

PLAIN TALK ON PRAYER

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1

Learning About Praying

When growing up I was naturally skeptical about anything like religion, and I was wary, scared to death, of being fooled or duped by those who were religious. I was ready to think that religious beliefs were artificial. This was my general frame of mind. I did not wish anybody harm; but deep down in my heart I felt that they were talking about a great many things they did not know much about. I knew that praying was a common exercise but that did not impress me very much. I felt that people prayed about the way they celebrate Christmas: it is the thing to do, a sort of social custom, and one who did not celebrate it would be a strange person. I knew that under certain circumstances some people return thanks when they sit down to eat, and some people pray at night before they go to sleep. When I went into a church service, I would expect the preacher to pray.

Then I became a believer. By the grace of God I came to believe that Jesus Christ was my Lord and Savior, and that Almighty God, the Creator of this world, sent His Son into this world for my particular benefit. I believed He sent Him into this world to make it possible for me to be saved, and then He called me to Himself. After I experienced that communion with the Lord, having dealings with the Lord face to face was a great personal blessing.

Now I felt that formal praying had a place. I felt that it was proper to pray at a certain time; there was nothing wrong about opening a meeting with prayer. There was nothing wrong about calling upon God to bless the food at the table, even though we used the same words every time. While I recognized that formal praying had a proper place, I rated informal, personal fellowship in communion with the Lord to be the very essence, the very core of real Christian experience, of real vital relationship with God. I prayed then, and since, not because others pray, nor because it was a good thing to do, but because there were things I wanted, I needed; things I wanted to say and things I wanted to ask for. I now encouraged myself to pray.

At the beginning of my spiritual experience, I had expected to go to the foreign field and so became more serious about praying. I can remember how it struck me suddenly with a shock that if I continued as I was doing, in just a matter of a year or two I might find myself in the middle of Africa, wondering why I was there and what I should do. I realized this could be avoided by praying. In the matter of thinking about serving God by going to the foreign field, I found I was following general ideas about that, but I suddenly realized this did not suit me. I needed and wanted to know personally what God wanted me to do.

After I became a believer I prayed morning and evening and on special occasions, but I found that much of what I was doing was because it was the thing to be done. This did not suit me. I had a feeling I wanted to do things as unto the Lord. When asking for definite things, I wanted to look for definite results. My own coming to confidence about praying was something I actually had to learn and this is what I want

to share with you.

I knew that, commonly speaking, people would say that praying was good. Some people would point out that praying is good because it will help you keep your mind on good things – it will help to keep you clean. Then again people would say that praying is worthwhile because it is honoring to God. This appealed to me. I felt God was to be honored. He is worthy to be praised and it is good for my soul to praise Him. I still think that is true and I would suggest now that any of us would find the reading of certain Psalms, which are expressed in prayer, an enriching experience.

Some people say that praying is good for you because it will assure success in whatever you are doing. I have always had a question about that. This idea seems to hold that if you are going to do something, you should work as hard as you can, and then when you have done everything you can do, you should then ask God to do the rest. It has always seemed to me that you would be having God support you – you would be the one doing the guiding and He would be the One who would do the supporting. I was not satisfied that was right, and my hesitance was sound because actually that procedure is wrong.

Some would say, "You ought to pray because it is good for your soul." This seemed to me to be much along the same line. Such praying could have its place, but I was not quite satisfied that this should be the reason for me to keep on doing it. Some would say I should pray because it would help to bring God's will into action. This is very important. If God wanted to have something done and there was a way I could enter into this and relate myself to Him in praying, this would be good. I could see this more clearly when I looked at the evidence to be seen in the, events developed in the lives of other people. The Bible records the lives of godly men, like Abraham, who prayed. He built an altar everywhere he went for the worship of God. The first thing Noah did when he came out of the ark was to build an altar. Moses was a man who turned to God at all times in the course of his active, eventful life. We find when we look at the list of the Old Testament giants of the faith that they were all praying men. David prayed, Daniel prayed, and Samson prayed: the records of these men indicate the value of prayer.

God's own commandments urge us to pray, telling us that God will hear and answer prayer. We are encouraged by God's promises. They point out what He is going to do in the future, and the direction that He wants us to take. It is obvious that if we were to pray along the line of God's promises, we would be directed in our thinking and in our doing.

Then, of course, we have the wonderful example in the life of the Son of God on earth, Jesus of Nazareth. In His earthly career He spent hours in praying to His Father. He set this example before the apostles and taught them how to pray. Finally, there is the experience of believers all over the world. We read these biographies. We hear their personal testimony over and over again that God answers prayer. This has been verified a million times over among the people who believe in God. The importance of prayer is universally recognized and on good grounds. Praying is a worthwhile exercise for us. I would like to say to you, and I would like to say to me – let us pray.

2

The Lower Level of Praying

As the hart panteth after the water brooks, so panteth my soul after thee, O God. My soul thirsteth for God, for the living God: when shall I come and appear before God? (Ps. 42:1-2).

No doubt this is the cry of the soul that has tasted communion with God. This would seem to be a

proper frame of mind for anyone who wants to pray, but is praying possible and proper when the heart is not deeply stirred? What shall I say about those who are not really yearning to be with God? They may believe in God, they may trust in Him, they may thank Him on occasion, they may be grateful to Him at times, but actually they are in such a frame of mind they could get along for the next hour or two, or for the next half day, without Him. Under such circumstances, should they pray? In other words, should I wait with my praying until I am mature and fervent? The fact is, if I planned to do my praying that way, I might never do it; because I need to pray before I can ever be mature.

At this point I bring something to my mind that is very encouraging. I know that as a baby I first learned to crawl, then I learned to walk, then to run, and then to jump. I did not do all of that at once. I can realize that my praying must begin at that crawling stage. I may need to get down on my hands and knees and painfully crawl inch by inch in what I am experiencing with God. All His grace is available to me but I am not ready to take it. As a matter of fact my praying must be arranged; it has to be planned, set out before me, or I will not ever do it.

Some person may say, "I don't think we should have a set time to pray. I think we should pray whenever we feel like it." I must say to that person, "I'm sorry, but you won't feel like it often enough. And before long there will be a day when you won't feel like it at all." Another person may ask, "Should I have a definite way of praying? Should I make it the rule of my life that when I pray I bow my head and shut my eyes? Should I get on my knees to pray? Do I have to do it like that?" I would tell that person, "Human nature being what it is, you will be better off if you have a way of doing it, and then do it that way." When I close my eyes and bow my head, praying seems to come naturally. And then again, when I get on my knees I certainly feel like praying. These things seem to belong together.

There is one hopeful aspect in this whole matter of praying. It is actually very natural for a believer to think of God. Much happens in my consciousness because I really do believe in God that I scarcely would dignify as praying. I may not be aware of this at all times and yet there is a type of daily fellowship with God that I tend to take for granted; I just count on it. I may find that in the morning, when I awake, I am aware that this day I will be in the presence of God. It may seem just a custom, but it is a part of my life. When I sit down to the table to eat, I do not feel free to start eating until I have given God thanks. I seem to do this naturally. It may be true that one would scarcely think that was praying, but it is. At night, when I go to bed, I feel I want to stop and pray; I want to have a last word of prayer with God. It could be said, "That's just saying my evening prayers," but that is what it is: praying. When I go to church or to prayer meeting, I go with a group of people to worship God in public worship. When the minister says, "Let us pray," I bow my head, I shut my eyes, I listen to him, and my thoughts more or less follow along the line that he is praying. At times I may actually share in that prayer. Always this happens when I repeat the Lord's Prayer. In all of this, I am praying.

Another type of praying is very common to me. I pray for my loved ones. Perhaps I don't pray for them all the time; maybe I don't pray for them as much as I should, especially if they are absent. But I do pray. At times trouble seems to weigh more heavily than at other times, and there are also times when I become very downhearted. Sometimes when I pray then I feel despair and the only thing I can say is, "O, Lord, how long, how long?" But that is praying. I am talking now about the kind of praying that goes on with a person who is not as close to God as he might be or even as he wants to be.

If it is true of me that I turn to God only when I am in deep trouble, then all I need to do is look around me and see how much trouble there is and I will pray more. I feel that I am not moved to pray so much in the time of trouble as in the time of crisis. When something suddenly comes up that is terrible. perhaps a loved one or a friend is in great danger. Then it is normal for me to pray. Or when I am in uncertainty it is not unusual for me to pray. Should I see a disaster, such as the falling of an airplane or perhaps the burning of a house, I find that I will want to pray. Prayer comes naturally for me when I see that crisis. I have reviewed the kind of praying that comes from my heart when I am not close to God. I believe in God

but I am not always as close as I could be. Mind you, God is merciful and He will hear me. Unfortunately, though this is good – and everything I have mentioned is good – it is not good enough. That kind of praying will dry up, and sooner or later I will quit. When I pray that way, my praying is oftentimes a sort of tax payment. It is as though I felt I had to do a certain amount of praying to get by. Or it is like an insurance premium – I want to be sure I keep in touch with God and so I pray some. Sometimes my praying is a sort of ejaculation – something happens to me, hurts me deeply, and I cry out, "Ouch!" That is what my prayer amounts to – as long as it hurts, I cry. All this isn't bad; but it is not good enough.

Then, again, we may pray in a sort of desperation. I am up against some difficulty. I have tried everything and I am utterly in despair. I don't know what to do. It is surprising how, in such a situation, it will come to me to think, "Well, at least I can pray. I am ready to try anything." And yet, I do pray. I lift up my heart to God; I may not have much joy, I may not have confidence, but I do turn to God some. In the next chapter I want to lead you to think about what more I could do. I can do better than what I have described. Actually if I can do this much, there is more blessing to be had by the grace of God.

3

The First Step in Praying Is Praise

Bless the Lord, O my soul: and all that is within me, bless his holy name. Bless the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits. Who forgiveth all thine iniquities; who healeth all thy diseases; Who redeemeth thy life from destruction; who crowneth thee with lovingkindness and tender mercies; Who satisfieth thy mouth with good things; so that thy youth is renewed like the eagle's (Ps. 103:1-5).

These are wonderful words of praise and of thanksgiving. To understand praying, one must remember that man does not begin this relationship. Praying does not start with man; everything starts with God. God is basic to all that is. And when we are thinking about man's relationship with God, let us always remember: God is and God is the rewarder of them that diligently seek Him. He is the One with whom we must deal. He is great and He is holy and complete. He is Almighty God.

What would be the proper attitude on the part of man as he comes to pray? Man is very limited. He is weak, and he is ignorant and sinful. What can a man do when he comes into the presence of God? Man can praise His Holy Name, ascribe to God His greatness and His glory, lift up the heart in praising Him. Listen to these words:

Praise ye the Lord. Praise ye the name of the Lord; praise him, O ye servants of the Lord. Ye that stand in the house of the Lord, in the courts of the house of our God, Praise the Lord; for the Lord is good: sing praises unto his name; for it is pleasant. For the Lord hath chosen Jacob unto himself, and Israel for his peculiar treasure (Ps. 135:1-4).

These words call upon all that is within us, in our consciousness, to lift up our hearts in recognition of God's almighty grace and mercy, His power and strength, His wisdom and His goodness.

Hear this admonition again:

Praise ye the Lord. Praise the Lord, O my soul. While I live will I praise the Lord: I will sing praises unto my God while I have any being (Ps. 146:1-2).

The psalmist ascribed to God, simply, the glory that belongs to Him. His words call to my consciousness. They call upon me, from within myself, to recognize who God is and how great and how good He is. In Psalm 147:1 we read: "Praise ye the Lord: for it is good to sing praises unto our God; for it is pleasant; and praise is comely." These words mean it looks good; it is the proper thing to do. When the psalmist on earth lifts his face to Almighty God and sees God as He is, he may see Him imperfectly, he may see Him as in a glass, darkly, but, even so, he knows who He is, then he says, "Praise be to God." He calls upon every believer to lift up his heart in tribute to Him.

Praise ye the Lord. Praise ye the Lord from the heavens: praise him in the heights. Praise ye him, all his angels: praise ye him, all his hosts. Praise ye him, sun and moon: praise him, all ye stars of light. Praise him, ye heavens of heavens, and ye waters that be above the heavens. Let them praise the name of the Lord: for he commanded, and they were created (Ps. 148:1-5).

God has done wonderful things. When we look above, the heavens declare the glory of God, the firmament showeth His handiwork. This is the frame of mind we can have when we come into the presence of God to look and see what He has done and give Him the glory, praise Him.

Praise ye the Lord. Sing unto the Lord a new song, and his praise in the congregation of saints. Let Israel rejoice in him that made him: let the children of Zion be joyful in their King (Ps. 149:1-2).

When people look around about them and see the world as it is, and events as they are, what do they think about? What does your own heart think about? Can you look deep enough and can you look high enough and far enough to see that God is in everything? Then lift up your heart to praise the Lord. You believe in God! Praise His Holy Name!

Praise ye the Lord. Praise God in his sanctuary: praise him in the firmament of his power. Praise him for his mighty acts: praise him according to his excellent greatness. Praise him with the sound of the trumpet: praise him with the psaltery and harp. Praise him with the timbrel and dance: praise him with stringed instruments and organs. Praise him upon the loud cymbals: praise him upon the high sounding cymbals. Let everything that hath breath praise the Lord. Praise ye the Lord (Ps. 150:1-6).

On this note of praise, the Psalms close. In all this Scripture we are being called upon to give God the glory that belongs to Him, the honor that is His due. This brings to our minds the basic truth that the first element in praying is praise.

Someone may say, "I don't see anything to praise God about." In that case, there would be nothing for you to pray about. Let me tell you right now, if you cannot praise God you will never get to first base in your praying. Unless you, deep down in your heart, recognize the greatness and the power of God, you just won't be able to praise Him. All attention is focused upon God – not upon man, not upon events, not upon troubles or despair. Quite apart from anything that man does or does not do, God already acts. Before I bow my knees to pray, God has been working. I may not know it: the ways of God are past finding out. He works in providence. He is the sovereign One in control of all things. My life is in His hands – the whole world is in His hands. He not only works in providence with His almighty power, but He works in benevolence with His great goodness. And the goodness of God endureth forever.

We see much trouble and distress in this world, so much so that our hearts and minds are filled with things that are wrong and hurtful; but there is more than that true: underneath all of this is the great Almighty God, whose thoughts toward us are thoughts of pleasantness and peace. He means to help us, and I can tell you right now, anybody, no matter who he is or where he is, who ever found peace in God found it right here in this world. God not only works in providence and in benevolence, but He also works in grace, doing "far more abundantly than we ask or think" (Eph. 3:20, RSV). Believe me, when I turn to

God in prayer I know that not only is God wonderful, but He has done mighty things. He is worthy of all praise.

4

In Praying I Worship God

Blessed is the man that walketh not in the counsel of the ungodly, nor standeth in the way of sinners, nor sitteth in the seat of the scornful. But his delight is in the law of the Lord; and in his law doth he meditate day and night (Ps. 1:1-2).

Scripture makes it plain that any man, any person, who believes in God, regardless of who he is or what he has done, may come to God in prayer. Remember this: "Whosoever will may come." "Whosoever cometh He shall in no wise cast out." "Though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool." Jesus of Nazareth Himself promised: "Come unto me all ye that are weary and heavy laden and I will give you rest." The plain message of the Bible says that Christ Jesus came into the world to seek and to save the lost: Christ receiveth sinful men. So, if a person should think: "There is no point in talking about praying to me – I'm not a good man," that person should come! And if he should think, "You don't need to talk to me about praying – I'm a wayward man," that person should come!

The first thing that any person should do when he prays is to praise God for what God will do. God means us well and we can praise Him for it. The second thing a person should do is to thank God for what He has done. In addition to looking back and praising God for what He planned to do, and looking around and thanking God for what He has done, I should look up into the face of God and worship God for what He is. Some may feel this is not practical: "I don't know about worshiping God. How can I know God? No man has seen God." But I believe Jesus of Nazareth when He said: "He that hath seen me hath seen the Father." If I want to see God, I need only to look into the face of Jesus Christ. My heart will be blessed and my faith strengthened when I behold God in the beauty of His holiness.

Isaiah called upon the remnant who believed in his day: "Behold your God." Take a look at that word "behold": notice how the verb *bold* is in there? If I am going to gaze upon God and really fasten my attention upon Him, I will have to exercise self-control. Actually any look at God will be a blessing; even a glimpse of God will be a blessing. It is true there is life for a look at the Crucified One. A person could carry one look at the cross of Calvary with him all the days of his life and it would be something that would bless him every time he remembered: "Christ died for us." If a person will think of why Christ Jesus is in heaven at the right hand of God, and who He is there for, he will learn a marvelous thing: when that person is looking at God, God is looking at him.

Luke tells of a very interesting incident. On one occasion Jesus of Nazareth was walking along the road with a company of people. Many were excited about His coming and there was a large crowd to see Him. A certain man was so short of stature he was not able to see over the heads of the people. Zaccheus climbed a tree to behold Jesus, and he received the surprise of his life. When he looked at the Lord Jesus, the Lord Jesus saw him. There can be no greater thing for anybody. If I will look into the face of Jesus Christ, the living Lord Jesus Christ will look into my soul. It is glorious to realize "there is life for a look at the Crucified One." I know.

Something even more wonderful is true: if I will gaze upon Him, I can be sanctified. That will really

lift me. To worship God means to look up to Him, to recognize Him for who He really is. I need to take time out. I need to ask myself: who am I thinking about? When I lift up my face and look, whom do I see? Then I will realize I am looking at the Creator of the heavens and the earth, the Judge of all the earth, Maker and Keeper of man, Savior and Redeemer of those who put their trust in Him, the Father of all those who believe, Almighty God. Thus I can esteem Him: He is above everyone. The name of Jesus Christ is above all; "He hath given Him a name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus, every knee shall bow and every tongue confess that He is Christ to the glory of God, the Father." While I am so esteeming Him, I should adore Him. I should let my heart enter into the contemplation of His beauty until I realize that He is greater than, more wonderful than, sweeter than, stronger than, kinder than anybody at all. He is the altogether lovely One. So I should exalt Him. I should raise Him up in my own heart. I should put Him on the throne. As surely as I do these things, my soul will be blessed.

To worship God in the face of the Lord Jesus Christ would be something of the same personal experience, psychologically, as would occur when I look at a beautiful sunset. Some can just look at a great mountain and be blessed; some can look at a lake or the ocean and a sense of glory floods the heart and soul as they look. Some people can look at a masterpiece of painting, while others can listen to great oratorios, and be blessed beyond words. This is the way a beloved looks into the face of his or her loved one, or a parent looks at a baby in the crib. All the various experiences approximate the idea of worship for the individual soul.

You may have sung the hymn, "Take time to be holy, speak oft with thy Lord." How can I do this? I can open my Bible and read it. I can read the Gospels: they will describe to me the things of Jesus of Nazareth. I can read the psalms that praise God. As surely as I will read and read, my heart will be lifted up in the worship and the adoration of God, and I will know that beside Him there is none else. He is over all and above all.

Something else is also true. Because He is mine, He will speak to me. He will say to me: "Fear not, for I have redeemed thee. Thou art mine." That is what He will say to me. Then I will be having communion with God. And communion with God means that He will speak to my soul and I will listen. My own heart and mind have been greatly blessed because, once upon a time, a good friend asked me if I ever took time to listen when I was praying. When I was praying and pouring out my heart, running quickly over all the different things I needed, and trying to be faithful to all the various responsibilities that I had, did I then take time to listen? What did God say? How did He touch my heart? I will remember these words: "Be still and know that I am God."

5

In Praying I Trust God

And all things, whatsoever ye shall ask in prayer, believing, ye shall receive (Matt. 21:22).

This is a remarkable promise, but there is no doubt that one of the unhappy aspects about praying is that so many earnest people do not understand what is actually revealed in Scripture. The Bible was not written to expose the ways of God to unbelieving minds. It was not written so that an unbeliever could understand it and judge God as to His procedures and decide whether or not he would like to follow Him.

In Isaiah 45:15 we read, "Verily thou art a God that hidest thyself, O God of Israel, the Saviour." But it is also written, "A broken and a contrite heart, O God, thou wilt not despise." One of the common errors

that ensnares so many people is to mistake the meaning of faith, of believing. What does it mean to pray, believing? Whom shall I believe? Shall I believe in me? No. I will believe in God. You can say, "And all things, whatsoever you shall ask in prayer, believing [in the Lord], you shall receive." And you will be believing in the Lord while you are asking. You are to pray believing the will of God; that is the kind of praying that will be answered.

What about my ideas? Let me tell you frankly they are not worth anything. What about my plans? I can also tell you they will come to nothing. What about my efforts? They are pitifully short. As a matter of fact, we don't even know what to pray for. Paul says, "We know not what to pray for as we ought." As a matter of fact, when it comes to praying, I do not know enough, I am not wise enough, and I am not good enough to pray, in the will of God. Then, what is my part? Praying as I do, it originates in me. That is where it gets the form it takes. So far as I am concerned, there is always my need, whether I pray or not. So far as God is concerned, there is His grace and His promise. So my need and God's promise will prompt me to pray. Perhaps I do not fully understand my need; I just feel where it hurts, though I don't really know what is the matter with me. So far as God's promise is concerned, I may not fully know the will of God. I cannot be real sure what God is going to do tomorrow. Then, what? The amazing truth is I may be moved to pray because of my need even if I don't fully understand it, and before I fully know the will of God for me. But God knows all about my need, and He has His promise in His mind, as He leads me in praying by His Spirit.

At this point I would ask each of us to come to the Garden of Gethsemane. In my notes I have these words "Let us tiptoe to the Garden of Gethsemane" and quietly listen as Jesus of Nazareth prays. You will hear these agonized words:

"O, my Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me nevertheless, not as I will, but as thou wilt." [In one of the other Gospels it is written "All things are possible unto thee!" That was His request. At the moment this is what was in His mind.] Nevertheless not as I will, but as thou wilt (Matt. 26:39).

O my Father, if this cup may not pass away from me, except I drink it, thy will be done (Matt. 26.42).

That is the way the Lord prayed when He came into the presence of God and put Himself in the hands of His Father. There was far more involved in His yielding Himself to die than I will ever understand. I do not think that Jesus of Nazareth would have shrunk back from physical death – much lesser men than He have died with composure. No, there must have been something in what He was facing that is far greater, far deeper, far more awful than I can ever imagine: when the Son would be turned away from His beloved Father in heaven.

Now let us hear the apostle Paul speaking about praying:

Be careful for nothing; but in every thing by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God. And the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and mind through Christ Jesus (Phil. 4:6-7).

These words are very familiar, but let me go over them carefully with you: "Be careful for nothing [be full of care, but anxious about nothing. Don't let things worry or upset you; don't be fretful and fearful. You need not be.] but in every thing [all things, anything that affects you] by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God. And the peace of God [that is the promise] which passeth all understanding [that is what we are being promised], shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus."

As we think about prayer and how we can come into the presence of God to think of what He has done, we are moved to praise Him. We look ahead and think of His promises – all of the things He has in mind to do for us; and we thank Him. We can look up into the presence of God and worship Him. After we

have praised Him and thanked Him and worshiped Him, we bring our requests, whatever they may be. God's hand is on our affairs. If it is trouble we have, God is there. If it is a problem we have, God is involved. If I am brought face to face with some issue, I can be sure God is setting these things up, and that all of this is intended to bring me to Him closer and closer.

You and I are not going to stay here in this world. In these very moments I could learn about putting my trust in God, and that trust would last forever and ever. I need to trust God with everything right now that is happening to me here. May God help me to put my hand in His and to walk with Him all the way all the days of my life

6

Hindrances to Praying

Yet ye have not, because ye ask not (James 4:2).

These are the words of James: straightforward and blunt. This is a wonderful aspect of the blessing of God in the promise of the gospel that God will answer prayer. It is a marvelous thing that Almighty God commits Himself to answer prayer: "Whatsoever you ask in my name, I will do it." "You shall ask what you will and it shall be done unto you." Believers rejoice in this promise. But it is a disturbing fact that many believers pray very little. Even intelligent persons do not pray as they know to pray. Humbly we will now think about this sad truth, asking ourselves to consider why those who are intelligent and have real need may not be praying. Why do those who believe fail to pray?

I should ask myself this question: Why don't I pray more? As I reflect on my own case, I will give you a number of considerations. (These may not be true in the case of everyone.) First there is my *ignorance*. By that I mean I do not realize that I can get help from God about some particular thing, and that I should get help from Him about that. I fill in my outlook with my own efforts. I may be in a situation where I need to have something done; so I try, I work, and I save, or I do research trying to find a better way, and I keep trying to find how to get this thing done. Do you recognize what is hindering me? It is my ignorance about God. Actually there is not anything I could not bring before Him, and there is not anything He could not handle; but as long as I am ignorant about what He can do and promises to do, I do not ask Him for the help I need, and which He promises to give.

The second condition that may hinder me from praying is my *indifference*. I may not care to consider anything more in the situation than the human element. Actually I may be satisfied just to have the people who are involved doing their best. I may try to organize and to encourage them; I may try to stimulate them and to arouse their interest into energy, because I am not really expecting God to take a hand. I am going to call this a form of spiritual indifference.

The next condition is *indolence*. This is not a common word, but I use it here because it sounds a little better than laziness. The plain fact is that one reason I do not pray more is because it is too much bother. Frankly, it makes me tired, though I may not like to admit it. I may think prayer is a good thing; I may think Almighty God is real. Then, why don't I pray? The truth is I just don't want to go to the bother to do that much extra work.

Another condition in me that goes along with laziness is my *irresponsibility*. By this I mean the attitude: "It is not on my shoulders. That is not my problem. I don't feel it is up to me." Any number of times I may see a real need and yet I do not pray because frankly I do not feel it is any of my business.

Another reason that I do not pray as I should comes close to home: it is my *indwelling sin*. In other words, the reason I don't pray more is that it hurts too much to look into the face of God. I cannot bring myself to do this with any kind of clear conscience because of what I have done.

There may yet be another condition that hinders my praying. It is my *impatience*. I feel that to seek results by praying takes too long. I want something done quicker. I may feel that if I wait for God to move I won't know what is going to happen, and something needs to be done now. I am often tempted actually to take things in hand and go to work on the problem because I just don't feel that I can depend upon God's doing anything about the matter in time to avoid certain undesirable events.

I have one more condition to name on this list, and that is my *irreligious intimacies*. Too many of the friends with whom I am intimate are irreligious. They have no personal relationship with God. The people I go around with do not pray and then I do not pray. This is too bad, but it is a real danger. The books I read do not encourage prayer. Many of them are good books as far as they go, and some are very interesting to read, but many of them do not encourage or strengthen my heart to pray. Again, the entertainment I enjoy – what I do with my spare time – the kind of pictures I look at – are all things that count. When the entertainment I enjoy is of such nature that prayer is out of character, I am inclined to leave off praying. The hobbies I have, the things I do in a special way, everything – where I put my time, my money, and where I put myself – when these things as they are do not promote praying, then I don't pray.

The truth is I can be snared into any of these conditions. If I have the Lord Jesus Christ active in my heart, if I have Almighty God with me, watching over and keeping me, it would not be like that with me. It is a very sobering thought to realize that because of the people around me I do not pray. And then the words of James are sadly true, "Ye have not, because ye ask not."

7

Mistakes in Praying

Ye ask, and receive not, because ye ask amiss, that ye may consume it upon your lusts (James 4:3).

These words will serve as an introduction to our theme now. The one uncertain element in the whole business of praying is "I." The truth is "I" can and do make mistakes.

What mistakes could I make when it comes to praying? No doubt the biggest mistake that I could make would be not to pray. Even when I come into the presence of God to ask Him for His favor, I am not always wise. I am not even always good. There are things I could ask for that might not be in His will. The mother of James and John, Zebedee's children, came to Jesus of Nazareth, and made a request. She prayed; she asked Him for something: "Grant that these my two sons may sit, the one on thy right hand, and the other on the left, in thy kingdom" (Matt. 20:21). It is possible her mother love prompted this request, but it was a selfish one. This request did not take into consideration what the Lord might want to do, what His preference might be. As the Lord dealt with her He went on to tell her He did not have it in His hands to do: this was the business of Almighty God. The big thing for us to note is that the request was not granted. The Lord dealt gently with her but the request was selfish. When praying is done in this manner, it is a mistake.

Another rather tragic incident of praying that was a mistake was reported in a story told by Jesus of Nazareth. There was a certain rich man who fared sumptuously every day, and in time he died and went to

hell. When the rich man was in hell, he asked Abraham to send someone to warn his brothers still upon the earth so they would not come where he was. The answer given to him was: They have Moses and the prophets. They have the Bible. They have the Old Testament Scriptures. And the rich man replied, "But if one went unto them from the dead, they will repent" (Luke 16:30). Then came these words: "If they hear not Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded, though one rose from the dead." And this was proven to be true in actual fact.

In due time Jesus of Nazareth was raised from the dead, and the same people who had rejected the Word of God while He was among them did so afterwards. A person could feel compassion for this man who apparently really wanted their welfare; but he made a mistake – he waited too long. It is a mistake when the praying is too late.

The Bible tells of godly men who trusted in God, yet each one in one way or another seems to have made a mistake in praying. Moses, the great servant of God, had in the course of his leadership of the Israelites at one time offended Almighty God in a special way, and God had said that because of what Moses had done in this one incident he would never enter into the land of Canaan. Moses did not complain about this. He besought God to give him the privilege of going into the promised land, and he was told to keep quiet and ask God no more about this thing. Praying for this privilege when he had been expressly told it was not in the will of God was a mistake.

Another incident we can consider is David. His reputation had been tarnished by his sin, and many people feel that David was actually not a good man; but the Bible tells us that God said about David: "This is a man after my own heart." Furthermore, the record is "in all things he did the will of God save in the matter of Uriah, the Hittite." David committed a grave sin, and as a consequence of that sin his own prophet came to him and told him that he would have trouble in his family all of his life, and that his child by Bathsheba would die. When the child fell sick, David prayed day and night that he might be healed. David would not eat nor drink. He did not shave nor change his clothing. He continued steadily praying but he was making a mistake. God had told him the child would die, so his request was contrary to the revealed will of God. David's praying did not prevail; the child died.

Paul was an outstanding servant of Christ but he had a thorn in his flesh. Paul knew about prayer and he had great answers to prayer; Paul also knew that God could easily have taken away that thorn in the flesh. He asked God to remove it three different times. God finally told him that the thorn was there for a purpose; that thorn had been put there to keep Paul humble. His request was not granted, because he was asking for something contrary to God's will. This was a mistake.

The story of King Hezekiah is found in Isaiah, chapter 38. He was old in years and the prophet came to him and told him that he would die. Hezekiah turned his face to the wall and wept. He prayed that he might be spared, reminding God that he had served Him. After he had prayed so urgently, the prophet was instructed to tell the king that God had heard his prayers; and now he would have fifteen additional years. During that fifteen years Manasseh was born. He became king after Hezekiah and was the wickedest king Judah ever had; he was the cause of the destruction of the nation. In that fifteen years Hezekiah also acted so foolishly that all his property fell into the hands of the enemy. It seems obvious that Hezekiah made a mistake when he prayed for something that was not in God's will for him.

All these men really believed in God. And yet each in turn made a mistake in praying when he asked for something that was not in the will of God. Jesus of Nazareth made no such mistake because He could say, "I do all things to please my Father."

Praying To Get Things Done

But we will give ourselves continually to prayer, and to the ministry of the word (Acts 6:4).

These are words spoken by the apostle Peter to the Christian believers in Jerusalem. They had been having trouble in the congregation in the matter of distributing food; and there was a feeling on the part of some that they were being neglected. There was a question as to the efficiency of the administration of their affairs and they were quarreling about it; so it was brought to the attention of the apostles. The apostles committed the management to persons the people themselves selected and which the apostles then installed to attend to this work. The apostles then made this statement: ". . . but we [the apostles] will give ourselves continually to prayer, and to the ministry of the word."

Just what is the function of prayer? Some think it is just something done at the beginning and the close of a meeting – as if when we close a meeting with prayer we have a momentary stopping of our affairs so that we can give a tip of the hat, as it were, to God. Surely there should be much more involved in this. What does it mean when Peter says, "We will give ourselves continually to prayer"? What do you suppose in that praying the apostles would be doing? Just contemplating God's own person? Just praising Him? I am sure they included that, but do you think that is all to which they would give their, time? No, I think that when we examine it here, we shall see this was their strategy for getting things done.

