

HIS IN A . . . LIFE OF PRAYER

by

Norman B. Harrison, D. D.

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CHAPTER FIVE

PRACTICAL HINTS FOR A LIFE OF PRAYER SEVEN CONDITIONS . . . SEVEN SUGGESTIONS.

That this treatise on prayer may prove itself as valuable as possible to the reader we must now pass to some of the practical considerations involved. What we have in mind is the question every earnest prayer should put to himself: How to succeed in a Life of Prayer. The answer is in two parts:

First, conditions of success in prayer, derived from God's Word;
Second, suggestions for success in prayer, drawn from experience.

I—Seven Conditions

Our Heavenly Father having made provision, as we have seen, for a Life of Prayer, His Word must contain the necessary directions. Scanning the teachings of Scripture, we find that the “irreducible minimum” of successful prayer consists of seven directions so essential that we may term them “conditions.” They are the fundamentals of prayer. What “contact” is to the transmission of electricity, these conditions are to prayer's answer.

1. IN FAITH, BELIEVING.

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

“But let him ask in faith, nothing wavering [doubting]: for he that wavereth is like a wave of the sea driven with the wind and tossed. For let not that man think that he shall receive anything of the Lord; a double minded man is unstable in all his ways” (James 1:6-8).

“Therefore I say unto you, What things soever ye desire, when ye pray, believe that ye receive them, and ye shall have them” (Mark. 11:24).

In this last Scripture the meaning is: *“Believe that you have in God's granting of them, and you shall have in the actual experience of them.”* In other words, faith is a precedent of experience. Yet it is to be feared that people look upon prayer as an inexpensive experiment, a cheap way of getting things. It costs nothing; if it works, well and good.

They remind us of the woman who ventured, on the strength of Jesus' words, to pray for the removal of the mountain in the rear of her home. The next morning, upon looking out and seeing the mountain unmoved, she said, "I knew all the time that it would be there." She disregarded Jesus' expressed condition: **"Shall not doubt in his heart, but shall believe that those things which he saith shall come to pass; he shall have whatsoever he saith"** (Mark 11:23).

Hers was a mere venture, tempting God. The faith "contact" that lays hold of God's power was lacking.

"But," someone says, "I haven't faith." Very well. Set about to have it. **"Ye have not, because ye ask not."** Faith **"is the gift of God"** (Ephesians 2:8). Saturate your mind, meanwhile, with God's Word as the means whereby faith "comes" (Romans 10:17).

2. A LIFE INWARDLY RIGHT.

This involves a clean heart and a loving, forgiving spirit.

"If I regard iniquity in my heart, the Lord will not hear me" (Psalm 66:18).

"And when ye stand praying, forgive, if ye have ought against any: that your Father also which is in heaven may forgive you your trespasses. But if ye do not forgive, neither will your Father which is in heaven forgive your trespasses" (Mark. 11:25, 26).

Our Lord cannot fellowship evil. To harbor known sin in the heart, to withdraw ourselves from the constant cleansing of His ever-availing blood—under these conditions we can no more secure His blessings through prayer than one can draw water through a pipe clogged with mud or choked with rubbish.

An unworthy, unforgiving, unchristian attitude toward our fellows is a sure barrier to effective prayer.

"Let all bitterness, and wrath, and anger, and clamour, and evil speaking, be put away from you, with all malice: and be ye kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven you" (Ephesians 4:31, 32).

We were freely forgiven and His love was poured into our hearts that we, in turn, might pass His love and His forgiveness on to others. This He expects us to do.

If we cannot find it in our hearts so to do, whatever the circum stance, we grieve him, we prove ourselves unworthy of Him, we choke the channels, our prayer-life is at a standstill. Prayer requires that our hearts be kept in an up-to-the minute state of cleansing. We should crave His searching inspection at all times:

"Search me, O God, and know my heart: try me, and know my thoughts: and see if there be any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting" (Psalm 139:23, 24).

3. A LIFE OUTWARDLY UPRIGHT.

“But your iniquities have separated between you and your God, and your sins have hid His face from you, that He will not hear” (Isaiah 59:2).

“If My people, which are called by My name, shall humble themselves, and pray, and seek My face, and turn from their wicked ways; then will I hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin, and will heal their land” (II Chronicles 7:14).

