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EFFECTUAL PRAYER



by

Rev. THOMAS E. STEELE

as featured over

THE BIBLE INSTITUTE HOUR
Los Angeles 17, Calif.

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What Prayer Is

Today we begin a series of messages about prayer. Poets and song writers have written endless verse on the subject but we want to examine what the Bible, our only acceptable source, indicates that prayer is. We must come to the Scriptures to find our authority in spiritual matters, for God has spoken in His Word. If we are to come to any correct conclusions at all on the subject of prayer, we must of necessity turn directly to the Word of God. For purposes of this study, we are not primarily interested in what men say prayer is. We are interested in what the Word of God actually teaches about prayer, and it has much to say on this wonderful and challenging theme.

Let us begin with a Biblical definition of prayer. We find no actual statement defining prayer in the Word of God; therefore we must define it by what we sometimes call the process of delimitation, objectively considering examples of prayer; exhortations to prayer; instructions about prayer in the Word of God; and the experiences of men of prayer recorded therein.

First, may I call to your attention this morning the fact that prayer is or can be said to be an act of humbling ourselves in the presence of God. In Second Chronicles 7:14 we read: "If my people which are called by my name, shall humble themselves, and pray, and seek my face, and turn from their wicked ways; then will I hear from Heaven, and will forgive their sin, and will heal their land." Here God lays down a condition for successful communication with Himself, humility of spirit. In the 3rd chapter of the book of Ephesians the 14th verse the Apostle Paul says: "For this cause I bow my knees to the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ." The context indicates that the Apostle Paul is speaking figuratively when he makes this statement, "I bow my knees." I believe he was expressing an attitude of heart on the part of the individual. This speaks to us of humility, does it not? In Second Chronicles 33:12-13a we read: "And when he (Manasseh) was in affliction he besought the Lord his God, and humbled himself greatly before the God of his fathers, and prayed unto Him." That prayer is in a very real sense an act of humbling oneself in the spirit of supplication before Almighty God.

Secondly, I would like to call your attention to the fact that prayer is an *expectant looking to God*. In Psalm 5:3, we have a beautiful picture of the Psalmist as he prays. We read his words: "In the morning will I direct my prayer to Thee and will look up." The Lord speaks to us here of open-heartedness and open-minded-

ness before God. Putting everything else out of our mind and expectantly looking into the face of God, in faith we open our hearts and minds to Him.

Thirdly, note that prayer is communicating with God. It is a communion of hearts, as in Psalm 62:8 the Psalmist says: "Pour out your hearts before Him." It is also communication of soul. We read in First Samuel 1:15 Hannah's words: "I have poured out my soul before the Lord."

Prayer then, is an act of humility; it is an act of expectantly looking to God and it is the process of communication that is carried on between the heart of the individual and the heart of God.

In the fourth place, prayer is calling upon the Lord. In Psalm 116:4 it is stated: "Then called I upon the name of the Lord; O Lord, I beseech thee, deliver my soul." Again and again in the Word of God we read of those who called upon the name of the Lord, the God of their fathers. Prayer is crying out to God and pouring out our petitions, our worship, our confession, our thanksgiving, our intercession to Him.

In the fifth place, prayer may also be said to be the act of drawing near to God. The writer of the book of Hebrews gives very striking truth in this regard. We are instructed in Hebrews 10:22 to: "Draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water . . ." Prayer is an act of drawing near to God because of the relationship which already exists between the Lord and oneself as a forgiven sinner, a child of God, by faith in Christ.

Preparing for Prayer

We continue our thinking on the subject of prayer with a message today entitled "Preparing for Prayer." Please turn in your Bibles to the eleventh chapter of Job, verses 13 through 15. In this great portion of the Word of God we read: "If thou prepare thine heart, and stretch out thine hands toward him; If iniquity be in thine hand, put it far away, and let not wickedness dwell in thy tabernacles. For then shalt thou lift up thy face without spot; yea, thou shalt be stedfast, and shall not fear."

We are told in this portion of scripture to prepare our hearts before we pray. We also read: "Man looketh upon the outward appearance, but the LORD LOOKETH ON THE HEART." (I Sam. 16:7) God is a reader, a discerner of hearts. The Holy Spirit through the Word of God is the "discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart." It was said of Jesus during His earthly ministry "and needed not that any should testify of man; for he knew what was in man," (John 2:25) God knows the condition of our hearts, our desires, our motives, our ambitions and our objectives. Success in prayer largely depends upon the spiritual condition of our hearts before God. Indeed, the Christian's most dreadful and deadly disease could well be diagnosed as spiritual heart trouble. Is it any wonder that the Divine Author of the Scripture asks this pertinent question on another occasion, "Is thy heart right with God?" Success in prayer is vitally concerned with the nature of our answer to this most important question. In our text, Job is instructed to prepare his heart for prayer. We shall endeavor to answer the question: "How do we prepare our hearts for successful prayer?"