The life of any believer is marked by tasks he needs to perform, missions he should carry out, work he should do. Any believer has his own human nature and he could live in his own wit and wisdom; he could do according to his own ideas and strengths. No doubt, many persons understand that this is their lot in life. In other words, they feel that now that they want to do right in the sight of God they are going to do the best they can for the sake of the Lord. It is as though they tried to accomplish something and bring this as a tribute to Him. They intend to work as hard as they can and bring the results to God; they will undertake in their own judgment things that seem good to them. They strain, they strive, they study, and they perform to the best of their ability. But this is not our true service as believers. We need to start with Christ in us. "God worketh in you to will and to do." We need to hear the Lord say again, "Apart from me you can do nothing." Not with the idea that He is at the far end of our efforts: because actually He is at the beginning and is with us all the way.

Now when it comes to this matter of praying, we have already seen that in praise the soul recognizes the nature of God, looks up into the very countenance of God, and appreciates His power and His grace. In *thanksgiving* the soul recognizes what God has done in His providence, in benevolence, and in His mercy. In *worship* the soul contemplates the wonder of God's being. All of this is proper and very much in place. Now we shall see that in *petition* the believing soul comes before God and prays about things to bring them to pass in the will of God.

I will give you a number of illustrations in Scripture. The particular incident I want to bring up is when Jacob, after having been with his Uncle Laban, was coming back to his own home with his family and his flocks and his herds, and he heard that Esau had threatened to kill him. Jacob turned to God to secure His blessing. We have read about that famous experience of Jacob wrestling with the angel all night long. "I will not let thee go except thou bless me." This aspect of praying transformed Jacob. He was given a new name – Israel – and was received by Esau in good will; the blessing he sought was also his.

Consider the case of Moses, that great servant of God. On one occasion when Israel was fighting with Amalek, Joshua had been sent to lead Israel. Joshua was the best military leader Israel had, and they were prepared to fight to the best of their ability because they were fighting for their lives. Amalek was not good and the whole tribe of Amalek was out of the will of God; but they were stronger than Joshua, and he was being defeated. But Moses was on the mountain with his arms raised up to God, praying to

Almighty God about that conflict. As long as Moses held his arms up in prayer, Joshua would prevail, but if Moses let his arms down, Amalek would prevail. Moses got tired and at that point Aaron and Hur came and held up the hands of Moses until the going down of the sun, and a great victory was won over Amalek. This was a classic example of waiting on God for the victory.

On another occasion, when Moses was leading the children of Israel out of Egypt from the status of being slaves to becoming citizens in their own right, these people needed to know how to live. The way they had seen the Egyptians live was not the way to live. Moses went to the top of Mount Sinai to wait on God, to discover His way. After forty days Moses came down with the tables of stone, the Tables of the Law, the Ten Words, that outlined what God required of man, and the tabernacle, the way in which a sinner could still come into fellowship with God. All this came to Moses in a forty day session, during which time he waited on God.

On one occasion when the Philistines were coming into the country and the people in terror came to Samuel and asked him to lead them, Samuel instructed them to come together to get right with God. He led them into a revival experience that is a classic for all time. He had them come and confess their sins, and they made their sacrifices to God; they were then able to claim the victory over the Philistines.

We may consider Elijah on Mount Carmel. You will recall when he was pitting himself against the eight hundred prophets of Baal and the priests of the grove who were pagan worshipers. Elijah stood alone, and when the time came for him to demonstrate the power of God, he built an altar, then raised his voice to God, "Oh, Lord, show thy power." He called from heaven fire that consumed everything on the altar. Afterwards he told King Ahab it would rain. It had not rained for years. He then went to the top of Mount Carmel to pray. He asked Almighty God to do what He had promised to do.

We pray to God for what He has promised. This does not always come immediately. Sometimes we wait and wait; this is what Elijah did, and the promise of God was fulfilled. We may think of Daniel in Babylon, Ezra and Nehemiah in Jerusalem, and Paul at Troas in the missionary work; or even the apostles when they were speaking: "We will give ourselves continually to prayer, and to the ministry of the word." Great works of faith have always been brought to pass by believing prayer on the part of the servants of God.

9

Praying in the Name of Jesus Christ

Not all persons in any one group of believers are uniform in their faith. People are different; some believe more, and some believe less. Even those who are convinced that Jesus of Nazareth was the Son of God do not all have the same convictions about the power of prayer. It is true that Jesus of Nazareth promised His disciples their prayers would be answered, but this very promise bothers some who believe in Him and who pray for things they want but who get no results. How are they to understand this? How can we understand this? I suggest to you that the understanding lies in the phrase "in His name."

In John 15:7 is this gracious word of Jesus of Nazareth, "If ye abide in me, and my words abide in you, ye shall ask what ye will, and it shall be done unto you." This is not a promise given to us as a kind of reward that if we are willing to abide in the Lord Jesus Christ and to cherish His words, there will then be given to us this privilege to ask what we will; and it will be done unto us. That is not the way it is. Look at

it more closely. If we abide in Christ (and that means, of course, we are trusting in Him, not in the world), if we are abiding in Him and His words are abiding in us, they control our hearts and thoughts.

If a person really is living in Christ Jesus and Christ Jesus is living in him, so that the words of Jesus Christ control his heart and mind, what do you suppose he would want? To that person it is promised, "Ye shall ask what ye will, and it shall be done unto you." We can understand that easily: that person will want to do the will of God. Notice again in the very next chapter:

Verily, verily, I say unto you, Whatsoever ye shall ask the Father in my name, he will give it you. Hitherto have ye asked nothing in my name: ask, and ye shall receive, that your joy may be full (John 16:23-24).

Here again is that phrase "in His name." The same truth is expressed in another passage:

And all things, whatsoever ye shall ask in prayer, believing, ye shall receive (Matt. 21:22).

To pray in His name means much more than to add a few magic words to an expression of our own wishes.

Any number of times when we pray we try to formulate in so many words what it is we really want and so we pour out a statement about what we personally want; then in order to pray in His name we say, "And this we ask in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ." But tacking on that little phrase does not qualify such prayers as praying "in His name." Oh, no! You could easily be deceived all along the line in that. When a believer reckons himself to be dead, asks nothing for himself, and is led by the indwelling Spirit of God to respond to the promise of God, such a person will have his thoughts shaped by God. He will be in the will of God, and it is no wonder his request will be granted. Much more could be said: I have said only enough to get you started thinking along this line.

We can consider the record of Jacob at Peniel when he laid hold of God in praying and continued believing until he received an answer. Jacob had a promise from God, ". . . for I will not leave thee, until I have done that which I have spoken to thee of" (Gen. 28:15). And that promise was the ground for his persistence in praying. It was similar when Elijah, on Mount Carmel, prayed for rain. Here was an outstanding case of a man praying fervently. He continued despite a whole day of discouragement because he believed the promise of God.

Now let us turn our attention to Daniel in Babylon. While reading a scroll of the prophet Jeremiah, he learned that God had said Israel would be captive in the land of Babylon for seventy years. When Daniel looked at the calendar and saw that the seventy years were now up, he prayed. What do you think he prayed for? That God would release Israel. Why? Because He had said He would. And Daniel kept praying until he had the assurance that it would come to pass. Why? Was Daniel so smart? Was he such a student of society that he knew what was going to happen? No, no. Daniel had the Word of God, written by the prophet Jeremiah, that in seventy years Israel should be delivered. Now the seventy years had passed, so he prayed. What? That God would do what He said He would do. Remember Daniel praying when you try to understand persistence in praying.

We are not trying to have God do something He doesn't want to do. We are reaching up to receive from Him something that He promised. Our faith in praying is to the honor and glory of God. To be able to pray, believing, one must have some revelation of the will of God and believe it.

10

Gethsemane

"I am the Way, the Truth and the Life." That is how the Lord Jesus spoke of Himself. In that same context, while He was talking with the disciples on that occasion, He told them, "He that hath seen me hath seen the Father." No doubt there is much about Jesus of Nazareth that is too profound for us to comprehend. I am not sure we would have fully understood Him if we had seen Him. I am not sure we understand Him today, when we have the records about Him. We do know some things. We know that He, the Son of God, came in the flesh to show us the truth of God in the gospel. We look into Scripture with expectation, hoping to understand more and to see more, to behold Him as He walked among men. Just now we are interested in the whole matter of praying, and we want to take a look at the praying of Jesus of Nazareth. There is much to be learned.

You will remember how we read that from time to time He continued all night in prayer to God. We know, of course, you don't have to be a sinner to pray. You don't have to be a person who has done wrong, or one who is in doubt and trouble, in order to pray all night long. Jesus of Nazareth, who was always with His Father and whose fellowship with His Father was unbroken, continued all night praying to God. On other occasions we read how He rose up early in the morning while yet it was dark and went out and prayed.

In John 11:42, when He was standing in the presence of people, and speaking to His Father in praying, He said, "And I knew that thou hearest me always; but because of the people which stand by I said it, that they may believe that thou hast sent me." Here we have an example for public prayer and for audible prayer for others to hear. As the Lord said, He didn't have to pray out loud for the Father in heaven to know what He wanted. The Father knew what He had in mind, but "because of the people which stand by" He said it.

Another incident comes to mind that I want to mention because it is very important. On the night before He was separated from His disciples, while having His last words with them, He had told them that when the time came for the crisis about Himself they would all forsake Him. You will remember how Peter said, "I won't. Not me." Then the Lord gave utterance to these words: "Simon, Simon, behold, Satan hath desired to have you, that he may sift you as wheat. But I have prayed for thee, that thy faith fail not: and when thou art converted, strengthen thy brethren" (Luke 22:31-32). What a wonderful thing! When a believer doesn't understand fully and he may be even wrong in his utterance, as Peter was, it is wonderful to have the Lord say: Simon, Simon, I want you to know something. You are in danger. Satan has desired to have you that he may sift you as wheat but I have prayed for thee. When thou art converted, strengthen thy brethren.

We read in John 17:9 that the Lord Jesus, standing in the presence of His disciples and praying to His Father, said words like this: "I pray for them: I pray not for the world, but for them which thou hast given me; for they are thine." Any number of people consider they are making a pious utterance when they talk in a grandiose way about how they are going to pray for the whole world. We should take note that Jesus of Nazareth did not. Mind you, He came for the world. He died for the world. He suffered because of the world. He gave His invitation to everybody everywhere in the whole world. But we know, and it is a sad fact, not everybody comes. Now when He is standing there looking up into the face of God, let us listen to Him: "I pray for them. I pray not for the world, but for them which thou hast given me. . . ."

Now, I want us to go humbly and reverently to the Garden of Gethsemane. You and I have the right to look at what is written. I hope when we do, however, that we will be quiet in our spirit and I would suggest that you take the shoes from off your feet because now we are going to be standing on holy ground. Here are the words in Matthew 26:36: "Then cometh Jesus with them unto a place called

Gethsemane, and saith unto the disciples, Sit ye here, while I go and pray yonder. And he took with him Peter and the two sons of Zebedee, and began to be sorrowful and very heavy [the word "heavy" meaning downhearted, burdened]. Then saith he unto them, My soul is exceeding sorrowful, even unto death [the way I feel is about to kill me] : tarry ye here, and watch with me. And he went a little farther, and fell on his face." Think of this. A small company of eleven; see them here with Him. We should note especially how He said to them, "You sit down here while I go and pray." He took three with Him and left eight behind. Then we read, "And he went a little farther" [than those three] "and fell on his face, and prayed, saying, O my Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me." (One of the other records states that He said, "Oh, my Father, all things are possible unto thee.") Then He added, "if it be possible, let this cup pass from me: nevertheless not as I will, but as thou wilt."

As I listen to that I think to myself – He had no desire to be separated from His Father. He had no inward, natural inclination to want to turn away from God; but He was willing to go out into the darkness on my account. He was willing to bear my burden, the burden of my sins, even though it meant that he would be separated from His beloved Father in heaven. There is more here than I can fully understand. He then said, "if it be possible, let this cup pass from me. nevertheless not as I will, but as thou wilt." That was His prayer simply: "Do your will."

And he cometh unto the disciples, and findeth them asleep, and saith unto Peter, What, could ye not watch with me one hour? Watch and pray, that ye enter not into temptation: the spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak. He went away again the second time, and prayed, saying, O my Father, if this cup may not pass away from me, except I drink it, thy will be done. And he came and found them asleep again: for their eyes were heavy. And he left them, and went away again, and prayed the third time, saying the same words (Matt. 26:40-44).

Sometimes people ask me, "Should one repeat oneself in prayer? Should one pray the same things over and over?" Yes, you should.

Then cometh he to his disciples, and saith unto them, Sleep on now, and take your rest: behold, the hour is at hand, and the Son of man is betrayed into the hands of sinners. Rise, let us be going: behold, he is at hand that doth betray me (Matt. 26:45-46).

And now let us walk along the road of sorrow, all the way to Golgotha, to the cross of Calvary, and there, standing before the cross, hear Him saying, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" Did you realize those are the first words of Psalm 22? What does that mean? It means that as He was dying He was praying Psalm 22. When He ended His prayer, He said, "It is finished." Luke reports these words. "Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit" (Luke 23:46). The last thing Jesus of Nazareth did in His human body was to pray to His Father. Now, in the presence of God, you and I can look up to the throne and see that He "hath an unchangeable priesthood. Wherefore he is able also to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by him, seeing he ever liveth to make intercession for them" (Heb. 7:24-25). "I have a Savior. He is pleading in Glory." Yes, Jesus of Nazareth prayed, and when His Holy Spirit has His way in me, He will move me to pray.

Basic Principles in Praying

Praying is a universal practice among men. I think it would be quite safe to say, in a general way, that all men pray everywhere to some extent, in some fashion, to some being or some power. All over the world, among all classes of people, and in all faiths and all religions, the practice of praying is commonly recognized as being important. It would appear that when we think about praying we are thinking about a man on earth conscious of an overwhelming universe around him bigger than he is, upon which he depends and which he cannot control and cannot do without; conscious of this universe, he addresses his thoughts to his God or gods, whoever they may be. Such reaction on the part of man to the whole world around him is often motivated by fear even if he does not know God, and even when he is not sure where to look. Because of that and for other reasons it is a common fact that many a man will have in his heart the idea that he wants to turn to God.

I suspect you have gathered from what I have said that a person would not have to be a believer in the gospel to pray. Any number of people pray. Certainly all of those who belong to the Jewish faith pray, and certainly those who are Mohammedans pray – probably more regularly than we do. It is a common thing for men to pray many times a day. All over the world, among all different classes of people, everywhere praying is going on.

We will be thinking about praying in the case of believers – those who believe in God through Christ Jesus. We want to talk about their experiences and their practices of prayer. When he prays, the believer who has found God in Christ Jesus may have a backward look and in doing so be moved to thanksgiving for what God has done. He can see the hand of God in his affairs. He can praise God for His attitude toward him. If he looks into the face of God, he realizes that God is benevolent and kind and intends to bless him. Or the believer may have a forward look. He may look into the future, the unknown, the uncertainty of tomorrow, and in that connection he will exercise himself in making petition to God for what God has promised to do. The believer will do all this because he has real confidence in his heart that God has promised to watch over and keep him. As we look at praying among all men we can see there are some elements that are involved in all of this which belong only to a person who is a believer in Christ; but at the same time there are some things that are common to all men.

Such reflection will help us to understand some of our problems in the matter of praying. All agree that praying is one exercise esteemed by common consent to be wonderful, yet we must admit we don't do as much as we would like to, or even as we could or ought to. We just don't pray the way our own hearts would prompt us to pray. Let us consider some of the things involved in this failure on our part. Because man is natural, he responds to this world as he sees it but when he is praying to God he is dealing with a Person he doesn't see. This means he is moving from this visible world into the invisible presence of God. Because he is a natural person, all things happen to him according to certain processes in the natural world, but when he prays he looks up into the presence of God, who is spiritual, and who does not operate according to any natural way.

God operates in similar fashion to the natural, it is true; but He is still spiritual; which is to say He is out of sight and not to be sensed; nor can He be heard, seen, tasted, touched, or smelled. We know only that about Him which has been revealed. Because we don't have to stop and think about the natural world, we could easily make a mistake. The natural world will make itself felt; but the spiritual world needs to be thought about. We must pay attention to it. Although it is greater and wider, it is not so vivid, so sharp, and for that reason we could fail to attend to it.

Man is a human being and this means that he is limited. I am not casting aspersions on man, but I am thinking about human beings as we are. Our knowledge is limited – we do not know everything:

oftentimes we do not know as much as we would like to know. Because we are human we are limited in our strength – we cannot do all we even think about doing. We cannot reach as far as we would like or run as fast as we would like. We are just limited in a number of ways. The human being is fragile, and especially so far as the human body is concerned, it can go wrong.

From this kind of limited human being comes this praying response to Almighty God, who is infinite, absolutely endless, absolutely beyond us, who knows everything, and is holy and almighty. In our need, we look to Almighty God. Again, because we are human, we are afflicted by sin in one form or another. No matter how we may have tried to reduce it, no matter how much we may have tried to be delivered from it, we have sin and God is holy. Things happen to us that we may have had nothing to do with, and we are caught in it. Then again, we can have disaster. We can have accidents and ultimately die. "It is appointed unto man once to die."

So this human being, limited in all these various ways, turns his face upward to God to pray. When man prays he realizes that while God is invisible, He is around everything. He is Almighty God, the Creator, He is infinite. The praying man likes to remember that God is gracious and merciful and kind and that He actually moves toward fulfilling His purpose, which will be to His name's honor and glory. That is the situation and that is what is involved – that is the setting in which praying takes place.

It is a common thing to think that when man prays he is probably in trouble and he is going to ask for help, or he may be in weakness and he wants more strength, or he is in sin and he wants forgiveness, or he fears and he wants comfort. Under these circumstances man would pray for help. That is the way in which it would seem that all prayer takes place, but praying is not primarily grounded in sin – we do not have to be sinners to pray. Nor is it grounded in weakness – we do not have to be weak to pray. Nor is it grounded in fear – we do not have to be afraid to pray. Why do I say that? Because some people are so good, so strong, so bold? No. I say that because the record is that Jesus of Nazareth, while He lived in this world, spent hours in prayer. He did not pray because He had sinned or because He was weak or afraid. This emphasizes something about prayer that we need to see. It is true that praying will always arise, so far as our human experience is concerned, out of our limitation and it is also true that in answering, God is able to do more than we can ask or think. Our hearts and minds are not big enough to ask Him for everything that we could receive.

I am reminded of a patient going to a doctor. Normally speaking, the patient might go without knowing what is wrong and without knowing what is needed, but he goes to the doctor because the doctor can find out. The doctor can prescribe for him. We read in Romans 8:26 these words. ". . . for we know not what we should pray for as we ought." Yet there are some things true about praying that we can know to our advantage. I want to touch on a number of these things as I continue thinking over with, you the meaning of this practice of prayer.

There are certain basic assumptions that we share as we pray. When a season of prayer is under way, there are certain things the praying person is thinking about God. He has not seen God but he has in mind certain things about God that I am going to call assumptions about Him. God is a living God. When the praying person turns to God, he is not talking to a post; he is not talking to a picture, to an idea. He is talking to a Person. God is what we call omniscient – He knows everything. When a man comes into the presence of God and understands anything about God as revealed in Christ Jesus, he knows this: God knows all things even before they happen. When they have happened, He understands them. God is gracious: He will listen.

We read in Scripture:

The Lord is merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and plenteous in mercy. He will not always chide: neither will he keep his anger for ever. He hath not dealt with us after our sins; nor rewarded us according to our iniquities. For as the heaven is high above the earth, so great is his mercy toward them that fear him. As far as the east is from the west, so far hath he removed our transgressions from us. Like as a father pitieth his

children, so the Lord pitieth them that fear him. For he knoweth our frame; he remembereth that we are dust (Ps. 103:8-14).

What wonderful encouragement about the gracious God, who will hear when a person comes to Him. In addition to all this, we also have in mind as we pray that God is sovereign: He can do what He wants to do. He is able.

There are many classic examples of praying in Scripture. We can continually learn more about this practice by reading the various instances recorded. Of course, when we are thinking about this we will have in mind that the supreme example of all was Jesus of Nazareth, the incarnate Son of God, who spent hours in prayer and when His disciples asked Him, "Lord, teach us to pray," He taught them what we commonly call the Lord's Prayer. He was teaching them how to pray by showing them the Lord's Prayer. If we wonder when should we pray, we should remember how the Lord told the parable about the man who needed help at night and who woke his friend after midnight, asking for help (Luke 11:1-13). We have these very simple words from Jesus of Nazareth: "Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you" (Luke 11:9). Nothing is more wonderful to the human spirit than the experience of finding out that God hears and answers prayers.

12 *The Common Practice of Praying*

Believers in the Lord Jesus Christ should be continually praying. This was the admonition of the apostle Paul to the people in Thessalonica: "Pray without ceasing."

I feel very humble in writing about something that I wish were much more developed in my own experience; however, "we preach not ourselves, but Christ Jesus the Lord; and ourselves your servants for Jesus' sake." So, if I tell you of some things that I wish I had more of for myself, you will understand. This matter of praying is something that is apparently recognized throughout the whole world as being very important. Perhaps no other exercise of the soul is so generally and universally commended by all men. I remember some years ago when I was in the university I sent a questionnaire to a group of theological students. I wanted to know about their personal attitudes on various matters. There were over 120 questions and about 100 men answered. I received all sorts of answers to the different questions but I was struck by one thing in particular: every respondent believed in prayer. That was the one thing they were unanimous about – their attitude toward prayer.

On one occasion early in my ministry I was in the city of Winnipeg, Canada, and we were sharing in an all-day prayer meeting. We began at six o'clock in the morning and one congregation after another would take an hour apiece, so at seven o'clock another congregation took over for an hour and this continued until ten o'clock that night. The place of praying was the same throughout the series, and it was my privilege that day to remain from beginning to end. All denominations were represented. One impression was made upon my mind that stays to this day: every preacher who spoke believed in prayer and every congregation that took part believed in prayer.

Not long ago I picked up a book which spoke about the value of prayer as recognized all over the world. The book itself was called *The Power of Prayer*. The point of view was not particularly Christian.

Rather, the outlook included all mankind as a whole and chose from the literature of all religions everywhere; but every one of these religions expressed a belief in prayer.

If you go through the Bible and look at the Scriptural record of the lives of godly men, you will find them to be men of prayer. Enoch walked with God – that would be in prayer. Noah talked with God – that would be in prayer. When I mention Abraham, you know he was a praying man. Jacob was a man who won a great victory in prayer. We may not like Jacob as a person but we cannot ignore his experience in all night prayer when he wrestled with the angel at Peniel. When you come to Moses you find, of course, a man of prayer; Joshua was a man of prayer; and Samson was a man of prayer. Every good king in I and II Kings was a man of prayer, even as David was a man of prayer. Among the prophets, when you note Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Daniel, you find each of these was a praying man.

When you move into the New Testament, you will think, of course, of the Lord Himself; and when you think of the apostles and others in the early church, you will find that praying marked the lives of these people. Prayer is encouraged by all the Word of God – it is found in verse after verse. "All things whatsoever ye shall ask in prayer, believing, ye shall receive." "Seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you." "Men ought always to pray, and not to faint." "I will therefore that men pray everywhere." One could continue quoting verse after verse. The Bible certainly tells us to pray.

There is the example of the Lord Jesus Christ Himself. If ever there was a man who could have made the claim that in Himself He was able enough and strong enough to live without help – if any person could live because he was good or because he was strong – you would certainly think of Jesus of Nazareth, a man who was without sin. Yet (the record is before us) there were times He spent all night in prayer; He prayed any time and every time; He prayed in full view of others. He lifted His face up toward heaven and prayed to His Father which is in heaven. In other words, He set the example of praying.

In the Book of the Acts, when there was some quarreling in the early church, the apostles said that they would appoint seven deacons to take care of the practical matter of distributing food, saying, "We will give ourselves continually to prayer, and to the ministry of the word." That is the way it was done in the early church, and so in Christian experience, if a believer knows of any other believers, if he has believers in his family or church whom he can look upon as real believers, he need not wonder whether they pray – he can *know* that they pray. There is no question about it: the value of prayer is recognized by believers, and there is no other exercise of the soul that is so commended by all who are interested in spiritual matters as this practice of praying. Some are inclined to let this matter of praying be neglected because they have the feeling that they cannot take the time for hours of prayer. Many would not know what to say in prayer if they were to spend all night praying. Many have the feeling that they are not really sure they can pray significantly. But there are some common forms of praying that should not be ignored, the kind of praying that should be appreciated.

For example, consider the daily returning of thanks at meals. Anybody who wants to honor God finds it to be a perfectly proper time to return thanks. If a person will do that, this is an opportunity several times a day for talking to the Lord – with thanksgiving. If a person will do that much at least, he can soon make it a practice so that he can give thanks to God any time. Even while a believer is having lunch, or a snack, especially in the presence of others, he could have fellowship with the Lord in thanking Him. The believer is instructed to ask the Lord, "Give us this day our daily bread." It would be right to give Him thanks for every morsel whenever or wherever he eats it.

The same is true with reference to personal habits. Some people pray in the morning when they awaken; others will pray in the evening upon retirement. It is a wonderful thing to start the day and to close the day by speaking to the Lord. It is good for a believer to have regular prayer: to have a certain routine time and place. That person can expect blessing who has a definite prayer time as a practice and a rule in his life.

A person may wonder, "What will I pray about?" It is normal to pray about the things a person carries

on his heart. If he has burdens, if he has problems, he may possibly turn them over to the Lord. If he has done things during the day that he feels should prosper, he may ask for the blessing of God. And, of course, he has loved ones that he should pray for. This is part of what is meant by praying. For that matter, if I go to church services, I will see that I cannot begin a service or close a service without prayer. All these things count. These are common forms of prayer.

Now let us look at the matter of special prayers. For example: if our loved ones are away from home, we can remember them especially in prayer. If there is any uncertainty about their affairs, if right now we do not know for sure how a business matter is going to go for them, we might be inclined to pray about it. If some loved one were going to the doctor for a checkup and we had reason to fear that he might have some physical sickness, it would not be unusual for us to pray. If someone is flying in a plane and the weather is bad, we will pray. Perhaps someone is coming on a long trip across country, traveling through mountains; we would pray for him because of the possibility of peril. If there is anything we are afraid of, we will normally turn to the Lord in prayer. Likewise, if there is something we want very much – for ourselves or for others – we join with others in praying that these things may come to pass.

Another common form of prayer is to call on God when we are in trouble. It is strange that we can pray when we are in trouble, even if we seem to have no hope. It is a proper thing, too. When we are in trouble and we are faced with distress, our hearts naturally turn to God because we feel that He can help us. Even when we feel hopeless, we turn to God, yielding ourselves to Him, and when we are downhearted or feeling bad, it is not an unusual thing for us to turn to God in prayer. So, also, in crisis: if we come into a situation where some big decision has to be made, especially if it is a crisis with danger involved, we will pray. Or if there is uncertainty involved, we will pray. When something happens about which we are not sure of the outcome, so that we may feel helpless about it, we can turn to God in our helplessness and pray to Him.

It may be that we are looking out upon our community and seeing all the troubles there; then we can ask God to be gracious and merciful and to work things out. Likewise, when we think of our nation and the dangers facing it, both from within and from without, we can talk to God about that.

Of course, what we have thus mentioned as common forms of praying is not really enough. If we pray only in these ways, our praying will tend to dry up, as it has for many people. Perhaps at one time you prayed more than you are praying now. On the other hand, if you are having the experience of praying now more than you did before, you are rejoicing in it. Just now I am looking at things the way they normally are. I think that the usual experience of the average Christian is that if you pray normally in the ways which I have mentioned to you – prayers that are offered only in times of distress and emergency – you will find yourself tending to pray less and less. That is because such praying in many cases is a sort of tax payment. We feel we have to do a certain amount of praying in order to get the blessing of God. It is almost like a premium on an insurance policy, so we pray just the way we go about making sure to pay for our insurance policies.

Sometimes this kind of praying is a sort of ejaculation which continues as long as something hurts. I think there are times when I have prayed, and it was a good deal like saying "Ouch." Something hurt and I had to make some kind of reaction, so I turned to God in prayer. Sometimes it is a sort of desperation. I am in trouble just so bad I don't know for sure what is going to happen; I have to turn somewhere, and I turn to God and pray to Him in desperation. That is very much in the nature of being at the point where I will try just about anything – I will even try prayer.

It is an amazing thing that God is so meek and so humble that when I come to Him – even for any of these oblique reasons – He apparently is ready to bear. If my heart is right – even though I act like a child – if I really do believe in Him, the Lord Jesus assures me that Almighty God will not turn His car from me. It is a trite thing to say that prayer is an activity which all agree is good, and all talk about it perhaps more than any other matter of spiritual experience, yet perhaps all perform it the least. This is part of a

common weakness, and I am hoping that this study may help you overcome that.

13

The Problem of Unanswered Prayer

Have you ever been troubled in your own heart because some have claimed there has been no answer to their prayers? Most *unanswered prayer* is actually *unheard prayer!*

Some years ago, while pastor of a church in Dallas, Texas, I had preached a series of sermons on prayer, and when announcing the particular sermon of the morning, I also announced that on the following Sunday I would preach a sermon on "Unanswered Prayer." That afternoon a lady telephoned to say that her high-school-aged daughter had been greatly disturbed when she heard that announcement. The young girl had supposed there was no such thing as unanswered prayer and this woman told me I should be careful what I announced in public because children could get wrong ideas.

As a result of this telephone conversation, I made a very close study on the matter of prayer during that week, going all through the Bible. I found out to my amazement that there is very little *unanswered* prayer in the Bible; but what I did find out was that there is much said about *unheard* prayer. Many times, and in different ways, the Lord lets it be known that He will not hear us when we pray. Nevertheless, there are some instances of unanswered prayer, and to these we will now give consideration.

Let us consider the prayer that is not heard in the presence of God. There are two general conditions when this is the case. First, when the heart of the person praying is not right with God; and second, when the heart of the person who is praying is not right with man. In either case sin is the cause, the underlying factor, and we can be very specific about this. At the very outset we should think of the passage that says, "If I regard iniquity in my heart, the Lord will not hear me" (Ps. 66:18). In other words, if I am thinking in terms of doing wrong, of walking in a way that the Lord does not want me to walk, it will not do me any good to pray to Him about where I am going. If I already have in mind that I am going to turn to the right, why ask the Lord whether I should turn left, go straight ahead, or go back? If I have already made up my mind that I am going to the right, God will not stop me. If I regard iniquity in my heart, if I look with favor upon the thing that is wrong, and that is really what I prefer, the Lord will not hear me!

There are some specific instances of this. For example, consider a person who refuses to hear or to heed God's Word. In the Old Testament we read about certain persons who would not listen to the prophets as they preached, and as the Word of God was spoken. To such people God says something like this: "Because they would not hear when I sent prophets to them and they would not listen to the Word of God, neither will I hear when they call unto me." We could quote many passages in proof of this. There can be no question about this teaching: if you will not listen to God, God will not listen to you! And it seems proper that it should be that way.

Insincerity also prevents our prayers from reaching God. If our devotion to God and our worship of Him is insincere, He will not answer. Isaiah, for example, said about the people of his day that with their lips they praised God but their hearts were far from Him (Isa. 29:13). "For the eyes of the Lord run to and fro throughout the whole earth, to show himself strong in the behalf of them whose heart is perfect toward him" (II Chron. 16:9). If a man is insincere, is dishonest in his personal dealings with the Lord, how can he expect that God is going to hear him when he prays? Frequently people like that will come to a believer

and ask him to pray for them. If you should be asked thus to pray, you might not recognize such lack of sincerity is present (unless it is someone with whom you have been counseling, or a member of your church), and you might pray earnestly, without the result you ask for. When no answer comes, you might wonder why, and you may never find out. It is quite possible that the individual making the request was harboring ideas contrary to the known will of God. In His gracious love, He may give you a further opportunity to deal with such a man. If a man or woman lightly makes a request for prayer and does not really care, there is no ground on which to approach God nor to expect a reply.

James expresses this same truth in a different way, and in James 1:7-8 we read, "A double minded man is unstable in all his ways," and are warned, "Let not that man think that he shall receive any thing of the Lord."

What is a "double minded man?" I would think this is a man who is trying to serve two masters, talking today about serving God and tomorrow playing with the things of the world, unable to make a decision about his own relation to God or to the world. Such a person, two-faced in his attitudes, cannot expect God to answer any prayer but one: the simple prayer of the publican, "God be merciful to me a sinner" (Luke 18:13).