“The prayer of the upright is His delight No good thing will He withhold from them that walk uprightly” (Proverbs 15:8; Psalm 84:11).

“The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much” (James 5:16).

“For if our heart condemn us, God is greater than our heart, and knoweth all things. Beloved, if our heart condemn us not, then have we confidence toward God. And whatsoever we ask, we receive of Him, because we keep His commandments, and do those things that are pleasing in His sight” (I John 3:20-22).

Negatively stated, sin, wherever found, is an offense to a holy and righteous God. It dishonors His covenant of Grace. It does despite to His Holy Spirit. Hence, a sinful life cannot approach God in prayer with any assurance of being heard. He cannot be a party to our sin.

The first step is to confess, and claim His faithfulness to forgive and cleanse—I John 1:9.

Positively, the life that can pray is the openly righteous, upright life. His is a faith emboldened by an uncondemning heart. **“He shall receive the blessing from the Lord”** (Psalm 24:5). Prayer’s unlimited promise, **“whatsoever,”** is unlocked by the **“because”** of an obedient life, one that seeks to please Him above all else. Moreover, the **“commandment”** of this prayer-condition is a purely Christian one— faith toward Christ and love toward our fellows.

4. IN AND THROUGH THE HOLY SPIRIT.

“For through Him we both have our access by one Spirit unto the Father” (Ephesians 2:18).

“But ye, beloved, building up yourselves on your most holy faith, praying in the Holy Ghost” (Jude 20).

“Praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit” (Ephesians 6:18).

“Likewise the Spirit also helpeth our infirmities: for we know not what we should pray for as we ought: but the Spirit Himself maketh intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered” (Romans 8:26).

“Not by might, nor by power, but by My Spirit, saith the Lord” (Zechariah 4:6).

This is the key to prayer achievements. As the telephone is dead and impotent without the electric current, so is prayer apart from the Spirit. He supplies the sending power; He secures the access; He forms the contact; He molds the prayer into the mind and will of God. The Spirit is at once the guide of prayer and the guarantor of its success.

5. IN THE NAME OF JESUS CHRIST OUR LORD.

“And whatsoever ye shall ask in My name, that will I do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son. If ye shall ask anything in My name, I will do it” (John 14:13, 14).

“Hitherto have ye asked nothing in My name; ask, and ye shall receive, that your joy may be full” (John 16:24).

The condition is clear-cut; the promise is abundant and explicit. But what does this involve? Surely infinitely more than the mere muttering of the name to conclude our prayer.

Acknowledging His claims as to His person and work; resting in His all-authority; relying upon His past sacrifice and present position of power; taking our place in that complete identification with Him which gives us the right to His name; asking as for Him, not for ourselves—this is the rich, rewarding content of the condition He has laid down for us.

6. IN ACCORDANCE WITH THE WILL OF THE FATHER.

“And this is the confidence that we have in Him, that if we ask anything according to His will, He heareth us; and if we know that He hear us, whatsoever we ask, we know that we have the petitions that we desired of Him” (I John 5:14, 15).

Here is a condition calculated to spur us on mightily. **“If we ask anything,”** meeting this one condition, **“we know that we have,”** etc.

First, *it precludes presumption*—the presumption of dictating to God in matters of circumstance such as sickness and suffering, position and prospering. Prayer must rest in our loving Heavenly Father’s wisdom in **“all these things”** He knows best. In this we have our Saviour’s example: **“Not My will, but Thine be done.”**

Second, *it constrains to a more utter, day after day, yielding of ourselves to Him, to seek, know and enter into His perfect mind and will.*

7. A LIFE THAT ABIDES IN HIM.

“If ye abide in Me, and My words abide in you, ye shall ask what ye will, and it shall be done unto you” (John 15:7).

In a very real sense this is the master key that unlocks all prayer-treasure, the master-condition that covers all other conditions.

To abide in Him and have His words abide in us—this is the key to the prayer of faith, to a clean heart, to an upright, obedient life. So abiding, we will have the Spirit’s vitalizing power; we will be led into the Father’s will; we will be bold to use His name, and that aright.