The Bible has a great deal to say on this important theme. In Psalm 66, verses 18-20, we find the first step to be considered: "If I regard iniquity in my heart, the Lord will not hear me: But verily God hath heard me; he hath attended to the voice of my prayer. Blessed be God, which hath not turned away my prayer, nor his mercy from me."

The Psalmist implies that because God has answered his prayer, there is no iniquity in his heart, for had there been, God would not have attended unto the voice of his prayer. He suggests here that the spiritual condition of an individual's heart has a direct effect upon the success or failure of his prayer life.

The first step in the preparation of the Christian's heart for prayer is a SINCERE CONFESSION OF SIN. Mere lip service will

not suffice, according to Psalm 17:1: "Hear the right, O Lord, attend unto my cry, give ear unto my prayer, that goeth not out of feigned lips." God does not acknowledge confession of sin that is simply lip expression. On the other hand, He will acknowledge a sincere expression of the heart that may never reach the lips.

God knows your heart and mine. If we are genuinely repentant of the sin which has been committed; if there has been genuine heart confession of that sin, because God is faithful and just, there is restoration; there is forgiveness; there is justification. But God will not hear the prayer of a Christian who knowingly and willfully refuses to confess and forsake known sin in his life. God cannot bless such a Christian in the way that He desires to. Since prayer is a privilege, available only to those who have received Jesus Christ as Saviour, answered prayer itself becomes an evidence of our salvation.

There is pictured in Matthew 7:21-23 a very sad company of people crying out that they had prophesied in the name of Christ, that they had cast our demons and had accomplished many wonderful works in His name. How sad were the words of Christ on this occasion as He says: "I never knew you . . . depart from me." Christ defines for us the acid test of the genuineness of our salvation in Matthew 7:21: "Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but HE THAT DOETH the will of my Father which is in heaven."

My friend, a genuine, individual, personal salvation is based upon the surrender of one's will to Almighty God. Acknowledging the guilt, the penalty, the power, the curse, and the consequences of your sin you ask the Lord Jesus Christ to save you. Perhaps your prayers are not answered because you are not really saved. Perhaps you have been depending upon church association, baptism or good works to be saved. God's Word says: "not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to His mercy he saved us, by the washing of regeneration, and the renewing of the Holy Ghost" (Titus 3:5)

It may be that God does not seem to answer your prayers, even though you are a Christian and an heir to the promises of the Word of God concerning prayer, because there is unconfessed sin in your life. The Word of God teaches that we experience success in our prayer life in direct proportion to the manner in which we fulfill the requirements of the Word of God. One of these requirements is a clean life resulting from a pure heart.

Secondly, we must prepare our hearts before God for prayer by forgiveness of others. In Matthew 6:12, Jesus teaches His disciples to pray, "And forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors." This matter of forgiveness of others is a measure of success in

prayer, a command, the fulfillment of which is necessary to answered prayer. In Mark 11:25 we read: "And when ye stand praying, forgive, if ye have ought against any: that your Father also which is in heaven may forgive your trespasses." Such forgiveness is to be unlimited in extent. Peter, on one occasion asked the Lord, how oft shall my brother sin against me and I forgive him?" (Matt. 18:22) Christ's classic answer to this very human question establishes the limit of our forgiveness: "Until seventy times seven." Elsewhere in the Word of God we are told to be "Tenderhearted, forgiving one another even as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven you." (Eph. 4:32) If we are to experience answers to prayer, we cannot harbor bitterness, animosity or malice in our hearts toward another, whatever the cause. We must forgive that individual before we can effectively pray.

