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BEHAVIORAL PATTERNS AND PRAYER

Stephen L. Brower*

Professional counselors, ecclesiastical leaders and other "helping" persons often work with troubled people whose frustration is complicated by unsuccessful attempts to solve problems through prayer. It is not uncommon to hear complaints like, "I prayed for help, but nothing happened." Even more difficult could be, "I fasted, prayed, and got my answer but it didn't work out." ("She married someone else," or "The job just didn't work out," or "I was miserable in that location.") Our sometimes quick, general answers based on the simple guidelines in the scriptures, i.e., real intent, keep the commandments, be humble, have faith and repent, may prove to be unhelpful to the frustrated person because of the lack of some specific diagnostic model linking the condition for receiving answers to prayer to one's behavioral patterns.

The helping person may find himself hard pressed to assist a discouraged, disillusioned person who is burdened not only with a personal problem but also with a seeming lack of help through prayer. Feelings of frustration and inadequacy are often intensified when the miserable one says, "I attend my church meetings, pray regularly, keep the Word of Wisdom, pay an honest tithing, keep myself morally clean, I have a testimony, and yet my prayers don't seem to be answered." Even the insight that "No" is also an answer will be unhelpful and inadequate at these times.

This paper (a) outlines requirements set forth in the scriptures for praying and for receiving answers to prayers, (b) outlines a systematic classification of patterns of behavior and description of the positive and negative elements of each behavioral pattern, and (c) combines these into an analytical framework to identify and classify the types of prayers most likely to be given from each pattern of behavior along with the answers to be expected.

Clinical experience with this framework suggests that it can aid counselors in helping clients understand, analyze and deal with prayer-related delinquencies.

Reviewing the scriptures we find instruction for prayer and praying in the following categories: (1) how to approach the Lord, (2) what conditions are set for receiving answers, (3) what prior conditions facilitate answers to prayer, and (4) what conditions restrict answers to prayer (Figure 1).

Scriptural instructions are clear about how to approach the Lord. We are to pray over all aspects of our daily activities, call on His name in the name of His Son, pour out our souls, seek Him diligently, and pray always.

The conditions set for receiving answers are also specified and include: asking in faith, believing we will receive, having real intent, not doubting, having an honest heart, asking for that which is appropriate, and

being worthy of His spirit in order to be directed in asking only for those things which are appropriate.

Figure 1

SAMPLE SCRIPTURES RELATED TO RECEIVING ANSWERS TO PRAYER

HOW TO APPROACH THE LORD

| | |
|----------------------------------|---|
| Pray - Ask - Seek - Knock | Luke 11:10; John 14:13-14, 16:24; James 1:5; D&C 4:7, 6:5, 9:7-9, 11-15, 12:5, 14:5-8; D&C 49:26, 66:9, 103:35. |
| Cry unto Him | Alma 34:18-25 |
| Call on His name (in My name) | John 14:13-14, 16:24; Alma 34:17 |
| Pour out your soul | Alma 34:26 |
| Seek him diligently | D&C 88:63, 90:24 |
| Pray always | D&C 90:24; Moroni 27:6,9 |

CONDITIONS SET FOR RECEIVING ANSWERS

| | |
|--|--------------------------|
| Ask in faith | James 1:6; D&C 8:1, 10 |
| Believing you will receive | Matthew 21:22 |
| Nothing wavering | James 1:6 |
| With real intent | Mor 7:6, 9, 10:4 |
| With an honest (sincere) heart | D&C 8:1, Mor. 10:4 |
| Ask for what is "right" or expedient for you | 3 Nephi 18:20; D&C 88:64 |
| Ask in the spirit according to will of God | D&C 46:30, 50:30 |

PRIOR CONDITIONS THAT FACILITATE ANSWERS TO PRAYER

| | |
|--|---------------|
| My word abide in you | John 14:7 |
| Exercise faith unto repentance | Alma 34:17 |
| Humble self | Mor 34:19 |
| Be purified and cleansed from all sin | D&C 50:29-30 |
| Be charitable - Impart of substance to needy | Alma 34:28-29 |
| If any of you lack wisdom | James 1:5 |
| Study it out in mind | D&C 9:8 |

