

## As You Wish Discover the Only Prayer You'll Ever Need

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by John Ortberg Issue #149 September/October 2005

On the bookshelf of my daughter Mallory's bedroom sits a volume called *The Princess Bride*. It was the basis of a quirky little movie that my family has seen more times than I can count. The book comes from the pen of William Goldman, though he pretends he just translated it from a Florinese manuscript by an S. Morgenstern that set records for the most weeks on a Florinese best-seller list. It took a long time to convince my daughter that there was no S. Morgenstern, no Florinese language, and, sadly, no country named Florin.

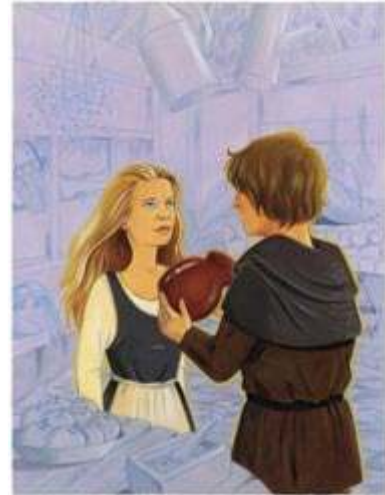


Illustration by Michelle Chang

### *The Greatest Prayer*

There is one line that lies at the heart of the book's story—and at the heart of your story as well. It is spoken when the story begins and when it ends. It is a kind of prayer. In fact, it is the greatest prayer Jesus Himself ever prayed. If we were ever able to pray it truly and continually, it is the only prayer you and I would ever need. My friend Gary Moon tells it this way:

As the movie opens, we see the heroine going about chores on a farm. Her name is Buttercup. (I know, but I still like the movie.) Soon we meet a young man who works on the farm and answers to the name Farm Boy.

Whenever Buttercup asks Farm Boy to do something for her, he always replies, "As you wish." That's all he ever says to her.

As they grow into their hormones, Buttercup seems to be developing a crush on Farm Boy. One day as he is about to leave the room, she asks him to fetch her a pitcher, which is within easy reach for her. Farm Boy walks over, then stares into her eyes, lifts the pitcher, and whispers: "As you wish." In that moment, returning his gaze, Buttercup realizes that every time he has said, "As you wish," he was really saying, "I love you."

For many centuries, those wisest among us about the spiritual life have insisted that this one line is the door that opens the heart to the presence of God. There is no greater expression of love than a freely submitted will. *As you wish.*

Jean Pierre de Caussade writes,

Every moment, and in respect of everything, we must say like St. Paul, 'Lord, what should I do?' Let me do everything you wish.

Jesus said,

As the Father has loved Me, I have also loved you...If you keep My commandments, you will abide in My love, just as I have kept My Father's commandments and abide in His love.

—Jn. 15:9-10, *NASB*

Brother Lawrence writes, "Let us often remember, dear friend, that our sole occupation in life is to please God."

"At the heart of communion with God," Gary Moon tells us, "is the whisper, 'As you wish.'"

There are moments when I remember to pray that prayer. They are not usually dramatic. The tax man emails us with the good news that Uncle Sam is sending back some of our money, and it occurs to me that I could be generous with it. I'm sitting in a meeting at work, and the thought strikes my mind that I could be quiet for a few minutes and look for someone else's idea to cheer on. I've been traveling for a week, and I'm in a strange airport and feeling lonely; I get a sudden impulse to open the Bible and ask God to meet with me there. And He does.

There are other times when it doesn't even enter my mind to say, "As you wish." I'm not necessarily being defiant, just oblivious. There are times when I'm not sure what God wishes me to do, and I just have to muddle through on my own. And there are times when I simply don't want to pray it—when I choose not to pray it.

C. S. Lewis wrote that the day is coming when every soul will adopt one of two postures before God: either joyful surrender or defiant separation. One day every being will say either "Thy will be done," or "My will be done." And the reality is that—at least to some small degree—our hearts are always assuming one or the other of these postures. From one moment to the next we make choices: What will I do next? How will I treat this person? What will I do with this money? Where will I allow this temptation to lead me?

