means of listening as each partner speaks to God. As such, each partner has the opportunity to listen less defensively and somewhat more objectively to his or her spouse (Fincham et al., 2008). Butler, Gardner, and Byrd (1998) state that prayer serves as a "softening event" as it facilitates empathy and unbiased perspective that lead to problem solving and reconciliation. As one of Waldron's and my (2008) interview participants reported, after praying together "we felt different" in a positive way (p. 146).

Joint prayer can also serve as a form of intimate behavior. As couples listen to each other pray to God they co-own one another's information. Communication Privacy Management theory (Petronio, 2002) posits that "co-owned" information can facilitate the development of intimacy between partners. Specifically, when partners give each other access socially and psychologically, they co-own those spaces (Kelley, 2012c).

The shared knowledge, resultant vulnerability, trust, and responsibility are capable of creating a deep sense of intimacy over time. In addition, the shared emotional experience of joint prayer may create a sense of psychological closeness (Prager, 1995).

Future Directions

Throughout this essay I have referenced possible areas for future research related to prayer and forgiveness. Here I suggest that focusing on the central interpersonal forgiveness tasks and reconciliation may provide rich fruit for one's labor. First, further research needs to explore the relationship between prayer and managing negative emotion. This could include the ability to manage arousal and the cognitive process of rumination, as well as prayer's ability to produce personal peace. Second, more work needs to look at the relationship between prayer and sense making. In particular, because empathy has been so closely linked to willingness and ability to forgive, research linking prayer and empathy could have a significant impact on prescriptive forgiveness programs and on helping injured parties to re-humanize the other. Third, much more study is warranted examining the relationship between prayer and altruism (e.g., the granting of forgiveness). In particular, examination of the relationship between altruism and reconciliation could provide important insights into reconciliation and relationship repair. Finally, research examining prayer and the ability to 'trust the divine' could inform marriage counselors regarding couples' ability to take risks when rebuilding the relationship.

Sample Prayer

To finish this essay I offer a well known Christian prayer as an example of how prayer can affect the forgiveness process. Emery and Pargament (2004) suggest that ritual prayer may be particularly useful in times of stress, because it is simpler and more comforting than other types of prayer, such as meditative or verbal prayer, that may demand more creativity and concentration.

A simple prayer, often called the Jesus Prayer (e.g., see Nouwen, 1981), reads as follows: "Lord Jesus Christ, have mercy on me" (p. 85). Such a prayer, often used in repetition, may prepare one's heart for forgiveness and possible reconciliation. Recognition of one's own need for forgiveness prepares one in humility to forgive one's brother or sister. As one meditates on the prayer, one may gain a sense of perspective on the transgression. Making sense of the transgression may involve understanding why the transgression took place, but primarily places the transgression and the transgressor, within a larger worldview. Putting the transgression and one's self into perspective will likely also affect one's emotional response. As such, repetition of the prayer should produce a calming response. Thus, the prayer's ability to facilitate perspective taking and management of one's emotional response sets the stage for forgiveness through empathy for one's transgressor and a desire to emulate the divine template, resulting in an openness to reconciliation when proper conditions are met. While one may not, yet, be able to

trust one's partner, trust in God may facilitate beginning negotiations for the future of a just relationship.

Prayer, then, facilitates communication with mortals and divine, alike. Prayer, itself, serves as interpersonal communication. And, prayer facilitates a shift in perspective that is able to manage errant emotion as well as create empathic, altruistic responses to one's relational partners in this life. Prayer facilitates and is, itself, forgiveness.

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Prophetic Prayer as Two-Way Communication with the Divine

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Abstract: Findings from the Godly Love National Survey (GLNS) have identified three major forms of prayer – devotional, prophetic and mystical – all of which contribute to a better understanding of human experiences of divine love. Using data from the GLNS and data from the qualitative interviews that served as a complementary source of information, in this article we explore the different types of prophetic prayer experiences – including impressions, words, visions, dreams and divine visitations – and their relationship to devotional prayer and to mysticism. *Prophetic prayer* is defined as "a two-way interaction between God and the pray-er in which the pray-er hears from God and responds to the divine initiative." More research is needed that approaches studies of prayer as a process of lived religion in which different streams flow together rather than as an undifferentiated phenomenon. *Keywords*: prayer, prophetic prayer, prayer experiences, Godly love

Introduction

Survey data collected by pollsters, demographers, and social scientists over six decades consistently have shown that some nine out of ten Americans say they pray. Unfortunately a simple question asking about the frequency of prayer is commonly the only information sought.[1] Although providing a warrant for further study, frequency of prayer reveals nothing about the content, context, purpose, affect or activities of those who pray. After reviewing the complexities of prayer and the inadequacy of prayer frequency as a sole measure, Ladd and McIntosh (2008) use a medical analogy to succinctly describe the problem: "While this single item is certainly a cost-effective way to gather important casual information, it is obviously a blunt tool. Its application is akin to a physician gathering data on 'frequency of meal consumption' in order to diagnose and treat the intricacies of diabetes"(p. 31).

Yet there has been some progress in moving beyond this simple measure as other scholars from a wide array of fields have entered the arena of prayer research. As they seek to unpack prayer as a multidimensional concept, researchers have developed prayer scales, typologies, taxonomies, models and theories.[2] Social scientists have proffered measures and designed studies to describe the nature, development, and effects of prayer (Ladd & Spilka, 2002; 2006); medical researchers have used clinical trials to explore the potential effects of prayer on healing and health (Brown 2010, et al.; Whittington & Scher 2010; Krause, 2011), and neurologists have focused on the human brain to learn more about its functioning during meditation and prayer (Newberg & Waldman 2010; Wildman

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2011). In spite the significance of such progress, prayer still remains largely an undifferentiated concept in general research that fails to mirror its multiple dimensions (Breslin, Lewis & Shevlin 2010). Furthermore, the limited research that has sought to differentiate types of prayer has been focused on devotional prayer activities – human activities directed toward the deity (e.g., worship, seeking comfort, petitioning favors, thanking for blessings, repenting from sin, etc.). The receptive dimension of prayer, in which praying people report perceived responses from God, has been largely overlooked (Dein & Littlewood 2008). The focus on prayer activities and the failure to explore receptivity in prayer has provided, at best, a blurred snapshot of an ongoing hi-definition conversation enjoyed by many prayers. Treating prayer solely as if it consisted only of human messages left on the divine answering machine has caused a blind spot.

Cognitive Activities and Affective Experiences

During the mid-1980s, when some social scientists were questioning whether prayer could or should be studied, Poloma and her colleagues (Poloma & Pendleton, 1991; Poloma & Gallup, 1991) were involved in ground-breaking survey research that went beyond tapping the frequency of undifferentiated prayer. Their four-fold typology of conversational, ritual, petitionary, and meditative prayer scales together with a prayer experience scale sowed the seeds for differentiating between devotional prayer forms that are monologic, active and cognitive *and* more receptive prayer forms that include dialogue with and affective experiences of the divine. Poloma's work on Pentecostalism (Poloma 1989; Poloma & Pendleton 1989) included measures of human devotional prayer activities and human receptivity to spiritual experiences (dialogic communication and mystical communion) with God. This line of inquiry was expanded in the local 1985 Akron Area Survey and further tested in a 1989 national Gallup Poll (Poloma & Gallup 1991); both of these early surveys contained items that tapped active and receptive dimensions of prayer. The survey results supported Poloma's thesis that experiences of God were not limited to Pentecostals. Although the experiences may be more intense, frequent, and more likely to be shared with others in some denominations and ethnic groups than in others, experiencing God clearly extended beyond the walls of traditional Pentecostal churches.[3]

For example, in the 1989 Gallup Poll seven out of ten national survey respondents (70%) claimed that they tried "to listen to God speak during prayer" and 57 percent acknowledged that they, at least on occasion, "heard God direct them to do something very specific during prayer" (Poloma & Gallup 1991). These statistics provided preliminary empirical evidence suggesting that for many, if not most people, prayer involves more than monologic prayer activities, but also receptive prayer experiences. Another two decades would pass before questions tapping receptive prayer gleaned from earlier research would be modified and included in the Godly Love National Survey (GLNS).[4] During the interim between the 1989 Gallup Survey and the 2009 GLNS, Poloma with colleagues (Poloma, 2003; Poloma & Hood, 2008; Poloma & Green, 2010) continued to provide thick

description from field research coupled with surveys that included traditional Pentecostal and neo-Pentecostal prayer experiences. Taken together these findings on prayer from the period of the mid-1980s through the present time provide ample empirical evidence that prayer is often more than one-way communication directed toward a deity, i.e. devotional prayer activities. Rather, receptive experiences, specifically in the form of divine instruction, direction, and guidance, appeared to be commonplace. The GLNS provides new and additional evidence that receptive prayer is indeed a common experience and is closely related to an experiential knowledge of God's personal love.[5] For the majority of pray-ers, prayer involves communication that fosters a strong sense of divine love that Lee, Poloma and Post (2013) have called "the heart of religion."

Communication theorist E. James Baesler, using the lens of communication theory and informed by three empirical studies (Baesler 2003), has conceptualized prayer as relational communication. His model suggests a relationship between receptive prayer and divine love, with Baesler describing the feelings of "loving and being loved by God" as "radically divine communication" (Baesler 1999, p.51). The metaphor of prayer as communication and its relationship to divine love has been recently applied to the Godly Love National Survey (GLNS) to test the statistical relationship between three types of prayer and experiencing divine love. Prayer – devotional, prophetic, and mystical – accounted for nearly 80 percent of the variance in the divine love scale, with all three forms of prayer contributing to the explained variance.[6] Active devotional prayer was measured and described in terms of human activities commonly reported by pray-ers, including petition, thanksgiving, adoration, repentance, etc. Prophetic prayer represented collaboration between God and humans expressed through a request for divine guidance, and "hearing" a response from the divine that includes a call to action.[7] It combines human activity found in both devotional prayer activities and in receptivity to spiritual experiences. Thus prophetic prayer is conceptualized as midway on a continuum between human prayer activities and divinely graced mysticism, although (as we have noted) our statistical analysis suggests that all three flow together for many pray-ers (see also Lee, Poloma, & Post, 2013).

All three prayer types – active, prophetic and mystical – can be framed using the lenses of communication theory. There are important distinctions, however, among these three prayer forms when considering them from a communication perspective. Devotional prayer activities are nearly universally practiced by pray-ers, with the vast majority reporting experiences of peace and the presence of God (at least on occasion).[8] Some pray-ers, however, never enjoy such spiritual experiences and for many they are experienced either hardly ever or only on occasion. These pray-ers, for the most part, appear to be engaging only in one-way devotional prayer that is best described as a monologue rather than as relational communication. Although they may experience feelings related to peace and love or sense the presence of God through devotional activities, this is different than engaging in a dialogue or two-way communication with the divine that is the hallmark of prophetic prayer. In mystical prayer there is an even greater degree of receptivity as the activities of the human actor are overshadowed by grace. The

praying person is overwhelmed by God and becomes a human receptor for what may be conceptualized as divine monologue.[9]

Baesler's model suggests an interactive sequence in prayer, moving from monologue to dialogue to mystical union. While the human agent is the primary actor in devotional prayer and a co-actor in prophetic prayer, it is God who is the primary actor in mystical prayer. Baesler (1999) succinctly describes the nature of communication through which the praying person moves from monologue to dialogue as follows:

> *Talking to God* was defined as one-way communication, a monologue, sending messages directed to God. These messages may be verbally (audible) or mentally (inaudible) "spoken." *Listening to God* was also conceptualized as one-way communication but with the emphasis on receiving messages. An attitude of openness and acceptance distinguished this prayer from the "talking to God" category. *Dialogue with God* implied two-way communication, both sending and receiving messages. The sequence of dialogue may be listening then talking, and/or talking then listening. . . . Lastly, in *Contemplation* the goal is to experience the presence of God, and the focus is on the heart, will/and/or soul and not on intellectual processes. . . .(pp. 48-49)

Thus, Baesler's proposed prayer typology based on the nature of the communication logically progresses from monologue, to listening, to dialogue, to communication exemplified by contemplation and mystical union.[10] With Baesler's (2011; 1997; 1999) communication theory as a framework, we directed our analysis to prophetic prayer, a form of prayer that often includes both devotional prayer activities and mystical experiences but in which communication between God and humans moves beyond monologue to dialogue.

