



“Sweet Hour of Prayer”

Walton Weaver

In this special issue on prayer there will be articles on the various aspects of prayer that are described in the different lines of that beautiful old hymn, “Sweet Hour of Prayer.” There is some uncertainty as to the author of this hymn, but the traditional story about its origin is presented by Kenneth W. Osbeck in the following words:

For more than a century “Sweet Hour of Prayer” has been one of our most familiar and beloved hymns, reminding Christians of the importance of daily communion with God. The text is thought to have been written, in 1842, by William W. Walford, an obscure and blind lay preacher and owner of a small trinket shop in the village of Coleshill, Warwickshire, England. The traditional account generally associated with the origin of this hymn is that one day a Coleshill Congregational clergyman, Thomas Salmon, stopped at Walford’s shop for a visit with his blind friend. William Walford had just completed a new poem on the subject of prayer and is said to have requested Salmon to notate it for him. Then, three years later, Salmon visited the United States and showed this poem to the editor of the *New York Observer*. The poem first appeared in the September 13, 1845 issue. It was here that Salmon described

the poem as the product of a blind, fellow-clergyman named Walford in Warwickshire, England. The text first occurred in a hymnal, in 1859, in a Baptist edition of *Church Melodies*, compiled by Thomas Hastings and Robert Turnbull.

The tune, “Sweet Hour,” was composed for this text by the noted American composer of early gospel music, William Batchelder Bradbury, in 1861. This was the year that the text and Bradbury’s

tune first appeared together in a hymnal collection, the *Golden Chain*. Lifted on the wings of this melody, the prayer poem was soon sung around the world (*101 More Hymn Stories* 259).

The hour of prayer is indeed “sweet,” and this is one reason that those Christians who do pray do so on a regular basis. There are many benefits made available to the Christian through the avenue of prayer. But there also is a divine “oughtness” to prayer. Even those Christians who have not learned to pray understand that they “ought” to do so. Luke says that Jesus spoke a parable to his disciples, “that men always ought to pray, and not lose heart” (Luke 18:1). The wording itself shows that the point
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“Calls Me From a World of Care”

Don Wright

The world is sometimes a cold place. Problems and difficulties abound even in the life of the most faithful saint. I have often pointed out that as Christians we do not have some impenetrable force field surrounding us, keeping us from all of the ups and downs and trials and tribulations of this world. Struggles find their way into our lives just like they do the lives of those who do not know God. Though we are followers of Christ, we too have to contend with financial burdens, family situations, health problems, obstacles at work, etc. For some, the everyday, ongoing drudgery of just making ends meet is hard to bear. I read a sign the other day that said, “Just when we make the ends meet, they move the ends.” That seems very true at times, doesn’t it? Yes, we live in a world of care. Thank God for the power of prayer! Prayer calls us from the cares of this world and brings us to the very throne of God where the solution to our greatest problems can be realized. The question is, will we answer the call? Jesus did!

JESUS AND PRAYER

Jesus lived in the same world of cares, concerns, and complications in which we live. The cares of the world did not exhibit themselves for the first time in the twenty-first century; they existed in the world in which Jesus lived. Sometimes Jesus grew weary (John 4:6). Sometimes the demands that Jesus faced were overwhelming. In the first chapter of Mark, we read of how Jesus amazed people with his astonishing doctrine and miraculous power, and how, as a result, his fame spread throughout the region of Galilee. The record tells us that after Jesus healed Peter’s mother-in-law, the entire city was gathered together before the door of the house where he was located (Mark 1:33). Jesus then proceeded for the next several hours of the night healing many that were sick (Mark 1:34). Where did Jesus get the strength and endurance to continue in this way throughout his ministry? When things got a little overwhelming, what did Jesus do? Listen:

And in the morning, rising up a great while before day, he went out, and departed into a solitary place, and there prayed (Mark 1:35).

Was this an isolated event in the life of Christ? No! It was a pattern (Mark 6:45-46; Luke 6:12; 22:39-41). Jesus was a man of prayer. Though he was the Son of God, from time to time he needed to go to a place of solitude, away from the crowds and even away from his beloved disciples, and be alone with his Father. Now let me ask you, if Jesus himself found it needed and

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“My Soul Has Often Found Relief”

Bobby Witherington

Sweet hour of prayer! Sweet hour of prayer!
That calls me from a world of care,
And bids me at My Father’s throne,
Make all my wants and wishes known;
In seasons of distress and grief,
My soul has often found relief,
And oft escaped the tempter’s snare
By thy return, sweet hour of prayer.

As will surely be noted by most of our readers, the preceding words constitute the first stanza of that beautiful hymn, “Sweet Hour of Prayer.” Throughout the world, many a child of God can personally attest to the fact that “in seasons of distress and grief, My soul has often found relief” — “relief” which came through the avenue of prayer. Every mature Christian, who has faithfully served God for many years, can surely recall numerous “seasons of distress and grief” — times when there were more questions than answers, when the storm clouds of life were low and heavy, times when they were weighed down with the burdens of life, times when responsibilities seemed greater than one’s physical, mental, and emotional strength, and times accompanied by feelings of utter helplessness. Indeed, many of us have faced those “seasons of distress and grief,” when the only available recourse was to cry out to God in prayer. And, yes, though the outward circumstances did not immediately change, our “soul . . . found relief,” and somehow obtained that surge of strength so necessary for spiritual survival. However, this article is not intended to serve as a subjective, personal testimonial to the “relief” people currently alive have found through the “sweet hour of prayer.” Instead, we shall focus upon the “relief” prayer brought to some of the noble saints whose names grace the pages of the Bible.

Abraham was born in “Ur of the Chaldees” and was a descendant of Shem, a son of Noah (Gen. 11:10-32). At age 75, in obedience to God’s command, Abraham took Sarah his wife and Lot his nephew from Haran and went “into the land of Canaan,” the land God then promised to “give” to his descendants (Gen. 12:1-7), a land in which he “sojourned . . . dwelling in tabernacles with Isaac and Jacob, the heirs with him of the same promise” (Heb. 11:9). Later, when Abraham was nearly 100 years old, God promised him that he would become “the father of many nations,” and even though his wife had been barren during the usual child-bearing years, “he did not waver at the promise of God through unbelief, but was strengthened in faith, giving glory to God” (Rom. 4:18-20). Abraham, of course, was not perfect.

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On two separate occasions, out of fear, he lied, saying of Sarah, his wife, “she is my sister” (Gen. 12:18,19; 20:1, 2). But, overall, Abraham proved to be a man of great faith, one whose faith was tested in ways more severe than any of us can imagine (cf. Gen. 22). Where did Abraham find the needed courage and strength? From God! For the most part, wherever he journeyed, Abraham “built an altar and called on the name of the Lord” (Gen. 12:8; 13:4; 21:33). Abraham’s intercession in behalf of whatever “righteous” people remained in Sodom (Gen. 18:23-32) is a superb example of one who went boldly before the throne of grace, and who surely obtained “relief” through “the sweet hour of prayer!”

Moses was a man of prayer. He was of the tribe of Levi, the youngest child of Amram and Jochebed, was raised by Pharaoh’s daughter, and was given the tremendous task of bringing God’s people, “the children of Israel, out of Egypt” (Exod. 6:20; 3:1-10). What a job! No wonder he felt totally inadequate, and tried to excuse himself (Exod. 4:1-17)! But Moses proved to be a man of faith, “refused to be called the son of Pharaoh’s daughter,” chose “rather to suffer affliction with the people of God than to enjoy the passing pleasures of sin, . . . forsook Egypt . . . , kept the Passover,” and led the Israelites through the Red Sea and on dry land (Heb. 11:24-29; Exod. 14:21-31)! His was not an easy task! The Israelites continually murmured and mouthed their cries against both God and Moses (Exod. 17:2; Num. 14:1-3; 20:1-5, etc.). Yes, on occasion, Moses showed some weaknesses — even losing his temper (Num. 20:7-13) — but for the most part he was relentless in resisting outside forces and relied upon God to see him through what appeared to be insurmountable difficulties. From whence did Moses receive so much strength? Could any deny that prayer was a significant factor? For example, please consider the time when Moses descended from the Mount, carrying the “two tablets of the Testimony, tablets of stone, written with the finger of God,” and witnessed the idolatry of the Israelites who were worshipping the golden calf they had made in his absence (Exod. 31:18; 32:8). God then said to Moses, “Let Me alone, that My wrath may burn hot against them and I may consume them. And I will make of you a great nation” (Exod. 32:10). But Moses interceded in behalf of the Israelites, and the text then said “the Lord relented from the harm which He said He would do to His people” (Exod. 32:11-14). In this case, prayer changed the mind of him who rules the universe! Moses surely found “relief” in prayer.

David, of the tribe of Judah, the eighth and youngest son of Jesse (1 Sam. 17:12-14), heroically defeated the mighty Goliath (1 Sam. 17:50, 51), was a skilled musician whose harp playing periodically “refreshed” King Saul (1 Sam. 16:23), and who for forty years served as Israel’s second king (2 Sam. 5:4, 5). Notwithstanding the fact that David was later described as a man after God’s “own heart”

(Acts 13:22), he had his moments of weakness in which he grievously sinned (cf. 2 Sam. 11). However, when made to realize the enormity of his own sin, David was swift to say, “I have sinned against the Lord” (2 Sam. 12:13). He wrote many of the psalms which abound in prayer and praise to God. Psalm 51 is thought to have been written after David’s illicit affair with Bathsheba. This psalm begins with David beseeching God to “have mercy upon me, O God, according to thy loving-kindness; according to the multitude of thy tender mercies blot out my transgressions” (v. 1). The psalm continued with David acknowledging his “transgressions,” asking God to “wash” him, to “create” in him “a clean heart,” and he later said, “My tongue shall sing aloud of thy righteousness” (v. 14). This psalm takes us from David praying to God for “mercy” to that of his praising God for deliverance. Yes, David found “relief” in “the sweet hour of prayer.” Consider Psalm 54:1 wherein David prayed, saying, “Save me, O God, by Your name, and vindicate me by Your strength” or Psalm 56:1 which begins with David praying, “Be merciful to me, O God, for man would swallow me up,” or Psalm 59:1 wherein David prayed, saying, “Deliver me from my enemies, O my God; Defend me from those who rise up against me.” Now go back and read further in each of these Psalms and you will note David praising God, saying, “He has delivered me out of all trouble” (54:7), he “kept my feet from falling” (56:13), and he is “my defense and refuge in the day of my trouble” (59:16). Many other similar examples could be cited, but surely these are sufficient to show that David’s soul “found relief” in “the sweet hour of prayer.”

The Apostle Paul was seemingly obsessed with the determination to capture the entire Roman Empire for Jesus Christ. He was God’s apostle to the Gentiles (Gal. 2:7). Acts chapters 13-28 depict Paul going out on “three missionary journeys” preaching the gospel of Christ and end with him traveling to Rome as a prisoner. He wrote thirteen books of the New Testament, and possibly fourteen (assuming that Hebrews was written by him). It seems as if nothing could quench his zeal for the Lord. But amid all his activities Paul found time to pray! At Philippi, he and Silas were apprehended, lied against, beaten, and cast into the inner prison with their feet “fastened . . . in the stocks.” However, instead of complaining, at midnight he and Silas “prayed and sang praises to God” (Acts 16:24, 25). Later, on his third journey as he was leaving Miletus and the elders of the church at Ephesus, “he knelt down and prayed with them all” (Acts 20:36). Continuing his journey, enroute to Jerusalem, the ship landed at Tyre where Paul found certain disciples, and as they began to depart, they “knelt down on the shore and prayed” (Acts 21:5). Near the beginning of nearly every epistle he wrote Paul mentioned the fact that he was praying for the brethren addressed in those letters (cf. Rom. 1:8; 1 Cor. 1:4; Eph. 1:16; Phil. 1:3, 4; Col. 1:3; 1 Thess. 1:2; 2 Thess. 1:3; 2 Tim. 1:3; Phile. 4). It was common for Paul to humbly request the brethren to pray for

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“Thy Wings Shall My Petitions Bear”

Christians have been enriched while singing the beautiful hymn, Sweet Hour of Prayer, written by the blind poet, William Walford in 1842. He recited this poem to Thomas Salmon, who copied it, and it first appeared September 13, 1845 in *The New York Observer*, and was set to music by William B. Bradbury (1861, information on the Internet). I recall singing this song from my early childhood; and it always positively affected my spiritual relationship. I am thankful to the author of this great hymn which has so enriched the followers of Christ for these many years.

