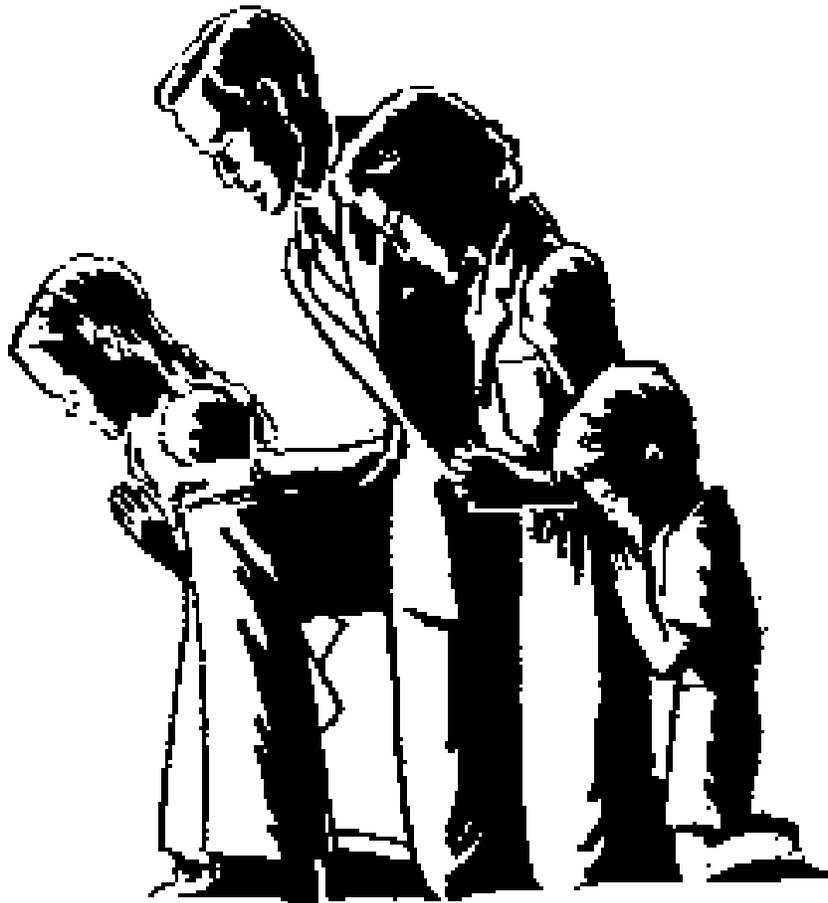


PRAYER



Emerson A. Wilson

Table of Contents



Effectual Fervent Prayer	1
Prayer	8
The Need of Prayer	15
Effectual Fervent Prayer	23
The Power of Earnest Prayer	29

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James 5:16 Confess your faults one to another, and pray one for another, that ye may be healed. The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much.

Effectual Fervent Prayer



Getting a Real Burden

There never has been any great move of God among His people until someone started praying and getting a real burden. We can go right on, as many are, looking for and expecting things to come to pass, but I have learned from experience that when we do not really get burdened and really get down to business praying, it just does not happen. God is ready to work. He has the power and the ability, and He is waiting for us, as the people of God, to take the burden as we ought.

The writer of our Scripture text made a statement that should challenge each of us and stir our hearts. If prayer is not effectual, there is no need to pray. The words "availeth much" stirred my heart. The Amplified version says, "The earnest (heartfelt, continued) prayer of a righteous man makes tremendous power available—dynamic in its working."

In the Greek translation, the words "availeth much" have deep meaning. It does not mean there will be just a small stir. The effectual, fervent prayer of a righteous man brings a big stir and causes God to move. Effectual prayer affects God, and when it affects God, it will cause many people to become affected.

We are living in a day and time when the enemy will make you feel that it does not do much good to pray. You do not get to the place where the enemy does not talk to you. When a sick person dies that I had been praying for, the minute I get the word, the devil is right there to say, "Why do you want to go on praying for the sick?" I tell him, "Everyone I pray for does not get saved, but I keep praying." I thank God that some do get saved and some also get healed.

Satan is ever working to put down your prayer life. He knows the power there is in prayer; that is the reason he gives you such a wrestle over it. He does not get excited over things that do not matter much.

Prayer is the mightiest instrument we have in our armor to war against the powers of darkness. More people have been affected by prayer than any other one thing that you can read about in the Bible. May God help us to see it and to lay hold of it as never before.

The battle of Armageddon is a battle of Truth against error. Error has moved in on many who claim to be God's people. Their thinking is not straight, and God is bringing Truth right to the forefront. The battle is hot, and we are into it, but I can let you in on a little something else: God's people are winning. When you stand by Truth, declare the Truth, and live the Truth, you cannot lose; you will win every time.

The enemy is moving in most deceptive ways to fill people's minds, even too many of God's people, with thoughts that do not line up with the Truth. God is sending forth the Truth clearly so that we can draw a battle line and know where we need to stand in these closing days of time.

I thank God for the instrument of prayer. Oh, how God has encouraged us to use it! He wants men to pray always and pray everywhere. Whether you think prayer holds a high place or not, God does; it is in His plan. Thank God, you can always be in an attitude of prayer no matter where you are, and you can pray everywhere by staying away from anywhere you cannot pray. If you cannot pray somewhere, then you should not go there. This is a good test on what you bring into your home, what you watch, and what you do. If you cannot truly pray in earnest while something is going on, you have no business being there, because the Bible tells us to stay in an attitude of prayer all the time everywhere.

Prevailing Prayer

Prayer is a great instrument, and if we are going to use it as God has encouraged us to use it, we must do everything in our power to bring it into exercise. When we think of the effectual, fervent prayer of a righteous man, we can look multiple places in the Scriptures and prove that effectual, fervent prayer prevailed.

You can read about Abraham, Moses, and Elijah. James even mentioned Elijah and wrote how, through prayer, Elijah caused it not to rain, and then he prayed again and it rained. You can read how prayer prevailed when Elijah raised a child from the dead. I could go on and on and tell of different Bible characters, definitely proving that the effectual, fervent prayer of a righteous individual avails much.

Since many are praying for revival, we want to study about Ezra. He was a righteous man who fervently prayed for revival, or reformation, and he got it. As we study his situation, we find that he was a governor and a priest. He prayed in a special way for a mighty revival, or a reformation, among a people that had slipped far away from God. His prayers so prevailed that the next move was for God to send Nehemiah to build the walls and bring the city back into the condition God had ordained her to be.

We want to study how much prayer can avail, in studying about Ezra the priest, whose prayer brought great revival. In Ezra 10:1-4 we read: "Now when Ezra had prayed [for the next ten verses, everything imaginable happened because Ezra prayed], and when he had confessed, weeping and casting himself down before the house of God, there assembled unto him out of Israel a very great congregation of men and women and children: for the people wept very sore.

"And Shechaniah the son of Jehiel, one of the sons of Elam, answered and said unto Ezra, We have trespassed against our God, and have taken strange wives of the people of the land: yet now there is hope in Israel concerning this thing. Now therefore let us make a covenant with our God to put away all the wives, and such as are born of them, according to the counsel of my lord, and of those that tremble at the commandment of our God; and let it be done according to the law. Arise; for this matter belongeth unto thee: we also will be with thee: be of good courage, and do it."

Failure to Separate From the World

Israel had been carried away, to a great extent, into Babylonian captivity. The seventy years that God had said they would be in captivity had passed, and to the surprise of the people, God began to move on the king, Artaxerxes, to hunt for someone who was sound in the Law of God and would teach it right. So the king found Ezra and began to send him to Jerusalem to see what the conditions really were there.

The point I want you to get right here is this: God will first correct conditions in the church before He looses other people to come in. The first thing the king did was to send Ezra to Jerusalem to see what conditions were among Israel that remained there. He sent him with the Law of God to straighten them out. When Ezra got to the city, he found it in a sad and dreadful condition.

Ezra 9:1-4 reads: "Now when these things were done, the princes came to me, saying, The people of Israel, and the priests, and the Levites, have not separated themselves from the people of the lands, doing according to their abominations, even of the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Perizzites, the Jebusites, the Ammonites, the Moabites, the Egyptians, and the Amorites.

"For they have taken of their daughters for themselves, and for their sons: so that the holy seed have mingled themselves with the people of those lands: yea, the hand of the princes and rulers hath been chief in this trespass. And when I heard this thing, I rent my garment and my mantle, and plucked off the hair of my head and of my beard [those are signs of

excessive grief], and sat down astonished. Then were assembled unto me every one that trembled at the words of the God of Israel, because of the transgression of those that had been carried away; and I sat astonished [or stunned] until the evening sacrifice." As soon as Ezra arrived at Jerusalem, the princes of Israel let him know that, from the leaders (even the Levites) right on down, they had disobeyed God and overstepped His laws. They had not separated themselves from the world as God had commanded them. They had gone so far as to marry strange wives and mix the seed of Israel.

When Ezra saw this, he was very troubled. Summing it up, it was a very sad state of affairs in which Ezra found the church. I call it the church because that is exactly what it was, the church of the Old Testament. He found them almost hopelessly involved with the world. They had failed to separate themselves from the world; therefore, they lost their position, their power, and their influence.

God has demanded the church in all ages to be separate from the world, such a separation that it amounts to antagonism. Some say that we should not be antagonistic; however, when preaching about God's people being separate from the world, it moves us to a place of antagonism. God will not put up with us playing around with the world; we need to get that straight.

Someone may say, "That was back then." God has had this trouble with His people in every age. Movement after movement of people have fallen and lost their power, their position, and their influence by trifling and mixing too much with the world. God has always had a separate people. I know that we are living in a day and time when people get mighty stirred because we hold ourselves separate. Nevertheless, it is Bible truth for God's people to be separate from the world.

Going back to a type, when God brought His people out of Egypt, He had one place in mind for them, and that was Canaan. Why did He want them there? It was a land full of blessings, flowing with milk and honey, as well as a place cut off from other nations by mountains, deserts, and seas. When God took them there, He told them not to have any affairs or business dealings with other nations. That is how strict God was in the Old Testament. Also, they were not to intermarry with other nations. He brought them to a position where they could be separate from the world around them.

In every age people have always gotten what I call *borderline anemia*: they want to get just as close to the world as they can and still be the people of God. That very desire and principle will cause you to be cut off from the people of God.

When Ezra went up to Jerusalem, he found the church paralyzed in a hopeless condition, prostrated by a violation of divine principle: not keeping separate from the world. This was the thing that stirred God.

Prayer That Avails Much

In Ezra, Chapter 10, when Ezra cast himself down before the house of God, he was not in the house, he was in the street in front of the house. Instead of standing and holding up his hands as the priests and the governors did, he was down on his face in the street weeping, praying, and confessing before God the condition that the people were in.

I want you to see the effect of an effectual, fervent prayer. In Ezra 9:4 you can read that very few people trembled at the Word of God and were distressed over the condition; but after Ezra got down and prayed, a very great congregation of men, women, and children assembled, and the people wept sore.

You do not need an interpreter to tell you that prayer had broken down the hard hearts of those that were determined to go their own way. When Ezra first went there, he tried to preach, but they hounded him and tried to run him out of the city. The only instrument he had left was prayer. So he got down in the street before the house of God and held on to God in prayer, and God went to work. The effectual, fervent prayer of a righteous man avails very much. No doubt, it was to his surprise when a very great congregation showed up.

The more I study God's Word, the more I believe that you can pray people into an experience with God. Certainly, we need to do everything that we can do, but our weakness is in praying. Someone may say, "You do not know the condition of my children." You do not know much about prayer. You are defeated before you start when you say that. You may pray for certain cases, and since some of them are hard, you lay that burden aside and start praying for someone else. You need to take a new, fresh look at what God can do. I am preaching to you on the effectual, fervent prayer of a righteous man and what it can avail.

What was the first thing that prayer availed when Ezra prayed? Most of the people had lost the fear of God, just as people have today, but when this dear man of God got down to business praying, a very great congregation came weeping and crying in a humble position. They had lost all their stiffness and hardness. The old-fashioned fear of God was on them, and they were under deep conviction even before he preached.

We can do more than we are doing. Too many people come into the services with hard hearts, and they go out untouched. Too many times the message does not move them. Where is the trouble? We are not praying as fervently as we ought before God.

Do not forget the words in Ezra 10:1, which reads, "Now when Ezra had prayed . . ." He had not gotten much done before, but after he prayed, they were broken up and wanted to hear what God had to say. His complete self-abasement on account of their sins touched their consciences, and they began to be troubled.

The lesson for us is this: if we ever see people get troubled over their sins, we will have to get troubled over them. None of us is troubled enough over the sins of the people. We know what sin is, but some do not, and many are deceived. The devil has made them feel that they are really living.

Whenever we have gotten under a deep burden for certain individuals and felt the condition they were in (they might have been blinded to their condition) and got down to business with God, it was no time at all until they came in. I have never seen it fail. I am not asking you to get out in the road and pray, but God has promised us that if we will get disturbed deeply enough, then He will move on the hearts of people.

Jerusalem was a big city, and the people were not near the temple. They had other things on their minds, but when Ezra got down and effectually, fervently prayed, they made their way to the house of God, weeping and crying. People who have been prayed in will come humbly.

There is no real conversion without old-time conviction, and that is the thing that is lacking today. Too many people want to argue about their sins; they want you to show them this, that, and the other. When old-time conviction strikes your soul, you will want free no matter what the cost, and that is the way the people of Israel came. The Bible tells us that they wept "very sore"; in other words, they wept in their weeping.

We are going to have to feel bad before we can feel good. A burden for the lost is not resting heavily enough on the people of God. Our Scripture text is a promise. If you look at the lesson found in the Book of Ezra, you will see that prayer can avail much. The very distress that Ezra manifested was contagious. Why isn't contrition and deep feeling for the guilt of sin more contagious? We, as saints, must have it before others feel it.

Hope Brought to a Hopeless Condition

Ezra had no idea what was going to befall him when he got to Jerusalem. When he saw the condition they were in, he was stunned. He could not believe that God's people had become so mingled with the world. They had broken law after law and still kept professing to be the people of God. As I mentioned earlier in the message, they would not let him preach. They were ready to run him out of town, but thank God, he had an instrument that they could not war against.

I want you to see that prayer is just as real and just as powerful yet today. Someone may say, "I can't even talk to my relatives." You have another instrument that is much greater and more effective than your talk ever will be—effectual, fervent prayer. God has ordained that every one of His people have this great instrument of prayer, and it avails much every time it is used. Too many times people come into the services and get stirred and then go away unchanged. People who are doing wrong do not want a preacher to stand up and tell them about it. They already know that they are doing wrong. However, effectual, fervent prayer will cause people to change their minds completely about the message.

There was only one weapon that Ezra could use to win this battle, and he was wise enough to use it—the weapon of prayer. You ought to take the time to read the whole chapter. One thing after another happened when Ezra prayed. Because of Ezra's prayers, people who had been hard and unrelenting were not just moved, they were very much moved. When they heard and saw Ezra, a good, righteous man, praying and weeping over their condition, they wept sore.

When Ezra prayed, what else happened? People in a hopeless condition began to see hope. My friend, you can mingle with the world and play around with sin to the place where the enemy will make you feel there is no way out.

Those people in Ezra's day were certainly in that shape. There had not been hope before. They thought they were doomed, but when Ezra prayed and God moved on their hearts, one of the men stood right up in the congregation and, in so many words, said, "We have trespassed against God. We have broken His law and taken strange wives; yet now there is hope in Israel concerning this thing."

Nothing except the people of God getting down to business praying will ever bring hope to many who are hopeless around us. Someone may say, "Oh, hope comes through preaching." No, Ezra had not preached yet. Praying brought hope.

I want to say again, many are in a hopeless condition. They feel it, and they are under the power of it. It will never be lifted until the people of God pray fervently. One of the things prayer avails is that it breaks the hopelessness and brings hope to the lost. There are many in a hopeless condition who do not need to be if we would get down to business and pray.

Another thing prayer brought was confession. Ezra still had not preached yet. Oh, I cannot make this strong enough. The enemy of our souls is causing us to minimize the greatest and strongest weapon we have. By prayer, they were moved to confession and repentance.

Prayer Brings Old-Time Contrition

In verse 3 we read, "Now therefore let us make a covenant with our God to put away all the wives" In their case, it was the wives, but today people need to put away anything that has caused them to fail God, or anything that they have failed to separate themselves from. You see, confession is no good without repentance. After Shechaniah stood up and confessed that they had trespassed before God, then they were ready to put away the things wherein they had failed God. What brought about their repentance? Ezra prayed.