CONDITIONS THAT RESTRICT ANSWERS TO PRAYER

| | |
|-----------------------------|-----------------|
| Not charitable | Alma 34:28, 29 |
| Seeking to counsel the Lord | D&C 22:4 |
| Ask for what you ought not | D&C 8:10, 88:65 |
| Ask without faith | D&C 8:10 |

Prior conditions that facilitate answers to prayer include: knowing the will of the Lord by studying the scriptures, exercising faith, humbling oneself and repenting of past errors, taking the steps to be purified and cleansed from all sin, and demonstrating our willingness to abide by His instructions. In addition, there is the expectation that we be charitable and impart of our substance to the needy as an evidence of our faith and obedience. Then, we are told, if we lack wisdom or otherwise need help we may approach Him for help and

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can expect a response. In addition, we are instructed to study it out in our minds, take responsibility to work out alternative possible solutions, choose an alternative and then approach Him for guidance and confirmation.

There are also certain conditions specified that restrict answers to prayer such as not being charitable, seeking to counsel the Lord, asking for "what you ought not," asking without faith, etc.

It is clear from these sample scriptures (Figure 1) that our frame of mind, intentions, motivations, priorities, values, and interests may form patterns of behavior that can cloud and complicate our capacity to establish a communicative relationship with a loving, responsive Father in Heaven.

It seems clear also that He would not support, foster, or reward inappropriate attitudes, behavior, intentions, motives, or requests by responding to prayers that disregard basic conditions set for praying and receiving answers.

A systematic analysis of the various ways in which we communicate or relate to others and to the Lord may give some insight into the types of prayer that might be offered and some predictions about possible outcomes.

Clinical observations of over 500 BYU students in an experience-based learning program called CLASP (Creative Learning Through the Application of Sociological Principles) suggest that a diagnosis of these perplexing, faith-testing dilemmas related to prayer and answers to prayers may be more fruitful if we identify the individual's dominant patterns of behavior and thoughts. In other words, the motives, priorities, and sometimes subconscious intentions behind one's approach to the Lord may preclude or facilitate His response.

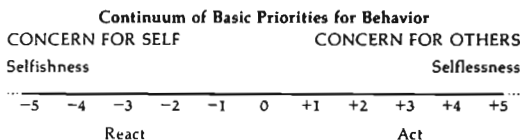
The basis for the classification of behavior in this paper builds on the concept that the roots of behavior can be traced to a few simple principles outlined in the scriptures. These principles define positive and negative elements of behavior and can be formed into a continuum that extends from complete selfishness to total selflessness. The positive, or selfless, end of the continuum is described in such terms as "do unto others as you would have them do unto you" (Matt. 7:12; Luke 6:13; 3 Ne. 14:12), or "love your neighbor as yourself" (Matt. 22:38), and includes the concept that laying one's life down for a friend is the ultimate act of love (John 15:19). Thus, "selfless behavior" is seen as behavior that originates with a priority for and a value on concern for others.

At the negative end of the continuum, called "selfish," the priority for behavior is directed toward self-interest or self-protection to the exclusion of a concern for others. The scriptures abound with warnings and admonishments against self-oriented behavior, such as "if he gain the whole world, and lose his own soul" (Matt. 16:26), impart not to poor and needy (D&C 104:18), or the comprehensive warning, "when we undertake to cover our sins, or to gratify our pride, our vain ambition, or to exercise control or dominion or compulsion upon the souls of the children of men, in any degree of unrighteousness, behold, the heavens withdraw

themselves; the spirit of the Lord is grieved;..." (D&C 121:37).

Similarly, we find in the scriptures a clear and simple description of the behavioral means one finds associated with selfless-oriented behavior and with selfishness. Lehi outlines two general means or patterns for expressing either of these types of behavior in his counsel to his son Jacob (2 Ne. 2). He teaches that man, unlike all the rest of creation, was created to "act" for himself, or choose between opposites or alternatives. Whereas, he emphasizes, all the rest of creation was created "to be acted upon." Reactive (being acted upon) behavior is thus dysfunctional for man and is characteristically associated with selfish behavior. That is, selfish-oriented behaviors are a series of reactive strategies aimed at self-protection, avoidance of pain or discomfort, or for self-gain independent of the consequence for others. Behavior dominated by self-interest or selfish motives as the central priority generally is based upon reactive strategies or means.

