

HIS IN A . . . LIFE OF PRAYER

by

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CHAPTER TWO

HIS PROVISION FOR A LIFE OF PRAYER

“The Lord is good unto them that wait for Him, to the soul that seeketh Him” (Lamentations 3:25).

The Scriptures abound with statements, akin to the above, calculated to keep constantly before us the fact that God encourages us to come to Him in prayer; that He expects us so to come; that He is disappointed when we fail to come. Jesus puts it yet more strongly, that the Father **“seeks”** those who will come to Him aright **“in spirit and in truth.”**

Due reflection upon these statements of the cause will surely lead us to see that the necessity for a Life of Prayer lies much deeper than in the mere stress of circumstances; deeper even than the native crying out of our own natures after God.

There is something back of all this.

It is the fact that prayer originates with God. Prayer is a part of His world-planning. Thus our practice of prayer is in no sense presumption, quite the contrary.

Prayer rests primarily in the fact that God has made provision for a Life of Prayer.

Prayer is, so to speak, a part of the machinery of the universe (no narrow conception this); as essential to the running of the world as are certain shafts and pulleys installed as an integral part of a factory's equipment. A mastermind planned and put them in place; it is not expected that things will go well, or the factory's work be done, apart from their use.

No wonder if, when they are disregarded, the factory is inefficient. And no wonder if, when prayer as God's peculiar provision, is ignored, spurned, left in disuse, life's threads are torn, tangled and snarled.

We have no room for complaint.

Meditation upon the matter discloses the following ways in which God has made provision for a Life of Prayer.

I—Man’s Relationship to God as Creator and Redeemer

Prayer is essentially the maintaining of a relationship set up between man and God, first in CREATION, then in REDEMPTION.

1. IN CREATION, man was made in the image of God (Genesis 1:26, 27).

Man was kin to God. Adam was called, and was in truth, “**the son of God**” (Luke 3:38). The result was a perfect basis for prayer. Fellowship, communion —prayer in its highest form— naturally followed. It was as native to Adam as to Christ, the Son of God. In both cases it sprang from an oneness of nature and life. When sin severed this cord of relationship, fellowship ceased, because the basis for it was gone (Genesis 3:8-10).

2. IN MAN TODAY PRAYER REMAINS A RUDIMENTARY INSTINCT.

Man everywhere, even in the lowest depths of human degradation, resorts to prayer. Yet this is true of no other creature; only man prays. In this fact is outstanding evidence of his divine origin. Prayer is a leftover from man’s unfallen state of fellowship with God.

It is a notable fact that there is scarcely a man but will, under stress of impending peril, of sudden overwhelming calamity, fall back upon prayer, however long neglected, as a creature-privilege, an appeal to his Creator.

3. REDEMPTION REESTABLISHES PRAYER THROUGH A RESTORED RELATIONSHIP TO GOD.

Objectively, the offense of sin is removed; God is propitiated; man is reconciled (I John 2:2; II Corinthians 5:18, 19). Subjectively, the New Birth replants in us both the nature and the life of God. We are, as Adam was, the sons of God:

“But as many as received Him, to them gave He power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on His name: which were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God” (John 1:12, 13).

Recognizing that prayer roots itself in relationship, the redeemed of the Lord must now realize that, this relationship having been fully restored, it is incumbent upon them to exercise themselves fully in their prayer-privilege, to make this restored relationship a practical, vital, meaningful bond. Prayer must become as natural to us as to Adam, yea as to Christ Himself.

4. WE ARE IN A COVENANT OF UNION AND COMMUNION.

In a sense, all men may pray: it is a creature-privilege. But such prayer, sin having intervened, places God under no obligation. When, however, God enters into covenant agreement with man, prayer is the exercise of a covenant-privilege. God has obligated Himself. It is a mutual matter. God must do His part. Thus prayer becomes more than mere prayer; it is communion and fellowship.

