

Praying in the Old Testament

Part II

by Dr. Manford George Gutzke

Table of Contents

1.	HANNAH	2
2.	SAMUEL	5
3.	DAVID	9
4.	ELIJAH	12
5.	HEZEKIAH	15
6.	ISAIAH	18

Hannah

"So Hannah rose up after they had eaten in Shiloh, and after they had drunk . . . and she was in bitterness of soul, and prayed unto the Lord, and wept sore." These words are found in 1 Samuel 1:9-10. They bring before us the person that we are going to study, Hannah.

Praying is something that believers do, when they need something from God. There is a good portion of praying that probably should be called worship. It is after the fashion of praise, in which you praise God for what He is, and thanksgiving, when you thank God for what He has done. It has in it an atmosphere of contemplation and adoration. You adore God for who He is and what He has done. If you have difficulty with that, let me suggest that you focus your attention upon Jesus Christ on Calvary's cross. You won't be able to picture Him as to His human appearance, because there is no clue as to what He actually looked like. But you do know that He was on Calvary's cross dying for you. That's always a good way to begin your time of devotion.

We are considering that aspect of prayer in which you ask – petition. It would seem natural enough in the matter of praying if we could feel in each case it was inspired by some desire to serve God. I expect that many of us, in praying, are inclined to think of high and holy and lofty reasons. We can think of the angels praying to God, or we can think of outstanding missionaries or great pastors praying to God for things. We are inclined to think that if there is somebody that has accomplished things for the Lord and served Him, then this kind of praying would be in order. We need to be very careful there that we do not tend to come to the conclusion that you qualify for praying by what you do, as if it were a reward.

I know it always seems remarkable to think that petitions will actually be answered, when the inspiration of it, the beginning of it, is actually aroused by desire inside the soul about one's own personal affairs. You remember in our last study (Part 1) we noticed that Samson's becoming involved in open conflict with the Philistines actually started in a personal matter. He fell in love with one of the Philistine women, and then he was mistreated by her relatives. It provoked and angered Samson to the point where he went home and actually caused hostile feelings against the Philistines. You and I might think that was just a purely human affair. But you know the scriptures themselves point out that this was done under the Lord. God actually allowed this to happen in order to bring about this open break. At that time there was such common tolerance of the Philistines on the part of the Israelites, they got along so well together, that in order to precipitate the open friction between the Israelites and the Philistines, God allowed Samson to become personally involved in something that provoked him to fight. I mention that to you because there may be more to the situation you're in than appears on the surface. You can put your trust in God, and you can believe that God who knows how to work all things together for good will be working in your situation too.

We come now to an example of praying. You'll find the story of Hannah in chapters 1 and 2 of 1 Samuel. It's a very human story. Hannah was involved in a very personal and private affair. She was one of two wives. It doesn't particularly help her to say that she was the favorite of the two, when actually she had no children. In those days that was considered a great blemish. She had no children, but the other woman did. And because the other woman did have children, she was preferred before Hannah. This to Hannah became intolerable. Now it seems very personal. It was a matter of feelings that existed between herself and this other woman.

Here we catch a glimpse of the truth that we are drawing your attention to. The inspiration of this

woman's praying was entirely personal. But it was real. Just because it was personal doesn't make it any less sincere.

So she began to pray. You'll read this in the first chapter. She didn't only pray once, but she prayed again and again and again. I want to point out something in passing. I think it's quite common for people to say when they are talking about prayer "After all, God is God, He knows what you have need of. So you ask Him. So that's that. Ask once. That's all it takes." Some would even feel and argue that you don't need to ask at all. They will tell you if you were a real believer and a real confident person, you would just trust God and not have to pray at all. I am sure there are many people who excuse themselves for not praying by simply saying, "Well I don't want to impose on God; I'd rather have it just His way." This is being said, you see, with no regard for the scripture which tells us to pray.

The Bible tells us to pray, and encourages us to pray. God tells us "You have not, because you ask not" (James 4:2). The Lord Jesus said, "Ask, and it shall be given you" (Matthew 7:7). You see, such views that you need to ask only once, or that if you really believe you don't have to ask are not scriptural. And, it's not that way in the history of people. On one occasion Daniel prayed for a certain answer for three weeks (Daniel, chapter 10). And when the answer came he was told that his request had been heard at the first, but that it had been delayed because of spiritual interference. Our Lord Jesus Himself taught "a parable unto them to this end, that men ought always to pray, and not to faint" (Luke 18:1). That's the situation.

But let us go on now to the story with reference to Hannah. The strain in that home situation where the other woman had children got worse and worse. Then we read that, as she was pouring out her heart to God, she vowed a vow. This is quite an important thing to notice, because it's before the answer came. This you'll see in 1 Samuel 1:11. She promised to God that if she was given a man child, she would not keep him. He was to belong to God. If you look at it closely, you will see that at this point she screened out of her request anything selfish. In one way you could say that it was selfish, because she was asking for herself. And yet in another way you can see it was not selfish, because she wasn't going to keep him.

While she was thus praying so earnestly, she was praying half out loud. You know when a person is earnestly in prayer, it is such a natural thing to slip into audible language. I expect it would have sounded something like mumbling. Eli, the priest, came by and saw her, and he thought that she was drunk. He came to her and accused her of being drunk and told her she shouldn't be there in this service if she wasn't able to keep quiet.

Here you want to see right away that she was humble. She took no resentment. That to my mind is very important. She very humbly helped Eli by telling him plainly, "Oh, no, it isn't a matter of me being drunk. As a matter of fact, it's my heart's concern. I am very much concerned about the thing that I want." And she told him that she was just concerned to get an answer to her petition. Well Eli was apparently affected by this. We do not know all that went through his heart; but we do know that he evidently had the light of God because Eli told her that her prayer was granted. In verse 17, "Eli answered and said, Go in peace: and the God of Israel grant thee thy petition that thou hast asked of him." Then in verse 18 notice how courteous she was. She said, "Let thine handmaid find grace in thy sight." Again she showed no resentment, no irritation, no offended pride. She humbly thanked the man for this word. Then in the latter part of verse 18 notice this: "So the woman went her way, did eat, and her countenance was no more sad." What is this an evidence of? Wouldn't you say that she had full confidence? She was a woman who had real confidence in God.

Now we have seen several things concerning this woman. We have seen that she took it to heart that the other woman was ahead of her. She felt very keenly about this. The second thing you will notice is

she was a woman of faith. When she was in this situation, she turned to God in prayer, and she prayed earnestly and sincerely. Then you will remember that when she was falsely accused she was humble. This is also very important. And now we see that she had full confidence. When Eli told her that her prayer was granted, she went home and rested. You see, she believed what he said.