A third step in the preparation of the Christian's heart for effective prayer is holiness of life. Hebrews chapter 12:24 instructs us to "Follow holiness without which no man shall see the Lord." As Christians, we are expected to continue in holiness of life by the power of the indwelling Holy Spirit of God. We are to become progressively more godly in the life that we live before God and man. In the first epistle of First John, chapter 2:1, John writes to believers: "My little children, these things write I unto you, that ye sin not." How wonderful it is that the Holy Spirit here reveals the blessed provision that has been made for us as believers when we do sin. The passage continues: "And if any man sin we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous." James, after denouncing sin in the life of the believer, thunders: "Cleanse your hands, ye sinners; and purify your hearts, ye double minded." (James 4:8) We have been speaking of preparing our hearts for prayer in order that God may bless us in the exercise of this high and sacred privilege reserved peculiarly for those who have claimed Him as Saviour and Lord. Christian friend, I ask you, is God answering prayer in your life? If not, I suggest that you examine the condition of your heart. Is there unconfessed sin, or bitterness, jealousy, rancor, malice toward another? I urge you today, confess it—forsake it—say with David, "Create in me a clean heart, O God: and renew a right spirit within me." And again: "Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean: wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow." (Psalm 51:10, 7)

In one of his great messages D. L. Moody said: "Some years ago, a remarkable picture was exhibited in London. As you looked at it from a distance you seemed to see a monk engaged in prayer, his hands clasped, his head bowed. As you came more closely, you saw that in reality he was squeezing a lemon into a punch bowl. What a picture of the human heart that is. Superficially examined, it is thought to be the seat of all that is good and noble and

pleasing in man; whereas, in reality, until regenerated by the Holy Spirit, it is the seat of all corruption. "And this is the condemnation, that light is come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light."

How true it is that "The heart is deceitful above all things and desperately wicked." Is it any wonder that the inspired writer asks the pertinent question, "Who can know it?"

My friends, this is one of the fundamental reasons why God cannot answer the prayer of an unsaved individual. Apart from the cleansing that comes through faith in Jesus Christ as Saviour, the heart is a cesspool of iniquity, totally incapable of pleasing God, and alienated from fellowship with Him.

Intercessory Prayer

Today we want to consider some of the things *for which* we are to pray. Let us think together for a few moments about intercessory prayer. We've mentioned it before, but I think in view of the text which is before us today, we must say a few more words about this very important theme. Paul, in I Timothy 2:1-4, says, "I exhort therefore, that, first of all, supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks, be made for all men; For kings, and for all that are in authority; that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and honesty. For this is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Saviour; Who will have all men to be saved, and to come unto the knowledge of the truth." The word, intercession, actually means intervention. Intercessory prayer then would be praying on behalf of another. We do not intercede for ourselves, Christ is our intercessor. The Holy Spirit is our intercessor in prayer, but we are called upon to pray on behalf of others, carrying their spiritual and physical needs to God. Too many people never learn the blessings, and the joy that comes from intercessory prayer.

Now in order to be genuine in our intercessory prayer we must pray first of all out of a deep concern for the person for whom we are praying. This can come only from a closeness to Jesus Christ, a submission to the Holy Spirit, a constant attentiveness to His leading and true Christian love for one another. Let us think together, then about that for which we are to pray.

In the second chapter of I Timothy 2:2 we are told that we are to pray for kings and for all that are in authority. Specifically we are to pray that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and honesty. Certainly this is needed today as never before. We need to uphold the leaders of our government. We need to uphold the needs of those who are in a policy-making position; who determine the course of our nation. Especially, do we need to remember the spiritual needs of those in authority over us that they may be attuned to the will and purposes of God.

Then we're told that we are to pray for those who are in places of *spiritual* leadership. In II Corinthians chapter 1 and verse 11, the Apostle Paul commends the Corinthian believers for being helpers together by prayer. In Philippians the first chapter and the 19th verse, the Apostle Paul says, "For I know that this shall turn to my salvation through your prayer, and the supply of the Spirit of Jesus Christ." Missionaries on these very broadcasts have expressed the utter necessity of men and women at home praying

for missionaries on the mission fields. How many are the true stories we have heard of incidents where specific prayer on the part of an individual at home was answered in a miraculous way on the field to meet a dire and direct need that had arisen.

God would have us to be faithful in praying for those who have spiritual oversight over us. If there is something that you do not like about your Pastor or other spiritual leaders, then you are to pray about it. Rather than criticize that individual, rather than talk to others about it, make it a matter of sincere earnest personal and private prayer until that thing is settled. If you fail to pray, you are being disobedient.