It was so at the beginning. Prayer is not mentioned in the Garden of Eden, but there was no want of intercourse. There existed a Covenant of Life. Within this covenant Adam and the Lord God exercised and enjoyed a beautiful, natural, unrestrained interchange of fellowship.

When God called Abraham, He extended to him a Covenant of Grace and Promise. Within this covenant Abraham set up an altar which became not merely a place of prayer but a trysting-place where the two parties to the agreement met in fellowship (Genesis 12:7, 8; 13:14-18; Chap. 15).

This eventuated in the Lord coming to talk with Abraham “as friend talketh with friend” (Chap. 18). Thus Abraham is called “**the Friend of God.**” It all grew out of a covenant.

Space precludes speaking at length of the covenant at Sinai whereby God brought His entire Old Testament people into fellowship with Himself, making provision through the Tabernacle and its appointments for their constant approach to Him and His Mercy Seat. Suffice it to say that this Old Covenant fellowship, typically taught and experienced in and through the Tabernacle, finds its fulfillment in the glorious facts of the New Covenant: Christ Himself has made full and final atonement; His blood is on the Mercy Seat (the throne of the universe); He Himself is there at God’s right hand, our Advocate and Intercessor, the pledge of our acceptance; and now we enter, not by proxy, not in the person of another, a priest appointed for the purpose, but we ourselves come in our own person and right, unhindered and unaffrighted.

So now, rehearsing these facts of a fully restored relationship, which constitute a basis for “boldness” of approach, the Scriptures exhort us thus:

“Having therefore, brethren, boldness to enter into the holiest by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way, which He hath consecrated for us, through the veil, that is to say, His flesh; and having an High Priest over the house of God; let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith” (Hebrews 10:19-22).

And again, reminding us that our High Priest, having triumphantly “**passed through the heavens,**” is there with our humanity, in perfect sympathy (Hebrews 4:14, 15), the exhortation reads:

“Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need” (Hebrews 4:16).

The Greek word, rendered “**boldly,**” means “*with free speech.*” We are invited to come and “tell it all,” with no sense of reserve or restraint. Not an abject approach, servile and cringing, but as men made free with a glorious freedom, in full covenant right.

II—God’s Relationship to Us as Father

The progress of revelation in this matter follows the progress of an unfolding relationship, and is of the utmost importance.

1. THE OLD TESTAMENT reveals the unity, majesty and sovereignty of God.

The conception of His fatherhood is most infrequent (some fifteen times), and never as setting forth a personal relationship to an individual, but rather as a provider for His people in the works of redemption and providence. It is reserved for the New Testament to present Him as Father. Here it is the constant conception of Him (so called some two hundred and fifty times). Under the New Covenant this is His name because this is the relationship now set up.

2. JESUS' MINISTRY had a twofold purpose:

(1) *In His teaching*, to reveal God as Father—His Father in an eternal relationship; our Father in a new-found relationship.

(2) *In His redemptive work*, to effect a Father-and-son relationship, in all truth and reality, between God and sinful man. Thus He taught and thus He wrought. By gracious word and life He persuaded us of the fact of a Father's love; by gracious work and death He purchased the power to bestow and beget that relationship.

“As many as received Him, to them gave He power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on His name: which were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God” (John 1:12,13).

That the relationship is a reality, His Spirit in us attests:

“And because ye are sons, God hath sent forth the Spirit of His Son into your hearts, crying, Abba, Father” (Galatians 4:6).

3. JESUS' DISTINCTIVE TEACHING CONCERNING PRAYER is that we therein approach and address God as **“OUR FATHER.”**

This is Jesus' one and only way of approaching God— **“Father.”** Never does He give over this intimate, endearing, privileged and prevailing relationship for any far-off, high-sounding mode of address. Always He says **“Father.”**

“At that time Jesus answered and said, I thank Thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because Thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent, and hast revealed them unto babes. Even so, Father; for so it seemed good in Thy sight” (Matthew 11:25,26).

“Father, I thank Thee that Thou hast heard Me. And I knew that Thou hearest Me always” (John 11:41, 42).