The heart that learns to say, "As you wish," from one moment to the next opens itself to the Power of the Universe. It does not matter whether our task is great or small or whether we are famous or obscure. Anne Lamott has a wonderful thought: "The Gulf Stream can pass through a straw, if the straw aligns itself with the Gulf Stream."

### Conductors and Resistors

An analogy from the field of electricity can help us think about our response to God. The difference between a conductor and a resistor can be put like this: A conductor is willing to let go. Floating around the periphery of its atoms are electrons that can quite easily pass from one atom to another. They are more or less free agents. So a conductor has what we might call a generosity of spirit when it comes to electrons. In previous times writers used to speak of this as a sense of detachment. Ignatius of Loyola said we are to cultivate a sense of indifference. The idea is not that we should be apathetic about all our

circumstances. Instead, it is that our deepest desire is for God and His kind of life, and every other desire has to take a backseat to this one absolute quest.

A resistor, by contrast, does not want to let go. It hangs onto its little electrons. It clings to the status quo. It is afraid to let go because it wants to keep its little possessions intact. And so it does. But the resistor never knows much power.

The secret of the conductor is that it is not generating its own power. The conductor is not particularly strong or clever; it is simply a conduit. It is open and receptive to the flow of current that can change the world from darkness to light.

The resistor prays, “Leave me alone.”

The conductor prays, “As you wish.”

Each prayer gets answered.

We live in a spiritually charged universe. The flow of the Holy Spirit is all around us. We did not invent it, but it has now become fully available. Jesus once said, “Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, streams of living water will flow from within him” ([Jn. 7:38](#)). John’s gospel explains that Jesus was talking about the Spirit.

We do not have much power in our wills, but we can choose whether we will be resistors or conductors. And our prayer will be answered.

It is striking how often resistors and conductors get paired up in Scripture. Often the people with the greatest outward power are the ones who resist, and those who look less significant end up being the conduits. Pharaoh was a resistor: God’s power could have flowed through him, but he said no. Moses was a conductor: He had many inadequacies and shortcomings, but from the burning bush to his final moments on Mount Pisgah, where he looked out over the Promised Land, he learned to say, “As you wish.”

King Saul was an impressive man, head and shoulders above the crowd, but he shut his heart from the flow. David was very human, embarrassingly fallible, but the flow of the Spirit through him was at times incandescent. Haman had the power, humanly speaking, but his hostile heart was a circuit breaker. Esther—a woman regarded as just a pretty ornament by the king and those in power—was a bolt of lightning.

Herod was called “the Great,” but he held tight to his throne and resisted the Messiah. John the Baptist was a hermit in the desert, but in his self-abandonment (“I must decrease”) a power flowed that even his beheading could not stem.

The ultimate conductor, of course, was Jesus Himself. Frank Laubach notes that 47 times in the Gospel of John alone Jesus said He was “under God’s orders” and that He did and said everything His Father commanded. “He was listening every moment of the day to His invisible companion and saying, ‘Yes.’”

## The Glowing Pickle

I did an electrical experiment in church one time. I brought in a scientist with a Ph.D. so that if someone got electrocuted, it wouldn't be me. We turned off all the lights, hooked up an ordinary pickle to some wires, and then passed an electrical current through it. The pickle glowed. It gave light to a room with thousands of people. It was not a huge amount of light—not enough to read by. But there was light.

Many people believe that the flow of the Holy Spirit is reserved for spiritual giants like Mother Teresa or Billy Graham. But throughout history God has caused His power to flow through the most unlikely people: a prostitute named Rahab, a con man named Jacob, a cheat named Zacchaeus.

This was the miracle of the early church. As the believers met for prayer, “the place where they were meeting was shaken. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit” ([Acts 4:31](#)), because the ordinary becomes extraordinary when filled with the power of God.

So the next time you feel inadequate or not very gifted, remember that even a pickle can glow if it stays plugged in to the flow. Remember: “The Gulf Stream can pass through a straw, if the straw aligns itself with the Gulf Stream.”

It is God's job to send the flow of the Spirit into our lives. When we have thoughts that prompt us toward the fruit of the Spirit—promptings to express love to someone, celebrations of inner joy, the conviction that we are at peace—these are all surges of the Spirit's current. My job is simply to offer the surrender of a conductor: *As you wish*.

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### About the author:

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