Although receptive experiences of peace and presence may be present in both monologic and dialogic conversational prayer, receptivity to the divine increases as directives are heard from God and the pray-er acts on those directives. This is a prayer type that has not been identified by previous typologies, situated midway on the continuum between active devotional prayer activities and the total receptivity of mystical divine union. This is more than semantics because failing to study the prophetic as a distinctive prayer type obscures important communication differences that help distinguish distinct (if somewhat overlapping) religious communities. For example, Catholic mysticism and neo-Pentecostal prophecy may represent different prayer communities but share the common element of hearing from God. Furthermore, Catholicism with its rich devotional liturgy and books of prayer is more likely to stress its heritage of doctrine, sacraments and clerical authority than personal revelations given by the deity. Different religious contexts offer different theologies, experiences, and behavioral responses rooted in their respective histories of prayer. Thus Catholics, who in our national survey were less likely to report having religious experiences, may be reluctant to say they "hear from God" and limit the likelihood of such experiences to occur only within the confines of disciplined contemplative prayer. Contemplation, often regarded as a prayer

technique involving a mystical resting in God learned at the hands of spiritual directors and select authors, is practiced by fewer Catholics than the populist spontaneous prophetic prayer commonly enjoyed by neo-Pentecostals, charismatics, and their evangelical cousins.[11]

Undergirding such considerations are different styles of communication, with the prophetic experience (that appears to have some resemblance to disciplined contemplation) being firmly rooted in a two-way dialogue to a greater degree than devotional or mystical forms. Thus prophetic prayer is distinctive and should be studied as such. Although God is not available as an interviewee or questionnaire respondent to provide data to support this thesis, reports of *perceptions* of divine-human communication are amenable to empirical investigation. Based on our empirical evidence we define *prophetic* prayer as follows: *prophetic prayer* is "a two-way interaction between God and the pray-er in which the pray-er hears from God and responds to the divine initiative."

GLNS on Receptivity and Prophetic Prayer

All prayer can be conceptualized as communication with the divine, but there are major differences, as we have noted, in the typology we have introduced. At one end of the continuum we find monologist active prayer as soliloquy or one-way self-talk directed toward the ears of the divine but to which no or limited response is received. It may – or may not – be the first step toward prophetic prayer. Communication as dialogue involves more than talking at someone. When prayer is a dialogue the pray-er believes the prayer has been heard and that God will provide some kind of response. Poloma and Lee (2011) have used the GLNS results to identify the three forms of prayer. We then took another step to determine which of them are related to intense and frequent experiences of divine love, a relationship that Baesler (1999; 2003) has suggested as a by-product of prayer. The results of the statistical analysis (see footnote 6) clearly demonstrated that a*ll 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.* Respondents who seemed most aware of God's love were also 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. In other words, for many people, prayer is likely to include talking to the divine, two-way conversation, and an altered state of mysticism. No single type of prayer appears to have a monopoly on divine love. Devotional, prophetic and mystical prayer all seem to glide together in the experience of God's love.[12]

Although devotional activities and, to a lesser extent, mysticism have been subject to social scientific inquiry,[13] prophetic prayer has not been, to our knowledge, identified or systematically studied. Prophetic prayer is more than an event to be counted or its duration measured; it is a process that is best described as an ongoing relationship of deep intimacy and dialog with God. Prophetic pray-ers (at least in some degree) have learned the art (found in Brother Lawrence's classic work with the same title) of practicing the presence of God. In *prophetic prayer* the

person will likely engage in informal or formal prayer activities, but their spiritual ears remain open long after formal prayer has ended so that they are able to receive a response from God at any time. These responses that may come through mental impressions, dreams and visions, seemingly serendipitous happenings, through other people or, on rare occasion, through the audible voice of God.[14] The latter might also be claimed for devotional prayer, contemplative prayer and for mystical prayer in which the praying person senses divine presence or peace, but with an important addition. *The dialogue in prophetic prayer calls for an active response on the part of the praying person – even at times a joint response with another person who has heard the same word from God.*

Questions that we asked in the GLNS to tap prophetic prayer included items that reflect an ability to hear from God directly or through another person. We used five items from the GLNS to create a prophetic prayer scale (alpha=.87): 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. One half of the total GLNS sample reported that they had "sensed a divine call to perform a specific act." Even more common was "God providing directions to do something through another person," (with 65 percent of respondents acknowledging that experience) and "having given a word from God to another person" (59 percent said they have, at least once in a while, had this experience). Forty-one percent of the GLNS pray-ers were likely to say that they "have received revelations directly from God" and that they have "seen future events in dreams or visions before they happen" (also 41%). Such statistics provide only bare bones that can be fleshed out best through accounts of lived experiences rather than with more enumerations.

In order to provide dynamic examples of prophetic prayer, we have selected four individuals (from the 120 interviewed as part of the same project that funded the GLNS; see Lee & Poloma, 2009) whose stories we use to illustrate prophetic prayer. We deliberately chose these interviewees to represent a larger array of demographics – young and old, black and white, married and single, male and female – although our survey statistics demonstrate that such demographics, with the exception of race/ethnicity, do not account for statistically significant differences in prophetic prayer.[15] Due to space constraints inherent in journal articles, these interviewees are carefully selected cases – just a sampling of all the rich data we have collected – used to demonstrate the lived religion behind the statistics. We judge them to be good representatives of the scores of others we have interviewed.[16]

Introducing Four Prophetic Prayers

The respondents whose stories we have chosen have not been used by us in other articles or books on Godly love. Nor are they presently serving or employed in religious ministry. Although we have permission to use their names, we have chosen to identify them with pseudonyms; their stories may each be unique but the lessons learned about prophetic prayer are instructive for understanding this widely

experienced but little understood form communication with the divine. The biographical sketches that follow were written to contextualize the prayer journeys and to provide background for the prayer accounts. Some tasted of receptive prayer early in their lives; others experienced memorable epiphanies that moved them from active to prophetic prayer. Each account is unique, but together they demonstrate that prophetic prayer is a journey that unfolds throughout life and is more interactive than devotional prayer. It is a dynamic relationship between the pray-er and God that often involves other human pray-ers who are also familiar with the working of prophetic prayer.

Bonnie, an African-American woman in her early 60s

Bonnie had served as an administrative assistant for two decades in a prestigious liberal arts college where she felt her primary mission was to serve others. She particularly felt called by God to serve young people from single parent homes – in her words, "a good mom to those who need mothered or just a friend." Bonnie knew well the heartbreak of losing a mom. As a child she was taken away from her mother and placed in foster care, a direct result of a family feud during which her aunt reported Bonnie's alcoholic mother to authorities. Nine-year-old Bonnie and her siblings were called to the school office one day, told they were being taken to their new homes – her brother and her to one home and three sisters to another. Bonnie and her brother found themselves in the home of a "cruel" white family where they "were emotionally, physically and verbally abused daily." Despite their complaints to the social worker, it was only after they ran away three times (and through the efforts of an observant and caring school principal) that they were removed from this family. Bonnie was then placed with a white single widow and her mother (who happened to attend the same church as the previous foster family) in a house that "was warm and not only just beautiful but you felt a peace there." It was here that she began to develop a prayerful relationship with God through the mentoring of her new foster mother, a woman Bonnie described as "an angel in my life, someone God sent just for me."

Zach, a young single entrepreneur and contractor in his mid-twenties

Zach has moved to the inner-city of a large urban metropolitan area. Together with some 20 other young adults, he is working to revitalize a decaying community. His early life was a privileged life, very different from Bonnie's childhood – "one of million dollar homes, country clubs, golf courses, just very privileged." He described himself as "always a leader, always a progressive thinker" as a student at a Catholic high school and later a prestigious Catholic college. Although he said he remembered "reading the Bible and sort of seeking God," as a college student Zach "was very much far away from Him." He decided to spend a semester studying abroad during his sophomore year – "I choose Barcelona, Spain, because it's one of the biggest party cities in the world." But the One who poet Francis Thompson called "the Hound of Heaven" seemed to be in pursuit of Zach, and his life would be

dramatically altered. Within two weeks after arriving in Barcelona, "I had an experience that changed my life." Zach would make his peace with God, and then cut short his planned four-month stay in Barcelona to five weeks. He returned home (rather than return to college where classes had already resumed) where he shared with his Protestant mother what had happened in Barcelona; her response: "You got saved."

Shortly after arriving home, someone he encountered gave him a book on prophecy – "a book they thought I should have. The book was called *The Final Quest*. I'm not sure if you're familiar with it." We were familiar with it. The book is a controversial account of visions, dreams and revelations by self-proclaimed popular prophet, Rick Joyner. Joyner opened up for Zach the possibility of present-day prophecy, leading him to write a highly unusual (and controversial) senior thesis on prophecy to fulfill a graduation requirement from the prestigious Catholic college he attended. Our interview Zach, now supported by a neo-Pentecostal church community where prophecy is taught and valued, has provided insight into post-denominational churches where prophecy is a regular part of daily life.

Carolyn, mid-40s, mother of three teens and business partner with her husband

We began our interviews by asking our interviewees to simply tell their stories – "begin with a couple of events that have shaped who you are today." Almost without exception they would pick some point in their childhood. For Carolyn, who had been adopted by her loving parents as an infant, this event was the death of her beloved father when she was nine years old. She shared how she thrived in the security and love she experienced in her family, adding "so when I lost him [her father] it was quite devastating."

Although raised a Catholic and attending a Catholic school at the time, she described her faith as "just form" and it offered her little consolation in her loss. Although her mother found great solace in attending mass each morning, devotional prayer just didn't work for Carolyn: "I went through first communion, went through confirmation. But, I don't know if, I really don't know if it wasn't explained to me, but I'm sorry to say those sacraments – they never were precious."

It wasn't until her college years that Carolyn began a serious religious quest – what she described as "looking for something you don't know what it is." She caught a memorable glimpse of what was possible when she and Mark, the young man she would soon marry, returned to their home town in their senior year in college and visited a small church in a neighboring community. "And there it was! It was the Holy Spirit. It was Jesus. It was God the Father. It was just there, and it was so overwhelming. I just knew he was there – it wasn't the pastor or his wife or the music. It's like there was a hunger within, and finally there was something to partake of." They would soon find a neo-Pentecostal church in their home community where they embarked on their early spiritual journey together: "And that's where it all began for me. It would seem to be cliché to say coming home, but just something within, within in you, your spirit reacting, you know to the Holy Spirit and knowing there's truth here."

Mark, business entrepreneur, mid-40s, husband of Carolyn

Unlike his wife Carolyn, Mark knew what it was like to experience the divine presence as a young child. When asked if God had always been a major player in his life, Mark responded: "Yeah, as a kid I can remember growing up in a household where there was alcoholism and that kind of stuff, but I always felt very close to the Lord. I grew up in a Catholic household, and I remember spending/having experiences with the Lord in my bedroom as a child – just knowing that He was there. I remember I had a Bible that hid underneath clothes in my drawers, and I would read the Bible at night as a kid. Even in high school I can remember always thinking (it's such a trite phrase now) what would Jesus do in a situation. I remember having that thought pattern then and always knowing the presence of the Lord; but not, I guess, fully understanding it or having not as much understanding as I came to later in life."

