

3. PRAYER

PRAYER IS the open highway to God. Jesus said, "Men ought always to pray, and not to faint." Luke 18:1. In our fast-moving age, when everyone is highway conscious, why have we forgotten the most important road of all? Through life, death, and the starlit spaces themselves, prayer is the highroad, the King's highway.

In Trygve Gulbrandsen's book *The Wind From the Mountains*, old Dag struggles toward the light amid his sorrows and troubles. But, opening the bishop's Bible, he sees these lines on the flyleaf:

"Our human thoughts and works are not so mighty
That they can cut a path to God, unblessed,
And so from Him the gift of prayer is sent us
To hallow both our labor and our quest.

Over life, and death, and starlit spaces
The highroad runs, that at His word was laid,
And reaches Him across the desert places;
By prayer it is our pilgrimage is made."

In the Old Testament story of Jacob and his dream at Bethel, he saw a ladder set up on the earth. The top of the ladder reached to heaven, and the angels of God ascended and descended upon it. God was encouraging him-and us-with the truth that heaven and earth are not separated, that there is still a highway, still a ladder between man and Himself.

When the first Atlantic cable was laid in 1850, great celebrations broke out on both sides of the Atlantic. Two great continents, which had been separated through the ages, were now united. When the deluge of sin first separated heaven and earth, a mighty cable of prayer was laid in the love of God, and never from that day to this has it been broken. The tempted and tried of earth communicate with the God of heaven; and messages of blessing, encouragement, and power come earthward.

There are several essential features of prayer. Fundamental to them all, however, is a recognition of the character of God and His relationship to us. Jesus taught us to say, "Our Father," when we pray. The purpose of prayer is to glorify God. "Praise waits for thee, O God. ... O thou that hears prayer, unto thee shall all flesh come." Psalm 65:1, 2.

Prayer involves thanksgiving when we recognize the true character of God and His constant manifestations of love and mercy to us as our Father. "In every thing by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God." Philippians 4:6. Before we make any requests to God, we are to recognize His universal dominion, His authority over all the universe and over ourselves, for "his kingdom rules over all." Psalm 103:19.

There are three kinds of petitions concerning our own welfare which are proper in prayer: (1) those that recognize God as the provider of all our necessities; (2) petitions that confess our sinfulness and seek God's forgiveness; and (3) those that recognize Him as our hope and refuge against all the workings of the evil one. In Jesus' life He practiced prayer, and in His words He teaches prayer. The whole aim of His life of ministry and sacrifice was to bring men back to God through redemption and adoption as sons, so that His disciples might pray in His name. His incarnation, His suffering, His ministry as our high priest-all are for this.

In what we call the Lord's Prayer there are six petitions for spiritual blessings and only one for our temporal wants. We need to remember that. Above all else, prayer is spiritual in its nature, its results, and the reasons behind it. The Lord's Prayer itself reveals Jesus Christ. Someone has said that He is in every word of it, that it is the "condensed substance of all previous prayers.

We know that Christ is in the Psalms, the great prayer book of the Bible, but He is there in prediction. He was the One longed for, hoped for, seen in the distance. In the Lord's Prayer He is Immanuel, God with us, the very loving heart of God speaking. Let us notice the main parts of the Lord's Prayer:

"Our Father which art in heaven." The cross made this prayer possible. Jesus said, "I ascend unto my Father, and your Father; and to my God, and your God." John 20:17. The Apostle Paul speaks of the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. (Ephesians 1: 17.) "Ye have received the Spirit of adoption,

whereby we cry Abba, Father." Romans 8:15. The word Abba, of course, means "Father." It is only through Christ and the redemption of the cross that we can really call God our Father. Jesus has died for us. He took our place, and we take His place as sons of God. Now we have also become the sons of God through faith.

"Hallowed be thy name." Jesus said, I am come in my Father's name." John 5:43. "He that hath seen me hath seen the Father." John 14:9. The name of Jesus is the "name which is above every name." (Philippians 2:9.)