Now we go on from there, and we see in verse 20 that in due time she bore a son, and called him Samuel. Then in verses 21 to 23 we are told that Hannah nursed him at home. She didn't go up to the temple the next year. She stayed home until it was time to wean him. It might help a little bit if you get this whole picture. In that country the nursing of children went on much longer than anything we are accustomed to. They didn't have pasteurized milk or sterilized foods. The water itself was oftentimes bacteria laden and would make children sick. It was very common for those people to nurse their children for several years.

When the time came to wean this child, she brought him unto the house of the Lord in Shiloh, and the child was young. "And they slew a bullock, and brought the child to Eli. And she said, . . . I am the woman that stood by thee here, praying unto the Lord. For this child I prayed; and the Lord hath given me my petition which I asked of him: therefore also I have lent him to the Lord; as long as he liveth he shall be lent to the Lord. And he worshipped the lord there" (Verses 24-28). She was faithful. If you summarize those things about Hannah, you will see a remarkable picture of this woman's disposition and character.

Again I want to emphasize to you that while I think that God's answering prayer is entirely of grace, He does it entirely out of the fullness of His heart. And it's true that anybody can pray. But it's not true that anybody can pray in any way. You need to come before the Lord with a certain frame of mind and attitude. And if you take this woman, Hannah, and see her as a believing person, even though she could be human, I want you to know she turned to God in faith, she was humble, she was full of confidence, and she was faithful. What she promised God, she did.

In chapter 2, verses 1-10, you have a remarkable report of Hannah's praying in praise and thanksgiving. Hannah rejoiced in praising God who had answered her prayer. There is none like the Lord. He knows the way of the human heart. The Lord is a God of knowledge, and by Him actions are weighed. He is sovereign to do as He will. "The Lord maketh poor, and maketh rich: he bringeth low, and lifteth up." He is gracious to lift up the poor. "He will keep the feet of his saints." Oh how she felt this was true for her! "For by strength shall no man prevail." It's God that does it. He is almighty and will sustain His believers, His saints.

Here is a wonderful lesson in this story of Hannah for anybody who needs help. Turn to God. Open your heart before Him. Sincerely come into His presence and yield to Him. And God will hear and answer to His own name's honor and glory.

Samuel

"And Samuel grew, and the Lord was with him, and did let none of his words fall to the ground. And all Israel from Dan even to Beersheba knew that Samuel was established to be a prophet of the Lord. And the Lord appeared again in Shiloh: for the Lord revealed himself to Samuel in Shiloh by the word of the Lord." These words in 1 Samuel 13:19-21 have a way of setting before us the man that we're going to study. In our last study we noted Samuel's mother, Hannah. Now we come to her child, Samuel. This is a man dedicated to God before he was ever conceived. Here is a child who, when he was born, was carefully and lovingly brought up by a mother who intended to give him to God.

I would like to emphasize to parents to think this over. There can be a great effect upon the child if the parent carefully and lovingly brings that child up in order to give that child over to God. You will say everybody does that? Oh, no they don't. There are people who bring their children up to become businessmen and to be rich. Some bring them up to become scholars and to be famous. Some bring their girls up to be pretty or stylish or sophisticated in order that they marry well.

Sometimes you may think this last is the way it should be. I question it. You don't let your children go out and pick any food that they want. When you do, they get sick. You don't permit your children to travel across the street any old way that they want to, you teach them to watch the traffic light. Why to keep your child alive and healthy and well you are constantly doing things that show the child how to select and pick out the good. Why not do this spiritually? If you train your child to eat only good and pure food, why not train him that way spiritually?

So far as Hannah was concerned, she brought this boy up with the definite intention of turning him over to God. When Samuel was just a child, he was brought over to Eli, to the house of God, and was committed to that for life. This is a case of the parent taking a very definite hand in shaping the child for life.

Now we're going to be considering Samuel with reference to his praying. Each time I have tried to say something about praying itself. If, when you speak of praying, you're referring to communing with God, of course it can be a matter of speech. You have heard people talk about how important it is that prayer should be a two-way communication. You should let God talk to you and then you talk to God. If you want to let God talk to you, I'd say let God talk to you first. And how will He do that? Through His Word – the reading of the Bible. Bible study and reading should precede prayer. If you have your Bible study and reading first, you will know what God promises. Then you can pray along the line of the promises of God.

Now there can be communion with God that is not specially put into words. You can be conscious of God's presence and look up into His great majesty, feel your utter dependence upon Him and yield yourself entirely to Him. All this too, can happen in the atmosphere of prayer, when you're conscious of God.

If you have this in mind, you could almost feel that the whole life of Samuel was one of constant praying. This man, from the time he was a boy, was always conscious of the reality of God, and the presence of God. And by the way, this is a possible frame of mind. It's possible to get into such a place that every moment of the day and every thought that you have, you're conscious of the presence of God. The Holy Spirit will affect you in such a way that you will be constantly aware of the presence of God.

We find that early in Samuel's experience a great truth about praying was emphasized. When he was

just a boy he learned about *the listening ear*. You will remember the story. He was asleep, and in the nighttime he heard his name, "Samuel." He rose up immediately, ran into Eli, and said, "Here I am." Eli said, "I didn't call you. Go back to sleep." When he went back to sleep he was awakened again with the name, "Samuel." He got up and ran again into Eli, "Here I am, you called me." He said, "I didn't call you," and sent him back. When this happened the third time, Eli perceived that God was speaking to Samuel and told him what to do. He said, "The next time this happens you say like this, 'Speak, Lord; for thy servant heareth.' And then you listen." And this is exactly what he did.

Isn't that a tremendous principle for you to get into your mind? "Speak Lord; for thy servant heareth." This is being alert to hear the voice of God, alert to heed the Word of God at any time.

In the course of time it became known among all people that Samuel knew the Lord. The Bible doesn't give us any details, but people became conscious of that and they often came to Samuel with their problems. They called upon him to interpret the mind of God in their practical affairs. In those days they called him a judge. So, Samuel became a judge, defining the Word of God. This became the whole nature of Samuel's ministry – to bring men closer to God by showing them the truth. He showed them the truth, and then he encouraged a response to it.

If you were to turn in 1 Samuel to chapter 7, you would see a typical incident in which you have Samuel functioning in this fashion. You will see that the people wanted a blessing from God. They had been under bondage, and they were distressed because of this bondage. For twenty years the ark had not been in the house of God. The time was long, and there was much lament. In the 3rd verse, Samuel told the people that "If ye do return unto the Lord with all your hearts, then put away the strange gods and Ashtaroth from among you, and prepare your hearts unto the Lord, and serve him only: and he will deliver you." This is teaching; this is telling them straight out what God would say. Put away natural, human ideas and practices and turn sincerely and entirely to God, and God will bless you. In verse 4, "the children of Israel did put away Baalim and Ashtaroth, and served the Lord only."