Then we are told in Ephesians, chapter 6 and verse 18 that we are to pray "for all the saints." Those of you who are familiar with the context of this sixth chapter of Ephesians, realize that Paul has been speaking here about the military conquest of Christ's army against spiritual foes; the militant nature of the Christian's individual testimony. Prayer is to be made for all Christians and among other things, we are to pray that our Christian friends may have victory in their lives. We need to pray for other Christians that they might overcome as Revelation, chapter 12 and verse 11 suggests to us by the blood of the Lamb. We are told again to pray for all men everywhere. Our first prayer for all men of necessity is a prayer for their salvation. Just as Paul prayed earnestly and with tears for his countrymen that they might be saved, you and I are to pray for others that they might be saved from the curse and consequence of sin.

We're to pray for specific groups or individuals. We're to pray for servants. In Luke chapter 7 and verses 2 and 3 we see the centurion as he prays for his servant. Those who work for us in a business capacity are to be remembered in our prayers. What a dynamic effect such a practice would make in some business firms or in labor management relationships. We're to pray for our children. In the 15th chapter of Matthew and the 22nd verse, the Syrophenician woman is praying for her daughter. In our family altar, we ought to pray for them by name and pray about their specific needs to our heavenly Father. Then we're to pray for our friends. The 42nd chapter of Job verses 8 and 10 tell us that Job prayed for his friends even after the terrible accusations that they had hurled against him. We're to pray for our fellow citizens. In Romans chapter 10 and verse 1, Paul prays for the nation Israel and their salvation. If you love America, then you ought to pray for America. We ought to remember the compassion with which Christ prayed for Jerusalem as he looked over that city. We're told that he wept because of their unbelief. We're to pray for our persecutors. In Matthew chapter 5 and verse 44, Jesus said: If someone mistreats you, pray for him. Then in Jeremiah chapter 29 and verse 7 we are told in principle that we are even to pray

for our enemies. Israel was instructed to pray for her captors.

We are to pray for the sick. The Christian who is ill is spoken of in James chapter 5 and verses 14 to 16 as calling together spiritual leaders of the Church who are to pray for that individual. God heals today many times in response to the effectual, fervent prayer of faith. For Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever. Indeed, intercession is to be a major factor in our prayers. We've mentioned but a few of the things for which we are to pray. The Scripture has much more to say.

We read that the New Testament Church continued steadfastly in prayers. Oh, that we might be steadfast in praying one for another. How many heartaches it would save. Unfortunately, we're quick to condemn when someone falls into sin but perhaps if we'd been faithful intercessors, that individual would have had more strength in temptation and would have been spared. We bemoan the lack of revival results in preaching but perhaps it is because we have failed to intercede for those who are ministering the Word of God. We weep over loved ones because they're not saved but are we faithful in praying for them often and witnessing to them? Paul said, "I exhort therefore, that, first of all, supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks, be made for all men."

The Mechanics of Effectual Prayer

On our last broadcast we spoke briefly about What and for Whom we are to pray. Today we want to consider further some of the mechanics of prayer. If you have your Bibles handy turn with me first to John 14:13 & 14: "And whatsoever ye shall ask in my name, that will I do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son. If ye shall ask any thing in my name, I will do it."

Again in John 15:16 we read, ". . . that whatsoever ye shall ask of the Father in my name, he may give it you." Then in John chapter 16 and verse 23 we read, ". . . Verily, verily, I ask the Father in my name, he will give it you."

The question is often asked, "To whom should we address our prayers." Some say that all our prayers should be addressed to the Holy Spirit. I do not find any specific order of address for our prayers in the Word of God that is given to the exclusion of other possibilities. However, one thing is very certain and that is that when we come to God in prayer we must come "in the name of Jesus Christ." This prerequisite for successful prayer is repeated on several occasions throughout the New Testament. Now it does not mean that we must of necessity verbalize the words "in the name of Jesus Christ . . ." The truth that is here emphasized is that we come in the office, on the merit, on the basis of our relationship to the Father. We come because we have been commended to the Father and represented before Him by the Lord Jesus Christ. It is on this basis that our request is granted . . . "that the Father may be glorified in the Son." This is a truth that could not possibly be over emphasized . . . there is no standing before God, no ground of prayer or fellowship with Him apart from the saving work of Jesus Christ in an individual's life.