Another reason for silence on God's part is that the petition may be the prayer of an unrepentant man. Isaiah brings this to our attention with great clarity:

Behold, the Lord's hand is not shortened, that it cannot save; neither his ear heavy, that it cannot hear. But your iniquities have separated between you and your God, and your sins have hid his face from you, that he will not hear (Isa. 59:1-2).

Unrepented sin makes prayer fruitless. God knows the heart! ". . . man looketh on the outward appearance, but the Lord looketh on the heart" (I Sam. 16:7). If you or I come to God and ask Him to undertake on our behalf something seriously needed, no matter how earnest we may be, if we are not normally walking with Him and seeking by His grace to do His will, He cannot answer. It may be a case of a man who is ordinarily found everywhere else but with the Lord's people and then, in a time of acute need or deep distress, he comes to God. That man is calling in vain! God knows about the former ways of life, the usual procedures: ". . . God is not mocked: for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap" (Gal. 6:7). Again, the only prayer God can or will hear from such a man is the prayer of the publican (Luke 18:13).

There is one group of people mentioned in the Old Testament whom I would like to mention in passing as being those whose praying was powerless: the Moabites. We are told that with their mouths they said they belonged to the Lord but in their hearts they served their own gods. Then we read that when they came into the sanctuary (to pray to God) they could not prevail. They sat down to eat and they rose up to play, they went on with their worldly ways of doing things but when they came into the presence of God to pray they had no power. How true this is, even to this day, of many people!

There are some instances of unanswered prayer in the New Testament. When Jesus of Nazareth came down from the Mount of Transfiguration, a man brought his son to Him for healing. He said to the Lord, "I brought him to thy disciples, and they could not cure him" (Matt. 17:16). Jesus rebuked the devil, and the child was cured. Then the disciples came to Jesus and said, "Why could not we cast him out? And Jesus said unto them, Because of your unbelief" (vv. 19-20). There is nothing that will more quickly block the channel of access to God and an answer from God than the sin of unbelief. True, the record does not report that the disciples had prayed here, but prayer was inferred, beyond a doubt. But evidently they failed to believe that God would do this. How can we expect an answer if we actually do not believe in God's power and His love?

We have briefly considered a number of situations where God did not hear, when people cried unto Him. Refusal on the part of a man to heed God's Word prevents God from hearing him. These instances I

have noted all had been caused by sin, which fostered a wrong attitude of heart toward God.

Now let us consider some circumstances which will prevent prayer from being heard, because of the praying person's attitude toward other people, when the heart is not right with other men. If, deep down in my heart, I bear ill will against anybody and am not willing to forgive, the teaching is very clear in the Lord's Prayer, when He says, "Forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors" (Matt. 6:12). If I do not forgive my debtors, God will not forgive me, and my prayer will be disqualified on that account (Mark 11:25-26). Furthermore, when I come to God, if I remember that my brother hath aught against me, the thing for me to do is to leave my gift at the altar, go and be reconciled to my brother, and then come back and offer my gift to God. This is the teaching of Matthew 5:23-24. The meaning is clear: if I bear ill will toward anybody, and am unforgiving about people, I will have no power in prayer; and I must seek reconciliation with that brother who has something against me before I can expect any favorable response from God.

Another condition which will disqualify me in obtaining answers to prayer is a lack of charity. If I am deaf to the cry of the poor, God will be deaf to my cry. It seems as though this is God's way of dealing with His people. In other words, if I do not respond to the will of God in the situation where the poor appeal to me for help, He will not respond to me when I call upon Him in my need.

Let us think a little more about the lack of charity. The Bible says that "He that hath pity upon the poor lendeth unto the Lord" (Prov. 19:17), and the Bible also says the person who "stoppeh his ears at the cry of the poor, he also shall cry himself, but shall not be heard" (Prov. 21:13). In other words, God is deaf to the cry of the uncharitable man.

The same holds true with reference to the matter of showing mercy. We read, "Blessed are the merciful: for they shall obtain mercy" (Matt. 5:7). Scripture seems to teach that if a man or a woman has shown a lack of mercy toward other people, God will be unmerciful to that individual.

Pride will hinder approach to God, as was shown in the case of the Pharisee and the publican. When the heart shows pride, God will resist that proud heart, but He giveth grace to the humble.

So we see that there are conditions and circumstances which cause prayers to be unheard, which disqualify a man when he tries to come into the presence of God. All of this about which we have been thinking, the matter of unheard and unanswered prayer, is set forth significantly in Scripture. I now want to note some recorded instances which are all the more significant because they deal with people who believed in God. There are many people who never have had faith, I am sorry to admit. Such persons naturally never have called upon God, and they are disqualified because they do not believe. But the incidents I am going to mention involve persons who did believe in God, but whose prayers were not answered.

As we are among those who know and believe in Him, we have several things to remember. Under certain conditions, as we continue to put our trust in Him we will receive answers to prayer, but if we do not meet those conditions, we will find that He will not answer. The first incident I want to bring to your mind is one that many people have thought much about; many probably have felt that there was something harsh in this experience. I am referring to the time when Moses was leading the children of Israel toward the promised land. He had reached the place where he could just catch a glimpse of the land. On top of the mountain, looking ahead, he could see it in the distance. At that time he conducted himself in a way that was displeasing to God. He disobeyed God and because he did this thing we read that God told Moses he was not to enter into the land. (See Num. 20 :7-12.) The truth in this incident is that Moses lost patience with God's people. He had been leading them across the desert, and the people began to complain about the length of the way and especially about the shortage of water. The record is that years before they had complained about water, and Moses, in answer to his plea to God, had brought water out of a rock. They were complaining about water again, and Moses faced the same situation, this time with impatience. God told Moses to take the rod and gather the people together and "speak . . . unto the rock before their eyes"

(v. 8). But Moses spoke unkindly to the people and "smote the rock twice" (v. 11), when God had said explicitly, "Speak." And God rebuked Moses, "Because ye believed me not, to sanctify me in the eyes of the children of Israel . . ." (v. 12). Not only did Moses disobey; he failed to glorify God. Therefore, although Moses brought them up to the land, he was never allowed to go in. Moses wanted to enter the land and asked God to permit him to go in, but God would not allow it. Here is a man whose request, his prayer, was against God's revealed purpose. God had said he could not go into the promised land, and then he asked God to let him go, contrary to what Moses knew was God's revealed purpose. God's answer again was "no."

We have already learned from the story of David and his child by Bathsheba, as recorded in II Samuel 12:7-19, that David's prayers to spare the child's life were contrary to the revealed will of God. Such prayers, however fervent, are not answered.

Another instance of unanswered prayer is Paul's request to have his thorn in the flesh removed. God's answer to Paul has been the comfort of His redeemed children ever since: "My grace is sufficient for thee: for my strength is made perfect in weakness" (II Cor. 12:1-9).

Let us bear in mind as we talk in these days about prayer that when God gives promises and we accept those promises and the conditions set forth, there is no human limit to what we may count upon in answer to prayer. But if God's judgment is against a thing and then we pray for it, that prayer is useless.

Another instance of unanswered prayer was in the case of the sons of Zebedee, James and John (Mark 10:35-45). They asked the Lord Jesus that they be given places of prominence when He came in His glory. One asked to sit on the right hand and the other on the left. You will recall they did not receive what they asked for. That is a case of unanswered prayer but they were given an explanation for the refusal.

One more example is rather stirring, and in some ways very sobering for us – the case of the rich man in hell. The story is told in Luke 16. When the rich man was in hell and in torment, he cried out to Abraham, asking Abraham to send someone back to his brothers to tell them not to come where he was. Abraham, you will remember, said "No." Then the rich man asked for a cup of water. He asked if Lazarus would only dip his finger in water and come touch the tip of his tongue. Again Abraham said "No." Every request of the rich man in hell, was refused. It was too late! He had already passed the place where praying could help. His own deeds had put him where he was.

We have been considering one instance after another of unanswered prayer. We have seen circumstances under which God could not answer prayer. Paul, James, and Peter knew about this. But such knowledge was a source of warning and encouragement, and the Lord can make these lessons a blessing to us today if we will, by His grace, profit from His dealings with others. Down through the centuries God's people have had confidence in prayer and have received answers to prayer.

May we daily learn to seek His will and pray "in faith, nothing wavering" (James 1:6), always remembering the blessed promise, "And whatsoever we ask, we receive of him, because we keep his commandments, and do those things that are pleasing in his sight" (I John 3:22).

Intercessory Prayer

It is normal and proper to come into the presence of God with praise and thanksgiving. "In every thing give thanks: for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus . . ." (I Thess. 5:18). This is a definite command, and Psalm 33:1 tells us that "praise is comely for the upright." Such praise and thanksgiving for blessing received brings new blessing. If you want blessing from the gracious hand of God tomorrow, then thank Him for what He did today. When we give thanks to God for what He has done, we are actually increasing our faith – and our expectation.

I want to talk now about a different aspect of praying, the thought of which is sobering and yet at the same time wonderful. I want us to consider intercessory prayer – the burden, joy, and responsibility of one person praying for another. Think of it! Friend praying for friend, brother praying for brother, wife praying for husband, children praying for parents! Let us study this aspect of intercessory prayer by bringing to our minds a number of illustrations from the Bible. There are many instances from which to choose, and I feel that as we open the blessed Book and seek, we will be taught and encouraged as God again speaks to our hearts.

First, I want to draw your attention to the incident between Abram and Lot, as found in Genesis 13. You will remember that Abram was the uncle and Lot was the nephew, and that the two of them came out of Abram's home country into the land of Canaan. Thus you will need to remember that Lot was also a believer. However, the time came when Abram and Lot were disturbed because of trouble between their herdsmen, and Abram proposed that they separate. "And Abram said unto Lot, Let there be no strife, I pray thee, between me and thee, and between my herdmen and thy herdmen; for we be brethren" (Gen. 13:8). Abram gave Lot the privilege of choosing first, and so Lot chose the well watered plains of Sodom. Abram went in the other direction, up into the mountains, where he found a plain, the valley of Mamre; there he built an altar unto the Lord.

The time came when Lot moved into the city of Sodom and so was there by his own choice when certain enemies came, took the city, and carried Lot away captive. "And when Abram heard that his brother was taken captive" (14:14), he pursued these kings and defeated them, rescued Lot, and restored him to the city.

Because of the wickedness in Sodom, God planned to destroy the city. In Genesis 18 we read, "And the Lord said, Shall I hide from Abraham that thing which I do. . . ." and He told Abraham about His plan. Following this in Genesis 18:20-33 we have the classic example of intercessory prayer as Abraham prayed for the city of Sodom. Scripture gives us the record of the amazing experience as Abraham talked with God about Sodom. Abraham started out by asking if God would destroy the city if there were fifty righteous men there, "And the Lord said, If I find in Sodom fifty righteous . . . then I will spare all the place for their sakes" (v. 26). Abraham then said if there were five less than that . . . just forty-five? And God's reply came back. He would spare the city for forty-five. The dialogue of prayer continued. For forty? Thirty? Then humbly, Abraham implored God to spare for twenty righteous lives. Mark the faith of this man! When God answered in the affirmative, Abraham said, "Oh let not the Lord be angry, and I will speak yet but this once: Peradventure ten shall be found there. And he said, I will not destroy it for ten's sake" (v. 32). Some people say that if Abraham's faith had been sufficient he could have demanded that the city of Sodom be spared; but stop for a moment! In James 2:23 we read, ". . . and he [Abraham] was called the Friend of God." II Chronicles 20:7 speaks of ". . . Abraham, thy friend for ever." Between friends, true friends, there is a communion of understanding and trust. Abraham was not testing God. He had a deep and abiding sense of God's honor and glory and His hatred of sin, and he also had full confidence in God's justice and mercy. No doubt Abraham felt that Sodom, so wicked that even today its

name is a reproach, deserved destruction. But he had a deep concern for any righteous souls in that sinful place, including members of his own family, and this gave him a burden to continue his intercession.

Note again that Abraham did not cease to pray! God stopped speaking with Abraham, as the Word states very clearly, "And the Lord went his way, as soon as he had left communing with Abraham: and Abraham returned unto his place" (Gen. 18:33). God was communing with His friend and the record would indicate that Abraham had a keen understanding of how far he should go. This was not an isolated case of intercessory prayer; of that we may be sure. God had said that Sodom was to be destroyed, and Abraham did not doubt that, nor did he intercede for the city. He pressed his petition for the righteous in the city, including Lot and his family, but suddenly he seemed to reach the place where he could go no further.

It might seem that this prayer was ineffectual. The events that followed would seem to indicate that the prayer was not answered! But in the next chapter there is an amazing statement: "And it came to pass, when God destroyed the cities of the plain, that God remembered Abraham, and sent Lot out of the midst of the overthrow, when he overthrew the cities in the which Lot dwelt" (Gen. 19:29). God remembered Abraham, His friend, and He spared Lot. What wonderful assurance to praying parents and interceding friends. I am convinced beyond the shadow of doubt that here is the original example, the basis for blessing to the hearts and lives of countless multitudes of men and women down through the years. A faithful parent, a believing grandparent, a conscientious Sunday School teacher, a wife, a child – anyone praying faithfully for a loved one – and the person thus held up before God in intercessory prayer, receiving blessing for reasons probably unknown to him and yet far beyond anything expected. How many pastors and evangelists have been instruments used of God to bring a man or a woman to a saving knowledge of Christ because, known or unknown, someone had prayed!

Lot was spared, so the record affirms. But there is nothing to show that Lot was worthy of this, for he was in Sodom of his own free choice. Yet Abraham interceded for Lot and God spared him. Here is an important lesson for us. Unworthy as we are, God yet hears and answers prayer in our behalf, blessed be His name! You may have an Abraham praying for you right now!

Now we come to an illustration of united intercession. In Exodus 17:8-16 we find the children of Israel in battle with the people of Amalek. This was a time of conflict, with Joshua leading the children of Israel in the battle. But Amalek was stronger and would have defeated Joshua if it had not been that Moses was on the mount praying for Israel. While Moses was praying, lifting up his hands to heaven, Joshua was actually winning. But if for any reason Moses let his hands drop, Amalek prevailed. Scripture says that "Moses' hands were heavy." If you want to know what that means: Moses was tired! As a human being, his arms grew weary. There follows here an illustration of united intercession. Realizing that Moses was physically exhausted, a stone was brought and he sat down upon it and "Aaron and Hur stayed up his hands, the one on the one side, and the other on the other side; and his hands were steady until the going down of the sun" (Exod. 17:12). Israel won a notable victory.

It seems obvious that Aaron and Hur were not as strong as Moses or Joshua. They could not pray like Moses, nor fight like Joshua, but they united to help in the praying. Can you not see the picture? Until the going down of the sun, they held up the hands of Moses, and at the end of that day Israel had won a notable victory as God took notice of this faithful, prevailing, united intercession.

Another illustration concerning prevailing prayer is found in I Kings 18:42-46. Here we find Elijah on Mount Carmel, praying that the rain should come. In the great conflict between the prophet Elijah and Ahab the king, Elijah had told Ahab that in proof of the fact that he was really a prophet sent from God, it would not rain until Elijah gave the word for the rain to fall. It did not rain for the space of three years and six months. The time came when God said, "Go, shew thyself unto Ahab, and I will send rain upon the earth" (I Kings 18:1). And so in this chapter we read that Elijah went to Ahab and delivered God's message that it would rain. Then Elijah went up on Mount Cannel and prayed that it should rain! Can you

see this picture? Elijah had God's promise that it would rain, and he had told Ahab it would rain; then he went up to the top of Mount Carmel and prayed that the rain would actually come!

This gives us an important revelation about prayer. In prayer we do not try to persuade God to do something He doesn't want to do. We don't try to "twist God's arm" to obtain something from Him that He does not want to give us. Actually we are like a person who reaches up for a glass of water. Someone brings along a tray that has glasses of water upon it and offers us one. We reach up to get that glass of water and we take it for ourselves. So it is in prayer. God offers us the blessing; He gives us the promise. We reach up to the promise of God and with thankfulness ask for its fulfillment. This is praying with confidence. This is the effectual, fervent prayer of a righteous man that availeth much (James 5:16).

There will be other instances of intercessory prayer for us to consider at another time, but let me draw your attention now to one in Acts 12:5, 12:17. Here we find Peter in prison and we read that "prayer was made without ceasing of the church unto God for him" (v. 5). Peter was in prison, waiting for Herod to put him to death, as he had James; and the church was praying for him all night long. Have you ever wondered about that prayer meeting, as to what they were praying for? Were they praying for him to be released? I don't think so. The Lord had told Peter (John 21:18-19) that he would be put to death, and this was no doubt common knowledge among the disciples. They were probably interceding that Peter's faith should not fail, that he might be kept strong in the hour of trial. They were probably asking God to enable Peter to die triumphantly, trusting in God.

The answer was more than they could ask or think. As we know, Peter was actually delivered in a miraculous way, but the thing of interest to me is that the church prayed for Peter when he was in trouble. Here, again, is unity in intercessory prayer, with God answering! This brings to my mind what you and I can do: we can pray for each other when we are in trouble. If we think of those who are in danger, in real trouble, we should be constantly in prayer on their behalf, not so much that everything will become beautiful and sweet but that they will be given grace, that the Lord will be with them in the day of trouble, that He will see them through.

Let us remember one thing with reference to trouble: this world has much trouble; but you know we are not going to stay here. We are one day going out of this world into the presence of God. Even with that blessed truth in mind we are still here on life's roadway and in His gracious love and providential care, God permits temptation, testing, sorrow, and trouble to come to His children. There is every reason to pray for one another. Indeed, long ago Samuel said, "God forbid that I should sin against the Lord in ceasing to pray for you . . ." (I Sam. 12:23).

We have both privilege and obligation to engage in intercessory prayer. We have seen several answers to such united prayer. I trust you will feel led to pray for one another because God hears and answers prayer!

15 *Prevailing Prayer*

Are we ever justified in continuing to pray, even if the answer has not come? James encourages believers to persist in praying, and describes a prayer pattern:

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

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. 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 (James 5:13-16).

In this passage believers are urged to pray one for the other and to seek prayer help from others. I am not sure that this passage in itself necessarily means only those who are sick in body, that it is confined only to physical health. It seems to me that the passage points to any who are ill in body or spirit. The healing which is mentioned in verse 16 can obviously apply directly to the faults that are referred to in that very verse. We read, "Confess your faults one to another, and pray one for another [pray obviously about those faults], that ye may be healed." I think those things go together! "The prayer of faith shall save the sick, and the Lord shall raise him up." If one is sick in spirit, if he is sick in soul, or if he has committed sins, they shall be forgiven him. There have been wonderful testimonies from people who have been blessed when they have trusted God for physical healing; but I think there are many people who would benefit from this passage, and get a truer meaning out of it if we did not restrict this Scripture only to the physical. But by all means, claim this promise! "Pray one for another that you may be healed."

There is another wonderful Scripture passage with an amazing promise!

If any man see his brother sin a sin which is not unto death, he shall ask, and he shall give him life for them that sin not unto death. There is a sin unto death: I do not say that he shall pray for it. All unrighteousness is sin: and there is a sin not unto death (I John 5:16-17).

Of course this means the man who sees his brother sinning shall ask, and He [God] "shall give him life." Such a gift of eternal life is not in your hand or mind to give! It is for God to give. This reminds us of that instance when Abraham prayed for Lot.

I do not think this "sin unto death" should bother us. Most of the sins that are indulged in, and most of those about which we are concerned with reference to our loved ones, are not "sins unto death." The only "sin unto death" apparently is the "unpardonable sin," and I have a feeling that the unpardonable sin is the rejection of Jesus Christ as Savior, for which there could be no remedy. But apart from that I believe this promise will cover the great, wide range of experience of our loved ones and ourselves. Most of the sins that we are concerned with are not unto death. The sin which is unto death – the rejection of the Lord Jesus Christ – will quite probably be out of sight and known only to the sinner and God. But in any case, here is the written promise that we can ask and God will forgive! I cannot do otherwise than bring this verse to your attention. I do not want to burden you unduly as you pray for your loved ones, but this is the most important thing in all the world – acceptance or rejection of Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord. Perhaps someone you know is actually on the verge of this "unpardonable sin." If so, my brother, my sister, pray that this one will turn now and confess and accept Christ. You have here a wonderful promise.

If any of your loved ones are sinning in the sight of God, you can definitely pray for them that they may receive forgiveness. I think this is the blessed experience of many of us as fellow believers. There are many who do not pray for each other, but there are many, many more who do pray for each other, and rejoice in the evidence that God is gracious to those for whom they pray.

We have considered in these studies the reality of prayer, the problem of unanswered prayer, and I am now completing the message on intercessory prayer. Now I want to draw your attention to *prevailing prayer*. Perhaps the most satisfying aspect about praying is that results can follow. That is a marvelous thing! Something can actually happen! Conversely, perhaps the most discouraging thing about prayer is that we can give up! And that is just as true with us as it was with Moses when he became tired. Patience is difficult for all of us and we need to be careful about the meaning of the word "patience." As it is used in the New Testament, it does not primarily refer to longsuffering. Longsuffering has an element of patience in it, that is true, but longsuffering does not especially refer to meekness. Meekness has a quality all its own. Patience refers more to perseverance, a sort of a "stick-to-it-iveness." When you stay with a

project until the last report is in, when you see that everything is complete, then you are manifesting patience. And in the matter of praying, we are to be patient; we are to wait until the results come in. This may be hard but it is very important.

In this connection our Lord told a parable we may study to our profit. "And he spake a parable unto them to this end, that men ought always to pray, and not to faint." When the Scripture says "always to pray," it need not mean to pray every minute of the day, nor that every word uttered is to be a word of prayer. The words "and not to faint" do not mean "at any particular moment." But these words indicate that a man ought to persevere in prayer and not quit! It refers to the quality of stick-to-it-iveness" as far as the person's attitude of mind and heart is concerned.

So the Lord Jesus told this parable of the widow with the unjust judge.

There was in a city a judge, which feared not God, neither regarded man: And there was a widow in that city; and she came unto him, saying, Avenge me of mine adversary. And he would not for a while: but afterward he said within himself, Though I fear not God, nor regard man; Yet because this widow troubleth me, I will avenge her, lest by her continual coming she weary me. And the Lord said, Hear what the unjust judge saith. And shall not God avenge his own elect, which cry day and night unto him, though he bear long with them? I tell you that he will avenge them speedily. Nevertheless when the Son of man cometh, shall he find faith on the earth?
(Luke 18:2-8).

Apparently it is faith on our part for which the Lord God is looking. Faith on our part is the disposition to keep on praying with expectation that God will keep His promise. This is what the Lord Himself was urging these people to do when He said that "men ought always to pray, and not to faint." Our Lord used many methods in teaching, and here He is teaching by contrast. Does it seem strange that He would use an illustration of an unjust judge? Not at all. In effect He was saying, "Think of this unjust judge, who feared not God and regarded not man; if he could be affected by the woman, how much more would God, your heavenly Father, be affected by the needs of His children!"

Let us consider this more closely. The widow was in need, she came because of her necessity, and she came to the right place – to the judge – who, by virtue of his office, was the man to bring justice to bear. The strange thing about this story, through which Jesus was teaching the lesson, was that the judge did not appear to answer by reason of his kindness or wisdom. Actually, however, her answer did not come from the Lord, but from the judge. What qualified her was her importunity. She kept on and on until the judge quite frankly "said within himself, Though I fear not God, nor regard man; Yet because this widow troubleth me, I will avenge her, lest by her continual coming she weary me" (vv. 4-5). What Jesus is teaching here is that we must persevere in prayer. Because God is unjust? No, do not even think it! What God wants is for us to recognize the fact of our utter dependence upon Him.

There is a similar case in I Samuel 1:4-28, the story of Hannah, which is well known. Hannah longed for a child. She went to God to pray for a child and "she wept, and did not eat." Hannah's husband chided her, "Am I not better to thee than ten sons?" (v. 8). Eli, the priest, thought she was drunk and rebuked her. "Put away thy wine from thee" (v. 14). In all this, Hannah was undergoing an experience of deep trial. Verse 6 tells us "her adversary also provoked her sore, for to make her fret," because she had no child; her husband was angry; the priest misjudged her. She was sad, but not bitter toward God. There is still more to be seen in this case of prevailing prayer. Hannah's need was personal. For a woman in that culture to be childless was a reproach, and it was taken to mean that God was withholding this gift. Hannah was not pleading for the gift specifically to glorify God, nor seeking to serve the nation; though when Samuel was grown, his life accomplished both of these things. Hannah's praying was simply a heart crying out for a child – a purely personal intercession. It was not wrong, not sinful, but still for herself. In the course of her distress, Hannah was cleansed of all personal pride. She could have been deeply humiliated by the scorn of a neighbor, the anger of her husband, the rebuke of God's priest, but her prayer was one of great faith and hope: "O Lord of hosts, if thou wilt indeed look on the affliction of thine handmaid, and remember

me, and not forget thine handmaid, but wilt give unto thine handmaid a man child, then I will give him unto the Lord all the days of his life, and there shall no razor come upon his head" (v. 11). When Eli understood her real burden, he told her, "Go in peace: and the God of Israel grant thee thy petition . . ." (v. 17).

Hannah rose from her knees, "went her way, and did eat, and her countenance was no more sad" (v. 18). Would that we had more women today with faith like that! She had committed herself in advance to God, as she waited upon Him in prayer. There is no need to complete the story. Hannah believed, and she dedicated the baby before his birth. And "when she had weaned him, she took him up with her . . . and brought him unto the house of the Lord" (v. 24). This is an extraordinary record of persevering prayer which in great faith brought an answer from our faithful and loving God.

As we continue this study of "prevailing prayer," let us consider another classic example. In Genesis 32:24-32 we have the story of Jacob at Peniel. Here we learn how Jacob wanted the blessing of God; he needed it. We are told that Jacob was left alone, "and there wrestled a man with him until the breaking of the day" (v. 24). The man said, "Let me go, for the day breaketh. And he said, I will not let thee go, except thou bless me. And he said unto him, What is thy name? And he said, Jacob. And he said, Thy name shall be called no more Jacob, but Israel: for as a prince hast thou power with God and with men, and hast prevailed" (Gen. 32:26-28). Here is a striking example of prevailing prayer. Jacob wrestled with this angel all night long, waiting upon God for blessing. He would not settle for anything less than real blessing. God answered and "blessed him there" (v. 29) to his own spiritual growth and with subsequent advantage to other people.

As we think about Jacob praying it seems obvious that Jacob was in real need. But his predicament was due to his own actions. Because of his earlier treatment of his brother, Esau, Jacob was in serious trouble. Esau was coming and Jacob well remembered Esau's threat to kill him. Jacob had earlier received assurance from God that he would live in this land, and that this land should be his. This promise was given to him in grace, it is true, and Jacob could rely on God's promise. So at Peniel when he was in need of help to save his life, he had a promise from God that would meet the need.

There is another aspect of this incident that needs our consideration. This meeting with Esau was a time of definite "showdown" for Jacob, and his need for divine help was urgent – that very night, that very moment. In his desperation, and yet with faith, he wrestled with God, and suffered personal consequences for " . . . the hollow of Jacob's thigh was out of joint, as he wrestled with him" (v. 25). Elsewhere we read that Jacob was crippled; he limped for the rest of his life. But his heart was cleansed from pride, and his name was changed from Jacob to Israel, as witness of his power with God and with man. We read in Genesis 33 how God answered Jacob's problem with Esau.

We can profit so much from these lessons God has been teaching His own. Each one asked for an obvious favor; each one felt an urgent, desperate need; each was humbled as God dealt with the need. Sinful pride was removed and each was changed through suffering, to the glory of God. In other words, prevailing prayer not only brings results in the outside world (and praise God, it does), it not only brings results in our affairs (for which we humbly thank Him), but prevailing prayer brings results in us, and we are actually changed by our experiences in prevailing prayer. We are brought more and more into the will of God.

God's will was actually accomplished in each one of these cases, through the urgency of their prayers. They *felt* the urgency, they *expressed* the urgency in their persistent prayer, and in that very way the will of God was done in and through each one.

16

Believers in the Lord Should Pray

All of us, everybody, everywhere, need help today. We need help just to live in this world. The gospel of Jesus Christ tells us what God has done, what He is doing, what He will do; and what Christ Jesus has done, what He is doing, and what He will do; also, what the Holy Spirit has done, what He is doing, and what He will do. All of this, telling us what the triune God has done for us, is in the Bible.

Now I want to raise the question: is there anything for us to do that we might live with blessing in this world? In view of how much is being done for us, is there anything that we should do? And I am going to turn to the first Epistle of Paul to Timothy. I believe the answer will be found in the words of Paul which this great witness for Jesus Christ wrote to Timothy, a young preacher and his follower, telling him what everyone should do, "I will therefore that men pray every where, lifting up holy hands, without wrath and doubting" (I Tim. 2:8).

This simple statement does not require any modification. We can accept this as a basic directive for all believing people. When Paul says "men" he is not excluding women and children, but I suspect he has in mind those who are "mature" and those who are "real" believers. So often, when a person first accepts the gospel, he comes to the Lord out of a sort of defensive frame of mind. He has been in trouble and he was condemned; he was about to be destroyed and he came to save his life. He came to the Lord Jesus Christ because He would deliver him and now he will not go to hell, where he had been headed. That is about where the believing experience starts. After he has accepted Christ, all his jeopardy is removed; he has now a home in heaven prepared for him. As long as he lives in this world he will grow in grace and in knowledge. During this time of growing, what should he do? Paul's words are plain; he should pray! And this is true for all believers in our own day. Responsible, concerned people, unselfish and helpful to others, what can you do? You can *pray* above all else. "I will therefore that men pray every where."

When a person is going to pray, the first thing he must do is to focus his heart and his mind's attention upon God. He will not only think about God, but he will bow down to God. He will worship God. He will recognize that God is high and holy and lifted up. I appreciate the tendency in this day in which we are living for people to suggest that there should be a certain relaxed liberty in coming to God. Sometimes, when we hear some people talk about coming to God, we get the impression that a person can have fellowship with God in much the same way he would have fellowship with a close personal friend. Some seem to suggest that we could saunter along with Him down any street as if we were chatting with a pal. But there is something vital which is missing. When reverence and awe is omitted, the description of communion with God is just not good enough.

It is wonderfully true that I can come to God freely and openly when He is my Father and I am His child. This is absolutely true. I can look up to Him and call Him "Abba, Father"; there need be no doubt about that. But this is not as if I were an equal. When I confront Him, always He is high and holy and lifted up. He is Almighty God!

Not only will the believer bow down to worship God, he will also praise Him. It is always a good thing, when I come into the presence of God in praying, that I should say something about Him that is true, something that reflects His greatness and His glory. I could say, "Our Father, which art in heaven." I could say, "O God, who made the heavens and the earth." That is a praiseworthy thing. Or I could say, "The God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ." That is certainly something to praise Him for. We can understand this clearly enough if we think, for instance, by way of illustration, that we would refer to the President of the United States as "Mr. President"; in this way we would show respect to him and to the high office he holds. When we think about God, we not only name Him but we praise Him and lift Him

up.

Then we give Him thanks in prayer. We remember what He has done for us and give thanks. And then we bring our petitions. We have something to ask Him, something we want from Him, so we bring those things out and "cast our burdens on the Lord." There will be times when we don't know what to ask for, but we want to share our concerns and we bring them to God as we pray. So in praying, we worship Him, praise Him, give Him thanks, and ask Him for help; thus we cast our burdens on Him while we are praying.

Paul urged that believers pray everywhere. "I will therefore that men pray every where" – any time, about anything, in any situation. "Lifting up holy hands." At this point some may say, "This matter of praying may be all right, but when you say 'holy hands' you leave me out." Let us think together about this. What does the word "holy" mean to you? For many years, for me the word "holy" always implied someone who had lived for a long, long time a very good life; someone very much superior in devotion to everybody else would be "holy." If that is what the Bible means by being holy, what do you think it means when the Bible says, "Be ye holy, for I am holy, saith the Lord." Do you think the believer is being challenged to undertake twenty-five years of faithful living in order to be holy? Actually the word "holy" comes from the English word "wholly." What it means to say is "one hundred percent." This is very important. When I come into His presence, there must be no reservations. I lift up my hands to pray with one hundred percent commitment to the Lord. My attention is focused upon Him, I am going to yield myself to Him, and I am dealing with God openly and honestly, one hundred percent-wise. That is "holy."