“Father, the hour is come; glorify Thy Son, that Thy Son also may glorify Thee” (John 17:1). **“Holy Father”** (vs. 11), **“Righteous Father”** (vs. 25).

It was thus that Jesus taught us to come:

“After this manner therefore pray ye: Our Father which art in heaven, Hallowed be Thy name” (Matthew 6:9).

“As He was praying . . . His disciples said unto Him, Lord, teach us to pray . . . And He said unto them, When ye pray, say, Our Father, which art in heaven” (Luke 11:1, 2).

Conforming to Jesus’ precept and practice all New Testament prayer thus addresses God. Indeed, the fact of His Fatherhood is so paramount as practically to supplant all other form of reference to Him throughout its Epistles. **“Abba, Father”** is the instinctive cry of the Spirit-born.*

** Note—While prayer to the Father is the normal form of address in the New Testament, it is not unscriptural to use the name of the Son in direct address. E.g., Acts 7:59, 60; Acts 9:12, 14; I Corinthians 1:2. The Holy Spirit is never so addressed.*

From this Father-child relationship, it follows:

(1) *It is no part of the purpose of prayer to give God information.* Some prayers, addressing Him as Almighty, All-wise, etc., proceed as though He were ignorant. Very evidently such praying is intent upon effect with the people rather than acceptability with God. It is presumptuous for a child so to speak to his Father. Says Jesus:

“Be not ye therefore like unto them: for your Father knoweth what things ye have need of, before ye ask Him” (Matthew 6:8).

(2) *In prayer we are to take our position as children, pleading to the full His Fatherhood.* This argues one supreme essential of prayer: a child-like attitude of dependence upon Him as Father. It is thus we are encouraged to come:

“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 7:11).

III—The Use of the Name of the Son

In our previous chapter we saw the use of His name as a remarkable privilege accorded us. We are now to see it as a part of the provision for prevailing prayer, occasioning the most outstanding PROMISE of prayer, coupled with a corresponding RESPONSIBILITY.

These are found in our Lord’s words:

“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 any thing in My name, I will do it” (John 14:13, 14).

1. THE SIGNIFICANCE OF “THE NAME.”

A name denotes a personality, either as an individual (given name) or in family relationship (surname or marriage name). It denotes what a person is—his character; what he has done—his work or achievement; what he is known for—his reputation or fame.

In oriental usage, especially, names carry a deep significance, selected to particularly fit or describe a person as to appearance or character (see Adam, Isaac, Joshua, Elijah, Daniel, etc., in Young's Concordance, or a good Bible dictionary). Hence, God frequently changed them to suit a new character, role, or relationship to Himself (Abram to Abraham, Sarai to Sarah, Jacob to Israel, Simon to Peter).

So we are to have “**a new name**” (Revelation 2:17), in keeping with our new relationship to God, residence in the Holy City, marriage to His Son, entitling us to His “**new name**” (see Revelation 3:12)—a name whose fullness of meaning is not now disclosed (Revelation 19:12).

The name of the Lord Jesus Christ, God-given, God-owned, comprises all that He is, has done or ever will do, Godward and manward—His person, redemptive work, present exalted position, and prospective glory.

Hence, because “**it pleased the Father that in Him should all fulness dwell**” (Colossians 1:19), His “**name**” is truly “**Wonderful**.” The Scriptures abound with titles and allusions, many and varied, in an attempt to set forth His person, position, power and preciousness. *

** The author's exposition of Philippians, entitled “His In Joyous Experience,” chapter two, gives a list of some two hundred and fifty such names and allusions. The reader should also make a study, with good concordance, of the use of “the name of the Lord” in Scripture. [Please note that this book is part of our library here at the Baptist Bible Believers web site].*

His, then, is “**a name which is above every name**” (Philippians 2:9). And that name is ours to use! It is one of the most precious and prevailing provisions for a Life of Prayer.

2. OUR RIGHT TO USE HIS NAME.

This right is twofold.