Although Mark's parents would take him to church, they themselves did not attend Mass with him. Mark reported that they did engage in formal (ritual) prayer with him every night before he went to bed. As he looks back, he seemed able to distinguish what we are calling devotional and receptive prayer forms:

> We knelt beside the bed and we prayed every single night. So that part, the formalized prayer part, yes we prayed together. But I also did a lot of what I have come to know as prayer now, but would not have called it prayer then. Where there's this kind of communication, kind of a knowing, kind of an awareness of God, kind of almost like a conversation on the inside. Just searching about certain things, asking questions, wanting to know. I had that, I wouldn't have called it prayer then, but I would now. So, there was a formalized prayer which is what my parents knew. They knew that form of prayer. But then there was this other awareness on the inside that I now would call prayer.

Experiencing and Discerning Prophetic Prayer

Even though one-time surveys do not permit us to determine time sequences, it seems safe to assume from the accounts of our interviewees that prophetic prayer begins with the pray-er having had a sense of the unmistakable presence of God.[17] Having experienced an intuitive sense of God's presence seems to be a precondition for ongoing prayer dialogue with the divine. According to GLNS findings, 96 percent of those who said they had never experienced the "unmistakable presence of God during prayer" scored low on the prophecy scale. In contrast, 52 percent and 56 percent (respectively) of those who said they experienced the divine presence daily or more than daily scored in the highest category for prophetic prayer. We see this relationship between sensing the divine presence and embarking on a journey toward more receptive prayer reflected in the biographical sketches. The connection with the divine may occur suddenly (as in the case of Zach's getting "saved") or it may emerge gradually (as in Bonnie's story through the love shown by her foster mother) and/or as earlier spiritual experiences are redefined (as we see in the case of

Mark). It may be the object of deliberate searching (as in Carolyn's narrative) or it may occur as a seemingly unprecipitated event (as seen in Zach's narrative). Once the presence of God becomes personal and real, prayer as dialogue can become for some as simple and natural as breathing.

Continuing to use these interviews we will explore some of the ways pray-ers communicate with God by considering three sources of prophetic prayer.[18] The first, and probably the most common, is prophetic prayer through *impressions or senses* that God is speaking. The second is through *visions and dreams* where God is said to have spoken to pray-ers through visions while awake and dreams while asleep. Less common, although reported by some of our interviewees, are *trances,* in which they experience an alternate state of consciousness or supernatural visitations by Jesus, Mary, or angels.

Divine Guidance via Simple Impressions

As we were drafting this section of the article, the first author received a long-distance call that provided yet another in a long series of reminders of how widespread prophetic prayer is and how creative ordinary people are when they actively incorporate this form of prayer into their daily lives. The phone call was from Emily, a friend in her late 30s who suffers from several chronic medical problems. Each year she is more challenged by the progression of a debilitating condition that has robbed her of her job, energy, and even old friends. A few years ago, Emily developed an on-line community of knitters with chronic disabilities, virtual friends who support one another. Always an outgoing and caring person, Emily also makes new friends and acquaintances through her regular visits to medical clinics. As we talked, she told me about her latest outreach project – making cute Elmo-like dolls called "monsters" in the knitting books. She elaborated on how this activity has become a prayer – "not the way I used to pray for fifteen minutes each morning but living, breathing prayer." She described the process as follows:

> I will often have a gut feeling that I am to make a monster for someone, sometimes even knowing the specific color and yarn to use. As I am knitting, I will pray blessings for the person – for happiness, healing, joy or more specific needs of which I am aware. I learned in Reiki how prayers have power long after they are said, and I pray that the person receiving the monster will feel God's love and blessings on an ongoing basis. There are other times that I make monsters and have no idea who they are for, but I always pray while knitting. I take a monster or two with me on each of my many visits to the doctor's office and say, "okay, God, who is this one for?" I will feel in my gut being directed to a particular person. Michael (her significant other) doesn't understand why I just don't make the monsters and sell them. All he knows is that I enjoy making them. He doesn't understand the other part of it. God has called me to make the monsters, and He tells me who to give them to.

After we got off the phone, I checked Emily's website and found a few pictures and stories of recent monster recipients and Emily's blog. She shared the following with her on-line community:

> I don't say anything about God when I give away my monsters. I don't make my monsters to convert or preach to anyone. But, somehow, these monsters have become prayers in my life for each of us. For more good days than bad. For the strength to keep going when we want to give up. For random acts of kindness when we need them the most. Prayer doesn't have to be formal or meditative. Prayer can be as simple as breathing and giving a little something to the world around you. A note, a phone call, a hug. And, even a monster.

Fifty-one (51) percent of all GLNS respondents indicated that, like Emily, they "sensed a divine call to perform a specific act," which included those who do not report praying. For those who said they prayed, the figure was 66 percent. Of these pray-ers who claimed a divine leading to act on something specific, nearly three fourths (74%) indicated that this experience was infrequent, another 16 percent reported "on some days" and 11 percent said they had this experience on most days or more often. A divinely ordered "sense" to do something is experienced, at least on occasion, by a clear majority of pray-ers, and a significant minority claim to experience it daily. Emily's account puts an important face on common every-day prophetic prayer experience as she intuitively makes and distributes dolls. Her story demonstrates a dimension of ordinary prophetic prayer that we did not capture in our interviews, since our interviewees more often provided accounts of "epiphany-like events." Prophetic impressions come in different intensities, frequencies and validations. They can be as simple as Emily's "gut" feelings that arise during her simple prayers as she asks for directions for giving away her monsters. Or they can be more dramatic – perhaps even surreal – as we see in some memorable prophetic experiences shared by our four select interviewees.

Bonnie responds to Paul's marriage proposal

Bonnie, who grew up in a foster home deprived of her biological mother and siblings, understandably wanted a better family life for her children. When Paul, a classmate in the Bible college, asked her to marry him, Bonnie's reply was that she "wanted someone who would be with me forever – there must never be a divorce. I didn't want what my mother had." She suggested that they not see each other until they both had heard from God: "We were at the same school but we didn't talk to each other. We had nothing to do with each other. We just prayed and fasted. We went on a fast for five days and we didn't see each other." Bonnie continued her story:

> I was up one night praying. We had a prayer chapel on our floor for the girls, it's a Bible college. And I was praying and I had opened up the Bible. The room was dark but the light was coming in from the window and I could read that scripture: "who God's put together, let no man put asunder." And so I

> wrote a letter that night to him and I said, "Paul, I was in prayer and I came across this scripture (I forget exactly where it was) and I really feel that God wants our lives to be together. I'm not worried about anything" – and so forth. I put that letter in his mailbox as I started my day. Well, he had put one in my mailbox too, but I never opened up my mailbox until that evening when I came in from the library. He was up praying at the same time. And God didn't give him that scripture, but God affirmed the fact that I was the one for him to marry. The same night that I was awake, he was also awake. He wrote, "I'm up praying and I have you on my mind, my heart. And I'm asking God to show me, to speak to me." And I was doing the same thing – the same night, same time. Both of us wrote letters, put the letters in our mailboxes and we read them at different times. So I really have never had any fear that my marriage would ever break up, and I was confident this was the person God had selected for me.

Bonnie's account demonstrates how prophetic impressions can interact with prayer activities (fasting, reading the Bible, praying in the middle of the night). Bonnie's prayer for guidance and seeming stumbling upon a scripture passage that spoke prophetically came to her through ordinary prophetic impressions. Many Christians approach the Bible in prayer as a "living word" that speaks to their circumstances rather than a literal and fixed word that is the making of doctrine. The story of the two letters demonstrates how the prophetic sense of one person can be confirmed by another. The seemingly serendipitous event of both Bonnie and Paul awakening the same night – the fifth night of their fast – to pray alone and then to write the letters to each other provided the prayed-for guidance to the young couple. Bonnie is someone who responds to what she believes to be the inaudible voice of God on a regular basis. As she shared this account with us nearly fifty years later, it was apparent that this prophetic experience had taught her to trust her sense that God does communicate with her.

Mark and Carolyn launch a business

Prophetic impressions can lead to spontaneous responses, sometimes with dramatic results. We see a bit of the surreal in Carolyn's account of how she and her husband Mark launched their first business while Mark was still in graduate school. The story begins shortly after Carolyn "started to pursue the Lord" in the church that she and Mark had begun to attend: "We were in that church for two years. So for two years I had this teaching – this is who God is, this is the Bible, and this is what He'll do for you. It was exciting; there were lots of ways that God did reveal himself in those two years, especially in financial miracles." The biggest "financial miracle" was establishing a new business.

Carolyn told the story of how she and Mark opened an ice-cream store in an upscale mall that was being renovated by a prestigious out of state developing company. They felt God had told them they were to launch the shop in the mall, but their proposal had been turned down repeatedly by representatives of the developing

company. Carolyn added, "They wanted noted nationals. They didn't want a mom and pop." She shared her discouragement with us – and her prayer:

> I just remember one day, giving up and being in bed and praying and saying 'Lord, I'm just ready to give up. I know that we feel this is what we are to do, but I've had it.' And, He said, 'call 1-800-. . . .' and I just knew the number – just knew the number. The Lord said 'call that number and ask for this guy's name.' I recognized the name. Off the cuff, one of the construction workers had mentioned the president of the mall's development firm's name to me. And I thought, 'I know people in business; you can't call 1-800 and talk to them.' Well, I called the number, asked for his office, of course got his secretary. She said, 'who are you?' and I said my name (which means nothing to her). She then said, 'please hold' because the phone was ringing in the background. I did, but I knew that she was going to say – 'I'm sorry but . . .' Well, the president of the company accidentally picked up my line instead of the other line, and I got to present our whole plan to him. He contacted these construction guys and said, 'you're working with her, this is the girl you're working with.' Here I am sitting on the bed in my pajamas – like you've got to be kidding me!

While some might label this successful business venture as serendipity, pure chance, or good luck, Carolyn and Mark saw the hand of God at work as their business became a reality. Carolyn may have begun her prophetic walk with financial miracles, but she soon began to desire a deeper intimacy with God. She was brought further into her spiritual path through an experience of God that released her from the deep grief she carried after a miscarriage:

> It was just amazing because that Wednesday, the baby died on Sunday, on Wednesday night we went to communion service the night before Thanksgiving. And I just remember sitting through that communion service just broken and weeping and crying out to God, silently, within, not even knowing what to say. The next morning I woke up with so much joy and hope that it was shocking. It wasn't like, 'Oh Lord, give me joy and hope.' It was just being broken and crying out and He had mercy on me. That was just so tangible. I just remember thinking it wasn't my son, who I adored and who was darling and wonderful and loving, that got me through it. It wasn't my husband, it wasn't anybody. It was God.

Although Carolyn's spiritual journey was rich in prophetic prayer experiences, she noted that (in retrospect) God was still distant: "God was always at a distance, part of my life, but not too near. And there is a big difference between that and knowing God as the Father – the Father in the sense that He has revealed Himself to me." One day some five years prior to our interview, Carolyn broke away from the picnic lunch she was packing to spend some time worshiping God in a nearby church. She described what happened next as follows:

> And I remember going in -- no one prayed for me, no one touched me. I just was sitting there with my eyes closed worshipping God, and all of the sudden He started to speak truth to my heart. I can't say it was audible, but it was probably the closest thing to it. He started saying things to me like, 'you are my daughter, you are my daughter,' -- and I'm thinking, 'yah, okay, that's nice.' But God went on: 'It doesn't matter who gave birth to you. It doesn't matter who raised you. It doesn't matter who married you. It doesn't matter whose mother you are. You're mine. You are mine. You are mine. You are my daughter.' And I mean that was the beginning of where I'm at right now.

Carolyn's adoptive father's death when she was a child, as we noted in her biographical sketch, had affected her deeply – it left her "feeling like an orphan." Through this prophetic prayer experience she felt "healed" as she experienced the voice of her heavenly Father claiming her as His own.

