

HIS IN A . . . LIFE OF PRAYER

by

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CHAPTER THREE

HIS RESPONSE TO A LIFE OF PRAYER

“Now unto Him that is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that worketh in us” (Ephesians 3:20).

Further meditation upon the foregoing study will suggest the fact that prayer is not of an unvarying uniformity in its expression, but rather falls naturally into different phases, or parts, according to the prevailing purpose in view.

- Our approach to God the Father calls for adoration and worship.
- Our use of **“the name”** leads on to petition and intercession.
- And the needful accompaniments of prayer call for confession and thanksgiving.

Paul exhorts **“that supplications, prayers, intercessions, thanksgivings, be made for all men”** (I Timothy 2:1). This listing covers a specific field, namely, **“for all men,”** hence it does not include worship.

Matthew Henry gives five parts of prayer: Adoration, Confession, Petition, Thanksgiving, Intercession.

Self—Others—Himself

Evidently there are degrees of ascent in prayer. There are steps of progress from the lower to the higher. These it is our present purpose to trace. Not that we outgrow the simpler forms of prayer—never that; but through these, as our spiritual life expands in purpose and enriches in experience of Him, we find ourselves led on into the loftier reaches of prayer-attainment.

Prayer, in its simplest conception, is asking. This is our child-privilege. In it we are occupied largely with ourselves and our needs. But as we grow into a realization of our spiritual relationships—to Christ our Head; to one another, as members of His body; to His Kingdom and to the world of men for whom He died—prayer becomes more than a privilege. It is nothing short of a serious responsibility. The soul has passed from mere asking to the business of interceding. Moreover, the center of concern has shifted—shifted from the needs of self to the need of others.

Yet, great as is this step, there is one higher. It is seeking His face, for His own sake. Herein we are engaged in communing with Him, holding fellowship with Him, occupied with Himself.

As in this prayer-progression our center of interest changes, from self to others, from others to Himself; so likewise is there a corresponding progress in His response. It may be stated thus: In response to our asking, He gives; to our interceding, He works; to our communing, He reveals.

I—Prayer as Petition

The prayer-teaching of Scripture is perfectly plain as to the intimate, cause-and-effect connection in the Christian's experience between asking and having. How altogether unwholesome if the child never asked, and the father never gave. Our Heavenly Father is more eager than we to have this bond maintained. Hence, we are taught:

1. WE HAVE BECAUSE WE ASK.

A simple solution of need, surely; yet it is supported by many scriptures. Here are a few:

“Ask, and it shall be given you . . . For every one that asketh receiveth” (Matthew 7:7, 8).

“If any of you lack . . . let him ask of God” (James 1:5).

“Call unto Me, and I will answer thee” (Jeremiah 33:3).

Not only is this true; it is so essential and fundamental to the divine economy that

2. WE HAVE NOT BECAUSE WE ASK NOT.

Jesus said, **“If ye ask . . . I will do.”** James, therefore, makes bold to trace our impoverishment, our going without, to just one source—a lack of desire Godward.

“Ye have not because ye ask not” (James 4:2).

The context suggests all manner of striving, even to wanton violence, in order to obtain. Why will a man resort to everything, rather than ask of God? Strange, is it not? And all to no avail, For **“God resisteth the proud,”** too proud to seek blessing at His hands. Should He not then, wisely, checkmate His child's effort to have apart from his Father, till he comes to himself and takes the child's rightful attitude of asking?

This he does, for our sake, for His own sake, in the interests of the bond between us. But more, the same considerations carry Him one step further in the matter.

3. WE HAVE NOT BECAUSE WE ASK AMISS.

We have learned the lesson of asking; this is qualified by yet one other. We have not sifted our motives in asking. We have not brought them to Him for purifying. We have seized upon prayer as a means of gratifying self. So James continues:

“Ye ask, and receive not, because ye ask amiss, that ye may consume it upon your lusts”
(James 4:3).