First, *He left His name with us for this purpose*. It is as though the most financially capable man of our community were to place in our hands a book of blank checks, signed by himself, bidding us fill them in as needed. Such is the language He uses: “**Whatsoever ye shall ask** (of the bank of heaven) **in My name**.”

We are somehow to arrive at the “amount” to be asked and present the request, as duly authorized, “**in His name**,” the one name that is honored there. What a challenge to prayer!

“**Whatsoever!**” Limitless; yet not reckless. Limitless as to the power of the name we use; limited only by the possibilities of our asking in that name.

Further, then, *our right to use His name rests in relationship, namely, that of our identification with Him*. We belong to Him. His name is upon us as the husband's name is upon the wife. So our standing before God and our approach to His Mercy Seat is not in our own name or right but in the name and right of His Son by virtue of our identification with Him. **“Whatever you shall ask** [on the ground of, and in keeping with, your union with Me], **I will do.”**

It becomes very evident that this so great promise is not claimed by merely closing our prayer with the words, “This we ask in Jesus' name.” Such words are right and proper, but far more is intended. It involves:

(1) the presenting of a name which is the most wonderful and efficacious in the whole world;
(2) the presenting of ourselves as one with Him in the petitioning. It contemplates a Life of Prayer rather than an isolated act of prayer.

3. THE PROMISE FOR PRAYER IN HIS NAME

Attached to this provision for the use of the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, so very wonderful is it, stands the most startling, challenging promise ever uttered in the teaching of prayer. And to make it doubly sure, lest, hesitating to believe it in its absoluteness, our faltering faith should think He had misspoken, He repeats and restates.

Note the four elements common to both verses (13, 14):

- 1—**“Whatever”** (“anything”);
- 2—**“ye shall ask”**;
- 3—**“in My name”**;
- 4—**“I will do.”**

A priceless coin of heaven, stamped on either side with the imprimatur of our Lord, handed to us there in the Upper Room. Only our lack of faith prevents our using it as the daily currency of our Life of Prayer here upon earth, making proof in practical experience of the riches of its promise, up to its full face value.

4. THE RESPONSIBILITY FOR ITS USE.

SO great a provision is not optional as to its use, it is a part of our Lord's **“goods,”** left with us for trading, for the carrying on of His business. His promised **“That will I do”** is the very thing He wants to get done. He will do it—**“if,”** if we ask and make it possible to Him. If we fail to ask, what? His provision is nullified; His plan is balked; the thing is not done.

Note well where the **“if”** lies. It is hard by our door. **“If ye.”** One man in the Gospels made the mistake of putting the **“if”** at Jesus' door. **“If Thou canst do any thing.”** Quickly Jesus threw that **“if”** back where it belonged: **“If thou canst believe, all things are possible to him that believeth”** (Mark 9:22, 23).

“If ye ask, I will do.” That means that the first move lies with us. It is ours to initiate. Power for the doing of things we could never do is placed at our disposal. It is released only **“if”** we call it into action. What responsibility!

To illustrate. Yonder at the station stands a train, its engine fired and throbbing with restrained power. Suppose the engineer approaches and says, “Engine, why don’t you pull the train out of here?” The engine might properly retort, “I will if—if you ask me. Not otherwise.” And it might add, “You cannot move the train; but if you will climb into the cab, pull the lever and open the throttle, I will do what you cannot do.” It is the engineer’s first move. And by so moving, power infinitely beyond his own, is set at work.

Such is the Christian’s staggering responsibility in the face of this provision and promise. What power of His remains impotent; what plans of His remain thwarted; what souls of His purchasing remain unsaved—back of our undischarged **“if”**?

IV—The Power of Prayer—Through the Spirit

The gracious provisions of prayer actively involve the entire Trinity:

- (1) *We come to God as our Father;*
- (2) *in the name of the Son;*
- (3) *in, by and through the Holy Spirit.*

We have seen the first two. The latter is equally clear in Scripture:

“We worship God in the Spirit” (Philippians 3:3).

“Praying in the Holy Spirit” (Jude 20).