A disease has to be discovered before it can be remedied, and through real prayer, they were made to see their condition. The sin must be perceived and acknowledged before it can be forgiven and removed. Ezra had not done any preaching, yet the wrong was brought to the forefront and confessed. Without any personal persuading, prayer caused God to move on their hearts to the place that they saw their sin and openly confessed it. Did you ever see conversions like that? Brother, sister, they are the most precious ones you can ever witness.

When old-time conviction strikes the soul to the place that a person starts telling you all about what he is guilty of before anything is ever mentioned, that is truly God working in the heart of an individual. Prayer brought confession and repentance, and the same thing can happen yet today through prayer. When Ezra prayed, not only did they confess and repent, but they were ready to make restitution, and no one had preached yet.

Israel was going to take their strange wives back where they had gotten them, and they were also going to leave any children who had been born to them. I am merely taking a spiritual lesson from this Old Testament setting to deal with prayer. I do not want anyone to misunderstand me. We are in a different dispensation of time. As a Christian, you may be married to an unbeliever, and nowhere in New Testament light will it tell you to put away your wife. We are under a different law to that extent.

If you read 1 Corinthians, Chapter 7, it will tell you what to do if you are married to an unbeliever now. Verses 12-15 let you know that if your wife is an unbeliever and she is pleased to dwell with you, you are to stay with her, and because of your experience, the children will be sanctified. If you have an unbelieving husband, the same principle holds true.

Certainly, under the old Law, God had told them back in Exodus that they were not to marry any people of any other nation. Since that was the Law back then, Israel had to put away their strange wives. Someone may ask, "Who should I marry?" The only biblical answer I can give you is to marry in the Lord. It is somewhat the same now as it was back in old Israel, in the sense that a Christian should marry in the Lord and should not mix the seed.

With prayer restitution also came. True repentance will always lead to restitution. I know we are in a time when many do not believe in restitution, but it is still necessary. What has been unjustly received cannot be justly kept. When old-time contrition and real conviction moves upon your soul, you will be ready to take back anything that is not rightfully yours.

The Fear of God Returned

When Ezra prayed, the people humbled themselves and trembled at the commandments of God. The saints of God do not have enough of the fear of God upon their hearts. I would be afraid to do what some people do. A man can preach the Word of God, and some are so far off from God that they quickly settle it in their minds that, "Those are his thoughts. I've got my thoughts." You had better be careful of rising up against God! You need to study what blasphemy is.

The effectual, fervent prayer of a righteous man brought fear and trembling back upon the people of Israel. They not only confessed, repented, and were ready to make restitution, but in Ezra 10:3 Shechaniah said, "Let it be done according to the law." They had broken the Law, but through prayer, God had so gotten hold of them that they no longer wanted things their own way; they wanted their lives to be gauged according to God's Law.

In verse 4 Shechaniah said to Ezra, "Arise; for this matter belongeth unto thee: we also will be with thee: be of good courage, and do it." When Ezra's prayer got through, the people told the very preacher they had hounded and wanted to run

out of town that if they ever knew the Law of God and knew what they needed to do, it was going to rest in him. They humbled themselves, and they were ready to hear what the preacher had to say to them; in addition, they had a real desire for service.

We read in Verse 5, "Then arose Ezra . . ." This was after he had prayed. I want to say kindly to everyone who claims to be a preacher: unless you have prayed through, you had better not get up from prayer. Much of the effectiveness of your work for God is going to rest on whether you have really prayed through. Ezra's prayer had availed much; it had changed the people's attitude.

Verse 5 continues, "Then arose Ezra, and made the chief priests, the Levites, and all Israel, to swear that they should do according to this word. And they swear." He moved the whole church after he prayed.

Verse 9 reads, "Then all the men of Judah and Benjamin gathered themselves together unto Jerusalem within three days. It was the ninth month [December], on the twentieth day of the month; and all the people sat in the street of the house of God, trembling because of this matter, and for the great rain."

On the twentieth day of December, when the temperature was low in Palestine, they stood before the house in the rain and trembled for hours while Ezra preached. They had been moved to the place where they really wanted to hear what God had to say. Everything has to be just about right for people today. If it rains too much, they can hardly get out of their houses to go to a dry building and sit on soft seats.

There were literally thousands of people that stood in the street. Ezra stood up and said that so many of them had failed God that the work could not be done in a day or two. It was going to take three days to hold that invitation. I do not know whether you can see the picture, but I see a beautiful picture there. Every strain of it runs back to the fact that Ezra prayed and humbled himself before God.

Oh, the power there is in the effectual, fervent prayer of a righteous individual. God is waiting on us, church. God is waiting on every righteous individual to sense the awfulness of having lost children and lost loved ones. Friend, they never will feel it until you do. When you get down before God and really feel their lost condition, they will begin to feel it. There has never been a mother yet who prayed fervently for a lost son or daughter but what that one felt it, though they were thousands of miles apart. That son or daughter will feel the weight of his or her condition even as the one who is praying.

Time and space do not allow me to go on and say what all prayer can avail. James did not say how much it availed, but he said that it "availeth much." If we really believe that the effectual, fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much, then we need to pray much so that we can see much accomplished through prayer. These things happened to them for our ensamples and our learning.

Ezra got away from his own human thinking. Who would think that you could go alone into a city that had failed God and move thousands of people? Well, it is right here before you. I can just about see Ezra's eyes after he had prayed that morning and afternoon. The people came by the thousands. There were no haughty spirits; they all broke down and wept sore. Prayer did it, not prayer and something else. Ezra told them, in so many words, "You have to put away those things that have drawn you away. Clean yourselves up, get yourselves clear and straight, and separate yourselves from the world on every level."

Jesus prayed that we would not be taken out of the world. We have to work and live in the world. We are here to win the world, but the things from which we have to stay separate are the principles and aims of the world, many of the pleasures of the world, and the ways of the world.

Israel had such a desire for service after Ezra prayed that they would go to the house of God and stay for hours. You can read in the Book of Nehemiah about when they were digging through the rubbish and rebuilding the walls. Ezra found the whole book of the Law, and when the word went out that he had found it, a large crowd of people showed up and wanted Ezra to read it. He read for hours while they stood and listened and rejoiced to be able to hear the Law of God again.

Prayer changes things, and prayer changes people's attitudes, feelings, and desires. Prayer affected Israel's attitude and obedience. When Ezra stood up and told them that they must do things according to the Word, they all said that they would do it. The people pledged to stand by Ezra and his work in effecting the great revival that was to follow.

A Little Space to Repent

Ezra 9:4-8 reads: "Then were assembled unto me every one that trembled at the words of the God of Israel, because of the transgression of those that had been carried away; and I sat astonished [or stunned] until the evening sacrifice. And at the evening sacrifice I arose up from my heaviness; and having rent my garment and my mantle [he had two garments

on; the mantle was an outer garment, and he tore both of them], I fell upon my knees, and spread out my hands unto the LORD my God, And said, O my God, I am ashamed and blush to lift up my face [Ezra himself had not done anything wrong] to thee, my God: for our iniquities are increased over our head, and our trespass is grown up unto the heavens.

"Since the days of our fathers have we been in a great trespass unto this day; and for our iniquities have we, our kings, and our priests, been delivered into the hand of the kings of the lands, to the sword, to captivity, and to a spoil, and to confusion of face, as it is this day [those are things to which flirting around with the world will lead you]. And now for a little space grace hath been shewed from the LORD our God, to leave us a remnant to escape, and to give us a nail in his holy place, that our God may lighten our eyes, and give us a little reviving in our bondage."

Thank God for that little space. God does not just bring judgment and destruction on people; He gives them a little space to repent. God so loves people that He even gave Jezebel a space to repent. Dear one, I pray that you will take this message to heart.

When Ezra stood up and preached, his message was accepted by the priests, the princes, and the Levites. Those with the greatest influence submitted and swore that they would stand behind Ezra. All Israel said they would do according to the Law.

Ezra 10:7-8 reads: "And they made proclamation throughout Judah and Jerusalem unto all the children of the captivity, that they should gather themselves together unto Jerusalem; And that whosoever would not come within three days, [That was the little space God gave them. How would you like to have a preacher like that? Honest-hearted people like things nailed down. Only hypocrites rise up against stances.] according to the counsel of the princes and the elders, all his substance should be forfeited, and himself separated from the congregation [in other words, he would be excommunicated from the Church of God] . . ."

God has not changed. You may think that you can play around and get straightened out when you are ready, but you may never have a chance. Read the Book of Leviticus. God's Law was that if anyone rebelled against it and refused to do what God said, they were to confiscate all his property and give it to the Lord, and then he was to be excommunicated and no longer a part of God's people. You see, God is more rigid than you think He is. If you listen to most people today, you would think that God is just a God of love. However, God is also severe.

In so many words, Ezra said in his message, "You have three days to straighten this up. If you do not straighten it up in that time, all that you own will be taken from you, and you are going to be excommunicated."

I could go on and on, but the greatest point is this: When Ezra prayed, he prayed a prayer that affected God. If you can get God to move, He will move the people. It does not make any difference how hard their hearts may be, how little of the fear of God is on their lives, or what their condition may be, nothing is too hard for God. Prayer is the only thing that will put God to work.

As you read this message, has the Holy Spirit pointed out that you have not separated yourself from the world as you should? Are you too entangled with the things of this life? If you are so entangled that you do not have time to pray, read the Bible, and meditate, then you are too busy.

When Jimmy Davis was governor of the state of Louisiana, from Thursday on, he usually could not be found in the office in the afternoons. The politicians questioned him concerning his whereabouts on the weekends, and he said, "I am home praying, and then I am out somewhere singing for the Lord."

They said, "Well, you are the governor of the state. You are too busy. You have too much to do to sing and pray."

He replied, "Whenever I have too much to do to sing and pray, I am too busy."

We can get entangled. Too many people do not understand that getting entangled in things of the world is more than putting on jewelry, getting their hair bobbed, and wearing the wrong kinds of clothes. You can get entangled with things that are not sinful and not have time to pray, seek God's face, and have communion with Him.

My question is, Have you gotten so taken up with things and not separated yourself from the world and the things of the world to the extent that you ought, and because of it, you know that you do not really pray an effectual, fervent prayer? Have you sold out to something cheaper, just going through the form of saying a few words of prayer? If you have, then you need to confess it, forsake it, and lay aside some things so you can give God His rightful place in your life.

Psalm 65:1 Praise waiteth for thee, O God, in Sion: and unto thee shall the vow be performed.

2 O thou that hearest prayer, unto thee shall all flesh come.

Isaiah 64:4 For since the beginning of the world men have not heard, nor perceived by the ear, neither hath the eye seen, O God, beside thee, what he hath prepared for him that waiteth for him [The Septuagint version says, "thy works which thou wilt perform to them that wait for mercy"].

Hebrews 11:6 But without faith it is impossible to please him: for he that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him.

PRAYER



Our Greatest Weapon

In general terms there is a great lack of really praying today. I say that because we fail to see the fruits (or the results) of it in individual lives and collectively as the church. References to prayer are found in the Word of God hundreds of times, and I believe God has something to say about prayer. It is instilled throughout the Word of God from one end of the Book to the other. Prayer is certainly a great necessity. It is our greatest weapon, and the enemy does not want us to use it. The older brethren used to say, "Satan trembles when he sees the weakest Christian on his knees," and it is still true. We can put forth great efforts (and certainly the enemy is working by moving on the minds of God's people to promote greater programs); but if we fail to pray, it all amounts to nothing.

Nowhere in the Bible did Jesus ever teach anyone to preach, but He did teach us to pray. Without real prayer there cannot be any real preaching; however, through real prayer someone who cannot preach can preach when God deems it that way. I am trusting that as we study God's Word, the Holy Spirit will stir you. One of the ways of getting your spirit stirred is through the teaching of God's Word. If you look into it honestly, really seeking, your spirit will be stirred, and it will do something for you.

The verses of Scripture that we read in the Book of Psalms and in Paul's writings to the Hebrews let us know that God hears and answers prayer. The other text in Isaiah lets us know there is no way of knowing what God will do and how He will work for those who wait on Him in prayer.

I believe there are greater things in store than our eyes have ever beheld. With just a little greater waiting before God in prayer, we can see God work the works that need to be accomplished and greater works. Jesus promised before He went away that when the Holy Spirit came into our lives, we would work greater works than He worked. The Scriptures plainly teach us that the greater works are the spiritual works that He could not do. He preached and gained 120 disciples; but when the Holy Spirit came and fell upon all flesh, a greater work was done, and has been done, than Jesus could do when He walked here on the earth. Friend, I am not talking about fantasies; I am talking about realities.

Diligent Seeking

Paul said that God is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him. The enemy is working as never before through the power of unbelief. If he can get you to doubt one part of God's Word as being true, he has done a terrible work on you. It is a fact that God is a rewarder of everyone who diligently seeks Him. Nevertheless, you have to go to God, who sees in secret, and pray in secret, and He will reward you openly. If there is anything we need as the church, it is some more open rewards. Thank God for everything that has happened and is happening, and for every bit of reward. God has rewarded us in a great way, but there can be greater open rewards. When God openly rewards you, you will begin to lift Him up and the world will begin to see that God is blessing you as an individual; then the church will be lifted to the place of being a city set on a hill that cannot be hid.

The truth that shines forth in Hebrews 11:6 is that reward comes to diligent seekers. That Scripture is very plain, but sad to say, the unbelieving world believes it more than most Christians do. Look at the very scheme of the universe: diligent seeking is the thing that has caused us to make such progress in scientific fields and other lines in the last fifty years. Scientists believe that if they search, they will be rewarded; so there are scientists who are searching round the clock, and they are being rewarded every day. If we could get the Church of God seeking on spiritual lines as diligently as scientists do in nature, we would be much further up the road as the church. While science has taken us way ahead the last fifty years, the church has gone in reverse.

Why are we not receiving more from God? Why is there not greater reward? The answer is, there is not enough diligent seeking. What if every scientist were to quit studying and researching and just sat around and took the attitude that many Christians take: "If God wants me to have it, He will send it"? That is not the law; you only get rewarded if you seek Him diligently. The scientists have learned that, and even men who do not believe in God put this principle into practice. They dig into what they term "the laws of nature." Many of them do not want to acknowledge that it is God; nevertheless, they can call it whatever they want, but it is still God.

Oh, how scientists search and search, and the first thing you know, they find something. How did they find it? They were rewarded for their diligent seeking. Brother, God is a just God who rules this whole world. It makes no difference whether you are delving into natural or spiritual things. If you are diligent in your seeking, you *will* be rewarded!

God Is True to His Word

It is God's desire that you dig deep when it comes to spiritual realities. When Israel was in bad shape and the Prophet did not know what was going on, God took him in a vision to the house and a hole in the wall. Then, God said, "Son of man, dig." When he dug, a door opened, and he went in. It was a vision of God opening up to him and showing him what was going on in the hearts of His people, but the Prophet had to dig.

Too many preachers are lazy today and are not willing to dig into the Word of God and seek diligently. Also, it comes right down to the laity who are not diligent enough in seeking God in prayer. God can show us things that eyes have never seen and ears have never heard. We are dealing with a limitless God. He is unlimited, and He can do anything. Also, He will do anything to awaken a lost world before the end of time, but the instruments through which He works are you and me, Christian friend.

Men in science are in daily pursuit of abstract knowledge through constant seeking. They find something every little bit, and then you read about it. They are rewarded for their diligent efforts. Just as God rewards the diligent seeker in one area of life, He rewards us in the other. How much more can we find in the realms of prayer if God will reward men who do not even have respect for Him and who do not believe He exists, yet He is true to His Word! When they diligently seek, He rewards them. God will reward us much more when we believe that He is real, and if we pray and really seek Him in a diligent manner.

In the day and time in which we live, prayer has become an unreasonable thing in too many cases, but I want you to see that it is very reasonable to pray and very unreasonable not to pray. We are in a day when so many people are struggling with the thought of finding time to pray and really praying. Throughout the Bible and through all ages, prayer has recommended itself to the human mind. As an illustration, when an individual's car rolls over and ignites, he might not have ever gone to church in his life, but he will start praying then.

The Word of God, as well as history, bears this to be true even in religions such as Buddhism. The Buddhists deny the existence of a true God distinct from nature; however, though they do not believe there is a true God distinct from nature,

in the last few years prayer has forced itself into Buddhism. Buddhists do not pray to the living God, but they pray. I want you to see that it is a human instinct right within man to pray.