“Lusts,” in the Greek, has no reference to the baser passions, simply to the self-cravings of our natures, seeking gratification. We ask because we want for ourselves. Such prayer is poorly disguised selfishness, parading under the cloak of piety.

To illustrate. Could we pray for a hundred dollar coat and expect to receive it? We need a coat, but why a hundred dollar coat? Analyzing the matter we see that the difficulty in getting it does not lie with God. Out of His abundant resources He could readily supply us with a five hundred dollar coat. Yes, He would gladly do it, for, as a Father, He delights to bestow the best. But the difficulty lies in us. Our praying for such a coat would be prompted by our **“own lusts.”** This it is that precludes God’s giving it in answer to prayer.

But now, as we continue to pray—and this is the point of the illustration—our answer comes within us. Not receiving our request, our praying intensifies. We pass from **“asking”** to **“seeking”**; from seeking to **“knocking.”** This is God’s opportunity. He searches the heart. He shows us our selfishness. Our prayer-life is purged of self-seeking. Our prayer-motives are purified. We say, “Lord, not a hundred dollar coat; any coat You, in Your love and wisdom, see fit to send me.”

Dear reader, this is the primal benefit accruing from a consistent Life of Prayer. In it the chief reason for unanswered prayer is removed. When our Father, through access to our hearts afforded Him in prayer, has secured a right inner state, He can so very readily care for our outer estate.

4. ASKING ARIGHT WE HAVE **“ABOVE ALL WE ASK.”**

When our hearts are cleansed of self-hindrances, we are brought out into a large place where His giving far exceeds our asking. Not that He always gives what we ask. To do so would leave no room for His divine wisdom and love. He always gives **“good things.”** What we ask, not now in “lust” but in short-sightedness, may be far from good for us. What He has to give may be infinitely better.

Thus a true Life of Prayer is not so much “getting” God to do something—though it is this; but more, it is “letting” Him do in accordance with His “exceeding-abundantly-above” ability.

Thanks be unto Him for His answers to prayer **“above all we ask or think.”** Yes, and thanks when His answers seem so adverse to the tenor of our asking. His ways are ways of wisdom; they are always best.

An illustration in point is the experience of Paul— II Corinthians 12:7-10. Prompted by a physical necessity, **“a thorn in the flesh,”** Paul petitioned the Lord for a physical benefit. He asked to have it removed. He asked, without answer. He asked again, and again. The Lord was preparing him for an answer **“above”** his asking.

The Lord wished to give him, not a physical, but a spiritual benefit. He left the thorn with him, saying, **“My grace is sufficient for thee: for My strength is made perfect in weakness.”**

This answer above his asking proved to be one of the unspeakable blessings of the Apostle’s life, a perpetual bond between himself and his Lord, of which he testifies:

“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” (II Corinthians 12:9, 10).

II—Prayer as Intercession

In the act of praying there is a centripetal force that tends ever to draw it in toward our normal center of thinking, namely, our natural concern for self and self’s interest— my health, my family, my business, my finances, my Church, my _____. The next time you “say your prayers” note how readily, yea unconsciously, the exercise gravitates to a routine rehearsal of these things in the ears of the Lord. It is the line of least effort and thought. But it spells spiritual stagnation.

The antidote is in a Life of Intercession—the resolute resolve to pray less for self, more for others. No more wholesome, broadening step could be taken.

- It lifts us out of the wearisome circle of self.
- It expands our horizon with world-wide sympathies and interests.
- It squares our prayer-life with the fact that **“the field is the world.”**
- It gives us a loving interest in all men, saved and unsaved, near at hand and remote.
- It makes us partners in the greatest undertakings, the Gospel, the Church, the enterprise of missions, to the ends of the earth.

1. OUR POSITION AS INTERCESSORS.

When the disciples besought Jesus, **“Lord, teach us to pray,”** He led them at once into the necessity of using prayer to meet the needs of others:

“And He said unto them, Which of you shall have a friend, and shall go unto him at midnight, and say unto him, Friend, lend me three loaves; for a friend of mine in his journey is come to me, and I have nothing to set before him? And he from within shall answer and say, Trouble me not: the door is now shut, and my children are with me in bed; I cannot rise and give thee. I say unto you, though he will not rise and give him, because he is his friend, yet because of his importunity he will rise and give him as many as he needeth” (Luke 11:5-8).

