

HIS IN A . . . LIFE OF PRAYER

by

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CHAPTER TWO

SEVEN REASONS FOR A LIFE OF PRAYER

“**Lord, teach us to pray**” (Luke 11:1).

How interesting, and profitable withal, would it be if we were in position to delve into the reasons, or reasoning, which prompted that first group of followers of our Lord to make request of Him that He teach them to pray.

- Was it primarily His example, as suggested by the statement, “**As He was praying in a certain place,**” an example they felt was a part of the pattern they should follow?
- Was it the natural yearning of an awakening spiritual life, a life that craves satisfaction in fellowship with God and that starves when deprived of it?
- Was it a logical tracing of the evident force and effectiveness of Jesus’ life and ministry—His grace and gentleness, His love and tenderness, His wisdom and meekness, His truth and genuineness—a tracing of these back to Jesus’ prayer-life as their fountain-head?
- Was it an undefined sense of need which they instinctively felt could be met only by a life of Prayer such as they saw in the Saviour?

Undoubtedly we, the present day disciples of our Lord, need a new urge to prayer, a new conviction of its indispensable values, a new reasoning as to the relationship of cause and effect between a genuine prayer-life and the attributes, attainments and achievements that should characterize a Christian, his life and service.

We will never pray as we should until we see it as a necessity, indispensable to the life we have undertaken to live.

- Why does a man install a telephone in his home? He feels that he cannot do without it, that it is necessary to his way of living, to his getting things done.
- Why does a farmer install and use a plow? He knows he cannot till the soil, he cannot function or succeed as a farmer without it. He does not need to be argued into owning and operating one; the case is too obvious.

It should be just so with prayer. And it would be, did we but understand the reasons which dictate its use, constantly and consistently.

Not seeing them, the result is disastrous. It is this: Many, many Christians say their prayers, and get nowhere; comparatively few, yes, lamentably few, make intelligent use of prayer as a definite means, adapted, and therefore adopted, to accomplishing definite and desired ends.

Were we so situated as to be capable of taking account of our losses in the realm of spiritual things, as we are accustomed to doing in things financial and material, we would undoubtedly be surprised, startled and shocked to discover what tremendous losses we are suffering, losses traceable solely and directly to a lack of prayer. The case is one of self-robbery, to our utter impoverishment.

In one of the most simple, inescapable statements of Scripture—so plain that a wayfaring man, though a fool, need not err therein—God sets down our losses and lacks as due to prayerlessness: **“Ye have not, because ye ask not”** (James 4:2).

Nothing could be more logically and categorically traced to its cause and source—**“because.”**

Nor does the failure to have apply merely, or mostly, to “things,” in the outward realm. If this were true we might obviate the need of prayer with more diligent effort to bestow “things” upon ourselves. But it applies the more by far to spiritual attainment. It is here we are wholly dependent upon Him. And how firmly, how faithfully, He forestalls any misunderstanding: **“Ye have not, because”** (let none seek to evade the issue or lay the blame elsewhere—**“because ye ask not.”**)

In glory, when the secrets of hearts are laid bare, we will doubtless be grieved beyond measure at the revelation of what we might have achieved had we but had full and faithful recourse to prayer as God has provided for it in His Word.

Briefly let us consider seven outstanding reasons that should spur us, in a day when prayer is so greatly needed yet so generally neglected, to devote ourselves anew to a Life of Prayer.

I—To Honor God as Our Father

God is a great economist. As such He must needs anticipate every possible requirement for the continued existence, comfort and well-being of His creatures upon earth. Man, seeking to understand His provisions, terms them “laws.” Their fine adjustment is a constant source of amazement. Occupying a superposition among them all is prayer, a sort of super-provision for His personal intervention and administration on behalf of those who will have recourse to it. Thus prayer is a wonderful part of the world’s economy. If this were all, we should pray.

But God is infinitely more than an economist. To us He is **“Our Father.”**

This adds an appeal that is highly personal. He is an economist, plus—plus the unfailing love and concern that Fatherhood carries with it. For, consider. What is a Father for? Confessedly to provide for his children.

This our Heavenly Father seeks the privilege of doing, and has appointed prayer to that end. Thus the Son, knowing the yearning of His Father-heart, seeks to persuade us:

“Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you: for every one that asketh receiveth; and he that seeketh findeth; and to him that knocketh it shall be opened. Or what man is there of you, whom if his son ask bread, will he give him a stone? Or if he ask a fish, will he give him a serpent? If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children, how much more shall your Father which is in heaven give good things to them that ask Him?” (Matthew 7:7-11).