Our Scripture text says, "Praise waiteth for thee, O God, in Sion . . ." (Psalm 65:1). Sion is the church, and if you rightly divide the Word of Truth in reading the other Psalms surrounding this one, you will find that God told how He was going to deliver Jerusalem once and for all. He was going to send a deliverer, Jesus Christ, and He would deliver them from sin. In essence, the Psalmist was saying, "Praise is waiting for you. We believe that You are going to answer prayer, and we are waiting to praise You for it." That is real faith. Those words were spoken hundreds of years before it happened. God prophesied that He was going to deliver His people from their sins; therefore, the Psalmist said, "Praise waiteth for thee." Then he said: "Unto thee shall the vow be performed. O thou that hearest prayer, unto thee shall all flesh come" (verses 1-2).

Partakers of God's Divine Nature

When a situation really gets troubled enough, it is a natural instinct for men to pray. However, beyond the natural instinct, there is a supernatural instinct put in every born again person that causes him to have a deep, burning desire to pray. It is a work of the Holy Spirit within. A child of God prays because he wants to pray. Old things have passed away, and one of the old things that passed away was the prayerlessness and unconcern for God that he used to have. Saint, when you are born again, you are a new creature and you get a great concern for God. Formerly you were not a praying individual, but you became a praying man or woman when you were converted. Now, you can become careless in your prayer life, but if the word comes that your child, your father, your mother, or your husband or wife has cancer, you will begin to vow your prayer more than you had before.

Let us read Romans 8:15 to see how this supernatural instinct comes into us. Paul said, "For ye have not received the spirit of bondage again to fear; but ye have received the Spirit of adoption, whereby we cry, Abba, Father." The word *Abba* is the Chaldean word for Father. When you receive the Spirit of adoption, you begin to cry, "Father, Father." For the benefit of those who do not understand this Scripture, I will clarify it. Paul said that you receive the Spirit of adoption. When you adopt someone else's child, you go through legal procedures and officially file the proper papers, and then the child legally belongs to you. Nevertheless, no matter how much he belongs to you legally, he will still have the attributes, the actions, and the looks of his biological parents.

By contrast, when God takes you into His family, He does not make out papers and bring you in legally and ceremonially, but He actually gives you the Spirit of adoption. When you receive the Spirit of adoption, you look like your Father, and you become a partaker of His divine nature. You act like your Father, and you know who He is. As soon as you become filled with His Spirit, you begin to cry, "Abba, Father."

Verses 16-17 read: "The Spirit [the Holy Spirit] itself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God: And if children, then heirs; heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ." When you are made to realize that you are truly a son of God and a joint heir with Christ, the very Spirit of God will bear witness with your spirit. Paul made that plainer in Galatians 4:6 when he said, "And because ye are sons, God hath sent forth the Spirit of his Son into your hearts, [and that Spirit is] crying, Abba, Father." My friend, you become a changed individual, and God has sent the Spirit of His Son. What does the Spirit of His Son do? He causes you to pray as Jesus prayed.

God's Storehouses

God has given us exceedingly great and precious promises. None of those promises were ours. We all were Gentiles without promise and without hope, but thank God, through the Spirit of adoption, we have been made children of God. As a result, all those precious promises and everything God has (who knows how much God has) are ours. We are heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ. God said to Abraham, "Is any thing too hard for the LORD?" When God wanted the world, He just made one. When God wanted a man, He made one. When God wanted a fruit tree, He made one. God is glorified in blessing His children. He wants each of us to be as rich as He is. All of Heaven's riches are ours, and God has given every storehouse to you and me. What is the combination that will open God's storehouses to us? We must cry, "Abba, Father."

Mark 14:34-36, speaking of Jesus in Gethsemane, reads: "And saith unto them, My soul is exceeding sorrowful unto death: tarry ye here, and watch. And he went forward a little, and fell on the ground, and prayed that, if it were possible,

the hour might pass from him. And he said, Abba, Father, all things are possible unto thee; take away this cup from me: nevertheless not what I will, but what thou wilt."

My friend, crying "Abba, Father" definitely has to do with prayer. We are brought into an experience where a supernatural work is working within us and the Holy Spirit bears witness with our spirit that we are the children of God. When we are children of God, how does the Holy Spirit bear witness with our spirit? When we are born again, our spirit will cry, "Abba, Father." This is the Spirit of adoption. Paul said that God sent the Spirit of His Son (the Holy Spirit) into our hearts, and the Holy Spirit cries, "Abba, Father." Both of them bear witness, opening up the great inheritance that God has ordained for us to enjoy. The devil wants to make you feel, "God has storehouses running over, but you just *try* to get anything!"

God still has a storehouse branded "divine healing." Every kind of healing imaginable is there for us. Jesus paid the price whereby each of us could have that precious privilege. Despite this fact, the enemy is working through unbelief. Many people do not even pray about things. They do not know whether God will answer because they do not pray. The devil has them sold on the idea that it will not do any good to pray, so they do not try. Preachers of every kind try to prove that anointing with oil means giving people every bit of medicine that can be given, and then pray. This is the enemy working through various avenues to sow thoughts in people's minds to kill the effectiveness of God's Word that He has given us to enjoy.

Someone may say, "I didn't know that crying 'Abba, Father' had to do with prayer." Even before conversion, when the Holy Spirit moves on a heart, it is a natural thing for someone to go to an altar of prayer and get down and start praying. When a person seeks God with his whole heart, which is a diligent way, God rewards him. Not one person who has ever sought God in a diligent manner failed to get rewarded. I am in no way saying that God will reward you the very moment you seek Him. Paul did not say that in that verse of Scripture, but he did say that you will be rewarded. If you hold to that promise and seek God in a diligent manner, you will be rewarded.

The Spirit of Grace and Supplications

In Zechariah, Chapter 12, the Prophet spoke of Jerusalem being delivered and how God was going to send a deliverer. He began to talk about physical, natural things down through the chapter, then in verse 10, he switched over to spiritual things. He said, "And I will pour upon the house of David, and upon the inhabitants of Jerusalem, the spirit of grace and of supplications." In other words, God can bring you to a place of praying. In Zechariah 13:1 he said, "In that day there shall be a fountain opened." That fountain was opened when Christ's side was pierced. God was furnishing real deliverance for Jerusalem, a deliverance they had never experienced before. They had physical deliverance of all kinds ever since they had left Egypt, but He was talking about a deliverance that would deliver them from sin.

God said that at that time He would pour out "the spirit of grace and of supplications." In Chapter 12, verse 10, He said, "And they shall look upon me whom they have pierced, and they shall mourn for him, as one mourneth for his only son, and shall be in bitterness for him, as one that is in bitterness for his firstborn." In essence, the Prophet was saying that God would pour out the spirit of grace and supplications to the degree that you would get down and mourn over your condition and pray and seek God as never before. All you have to do is read the New Testament and you will know that very thing occurred. I want you to look at the Apostle Paul's conversion, and you will see exactly how this happened.

In Acts, Chapter 9, we read how Paul was breathing out threatenings against the church. He was persecuting and wasting the Church of God. As He was going down the road to Damascus with papers to put the saints in jail, a great light shone down upon him, and he fell to the earth. Jesus, the resurrected Jesus who had gone back to Heaven, appeared to him and talked to him. He said, "Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me" (verse 4)?

In verses 8-11 we read: "And Saul arose from the earth; and when his eyes were opened, he saw no man: but they led him by the hand, and brought him into Damascus. And he was three days without sight, and neither did eat nor drink. And there was a certain disciple at Damascus, named Ananias; and to him said the Lord in a vision, Ananias. And he said, Behold, I am here, Lord. And the Lord said unto him, Arise, and go into the street which is called Straight, and enquire in the house of Judas for one called Saul, of Tarsus: for, behold, he prayeth."

God Exalts Real Prayer

Someone may say, "Saul was a Pharisee. He prayed three times a day, and he prayed long prayers." He was not truly praying. You see, Jesus knows when you are *really* praying. Many people pray as the Pharisees prayed: they merely go through a form. However, it is an outstanding thing when a man really prays. Jesus already knew what Ananias would say, so Jesus said, "Behold, he prayeth." It is something to behold when a man really prays. You do not have to worry about a man hurting you when he is praying. There are many troubles that people are fussing back and forth over, but if the parties involved would pray, the problems would be dissolved.

Jesus had won a great battle: Saul was willing and submissive. He said, "Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?" The Lord told him to go into the city and wait there. For three days Paul did not eat, but he prayed, and it was not a Pharisaical prayer. He was speaking with a new tongue. Mark 16:17 says, ". . . they shall speak with new tongues." The word *new* there is a different Greek word altogether from the word used in Acts, Chapter 2, where they spoke in another tongue. The word *new* in Mark 16:17 means "a refreshed tongue." When you become a Christian, the tongue that used to cuss, lie, and swear will start praying, "Abba, Father. Praise God!" It has nothing to do with another language. Paul had a new tongue.

Jesus was talking to one disciple about another disciple. In other words, Jesus was saying, "Ananias, you are My disciple, and you are not going to see the old Saul of Tarsus, because he is praying." Ananias lost all his fear and went his way, and when he went through the door, he said, "Brother Saul." Do not tell me that prayer will not do away with a lot of differences when people really pray.

There is so much more to praying than what people are seemingly getting hold of today. When someone is truly praying, it is a sight that the resurrected, glorified Christ notices above everything else. You may be able to sing like a bird or preach like an orator, but you will not excite Jesus. When someone gets down in real prayer, it is a sight worthy to be observed. To many, this sight would be very ordinary. This attitude toward prayer shows the difference in value that earth puts on things and Heaven puts on things. God exalts praying. He would rather see you on your knees really praying, and I am not talking about merely saying prayers.

A New State Toward God

Saul excelled beyond any of his equals. He outprayed them and outworked them. He was the strictest of the Pharisees. When they had to pray three hours, he did not pray two hours and forty-five minutes. Even so, all the praying that he had done through that form of religion never excited God one bit. However, when he got down to business diligently seeking God, God took notice. Paul was praying, "Lord, I can see the Christ that I had been against and the very church that I had persecuted. I see it is the church. I know You are the Messiah," and Jesus said, "Behold, he prayeth."

Jesus points to the sight of a man on his knees as something worthy to behold. Why is this such a sight to behold? First of all, it is the first sign that a great change is coming. Mark it down, my friend, when you get down and diligently pray, it portends that there is much to come and something is going to happen. No one can diligently seek God without moving God on His throne. Paul was wasting his life, but when he really prayed, God heard his prayer and lifted him to the place where he was one of the most outstanding Apostles. He wrote the rest of the Bible! Where did it start? He prayed! I cannot put too much emphasis on this.

The man who prays has come into a new state toward God. You cannot really pray without changing your state toward Him. Oh, you can get down and say a few words before you go to bed, say a few words when you get up tomorrow, and say a few words over your food; but I am talking about getting to a place where Jesus looks down and says, "He is really praying!"

Real prayer changed Paul's state toward God. After he was filled with the Holy Ghost and was baptized, he went out on the street and preached the Church of God doctrine, and the people said, "Isn't that the man who used to persecute the church? Wasn't he against it? What happened to him?" Peter said, "He prayed!" Real prayer will change the church's state toward God, and when our state toward God is changed, our state toward one another will be changed. The man who prays desires to come into a new attitude toward God. He has discovered a need with real depth.

Being Awakened to Your Need

I do not know how many of those three days it took Saul to come to the realization that he had a deep need. He thought he was on the mountaintop, but when he got straightened out, he saw that in terms of real salvation he had nothing. One will never get to the place of really praying until he is somehow awakened to the depth of his need of praying and calling on God.

The reason you do not pray is that you do not think you need to pray; the flesh has raised up. You rest on the length of time that you have been saved, but it does not amount to anything if you have not prayed through today. You are not in any better shape just because you have been saved for years. The devil will try to switch you over to the externals, and you will fall into Pharisaism.

Jesus is looking down to see if you are really praying. His eye is on His children, and His ear is open to their cry. This is sad to say, but it is true: some people do not get diligent until catastrophe comes. It should not be that way, but it happens that way in too many cases. You cannot really pray until you become diligent.

As Jesus looks down upon you, I wonder if He is saying, "Behold, he prayeth" or is He saying, "Behold, he does not pray"? In either case, it is amazing to Christ. It is an amazing thing to Christ when people have been so blessed and then do not pray. Friend, when you get down to business praying, it is a state wherein you have discovered a great need with great depth. When you really pray, pride is gone. Second Chronicles 7:14 says, "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." You cannot really pray until pride is gone.

Paul's pride was gone. No doubt he dressed well and was well respected; he was a man who got things done. Other Pharisees just sat and said, "That Church of God is terrible. They are turning the world upside down and putting the doctrine of Christ in every town." Yet they never did anything about it. Paul was a doer. He got the papers and went to work. He was proud that he was wasting the Church of God; he was doing it ignorantly, but he was proud of what he was doing. He caused many saints to recant and back off by causing them to fear.

Once Paul got down to business praying, all pride was gone. He who had been the strictest of the Pharisees then called himself the chief of sinners. That is getting down to the bottom. Instead of being proud, he was saying, "No one is as bad as I am, Lord." See, when you are a Pharisee, you are glad that you are not as other men; but when you get down to business praying, you are chief of sinners, the ugliest and the worst.

Do you know one reason that your prayers have not been going through? You hold yourself in too much of an elevated position. You have not gotten down to business telling God who you are as He sees you. I am trying to help you so that you can pray diligently. There is too much praying without reward. I still believe that Jesus gets excited when a man or a woman really prays.

A Greater Work to Be Done

When Jesus said, "Behold, he prayeth" (speaking of Saul), He was getting the attention of not only Ananias, but the angels and the Father. Jesus said, in so many words, "If he will just pray, I will do the rest," and brother, He did do the rest. Oh, what a man Paul turned out to be! Aren't you anxious to talk with Him someday? The historian tells us that Paul was a short man and baldheaded, but what a great man of God he was! He prayed, and Jesus did the rest. He started revival fires everywhere his feet trod, and he plainly told people, "It is not me; it is Christ that liveth in me."

Paul gave the same testimony everywhere he went. When they brought him before the captain and let him speak, he said, in so many words, "Well, I was going down the road to Damascus. I had papers to persecute the Christians, but a light brighter than the noonday sun shone down, and Jesus said, 'Saul, why persecutest thou me?' and I fell under the light. He told me to go into the city, and there I prayed three days. Ananias came and laid hands on me, and I received my sight and was filled with the Holy Ghost."

Paul was brought before Agrippa and said, "I was going down the road to Damascus." He stuck right with his testimony. Men trembled when he told them about it. A man of great authority was almost persuaded to be a Christian when he heard Paul tell how he prayed that day and how God moved on his heart and life.

God is no respecter of persons. We are not going to do the same work that Paul did because the Bible has already been written; but God has a greater work for us to do than that which is being done. The starting place is right where Paul started:

he really prayed until he moved Jesus. The name Saul (his name before he was converted) means "destroyer"; the name Paul means "worker." He went around building up the very thing he had been tearing down.

When men truly pray, self-satisfaction and trust in the world's resources are gone. Although there is every reason and encouragement to pray, many fail to pray. Men seeking salvation are praying men, and men living salvation are praying men. Jesus told us to ask for our daily bread. How are you going to live tomorrow without praying? The Bible tells us that without Him we can do nothing.

Keep Asking

Jesus gave us the law of prayer to govern our everyday living. Matthew 7:7-8 says: "Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you: For every one that asketh receiveth; and he that seeketh findeth; and to him that knocketh it shall be opened." Seeking is more diligent than asking; too many just ask. The Greek translation for the word *ask* there actually means "keep asking." It does not mean to ask one time and go your way nonchalantly as people are today. I have heard people say, "If the Lord wants me to have it, He will give it to me." He will not give it to you if you do not ask, seek, and knock. There is not a place in the Bible where He told you to just mention it to God and go on your way and He will give it to you if you are supposed to have it. He has ordained that you pray.

Paul said, "I will therefore that men pray every where, lifting up holy hands, without wrath and doubting" (1 Timothy 2:8). Prayer is a great privilege. I thank God for the privilege of prayer. Is Jesus moved when a man prays? He watched Stephen being stoned until they stoned the very life out of him, yet Stephen prayed. Did he pray, "My God, I can't hardly wait until you put vengeance on this bunch"? No! There is too much of this kind of praying today. Stephen's prayer was, "Lord, lay not this sin to their charge." Jesus no doubt stood up and looked over the banister of Heaven as Stephen prayed, saying, "Come home, son, you have finished your work." The reason some people do not get salvation when they kneel at an altar of prayer is that they do not come seeking wholeheartedly. The word *supplication* means "to ask humbly and earnestly." In other words, one really gets down to business in prayer, with his whole being, praying diligently. Our praying has to be much more diligent in order to move God to the place where He will answer prayer. In Song of Solomon 2:14 Jesus said to the church, "O my dove, that art in the clefts of the rock, in the secret places of the stairs, let me see thy countenance, let me hear thy voice." That is Jesus' attitude toward the church.