As can be seen from these brief accounts, impressions often include both active prayer and a divine response as part of a dynamic process taking place over time. Impressions can be a powerful driving force, and hearing stories describing them casts light on how it is that people "hear" the divine voice. Dialoguing with God is central to the stories of most of accounts shared by our interviewees, but they would often stumble when we would ask for more details of their experiences. Mark provides one such example when he attempted to put words on how he felt when he and Carolyn sensed a divine call to step back from the two businesses in which they were involved to attend a Bible college:

> All I can tell you is that, it's so hard to put words to so much of this stuff. It is almost like an inward knowing – or maybe almost like beyond the knowing. It's like if you didn't do it, you couldn't live with yourself type of thing. I don't know how else to put that. The sense we had was *more* than just a 'why don't you do this?' or 'this is a good idea.' It was more of like a strong urging on the inside. I guess is the way that I would put it. Had we not done it I would have felt like, 'oh my gosh, I can't believe we didn't do this.' So, I don't know how else to put it.

Not being able to find words to provide details of prophetic experiences suggest that they may border on the mystical or actually become mystical experiences. Such accounts may be an indicator of how prophetic prayer experiences can include devotional as well as mystical prayer in a single narrative, as suggested by GLNS findings reported earlier in this article. Devotional prayer activities were of course quite common in the narratives that we collected. However, when more receptive forms of communication with the divine were reported, it is important to note that our interviewees generally framed their experiences in prophetic language rather than in mystical terms. In fact, when we explored with our interviewees some of the components of a widely used mysticism scale developed by psychologist Ralph Hood (2009), they had a difficult time relating their experiences to these items. The two-way interaction captured by our

conceptualization of prophetic prayer resonated with them, whereas classic mystical notions of merging with God or having the experience of "everything disappearing except the consciousness of God" did not.[19]

Dreams and Visions

Like intuition, dreams and visions depend less on human activity and more on receptivity than cognitively and mindfully working through a problem. Dreams taking place during sleep and visions occurring while the pray-er reports being awake can provide for more complex prophetic leadings. They also appear to be a somewhat less common medium for prophetic communication than is intuition. For example, while 56 percent of the GLNS respondents have "sensed a divine call to perform a specific act," 41 percent claimed to ever have "seen future events in dreams of visions before they happen." Although dreams and visions may be less common, they provide an intriguing context for a better understanding of dialoging with the divine.

Mark and Carolyn pay attention to their dreams, and in separate interviews both reported accounts of dreams that have dramatically affected their lives. At times their dreams are danced out in tandem, as one spouse shares a dream with the other who provides the interpretation. Mark reported one dream in which he believes he was physically healed. "It was the spring of '98, and I had this big lump on my throat -- right here [pointing to the location] I had this big egg-sized lump on my throat." He continued with his narrative:

> It didn't hurt or anything, but it lasted for weeks so I thought, I need to go to the doctor. So I went to the doctor and the doctor looked at me and was like, within seconds had me into a specialist. He said, "Does this hurt?" I said, no. So he sent me to another ears, nose, throat specialist guy and so I went to the specialist. I could tell he was very, very concerned. So he ran some tests and did some things and that day I got an MRI on it. And, um, within a period of time, (I don't remember exactly the timing of it all), but remember I was lying in bed and I had this vision, or whatever it was. It was like beyond a vision, it was like sensory -- Jesus walking in the room. (Actually I wasn't concerned about the lump; I was just thinking it was like an infection or whatever because I used to get throat infections a lot as a kid – but not like that, not a big, egg-shaped thing.) Anyway, I was lying in bed and Jesus was lying on top of me, hand on hand, foot on foot. I could smell, like earth. It was a real earthy smell, like someone had been sweating. He put His mouth over my mouth and He blew into my mouth. And that was it. I shared the dream with Carolyn and never connected these two events much until later. (Given my phobia about cleanliness and germs, we didn't know what to make of the dream.) When I went back to the doctor, and he said the thing went away, and I didn't think much of it. But the specialist was 'Oh my gosh. It's gone. This is actually gone. This has actually disappeared.' I said, 'yeah, it has.' He was all excited. The guy was like, to make the story longer, was a very automatic type guy. He

> spent like 30 seconds with me with no emotion. This time he was so emotive about it. Fast forward about 2 years later, I am sitting in my doctor's office, the nurse comes in. She forgot something and she lays down my file and leaves the room. I figure, it's my file, I can look at it if I want to. I pick up the file and I see that I was diagnosed with lymphoma. They never uttered those words to me.

As illustrated by this narrative, prophetic prayer, including dreams and visions, are journeys rather than simple events. Many who experience dreams and visions, as with those who receive prophetic words from others, hold fast to them as the dialogue with the divine continues to unfold. A particular stream of dialogue may seem latent (as it was for two years with Mark), but it can unexpectedly take on new meaning (as it did when Mark read his medical file).

Although a nearly a generation younger than Mark and Carolyn, Zach also is familiar with dreams and visions that are integral to his prayer life. He is involved with a church community that provides a milieu to cultivate his seemingly natural intuitive spirit. He found this church after graduating from college in a sequence that some might call serendipitous but which he regards as a prophetic leading. In a follow-up interview with Zach, he introduced us to a young woman, Amy, who is also in his community. Amy shared a number of stories about prophetic art, a form of prayer that she described as follows:

> You don't have to be an artist to do it. It is like prophetic prayer. It is ministry – I feel like anyone and anybody can do it. We have art parties and everyone who lives there can come over and we just soak [in God's love][20] – and we paint. Basically you just ask the Lord to give you something and then to bring it to life – you put it on canvas or you put it in paper. The purpose is that it releases things – it releases peace; it releases healing; it releases the kingdom and its freedom. The goal is to get this into the community; into people's houses.

Amy's description of prophetic art brings to mind Emily's monster dolls that we described earlier in this article. Like Amy, Emily creates with prayer and believes the paintings she gives away are an ongoing source of blessing to the recipients.

Amy has also been present with Zach and other community members when they have experienced collective visions during group prophetic prayer. In order to better understand visions, we asked Zach to tell us about the process through which he receives visions. After a brief description, he proceeded to share the account of a collective vision where prophetic prayer consists of multiple human pray-ers in dialogue with God.

> I think that it happens to different people in different ways. In my case, I will see things in the same place that my imagination is. Take for example, I can imagine right now a ship. I can picture a ship in my mind – in my imagination. That is the same place that the Lord gives me visions. Some have more

> prophetic giftings than others. We see and deal with a lot of dreams. We will all be together praying in my living room, and we will all go into the same vision. It is a very unique thing – it started happening during our prayer times last year. We would be in a prayer meeting and all of a sudden we would be seeing the same thing and we would all have different pieces of this prophetic experience. I remember the first time that this happened; the room was so thick that it was like this breakthrough – it was so powerful. Everyone was like in a different place but the pieces of our vision all fit together.

Zach's common vision centered on a ship with "US Abraham Lincoln" painted on the side. The six young adults praying together each focused on a special part of the ship. The name of the ship was interpreted as an impending crisis that the community would face just as Lincoln had to deal with the crisis of Civil War. Other pieces of the vision promised that peace and calm would prevail. Zach concluded: "Everything fit perfect and we were all in this shared experience. This really fed us. And there was one more huge wave that came in the storm and then it got very calm. It was like Jesus said, 'Be still.' And then you could see the sun coming up in the distance."

These last accounts demonstrate that prophetic prayer can include an array of interactions – not only between individuals and the divine but between and among pray-ers as they seek interpretations and confirmation of what they have seen and heard. They also point the processual and dynamic qualities of prophetic prayer. As these examples indicate, prophetic prayer may contain elements of mystical (or perhaps contemplative) forms of prayer, but it is distinguished from these types by its focus on two-way communications with God and other people that involve both receptive experiences and active responses.

A Caveat on Trances

Although our typology differentiates mysticism from prophetic prayer, it would appear that descriptions of prophetic dreams and visions can blend into trance-like experiences and into altered states of consciousness. Most of our interviewees would have been reluctant to use the term "trance" – or even "altered state of consciousness."[21] As we will see, Mark reminds us of the difficulty many interviewees had in responding to commonly asked questions about mysticism that referred to "altered states," saying they struggled with the terminology because of their own religious understandings. (Zach refused to describe his experience as an "altered state of consciousness," preferring the term "alternate" as a reference to a spiritual reality that complements physical reality.) Although he was reluctant to use the term, Mark told us of several intense religious experiences he enjoyed during the so-called Toronto Blessing – experiences that we might label as *trance.*[22] He described his first experience in Toronto as follows:

> At the end of the sermon, they said you can line up on the back of these rows and people will come by and pray for you. And so they did. We were standing,

> so I thought well, I'll get prayer, why not? So I stood there, my hands raised and hearing, I've got my eyes shut and I'm feeling something, I don't know what it is. It feels nice, it feels good. I am feeling it on the inside and on the outside. I remember I was standing there and I remember these people, I have no idea who they are came up and started to pray for me and I remember I went down, I went back. I felt like this push on me. It's not uncommon, I had felt that many times before because I had been in the charismatic churches for a while and going down under the power of the Holy Spirit really wasn't that unusual. What I really remember is being down on the ground – it was like in this, um, I don't know what the word is and I hate to use this terminology because it has a lot of baggage with it. (pause) But it was almost like altered state of consciousness. As I was lying on the ground I was having this experience with Jesus, um, and we were kind of like, I won't get into a lot because this is very personal but it was kind of like face-to-face experience with the Lord. I didn't know how long it was lasting, time had kind of disappeared. I didn't really know how long it had been, I didn't really care.

Trances were only infrequently reported by our interviewees, and they were very unlikely to be shared as central to epiphany-like, life-changing experiences. That doesn't mean they were not meaningful; they were greatly valued as an encounter with the divine but they may or may not have a prophetic quality of hearing any divine directives. Mark's unusual "feelings" were followed by an involuntary response to a divine encounter (in his case, falling to the ground). Other reports included feeling "an intense fire burning within," "feeling like I was dying," "seeing the throne room (of heaven)" and sensing a "gentle rain" or "intense wind" (believed to be the Holy Spirit).[23] Although in Mark's case one could say the pray-er or perhaps background music served as an external stimuli during this public prayer meeting, Mark took care to disavow that the pray-ers were the catalyst for his experience.

An Ongoing Process

Prophetic prayer, as we have described it through some experiences of our interviewees, is generally not a single act. It blends active and receptive prayer in an elongated dialogue with the divine that is fed by impressions, dreams, visions and/or trances. The process of receiving a message believed to be from God and responding to it cannot be adequately tapped with measures that are limited to human activities. Prophetic prayer is an ongoing dialogue with the divine that is marked by receptivity, and it appears to be an integral part of living a life of prayer. Furthermore communication in prophetic prayer often includes human partners who give and receive words to stir up and to confirm prophetic prayer. Thus prophetic prayer involves relationships, both those formed with God as well as those that occur with others. As we have seen, prophetic pray-ers may receive a word from God through another person, and/or they may give a message to another in response to divine prompting.[24] Our GLNS findings suggest that all three types of prayer –

devotional, prophetic and receptive – are reported by most pray-ers. Furthermore, as Baesler's model of prayer as communication has hypothesized, "loving and being loved by God" is integral to the prayer journey. Those respondents to our national survey whose high scores on the divine love scale reflected an enduring and intense love relationship with God were familiar with all three types of prayer.

Identifying prophetic prayer as a prayer form mid-way between active devotion and the intense reception characterized by mysticism hopefully will provide research initiative to move away from the study of prayer activities as events and to focus on prayer forms as process. We contend that there are other prayer forms aside from the prophetic along the active receptive continuum, including healing (emotional, physical, spiritual), petitionary prayer (for one's own needs), intercessory prayer (for the needs of others), worship and adoration, etc. These forms of communication occur alone, with family and friends, in churches, and in the larger secular world. Future research must move beyond limiting study of prayer as an event to explore prayer as an interactive process in lived religion. The fact that experiencing divine love appears to be intricately woven into the dynamics of prayer also requires additional investigation. Although our work has focused on Christians, processual prayer (including its prophetic form) deserves to be explored in other religious contexts, including Judaism, Islam, Hinduism, and Buddhism. Measuring prayer through frequency or indicants limited to devotional prayer activities fails to capture the richness and diversity we have reported in this article. Clearly prayer is a complex and dynamic communicative process, and one that we believe is the key to knowing divine love and energizing human benevolence.[25] As indicated by the statistics and illuminated by the narratives, it is safe to say that all three types of prayer can blend together in a single song with divine love as the background music. Researchers must find ways to hear the music and to decipher the words to the richly diverse songs that we call prayer.

