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The Prayers of the Bible



THOSE WHO HAVE LEFT the deepest impression on this sin-cursed earth have been men and women of prayer. You will find that Prayer has been the mighty power that has moved not only God, but man. Abraham was a man of prayer, and angels came down from heaven to converse with him. Jacob's prayer was answered in the wonderful interview at Peniel, that resulted in his having such a mighty blessing, and in softening the heart of his brother Esau; the child Samuel was given in answer to Hannah's prayer; Elijah's prayer closed up the heavens for three years and six months, and he prayed again and the heavens gave rain.

The Apostle James tells us that the prophet Elijah was a man "subject to like passions as we are." I am thankful that those men and women who were so mighty in prayer were just like ourselves. We are apt to think that those prophets and mighty men and women of old time were different from what we are. To be sure they lived in a much darker age, but they were of like passions with ourselves.

We read that on another occasion Elijah brought down fire on Mount Carmel. The prophets of Baal cried long and loud, but no answer came. The God of Elijah heard and answered his prayer. Let us remember that the God of Elijah still lives. The prophet was translated and went up to heaven, but his God still lives, and we have the same access to Him that Elijah had. We have the same warrant to go to God and ask the fire from heaven to come down and consume our lusts and passions—to burn up our dross, and let Christ shine through us.

Elisha prayed, and life came back to a dead child. Many of our children are dead in trespasses and sins. Let us do as Elisha did; let us entreat God to raise them up in answer to our prayers.

Manasseh, the king, was a wicked man, and had done everything he could against the God of his father; yet in Babylon, when he cried to God, his cry was heard, and he was taken out of prison and put on the throne at Jerusalem. Surely if God gave heed to the prayer of wicked Manasseh, He will hear ours in the time of our distress. Is not this a time of distress with a great number of our fellowmen? Are there not many among us whose hearts are burdened? As we go to the throne of grace, let us remember that **GOD ANSWERS PRAYER.**

Look, again, at Samson. He prayed; and his strength came back, so that he slew more at his death than during his life. He was a restored backslider, and he had power with God. If those who have been backsliders will but return to God, they will see how quickly God will answer prayer.

Job prayed, and his captivity was turned. Light came in the place of darkness, and God lifted him up above the height of his former prosperity—in answer to prayer.

Daniel prayed to God, and Gabriel came to tell him that he was a man greatly beloved of God. Three times that message came to him from heaven in answer to prayer. The secrets of heaven were imparted to him, and he was told that God's Son was going to be cut off for the sins of His people. We find also that Cornelius prayed, and Peter was sent to tell him words whereby he and his should be saved. In answer to prayer this great blessing came upon him and his household. Peter had gone up to the housetop to pray in the afternoon, when he had that wonderful vision of the sheet let down from heaven. It was when prayer was made without ceasing unto God for Peter, that the angel was sent to deliver him.

So all through the Scriptures you will find that when believing prayer went up to God, the answer came down. I think it would be a very interesting study to go right through the Bible and see what has happened while God's people have been on their knees calling upon him. Certainly the study would greatly strengthen our faith—showing, as it would, how wonderfully God has heard and delivered, when the cry has gone up to Him for help.

Look at Paul and Silas in the prison at Philippi. As they prayed and sang praises, the place was shaken, and the jailer was converted. Probably that one conversion has done more than any

other recorded in the Bible to bring people into the Kingdom of God. How many have been blessed in seeking to answer the question—"What must I do to be saved?" It was the prayer of those two godly men that brought the jailer to his knees, and that brought blessing to him and his family.

You remember how Stephen, as he prayed and looked up, saw the heavens opened, and the Son of Man at the right hand of God; the light of heaven fell on his face so that it shone. Remember, too, how the face of Moses shone as he came down from the Mount; he had been in communion with God. So when we get really into communion with God, He lifts up His countenance upon us; and instead of our having gloomy looks, our faces will shine, because God has heard and answered our prayers.

Jesus, as a Man of Prayer

I want to call special attention to Christ as an example for us in all things; in nothing more than in prayer. We read that Christ prayed to His Father for everything. Every great crisis in His life was preceded by prayer. Let me quote a few passages. I never noticed till a few years ago that Christ was praying at His baptism. As He prayed, the heaven was opened, and the Holy Ghost descended on Him. Another great event in His life was His Transfiguration. "As he prayed, the fashion of his countenance was altered, and his raiment was white and glistening" (Luke 9:29).