When the believer in Christ prays, the Scripture stipulates that he is to pray according to the will of God, and that prayer will be answered upon the basis of the program and the purpose of God for the individual's life. We are to pray that the Father might be glorified. Then again we read in First John chapter 5 and verse 14 "And this is the confidence that we have in him, that, if we ask anything according to his will, he heareth us." Nothing could be more clear than the truth that God has a plan, He has a purpose and a program for each individual's life. Every phase of our experience, everything that comes into our life is designed to work

in accordance with that plan. That is why the Apostle Paul could confidently promise the Roman Christians "We know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called *according to his purpose.*" Now, some say, how can I know that I am praying according to the will of God? First let me say that it is not necessary to know that we are praying according to the Will of God. It is important only for God to know whether we are praying according to His will. The primary thing is that we are willing to accept the perfect will of God not knowing what it might be. So then we pray with subjection, with yieldedness, with submission to Him even as Christ did when He said, "Nevertheless, not my will but thine be done." Secondly, it is true that in many cases God has already revealed his will for our lives in His Word so that when we pray according to the Word of God, we are praying according to the will of God. If a thing is contrary to the Word of God, certainly we ought not to pray for that thing. Again the believer is thrown back upon a vital, constant and expanding relationship to the written Word of God.

The Bible has much to say about prayer and of primary importance is the emphasis that is laid on private, personal prayer. Jesus told his disciples not to be as the hypocrites were in their prayers; those individuals who in that day made such a pretence of prayer. In contrast to this Jesus instructs us to "enter into thy closet, and when thou hast shut thy door, pray to thy Father which is in secret; and thy Father which seeth in secret shall reward thee openly." Dawson Trotman used to say in his characteristic piercing and challenging manner, "Long Prayers in public, mean short prayers in private." Need we to be reminded that "God looketh upon the heart." We may deceive our friends, we may deceive our Pastor, or even our family into thinking that we are men and women of prayer, but God "who seeth in secret," evaluates us for our efforts in prayer from his knowledge and understanding of our hearts.

But while private prayer is of extreme importance and is the basis of all prayer, public, collective prayer is also given a place of importance in the Word of God. We find it exemplified throughout the entire Bible. Great leaders of the Old Testament such as: Abraham, Moses, David, Solomon, and Daniel are spoken of as engaging in public prayer. David, Solomon and other godly kings of the Old Testament led their people in public prayer meetings and seasons of spiritual refreshing followed.

In the New Testament we see the infant Church gathered together for prayer on numerous occasions and we find that in response to those prayer meetings great things were accomplished; buildings were shaken, prisoners released, earthquakes resulted, and empires were changed. I wonder, friends, if we do not need

some of these "old fashioned" prayer meetings in these perilous and trying times. What a change it would make in our 20th century churches if it could be said as it was of the New Testament Church, "... Prayer was made without ceasing of the church unto God for him." (Acts 12:5) And yet we cannot escape the question that is on hearts this morning. Why is it that the prayer meeting attendance at our fundamental evangelical churches is so pitifully and woefully small? In the answer to this question is the reason for the seeming powerlessness and sterility of many of our churches today.

We would be amiss today if we did not mention that to fail to pray is to sin. Prayer is a specific command and instruction from God Himself, while it is indeed a privilege and a wonderful heritage, it is nevertheless a command. For instance in James 5:16 we read, "... Pray one for another ..." In Matthew 5:44, "Pray for those which despitefully use you." In Luke 18:1, "Men ought always to pray and not to faint." and in 1 Thessalonians 5:17, "Pray without ceasing." As disciples of Jesus Christ we ought to keep the commands of His Word. Jesus said, "He that hath my commandments and keepeth them, he it is that loveth me; if a man love me he will keep my words." (John 14:21-24) Do you love Him today? If you do your prayer life will be in direct proportion to the measure of your love for the Lord Jesus Christ. I am afraid this leaves many of us woefully lacking in our love for the Lord Jesus Christ.

But while prayer is commanded, it is also the natural expectation of a heart that is in tune with Christ. Jesus assumes that we pray when in Matthew 6:5-7 he says, "When ye pray enter into your closet ..." If you are a child of God he expects you to pray, and if you truly love Him you will want to share this blessed communion and fellowship with Him.

Finally, the Word of God makes prayer an absolutely essential element in victorious Christian living. In Ephesians chapter 6 and verse 18, "Praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, and watching thereunto with all perseverance and supplication for all saints." There is no victory in the Christian's life where prayer is not exercised. There is a greater measure of victory where there is a greater measure of prayer. If your Christian life is one of constant defeat, perhaps it is because you have failed to pray as you ought. Why not ask God to search your heart right now. Confess the sin of prayerlessness to Him and ask Him to restore you to perfect fellowship with Him. It is on the basis of Grace and the bestowments of God's love.

Accompaniments to Prayer

This morning, I want you to think briefly with me about some things that accompany prayer, some things that are attendant upon effectual, fervent, prevailing prayer to an all powerful God.