Now in verses 5-7, Samuel showed them the real meaning of turning to God. He led them through an experience of confession of sin. And they confessed that they had sinned against the Lord.

When the Philistines heard about it, they came up to attack. Then the Israelites called on Samuel for help, and Samuel made intercession for them. "Samuel cried unto the Lord for Israel; and the Lord heard him." The Lord took a hand in the matter and turned the tide of battle in their favor. Samuel led them out to follow God and to have a complete victory over the enemy. He raised up a stone and called it Ebenezer, which means, "Hitherto hath the Lord helped us." "The Philistines were subdued, and they came no more into the coast of Israel . . . And there was peace between Israel and the Amorites. And Samuel judged Israel all the days of his life."

After this, there came an experience in Samuel's life that we want to notice. Samuel learned more spiritual truth and he learned it in what we would call the hard way. We see this in 1 Samuel, chapters 8-12. Notice one thing – Samuel learned the unwillingness of people to follow the truth. That must have been a shock to Samuel, because he had been trained to walk in the ways of God. He found out that when he told the people what was true, and what was right, they were unwilling to do it. You'll read, for instance, in 8:19, "Nevertheless the people refused to obey the voice of Samuel." Oh what that must have been to him! It wasn't Samuel so much – it was the truth. He was telling them the truth.

They insisted on having a king. In verse 20 we are told why. It says, "That we also may be like all the nations." How many there are like that! Maybe your name isn't Samuel, and maybe you're not dealing with the whole kingdom of Israel. All you may be dealing with are the people in your own family. You've been trying to guide them. They are getting old enough to make up their own minds and have

some choice in the matter, and you are showing them what would be good. Now they are letting you find out something – they are not going to do it. Even though it's good and even though you advised it, they are going to choose something else. This is what Samuel learned. They insisted on having a king, why? So that they could be like the other nations round about them. You'll have people that will ask for certain things and do certain things because they want to be like the rest of the folks.

"Samuel heard all the words of the people, and he rehearsed them in the ears of the Lord." When these people wouldn't do what he asked them to do, he went to God. He turned to God. He was confronted by their general disobedience. I call it their massive disobedience. The whole nation didn't want to walk the way Samuel pointed out that they should walk. So he turned to God.

Then Samuel got what I can't help but feel must have been the shock of his whole life. You know what happened? "The Lord said to Samuel, Harken unto their voice, and make them a king." That must have shaken Samuel, God saying to him, "Give in and give them what they want." Now their plan was not wise, that's true; and it was not good, that's true; but it was their plan. Samuel saw clearly the dangers of having a king, and he discussed these. He personally would have refused to go along with them. He would have refused to let them do this thing because it was an inferior way. Yet he was to let them do it. This was their privilege. Here is a great truth – a person can have what he insists on having. If he wants to turn away from God, he can do it. You can't stop him. If he wants to neglect God, he can do it. You can't make him think of God. If a man wants to neglect prayer, he can neglect it. But I want to point out to you that they learned that results will follow. God may let you have what you want, but you'll pay for the piper.

In waiting before the Lord in prayer, Samuel learned several things. First, he found out that he should not take this issue too personally. God told him that "the people didn't do this against you, they did it against me." The people had actually rejected God, who was far more important than Samuel. These people belonged to God, not to Samuel. Isn't it true with reference to us, don't you sometimes take it very personally when your own people go wrong, and you feel like they insulted you? Well, don't (p.16) take it so personally. You're not that important. It's far more important that they turned against God.

The second thing I want to point out is that even though wrong, people can choose what they will. They have the freedom to make a bad choice. Now mind you they'll have to pay for this foolishness. But their freedom insists upon it, and nobody living can make them do what they don't want to do.

Thirdly, Samuel must bear witness according to his own good sense. Even though they are going to go wrong, he had to tell them it is wrong. Even though they were going to choose to do something that they wanted to do, and he knows it isn't good, he had to tell them it wasn't good. This is hard to bear, to stand up there and give your witness, knowing the people won't follow your advice.

The next thing that Samuel learned was that he must try to help his people escape their own perils. In some respects this is almost a crowning burden for Samuel. Not only do they turn away from him, not only do they neglect his advice, not only do they do the thing that is wrong, but God actually tells him to go and help them.

It's like this. Suppose you were riding along with someone in a car, and they insisted on taking a certain road. You tell them that's a bad road, and they say it's a good road. You say, "It's a bad road. I know they are fixing a bridge down there over the river, and it has a bad detour. You have to go across the river on a stony spot, and it's a very difficult thing. You may hurt your car doing it." You know that's true. But they insist on traveling. God told Samuel, "Go along with them and show them how to cross the river." And that's what he did.

Then finally in chapter 12:23 Samuel told them: "God forbid that I should sin against the Lord in

ceasing to pray for you." So if you, like Samuel, are learning the hard way that your loved ones will do as they please, whether you like it or not, you're still going to have to stand up for what is right and good, and you're going to have to pray for them all the time.

David

"Then went king David in, and sat before the Lord, and he said, Who am I, O Lord God? and what is my house, that thou hast brought me hitherto?" (2 Samuel 7:18). Our study will be about David and particularly about the prayer that he offered in the course of this 7th chapter of 2 Samuel.

As I have been preparing myself for these studies, I have been given deeper insights and more understanding about praying than I have ever had before. I am impressed to say rather soberly, and I think perhaps a bit sadly, that so often so much is said about praying by persons who do not really practice this method of securing blessing from God. I suppose what I recognize is that it's a common thing to emphasize and to accent this great truth that "God is no respecter of persons" (Acts 10:34). Anybody can talk to God, but I have been impressed to feel that it's often overlooked that saying the words of a prayer is not actually all that there is to praying.

Recall the story of Cain and Abel at the beginning of the Bible. These two sons of Adam and Eve came to worship God, but only one was accepted. I think sometimes many of us have been led to think that it was the sacrifice that they offered that made the difference. In the Book of Hebrews we read that God had respect unto Abel and to his offering. God looked on the hearts of these men, and the heart of Cain and the heart of Abel were two different hearts. God had a different reaction and response to their offerings. God does look at the worshiper who is offering prayer.

When the Lord Jesus was talking to His disciples, and He taught them His great prayer, He said, "Forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors." In that connection He said that if we do not forgive those who trespass against us, neither would our heavenly Father forgive us our trespasses. Here it would appear again that there is a certain frame of mind that you need to have when you pray to God.