The heart of Jesus’ picture is this: He places us between two friends, the one in need, the other abundantly able to supply that need. We are the go-between.

To know men and their need; to know the Lord and His Grace; again, to be touched with the urgency of the need, and to believe implicitly in the power that will supply the need at our request—this constitutes our call to intercession.

And what is it but another way of describing our office as priests? To know both men and God; to be touched with man's dire need and helplessness, and be privileged to lay hold of God on his behalf—this is the position of priest into which we have been officially inducted.

Again, viewing our responsibility through Old Testament imagery, we read:

“I have set watchmen upon thy walls, O Jerusalem, which shall never hold their peace day nor night: ye that make mention of the LORD, keep not silence, And give him no rest” (Isaiah 62:6, 7).

“**Ye that make mention of the LORD!**” What a calling! As though He invited us to keep Him ever mindful of His solemn, covenant promises. Having bound Himself thereby, He bids us share the obligation by pleading it in His ears.

2. IN INTERCESSION WE WORK.

That we grasp this is so very essential. Prayer is an appointed means for getting work done. Work that we could do no other way. Work that otherwise will not get done. Moreover, we are not working alone; we are working with Him. Doubtless there is no way in which we work so hand-in-hand with Christ Jesus our Lord as in praying for others.

In the hour that Jesus passed through the heavens, and was seated at the Father's right hand, He became the Great Intercessor. His redemptive work accomplished, He began His intercessory work. The one portraiture we have of Him there through these centuries is that “**He ever liveth to make intercession.**” The Gospels contain a record “**of all that Jesus began to do**” (Acts 1:1). This work He is carrying on from Heaven, through intercession.

Believers, united to Him by the Spirit, partakers of His nature and life, co-partners with Him in the Gospel and its ministration, He has called and qualified us to share His age-long work. And what a work it is. For, while we work with Him, He, in response, works through us and far beyond us, in ways past tracing out.

3. THROUGH OUR INTERCESSION HE WORKS.

Jesus, about to leave His disciples, said of the believer: “**Greater works than these shall he do; because I go unto My Father**” (there to take up this intercessory work). But in His very next words these “**greater works**” are shown to be not ours, but His in response to our asking. Let us write it thus:

“**Because I am going to My Father, and** (through My presence there) **whatsoever ye shall ask in My name, that I will do**” (John 14:12, 13).

The “**greater works**” are made possible by His presence with the Father; they are made actual by His working in response to our asking.

As soon as Christ had ascended, this very thing was demonstrated. The Book of Acts—deeds—is a remarkable record of the Apostles and early Church, in which two prominent features are these:

(1) THEY PRAYED.

- The Church began with prayer (1:14);
- They continued in prayer (2:42);
- The leaders put prayer before preaching (6:4);
- They were endued with the Spirit by prayer (8:15);
- Their leaders were set apart by prayer (6:6; 13:3); etc., etc.

(2) THE LORD WORKED.

- He sent the Holy Spirit;
- He brought conviction to three thousand hearts;
- He added daily to the Church;
- He healed the lame man;
- He did wonders in His name;
- He sent His angel to release His Apostles, and later Peter, from prison;
- He effected from heaven the conversion of Saul;
- He constrained Peter to go and preach the Gospel to the Gentiles.

The Apostolic missionaries, being sent forth with undergirding prayer (Acts 13:2-4), came back and “**declared particularly what things God had wrought among the Gentiles by his ministry**” (Acts 21:19).

Thus it was intended to be throughout the centuries. Thus it is meant to be in the twentieth century. The history of the Church should be the record of the Lord working through, yet above and beyond our working, in response to believing prayer.