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

Note the three Persons of prayer, as above, in this one statement.

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

1. THE SPIRIT IS THE “SENDING” POWER IN US.

Were we left to ourselves and our own effort in prayer, we could not be heard. We would be as impotent as a radio set or a telephone without electric current. As electricity gives carrying power to the human voice, projecting it for thousands of miles, so the Holy Spirit performs a like service in winging our worship, petitions and aspirations **“to the Father.”**

We may be well assured that, **“praying in the Spirit,”** they do not fall short of His throne of heavenly Grace.

Yet the dominant thought, from the metaphor used, is not one of distance. That which enables us to “reach” the Father, giving us **“access”** to Him, is the Spirit-quality.

“God is a Spirit: and they that worship Him must worship in spirit and in truth” (John 4:24).

2. THE SPIRIT IS THE PROMPTING, GUIDING POWER IN US.

Thus we are taught, much to our comfort and encouragement:

“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. And He that searcheth the hearts knoweth what is the mind of the Spirit, because He maketh intercession for the saints according to the will of God” (Romans 8:26, 27).

Four things are here concerning the Spirit’s prayer-help:

- (1) *Its necessity*—our weakness and ignorance.
- (2) *Its nature*—He prays in us and for us.
- (3) *Its assured acceptance*—His mind, wrought in us, is known to God.
- (4) *Its assured answer*—He prays for us **“according to the will of God.”**

The picture is made complete by the statement, in verse 34, that Christ is our Intercessor above us as the Spirit is our Intercessor within us. They two are in perfect accord. Their ministries are complementary. Together they secure our success in a Life of Prayer.

Prayer, then, primarily and in a very true sense, is a matter of divine activity. The Spirit prompts it in us. He prays it through us. He guides it into complete accord with One yonder on the throne, that One being equally and correspondingly occupied on our behalf.

True prayer, then, is a cycle, originating in Heaven, in the mind and heart of God, brought to earth by the Spirit, prompted in the human heart that is yielded to Him, borne back on Spirit wings to the Father, accepted of Him and answered.

Assuredly, in such prayer the divine mind and the human blend as one.

This explains the startling, superhuman boldness of some prayers. They are borne upon the stream of the divine mind and will. For example, Elijah, asking for a drought that meant famine for three and a half years. What man of us could ask this, realizing it would ruin our country, our relatives, neighbors and friends? Yet as Elijah, with breaking heart, prayed over the sin and apostasy of Israel, a conviction was born in his soul that there was just one cure—the disaster of drought and famine. It did not originate, so it has always seemed to us, with Elijah. It was Spirit-suggested. It was the thing God proposed and wished to do. He had found a co-worker upon earth through whom He could do it. It was the truest of prayer, prayed “in the Spirit” and “according to God.” He prays best who keeps his heart open world-ward to the sins and sorrows of earth and his mind open heavenward to the will and remedy of God.

V—The Program of Prayer—Matthew 6:6

In one brief verse our Lord Jesus has given us a specific program for a Life of Prayer, the practical wisdom of which we do well to note and heed:

“But thou, when thou prayest, enter into thy closet, and when thou hast shut thy door, pray to thy Father which is in secret; and thy Father which seeth in secret shall reward thee openly” (Matthew 6:6).

An analysis yields a succession of six steps, suggestively presented to the eye by the initial P:

1. THE PERIOD OF PRAYER—**“When thou prayest.”**

To succeed the prayer should have a specified time devoted to its exercise, a period definitely and sacredly set apart for this purpose. It should be a habit of the soul, as regular as eating and sleeping for the body. Through the observance of such a time prayer comes to be a trysting, an appointed meeting between our Lord and ourselves. To its daily return He looks forward as eagerly as we, for lo, He has a child who eagerly covets His fellowship at a set period. He will not disappoint him. He reserves for him His choicest. He will take him, Abraham-like, into His confidence. And so the bond strengthens, till he who prays is in truth **“the friend of God.”**

2. THE PLACE OF PRAYER—**“Enter into thy closet.”**

Every prayer should have a place, be it only a chair or a corner, where he is accustomed to meeting his Lord. The very law of association, so strong in our make-up, dictates this. The place made sacred by sweet disclosures of truth or strong wrestlings of spirit—it is in such a spot the soul can best gird itself for prayer with the sense of truly succeeding. Out from such a closet, from its habitual meeting a private, personal interview with the Father, one can go to face a world of sin, of difficulty and discouragement, undaunted and undismayed.