"Thy kingdom come." Jesus is revealed as the King. He said, "My kingdom is not of this world: if my kingdom were of this world, then would my servants fight, . . . but now is my kingdom not from hence." John 18:36. But His kingdom will come, as we read in Matthew 25:31: "When the Son of man shall come in his glory, and all the holy angels with him, then shall he sit upon the throne of his glory."

The prophet Daniel describes the Son of man: "And there was given him dominion, and glory, and a kingdom, that all people, nations, and languages, should serve him: his dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and his kingdom that which shall not be destroyed." Daniel 7:14.

"Thy will be done in earth as it is in heaven." Jesus is the only One who has ever fulfilled God's will perfectly. "Lo, I come ... to do thy will, O God." Hebrews 10:7. He said, "I seek ... the will of the Father" (John 5:30); I came down from heaven ... to do ... the will of him that sent me." John 6:38. Through His petition the will of God will be done on earth and find its full realization when the knowledge of the Lord will cover the earth as the waters cover the sea. (Isaiah 11:9.)

"Give us this day our daily bread." Jesus said, I am the living bread which came down from heaven." John 6:51. All the goodness of God and the very food that we eat come to us through the grace and for the sake of Christ and the redemption. wrought in Him of all that is lost.

"Forgive us our debts." If any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous." 1 John 2: 1. "If we confess our sins., he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness." 1 John 1:9. God forgives us because Jesus has paid our debt upon the cross. In this we see the sufferings of Christ and His death for our redemption.

"Lead us not into temptation." Jesus `was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin." His sympathy for us is complete. He was "touched with the feeling of our infirmities." (Hebrews 4:15.) When Satan desires to have us to sift us as wheat, Jesus prays for us that our faith fail not. (Luke 22:31, 32.) This shows our Savior as our high priest, ministering for us and watching over us in tender sympathy.

"Deliver us from evil." Jesus won the victory on the cross. He said, "And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto me." John 12:32. "Now is the judgment of this world: now shall the prince of this world be cast out." Verse 31. I beheld Satan as lightning fall from heaven." Luke 10: 18. Jesus is the victor in the great controversy between good and evil. He will bruise Satan's head at last, for He came not only to destroy the works of the devil (1 John 3:8) but to destroy the devil himself. "That through death he might destroy him that had the power of death, that is, the devil." Hebrews 2:14. And He has promised to bruise Satan under our feet shortly. (Romans 16:20.)

"For yours is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, for ever." This reminds us of the words of the great prophecy of Revelation 11: 15, when "the seventh angel sounded; and there were great voices in heaven, saying, "The kingdoms of this world are become the kingdoms of our Lord, and of his Christ; and he shall reign for ever and ever."

"Amen." Jesus Himself takes this name. In the Book of Revelation 0:14) we find these words: "These things says the Amen, the faithful and true witness, the beginning of the creation of God."

We do well to study this prayer that Jesus gave us, for it is a model and part of His teaching. However, Jesus has much more to say on the subject. For example, our prayers are to be offered in His name: " whatsoever you shall ask in my name, that will I do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son. If you shall ask any thing in my name, I will do it." John 14:13, 14. The Savior made this very strong: 'Verily, verily, I say unto you, Whatsoever you shall ask the Father in my name, he will give it you." John 16:23. To pray in the name of Christ means more than merely mentioning His name at the beginning or ending of our prayer. It means to pray with the mind and spirit of Jesus, relying upon His promises, His grace, and working His works. Praying in Christ's name means praying for things that will promote His kingdom on earth. It means that we are seeking what He seeks. To come in Christ's name asking for selfish and worldly desires is absurd.

True prayer demands faith. "He that comes to God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him." Hebrews 11:6. Prayer involves submission to the revealed will of God. "He that turns away his ear from hearing the law, even his prayer shall be abomination." Proverbs 28:9. Real prayer means willingness to forsake all known sins. "If I regard iniquity in my heart, the Lord

will not hear me." Psalm 66:18.