Notes

[1] Ninety 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 that led to the 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.

[2] This progress is reflected in Francis and Astley's (2001) excellent edited work *Psychological perspectives on prayer*. For examples of empirically driven models of

prayer see Baesler (1999; 2003); Ladd and Spilka (2002; 2006); Poloma and Pendleton (1991).

[3] The 2009 Godly Love National Survey findings indicate that a shared Pentecostal worldview with its belief in supernatural "signs and wonders" is a factor in prophetic prayer. Black, Hispanic, Evangelical Protestants were significantly more likely to identify with the Pentecostal worldview and to have affective experiences of the divine than were Mainline Protestants and Catholics. With controls for the effects of common demographic measures (age, education, income, gender and race), self-identifying as a Pentecostal or charismatic (Pentecostal) Christian was the leading factor in accounting for prophetic prayer scores. Those who self-identified as Pentecostal were more likely to engage in prophetic prayer than those who were not (Standardized Beta = .27). Of the demographics, non-whites were more likely than whites to report prophetic prayer experiences (alpha = .21); the other demographics were not statistically significant (Lee, Poloma & Post, 2013).

[4] In 2009 the authors included a battery of questions on prayer for the Godly Love National Survey (GLNS), sponsored by the Flame of Love Project (for which Lee & Poloma served as co-principal investigators). In this article we use our GLNS survey findings and open-ended interviews to demonstrate how prophetic prayer, communication with God that includes both human activity and receptivity to the divine, is a common but often overlooked form of prayer. See Lee and Poloma (2009) for further methodological details on the GLNS.

[5]A reliable scale comprised of multiple items to measure a single phenomenon, when available, is more robust and provides a better measure than use of a single item. The 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 reliability co-efficient for this four item measure is .93.

[6] The three scales measuring devotional, prophetic and mystical prayer were used in a multiple regression analysis to determine which of them were related to perceiving God's love. All three of the prayer scales proved to be statistically significant, explaining nearly 80 percent of the variance (adjusted R square = .79). Those who scored high on experiencing God's love also scored high on prayer activity (beta = .42), mysticism (beta = .39) and prophetic prayer (beta = .17).

[7] Although prophecy is commonly thought of in the larger culture as "foretelling" or prediction, in the Pentecostal worldview where the Spirit is an active collaborator in human affairs, prophecy is most commonly described as "forthtelling," or speaking/acting on divine directions. *In sum, prophecy as commonly understood and practiced by prophets on "Main Street" and used here to describe a form of prayer consisting of hearing from God and then "speaking and acting on God's behalf as a result of the prompting of the Holy Spirit"* (c.f. Robeck, 2002; Poloma, 2003; Tyra, 2011).

[8] See, for example, Poloma and Gallup (1991) where only 12 percent of pray-ers reported "never" having experienced divine peace during prayer with another 19 percent acknowledging they experienced it "once or twice." Thirty-two (32) percent claimed to have this experience regularly. Slightly fewer "felt the strong presence of God" regularly (26%), with 21 percent reporting they have never had that experience.

[9] For additional discussion of such mystical prayer found within the Catholic tradition, see Dubay (1989), especially chapter 3 on the experience of God; see also chapters 5 (contemplation), 6 (Teresian mansions), 9 (fire in the night), and 10 (transforming summit).

[10] Baesler's model and our discussion of prophetic prayer as social interaction fits well with Sharp's (2012) claim that prayer should be treated as a social psychological phenomenon that shares many characteristics with and involves many of the same psychological and interactional processes as human-human interactions.

[11] Contemplative prayer seems to be closer to some forms of "meditation" than to prophetic prayer. Wikipedia defines meditation as "any form of a family of practices in which practitioners train their minds or self-induce a mode of consciousness to realize some benefit" (*http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Meditation*, downloaded March 9, 2012). We discuss trances later in this article, which is also related. We do not dwell on contemplative prayer or meditation more generally in this article, although a future comparative project involving contemplative and prophetic prayer would be helpful. Our point here is that the practice of contemplation and/or meditation, which may involve encounters with the divine that could be seen as "prophetic," are both conceptually and experientially distinct from the ongoing two-way dialogue we have labeled prophetic prayer. There is perhaps some overlap, but the patterns of communication between the person and God are quite different.

[12] For a more extended exploration of the impact of these three types of prayer on the experience of divine love and related issues, see Lee, Poloma, and Post (2013).

[13] Flame of Love Project team member and psychologist Ralph W. Hood, Jr. has long used the items contained in the mysticism scale in his own work on religious experience (See Hood, 2002; Hood, Hill, & Spilka, 2009).

[14] For an example of a populist theology providing guidance in prophetic prayer see Witt (2007). Witt's ongoing adventure with the prophetic is traced in Lee, Poloma, and Post (2013).

[15] We created a multiple regression equation where prophetic prayer was the dependent variable and commonly used demographics (age, education, income, gender, and race) were used as independent variables. The equation accounted for eight percent of the variance (adjusted R square = .08), with only race being statistically significant (beta = .24). Non-whites were more likely than whites to engage in prophetic prayer, a finding consistent with results found by Krause and Chatters (2005) for older adults.

[16] For other more detailed presentations of other exemplars we have interviewed, see Lee and Poloma (2009) and Lee, Poloma, and Post (2013).

[17] See Hay (2006) for further discussion of the "felt presence" as a spiritual experience that is rooted in human physiological and evolutionary makeup.

[18] Many books have been written by Christian authors to encourage communicating with God through impressions, dreams and visions. For some examples see Jacobs (1995), Johnson (2007), Witt (2007), and Ryle (1995).

[19] For more details on Hood's mysticism scale and how we used it in our interviewees, see Lee and Poloma (2009).

[20] "Soak" refers to soaking prayer during which the pray-er rests and "soaks" in the divine presence. For more information in soaking prayer, see Poloma (2003) and Wilinson and Althouse (2010).

[21] For a systematic model of different levels of consciousness that has sought to integrate the great psychological systems of the west with the contemplative traditions of the East, see Wilber (1993).

[22]The so-called "Toronto Blessing" was a revival that began in Canada and spread throughout North America and beyond in the mid-1990s. For a discussion of the religious experiences that were the hallmark of the Toronto Blessing and the impact of this revival in renewing American Pentecostalism see Poloma (2003).

[23] Mystics in a variety of traditions have reported similar trance-like experiences. Although we have no data on how prophetic prayer experiences might be related to practices such as contemplative prayer or other forms of meditation, future research may find it fruitful to study such practices. The results may confirm our suspicion that there is some fuzziness in the boundaries separating prophetic and/or contemplative prayer, while also reaffirming their conceptual and experiential distinctiveness.

[24] Experiences of three way and even corporate dialogue with the divine are reflected in two of the five questions that were part of the prophetic prayer scale. Sixty five percent of respondents reported that "God had provided direction to do something through another person," and 59 percent acknowledged that they had "given a word from God to another person."

[25] For a book length investigation and discussion of the relationship between prayer, divine love, and human benevolence, see Lee, Poloma, and Post (2013).

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Interpersonal Conversations and Prayers: Differences of Content and Attachment Functions

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Abstract: Is talking to God the same as talking to a close personal friend? Recent experimental work suggested that the two forms of communication are similar if not the same. The present paper contends, however, that there are actually profound differences at behavioral and phenomenological levels when the multiple dimensions of prayer are investigated. Students (N = 128) responded to an online survey reporting: use of language during prayer and during conversations with close personal friends, and typical attachment style in relation to God and close personal friends. Significant differences emerged for both language use and attachment patterns demonstrating that at a fundamental level, prayers and interpersonal communications are distinct events. *Keywords*: prayer, attachment theory, conversation, friendship, interpersonal communication

Introduction

Human communication is as complex as the organism from which it arises. In groups, dyads, or even in talking to oneself, multiple forces are exerting influence on both the communicator and the message delivered. For instance, Burgoon and Hale (1984) note that trust, intimacy, submission, intensity of involvement and depth of interaction are among the most salient features of relational communication. As the relative weighting of each relational dimension shifts, so does the understanding of the present role and the enduring nature of all parties involved. While this matrix is complicated at the human level of discourse, the challenges increase many fold when thinking about prayer as a kind of communication (Baesler, 2003). In this paper, we explore the extent to which human conversations and prayers share linguistic content and the degree to which the two types of communication serve similar functions.

Friendships

Since the matrix of interactions is ever in flux one way to facilitate the study of communication is to narrow the field of interest to specialized forms of interactions. For instance, the exploration of dyadic relationships is a staple of the discipline and the literature is immense and detailed (Knapp & Daly, 2011). Of particular interest for the present paper are exchanges that can be classified as interpersonal

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conversations occurring among close friends. By definition these encounters highlight the immanence of the participants; friends are literally "there for" each other physically and verbally. The embodiment of such communication processes can be objectively witnessed in the form of behavioral mimicry or synchrony (Wiltermuth & Heath, 2009). Both this physical "social dance" (Reed & McIntosh, 2008) and the accompanying verbal activity help dyads or larger groups establish a sense of similarity and closeness (Valdesolo & DeSteno, 2011) that facilitates cooperation (Wiltermuth & Heath, 2009). What of more "transcendent" friendships, those that are characterized by extended periods of physical separation? In particular, to what extent is it feasible to conceptualize prayer as a means of communicating with a deity who is also a friend?

Recent work in social psychology (Balcetis & Lassiter, 2010) suggests that relationships lacking physical proximity will be difficult to sustain because perceptual processes render absent stimuli more difficult to recall with accuracy. In other words, our most frequent and heartfelt communications are more likely to occur with friends who are physically proximal rather than distal. This suggests that there may be important differences between interpersonal communications and prayer to a deity.

A central feature of relationships involving people who are in the same general geographic area revolves around the homophily principle (McPherson, Smith-Lovin, & Cook, 2001). Social networks, and close friends in particular, tend to be quite homogenous. When friendships are formed among people of dissimilar characteristics, they tend to dissolve more quickly (McPherson, Smith-Lovin, & Cook, 2001). For instance, relationships between members of management and labor are tentative at best because of the notable difference in the amount and kind of power available to each group. This is, in part, because truly intimate friendships are reciprocal in nature (Vaquera & Kao, 2008), something that is generally not feasible when the inherent power structure is dramatically and perpetually unequal. Again, when extending this thinking to consider the phenomenon of prayer, it is readily apparent that a power differential of great magnitude exists.

Friendship Language in Faith and Prayer

Relationships necessarily occur in some specific context and in this study prayer as an aspect of a relationship is contextualized by a religious or spiritual dimension. While religious/spiritual relationships are not unusual in most senses, the language of friendship is often extended beyond human-human interactions to include "God-as-friend." This theology of the immanence God is clear, for instance, in popular hymnody: "He walks with me, and he talks with me, and he tells me I am his own" (Miles, 1913/1989) or "What a friend we have in Jesus…" (Scriven, 1855/1989). This use of the language of friendship suggests a certain homophilic state of affairs between the believer and the one in whom belief is placed. Yet, the friendship language is only part of the story. In addition to the immanent character of God, there is an equally strong notion of transcendence: "Holy, holy, holy! ...only Thou art holy; there is none beside thee." (Heber, 1826/1989). In other words, if

God is a friend, then this is a highly unique friendship because God also possesses a range of powers beyond those accessible to humans. Although links between music and prayer have received scant empirical attention, the notion that singing augments prayer (Wren, 2000) suggests that this popular mixture of immanent and transcendent God concepts, replete with friendship language infuses the prayer lives of many practitioners.

