

PREVAILING PRAYER

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The Power Of Prevailing Prayer

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FOREWORD

PRAYER is as vital to the spiritual life as breathing is to the physical. We must “pray without ceasing,” just as we must breathe without ceasing. In either case death is the certain result of willful negligence or stubborn disobedience to the laws that govern our spiritual and physical beings. The penalty is not an arbitrary sentence, but rather the operation of natural law with its self-imposed judgment and punishment. The person who refuses to breathe, brings upon himself the sentence of physical death. Likewise the person who neglects or refuses to pray, cuts off the source of spiritual life and the means of maintaining it.

Prayer is the very soul of the Christian religion. Without it, profession becomes a hollow and lifeless form and religious experience a valley of dry bones. It is prayer that gives religion its vitality, and spirituality its radiant glow. There are many religious practices, but prayer is the most holy exercise of the soul. It takes the worshiper into the holy of holies of devotion, the inner sanctuary of spiritual experience. It is the secret of the beauty of holiness.

This book has been written with the hope and prayer that it will bring to the readers a quickening of spiritual life through the agency of fervent and effectual prayer; that its reading will result in an increasing experience in the kind of wrestling with God that exerts a mighty influence and prevails with God and man. As princes of the royal family of heaven we have the privilege of knowing more and more of the power of prevailing prayer.

THE AUTHOR

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The Privilege of Prayer

HE SPAKE a parable unto them to this end, that men ought always to pray, and not to faint.” Luke 18: 1. The parable was of the unjust judge who finally granted the request of the widow, not on the basis of justice, but because of her persistency. The word “parable” comes from the Latin parabola, which means a comparison or illustration. It is a thing figuratively expressed—a figure or similitude.

The purpose of this parable was to teach Christians not to lose heart in prayer and give up too soon. Faintness is a condition of weakness or weariness. It symbolizes the loss of hope and faith. It describes one who becomes discouraged and gives up. It is the opposite of hope, faith, courage, and persistency.

The widow of the parable repeatedly came and entreated the judge. She refused to take “No” for an answer because she knew that her cause was just and that it was the duty of the judge to grant her request. He doubtless treated her discourteously and did everything possible to discourage her, but to no avail. The judge is called “unjust” by way of contrast with a just God. If an unjust judge will finally render justice and grant the persistent request of a suppliant, surely “the God of Justice” will hear and answer the requests of His people when they are in harmony with His will.

This is true even “though He bear long with them” or “although He seems slow in taking action on their behalf.” (Weymouth.) To us, God sometimes seems slow in answering our prayers. What is the reason for this delay? Most answers to prayer must be delayed for the good of those who pray. Prayer does not change God, nor does it change His mind. He already knows our needs and longs to supply them. He even anticipates our needs before we pray. “It shall come to pass, that before they call, I will answer; and while they are yet speaking, I will hear.” Isaiah 65:24. Prayer changes us. It changes our attitude and our character. It prepares us to receive and appreciate what God finally gives us.

Parents ruin their children when they immediately grant every request. Such children become greedy, selfish, self-centered, proud, and unappreciative. They are often ruined for this life and for all eternity. The best children, and later the most useful and unselfish men and women, are those whose requests were often denied or at least delayed until their characters were developed. By years of self-denial and discipline in the school of experience, they learned to be unselfish and appreciative. The greatest men and women are developed in the school of hard knocks. Would our heavenly Father be less wise than earthly parents in training His children?

Even though God does hear and answer the persistent prayer of faith, Jesus ended the parable with the question, “Nevertheless when the Son of man comes, shall He find faith on the earth?” Because of delayed answers to prayer, faith sometimes wanes. Faith will be especially scarce in the last days, when it should be the most plentiful. The question of Jesus is answered in Revelation 14:12, where we are told that our Lord will be welcomed at His return by a people who have “the faith of Jesus.”

“The faith of Jesus,” or the kind of faith Jesus had, will be obtained in the same way He obtained His faith—“by prayer and fasting.” (See Matthew 17:19-21.) Only praying people develop faith, and only those who enter into the prayer life of Jesus can have the same kind of miracle-working faith He had. Such a people will be on earth when He returns. A people of faith who are persistent in prayer will proclaim a message that will lighten the earth with its glory.