Here we meet the intimate connection between the Word and prayer. It is an integral part of the condition. To be led into all the mind and will and righteousness of His Word is to have all the resources of prayer unlocked to us.

Moreover, the Abiding Life is the supreme, comprehensive, climactic condition, since it calls for that which is continuous, uninterrupted, “**abiding.**” The Life of Prayer is the flower and fruit of the Abiding Life.

II—Seven Suggestions

The conditions above are in the nature of Scriptural requirements, the *sine qua non* of success in prayer. To these we add the following suggestions, which should commend themselves to the earnest seeker after progress in prayer for their practical helpfulness.

1. TAKE TIME.

To have caught the vision of the possibilities of prayer-achievement is to know that henceforth time must be given up to it. But there are many enemies to this. Satan will see to it that we are otherwise occupied. There must be high and firm resolution on our part. Hasty, hurried prayer is ruinous and fruitless.

Set apart a season that is sacred to the Lord and to the work of prayer. David maintained at least three such daily seasons:

“Evening, and morning, and at noon, will I pray, and cry aloud: and He shall hear my voice” (Psalm 55:17).

Daniel had the same habit, continuing it at the peril of his life (Daniel 6:10). And these were busy men of affairs.

Did they lose time or save it, judged by their abiding influence?

Robert Murray McCheyne, the sainted young Scotch divine, was so impressed with the need of a deepened prayer-life that he embodied his resolves and convictions in the following declaration of purpose:

“I am persuaded that I ought never to do anything without prayer, and, if possible, special secret prayer . . . I ought to pray far more for our church, for our leading ministers by name, and for my own clear guidance in the right way, that I may not be led aside, or driven aside from following Christ . . . I should pray much more in peaceful days, that I may be guided rightly when days of trial come.

“I ought to spend the best hours of the day in communion with God. It is my noblest and most fruitful employment, and is not to be thrust into any corner. The morning hours from six to eight are the most uninterrupted, and should be thus employed, if I can prevent drowsiness. A little time after breakfast might be given to intercession. After tea is my best hour, and that should be solemnly dedicated to God, if possible.”

2. BE DEFINITE.

If you have no definite purpose in prayer, you can expect no definite results from it. Be sure you know what you want before you pray and that God knows what you want when you are through. This requires:

(1) Searching of heart, to see that our prayers are not a mere saying over of meaningless phrases but that they are the expression of real desire.

(2) Preparation beforehand, to determine how we shall spend our time with Him. (How much previous thought would you give to a privileged ten minutes' audience with the President?)

Lacking this preparation, we should quietly “**wait upon Him**” that He may order our thoughts, lest we find ourselves talking at random in the presence of the King.

(3) A Prayer List. Our minds and hearts are so limited, so much so that the petition which grips them today fades from us tomorrow. Such an experience shames us. To be consistently definite we must have a record of that which we have undertaken to ask of the Lord.

3. BE PERSEVERING.

We cannot dictate times and seasons to God. These He must ever keep within His own wisdom and power. Moreover, it is a part of His purpose to prove us by testing the tenacity of our faith. If we seek something in prayer, only to cease making request after a week, a month, or a year has passed, we have given conclusive proof that we were making trial of God, that we had no deep-seated sense of need, that we could content ourselves without the answer. Prayer must prove itself genuine by persevering.

This means that faith will not, on the one hand, be impatient because the answer is not immediately forthcoming; nor yet will it be dissuaded by delay that seems tantamount to denial.

Feeding upon His faithfulness it will pray on, as partner with the unwearied Christ.

“More than half a century ago George Mueller, that prince of intercessors with God, began to pray for a group of five personal friends. After five years one of them came to Christ. In ten years two more of them found peace in the same Saviour. He prayed on, for twenty-five years, and the fourth man was saved. For the fifth he prayed until the time of his death, and this friend came too, came to Christ a few months afterwards. For the latter friend Mr. Mueller had prayed almost fifty-two years” (James H. McConkey).

Delay may be designed of God to prompt to self-examination, leading to the discovery of the difficulty in the personal life of the prayer. Then faith, the barrier removed, rises to its task with renewed confidence. And, perchance, it fortifies itself with a prayer-helper, claiming the gracious promise given to united prayer:

“If two of you shall agree on earth as touching any thing that they shall ask, it shall be done for them of My Father which is in heaven” (Matthew 18:19).