The uniqueness of this friendship with God is further evident in that there is no traditional physical proximity of the interaction partner as there is in human-human friendships. While the language of friendship with God often communicates a sense of the spiritual presence of God, claims of the actual physical presence of God are atypical, except in mystical writings (e.g., Weil, 1951). Across the world's religious traditions, for most believers, the main mechanism of connecting with God is through prayer (Smith, 1991). The process of praying highlights the inherent power structure of a relationship that is in some ways similar, but in other ways very distinct from a human–human situation (Baesler, 1997). Not only does the person communicate with God by offering (an important power-laden word) prayers to God, traditional perspectives within world religions also claim that the very impetus to pray arises from God (Smith, 1991). Prayer, in short, is conceptualized as a communication initiated by God and directed back to that same initiating God. If this act of praying occurs in the context of what can be called a friendship, within the framework of communications, this relationship is very atypical compared to analogous experiences with other people.

When a Conversation is Not a Conversation: Friends and Prayer

Recent studies claim that prayers and interpersonal conversations are fundamentally the same sort of events (Schjødt, Stødkilde-Jorgensen, Geertz, & Roepstorff, 2009). For instance, Schjødt and colleagues (2009) used functional magnetic imaging (fMRI) to investigate the active areas of the brain during two different types of prayer, improvised and recited, and two types of similarly structured secular behaviors, making wishes to Santa and reciting a nursery rhyme. The fMRI showed that during improvised prayer the areas of the brain associated with theory of mind, the temporo-parietal, temporopolar, and anterior left medial prefrontal cortex (MPFC), were active. The fact that these areas of the brain typically are considered important to social cognition implies that prayers to God are similar to interpersonal conversations at the neural level. This assumption, however, is based on a research design that included an idiosyncratic and restricted definition of prayer. Further, the comparison groups (Santa; nursery rhyme) are arguably of such different phenomenological content that the outcomes are ambiguous. Others have presented arguments that praying to God is the same as conversing with a close personal friend (Beach, Fincham, Hurt, McNair, & Stanley, 2008). Beach and colleagues (2008) emphasize "potential ways of utilizing prayer that may be functionally equivalent to existing marital techniques" (p 646). Among other observations, they argue that conversing with a supportive friend or privately engaging in prayer to God are functionally equivalent acts. In this context they

suggest that "[c]ouples can be told that if they can no longer talk to each other effectively, they might consider 'taking a break to talk to a deity' (p 650). The intent here is to employ praying and talking to a supportive friend as equivalent and complimentary means of promoting a classic "time-out" strategy to limit unproductive escalation of negative exchanges. While the authors make an effort to suggest how prayer might add benefits over and above other conflict resolution strategies, the nature of those potential benefits are fundamentally that prayer may serve to provide a positive interpretive framework to facilitate reconciliation. In accord with Beach and associate's (2008) position of equivalence between conversing with a friend and with God, it is equally plausible that a close friend with shared spiritual values could provide a similarly compelling positive framework.

Measurement Challenges

Part of the difficulty with the above cited investigations is that they employ narrow definitions of prayer that miss its multidimensional character (Baesler, 2003; Ladd & Spilka, 2002, 2006; Spilka & Ladd, in press) and only focus on the image of God-as-friend, which is one among many options (Gorsuch, 1968). The studies also share an emphasis on *outcomes*. Highlighting the "ends" does not necessarily provide information concerning the "means" (e.g., the origins, contents, and motivations). These are part of the larger constellation of behavioral and phenomenological challenges confronting such studies outlined below.

On a purely behavioral level, prayer and interpersonal conversations do contain similar components such as speaking aloud, gesturing, and saying what's on one's mind. Baesler and colleagues (1997; Baesler, Lindvall, & Lauricella, 2011) suggest that there are multiple points of overlap between the two forms of communication such as the presence of a dyadic or group relationship, a desire to communicate, and the effective use of communication skills such as talking, listening and dialoging. When only looking at behavior, therefore, interpretations tend to be overly broad because only a few of multiple ways of praying are addressed. Prayer takes many forms. As one example, Foster (1992) theorizes 21 different ways of praying such as contemplative, meditative, sacramental, petitionary, intercessory, and prayers of the heart. Further empirical work (Ladd & Spilka, 2006) has shown that people do not typically employ that level of refinement, nor is it clear that there is a single factor that unites these forms. Prayer also occurs in many contexts, such as alone or in groups, and those group level variables influence the nature of the prayer (Baesler & Ladd, 2009).

At the phenomenological level, however, there is a profound difference between the experiences of human conversations and prayer. In spite of the fact that researchers frequently refer to prayer as a type of conversation (James, 1902; Baesler, 2003) or refer to certain types of prayer as conversational (Poloma & Gallup, 1991), these discussions necessarily distinguish between conversations with a deity and conversations with humans. What differs is largely related to how the practitioner conceptualizes what is happening. It is not simply the case that the deity is viewed as an important other. The deity is seen as a metaphysical "other" with

qualitatively distinct features. For instance, prayers are, by typical definition, directed toward a deity possessing "omni" powers (e.g., omniscience) far surpassing the abilities of humans (Tremlin, 2006). This necessarily establishes an inequitable relationship, with human practitioners of prayer in the lesser position.

Reinforcing this distinction, prayers often add the paradoxical note that the ultimate source of prayers is the very deity toward whom the prayers are directed. In other words, it is imperative to consider the internal experience of prayer because it provides a context for the behaviors that is radically different than engaging in human – human dialogue (Baesler, 1997). While it may hold true that there is a similar neurological process and neurochemical activation that occurs during some forms of interpersonal conversation and some forms of prayer, patterns of activation are not necessarily equivalent to reported experiences. There remains a significant logical and practical gap between higher order thought and neural processes in part due to the nature of neural evidence (Lundervold, 2010).

While comparing prayer to interpersonal conversations is understandable at a behavioral level, saying that prayer is the fundamental equivalent of human – human conversation is too limited. More appropriately, prayer can be thought of as part of a human – deity relationship (Watts & Williams, 1988) that includes conversation as one among other features. Watts and Williams (1988) described prayer as being the main constituent of human relationships with God. Therefore, prayer is not simply a form of conversation, but also the defining aspect of one's multi-faceted relationship with God (Foster, 1992).

In order to validate or disclaim the idea that prayer and conversations are virtually the same, the two practices must be objectively compared. As noted above, there are a wide number of ways that prayer and conversation behaviors show similarities. Our concern here, however, is to explore issues of content and function rather than behaviors.

Connectivity Content: Interpersonal and Divine Emphases

Across the history of prayer studies, there have been a wide variety of taxonomies offered for different purposes (Zaleski & Zaleski, 2005). For instance, Baesler (2003; Baesler, Lindvall, & Lauricella, 2011) outlines a model based on communication theory that focuses on contextual aspects of prayer such as internal/external loci and whether the prayers occur in a private or public setting. His concern also incorporates experiential facets of prayer by noting whether the practitioner is active or receptive in regard to the act of praying.

Highlighting the linguistic content of prayer, Ladd and Spilka (2002; 2006) developed a model that defines different ways of praying in relation to how they serve the purpose of offering practitioners a sense of connectedness. The model is predicated on the notions that 1) prayers with different foci are offered to a deity and 2) practitioners understand any variety of felt connectivity as a result of their initial prayerful communication with that deity.

This connectivity may be primarily with one's self (inward), in an experience of grappling with personal features of spirituality. The main sense of connection

might alternatively be understood in relation to other people (outward): How are we united via prayer? It could also be the case that the central content of the prayer is dedicated to developing an explicit sense of closeness to a deity (upward).

As with any taxonomy, these facets of prayer connectivity work well as academic categories, but rarely occur in strict isolation. Rather, the goals of attaining a better relationship with self, others, or a deity are constantly intermingling. When prayers are actually uttered the inward, outward, and upward senses of connectivity interweave creating three common themes (Ladd & Spilka, 2002; 2006): internal concerns, embracing paradox, and bold assertion. Prayers of internal concerns focus on how one's personal spirituality is linked to that of others. Prayers that embrace paradox are those that ponder the often self-contradictory nature of religion (e.g., the last shall be first). Prayers of bold assertion demand answers or responses.

These sorts of themes are well-known within various academic disciplines that explore human–human relationships. Yet the nature of those themes is radically transformed in the act of praying to a deity for all the reasons outlined above. While we can expect people to have similar goals of pursuing understanding of the self, others, and beyond in both interpersonal interactions and in prayer, we anticipate that the ways of pursuing those goals and the accompanying affective experiences of prayers would be significantly different from that of interpersonal conversations.

Since these directions and themes can easily vary across contexts, it is often helpful to think of them simply in terms of the language that is employed. In this case, we find eight scales: examination, tears, sacraments, rest, radical, suffering, intercession, and petitioning (Ladd & Spilka, 2002; 2006). Examination of language includes explicit consideration of one's personal condition. Tears may be thought of as contrition or focusing on one's shortcomings. Sacramental notions are those that tie the individual to traditions of her or his group. Language of rest indicates that a person seeks comfort and peace as the result of the communication. Radical linguistic formulations are those where people express their opinions strongly. With words of suffering, the goal is to enter into another's experience so as to better understand it. Intercession is a less stress inducing approach when simply seeking help for someone else from a safer distance. The language of petition is one of naming and requesting specific physical items that one feels are needed.

Although these scales were initially designed in the context of prayer, the items do not focus on uniquely religious language or concepts. This makes the instrument useful for other forms of communication beyond prayer, such as interactions with close personal friends. Each of the eight language groupings sketched above (e.g., examination, tears, etc.) is clearly evident in close human–human exchanges where personal information is divulged, opinions offered, and petitions voiced. By exploring the language, what people are thinking about, during these moments, we can employ the scales in the present context to evaluate how close personal conversations and prayers are similar or different.

More specifically, we hypothesize that since prayers involve approaching a deity who ostensibly has far greater power and a more sweeping range of influence than any human, the language of prayers will be consistently more diverse in scope

than will the contents of conversations with a close personal friend. The deity can "do" more than a human friend, so people's prayers will have a wider scope. Likewise, since the character of the deity is traditionally one of greater stability than humans, we anticipate that both positive and negative emotions will be greater during prayer than during conversations with close personal friends. We know from personal experiences that friends can become uncomfortable when strong emotions are expressed, so we self-censure our conversations. God, on the other hand, as an omniscient deity already is aware of the gamut of human emotions, so it is more "safe" to express those strong emotions during prayer. In short, there is less risk of emotionally scandalizing God than our friends.

Connectivity Function: Interpersonal and Divine Attachment

Interpersonal conversations and prayers have a common function of providing a sense of connecting through communication. Both practices offer an individual the opportunity to dispense and collect information about the self and others; that shared knowledge creates a mutual bond. The nature of those bonds is the subject of a field of psychological study known as attachment. There are four basic ways that these relationship bonds are manifested: secure, dismissing, fearful, and preoccupied (Bartholomew & Horowitz, 1991). In a secure relationship, the ebb and flow maximizes both interdependent and independent development. A dismissing context finds one member of the dyad restricting the flow of information, closing down the interaction. When a fearful attachment prevails, the exchange is compromised due to a perception of impending failure; there is a prevailing belief that a good relationship is not feasible. The bond may also take a preoccupied form where the flow of information is excessive, damaging the exchange.

These attachment profiles are of specific interest because research has shown that they can be active not only in human–human (H–H) but also in human–deity (H–D) relationships (Kirkpatrick, 2005). While early attachments to caregivers influence adult attachments to other people and to God, they do not necessarily influence these relationships in the same way. For instance, insecure attachments by children to caregivers often lead to insecure attachments with romantic partners, but those early patterns of relationship do not necessarily lead to insecure attachments to God (Kirkpatrick, 2005). Instead, *insecure* attachments to caregivers can lead individuals to seek out a *secure* attachment to God (Kirkpatrick & Shaver, 1990).