The greatest need of the modern church is a spiritual revival, and this will come only in answer to prayer. Every revival since Pentecost has been produced by a few praying saints who were persistent in their requests. The refreshing showers of the early rain came in answer to the continual prayers of a small group. It is not necessary to wait for a mass movement in the church. One righteous person can move the arm of God. The power that shook the world in the great Reformation came from the secret place of prayer. From the same source must come the power that will complete the Reformation and bring a people back to the faith and practice of Christ and the apostles.

Prayer is therefore the greatest privilege of Christians in this sinful and rebellious world. It is the breath of spiritual life to the soul. It is to the spiritual life what breathing is to the physical. Its neglect leads to certain spiritual death. Prayer is communion, or conversation, with God. It is the golden cord that connects man with God, earth with heaven. It is the power that moves the arm that moves the world. Prayer can change the most hopeless, discouraging outlook. It makes the future as bright as the promises of God.

Someone has said that “prayer is the golden river at whose brink some die of thirst while others

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kneel and drink.”

The Power of Prayer

THE evangelization of the world is a super. human task. It requires divine power. When Jesus gave the gospel commission, He made it clear that if the disciples would preach the message, He would furnish the power, and that the supply was unlimited. The Father had placed all the power of heaven and earth in His hands, that He might dispense it to them for their world embracing task. The keeping and witnessing power required for their work was to be obtained from Christ for the asking. This omnipotent power would be sent through the agency of the Holy Spirit. The asking began in the upper room, and the power was given on the day of Pentecost.

The power came “as of a rushing mighty wind.” On a later occasion, “when they had prayed, the place was shaken where they were assembled together.” Acts 4:31. The prayers of Paul and Silas in the Philippian jail brought “a great earthquake” that opened the prison doors. Wind and earthquake are two of the greatest powers of nature. Prayer has cyclone and shaking power. It moves and changes things touched by its influence.

Prayer is one of the chiefest of those spiritual weapons that “are not carnal, but mighty through God to the pulling down of strongholds. Casting down imaginations, and every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God, and bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ.” 2 Corinthians 10:4, 5. The prayers of the apostles not only shook the place where they prayed and the prison where they were confined but also shook kingdoms. Pagan bulwarks and evil strongholds fell before their prevailing prayers. No barrier could stand before the triumphant march of the soldiers of the cross as they “went forth conquering, and to conquer.” “The gates of hell” could not prevail against them.

Most of the wonderful answers to prayer recorded in the Scriptures came as the result of the supplications of one godly man or woman. Some of these prayers changed the course of human history. Israel was many times saved by the prayers of a single man of God. Joseph prayed, and God delivered him from the Egyptian dungeon, made him governor of the empire, and thus saved both Egypt and Israel during the time of famine.

The prayers of Moses delivered Israel from Egyptian bondage and made of them a great nation. His prayers delivered them from destruction by the warlike Amalekites and again later from the wrath of an offended God at Mount Sinai. The prayers of Elijah defeated the purpose of Jezebel and saved Israel from a terrible apostasy and possible extinction. The prayers of Asa brought defeat to an Ethiopian army of one million men with three hundred chariots, the ancient tanks. The earnest petitions of King Jehoshaphat brought victory to the small army of Israel when it was attacked by overwhelming allied forces. The prayers of Daniel, Ezra, Nehemiah, and others delivered Israel from Babylonian captivity and restored the nation in the homeland. It was the power of prayer that wielded the sword of the Spirit in the great Protestant Reformation and thus changed the history of the world.

The prayer of faith is the great strength of the Christian warrior. Nothing else so enrages Satan or so surely prevails against him. He hates the name of Christ and is always alarmed when we call on Him for help against his devices. Earnest, fervent prayer causes Satan’s whole host to tremble and retreat. Though we belong to a defeated race, Satan our conqueror is a defeated foe. He has been defeated by Christ on every battlefield, and the victories of Emmanuel are promised to those who seek in faith. Every child of God should learn to say with Paul, “Thanks be to God which gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.” 1 Corinthians 15:57. This triumph by faith is promised to the Christian “always” and “in every place.” 2 Corinthians 2:14.