What did Paul mean when he wrote "without wrath?" We don't ordinarily use that word "wrath" in our conversational speech. Wrath is against people; it means anger. And to pray "without wrath" means that I do not come to God to pray while I am angry with other people. It means I am to have no grudges against anybody, no ill will, no envy, and no malice.

What does the word "doubting" mean? Doubting has to do with our relationship with God; "without doubting" means I have total confidence in God. Right away someone may say, "That would be one reason why I could not pray. I cannot be really sure what I ask for is going to happen." But such a comment is based on a mistake. It is not a question as to whether or not you are absolutely sure of the consequences. It could be quite normal to be dubious about what is going to happen and even to have misgivings about what is going to happen. The question Paul had in mind was, "Do you believe in God?"

There is an illustration of this truth in Scripture that can be helpful. On the occasion when the Lord Jesus told Peter to go out into the lake and to let his net down for a draught of fish, the fisherman said, "Lord, there aren't any fish out there. We've been out there and we've tried. There just aren't any fish there." But then he added, "Nevertheless, at thy word I will let down the net." That incident shows us an act of obedience on the part of Peter, when it seems quite clear that he was not sure of the outcome. Peter did what the Lord told him to do, although he probably had misgivings about what would happen; but he had no misgivings about the Lord, who told him what to do. It would seem that Paul wants the believers to put their total confidence in God. There should be no question about God's power, no question about God's purpose in the heart of the one who is praying.

How, then, shall we see all of this together? "I will therefore that men pray." [You should turn to God, lift up your heart, talk to Him.] "Lifting up holy hands," you should be 100 percent in your yielding to God. You should come openly, honestly, sincerely to God if you want His blessing. You should not hold grudges against anybody, because that will cut you off as sure as anything. So far as you are concerned, deep down in your heart, you should forgive men. You should let them go. You should turn them over to God. To come "without wrath or doubting" means that you will not question God, whatever you do. You may not be sure of the outcome, because you are human. You may not know what is going to happen tomorrow – also because you are human. But when you turn to Him, you have full confidence in Him. You believe God could. You know that nothing is impossible with God. Then you yield to Him as you

come and you can be satisfied He will hear you and answer you according to His own purpose to the glory of His name.

17

Praying Should Be Urgent

If you understand that God hears and answers prayer and that we are not heard because of our much speaking, would you think that a person should ever ask repeatedly for the same thing over and over again?

Praying is very important. We need help desperately; Almighty God is very powerful, and we can ask and get help from Him. But praying needs to be learned. No one needs to learn to cry – when a baby is born he can cry, but a person must learn to talk, to express his inward feelings, his needs, and his wants to other people. This is the truth in praying. No one would need to learn to come into the presence of God to just call on Him, "Oh, Lord, help me." Anybody could say that. But how can one know what to ask for, and how can one know whether to ask for it or not? This one needs to learn.

The disciples came to Jesus of Nazareth on one occasion and asked Him, "Lord, teach us to pray even as John taught his disciples to pray." Fortunately for us who have come along at this time there is a record of His instructions for prayer. We actually have it written out for us in so many words what the Lord Jesus Christ actually said when He taught His disciples.

And he spake a parable unto them to this end, that men ought always to pray, and not to faint; Saying, There was in a city a judge, which feared not God, neither regarded man: And there was a widow in that city; and she came unto him, saying, Avenge me of mine adversary. And he would not for a while: but afterward he said within himself, Though I fear not God, nor regard man; Yet because this widow troubleth me, I will avenge her, lest by her continual coming she weary me. And the Lord said, Hear what the unjust judge saith. And shall not God avenge his own elect, which cry day and night unto him, though he bear long with them? I tell you that he will avenge them speedily. Nevertheless when the Son of man cometh, shall he find faith on the earth?"
(Luke 18:1-8).

These are the words of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the message I want to share with you is right in these words. Let us look at them, "And he spake a parable unto them to this end, that men ought always to pray." This does not mean praying twenty-four hours a day. It does not mean that every waking moment we are talking to God in prayer. It does mean praying again and again. Just as long as the need is there, there should be praying. Men ought to pray over and over and again and again. "And not to faint." That is a very simple idea. In everyday English it means "don't quit" – keep it up.

Now, why should this be so? I don't mind saying right now I don't know why it should be like this. I can't really understand why God leaves any of it in our hands. It just seems to me sometimes that if He did the whole thing, it would be done better. But He has reasons for doing what He is doing, and He has put some of the responsibility in your hands and in mine. He prepares things and offers them to us; we reach out to receive them, to take them. If we don't reach, we don't get. If we don't take, we don't have. It is just like that.

God gives us promises, and He tries in every way to encourage us; but you and I must reach out to receive those promises from Him. Why should that be? I repeat, I don't know why He did it that way. I am sure He is all wise and therefore I am quite sure it is good, but that this is so seems undeniable from

Scripture. There is no question about it. Someone might very well say, "How can you do it? How can you keep on praying again and again?" Well, it isn't as difficult as it might seem to be. For instance, consider how important praying is. How important is it for you to get the blessing of God? Do you remember when Jacob on one occasion was wrestling with an angel about the matter of getting a blessing from God? He wrestled all night long and even after he was crippled, when his thigh was broken, he would not let go. Why? Because his life depended upon it. He needed the blessing of God. So we keep on praying when we feel it is important. If we want to help ourselves to keep on praying, let us examine the situation as it is and look for the importance of it. When we see that the situation is important, we will pray.

Now here is another consideration: how able is God? Can God do it? Scripture teaches that nothing is impossible with God. Since God can do it, why should we not ask Him? Whatever we were praying for, is the need still there? If the need is constant, then our praying should be.

There is another parable that Jesus of Nazareth told which is very much like this:

And he said unto them, Which of you shall have a friend, and shall go unto him at midnight, and say unto him, Friend, lend me three loaves; For a friend of mine in his journey is come to me, and I have nothing to set before him? And he from within shall answer and say, Trouble me not: the door is now shut, and my children are with me in bed; I cannot rise and give thee. I say unto you, Though he will not rise and give him, because he is his friend, yet because of his importunity he will rise and give him as many as he needeth (Luke 11:5-8).

In noting this parable we may see that this person came at a poor time (after midnight) to this man, awakened him, and asked for help. The man would have had every excuse not to do anything, but because of his friend's need he came to help. And so it will be so far as you and I are concerned: we come before the Lord – do we really need what we are asking for? Is what we are asking for right? When we pray we should keep one thing in mind: praying may take time. Nothing in the Bible indicates that we can pray once and be done with it. We will need to pray until the petition is granted in actual consequences.

Praying is something like breathing. How often do we breathe? Again and again. For how long? As long as we live. We breathe and we breathe, and we never finish breathing. It takes time but it is important and it is necessary; it must be repeated over and over again. So it is with praying.

There is a strange note in these parables we might well note. The record notes the judge saying, "Though I fear not God, nor regard man; Yet because this widow troubleth me, I will" (Luke 18:4-5). Is it not strange that the Lord should emphasize this? Note the similar situation. "Though he will not rise and give him, because he is his friend, yet because of his importunity he will rise and give" (Luke 11:8). Both of these instances seem to place special emphasis upon persistence in petitioning. It seems important to be keeping it up. The persistence with which we ask and ask, and will not be denied because we need it, seems actually to be commended. Here is a challenge to us in our praying. Do we care? Do we really and truly care? Do we care enough to persist in praying until the answer comes? It is apparent the Lord is using by contrast an unjust judge, noting that even the unjust judge was influenced by this petitioner coming again and again. How much more will God, who is not unjust, who does care, be inclined to hear us and to answer? Paul says, "If God spared not His own Son, but freely gave Him up for us all, how will He not also with Him freely give us all things?"

Jesus of Nazareth went on to say:

And shall not God avenge his own elect, which cry day and night unto him, though he bear long with them? I tell you that he will avenge them speedily. Nevertheless when the Son of man cometh, shall he find faith on the earth? (Luke 18:7-8).

This passage seems to show that Jesus of Nazareth was pointing His remarks to believers. God's people come to Him, His people call on Him, and they ask Almighty God to do that which will show the whole world that they were not wrong when they trusted in God. They put their trust in God; they took God's

name in their mouth, and they were sincere about it. God is going to verify it; He is going to vindicate it and show the whole world that these people were wise when they put their trust in God. "Which cry day and night unto him" – we recognize that very expression implies earnest, continual praying, over and over – praying for something which has not yet been answered.

In II Kings 13:18 we are told a very interesting thing. King Joash had Elisha the prophet come before him. He asked Elisha what he should do about Syria, and Elisha told him to take certain arrows in his hands and smite the ground. The king smote the ground three times, and Elisha was provoked and said, "Thou shouldest have smitten five or six times." Thou shouldest have gone on and on. Scripture is telling us just don't ever give up. And this is what I am saying to you now. "Men ought always to pray, and not to faint," meaning to say, "Men should continue praying again and again and not let themselves ever be weary."

18

Praying Should Be Specific

Very often with reference to our spiritual experiences, there is so much talk and not enough talk. This is especially true in the matter of praying. I suspect that of all the exercises of the soul there is none that has been talked about as much as praying, but I am sorry to say it may be true there is none so little done as praying. And this may be the cause of widespread "no results" in Christian experience. A well-known Scripture passage will point the way for us to think about this:

And I say unto you, 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 (Luke 11:9-10).

It could not be stated any clearer, yet in this simple statement some people can actually be misled. This is especially the case in the first part, where the first word, "ask," is the one about which a person could be most easily deceived. It is so easy to think that just to say the words "give me" will be sufficient. But that is not really "asking." Suppose you were serving guests in your home and one of the guests came with empty hands and said, "Give me some coffee." You could not do it. The guest needs to bring a cup. But if that person brought a cup, she would not need to say anything. All she would have to do is hold that cup, and you would know exactly what she meant. She wanted some coffee and she would get it.

In the spring of the year, a person may say, "I intend to have a garden on that plot of ground over there." You know, of course, that such a statement will not plant the garden. If that person never worked the soil and did not plant the seed and cultivate the ground, there would be no garden. Let us then look again at the word "ask," and think about the spiritual things we may want to have. What is it that we may want spiritually, that we really would like to have God give to us? Would it be more faith? How do you think we would get it? Should we just look up to God and say, "Almighty God, give me faith," and then go about our business? Would you expect that we would have more faith? What does the Bible teach about receiving faith? "Faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God" (Rom. 10:17). Could I expect God to strengthen my faith if I do not read the Bible? That would be just like asking God to make my beans grow when I did not plant them.

You may say, "I want blessing; I would like to have blessing in my home." Are you going to "ask" for

it? Blessing will come, certainly, if you seek blessing. This is something you will come to God about, but how will you seek it? For one thing you would pray. If you would pray for other people, you would be blessed. And if you were to obey Him, walk in His way, live honestly and sincerely, you may be very sure God would bless you.

The blessing of God always comes to the person who does something. Suppose I am asking for blessing for guidance: I want God to lead me. I ask God, "Show me the way. Guide me along the way." Now, if I want that blessing, I must move on out, for the man who is standing still certainly cannot get guidance. Let me use another illustration: suppose I say, "I'm going to trust my household to God. I realize there are homes being burglarized but I'm going to trust everything to God." Then I don't lock the door. Is that trusting God? Am I not really acting foolishly? Is that not like parking my car and leaving the key in the ignition, and then asking God to watch over my car in providence so that it should not be stolen?

Someone will say, "You are just talking about works." No, I'm not talking about works; I'm talking about praying that works. I have been seeking to emphasize that just the word "ask" is not enough. In other words, you want the coffee? Bring a cup. You want God to protect you? Stay where it is safe. You want God to bless you? Walk in His ways. You want God to give you faith? Read the Bible, study it.

The meaning of the word "seek" is more obvious. We can follow it more easily. It is not so easy to be misled in the use of this word, because if we "seek" we have to dig to find something. "Seek and you shall find." How does one seek? Did you ever try to find a suit that you wanted to wear and you couldn't remember which closet you hung it in? If you have ever had that experience you know what seeking is; you look and look. You seek by hunting and looking, and when you seek you can find.

Concerning peace, the Bible tells us to "seek peace and pursue it." We need to yield to God in order that we may have His peace. We need to come before Him and bring all our requests unto God; then "the peace of God, which passeth all understanding," will keep our hearts and minds. How do we seek joy? "Commit thy way unto the Lord." If we want to be really sure that He will take care of us, let us bow our hearts before Him and say "Thy will be done"; then we will have assurance. That's the way it will come.

The third word in this passage, "knock," is the easiest one of all to understand, because we do not knock by talking. We actually have to get up and do something. We start from where we are, go to the door, and knock. How do we knock to get the favor of God? I'll tell you very quickly how to get the favor of God. Go to church. Worship God. Read your Bible and study it. Pray. Bring all things before God. Give in the Lord's name. If you do these things, I'll promise you the favor of God.

In looking to God for blessing, we must remember the importance of obeying His Word as He guides us. Scripture says "Open your windows and see if I will not pour out a blessing upon you." The Lord Jesus told Peter, "Let down your nets for a draught of fish." Peter wasn't sure there were any fish there but because the Lord told him to do it, he let down the nets, and he got fish, The Lord Jesus said to Martha when Lazarus was in the tomb, "Take ye away the stone." She didn't want to do it: she thought it was not worthwhile. She protested that it just didn't make sense. He told her, "Didn't I tell you that if you believe you would see the glory of God? Believing includes obeying: so take away the stone."

"Ask, seek, knock": put feet on these words. Let them walk into your life. Do something about it and trust in God, and He will hear you and will bless you to the glory of His name.

Praying Should Be About Everything

What we think about God is often shaped according to our own ideas. This is particularly true in the whole matter of praying. So often we are inclined to think that God will act in a certain way because we think that would be good; or we feel He should do a certain thing that we think would be good. We feel sure that God is good; so we project what we think would be good and then feel that we know that God would do that because He certainly would do whatever is good because He is good.

Did you notice how in all of that line of thought we were getting off on the wrong foot? When we think we know what good is like, we are making two simple but very great mistakes. We overestimate ourselves. We don't know that much – we are not that good. We don't really know what goodness would be like. And we underestimate God. He is far greater than we, far beyond us, "his ways past finding out" (Rom. 11:33).

This is brought to our minds in the Book of Isaiah, where we read words like this:

For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, saith the Lord. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts (Isa. 55:8-9).

It could not be stated any plainer. We human beings on earth just cannot think like God. Since we cannot think like Him, we are not able to know what He is going to do. Any basic concept of God will include the idea that He is infinite.

That word *infinite* is somewhat difficult to grasp. What do we mean by infinite? We mean "no limit." We are naturally inclined to think of infinite as being big, big, bigger than that; but actually infinite may mean small, small, smaller than that, because if it is infinite it has no measurement either way. God is infinitely big, I know, but He is also infinitely small. He is infinitely great, wise, and gracious. Size means nothing in the realm of the infinite. Even in human affairs size is not nearly as important as we are inclined to think.

It is helpful to me when I think of something like this: take a cinder. It can be very small if you compare it with a boulder, a great rock that one can sit on. But if the cinder is in your eye it can be a mighty big thing. That little speck may be so small one can scarcely see it, but if it sits right next to the eyeball it can start all kinds of trouble. So actually this idea of size is only relative. It depends on how close it is to one.

We need to ask ourselves right at this point: is anything too hard for God? And, of course, we say right away, "Why, no." That means it is not too hard because it is so big, and it is not too hard because it is so small, or because it is different; it is just not too hard for God. "Nothing is impossible with God." We now come to the question, "Can you understand why nothing is too small to bring to God?" The best answer to that is to realize that anything that troubles you troubles your Savior.

In Hebrews we find these words, "For we have not a high priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities; but was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin" (Heb. 4:15). So we can grasp the great thought that He is a high priest who is sensitive to all our infirmities. Because this is so, we can bring everything to God in prayer. Does anything trouble you? Do you have any concern? If you have any thoughts or wishes about anything, you can bring them to God. This is proper. This is right in focus, and we can bring everything to God in prayer; partly because we need help about things. We need guidance and we need strength. As you and I live day in and day out we come again and again to things we cannot handle. With these we need help. God is both able and willing to help. In facing certain

situations there may be two or three alternatives – which should we take? Who knows? God knows. So we go to Him because we need His guidance to know His will, since only He knows what tomorrow will bring forth.

20

The Spirit Also Helpeth

Did you know that any person who comes humbly to pray to God will be helped to ask for the right things when he is praying.

No doubt many persons do not pray because of confusion in their minds. It is not so much that they don't believe. Of course, there are some people who do not believe; I know about that. But I am now thinking about people who do believe in God. It is not that they don't care, because they do care about the things of God, about blessing from God. They really do care about their families and about, all the things they hold dear. They just frankly are not sure what they should pray for. In other words, they are not sure they would be welcome if they came into the presence of God: they know deep down in their heart they are sinners, and they haven't been living right, and now they wonder if they would be welcome if they did come.

I know every now and again there are some people who think about God in such a way that they will say, "I didn't go to Him before and I feel ashamed to go to Him now." This would be as if He were some human being who would treat them ill. Of course, they are wrong in action, but they don't know that. There are those who are just not sure whether they would be welcome if they came, and again even if they were to come and even if they felt welcome, they would not be sure what to say. They feel they would just be dumb. I want to say something about that. Perhaps for them one could understand their condition if you think of the way it is with some people when you talk to them about going to a doctor for a checkup.

Many people who probably should go, because they haven't been for some time, actually feel hesitation. They don't feel like going because they don't know what is wrong with them. They are not sure that anything is wrong, and if they don't feel too good they are not sure they would know what to tell the doctor. You may say, "That is pretty naive." It is, but it is very common. It is a common, naive impression that lingers in the hearts and minds of many people that when we go to a doctor we should be able to tell the doctor what is wrong with us. We feel dumb if we can't. So we tell him what is wrong with us, and we also tell him what medicine he should give, because we already know what is wrong. Of course, you say that is all foolishness. I know it is foolish, but it is human and it is common. Actually, what should prompt me to go see a doctor is any pain I have or any discomfort I feel, or any symptoms I may have.

Let me tell you one thing about going to see the doctor – if you don't need his help, most doctors will tell you that right away. They will tell you there is nothing wrong with you, which is a wonderful thing to hear. I am very fortunate in that I have a very kind friend who is a doctor and he has prevailed upon me to come to see him often. I have an understanding with him and it is routine in a way, but nevertheless there is a careful checkup to keep me physically fit for the work that I do.

Just as it is important to visit the doctor at intervals, it is just as important to have a regular time to pray. You don't have to wait for once a year or once a month, but it is important to have a regular time to pray.

But just now I want to deal with another aspect of this. I want to ask the question, "What should we

pray for?" And how can we answer that? I would turn your attention to Romans 8:26: "Likewise the Spirit also helpeth our infirmities: for we know not what we should pray for as we ought: but the Spirit itself maketh intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered." Let us examine this closely: "Our infirmities" – the Spirit also helpeth our infirmities. What do we mean by an infirmity? It is a weakness. What weakness would I have? My understanding. I am actually very limited in what I know, or should I say, very limited by what I don't know about the situation, about where I am actually living, what I am doing, and about God.

Who knows what a day will bring forth? Who knows anything at all about the future? How do I know about other places? I don't know who you are; I don't know where you are or the kind of life you live. Some of you are shut-ins, some are bedridden, others are so preoccupied with work that they haven't time to read anything; they just don't get time. There are people all round about me like that. So you see, my understanding is very limited, and the Spirit needs to help me in my infirmity and in my understanding. Not only that, but I am limited in my attitude. We commonly tend to be personal. We take everything just for ourselves. What fits me fits my wife, my son John and his wife, us four and no more. That is the way we are inclined to be – limited in ourselves; it is just like an infirmity.

We may not recognize it but that makes us selfish. We are inclined to be selfish, interested only in "what do I get out of it?" I'll venture to say there are people whose whole attitude toward the church and toward the Bible, toward prayer meetings, is "what do I get out of it? What is it going to do for me?" And this is selfish all the way through – an infirmity. Again, I can be blind in my attitude. There is much I do not know, so one-sided according to just what I happen to have in mind. With reference to me as I look forward in my life, there is one thing I should keep in mind – I just can't go by me. Then again, my faith may be very little. I am really weak in my faith. When you put those things together – in my understanding, attitude, and faith, I can be so limited I need help.

The Spirit helpeth. How does the Spirit do this? The Bible tells us what He does. He takes the things of Christ and shows them unto us and you know, of course, the biggest thing about Christ was that He died for me. And you know that tied up with that is this word from Paul: "He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things" (Rom. 8:32)? The Spirit will help me to remember that. And when I turn to God in prayer and I think to myself, "I don't know what to pray for and I don't know what I should ask for," I should look up into the presence of God. Right with me is the living Holy Spirit of God who will show me the things of Christ. "For we know not what we should pray for as we ought." Our principal problem is our lack of knowledge. We are so limited and we just don't know what to ask for, what we should pray for as we ought. We do not always know what the practical needs are; we can't even know what the will of God is.

You may want to pray for your girl in high school. How do you know what she will need tomorrow, or next year? How do you know where she is going to live? You don't know. You don't know what to pray for as you ought, but God knows and you can turn her over to God and trust Him. We know not what to pray for as we ought. You have a young man in your home and you may think that you want to plan things for him. You can't plan his future; you can't tell him what to do. You don't even know what is going to happen to him. God knows. God is over all. He won't tell you everything but He will guide you and the Holy Spirit will help you.

Then we read "But the Spirit itself maketh intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered." The Spirit *Himself* – the Holy Spirit – knows what we need and He will ask. He knows what God can do, and He will ask. He knows what God will do, and He will ask, and He knows what God wants to do, and He will ask. He knows what we need now. The Spirit knows and He makes intercession for us, praying in us and through us and for us with groanings that cannot be uttered.

There is an earnestness and urgency that comes from the Holy Spirit of God – a compassionate yearning. I sometimes try to illustrate that as if I were going to pray for one of my children, and I would

say, "Oh, Lord, be gracious to this woman." Those are the words. But suppose I say something like this, "Oh, Lord, be gracious to this woman – uhh." Do you realize that it is in the "uhh" that the Holy Spirit came in? The urgency, the groaning that cannot be expressed, a compassionate yearning that you have that God should hear and answer.

The will of God may not be known to us; there may be something to do tomorrow about which we are ignorant and there may be something to ask for for some person that we do not even recognize, but the Holy Spirit does know. When you and I kneel to pray, we can open our hearts and our minds and pray what comes into our hearts before God, for the Spirit Himself is helping us, making intercession for us, with groanings that cannot be uttered.

21

Effectual Praying

I will therefore that men pray every where, lifting up holy hands, without wrath and doubting (I Tim. 2:8).

The need for praying is felt today among all classes of people. We need help. Our loved ones need help. People everywhere need help. We need more help than we can receive from any other source than Almighty God. But praying should be with understanding. It should be with intelligence. It is often true that in praying we ask God to do things for us which we do not deserve. We want Him to do more for us than we can ask or think. Yet there should be an understanding and a reasonableness about our praying.

There are certain things that we should have in our hearts and minds when we pray. If a person is going to practice this exercise of praying, he needs a floor to walk on. In other words, the praying person needs a sure foundation on which to base his praying.

In this series of studies on praying, we shall consider several basic essentials in the whole experience of praying. We shall begin with, "Have faith in God." "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" (Heb. 11:6). So a man should ask himself at the very outset, "Do I believe in God?" If I believe in God, then I can pray. When I really believe that God is, that God matters, and that God can help, then I can pray. Then I can call upon Him. Certainly if praying is to be effectual, there must be a basic confidence in God.

The second requirement, which I think all of us should have in mind, is an open, plain acknowledgement of personal sin. Anyone who is a believer should be able to say with the prodigal son, "I will arise and go to my father, and will say unto him, Father, I have sinned against heaven, and before thee, And am no more worthy to be called thy son: make me as one of thy hired servants" (Luke 15:18-19). There are those who have a desire to pray, but who have not yet established a relationship with Christ Jesus. Even though they do not consider themselves Christians, nor understand the gospel, they may need help. They may believe that God could help and may wonder whether they have the right to pray. Let me say there is a very simple prayer they may utter, "God be merciful to me a sinner." This prayer expressing repentance must come first with Christians and non-Christians, because repentance is most essential to praying. Some of us may feel that God has done away with sin and that therefore we can easily come to God. Not so easily! We must keep in mind that God is holy and sin is sin. God will deal with our sin but only if we come before Him in repentance. We must judge ourselves before God. "If I regard iniquity in my heart, the Lord will not hear me" (Ps. 66:18).

The third requirement for effectual praying is the realization that "Christ died for me." Thank God that even though I have sinned against Him who is holy, Christ died for us who are ungodly and unworthy. "But God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us" (Rom. 5:8). There is still another passage of Scripture that we can carry in our hearts and minds to give us strength. "He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things?" (Rom. 8:32). No one can argue about this truth. If Christ Jesus died for you, you can come to God. Your debt has been paid. There is nothing on the books against you. All may come. If we will come believing and appreciating the fact that Christ died for us, God is ready to receive us. The way into God's presence is open to every one of us that believe this.

There is a fourth requirement for effectual praying. When we come to God praying, it is essential that we come in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ. This simply means that we cannot come on our own. We cannot come because of who we are. Whoever we may be among men, we are sinners in the sight of God, and as such we have no claim on God. But if we come in the name of His beloved Son, we have free access into the presence of God. Without Christ we are bankrupt in the sight of God. Nothing we could bring would be sufficient funds to pay our debts. We can never draw on our own resources. We must draw on Christ's account. Let the request that we bring be in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, who gave Himself for us. Whatever we ask for from God, our praying must be in His name, in His will. The great thing about this is that in the sight of God believers, such as we are, now belong to Him. We are no longer our own. In His Son, we can come as we are and receive the blessing of God.

The fifth condition we will consider as essential in order to pray effectively will be this matter of abiding in Him. "If ye abide in me, and my words abide in you, ye shall ask what ye will, and it shall be done unto you" (John 15:7). Abiding in Christ will mean that we will have in mind what He has done to set us free. So, each time we come before God in prayer, we think about the Lord Jesus Christ. We remember that He is interceding for us. Our trust is in Him. Then we think of what He wants to do for us. Scripture abounds with promises of what Christ will gladly do for us, so we must search Scripture, we must read the Bible, to find the promises which are there for us. As we take time to read the Bible we will find them there. We should read books on spiritual life and have fellowship with people who are believers. We should attend Bible classes and go to a church where men think and preach and believe these things, where they know the meaning of "abiding in Him." As we saturate our thinking with the facts of the life of Jesus Christ, we will come into the presence of God to pray, trusting in the Lord Jesus Christ and abiding in Him.

There is one more topic for our consideration. It will be the sixth basic essential for effectual praying. When we come into the presence of God to pray, we must be prepared to say, "Thy will be done." We must come before God, being yielded to Him. Before we can come that way, we will need to give up our own ideas. There is just one way to do this. We must, each and every one of us, go through our own Gethsemane. I must want to do God's will. As I come to pray, have I truly committed everything to God? Is everything really in His hands? Am I fully trusting in Him? Have I turned everything over to Him? Am I willing for God to have His way in my life? Am I so yielded to God that I will accept His way as the best way, even though it goes against my own will? If I come with this attitude, God will hear and He will answer my praying.

With these six qualifications in mind, we can ask ourselves, "What remains to be done?" The answer is, "Pray always, keep it up, everytime and about everything." We read these words in the Bible, "In every thing by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God" (Phil. 4:6). Again and again we are reminded to pray always. The formula is simple: ask, seek, and knock. "Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you" (Luke 11:9). I am to put my faith in God into action when I pray. It is not enough to think about praying, nor to believe in prayer. I must pray: actually get on my knees and pray.

"Ye have not, because ye ask not." Let us avoid this tragedy. Suppose a person gets ready to eat breakfast and goes to the refrigerator to get some milk, and there is no milk there. Why? Because he did not buy any. He did not put it there. "Ye have not, because ye ask not."

Finally in this whole matter of praying, we are admonished, "Pray for one another." Intercession in behalf of others actually seems to strengthen our own praying before God. Praying together will also strengthen our faith. "Again I say unto you, That if two of you shall agree on earth as touching any thing that they shall ask, it shall be done for them of my Father which is in heaven" (Matt. 18:19). One thing we may be sure of, when we once get answers to our prayers, we will continue, we will keep it up. It is no wonder that the early Christians, when they expressed their faith, began by saying, "I believe in God the Father Almighty, Maker of Heaven and Earth." This is what the apostles taught them. That is why we say to one another, "Have faith in God." Our sure foundation, if we would get results in praying, is this. "Have faith in God."

When we come to God in prayer, we first express our appreciation of who God is and what He has done. We come praising God and worshiping and honoring Him. This kind of praying is always healthy and wholesome and good. It is when we have burdens and troubles that we come into the presence of God to get answers. When we seek God's help, certain things will follow in succession. First, we will at such times be conscious of our burden, whatever that burden is. It will be good for us to look at it, to face it, to recognize it for what it is. We could be concerned about our home or our business. We could be concerned about our neighbors, but far more likely we are concerned about our loved ones. Perhaps our hearts are burdened about our children, our husbands, or our wives. As we bring our problems and burdens to the Lord, we are aware not only of our own particular concern, but also that He alone can help us.

Secondly, we come, conscious of our personal inability to cope with our problems. We are utterly dependent on Him. Human nature resents such dependence. Human nature does not turn to God as long as it thinks it can work things out by itself. How strange that this is true. It could be partially due to unbelief as far as God is concerned. To those of us who do not know Him well, He seems so far away. That being the case, we are inclined to think, "Well, if anything is going to be done here, I am going to have to do it." That kind of attitude will never lead us to prayer. If we come before God, we must be conscious of the fact that we are personally unable to solve our problems and to bear our burden. As far as this world's problems are concerned, they are just too much for us. When we admit that we do not have the strength, nor the wisdom, nor the virtue, nor the ability to help ourselves, we are in the right frame of mind for praying.

This is a wonderful preparation for coming into the presence of God, with our burden and our weakness. Then all our thoughts will turn away from ourselves and we will think of our God. If we come with this attitude, we will come in faith that God can help. He can lift our burden. That is wonderful. That is remarkable. God knows our need and God cares. He will help us. Marvelous! Glorious! God is holy, "of purer eyes than to behold evil, but He is full of mercy and tender compassion." "Like as a father pitieth his children, so the Lord pitieth them that fear him. For he knoweth our frame; he remembereth that we are dust" (Ps. 103:13-14).

Some of us in coming to Him will be conscious of the fact that He is Judge. This is true. He sees everything and knows everything, and He tries the heart. He looks on the innermost thoughts, but He is also the Savior. As a Judge He will condemn sin, but it is also true that He is our Savior, and He will redeem all who call upon Him. God has been revealed to us in the person of His Son, Jesus Christ. Jesus, Himself, could say, "He that hath seen me, hath seen the Father."

In Jesus Christ, we can have God as our Father. Perhaps no greater word can be said than this, that God is a Friend.

What a friend we have in Jesus,
All our sins and griefs to bear.
What a privilege to carry,
Everything to God in prayer.

22

Forgiveness Helps Praying

In the time of Isaiah, many of the children of Israel felt that God had forsaken them. However, they had sinned and their sins stood between them and God. Isaiah told them plainly. "Behold, the Lord's hand is not shortened, that it cannot save; neither his ear heavy, that it cannot hear: but your iniquities have separated between you and your God, and your sins have hid his face from you, that he will not hear" (Isa. 59:1-2). In his first epistle John put it this way: "There is no man that sinneth not." Paul writes. "For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God" (Rom. 3:23).

In this chapter we would like to encourage each other to pray. We will consider the things we should have in mind when we turn to God in our need. Today I want to bring it to our minds that our sins can keep us from praying. Many, many of us have a question with reference to prayer, as to whether God will answer when we call. How many there are of us who just do not pray! In spite of troubles and problems and burdens, we hold back from praying. When our hearts turn to God with burdens too heavy to bear, a consciousness of sin blocks the view. We feel that we are not good enough to pray. We feel paralyzed, dumb, and unable to speak to God, because we are sinners.