3. THE PRIVACY OF PRAYER—**“And when thou hast shut thy door.”**

This is a difficult thing to do. It is something few succeed in doing, and still fewer are careful to do. Many seem to assume that prayer is like a one-way telephone conversation: call Him on the phone, tell Him what you want, and depart without making sure that He has heard or waiting for reply. Such an approach will prove barren of results.

Our proneness to distraction by wandering, scattering thoughts (shall we say, Satan-sent?) as soon as we settle ourselves for prayer, was well illustrated some time since by a cartoonist. He pictured a congregation bowed in prayer; a beautiful summer day; the windows lowered; and through the openings come insects that buzz about the worshippers' heads, distracting their thoughts. Women are disturbed by: “Wonder how my dinner is coming along”; “What shall I wear to the party”; “What a horrible hat”; etc. Men, by: “Wonder if my stock will go up”; “Wish I could land that job”; etc. Boys are attacked by the baseball bug, etc. The futility of prayer when the door is not shut, that the whole being may be given over to audience with God!

On the other hand Chinese Gordon exemplified so well these essential principles of successful prayer. Out on his military campaigns this Christian General observed the period, place and privacy of prayer. A white handkerchief outside his tent door was the signal by which all knew Chinese Gordon was on no account to be disturbed. He was holding audience with the Captain of his Salvation.

4. THE PRACTICE OF PRAYER—“**Pray.**”

Now that you are in position to pray, proceed. Really do it. Too frequently we essay to engage in prayer and just when we begin to feel the sacred glow of fellowship and communion, the assurance that we are touching the Throne, we rise and depart. We were just beginning to succeed. Having spent the time gaining a hearing with our God, we should have tarried to make use of it.

Some say, with lament, “I cannot pray.” Of course not, but you can if you will practice yourself in it, going through its simplest exercises faithfully. Here is a child who says she cannot play the piano. But let her practice diligently and intelligently, and in a few weeks’ time she will surprise you by her facility in playing. So any child of God can pray if he will practice himself in it.

5. THE PERSONS IN PRAYER—“**Pray to thy Father which is in secret.**”

Prayer is not a subjective exercise for personal uplift. It is one person in converse with another.

The boastful Pharisee whom Jesus pictures as standing and “**praying with himself**” failed to pray at all. Prayer is nothing if it claims not the ear of One we delight to call “**Father.**” Waiting in His presence what heavenly fragrance, what divine stillness, calming fears, banishing unworthy purposes, supplanting weakness with strength, is distilled into the soul.

“**Who is in secret**”; hence the program Jesus laid down for a successful Life of Prayer. As we go into the secret we find Him there. That is the essence of it all. Then necessarily follows,

6. THE PROMISE OF PRAYER—“**Thy Father who seeth in secret shall reward thee openly.**”

It cannot be otherwise. It may be in outward circumstance, in such answer to prayer as thousands of God’s children have rejoiced to receive as “**reward**” for waiting upon Him. It may be in the evident transformation of face and life.

It was this that Moses brought with him from the mount of closeted communion, yet in beautiful unconsciousness: “**Moses wist not that the skin of his face shone.**” Thus would our Father “**openly**” glorify Himself today, in the midst of materialistic unbelief, in the lives of His praying people.

Too infrequently do we make use of that hymn in which a native Christian of India has embodied the priceless lessons learned by making prayer in all reality the program of her life.