“Satan dreads nothing but prayer The church that lost its Christ was full of good works. Activities are multiplied that meditation may be ousted, and organizations are increased that prayer may have no chance. Souls may be lost in good works as surely as in evil ways. The one concern of the devil is to keep the saints from praying. He fears nothing from prayerless studies, prayerless work, prayerless religion. He laughs at our toil, mocks at our wisdom, but trembles when we pray.”-S. CHADWICK.

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The Word of God and Prayer

THE church is engaged in a warfare in which she must “fight the good fight of faith.” Every Christian is a soldier clothed in armor and equipped with weapons for defense and aggressive fighting. The soldiers of the cross who put on the whole armor of God are assured of victory over the unseen hosts of darkness under the leadership of the prince of devils. “Therefore put on the complete armor of God, so that you may be able to stand your ground in the evil day, and, having fought to the end, to remain victors on the field.” Ephesians 6:13, Weymouth. Christians are not on a playground, enjoying a picnic. We are on a battlefield, engaged in a fight to the finish. It is an all-out war. We occupy a fortress, not a pleasure house. The reward is promised only to “him that overcomes.”

In Paul’s picture of this spiritual conflict the Word of God and prayer are the only weapons for offensive, or aggressive, warfare. The various parts of the armor are for defensive purposes only. The mighty “weapons of our warfare,” therefore, which pull down strongholds, “fortresses,” and unholy “imagination,” and which bring “into captivity” straying and reprobate thoughts, are the Word of God and prayer. These two weapons of the Christian warrior are inseparable in the all-out battle for victory. One cannot be used effectively without the other. The Word is powerless without prayer, and prayer is ineffectual without the Word. The Word of God is “quick, and powerful, and sharper than any two edged sword” only when it is wielded by effectual, fervent prayer.

The program of the apostles is stated in Acts 6:4: “We will give ourselves continually to prayer, and to the ministry of the word.” The result of this plan is stated in verse 7: “The word of God increased, and the number of the disciples multiplied in Jerusalem greatly; and a great company of the priests were obedient to the faith * “ The same program will bring the same results today. The modern ministry is spending more time in serving tables than in study and prayer. No man can properly minister the Word without spending much time in the study of the Word, and the Word ministered will produce little or no results unless seasoned with much prayer. When the church returns to the apostolic program, we shall see Pentecostal results. Again the sword of the Spirit will be edged with power and bathed in the lightning of heaven, so that it will cut its way through doubt and unbelief, and produce thousands of converts in a day. This experience will be repeated when leaders again give themselves “continually to prayer, and to the ministry of the word.”

Prayer and the study of the Word must be properly balanced, in order that they may be effectual. Too much study and too little prayer lead to formalism and legalism, to a cold, hard, dead, Christless religion. This produces a critical, exacting, self-satisfied, pharisaical spirit. On the other hand, the overemphasis of prayer to the neglect of the study of the Word of God creates extremes and fanaticism. Persons who follow this course are not controlled by the reason and judgment that come only from a knowledge of the Scriptures. Like many of the Jews, they have a zeal for God, but as Paul says, it is an enlightened zeal. If we would be well-balanced Christians, we must rightly proportion study and prayer.

Prayer is communication, or conversation, and calls for a division of the time between the two who converse. It is always impolite for one person to do all the talking and monopolize all the time. The same is true in our communing with God. He talks to us through His Word; we talk back through prayer. The Lord does not want to do all the talking, nor does He want us to be so rude as to consume all the time and refuse to listen to His voice.

The apostle Paul speaks of a class of professed Christians in the last days who have “a form of godliness” but deny “the power there of.” Religion must have form and organization, but form without power is like a body with out life. It is God’s Word that gives us a knowledge of true religion. It tells us what He requires of us and what our conduct should be. But it is prayer that puts life and power into our religious experience. It puts the spirit of Jesus into the doctrines of Jesus. Otherwise our spiritual experience is like a valley of dry bones. Prayer makes us kind and sympathetic toward others. It subdues the nature and gives us grace to live out the golden rule.