We know that God is holy and this blocks us off, even when we are ready to confess our sin. It is true that as we read our Bible, we learn that the law of God is eternal. We know how He looks upon sin. That is set forth in the Ten Commandments, and we know only too well that we have transgressed His Law. Thus we feel disqualified. We realize our sinfulness and that sin is universal and devastating. The psalmist writes about it: "My sin is ever before me." This awareness of sin has a terrible effect on us. Sin will not only separate us from God, but sin will cause the deterioration of our souls. We may, for instance, have kept a certain degree of honesty since our youth, but if we keep on sinning we will get to be liars. We will get to be deceitful. It will happen. We may have a certain concept of high ideals and perhaps high standards of performance in maintaining our integrity, but if we keep on sinning, these will wear out. I'll tell you, you will break down. This is because in sin there is a certain basic unbelief in God. If we sin and continue in it, it is not ignorance. There is no excuse that can be offered.

Now sin actually appears in our experience through temptation. We are tricked by our appetites, taken in by our imagination, and fooled by our pride. That is the way sin comes and sin brings judgment. No matter how we alibi, no matter how we try to explain it away, the truth remains that God is holy, and He will not look upon sin. This means that sin brings with it guilt. It leaves us feeling that we will be judged and that causes us to want to hide. We are like escaped prisoners who hide from every policeman they see. We run whenever God is mentioned. Because this is true, some of us do not go to church. We know the preacher and the people cannot read our thoughts but God can, and the church is the house of God, so we stay away.

Sins, our sins, have to be admitted. There is no use in trying to deny them. Whether we are honest or not, our conscience will convict us. It is no credit to us to admit that we have sinned. We know it. We

need help, real help. We may hope that God will help, but for many of us, because of our sin, we just doubt that God would. Having realized the dire consequences of sin, we turn to a passage of Scripture which brings hope to all of us who are sinners. It is wonderful to read these words: "Though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool" (Isa. 1:18). Believe me, your sins can be forgiven. "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness" (I John 1:9). No matter how dark our sin may be, the "blood of the Lord Jesus Christ will cleanse us from all sin." In order for us to come in prayer before God, there are a number of things we need to know. We need to know about the grace of God. Sin is real, but grace is real. And "where sin abounded, grace did much more abound" (Rom. 5:20). What, then, is grace? It is the undeserved favor of God toward men. We deserve neither His kindness nor His grace. When we were yet sinners, Christ died for the ungodly. "Marvelous grace of our loving Lord. Grace that is greater than all our sin."

Because of this grace of God, we can be sure of forgiveness. This is not a matter of God saying, "Oh, well, that's all right." It is not all right. It is rather all wrong. Sin is wrong, but God can forgive sin because "Christ our passover is sacrificed for us" (I Cor. 5:7). The Lord Jesus Christ in Himself will take away our sin. He bore the punishment of our sin in His own body. We do not have to cover it up. The Bible tells us that "He that covereth his sins shall not prosper: but whoso confesseth and forsaketh them shall have mercy" (Prov. 28:13). We do not need to make any attempt to get by. We need not pretend, nor hide, nor cover up. We may not want to tell our neighbors, but we do not have to. We need only confess openly before God.

We can come to Him, remembering this, "Christ Jesus gave Himself for the sin offering on our behalf." He came into this world to reconcile us to God. What a wonderful word "reconciliation" is. It refers to what the Lord Jesus Christ has done, when He took away my sins. He bore them away in His own body on the cross of Calvary. Someone may say, "Even after we become Christians we are still prone to sin." John writes in his epistle, "And if any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous" (I John 2:1). The Lord Jesus Christ is "able also to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by him, seeing he ever liveth to make intercession for them" (Heb. 7:25). We can take courage. It is true that we have sinned, and we are ashamed of it, but even though we have sinned, there is hope. Let us turn to God, and let us say it over and over again, "Where sin abounded, grace did much more abound."

What, then, shall we say about our sins? Acknowledge them. Confess them. Actually admit them and repent. We ought to confess every known sin. When we bring them out by name, it will affect our sins, much the way a gardener does with weeds in a garden. Those of us who have worked in a garden know how bothersome it is to have those weeds grow and grow. We hoe them out today, but next week they are growing again. It seems as though they never come to an end. I'll tell you one thing you can do: pull them out and let them lie on the ground. Let the sun get at the roots until they actually wither away. That's the best way in the world to do with them. The same thing is true as far as your sin is concerned. If we want to get rid of our sin, whatever else in the world we do we must not cover it up. There is no use pretending everything is all right. We need not show our neighbors all our dirty linen. That is not necessary. But in the sight of God we cannot hold anything back. He knows us like an open book. So we can only acknowledge our sins. When we have not told the truth, we must admit it. If we have been impatient and envious, if we have been jealous, we must acknowledge these things. Just as surely as we pull these sins into the open, out into the bright light, and name them by name, we will weaken them. They will actually begin to wither, and we can be free. This is the great blessing of confession. Open confession is good for our souls.

The other matter that goes right along with confession is a little harder to handle. After we have confessed our sins, we must turn away from them. We must forsake them. This causes a problem for many of us. They are so sticky. When we want to turn away from them, we can't. I may say deep down in my

heart, "I know this is not honest," yet tomorrow I may be dishonest again. We may say deep down in our hearts, "We know we have tried to get away with things on our jobs. We know we have neglected them." Yet it is so easy to neglect them again, even after we have confessed our negligence. Just the same, we can decide in our hearts and minds that we will vote against our sins and turn from them. We can hate them. God will know our heart, and we can come to Him and ask Him to set us free. We must never start favoring our sins and alibiing for them. If we compare ourselves with others and say, "I'm as good as he is, or I'm no worse than she is," there is no use to go any further. If we regard iniquity in our heart, the Lord will not hear us.

We must be ready, deep down in our hearts, to say to Almighty God, "Oh, God, deliver me. Get me out of these things." Only then can we be delivered from our sins. We may say, "How can we actually be delivered from our sins?" The answer may seem hard for many of us, because it involves an aspect of self-denial. "Reckon yourself dead unto sin." Count yourself dead. We cannot get rid of our sin the way we are. Only as we deny ourselves, as we reckon ourselves dead, can we be delivered. Then we can be raised from the dead in newness of life.

Another thing I want to say is this: we must believe His Word and accept His mercy and His forgiveness. When the Lord says, "I have cast all thy sins behind my back," we can truly believe it. When we read, "As far as the east is from the west, so far hath he removed our transgressions from us" (Ps. 103:12), we can apply that promise to ourselves. We can trust God to take care of us, to help us, to turn our backs on our sins. Then we can forget the things that are behind. We can praise Him for His grace and mercy. God will forgive. Jesus Christ cleanseth us from all sin. He can set us free from sin, so that we can pray to God in an acceptable way.

23

Removal of Sin Helps Praying

In this was manifested the love of God toward us, because that God sent his only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through him. Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins (I John 4:9-10).

In these words, John gave expression to a very profound truth about the love of God. He points out that our whole relationship to God depends upon God coming to us in grace and mercy. In the two previous chapters we have considered some of the qualifications of effectual praying, such as a basic confidence that God can hear and answer prayer when we come to Him in the name of Jesus. We also considered the fact that many people do not pray because they feel "blocked out" by their own sin, and how God in grace and mercy has removed this "block" in Jesus Christ.

In this chapter, I want to point out to you something more about how our sin is removed. All of us, as we come into the presence of God and kneel to pray, are confronted with a deep consciousness of our guilt. Probably the first thought that will come to me is, "I'm not worthy, I'm not good enough." It is very discouraging to feel that in spite of my faith in the power of God my sin is ever before me. Sin is like our shadow. We can't get rid of it. It is with us all the time. It is a distracting and disheartening thing. We can think about sin and have it on our minds so much that we forget about God and about prayer. How often we are smitten with the realization of our unworthiness when we turn to God to pray! We come promising

in our hearts to do better and to be better. Oftentimes I am almost tempted to come into the presence of God and say, "I know I have not been what I ought to be, but from now on I am going to be different."

I would not want to disparage personal commitment to God. I don't want to say anything that is inclined to belittle a real dedication of ourselves to God. But in reality what we do does not make us acceptable to God. By no act of ours can we earn access to God; that has been done for us. We might feel that since God is merciful, since we know His goodness is from everlasting and His loving-kindness is to all generations, we may hope that He will show His mercy and goodness and kindness to us. It helps to think on these things, but the wonderful truth is that the grace of God has been manifested. This means that God has already done what is necessary to make it possible for me to come into His presence and talk to Him. The Son of God, Jesus of Nazareth, God incarnate, came into this world expressly to die for me. We read in the Book of Hebrews that when He came, He did not take on Himself the nature of angels. We understand this to mean that if He had taken on Himself the nature of angels He could not have died. He took on Himself the nature of Abraham. He took on Himself humanity in order that He might offer His human body as a sacrifice and die in this body. Only then could He be raised in the newness of life. All of this Christ has done for each one of us. He died in my stead and place, passing through the grave and coming out of it to open the door for me into the presence of His Father.

This truth not only affects our souls and their eternal destiny, but it also applies to us when it comes to praying. So, when we come before God in prayer, when the consciousness of our sins would overwhelm us, we remember the cross of Calvary. Christ died for us. John the Baptist said about Jesus of Nazareth: "Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world." He took away our sin, yours and mine. He took it away as the Lamb of God and now, being reconciled to God, we are free to pray to Him.

When John the Baptist said the word "The Lamb of God," he was not referring to the disposition, nor the gentle innocence of Jesus of Nazareth as being like that of a lamb. He was called "the Lamb of God" because He would be slain for us. This name actually takes us back to the days of Moses in the Old Testament. When God sent the plagues upon Egypt, the final and most terrible plague was the death of the firstborn of every family in Egypt. God told Moses how the children of Israel could escape this judgment. They were to take a lamb under certain conditions, kill the lamb, and sprinkle its blood upon the door posts of their homes. We read "And when I see the blood, I will pass over you" (Exod. 12:13). That night when the angel of death passed through the land of Egypt, he entered every house of the Egyptians, but he did not enter the homes of the Israelites because of the blood of the lamb upon each door post of each home. This is why Christ Jesus was called the "Lamb of God."

Because Jesus died for us, God does not deal with us on the basis of our sins. Because Christ was raised from the dead, God's Word promises that we who believe this and trust Him need not remain in death but will be raised into eternal life. It seems too great, too wonderful, to be true; but when we speak about being saved by the "blood of the Lord Jesus Christ," we mean we are saved because He died for us. "The blood of Jesus" refers to His physical death. Because His precious blood was shed for us, we are healed, we are cleansed, and by this we are purchased. In other words since the death of Christ on Calvary was in our behalf, we are the beneficiaries. We receive these benefits because of what He has done for us. When we kneel before God in prayer, we must keep this in our minds and hearts. He died for us in God's will. He carried our sins away. Our hearts may condemn us and bring to our minds our sinfulness, but He is greater than our hearts. He would remind us that His Son died for our sins. We can overcome this feeling of unfitness which would overwhelm us by looking at Calvary, where our Lord purchased for us our acceptableness before God. "He hath made us acceptable in the Beloved."

In Romans 5:8 we read that "God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us." To say that God loves us is far more than and different from saying that God likes us. If we were to claim that God likes us, that would open the door to argument, because Scripture says "God is angry with the wicked every day" (Ps. 7:11). But the wonderful truth is that God loves us, and in love

there is no appraisal.

In the New Testament usage of the word, we do not "love" a person because he is good, or because he is strong, or because he is nice. We do not "love" someone because he is great to look at, nor because of what he is going to do. When we "love" in the New Testament sense, we "love" people because of the grace that is in our hearts. We are ready to give and do something for them. There is no appraisal in this kind of love. There is no evaluation in love. When we say "God so loved the world," we do not mean God so liked the world. God "so loved" that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever, anybody, who "believeth in Him shall not perish but have everlasting life."

Our Lord Jesus Christ, before His death, left instructions to His disciples as to how they were to remember Him. At the last supper He ". . . took the cup, and gave thanks, and gave it to them, saying, Drink ye all of it; For this is my blood of the new testament, which is shed for many for the remission of sins" (Matt. 26:27-28). John in his first epistle discusses our relationship with God. "Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us" (I John 4:10). This is something already accomplished. In grace and mercy He loved us in a very practical sense, when He provided our salvation. When we kneel in prayer we can remember that Christ gave Himself for us. He gave Himself for all people who believe, but what is really dynamic and is actually effectual in our souls is to know that He died for each and every one of us personally. Knowing this has certain results: our penalty is paid. We deserved judgment and that judgment would sentence us to destruction. "The soul that sinneth, it shall die." How we thank God for the assurance that He has paid it all. "All to Him I owe. Sin had left a crimson stain, He washed it white as snow." Our sins will never be brought up against us. They will never be brought to mind. Now to some of us this might be a most difficult thing to believe, but this truth is very, very important. God has carried away all our sins. He has cast them behind His back. They are out of sight. "As far as the east is from the west, so far hath he removed our transgressions from us" (Ps. 103:12). Our guilt is pardoned, our fear of coming judgment and its penalty has been taken away. "All because of Calvary." Our soul is cleansed. We have been washed in the blood of the Lamb. His death takes from my heart the very presence of sin and has set me free. "Amazing grace, how sweet the sound." This is a marvelous thing that we may come to Him. This is what we can keep in mind when we come to God in prayer. No matter how grave the wrongs we have done, God will accept us. We can believe and rejoice and give God the glory.

We read in Scripture that this demonstration of grace, the Son of God dying for sinful men, is something that the angels desire to look into. Heaven itself cannot grasp or understand this amazing grace of our loving Lord. "Grace that is greater than all our sins."

Let me urge upon each one of us to believe on the Son of God and to trust Him completely. Then we can cast aside all fear and come into His presence saying, "Abba, Father." "Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is" (I John 3:2). No matter how many verses we call to mind, or how many other promises there are, all through the New Testament one promise is stressed over and over again: God sent His Son to die for sinners. "Whosoever will may come" and "Whosoever cometh He will in no wise cast out."

These promises of God put into our hearts and minds a sure and certain underlying confidence. "He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things?" (Rom. 8:32). Now nothing hinders us. The door into God's presence is open. We may come to Him in prayer without doubt and fear. We may praise and bless His holy name for what He has done for us. We may make our requests known to Him, confident that He will hear and answer prayer.

24

Praying Through Jesus Christ

Verily, verily, I say unto you, Whatsoever ye shall ask the Father in my name, he will give it you. Hitherto have ye asked nothing in my name: ask, and ye shall receive, that your joy may be full (John 16:23-24).

What a challenging promise these words contain! They are, however, not spoken to anyone who comes to God in his own sinful human nature. In other words, if we come before God in prayer as human beings, we have nothing to bring to Him that would make us acceptable to God. We will have nothing to offer to Him that will be a basis for making our requests acceptable to Him. It is only as we come in the name of Jesus that our requests will be heard. Only then is our request in line with God's will. This indicates something much deeper. It means that when we come in the name of Jesus Christ, we will ask for the things that the Lord Jesus Christ will lead us to ask for. By the way, we who are Christians will want to remember that right now, and all the time, Jesus Christ Himself is in the presence of God interceding for us. He is praying for us. It would be impossible for us to ask aright if Christ Jesus were not praying about us and for us. This involves and implies that when we come in His name, we will come in line with His living will. We will be asking the Father to do for us what the Lord Jesus is asking from the Father for us. Our requests will move along in the line of His purpose for our lives.

When we come, for instance, in such a frame of mind into God's presence to pray, it is a good deal like a messenger boy who is delivering a parcel. We have often been at home when the doorbell rang, and when we opened the door, the call came, "Drug store." Well, we know the drug store is not standing in the front yard. We understand that it isn't the drug store we heard; it was a boy. But he is from the drug store. He is there because he comes in the name of the drug store, to make his delivery.

If someone comes to our door and calls out, "Groceries," well, that's someone from the grocery. If we are to find an open door when we would speak to God, we would call out, "We come in the name of Jesus."

There are several ways in which it would be proper to use His name, and to come in His name. Suppose that Mr. Brown and Mr. Smith are business partners. Mr. Brown could sign, "Brown and Smith," and Mr. Smith could sign, "Brown and Smith"; because they are partners each one can sign for the firm. And so, in a very real sense if we want to do the same thing Jesus would have us do, if we are actually seeking to do His will, then we will be working as partners with Him. We can really come to God in His name. For instance, John writes in his first epistle, "And whatsoever we ask, we receive of him, because we keep his commandments, and do those things that are pleasing in his sight" (I John 3:22). We are working along with Him. We are walking along with the Lord. Whatever we do, we do it unto the Lord. This will make us acceptable to the Father.

We may be very humble in what we are doing. We may be imperfect. We may stumble and fumble around, but if we truly intend to serve Him and that is the purpose we have in mind and heart, we can take courage. We are now His co-workers and we come to God as partners of His Son. We know that as far as God is concerned He is not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to everlasting life. So it follows that for us to be partners is to witness to all people, anywhere and any time we possibly can. We may not be able to witness any more than just to invite others to church. In this way we may be able to show that we are concerned about them. If there is a prayer meeting, or if there is a Bible study group, a radio program, or a tape listening group, we can call up our neighbors and invite them to listen. We could say very simply, "Listen to this program. It will be helpful to learn the way and the will of the Lord."

Anything we do, anything at all, that will draw others closer to God is doing His will. This is actually

sharing with Him in His overall plan, "that all may come to everlasting life." When we are active in witnessing, in doing His will, our praying becomes wider in its scope and more inclusive. Our concern for the salvation of others enters into our hearts and minds as we come before God to pray.

We know that Jesus Christ came into the world to seek and save the lost. We know very well that right now His Holy Spirit is at work, to seek and save those who are lost. As we take part in drawing the attention of the uncommitted and the unbelieving to the Lord Jesus Christ in any way at all, we are actually being partners. Jesus said, "I am come that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly" (John 10:10). In a very broad general sense, when we try to help others into a right relationship with God, our dealing with them is not for our own sake but theirs. We are actually doing the work Christ would have us do. So when we come into God's presence, we are strengthened as we realize that our lives are committed to Him. In spite of our imperfection and unworthiness, our thinking and our whole being, in its humble way, seeks to follow in the footsteps of our Lord.

Now, there is another relationship in this world, where we can use the name of another person. When persons are born in a family with the surname Jones, the children, whether they are called Bill or Tom, have the name Jones. I am dwelling upon this for a moment, because when we believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, when we have accepted Him as our Savior, God has regenerated us by His grace, so that we are born again of the Word of God. We now have a name, the name of our Lord, that we can be known by. "Behold, what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God" (I John 3:1). As surely as we are called the sons of God, so surely can we come like sons of God, in the name of the Son of God, to ask the Father for help. The New Testament clearly teaches that when we have believed in Christ as our personal Savior we are adopted as children of God. Now we may come before God with a clear conscience, trusting fully in Jesus Christ, whose we are. We come yielded to Him in His name. When we count ourselves Christians, we can humbly and sincerely and assuredly lay claim to this name. We are the children of God.

There is a further arrangement, one other relationship, in which another's name can be used. This has to do with a bride when she takes the name of her groom. From the moment that she is married she uses the name of her husband. This application is more or less artificial, nevertheless it points up an important idea. A bride's devotion and the love of her whole heart is centered on her husband. She is proud to bear his name. So we, deep down in our hearts, really want to see the name of Jesus magnified. We want to see the things of the Lord lifted up and increased. The bride can bear the name of the groom, because she belongs to him. We also may consider ourselves members of the "Bride of Christ, His church." We have become "heirs of God, joint heirs with Jesus Christ." We want to please Him above all else. This too is one of the characteristics of a bride: she wants to please the bridegroom. When our hearts yearn to seek the face of the Lord, then the soul can pray.

Having considered these various relationships in which we can pray in His name, we come to God in confidence. We need not fear that our prayers will be futile or cast aside when we come in the precious name of Jesus. Born again by the grace of God, we are members of His family in Christ. He knows our every thought and motive. He knows that deep down in our hearts we love Him and desire to serve Him. How wonderful that although none of us is good enough, or strong enough, or wise enough, we may bring our request before God in the name of Jesus Christ.

Someone may say to me, "I would not know what to pray for." I'd ask him right away, "What's on your mind? What do you need? What do you want?" If he doesn't get any guidance from these questions, I'd ask him something else. "Where does it hurt?" He may say, "Oh, well, I couldn't go by that." The one significant place he hurts is not a secret to God. God knows he is hurting about his family. So I ask, "What about the family?" He may answer, "My boys and girls are not good." Okay, pray about it. Someone else may say, "My girl is all right. She's just silly." "Pray about it." Another might say, "I'm worried about my husband. He is in business and he is out with strangers all the time. I hardly ever get to see him." "Okay,

pray about it." Whatever your concern, bring it before the Lord. Pray in the name of Jesus. Come to God not as a sinful, selfish human being, which we all are. Come as a member of the body of Christ. Come as a yielded Christian. Bring before Him the desire of your heart. He has promised that He will hear and answer you. "If ye abide in me, and my words abide in you, ye shall ask what ye will, and it shall be done unto you" (John 15:7).

25

Abiding in Christ Guides Praying

"Abide in me and I in you." These words of the Lord Jesus Christ call His disciples to enter into a closer fellowship with Him.

As we think about praying do we sincerely desire the answers that God would give us in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ? In other words, do we turn to Scripture to see what our Lord has said that would help us and guide us in our prayer life?

We will find answers to these questions in the Gospel of John: "Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, except it abide in the vine; no more can ye, except ye abide in me" (John 15:4). These words of our Lord apply not only to Christian living, but also to Christian praying. Just because we believe in the Lord Jesus Christ does not mean that God will give us anything we ask for. It does not work that way. If we do not abide in Him, if as a branch we are separated from the tree, we will of ourselves not ask for the things He would have us ask. The Lord said, "I am the vine, ye are the branches: He that abideth in me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit. for without me ye can do nothing" (John 15:5). These words lay the pattern for true spiritual living. They are true in our whole Christian experience and they apply to our praying. When we come to God as Christians, we must realize that God will not hear us and our prayers because we simply accept the facts about the Lord Jesus Christ. He has nowhere promised to give us an open door, that we may come in and ask for anything we want and receive it. It is not quite like that. The words of our Lord are not meant to lead us to such a conclusion. Rather, we are to believe in Him, and receive Him into our hearts and abide in Him.

Christians are warned: "If a man abide not in me, he is cast forth as a branch, and is withered; and men gather them, and cast them into the fire, and they are burned" (John 15:6). These words openly indicate that when we no longer abide in Him and He in us, we no longer walk with Him. Then we are on our own. Having neglected our personal relationship with the Lord, we will turn away to other things. We will now follow our own ideas which are without any spiritual value.

After such warning He spoke words of shining promise; "If ye abide in me, and my words abide in you, ye shall ask what ye will, and it shall be done unto you" (John 15:7). When we let the Word of God move in our hearts and control us, these words apply to us: "Ye shall ask what ye will." A Christian whose heart and mind is saturated with Scripture shall ask and receive. "Herein is my Father glorified, that ye bear much fruit; so shall ye be my disciples" (John 15:8).

We have been thinking together about the basic truths which will support us when we bring our burdens to the Lord. Each one of us has some particular burden; he has some particular hurt or longing that he wants to pray for. How effectually I pray will depend upon my faith and assurance. Both my faith and my assurance will depend on certain conditions. Faith means that I take the Word of God to be true.

As I do the will of God, revealed in His Word, I can have the assurance that He will never leave me nor forsake me, and that means He will hear and answer my praying.

When we speak of "abiding in Christ," the meaning is "dwelling in Him." There is a wonderful song which comes to our minds in this connection: "Constantly abiding, Jesus is mine." We abide in Him when we read Scripture that is inspired, word for word, and is written for our learning. As we read what happened with the people in Bible times and remember His promises to them, our understanding is illuminated. We read of the things that happened to Paul and to John, to James and to Peter, and our spiritual vision is increased. We read of the woman of Samaria at the well of Sychar, of the faith of the Syrophenician woman, and the devotion of the woman who came and anointed His feet with precious ointment, and we note how things happened with them. Reading of the experiences of these people, we can learn the promises to us. What God in His mercy has done for them, He will do for us. His promises will guide our requests. His Holy Spirit will lead us to ask for those things which the Lord would have us ask for. We will be led in our response and conduct so that we trust Him to speak in our hearts. As the Lord Himself affects our lives, our thoughts and desires will be God-ward. This will affect our praying. Living in Him, thinking about the things He has said and done in the past, and remembering His promises for the future, will cause us to pray whenever and wherever needs arise.

Abiding in Him will strengthen our confidence and guide our thoughts. These words "abiding in Him" include many things. Before we can "abide in Him" we must accept Christ as Savior and Lord. There must be no doubt about our being Christians. We will all realize that when we say that we are Christians this does not mean that we are perfect. It does not mean that we claim to be good. It does mean that we claim that we belong to the Lord Jesus Christ, and He is gracious. We belong to Him, not because we are good, but because we believe His Word. We took Him at His promise that, "Whosoever cometh to me, I will in no wise cast out." We came to Him and found that everything He said He would do for us, He has done. "Abiding in Christ" is based on the fact that I have taken Him to be my Savior.

No matter what time of day or in what circumstances we find ourselves, we can come to God in prayer. As we do so, the first thing that comes to our hearts and minds is "I belong to Him, and He belongs to me." The second step in "abiding in Him" is yielding to Him as Lord. As Savior, He saves my soul from destruction. As Lord of my life, He will motivate me into the direction He would have me go. He will guide my footsteps.

Associated with this second step is the third step: "Follow His Spirit," as He directs. The Holy Spirit was given to us as a constant companion and He is with us. Someone may say, "How will I know His presence?" Let me tell you there will be neither sound nor feeling to indicate His presence. We have the record of Scripture that the Lord promised to send Him. We become aware of the Holy Spirit when He takes the things of Christ and shows them unto us. Actually, when I accepted Christ as my Savior, the Holy Spirit prompted me in this. It is the Spirit which causes us to come to God crying, "Abba, Father." As we abide in Christ, the Spirit will lead us to confess Him before men. We will let other people know that we are Christians. The simplest way to confess Him is to join a church. We also need to confess Him in the community we live in and the office we work in. Somehow or other we must do this. There are many of us who will have trouble putting what we believe into words. We may find it difficult to let the people we work with know that we belong to the Lord. One of the simplest things to do in this regard is to carry a pocket Testament or Bible with us. Carrying a Testament in our pocket will mark us. We can count on that. Take as an example the case of any young woman. She can carry a copy of the New Testament in her handbag. She can create a situation where she can display it, no matter how briefly. She could, for instance, look in her handbag for something. She could lay the New Testament on the table for just a moment and never need to show it again all evening. I will assure you everybody will know about it. It is just like a flag. It will make clear to other people that she belongs to the Lord. Confessing Him before men carries a wonderful blessing with it. We will come closer to Him, and He will be very near to us.

The next thing I want to bring to our minds is "personal surrender." An occasion may arise in which we feel that the will of the Lord is involved. We may be invited on a weekend trip which would keep us away from church on Sunday. When we decide to forego this trip in order not to miss Sunday worship, we will be drawn nearer to the Lord. Little experiences like this will serve to help us "abide in Him."

Diligence in prayer, praising God, waiting before Him, and worshiping Him will draw us ever closer to our Lord. Surely He who created the universe and who loves us with an everlasting love is worthy of our praise. When we exercise ourselves in praising and worshiping Almighty God, the Father of our Lord and Savior, prayer will become a very real part of our lives. Bible reading and study also will draw us closer to the Lord. These are the things we can do in order to become more and more conscious of being in the presence of the Lord Jesus Christ, and feeling His presence near and real. It stands to reason that since the Bible is the Word of God, reading it and studying it brings us into an abiding fellowship with Him.

It also is good for us who believe in the Lord to have personal fellowship with other believers. Reading, studying the Bible, praying with other believers will strengthen our spiritual life. When we get together to listen to some tape recordings on spiritual subjects, or gather together to hear significant spiritual radio programs, it will bring blessing into our lives. Anything we do along those lines will tend to occupy our hearts and minds and draw us into closer fellowship with Christians. Someone may say, "I don't think I need that." It is true that to be a Christian it is not essential that we do these things, but they are all helpful. God has promised that "If two of you shall agree on earth as touching any thing that they shall ask, it shall be done unto them."

When we abide in the Lord we will have a burden for those who are lost – those who have never heard of the love of God. This will very naturally awaken an interest in missions in our hearts. "Abiding in Him" will even change our thinking and our attitude toward other people. We will be more considerate of them. We will never take advantage of anyone. We will be charitable to the poor. We will obey the law of the land and respect those in authority.

Abiding in Him is actually a practical situation and a condition we can live in and work at. When we walk reverently and humbly in His presence, we can be talking to someone whom we are thinking about at any time and all the time.

26

Praying in the Will of God

Nevertheless not my will, but thine, be done (Luke 22:42).

These are the words of our Lord Jesus Christ as He prayed to His Father. Praying keeps us in close personal relationship with God. There is a certain sense in which, as we pray, we meet God face to face. At such times we need to be sincere and honest and humble, realizing that God looks upon our hearts. Now in the previous chapters we have been considering how we can be enabled to pray with confidence. We have considered the various ways in which we can develop our personal faith as we pray to God. We go through this world just once, and everything we do counts. Living along, we find that over and over again the world is too much for us. We don't know how to do what needs to be done. We need help from Someone higher and stronger and wiser than we could ever hope to be. This help we need can come only from God.

Praying is very important. We do not pray only because it is the right thing to do. We pray in order that

we might get the help and the results we need. That is why we have dwelt on those things which give us understanding and more power in prayer. We have learned that when we pray there must be perfect trust in God, an awareness of our own sinfulness followed by true repentance, the assurance that Jesus paid our debts on Calvary, and a new fellowship and kinship with Him.

In this chapter we shall consider another very important aspect in connection with our praying. Actually when we pray to God, we are not bringing something new to the attention of God. He already knows about our situation. He knows everything that is facing us. He has in mind the very thing we are going to talk about. "He knoweth what we have need of before we ask." Years ago, as little children, many of us learned a wonderful verse in Sunday School. "He knoweth the way I take." We may then ask, why need we pray at all? If God knows all things and has promised to do for us, why do we need to ask for the things He has promised? The answer is: praying is something that we do in the Lord. God Himself is bringing His will to pass, but He wants us to ask. This brings us into fellowship with Him. As we keep this thought in our hearts and minds, we may ask what is in His will? It is characteristic of the people of God, who have fellowship with Him and have power in prayer, that they ask for the things which God has already promised to do. So when we come in prayer, what promises do we call to mind? What promises apply particularly to our situation? When we bring God's promises to mind, we may be sure that He will keep that which He has promised.

When Daniel was a young man in Babylonian captivity, he read in the prophecy of Jeremiah that after seventy years Israel would be restored, so that their captivity would be ended. Because Daniel believed that God would set Israel free at the promised time, he prayed a remarkable prayer of intercession. Daniel prayed that God would fulfill His promise spoken by the prophet Jeremiah and perform what He had said He would do.

I am dwelling on this aspect of prayer because it is very, very important. Actually, when we come before God to pray, He already knows our request before we utter it. We do not need to persuade Him. God already wants to grant our prayer, but we need to come and ask. When God grants our request in response to our prayer, He gives the glory to our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. This is God's way. So far as Daniel was concerned, he asked God to deliver Israel. God did! He used Ezra, Nehemiah, and Zerubbabel to get it done. God delivered the Israelites from their captivity in Babylon. Daniel started with the Lord's promise that in seventy years He would release Israel, and began to pray that God would activate His will to do exactly what He said He would do.

When we turn to the Book of Ezra, we find this priest praying for the sins of his people. Ezra was dismayed when he realized that Israel, which had been honored and blessed of God, had now turned away from Him and had sinned again. He knew God's promise: when the Israelites repented of their sin He would forgive and restore. Ezra pleaded with God that He would restore Israel again even according to His promise. He actually reminds God of His promise that whenever the Israelites would forsake their evil ways and turn to Him in repentance, He would forgive them and accept them again as His people.

We need to realize that our problems are known to God, and that our prayers must be based on His promises. There is another aspect of this whole matter of prayer in that we may want something very much, which is not in His will. God will not grant our requests when they are not in His will. Several of the great men of faith, of whom we read in the Bible, had their requests denied by God. There is the case of Moses. During the time he led the children of Israel to the Promised Land, he had on occasion disobeyed God. God then told Moses that because of this he would not enter into the Promised Land. He could look at it from a mountaintop but he would not enter it. Moses prayed a number of times that God would change His mind. Finally he was told not to ask again. In other words, our prayers cannot be intelligent if we pray for something God has already refused to do.