Cry Unto Him

Hosea, Chapter 5, talks about the priests who were leading God's people astray, and the people were not paying much attention to God. Verse 15 says, "I will go and return to my place, till they acknowledge their offence, and seek my face: in their affliction they will seek me early."

This verse of Scripture lets us know that God will even send affliction to cause you to turn to Him and cry unto Him. God said that He would go His way and leave them alone until they got to the place where they would acknowledge their offense and seek His face. He said when affliction comes, they would seek Him early. Then James said, "Is any among you afflicted? let him pray" (James 5:13).

God allows certain things to happen because He wants you to pray. I have seen cases of serious diseases of every kind where the doctors finally had to say that as far as they were concerned, the case was hopeless, and God was standing right there waiting for someone to turn to Him and really pray.

We are living in an age where we are blessed, but the blessings can become a curse and a hindrance to us. I am thankful for every bit of help that medical science can give, but it has worked wrong when it hinders you in your praying. Whenever those things hinder real praying, then they have not really been a blessing.

In all honesty, has God shown you that you have not been really diligent in your prayer life, and because of it, you have not reaped the rewards? If the devil can keep you praying without getting any reward or answer, all it will take is time until you quit praying. As I mentioned earlier, nowhere in the Bible does it say that you will get an answer the second you ask; but God is a rewarder of those who seek Him diligently. Whether you receive an answer now or later, you will receive it if you ask in faith without doubting.

Friend, if you do not pray diligently and do not get anything, the devil will keep pecking at you, saying, "What are you praying for? God does not answer prayer," and you will become weary in well doing. Then you will do just as many other people are doing now: they are trying to plot their own course, and when sickness comes, their first thought is never prayer. I ask you again, in closing, how is your prayer life?

1 Timothy 2:1 I exhort therefore, that, first of all, supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks, be made for all men;

2 For kings, and for all that are in authority; that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and honesty.

3 For this is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Saviour;

4 Who will have all men to be saved, and to come unto the knowledge of the truth.

5 For there is one God, and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus;

6 Who gave himself a ransom for all, to be testified in due time.

7 Whereunto I am ordained a preacher, and an apostle, (I speak the truth in Christ, and lie not;) a teacher of the Gentiles in faith and verity.

8 I will therefore that men pray every where, lifting up holy hands, without wrath and doubting.



The Need of Prayer

The Secret of a Good Warfare

I want you to study this Scripture text in light of the context. Paul said in verse 7, "I speak the truth in Christ, and lie not." He was speaking a Bible truth, and it is something we definitely need to consider. Verse 8 reads, "I will therefore that men pray every where, lifting up holy hands, without wrath and doubting."

In 1 Timothy 1:18 we find the key to Paul's exhortation: he was teaching Timothy the secret of warring a good warfare. The Apostle Paul was letting Timothy know that he was dealing with those things so that he "mightest war a good warfare." I want to stress the need of prayer in a greater way in our Christian living. Paul, writing to the church at Ephesus, set forth the same truth in Ephesians, Chapter 6. He said in verse 11, "Put on the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil."

Step by step, Paul outlined how to live carefully. Then, after the armor was finished, he said, "Praying always." Prayer goes right along with warring a good warfare. Far too many have made shipwreck in their Christian experience because their prayer lives were not what they ought to have been.

You can endeavor to live right and put on the whole armor of God, but unless you keep your prayer life up to date, that will be the avenue through which the devil works to take advantage of you in your weakness, eventually overriding and overruling you. Therefore, after Paul gave instructions concerning putting on the whole armor, he said, "Praying always."

He was talking about staying in an attitude of prayer. Prayer is not always words expressed: you can pray and never say a word. One time Jesus prayed at a certain place and, in so many words, said, "Father, You have already heard Me, but for the benefit of those standing by, I speak these words."

Prayer is keeping your heart in an attitude of communing with God. You cannot pray at all times. Certain religious groups have taken that literally, and because of that, they have certain men who spend all the time they are awake in prayer; he was not talking about that. He realized that we have other duties that we have to do, but we can stay in an attitude of prayer in our hearts and be reaching out to God.

"Praying always with all prayer [that is a big job] and supplication in the Spirit [then after you pray all the time, you must watch all the time, because it does not do any good to pray if you do not watch], and watching thereunto with all perseverance and supplication for all saints" (Ephesians 6:18). This verse lets us begin to see what a job we have.

Paul instructed us to pray for all saints, and in our Scripture text, we read a command for all men everywhere to pray. If you think that is foolishness, you do not believe the Bible. You read what the Bible says, and then you go and do what you want to do. That is just exactly what is going on, and it is making the church more powerless every day.

God has ordained the way in which we should walk. He knows more about what it takes to stay saved than we will ever know, but people get heady and begin to think, "I do not have to do that to be saved." You have to do just what the Book says; do not be deceived. I am not warring against you; I am warring against spirits that are warring against every one of us.

If people would start widening out on their praying as the Word of God says, they would be getting along better than they are. If you would go back to the very scheme of salvation, you would see that God never ordained for you to take care of yourself. You are your brother's keeper. We must bear one another's burdens.

The church is in a corporate position: we pray for all saints, and all saints pray for us. If you are not careful, you will get caught up in the spirit of the age and become selfish; then your prayers will not get beyond yourself, your family, and maybe out into the congregation a little. Remember, God is looking down.

Your First and Greatest Duty

In verse 1 of our Scripture text Paul said, "I exhort therefore, that, first of all [above all else and before all else], supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks, be made for all men." God would have you to realize that your first and greatest duty is your prayer life. I wonder, how do you rate?

You may say, "Oh, I am doing my duty." If you were to lay aside preaching, ushering, Sunday school teaching, or whatever you consider to be your duty, what about prayer? God is looking at that first of all. He is glad when you preach right, sing right, testify right, usher right, or teach Sunday school right; but first of all, how is your prayer life? God deals with first things first.

If you could only realize that Paul's writings are the words of a man who was more successful than any two or three preachers today put together. Paul, in writing to a young minister, was revealing the secret of his success so that Timothy could be successful too.

I want to deal with the first thing Paul instructed Timothy on—prayer. The point that I want to get to you is the expression, "First of all, supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks, be made for all men."

You are under a command of duty to thank God for all men: the high and the low, the educated and the uneducated, the good and the bad. Paul went on to tell why we should pray for all men. He wrote in verse 4, "Who will have all men to be saved, and to come unto the knowledge of the truth."

Why is it that more people are not coming to a "knowledge of the truth"? I believe one of the greatest reasons is that the church is not under the burden of prayer to bring people to a knowledge of the Truth. Some even developed the attitude, "Well, they can see the Truth if they want to. I found it, so they can find it." You did not find it! If you were ever blessed with salvation and with coming to a knowledge of the Truth, it was because someone prayed and wept for you. You did not accidentally fall into it.

My friend, I believe that with a little more diligent prayer on the part of the church, we will see more men and women saved and more people come out of Babylon and come to a knowledge of the Truth. I remember the old saints used to say that they prayed people in. My father and mother prayed me in, and when they prayed, oh, how miserable I was. Afterward, they told me, "You would not come, so we just prayed you in."

God is just the same today! His attitude toward the lost is just the same, and His power to work is just the same. Where is the breakdown? We are not getting hold of God in a diligent enough manner. When we get as interested in people being saved and coming to a knowledge of the Truth as God is, more people will get saved and come to the Truth.

Praying for All Men

Church, I hope you can see that we are laborers together with God. You can read that in 1 Corinthians, Chapter 3. However, there is a part that we cannot do, and there is a part that God does not do. I repeat, we must pray for all men to be

saved and come to a knowledge of the Truth. You may say, "Well, I have not let down." The whole church needs this message, and you need it too; but you are not awake to your need.

My friend, when you cease to pray people in, the next move will be some kind of gimmick to get them in some other way. There is no other way to get people in the church but to pray them in; that is God's way. You should not be satisfied to enjoy this salvation another year and yet see people lost and dying all around you. I believe there are still countless thousands of honest hearts over the world. Unfortunately, we are waiting for God to do something, and God is waiting for us to do something.

God's will is that you pray for all men. Kings, potentates, and vile people need to be saved, and people who are saved out in Babylon need to come to a knowledge of the Truth. Our Scripture text states in verses 4-6: "Who will have all men to be saved, and to come unto the knowledge of the truth. For there is one God, and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus; Who gave himself a ransom for all"

I will just make it a little stronger, and say this concerning division: Brother, we need to be burnished with the thought of truth that there is one God, one mediator, and one body. That is a pertinent truth which is needed today above any other truth. If you really believe and practice that, there would be just one brotherhood. To have division, someone has to step aside from that truth of there being just one God and one mediator between God and man.

For example, you may not believe in wearing a necktie; that is your business, but you should not split up with someone who does wear one. People need to come back to this truth! You may not believe in using a guitar when you sing; that is your privilege, but if you split up with another brother because he uses a guitar when he sings, you are not holding to the truth that there is one God, one mediator, and one brotherhood. I say, we need to pray! What is going to heal division? Prayer. What is going to heal breaches? God's people praying.

I am glad that I have never run down another brother, privately or publicly. I preach my convictions, but I in no way run others down. No, sir! I will not do it. Church, we need to get down to business and pray until God dissolves the breaches. Why has it not happened? Because too many think, "Well, we respect other groups of people. We believe they are getting people saved." So we just go on our way and get people saved, and let them go on their way and get people saved; all the while failing to see that the world is looking on. May God help us.

Someone may say, "Well, there will have to be some concessions made." The starting place is prayer! One reason divisions exist is that so often people do not really pray about it. They just live with it and accept it. This is so whether you want to admit it or not! God is telling us that we need to pray for all men. Pray for these circumstances; pray that breaches can be dissolved and that we can be brought to the place where we can have a real brotherhood.

God wills that all men be saved and come to a knowledge of the Truth. God wants the people behind the bamboo curtain and the iron curtain saved. How long has it been since you prayed for the Russians? You cannot have a wrong attitude toward people and pray for them. Your prayer life can become diversified; however, in too many cases, people pray according to their own feelings, not according to what the Word says. If there is anyone at all that you would not pray for, then you cannot pray for anyone. The Bible lets you know that. You ought to pray for all men so that they might be saved.

Maintaining an Attitude of Prayer

God moved on the Prophet Malachi, the last of the Old Testament prophets, to set forth the work of Christ in the words of prophecy. He prophesied of many things that would happen. Old Testament Israel did not want to hear the Word of the Lord, so he just hushed and wrote the last words spoken to them. In the Book of Malachi God put stern judgment on them. He told them, in so many words, "You do not want Me. My table is contemptible to you. You do not want to hear My voice or pray to Me." He then began to speak in words of prophecy of what would happen in this New Testament dispensation.

Malachi 1:11 reads, "For from the rising of the sun even unto the going down of the same my name shall be great among the Gentiles [you know he was talking about a New Testament day because His name was never great among the Gentiles during the Old Testament age]; and in every place incense shall be offered unto my name, and a pure offering."

Incense is symbolic of the prayers of the saints. So, in essence, God was saying, "You people can turn Me down, but a day is coming when the Gentiles will rejoice in My name and there will be incense [prayer] going up in My name from early in the morning till late at night. When the Gentiles have opportunity to come in, they will be a praying people." He said that incense would be going up everywhere. This is where Paul derived the expression, "I will therefore that men pray every where."

In 1 Thessalonians 5:16-18 Paul said to the church at Thessalonica: "Rejoice evermore [that is not merely a good idea; it is a command]. Pray without ceasing. In every thing give thanks: for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning you."

Paul said in our Scripture text, "I will therefore that men pray every where" (verse 8). A praying heart will find and stay in a praying place. Paul was telling us to stay in a praying condition, or in an attitude of prayer, everywhere, all the time. You may ask, "How can I pray everywhere?" You can pray everywhere by staying out of places where it is impossible to pray. There are some places where prayers are strange and real prayer cannot be made.

Barriers to Prayer

A man cannot pray when he is engaged in a crooked bargain. The devil may tempt you to cut the corners a little to get some extra money. When you know that you are being slightly crooked, it would be impossible to stop and tell a customer to wait a minute while you pray about it; prayer would be the least of your thoughts.

You can get into places where prayer is out of the question. The only way you can pray everywhere is to stay out of anyplace where you cannot honestly and uprightly pray, and that covers a multitude of places and things. If you cannot pray there, then you should not be there. There are places where, if you were to even try to pray, it would be blasphemy. Can you picture a drunk sitting in a barroom having to hold on to keep from falling off his seat and saying, "Bring me another. Wait a minute, I want to pray"? That would be blasphemy.

It is impossible for one who is engaged in gossip to pray. I do not think people today know what gossip is. *Webster's Dictionary* says that gossip is, "a person who habitually reveals personal or sensational facts; a rumor or report of an intimate nature; a chatty talk." You cannot engage in gossip and pray.

Have you ever heard two gossipers talking concerning things they did not know anything about, and saying, "I heard this. I don't know if it is a fact, but I heard it"; then about halfway through the conversation, say, "Let's stop and have a word of prayer"? No, there is no atmosphere of prayer when a person is running down someone else and doing defilement.

I want you to get the point: there are places and conditions in which you cannot pray. No one can pray all stirred up and worked up in an outburst of anger. Have you ever seen anyone stop right in the middle of that and pray? Prayer is out of the question when young people overstep and go somewhere alone and pet and carry on. Have you ever heard of them stopping and having a good season of prayer? I want you to see that there are some situations that you can get into where prayer is out of the question; and when prayer is out of the question, you are out of line with God. Moreover, when you cannot pray, you are not right with God.

Some younger leaders are telling people that so much of that is natural. Friend, do not pay any attention to them. They have not been around long enough to know too much. I am telling you what the Bible says. Young people need to keep their hands off each other. You may ask, "How far should I go? What should I do?" A good rule is, when you get worked up in any circumstance or place that you cannot calmly pray and get hold of God, you are out of divine order with God and have overstepped biblical principles.

God wills that men pray everywhere. No man can pray while sitting in the living room watching two men fight on the television screen. That is an atmosphere where your affections become stirred and carried away. You cannot watch the devilish television (the love scenes, the fighting, people shooting in a western movie) and get down in the living room and earnestly pray. You would be completely carried away from the thought of prayer. You are in a place where prayer cannot rightly be uttered.

All these things are keeping people from praying as they ought. "I will therefore that men pray every where" covers all circumstances. You must not allow yourself to get into circumstances where you cannot pray. This is the devil's way of carrying you away.

It is impossible to pray a fervent prayer while you are reading suggestive literature or listening to suggestive music. Those things could not stay in print or stay on the radio another day if they did not affect people. They are there because they do affect people, and worldly people like to be affected in that manner.

You cannot fuss with your husband or wife and pray. People wonder why they are not getting any diligent praying done. There are barriers to prayer. You can get in such a frame of mind and attitude of heart that you cannot pray. Jonah could call on God out of the belly of the whale, but professing Christians today get swallowed up with the monsters of our day and are ashamed to pray and look up to God.

Lifting Up Holy Hands

Paul was not writing to the world in our Scripture text. He was writing to the people of God. The devil is working to get you in a position where you cannot pray right, and then your defense will be gone. Study the whole armor of God: it is all defensive, and the weapon is prayer. None of us has any other weapon to use against the devil. When speaking of prayer, I am not talking about when you cannot say a prayer, but rather praying in such a way that God recognizes that you are really praying.

Again, 1 Timothy 2:8 reads, "I will therefore that men pray every where, lifting up holy hands . . ." Lifting up holy hands is symbolic in the sense that the Jewish attitude of prayer was different from ours. In the Old Testament, when Solomon prayed, he lifted his hands toward heaven with his palms opened to God. You may ask, "Do I have to lift up my hands when I pray now?" No, that was symbolism; however, there are some truths that shine forth from that Old Testament custom which we want to study.

The Psalmist David wrote in Psalm 141:2, "Let my prayer be set forth before thee as incense." Back then, they took fire off the brazen altar, took incense, and went in before God. As I mentioned earlier, the incense was symbolic of the prayers of the saints. If you were to go back and study that incense, you would find that many rules had to be observed. Just any kind of incense could not be brought. God went into detail to tell them how to mix it right. After it was mixed right, it had to be kindled with holy fire and rightly presented before God.