God hears prayers uttered in secret. Matthew 6:6: “But thou, when thou prayest, enter into thy closet, and when thou hast shut thy door, pray to thy Father which is in secret; and thy Father which seeth in secret shall reward thee openly.” One cannot fully comprehend the complete nature

of God. How does anyone know my secret thoughts? By faith, we accept that God is all powerful and all knowing. He even knows our needs better than do we. In John 1:48-50 Nathanael asked Jesus, “Whence knowest thou me? Jesus answered and said unto him, Before that Philip called thee, when thou wast under the fig tree, I saw thee. Nathanael answered and saith unto him, Rabbi, thou art the Son of God; thou art the King of Israel. Jesus answered and said unto him, Because I said unto thee, I saw thee under the fig tree, believest thou? Thou shalt see greater things than these.” God does see and know all about us!

How does God hear our prayers? The poet speaks of prayer, “. . . thy wings shall my petitions bear.” This is an hyperbole, which is an “exaggeration for effect, not meant to be taken literally” (Webster). One must know that God

him, or to state specifically what it was that he petitioned God for in their behalf. Yes, Paul was a man of prayer. And you can be sure that he found “relief” in prayer, so much so that he urged the brethren “in everything by prayer and supplication” to let their “requests be made known to God,” and then assured them that “the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus” (Phil. 4:6, 7). Imagine the “relief” he obtained through prayer!

Jesus Christ prevailed in prayer. At his baptism “while He prayed, the heaven was opened, and the Holy Spirit descended in bodily form like a dove upon Him” (Luke 3:21, 22). On the night before “He called His disciples” Jesus “went out to the mountain to pray, and continued all night in prayer to God” (Luke 6:12, 13). On another occasion Jesus rose “a long while before daylight” and went out to “a solitary place” and prayed (Mark 1:35). Shortly before his betrayal and arrest, Jesus prayed to God for himself, for the disciples, and for those of us who believe on him through their words (John 17:1-26). After instituting the Lord’s supper, Jesus entered “a place called Gethsemane” and prayed, “O My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from Me; nevertheless, not as I will, but as You will” (Matt. 26:36-39). On this occasion he prayed three times, “saying

the same words” (Matt. 26:44). It is true that the “cup” of suffering did not pass from him, but Jesus found “relief,” for “an angel appeared to him from heaven, strengthening him” (Luke 22:43). Regarding this same event, the Hebrew writer later said he “was heard because of His godly fear” (Heb. 5:7). Yes, Jesus found “relief” through prayer. By reason of his death he became our High Priest (Heb. 2:9-17). And inasmuch as he was “tempted as we are, yet without sin,” Christians can now “come boldly to the throne of grace, . . . obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need” (Heb. 4:15,16). Thank God for the sweet “relief” scriptural prayer brings!

CONCLUSION

“And what more shall I say? For the time would fail me to tell of” (cf. Heb. 11:32) Elijah who prayed that it might not rain and it rained not (Jas. 5:17, 18), of Hannah who prayed for a son and later bore Samuel (1 Sam. 1), of King Hezekiah praying for deliverance from the Assyrians and God sending an angel who destroyed 185,000 Assyrian soldiers in one night (2 Kings 19), of Jonah who prayed from the belly of the whale and being delivered (Jonah 2:1, 10). Yes, friend, there is “relief” in prayer. Let us therefore “pray without ceasing” (1 Thess. 5:17)!

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will hear our prayer! And, why not “thy wings shall my petitions bear”? How do our prayers reach the ears of God?

God led Jacob through the wilderness. It was said of God, “He found him in a desert land, and in the waste howling wilderness; he led him about, he instructed him, he kept him as the apple of his eye. As an eagle stirreth up her nest, fluttereth over her young, spreadeth abroad her wings, taketh them, beareth them on her wings: So the Lord alone did lead him, and there was no strange god with him. He made him ride on the high places of the earth, that he might eat the increase of the fields” (Deut. 32:10-13). Look at the direction from the Lord — like the eagle teaches its young to spread their wings and bears them; so the Lord leads, directs, and bears us!

David said, “The Lord is my rock, and my fortress, and my deliverer; The Lord is my rock; in him will I trust: he is my shield, and the horn of my salvation; my high tower, and my refuge, my saviour; thou savest me from violence. I will call on the Lord, who is worthy to be praised: so shall I be saved from my enemies. . . . And he rode upon a cherub, and did fly: and he was seen upon the wings of the wind” (2 Sam. 22:2-4, 11). This shows through poetic beauty the wonders of God! Who has seen the “wings of the wind”? Look at these following passages.

Hide me under the shadow of thy wings (Ps. 17:8).

And he rode upon a cherub, and did fly: yea, he did fly upon the wings of the wind (18:10).

Be merciful unto me, O God, be merciful unto me: for my soul trusteth in thee: yea, in the shadow of thy wings will I make my refuge (57:1).

Because thou has been my help, therefore in the shadow of thy wings will I rejoice (63:7).

He shall cover thee with his feathers, and under his wings shalt thou trust (91:4).

If I ascend up into heaven, thou art there: if I make my bed in hell, behold, thou art there. If I take the wings of the morning, and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea; Even there shall thy hand lead me, and thy right hand shall hold me (139:8-10).

Read this beautiful passage, “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).

So, with these assurances from God, Mr. Walford quoted (as copied by Thomas Salmon),

Sweet hour of prayer! sweet hour of prayer!
Thy wings shall my petition bear
To Him whose truth and faithfulness
Engage the waiting soul to bless.

And since He bids me seek His face,
Believe His Word and trust His grace,
I'll cast on Him my every care,
And wait for thee, sweet hour of prayer!

What was the poet saying? Lord, we do not know the things that shall come upon us in these hours, but we do know Thee, and we know that You will hear our prayers. “Sweet Hour of Prayer” is a comprehension of:

- God’s truth and faithfulness. This is so often affirmed within Scriptures. We need to have that assurance, and wholly give ourselves to his will. We may not understand, but God will not mislead his people.

- Confidence that he does hear our prayer given even in secret. He cares, he answers; therefore, one can cast all cares to him (1 Pet. 5:7).

- Reassurance is ours. God does forgive our sins. God still loves me! The song reads, “. . . to Him whose truth and faithfulness, engage the waiting soul to bless!” God delights in his children! Do not be so hard upon yourself! When God forgives, he forgives; that is, he does not keep bringing that matter up over and over. We are cleansed! Accept his salvation!

- Hope will fill our hearts because we serve such a gracious God! Look in *Young’s Analytical Concordance* (490-491). Hope is confidence (Pss. 16:9; 78:7), expectation (Ps. 39:7; Prov. 10:28). Because of God’s promises (Acts 2:26), “Therefore . . . my flesh shall rest in hope.”

- Hope is the anchor to the soul (Heb. 6:19).

- Against hope, we believe in hope (Rom. 4:18).

- Hope makes us not ashamed (Rom. 5:5).

- Our hope is the eternal reward offered by God (Col. 1:5).

- Our helmet, the hope of salvation (1 Thess. 5:8).

- God has promised, and cannot lie (Tit. 1:2).

- Happiness is the by-product of the forgiven sinner. Many Christians live in fear, distrust, pain, unhappiness and sorrow. But, we are to be a people that trusts in God.

We need to go to that closet and pray in secret, knowing that God in secret will hear our prayers and answer them. In times of distress; in times of joy and fulfillment, in times of need, we need to pray to God with full knowledge and appreciation that on these “wings” my petition will reach the Father, who is love and he will grant our petition.

God is for us, who can be against us (Rom. 8:31)!

“The Joy I Feel and Bliss I Share”

A feeling of joy and bliss to share when I pray during that “SWEET HOUR OF PRAYER,” indicates that I believe in the God whom I address. There is no better test of faith

“Bliss” — the highest degree of happiness, a heavenly joy. The bliss I share cannot be shared unless I possess it. Sharing bliss evidences the highest degree of generosity and the greatest regard for those with whom it is shared. This is part of the action in engaging in the “Sweet Hour of Prayer.”

What a blissful joy comes from feeling that we are talking to God. How else could one feel if he had any fixed conviction of the magnificent power of God. He who sees the end from the beginning, is able to call things that are not as though they were, has but to speak the word and worlds burst into existence, and is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think (Eph. 3:20).

What a feeling of joy to understand that this God of ours condescends to allow us to talk to him and gives us divine assurance that he will adequately respond to our requests in spite of our own unworthiness: “Whatsoever we ask we receive of him, because we keep his commandments and do the things that are pleasing in his sight” (1 John 3:22). He demands no more than this of us, but will accept nothing less. In view of these promises, based upon these conditions, one would have to be turned into a pillar of salt not to have a joyous feeling. Persecutions may attack us before and distresses follow after, but at the time that we are engaged in the “Sweet Hour of Prayer,” those things are crowded out

of our minds by the “joy we feel and the bliss we share.”

This has to do with an emotional experience that comes from an intelligent decision. Just a feeling of joy might be deceptive because feelings are not a safe guide. Situations and circumstances can change feelings. Feelings are affected by what we believe without regard to whether that which we believe is true or false. Therefore, a feeling of joy must be based upon truth or it is deceptive and short-lived. But when the feeling of joy is the result of talking to God and meets the conditions, which God sets forth, it can produce nothing but a feeling of joy with a sincere desire to share the bliss.

However, if one is separate from Christ, he is without God and has no God to whom he can pray. In that event, he would have no joy or bliss to share. Such a one is without hope and without God as long as he resides in the world (Eph. 2:12). In this situation, of course, there can be no lasting joy. Any such feeling that one might think that he possessed would be a perverted joy. It is through Christ that we have access in one Spirit unto the heavenly Father (Eph.2:18). Without Christ we would be unable to even approach God in prayer with any assurance of being heard. Thus such prayers would be useless and worthless; there could be no feeling of joy or bliss! He who tunes away from hearing God’s law, even his prayer is an

abomination (Prov. 28:9). Therefore, enjoying the emotional experience of a joyous feeling that prefers to share that bliss requires one's meeting the conditions: "If I regard iniquity in my heart, the Lord will not hear" (Ps. 66:18). When one comes forth guilty, following judgment, his prayer is turned into sin (Ps. 109:7). This condition robs one of real joy and leaves him poor indeed with reference to any durable bliss.

All of this evidences the need of Christ if the hour of prayer is to be *sweet, joyful, and blissful*. Without him we would have no access to God. "Christ was delivered for (Greek, *dia*, Eng. "because of, on account of" — Spiros Zodhiates) our trespasses, and was raised for (*dia* — "because of, on account of, etc.") our justification" (Rom. 4:25). Not only was Christ delivered for (because) of our trespasses, he was also raised for (because) of our justification. Even though we stand *justified*, we still have a need of Christ not only to reach God's throne of grace in prayer, but especially in our daily walk. Without him there would be no joy or bliss in prayer for it would fall far short of its aim.