In other words, God wants to be to us as a Father if only we will be to Him as children, and ask. But if we do not ask, what? We are preventing Him from functioning as a Father. We are excluding His Father-care from our lives, spurned and unsought.

A prayerless life dishonors the Father-son relationship. To give to Him the honor rightfully due Him as our Father, aside from all consideration of results accruing therefrom, we must live a Life of Prayer.

II—To Discharge Our Office as Priests

Every believer knows, or should know, that under the New Covenant he has been inducted into the office of Priest, with prescribed duties to discharge.

“Ye are an holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God by Jesus Christ” (I Peter 2:5; see also v. 9).

All evangelicals readily acknowledge that the Old Testament priest was a type, which type is fulfilled in us. But the implications of this fact have never struck home with seriousness to the Christian consciousness. We still call the rank and file of our people “laymen” and look upon the “clergy” as our official class. This is an unscriptural distinction that robs our people of a due sense of official responsibility. Truth is, there is no provision in the Church for laymen. Every one occupies an official position. Everyone must assume official duties. They are those of the priest’s office. No one is exempt.

This, then, is the second reason for a Life of Prayer. It is an urgent one that should stir every last believer to a new alertness. We are to give ourselves to prayer for the exercise of our office, for the discharge of our official duties.

Whenever we live prayerless lives we are neglecting, we are vacating, our office.

What would we think if we went down town in one of our cities, only to find desks closed and office doors locked, business men neglecting their office, the work they have undertaken? It is no different with Christians when they are neglectful of prayer. The work to which they have been officially called and appointed remains undone.

Moreover, we are not alone in this work.

When Jesus ascended on high, it was to take upon Himself the office-work of High Priest. It is an office with a real work, an age long task—**“He ever liveth to make intercession.”** In appointing us to the office of priests He is privileging us to share His work. He asks us to take part of it upon ourselves. This is just what we do when we engage in prayer. How glorious the task! Surely we will not neglect it.

III—To Avail Ourselves of Our New Privilege as Believers

When the New Covenant was completed with the Saviour’s death, resurrection and ascension to the right hand of the Father, these facts not only ushered the believer into the priestly office but brought to him an entirely new prayer-privilege. Anticipating this, Jesus said to His disciples: **“Hitherto have ye asked nothing in My name: ask, and ye shall receive, that your joy may be full”** (John 16:24).

Necessarily this is something new. Not until now has His name been of any value as a plea in prayer. But the moment He has triumphed as our Sin-Bearer and been received back into glory, He is accorded the Victor’s place of honor and power, sharing the Father’s throne, possessed of **“a name that is above every name”** (Philippians 2:9).

That “Name,” He takes pains to tell us, He is leaving with us as our all-prevailing approach to the throne of heavenly grace. Its use is the prerogative peculiar to the New Testament believer. No name comparable to His in all the universe. By the same token no privilege among men is comparable to this which is accorded to us. What if we neglect to use it? What must He think of us? What must be our irreparable loss?

IV—To Fulfill Our Obligation to Fellow-Believers

Paul’s loftiest Epistle closes with this exhortation, if not command:

“Praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, and watching thereunto with all perseverance and supplication for all saints” (Ephesians 6:18).

This is accompanied with the inclusion of himself and his particular needs in ministering the Gospel (vs. 19), thereby enlarging the scope of the exhortation to comprehend all believers, workers and leaders down through the age.

This all-inclusive prayer-duty rests upon a twofold relationship: The fact of our union with Christ and with one another in His body, together with the further fact that, thus identified with Him, we secure for ourselves and all other believers the active hostility and relentless enmity of His foe and ours (see Ephesians 6:11,12). This community of interest, one life uniting us all, one danger confronting us all, binds us together in the solemn obligations of a holy prayer-union.

The claims created by this union for a mutual faithfulness to each other in prayer are readily enforced by the experiences of our natural bodies.

As the members of the body instinctively protect one another, each mindful of the other's welfare, each alert to the other's peril, such is the instinctive prayer-obligation of each believer for every other.

It is the most beautiful, the most intimately binding bond of brotherhood ever conceived. To practice ourselves faithfully in this prayer-call is to create, inevitably, a new consciousness of oneness among Christians the world over.

Nor are we at liberty to regard the prayer enjoined as of merely occasional or passing concern. It must go to grips—praying always, watching, persevering, supplicating on behalf of those in the prayer-union, a truly great conception of Christian obligation this.

How glorious to really, faithfully and continuously, give ourselves to each other in the practice of it.

V—To Seek and To Save the Souls of Men

The soul-winning ministry of prayer has yet to come home with conviction to the heart and conscience of the Church of Christ. Why do we see so few passing from death unto life? Lack of definite, believing prayer to this end; that lack rooted further back in a deep-seated sluggishness of desire—this we must own, with shame, to be the answer.