In the Secret of His Presence

In the secret of His presence, how my soul delights to hide!
Oh, how precious are the lessons which I learn at Jesus' side!
Earthly cares can never vex me, neither trials lay me low;
For when Satan comes to tempt me, to the secret place I go.

When my soul is faint and thirsty, 'neath the shadow of His wing
There is cool and pleasant shelter, and a fresh and crystal spring;
And my Saviour rests beside me, as we hold communion sweet;
If I tried, I could not utter what He says when thus we meet

Only this I know: I tell Him all my doubts, my griefs and fears:
Oh, how patiently He listens! and my drooping soul He cheers:
Do you think He ne'er reproves me? what a false friend He would be,
If He never, never told me of the sins which He must see.

Would you like to know the sweetness of the secret of the Lord?
Go and hide beneath His shadow: this shall then be your reward;
And whene'er you leave the silence of that happy meeting place,
You must mind and bear the image of the Master in your face.

- Ellen Lakshmi Goreh.

VI—The Prescription of Prayer—At All Times

“Men ought (must) always to pray” (Luke 18:1). **“Praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit”** (Ephesians 6:18).

(1) It is NOT OPTIONAL, used or not at pleasure or whim.

We are not to pray today because we feel like it and omit it tomorrow because not so inclined. Prayer is an essential, a constant of spiritual life. So we read:

“In everything by prayer and supplication . . . make your requests known unto God”
(Philippians 4:6).

“Pray without ceasing” (I Thessalonians 5:17).

If this is true, and is to prove true in experience, evidently the Life of Prayer calls for and includes certain other kindred spiritual exercises and states that nurture, sustain and promote its uninterrupted flow. That is to say,

(2) It is NOT ISOLATED.

It cannot go alone, unsupported by certain aides.

Two of these aides, or aids, are mentioned in the context of the above quotations. In both instances they are on either side of prayer, as though buttressing, protecting and supporting it. Or, shall we say, the three form the essential, inseparable ingredients of the PRESCRIPTION of prayer. Let us place them side by side:

Philippians 4:6
“**In nothing be anxious.**”
“**In everything by prayer and supplication.**”
“**With thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God.**”

I Thessalonians 5:16-18
“**Rejoice evermore.**”
“**Pray without ceasing.**”
“**In everything give thanks: for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning you.**”

Here, then, are the three sister graces of a Life of Prayer.

1. ANXIOUS FOR NOTHING.

Instead, and this is the only means for precluding anxiety and worry, we are to “**Rejoice evermore.**” The glorious facts of our faith are such—God is our Father; Eternal Life is ours through our Lord Jesus Christ; He ever lives to intercede for us; “**We know that all things work together for good,**” and “**No good thing will He withhold from**” us—He has left no room nor right to worry. To do so is only to doubt and hurt Him.

Rather, He bids us supplant worry by being always joyful. That this is the privilege of the Christian, made possible always because we are always “**in Christ,**” is the standing marvel and miracle of Christian experience:

“**Rejoice in the Lord alway: and again I will say, Rejoice**” (Philippians 4:4).

“**And thou shalt rejoice before the Lord thy God**” (Deuteronomy 16:11).

Meditation upon this matter will yield a profitable realization of how far short we come of Christian duty and privilege when we fail to “**Rejoice.**” But our present point of concern is that any faltering of the spirit of rejoicing, making room for the spirit of worry, is hostile and fatal to our prayer-life.

2. PRAYERFUL FOR EVERYTHING.

Prayer is a creature-instinct in man.

With the twice-born it takes its instinctive place in practice. Not as a last resort, driven to it by dire circumstance—shame on us that it should ever be so—but the spontaneous turning of the child-spirit to the Father, pouring out its heart-interests, whatsoever of joy or sorrow, of need or dread, of aspiration or expectation, into His sympathetic Father-ear.

How slow we are to learn this lesson.