What a limitless field for service is opened by this provision to every believer, once he accepts his calling to intercession. The circumstances of his life may seemingly hem him in to a narrow routine, possibly secular in the extreme. Yet here is a service that lifts him out of all such limitations, makes his horizon coextensive with earth’s remotest bounds, sends him far afield to the achieving of world-wide victories. In it his Lord says to him, “**Behold, I have set before thee an open door, and no man can shut it**” (Revelation 3:8).

(1) *He may multiply his own life many fold.* Eager to do the Lord’s work, yet denied the privilege of going in person, he finds the Lord has made explicit provision for others to go through his interceding.

“The harvest truly is plenteous, but the labourers are few; pray ye therefore the Lord of the harvest, that He will send forth labourers into His harvest” (Matthew 9:37, 38).

The Lord invites us, through a deep concern for the harvest, to ask Him to send enough laborers to care for it. **“If ye ask, I will do.”** Today, on all sides, there is complaint of serious shortage. If men so see it, how much more the Lord? But He made ample provision. He is waiting upon us, His intercessors. In testimony of this read the incident on “Pastor-less Churches,” at the end of chapter six.

The writer had hoped to be on the mission field. Denied the privilege, he has had the joy of seeing many young lives claimed for the Lord. They have yielded themselves, trained and gone. Still others are going. Untold others might have gone had we matched the challenge of the Lord of the harvest.

(2) *Again, the believer may project himself into the field through intercession.* Going in person, one experiences the limitations of language, locality, prejudice, opposition, etc. Going by way of the Throne, through the power of His Spirit, we may touch lives, transform situations, break down opposition, achieve results that could not be wrought through our personal presence or human effort. Let us remember, wherever we can send a thought, Christ can send a blessing. Radio is no more efficient for reaching distant places and peoples than the instrument of intercession in the hands of persevering faith, flung forth from a heart burning with divine yearning.

III—Prayer as Communion

In response to our asking, He gives. In response to our interceding, He works. But now, the soul mounts up through these privileged forms of prayer to a yet higher— that of communion.

In Communion we are occupied, not with His gifts, nor yet with His graciously promised works, but with Himself. We seek, not His benefits, but His own Self. This is aptly illustrated by the story of the little boy coming one morning to his father’s study. To the father’s question, “What do you want, my boy?” the reply was, “Oh nothing; I just wanted to be with you.”

Says the Apostle John, doubtless out of experience, **“Truly our fellowship is with the Father, and with His Son Jesus Christ”** (I John 1:3). As God saw Adam unsatisfied and alone in the midst of an animal creation, no kindred spirit with whom to commune, calling for the creation of one like unto himself with whom he could hold fellowship, so is it with every born-again one. **“That which is born of the Spirit is spirit.”** Nothing can answer to or satisfy the spirit. There is no kinship. The heart craves communion. The soul is starved that does not seek and find fellowship with God. **“When Thou saidst, Seek ye My face; my heart said unto Thee, Thy face, Lord, will I seek”** (Psalm 27:8).

But it means far more than merely “to be with Him,” wonderful as is the privilege. It is our Lord’s expressed purpose to manifest Himself unto us, as not unto the world.

“I will manifest Myself to him.”

This is the greatest reward of prayer. Here prayer rises to its highest and best. It does not longer depend upon human wisdom in asking. It is tapping the resources of **“Him who is able to do exceeding abundantly above all we ask or think.”** It is laying hold of the mind of Him **“in whom are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.”** In it human initiative and desire are exchanged for the divine. Confessedly it opens to us a field of limitless possibility.

An illustration may be found in the use of wireless at sea.

Someone aboard ship wishes information. A question is sent out and the answer received over the air. How wonderful! Who in our day can reasonably doubt the reality of prayer? But such use of the radio is too limited; it has brought in nothing but what was initiated by those aboard. Let the instrument be opened and adjusted to receive what is in the air for them, and lo, bits of world-intelligence, things unknown and unsought, come trooping in to them. Such preeminently is prayer when it rises to its highest prerogative.

God’s Response to a Life of Prayer

Very evidently we have come to the place where prayer can no longer be regarded as isolated acts of petitioning, in an attempt to get something from God. It is meant to be so much more. Prayer is a life, constantly aspiring to live in conscious communion with God.