You may remember that in 1 Peter, when Peter was talking to husbands about caring for their wives, he ended his comment by saying "that your prayers be not hindered." That implies to me that if a husband, did not deal rightly with his wife, his praying would be hindered. And this is in keeping with everything that we have in mind. In 1 John 3:22, "And whatsoever we ask, we receive of him, because we keep his commandments, and do those things that are pleasing in his sight." Personally I don't think that those commandments refer necessarily just to the Ten Commandments in the law of Moses, but they would refer to keeping God's guidance, following His Word, as you are led of Him. As we seek to follow His guidance and do those things that are pleasing in His sight, we are able to pray more effectively. In our studies thus far, we have seen that the persons who prayed effectually were those who walked carefully in the will of God. In John 15:7 the Lord Jesus said, "If ye abide in me, and my words abide in you, ye shall ask what ye will, and it shall be done unto you." There you have the same idea. Remember, anybody can come to God, but no one can come to God in any way. There is a way to come to God.

Now we're going to look at David. We ought to recognize him for what is actually said in the Bible. The Bible says he was a man after God's own heart (1 Samuel 13:14). You'll say he sinned. Yes, true, He sinned grievously. Incidentally, he suffered grievously for that sin, even though he was forgiven. But this makes his testimony all the more significant to us.

Let's you and I stop for a moment. He sinned. Well now, what man is there that sinneth not? And what about you, as well as about me? Isn't it a wonderful thing to think that a man who has sinned could still be counted as a man after God's own heart? This emphasizes the fact that no man stands before God

on the basis of his record. You're never going to be a man after God's own heart because you have done everything perfectly. You're a man after God's own heart when your attitude toward God is what is acceptable. That means that when you have sinned, you are repentant and you confess.

While it is true that David sinned, that was not his characteristic way of life. No one can read the stories of David in the Bible and think that you're watching a man who carelessly and willfully went into sin. And then keep in mind that God will bless a man in spite of his sin. He will not bless him in his sinning, but in spite of his sins. It's very, very important to keep that in mind for every one of us. Remember that David was a sinner, you're a sinner and I'm a sinner.

As we consider David, we also need to remember that this is the great grandson of Ruth. Ruth married a man by the name of Boaz and had a son named Obed. Obed begat a son by the name of Jesse, and one of Jesse's sons was David. This means to say that David grew up in a believing family. If you have had Christian parents, you have blessings stored up for you that you shouldn't miss. Or if you did not grow up in a Christian home, remember that you have the Lord Jesus Christ to help you in every way that's necessary.

David as a lad and shepherd loved music. He became an expert with the harp. He became known as the sweet psalmist of Israel. This is a man who took time in his youth to sing praises to God. In addition to that, when he was just in his teens, he was anointed by Samuel to be king. When Samuel came to anoint one of the sons of Jesse to become the king, David was still so young that he wasn't even considered at first. After that when he went back out taking care of his sheep, we read that he met a lion and killed the lion to protect the sheep. He also killed a bear to protect the sheep. Later on, when he was still too young to be in military service, you remember he came to the camp of Saul with food for his brothers. There he heard about Goliath the giant, and he went out and killed Goliath. I hope it's clear to you that David didn't go out in the consciousness that he was any great man. When we read that David ran to meet the giant, it wasn't that David was so confident of himself, or because he had such confidence in his slingshot, he had confidence in God. The thing that impressed him was that a Philistine defied God. David was able to feel it didn't make any difference who he was, as long as he was on God's side this man couldn't stand against him.

Later he was taken into King Saul's household to serve him, and afterwards into the army. He conducted himself wisely, quietly, humbly, respectfully. This is the conduct of a man who is humble before God. You can be sure that the usual routine ritual of worship was followed by this man. I mean he went to the tabernacle, he brought his sacrifices, he confessed his sins unto God.

Now I want to draw your attention to David's particular response to the gracious promise that God gave him in the covenant we read about in 2 Samuel 7. We're going to see him in prayer. The whole thing started when David planned to honor God by building Him a house. David himself had a house of cedar, but the worship of God was carried on in the tabernacle, a great big tent made of skins. It was like a temporary structure, and David planned to build God a house. So God sent Nathan the prophet. When you think of Nathan the prophet, you can say to yourself that he was the personification of the Word of God. Today he would do this through the scriptures, through the written Word, by the Holy Spirit. And he sent the Word of God to David, to tell him something: David was to receive blessing from God that he would never have been able to earn. He wasn't good enough to qualify for this blessing, but God was going to give it to him out of His grace and mercy. Because David had in mind to honor God, God was going to honor him. And then Nathan told him that his throne would be kept secure as long as he lived, and that after he died one of his seed would sit on that throne forever. The house of David would forever be the ruling house in Israel.

Now we're face to face with the thing that we want to notice. What did David do? Look in 2 Samuel 7:18. "Then went king David in, and sat before the Lord, and he said, Who am I, O Lord God? and what is my house, that thou hast brought me hitherto? And this was yet a small thing in thy sight, O Lord God; but thou hast spoken also of thy servant's house for a great while to come. [God said that David's house would be established forever.] And is this the manner of man, O Lord God. And what can David say more unto thee? for thou, Lord God, knowest thy servant." Can you feel the humility in this? David was pausing before God and saying to God, "You know right well I'm not good enough for this." There was no question about David's unworthiness. David knew, that this act of God was an act of grace. It didn't depend on David. This promise didn't depend on David being strong and it didn't matter that David was a sinner. David couldn't earn the promise, but neither could he forfeit it. There was no way in which anything that David had done would hinder it. This was the work of God. All David had to do was to yield himself to it. Faith to believe that God will do as He had promised, is in keeping with David's whole record. Notice how he said, "And now, O Lord God, the word that thou hast spoken concerning thy servant, and concerning his house, establish it forever, and do as thou hast said. And let thy name be magnified" (Verses 25-26). Of course David wasn't worthy, of course David's sons were not all going to be perfect men, but God is perfect, and God is worthy.

You may desperately want the blessing of God, and perhaps you're being hindered. Maybe your faith is being shrunken because you're conscious of the fact that you're not good enough. I don't want to condone evil, I don't want you to think that it's a passing thing of no importance. You and I both know that you will deal with God concerning evil. But here is the glory of the truth. God doesn't go by you because you're good or because you're bad. He will go with you and for you and to you if you will receive Him and honor Him. Here in David you see believing, effectual praying: "Now, O Lord God, the word that thou hast spoken . . . establish it forever, and do as thou hast said." Don't deal with me. Don't pay me off one way or another. Glorify thyself and let thy name be magnified. Thou hast promised wonderful things. I am not worthy, but thou art true, altogether true. So let it happen and do according to thy promise.

Now look at the last verse in this chapter, "Therefore now let it please thee to bless the house of thy servant, that it may continue for ever before thee: for thou, O Lord God, hast spoken it: and with thy blessing let the house of thy servant be blessed for ever." It would honor God if you and I would believe Him and receive His blessing with thanksgiving

Elijah

"Elijah 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. And he prayed again, and the heavens gave rain, and the earth brought forth her fruit" (James 5:17-18). It is not unusual to speak of the God of the Bible as being the God of Elijah, because the God of Elijah was a mighty God. And no study of praying would be complete without the witness of Elijah.