What was the Psalmist conveying? Just any kind of prayer will not work; God will not accept it. In essence, he was saying, "Let my prayer be rightly ordered. Let it be kindled by the power of the Holy Spirit. I want it to be accepted as incense." Then he said, ". . . and the lifting up of my hands as the evening sacrifice" (verse 2). The evening sacrifice had to be pure and clean, without spot and blemish, acceptable to God.

The Psalmist was expressing that when he lifted up his hands, he wanted them to be as clean as the evening sacrifice. Lifting up the hands with the palms open to God showed forth the entreating request. The palms were open, ready to receive. These ceremonial moves set forth truths, conveying to God, "I need help, I desire help, and I expect help."

When Paul mentioned "lifting up holy hands" in 1 Timothy 2:8, the Greek word *holy* used there means, "hands that have not touched forbidden things." Psalm 26:6 says, "I will wash mine hands in innocency [holy hands—innocent, clear]: so will I compass thine altar, O LORD."

People today mess around and get into things that they know they should not be in, touching forbidden things and doing things that are contrary to the Scriptures, then they turn around and want to pray. Let us read how God feels about that in Isaiah, Chapter 1. Old Testament Israel delved in sin and then wanted to come through His courts and raise their hands and pray. God said: "And when ye spread forth your hands, I will hide mine eyes from you: yea, when ye make many prayers, I will not hear: your hands are full of blood. Wash you, make you clean; put away the evil of your doings from before mine eyes; cease to do evil" (verses 15-16). If you do that, God will hear you.

Someone may say, "If that were the standard, a sinner could not be saved." Let me make it plain: I am talking about a saint praying. God holds a different standard on the saint than He does on the sinner who is coming defiled, seeking help from Him. God will hear the vile sinner who comes in repentance and wants to be clean. He can be corrupt and lift up his hands when he comes in a repentant attitude, and God will hear him. On the other hand, if you, as a child of God, know what the truth is and mess around a little and then lift up your hands, see how much He hears you.

Regarding Sin in the Heart

Psalm 66:18-20 says: "If I regard iniquity in my heart, the Lord will not hear me: [The sinner who comes in real repentance is not regarding iniquity in his heart. He is coming to confess and forsake his sin. When you regard iniquity in your heart, you know it is wrong, but you will not confess and forsake it. Therefore, you are regarding it and keeping it in your heart, and God will not hear you!] 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."

Paul spoke of the first requirement as that of lifting up holy hands. God's good gifts cannot be laid on dirty palms. A little sin regarded in the heart will hold back the whole of God's grace. If you, as a professing Christian, regard something wrong in your heart, you may pray and pray, but the answer will not come. People today are doing this very thing. The devil has shifted them over to something that is not in accordance with the Bible; then when their prayers go unanswered, they say, "I am just leaving it with the Lord." You need to be very careful along this line.

First Peter 3:8-12 tells us: "Finally, be ye all of one mind, having compassion one of another, love as brethren, be pitiful, be courteous: Not rendering evil for evil, or railing for railing; but contrariwise blessing; knowing that ye are thereunto called, that ye should inherit a blessing [read closely]. For he that will love life, and see good days, let him refrain his tongue from evil, and his lips that they speak no guile: Let him eschew evil, and do good; let him seek peace, and ensue it. For the eyes of the Lord are over the righteous, and his ears are open unto their prayers: but the face of the Lord is against them that do evil." You do evil when you overstep God's eternal Word and God-given convictions that He has taken time to implant within your heart. When you overstep those, the face of God is against you. This is according to God's Word.

"I will therefore that men pray every where, lifting up holy hands, without wrath . . ." "Without wrath" means having no vindictive or re-vengeful feelings toward anyone. We are living in a time when people carry wrong feelings for years. Some people cannot pray because there is wrath in them and they carry revengeful feelings toward others. If that is the case with you, you need to make things right with your brother, and then come back and God will receive your gift and hear your prayer. If you have revengeful feelings against anyone, it will affect your praying.

If you carry a hurt for very long, you will begin to develop revengeful feelings; it is just as natural as getting hungry. You had better forgive that person from the heart, and do not let too much time pass before you do so. This is the reason Ephesians 4:26 says to "let not the sun go down upon your wrath." That means, when anything in anyway has hurt you or stirred you, do not let the sun go down upon it. You had better get down somewhere and pray, "Lord, I do not believe this was right. I think that person has done me wrong, but by Your grace, I forgive him from the depths of my heart. I am not going to hold him, I am not going to think about it, and I am not going to be plagued with it." That is what the Bible says to do.

My friend, human and divine forgiveness go hand in hand. Jesus let us know in Matthew 6:14-15 that just as you forgive men their trespasses, so the Father will forgive you. If you forgive men and kind of hold them, then He will forgive you and kind of hold you. On the other hand, if you forgive men freely, then He will forgive you freely, and you can be free.

Just as an angry man is unfit to pray, likewise, one who cherishes feelings of that nature in his heart is shutting himself out of the secret place. Your relationship with God is governed by your relationship with others.

Hindrances to Prayer

Psalm 62:3 says, "How long will ye imagine mischief [or evil] against a man?" Evil imaginations will ruin your prayer life. The Psalmist went on to say that if you imagine evil against someone, you become like a tottering fence and a bowing wall; you will be slain. May God help us to reach the day when we will have enough confidence in one another as brothers and sisters in Christ that we will not imagine anything about a brother or a sister until we know that it is definitely a fact and not an imagination.

Imagination can wreck you spiritually. As an example of what I am talking about, suppose someone said, "Well, I saw this and that, and I can just imagine . . ." or "I put two and two together, and I just imagined they were up to something." Right there your wall begins to get a bow in it, and your fence begins to totter, spiritually speaking. It will end up killing you spiritually. Those are the devil's works; he is out to destroy your soul.

While speaking of relationships and what will hinder your prayers, let us read 1 Peter 3:7. It says, "Likewise, ye husbands, dwell with them according to knowledge, giving honour unto the wife, [Husband, how long has it been since you told the wife that you appreciate how clean she keeps the house?] as unto the weaker vessel, and as being heirs together of the grace of life; that your prayers be not hindered."

Many times people get into a form and live as they want to live, yet they think they can really pray. Dear one, you must first get rid of the things that hinder your prayers. Not having a right relationship in the home hinders many people's prayers. Because their prayers are hindered, the children slip out of their hands and into the world and they are lost; nevertheless, you have your own way of living and your own ideas, and you are not going to change. Well, you are going to pay the price when you do not change.

Peter, throughout this letter, was dealing with the attitude of a slave toward a master and a master toward a slave, a parent's attitude toward a child and a child's attitude toward his parents, and the attitudes and actions of a husband toward a wife and a wife toward a husband. Whether you believe it or not, these things will hinder your prayers.

People go on living the way they want to live, holding on to their own fanciful ways, but watch them when they get down to prayer. See how much praying they can do. Why would God bring up the thought of the way the husband and the wife live hindering their prayers? Because prayer is such a necessity.

Above everything else, you need to keep your home in such a way that you can offer prayer and God will hear. It is the only defense for your home. If you allow things to get into your life, they will hinder your prayers. Too many are claiming to be Christians, maybe even holding offices in the church, whose home lives are not good. They have hurt each other until they do not have family worship anymore. The father prays in one place and the mother prays some place else.

You cannot treat your wife or your husband just any old way and get down and really pray in front of him or her. Why? He or she will condemn you so that you cannot pray. He will not have to say a word; just his presence there will make you mutter and stutter. The devil has been working in the home as never before. My friend, by attacking the home, he has thrown countless thousands of youth into the deep abysses of sin because their homes were not what they ought to have been.

Principles of Conduct Governing Marriage

Peter said that husbands need to dwell with their wives according to knowledge, giving honor to her as unto the weaker vessel (and wife, you need to make sure that you are the weaker vessel). If she remains the weaker vessel, it will not be hard for the stronger one to handle her, take care of her, and help her. However, when the weaker vessel becomes the stronger and the stronger one becomes the weaker, then your home is not as God would have it to be. You may say, "Oh, that is the way we live." Well, if it is, you are not doing any real praying. No, you are just going through a form.

The Bible lets you know that your prayers can be hindered by what goes on in the home. When Paul taught about the home, he taught what is known as reciprocal ethics. He never places all the responsibility on either one. He never brought up what only the husband should do, but he also brought up what the wife should do and what her attitude should be. Marriage is not a one-sided relationship. You cannot have a really happy marriage with one-sidedness. A marriage must be placed on a reciprocal obligation.

When Peter wrote this in A.D. 62, it was a completely new concept for that era. He was writing to a society of people where women had little or no rights. Therefore, he began to teach that the husband is to deal with her according to knowledge, as the weaker vessel, and as being an heir together of the grace of God through New Testament salvation. The husband must be understanding, sensible, and sensitive to the feelings of his wife. Why? He is the stronger vessel.

First Corinthians 7:1-4 reads: "Now concerning the things whereof ye wrote unto me: It is good for a man not to touch a woman. Nevertheless, to avoid fornication, let every man have his own wife, and let every woman have her own husband. Let the husband render unto the wife due benevolence: and likewise also the wife unto the husband. The wife hath not power of her own body, but the husband: and likewise also the husband hath not power of his own body, but the wife."

When you get married, you sign an agreement. There are three of you in that union: the husband, the wife, and God. Matrimony is holy, and both of you swore an oath that you would fill the position of a wife or a husband to each other for as long as you both shall live.

Paul said, "Nevertheless, to avoid fornication . . ." I just want to say right here, there is no excuse for sin, but there are reasons why men have been drawn into sin: because their wives refused to fulfill their rightful position to their husbands. A man may be tempted, but temptation is not sin; however, yielding to temptation is sin. God has ordained that if a man is tempted, if his passions are stirred in any way, he can go home to his companion. The same holds true for the wife.

There are people who teach that a man and his wife should never come together except to produce a child. That teaching is false, and it is working in a devilish way among people. There is nothing in the Bible that teaches such an idea. The Bible teaches just the opposite. It teaches that within you is a craving for the opposite sex, and when you get married, your body is no longer your own.

The husband's body belongs to the wife, and the wife's body belongs to the husband. Paul let us know that the husband and the wife are to keep coming together and have a close relationship. Homes do not break up where the husband and the wife have a close relationship with each other. Paul went on to say in verse 5, "Defraud ye not one the other." Who can be a Christian and defraud? But this happens, and their prayers are hindered.

The husband should dwell with his wife with understanding. Brother, there are some things you have to understand. The woman is the weaker vessel, and she may not always be as strong as you are. She might have more sicknesses throughout her life, and you will have to understand. So Paul said, "Defraud ye not one the other, except it be with consent for a time, [You should not just shut each other off; it has to be with consent and some understanding. When you deal with understanding, the other companion will say, 'I understand; that will be fine.'] that ye may give yourselves to fasting and prayer; and come together again, that Satan tempt you not for your incontinency." You can keep a lot of temptations out of your home if you will be the right kind of husband or wife. If you fail to do this, you will hinder your prayers.

Paul was writing to people who were in darkness. They did not deal with the woman as the weaker vessel. Before the Gospel came, the woman was dealt with as the stronger vessel. In some countries yet today, you can see a woman carrying a heavy load on her head and her husband walking along beside her not carrying anything. That is the way people in darkness live. The Gospel brought the understanding that the woman is the weaker vessel and the man is the stronger vessel, and he should take care of her. Christianity introduced chivalry.

"Without Wrath and Doubting"

There are things that are barriers to your prayers. Our Scripture text says, ". . . lifting up holy hands, without wrath and doubting," or the Greek version says, "without disputings." In Mark 9:17-29, when the man brought the boy who had a dumb spirit and threw himself on the ground, the man told Jesus that he had brought his son to His disciples but they could not cast out the spirit; so Jesus cast out the devil.

The disciples asked why they could not cast him out. In Matthew 17:20, which relates the same story, Jesus answered the disciples, "Because of your unbelief." Mark 9:33-34 reveals the cause of their unbelief. Jesus said, in so many words, "What were you fellows disputing over when I came down?" Here was the reason for their unbelief! They all held their peace, so Jesus let them know that He already knew what they were disputing over: it was over who was the greatest. Disputations, whether over the standard or anything else, will kill your faith. It is one of the devil's ways of working unbelief.

James, Chapter 1, tells you that when you pray, if you doubt, do not expect to receive anything. If you doubt, you are like the waves of the sea, tossed to and fro. You must first come implicitly, relying on the promises of God and the finished work of Jesus Christ. These promises would not be any good had Jesus not done a finished work. What good would the promise of healing be had Jesus not taken the stripes across His back and paid the price? You must come looking and leaning implicitly on the Word of God and the finished work of Jesus Christ, without doubting.

Jesus said in Mark 9:23, "If thou canst believe, all things are possible to him that believeth." In Mark 11:22 and 24, Jesus said: "Have faith in God. . . . Therefore I say unto you, What things soever ye desire, when ye pray, believe that ye receive them, and ye shall have them."

How does God want you to pray? First of all, our lesson text lets us know that you need to have a little greater consideration for all men everywhere. Next, he tells you how to pray: "Lifting up holy hands [meaning clean lives], without wrath [God, who is looking on the heart, must see that you have no revenge and no bitterness] and [without] doubting." God is still a rewarder of everyone who diligently seeks Him. How can you diligently seek Him? When you come to Him with clean hands, a pure heart, and without doubting.

God is still on the throne. He is as ready to answer prayer today as He was when He walked here on the earth. The Bible states plainly in the Book of Romans that the gifts and callings of God are without repentance. God has never repented. People say that God does not heal today as He used to. God has never repented. When He gave the gifts of healing to the morning-time church, He did not take them back. As long as the church is here on the earth (until Jesus comes again), every gift is available for the church to operate. The starting place is getting our lives straightened out to the place that we can truly pray.

James 5:13 Is any among you afflicted? let him pray. Is any merry? let him sing psalms.

14 Is any sick among you? let him call for the elders of the church; and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord:

15 And the prayer of faith shall save the sick, and the Lord shall raise him up; and if he have committed sins, they shall be forgiven him.

16 Confess your faults one to another, and pray one for another, that ye may be healed. The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much.

17 Elias was a man subject to like passions as we are, and he prayed earnestly that it might not rain: and it rained not on the earth by the space of three years and six months.

18 And he prayed again, and the heaven gave rain, and the earth brought forth her fruit.

Effectual Fervent Prayer



Great Tidings Bring Great Joy

The Apostle James spoke of some divine truths that we need to consider. God's Word sets forth some dominant characteristics of the morning-time church. We see a picture of the church that Jesus built in action. We find in God's Word that the true Church of God is a singing church.

One of the earmarks of the true church is that she is made up of singing people who have a definite song. In Ephesians 5:19 we read, "Speaking to yourselves in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord." Colossians 3:16 tells us, "Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom; teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your heart to the Lord." Out of the heart wherein the Word of God dwells richly comes songs of real praise.

I believe God wants His Word to dwell in us in a richer manner than we are allowing it. The Apostle Paul said to let the Word of God dwell in you richly. That means to let it work in abundant effort and bring forth everything God wants it to. If you do that, you will begin to have a merry heart, and you will begin to feel like singing and praising God.

Real salvation came to bring great joy. This is the message the angels brought to the shepherds. There are great tidings throughout the Gospel that will bring you great joy. One of those is the tidings of salvation: that a man can be delivered from the quagmire of sin and not made over, but made completely new, having every sin removed as far as the east is from the west, with the filth of sin cleansed from his life and the guilt of sin gone. What good tidings!

Moreover, there are many other good tidings, such as the good tidings of divine healing. Our Savior is the Great Physician. He bore the stripes to heal our bodies as well as to save our souls. These good tidings go on and on. The morning-time church was the apostolic church in the beginning of the Gospel Day and a singing church, and she was also a healing church; the record declares it.

"The Prayer of Faith Shall Save the Sick"

The Bible tells the sick to call for the elders of the church, and they will anoint him with oil and pray the prayer of faith. I have studied the anointing with oil because I wanted to know why it was used. Using the oil was a tradition carried over from Judaism. If you study history, you will find that when a Jew was ill, he never went to a doctor. He went to the Rabbi, and the Rabbi anointed him with oil and prayed for him.

Even during the second century, Justin Ireneus made the statement that the sick were healed by the laying on of hands and the anointing of oil by the Christians. History declares this to be true. An emperor named Alexander Severus was healed instantly when a Christian anointed him with oil, laid hands on him, and prayed the prayer of faith. In gratitude, he kept that Christian in his palace until he died. The emperor's testimony was that it was beyond anything he had ever seen when the Christians laid hands on people, anointed them with oil, and prayed, and they were healed.