Christ now serves as our *advocate* and the propitiation (pacifier) of our sins to appease the wrath of God toward us because of our sins day by day even though we have been justified (1 John 2:1, 2). He is the one and only *mediator* between us and God (1 Tim. 2:5). Without his intermediate position, we would have no access to God in prayer or in anything else seeing he ever liveth to make *intercession* for us (Heb. 7:25). So "whatever we do in word or deed, we do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him" (Col. 3:17). Seeing that our Lord now serves as advocate, mediator, and intercessor, who can doubt our need of a resurrected savior? Without him we would be unable to reach God in prayer. Hence, there would be no joy or bliss to enjoy and no communion with God.

Not all prayers have a feeling of joy attached from a physical point of view. We are faced with an exhibition of differences. One which life presents is when a man and woman acknowledge their preference for each other at the marriage altar. There stands in the background awareness that one day the joy that is now theirs will be bathed in the tears of the survivor, regardless of the prayers to the contrary. But no such pain attaches to one's acceptable prayer to God. Therefore, we should never be discouraged from doing something through fear or doubt that we know to be right. If we want the best from our prayers to God, we must lean upon him regularly in this joyous activity and blissful sharing. Not only will this provide that for which we properly ask, but will afford us this inward feeling that comes from nothing else that we can do.

There are many promises made in the New Testament, but the joy and bliss that comes from a prayer that God hears is only one of those promises (1 John 5:14, 15).

The captivity in which Jesus found himself was not a pleasant surrounding attested to by his prayerful plea to his Father in heaven, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" Yet it must have been a feeling of joy to know that he had one who cared, upon whom he could call, and a blissful security that completely satisfies, to know that he could call down twelve legions of angels in his own defense.

T.B. Larimore put it like this: "Language of the loving Lord under most trying circumstances expressed in a prayer to the Father for those who nailed him to the cross and cursed him as he died: Father forgive them; for they know not what they do. . . . The human race is accustomed to striking contrasts. The hovel stands in the shadow of the palace; the pauper and the millionaire pass each other on the street; the bridal veil and the shroud touch each other. The life of Jesus presents some striking contrasts.

The babe of Bethlehem, the child of poverty in Mary's arms, had been the darling object of God's delight, his constant companion and bosom friend, from all eternity, and had stood at the foot of the throne of God, with admiring angels around, rejoicing to cast their crowns before him, while the stars that glitter were but dust beneath his feet. The man of sorrows, poorer than the foxes of the fields and the birds of the air, so poor that he had no place to lay his head . . . that sighing, suffering Son of the living God, kneeling down thrice upon the bosom of gloomy Gethsemane, while the mantle of dark night was thrown around him, pouring out his soul in prayer to the Lord Almighty to remove from him the bitter cup he was about to drink. . . . But all the contrasts that are presented to us do not show the Savior in a more glorious point of view, so far as the attractiveness of his divine spirit is concerned, than when on the cross he prays for murderers. . . . When the Savior offered that prayer . . . to the Father, who had sent him, in mercy, to save a lost and ruined, wrecked and recreant race. . . . While God had sent him, he had gladly come, being glad to do the Father's will, and glad especially to do anything that might stay the tide of sin and lift the sons and daughters of men from their wrecked and ruined state and bring them home to God." Who can doubt that this was a "feeling of joy with a bliss to share."

A feeling of joy and bliss to share when I pray during that "SWEET HOUR OF PRAYER," indicates that I believe in the God whom I address. There is no better test of faith than prayer.

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“With Strong Desire For Thy Return”

How important is prayer in your life? Do you pray often? If you are married or otherwise living with family, do you pray alone in addition to whatever group prayers may be offered? Or have you gotten to where prayer is just something of a habit or, worse, do you seldom pray outside of services except at meal time? The song we study in this series of articles deals with a time that is “sweet.” In this sense the word means, “Pleasing to the mind; gratifying” (*Webster’s New Universal Unabridged Dictionary* 1843). The “return” of the “hour of prayer” implies one’s continuance in prayer (Rom. 12:12; 1 Thess. 5:17). However, the Bible teaches us that this alone does not mean we have the proper attitude towards prayer (Matt. 6:5-6; Isa. 1:1-14). Is prayer time “sweet” in your life? Is it something you find yourself longing for? Why should it be so? Let us begin our study by looking at some reasons why we should have a “strong desire” for the “hour of prayer” in our lives.

WHY WE SHOULD HAVE A “STRONG DESIRE” TO PRAY

1. Prayer is to God. “In everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God” (Phil. 4:6). In a day when so many sources and resources are at our fingertips, let us never forget that no one to whom we can turn is so caring, constant, or able as our God whom we address in prayer (1 Pet. 5:7; Matt. 10:28; John 10:29; Eph. 3:21). Because prayer is to him “the supplication of a righteous man availeth much in its working” (Jas. 5:16). As 1 Kings 18:24-39 shows, prayer to any other supposed higher being — be it Baal or Allah — may give false comfort to the one offering it, but prayer to God brings results. He is indeed the “fount of every blessing,” our help in time of temptation and need (Acts 20:32; 14:17; Heb. 2:18; 4:16). It is meet that he be thanked for the many manifestations of his care to us (Eph. 5:20; 1 Thess. 5:18). Let us never take for granted or fail to appreciate the blessing it is to pray to God (Ps. 66:20).

2. Prayer is through Jesus. There are several points about Jesus being our intercessor or mediator that make prayer something to be both anticipated and desired (Heb.

7:25; 1 Tim. 2:5). The many miracles he worked testify to Jesus’ interest in our well-being (Matt. 20:28, 34; Mark 1:41; Luke 7:13). His anxious concern for the final salvation of man is not only shown by his death for the sins of man (Isa. 53; Heb. 10:8-18). He also has given us his word to guide us, pledged his faithfulness, shown himself to be both compassionate and “help of the helpless,” and “ever liveth to make intercession for us” (Heb. 9:14-17; Jas. 1:21; Heb. 13:5-6; Rom. 5:10; Matt. 9:39; Mark 4:35-5:43; Heb. 7:25). All of these things undergird the truths found in other songs we sing like “He Loved Me So” and “What a Friend We Have in Jesus.” What a blessing it is to pray *to God through Jesus!*

3. Our dependence upon God. “For of him, and through him, and unto him, are all things” (Rom. 11:36). “In him we live, and move, and have our being” and there is no salvation outside of his Son, Jesus (Acts 17:28; John 14:6; Acts 4:12). These facts may be ignored or forgotten by the lost or erring, but the faithful Christian recognizes his complete dependence on God. This makes the avenue of prayer precious, necessary and desirable (1 Tim. 6:17).

These are some reasons why our spirits should burn with a strong desire for the time or times during the day we have set aside to pray. These facts are directly connected with the kind of people who have such a desire.

SOME CHARACTERISTICS OF THOSE WHO HAVE A STRONG DESIRE TO PRAY

1. They recognize their own helplessness. Mark relates the accounts of the healing of the woman with the issue of blood and the raising of Jairus’ daughter (5:21-43). We hear sad stories from time to time. Think of the stories these two people could tell! However, they were not just in a sad or sorry state, *they were helpless*. How earnestly they both sought Jesus! Likewise with the publican in Luke 18:9-14. His simple prayer, “God, be thou merciful to me a sinner,” speaks volumes as to what he acknowledged his state to be. How differently he must have felt from the Pharisee as he “went up into the temple to pray” (v. 10). How his heart must have burned within him as anticipated pouring

out his heart before God!

2. They see God as the source of true help. The woman with the issue of blood “had suffered many things of many physicians, and had spent all that she had, and was nothing bettered, but rather grew worse” (Mark 5:26). She had no problem seeing that man could not help her. Such people’s heart will burn for any avenue which gives them access to God. We have a similar case with the Canaanite woman of Matthew 15:22-28. She came to Jesus and was ignored and rebuffed initially, but she still came away with an answer to her request. William Barclay’s comments on this passage are helpful:

This woman had *indomitable persistence*. . . . So many people, it has been said, pray really because they do not wish to miss a chance. They do not really believe in prayer; they have only the feeling that something might just possibly happen. *This woman came because Jesus was not just a possible helper; he was her only hope.* She came with a passionate hope, a claimant sense of need, and a refusal to be discouraged. She had the one supremely effective quality in prayer — *she was in deadly earnest.* Prayer for her was no ritual form; it was an outpouring of the passionate desire of her soul (*The Gospel of Matthew*, II:123-124, italics in original).

Combining the two points we have made under this heading, those who see their own helplessness and seek God as the source of true help *need God*. Such people will treat God like the God we described in our first point above. Prayer to God will be the earnest desire of their soul.

3. They want to thank God for blessings received. The psalmist wrote, “O Lord my God, I will give thanks unto thee for ever” (Ps. 30:12). This is an important reaction that the message of the gospel seeks to bring about. God’s people should “abound with thanksgiving” (Col. 2:7; 1 Thess. 5:18). Those aware of God’s attention to our

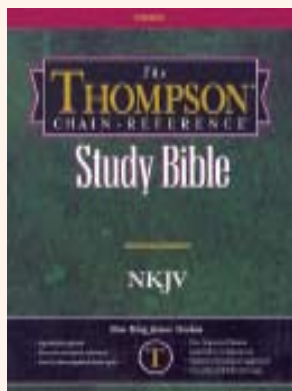
prayers, careful consideration of our state, righteous guidance, and intervention in this world for our good will *want* to thank God (1 Chron. 16:18; Pss. 34:4; 119:7; 145:6-10; Matt. 5:45; Acts 14:17; Phil. 4:5-6).

4. They have a sense of urgency with regards to their relationship to God. When distanced from the temple the psalmist wrote, “My soul thirsteth for God, for the living God: when shall I come and appear before God?” (Ps. 42:2). It was in one of those “seasons of distress and grief” that the psalmist expressed a “strong desire” to be before God. However, if we have a proper attitude towards our relationship with God, it will not only be at such times that our spirits “burn” for our time of prayer with him. Christians are to “hunger and thirst after righteousness,” seek God’s kingdom and righteousness first, and be “fervent in spirit” (Matt. 5:6; 6:33; Rom. 12:11). If they have sinned they will “be zealous and repent” (Rev. 3:19). Therefore, having a “strong desire” for a time to pray is just part of the pervading importance of a relationship with God in their lives.

CONCLUSION

There are good reasons to pray, and we should manifest the characteristics of those who both understand and believe these reasons. Concerning his second coming Jesus said, “Take ye heed, watch and pray: for ye know not when the time is” (Mark 13:33). As the Christian looks forward to each opportunity to pray, he also looks forward to the time when he will meet the Lord in person. Thus, the yearning for each opportunity to pray looks away to the time when we will “be with Christ; for it is very far better” (Phil. 1:23; cp. 2 Cor. 5:1-10). May we all develop and maintain such desire in our lives.