Let me say a word to you about his being a prophet. Remember who Israel was. Israel was the people of God. They were living on earth but were to live trusting in God and counting upon God to bless them. Leadership among these people of God included prophets. These were men who spoke forth the Word of God to the people. The prophet was a man who helped other men to understand the ways of God by the Word of God. You see, guidance from God comes to us in several ways. It comes according to processes in nature.

Then there also is a guidance from God that comes according to promise. God promises something that He will do. Now when a person acts according to the laws of nature, the natural factors, he is putting his trust in processes. He learns the natural process and counts on that. With him law prevails – "Whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap." But when a person is living according to the promises of God, grace prevails. You don't get what you deserve. You get what God gives you. God says, "I will bless you not because you're good, not because you're great and not because you earned it, but I will bless you." If all we ever expected was just to get our wages, one thing we would look forward to is death, "the wages of sin is death." But if we wanted to count on the favor and the blessing of God in the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ, then we must know and believe the promises of God. In His grace, God will do more than you can ask or think on the basis of natural processes.

In the time we're studying just now, Israel needed to know that the God in whom they put their trust was a living God, who acted in mercy according to His Word. At the time when the people were under the leadership of a king, they began to forget the promises of God. They began to disobey God's Word, which sets forth these promises. God raised up prophets. These were men who appeared in Israel preaching and teaching the Word of God. It just so happened that when the kings were the most delinquent and the most evil, the prophets were the strongest. So when Ahab was king and had married Jezebel, a priestess of the cult of Baal, he was influenced by her to Baal worship. At that time God sent Elijah.

The real spiritual issue was between Baal and God. The worship of Baal emphasized natural powers and processes. The name of God stands for a living being who overrules and oversees and who brings His will to pass, even if the natural doesn't point in that direction. The contrast was between these two.

How is it that men can become so enamored with human ideas of God? Why is it that the prophets of Baal could number 450? I think it could be understood that men are naturally interested in success. They are naturally interested in being blessed. In natural thinking, success or blessing will come by the use of natural factors. The thing to do then is to honor and to esteem natural factors. And for this reason much attention is paid to natural philosophers, men who explain things on a natural basis, or to scientists, who manipulate natural processes. And really, this kind of thinking is flattering to man, because it makes man feel that he can do it. He flatters his own ego. The achievement that is going to follow is going to be his.

This tendency to give an improper and non-Biblical emphasis on man carries over even into religion.

We sometimes speak of it as humanism. The impression is given that man can create his own world and blessing. Subtly you can see that we are flattering man. We are telling him he can do it, and if he just would do it, he'd get the blessing.

In the same way you could ask why is it that people turn away from the reality of God so easily? You'll find today people come into church and spend a great deal of time talking about how things work out. They seldom talk about what God will do. People who study the life of Jesus of Nazareth, point out certain principles to follow. They seldom will refer to Him as Christ Jesus, the One who could do something for you now. Man, you see, is sinful. And in the presence of God man will feel weak and dependent upon God. That's not flattering. Although man is dependent upon God, he doesn't want to be. Over the world as a whole, you can get a lot of interest in religion. And if it's something that man can do, people will discuss it. But if it's a matter of trusting in God and you're being called upon to face God and have dealings with him, people shrink away from that.

Now Elijah in his public ministry insisted to Israel that only the Living God could bless the country and that God was actually alive. In those days it was a bit different than it is today. In the first place they didn't have the scriptures in hand like we have today. They couldn't get together and study God's way of guiding them. But God arranged things in their daily life and experience to show and teach them His way. God brought Israel from Egypt into the land of Canaan. He pointed out to them that in Egypt the country was flat and the land was irrigated by mechanical irrigation. They pumped the water up out of the river and spread it over the fields. But when they would go into the mountain area of Palestine, they couldn't irrigate the land. God said He was going to take them up into a country where they would be dependent upon Him for rain (Deuteronomy 11:10-12). And so it followed that when Israel was doing the will of God it rained at the right time. And if Israel was not doing the will of God it might not rain. Drought became an evidence that God was withholding His blessing.

Elijah was going to show the people that God was a living God and that the living God is active. He went to the king and told him, "I am going to show you that the Lord God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob is a living God. I am going to ask Him that it not rain until I say so." He made this announcement and for three years and six months it didn't rain. During that time the king hunted him and would have killed him if he could have gotten hold of him. At the end of three and a half years God sent Elijah to Ahab to tell him it would rain. Elijah was to demonstrate that God is a living God.

Elijah challenged Ahab to bring together all the priests of Baal and the priests of the groves, of Ashtaroath to Mount Carmel. He challenged that they would all come together there and that they show the people who was really God. So the contest was arranged on that mountain top with Elijah standing alone against 450 prophets of Baal in front of the people. Elijah turned to the people, "How long halt ye between two opinions? if the Lord be God, follow him: but if Baal, then follow him. And the people answered him not a word" (1 Kings 18:21). What does that mean? They just didn't know; they were downright confused, and this is the way in which he tested them.

You will remember how he had an altar made and how the priests of Baal were to cut up the bullock and put it on the altar and then they were to pray to their gods. They prayed all day long, morning, noon and afternoon, up until the evening hours. They prayed and they danced around and they cut themselves and made a big to-do, but there was no answer. Elijah then repaired the altar of the Lord, built a trench, slew the ox and placed it on the altar. Then he prayed to Almighty God. This is the first place you will see the kind of prayer I want you to notice. He said, "Hear me, O Lord, hear me, that this people may know that thou art the Lord God." What Elijah asked had no natural way of coming to pass. He showed a straightforward dependence upon God according to His Word. And as you know, the fire fell from

heaven in a dramatic way and licked up everything that was on the altar. After this everybody said, "The Lord, he is the God; the Lord, he is the God." When this had happened, Elijah openly announced that it was going to rain. And he went to the top of the mountain and prayed. What is he going to pray for? That it should rain. Why? God said it would rain. Notice this – he prayed for the rain that had been promised. Do you understand that? He prayed for the rain that had been promised. The ground for believing prayer is the known promise of God's Word. When you have God's word given to you in so much plain statement, then you can pray God that He will do what He said He would.

This brings a marvelous truth about prayer to our minds. Praying isn't a matter of reaching up and twisting God's arm. You're not getting God to do something He doesn't want to do. You're not reminding God of something He hasn't thought of. In prayer you're reaching up for something that God is holding out to you. You're to receive something from God. In this case Elijah knew it was going to rain. He told the people it was going to rain, and he sent Ahab home because it was going to rain. Then he went to the top of the mountain and prayed that it should rain as had been foretold. In that praying he put his head down between his knees, stayed in that position, and prayed and prayed. He sent a servant of his to go and look toward the sea, that's where the rain comes from.