This biblical practice continued right on through the falling away from Truth and the rise of papalism, a time when spiritual darkness covered the earth. God's mode of healing people was, and still is, by hands being laid on the sick, anointing them with oil, and praying the prayer of faith. If you follow history right down through, you can see how far the devil has led people away from this truth.

Our Scripture text states that the elders are to anoint the sick with oil in the name of the Lord and pray for them, and the Lord will raise them up. By A.D. 852 Roman Catholicism had raised up with its counter doctrine. The anointing oil was no longer put on a man and prayer lifted to cure him; but the anointing with oil and praying was done when a man was dying, and it is still done yet today. When a Roman Catholic is ready to die, the priest is called in to anoint him with oil and get him ready to die.

When God has ordained that we anoint the sick with oil and pray over them so that they can be healed, it is hard to think that the devil could work such a work and cause religious people to use it for just the opposite of that. Instead of calling the priest to be anointed so they can get well, they call the priest to be anointed so they can die. That is 100 percent contrary to the truth. You may think that is ridiculous, but that is what is going on. The anointing with oil is to raise up the sick and make them well.

I merely brought that forth to show you how the devil can twist the truth. You and I are just as human as the people in any past age. There is only one way to hold to any truth, and that is to practice it just as it is. When people cease to practice it, it will become cloudy in their minds; next, they will become confused, and then they will come forth with some other idea.

Truth is not slippery, but it can slip away from us. The only truth any of us really has hold of is what we practice. Whenever one ceases to be a doer of the Word, deception begins to work. God's ordained plan is to anoint the sick with oil and pray the prayer of faith. History lets you know that this was carried out. Today we are serving the same God who healed in days gone by. God has not changed His mind or His plan.

The Law of Prayer

The morning church was a healing church and a praying church. Prayer is so vital, yet it seems to be a mystery to many people. Some people have asked, "Why did God ordain that we must pray?" I may not be able to fully explain why, but I can tell you that God has ordained that it is through prayer that we receive anything from Him.

God taught in the Old Testament and Jesus taught in the New Testament that you must ask to receive. Although God already knows what you need and it is available, you still must ask. It is God's law. The sooner you realize this in a greater way, the better off you will be. God has, with His own motion, placed Himself under the law of prayer. He has obligated Himself to answer the prayers of the righteous. Prayer is the interlink between the divine promise and actually getting the answer to that promise.

In 2 Peter 1:4 Peter said that God has "given unto us exceeding great and precious promises," meaning that His promises are far beyond great. It would have been good enough for God to have given us great promises, but these are "exceeding great and precious promises." God has given them to us because He wants us to enjoy them, and He wants them to become actual realities in our lives.

Peter started in verse 1 of the same chapter by saying that it was "to them that have obtained like precious faith." In other words, these promises are to everyone who is born again. If you are going to lay hold of these exceeding great and precious promises, you have to add to your faith virtue. As great as these promises are (and I cannot begin to tell you how great they are), they will never bring fruit to a perilous heart except through prayer. This is the only ordained means of bringing them to actualization.

Peter instructed us to add to faith virtue, and to virtue knowledge. There are greater promises than we are getting hold of. The devil, through unbelief, will tell you that they are not there, but he is a liar. The promises are there; however, many are not getting hold of them because they are neither praying nor exercising faith as they ought.

The promises of God are golden fruit that can only be picked by the hand of prayer. We can tell others what great promises God has given us, and even sing about our Father being great, and yet not be affected by them. There is no other way to receive the promises of God except through prayer.

In our Scripture text James mentioned how Elijah prayed that it would not rain, and it did not rain. I want you to see how prayer fits in. Elijah did not pray that it would not rain until God told him that He was not going to let it rain; however, God would not do it until Elijah prayed. Had Elijah not prayed, the rain would not have been shut off. The promise was linked to fulfillment through prayer. After three years and six months, God let Elijah know that it was time to pray for rain; so he prayed, and it rained. God never let it rain until Elijah prayed.

God has chosen to work through human instrumentality. God put the scales on the Apostle Paul's eyes, and He could have removed them, but He did not do it until He told Ananias to go and pray. When Ananias prayed, God removed them. Jesus told His disciples before He went back to Heaven to wait for the promise of the Father. The promise was there, but they had to pray to be endued with power from on high.

In Ezekiel God told His people that when seven years were up, He was going to bring them out of Babylon; yet they had to seek His face and pray for deliverance. Every promise God makes is there for us to enjoy, but prayer is the interlink between the promise and its fulfillment.

One way the devil works on people is to make them feel that it is useless and fruitless to pray. The devil will cause you to think, "If God wants me to have it, He will send it." However, God will not send it if you do not pray. The promise is to you, and He wants you to have it, but you must first ask. Jesus said, "Ask, and ye shall receive" (John 16:24). Then James 4:2 says, ". . . ye have not, because ye ask not."

God's law is not a hard law. Just as Elijah prayed, you must also pray to see fulfillment. You may understand the promise, but you have to pray just as Elijah did. Had Elijah been as many people are today, when God told him that He was going to turn off the rain, he might have thought, "Well, there is no need to pray. God already said He was not going to let it rain."

Effectual Prayer

Verse 17 of our Scripture text says, "Elias was a man subject to like passions as we are, and he prayed earnestly that it might not rain: and it rained not . . ." Elijah understood prayer. He understood where we, as humans, fit into this picture. We have to use the same principle in praying for our personal needs, and also in our anxiety and burden for revival. God definitely wants revival, and He has promised it. You can read in His Word where God said that He would save your sons and daughters and your whole household, but He has ordained to work through prayer.

According to the Scriptures, Elijah's prayer was a prayer of faith. This troubles many people; but it is very simple. How could Elijah pray the prayer of faith? He had an argument in prayer. His argument was, "God, you said . . ." Romans 10:17 tells us, "So then faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God." Faith comes by God speaking to you through His Word.

God had spoken to Elijah, so he could pray the prayer of faith because he had God's promise. He boldly held the shield of faith right in front of God's face; the prayer of faith is just that simple yet. When we get a promise from God, we need to pray, "God, You said so. I believe Your Word, and I refuse to give up."

Elijah could not have prayed the prayer of faith had God not told him that He would shut off the rain. He would have had nothing on which to build faith. He had faith because he had already heard from God. This was put in the Bible for our ensample and for our learning.

The prayer of faith, or the effectual prayer, is a prayer wherein one takes God at His Word and hangs on to it. Numbers 23:19 tells us, "God is not a man, that he should lie; neither the son of man, that he should repent: hath he said, and shall he not do it? or hath he spoken, and shall he not make it good?"

If you want to have an effectual prayer, you must pray believing just what God said. Right in this world of unbelief, there is nothing that will affect God any more or any quicker than one of His children fully believing from the heart that He will do what He said He would do and holding right to the promise. The prayer of faith is simply believing that God will be true to what He has promised. The devil has made people feel that the prayer of faith is something that they cannot attain.

Elijah's prayer was effectual because it came from a consecrated heart. He was sold out to divine service. He was a man who had given up to God, and he proved his righteousness by his obedience. He could boldly pray right in front of a whole crowd of people, including four hundred and fifty prophets of Baal, four hundred prophets of the groves, and King Ahab. When he started praying, he said, "LORD God of Abraham, Isaac, and of Israel, let it be known this day that thou art God in Israel, and that I am thy servant" (1 Kings 18:36).

When you do not live right, you are afraid to put yourself in the prayer; you cannot pray boldly. Paul said in Hebrews 4:16, "Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need." When you really pray the prayer of faith, you can come boldly.

Persevering Faith

If Elijah had not been righteous, he could not have done what he did. In the face of dark religion and the devil's doctrines, Elijah was out to prove God true, and he was not afraid to put his God to the test and put his life on the line. This is what is needed in a greater way today.

There is too much slipping around and living in the shadows today. Elijah put his own life in the prayer. In essence, he said, "These people do not think I am Your servant. Lord, prove to them that You are the God of Israel and that I am Your servant." His prayer came from a consecrated heart, and it was specific and untiring. Too many times, we think that when we pray the prayer of faith, the answer will come immediately; however, there are times when you show greater faith when you hang on and hang on and hang on.

Elijah told Ahab that it was going to rain, and then he went up to the top of Mount Carmel and got down with his head between his knees and prayed. He told his servant to go up and look toward the sky to see if anything had happened. He told him to go again seven times; that is what faith will do.

The reason many people do not receive anything today is that they do not hold on in prayer. They get prayed for, but they already have other arrangements made just in case nothing happens. If you do that, you are wasting your time praying. The prayer of faith will hang on. If you really believe from the heart that God is going to do what He said, you will not give up on it. The prayer of faith does not always bring results the minute you pray. The prayer of faith will be prayed just as effectual the seventh time as it was the first time.

When Elijah's servant came back the seventh time, he said that he saw a cloud about the size of a man's hand. Elijah did not say, "It looks like we might have a storm in a couple of hours." He said, in so many words, "Hurry! Let's get off this mountain. There is going to be a downpour!" Who ever heard of a downpour out of a cloud the size of a man's hand? Faith does not have to have a very big sign. When it is real faith, it does not take a big move to bring great encouragement.

In Luke 18:8 Jesus asked the question, "Nevertheless, when the Son of man cometh, shall he find faith on the earth?" He was talking about persevering faith, not nominal faith. There is too much nominal faith.

Elijah's prayer of faith was an expectant prayer. He was on the outlook for the answer, and he knew it had to come. Every time the servant came back, he told him to go again. It would not have made any difference to Elijah how many trips it would have taken. He knew that if he kept praying, the servant was eventually going to see something.

The Bible tells us that Elijah was a man subject to like passions as we are. The Bible does not say that he had like passions, but that he was *subject* to them, just as you and I are; he was just as human. Some people do not get more from God because they try to deify the prophets, thinking they were extraordinary. On the contrary, they were just ordinary men filled with God's Spirit, and they obeyed God and believed His Word.

Elijah was troubled with a corrupt world just as we are, although probably in a greater way. He had to stand up against more than eight hundred false prophets, go before the king and take a stand, and many other things. When he went and told the king that it was not going to rain, God told him to. That is where the Word of God became Elijah's word. This is what Jesus meant when He said that His Word abides in you. When His Word abides in you, it becomes your word; you can control it.

First Kings, Chapter 18, tells about when Elijah met with Ahab, the false prophets, and the people of Israel up on Mount Carmel. After Elijah repaired the altar of the Lord, he had them pour twelve barrels of water on the sacrifice and the wood. He really put it to the test, and when he finished praying, the fire fell, and the people said, "The LORD, he is the God" (verse 39).

You have to be willing to let your faith be put to the test in front of the eyes of the people if you ever magnify God and cause people to see what God can do. How is the world going to believe in the Church of God unless we can call some power down from Heaven in the time of need and show them what God can do?

Confessing Your Faults One to Another

Verse 16 of our Scripture text says, "Confess your faults one to another, and pray for one another, that ye may be healed. The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much." The Bible tells you to confess your faults one to another. One has well said that the hardest words in the English language to say to another person are, "I was wrong. It was my fault." Then, I will state right behind that, it is much easier to confess to God than to one another. Human pride works in a great way.

It is not hard to confess to God because you know that God is greater than you are, but it is hard to confess to a brother or a sister in the Lord. Nevertheless, confessing your faults is the only way to be healed of them. If you carry your faults, they are just going to fester into more problems in your life; but if you will confess them and get them out, you can be healed. I believe there is more power and greater victory for us. We can obtain more promises than we are getting. I long to see more gifts of the Spirit working in the church. They are for us.

Many talk about the power of John Wesley's day and of how God did use him in England and the United States in upturning revivals. Back in the beginning of his ministry, every Wednesday he had the church come together and openly confess their faults to one another, and my, what power those people had with God.

Today we would be willing to raise thousands of dollars if it could buy a manifestation of that power, yet we are not willing to confess our faults. I am preaching from a verse of Scripture that says to confess your faults, not just to God, but one to another. The more you carry your faults, the more you will find fault with everyone else.

I do not suppose there was a better person than Daniel. Your life may be as clear as his, but I doubt if you go beyond it. How would you like to test whether your obedience has been right by spending the night in a den of lions? He knew that he was right; he kept his prayer life up. Praying got him thrown in a den of lions. Do not tell me that the devil is not against prayer!

Daniel was one of God's great ones. God mentions him in the Book. Yet, how did he pray when he prayed for deliverance for his people? In so many words, the first part of his prayer was, "Lord, You know my faults. Forgive my failures, and forgive the failures of the people," and God heard him. He was a man of prayer, and when he prayed, he was not afraid to confess any fault in his life. That old Pharisaical spirit never got hold of him.

The devil will get you to do wrong, and then what does he tell you? "No one is perfect." Then on you go, and you add another fault, and another fault; all the while it is moving you from a righteous position, and it is hindering you and putting you in a place where you cannot pray the prayer of faith. If you do not acknowledge your faults, you will never correct them, and you will never be healed of them. A fault will infest the whole character. Many times men will confess great sins but not their faults, and they are not healed.

Confess your faults one to another, and pray for one another. If you would do more praying for one another, you would blame one another much less, and you would also be more tolerant. Moreover, if you would be more awake to your own faults, you would be easier on others; but when you overlook your faults, you will be hard on others.

Energizing Your Prayers

The effectual, fervent prayer means an energized prayer. The Greek version actually says "the energized prayer." It is a prayer that the Holy Spirit words, directs, and imparts with fervency. Paul told the church to pray with the Spirit and to pray with the understanding. For a prayer to be energized, you must be energized by the Holy Spirit, and you must put yourself into it.

First Kings 18:42 tells how Elijah prayed with his face between his knees. You must put your feelings into your prayers. If you want God to hear your prayers for others and if you want your prayers to have an effect on others, it has to have an effect on you first.

It is mere mockery to pray for those whom you love to be brought to Christ while you never move a finger to bring them. There is no need to pray for God to bless unless you energize your prayers by doing what you can do. If you are not careful, you will go right on thinking that you have really done your duty if you have made your way to the house of God and prayed for your neighbors and loved ones to be saved. God cannot believe that you are brokenhearted over the lost condition of your neighbors when you never make a move to get them in to hear the Gospel; that is mockery to God.

It is foolish for a man to sit down amidst building materials and then pray for a house to be built. He would still be praying fifty years from now. We have to pray, but there are some pains that go along with real prayer. You would not pray for your little boy to be a good Greek scholar and never teach him Greek. It would do well for you to pray, but you would also have some moves to make. The same principle applies if you want your child to be a good Christian: you have some moves to make. You must put yourself into your prayers in a greater way.

In 1 Kings 18:42 you can read that Ahab went to eat and drink when Elijah went to pray. Which way are you going? Ahab was as unconcerned as people are today. Elijah had proved God true. Ahab admitted that God was the true God and that all must serve Him, yet he went to eat and drink while Elijah went to pray.

If praying does not work, then you need to fast. It is not that fasting moves God. Fasting does not change God; it changes you. You are tied to the things of this earth more than you think you are. It is through fasting that you begin to cut the cords.

You may be an individual who likes to go shopping. Well, someday instead of going shopping, fast and pray. You may be an individual who really likes to eat. Take a day or two to fast and pray, and get yourself completely cut off from everything else. The more you get cut off from this world and the earthly things of this life, the closer you can get to God and the more fervently you can pray.

There are people waiting to be saved. God wants you to take hold of the promises of His Word, but He wants you to take hold of them by prayer and faith. Prayer and faith will bring the actual promise into your life. Down through the years, we have claimed things by faith before they ever happened, and God brought them to pass. God is unlimited: anything you can believe, He will do.

Too many times we just pray and throw words into the air. We need to nail it down by faith in His promises. You may say, "I am afraid I will not pray according to the will of God." It is God's will for all men everywhere to be saved. You do not need to say, "If it is Your will, Lord, save them." It is His will to save all men; you are praying according to the will of God.

Jesus said in Mark 11:24, "What things soever ye desire, when ye pray, believe that ye receive them, and ye shall have them." There are no more positive words to be used than those. You need to open your heart before God and let Him check you out. Won't you be like David and ask the Lord to search you and try you and see if there is any evil way in you? You need to ask God if you have a fault that hinders you in your praying. If there is, you cannot pray an effectual, fervent prayer as you ought. Do you really desire to be able to pray an effectual, fervent prayer?