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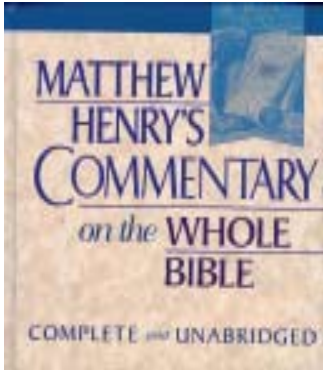


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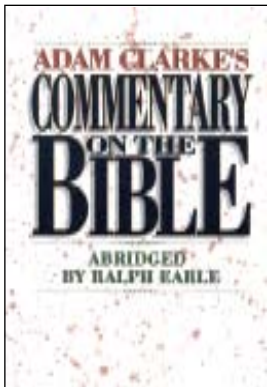
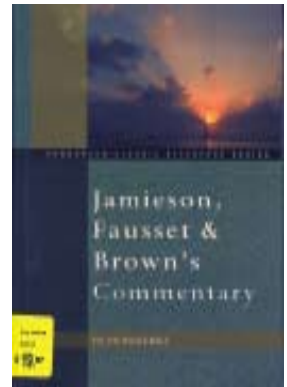
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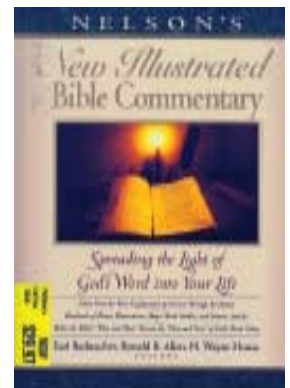
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“Where God My Savior Shows His Face”

Just take a look around you, do you see him? The face of God surrounds us, and sometimes we become so preoccupied in our own lives that we fail to recognize him, even when his face is staring right at us. When we recognize, through our faith in God, that he truly is everywhere about us, then we can live our life as a Christian fully engaged in communion with our Savior, seeing his face everywhere we go. In this article I want to address prayer as our “communion” with God.

COMMUNION WITH GOD

When we begin to see God as he wants us to see him, then our prayer life has progressed to a walking and talking relationship with him. Communion with God in prayer involves *praise, adoration, thanksgiving*, and even *confession*. This aspect of our prayer life truly edifies the Christian because we are humbled at the awesomeness of our Almighty God everywhere we go. I believe that we can understand fully the scope of our communion with God by reading the words of David in 1 Chronicles 29:11-15:

Yours, O Lord, is the greatness, The power and the glory,
The victory and the majesty; For all that is in heaven and
in earth is Yours; Yours is the kingdom, O Lord, And You
are exalted as head over all. Both riches and honor come
from You, And You reign over all.
In Your hand is power and might;
In Your hand it is to make great
And to give strength to all. “Now
therefore, our God, We thank You
And praise Your glorious name.
But who am I, and who are my
people, That we should be able
to offer so willingly as this? For
all things come from You, And of
Your own we have given You. For
we are aliens and pilgrims before
You, As were all our fathers; Our
days on earth are as a shadow, And
without hope.

When I read these words I fully realize how little I am and how big God is. Therefore, I know how much I need him and I know that he will always be here for me as long as I stay in constant communion with him. Every time we pray in the presence of almighty God, we are edified because prayer brings us closer in our relationship with him.

COMMUNION AS PRAISE AND ADORATION

God wants us to commune with him through prayer so that we will turn away from our preoccupation with ourselves, sometimes being imprisoned in self-centeredness. The very center of our lives should be transferred from ourselves to the living God. We begin humbling our life so as to be able to praise and adore him by understanding that our life has undergone a transformation when we became a Christian. The apostle Paul wrote:

I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service. And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God (Rom. 12:1-2).

When we fully understand his great love for us, then we can praise and adore him as we should. Every Christian who is deeply and devoted to God, loving him with all their heart, soul, mind, and strength will not be able to keep back their attitude of devotion and love. The Christian will continually praise him, understanding it is from God that all blessings flow and that he is the source of every good and perfect gift (Jas. 1:17). No



doubt we can remember when we have stood in the midst of a beautiful sunset; under a starlit sky; or taking in the beauty of a rainbow; or perhaps looking across a great valley from atop a high mountain. I remember the first time I stood at the rim of the Grand Canyon and gazed across it. All was quiet within and without and I still recall saying to myself, "This can only be accomplished by the mighty hand of God!" When we see such sights we become so absorbed with that which is outside ourselves that we cease to think of ourselves. When we behold such sights we usually shout to others to quickly come and behold the wonder of God. These things are experiences of praise and adoration. The same spirit of praise and adoration for Jehovah was also seen in the prayers of his followers whose names are recorded in the New Testament. The Hebrew writer stresses praise as the sacrifice we make to God with our lips: "Therefore by Him let us continually offer the sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of our lips, giving thanks to His name. But do not forget to do good and to share, for with such sacrifices God is well pleased" (Heb. 13:15-16).

COMMUNION AS THANKSGIVING

When we as Christians unselfishly adore and give ourselves wholly and unconditionally to God and intercede for our fellow men in Christian love and concern, we then find that our life becomes radiant with thankfulness. The fact is, the more we adore God, the more we thank him, the more we give ourselves completely to him, the deeper our gratitude is for being under his wise and loving providence. To the Christian a spirit of thanksgiving is a stable and persistent mood of perpetual thankfulness to God, and it is always rooted and grounded in a deep conviction that the whole of our life is under God's providence. However, sometimes in our desire to receive the blessings from God, not only can we be forgetful of rendering praise and adoration to him, but also of rendering him thanksgiving. Before one can genuinely express his gratitude one must first possess a gratitude that is felt. How can any Christian lovingly and appreciatively think about all the numerous blessings that he continually receives from God, and then not simply say, "I thank you, Father"? In Luke 17, the story is told of the Samaritan leper as the only one who returned and glorified God in thanksgiving. The response Jesus gave to this incident did not apply only to that moment in time but has served as an indictment to all ungrateful people even today: "Were there not ten cleansed? But where are the nine? Were there not any found who returned to give glory to God except this foreigner?" (Luke 17:17-18). Words of praise and adoration are given to God for what he is; words of thanksgiving are given to him for what he does. God has done so much for each one of us and that is why we have so much to be grateful for (Jas. 1:17; Acts 17:28; John 15:5)! In our communion with God we constantly thank him for all the physical things that we have been blessed with, things such as food, drink, clothing, and

shelter (Matt. 6:11; Deut. 8:17-18; Job 1:21; Ps. 50:10-12; Hag. 2:8). Grateful Christians will continually express gratitude for the physical things that sustain life on this earth. In addition, we should continually thank God for his care, protection, our families, and for fellow laborers in the kingdom. Paul's letters are full of personal expressions to God, expressing gratitude for those of his fellow Christians whose fellowship and the inspiration of their godly lives were of such great blessing to him. "I thank my God always concerning you for the grace of God which was given to you by Christ Jesus," "We give thanks to God always for you all, making mention of you in our prayers" (1 Cor. 1:4; 1 Thess. 1:2 — See also Phil. 1:3-5; Col. 1:3; 1 Thess. 3:9). There is so much to be thankful for and so as we see our Savior's face day by day, let us always be mindful to thank him for all the wonderful blessings he has bestowed upon us. He loves us and it really shows!

COMMUNION AS CONFESSION

We are not a perfect people. We do sin (Rom. 3:23). But to the Christian who sees the face of God in his daily walk, who has learned the power of prayer in praise, adoration, and in thanksgiving, has certainly learned that communion with God also includes being able to ask for forgiveness of sin. In communing with God in prayer it is necessary that we humble ourselves before God in an honest, forthright declaration and admission of our shortcomings. If our prayers are void of the confession of sins, then our prayer life is void of the spirit of humility. We must be able to recognize our own shortcomings and sin in our life. We must understand that God can see everything that we do, hear everything that we say, know how we act and treat others. Before one can be forgiven of sin, one must first acknowledge sin exists and then ask for that sin to be forgiven. The prodigal son soon came to understand this principle in Luke 15. Before he could have a renewed fellowship with his father, the son had to first acknowledge his sinful condition. Every Christian today can learn a great deal concerning the attitude that the prodigal son displayed in his confession, and, as a result, should confess sin in the same manner. Sins committed against men are to be confessed to them (Matt. 5:23-24; 18:15; Jas. 5:16); but since *all* sins are against God, it is needful that sins be confessed to him. We are told by the inspired writer in 1 John 1:9: "If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness." The Christian should humbly admit in prayer that he has sinned. When we are able to commune with God on a continual basis, confessing our sins to him, asking for forgiveness, then our soul can be refreshed as we move forward in life progressing on toward spiritual maturity.

CONCLUSION

It is so good to have a heavenly Father who loves us and wants to hear from us. He wants us to ask him for everything that we need, even though he already knows

Joe R. Price

An Example of Prayer: Jesus in the Garden

Perhaps no other scene in the life of our Lord Jesus Christ so vividly depicts the humanity of Emmanuel (Phil. 2:6-8) than his prayer in the garden of Gethsemane. Being in tremendous agony and sorrowful to the point of death (Luke 22:44; Matt.26:38), Jesus fell on the ground and pleaded three times, with strong crying and tears and sweat as it were great drops of blood falling down to the ground, that the cup of suffering might pass from him (Mark 14:35; Matt. 26:39-44; Heb. 5:7; Luke 22:42-44). Unlike any previous attempts made by his enemies to kill him, such as the time they tried to toss him from the top of a cliff (Luke 4:28-30) and their attempt to stone him to death (John 8:59), Jesus was unable to avoid this cup of suffering for the time was finally at hand that he should suffer death (John 7:30; Matt. 16:21). Jesus sought the one and only avenue through which there was power to save him from the excruciating pain of torture and crucifixion: praying to his Heavenly Father. His agonizing distressful

exactly what we need. Persistent prayer can affect the will of God. We can influence God just as Abraham persuaded God to spare Sodom if just ten righteous inhabitants could be found. Persistent praying also affects us. When we can sincerely pray as Jesus did in Gethsemane, “Not my will, but thine be done” (Luke 22:42), our wills are changed and brought into harmony with the will of God. Brethren and friends, this can happen and will happen when we truly commune with God as we walk hand in hand with him each and every day of our life. We become close to God when we commune with God. There is no other way to be close to him. God talks to us through his holy word, the Bible. We talk to him through prayer in praise and adoration, thanking him for all the blessings that he has bestowed upon us, and by confessing sin in our life. Let me close by asking, “Can you see where God my Savior shows His face?”

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plea for his Father to remove the cup of suffering from him gives us perhaps the biggest window by which we may view the absolute humanity of the Christ: the dreadful fear of pain, suffering, and death.

Jesus knew all too well just how large this cup was and just how full it was to be filled with unbearable pain and suffering, as it was described in precise detail through prophecy what would befall the Messiah. He would be betrayed by Judas, his own familiar friend, for the price of thirty pieces of silver, which would later be thrown into the temple and used to purchase the potter’s field (Ps. 41:9; Zech. 11:12-13). Upon his arrest, he would be completely abandoned by all of his disciples (Zech. 13:7). Standing trial on the testimony of false witnesses, he would remain silent before them all (Ps. 35:11; Isa. 53:7). Beaten and tortured, he would be cruelly mocked and spat upon (Isa. 53:5; 50:6; Ps. 22:7-8). So weakened from the relentless beating and scourging, he would fall beneath the weight of his own cross he would be forced to carry (Ps. 109:24-25). They would pierce his hands and feet, being crucified between two thieves (Ps. 22:16; Isa. 53:12). Though rejected by his own people and hated without a cause, the merciful Jesus would plead to his Father to forgive them (Isa. 53:3; Ps. 69:4, 8; Isa. 53:12). His friends were standing afar off and those near the cross stare and shake their heads at the accused blasphemer, while soldiers cast lots for his parted garments (Ps. 38:11; 109:25; 22:17-18). Offered vinegar mixed with an anesthetic, Jesus would refuse to drink and numb the pain, and would later cry out for thirst and be given vinegar to drink (Ps. 69:21). He would cry out from being forsaken by his God, and before his death, would commit his spirit into the hands of his Father (Ps. 22:1; 31:5). During his bitter agony and suffering, darkness would fall over the land for three hours (Amos 8:9). Dying before they had opportunity to break his legs, preventing him from being able to push up for a breath prolonging the inevitable, none of his bones would be broken. A Roman soldier would pierce his side (Ps. 34:20; Zech. 12:10). And finally, after removing his body from the cross, he would

be buried in a rich man's tomb (Isa. 53:9).