Prayer must be earnest. Jesus illustrated this with the story of the unjust judge who would not give justice because it was right to do so, but because the widow who desired justice continued to come to him and would not be denied. At last the judge said, "Because this widow troubles me, I will avenge her, lest by her continual coming she weary me." Luke 18:5. And Jesus commented, "Shall not God avenge his own elect, which cry day and night unto him, though he bear long with them?" Verse 7.

And here is something important: True prayer must be accompanied with the spirit of forgiveness. Jesus said, "If you do not forgive, neither will your Father which is in heaven forgive your trespasses." Mark 11:26.

Prayer is to be offered not only in public but in private. We are to praise God in the great congregation, as David reminds us in Psalm 22:22, 25. At the same time we are to remember what Jesus said in Matthew 6:6: "But thou, when thou prays, enter into thy closet, and when thou has shut thy door, pray to thy Father which is in secret; and thy Father which sees in secret shall reward thee openly."

We notice also in this connection that we are not to use "vain repetitions, as the heathen do: for they think that they shall be heard for their much speaking. Be not you therefore like unto them: for your Father knows what things you have need of, before you ask him." Verses 7, 8. We think of some who repeat the same words over and over, even thousands of times. In the hearts of millions such prayers become a mere form. Some even have prayers written on pieces of paper and hung on trees; some use prayer wheels turned by hand or even by water or electric power! They feel that the mere repetition of sacred names or exalted sentiments will bring the blessings that they need. True prayer is an intimate communion between God and man; this is not found in vain repetitions.

Every day should open and close with prayer. In ancient Israel the morning and evening sacrifices continually turned the people's eyes and hearts toward God. In the morning our prayer should be one of dedication, giving ourselves anew to God for the day's work and service, and asking His care and protection. Evening prayer should be a prayer of retrospection. We should look back over the day that is past, confess our sins, thank God for His mercies, and commit ourselves in childlike faith into His hands during the hours of darkness and sleep.

The quiet spirit of meditation has its place in our prayers, especially in our secret prayers. It is said that Madame De Stael after a two-hour visit with a friend, in which she had talked continuously, remarked in parting, "What a delightful conversation we have had!" So it is with some of us. We talk and talk and talk to God and never listen to His voice speaking in our hearts. We forget that the Lord would like to speak to us. Savonarola, the great reformer and martyr, once remarked ironically that many of the saints in his day were "so busy talking to God that they could not hearken to Him." And so it is with us. We seldom wait to listen to God.

Listening for God's voice may be illustrated by the words of Samuel, who as a boy heard the voice of God and said, "Speak; for thy servant hears." 1 Samuel 3: 10. Maurice D. Stevenson tells of an experience in the oil country of Pennsylvania, where his parents came to visit him. One day he and his father were in the barn. When someone opened the window suddenly, the father asked, "Son, where are they drilling out there?"

"Nowhere," young Stevenson answered.

"Yes, they are. It might be a mile and a half or even two miles away, but I can hear them pulling the tools now.

The son could hear nothing, so he put his head out the window. Very faintly in the distance he could hear the humming of the rope, the turning of the wheels and pulleys. Then he remembered that there was a well being drilled about a mile and a half away.

Why had his father heard it when he did not hear it? His own hearing was normal, while the hearing of the father was not good. The reason the older man heard it was that he had spent about half of his life in the oil business and was trained to hear such sounds. So every Christian should be trained by experience and faith to hear the voice of God.

Our prayers should not be proud prayers. "And when thou prayest," Jesus said, "thou shall not be as the hypocrites are: for they love to pray ... that they may be seen of men." Matthew 6:5. Two preachers Dr. A. H. Franke and Dr. Anton, were walking along a country road when suddenly they heard someone praying. There, behind some bushes not far from the road, were two lads on their knees, one of them praying very loudly. It seemed to be a good prayer, and the ministers enjoyed listening to it. When he closed, the boy who had prayed turned to his friend and said, "Say, didn't I pray nice?" Of course the ministers were shocked. Such an attitude of spiritual pride pains us, but isn't that the experience of many,

far too many, even now? Is it not possible to begin a prayer in humility and then, by an imperceptible change, end in some sort of self-praise?