There are times when people will feel that they are honoring God when they say that God can do anything. "I just believe that God can make dollar bills grow on trees." That's not really honoring God. You know where dollar bills come from. They come from printing presses, and they come out of men's pockets – that's where they come from.

It doesn't rain out of a blue sky. It rains out of clouds. And where do the clouds come from? They come from the sea. The account has all these natural elements and aspects about it that keep it true and rational and real, but that it came in answer to prayer is obvious.

In Elijah you can see that the ground for believing prayer is the known promise of God's Word. Find out what God has promised and pray that what God has promised He will also perform to His glory.

Hezekiah

"In those days Hezekiah was sick to the death, and prayed unto the Lord: and he spake unto him, and he gave him a sign. But Hezekiah rendered not again according to the benefit done unto him; for his heart was lifted up: therefore there was wrath upon him, and upon Judah and Jerusalem" (2 Chronicles 32:24-25). There will be a number of different passages in which we will be referring to Hezekiah. You read about him in 2 Kings chapters 18-20, in 2 Chronicles chapter 32 and also in the Book of Isaiah in chapters 37-39.

I expect you would agree with me that the idea of praying is commonly associated with spiritual persons. It would give us confidence about a person if we were to hear, "he is a praying man." We just feel that's good. "She is a woman of prayer," that would be a real tribute. It's a normal thing to think that praying is always good and always for good. It's also possibly true that we're inclined to think that anybody who prays will be virtuous, will be good, and will be wise. This is not exactly true.

We have no way of knowing during the Old Testament times how many prayers were offered or how many prayers were answered. There is no report on anything like that. There are only some prayers that are recorded and always for a reason.

We are now going to study a case of praying that has a reason in it that I want to share with you. The case that I am going to study with you is one that was not wise. I am speaking about Hezekiah. Our whole consideration here depends a good deal on us remembering that Hezekiah was a good king. He was a good king because he was a good man. Notice these verses, "Now it came to pass in the third year of Hoshea son of Elah king of Israel, that Hezekiah the son of Ahaz king of Judah began to reign. Twenty and five years old was he when he began to reign; and he reigned twenty and nine years in Jerusalem. His mother's name also was Abi, the daughter of Zacchariah. And he did that which was right in the sight of the Lord, according to all that David his father did. He removed the high places, and brake the images, and cut down the groves, and brake in pieces the brasen serpent that Moses had made: for unto those days the children of Israel did burn incense to it: and he called it Nehushtan. He trusted in the Lord God of Israel; so that after him was none like him among all the kings of Judah, nor any that were before him. For he clave to the Lord, and departed not from following him, but kept his commandments, which the Lord commanded Moses. And the Lord was with him; and he prospered whithersoever he went forth: and he rebelled against the king of Assyria, and served him not. He smote the Philistines, even unto Gaza, and the borders thereof, from the tower of the watchmen to the fenced city" (2 Kings 18:1-8). At a time when godly men were rare, this was a godly man.

Then there came a day when the Assyrians invaded the whole country. They destroyed the northern Kingdom of Israel, and they laid siege to Jerusalem in Judah. The Assyrian army was all round Jerusalem. The army of Judah was on the walls defending the city. The Assyrian besiegers broadcast messages to the people inside the city warning them and threatening them what they were going to do. And on one occasion when they were doing this broadcasting, word was sent out to the Assyrians requesting that they send the broadcast in their own language. But the Assyrians wouldn't do that. They talked in the Jewish language, because they wanted the people to hear it. It was a war of nerves. It was just like sending messages with radio into the enemy territory, as we do today.

Finally, Sennacherib, the King of the Assyrians, sent a letter to Hezekiah with an ultimatum. If he didn't surrender, Sennacherib would take the city and destroy it. In 2 Kings 19:14 we have some idea of

the way Hezekiah dealt with this matter: "And Hezekiah received the letter of the hand of the messengers, and read it: and Hezekiah went up into the house of the Lord, and spread it before the Lord." There couldn't be a better way of doing it than that. Here was this warning. Hezekiah read it, saw what it was, took it in and laid it down before the Lord. And Hezekiah prayed before the Lord. This is the thing to do. He said, "O Lord God of Israel, which dwellest between the cherubims, thou art the God, even thou alone, of all the kingdoms of the earth; thou hast made heaven and earth. Lord bow down thine ear, and hear: open, Lord, thine eyes, and see: and hear the words of Sennacherib, which hath sent him to reproach the living God. Of a truth, Lord, the kings of Assyria have destroyed the nations and their lands, and have cast their gods into the fire: for they were no gods, but the work of men's hands, wood and stone: therefore they have destroyed them. Now therefore, O Lord our God, I beseech thee, save thou us out of his hand, that all the kingdoms of the earth may know that thou art the Lord God, even thou only." This was his prayer. This is the way in which he responded when he was pressed by the enemy from the outside. It was in keeping with this man, who had earlier called Israel to worship God and who had received assurance from Isaiah, that God had heard his cry and would protect the city.

Now again Isaiah sent assurance to Hezekiah. In 19:20, "Isaiah, the son of Amoz sent to Hezekiah, saying Thus saith the Lord God of Israel, That which thou hast prayed to me against Sennacherib king of Assyria I have heard." In verse 34, God said to Hezekiah, "I will defend this city, to save it, for mine own sake, and for my servant David's sake." This is the way in which Hezekiah had prayed. This is the kind of praying you do when you get into an emergency. You're in real need, and you turn to God and call upon Him, and God hears you and answers you and carries it out. Now this in itself would have made a good study.

But now we come across what I referred to at the start. In 2 Kings chapter 20, 2 Chronicles, and also in Isaiah, you will read that Hezekiah took sick. It says that he was "sick unto death." Isaiah the prophet came and told him to put his house in order, that he would die. Then the story goes that Hezekiah turned his face to the wall and cried to God, "And Hezekiah wept sore" (20:3). He didn't want to die. He reminded God that he had been faithful. He prayed for more life.

This might seem like the thing a man would do. Yet I want you to take notice of it exactly as it happened, because this was the beginning of the one flaw in the life of Hezekiah, the one thing reported of him that wasn't up to God's standard. And the interesting thing is he had been a good man, a faithful man, an obedient man. He was a man of faith, and because of this he was able to exercise his faith and have his prayer answered. Notice what happened. "He turned his face to the wall." You see, he didn't accept God's will.