Kirkpatrick (2005) proposed two different hypotheses in relation to attachment to God: the correspondence and compensation hypotheses. The correspondence hypothesis states that one's image of and attachment to God will reflect his or her image of and attachment to his or her primary caregiver, whether that image is either positive or negative. The compensation hypothesis states that individuals with insecure attachments to their caregivers will compensate with a secure attachment to God (Kirkpatrick, 2005).

Sorting through various tests of these two competing hypotheses, Hall, Fujikawa, Halcrow, Hill, and Delaney (2009) noted inconsistent findings partially due to conceptual ambiguity. Advancing an alternative, they proposed that

attachment to God follows both implicit and explicit pathways. Implicit knowledge is linked closely to emotions and relatively unprocessed experience. Explicit knowledge is related to cognitive, reasoned understandings (Watts & Williams, 1988). Hall and associates argue that psychological and spiritual ways of thinking and functioning are inseparable at the implicit level. Correspondence (secure attachment to people is correlated with secure attachment to God) is therefore the major principle to consider.

On the other hand, explicit knowledge may be tied to notions of compensatory behaviors or situations in which people intentionally seek to replace or repair attachments that were maladaptive (poor attachment to people is correlated with secure attachment to God). The authors further report that implicit states are imperfect predictors of explicit states because the ways of experiencing and knowing do not develop in identical fashions. In other words, emotions and cognitions do not always perfectly align because they arise from different origins.

Hall and colleagues (2009) contend that implicit ways of knowing and forming attachments are most similar to religious experiences. Following this synthetic work, we anticipate a matrix of positive correlations between H–H and H–D attachment models of the same types, representing fundamental implicit coherence (correspondence) for individuals.

At the same time, we expect that language usage patterns will differ substantially because the implicit, internal model (relational / emotional paradigm) and the explicit behaviors (conscious, rational communicative use of language with close personal friends or with God via prayer) are not automatically reflections of each other (Hall, et al., 2009). This is because communications in either friendship or in prayer are multidimensional and sensitive to a wide variety of influences like those described by Burgoon and Hale (1984). The juxtaposition of the complexities inherent in interpersonal communications and in prayers to a metaphysical deity make it highly unlikely that even similar implicit attachment models will be expressed in similar language. Therefore, we anticipate that language used to describe H–H conversational relationships will produce a matrix of correlations distinctly different than the matrix for H–D prayer relationships.

Method

Participants

One hundred and twenty-eight introductory psychology students participated in this study. Participants received extra credit points for their participation. The average age of participants was 22.14 (range: 18 to 42 years) and most were single, never married (90%). In relation to religious affiliation, the majority of the participants classified themselves as “other” (44.6%), Catholic (17.9%), Protestant (14.3%), “none” (12.5%), agnostic (4.5%), and Jewish (1.8%). The sample consisted predominantly of women (92%). Given the low response rate from men, the analyses reported here include only women (n = 117).

Materials

This study utilized SurveyMonkey®, a survey program that allows participants to complete surveys online. The present measures reported were embedded in a larger survey that captured a variety of details concerning personality and beliefs.

Language Use. The linguistic content of conversations and prayers was assessed using the Prayer Thoughts scale (Ladd & Spilka, 2006; 2002)which consists of eight scales comprised of short words or phrases related to different ways of communicating information about oneself in relation to others. The affective content of conversations and prayers was assessed using the Prayer Affect scale (Ladd, Ladd, Harner, Swanson, Metz, Pierre, & Trnka, 2007). This instrument requests people to indicate on single items the degree to which they experience "basic emotions" notably: anger, fear, disgust, surprise, or happiness (1 = low; 6 = high). Both of these instruments consistently demonstrate good reliability and validity (Ladd & Spilka, 2006; Ladd, et al., 2007). In the present study, only the language on intercession was somewhat low in reliability (.50) while the other reliability scores were in the .70 range.

Attachment. Styles of attachment were assessed using the single item indices previously validated in the Modified Attachment Interview (Bartholomew & Horowitz, 1991). This allowed for categorizing scores on the four dimensions of secure, dismissive, preoccupied, and fearful attachment as described above.

Design and Procedure

Using a within subjects design, participants were first asked to think about a close personal friend and rate the degree to which they were close to this person using a single item index. Next, they were asked to rate the extent to which they used various words and phrases when conversing with a close personal friend. They were likewise asked to rate the extent to which the felt various emotions during those conversations. Next, they read the four attachment scenarios and reported their level of agreement with each attachment style in the context of relation to other people.

In the following sections they were asked to rate the same words, phrases, and emotions but in the explicit context of their private, personal prayers. Then they responded to the attachment scenarios, but this time in the context of their relationship with God. The order of presentation was not counterbalanced to avoid introducing the concept of faith-based interactions that might significantly alter how the person thought about her or his language use with their close personal friend.

Results

An omnibus repeated measures analysis of variance test revealed significant main effects of the context (conversation / prayer), $F(1, 102) = 8.63$, $p = .004$, $\eta^2 = .08$, power = .83, the language used, $F(7, 714) = 38.98$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .28$, power = 1.00, and an interaction between the two variables, $F(7, 714) = 8.88$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .08$, power = 1.00.

Language

Contrary to our expectation, people reported more use of language during conversations ($M = 3.22$, $SD = .99$) than during prayer ($M = 3.03$, $SD = 1.14$). Lacking specific hypotheses concerning the type of language used and faced with a large number of possible comparisons, this main effect was not decomposed. Our primary interest was the interaction between context and language (Table 1). To decompose this effect, we employed repeated measures *t* tests, with the Holm-Bonferroni correction (Holm, 1979). The languages of examination, sacrament, radical, and intercession showed significant differences across contexts. In the first three, the language use was higher in conversations, while the language of intercession was higher during prayer.

Table 1: *Paired-Sample T-Tests: Contents of Conversations with a Close Personal Friend versus Prayer*

	Conversation			**Prayer**			
Contents	***M***	***SD***	***α***	***M***	***SD***	***α***	***p***
Examination	4.14	.95	.72	3.81	1.23	.87	.008*
Tears	3.10	1.08	.77	2.88	1.05	.77	.05 (ns)
Sacrament	2.84	1.10	.68	2.59	1.12	.71	.01*
Rest	3.11	1.04	.68	3.12	1.17	.84	.96
Radical	3.06	.99	.68	2.58	1.01	.73	.001*
Suffering	3.22	1.11	.65	3.15	1.16	.79	.44
Intercession	3.39	.95	.50	3.76	1.14	.77	.004*
Petition	3.22	.90	.67	3.01	1.01	.77	.132

Affect

To evaluate affective content, researchers again used a repeated measures analysis of variance procedure. Significant main effects of the context (conversation / prayer), $F(1, 99) = 8.42$, $p < .005$, $\eta^2 = .08$, power = .82, the affect experienced, $F(5, 495) = 59.46$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .38$, power = 1.00, and an interaction between the two variables, $F(5, 495) = 42.83$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .30$, power = 1.00.

In line with our expectation, people reported less overall affect during conversations (M = 3.13, SD = 1.18) than during prayer (M = 3.46, SD = 1.42). Lacking specific hypotheses concerning this main effect, it was not decomposed.

Our primary interest was the interaction between context and affect (Table 2). To decompose this effect, we employed repeated measures t tests, with the Holm-Bonferroni correction (Holm, 1979). The affects of happiness, surprise, disgust, anger, and fear showed significant differences across contexts. For the two more positive emotions (happiness, surprise), the affect was greater during conversations. In the other cases (disgust, anger, fear), the affect experienced was greater during prayer. These findings support our hypothesis that affective content of conversations with a friend differ significantly from prayer, but they oppose our hypothesis that prayers contain more positive affect and less negative affect than do conversations with a close personal friend.

Table 2: *Paired-Sample T-Tests: Affect of Conversations with a Close Personal Friend versus Prayer*

	Conversation		**Prayer**		
Affect	***M***	***SD***	***M***	***SD***	***p***
Happiness	4.91	1.09	3.91	1.41	< .001*
Surprise	3.71	1.11	3.27	1.38	.03*
Sadness	3.06	1.38	3.02	1.31	.78
Disgust	1.78	.92	3.55	1.56	< .001*
Anger	2.68	1.06	3.64	1.44	< .001*
Fear	2.64	1.51	3.34	1.42	< .001*

Note. Significance (*) is determined using the Holm-Bonferroni correction (Holm, 1979)

Attachment

In relation to attachment, researchers first explored the extent to which H–H and H–D attachments aligned by using correlations. In all but one instance (H–H fearful and H–D preoccupied = .30, p < .01), there were no significant relations suggesting a lack of support for the implicit correspondence hypothesis under these conditions.

Attachment styles and language employed during conversations with a close personal friend versus prayers were also explored using correlation coefficients (Table 3). In broad terms, the different ways of using language were most strongly related to secure (positively) and dismissive (negatively) H–D attachment styles. This demonstrates that the language in question functions in different ways depending on whether the context is a conversation or a prayer.

Attachment in the H–H context seems basically unrelated to the type of language employed, while secure H–D attachment is heavily dependent on language.

Table 3: *Correlations of Human–Human and Human–God Attachment Styles and Language Use*

Language Use	**Attachment Styles**							
	Secure		*Dismissive*		*Preoccupied*		*Fearful*	
	H–H	**H–D**	H–H	**H–D**	H–H	**H–D**	H–H	**H–D**
Examine	*-.03*	**.61****	*.08*	**-.46****	*.13*	**-.11**	*.18*	**-.20***
Tears	*-.13*	**.19***	*.02*	**-.07**	*.20**	**-.01**	*.21**	**.04**
Sacrament	*-.09*	**.35****	*.01*	**-.12**	*.00*	**.19**	*.10*	**-.07**
Rest	*-.11*	**.48****	*.03*	**-.34****	*.08*	**-.02**	*.03*	**-.10**
Radical	*.12*	**.36****	*.21**	**-.18**	*.03*	**.24****	*-.03*	**-.06**
Suffering	*.11*	**.34****	*.07*	**-.28****	*.07*	**.10**	*.04*	**.06**
Intercession	*.11*	**.47****	*.09*	**-.17**	*-.05*	**-.10**	*-.02*	**-.11**
Petition	*.10*	**.45****	*.03*	**-.29****	*.15*	**.03**	*.02*	**.05**

Discussion

Two recent studies argued that interpersonal conversations and prayers to God are fundamentally the same sort of event (Schjødt et al., 2009; Beach, et al., 2008). The present study sought to further investigate this proposal through the use of objective comparisons of human conversation versus prayer contexts. The data analyses partially supported the hypotheses. Differences emerged at the levels of both simple linguistic content and with regard to the function of that language *vis-à-vis* attachment styles.

Language

In some senses the results were surprising because we anticipated less reliance on language during human interactions than during prayer activity. The present findings suggest, however, that this is not universally the case. People appear to use

a more wide variety of language during interpersonal communications than during prayer. This may well reflect the fact that conversations are less likely to have socially proscribed patterns than are prayers. Many religious traditions have well defined prayers that serve as core statements of faith (e.g., the Christian Lord's Prayer; the Jewish Shema; the Islamic Salah) and those expressions contain limited language. In addition, some forms of prayer actually emphasize the *absence* of language (Baesler, 2003).

Affect

It is self-evident that two infants placed in proximity of each other will spontaneously react to each other in some fashion. On the other hand, it is not immediately apparent that either of those infants ever will engage in spontaneous prayer (although this could be claimed to be innate, metaphysical activity outside the realm of scientific discussion). In general, then, observable prayer behaviors most often are the result of explicit training and these behaviors change in predictable ways as children's cognitive abilities advance (Woolley & Phelps, 2001. In other words, human interaction is typically taken for granted (though much effort is spent by parents to refine those actions) while praying is a more specialized task that relies on the development of cognitive skills. Bamford and Lagattuta (2010), for instance, report that by eight years of age, children begin to expand their intentional use of prayer from primarily positive emotions to include negative emotions as well. As more is learned about prayer's characteristics, it may be that when someone needs help beyond what is perceived as possible within typical physical boundaries, prayer takes on special significance. Human friends possess less efficacy than would a deity at providing the needed assistance, so the language of intercession is more strongly represented in prayers. The other kinds of language employed (e.g., self-examination, rest, petition) represent situations that would certainly benefit from a deity's attention and assistance. They are, however, situations that do not *require* such attention and therefore are addressed via both conversations and prayers.