To "act," on the other hand, is seen as facilitating functional, growth-oriented behavior. To act is to choose behavior that takes into account the best interests of all concerned. It is being responsibly concerned for the welfare of others and at this, the positive end of the continuum, are the basic priorities associated with selfless behavior.



Observing behavior and applying it to this continuum can help one trace and judge the degree of dominance of one or the other of these two underlying priorities for behavior in others and in self.

For simplicity, six general functions for behavior are described to illustrate the process. We will include behavior that functions to: (1) free, be uninhibited or natural, (2) conform to external influence or direction, (3) resist external influence or direction, (4) value, (5) protect, and (6) administer or facilitate. The following chart provides a label and a description of the function associated with each of the above sample behavioral patterns. The chart also labels the negative and positive behavioral dimensions of each function. The negative label in each case typifies behavior that arises out of "selfish" motivated behavior aimed at protecting self-interest. The positive labels typify behavior that functions out of choices to act for the best interest of all who would be affected by that situation.

CHART 1

Description of the function of six categories of behavior patterns and the corresponding label for the negative and positive expressions of each function.

| Description of the Function of Selected Behavior patterns | Negative (REACTS to protect self-interest) | Positive (Chooses to ACT for best interest of all concerned) |
|---|--|--|
| FREE: natural, uninhibited, impulsive, energetic, curious | Brat | Princes(ss) |
| CONFORM: accommodate or adapt to rules, authority, direction, instruction | Compliant | Obedient |
| RESIST: accommodate to influence, rules, authority, direction by rejecting or seeking to be independent | Rebellious | Self-Reliant |
| VALUATE: uses experience, past-precedence, rules, principles or values, to assess, judge or evaluate appropriateness of present activities | Critical | Guiding |
| PROTECT: cares for, watches over, willing to bear another's burdens, or be "brother's keeper" | Smothering | Nurturing |
| ADMINISTER: organizes, coordinates, directs, controls, plans | Manipulates | Manages |

With this frame of reference established, we can now describe and specify the typical positive and negative behaviors associated with each function. Also included is an outline of the types of prayers and answers expected from the positive and negative expressions of each functional pattern of behavior.

CHART 2

Descriptions of negative and positive types of behavioral patterns comparing the types of prayers and predicted answers for each.

| Negative Behavior (REACTS to protect self-interest) | Positive Behavior (Chooses to ACT for best interest of all concerned) |
|---|---|
| Brat: Self-indulgent, rowdy, hyperactive, demanding, impatient, seductive, noisy, etc. Prayer: Asks or demands to be released from problems, to remove all constraints or blocks that restrict one from self-gratification, self-interest. Answer: "No" or no response. | Prince(ss): Trusting, affectionate, joyful, guileless, and is responsive to others' moods; playful, inquisitive, spontaneous, curious. Prayer: Makes simple, direct requests for help involving current, practical problems, affecting self and others. Answers: Direct, immediate response where appropriate. Results frequently highly faith promoting. |
| Compliant: Quickly agrees or conforms to others' expectations, either is overly eager to please or withdraws apathetically and feels helpless and bewildered, is uncertain in communication (I'll try) and unable to commit. Prayers: Either uses a memorized prayer or pleads for the Lord to take over and solve the problem. Answer: No response, which would seem like abandonment, rejection, or "there's no one there." Oliver Cowdery's prayer for power to translate seems to fit this category (D&C 9). | Obedient: Chooses to comply based on reason, faith, and trust of others. Conscientious and responsive to legitimate influence or counsel and is able to make commitments. Prayers: Expresses gratefulness for blessing, asks for blessings that strengthen one's ability to do right and do what is expected, and asks in faith, humility, and with real intent. Answer: Specific directions and inspiration for what's right and wrong. |

Rebellious: Defiant, aggressive, resentful, hostile, stubborn, procrastinating, and rejects direction without reason.

Prayers: Given with a doubting heart. Requests a sign or a special blessing as proof of His existence or power.

Answer: Generally one could expect no response to the rebellious prayer. Exception might be a case like Alma the Younger when a lesson in the form of a sharp rebuff to confront the person with the inappropriateness of their life and behavior.

Critical: Punishing, judgmental, moralizing, nagging, or opinionated communications focused on the should and shouldn'ts from old or outdated rules and information.

Prayers: Seeks support or justification for one's opinions or judgments, asks the Lord to punish those who disagree or do not conform to our opinions of what's right and wrong. Seeks for deliverance from evil and problems "caused" by other.