1 Timothy 2:1 I exhort therefore, that, first of all, supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks, be made for all men;

2 For kings, and for all that are in authority; that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and honesty.

3 For this is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Saviour;

4 Who will have all men to be saved, and to come unto the knowledge of the truth.

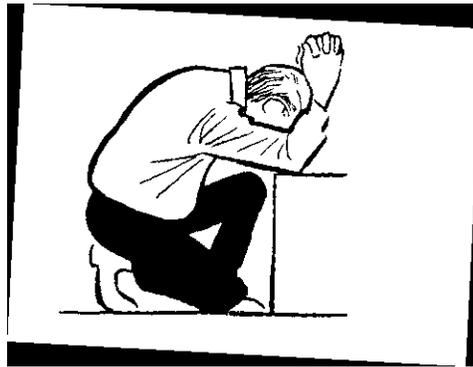
5 For there is one God, and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus;

6 Who gave himself a ransom for all, to be testified in due time.

7 Whereunto I am ordained a preacher, and an apostle, (I speak the truth in Christ, and lie not;) a teacher of the Gentiles in faith and verity.

8 I will therefore that men pray every where, lifting up holy hands, without wrath and doubting.

THE POWER OF EARNEST PRAYER



Lifting Up Holy Hands

God has promised that He would be all we need. Prayer is one of the greatest needs we have. It is the only thing that will change the situations that we want to see changed and the only thing that will further the work of God. Some of what people call praying today is not real prayer according to the Word of God; so may God help us and give us understanding. I am sure everyone will agree that Paul was a man of prayer. In fact, he came into an experience with God in the midst of spending three days in fasting and praying. He certainly believed in practicing a life of prayer, and he exhorted others to try to get them to feel its needfulness.

Paul said that prayer should be made for all men, and he told us why in verse 4 when he said that God wills all men to be saved. He also said in verse 2 that we need to pray for all those in authority, and certainly much praying needs to be done along this very line in the troublesome time in which we live. There needs to be much praying for people in other nations as well.

Paul said to pray for kings and leaders in authority, and he gave good reason: ". . . that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life [that would be the prayer of any good citizen; then he got a little stronger than that] in all godliness and honesty"(verse 2).

In verse 8 he said, "I will therefore that men pray every where, lifting up holy hands, without wrath and doubting." If you will look into the history of that text, you will find that much of the early church reverted to the Jewish attitude of prayer. When the Jews prayed, they prayed with their hands lifted up and their palms turned toward heaven.

The Jewish people knew very well the barriers that kept a man's prayers from getting through to God. In fact, Paul was quoting Isaiah 1:15-16, which reads: "And when ye spread forth your hands, I will hide mine eyes from you: yea, when ye make many prayers, I will not hear: your hands are full of blood. Wash you, make you clean; put away the evil of your doings from before mine eyes; cease to do evil."

Paul merely brought an Old Testament Scripture into the light of the New Testament. He let them know that if they were going to pray and have God hear them, they would have to lift up holy hands. Holy hands are nothing more than hands that have not touched forbidden things. Lifting up the hands was symbolic of a clean life.

God said in Isaiah 52:11, "Be ye clean, that bear the vessels of the LORD." God wants not only your hands to be clean but everything about you. When Paul said "without wrath," he meant with no anger in your heart. The Word of God teaches very plainly that human and divine forgiveness go hand in hand. When you pray, you must also forgive. If you are going to receive forgiveness from God, Jesus taught that you must forgive.

Paul said prayer must be without wrath and without doubting. Also, before you pray and before your prayers can be answered, you must definitely believe that God will answer. You have to come in complete confidence and believe that God is and that He is a rewarder of everyone who diligently seeks Him. Nothing will inspire your faith any more than knowing that your hands are clean, that your heart is pure, and that you have the right attitude toward God and the saints of God.

The Value of Prayer

As I looked at our Scripture text, as well as many other verses, I was prompted to ask the questions: Who can properly estimate the true value of prayer? and Who can appreciate the privilege of prayer? I wonder if we really know its real value and if we really understand and appreciate the privilege of prayer.

Friend, we need to be challenged. I will just make it plain: the way we have been praying is not going to get the job done. We just might as well dismiss the thought that we are fully up to date in our praying and that there is no way we can gain in this area. Too many works have remained undone, and too many have not gotten the victories they ought to have, victories that belong to the Church of God. Prayer is the very foundation and the very reason for every bit of victory.

Many feel it is a great honor to be admitted into the courts of an earthly king, potentate, or president; however, that is nothing compared with being able to step into the court of the King of kings, the Potentate of potentates. The devil has done a work on our thinking and our values to the place that most anything else—shopping, running here and there, seeking pleasure, gossiping—is more valuable than prayer. The sad part of it is, God is looking on, and He sees the attitudes we have toward prayer. I doubt if we really know the value of prayer as we should.

The devil is striking a vital area. He knows where our victory lies, and he knows where our overcoming power is; this is the reason he is working on our prayer lives. May God help us. According to the Bible, prayer is the energy and life of the soul and the mighty weapon with which we fight life's battles. There has never been a victory in any Christian's life but what he prayed and sought God's face; that is God's ordained plan.

In Ephesians 6:10 Paul stated, "Be strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might." Then he told us in verse 11 how to do this: "Put on the whole armour of God." Every piece of that armor is to protect you. After you get full protection, then pray much, "with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit" (verse 18).

I have heard this statement many times: Satan trembles when he sees the weakest Christian on his knees. The devil is not afraid of your singing, preaching, or testifying; those things do not bother him. He gets disturbed when he sees you down on your knees getting hold of God in real prayer.

You may ask, "Are you sure prayer is valued so highly?" Why does the devil fight you on your prayer life more than anything else? Why is it so hard to read God's Word and pray? It is because prayer is where our power and our victory really lies. Satan will let you do many other things, but without prayer they will not avail much.

The Power of Prayer and the Results of Prayer

He who really lives the life of prayer reigns triumphant. You cannot have a good prayer life without reigning and being victorious. Some things are possible only through prayer. Through prayer, dark storm clouds are driven away; through prayer, mountains of discouragement are cast into the sea; through prayer, chasms of difficulties are bridged over; through prayer, hope is given wings; through prayer, faith increases; through prayer, joys abound.

There has never been anyone who has gotten hold of God in prayer that has not left the prayer room with joy and praises going forth unto God. It is impossible to pray and get hold of God without the soul being touched afresh and uplifted by God's presence. There have been many, including myself, who have gone into the prayer closet and had a hard time praying until they really began praying.

How can you know when you are really praying? When you are just saying a prayer, it is hard, it will be very short and limited, and you will be glad when it is over. On the other hand, when you really pray, you do not want to quit when you get God on the line and He begins to say, "Yes, son, I hear you. Go on."

You may go into the prayer closet feeling beat down, because the devil has been giving you such a difficult time, with waves of discouragement rolling over your soul. The devil may even make you wonder if it is really worth living; but once you shut the door and get alone with God and pour your heart out to Him, you will come out ready to fight the good fight of faith no matter what happens. You will be ready to go forth and be victorious for God. By prayer, the windows of Heaven are opened and showers of refreshing dew are rained down upon the soul.

The power of prayer and the results of prayer are manifested in arresting and changing the purposes of God and in changing God's mind. Someone may say, "Oh, some things are going to be just this way." According to the Word of God, you can change God's mind completely through prayer and cause God to repent. I am talking about something mighty powerful when you can cause God to repent by praying.

We are down to the last days. There is much ungodliness and corruption; religion, as a whole, is failing men, and an evening-light apostasy is working all around us. If you are not careful, it will cause you to feel, "I just have to hold out to the end. I pray that I can make it." Prayer changes conditions, and it can change God's mind. If people would really get down to business praying, our nation is not too far gone to have a revival.

Someone may say, "The wheels of God's judgment are already turning." Over and over, you can read in the Bible where God had decided to pour out His judgment and destroy people, but because someone prayed, God changed His mind and had mercy on them. Oh, the privilege we have of really praying!

The devil hates prayer, but it is the thing that governs our universe. Whether you want to own it or not, every nation is governed by the praying people in that nation. When there are not any praying people, the devil takes over and corruption fills the earth, but praying people can change that.

Prayer Can Affect a Whole Nation

In Genesis, Chapter 20, you can read where Abraham traveled in Gerar. Because His wife was fair to look upon, he was afraid they would kill him; so he told a half lie and said that she was his sister. Abimelech looked upon her and saw that she was a beautiful woman and took her to be his wife. Before the king could go in to her, God gave him a dream and told him that the woman he had taken was another man's wife and that he had better not touch her. God was so stirred that He closed up the wombs of all the people over whom Abimelech was king.

When Abimelech rose in the morning, he went to Abraham and asked, "What have you done to us?" In verse 12 Abraham said, "And yet indeed she is my sister; she is the daughter of my father, but not the daughter of my mother; and she became my wife." Abimelech let him know that he had brought terrible judgment upon them. Not a woman in the country could have a child because God had closed up the wombs of every one of them.

In verses 17-18 we read: "So Abraham prayed unto God: and God healed Abimelech, and his wife, and his maidservants; and they bare children. For the LORD had fast closed up all the wombs of the house of Abimelech, because of Sarah Abraham's wife." This is a biblical illustration of how one man's prayers can affect the condition of a whole nation.

God is just as much stirred today as He was back then when you take someone else's wife; He has not changed His mind. Not too many years ago, it was against the law in some states for an individual to live with another man's wife; the police would go in and bring him out. Now the laws and people's feelings toward such things have been so changed that it is commonplace.

Religion has so failed man in laying down the judgments of God that people are made to feel that God does not hate such sin anymore and that it is not as bad as it used to be. God still brings judgment on sin; every transgression receives a just recompense of reward. Mark it down, no one gets by.

In Exodus you can read where Pharaoh was a firm believer in prayer. Every time God poured out those plagues upon Egypt, Pharaoh called for Moses to entreat the Lord and ask Him to lift the plague. When Moses prayed, the Scriptures say that God lifted the curses. Pharaoh was a wicked and ungodly king, but he believed that the man of God could pray and get hold of God. In Exodus, Chapter 32, when Moses was up on the mountain getting the Law and Aaron led the people to make a golden calf, the Scriptures tell us that the anger of the Lord waxed hot. God said that He would destroy all the people, but Moses fell down before the Lord and prayed for forty days and forty nights. Have you ever prayed for one thing forty days and forty nights? You see, we do not know what real praying is. Forty minutes would be a limit to some people.

Moses got down before God and prayed forty days and forty nights without eating or drinking. I am not saying that you have to pray for the same length of time, but you need to pray as long as it takes to have God hear you. Two or three minutes talking a little and telling God just what you want Him to do is not getting the job done. I speak with respect to every person; however, we are not sincere enough about prayer. Moses really believed that God was going to do what He said He would do.

Changing the Judgments of God Through Prayer

Let us read Deuteronomy 9:18-20: "And I fell down before the LORD, as at the first, forty days and forty nights: I did neither eat bread, nor drink water, because of all your sins which ye sinned, in doing wickedly in the sight of the LORD, to provoke him to anger. For I was afraid of the anger and hot displeasure, wherewith the LORD was wroth against you to destroy you. But the LORD hearkened unto me at that time also. And the LORD was very angry with Aaron to have destroyed him: and I prayed for Aaron also the same time."

When Moses prayed, God had mercy and let the people live for Moses' sake. I want you to see how much God looks on and loves a praying man or woman. God will start saving your children for your sake! The judgments of God might have already passed upon some of them; yet really earnest, sincere prayer in their behalf will change God's mind and make a way for those who perhaps had no hope whatsoever.

God sent Jonah to Nineveh with a message, but he ran from the Lord and went another way. Jonah got on a ship going to Tarshish, and God prepared a great fish to swallow him. When they threw Jonah overboard, the Scripture tells us that Jonah said, "I cried by reason of mine affliction unto the LORD, and he heard me; out of the belly of hell cried I, and thou heardest my voice" (Jonah 2:2).

Jonah got down to business with God, and that is what it takes. Do not wait until you are swallowed up in great distress. You need to get down to business with God now and cry unto Him from the depths of your heart, in all honesty and sincerity. God caused the fish to vomit Jonah out on dry land, and he quickly went down to Nineveh and said, "Yet forty days, and Nineveh shall be overthrown"(Jonah 3:4).

There was so much of God in his message that they knew it was God speaking to them, and when they believed God, the king called a fast. Let us read Jonah 3:7-10: "And he caused it to be proclaimed and published through Nineveh by the decree of the king and his nobles, saying, Let neither man nor beast, herd nor flock, taste any thing: let them not feed, nor drink water: But let man and beast be covered with sackcloth, and cry mightily unto God: yea, let them turn every one from his evil way, and from the violence that is in their hands [that was the reason God would not hear them].

"Who can tell if God will turn and repent, and turn away from his fierce anger, that we perish not? And God saw their works, that they turned from their evil way; and God repented of the evil, that he had said that he would do unto them; and he did it not."

A whole city of sinners prayed; but I dare say, they out prayed some who claimed to be saints, and they moved God! They got down to business and turned from every evil way, cleaned up their lives, and convinced God that they were sincere; so God heard their prayers and repented. I want to say again, prayer has power to cause God to repent; in other words, prayer can cause God to change His mind.

We have more power and more authority through prayer than we realize. If we are not careful, we will fail to use the greatest instrument that God ever gave us, and then we will seek human ways of trying to get things worked out. That is so easy to do.

A Limitless Storehouse Through Faith

Jesus taught us a great lesson concerning talents. One talent that God gives every Christian is the talent of prayer. There has never been a Christian yet who could not pray. This is one of the gifts that God gives every born-again person. It is your privilege to pray. The talent of prayer is something far beyond what people in the world know anything about.

In the parable of the talents that Jesus told in Matthew, Chapter 25, the man with one talent hid it in the earth and did not use it; therefore he lost it. The law of elimination is, whatever you do not use, you lose. Anything God has given you, if you do not use it as He gave it to be used, you will lose it. We have a high privilege in being able to pray. I cannot begin to tell you the power there is in prayer.

The enemy will work to try to cause you to feel, "What is the use?" When something is very serious, he will try to cause you to give up on God. Friend, it does not have to be that way. In Isaiah 45:7 God said, "I form the light, and create darkness: I make peace, and create evil."

In Psalm 2:8 God said, "Ask of me, and I shall give thee the heathen for thine inheritance, and the uttermost parts of the earth for thy possession." There is power in prayer when God can give you the heathen, the unbelieving world. How are you going to get them? "Ask of me," God said.

Oh, what power there is in prayer! The Word of God is full of living, truthful illustrations, but let us join Paul in Hebrews, Chapter 11. This chapter is about praying people. People who have faith are praying people. Paul had been teaching how God is a rewarder of everyone who diligently seeks Him in prayer. He mentioned many patriarchs of faith down through that chapter. In verses 32-33 he said: "And what shall I more say? for the time would fail me to tell of Gedeon, and of Barak, and of Samson, and of Jephthae; of David also, and Samuel, and of the prophets: Who through faith subdued kingdoms, wrought righteousness, obtained promises, stopped the mouths of lions."

Too many people think that Daniel just went into the den of lions and God automatically took care of him. No, Daniel's deliverance in the den of lions was an answer to the prayers that he had prayed three times a day when he bowed and prayed to the God of Heaven, letting Him know, "You are my God. You are my protector. My faith and trust are in You." Daniel's prayer life was up to date! That is the reason he could walk boldly into the circumstance and say, "My God will deliver me."

Verses 34-39 continue: "Quenched the violence of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, out of weakness were made strong, waxed valiant in fight, turned to flight the armies of the aliens. Women received their dead raised to life again: and others were tortured, not accepting deliverance; that they might obtain a better resurrection: And others had trial of cruel mockings and scourgings, yea, moreover of bonds and imprisonment [we ought to be ashamed to put our trials up beside some of these trials]:

"They were stoned, they were sawn asunder, were tempted, were slain with the sword: they wandered about in sheepskins and goatskins; being destitute, afflicted, tormented; (Of whom the world was not worthy:) they wandered in deserts, and in mountains, and in dens and caves of the earth. And these all, having obtained a good report through faith, received not the promise."

May God have mercy on us. They looked forward to the promise. They sealed their lives believing that God's promise was coming and that His promises were true. On the other hand, we have received the promise, and God has taken up His abode: Jesus Christ, through the Holy Spirit, is living within every born-again individual, and He has promised never to leave or forsake us. God is reminding us again, "Ask of me."

Those people faced impossible circumstances, and there was no way out. It was impossible to retain their lives unless they fully placed their faith and trust in God. They knew how to pray, and they knew how to prevail in prayer. Their faith in prayer was no passing attitude that changed with circumstances or with their own feelings. It was a fact with them that God heard and answered prayer. They threw themselves unreservedly into the hands of God, believing that He would help them, and He did.