Solomon in his great prayer of dedication after the completion of the Temple, standing before that great throng of people said "... "When thy people Israel be smitten down before the enemy because they have sinned against thee, and shall turn again unto thee, and confess Thy name, and pray, and make supplication unto thee in this house, then hear thou in heaven and forgive the sin of thy people Israel." Here he calls our attention to the fact that there are times when repentance is attendant to prayer. After declension from God, after disobedience, backsliding failure, coldness on the part of his people God says there must be *repentance*. Unfortunately this has become almost a forgotten truth in many churches today. Repentance is a God-inspired sorrow for sin, an acknowledgment of one's sins and a turning from it in utter repulsion. Many of our lives become like an unkept backyard in Spring with weeds of habit, immorality, evil thinking, bitterness, jealousy, and prayerlessness, choking out what spirituality remains.

Confession is another accompaniment to prevailing prayer that is often seen on the pages of God's Word. In the first chapter of Nehemiah God gives us the picture of the dejected prophet as he hears of the judgment of God upon his people in captivity. As a result of this word, Nehemiah confesses the sins of the people. In Proverbs 28 and verse 13 we read, "He that covereth his sins shall not prosper: but whoso confesseth and forsaketh them shall have mercy." And again in I John 1:9, "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness." Many times it is in periods of earnest prayer that the Holy Spirit makes very real to us the nature of our sins and we are brought to a place of genuine and fruitful confession.

Our study of the Word also reveals that many times effectual prayer is accompanied by a spirit of watchfulness. Jesus told his disciples to "watch therefore and pray ..." There is to be a watchfulness in regard to the Lord's return on the part of those who look for his appearing. There is to be a watchfulness against sin and its allurements in the life of the believer and a sober watchfulness against the constant onslaughts and attacks of Satan. Prayer attunes the individual's heart and being by a sensitivity to God's presence and reality. The Apostle Peter further reminds us,

“Be ye therefore sober and *watch unto prayer.*” (I Pet. 4:7) I fear that too many of us would come under the stinging condemnation in the words of Christ to His disciples on the very evening of His departure, when after leaving them to watch and pray He returned to find them sleeping. Jesus asked the question . . . “Could ye not watch with me one hour . . .” O my fellow Christian, Christ has given you specific instructions and commands regarding prayer. What would your answer be to that question today? Could ye not watch with me?

May I suggest to you that prayer is also accompanied by Joy. Jesus said, “Ask and ye shall receive that your joy might be full.” Fullness of joy in the Christian life is also dependent upon our prayer life, asking and receiving from God. If our prayer life is ineffective, unproductive, the joy that we experience as a Christian is going to be limited. We’re living in days of shaking foundations and changing situations rightly described in the Word of God as perilous times. Certainly there is little in this world, in our circumstances and environments which can give us true and lasting joy. How wonderful it is for a Christian to draw from the wells of God that blessed joy that comes from a successful prayer life.

We find also that prayer is sometimes accompanied with fasting. In the Word of God fasting is usually indicative of self-chastening or humility. The Psalmist says in Psalms 69:10, “When I wept, and chastened my soul with fasting . . .” And again in the 35th Psalm and the 13th verse, “. . . I humbled my soul with fasting.” Fasting in the Old Testament was usually observed on occasions of judgment from God (Joel 1:14, 2:2); in times of great calamity (II Sam. 1:12; and affliction (II Sam. 12:16). Times of approaching danger were also sometimes prepared for by seasons of fasting (Esther 4:16). Fasting appears to have been a peculiarly Jewish thing, but was exercised also on rare occasions by the New Testament church. However, it does not appear as a teaching in the New Testament and apparently was not practiced in later years of early Church history. The purpose of fasting in the New Testament seems to have been as a means of helping the individual to subjugate the physical to the spiritual and achieve greater consecration and intensity in prayer.

Prayer is also to be accompanied at times with praise and thanksgiving. Paul tells us in Col. 4:2 to “Continue in prayer and watch in the same with thanksgiving.” The Psalmist says, “I will bless the Lord at all times: His praise shall continually be in my mouth.” Again the Psalmist says, “Let everything that hath breath praise the Lord. Praise ye the Lord.” Much of our praying is unbalanced with the major portion of our time taken up with petition and intercession. The Psalmist had a God-given vocabulary for Praise.

I fear that many of us do not really know how to praise the Lord. One needs but to read the Psalms to realize the importance of Praise, as the Psalmist praises God over and over for His mercy, His goodness to the children of men, His works, His care for His own and His person. I wonder if we would not have more success in our prayers many times if we would take more time to really praise the Lord.