4. BE SCRIPTURAL.

True prayer puts its finger upon some promise of God and pleads His faithfulness to His own Word. It is one thing for a child to ask the parent for something of its own requesting; it is quite another to simply remind the parent of his own, previously made promise. Prayer after the pattern of the latter, is merely turning His believed Word back to Him in simple child-like plea and confidence. George Mueller, the man of prayer, puts it thus:

“The man and the woman who are able thus to receive the Word of God—thus to rest on it, these are the strongest in faith. And that is just what we have to aim at continually—that we are satisfied with the Word of God, that we receive the Word of God, and that we say to our selves: ‘It will be so simply because God has said it’”

And not only the voice; the face as well speaks forth the blessing of the joyous heart behind it. **“A merry heart maketh a cheerful countenance.”** Its presence within, like that of our Lord Himself, cannot be hid. It was so in the life of Adoniram Judson, the great missionary to Burma. The story is told of a boy, playing at the railroad station of a certain town in Connecticut, that he became fascinated by the countenance of a man waiting to take the train. The stranger seemed to him to have the most wonderful face he had ever seen. Then the boy learned that the man with the shining face was none other than the man who had wrought so wondrously on the mission field. Years afterward that boy wrote a book, devoting a chapter to “What a Boy Saw in the Face of Adoniram Judson.” It was the Psalmist who, centuries before, told us the secret: **“They looked unto Him, and were lightened”** (Psalm 34:5). The secret is open to all.

6. KEEP THE WILL YIELDED.

Nothing is clearer than that we should never, if we would succeed spiritually, resist or rebel against the will of God. To be in truth the followers of our Lord, we must say with Him, not once or on occasion but as the attitude of life, **“Not my will, but Thine, be done.”**

Nor is a mere passive submission to the divine will, as to something inscrutable and hard to bear, sufficient. It may be that at times, but it should be infinitely more, even an active yearning for the will of God at all times. Mark puts the Saviour’s prayer thus: **“Not what I will, but what Thou wilt.”** His will the supreme consideration! An alert eagerness should possess us to know it and see it performed. No prayer so becomes the Christian as that which invites, yea implores, Him to have His way with us:

Have Thine own way, Lord!
Have Thine own way!
Thou art the Potter;
I am the clay.
Mould me and make me
After Thy will,
While I am waiting,
Yielded and still.

—Adelaide Pollard.

7. KEEP THE LIFE CHRIST-CENTERED.

Worldly aims and ambitions will soon atrophy the prayer-life. Its motor nerve will soon shrivel and cease to function. It must be fed by a spiritual life-purpose.

As Paul puts his own determination: “**Wherefore we labour, that, whether present or absent, we may be accepted of him**” (II Corinthians 5:9).

Then Christ comes to the center; the whole of life radiates out from Him; the life-prayer becomes: “**that in all things He might have the preeminence**” (Colossians 1:18).

The holding of any lower ideal of life must bring us, sooner or later, to the realization that we have spent ourselves in ways not worth the while, that what we have wrought will not stand the searching test of finality.

While Helen Hunt Jackson lay upon her sick bed, she wrote a poem of penitent regret and petition for opportunity to retrieve the past with purposeful service. It came too late, for in four days after she had written these lines, she was dead. While the shuttle of time runs swiftly back and forth for us, let us busy ourselves weaving a life-fabric whose warp and woof are Love and Service for Him “**who loved us and gave Himself for us.**” There is no time to waste in prayerless idleness or aimlessness.

The Brevity of Our Opportunity

Father, I scarcely dare to pray,
So clear I see, now it is done,
That I have wasted half my day,
And left my work but just begun.
So clear I see that things I thought
Were right or harmless were a sin;
So clear I see that I have sought,
Unconscious, selfish aims to win.
So clear I see that I have hurt
The souls I might have help'd to save,

That I have slothful been, inert,
Deaf to the calls Thy leaders gave.
In outskirts of Thy Kingdom vast,
Father, the humblest spot give me;
Set me the lowliest task Thou hast,
Let me repentant, work for Thee.

— H. H. J.

~ end of chapter 5 ~

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