Answer: No response. One could predict that there would be a withdrawal of the spirit, followed by self-righteous attitude that justified taking matters into one's own hands.

Smothering: Over-protective rescuing, conditional love and is helpful for self-recognition or for wrong reasons. Tends to take the role of the martyr, by self-pitying, or oversolitious, and overanxious.

Prayers: Seeks deliverance from being misunderstood, draws attention to one's own sacrifices and miseries or lack of being appreciated. Reminds the Lord of all the things they have done to help others. Seeks to have others (and self) avoid responsibility.
Answer: Impatient "No" or no response.

Manipulates: Intuitively reacts for self gain. Manipulates and controls environment and others for self-protection and self-gratification. Blames others to avoid responsibility and screens and distorts data for self gain.

Prayers: Asks for relief from consequences of error, mistakes. Pleads for the easy way out. Persistently pleads, negotiates, and bargains for own way. Specifies conditions and answers that will be acceptable.

Answer: "No" or no response. Sometimes an answer may come

Self-Reliant: Determined, persistent, assertive, wants to do things himself; takes responsibility and is self-corrective.

Prayers: Asks for strength, wisdom, endurance, ability to overcome and to deal with the challenges and problems. Asks for opportunities to grow and achieve.

Answer: Often given what is asked for even if it may not be best solution. Subsequent faithful prayers dealing with any resulting dilemma would also be answered in ways to facilitate a person's continued growth and experience.

Guiding: Instructs, counsels, teaches, and guides based on relevant data; defines relevant rules, values, rights and wrongs and is firm, patient, fair and concrete in communication.

Prayers: Asks for spirit of discernment and wisdom, for strength to be an example of appropriate, correct behavior.

Answer: Immediate and direct inspiration and guidance.

Nurturing: Unconditional love, caring and helping; selfless in sacrificing for others, empathetic, positive and optimistic, yet is realistic and avoids dependency-producing helping situations.

Prayers: Asks for strength and patience to be helpful, comforting, caring, and concerned. Expresses compassion for others' needs and prays for others' well-being and comfort.

Answer: Warm, supportive inspiration and strengthening influence of the Spirit.

Manages: Creative yet orderly, organized and productive. Integrates, coordinates, and facilitates positive productive behavior; accurately shares data, both feelings and thoughts, relevant to others. Skillful in discerning real causes and reasons, is wise in decisions and choices of appropriate means and ends.

Prayers: Humbly gives credit and expresses thanks for blessings available to self and others. Asks for strength to serve needs of self and others. Works out alternative

and be more than bargained for, i.e., Martin Harris and the first 116 pages of the Book of Mormon manuscript. A "No" answer or lack of answer could become a challenge to further petition, negotiate, plead, and campaign with the Lord to get one's way.

solutions to problems and seeks confirmation of choices. Answer: Direct and continuing inspiration that reinforces one's faith in divine direction. Receives unanticipated direction and guidance in unexpected situations.

From Chart 2, a person can now quickly identify which pattern of negative or positive behavior is dominant and determine the likely types of prayers and answers to prayers. It can be used as a diagnostic tool to pinpoint potential problem areas associated with dilemmas in praying and getting answers to prayers. The chart can also be used to identify from the descriptions of types of prayers and responses to those prayers what behavioral patterns are likely dominant for that person and the behavioral problems that might be associated with that pattern. As an additional assessment tool, Charts 3 and 4 provide brief descriptions of attitudes and behaviors likely to be present for each positive (Chart 3) and negative (Chart

4) behavior pattern in relation to the scriptural conditions set for prayer and the receiving of answers to prayer that has been identified earlier in Chart 1.

Charts 2, 3, and 4 can serve counselors and clients as diagnostic tools for pinpointing behavioral problems and prayer-related dilemmas. Similarly, they can be used to outline strategies for overcoming such problems and for planning developmental procedures. With this frame of reference, a problem diagnosis can begin either from (1) observation of behavioral patterns, (2) exploring the history of dilemmas with praying and receiving answers to prayer, or (3) reviewing and analyzing the procedure used by the individual in approaching the Lord in prayer to check for omission of essential conditions for receiving answers to prayers.