The same truth was seen when David prayed for his sick child. God had already told David, through His prophet Nathan, before the child was born, that it would not live. David knew that God had said this.

Still he pleaded for the life of the child. He was not praying the prayer of faith. David trusted God, but in this he asked for something God had not promised, and his prayer was not answered. There may come a time in our lives when we realize that the thing which seems so important to us may not be in His will. We cannot expect that God will grant us our request when we are asking for something He has not promised to do.

In the Garden of Gethsemane our Savior prayed, "Father, all things are possible unto thee; take away this cup from me. nevertheless not what I will, but what thou wilt" (Mark 14:36). This is what needs to be foremost in our thinking when we come into the presence of God: that we come subject to His will. We may cry out to God, but if we ask contrary to His expressed will, our request will not be granted.

I feel that the great truth portrayed by our Lord in Gethsemane is so important that at this point we will take time to consider prayerfully the report of this event as it is recorded in Matthew 26:36-46.

Then cometh Jesus with them unto a place called Gethsemane, and saith unto the disciples, Sit ye here, while I go and pray yonder. And he took with him Peter and the two sons of Zebedee, and began to be sorrowful and very heavy. Then saith he unto them, My soul is exceeding sorrowful, even unto death. tarry ye here, and watch with me. And he went a little farther, and fell on his face, and prayed, saying, O my Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me: nevertheless not as I will, but as thou wilt. And he cometh unto the disciples, and findeth them asleep, and saith unto Peter, What, could ye not watch with me one hour? Watch and pray, that ye enter not into temptation: the spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak. He went away again the second time, and prayed, saying, O my Father, if this cup may not pass away from me, except I drink it, thy will be done. And he came and found them asleep again: for their eyes were heavy. And he left them, and went away again, and prayed the third time, saying the same words. Then cometh he to his disciples, and saith unto them, Sleep on now, and take your rest: behold, the hour is at hand, and the Son of man is betrayed into the hands of sinners. Rise, let us be going: behold, he is at hand that doth betray me.

What a remarkable example of prayer! Jesus, speaking to His Father, personally asking for help, yet ending His prayer with these words, "Nevertheless not as I will, but as thou wilt." No matter how hard it may be for us, we must learn to say, "If my request is not according to Thy will, do not go by what I ask. Not my will but Thine be done."

I can remember in my own experience how on one occasion I could not leave my burden in the hands of the Lord. I'd bring my problem before God in prayer, and I'd ask Him to do something about it. As I prayed I knew in my own heart that I had not really yielded the whole matter over to Him. I would try to yield the whole problem over to the living Lord. Then very shortly I found that I would be thinking of it again. I was so bothered with it that I realized that I had never really put it into His hands; Finally, when I had reached a desperate extremity in this whole matter, it came to me that God would take care of me, regardless of the outcome of the thing that bothered me. He would take care of me. He would be with me according to His promise. I found rest and peace and strength when I was able to turn to the Lord and say, "Not my will, but Thine be done." When all our praying is subject to the will of God, we can say, "He alone knows what is best and right for each and every one of us," and this will bring peace into our hearts.

Praying Without Ceasing

And he spake a parable unto them to this end, that men ought always to pray, and not to faint (Luke 18:1).

Perhaps the most alluring aspect of prayer, the one that draws us and causes us to pray more and more, is that results will follow praying. This is the common testimony of people who pray: "Prayer changes things." Praying makes a difference and results do follow.

But the most discouraging aspect in praying is that we may tire of waiting for an answer and quit praying. Patience is so difficult for us. We have such a short span of commitment. It is hard for us to stay with a project until it is done. Patience has in it the idea of stick-to-it-iveness. Patience is very important when it comes to praying.

The disciples of Jesus on occasion asked Him about praying. Because praying is so very important, He was ready to teach them and to encourage them to pray. Always Jesus illustrated His teachings with parables. We have already examined the parable of the widow and the unjust judge (Luke 18:1-8).

In this parable our Lord is evidently bringing to our minds an illustration of someone coming again and again and again. Here then is the meaning of saying "that men ought always to pray, and not to faint." This does not mean that we are to pray twenty-four hours a day. It does mean that we keep on praying about a particular problem. When we have a great need, we do not have to vary or to change our prayer. We come because our problem is actually pressing on us. We come again and again. Our Lord Jesus has told us to come and to keep coming and not to quit.

There is another classic illustration of prevailing, persistent prayer recorded in the Old Testament. This involved Jacob as he journeyed back home after being away for twenty years. He was coming home with a family and with money, with flocks and with herds. He was returning a rich man. His estranged brother Esau, who had vowed to kill him when he left twenty years before, came to meet him. He was coming with hundreds of soldiers, armed and ready to fight. Jacob could foresee the possibility of hostile opposition from his brother. In his great distress he went to God in prayer. The story that follows has a message of its own for each one of us. There is something very apt in the words: "And Jacob was left alone." Many times in our praying we will be left alone. Many, many times when we carry our burden to the Lord, there will be no one else to do it for or with us. Jacob was left alone as he wrestled in prayer with God until the breaking of the day. He was not able to get an easy answer to his praying. He had to have help from God. God had promised Jacob to bring him safely home and now Jacob came for this help. Jacob was afraid of Esau but he trusted God.

It may be helpful to note the fact that Jacob's need had arisen as a result of his own actions. Many years before, his mother and he had deceived his father in order to receive the blessing which his father intended for Esau. This so enraged Esau that he had vowed to kill Jacob. Now Jacob had to face the threat of the danger, which in a sense he himself had created. The fact that Jacob was responsible for his desperate plight was never held against him. The threat to him was real and so was his need for help, regardless of whether he had done right or wrong. It may be that Jacob was at fault, but this did not hinder his praying. When we are in need, we come for help. A fire might break out in our house because of carelessness on our part, but that does not change things. When fire threatens the lives of our children, we need help right now. It does not matter how or why the fire started. We need to get them to safety. So it was with Jacob. He needed help, and he had God's promise that He would be with him.

This is the second thing we should remember: Jacob had a promise. On his first night away from home, he had had a dream. In his dream he saw what we commonly call "Jacob's ladder." At that time God promised that He would watch over him and keep him wherever he went. He would bring him safely home again and give him the land on which he was resting that night. It could be that he had not always

kept this promise in mind and that he had not always done the will of God. We do not know about that. We do know, however, that when this great need arose, when he was right up against it, Jacob remembered that Almighty God in His providence had made him a promise. On the basis of this promise, Jacob now came to God, in his fear and desperation.

His meeting with Esau was unavoidable. He knew that his brother could destroy him, and he was only a day's journey away. Esau was a threat to his life and safety. Jacob was in grave danger of being killed and all his property and his herds taken over by his opposing brother. He knew that all this was possible. He was facing actual ruin when he turned to God in prayer that night. He prayed with "importunity."

Another example of prevailing prayer is the well-known story of Hannah (I Samuel 1:4-28). It is obvious there was persistence and deep urgency in the continued praying of this woman. She felt she could not go on as she was. Her whole heart and mind was focused on this one petition to God. It is a most wonderful thing that God heard her and answered her prayer.

In this chapter we have noted three people whose requests were granted by God. In each case, the need was great, the praying was persistent, and the request was granted. Each came in humility, seeking relief from a pressing problem; each came persistently with importunity; and each request was granted. We may take heart when we are confronted by some personal need. We may bring it before God and trust Him to deal with us according to His grace and mercy.

28

Praying with Expectation

And I say unto you, Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you (Luke 11:9).

As we continue our studies on praying I will call to our minds some words which Jesus Himself told His disciples to encourage them to pray. The opening words of this chapter contain one of the strongest encouragements and the most open positive promises that we have in the Bible about praying. All spiritual experiences are grounded in the unseen, for "No man has seen God at any time." Because of this, people often make mistakes in expressing their views in regard to some Bible doctrines. Because of this, when we try to understand spiritual truths with our natural mind, it is so easy to go wrong. It follows that when we lean on our own understanding we will make mistakes in our explanations and in the way we express our views on doctrine. Besides making mistakes in this area, we can also be in serious danger of error in our performance. It could be that even when we say the right things we fail to do them. Understanding some doctrine and expressing it and then not doing according to what we know can be fatal. James says, "Be ye doers of the Word and not hearers only." Perhaps all our spiritual experiences suffer from too much talk. Actually what we need is more "walk." A man sitting in the pew is almost right when he feels that there is too much talk about nonessentials. There is not enough "walk," and certainly this is true in regard to praying and in trusting God.

There are actually some very inadequate ideas that are common in this whole matter of praying. Prayer is sometimes regarded as if it were a kind of tax premium. It is as though praying paid a certain amount of credits to keep up an accident and health insurance policy. This attitude toward prayer is dishonoring to the Almighty. Such prayers are not good enough. Then there is the kind of praying which is a sort of devotional courtesy. On entering a home it is considered customary for a man to take off his hat. When a

lady enters the room, I have seen the very normal courtesy exercised that the men stand. I myself always feel that when a woman walks into a room, it is a challenge to me to act like a gentleman by standing. True, this is a custom, but it is also a courtesy. Let us beware of praying as though this were some kind of a courtesy to God. Opening a service with prayer, asking for God's blessing at the end of it, must never degenerate into a mere custom.

Another very inadequate view of praying is what I will call a sort of ecclesiastical protocol. Someone may wonder what I mean by that. I mean, something that must be done in order that I may talk to God. In order to get help from God, it may not be stipulated that I compose myself, bow down my head, shut my eyes, and say some words. There is not just one way to get ready to come into the presence to receive His blessing. Being willing to go to church, to take part in the service, even sharing all the things involved, and observing all the requirements may not impress God. Observing certain forms by way of doing what is necessary to get the blessing of God is not good enough. I could have more confidence in "prayers-in-distress." When I am in real trouble and I turn to God, it is like an escape into a high tower in time of danger. I can understand such praying and yet even such praying is inadequate if it is practiced only in times of trouble. Otherwise I would not say anything against them. In fact, any of these prayers I have mentioned could be offered in a way that is good, but they are not good enough if they are not sincere.

Praying should be used as a functional procedure, as a way of getting things done. Sometimes people, when bringing up their children, say that they are going to pray about them. What they mean is that they will do the best they can with their boy and girl. They carefully check their daily program and their school work for six days of the week. Then on Sunday they will pray, "Now Lord, bless what I have done." As they pray they hope that God out of His own grace and mercy will do something so that the boy and his sister will become Christians. But there is more involved in what is called "effectual praying." Praying involves a close fellowship with God. It means daily contact with Him. Effectual praying is most important in daily living. It truly accomplished things. "The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much." Something of the meaning of effectual praying was taught by the Lord Jesus by way of a parable stressing importunity in praying (Luke 11:5-10).

These words of our Lord Jesus Christ place in our hands a clue to the frequently discouraging experience of having no results in prayer. I am not sure that we have really prayed. In the well-known promise which was noted as we began this study, the Lord uses three imperative verbs: ask, seek, knock. Doubtless I could utter these words thoughtlessly, asking with my mouth and not my heart: "Give me this," or "I want that." But saying "I want this" is not really asking.

Let me put it this way. Suppose that one of my neighbors comes to my house and asks, "Will you take my boy Johnnie to town with you?" I might be inclined to say, "Yes," but Johnnie is three blocks away playing ball with other boys. Obviously, if Johnnie is three blocks away playing ball, I won't be able to take him to town. Now if my neighbor had brought Johnnie with her, if she had brought him right into my home, her request would have been reasonable. It would not have been just a thoughtless question. If she had backed up her request holding Johnnie by the hand, it is more than likely that Johnnie would have been given a ride to town. And that is the only way it could have happened.

Now let us examine the word "seek." How does a person seek? Certainly it cannot be done by talking. A woman digging into her handbag and looking for her car keys would be a good illustration of seeking. Going from room to room, checking drawer after drawer for something we have misplaced, is seeking. We turn things inside out and upside down while we seek. So I would say, "Are we seeking for peace? Do we want peace?" The Word of God is, "Seek peace, and ensue it" (1 Peter 3:11). Seeking peace includes yielding to God. When we really want peace, we are careful to get along with other people. We will do those things that make for peace. The same is true in the matter of joy. If we really want joy and we pray for it, we will find the answer in God's Word: "Commit thy way unto the Lord" (Ps. 37:5). This includes praying and worshiping and getting involved in His work and having fellowship with His people. If we

want to have confidence and assurance that God will keep us in our daily life, we must surely come to God for help. Without praying and without seeking His face, how could we have confidence that He will keep us? In all these examples we can see how very important it is to seek until we find.

"Knock, and it shall be opened unto you." This is the easiest of the three phrases to understand. The word "knock" means that we will pull ourselves together, as it were, reach out with our knuckles, and hit the door. A person must do something to knock. For me, knocking on a strange door has always been an unpleasant thing to do. I have always been reluctant about knocking on a door. I hate to ring a doorbell. When I am about to press the doorbell, I hesitate. After some thought, I have discovered why I hate to do it. One reason why I hate to do it is that I am afraid the door will open. I am afraid that someone will actually come out, and I am going to be involved in something. In other words, when we knock we are committed to whatever happens. How different when we knock on the door that opens up opportunities to serve the Lord and to walk with Him. "Knock, and it shall be opened unto you." When we seek the favor of God upon us, I would say, "Knock!" Have we knocked on the door of heaven to receive the favor of God? I would say, first of all, we need to read our Bibles and worship God. There is no substitute for this. Then, there are other methods of knocking at the door. We can start by getting on our knees and actually praying. We can witness to others of God's grace and mercy. We can invite others to church and prayer meetings to share with them the joy we have found. We can give. When we knock at the door in this way, it will be opened unto us just as surely as we live, and we shall receive.

29

Praying in Humility

And he spake this parable unto certain which trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and despised others: Two men went up into the temple to pray; the one a Pharisee, and the other a publican. The Pharisee stood and prayed thus with himself, God, I thank thee, that I am not as other men are, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this publican. I fast twice in the week, I give tithes of all that I possess. And the publican, standing afar off, would not lift up so much as his eyes unto heaven, but smote upon his breast, saying, God be merciful to me a sinner. I tell you, this man went down to his house justified rather than the other: for every one that exalteth himself shall be abased; and he that humbleth himself shall be exalted (Luke 18:9-14).

In these words the Lord Jesus taught His disciples the importance of having a right attitude when praying. It is a wonderful thing to realize, as we come to pray, that God answers prayer. However, there are times when our prayers are unheard and unanswered. In this parable we are shown unmistakably that certain attitudes can disqualify us from praying. When we come to God in the wrong frame of mind, we cannot expect our prayers to be successful or effectual. On the other hand, there are certain attitudes which will qualify us and enable us to pray effectually.

From this parable of the Pharisee and the publican, we learn that self-righteousness will disqualify us from praying aright. When we are sure that we are better than other people, we are in a poor way to start praying. Let us be very careful to humble our hearts before God when we come to pray. Thoughts of self-righteousness can come in several ways. Some of us think that we are better than others because of our good record. Some of us think we are better because of our good understanding. Some of us think we are better because we belong to an old, well-known family. When we come into the presence of God, trying to bolster and strengthen ourselves with such thoughts and feelings, we will surely be hindered in our praying.

In the second place, our praying can be disqualified when we have no interest in the Word of God. When we have no interest in the message of the Bible, it follows that we are not trying to find out what God wants to say to us. If this is the case, we may be very sure that God will not be interested in what we have to say to Him. Scripture actually reports the Lord saying that He will not hear them who do not listen to His Word. When they cry unto God, He will not answer them. The truth is that if we come into the presence of God asking for His blessing when we do not read His Word or study it, our praying is disqualified. We dishonor the God of the Bible when we say by our attitude that we are not interested in Him nor in His Word.

Then, again, there is the matter of unconfessed sin. We read in His Word, "If I regard iniquity in my heart, the Lord will not hear me." The meaning is plain and simple. If we come to God in prayer, holding something in our hearts that is wrong in His sight, He will not hear us. If we are not repentant, if we have not confessed our sin, we disqualify ourselves. We read in His Word, "God resisteth the proud." If we are proud we will get nowhere with God.

There is still another attitude that will disqualify us, and that is unbelief. Just saying "I'm a Christian" is not enough. Believing that Jesus Christ died for me and that I have accepted His salvation is fine, but there is something else I must consider. Do I believe that God will do anything about this situation that I am praying about? Do I have confidence that God will actually work things out for me? If I come in prayer without trusting Him to hear and help me, He will do no mighty works then because of my unbelief.

On one occasion the disciples of our Lord could not help a certain child, which was brought to them for healing. A father whose son was plagued by an evil spirit had asked that they pray for him so that he might be delivered. The disciples prayed and nothing happened. When they came to Jesus and asked, "Lord, why could not we cast out the evil spirit?" Jesus answered them, "Because of your unbelief." The truth is if I come to pray, and deep down in my heart I do not think that anything will happen, I can be sure that nothing will. "According to your faith be it unto you." No faith, no results.

Another widely practiced and rather common hindrance in praying is selfishness. James refers to this attitude when he writes: "Ye ask, and receive not, because ye ask amiss, that ye may consume it upon your lusts" (James 4:3). In other words, when we ask God to grant us things which would bolster our pride and our vanity, we need not expect God to do this for us.

Even when we ask for our children, our home, and our church, and are motivated not with concern for them but with pride and selfishness, we will receive nothing from the Lord. As surely as we pray selfishly, we are disqualified. If we seek God's favor and blessing on us, we should remember to show favor and charity to the poor. Without charity in our hearts for the needy, God has no reason to show charity toward us. "He that giveth to the poor, lendeth to the Lord." God watches over the poor and He knows how we deal with them.

The most sure way to be disqualified from strong, effectual prayers is to have an unforgiving spirit. Our Lord Himself taught His disciples to pray, "Forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors." "Forgive us our trespasses as we forgive them that trespass against us." Then our Lord went on to say, "If ye do not forgive them that trespass against you, neither will your heavenly Father forgive your trespasses." To be unforgiving, to hold a grudge against anybody, is just cutting the line so far as reaching out to God in prayer is concerned. When we hold ill-will in our hearts against anyone, we may say the words but God will not hear us. Someone may say, "What can we do about it?" Turn the whole matter over to the Lord. He will do something about it. He can take the ill-will out of our hearts. As we study the list of attitudes that disqualify us from positive, effective prayers, we should with God's help set them aside one by one. It is a wonderful thing to be free from them. Surely then our hearts will be filled with gratitude and thanksgiving.

Now I would like to point out that there are right attitudes which will actually help us to pray effectually. First of all, let me repeat what I have said in previous chapters. Praise God. When we come

into His presence to pray, let us praise Him and thank Him for what He is and for what He has done. Next I would say, "Obey Him." One of the ways in which we can show our obedience is to accept the situation we are in. Believing that God has brought us to this place and that we are exactly where He wants us to be is something we can relax about and rest ourselves in. In other words, our attitude toward God should be one of praise and thankfulness and obedient trust.

It is also very clear what our attitude toward Christ Jesus, the Son of God, should be. It will be, first of all, an attitude of faith in Him whom we have accepted as our Lord and Savior. Then we believe that He is alive, praying for us. When we believe, we will also abide in Him. This means that we rest in Him and trust Him so that daily, moment by moment, we are conscious of His presence. Being in Him and abiding in Him gives us the right to ask in His name and to have the assurance that God will hear us.

Then there should be the right attitude toward the Holy Spirit, the third person of the Godhead. Since it is the Holy Spirit, who wants to lead us into the will of God and of our Lord Jesus Christ, we should at all times be yielded to Him. When we are yielded to the Holy Spirit and willing to be led, "The Spirit Himself helpeth our infirmities." Paul writes ". . . for we know not what we should pray for as we ought: but the Spirit itself maketh intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered" (Rom. 8:26). So when we come to God in prayer, we will ask that the Holy Spirit open our hearts and minds and that He will guide and direct us to ask according to God's will.

Besides the right attitude with reference to God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit, we must be conscious of our attitude toward others. This too can influence and prepare and qualify us for praying. I would say that the people we meet come into one of three classes. First, there are those who are the poor and the unfortunate. Toward them we will show charity. Second, there are those who are in authority over us. Our attitude toward them is one of respect. We will obey the laws of the land and do what we are asked to do. Third, with reference to those whom we consider our equals, we need to show consideration. When we come into the presence of God to pray, our conscience should be clear that so far as the poor are concerned, we are charitable, as far as our leaders are concerned, we respect them, and as far as our neighbors are concerned, we show them consideration.

Now, with reference to ourselves, there is a certain attitude that helps to qualify us in praying. The first thing I would suggest is that we be humble. In this we would include the idea of being repentant and contrite. When we come into the presence of God, it is a good thing for us to remember that we are nothing in ourselves. We are not so great. In fact we are not great at all. We are actually dependent on God. As far as our conduct is concerned, we must be contrite, ready to confess and regret the wrong we have done. It is only right that we should be sorry for our sins.

There is another group of people toward whom our attitude should be considered. These are the people I will call believers. The first thing I would suggest is that we unite with them and that we be of one mind with those who try to serve the Lord. We will try to avoid divisions among Christian people. If questions come up that cause dissension, we will avoid them if at all possible. We will instead stress the essentials that have to do with our salvation. We will keep in mind at all times that Christ Jesus died for us, and that one day He will take us home to glory. We will rejoice in God's grace toward us and toward other believers.

Last, I would like to comment on our attitude toward the issues we face and the problems that we have. I would say again, "Have faith in God." It does not matter where we are if we believe that we are exactly where God has permitted us to be. It does not matter whom we will meet if we believe that we will meet only the people God would have us meet. When we believe that things will turn out the way God wants them to, then our problems will not overwhelm us. We will rest in the assurance that "all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose" (Rom. 8:28). And we will praise God that we, in spite of all our shortcomings, are among those who are His "called."

Praying for One Another

Is any among you afflicted? let him pray. Is any merry? let him sing psalms. 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: 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. 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 (James 5:13-16).

In these words the apostle James sets out for us certain ideas which we need to take to heart and mind. They are intended for us that we might learn by them. They are guidelines in the matter of praying. We notice that they enjoin all Christian believers to pray for one another. In this chapter as we continue our study of the various aspects of praying, we will come to one of the most solemn and one of the most glorious aspects of our salvation.

In this portion of our discussion we will note the place and power of intercessory prayer in the lives of believers. We turn to the Bible as our textbook on this vital subject in order that we might approach it with complete confidence. We will consider recorded instances in Scripture of events that actually happened which clearly show the hand of the Lord at work.

First we will consider the significance of intercessory prayer in a time of personal danger. Remember the classic example in the Book of Genesis in chapter 18, the account of Abraham and Lot. How wonderful to read this record: "God remembered Abraham and delivered Lot." What a challenge it is to parents and friends! How many, many young people there are who enjoy benefits from God, because they have parents who pray for them. God thinks of the parents and delivers the children. So in the time of great personal danger, we may come to God with our concern for others. Let us all be faithful in praying for all our loved ones that are in danger or that have a special need. It could be that God will remember us and bless those we pray for.

Next, there is the familiar story in the seventeenth chapter of Exodus, the story of Moses, Aaron, and Hur. We have here a remarkable picture for all of us to remember: united intercession brought victory. It is true that Joshua and his armies were fighting for their lives, but they would have been beaten. It is true that Moses was praying faithfully, but he would have become too tired to go on if it had not been for Aaron and Hur. They could not fight like Joshua; they could not pray like Moses; but they could hold up the hands of Moses, which resulted in a great victory. United intercession can bring victory to this day. Let us get together and pray for one another.

We must not overlook the classic example of intercessory prayer found in I Kings 18, Elijah on Mount Carmel. Good, strong praying is based upon known promises, which God has revealed so that one may take them to heart and pray according to His will. Elijah was actually praying to God in terms of such a promise.

Let us now consider another instance where a miracle followed praying. In Acts 12:5 we read of a time of grave trouble. "Peter therefore was kept in prison: but prayer was made without ceasing of the church unto God for him." Here we have an all night prayer meeting going on for the imprisoned Peter.

At the beginning of this chapter, I called attention to James 5:13-16. Here we find some instructions about praying for one another, which are most important., I know that many earnest sincere people think that this passage in James refers to physical health. Some people have actually had answers to prayer in the matter of physical conditions because of this passage in James, but I would say that this is not the basic intention of this passage. I think that the main thought here is that when someone is sick we should pray that he might be given strength to endure his sickness. We pray that if he should die he would enter the heavenly mansions with joy.

In James 5:16 we read: "Confess your faults one to another, and pray one for another, that ye may be healed." I do not think this means that we will be healed of smallpox or some other disease or sickness we may have. That is not the point. When we confess our faults, one to another, and pray that we may be healed of the fault we have confessed, so far as our fault is concerned it can be overcome with prayer. This we can do in praying one for another.

In closing, I would like to call to our attention a very important passage in I John 5:16: "If any man see his brother sin a sin which is not unto death, he shall ask, and he shall give him life for them that sin not unto death." Most of the sins that we are conscious of are not unto death. Most of the sins that our loved ones may be involved in are not unto death. We have His promise that if we see a brother sinning a sin, we can pray for him and "give him life." This is what we as parents do and this is what we do for our loved ones and our friends who have sinned against God. It is a marvelous thing to know that we can pray for one another. In an exercise of prayer, let us not only pray that God will bless us but that He will make us a blessing by enabling us to pray for others.

31 *Abraham*

Among the persons in Old Testament history who were outstanding in the blessings they received from God was Abraham. He has been called the "Father of the Faithful" because, of course, he was the first one whose life was lived according to what the Bible speaks of as the life of faith. He was a pioneer in believing.

Of interest to me is the fact that no personal description of Abraham is given to us. We do not know whether he was tall or short, dark or fair. Perhaps personal appearance is not important in receiving God's blessing, and we are as eligible for the blessing of God as was Abraham. There is also no personality description. We are not told whether he was quick or slow, eager or dull, smart or foolish. Here again the lesson to be learned is that God's blessing for our life does not depend on our background. The life of Abraham is largely an action report: what he did, and what God did.

By the way, there is no report of Abraham seeking God. God called Abraham; and God calls you. It is natural that there may be in you some disposition to know God, to turn to Him. God could give you that urge. But don't ever fail to remember it all starts with God. The call of God was very simple. He called Abraham to come out of everything that was his own, and into what God would give him. This principle of separation, of coming out of that which was his, was in operation throughout Abraham's career. This was an important aspect in his life.

Abraham became a great servant of God, but that did not take place on his own initiative. It was not something that he did. It is not important that you should teach your children to go out and make something big out of themselves; it is important that you teach them to listen to God. Find out what God has for you and yours and do that; then you will be walking in the ways of Abraham. Scripture will always say to you, "Seekest thou great things for thyself? seek them not" (Jer. 45:5).

This passage has a real bearing on what you will learn about praying. Abraham did not pray for selfish things. I wonder if it is true that you understand prayer as a way of getting what you want. Abraham would stand right here before you and say, "Oh, no, never what you or I want." He was receiving those things which God gave to him.

Abraham passed through a series of crises, each of which was solved by separation. He was expecting to become rich; he was expecting to become great, but this would come to pass because he would be leaving off, letting go, and turning away from any number of things. He was called to separate himself from his own country and his own people: "Get thee out of thy country, and from thy kindred, and from thy father's house." He obeyed and went out, not knowing whither he went. He went first to a place called Sichem; when he reached there he built an altar. This was the style of his life: wherever he went he made it a point to turn to God.

Later in his life Abraham was obliged to separate from Lot because of a situation that arose over their cattle. Here you will find Abraham turning away from his own family, his own kith and kin. He said to Lot, "It isn't fitting that our servants should be quarrelling; it does not make a good impression on people. The country is big; you go one way and I will go the other way." He gave Lot first choice. Lot took the best opportunity – the well-watered plains of Sodom. Abraham was left with the mountains – not a good place for cattle. But in the mountains he found a plateau called Hebron; and there, on the plains of Mamre, he made his home. Scripture records that he built an altar, as was his custom. Here is separation from his own, but in that separation he drew nearer to God. Can you learn from that? Is it possible in considering your own problems that you may need to give up some of your own things, your own people? That you may have His blessing, turn to God, draw nearer to God.

Later in Abraham's life he married Hagar and had a child by her named Ishmael. There came a day when he was obliged to cast out this child. Abraham went to God in prayer, and God told him that this was necessary. In sorrow and in grief, because he loved his son, Abraham yielded to the necessity. Here you see him separating from his own flesh. This was hard to do. In your day and time and in your culture it will be an easy thing for you to assume that the bonds you have in the flesh, the biological relationships, the children you have begotten out of your own bodies, have a spiritual significance. I must say to you, gently, "No, no. They will have a spiritual significance only if you bring them to God." There are some who have had children "go bad," so to speak. That is a sorrow and a grief, but you may see it happen. It happened to Abraham.

His hopes were tied up in Isaac, the only son of his wife Sarah. He was called by God to offer up Isaac. He did not hesitate to offer up the very son in whom all of the promises were involved. In the Book of Hebrews is the record that he counted that God was able to raise him from the dead. This was the story of Abraham's life.

When Abraham prayed you will want to notice the kind of man who was praying. Here was a man who would turn away from his own country and his own people to God. Above everything else, God was first in the heart of Abraham. When each call involved that he would have to deny himself more and more, he did not falter. Abraham believed in God; God came first always.

The call to yield, to surrender, was sustained, so far as Abraham was concerned, by appearances from God which strengthened his faith. If you want to have faith, that will require much more than determination, more than will power, much more than wishes. Faith needs conviction grounded in some participation in the will of God. As you study the life of Abraham, you will find the Lord spoke to Abraham and gave him His covenant.

The Lord told Abraham, after Lot was separated from him, that He would be with Abraham and watch over him. So Abraham always built an altar unto the Lord. Later, after the rescue of Lot from the kings of the plain, when Abraham refused to take any booty from the King of Sodom, the Word of the Lord came to Abraham in a vision: "I am thy shield, and thy exceeding great reward." Abraham asked Him, "What wilt thou give me, seeing I go childless?" Abraham received the promise: "He that shall come forth out of thine own bowels shall be thine heir." Then God took him out and showed him the stars, saying, "Can you count them? That's the way your seed shall be." When Abraham was ninety-nine years old, God appeared to him and said, "I am the Almighty God; walk before me, and be thou perfect."

Now watch this great man of faith, Abraham, when he prays. In the eighteenth chapter of Genesis you have the great example of the prayer of intercession. Many people say that Abraham did not have enough faith; if he had more faith he could have continued to pray and so have saved the city of Sodom. Whenever I hear this I think of somebody who has not had experience in praying. Would you understand if I point out to you that was not Abraham's intention? "And the Lord went his way, as soon as he had left communing with Abraham: and Abraham returned unto his place" (Gen. 18:33). It was not Abraham's idea to stop praying; it was the will of God.

This is the principal lesson for your interpretation of praying today. Here is a believing man with confidence in God, exploring the possibilities in the grace of God. He would find out if the name of God could be honored by sparing this city. I do not think Abraham had one single idea that he did not feel free to express before God. It was when God was through speaking that God left. But the whole incident about Sodom presents a wonderful truth: God can do more than you can ask or think. Abraham could not ask more than he did, but God did more. "God remembered Abraham, and sent Lot out of the midst of the overthrow, when he overthrew the cities in which Lot dwelt" (Gen. 19:29). This is the wonderful fact: God remembered Abraham and delivered Lot.

How many parents, how many friends could wish to God this would be the case with them! And it can be. If you will be the kind of person who will seek first to honor God, this can actually be the case with you.

So far as Abraham was concerned, this great fact marked his life: he wanted God to be honored. This kind of man can pray. In his praying this man would always seek to praise and glorify God. God blessed Abraham, and he was thankful.

32

Jacob

We learn about praying by studying men and women with whom God had dealings. Jacob is one of these men. He was the son of Isaac, the grandson of Abraham; and he became the ancestor of Israel. Jacob's name was changed to Israel. What could commonly be called the sons of Jacob can also be called the children of Israel. By studying the life of this man we can learn much about living by faith and what it means to be living with God.

I am sure we have all heard the expression many times, "Prayer changes things." I want to point out that one of the things that prayer most commonly changes is the person doing the praying. When we study the case of Jacob, we will recognize that the blessing of God is not earned. The most popular person or the kindest person or the strongest person is not the one who is necessarily blessed. Those who do the will of God are blessed. We will learn things about Jacob, but the things we find out about him are not the things that account for his blessing. We should keep before us this word of Scripture: "Jacob have I loved." What brought blessing was this relationship with God that Jacob accepted and adopted.