Finally, one cannot spend time before God in prayer without coming away from the place of prayer with a new realization of his own insignificance and sinfulness. Abraham after a time of seeking the Lord on behalf of Lot was moved to say . . . “I am but dust and ashes.” Isaiah when he saw the Lord in a prayer-vision was moved to say, “Woe is me for I am undone.” One needs but to draw nigh to God in the sacred communion of prayer, to see himself as God sees Him, in order to realize that he is a guilty, helpless, vile and undone sinner apart from the Grace of God in Christ Jesus. Paul even after he became a Christian and had served the Lord cried out, “O wretched man that I am, who shall deliver me from the body of this death.” But you and I like Paul, after realizing the pit from which we have seen digged as it were can say with a triumphant note . . . “I thank God through Jesus Christ my Lord.”

Prayer--A Cure for Anxiety

On our last broadcast we spoke briefly on the subject, praying ceaselessly, from 1st Thessalonians chapter 5, verse 17, where we are commanded to "pray without ceasing." Let us continue our thinking together on this great theme of prayer today by turning our thoughts to another passage of Scripture found in Philippians chapter 4 and verse 6: "Be careful for nothing; but in every thing by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God." The seventh verse is the natural sequel to the sixth verse: "And the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus." We find in this passage of Scripture what may well be termed God's cure for anxiety and worry. It is inseparably linked with the meaning and the practice of prayer. The apostle says: "Be anxious for nothing." On the surface this would seem like an unusual and an unreasonable demand. "Do not worry about anything." "Do not be concerned or wrought up about anything." It would seem unreasonable were it not for the remainder of the verse, for the Apostle Paul offers a substitute or an alternative to worry and anxiety when he says: ". . . in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God." We are told to pray about everything. May I suggest that when we are tempted to be anxious or to worry that we follow the instructions given us in Isaiah chapter 26 and verse 3 where we read: "Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace, whose mind is stayed on thee . . ." In the seventh verse of Philippians 4, we are told that the peace of God shall keep our hearts and minds. Literally "shall *guard* your hearts and minds by Christ Jesus." When our hearts and minds are guarded with the arsenal of prayer, then we are kept in perfect peace, and we have no room in our thinking for worry and anxiety. This thought is expanded somewhat by our Lord in Matthew chapter 6 and verses 25 to 34. Here we have this very thrilling and beautiful literary discourse—"Therefore I say unto you, Take no thought for your life, what ye shall put on. Is not the life more than meat, and the body than raiment? Behold the fowls of the air: for they sow not, neither do they reap, nor gather into barns; yet your heavenly Father feedeth them. Are ye not much better than they? Which of you by taking thought can add one cubit unto his stature? And why take ye thought for raiment? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they toil not, neither do they spin: And yet I say unto you, That even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. Wherefore, if God so clothe the grass of the field, which

to day is and to morrow is cast into the oven, shall he not much more clothe you, O ye of little faith? Therefore take no thought, saying, What shall we eat? or, What shall we drink? or, Where-withal shall we be clothed? (For after all these things do the Gentiles seek:) for your heavenly Father knoweth that ye have need of all these things. But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you. Take therefore no thought for the morrow: for the morrow shall take thought for the things of itself. Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof."

Our Lord would suggest to us in this very delightful portion of Scripture that when we are placing first in our thinking things that are of a spiritual nature, things that have to do with God, His love and His grace to us, then we do not have time to be worried, and disturbed over things of less importance. In verse 25 and 32 our Lord suggests that we give some thought to the manner in which God provides for nature! God in a wonderful way takes care of creatures of nature.