Luke 6:12 reads, "It came to pass in those days, that he went out into a mountain to pray, and continued all night in prayer to

God." This is the only place where it is recorded that the Saviour spent a whole night in prayer. What was about to take place? When He came down from the mountain He gathered His disciples around Him, and preached that great discourse known as the Sermon on the Mount—the most wonderful sermon that has ever been preached to mortal men. Probably no sermon has done so much good, and it was preceded by a night of prayer. If our sermons are going to reach the hearts and consciences of the people, we must be much in prayer to God, that there may be power with the Word.

In the Gospel of John we read that Jesus at the grave of Lazarus lifted up His eyes to heaven, and said: "Father, I thank thee that thou hast heard me. And I knew that thou hearest me always: but because of the people which stand by I said it, that they may believe that thou hast sent me" (11:41–42). Before He spoke the dead to life He spoke to His Father. If our spiritually dead ones are to be raised, we must first get power with God. The reason we so often fail in moving our fellowmen is that we try to win them without first getting power with God. Jesus was in communion with His Father, and so He could be assured that His prayers were heard.

We read also in John 12:27–28 that our Lord prayed to the Father. I think this is one of the saddest chapters in the whole Bible. He was about to leave the Jewish nation and to make atonement for the sin of the world. Hear what He says: "Now is My soul troubled, and what shall I say? Father, save me from this

hour: but for this cause came I unto this hour." He was almost under the shadow of the Cross; the iniquities of mankind were about to be laid upon Him; one of His twelve disciples was going to deny Him and swear he never knew Him; another was to sell Him for thirty pieces of silver; all were to forsake Him and flee. His soul was exceeding sorrowful, and He prays; when His soul was troubled, God spoke to Him. Then in the Garden of Gethsemane, while He prayed, an angel appeared to strengthen Him. In answer to His cry, "Father, glorify thy name," He hears a voice coming down from the glory—"I have both glorified it, and will glorify it again" (John 12:28).

Another memorable prayer of our Lord was in the Garden of Gethsemane: "He was withdrawn from them about a stone's cast, and kneeled down, and prayed" (Luke 22:41). I would draw your attention to the fact that four times the answer came right down from heaven while the Saviour prayed to God. The first time was at His baptism, when the heavens were opened, and the Spirit descended upon Him in answer to His prayer. Again, on the Mount of Transfiguration, God appeared and spoke to Him. Then when the Greeks came desiring to see Him, the voice of God was heard responding to His call; and again, when He cried to the Father in the midst of His agony, a direct response was given. These things are recorded, I doubt not, that we may be encouraged to pray.

We read that His disciples came to Him, and said, "Lord, teach us to pray." It is not recorded that He taught them how to

preach. I have often said that I would rather know how to pray like Daniel than to preach like Gabriel. If you get love into your soul, so that the grace of God may come down in answer to prayer, there will be no trouble about reaching the people. It is not by eloquent sermons that perishing souls are going to be reached; we need the power of God in order that the blessing may come down.

The prayer our Lord taught His disciples is commonly called the Lord's Prayer. I think that the Lord's Prayer, more properly, is the one in chapter 17 of John. That is the longest prayer on record that Jesus made. You can read it slowly and carefully in about four or five minutes. I think we may learn a lesson here. Our Master's prayers were short when offered in public; when He was alone with God that was a different thing, and He could spend the whole night in communion with His Father. My experience is that those who pray most in their closets generally make short prayers in public. Long prayers are too often not prayers at all, and they weary the people. How short the publican's prayer was: "God be merciful to me a sinner!" The Syrophenician woman's was shorter still: "Lord, help me!" She went right to the mark, and she got what she wanted. The prayer of the thief on the cross was a short one: "Lord, remember me when Thou comest into Thy Kingdom!" Peter's prayer was, "Lord, save me, or I perish!" So, if you go through the Scriptures, you will find that the prayers that brought immediate answers were generally brief. Let our prayers be to the point, just telling God what we want.

In the prayer of our Lord, in John 17, we find that He made seven requests—one for Himself, four for His disciples around Him, and two for the disciples of succeeding ages. Six times in that one prayer He repeats that God had sent Him. The world looked upon Him as an imposter; and He wanted them to know that He was heaven-sent. He speaks of the world nine times, and makes mention of His disciples and those who believe on Him fifty times.