How important was it that these prophetic events be fulfilled in Jesus? So vitally important that John says their fulfillment in Jesus' death has the power to convince the unbeliever that Jesus is the Christ sent to take away the sins of the world. "And he that saw it bare record, and his record is true: and he knoweth that he saith true, that ye might believe. For these things were done, that the scripture should be fulfilled, A bone of him shall not be broken. And again another scripture saith, They shall look on him whom they pierced" (John 19:35-37). "But these are written, that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing ye might have life through his name" (John 20:31). Jesus himself relied upon the power of fulfilled prophecy in his suffering death to convince two doubters that he was the Messiah. "O fools, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken: ought not Christ to have suffered these things, and to enter into his glory? And beginning at Moses and all the prophets, he expounded unto them in all the Scriptures the things concerning himself" (Luke 24:25-27).

Understanding the powerful effect his suffering and pain in its fulfillment of over twenty Old Testament prophecies would have upon imparting belief in Jesus to be the Christ, how could Jesus ask three times for prophecy to remain unfulfilled in his deliverance? Could God let these numerous prophecies that would lead others to the identity of the Christ just fall by the wayside? How could the prophecy that his hands and feet would be pierced be fulfilled if the cup of suffering in the cross be removed from him? The answer to these difficulties is found in a statement that Mark records Jesus uttering in his prayer, that neither Matthew nor Luke state, which also teaches a remarkable lesson about the nature of prayer. "Abba, Father, all things are possible unto thee; take away this cup from me" (Mark 14:36). Apparently, Jesus had absolutely no doubts about the ability of God to save him from the painful torture of the cross and still fulfill prophecy (Heb. 5:7). How? I haven't the slightest idea how God could accomplish that task, but the minute I dismiss the possibility, I deprive myself of the most powerful gift God has given to me in the blessing of prayer: to ask God to accomplish those things which are impossible to be achieved by men. "The things which are impossible with men are possible with God" (Luke 18:27).

The Holy Spirit has given us numerous examples of the ability God's servants have to change God's mind through the avenue of prayer. When God's anger burned against the Israelites for their idolatrous worship of the golden calf during the imparting of the Law to Moses on Mount Sinai, Moses was able to plead to God and change his decision to destroy them. "Now therefore, let me alone, that my wrath may wax hot against them, and that I may consume them . . . And Moses besought the Lord His God, and said . . .

Turn from thy fierce wrath, and repent of this evil against thy people . . . And the Lord repented of the evil which he thought to do unto his people" (Exod. 32:10-14). Hezekiah experienced a similar blessing of changing God's mind through prayer. "Thus saith the Lord . . . thou shalt die, and not live . . . Then he turned his face to the wall, and prayed unto the Lord . . . And it came to pass . . . thus saith the Lord . . . I have heard thy prayer . . . I will heal thee" (2 Kings 20:1-5). Both Jeremiah and the angel Gabriel summed up the boundaries and limitations in making requests to God. "Ah Lord God! Behold, thou hast made the heaven and the earth by thy great power and stretched out arm, and there is nothing too hard for thee" (Jer. 32:17). "For with God nothing shall be impossible" (Luke 1:37).

Jesus understood this great truth about the power of prayer. There is nothing too complicated or difficult to be accomplished by God that we can't request it to be granted through the glorious blessing of prayer. But we know the rest of the story. Jesus did drink the cup of suffering that was appointed for him. He was betrayed, handed over, beaten and scourged. He was spit upon, nailed to a cross, and forsaken by God. Was his Father's refusal to grant Jesus' humble request to be saved from this fate because of the difficulty and virtual impossibility for such a thing to happen? Obviously, as we see through Scripture, it was not impossible for God to do. The reason his request was denied is answered in the end of Jesus' prayer: "O my Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me: nevertheless, not as I will, but as thou wilt . . . O my Father, if this cup may not pass away from me, except I drink it, thy will be done" (Matt. 26:39, 42). Understanding that while nothing is impossible with God, and that God was very well able through his supreme divine power to save his Son from death, Jesus also understood quite well that God will only accomplish those things that are his desire and will to do. As much as I cannot possibly understand how God could accomplish the deliverance of Jesus from death and still fulfill prophecy pointing at him to be the Christ, I just as well cannot understand God's reasoning behind his decision to let Jesus die. "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). God never asked Jesus to understand his reasoning, but rather to submit and obey to his will. "Though he were a Son, yet learned he obedience by the things which he suffered; and being made perfect, he became the author of eternal salvation unto all them that obey him" (Heb. 5:8-9).

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Paul's Sweet Hour Of Prayer

And lest I should be exalted above measure through the abundance of the revelations, there was given to me a thorn in the flesh, the messenger of Satan to buffet me, lest I should be exalted above measure. For this thing I besought the Lord thrice, that it might depart from me. And he said unto me, My grace is sufficient for thee: for my strength is made perfect in weakness. Most gladly therefore will I rather glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me. Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in necessities, in persecutions, in distresses for Christ's sake: for when I am weak, then am I strong (2 Cor. 12:7-10).

Our passage comes from a section of 2 Corinthians in which Paul was doing something he didn't like to do — defend his apostleship. Paul did not like to “boast” about himself, but he found it necessary given the circumstances. False teachers had made prey of weak Christians in Corinth by convincing them that Paul was not an apostle.

In chapter 11, Paul reminded them of his conduct among them, his Hebrew lineage, and the things he had suffered as an apostle. Paul viewed these sufferings as marks of his apostleship (cf. Gal. 6:17). In chapter 12:1-6 (speaking of himself in the third person), he told them of a time, fourteen years previous, that he was caught up into the presence of God and heard inexpressible words not lawful for him to utter. Paul did not want to boast of this divine favor he received, but he told it as a fact to see if the false teachers had experienced anything like it.

This brings us to the text under consideration. Paul revealed that, in addition to the heavenly vision, he was given a “thorn in the flesh.” The identity of this thorn has brought endless speculation. Some believe it was the trouble caused by the false teachers at Corinth. Others believe it was an emotional struggle: either guilt over past sins or struggles with fleshly lusts. Still others suggest it was a physical ailment: epilepsy, severe headaches, or poor eyesight. Some have even suggested that it was a speech impediment or a disfigurement that made Paul's appearance offensive to others. The word “thorn” is translated from the Greek word *skolops*, which generically refers to “anything pointed.”

Our text is the only place that this Greek word is used in the New Testament. It appears, from the language of this passage, that this “thorn” was a physical ailment as painful and troublesome as a literal thorn in the flesh would be, and one which was reoccurring. However, no one can know for certain what Paul's thorn in the flesh was. Why didn't Paul make things easy on all of us and just identify what this thorn was? There is actually a benefit to not knowing. The strength, understanding, and hope found in this passage are for everyone who is suffering, regardless of what his “thorns” may be.

We don't know what the thorn was, but we do know what it was for — to humble Paul. Before his conversion, Paul was a very proud man (1 Tim. 1:13 — “injurious” means “a violently arrogant person”). His elevated role as an apostle would give him reason to be proud. His privileged revelation in verses 1-6 would only increase this threat. If Paul had a weakness, apparently it was a tendency to be arrogant. The thorn had a purpose, to keep him humble.

Paul admits that he did not understand or appreciate the positive role that this “thorn” could have. When he first received it, he saw it only as a burden to be removed. His thorn drove him to God in prayer. His prayer was answered, but not the way he expected. In this communion with the Lord, Paul learned some things about his thorn, about himself, and about the way God works in the lives of those who serve him.

THE EFFECTIVENESS OF URGENT, REPETITIOUS PRAYER

Some people treat prayer like a wish list. If they get what they ask for, fine, if they don't, fine. This is not the way Paul prayed on this occasion. He “besought the Lord thrice” (v. 8). “Besought” is translated from the Greek *parakaleo*, which means “to call to one's side or aid, to beg, to entreat, to strive to appease by entreaty.” It is translated elsewhere in the New Testament as “to beg,” “to plead with,” and “to urge.” This was not a mere wish. Paul was *begging* the Lord *repeatedly* about this matter.

“The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth

much” (Jas. 5:16b). “Effectual fervent” is translated from the Greek word *energeo*. One can easily see the English word “energy” in this word. It means “to be operative, to put forth power, to be active.” It is often translated “to work” in the New Testament.

Prayer works if we *work* it. Paul *worked* it. He pleaded with the Lord three times about this matter; the same number of times his Lord prayed in the Garden of Gethsemane. I believe it is significant for us to observe that Paul did not receive the answer to his prayer until after repeated supplications. If we expect our prayers to avail anything, we must pray earnestly and fervently unto the Lord.

GOD’S WAYS ARE NOT OUR WAYS

The effectual fervent prayer of this righteous man *was* answered, but not the way he thought it should be. How many times do people keep looking for the answers to prayers that God has already answered? My wife and I are trying to teach our children that “No” *is* an answer. Regardless of how often they continue to ask, the answer is still “No.” The same is true for God. Sometimes God will answer our prayers with a “No.” “No” may not be the answer that we want, but it is often the answer that we need. The sooner we learn to accept God’s “No’s,” the better off we will be.

Paul learned this lesson. It would be to his immediate physical benefit if his thorn was removed, but there were long-term spiritual benefits if it remained. It was not God’s will that the thorn be removed. It was working to keep Paul humble. Instead of removing it, God answered the prayer with a promise of strength to endure it. This strength supplied with the thorn was needed by Paul, and it was something that Paul could never have accomplished on his own.

By coming to see things God’s way, Paul changed his point of view. Instead of pleading for the thorn’s removal, he took pleasure in it and accepted it as a gift, understanding that it was accomplishing a great work in him. The purpose of prayer is not getting God to do our will, but coming to see and accept God’s will.

GOD WILL PROVIDE OUR STRENGTH

TV evangelists like to promise that God will make all of our problems go away. God has never promised such, and this passage is a perfect example. God has not promised to deliver us *from* our trials and pain, but he has promised to deliver us *through* them.

“My grace is sufficient for thee” (2 Cor. 12:9). Grace has a number of meanings. The general definition is “unmerited favor,” but as it is used here, Vine says it is “the power and equipment for ministry.” It is used this way by Paul several times in the New Testament (Rom. 1:5; 1 Cor.

3:10; 15:9-10; Gal. 2:9; Eph. 3:2, 7-8).

Strength to endure the trials of life is not found in a bottle, pipe, or pill. It is not found by escaping reality or running away from our responsibilities. It is found in Christ (Phil. 4:12-13), and it is obtained only when we realize our weakness and surrender to it. “For my strength is made perfect in weakness” is one of the paradoxes of the gospel. It often takes a tragedy, in which every effort is failed and exhausted, before some see their need for God. This is just as true for struggling Christians as it is for unbelievers.

GOD CONFOUNDS THE WORK OF SATAN

Paul knew where this painful hindrance came from. It was a “messenger of Satan.” Paul was a great enemy to the efforts of Satan. His success in spreading and defending the gospel was obviously something that Satan would want to stop. Paul was correct in seeing that this came from Satan, but what he did not realize was how God could use it to his benefit.

God was able to take this debilitating work of Satan and turn it back on him. Instead of weakening Paul, God used it to humble him and make him better. This thorn in the flesh may have been the work of Satan, but it became the gift of God.

God has been doing things like this to Satan all along. The greatest victory ever won was when God took the death of his Son and turned it into salvation for mankind. God can do the same thing for us today, but the success depends on us. We have to see and realize the good that God intends as a result of the trials we have to face, and we have to accept those trials. God only knows how many times he has confounded the efforts of Satan because his people could see what he was doing and cooperate with his efforts.