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CHART 3

Characteristics of Prayer from Each of the Positive Patterns of Behavior in Relation to Scriptural Conditions Set for Praying and Receiving Answers

| Scriptural Conditions Set for Praying and Receiving Answers | Free | Conform | Resist | Value | Protect | Administer |
|--|--|-------------------------------------|---|--|---|---|
| | Princess | Obedient | Self-Reliant | Guiding | Nurture | Manages |
| Study out in Mind | Impulsive thoughts about immediate desire, wants | Thinks out what is expected | Thinks about how much I can do by self | Determines what ought or ought not be done | How can others best be served | Analyzes data, outlines alternatives, chooses and seeks confirmation |
| Ask-Pray-Knock-Seek | Help with immediate specific needs | What is expected | Strength, ability to achieve | Discernment of right | Strength, patience to be helpful to others | Understanding, confirmation, gives credit, appreciation |
| In Faith Believing You Will Receive--With Real Intent | Simple, unquestioning, not doubting, guileless | With trust seems to act as directed | Confident, self-assured that help will come if one does all one can | Assurance about source of right | Feels support and strength from others | Acts with confidence and assurance based on faith and spiritual knowledge |
| Prior conditions to be met for receiving answers to prayers: | | | | | | |
| Repent--Clean and Pure from Sin--Humble | Innocent of wrongdoing | Acts to meet expectations | Initiates corrective processes | Teaches and models repentance process | Helps others take corrective action in love | Quick to recognize error and acts to correct |
| Charitable to Others | Unselfishly includes others | Follows rules for helping others | Cares for own needs so not to be a burden to others | Help to others in harmony with what is right | Selfless in caring for and helping others | Sensitive to others' needs, helps without causing dependency |
| Negative factors that inhibit answers to prayers: | | | | | | |
| Counseling the Lord | Innocently ask for inappropriate solutions | Acting on poor counsel | Overzealous in doing in own way | Resists new, insisting on "old" | Petitions for mercy when justice is most needed | Makes poor decision, requests the Lord's before seeking help confirmation |
| Ask for What Ought Not | Innocently ask for things that can be harmful | Acting on poor counsel | Seeks to move too fast--force solutions | Seek more rules and guidelines than needed | Helps others in ways that increases dependency | Makes poor decision, requests the Lord's help before seeking confirmation |

CHART 4

Characteristics of Prayer from Each of the Negative Patterns of Behavior in Relation to Scriptural Conditions Set for Praying and Receiving Answers

| Scriptural Conditions Set for Praying and Receiving Answers | Free | Conform | Resist | Value | Protect | Administer |
|--|--|---|---|------------------------------------|--|--|
| | "Brat" | "Compliant" | "Rebellious" | "Critical" | "Smother" | Manipulate |
| Study out in Mind | Little or no forethought | Others think and decide for him | Rejective hostile thoughts | It's an open and shut case | What will make me most comfortable | Scheming how to get own way |
| Ask-Pray-Knock-Seek | Demands many things | Asks as told to to | Skeptical, seeks for sign | Seeks support for own opinion | Help me shield them from life's problems so I can have peace | Seeks all things for self-interest |
| In Faith Believing You Will Receive-- With Real Intent | Hoping to Receive now all he wants | If told to believe-- | Doubting--skeptical | If you're there, do it this way | No one but me seems to care | Keep pressure on, hoping he will give in |
| Prior conditions to be met for receiving answers to prayers: | | | | | | |
| Repent--Clean and Pure from Sin--Humble | Feels no responsibility for action so can't repent | Feels not O.K. no matter what--doesn't know how to repent | Why try? I'm not O.K. anyway | They have the problem, not me | Don't worry, He loves us. He won't punish us | Failure to get my way is a sin |
| Charitable to Others | Concerns are for self-comfort | Nice to others when expected or told to | Can't trust others, so why try to help? | Ain't they awful? | Look how I have sacrificed for others | Not thinking about others' needs |
| Negative factors that inhibit answers to prayers: | | | | | | |
| Counseling the Lord | Specifying the answers | Ask for what others expect you to | Regularly in rebellious tones | Look how bad they are--punish them | Save them from opposition and struggle | Sets conditions and specifies answers |
| Ask for What Ought Not | Demand immediate response | Do it for me | Ask for proof, evidence with no effort on my part | Destroy them for their mistakes | Help us avoid consequences | Give me this or that so I can be happy |