“Friendship with Jesus,
Fellowship divine,—
Oh, what blessed sweet communion!
Jesus is a friend of mine.”

This is our side of it. From His side, what? He has purposes entirely beyond our ken.

“As it is written, Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love Him” (I Corinthians 2:9).

The exposing of mind and heart to Him in prayer-fellowship furnishes Him the opportunity to reveal Himself as in no other way. The beneficent results, who can anticipate? Carried out of the narrowness and shallowness of ourselves into the breadth and depth of Himself, what surprises await us. Thus prayer is God’s provision for further and fuller revelation.

What the consistent practicing of a Life of Prayer has meant to others it may, and should, mean to us. For our encouragement we consider the following:

1. JESUS CHRIST OUR LORD.

Jesus lived a Life of Prayer, with such devotion that His disciples, seeking to emulate His example, requested: **“Lord, teach us to pray.”**

Yet the Gospel narratives are singularly lacking in any record of specific answers to His prayers. Why? His prayer-life was one of constant communion with His Father, in loving, filial dependence upon Him. His ministry was the equally constant response of the Father, manifesting Himself to Him, speaking His words and working His works through His Son.

“Believest thou not that I am in the Father, and the Father in Me? the words that I speak unto you I speak not of Myself: but the Father that dwelleth in Me, He doeth the works” (John 14:10).

Turning now to specific experiences in His prayer-life, we find the following:

First, at His baptism, the record reads:

“Jesus also being baptized, and praying, the heaven was opened, and the Holy Ghost descended in a bodily shape like a dove upon Him, and a voice came from heaven, which said, Thou art My beloved Son; in Thee I am well pleased” (Luke 3:21, 22).

There is no hint that Jesus asked for this. It is not that the bestowment of the Spirit and accompanying commendation were an answer to prayer. They were the Father’s response to His Son; His superabundant blessing upon One who had put Himself in the way of blessing.

Second, the Sermon on the Mount was preceded by an **“all night”** with the Father.

“And it came to pass in those days, that He went out into a mountain to pray, and continued all night in prayer to God” (Luke 6:12).

This matchless sermon has been the admiration of the ages, yet men are wont to miss the fact, carefully called to our attention by Luke, that its words of wisdom, correction, instruction and authority are the Father’s response to a protracted communing with Him. What might not the Father do for other sons to whom the same privilege is freely accorded?

Third, the Transfiguration. Of this gracious and glorious experience it is recorded;

“He took Peter and John and James, and went up into a mountain to pray. And as He prayed, the fashion of His countenance was altered, and His raiment was white and glistening” (Luke 9:28, 29).

“As He prayed” there was vouchsafed to Him, not an answer, but a response—a response suited to the Son’s need in that crisis hour.

Facing the Cross, He was given a foregleam of the glory that awaited Him beyond. The disciples **“saw His glory”** and heard the accrediting voice, **“This is My beloved Son: hear Him.”**

He was transformed through prayer. What encouragement for us to seek our Father’s face at all times.

2. ABRAHAM.

Here is a life with but one explanation. It is the unfolding of a fellowship with God. Even its failures are recorded to give added emphasis to this fact; they occur where communion is broken off. The story of his life is comprehended in: faith in God, separation unto God, communion with God, obedience to God, all summarized in the title “**the friend of God.**”

As we have seen, prayer first became a mutual matter, a communion, in the covenant relationship of Abraham and his Lord. In response “**the Lord appeared unto him**” in an intimacy of fellowship anticipative of “**the days of His flesh**” (Genesis 18:1 ff). He supped with him, a beautiful picture of New Covenant fellowship (see Revelation 3:20). Then, as He was leaving for His inspection of Sodom’s wickedness, He said:

“**Shall I hide from Abraham that thing which I do?**” (Genesis 18:17).