Then God sent Isaiah back immediately, told Hezekiah, "God has heard your cry, and He is going to give you fifteen years more." Incidentally, God let Isaiah make a poultice of figs and place it on the boil. This caused the infection to be gathered up, and Hezekiah got well. It's very interesting that when God was dealing with Hezekiah, you actually see medicinal treatment used. The big point is that God gave him what he asked for. And He gave Hezekiah fifteen more years.

In addition to that, Hezekiah asked for a sign, and God gave him an amazing sign. The shadow on the sun dial went back ten degrees. I have heard that talked about and written about and talked about and written about, and I don't know any more to say than just that the shadow went back ten degrees. It was a famous happening and became known all over the country. Visitors from outside the country came and said, "Show us the sun dial where this happened." It was just as strange to them as it is to you when you hear about it. It was a miracle.

And now starts the sad part. This made Hezekiah proud. Have you ever thought that if you got

answers to all your prayers what a tendency you'd have to become proud? Have you ever felt that with some people, who have had an answer to prayer, they talk about it as if it almost made them special? Do you realize that that's pride? Sometimes people call it spiritual pride. You don't need to use that word spiritual; it's just plain pride. It's a case of thinking you're something extra. It's a temptation. You know you're not nearly so tempted if you are humble under trouble as when you are blessed with prosperity. When you are blessed with prosperity you can get such a feeling that you must be something extra. This is a mistake, and this is what happened in Hezekiah's case.

Shortly after this some strangers came from Babylon. Later on Babylon was to be the nation that would destroy Judah. They asked him, "Are you the man that had the great miracle performed for him? Are you the man that actually had your prayer answered and the sun dial went back ten degrees?" "Yes," he admitted, "he was the man." "Show us the sun dial." He went out and showed them the sun dial where this thing took place. There isn't any doubt about it from the very way in which it reads in the context. Evidently he felt pretty good. He felt pretty big, and he felt pretty important because all this attention was given to him. God had honored him by this special work of wonder. These men then very quietly asked, "Well God must have done other wonderful things for you?" "Yes, He had." "He must have given you great things?" "Yes, He has given me much." "My, we would like to see what He has given you." And so Hezekiah took the men and showed them the gold and silver that God had given to him.

When he got through with all this display, showing off what God had done for him and the men were gone, Isaiah came. All he asked Hezekiah was, "Who were those men?" Hezekiah said, "Well, they were strangers; they were Babylonians." "What did they want here?" "Well, they wanted to see the things that God had done for me." Isaiah asked him, "What did you show them?" "I showed them the gold and the silver and all the blessings that I had gotten from God." Now listen to Isaiah – "Every single thing you showed them you're going to lose. Every single thing you displayed in your vanity you're going to lose. The very kingdom itself is going to be destroyed. However, because you've been a good and a faithful man, God is not going to bring it in your time. But after your time it will certainly happen." Isn't this an amazing thing?

Is it possible for people to get to be proud in an unhealthy way when they receive answers to prayer? There's always a danger. Is it possible that in testifying to the blessing of God that you give in testimony meetings, you sometimes talk about these things until you begin to think you're somebody extra? You feed your own ego. You know they said about Martin Luther that he prayed to God that God should take him before he would ever recant. He was always afraid someday he might turn back from where he was, and he wanted God to take him before he made a fool of himself. The famous George Mueller used to pray, "God keep me from ever being a wicked old man."

There are sins of youth, and we all know about them. But there are sins of old age. Not many of us want to talk about those because we always feel we should respect older people. But you know an older person can get to be proud. You can get to be selfish and love yourself. God isn't impressed with my age. He looks on me like a person. And He doesn't want me to be proud.

Isaiah

"Seek ye the Lord while he may be found, call ye upon him while he is near: Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts: and let him return unto the Lord, and he will have mercy upon him; and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon" (Isaiah 55:6-7). This study will concern praying as it was dealt with and taught by the prophet Isaiah.

If someone has had any dealing with God at all, has experienced the promises of God, and believes in Him, then that person has had communion with God. The prophets in the Old Testament times noted that praying practices among the people showed what their spiritual life was like. If the people prayed earnestly, they were in earnest. If they prayed casually and carelessly, they were careless. If they didn't pray at all, there wasn't any spiritual life in them. This is the way the prophets would have felt.

Living among God's people as they did, the prophets gave instruction to believers as to how they might prosper in spiritual things. They were men who were sent to God's people to help them understand the mind of God. If a person is going to walk with the Lord, "Can two walk together, except they be agreed?" (Amos 3:3). And in order to have human beings walking with the Lord, there must be revealed the things which the Lord would want them to do. This is what the prophets did. The people of God are people who are living in a conscious awareness of God and of His call. And yet because they have minds of their own and because they do in themselves what they want to do, this is where they can falter and fall.

With reference to prayer, Isaiah first of all took note that there was a neglect of praying on the part of the people, and this neglect actually showed itself in the form of rebellion. For instance in chapter 30:1-2, "Woe to the rebellious children, saith the Lord, that take counsel, but not of me; and that cover with a covering, but not of my spirit, that they may add sin to sin: that walk to go down into Egypt, and have not asked at my mouth; to strengthen themselves in the strength of Pharaoh, and to trust in the shadow of Egypt." This is characteristic of people who, not praying, neglect to turn to God and ask Him for help. They turn to human beings and they ask human beings for help. They seek help and comfort from natural elements instead of coming to God. In chapter 31:1 you'll see the same idea: "Woe to them that go down to Egypt for help; and stay on horses, and trust in chariots, because they are many; and in horsemen, because they are very strong; but they look not unto the Holy One of Israel, neither seek the Lord!"

In chapter 43:22 we see words like this: "But thou hast not called upon me, O Jacob; but thou hast been weary of me, O Israel." The reason given that they stayed away from God was that they actually were weary of Him. I don't know whether you believe anything like that can happen. I wonder whether you realize that people can have a feeling of being tired when you mention the things of God? This is no reflection on God. This is simply an indication of their own disposition. They are in the flesh, and as human beings, naturally they are tired of the things of God.

Now in Isaiah 64:7 there is another very clear indication of why they didn't turn to God: "And there is none that calleth upon thy name, that stirreth up himself to take hold of thee." Some people will be inclined to think they should pray just whenever they feel like it. That's not good enough. You need to stir yourself up to pray. It's like having sugar in a cup of tea. You can have sugar all right, but it can all be at the bottom of the cup. You need to stir it up. There are people who basically in their hearts have some faith in God, but it doesn't affect them. You'd surprise them and hurt their feelings if you told them they

didn't believe in God. They do believe in God, but they're not conscious of it. It's lying in the bottom of their hearts and needs to be stirred up.

In chapter 66:4 God says, ". . .when I called, none did answer; when I spake, they did not hear: but they did evil before mine eyes, and chose that in which I delighted not." God noticed these people were not conscious of Him. They were neglecting their personal relationship with Him. This general condition is a mark of what we would call apostasy, real apostasy.