The Apostle Paul by divine inspiration wrote, 'We know not what we should pray for as we ought.' But that wasn't all. He continued, "The Spirit also helps our infirmities: ... the Spirit itself makes intercession for us with groaning which cannot be uttered." Romans 8:26. We may have God's help even in our prayers. He who desires to hear our prayers will help us to pray.

Jesus stressed three ingredients of real prayer: First, it is conditional. We approach God on a condition, and that condition is threefold: (1) We must have clean hearts; we cannot cling to idols. (2) We must have faith; we must believe that God can and will answer prayer. (3) We must be obedient. "And whatsoever we ask, we receive of him, because we keep his commandments, and do those things that are pleasing in his sight." 1 John 3:22.

Secondly prayer is costly. It takes a surrendered heart; it takes earnestness; it takes time. We are to be in a spirit of prayer all the time. We can pray while we work, while we walk, while we wash dishes, while we make beds, while we sit at our desks. But besides this, there must be earnest secret prayer. Jesus said, "But thou, when thou prays, enter into thy closet." Matthew 6:6. If Jesus should come to your home, you certainly would not walk around continuing your work while talking to Him. You would welcome Him; you would sit down and talk with Him. You would show Him every respect. You would spend time with Him. So in prayer; prayer costs time. The devil will do all he can to stop such communion. He will interfere; he will bring interruptions.

Lastly, prayer is victorious. It conquers; it overcomes circumstances. And it will conquer not only in our own lives but in the lives of others. "If any man see his brother sin a sin which is not unto death, he shall ask, and he shall give him life for them that sin not unto death." 1 John 5:16. We need power if others need help. If the work of God needs victory, let us pray. "Ask, and you shall receive." John 16:24. Let us not limit God in our unbelief or hold back the blessings that would come upon the world if we prayed for God's work and God's workers. "Thus says the Lord, the Holy One of Israel, and his Maker, Ask me of things to come concerning my sons, and concerning the work of my hands command you me." Isaiah 45: 11.

If we should quote all Jesus said about prayer and all the Bible says about prayer, we would fill many pages. Let us never forget that above all else, God desires to answer the prayers of His children. Jesus said, If a son shall ask bread of any of you that is a father, will he give him a stone? Or if he ask a fish, will he for a fish give him a serpent? Or if he shall ask an egg, will he offer him a scorpion? If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children: how much more shall your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to them that ask him? " Luke 11: 11 - 13. Then why do we not ask? Any father loves to give good things to his children. He receives more joy from the giving than they do from the receiving.

So it is with God; He longs to give. The trouble is that we do not pray, we do not ask, we do not beseech Him for the gifts we need. Jesus told the story of a man who went to his friend at midnight and said, 'Lend me three loaves. A traveler who needs refreshment has come to my home.' But the response was, 'Don't bother me. The children are all in bed. I can't get up and help you now.' But the man kept asking, he kept requesting. So this friend finally got up in the cold night and gave him the bread. By this parable Jesus illustrates the constancy, the earnestness, so necessary in prayer. We mean business in other things. Why not in prayer? When we pray in faith we should leave our worries and problems in the hands of God. He understands them all and does not wish us to carry the burdens of the world. Jesus has carried them, and He is watching over us. Hall Caine, the well-known British author, tells the story of a bishop who was riding along a road in the Isle of Man and saw a convict on his knees breaking stones on the road. The bishop stopped to give some encouragement and advice to the poor fellow. When he was about to leave him, he said, "I wish I could break up the stony hearts of my people as you are breaking up those rocks." The convict looked up at the ecclesiastic and replied, "Perhaps, you could, Sir, if you would work on your knees."