How wonderful a result of communion with God! It was nothing Abraham had asked or sought. Fellowship had established a bond that constrained the Lord to this piece of confidence with His friend. And, be it noted, it also emboldened Abraham for a remarkable bit of intercession, growing out of it (Genesis 18:23-32). The scene concludes:

“**And the Lord went His way, as soon as He had left communing with Abraham: and Abraham returned unto his place**” (Genesis 18:33).

3. MOSES.

In many respects Moses is the most remarkable exponent of prayer in the Old Testament. In this he is a type of Christ.

(1) *He is led into a life of communion with the Lord.*

(2) *He becomes the great intercessor.* And, like Abraham, the latter grew out of the former.

What communings characterized the forty years of retirement we may only conjecture; but it was in response to them that the Lord appeared to Moses in the burning bush (Exodus 3:2).

In what followed there is naught of Moses’ asking; it is altogether beyond his asking or thinking, yes, even contrary to it.

(1) *The Lord revealed Himself;* and the experience was so wonderful that we read:

“**And Moses hid his face; for he was afraid to look upon God**” (Exodus 3:6).

(2) *He revealed His plans, taking Moses into His confidence* (vv. 7-9).

(3) *He proposed that Moses become partner with Him for the carrying out of His purposes* (vs. 10 ff).

(4) *This experience altered his entire life’s course.*

He moved forward by a divine plan, not of his own devising. Having seen the Lord **“he endured as seeing Him who is invisible”** (Hebrews 11:27).

Many times did the Lord vouchsafe guidance and direction to His servant in the supplying of His people’s need. Then, chief of all, came the two protracted audiences in the mount. Descending from these prolonged communings, his face was radiant with heavenly light.

4. ELIJAH.

There is a rugged boldness about this prophet’s prayer-life that could come only from intimate communion with the Lord. Out of a confidence begotten of heavenly converse he asked with a daring scarce equaled anywhere. Lest he seem to us of another mold, we read for our encouragement:

“Elijah was a man subject to like passions as we are, and he prayed earnestly that it might not rain: and it rained not on the earth by the space of three years and six months. And he prayed again, and the heaven gave rain, and the earth brought forth her fruit” (James 5:17, 18).

The end of that trial of faith came with a spectacular demonstration of power on Carmel. The Lord God heard and answered with heaven-sent fire. And then, altogether apart from his asking, the end of the prophet’s career came in a climax of power and glory, a chariot of fire sent to carry him home. It was the Lord’s response in signal testimony to a life lived in separation to his Lord as well as in opposition to the infidelity of his day.

5. DANIEL.

Daniel’s was a life of utmost devotion to his God. It centered wholly in Him. In intimate communings with the Lord he sought to know His mind and with equal fidelity to do His will. Resolutely determining at the outset, in the midst of adverse circumstances, to be separated unto his God and well-pleasing unto Him, he grew in favor with God and in esteem with men.

Daniel’s prayer-life was seemingly its dominant characteristic, its ruling passion. When he had risen to the premiership of the realm, his political enemies plotted against him. They found but one vulnerable point—his habit of prayer. They acted upon the conviction that he would continue in it at all costs, even to death itself. And he did. But God’s answer to such devotion was his deliverance from the lions and his enemies’ destruction by them, much to the glorification of His name and worship under the king’s edict.

Daniel’s whole life, with the marvelous book that bears his name, is a remarkable testimony, not to the fact that God answers prayer, but to the manner in which He responds to such a life in the revealing of His mind and will. **“The secret of the Lord is with them that fear Him; and He will show them His covenant”** (Psalm 25:14). The word for **“secret”** means counsel, the intimate converse of confidants or familiar friends. Doubtless this very scripture was Daniel’s frequent inspiration in prayer.

It was thus he came to know the secret of the king's dream and its interpretation. It was thus that the Lord entrusted him with the revealing of His prophetic program down to the end.

When at last Daniel was prompted to pray that great prayer of confession on behalf of himself and his people (Daniel 9:1-19), he was accorded this twofold response:

- (1) the assurance that he was “**greatly beloved**” (9:23);
- (2) the revelation of the Lord's purposes for his people—far beyond all asking—even their prophetic history determined to the end (9:24-27).