One of the things we will learn about praying in the Old Testament is that while it would appear that "whosoever will may come," the truth of the matter is not quite that simple. It can be if the person believes in the Lord Jesus Christ. But if he does not believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, no matter who he is, he will not be blessed. It is "Whosoever believeth in Him" that shall have everlasting life.

The truth is that Jacob did have a godly heritage. His father and mother were Isaac and Rebecca. His

grandparents were Abraham and Sarah; all were believing people. But we should note the fact that while Esau had the same heritage, the truth remains, "Jacob have I loved, but Esau have I hated." It was not the heritage that made the difference. Jacob was a grasping person. The Bible tells us that he was born second as a twin. When he was born he was clutching his brother's heel. It was here that he got his name, Jacob, which in Hebrew means "heel."

Jacob recognized value wherever he saw it, and sought to possess it, no matter where it was. It is not true that Jacob stole or that he took by force; it is true that he connived and manipulated. Even though there are some things about the way he did it that we may not like, Jacob had an appreciation of spiritual values. He really thought it mattered about God.

We remember the occasion when he traded his meat that he had prepared for his elder brother's birthright. Esau had been hunting all day and had not been able to get any deer. He was hungry and faint, and he came to Jacob and asked for a meal. The fact is that Jacob was just as hungry as Esau: a person gets just as hungry working in the field as one who hunts. Jacob was willing to sell food to Esau. The only thing Esau had to give to Jacob was his birthright. So Jacob offered him the meal for the birthright. Esau willingly gave up the birthright to get the meal. As a matter of fact, he said, in effect, words something like this, "I will die if I don't get something to eat. And if I die, the birthright won't be any good. The birthright doesn't have any real practical value. What I need is food."

And here is one reason why God would say, "Jacob have I loved, but Esau have I hated." Jacob appreciated the blessing of God; Esau did not appreciate it. Esau would rather have something to eat. Jacob would give up what he had to eat that he might get this blessing.

Many people have trouble understanding the incident when Jacob and his mother connived to deceive his old father. Isaac's eyes were dim and he could not see clearly who came up before him when he was ready to give his blessing. The blessing would normally have come to Esau as the older, but Jacob had gained that birthright in the deal that they made. Whether Isaac knew about it, I don't know. It reads as though Jacob and Rebecca, working together, deceived Isaac as to who was going to get the birthright. All this is inside the family, and it is true that so far as Jacob is concerned he was going to get the birthright anyway. Remember, Esau did give up this blessing.

There are two instances of prayer in Jacob's life, both of which are famous. The first is the instance of Jacob having his vision of the ladder. This was actually a vision of a stairway, ascending steps. Jacob saw in the vision that God was blessing him. This was not a case of Jacob seeking something; this was the case of Jacob being told, being shown the truth that God was seeking him and doing things for him. The principle thrust of this vision was that God would bless him.

Two things should be noted: Jacob believed the promises of God and he vowed a fitting response. He said that the Lord would be his boss, that he was going to worship Him, and that of all the Lord gave him, he would give a tenth back to God.

During the next twenty years he served his uncle Laban and he won Leah for his wife and Rachel for his wife, as well as two handmaidens. The twenty years he was working for Laban were featured by an appearance of God. Laban tried to keep Jacob working for him, and Jacob did not object to working for Laban. Both became rich. At the end of twenty years, however, Jacob started home and was confronted by the crisis of his career.

When Jacob started home, word came that Esau was coming to meet him. Twenty years before, Esau had said he would kill Jacob for deceiving his father and getting the blessing. Jacob realized how vulnerable he was with four wives, children, oxen, and herds. He could not defend himself against an angry brother, who had said he would kill him. Jacob made what plans he could, dividing his company of people, his flocks, and his herds into several companies so that if one fell the others might escape. Having done that, he sent gifts to his brother, hoping to soften Esau's attitude. But Jacob did not have full confidence in what he did, so he turned to God in prayer.

In Genesis 32 is the remarkable story of Jacob praying at the ford of Jabbok, in the place that is called Peniel. Here Jacob, left alone, wrestled with a man until the breaking of day. When the man saw that he could not prevail, he touched the hollow of Jacob's thigh and it was broken as he wrestled. The man said, "Let me go, for day breaketh." Jacob said, "I will not let thee go, except thou bless me." Even with that injury, Jacob held on. Finally, Jacob's name was changed to Israel, because he had prevailed. This was the showdown in Jacob's life. The evil that he had done as a youth came back now to loom over him and threaten him. He was in danger of being destroyed because of the wrong he had done before.

Under these circumstances, having done everything he could to help himself, and having no confidence in what he had done, he turned to God in prayer. That is the message for each of us. We are going to face God one day, and when we do, the things of the past will come up and stand there before us to threaten us. When Jacob's past came up, he went into prayer. For a long time his prayer had no results. Finally, his flesh was crippled so that he could not struggle any longer, but he would not let go. This was persistent, prevailing prayer, with the result that he finally prevailed. His name was changed from Jacob to Israel, from the word meaning "heel" to the word meaning "Prince with God." His whole personality was changed; Jacob became a new man through this praying experience. He had thrown himself upon the mercy and grace of God and would not let go until God would bless him. Although he was forever crippled in his flesh, he became Israel, a prince with God. And further, the meeting with Esau was marvelously blessed and the two became reconciled. This is great encouragement to us to persist and to prevail in prayer with our God, who is minded to bless us.

33

Moses

"Moses my servant." These are the words recorded in Scripture (Josh. 1:2) that were spoken by God concerning this great man of faith. When the writer to the Hebrews was comparing Jesus Christ to beings and creatures that God had made, he compared Him to Moses as a servant. The particular aspect in which he compared Christ Jesus to Moses was in the matter of being faithful. "Moses verily was faithful in all his house, as a servant" (Heb. 3:5). He was a man who "endured, as seeing him who is invisible" (Heb. 11:27).

As we study persons presented to us in Scripture we are told about their praying, and it is here that we can learn about prayer. Perhaps each of us thinks that a large part of prayer is mostly routine; and it should be as routine as breathing. If breath were cut off we would die. Thus, spiritually speaking, we need to pray.

We are not told about the prayer habits of Moses in any biographical sense. Moses was a believing man. He sought the blessing of God, and for that a man must believe that God is, and that He is "a rewarder of them that diligently seek him" (Heb. 11:6). Certainly, so far as Moses is concerned, nobody would question that every single day he was aware of the reality and character of God.

In addition, there are certain exercises of worship that are to be expected day by day. There is the matter of adoration. In this we contemplate in order that we might think about God. The psalmist said, "I have set the Lord always before me" (Ps. 16:8). In our day and time we are given the Holy Spirit to help us. The Holy Spirit takes the things of Christ and shows them unto us. Because of this we should welcome the thoughts of God as we go about our business. We could keep in mind, "I have set the Lord always

before me." This is part of worship, and thus it is a part of prayer.

There is also the matter of *praise*. We praise God when we think of what He is like, what He has done, and what He has promised. We praise God for His faithfulness. We praise Him for His grace and mercy, "the goodness of God endureth continually" (Ps. 52:1). We praise Him for His loving-kindness, His eternal unchangeableness. We praise God for what He is. We give the Lord thanks for what He has done. "In everything give thanks." This kind of praying – believing in God, worshiping God, adoring God, praising and thanking God, should be as normal and natural in the life of a believer as breathing.

Should one ever ask for anything? "Yes." Listen to the Lord Jesus Christ: "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" (Matt. 7:7-8). Could anything be clearer? "Ye have not, because ye ask not" (James 4:2). God wants me to ask Him because when He hears my request and answers my prayer, it is to the glory of the Lord Jesus Christ.

In this study about Moses, we shall see a man who asked God for various things. We should remember anybody can come to God. "Whosoever will" may come to God. But in this case Moses was not just anybody. Scripture mentions the faith of his parents: "By faith Moses, when he was born, was hid three months of his parents" (Heb. 11:23). In speaking of Timothy, Paul said, ". . . I call to remembrance the unfeigned faith that is in thee, which dwelt first in thy grandmother Lois, and thy mother Eunice; and I am persuaded that in thee also" (II Tim. 1:5). Anybody can come; God will graciously receive him. But it is also true, to the glory of God, that there is blessing on a person because of godly parents. Are you praying for your children? for your loved ones? Do you want them blessed? Pray for them! It matters. But even when you pray for your children and for your loved ones, they must turn to God; every man must deal personally with God. This is what Moses did.

When he was eighty years old and had been in the desert for forty years, he saw the burning bush. He went over to look at it and this is what he heard, "Put off thy shoes from off thy feet, for the place whereon thou standest is holy ground" (Exod. 3:5). It would be well to stop right there. Are you having any dealings with God? Do you want to turn to God in prayer? You can be assured: God is gracious.

When God called Moses to the task of leading the children of Israel, he said, "I cannot speak. I am not good enough. I am not strong enough." The Lord replied, "Who made you? Who made your mouth?" In the matter of praying, some of you right now may be troubled because you think you are not good enough. That is not sound thinking. God made you and He can help you. When Moses said, "They will not believe," God said, "I'll be with you and I'll help you."

When we read the account of Moses leading the people through all the various plagues that came, we note that Moses did not use his own judgment: he was constantly in prayer. God showed him what to do in answer to prayer. When the children of Israel were ready to cross the Red Sea, and the army of Egyptians was following, Moses cried to God and He heard. You can imagine what a tremendous problem it was to lead all those people into a strange country, but we must remember what God did for Moses: every day the cloud overshadowed them; every night the pillar of fire was round about them. They were always reminded of God's presence. Moses was so wonderfully blessed in that God arranged he would never have to take one step alone.

The Israelites were confronted with problems one after another. They found that Moses would turn to God in every crisis. They came to a place where the water was bitter; and at Marah Moses turned to God and He showed Moses what to do. They had no food. Moses cried to God and He told Moses about the manna that would fall every day. They had no water and God showed them a rock which, if Moses smote it, would open up and the water would gush forth. In all these impossible situations Moses turned to God. Moses was a man who believed in God, who was doing the will of God.

The grace of God is so wonderful that it is not necessary that a person be good enough or strong enough in order to qualify for His blessing. But if I am to have power in prayer I need to be an obedient

person. I need to be following the will of God. I cannot do as I please and then, when I get into trouble, ask God for help and expect Him to help me by fixing everything up so that I can go along the way I was going. That would be foolishness.

If I want God to be with me, I must walk in His direction. I must turn my face in His direction. I must want to be close to Him. And as surely as I yield myself into His will and walk with Him, one of the blessings I will receive for being with God is that He will hear and answer my prayer. Moses is a man whose record emphasizes this strongly. We should remember that so far as Moses was concerned, God was with him.

34

Joshua

There shall not any man be able to stand before thee all the days of thy life: as I was with Moses, so I will be with thee: I will not fail thee, nor forsake thee (Josh. 1:5).

These are the words that were given to Joshua, the son of Nun, when he was called in to take the position that Moses had held.

Much of Joshua's preparation took place as he served as an assistant or as a worker with Moses. Because he was associated with and followed Moses, the life, career, and testimony of Joshua could be dwarfed in comparison with Moses, who was a giant among believers. Yet Joshua was a great man. Known principally as a military leader, there was much more of interest about Joshua. We are going to notice him in prayer.

To understand the matter of prayer, it is important to realize there is more involved than just saying prayers. Prayer is going to have to be the expression that comes out of the heart. With Joshua this was certainly the case. In Exodus 33:11 we read, "And the Lord spake unto Moses face to face, as a man speaketh unto his friend." I think that is wonderful! Again, "And he [Moses] turned again into the camp, but his servant Joshua, the son of Nun, a young man, departed not out of the tabernacle." Now pause and think a moment. Joshua was right there while this communion with God was taking place.

Surely that speaks to your heart as it does to mine that Joshua continued in prolonged communion in the presence of God. It seems to me that this is very important in understanding Joshua: he took "time to be holy and spoke oft with the Lord." This strengthens conviction. We need to take time before God. When we are conscious of the presence of God and think about the things of God, we should be careful not to take just another snapshot picture. Take a time exposure. Open the lens of your heart, focus it upon the life and death of the Lord Jesus Christ. Look upon Him, gaze upon Him, and keep Him before you. Joshua stayed in the tabernacle of the presence of God. I think this has a lot to do with everything we know about Joshua.

The next thing I want to bring to your mind is one of the earlier reports we have of him and his leadership in battle. In Exodus, chapter 17:8-13, we have the story of this battle. It was here that Joshua learned his real dependence upon God – I could almost say his complete dependence upon God. Joshua was a very clever military tactician. Those of us who read the accounts of his battles can be impressed with the way he oftentimes maneuvered to win. But in this case it was obvious that he did nothing in any noteworthy fashion personally to win that victory. Joshua learned that apart from the help of the Lord he would have been defeated. Victory was possible in that battle with Amalek only because there was united

intercessory prayer on his behalf.

By the way, something very interesting is indicated here. You see, the story is not one of Joshua praying. Isn't that interesting since we are talking about Joshua? I'll tell you what Joshua was doing – he was fighting for his life. Joshua was in battle, evidently preoccupied with the actual needs of the moment, yet he benefited by the praying of other people.

This should be of help if we keep this in mind. It is possible that at times our daily life has so much activity in it, so many things to do, that we scarcely have time to pray as we ought. According to this seventeenth chapter of Exodus, it was the praying of Moses, Aaron, and Hur on the mountain that turned the tide of victory for Joshua. He won because they prayed. We need to learn that there is power in united prayer, in joint intercessory prayer.

In the life of Joshua, there are a few other things we can profitably look at. One is the insight into his faith at Kadesh-barnea. That is the place from which the children of Israel sent spies into the land to see if it was a satisfactory land to try to take and whether they were strong enough to take it. Moses directed twelve men, one from each tribe, to go. They returned and made their report, answering the three questions. On the first question, "Is it a good land?" they were unanimous. "Are there difficulties?" and again they were unanimous: there were difficulties – high walled cities and soldiers who were giants. The third question was "Are we able to take it?" Ten said, "No, we are just like grasshoppers in their sight." Two said, "Yes, it is true that there are difficulties, it is true that there are high walled cities. It is true that they have soldiers that are like giants and we are like grasshoppers in their sight, but our God shall fight for us. If God be for us, who can be against us?" The two men who said, "Yes," were Joshua and Caleb. As it happened at that particular time, the majority prevailed. The result was that Israel did not go forward; so they had to go back into the desert for thirty-eight years. Thus Joshua knew what it was to go through a period of thirty-eight years of frustration and dissatisfaction, because his fellowmen were not ready to go forward when the time came.

Until the death of Moses, Joshua was working as the leader of the armed forces. Upon the death of Moses, Joshua was called to take his place. In the first chapter of Joshua, we read that the Lord gave to Joshua a certain rule to follow, a law he could use. Every place that the sole of his foot trod upon was to be his. The whole land was before him, and he was entitled to go in any direction he wanted to go. This is the principle of appropriation for all the promises of God. All the promises of God are yea and amen in Christ Jesus; any Christian person can have all of the promises of God, but he will get only those he takes for himself.

This is the principle that is true in spiritual matters. God offers things to me in Christ Jesus. Will I reach and take them? If I will reach and take them, they are mine. If I do not reach and take them, they are not mine. This is what Joshua learned. And in communion with God, Joshua was given to understand that this would be the principle that he was to follow.

After he was shown exactly what he should do, Joshua led the nation of Israel in crossing the river Jordan. They set up memorials to commemorate this crossing so other people would be convinced that God had done this. After the crossing Joshua had all of the men circumcised. That had been omitted while they were on the desert; now he wanted everything to be done right. Joshua was a man who obeyed to the letter every commandment that was given to him from God.

Just before he moved into his first big problem, which was Jericho, Joshua had a vision. One evening he saw an armed man coming toward him. Joshua went out to meet him and asked if he was for him or against him; the person said, "As captain of the host of the Lord am I now come" (Josh. 5:14). This vision was to show Joshua that he was not boss; God was in charge and Joshua was His servant. What a wonderful thing to learn! While he was learning this he was told, "Loose thy shoe from off thy foot; for the place whereon thou standest is holy." You remember that was what Moses had learned and now Joshua learned the same truth.

All the way through Joshua's life, over and over again, God was ready to help him and gave him rich promises. But Joshua was to be strong and of good courage, and do what God wanted him to do. As Joshua went forward obeying, doing exactly what he was supposed to do, God blessed him.

35 *Gideon*

The Lord is with thee, thou mighty man of valour (Judg. 6:12). These were the words spoken to Gideon by the angel who came to call him to service for God.

We have been impressed by the way the men we have studied so far have responded to God's call by obedience. It is almost as though we would have to look for the time when some petition was recorded to find out about their praying. We have no reason to suppose these men did not pray regularly; this would be the normal thing for a godly man to do, praising God and thanking Him for His providence in what He has done.

When Abraham called upon God at the time when he heard that Sodom would be destroyed, he prayed a long prayer of intercession. Jacob called upon God when he understood he was going to meet his brother Esau and was in grave danger of having Esau destroy him. When Moses was face to face with a rebellious people and God was on the point of destroying them, Moses stepped into the breach and prayed that God would keep them for His own name's sake. When Joshua was in battle, he found that it was God who helped him. It was just a question of having God exercise His power in each instance.

Again, in each one of these cases there was a humble admission of personal unfitness on the part of the person doing the praying. So far as Abraham was concerned, there was never the slightest intimation that Abraham thought he was good enough to ask God for the blessing. The same is true with Jacob. All that Jacob could do was just humbly "hang on." So far as Moses was concerned, it was a humble, contrite man who didn't think he could speak, who didn't think he was able, who didn't think the people would want him. But he did feel that God could do it if He would. And the same was true of Joshua. When Joshua was in battle, he knew right well he would have been defeated if God had not intervened on his behalf. There was in each of these cases a humble, frank admission of personal unfitness.

One more thing – in each case there was a deep desire on the part of the man praying to see God's name magnified. It is almost as though that was the most important thing. The thought of destruction of people in Sodom who might be innocent appalled Abraham. He called on God for His name's sake to spare Sodom if there were any righteous people there.

We come in our studies to Gideon about whom we read in the Book of Judges. Right away there will come to our minds one of the most famous ideas that has ever been understood or released in the whole history of prayer, known as "Gideon's fleece." You will remember that on a certain occasion Gideon had called together a large company of soldiers and they were facing the Midianites, who were an even larger army. The question was whether Gideon should attack the large forces of the Midianites. You will recall he decided it by using a fleece. He first put the fleece on the ground; then he asked the Lord to let the dew be on the fleece during the night and let the ground around the fleece be dry. The next morning Gideon took the fleece and wrung water out of it; the ground around it was dry. Then Gideon said to the Lord, "Now don't be angry with me but I wanted to know for sure. Tonight let the ground be wet and the fleece be dry." And so it was.

This incident has appealed to people everywhere. We want to take a closer look at it and see if it was as simple as it seems. Let us begin again with Gideon. Anybody may call on the Lord, but not everybody does call on the Lord. Gideon believed in God. He was conscious of the plight of God's people. He knew the people were not being blessed, and that the lack of blessing was a shame to the name of God. So far as Gideon was concerned, he took the first step, the first opportunity, to openly defy the pagan powers that ruled in his day and time. You will enjoy the story in the sixth chapter of Judges.

Gideon took the initial step in defying the Midianites. He had already said he was going to fight. It was just a question of when. The test that he put before the Lord was not merely curiosity to find out whether God would answer prayer. It was actually related to the service that he was committed to render. When Gideon set up the second test, he wanted to be doubly sure he had the leading of God.

36

Samson

And what shall I more say? for the time would fail me to tell of Gideon, and of Barak, and of Samson, and of Jephthah; of David also, and Samuel, and of the prophets: Who through faith subdued kingdoms, wrought righteousness, obtained promises, stopped the mouths of lions, 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 (Heb. 11:32-34).

This is a part of that famous honor roll of men and women of faith who were listed in Hebrews to give us some idea of how God had honored the faith of His people throughout generations. In this list appears the name of Samson. Who was this man? Why should he be listed with these heroes? What is popularly known about Samson would make him only a horrible example. Yet here he is listed among giants, among great men of God. We are going to examine the record of this man. We are going to find before we are through that there was an occasion when he definitely prayed to God; the greatest thing about this man, however, is the way in which he served God.

There is one truth. we should not fail to notice and to remember: not all prayers are alike. There is a general line of truth we can keep in mind in this, as well as in all Christian living: "According to your faith be it unto you" (Matt. 9:29). Not according to what you said, where you stood, but according to your faith. How much real inward faith did you have?

We find the story of Samson in Judges 13:16. Most of chapter 13, interestingly enough, discusses primarily the home into which Samson was born. Both mother and father had personal relations with God. Before the child was born, an angel talked with the mother, telling her that she would bear this son who was to be a Nazarite unto God, and who would serve God as the deliverer of Israel. The mother shared with the father what she had been told. The father then asked and received God's confirmation of the promise. We read, "The woman bare a son, and called his name Samson: and the child grew, and the Lord blessed him." That covers the whole case. This is important because it shows that in the ordinary experiences of the human being before God, it is his relationship with God that counts.

In Chapter 14 we have the first glimpse of trouble so far as this man is concerned. We read that Samson saw a woman, one of the daughters of the Philistines, and fell in love with her. This might seem to you very natural, but it was not in the will of God. This was the beginning of trouble for him. He had fallen in love with a woman who had not had the upbringing of faith Samson himself had received.

Samson was warned of the peril in this sort of relationship. His father and mother said unto him, "Is there never a woman among the daughters of thy brethren, or among all my people, that thou goest to take a wife of the uncircumcised Philistines?" Notice the word "uncircumcised." The Philistines had no trust in God; they had no relationship with Him. But Samson said unto his father, "Get her for me; for she pleaseth me well." In Judges 14:4, however, we are given insight into the real significance of what happened. This action of Samson led into a course of hostility and a violent break with the Philistines. We read in 13:1, "And the children of Israel did evil again in the sight of the Lord; and the Lord delivered them into the hand of the Philistines forty years." For forty years they had been dominated by these unbelieving, ungodly people. Now in 14:4 we find God overruling to bring this evil situation to an end.

God's power and amazing wisdom are able to overrule. He allowed this relationship between Samson and the woman to develop in such a way that the trouble between Israel and the Philistines would be brought out into the open and there would be a break. As long as Israel was having fellowship with the Philistines it was not good for them. I use that word "fellowship" to indicate that this young Israelite could fall in love with a young Philistine woman and expect to get married; and nobody objected to it. Apparently the danger was so subtle the Israelites would not have recognized it in time to see how bad it was.

We mentioned earlier that Samson's parents were believing people. They believed that man was a creature of God. They believed that God was the judge of all the earth and the Judge of man. They understood that God was the Savior. They knew about the covenant with Abraham. They knew that the way of faith was to obey God. They knew that God could deliver them because they knew about the Exodus. They also knew that God could restore because He had done this under the various judges who had served in the time of Gideon and others. All of this was part of the culture in which he lived, yet Samson could leave all of this and go out and fall in love with a Philistine woman. We should also note in chapter 14:10 that "Samson made there a feast; for so used the young men to do." This would show that there was free and easy access to those who were actually his enemies.

In the rest of chapter 14, we learn something as a lesson that we might not want to hear – once a Philistine, always a Philistine. In other words, if we deal with worldly people we should keep one thing in mind. They are worldly people. And except a person is born again, he is still worldly. Ignoring the character of other people is a serious, dangerous thing when having fellowship with them. As it turned out, this woman deceived Samson and gave him away. This was in line with her nature – she was a Philistine. Angered and insulted, Samson went home.

We read in chapter 15 about the further deterioration of Samson's relationship with the Philistines. When he came to get his wife, he found her married to another. Samson then began to do things that were hostile. By a clever trick he burned the crops of the Philistines; and again, by a daring maneuver he managed to slay a thousand of them in battle. In this manner he broke the bondage of the Philistines from his people. For our own learning we would do well to remember that God planned to use him for this very thing.

The part of the story that is most commonly known is chapter 16. This is the notorious story of Samson and Delilah. One might wonder how a great man like Samson could ever get into something like this. Here again Samson showed his proclivity to trust strange women. The Philistines worked through Delilah to discover his secret.

Samson had a personal relationship with God, and God was dealing with Samson. Apparently, Samson did not fully appreciate this; he risked the matter of association with the Philistines. Great man that he was, he had no consciousness of danger here. But he learned it the hard way. When a person tolerates evil, touches evil, trusts evil, he is in trouble. And so Samson was betrayed and was enslaved. He was abused, blinded, and ridiculed.

We have gone through all of this story because we wanted to get to his prayer. This was the time when

he actually prayed to God (Judg. 16:28). The Philistines had arranged a big day when they were to have sporting events for entertainment. They planned to bring Samson out to make sport of him. They had blinded him after they had shaved his hair. In so doing he had lost his strength because he had broken his relationship with God. But now an amazing, wonderful, marvelous thing happened. When his hair grew out, his strength returned. This teaches that if a person has a true relationship with God, even though he falls into disobedience and so gets into trouble, things can turn out all right. God will not forsake His own. Samson called unto the Lord and said, "O Lord God, remember me, I pray thee, and strengthen me, I pray thee, only this once." We should note what was involved in this prayer: "Let me die with the Philistines." And so Samson, by this one act of committing himself to death, accomplished more in his death than he did in all of the years of his life.

37

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" (I Sam. 1:9-10). These words bring before us the person that we are going to study, Hannah.

We find her story in I Samuel 1, 2, and it is a very human one. Hannah was involved in a 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 and the other wife did. In those days being childless was considered a great blemish. Because the other wife did have children she was preferred; this became intolerable to Hannah. Feelings existed between herself and this other woman. The inspiration for Hannah's praying was entirely personal, sincere.

Hannah began to pray. She prayed again and again. The Bible urges us to pray. God tells us, "Ye have not, because ye ask not" (James 4:2). The Lord Jesus said, "Ask, and it shall be given you" (Matt. 7:7). Such ideas that you need to ask only once, or that if you really believe you won't have to ask at all, are not Scriptural. 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).

The strain in that home where the other woman had children became worse and worse for Hannah. The Bible records that she vowed a vow as she poured out her heart to God. The important aspect in this is that it was done before the answer came. She promised God if she were given a man child she would not keep him: he was to belong to God (I Sam. 1:11). At this point she screened out of her request anything selfish. In one way it may seem her praying was selfish because she was asking for herself; yet in another way it can be seen that she was not selfish because she was not going to keep the child. She prayed half out loud, and Eli, the priest, thought that she was drunken. He rebuked her and said she should not be in the service if she was not able to keep quiet.

Here it is apparent that Hannah was humble. She felt no resentment. She told Eli, "Oh, no, it is not a matter of my being drunk. It is my heart's concern; I am much concerned about the thing that I want." She then told Eli about her petition, and was blessed. "Then Eli answered and said, Go in peace: and the God of Israel grant thee thy petition that thou hast asked of him" (I Sam. 1:17). Despite all that happened, Hannah was courteous: "Let thine handmaid find grace in thy sight." She showed no resentment, no irritation, no offended pride. She humbly thanked the priest for his word. "So the woman went her way,

and did eat, and her countenance was no more sad" (I Sam. 1:18). This is the conduct of a person who was a woman with full confidence in God.

In this account several things should be noted concerning this woman. On the one hand she was entirely human, since she took it to heart that the other woman was preferred; but on the other hand, she was a woman of faith. She turned to God in prayer, and prayed earnestly and sincerely. When falsely accused, she was humble. Now we see that she had full confidence. When Eli told her that her prayer was granted, she went home and rested. She believed what he said.

We learn in verse 20 that in due time she bore a son and called him Samuel. In verses 21-23 we are told Hannah nursed him at home. She did not go to the temple the next year; she stayed at home until it was time to wean him. When the time came, she brought him unto the house of the Lord in Shiloh. "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" (vv. 24-28). She was faithful. Looking at these characteristics of Hannah, we can see she was a remarkable woman of faith.

God's answer to prayer is entirely of grace, but He does it out of the fulness of His heart. It is true that anybody can pray but it is not true that anybody can pray in any way. One needs to come before the Lord in a certain frame of mind and attitude. We see Hannah as a believing person, even though she was human. She turned to God in faith, she was humble, full of confidence, and she was faithful. She did what she promised God. In chapter 2, verses 1-10, we have a remarkable report of Hannah offering praise and thanksgiving. There is none like the Lord; He knows the human heart. The Lord is a God of knowledge and by Him actions are weighed. The Lord is sovereign. "The Lord maketh poor, and maketh rich: he bringeth low, and lifteth up." "He will keep the feet of his saints." God is Almighty and will sustain His believers.

There is a wonderful lesson in this story of Hannah for all who need help. They should turn to God. They should open their hearts before Him. They should come sincerely into His presence and yield to Him. God will hear and answer to His own name's honor and glory.

38

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 (I Sam. 3:19-21).

Samuel was a man dedicated to God before he was conceived. When he was born, he was carefully and lovingly nurtured by a mother who intended to give him to God. When a parent lovingly brings a child up in order to give that child over to God, such upbringing will have a great effect upon the child. Hannah brought up her son with the definite intention of turning him over to God. When only a child, Samuel was brought before Eli, to the house of God, and was committed to the service of God for life. Praying should be two-way communication. I should let God talk to me, and then I talk to God. If I want God to talk to me, I should let Him talk first. How will He do that? Through His Word. Bible study and reading should

precede prayer. When I study my Bible, one of the first things I will learn about is God's promises. Then I can pray along the line of the promises of God. There will be communion with God that is not specifically put into words. I can be conscious of God's presence and look up into His great majesty so that I feel my utter dependence upon Him and yield myself entirely to Him. All of this can happen in the atmosphere of prayer when I am conscious of God.

With this in mind it is easy to think that the 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 of the presence of God. It is possible to reach the point where in every moment of the day and in every thought I have I am conscious of God's presence. The Holy Spirit will affect me in such a way that I will constantly be aware of the presence of God.

Early in Samuel's experience a great truth about praying was demonstrated. When he was just a boy, he learned to listen to God's Word. On one occasion he was asleep and in the nighttime he heard his name, "Samuel." He rose up and immediately ran in to Eli and said, "Here I am." Eli said, "I did not call you. Go back to sleep." When he went back to sleep, he was awakened again with the name, "Samuel." He ran again to Eli, "Here I am, you called me." Again Eli said, "I didn't call you." When this happened the third time, Eli perceived that God was speaking to Samuel and he told Samuel, "The next time this happens you say, 'Speak, Lord; for thy servant heareth,' then listen." This is what Samuel did. This is a tremendous principle for any believer to have in mind. He was urged to be 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. Scripture does not record any details, but people became conscious of that fact and often they came to Samuel with their problems. They called upon him to interpret the mind of God in their practical affairs. In those days he was called a judge, because he defined the Word of God. This became the nature of Samuel's ministry – to bring men closer to God by showing them the way of the Lord and encouraging them to respond to it.

In I Samuel 7 there is the account of a typical incident in which Samuel functioned in this fashion. The people wanted a blessing from God. They had been under bondage and they were distressed because of it. For twenty years the ark had not been in the house of God. There was much lament. Samuel told the people:

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 (I Sam. 7:3).

This was teaching, telling them plainly what God wanted. They were to put away natural, human ideas and practices, and turn sincerely and completely to God, and He would bless them. "The children of Israel did put away Baalim and Ashtaroth, and served the Lord only" (I Sam. 7:4). Samuel showed them the real meaning of turning to God. He led them to confess their sin, and they confessed that they had sinned against the Lord.

When the Philistines heard what had been done, they attacked the Israelites. Then the people called on Samuel for help, and he made intercession for them. "Samuel cried unto the Lord for Israel; and the Lord heard him" (I Sam. 7:9). The Lord took a hand in the matter and turned the tide of battle in their favor. Samuel led his people to follow God and thus won a complete victory over the enemy. He raised up a stone and called it Ebenezer, which means, "Hitherto hath the Lord helped us." After that it is written:

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 (I Sam. 7:13-15).

Later there was another experience in Samuel's life in which he learned more spiritual truth; but he learned it in what we would call the hard way. Samuel learned of the unwillingness of people to follow the

will of God. This would undoubtedly be hard for Samuel to accept, because he had been trained to walk in the ways of God. He found out that when he told the people what was the will of God, and what was right, they were unwilling to do it. "Nevertheless the people refused to obey the voice of Samuel" (I Sam. 8:19). Oh, what a shock it must have been to him! He was telling them the truth!