CONCLUSION

What made this a sweet hour of prayer for Paul? The way many people view our subject, they would say that prayer failed Paul on this occasion. However, Paul did not see it that way. He may not have received what he asked for, but God gave him what he needed. Because of this prayer, Paul was able to take pleasure in his weakness, having come to see it as an instrument of God working to make him better. Paul now found the strength and assurance he needed to overcome every hindrance Satan placed in his way. May God give us the wisdom to find such in our sweet hours of prayer as well.

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Kinds Of Prayer

Many of the kinds of prayer that are discussed within the pages of the Bible have, no doubt, been discussed in the other articles of this special issue. Of particular importance it should be noted that the kind of prayer we are assured God hears and answers must be one which is authorized (i.e., in agreement with his will as it is revealed in his word, cf. John 15:7; 1 John 5:14), unselfish (i.e., its ultimate focus should be on God's glory; cf. Luke 22:42; John 17:21, 23; Acts 4:29; Jas. 4:3), confident (cf. Matt. 21:22; Mark 11:24; Jas. 1:6-8), and offered in humility (cf. Heb. 5:7 "feared," KJV). Other types of prayer that are mentioned in Scripture are private (cf. Matt. 6:6) and public (cf. Matt. 18:19; Acts 4:23-31; 12:12; 21:5) prayers.

PRAYERS AND SUPPLICATIONS

It may be said that a prayer is a petition of God. That subject is also discussed in at least one of the other articles of this special series. It may be that supplications (Acts 1:14; Eph. 6:18; Phil. 4:6; 1 Tim. 2:1; 5:5) are also addressed in that article. If so, we see that the term "prayer" and "supplication" may be used interchangeably, but that a supplication may also differ from a prayer in that it is a more intense form of prayer. In most places where we find the English word "supplication" it is translated from the Greek, *deesis*. The King James Version most often translates *deesis*, as "prayer/prayers," and one time as "request" (Phil. 1:4). The demonstration of a supplication may be the non-pretentious (cf. Matt 6:7; 23:14) duration of the prayer (cf. Luke 6:12). A supplication may also be demonstrated by the posture of the one offering the supplication (cf. 1 Kings 18:24; Matt 26:39), or it may be accompanied by tears (cf. Heb. 5:7) and/or fasting (cf. Matt. 17:21; Acts 9:8, 11b; 13:3; 14:23).

PRAYERS OF PRAISE

The Bible contains many examples of what may be called "Prayers of Praise." Hannah's prayer, found in 1 Samuel 2:1-10 is one such example. At the close of his reign, David offered a prayer of praise and thanksgiving, along with a humble request on behalf of his son and heir, Solomon (1 Chron. 29:10-19). Mary lifted her voice in prayer and praise to God (Luke 1:46-55).

Many of the Psalms praise God for his attributes and general goodness toward mankind and the people of God, in particular (cf. Pss. 8; 9; 18; 19; 22; 23; 24; 29; 30; 33; 34; 36; 40; 46; 47; 48; 50; 65; 66; 68; 75; 76; 77; 81; 85; 91; 92; 93; 95; 96; 97; 98; 99; 100; 103; 104; 105; 107; 108; 111; 113; 114; 115; 116; 117; 118; 121; 124; 126; 129; 134; 135; 136; 138; 139; 144; 147; 148; 150). Prayers of praise teach us that praying is not just about us and our needs, but that the end of our request of God for his attention and intervention is to be his praise and glory.

PRAYERS OF THANKFULNESS

Colossians 2:7 instructs Christians to be, "rooted and built up in him, and stablished in the faith, . . . abounding therein with thanksgiving." Chapter three, verse fifteen simply reminds us to be thankful. We are to be thankful for all that God has given us, and we are to express our gratitude to God (cf. Ps. 50:14; Eph. 5:20; Col. 3:17; Heb. 13:15). The absence of gratitude contributes to the absence of godliness and righteousness (cf. Rom. 1:21).

Colossians 4:2 instructs us to "continue in prayer, and watch in the same with thanksgiving." The admonition to "watch" in prayer calls to our mind the responsibility of a soldier who is "on watch"; he must be attentive to his responsibility for the good of himself, his fellow soldiers, and the cause he is defending. A soldier who lapses in his attention to his duty weakens his position and thus, the defense of his unit. In addition, the cause he is defending may be lost. Prayer is a valuable and powerful weapon in the arsenal of the armor of God (cf. Eph. 6:10-18). We should be thankful that we have it and all things that God has provided in Christ.

1 Thessalonians 5:18 instructs us; "In every thing give thanks: for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning you." Some particular things for which we are to be thankful are, as we saw in the first paragraph of this section, Christ and our faith (Col 2:7). Jesus taught us to be pray to God with our concern for our "daily bread" (cf. Matt. 6:11; Luke 11:3). While this would include our food, it encompasses all of our daily needs for physical survival.

By example, Jesus taught us to be thankful for our “daily bread” and the memorial emblems of his sacrifice (cf. Matt. 15:36; Mark 8:6; John 6:11, 23; Mark 14:23; Luke 22:17, 19; 1 Cor. 11:24). Paul exemplified the appropriateness of giving thanks for our food (Acts 27:35). The Holy Spirit, through Paul, taught that giving thanks was one element that set apart food as appropriate for human consumption (1 Tim. 4:4-5).

We are to be thankful for brothers and sisters in Christ and make mention of them in our prayers (cf. Eph. 1:16; Col. 1:3; 1 Thess. 1:2; 2 Tim. 1:3; Phile. 4). Many brotherhood difficulties could be avoided if we first demonstrated that we were thankful for one another and we prayed for one another.

Philippians 4:6 instructs us to, “Be careful (*worrisome*) for nothing; but in every thing by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God.” We are to be thankful for God’s answer to our prayer even before we see his answer to it.

THE PRAYER OF SORROW

James 5:13 reads, “Is any among you afflicted? let him pray. . . .” Times of sorrow are times when we realize we most need God, but they may also be times when we find ourselves wondering if he cares. We only add to our sorrow when we doubt God’s interest in our personal concerns. The Holy Spirit, through Peter, reminds us to cast “all your care upon Him; for He cares for you. Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walks about, seeking whom he may devour: Whom resist steadfast in the faith, knowing that the same afflictions are accomplished in your brethren that are in the world” (1 Pet. 5:7-9).

Hannah’s prayer was partially motivated sorrow (1 Sam. 1:15). Jesus turned to prayer in his time of great sorrow (Matt. 26:37-44; Mark 14:34-42; Luke 22:42-44). Although his friends failed him in their watch with him, he found renewed courage and strength in his commitment to the will of his Father. Likewise, when the apostles were threatened by the high priest, rulers, elders, and scribes of the Jewish nation, they returned to the brethren and entered into prayer that they would not succumb to the threats, but that they would continue to speak God’s word with all confidence and boldness (Acts 4:23-31). These are only a few of the wonderful examples of people who prayed in their time of sorrow. They are examples that encourage us to pray in our time of sorrow.

THE PRAYER OF INTERCESSION

The final kind of prayer we would like to consider in this article is the prayer of intercession. God’s word teaches us to intercede in prayer on behalf of others.

Jesus interceded in prayer on behalf of Peter. Luke

22:31-32 records, “And the Lord said, 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.” All souls belong to God (Ezek. 18:4). Satan desires to have them all. God, through the demonstration of his love for us in the sacrifice of his Son on our behalf (John 3:16) has proved that he is not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance (2 Pet. 3:9). Therefore, we know that the prayer of intercession on behalf of one whose soul is in jeopardy is in agreement with the will of God. James 5:16 instructs us, “Confess your faults one to another, and pray one for another, that ye may be healed. The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much.” Acts 8:24 is an example of a request for intercessory prayer, “Then answered Simon, and said, Pray ye to the Lord for me, that none of these things which ye have spoken come upon me.”

1 John 5:13-21 gives additional instruction in intercessory prayer on behalf of one who has sinned. Here, a distinction is made between “a sin unto death” and them “that sin not unto death.” We know that, “the wages of sin is death” (Rom. 6:23a). The rebellious practice of any and all sin results in spiritual death, i.e., separation from God. However, “the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord” (Rom. 6:23b). Reconciliation, redemption, and spiritual life are available to all who will trust God and turn from their sin to practice his righteousness. Therefore, “If any man see his brother sin a sin not unto death, he shall ask, and He shall give him life for them that sin not unto death” (I John 5:16a; cf. Jas. 5:14-20). The sin “not unto death” may be a sin of ignorance or immaturity of which one may be guilty, but for which God will extend mercy. It most certainly includes a sin from which one turns to renew his commitment to Christ. The “sin unto death” is the sin in which one rebelliously continues after loving efforts to restore such a one with the truth of God’s word. Although we may pray that such a one will repent and return to Christ, we may not pray that God will forgive such a one in spite of his rebellion and rejection of God’s word. He has “trodden under foot the Son of God, and has counted the blood of the covenant, wherewith he was sanctified, an unholy thing, and has insulted the Spirit of grace.” Such a one can expect the righteous vengeance of God (Heb. 10:26-31).

As seen in the incident of Jesus with Peter, a key element to the prayer of intercession is that the one for whom you are praying knows that you are interceding in prayer on his behalf. It’s quite possible that the apostles heard the intercessory prayer of Jesus on their behalf; that part of the prayer that was for our benefit was recorded for us (John 17).

1 Timothy 2:1-3 reads, “I exhort therefore, that, first of all, supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of

Prayerlessness

Prayer may be the most neglected obligation that we have in our Christian life. Notice I said obligation. We need to understand that we have an obligation to God, to spend time with him in prayer. God has chosen through the avenue of prayer for you and me to spend time with him and build a relationship with him as a Father with a child. Note the following commands:

Continue instant in prayer (Rom. 12:12).

Praying always with all prayer and supplication (Eph. 6:18).

Be anxious in nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known unto God (Phil. 4:6).

Continue in prayer and watch in the same (Col. 4:2).

... and watch in prayer (1 Pet. 4:7).

Pray without ceasing, in everything give thanks for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning you (1 Thess.

thanks, be made for all men; For kings, and for all that are in authority; that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and honesty. For this is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Savior.” Although there are those who have authority over us, it is humbling and comforting to know that we can intercede on behalf of them and their responsibilities and that God hears and answers our prayers. We are to pray even for our enemies (Matt. 5:44), for, after all, God desires that they trust and obey him, also.

The avenue of prayer is a wonderful blessing. May we be “praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, and watching thereunto with all perseverance and supplication for all saints” (Eph. 6:18).

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5:17).

You can't read these passages, and a myriad of others like them, without understanding the fact that God desires for you to spend time with him in prayer. Listen my friend, God does not want what you have, he wants you. He wants to spend time with you and build a relationship with you through the avenue of prayer.

What makes a house a home? Is it not the relationships that we develop between a husband and a wife, and parents with their children? We are God's family and he wishes to build that closeness, that trust, that dependence that we all have with our families.

In Matthew 14:23 I read, “And when He (Jesus) had sent them away, he went up into a mountain to pray. . . .” Every night, and every day, Jesus made the time to pray to his Father. If he felt like he needed prayer so badly in his life, why don't we? Some say they're to busy. We're not to busy, we just don't feel the need. What brings the need? Pain. Something goes wrong in our life and we are driven to prayer. God doesn't desire such. God wishes you to use prayer as an avenue to build a relationship with him where you depend upon him, and cast your cares, concerns, and thanksgivings to him daily.

In Matthew 6:6, Jesus said, “ But thou, when thou prayest, enter into thy closet, and when thou hast shut thy door, pray to thy Father which is in secret; and thy Father which seeth in secret shall reward thee openly.” We need to spend time alone with God in prayer. Quiet, calm, deliberate, prayer and meditation, where we are building a relationship with him that we need so desperately and he desires.

