

Lord . . . Teach Us To Pray

By Dr. Manford George Gutzke

One of the most challenging aspects of the Christian Gospel is the claim that praying to God can actually bring results. No man could 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. And 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 could ever believe 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 it were possible for a human being to call upon Him for help in the day of trouble!

I am naturally a skeptic. Doubting comes very easily to my mind. This is especially true about anything that means a great deal to me. It is easy for me to be pessimistic about anything that would be very desirable to me personally.

This was the mood that caused me to become agnostic in all that I heard about God in church, in Sunday School, and in common conversation. By the time I was a junior in high school I sadly realized that I had no faith or confidence about 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. But the idea that God would answer prayer was just as hard for me to believe. It took me a long time to learn through different experiences that God actually could or 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 any 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. My reading of 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. I could not accept the idea that such praying would make any difference in the course of events.

Now as I look back I feel sure there had been actually some answers to prayer in my experience, but at the time I did not recognize them as such. I always could 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.

But God was merciful and patient. Through different specific situations in which definite prayer was answered in such obvious fashion that I could no longer doubt, I was led step by step to the blessed assurance that the living God could and would affect my local 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. It has always been kept 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. But 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 could have. Yet I have seen my assurance grow stronger that God can and will and does 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, and when ye ask, ye ask amiss that ye may consume it upon your own desires." 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 get 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 the 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 know what it was to be in a situation that became unbearable because of danger that my whole world would be shattered. I know very well that we are all mortal, and any one or all of my loved ones might die at any time, but I was not ready to accept that this would happen then. I realized too that there were things worse than death. But when our doctor faithfully told us that our baby boy would not live beyond a few days, I frantically turned to God 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 our whole household. 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 plight we took him to the doctor because he looked so pale. Within a few hours I was told that apparently the baby had leukemia, and would probably live only about three or four days.

My wife and I were stunned. We encouraged each other not to build up false hopes, nor to indulge in wishful thinking. The 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 at about ten o'clock that night, and bring the news to the four teenagers that their baby brother would die in a few days. Broken-hearted, weeping we knelt in prayer before our Heavenly Father and asked for grace to live through the pain and agony of this soon bereavement.

In time they went to bed. Each alone in misery clutching to whatever promise was remembered, but feeling totally shattered and stripped of every earthly joy or satisfaction. I went into the living room of our apartment to be alone with God.

You who read this may remember that at that time I was Professor of Bible in a Seminary. Some months before, during a class discussion, one of my students, himself the father of several children, had challenged me to claim that in the event some calamity were to take even one of our children, I would be able to say with Job: "The Lord hath given, the Lord hath taken: blessed be the name of the Lord." I remember that I answered quietly that in such a case I would expect God to give special grace that would

enable such an attitude. Now I was in that very situation.

And I was soon to learn something more about the ways of God in answering prayer than I had ever known. I do not remember that on that night I turned to God to pray with any desperate urgency that Peter should live. My wife and I had agreed that living in this world might not be actually 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 that might bring hurt and sorrow to other people. Just because he was our child would not guarantee that he would turn out to be a blessing to others if he lived.

Nevertheless, 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. And I had also 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 be expected to look to me for some demonstration of my faith in God. As a Christian among my fellow-believers, I could expect them to look to see how I would do, 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 my classes.

In such a situation as I was in, how would a believing soul pray? 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? Would I then witness to the whole world what God had done in answer to prayer? And did I not have a responsibility to go to God *now* about *this* very thing?

I remember how 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!

And yet in all my distress, and in all my misgivings and my sense of weakness, I began to realize that I was safer in His Presence than I could be anywhere else. Out of my own 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: He was my Father; I was His child! My heart freely cried out, "What wilt Thou have me to do?"

And 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 should be healed, and get well, and live? I do believe you could: nothing is impossible with God. But do you want me to 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: do you want me to ask that he should live?" Again He said, "For how long?" And I replied, "Lord, I don't know for how long. Let it be as long as according to Thy will!"

And 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!"

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 couldn't!! Not even for one day! You must carry him." Once more He gently but firmly said, "Well! 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 step-mother sing in the days of my childhood sounded through 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 the baby in your arms."

And then I knew 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 said: "You found out he would not get well! So did I! He will be so safe with the Lord."

Later, we were given a wonderful verse of Scripture, which has been entitled in our family as "Peter Daniel's verse": "Because thy loving-kindness is better than life, my lips shall praise Thee." (Psalm 63:3).

Our's was the grief, but Peter's was the glory! And 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 I learned so much about trusting God as we face 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. Some few may even feel that they do not need help. But I have in mind the many who believe that God could, and even that He would if they asked, who are frustrated in 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 to eat, 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, and 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.

Because I was so pleased to have him turn to me when he wanted something, 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 out-stretched 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 couldn't talk. He couldn't 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 could point at 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 want! And, brother, even if you do not know what to ask for, nor how to say it, *you can always point!!*

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

*"Thy loving-kindness is
better than life . . . "*

Psalm 63:3

(Peter Daniel's Verse)