We're going to see that some of these people looked for help. They sought for help but they didn't want it from God. They sought help from natural people, from pagan sources. And despite the fact that it was illogical to do so, they did. For instance, in 44:17-19, talking about a wooden idol, "And the residue thereof he maketh a god, even his graven image: he falleth down unto it, and worshipeth it, and prayeth unto it, and saith, Deliver me; for thou art my god. They have not known nor understood: for he hath shut their eyes, that they cannot see; and their hearts, that they cannot understand. And none considereth in his heart, neither is there knowledge nor understanding to say, I have burned part of it in the fire." They are not logical. If they stopped to think about it they would know that they made up their own ideas of God.

Sometimes as I talk about the gospel and the things of God revealed in the Bible, someone will say to me, "I just don't think that at all." I say, "What do you mean?" "Well I just don't think that's the way it would be." "Well how do you think it would be?" Then they tell me how they think it would be, not because they read it anywhere, but just out of their own minds and hearts. They think that's the way they'd do it if they were God. And then the strange thing is they turn around and put their confidence in their own notions. Isaiah thought it was so strange that they did this kind of thing. Using Babylon as a lesson, in 47:12-15 Isaiah said, "Stand now with thine enchantments, and with the multitude of thy sorceries, . . . if so be thou shalt be able to profit, if so be thou mayest prevail . . . Let now the astrologers, the stargazers, the monthly prognosticators, stand up, and save thee from these things that shall come upon thee . . . they shall not deliver themselves from the power of the flame . . . none shall save thee." I have picked out certain phrases in this portion. By actual test, confidence in your own ideas is utterly useless.

It is true that some of God's people had practiced the public worship prescribed for them. They had gone to the temple, but not sincerely. For this Isaiah had a very strong word to say in the first chapter. Beginning at verse eleven. It's actually an offense to God to be talking about the things of God when you don't really mean it. "To what purpose is the multitude of your sacrifices unto me? saith the Lord." Just take that for our ordinary church services when the preacher or someone else would talk about Calvary and talk about the cross and praise the cross and sing about the cross, but they don't actually call on the people to yield themselves to God. "I am full of the burnt offerings of rams." That's like saying I am fed up. "And the fat of fed beasts; and I delight not in the blood of bullocks, or of lambs, or of he goats. When ye come to appear before me who hath required this at your hand, to tread my courts? Bring no more vain ablations." Then in verse 15: "I will hide mine eyes from you: yea, when ye make many prayers, I will not hear: your hands are full of blood." In other words these people were not sincere.

The same idea is to be seen again at chapter 29:13: "Wherefore the Lord said, Forasmuch as this people draw near me with their mouth, and with their lips do honor me, but have removed their heart far from me, and their fear toward me is taught by the precept of men." Did you catch the significance of that – their fear is taught by the precept of men? That is to say, they give human reasons for doing this and that in the worship of God. And God notices it. They are not really thinking of God.

Let's turn now in Isaiah to 16:12, which speaks of Moab, one of the nations surrounding Israel. Moab,

a descendent of Lot, had had a knowledge of God. But this is what I read, "And it shall come to pass, when it is seen that Moab is weary on the high place, that he shall come to his sanctuary to pray; but he shall not prevail." The high place is where they worshiped the things of nature, natural power, and where the pagan ideas were found. Moab would start out doing like the people of the world. After he tired, not getting anywhere with that, then he'd come to the sanctuary to pray, but he wouldn't get anywhere. He'd have no power in prayer.

Some of God's people become discouraged because they get no results in their praying, but there is a simple reason for it. Isaiah pointed it out in chapter 59:1-2, "Behold, the Lord's hand is not shortened, that it cannot save; neither his ear heavy, that it cannot hear." If you haven't had salvation taking place, and you haven't had answer to your prayer, it's not because God is not able. Verse 2: "But your iniquities have separated between you and your God, and your sins have hid his face from you, that he will not hear." The real reason is sin. But this can be handled. According to chapter 58 of Isaiah, if you really repent, God will turn to you. And if you should feel discouraged because your praying hasn't been blessed, have you really faced up to God about your sins?

Now I want to draw your attention to one of the most wonderful promises about prayer that you'll ever get. I read it to you at the very beginning. I want to read it again in chapter 55:6-7 "Seek ye the Lord while he may be found, call ye upon him while he is near: let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts and let him return unto the Lord, and he will have mercy upon him; and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon." Here is the promise that you really need. Seek the Lord while He may be found. That's right here while you're in this world. Believe me, while you're still alive and you're here, you can turn to God. If you draw close unto the Lord, He'll draw close unto you every time. You look to Him; He'll look to you. You move toward Him, and you'll find He has moved toward you. He's watching you all the time. Now if you turn away from Him, He'll turn away from you. "Seek ye the Lord while he may be found, call ye upon him while he is near." "Let the wicked forsake his way." This word wicked does not refer so much to the immoral and to the ugly. The wicked is the person who has lost his way. The Hebrew meaning of the word wicked is to be off course. You've lost your way, you're on the highway but it isn't the right road. Let the wicked forsake his way – if you're on the wrong road, the thing to do is quit it. Get off that one. "Let him return unto the Lord." Just wherever you are, come back to God. "He will have mercy upon him; and to our God; for he will abundantly pardon."

Some one might possibly say, "How could I do this? What in the world can I do? Where can I go? If it was as simple as walking on the street, I'd do it. If it was to walk down the road, I'd do it. If to walk from here to the church, I'd do it. How will I do it?" Well now I want to give you another verse, Isaiah 40:31, "But they that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings as eagles; they shall run, and not be weary; and they shall walk, and not faint." Waiting upon the Lord, looking into His face, asking Him and waiting for Him to do it, trusting in Him – this is the big thing.

Isaiah knew what he was talking about because he had this experience. He gave, in chapter 6:1-6, the great story of his vision. Isaiah was in the presence of God and saw the glory of God, and he was greatly affected by it. He felt so guilty, and then he saw the angel take a coal off the altar and touch his lips and tell him that his iniquity was cleansed and his sin was taken away. Then he heard God saying, "Who will go for us?" And this cleansed person said, "Here am I; send me." Isaiah found that the sight, the vision of the glory of God, will greatly affect you and cause you to feel that you are personally unfit. But the grace of God is greater than all your sin. And, "Though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool" (1:18).

This matter of praying is to be the whole character of our fellowship with God. And the offer is to all

who come. In chapter 56:7, Isaiah, speaking for God said, "Mine house shall be called a house of prayer for all people." As you have read these words, you will inwardly feel called to draw close unto the Lord. "Seek ye the Lord while He may be found, call ye upon him while he is near."