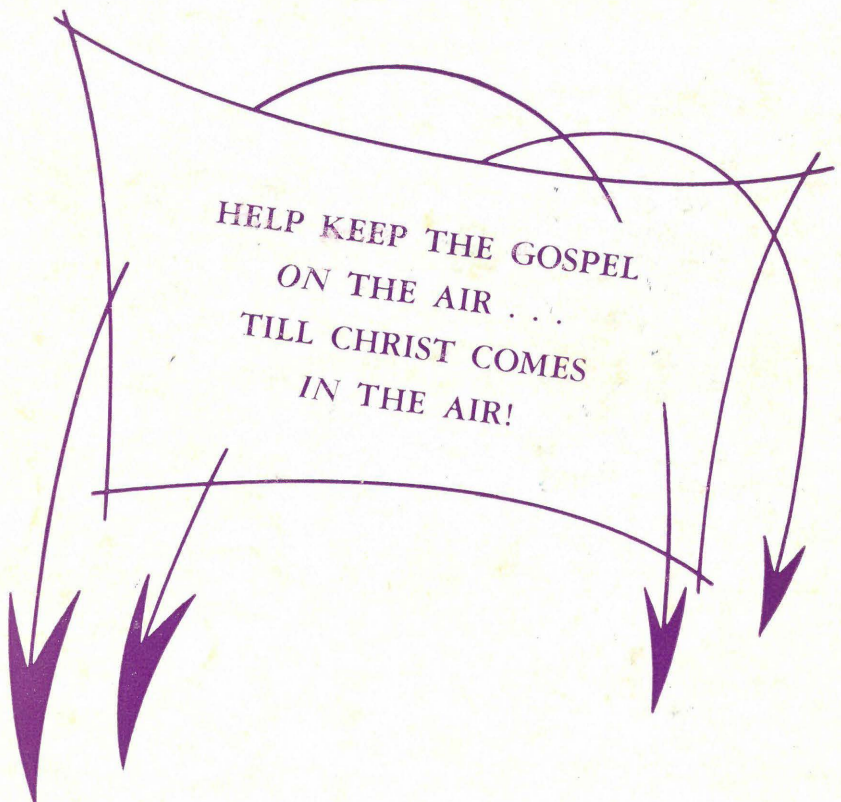
The Apostle Peter continues this thought by instructing those who know Christ as Saviour to "cast all your care upon him; for he careth for you." (I Peter 5:7) Peter pictures for us a shepherd as he takes care of the sheep. As he provides water, sufficient pasture, and protection for the sheep. Peter reminds us that Jesus Christ is the Shepherd and Bishop of our souls and we are to commit ourselves in utter resignation and trust to Him. We realize also that He is committed to His own promise to take care of us and that as the Good Shepherd, he cares for His own. Our text from Philippians also implies that nothing is too small or too great but that God is interested in it. "In everything prayer is to be made with supplication and thanksgiving." The problems that have to do with our homes, our jobs, and our churches are to be met by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving unto God. We have this divinely suggested alternative for the cankerous obstacle of worry and anxiety that creeps in upon the life of the individual who has not let God take the place of supremacy in his life. We find implied in this great passage of Scripture, the necessity of thanksgiving. We are told to make our requests known unto God, "*with Thanksgiving.*" When we bow before God to offer our petitions—when we bow before God to unload the worries and cares of the day—that we come in such a spirit of faith and expectancy that we are to be able to say, "Thank you, Lord, for the answer," even before the prayer is uttered. And how wonderful it is to know a God who is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we can ask or think. We are instructed in this very wonderful passage of Scripture to pray in everything. Nothing is too small but that God is interested in it. No problems that you may have regardless of the nature of them are too insignificant

for God to be concerned with them. He delights for you and I as children of God to come to His throne and open our hearts; to bare our minds; to speak with Him; to petition Him concerning those things. Do you know this blessed privilege of prayer? Do you know what it is to substitute prayer and supplication for anxiety and worry. If you don't, may I suggest to you that you need to come into a personal relationship with this Christ Who has said: "Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest." You say, how do you do this? How do you receive a gift? We've recently had a wonderful Christmas season when we received and gave gifts. In receiving a gift we had to do nothing but extend a hand to accept that which was placed in it. In John chapter 1 and verse 12 we read: "But as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name:" Again in Romans 6:23: ". . . the gift of God is eternal life . . ." Will you receive it by faith today?

My Christian friends have you learned to cast on Him your anxiety and care—to *trust* Him. Ask God to reveal to you in a very practical way the meaning of these wonderful Scriptures.

One of the hardest experiences in Abraham Lincoln's life was the delivery of his first inaugural address. The storms of the Civil War were about to break. One of his sons lay dead in the White House and the other nearly dead but he walked into the Senate and delivered his address with the calmness and fearlessness that was born of something external to himself. When asked how he did it he explained that morning before he walked into the packed Senate, he had taken down the Bible and even with the threat of death and in the very shadow of the precious son that was already dead, he had conducted family worship as usual. Then he had gone alone to his own room and there alone he had fallen upon his knees to plead with God that He might strengthen him for the duties of the day. There he had committed himself—his family and all his problems to the God Who sustains the universe and works on behalf of those who love Him.

"Be anxious for nothing; but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God. And the pace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus."



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