Everything was possible to men and women who knew how to pray. If you will take your time and read Hebrews, Chapter 11, you will see that they had God doing just about everything a person could possibly need done. Prayer opened to them a limitless storehouse, and God's hand withheld nothing. Someone may say, "Well, it is not the same with us." Jesus' words were, "What things soever ye desire, when ye pray, believe that ye receive them, and ye shall have them" (Mark 11:24). Although other Scriptures govern that, it is a fact.

Prayer introduced God's people to a world of privilege. It brought the strength and wealth of Heaven down to aid finite man. When Moses prayed, he saved a nation. Have you ever stopped to realize that the Jewish nation would have been wiped out right then had Moses not prayed? God was going to kill them all! Ezra prayed and saved the church, yet he was just one man. Certainly, there is more power in agreement of prayer, but there is also power in one man's prayers.

The Danger of Slackness

You must war against an old spirit that will try to settle down on you and cause you to think, "What can I do?" The message is, you can pray. You have the same privilege and right that everyone else has ever had. The same God who changed His mind, saved nations, changed circumstances, and saved lives will hear and answer prayer just the same today if you will get down to business and pray.

If you will study through the Bible, you will see that people are pretty much the same. It is sad to say, but following every one of those great eras of time when God performed such wonderful works, a slackness in prayer among God's people always followed. It is a pattern, and it is something of which you need to beware and battle against. If you get down to business and pray, and God does great things for you, then the next danger is slackness in prayer.

Many times we do not hold on as fervently as we did when we prayed and saw the great need filled; because of that, even though we are praying to the same God, we do not see Him move as He once did. You can follow this pattern throughout the Scriptures. In Judges, seven times over, you can read where this same thing happened with Israel. They got down to business with God, and He blessed them and drove out their enemies, and they reigned on high. Next, they gave up, slackened on prayer, and they went down.

All those things happened for our learning and admonition. What is the lesson? If you have been able to get hold of God in a great way, the enemy's next tactic will be to try to cause you to rejoice in the victory and slacken on really praying. If you let down on really praying, he will steal away the victory and the glory that you once enjoyed.

Israel had such a mighty hold on God that so often had struck terror and awe in the hearts of their enemies; but when they lost their grip on God, they could not call Him on the scene as they once had. God dwelt in that little box overlaid with gold called the ark. Whenever God saw fit for them to go out and battle against the enemy, they did not have to fight when they carried the ark. Their enemies retreated because they knew they could not fight against God.

Unfortunately, Israel failed God, and His presence left them. They still had the ark of God, but they had lost the God of the ark. After that, they battled with the Philistines and felt that they did not have to worry; however, when they carried the ark out, the Philistines took it away from them.

Friend, you can talk about the Church of God in a formal way being the house of God and having the presence of God. However, if you are not careful, you can lose His presence and hold on to a form and yet be powerless. You must meet God's conditions for Him to stay in the midst. If you fail to meet those conditions, you will be left powerless.

Look at the power the morning-time church had: they raised the dead, healed the sick, worked miracles of every kind, opened prison doors, and caused earthquakes through their prayers. Then what happened? They let down and there was a great falling away.

God Renders According to Your Work

Taking a long jump down through the ages, let us also consider the reformation. Men started to get hold of God again. One could say many good things about the reformers, but one thing that stands out about every one of them is that they were men of prayer. They spent much time in prayer, and they believed that God would give them the victory. It was God who took them forward in reformation work, right on through the evening-time reformation until the Lord brought again Zion, and the truth once again shined brightly in the Church of God.

What has happened to us? When the Lord brought again Zion, it was nothing to see the lame healed and crutches hung up and cancers in bottles. I saw a lame man healed all at once when I prayed for him in a revival. Mighty works were done because God's people were a praying people. It was nothing to see groups of people divided up in different places in the church building praying for an hour before the service.

People think they do not have to do that now; they think they can just turn it on. Well, where is the power? To have the power of God demonstrated in the way every heart desires is going to cost us just the same as it cost people in every other age of time: spending time seeking God in real prayer.

If you will study Old Testament Israel and read of how God showed Himself so strong, it will thrill you. However, it was not very long until spiritual decay and spiritual death moved in. They had withstood many things through prayer. There was a reason for it. Sad to say, later they no longer were able to get hold of God and pray to withstand famines. Even as people today, they became very busy with other things rather than spending time in prayer.

Study the morning-time apostasy in the New Testament. What was the devil's first work on them? He got them busy with things other than prayer. We are not in a praying age today. There have been praying ages, times when people really prayed and really got hold of God. They spent much time seeking God, and God answered prayer in marvelous ways.

I remember when I was twelve years old, Dad was holding a revival meeting in a Roman Catholic town in a little old church building. Dad baptized over sixty converts when the two weeks were over. That happened in a town right where the very seat of the beast was. How was that accomplished? It was through prayer. They prayed, and the power of God was manifested.

God can still convince the gainsayer that he is wrong, but it is not going to come about by eloquent speech or long years in service. Too many are resting on the fact that they have been around for forty years, but spiritually, they are as weak as a church mouse. The power of God does not rest in that; it rests in how much fervent praying you are doing before God.

The Psalmist said in Psalm 62:11-12: "God hath spoken once; twice have I heard this; that power belongeth unto God. Also unto thee, O Lord, belongeth mercy: for thou renderest to every man according to his work." You can be strong in the Lord and in His might and power by spending time in prayer, earnestly seeking His face.

Paul instructed us to redeem the time. Why? Prayer is not on people's minds much; in fact, the very powers of hell are warring against prayer. Lawmakers have removed it from the schools, and many people do not really want it in the churches. The devil will let you say prayers, read prayers, and go through forms, but he gets stirred when you get down in fervency and earnestness and really get hold of God.

If you will study old Israel, the morning-time church, and the reformation, you will find that they became busy with many material things. My friend, we are in an age of great activity. Much is going on, and there is a tendency to stress the things that are seen, the material things, and to neglect the unseen and spiritual realities.

The Fire of God

There never was a time when God's people were not religious. No matter how much they apostatized, they were still religious, and they always said their prayers. Read about Israel in the Old Testament. They still went to the temple and offered sacrifices, but they were merely going through a form. That is the reason God asked them why they were coming before Him and having assemblies and offering a multitude of sacrifices.

Then coming right over to the New Testament, in 2 Timothy, Chapter 3, Paul pictured a terrible falling away. He said that people would be lovers of their own selves and that children would be disobedient to parents. Sin of every kind was going on in their hearts and lives, yet they still had a form of godliness, or in other words, they remained religious.

These things are also going on today. People are just as backslidden as they can be over the country, and congregations have apostatized, but they are still religious, still claiming to be the people of God, and still calling themselves the Church of God. This is the way the devil works. Even though those people say their prayers, they have lost the real fire, without which all praying will degenerate into a lifeless form.

In the Old Testament, when they brought their sacrifices, God told them to lay their sacrifices on the altar and let the priest pray, but no one was to light a fire. If it was pleasing, God sent the fire down out of Heaven, and that fire was to let them know that they had pleased God.

The same is true in the New Testament: without the fire falling, we have no way of being assured that God has been pleased with our living and our praying. Someone may ask, "Isn't prayer symbolized in the Old Testament as incense?" It is a symbol of prayer in the Book of Revelation, and also back in the old tabernacle they offered incense. Now, it took effort and toil to prepare the incense because many things had to be beaten together. By the same token, real prayer is no sluggard's work; real prayer takes effort.

They did not get some incense out of a box and God lit the fire to it. No, they had to gather this ointment and that ingredient, beat it small, work it together, and lay it out before God. After all the preparations had been made and they laid it out before God, the fire was needed to unloose the incense and cause it to rise unto God.

This may be a simple message, but I hope you get the point: we can offer all the incense there is; but without the fire of God, we will never get it off the place we are offering it. It takes the fire of God to reach down and ignite it and cause it to go up in a pleasing fragrance to Him; otherwise, it cannot be done. Do not be deceived! When will the fire fall? When you do it according to God's will and your life lines up with the Word.

Even the high priest (and he, in that sense, was higher than you are until you become a son of God), who had to take in the incense, trembled as he took it in. The Bible tells us that he took some blood with him for his own errors and for the errors of the people. Why did he tremble? He knew that if his life was not clear and the sacrifice on the brazen altar had not fully covered him, and if he did not come in the right way, he would fall dead. He had bells on his robe, and if they heard the bells quit ringing, they went in and carried him out.

Since Jesus Christ, through His blood, has opened a new and living way for us to go into that holiest place where the high priest went, do you think that you can enter there in just any kind of shape? No, my friend. I pray that God will help you and will stir your heart. If only people would really pray, every circumstance could be changed, the lost could be saved, and many who are not healed could get healed.

Without the fire of God our prayers have no spirit or fervency. Paul said that the effectual, fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much; it is the fire of God that makes it fervent and puts heat to it.

Prayer and Holy Living

Apostasy always begins in the prayer closet. You can apostatize and fall away from the experience that you once had, and if you are not careful, you will look at your outward standards, your church attendance, and your giving. Why not get to the very heart of it: how is your prayer life? Every up-to-date, spiritual member of the church is ever knocking on that secret closet where the Father brings you in secrecy. If you really pray and keep your prayer life as up to date as it needs to be, you will never apostatize on any other line.

Prayer and holy living are one: they mutually act and react; one cannot survive without the other. Unless you really take time to pray, you will not be holy. You can take time to pray and not live right and your prayers will not mean anything. Holy living and prayer act and react together. You must be careful lest your praying become nothing more than vain repetition. Your prayers can become depraved.

The spirit of that beast spoken of in the Revelation is going out to the whole world. Church of God, how can he work on you? He is not trying to get you to confess your sins to some priest. However, that spirit can work on you just as it has worked on others; then your prayers will become vain repetition, and instead of real holy living, you will have superstition. The word superstition in the dictionary means "false religion."

The spirit of the beast is working, and it is working beyond the realms of Roman Catholicism. The Bible says that it has gone out to the whole world. We are in danger of substituting church work for real prayer and holy living; that is how the spirit of the beast works. You can get very busy at church work, and you can even get too busy at it. I have to keep telling myself this. Why? You can go fast and say, "I am really wrapped up in church work," and lose out in your experience right while you are doing it without spending real time in prayer.

You may say, "Oh, I couldn't be lost doing church work!" Thousands have been. How is it in your prayer closet? I am not talking in terms of time. I am not asking anyone to pray forty days and forty nights. However, I am telling you that you need to get down before God and pray until God has accepted you in prayer and warmed your heart with a precious up-to-date moving of His Holy Spirit.

People may say, "Well, a holy life cannot be lived in a closet." It cannot be lived without the prayer closet. I realize that you do the living after you get out, but you cannot live holy without it. Certainly, there is much church work that needs to be done, but you cannot do more than pray until you have prayed.

Martin Luther once said, "I have a busy day and much to do tomorrow. I must get up three hours earlier and spend it in prayer." He looked at prayer just the opposite of the way we do. We do not think we *have* time to pray, but he *took* time to pray. If you have a busy day scheduled with many things ahead of you, then you need to spend more time in prayer than when you do not have so many things to do.

Someone may say, "You shouldn't read those old books." You cannot show me a modern one that will do me any good. Why would I want to read after these later preachers who tell you that God does not heal anymore! They tell people that God only healed the sick in pre-penicillin days. God does not care whether or not penicillin is available to you; it makes no difference to Him when it comes to healing people.

God Is a Respector of Prayers

Men such as John and Charles Wesley were men of prayer. I read about when John Wesley was on a ship reading the Bible, and a man who was sitting in a deck chair beside him said, "Mr. Wesley, don't you know that we haven't moved a mile or a mile and a half in two days? The wind is against us."

He said, "No, I didn't notice. Just a moment." He looked up and said, "Father, You handle the wind. You are the master of every circumstance. Father, we need to be in New York in so many days."

The man sitting beside him started crying and said, "The wind is blowing, Mr. Wesley. Look at the sails!"

He merely replied, "Oh, yes," and went back to reading the Word. There was nothing exciting about it to him, for he had often prayed and received an answer.

Now that same God is at our disposal. God did not love John Wesley any more than He loves you. God is no respecter of persons, but He is a respecter of prayers. It is only when the whole heart is gripped with the passion of prayer that life-giving fire descends. James taught us that none but the earnest man ever reaches the ear of God. You have to be earnest, and when you are, God sees it.

In Luke 18:8 Jesus asked the question, "When the Son of man com-eth, shall he find faith on the earth?" Someone may ask, "What does that have to do with prayer?" Well, anyone who has real faith is a praying individual. God does not let you have faith that you do not use any more than He will give you light that you do not have to walk in.

In Luke 12:35 Jesus said, "Let your loins be girded about, and your lights burning." Church of God, let us make sure the lamps of faith and the lamps of prayer are burning brightly. Those are two things that Jesus is going to look for when He comes. In Matthew, Chapter 25, Jesus told the parable of the ten virgins, five of which had allowed their lamps to go out. How we need to tremble!

One has well said, "To graduate in the school of prayer is to master the whole course of religious life." People who did not know how to read or write (and I am not advocating illiteracy) were great, strong, stalwart men and women for God; they knew how to pray.

Even though Jesus knew that the furtherance of the kingdom was going to rest on the Apostles, never one time did He teach them to preach; but He taught them to pray. Why is that? If God has called you to preach and you are a prayer warrior, you can preach, and you will preach effectively. On the other hand, you can take all the training there is for preaching, but if you do not have a secret closet of prayer and your prayer life is not what it ought to be, you will never be effective in preaching the Word.

The same principle applies when it comes to living the Word. Your happiness and success in life depend on prayer. The salvation of the lost, even some of your own flesh and blood, depends on your prayers. You might as well get rid of the idea that they are going to accidentally drop in some night and get saved. No one ever got saved (unless it was the Apostle Paul) without someone somewhere praying for him.

"Ask of Me"

There was a minister that I heard about whose wife was in a coma and had been given up to die. They told him that she was a vegetable and would never be any different. He said that he wanted to take her home and take care of her. However, they said that he must never try to move her without flying, because she would die if he tried to take her home in their motor home. So he called the airlines, and they told him it would cost him ten thousand dollars because they would have to take out so many seats and put in a bed, and that he would have to sign a paper that the airlines would not be responsible if she died on the way.

He did not have that kind of money, so he thought of a friend of his who was a wealthy Christian man who owned a Lear jet. He called the man's home, and one of his parents said, "I'm sorry, but he is not here. He is vacationing." When he asked for a telephone number so he could call him, his parent said, "I'm sorry, but he wouldn't give us a number. He said he was so worn out that he was taking a month off, and he wouldn't let anyone know where he could be reached."

So the man got down and prayed, "Lord, You know where he is; I don't know. Have him call me." Before he got up off his knees, the telephone rang, and it was his friend. He said, "How did you come to call me?" His friend said, "Well, I was sitting out in the sun down by the beach and all at once God told me I had better call. What do you need?" He said, "I need that jet. I know it costs several hundred dollars to keep a Lear jet up, but I need it."

He told him the condition of his wife, and his friend asked, "When do you need me?" He said, "Eight o'clock Monday morning." At eight o'clock Monday morning the jet landed. In five minutes time, God had supplied his need.

We read in Isaiah 64:4, "For since the beginning of the world men have not heard, nor perceived by the ear, neither hath the eye seen, O God, beside thee, what he hath prepared for him that waiteth for him." Then, as we read earlier in Psalm 2:8, God said, "Ask of me." Nothing is impossible with God if you can believe. Who would have faith to get on his knees, and on a crowded beach expect God to pick that man out and burden him to go to the telephone? Yet he did. There is no limit to what God wants to do for His people if we will only get on praying ground.

God said in 2 Chronicles 7:14, "If my people, which are called by my name, [The condition of the whole world rests on praying people. My Scripture text told us to pray for those in authority, kings, and potentates, so that we might live a peaceful and happy life and live in holiness and righteousness before God. When catastrophes come on the land, where is

God looking? He is not looking to leaders of nations. He said, 'If my people'; that is the key.] 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."

What a responsible position we stand in! Salvation has been taken too lightly. Selfish spirits have so gotten hold of people that all they think about is just what they themselves have to do to make Heaven. There is more to living for God than that. When we got saved, He washed us in His blood and made us kings and priests. Why have we been made priests? To intercede.

I pray that every honest heart will open to God in honesty, and if it is true, say, "Lord, my prayer lamp and my faith lamp have not been burning very bright. Now after reading the Word, I am fearful that it might go out as it did in the parable of the foolish virgins. I want to humble myself. I want to seek Your face, Lord. I want You to teach me how to pray."

Jesus has never quit teaching the saints how to pray. He taught the disciples. If you will study it, you will see that it was an order of prayer. He will teach you individually how to pray and get hold of God if you will ask of Him.