Christ's last prayer on the Cross was a short one: "Father, forgive them for they know not what they do." I believe that prayer was answered. We find that right there in front of the Cross, a Roman centurion was converted. It was probably in answer to the Saviour's prayer. The conversion of the thief, believe, was in answer to that prayer of our blessed Lord. Saul of Tarsus may have heard it, and the words may have followed him as he traveled to Damascus; so that when the Lord spoke to him on the way, he may have recognized the voice. One thing we do know; that on the day of Pentecost some of the enemies of the Lord were converted. Surely that was in answer to the prayer, "Father, forgive them!"

Men of God Are Men of Prayer

Hence we see that prayer holds a high place among the exercises of a spiritual life. All God's people have been praying people. Look, for instance, at Baxter! He stained his study walls with praying breath; and after he was anointed with the unction of the

Holy Ghost, sent a river of living water over Kidderminster, and converted hundreds. Luther and his companions were men of such mighty pleading with God, that they broke the spell of ages, and laid nations subdued at the foot of the Cross. John Knox grasped all Scotland in his strong arms of faith; his prayers terrified tyrants. Whitefield, after much holy, faithful closetpleading, went to the devil's fair, and took more than a thousand souls out of the paw of the lion in one day. See a praying Wesley turn more than ten thousand souls to the Lord! Look at the praying Finney, whose prayers, faith, sermons and writings, have shaken this whole country, and sent a wave of blessing through the churches on both sides of the sea.

Dr. Guthrie thus speaks of prayer and its necessity: "The first true sign of spiritual life, prayer, is also the means of maintaining it. Man can as well live physically without breathing, as spiritually without praying. There is a class of animals—the cetaceous, neither fish nor seafowl—that inhabits the deep. It is their home, they never leave it for the shore; yet, though swimming beneath its waves, and sounding its darkest depths, they have ever and anon to rise to the surface that they may breathe the air. Without that, these monarchs of the deep could not exist in the dense element in which they live, and move, and have their being. And something like what is imposed on them by a physical necessity, the Christian has to do by a spiritual one. It is by ever and anon ascending up to God, by rising through prayer into a loftier, purer region for supplies of Divine grace, that he

maintains his spiritual life. Prevent these animals from rising to the surface, and they die for want of breath; prevent the Christian from rising to God, and he dies for want of prayer. 'Give me children,' cried Rachel, 'or else I die;' 'Let me breathe,' says a man gasping, 'or else I die;' 'Let me pray,' says the Christian, 'or else I die.'"

"Since I began," said Dr. Payson when a student, "to beg God's blessing on my studies, I have done more in one week than in the whole year before." Luther, when most pressed with work, said, "I have so much to do that I cannot get on without three hours a day praying." And not only do theologians think and speak highly of prayer; men of all ranks and positions in life have felt the same. General Havelock rose at four o'clock, if the hour for marching was six, rather than lose the precious privilege of communion with God before setting out. Sir Matthew Hale says: "If I omit praying and reading God's Word in the morning, nothing goes well all day."

"A great part of my time," said McCheyne, "is spent in getting my heart in tune for prayer. It is the link that connects earth with heaven."

A comprehensive view of the subject will show that there are nine elements which are essential to true prayer. The first is Adoration; we cannot meet God on a level at the start. We must approach Him as One far beyond our reach or sight. The next is Confession; sin must be put out of the way. We cannot have any communion with God while there is any transgression between

us. If there stands some wrong you have done a man, you cannot expect that man's favor until you go to him and confess the fault. Restitution is another; we have to make good the wrong, wherever possible. Thanksgiving is the next; we must be thankful for what God has done for us already. Then comes Forgiveness, and then Unity; and then for prayer, such as these things produce, there must be Faith. Thus influenced, we shall be ready to offer direct Petition. We hear a good deal of praying that is just exhorting, and if you did not see the man's eyes closed, you would suppose he was preaching. Then, much that is called prayer is simply finding fault. There needs to be more petition in our prayers. After all these, there must come Submission. While praying, we must be ready to accept the will of God. We shall consider these nine elements in detail, closing our inquiries by giving incidents illustrative of the certainty of our receiving, under such conditions, answers to prayer.

The Hour of Prayer

Lord, what a change within us one short hour
Spent in Thy presence will prevail to make!
What heavy burdens from our bosoms take;
What parched grounds refresh as with a shower.

We kneel—and all around us seems to lower,
We rise—and all, the distant and the near.
Stands forth in sunny outline brave and clear;
We kneel: how weak!—we rise: how full of power!

Why, therefore, should we do ourselves this wrong,
Or others—that we are not always strong?
That we are ever overborne with care;
That we should ever weak or heartless be,
Anxious or troubled, while with us is prayer,
And joy, and strength, and courage, are with Thee?

R. TRENCH