Faith and Prayer

AN IMPORTANT element in prevailing prayer is faith. The prayer of faith is the only kind of prayer that is ever answered. Prayer is either an audible or an inaudible expression of the desires of the heart, but

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unless our prayers are backed by faith, they fall lifeless at our feet or go no higher than our heads. Faith is the power that sends our prayers heavenward. It gives them wings so that they reach God.

Sometimes when we pray, it seems that the very heavens above our heads are brass and that our prayers cannot penetrate to the throne of God. That imaginary brass barrier is composed of doubt. This great obstacle to answered prayer is pierced by faith. Faith is the bow that sends the arrows of our petitions to the throne of the Eternal. A painted fire is no fire; a dead man is no man; and a faithless prayer is no prayer, because it has no life or power. Faithless prayers are like arrows without heads, swords without edges, birds without wings. They cannot pierce or cut or fly.

In Bunyan's Pilgrim's Progress Christian and Hopeful, while on their way to the eternal city, got off the highway of holiness and fell into the hands of Giant Despair, who locked them up in the dungeon of Doubting Castle. After having tried every means within their power to escape from prison, they despaired of deliverance. As a last means they resorted to prayer, and continued praying till almost break of day. Then Christian thought of the key of faith which was concealed in his bosom and had been entirely forgotten. To their delight this key opened the door of the dungeon, the outer door, and the iron gate leading out of the yard and to freedom. Many professed Christians are in despair, locked up in Doubting Castle. Their prayers are not answered because they do not use the key of faith.

Moody declared that "prayer is the golden key that unlocks the treasures of heaven." Another has said: "Why should the sons and daughters of God be reluctant to pray, when prayer is the key in the hand of faith to unlock heaven's storehouse, where are treasured the boundless resources' of Omnipotence? Without unceasing prayer and diligent watching, we are in danger of growing careless and of deviating from the right path. The adversary seeks continually to obstruct the way to the mercy seat, that we may not by earnest supplication and faith obtain grace and power to resist temptation." - Steps to Christ, P. 99.

What is faith? The answer is given in Hebrews 11:1: "Now faith is a well-grounded assurance of that for which we hope, and a conviction of the reality of things which we do not see." (Weymouth.) Practically everything the Christian hopes and prays for is out of sight, or invisible'. Faith is the assurance that these things are real, that God's promises are good, and that He will keep His word. Faith means depending wholly upon the promises of God with no evidence in sight except a "thus said the Lord."

One of the most beautiful illustrations of the prayer of faith is found in Matthew 8:5-10. A Roman officer made supplication to Christ in behalf of his sick servant. Jesus promised to visit his home and heal the palsied man. The centurion decided that he was not worthy to receive a visit from such an honored guest, and asked Jesus to "speak the word only," and with assurance added, "and my servant shall be healed." Jesus spoke the word, and the Gentile officer, with no evidence in sight, believed Him, and went his way rejoicing because his servant was healed. He believed that what he hoped and prayed for was his even before it was confirmed by eyesight. Jesus marveled at such faith, and told His disciples that He had not seen "so great faith, no, not in Israel."

Since faith means depending on the word of God, there can be no genuine faith till God speaks or until we know what He has spoken. Otherwise it is presumption. This is illustrated by Peter's experience in walking on the water. When the frightened disciples were assured that the "ghost" was Christ, Peter cried out, "Lord, if it be Thou, bid me come unto Thee on the water." Jesus answered, "Come." Peter knew that to jump out of the boat without an invitation would be presumption. He knew that the waters of Galilee could not hold him up. That had been demonstrated many times in his fishing experiences. Christ must speak first before he could exercise faith. It was his faith in the word "come" that held him up. This was the substance of that for which he hoped and asked. When he took his eyes off Christ and exultantly looked back at his fellow disciples, he began to sink. Jesus saved him and rebuked him for his little faith.

James declares that many of our prayers are unanswered because we "ask amiss." It is the Word of God that tells us what we need and gives us a knowledge of the promises of God. Therefore it is the Word that regulates our praying so that we know what to ask for. We show our faith by earnestly asking for what God has promised to give. The Lord delights to fulfill His word in answer to the prayer of faith.