David Helfenstein tells of a time of special prayer in his own life. Great burdens were facing him, and apparent injustice was to be done to him. At the family altar he prayed earnestly that he might be delivered from those things and from unscrupulous men. The next day he expressed the same anxiety. His little girl ' about nine years old, came and climbed up on his knee, put her hands on his cheeks, looked him in the eyes, and said: -Father, you prayed about that last night. I wouldn't pray and worry both." This reproof was heeded, and soon God did answer his prayer. So friends, why should we pray and worry both? Prayer is enough.

Both the Holy Scriptures and Christian experience are full of answered prayers. I shall tell here of

just one answered prayer which has been of great interest to me for years. The story is taken from an old book which describes the work of Dr. Jacob Chamberlain, a pioneer missionary in south central India.

The Godavari River was in flood, and the missionary was caught out with a party of workers, having expected to find a government boat on the river. Word had come to them that the boat had broken down fighting the swift current. So there seemed nothing for them to do but to hasten to higher land back from the river. The path they had to travel was a dangerous one, and night would soon come. Already the roar of tigers could be heard in the jungles. The hired carriers had deserted their loads and fled for safety before nightfall.

The missionary dropped back a little way from the marching party and called upon God in prayer. "Master," he said, "was it not for Thy sake that we came here? Didst Thou not promise, 'I will be with thee'? O Master, show me what to do!" Now we will let Dr. Chamberlain tell in his own words how the answer came:

"An answer came, not audible, but distinct as though spoken in my ear by human voice: 'Turn to the left, to the Godavari, and you will find rescue.'"

"Riding rapidly forward, I overtook the guides. "How far is it to the Godavari?" I asked.

"A good mile."

"Is there no village on its banks?"

"No, none within many miles, and the banks are all overflowed."

"Is there no mound, no rising ground, on which we can camp out of this water?"

"It is all low and flat like this."

I drew apart and prayed again, as we still plodded on. Again came the answer, "Turn to the left, to the Godavari, and you will find rescue."

"Again I called to the guides and questioned them: 'Are you sure there is no rising ground by the river where we can pitch with the river on one side for protection and campfires around us on the other, through the night?'"

"None what ever."

"Think well; is there no dry timber of which we could make a raft?"

"If there were any, it would all be washed away by these floods."

"Is there no boat of any sort on the river? I have authority to seize anything I need."

"None nearer than the cataract."

"How long would it take us to reach the Godavari by the nearest path?"

"Half an hour; but it would be so much time lost, for we would have to come back here again, and cut our way through this jungle to the bluff, and climb that. There is no other way of getting around these two flooded streams that we must pass to reach the cataract."

"How long would it take us to cut our way through to the bluff?"

"At least six hours; and it will be dark in an hour."

"What shall we do for tonight?"

"God knows." And they looked the despair they felt.

"I drew aside again and prayed as I rode on. 'Turn to the left, to the Godavari, and you will find rescue,' came the response the third time. It was not audible; none of those near heard it. I cannot explain it, but to me it was as distinct as though spoken by a voice in my car; it thrilled me. 'God's answer to my prayer,' said I, 'I cannot doubt. I must act, and that instantly.'

'Hastening forward to the guides at the head of the column, I said, 'Halt!' in a voice to be heard by all. 'Turn sharp to the left. Guides, show us the shortest way to the Godavari. Quick?'

"They remonstrated stoutly that it was only labor lost., that we should be in a worse plight there than here, for the river might rise higher and wash us away in the darkness of the night.

"Obey!' said I. 'March sharp, or night will come. I am master here. Show the way to the river.'

"All the party had surrounded me. My native preacher looked up inquiringly at my awed face. 'There is rescue at the river,' was all I said. How could I say more?"

Pushing his guides before him, the missionary soon broke through to the river, and there he saw the way of refuge. At that moment a boat crew was attempting to tie a large barge to a tree on the bank. The craft had broken loose far above, and at no place before had they been able to stop it. The boatmen were afraid, thinking that Dr. Chamberlain was an official. "Please don't be angry with us," they said. "We did our best to keep the boat from coming here; but, Sir, it seemed as though it was 'possessed.'" Dr. Chamberlain knew well the hand that had interposed.