What I want us to understand is that there are some dire consequences when we commit the sin of prayerlessness. It is really a domino effect that eventually ends with ruin when we don't spend the time we need daily with God in prayer.

BURDEN BEARING

When we commit the sin of prayerlessness, we begin to

bear burdens that we were never intended to bear alone. God never intended for his children to face the trials and temptations of this life all by themselves. The Psalmist wrote, “Cast thy burden on the Lord, and He shall sustain thee, He shall never suffer the righteous to be moved” (Ps. 55:22). And again Peter wrote, “Cast all your cares upon Him, for He careth for you” (1 Pet. 5:7).

Someone says, “I have so many burdens to bear.” Why? Because you have failed to take it to him in prayer. Paul said, “Be anxious about nothing, but in every thing by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God” (Phil. 4:6). I hear brethren say, “I don’t take everything to God in prayer.” Why not? God desires that relationship with you. If my children had problems that were causing them any concern, I would be greatly upset if they didn’t bring their problems to me. So it is with God. When we commit the sin of prayerlessness, we begin to bear burdens we were never intended to bear alone.

WEARY

When we begin to carry burdens we were never intended to bear alone, we become weary. Jesus said, “Come unto me all ye that are weary and are heavy laden” (Matt. 11:28). We must go to God in prayer to find the help we need before we become weary. When we become weary, then the devil has us where he wants us. Peter wrote, “Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour” (1 Pet. 5:8). I’ve watched with much interest the documentaries on the lion on such channels as Animal Planet. Do you know whom the lion devours? You guessed it. The tired, the lame, the weary. When we commit the sin of prayerlessness, we become weary from our burdens and become easy pray for the devil.

DISCOURAGED

When we commit the sin of prayerlessness, we begin to bear burdens we were never intended to bear alone, then we become weary, and then we become discouraged. “Lord, things aren’t working out. Where are you? Why is this happening?”

God said to Joshua, “Only be thou strong and very courageous, that thou mayest observe to do according to all the law, which Moses my servant commanded thee: turn not from it to the right hand or to the left, that thou mayest prosper whithersoever thou goest. This book of the law shall not depart out of thy mouth; but thou shalt meditate therein day and night, that thou mayest observe to do according to all that is written therein: for then thou shalt make thy way prosperous, and then thou shalt have good success” (Josh. 1:7-8).

Meditate on God’s law and go to your closet and spend

time with him in prayer. Our problem is a lack of focus. Recently I had a splinter in my little pinky finger. It hurt badly. I was reduced to a three-year old child begging my wife to be more gentle as she used a needle to get it out. Then I got to thinking about that episode. Here I have all of this body, but all I am focused on is the end of my little pinky finger! That’s like discouragement. We lose our focus on God, because we’re not spending time with him in prayer, talking with him, building a relationship with him, and we begin to focus on all of the little irritations of this life.

Jesus said, “And take heed to yourselves lest at anytime your hearts be overcharged with surfeiting and drunkenness, and the cares of this life.” How Lord, how do I do this? “Watch ye therefore and pray always” (Luke 21:34, 36). When we commit the sin of prayerlessness, we become discouraged.

DOUBT

When we commit the sin of prayerlessness, we then begin to doubt. We begin to doubt in Christianity, in God’s promises, in God himself. Prayerlessness breeds doubt. Doubt is one of the greatest threats to the Christian. The Hebrew writer said, “For without faith it’s impossible to please Him” (Heb. 11:6) and again, “Take heed brethren, lest there be in any of you and evil heart of unbelief” (Heb. 3:12). A Christian can lose his faith and becoming prayerless is a sure fire way to lose it.

I hear folks say, “I just don’t know anymore, life seems so cruel. I have so many problems. It just doesn’t seem right. If there is a God, then why. . . .” When we commit the sin of prayerlessness, we begin to doubt. Jude exhorted, “But ye, beloved building up yourselves on your most holy faith . . . How? . . . praying in the Holy Spirit” (Jude 20). When we commit the sin of prayerlessness, we begin to doubt.

DISILLUSIONED

Folks say, “I don’t feel it. The Christian life isn’t what it’s supposed to be. Where’s God? Why is this happening? Where’s the joy, where’s the happiness I’m supposed to feel as a Christian?” God said to Joshua, “Have not I commanded thee? Be strong and of a good courage; be not afraid, neither be thou dismayed: for the Lord thy God is with thee whithersoever thou goest” (Josh. 1:9). We need to understand that God never leaves us. But are we with him? The problem is that we leave his joy, we leave his peace. It is we that become prayerless and then we begin to bear burdens we were never intended to bear alone, and then we become weary from the struggle, discouraged with the fight, and we then begin to doubt. When we commit the sin of prayerlessness, all of these things begin to stack one right on top of the other, and then we become disillusioned.

DISASTER

When we commit the sin of prayerlessness then we are

set up for disaster. The Hebrew writer stated: “Take heed, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief, in departing from the living God” (Heb. 3:12). We’ve now gotten to the point where we’re going to leave God completely. You’ve seen it a hundred times. Folks begin to miss mid-week Bible study. Then they’re not showing up for Sunday morning Bible study. Then they are only assembling for Sunday morning worship, and then they’re not there at all. Everyone then scratches his head and asks, “What happened, where did they go all of a sudden?” When in truth they had begun to die weeks, months, or years ago as they began to practice the sin of prayerlessness.

Moms need God, and dads need God. You need God in your business. You think you’re smart? God will show you how smart you’re not, when you begin to practice the sin of prayerlessness and he simply allows the natural progression of this sin to enter into your life. When you begin to bear burdens you were never intended to bear alone, you become weary from the burdens. You then become discouraged. You then begin to doubt all that Christianity stands for and promises. You then become disillusioned, then disaster hits your life, as you depart from the living God.

Don’t allow this to happen to you. Begin building your relationship with the Father today through prayer. It is a relationship that you so desperately need and God desires.

(This article is written based upon a sermon I preach in which I used sources in putting the sermon together that I no longer have the ability to document.)

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“Sweet Hour” continued from front page

of the parable is on the importance of continuing in prayer. It does not directly address the disciple’s need for prayer. But who would deny that the Christian “ought” to pray? If men “*always* ought to pray,” then men “*ought* to pray.” In this introductory article we want to briefly discuss the subject of the “oughtness” of the “Sweet Hour of Prayer,” or worded another way, why the Christian *needs* to be in the habit of prayer. Some of the points we will make may be more fully developed in other articles in this special issue.

OUR FATHER ALREADY KNOWS OUR NEEDS

We should not be so presumptuous as to assume that we need to pray to inform God of our basic needs. Jesus dispels this notion when he says, “Therefore do not worry, saying, ‘What shall we eat?’ or ‘What shall we drink?’ or ‘What shall we wear?’ For after all these things the Gentiles seek. For you heavenly Father knows that you need all these things” (Matt. 6:31-32). Yet God wants us to ask him for them. In verse 8, after charging his disciples not to use vain repetitions as the heathen do, Jesus says, “Therefore do not be like them. For your Father knows the things you have need of before you ask Him.” “Before you ask” shows God wants us to ask in spite of the fact that he already knows our needs. He will not grant some things unless we ask for them (Matt. 7:7, “Ask and it will be given to you”; Jas. 4:2, “You do not have because you do not ask”). “Sweet Hour of Prayer”!

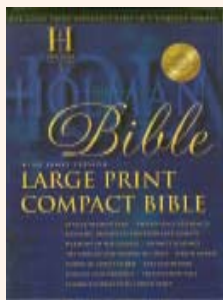
ABOUNDING WITH THANKSGIVING

Christians need prayer as a way of expressing thanks to a loving and benevolent God. There is no heart so mean as the ungrateful heart. David cried out, “Unto thee, O God, do we give thanks” (Ps. 75:1), and this has been the refrain of all grateful hearts throughout the ages. Paul tells Timothy that “every creature of God is good . . . if it is received with thanksgiving” (1 Tim. 4:4). Even the food we eat is worthy of thanks from a grateful heart that recognizes God as the giver of all good things. The Christian takes nothing for granted. He has so much to be thankful for, and for this reason he should abound with thanksgiving for all that God has done for him. Such prayers of thanksgiving are surely a part of “abounding in faith with thanksgiving” that Paul speaks of in Colossians 2:7.

Most of Paul’s letters begin with a prayer of thanksgiving, and in those letters he keeps calling upon Christians to “give thanks” for a variety of things. One beautiful passage tells us to “be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God” (Phil. 4:6). Did you notice how that little phrase, “with thanksgiving,” is coupled with the preceding words, “in everything by prayer and supplication”? We pray and offer our supplication for everything,

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but everything for which we pray must be accompanied with thanksgiving. The Christian needs prayer to express his thankfulness to God. "Sweet Hour of Prayer"!

THE NEED FOR GRACE AND MERCY

Christians need prayer as a way of calling upon God for help in time of need. This is especially true in the moment of temptation. We pray for many things, including our daily bread, or our basic needs on a day to day basis (Matt. 6:11), the sick (Jas. 5:13f.), the courageous preaching of the gospel (Eph. 6:18), the progress of the gospel in the hearts and lives of men and women around the world (2 Thess. 3:1), and "for all men; for kings and all that are in high places." We could give a long list of things that Christians pray for, but one of the most beautiful statements to be found anywhere in Scripture is the one given in Hebrews 4:16: "Let us therefore come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need."

In the preceding verses (Heb. 4:14-15) Jesus is described as one who "was in all points tempted as we are, yet without sin" (v. 15). The Christian is then encouraged to come "to the throne of grace, that he may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need." This is a reminder that the Christian is not free from needs, and prayer provides "help in time of need." Jesus is the one who can help, especially in the time of temptation. This is the subject that is being described in Hebrews 4:16. Our great high priest can intercede on our behalf, and he can "sympathize with our weaknesses" because he himself has been tempted and understands. Jesus is "a merciful and faithful high Priest," and "being tempted, He is able to aid those who are tempted" (Heb. 2:17-18). When you need help in a moment of temptation, you need prayer. Jesus can provide that help. No need to fear. Come

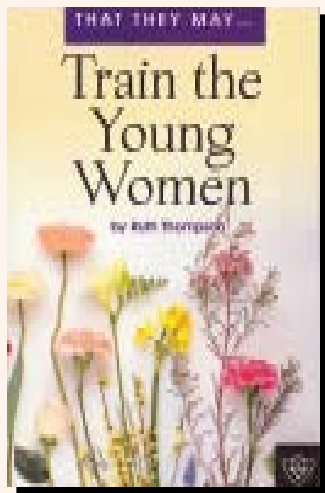
boldly to the throne of grace! "Sweet Hour of Prayer"!

KEEPING IN CLOSE CONTACT WITH GOD

Christians need to pray to keep in close contact with God. It is amazing how much our Lord, the apostles, and the early Christians were engaged in prayer. Jesus prayed before all the great events in his life, such as when he was baptized (Luke 3:21), at the calling of the twelve (Luke 6:12f), before Peter's confession (Luke 9:18f), and at the transfiguration (Luke 9:29f). Prayer was a normal thing for him as he went about his work: before the great conflict with the religious leaders of his day (Luke 5:16), before giving the model prayer to his disciples (Luke 11:1), when the Greeks came and asked to see Jesus (John 12:27f), at the time of the raising of Lazarus (John 11:41), and in connection with other miracles (Mark 1:41; 6:41; 7:34). He often prayed for others (John 17:6-19; 17:20-26; Luke 22:32; 23:34). He knew the importance of thanking God for his food (Mark 8:6; John 6:11, 23).