The people insisted on having a king, and frankly admitted their reason: "That we also may be like all the nations" (I Sam. 8:20). How many believers are like that! Maybe my name isn't Samuel, and I am not dealing with the entire kingdom of Israel; I may be dealing with only the people in my family. I may have been trying to guide them. They are now old enough to make up their own minds and have some choice in the matter, and I am showing them what would be right. Now they are letting me find out something—they are not going to do it! Even though it is good and I have advised it, they are going to choose something else. This is what Samuel learned. Why did they insist on having a king? So that they could be like other nations. How many people will ask for and do certain things because they want to be like the rest of the folks!

"And Samuel heard all the words of the people, and he rehearsed them in the ears of the Lord" (I Sam. 8:21). When these people would not do what he asked them to do, Samuel turned to God. He was confronted by their massive disobedience. The whole nation did not want to walk the way Samuel pointed out they should walk. So Samuel turned to God. Then he received what must have been the shock of his life. "The Lord said to Samuel, Harken unto their voice, and make them a king." That must have shaken Samuel to have God say to him, "Give in and give them what they want." Their plan was not wise, and it was not good; but it was their plan. Samuel realized clearly the dangers of having a king, and he warned them against it. He personally would have refused to go along with them, yet he was instructed to let them have their way! This was their privilege. Here is an astonishing, sobering truth: a person can have what he insists on having. If he chooses to turn from God, he may do so. If a man wants to neglect prayer, he may neglect it. God may let him have what he wants, but, of course, in the long run this person will pay the piper.

Thus Samuel learned several things in waiting before the Lord in prayer. First, he found out that he should not take any issue too personally. God is more involved than he is. God told him that "the people did not do this against you, they did it against me." The people had actually rejected God, who was far more important than Samuel. They belonged to God, not to Samuel. The second thing is that even though wrong, people may choose what they will. They have the freedom to make a bad choice. Third, Samuel must bear witness according to his own good sense. Even though they were going to do wrong, he had to tell them it was wrong. This is hard to do: to stand up and give your witness, knowing the people whom you are advising will not follow your advice.

The next thing that Samuel learned was that he must try to help his people escape their own perils brought on by their own willful mistakes. In some respects this was almost a crowning burden for him. Not only did they turn away from him, but God actually told him to help them, "Go along with them and show them how to cross the river." Apparently Samuel accepted God's guidance for he told them, "God forbid that I should sin against the Lord in ceasing to pray for you" (I Sam. 12:23).

39

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? (II Sam. 7:18).

This study will be about David and particularly about a prayer that he offered. While preparing these studies, I have been impressed that often much is said about praying by persons who do not seem to practice this method of securing blessing from God. "God is no respecter of persons" (Acts 10:34). Anybody may talk to God, but saying the words of a prayer is not actually all there is to praying.

We may 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. God looked on the hearts of these men, and the heart of Cain and the heart of Abel were different. 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 teaching 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. It seems there is a certain frame of mind one needs to have when he prays to God.

And whatsoever we ask, we receive of him, because we keep his commandments, and do those things that are pleasing in his sight (I John 3:22).

As we seek to follow His guidance and do those things that are pleasing in His sight, we are able to pray more effectively.

If ye abide in me, and my words abide in you, ye shall ask what ye will, and it shall be done unto you (John 15:7).

Here is 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 that will be acceptable to Him.

The Bible says David was a man after God's own heart (Acts 13:22). Men will say he sinned. Yes, 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. It is true he sinned. But what man is there who sinneth not? Isn't it wonderful to think that a man who has sinned can still be considered to be a man after God's own heart? There would never be a man after God's own heart because he had done everything perfectly; he would be a man after God's own heart when his attitude toward God was acceptable. That attitude would imply that when he has sinned he is repentant and he confesses.

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 he was a man who carelessly and willfully went into sin. God did not bless him in his sinning but in spite of his sins. It is very important for each of us to keep that in mind. Remember, David was a sinner, you are a sinner, and I am a sinner, but God forgives sins and will be gracious to the repentant.

David was the great grandson of Ruth. Ruth married 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 that David grew up in a believing family. When you have had believing parents, you have blessings stored up for you that you should not miss; but if you did not grow up in a believing family, you should remember that you have the Lord Jesus Christ to help you in every way that is necessary.

David as a lad and shepherd loved music. He became an expert with the harp and was known as the

sweet psalmist of Israel. This was a man who took time in his youth to sing praises to God. In addition to that, when he was 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 he was not even considered at first. After that, when he went back to take 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 his sheep. Later on, when he was still too young to be in military service, we read that he brought food for his brothers to the camp of Saul.

At the camp he heard about Goliath the giant, and he killed Goliath. It will be helpful to keep in mind that David did not go out to that battle in the consciousness that he was a great man. David ran to meet the giant, but it was not that David was so confident of himself, or because he had confidence in his slingshot – he had confidence in God. The thing that impressed him was that Goliath was a Philistine who defied God. David felt that as long as he was on God's side this man could not stand against him. Later he was taken to 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.

We can learn much from David's particular response to the gracious promise that God gave him in the covenant recorded in II Samuel 7. David had planned to honor God by building Him a house. David had a house of cedar, but the worship of God was carried on in the tabernacle, a large tent made of skins. It was a temporary structure and David planned to build God a permanent house. But God sent Nathan the prophet, who came as the personification of the Word of God. Today God would do this through Scripture, through the written Word, by the Holy Spirit. God sent His Word to David, to tell him something: David was to receive blessing from God which he would never have been able to earn. David was not 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. Then Nathan told him his throne would be secure as long as he lived, and 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.

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. 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 (II Sam. 7:18-20).

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. He knew that this act of God was an act of grace. David could not earn the promise, neither could he forfeit it. There was no way in which anything 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 has promised is in keeping with David's entire 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 for ever, and do as thou hast said. And let thy name be magnified (II Sam. 7:25-26).

Of course David was not worthy, and his sons were not perfect men, but God is perfect and God is worthy.

You may desperately want the blessing of God and perhaps you are being hindered. It could be your faith is being challenged because you are conscious of the fact that you are not good enough. We need not condone evil. We need not think that it is a passing thing of no importance. You will deal with God concerning the evil; but here is a glorious truth that God does not base His actions on your record. It is not because you are good or because you are bad. God will go with you and for you and to you, if you will

receive and honor Him. Here in David's case we see believing, effectual praying, "Now, O Lord God, the word that thou hast spoken . . . establish it for ever, and do as thou hast said" (II Sam. 7:25). David is pouring out his heart to God in humble petition: "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."

The closing of David's response is eloquent:

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 (II Sam. 7:29).

40 *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 heaven 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 He was a mighty God. And no study of praying would be complete without the study of Elijah.

The Israelites were the people of God. They were called to live trusting in God, counting upon God to bless them. Prophets were men who spoke forth the Word of God to the people; they helped men to understand the ways of God by teaching the Word of God.

In the Word of God, God promises what He will do, e.g., "Whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap." But it is also true that when a person lives according to the promises of God, grace will prevail. Men don't get what they deserve; they get what God gives them. If men ever expected only to get their wages, the one thing they would look forward to is death: "The wages of sin is death." For men to count on the favor and the blessing of God in the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ, they must know and believe the promises of God. In His grace, God will do more than they can ask or think. All this needs to be proclaimed, that men may know what they could receive.

Israel needed to know that God, in whom they put their trust, was a living God who acted in mercy according to His Word. Whenever the people were under the leadership of a king, they were inclined to forget the promises of God. They would disregard God's Word, which set forth these promises. Then God raised up prophets to remind the people of His plan for them. It happened that when the kings were the most evil, the prophets were the strongest. So when Ahab was king and had married Jezebel, a priestess of the cult of Baal, and was influenced by her to Baal worship, God sent Elijah.

The real spiritual issue was between Baal and God. The worship of Baal emphasized trust in natural powers and processes. The name of "God" referred to a living Being who overrules and oversees and who brings His will to pass, even when natural processes would not point in that direction. The conflict was between these two centers of influence.

Why can men become so enamored with human ideas of God? It can be understood that men are naturally interested in success: so they are naturally interested in being blessed. To think of God in a human way of thinking is flattering to man, because it makes man feel that he can manage the outcome; it builds up his ego. We sometimes speak of it as humanism. The impression is given therein that man can

create his own world and blessing.

We could ask, "Why is it that people turn away from the reality of God so easily?" Today it is common for people who come to church to spend much time talking about how things should be done. 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 feels weak. That is not flattering. Although man is dependent upon God, he doesn't want to admit it. Over the world as a whole, there is much interest in religion; as long as it is something that man can do, people will discuss it. But if it were a matter of trusting in God and being called upon to face God and have dealings with Him, people shrink away from that.

In his public ministry Elijah insisted to Israel that only the living God could bless the country, and that God was actually alive. In those days things were different: for one thing, they did not have Scripture in hand as we have today. They could not get together and study God's ways of guiding them; so He arranged things in their daily life and experience to teach them His way. God brought the Israelites from Egypt into the land of Canaan. He pointed out to them that in Egypt the country was flat and the land was irrigated, but when they would go into the mountain area of Palestine they could not irrigate the land. God said He was going to take them up into a country where they would be dependent upon Him for rain (Deut. 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 wanted to show the people that God is a living God and that the living God is active. He announced to the king, "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." After he made this announcement, for three years and six months it did not rain. During that time the king hunted Elijah and would have killed him if he could have found him. At the end of three and a half years, God sent Elijah to Ahab to tell him it would rain. In this way Elijah was to demonstrate that God is a living God.

Elijah challenged Ahab to bring together all of the priests of Baal and the priests of the groves of Ashtaroath, to Mount Carmel. He challenged that they should all come together there, that it might be shown to the people who was really God. The contest was arranged on that mountaintop, with Elijah standing alone against four hundred fifty 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 (I Kings 18:21).

What did that show? They just didn't know; they were so confused.

The priests of Baal were to present their sacrifices on their altar and, then they were to pray to their gods. They prayed all day long 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. He then prayed to Almighty God, "Hear me, O Lord, hear me, that this people may know that thou art the Lord God." What Elijah asked for had no natural way of coming to pass. In this he showed a straightforward dependence upon God according to His Word. The record is that fire fell from heaven in a dramatic way and licked up everything that was on the altar. And then all the people said: "The Lord, he is the God; the Lord, he is the God."

When this happened Elijah announced that it would rain. Then he went to the top of the mountain and prayed. What did he pray for? He prayed that it should rain. He did this because God had said it would rain. 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 you in plain statement, you can pray God that He will do what He said He would do.

This brings to our minds a marvelous truth about prayer. Rain does not come out of a blue sky; rain comes out of clouds. And where do the clouds come from? They come from the sea. The account of this incident includes 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. Thus in the study of Elijah we learn that the ground for believing prayer is the known promise of God's Word. The believer needs to find out what God has promised and pray that what God has promised He will also perform to His glory.

41

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 (II Chron. 32:24-25).

All praying is not wise. Hezekiah is a classic example of a man who was unwise in his praying. Hezekiah 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 Zachariah. 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 brazen 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 (II Kings 18.1-8).

This is the record of a godly man. At that time, even as amongst us, godly men were rare.

There came a day when the Assyrians invaded the land of Palestine. They destroyed the northern Kingdom of Israel, and they laid siege to Jerusalem in Judah. The Assyrian army was all round Jerusalem, and 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. On one occasion, when they were broadcasting, word was sent out to the Assyrians requesting that they make the broadcast in their own language. But the Assyrians would not do that. They talked in the Jewish language because they wanted the people to hear it. This was a war of nerves; it was like sending messages by radio into enemy territory as is done today.

Finally Sennacherib, the King of the Assyrians, sent a letter to Hezekiah with an ultimatum. He told the King of Judah that if he didn't surrender, Sennacherib would take the city and destroy it. Scripture tells 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 (II Kings 19:14).

There could not be a better way of handling it than that. Hezekiah received this warning and when he had read it and saw what it was, he took it into the house of the Lord and laid it before the Lord. Then Hezekiah prayed before the Lord.

O Lord God of Israel, which dwellest between the cherubim, 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 (II Kings 19:15-19).

This is the way he responded when he was pressed by the enemy from the outside. It was in keeping with the testimony of 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.

Again Isaiah sent assurance to Hezekiah:

Then 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 (II Kings 19:20).

Later in response to Hezekiah's prayer, God added these words:

For I will defend this city, to save it, for mine own sake, and for my servant David's sake (II Kings 19:34).

The way in which Hezekiah had prayed is the kind of praying believers practice when in an emergency. Believers in real need turn to God, and God hears and answers them.

But there is more to this account as it is recorded. Scripture records that Hezekiah became sick. He was "sick unto death." Isaiah told him to put his house in order, that he would die. Then Hezekiah turned his face to the wall and cried to God, "And Hezekiah wept sore" (II Kings 20:3). He did not want to die. He reminded God that he had been faithful. He prayed for more life.

This may seem to be a natural development, but it should be closely studied, because this was the beginning of the one flaw in the life of Hezekiah, the one thing reported of him that was not up to God's standard. It is important to note that he had been a good man, a faithful man, an obedient man. He had been a man of faith. Because of this he was able to exercise his faith to have his prayer answered even though he did not accept God's will.

God sent Isaiah back immediately to tell Hezekiah, "God has heard your cry, and He is going to give you fifteen years more." Incidentally, God instructed Isaiah to make a poultice of figs and place it on the boil. This drew the infection out and Hezekiah got well. It is interesting that when God was dealing with Hezekiah, medicinal treatment was used. The big point is that God gave him what he asked for and Hezekiah lived fifteen years longer. In addition to that, Hezekiah asked for a sign and God gave him an amazing sign. The shadow on the sundial 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 sundial where this happened." It was a miracle.

And now comes the sad part: Hezekiah became proud. Have you ever noticed that when some person has received answers to prayers there appears a tendency to be proud? Have you ever noticed that with some persons who have had answers to prayer, they talk about that as if it made them something special? Do you recognize this as pride? Sometimes people call it "spiritual pride." But it is not necessary to use that word "spiritual" – it is just plain pride. It is a case of thinking oneself as something extra. This is a temptation. We are not so tempted if we are humble under trouble, as when we are blessed with

prosperity. When blessed with prosperity, a person can get the feeling that he 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. They asked, "Are you the man who actually had your prayer answered and the sundial went back ten degrees?" Hezekiah admitted he was the man, and he showed them the sundial where this miracle took place. It is probable he felt pretty big and important because all of this attention was being given to him. God had honored him by this special work of wonder. Hezekiah then showed the men the gold and silver that God had given to him.

When he had finished showing off what God had done for him, and the men had left, Isaiah came and he asked, "Who were those men?" Hezekiah answered they were Babylonians; they wanted to see what God had done for him. Isaiah asked, "What did you show them?" "I showed them the gold and silver and all the blessings I had gotten from God." Then Isaiah announced, "Everything you showed them you are going to lose. Every single thing you displayed in your vanity, you are going to lose. The very kingdom itself is going to be destroyed; however, because you have been a good and faithful man, God is not going to bring it in your time."

This incident shows that it is possible for a person to become proud in an unhealthy way when he receives answers to prayer. There is always this danger. It seems possible that in testifying to the blessing of God a person may talk about these things until he begins to think he is somebody special. He feeds his own "ego." History records that Martin Luther prayed to God that God would take him before he would ever recant. Luther was always afraid that some day he might turn back from where he was, and he wanted God to take him before he made a foot 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 commonly know about them. But there are also sins of old age. Not many of us want to talk about those because we always feel we should respect older people. But an older person can become proud. Such a person can become selfish and love himself. God is not impressed with any person's age. God looks on me as a human being, and He doesn't want me to become proud.

42

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 (Isa. 55:6-7).

Living among God's people as they did, the prophets gave instruction to believers as to how they might prosper in spiritual matters. These were men who were sent to God's people to help them understand the mind of God. The people of God are those who live in a conscious awareness of God and of His call, but because they have minds of their own and because they do in themselves what they want to do, this is where they can fatter and fall.

With reference to prayer, Isaiah first of all took note that there was neglect of praying on the part of the people and this neglect showed itself in the form of rebellion.

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 (Isa. 30:1-2)!

The Word of God records this complaint: "But thou hast not called upon me, O Jacob; but thou hast been weary of me, O Israel" (Isa. 43:22). The reason they stayed away from God was that they were actually weary of Him! Do you realize that people can have a feeling of being tired when the things of God are mentioned? This is no reflection on God; this is simply an indication of their own disposition. They are in the flesh, and as human beings they naturally are easily tired of the things of God.

There is another clear indication why they did not turn to God in Isaiah 64:7: "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 only when they feel like it. That's not good enough. A person needs to stir himself up to pray. It is like having sugar in a cup of tea – the sugar can be there all right, but it can be at the bottom of the cup. It needs to be stirred up. There are people who basically in their hearts have some faith in God but their faith does not affect them. They would be surprised and their feelings would be hurt if they were told they did not believe in God. They do believe in Him in a way, but they are not conscious of it. Their faith is 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 call apostasy – real apostasy.

We are going to see that some of these people needed help. But they did not want help 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,

And the residue thereof he maketh a god, even his graven image: he falleth down unto it, and worshippeth 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 (Isa. 44:17-19).

Such people are not logical. If they stopped to think about it, they would know that they had made up their own ideas about God.

Sometimes as I talk about the gospel, and the things of God revealed in the Bible, someone will say, "I just don't think that is the way it would be." How would he think it would be? Then he tells me how he thinks it would be, not because he read it anywhere, but just out of his own mind and heart. He thinks that is the way he would do it if he were God. The strange thing is, they often put their confidence in their own notions. Isaiah thought it strange that they would do this kind of thing. Using Babylon as a lesson, 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 (Isa. 47:12-15).

By actual test, confidence in their own ideas is utterly unwarranted.

It is true that some of God's people had apparently practiced the public worship prescribed for them. They had gone to the temple but not sincerely. It is actually an offense to God to be talking about the things of God when you don't really mean it. For this Isaiah had a strong word to say in the first chapter, "To what purpose is the multitude of your sacrifices unto me? saith the Lord." This makes us think of some of our ordinary church services, when the preacher or someone else talks about Calvary: they praise and sing about the cross, but they fail to call on the people to yield themselves to God. "I am full of the

burnt offerings of rams." [That is 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?" (Isaiah 1:11-12). Then in verse 15 God goes on to say, "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 in their worship, and God rejects their insincere actions.

The same idea is to be seen again in this prophecy:

Wherefore the Lord said, Forasmuch as this people draw near me with their mouth, and with their lips do honour me, but have removed their heart far from me, and their fear toward me is taught by the precept of men (Isa. 29:13).

Their fear was taught by the precept of men, which is to say, they give human reasons for doing certain things in the worship of God. And God notices that. They are not really thinking of God, but of themselves.

Moab was one of the nations surrounding Israel. Moab, a descendant of Lot, had a knowledge of God. But this is what happened. "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" (Isa. 16:12). 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 of that, not getting anywhere with that, then he would come to the sanctuary to pray, but he wouldn't get anywhere. He had no power in prayer, when he turned first to the powers of nature.

Some of God's people become discouraged because they get no results in their praying, but there may be a simple reason for it.

Behold, the Lord's hand is not shortened, that it cannot save; neither his ear heavy, that it cannot hear (Isa. 59:1).

If I have not experienced salvation and I haven't had answer to my prayer, it is not because God is not able.

But your iniquities have separated between you and your God, and your sins have hid his face from you, that he will not hear (Isa. 59:2).

The real reason is sin. But this can be handled. Isaiah pointed out in chapter 58 if I really repent God will turn to me. And if I should feel discouraged because my praying has not been blessed, I need to ask myself, "Have I really faced up to God about my sins?"

Isaiah points out one of the most wonderful of all promises about prayer.

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 (Isa. 55:6-7).

Here is the promise that I really need. "Seek the Lord while He may be found." That is right here while I am still alive and here: I can turn to God. If I draw close unto the Lord, He will draw close unto me every time. He will look after me. When I move toward Him, I will find He has moved toward me. He is watching me all the time. If I turn away from Him, He will turn away from me. "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." When I have lost my way – I may be on a highway but it isn't the right road. "Let the wicked forsake his way" – if I am on the wrong road, the thing to do is to get off that one. "Let him return unto the Lord." just wherever I am, come back to God. "He will have mercy upon him; and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon."

Someone may say, "How can I do this? What in the world can I do? How will I ever do it?" Here we can turn again to Isaiah.

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 (Isa. 40:31).

Waiting upon the Lord, looking into His face, asking Him and waiting for Him, trusting in Him – this is the way.

Isaiah knew what he was talking about because he had this experience. In chapter 6:1-6 he told the great story of his personal vision. Isaiah was in the presence of God and saw the glory of God; he was greatly affected by it. He felt so guilty; 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?" Isaiah at once said, "Here am I; send me." Isaiah found that the sight, the vision of the glory of God, greatly affected him and caused him to feel that he was personally unfit. But the grace of God was greater than all his sin. No wonder he could write:

Though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool (Isa. 1:18).

This matter of praying is of prime importance in any fellowship with God. The offer is open to all who come. Isaiah said, "Mine house shall be called an house of prayer for all people" (Isa. 56:7). "Seek ye the Lord while he may be found, call ye upon him while he is near" (Isa. 55:6).

43

Lord, Teach Us To Pray

One of the most challenging aspects of the gospel of Christ is the claim that praying to God can actually bring results. No man can ever be so sure of himself and so satisfied with his own results that he would not be intrigued by the possibilities of advantage if God would answer prayer. Many persons carry such burdens, face such trials, endure such suffering that they would certainly want to know the truth of such a claim. "Is there a balm in Gilead?" Can and will God really answer prayer?

Long before I ever believed in God, I felt this would be a wonderful thing and I could have wished it were true. If only there were a living God who was willing and able to help, and if only it were possible for a human being to call upon Him in the day of trouble!

I am naturally a skeptic. Doubting comes easily to me. This is especially true about anything that means a great deal to me. It is easy to be pessimistic about anything that is desirable to me personally. This was the mood that caused me to be agnostic in all that I heard about God in church, in Sunday school, and in every day conversation. By the time I was a junior in high school I realized, sadly, that I had no faith or confidence in the reality of God.

By the grace of God I was enabled to believe in Jesus Christ as the Son of God who came to die for me. I understood this meant that my sins would be forgiven and that I would be adopted as a child of God. This faith brought a wonderful joy to my soul; I loved God because He first loved me.

The idea that God would answer prayer was just as hard for me to believe. It took a long time for me to learn through different experiences that God actually could and would affect things in my life because I asked Him to do so. When I first heard about it, this was another of those things that were just too good to be true. As a matter of fact, I was not able at one time to accept this to be true in any general overall sense; I had to learn this truth bit by bit. I readily accepted the idea that praise to God was proper, and that thanksgiving was a good spiritual exercise which would bring blessing. The Bible taught me that it was good to pray to God about everything, but I felt that the good aspect was that it was good for my soul. The idea that such praying would make a difference in the course of events I could not accept.

Now, as I look back, I feel sure there had been some answers to prayer in my experience, but at the time I did not recognize them as such. I could always appreciate the kindness of the providence of God and could praise Him for His grace in caring for me, but I did not accept the idea that anything had happened differently because I prayed. However, God was merciful and patient. Through certain specific situations in which definite prayer was answered in such obvious fashion, I could no longer doubt, and I was led step by step to the blessed assurance that the living God could and would affect my personal situation because I had asked Him to do so.

It was always very clear to me that this was entirely a matter of His grace, and it has also been plain to my heart that such blessing was apart from any virtue in me. God would answer prayer for His name's sake to the honor and glory of Jesus Christ. I was the fortunate child of God, the "heir of God, the joint heir with Jesus Christ," who had the privilege of asking in His name and receiving from God whatsoever I asked.

I am humbled to realize how sadly I have neglected to exercise this privilege. I am often burdened about the blessing others have not received because I did not pray as I should have; yet I have seen my assurance grow stronger that God can and will answer prayer.

Along with my growing confidence that God answers specific prayers in a definite way, there has been a growth in my understanding of the limitations of prayer. Paul wrote, "We know not what to pray for as we ought," and James pointed out, "Ye have not, because ye ask not. Ye ask, and receive not, because ye ask amiss, that ye may consume it upon your lusts." I began to realize that praying should be intelligent. I should not let my own wishes lead my thoughts when I turn to God to pray. I should seek to know His will that I might pray "in His name."

My soul is enriched whenever I meditate upon our Lord praying in Gethsemane. I try to sense the truth being shown as I read, "Nevertheless, not my will but thine be done." This leads me to the impression that the praying of the child of God is involved in God's plan to bring His will to pass on earth. It is not that the believer asks as he will in order to please himself, but that the believer is led from within by the Holy Spirit to ask for the very thing God wants him to have. I am sure I am only a babe in understanding the privilege and power of prayer, but God has been gracious to let me learn in the course of my own living how praying can bring the soul into better understanding of the ways of God.

I have known what it was to be in a situation that became unbearable because of danger that my whole world would be shattered. We are all mortal and any one or all of our loved ones might die at any time, but I was not ready at one time to accept that this would happen. There are things worse than death, but when our doctor informed us that our baby boy would not live beyond a few days, I turned to God frantically for grace to bear and strength to live.

Peter Daniel was the child of our mature years. Born some twelve years after the youngest of our first four children, he was very dear to each of us. His two sisters and two brothers were of high school and junior high school ages when he came to grace our home in such a blessed way. After seventeen months

of seemingly perfect health, he was stricken with leukemia. Unaware of his condition we took him to the doctor because he looked so pale. Within a few hours I was told that our baby had leukemia and he would live only about three or four days.

My wife and I were stunned. We encouraged each other not to build up false hopes or to indulge in wishful thinking. Our baby would probably die as the doctor had said. Our trust was in God, and we felt that it was for us to "wait patiently on Him," even in this extremity.

It was my task to go home from the hospital that night and tell the four teenagers about Peter's condition. Broken-hearted, weeping, we knelt in prayer before our heavenly Father and asked for grace to live through the pain and the agony of this imminent bereavement. In time they went to bed, each alone in misery clutching to whatever promise was remembered but feeling utterly shattered and stripped of every earthly joy or satisfaction. I went into the living room to be alone with God.

At that time I was Professor of Bible at Columbia Seminary. Some months before, one of my students, himself the father of several children, had challenged me to claim that in the event some calamity were to take one of our children I would be able to say with job: "The Lord hath given, the Lord hath taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord." I had answered that in such a case I would expect God to give special grace that would enable such an attitude. Now I was in that situation, and I was soon to learn more about the ways of God in answering prayer than I had ever known.

It was not with desperate urgency that Peter should live that I turned to God that night to pray. We had agreed that living in this world might not be the most blessed future our baby might have. We have always been aware of the weakness of human flesh and we realized that any child might grow into a person who could bring hurt and sorrow to other people. Just because he was our child would not guarantee that he would become a blessing to others if he lived.

I was moved to pray partly because my own grief was breaking my heart and I needed to find grace to endure the sorrow of that hour. God was my refuge, and my soul turned to Him for comfort and strength. There was another more general, less personal reason: I needed to discover what God wanted me to do in this situation.

In my witness as a Christian I had testified that God answers prayer. As a Christian in my own family, my wife and my children could expect to look to me for some demonstration of my faith in God. As a Christian among my fellow-believers I could expect them to see how I would react and what God would do. As a professor in the seminary, my students would note closely what sort of witness I would have in demonstrating my submission to the will of the living God, whose Word I was interpreting daily in class.

How would a believing soul pray in such a situation as this? What would I ask for? Did I believe God could heal? Did I dare to ask God to heal this child by His Almighty Power and would I then witness to the whole world what God had done in answer to prayer? Did I not have a responsibility to go to God now about this very thing?

I shrank from such confrontation with God: I was so uncertain about my own understanding and had so little confidence in my own strength. I trembled to think I might blunder – yet I did not dare to turn away! Come to Him, I must! Even though I had no assurance that I would do what I should!

In my acute distress and in all my misgivings and sense of weakness, I began to realize that I was safer in His presence than I could be anywhere else. Out of my past experiences I was led to ask Him to help me. Facing Him was the right place for me – now He must help me in deciding what I should ask. I first reviewed my basis for turning to Him: He was my Creator; He was my God; He was my Savior; He was my Father. In His grace He had given me His precious promises, calling me to turn to Him. I was His creature; I was His child; I was helpless; I needed help now. I had no merit of my own but He had revealed I would not need any. My heart cried out, "What wilt Thou have me to do?"

Now I will recount my thoughts as I remember them: "Father, do you want me to pray for this child? Do you want me to pray that he shall get well and live? I do believe nothing is impossible with Thee, but

shall I ask that this child shall live?" Then it seemed as though He were saying to me, "For how long would you want him to live?" And my heart replied, "Oh Lord! I don't know!" Then He said, "For ten years? For twenty years? For fifty years?" Again my heart cried out, "Lord, I don't know! just let me know: shall I ask that he live?" Again He said, "For how long?" And I replied, "Lord, I don't know for how long. Let it be in accordance with Thy will!"

Then He seemed to ask me further, "Will you carry him if I let him live?" At once my heart cried, "Oh, no! Lord! I can't carry him." Gently He asked me, "Do you want me to carry him?" My heart gladly responded, "Oh, yes, Lord! I could not carry him for one day! You carry him!" It was then it seemed as though I could see Peter in His arms as I heard Him say, "I have him now. Do you want to take him, to carry him?" Again my heart cried out, "Oh, no, Lord! I cannot! Not even for one day!" Once more He gently but firmly said, "I have him in my arms now. Do you want to take him?" And then I knew, and my heart could say in peace, "No, Lord! No, never! I could never carry him. Thank You, Lord. Keep him safely in Your arms! Carry him always." The words of that sweet hymn I had heard my stepmother sing in the days of my childhood sounded in my soul: "Safe in the arms of Jesus; safe on His gentle breast." And I was able to pray with peace and gladness, "You keep our baby in Your arms."

I knew then that Peter would not live and that he would be always with the Lord through all eternity. With a sweet, strange calm my heart was quieted and seemed to sing with joy. I hurried to the hospital at about midnight. When I met my wife I said, "I have just had the most wonderful experience in praying about Peter." With a smile she answered, "You learned that he would not get well. So did I. He will be safe with the Lord."

Later, we were given a wonderful verse of Scripture, which has been entitled in our family "Peter Daniel's verse": "Because thy lovingkindness is better than life, my lips shall praise thee" (Ps. 63:3). Ours was the grief, but Peter's was the glory! To this day our hearts humbly praise God for leading us in that dark hour of grieving sorrow away from the natural desires of our human hearts into the quiet rest of the perfect will of God. In a deeper way than ever before we were able to pray, "Thy will be done on earth, as it is in heaven."

As I have recalled this personal experience, in which so much was learned about trusting God as I faced the issues of living, my heart has gone out to such persons as do not feel that they can pray. I realize there are those who do not believe that God can help them. A few may even feel that they do not need help. I have in mind the many who believe that God could help and even that He would help if they asked Him, but who are frustrated by their inability to utter their prayers. They need help, they want help, but they cannot talk to God.

When Peter Daniel died, he was about seventeen months old. He had a vocabulary of about twenty words, but he had not yet learned to make sentences. When we sat down at mealtime, he would be put in his high chair next to me. He had his own food specially prepared and served to him, but he was permitted to have some of the food served on the table for the family.

From time to time he would ask me to give him something he was permitted to have from the table. By tapping my shoulder he would get my attention; then he would point with one finger at what he wanted. He could not say the name of the dish; he could not utter a sentence to voice his request, but that finger was eloquent in its meaning: he wanted some of that to which he was pointing.

I was pleased to have him turn to me when he wanted something and I sometimes tested his ability to communicate his wishes to me. When he pointed at something he wanted, which he was permitted to have, I would pick up a different dish close to the one he wanted. He would shake his head vigorously and keep pointing with outstretched finger at the food he wanted. If I would pick up a dish on the other side of what he was asking for, he would begin to be provoked. He knew that I knew what he wanted! All he had to do was point. He could not talk. He could not name the food he wanted. But he did not need to say it in so many words. I knew what he wanted; all he needed to do was to ask me.

If someone is reading these words who has difficulty praying for lack of words, learn from this little boy, Peter. You can point at what you need or want. just as I knew what Peter wanted when he pointed, God knows what is on your heart before you ask! He wants you to ask Him! He wants you to pray for what you want! And, brother, even if you do not know what to ask for, nor how to say it, you can always point!!

"For every one that asketh receiveth" (Luke 11:10).