Later, a three weeks' seeking of the face of the Lord (10:2, 3) received a like twofold response:

- (1) he was twice assured of being “**greatly beloved**” of the Lord (10:11, 19);
- (2) he was vouchsafed a vision of the Lord (10:5-21).

He saw Him as the incarnate Son of God—the Son of Man in glory (cf. Daniel 10:5-8 with Revelation 1:12-18). Truly this is the highest reward of a Life of Prayer.

6 AND 7. CORNELIUS AND PETER.

We come now to two New Testament characters, and their prayer experience is so intimately interwoven that we must necessarily study them together. They too exemplify the needfulness of a Life of Prayer if we are to take our place and play our part in the harmonious working out of the divine will.

The story is a beautiful one. Cornelius, a centurion, a Gentile proselyte to Judaism, is introduced to us as

“A devout man, and one that feared God with all his house, which gave much alms to the people, and prayed to God alway” (Acts 10:2).

He “**prayed to God alway,**” yet in ignorance. He knew not the name, the worth and saving power of His Son. So God sent a heavenly messenger to Cornelius, to say to him:

“Thy prayers and thine alms are come up for a memorial before God. And now send men to Joppa, and call for one Simon, whose surname is Peter: . . . he shall tell thee what thou oughtest to do” (Acts 10:4-6).

Now, be it noted, this is not an answer to prayer, rather a response to a Life of Prayer.

Cornelius is not said to have asked anything, but his consistent prayer-life commended him to God and put him in the way of receiving beyond all he asked or thought, even that which he was too ignorant to ask. The Lord said, “**Here is My servant, Cornelius. He is a man of prayer. I cannot keep from him the good news of My grace, the Gospel of My Son.**” So He bids him send to Joppa.

But now for Peter's part in the story. Peter is wholly unprepared to be a messenger in this matter. He is a Jew at heart, bound by Jewish practice and prejudice. But—he is also a man of prayer. This gave God His opportunity. It is not what Peter accomplished in that hour of prayer; it is what the Lord accomplished. Prayer is a preparation for fuller revelation, an open door into the mind and will of our God.

See now how the two experiences dovetail. The narrative continues:

“On the morrow, as they (Cornelius' messengers) went on their journey, and drew nigh unto the city, Peter went un upon the housetop to pray about the sixth hour” (Acts 10:9).

The Lord used that prayer-hour to take out of Peter's heart all ceremonial distinction of clean and unclean, and prepare him as a preacher of the Gospel to the Gentiles (see Acts 10:9-22). What would Peter have missed if he had not given himself to prayer, thereby giving God a chance at his prejudices? There follows one of the most wonderful experiences of Peter's life (see Acts 10:34-48).

It was wholly the result of prayer—prayer on the part of two men. But it was wholly apart from anything they asked. In the case of the one, he was too ignorant to ask it. In the case of the other, he was too prejudiced. In the one, it was a response beyond the asking; in the other, contrary to the asking or desiring. In each case it was God's response to a Life of Prayer. Such a life lays the mind and heart of man open to a fuller revealing of His perfect will and planning for our living and serving.

Focusing these lessons upon ourselves, how intensely we should feel the need of a Life of Prayer. First of all, from God's side: that He may break down our narrow, limiting prejudices, be they racial or social, ecclesiastical or spiritual, and, with resulting freedom, carry out His own purposes in us. That is, prayer is not a grocery list that one takes to the store to have filled; not just the supplying of our conscious need.

Our listing of needs falls far short of His comprehensive purposes for us.

So, again, from our side: we need a Life of Prayer to put us out into the stream of His will, to broaden and deepen our spiritual life-currents. Not to live a Life of Prayer is to leave unexplored a great area of the will of God. It is to daily miss unsuspected bestowments. It is to live on a plane of self-imposed spiritual impoverishment.

A Life of Prayer puts us in the way of being enriched **“exceeding abundantly above all we ask or think.”**

~ end of chapter 3 ~

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