We are told that the Lord is very liberal in His dealings with those who ask in unwavering faith. The petitioner whose faith wavers does not get anything from the Lord. (See James 1:5-8.) Faithless prayers are unanswered prayers. Doubtless this is the chief reason why so few prayers are answered in this faithless generation of doubt and skepticism. The promise is that if we ask anything in His name, it will be granted. A bank note without a signature at the bottom is a worthless piece of paper. It is the stroke of the pen that confers on it its value. Prayer is a feeble thing in itself; but when endorsed by Christ, it is valuable and avails much. It is faith that endorses the check with the name or promise of Christ.

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Prayer and Soul Saving

JESUS is our example in all things, including soul saving. He is the great scientist in the science, of salvation. His methods were the best, and He gave them to His disciples when He commissioned them to carry on the work He had begun. For more than three years He trained them for this work by both precept and example. The methods used by Christ and His disciples bring success in any age. By these same methods the work of redemption will be finished under the latter rain.

Prayer occupied an important place in the work of Christ and His apostles. It was the chief secret of their success. It was the soul of their religion and the science of their labors. A religion without a soul is a religion without life and power. Prayer is the holiest exercise of the soul. The salvation of souls, is the greatest work committed to mortals. When its impelling power is prayer, it is the greatest of all sciences.

The place of prayer is the place of power. It is the powerhouse, or dynamo, of the church, whence comes its light to lighten the earth with its gospel truth. From the secret place of prayer comes the power of Christianity. Jesus told His disciples that "all power" was available in the gift of the Holy Spirit, which would be given them in answer to prayer. This would qualify them to be witnesses. All the resources of heaven are at the command of those who are seeking to save the lost; the angels of heaven are waiting to co-operate in this noble work.

Jesus was the greatest soul saver because He knew best how to prevail in prayer. He spent a great deal of time praying for His disciples. He told Peter He had prayed for him, that in the hour of trial his faith would not fail. Before He ordained the twelve, Jesus spent all night in prayer. In the prayer of John 17 Jesus said He had kept all except "the son of perdition." One whom He dearly loved and for whom He had labored and prayed had slipped through His fingers and been lost. It almost broke the heart of Jesus to lose Judas. This is a real passion for souls.

In His prayer Jesus virtually said, "I have kept most of those whom Thou has committed to My care. I have kept impulsive and fickle Simon. In spite of many a weakness and many a blunder My grace has proved sufficient for him. I have kept James and John, the sons of thunder, in spite of their narrowness and their keen ambition. I have kept Matthew, having wooed him from his moneybags. I have kept gloomy and doubting Thomas, in spite of the fact that he tends to cling to life's somber and shady side as ivy clings to old ruins. But Judas has thwarted Me. Judas has disappointed all the fine dreams that I cherished for him. In spite of all the big possibilities that were locked in his gloomy heart, in spite of all that I did for him and longed to do, he has run past Me and I have lost him."-C. G. CHAPPELL, Sermons on the Lord's Prayer, p. 184.

Prayer occupied an important place in the soul saving program of the apostolic church. The Lord instructed His people to pray for all men, including kings and all in authority. In every human being, however sinful, Jesus beholds a potential son of God whom He longs to restore to divine favor. Paul continually prayed for his converts that they might not fail. He prayed "day and night with tears." Thus he watered the seeds of truth. No wonder there was a glorious harvest. In return he asked his converts to pray for him.

A working church in travail for souls will be a praying church, a believing church, a receiving church. A church whose members seek the Lord daily will feed on the bread of life, will drink of the water of life, and will have a burden for souls. Earnest supplications from broken, contrite hearts will bring apostolic success in soul saving.

When Job ceased to argue and debate with his friends, and instead prayed for them, his captivity turned, and the situation was entirely changed. The same procedure would turn the captivity of many today and would give them a vision of God and therefore of self such as transformed the character and changed the experience of Job. As in the case of Philip and the Ethiopian eunuch, the Lord can bring praying Christians in contact with those who are praying for light. All over the earth there are honest hearted men and women looking wistfully to heaven and praying for divine enlightenment. Multitudes are on the verge of the kingdom of heaven, waiting only to be gathered in.

The very life and welfare of the church depends on the faithfulness of Christians in fulfilling the great commission. To neglect this divinely appointed task is to invite spiritual feebleness and decay and eventual death. Where there is no missionary activity or foreign mission program, love soon wanes, and