When we have taken our place in the Body of Christ, and realize that all about us are those who should rightfully be one with us in Him, we are moved to plead in prayer:

- The finished work of our Christ on their behalf, **“that by the grace of God He should taste death for every man”** (Hebrews 2:9);
- The gracious purposes of our God, **“who will have all men to be saved”** (I Timothy 2:4), **“not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance”** (II Peter 3:9);
- The blessed ministry of the Spirit, come, since Calvary, to **“convict the world of sin . . . because they believe not on Me”** (John 16:8, 9);
- The quickening power of His Word to beget faith unto life (James 1:18; I Peter 1:23; Romans 10:17).

A study of the Gospels yields this interesting and instructive fact regarding faith for others: as far as the record states the circumstances, three times as many were healed and helped through the intercession of others as obtained this blessing through their own asking.

For example, consider the paralytic, borne of four. Recall their earnestness in seeking the blessing for their friend, tearing up the roof and letting him down at Jesus' feet. **“When Jesus saw their faith, He said unto the sick of the palsy, Son, thy sins be forgiven thee”** (Mark 2:5).

And again, the Syrophenician woman, coming with her daughter. **“Then Jesus answered and said unto her, O woman, great is thy faith: be it unto thee even as thou wilt. And her daughter was made whole from that very hour”** (Matthew 15:28).

“He shall ask.” But what if we do not ask? We shudder at the responsibility. Lost! And the blame lies at the door of negligent Christians, in the charge, **“No man cared for my soul.”**

Dear reader, have you a prayer list (the mark of an in-earnest prayer life), and are you daily bearing up before God those for whom Christ died, including them, as He undoubtedly did, in His Calvary sacrifice? Prayer is the fundamental agency in Evangelism. It is yours to use.

VI—To Outwit and Overcome the Powers of Evil

No mere man is a match at any time for the superhuman spiritual forces arrayed against us. Even our Lord Jesus would not face the enemy of God and of souls, keenly intent upon defeating the whole scheme of redemption, apart from prayer and God’s Word as His weapons. So in His model of prayer He puts this petition into our mouths:

“Deliver us from evil [the evil one]” (Matthew 6:13).

Many are the scriptures that warn of the spiritual warfare upon which we are launched, of the subtlety of the foe, of his sinister purposes, and, withal, of his strength. Consider but two, in each case coupled with an exhortation in keeping with the conflict that confronts us:

“Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh 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” (I Peter 5:8, 9).

“Put on the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places” (Ephesians 6:11, 12).

Nothing short of **“the whole armor of God”** will do. Thank God, He has provided an armor and it is adequate if taken in its entirety. Of this equipment, prayer is an essential, integral part, without which we are not only vulnerable and defenseless but weak and defeated.

He who neglects prayer can never hope for the crown of the overcomer.

VII—To Personally Grow in Grace and Godliness

Paul and Peter have left these significant words of admonition for the believer:

“Exercise thyself rather unto godliness” (I Timothy 4:7)

“But grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ” (II Peter 3:18).

In both instances the writers, as shown by the context, are warning against the trend toward apostasy, evil and unbelief in the world of men about us.

Also, they are proposing an antidote for the safeguarding of our own lives.

- Instead of yielding to popular ungodliness we are to **“exercise ourselves unto godliness.”**
- Instead of going off into scoffing unbelief we are to **“grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord.”**

How shall we do this? What method shall we employ? Whatever else may seem needful, or desirable, this is certain: there is no possibility of our doing it apart from a Life of Prayer.

That subtle something for which there is no substitute, the dew of heaven resting upon our spirits, a sacred sweetness distilled in the soul—there is no provision for getting these ingredients of godliness into our lives save the quiet hour set apart for secret heart-communings with our glorified Christ.

“That I may know Him, and the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings, being made conformable unto His death”; that I may have in my life **“the fruit of the Spirit (which) is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faithfulness, meekness, self-control”** (no one has ever discovered, nor will one ever invent, a short cut to these gracious experiences and soul-qualities. He who would have them must travel the King’s highway—a Life of Prayer.

- Every day we need the touch of His hand upon our spirits, to keep us free from the feverish contagion of the world about us.
- Every day we need a renewed sense of His presence to maintain a life in conscious fellowship with Him.
- Every day we need to whisper in His ear, as though we had never done so before, our heart’s love for Him, our humble dependence upon Him, that His Spirit may enfold us anew in the all-sufficiency of His all-seeing wisdom, protection and guidance.

Such daily habits are the making of a life that, Enoch-like, walks with God.

~ end of chapter 1 ~

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