No doubt many who read this could themselves tell true experiences of answered prayer. Jesus is our example. He prayed; His life was a life of prayer. He prayed during His ministry. He prayed in the Garden of Gethsemane. He prayed on the cross. The disciples were so impressed by His prayer life that they said, "Lord, teach us to pray." Luke 11: 1. The Savior will teach us to pray, and our lives will be transformed and victorious.

"Lord, what a change within us one short hour Spent in Thy presence will avail to make!
What heavy burdens from our bosoms take!
What parched grounds refresh as with a shower! We kneel, and all around us seems to lower;
We rise, and all, the distant and the near,
Stands forth in sunny outline, brave and clear;
We kneel, how weak! We rise, how full of power!
Why, therefore, should we do ourselves this wrong, For others-that we are not always strong-
That we are sometimes overborne with care
That we should ever weak or heartless be,
Anxious or troubled-when with us is prayer,
And joy and strength and courage are with Thee -Archbishop Trench.

BIBLE SUMMARY

What did God do for job when he prayed?

"And the Lord turned the captivity of job, when he prayed for his friends." job 42:10.

Who are some other men of God who prayed?

Jacob. (Genesis 32:24-30; Hosea 12:4.) Moses, a man of God. (Psalm 90.) Hannah, who prayed for a son. (1 Samuel 1:10-28; 2:1-10.) David. (2 Samuel 22.) Daniel, who prayed for the restoration of Jerusalem. (Daniel 9:4-19.)

What did Jesus say about agreeing in prayer?

I say unto you, That if two of you shall agree on earth as touching any thing that they shall ask, it shall be

done for them of my Father which is in heaven. For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them." Matthew 18:19, 20.

What can we do when the laborers in God's harvest are few?

"But when he saw the multitudes, he was moved with compassion on them, because they fainted, and were scattered abroad, as sheep having no shepherd. Then said he unto his disciples, The harvest truly is plenteous, but the laborers are few; pray you therefore the Lord of the harvest, that he will send forth laborers into his harvest." Matthew 9:36-38.

What should we do when temptation threatens?

"And when he was at the place, he said unto them, Pray that you enter not into temptation." "Why sleep you? rise and pray, lest you enter into temptation." Luke 22:40, 46.

Does the Bible give another example of brief prayer besides the Lord's Prayer?

"At that time Jesus answered and said, I thank thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because thou has hid these things from the wise and prudent, and has revealed them unto babes. Even so, Father: for so it seemed good in thy sight." Matthew 11:25, 26.

What should accompany prayer in some cases?

"Howbeit this kind goes not out but by prayer and fasting." Matthew 17:21.

What did Jesus say about His Father's temple?

"My house shall be called the house of prayer." Matthew 21:13.

What was our Savior's prayer regarding His disciples?

"Neither pray I for these alone, but for them also which shall believe on me through their word; that they all may be one; as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us. That the world may believe that thou has sent me." John 17:20, 21.

What did Jesus pray regarding the cup of agony that was presented to Him in the Garden of Gethsemane?

"And he went a little farther, and fell on his face, and prayed, saying, O my Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me: nevertheless not as I will, but as thou wilt." Matthew 26:39, 40.

What was Jesus' last prayer before His atoning death upon the cross?

"My God, my God, why has thou forsaken me?" Matthew 27:46.

What request is made in the last prayer in the Bible?

"Even so, come, Lord Jesus." Revelation 22:20.

With our readers we leave these words of Jesus: "Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and you shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you; for every one that asks receives; and he that seeks finds; and to him that knocks it shall be opened." Matthew 7:7, 8.

"More things are wrought by prayer Than this world dreams of. Wherefore, let thy voice Rise like a fountain for me night and day. For what are men better than sheep or goats That nourish a blind life within the brain, If, knowing God, they lift not hands of prayer Both for themselves and those who call them friend? For so the whole round earth is every way Bound by gold chains about the feet of God."

-Alfred Lord Tennyson.