It is imperative to keep in mind that the present study investigated only self-reported private prayer data as a situation most closely aligned with dyadic communication; corporate, public prayer may well show a different pattern of results. Likewise, the present data are limited to self-reported interactions with a close personal friend; other forms of dyadic or larger scale interpersonal communications were not explored, but are likely to have patterns that would discriminate those situations from the ones reported here.

Under these specific conditions of private prayer, another observation is that the affective quality of conversations and these prayers differ at many points. While happiness and surprise are more associated with conversations, disgust, anger, and fear are more likely expressed during prayer. Happiness, in particular, characterizes the human interactions as captured in these data. In other words, "safe" emotions are part of communicating with close personal friends. By contrast, more negative emotions emerged during prayer experiences. We must be cautious with the

interpretation here because we do not know the nature of the various emotions indicated. Was the happiness during conversations a rejoicing at another's failure? Was the anger during prayer directed at God or at another person? What we can observe is that the more powerful emotions are linked to prayer experiences. This suggests that prayer generally consists of more heavily valenced communication than do human communications. Clearly this is not to argue that human communications are restricted to positive emotional encounters, however, it appears that, on balance, prayer experiences foster a distinct type of experience that may well be more emotionally labile.

Attachment

The present results provide no support for correspondence of H–H and H–D attachment styles. Neither do they offer support for ideas of compensation. It is possible that the use of the single item measures employed for the attachment styles were not sufficiently sensitive to capture the orientations effectively. This seems unlikely since the items clearly discriminated with regard to the patterns of language use.

When attention is turned to the manner in which language reflects attachment styles, language becomes more important in H–D interactions than in H–H communications. This is in line with our understanding that the nature of attachment to God must rely heavily on language in the absence of other non-verbal communication options. Taken together, these data provide evidence that conversations and private prayer are distinct in emotional tone and style of attachment. We note that this position, however, may also represent a popular conceptualization of prayer as an "active" as opposed to a "receptive" process (Baesler, 2003). In the receptive mode, individuals would not engage language to the same extent because the manner of praying encourages adopting an attitude of listening rather than talking to the deity. It may be the case that the present sample only reflected on active modes of praying since that mode of interaction would more closely align with the idea of a conversation with a close personal friend. Additional research will help to clarify this issue.

Limitations

This study is limited in some important ways. The sample consisted of undergraduate introductory psychology students who were female, white, and never married. This lack of diversity renders it difficult for these results to be generalized. Our decision not to counterbalance the presentation of conditions may have skewed the results, but they may also have prevented contamination of responses by not contextualizing the study with respect to religious beliefs. The sample also consisted of only moderately religious individuals. Perhaps most limiting is the fact that, as noted above, only private, personal prayers were represented. Although this was

necessary as a comparison for dyadic interpersonal communications, this single mode of prayer fails to represent the gamut of the practice.

Within these caveats, this study presents evidence that while it is possible to conceptualize prayer as a type of conversation, the two behaviors clearly differ in a number of ways. With this particular sample, people engage in interpersonal conversations more often than prayers. Perhaps this indicates that people start by looking for answers with others and if not satisfied move on to prayer. Future studies should seek to obtain a more highly religious sample to see if the same results are obtained. Use of a more highly religious sample would also allow for exploration of individuals' use of the various styles of prayer (i.e., contemplative, sacramental) and analyze how these prayer styles effect one's communication with God as well as explore how one's image of God effects prayer styles.

Future studies also could use different measures to objectively compare the differences between interpersonal conversations and prayers. Bänziger, Janssen, and Scheepers (2008) investigated the prayers of individuals in a mainly secularized society, the Netherlands. It would be informative to see how the prayers of individuals from this or other more secularized societies relate to interpersonal conversations. Perhaps these prayers are more similar to interpersonal conversation than are prayers offered in more religious societies.

There is much to warrant exploring prayers, both private and public, from the perspective of communications theory. For instance, following the lead of Burgoon and Hale (1989) in exploring trust, intimacy, submission, intensity of involvement and depth of interaction as variables of interest across the multiple dimensions of prayer could add both depth and breadth to the available literature. At the same time, widening the circle of dialogue is becoming ever more critical in at least two senses. In the first instance, it is imperative that we intentionally expand our efforts beyond Christian prayer. In the second instance, we must recognize the limitations of our various disciplines and explicitly seek to combine our methodological and theoretical strengths. What sort of study of prayer might emerge, for example, when forming a working group consisting of a jazz musician, an interpersonal communications expert, and a Buddhist monk who creates sand mandalas as a form of prayer? There are many such fascinating opportunities available for the intrepid researcher of prayer. The contents of this special issue represent a fine starting point for musing about precisely those creative challenges.

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Notes

[1] Ninety 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.

[2] This progress is reflected in Francis and Astley's (2001) excellent edited work *PsychologicalpPerspectives on prayer*. For examples of empirically driven models of prayer see Baesler (1999; 2003); Ladd and Spilka (2002; 2006); Poloma and Pendleton (1991).

[3] The 2009 Godly Love National Survey findings indicate that a shared Pentecostal worldview with its belief in supernatural "signs and wonders" is a factor in prophetic prayer. Black, Hispanic, Evangelical Protestants were significantly more likely to identify with the Pentecostal worldview and to have affective experiences of the divine than were Mainline Protestants and Catholics. With controls for the effects of common demographic measures (age, education, income, gender and race), self-identifying as a Pentecostal or charismatic (Pentecostal) Christian was the leading factor in accounting for prophetic prayer scores. Those who self-identified as Pentecostal were more likely to engage in prophetic prayer than those who were not (Standardized Beta = .27). Of the demographics, non-whites were more likely than whites to report prophetic prayer experiences (alpha = .21); the other demographics were not statistically significant (Lee, Poloma & Post, 2013).

[4] In 2009 the authors included a battery of questions on prayer for the Godly Love National Survey (GLNS), sponsored by the Flame of Love Project (for which Lee & Poloma served as co-principal investigators). In this article we use our GLNS survey findings and open-ended interviews to demonstrate how prophetic prayer, communication with God that includes both human activity and receptivity to the divine, is a common but often overlooked form of prayer. See Lee and Poloma (2009) for further methodological details on the GLNS.

[5] A reliable scale comprised of multiple items to measure a single phenomenon, when available, is more robust and provides a better measure than use of a single item. The 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 reliability co-efficient for this four item measure is .93.

[6] The three scales measuring devotional, prophetic and mystical prayer were used in a multiple regression analysis to determine which of them were related to perceiving God's love. All three of the prayer scales proved to be statistically significant, explaining nearly 80 percent of the variance (adjusted R square = .79). Those who scored high on experiencing God's love also scored high on prayer activity (beta=.42), mysticism (beta=.39) and prophetic prayer (beta=.17).

[7] Although prophecy is commonly thought of in the larger culture as "foretelling" or prediction, in the Pentecostal worldview where the Spirit is an active collaborator in human affairs, prophecy is most commonly described as "forthtelling," or speaking/acting on divine directions. *In sum, prophecy as commonly understood and practiced by prophets on "Main Street" and used here to describe a form of prayer consists in hearing from God and then "speaking and acting on God's behalf as a result of the prompting of the Holy Spirit"* (c.f. Robeck, 2002; Poloma, 2003; Tyra, 2011).

[8] See, for example, Poloma and Gallup (1991) where only 12 percent of pray-ers reported "never" having experienced divine peace during prayer with another 19 percent acknowledging they experienced it "once or twice." Thirty-two (32) percent claimed to have this experience regularly. Slightly fewer "felt the strong presence of God" regularly (26%), with 21 percent reporting they have never had that experience.

[9] For additional discussion of such mystical prayer found within the Catholic tradition, see Dubay (1989), especially chapter 3 on the experience of God; see also chapters 5 (contemplation), 6 (Teresian mansions), 9 (fire in the night), and 10 (transforming summit).

[10] Baesler's model and our discussion of prophetic prayer as social interaction fits well with Sharp's (2012) claim that prayer should be treated as a social psychological phenomenon

that shares many characteristics with and involves many of the same psychological and interactional processes as human-human interactions.

[11] Contemplative prayer seems to be closer to some forms of "meditation" than to prophetic prayer. Wikipedia defines meditation as "any form of a family of practices in which practitioners train their minds or self-induce a mode of consciousness to realize some benefit" (*http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Meditation*, downloaded March 9, 2012). We discuss trances later in this article, which is also related. We do not dwell on contemplative prayer or meditation more generally in this article, although a future comparative project involving contemplative and prophetic prayer would be helpful. Our point here is that the practice of contemplation and/or meditation, which may involve encounters with the divine that could be seen as "prophetic," are both conceptually and experientially distinct from the ongoing two-way dialogue we have labeled prophetic prayer. There is perhaps some overlap, but the patterns of communication between the person and God are quite different.

[12] For a more extended exploration of the impact of these three types of prayer on the experience of divine love and related issues, see Lee, Poloma, and Post (2013).

[13] Flame of Love Project team member and psychologist Ralph W. Hood, Jr. has long used the items contained in the mysticism scale in his own work on religious experience (See Hood, 2002; Hood, Hill, & Spilka, 2009).

[14] For an example of a populist theology providing guidance in prophetic prayer see Witt (2007). Witt's ongoing adventure with the prophetic is traced in Lee, Poloma, and Post (2013).

[15] We created a multiple regression equation where prophetic prayer was the dependent variable and commonly used demographics (age, education, income, gender, and race) were used as independent variables. The equation accounted for 8 percent of the variance (adjusted R square = .08), with only race being statistically significant (beta = .24). Non-whites were more likely than whites to engage in prophetic prayer, a finding consistent with results found by Krause and Chatters (2005) for older adults.

[16] For other more detailed presentations of other exemplars we have interviewed, see Lee and Poloma (2009) and Lee, Poloma, and Post (2013).

[17] See Hay (2006) for further discussion of the "felt presence" as a spiritual experience that is rooted in human physiological and evolutionary makeup.

[18] Many books have been written by Christian authors to encourage communicating with God through impressions, dreams and visions. For some examples see Jacobs (1995), Johnson (2007), Witt (2007), and Ryle (1995).

[19] For more details on Hood's mysticism scale and how we used it in our interviewees, see Lee and Poloma (2009).

[20] "Soak" refers to soaking prayer during which the pray-er rests and "soaks" in the divine presence. For more information in soaking prayer, see Poloma (2003) and Wilinson and Althouse (2010).

[21] For a systematic model of different levels of consciousness that has sought to integrate the great psychological systems of the west with the contemplative traditions of the East, see Wilber (1993).

[22] The so-called "Toronto Blessing" was a revival that began in Canada and spread throughout North America and beyond in the mid-1990s. For a discussion of the religious experiences that were the hallmark of the Toronto Blessing and the impact of this revival in renewing American Pentecostalism see Poloma (2003).

[23] Mystics in a variety of traditions have reported similar trance-like experiences. Although we have no data on how prophetic prayer experiences might be related to practices such as contemplative prayer or other forms of meditation, future research may find it fruitful to

study such practices. The results may confirm our suspicion that there is some fuzziness in the boundaries separating prophetic and/or contemplative prayer, while also reaffirming their conceptual and experiential distinctiveness.

[24] Experiences of three way and even corporate dialogue with the divine are reflected in two of the five questions that were part of the prophetic prayer scale. Sixty five (65%) percent of respondents reported that "God had provided direction to do something through another person," and 59 percent acknowledged that they had "given a word from God to another person."

[25] For a book length investigation and discussion of the relationship between prayer, divine love, and human benevolence, see Lee, Poloma, and Post (2013).