The apostles also were in the habit of constant prayer (Acts 1:4, 14; 9:40-41; Acts 10:9f.; 14:23; 16:25; 20:36; 21:5; 22:17; 27:33-38; 28:7-10), as was also true of the early church (4:23ff.; 12:5; 13:1-3). Paul also knew how to thank God for his food (Acts 27:35). These examples show that Jesus, the apostles, and the early Christians viewed every incident in life as an event to be dealt with in prayer. They prayed "always" and "without ceasing." After examining the evidence, surely none will doubt that prayer was their way of keeping in close contact with God. "Sweet Hour of Prayer"!

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“Calls Me” continued from page 2

necessary to find relief from the cares of the world through the avenue of prayer, should not we, his inferior followers, find the same necessary? Jesus answered the call of prayer. Will you answer that call?

LET US PRAY

There is no better habit that you can develop than that of prayer. Daily prayer is food to the soul and in this sinful world in which we live, full of care and satiated with sin, prayer is a must. If you knew of some way by which you could obtain deliverance from trouble, strength in weakness, guidance in times of crisis, comfort when lonely, peace in the midst of confusion and solutions for perplexing questions, would you not want to know the what, the who, and the how of that way? That way is prayer. Sadly, prayer is a blessing neglected by far too many Christians. In fact, rare is the Christian who takes full advantage of this power and few are the congregations that could really be described as a house of prayer. In a survey taken by 40,000 members of the church of Christ a few years back, the lack of prayer on the part of many Christians became obvious. One of the questions on the survey was, “Do you sincerely pray at least once per day?” Fewer than ten percent of those 40,000 said “yes.” That’s astonishing. How would you be able to answer that question? Do you regularly find time in your busy schedule to do what Jesus did and find a solitary place to pray? In the Sermon of the Mount, Jesus encouraged those who would be citizens of the kingdom to go into the closet to pray (Matt. 6:6). That doesn’t mean that we have to go into a literal closet to pray. Though I suppose a literal closet would work fine, that is not really what Jesus is saying. What Jesus is encouraging us as his disciples to do is find time to separate ourselves from all of the hustle and bustle of life, find a place where we can be all alone with our Father and pour out our heart to him in prayer. We should do this often, even daily. Our burdens will seem lighter, our temptations will become less tempting, and the cares of the world will not seem so overwhelming when we talk to our God about them. Peter once said, “Casting all your care upon him; for he careth for you” (1 Pet. 5:6). One lady said, “Every evening I turn worries over to God. He’s going to be up all night anyway.”

PRAYER HELPS US WITH SIN

It’s hard to live the life of a Christian. Those who say it is always easy to be a Christian probably have a low view of Christianity. We need God’s help. The Devil will cast every kind of temptation imaginable our way, but prayer can help us with this. Jesus told his disciples to watch and prayer that they entered not into temptation (Matt. 26:41). Prayer has the power to protect us against the wiles of the Devil. It’s no wonder that after Paul admonishes us to put on the whole armor of God, he encourages us to pray (Eph. 6:19). Someone once prayed this prayer: “Dear God, so far today I’ve done all right. I haven’t gossiped. I haven’t lost

my temper. I haven’t been greedy, grumpy, nasty, selfish, or overindulgent. I’m very thankful for that. But in a few minutes, God, I’m going to get out of bed, and from then on I’m probably going to need a lot more help. Amen.”

Needing help is a real part of prayer. Don’t try to fight against sin and temptation alone. Turn to God and ask him for help. The Hebrew writer encourages us along these lines, assuring us that before God’s throne we can find mercy and grace to help in times of need (Heb. 4:16). Don’t feel too macho to ask for God’s helping hand. Remember, even our Savior turned to God for strength.

TAKING ADVANTAGE OF OUR ADVANTAGE

We should never forget what a blessing prayer is. Prayer is a spiritual blessing reserved for those who are in Christ (Eph. 1:3). That sinners not in a relationship with God have no access to God through prayer is clearly taught in the scriptures (Ps. 66:18; Prov. 15:29; Isa. 1:15; 59:1-2; John 9:31; 1 Pet. 3:12). Addressing God through the avenue of prayer is a blood-bought privilege paid for by Jesus (Heb. 10:19-22). What a shame it is that we do not always take advantage of this power to which we have access. As I mentioned earlier, we don’t have a force field that prevents us from experiencing pain and hardships and the cares of the world, but we do have a Father who loves us and will help us when we need it most. We merely need to ask for that help. I came across this illustration that makes the point.

THE BIG ROCK

A little boy was spending his Saturday morning playing in his sandbox. He had with him his box of cars and trucks, his plastic pail, and a shiny, red plastic shovel. In the process of creating roads and tunnels in the soft sand, he discovered a large rock in the middle of the sandbox. The lad dug around the rock, managing to dislodge it from the dirt. With no little bit of struggle, he pushed and nudged the rock across the sandbox by using his feet. (He was a very small boy and the rock was very huge.) When the boy got the rock to the edge of the sandbox, however, he found that he couldn’t roll it up and over the little wall. Determined, the little boy shoved, pushed, and pried, but every time he thought he had made some progress, the rock tipped and then fell back into the sandbox. The little boy grunted, struggled, pushed, shoved — but his only reward was to have the rock roll back, smashing his chubby fingers. Finally he burst into tears of frustration. All this time the boy’s father watched from his living room window as the drama unfolded. At the moment the tears fell, a large shadow fell across the boy and the sandbox. It was the boy’s father. Gently but firmly he said, “Son, why didn’t you use all the strength that you had available?” Defeated, the boy sobbed back, “But I did, Daddy, I did! I used all the strength that I had!” “No, son,” corrected the father kindly. “You didn’t use all the strength you had. You didn’t ask me.” With that the father reached down, picked up the

rock, and removed it from the sandbox.

Are you taking advantage of all your strength? If you are relying on yourself to overcome the cares of the world, you are wasting strength, God's strength, and you are fighting a hopeless battle. Let's learn from Jesus and avail ourselves of the power that comes when we take advantage of that sweet hour of prayer.

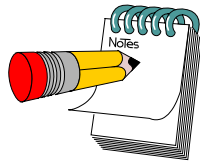
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Field Reports



Larry R. Devore: During 2003, we had three baptized into Christ at Medina, one restored and one to place membership with us. Also, it was necessary to withdraw from or "mark" three for unfaithfulness. One of our members, Paul Chizek, began to do considerable part-time preaching. Richard A. Chilcote and Larry R. DeVore continue to serve as elders. We conducted meetings with Jim Walsh from Barberton, Ohio and with James Hahn from Lawrenceburg, Kentucky. When traveling in north central Ohio, stop and visit with us. P.O. Box 313, Medina, OH 44258.

Quips & Quotes



Back Issues of Truth Magazine For Sale

I have back issues of Truth Magazine, volumes 1-36, which I wish to sell. The set is nearly complete. Volume 6 is missing as are 20 single issues from the first 12 volumes. Volumes 3, 9, 11, 13-23, 26, and 30 are all bound volumes. The rest are in large clip ring storage binders. There are a good bit of highlighted texts and notes in margin. Make offer. [Steve Wallace, styvas@t-online.de](mailto:SteveWallace,styvas@t-online.de).

Harvard University OKs Student Sex Magazine

"Boston — Harvard University has approved a student magazine about sex that will feature art, sex advice and fiction — as well as photographs of undressed Harvard undergraduates.

"A 14-person committee, made up of faculty, staff and students, approved 'H Bomb' magazine Tuesday with a 12-0 vote, with two abstentions. The vote lets the magazine's publishers apply

for funding but does not guarantee money; when it would be published is uncertain" (The Indianapolis Star [February 12, 2004], A15).

Attendance Declines in Boston Archdiocese

"The Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Boston said Mass attendance for a typical week has dropped 15 percent since the clergy sexual abuse crisis hit two years ago.

"For the first time, the archdiocesan newspaper published attendance figures and the number of key sacraments performed for most of Boston's 357 parishes (39 did not participate). The report said average weekly Mass attendance in October was 304,000, out of a baptized membership of 2,084,000" (The Indianapolis Star [February 14, 2004], F3).

Episcopal Parish Splits over Gay Bishop

"Only 60 people attended the three services at historic St. John's Episcopal Church in Versailles, Ky., on a recent Sunday, while some 180 departing members held the first formal service of their new conservative congregation, St. Andrew's.

"The split occurred when Bishop Stacy Sauls and diocesan leaders ousted the parish's governing board and took control of the building and bank accounts worth \$1.87 million" (The Indianapolis Star [February 12, 2004], A15).

Governor Signs Bill Banning Gay Marriage

"Columbus, Ohio — Gov. Bob Taft approved one of the country's most-far reaching gay-marriage bans on Friday, saying its adoption was urgent because the nation's first legally sanctioned same-sex weddings could take place as early as this spring in Massachusetts.

"The bill also prohibits state employees from getting marital benefits for their unmarried partners, whether homosexual or heterosexual.

"When the law takes effect in 90 days, Ohio will become the 38th state to adopt a 'defense of marriage act' and the second to deny benefits to some employees' partners. Indiana is among the states that ban gay marriage" (The Indianapolis Star [February 7, 2004], A4).

Acceptance of Gays is Way Up, Poll Finds

"Gays and lesbians have experienced a dramatic rise in acceptance over the past two decades, according to a new Los Angeles Time Poll. Almost seven in 10 Americans know someone who is gay or lesbian and say they would not be troubled if their elementary school-age child had a gay teacher. Six in 10 say they are sympathetic to gays, displaying an inclination to view same-sex issues through a prism of societal accommodation rather than moral condemnation" (The Indianapolis Star [April 11, 2004], A3).

First Annual Truth Magazine Lectures

The Renewing of Your Mind

July 12-15, 2004

Bowling Green, Kentucky — Convention Center

“I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service. And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God” (Rom. 12:1-2).

Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday
8:00 - 8:50	Scientific Fore-knowledge and the Bible (Larry Dickens)	House Churches (Harry Osborne)	Testifying in the Worship Assembly (Bobby Graham)
9:00 - 9:50	Renewed View of Morals (Dan King)	Renewed View of the Church (Larry Hafley)	Renewed View of Jesus (John Isaac Edwards)
10:00 - 10:50	Renewed View of Sexual Morals (Lewis Willis)	Renewed View of Unity (Russell Dunaway)	Renewed View of Biblical Interpretation (Marc Gibson)
11:00 - 11:50	Renewed View of Marriage (Brett Hogland)	Renewed Commitment to Balanced Preaching (Ron Halbrook)	Renewed View of Worship (Jason Longstreth)
Lunch Break			
Ladies Classes			
1:30 - 2:20	Material available for Children's Classes (Vernita Goodall)	A Biblical View of Femininity (Anne Stevens)	Issues for a Preacher/Elder's Wife (Bobby Adams)
Auditorium			
1:30 - 2:20	Evangelism in Canada (Brian Sullivan)	Evangelism in India (John Humphries)	Evangelism in Nigeria (Karl Diestelkamp)
2:30 - 4:00	Open Forum: No Assigned Topic	Open Forum: Role of Government in Divorce/Remarriage (Mental Divorce): Ron Halbrook, Harry Osborne, Donnie Rader, Greg Gwin	Open Forum: Sunday Evening Communion (Al Diestelkamp, Dick Blackford)
Singing: 7:00 - 7:30 Led by R.J. Stevens			
"The Renewing of Your Mind" (Rom. 12:1-2) (Mike Willis)	Renewed View of Parental Discipline (Weldon Warnock)	Renewed Commitment to Evangelism (Connie W. Adams). This service will begin at 8:45 p.m.	Recommitment to Biblical Authority (Bill Cavender)

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- Heaven's Road
- I Believe In Jesus
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- Glorify Thy Name
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