How frequently we have struggled along, in our own creature-strength, alone, until the seriousness of our situation constrained to prayer. And, graciously, our God heard and brought relief, but, oh, the reproach of spirit that we turned to Him as a last resort. The delight of prayer, its joyous exhilaration, comes when, through oft-repeated recourse to it, it becomes the involuntary attitude and appeal of the heart. Then we understand what it means to **“Pray without ceasing.”**

A dear friend said to the writer the other day, with evident joy over his attainment: “I have found that I can pray effectively while driving my auto” (He is a doctor, under daily necessity of driving). Certainly. One can think while driving; why can he not pray, think Godward, if his spirit so prompts? Likewise, at all seasons”

3. THANKFUL FOR ANYTHING.

“With thanksgiving let your requests be made known.” That is, the giving of praise and thanks to God is an essential ingredient of our approach to Him. If we cannot say “Thank you” to our Father for blessings and benefits bestowed out of His constant love and thought for us, why should He trouble Himself with our requests, answers to which will be received with like unthankfulness.

No greater barrier to progress in prayer can be set up than ingratitude toward God. It is said that two angels came forth from Heaven, each with a basket, the one commissioned to gather up the petitions of God’s people, the other their praises. The first returned with his basket overflowing; so many requests did men have to make of God. The other brought his basket back almost empty; so little did men have of praise to God. It is altogether a fault that our hearts do not constantly overflow with thanksgiving to Him **“who daily loadeth us with benefits.”**

The secret of thankfulness is:

- (1) The discerning of our Father’s hand of blessing in the simple things of life, the daily commonplaces, if you please, in which He delights to show His love. No concern of ours too small for His interest; then no blessing of His too small for our grateful notice.
- (2) The resolute **“In every thing give thanks,”** persuaded that if this is His **“will [requirement] in Christ Jesus,”** His all-wise plans for us will always furnish a reasonable basis for it, even though our feeble sense fail to see it, **“for we walk by faith, not by sight.”**

Here, then, is the prescription of prayer, God-compounded, with three ingredients, each one essential, which we are to take as directed if we hope to enter into a successful and satisfying Life of Prayer.

VII—The Practice of Prayer—Under All Circumstances

It remains for us to see that God’s provision for a Life of Prayer is an all-comprehensive “coverage”; that by it He proposes to care for every necessity, every exigency of our earthly existence, as it may arise.

Jesus taught that we must always pray and couched the teaching in a parable calculated to encourage us so to do under all circumstances—Luke 18:1-8.

The woman He pictures is circumstanced most adversely: she is hard pressed by her adversary and is compelled to appeal her case to an unjust judge **“who had no fear of God and no respect for man.”** She is in a hard way, yet she secures justice, righting her wrong. By contrast, how much more shall a child of God prevail, coming with whatever circumstances to One who is kind and good, as well as just, our Heavenly Father. Even though He ask us to share for a time His patient long-suffering with evil, His answer is sure (vs. 7, 8).

A survey of the Scriptures leads to the inescapable conviction that every circumstance is included in the gracious provisions of prayer. Our God has left no room or occasion for groveling doubt or grumbling discontent. Whatever the state of affairs, His hand holds open the door of our prayer closet, reminding us that we **“ought always to pray.”** For example:

1. IN TROUBLE—NEEDING DELIVERANCE.

“Call upon Me in the day of trouble: I will deliver thee, and thou shall glorify Me” (Psalm 50:15).

“He shall call upon Me, and I will answer him: I will be with him in trouble; I will deliver him, and honour him” (Psalm 91:15).

“The righteous cry, and the Lord heareth, and delivereth them out of all their troubles” (Psalm 34:17; see also vs. 15).

“In the day of my trouble I will call upon Thee: for Thou wilt answer me” (Psalm 86:7).

2. IN SICKNESS—NEEDING RESTORATION TO HEALTH.

“Is any among you afflicted? let him pray. Is any merry? let him sing psalms. Is any sick among you? let him call for the elders of the church; and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord: and the prayer of faith shall save the sick, and the Lord shall raise him up; and if he have committed sins, they shall be forgiven him. Confess your faults one to another, and pray one for another, that ye may be healed. The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much” (James 5:13-16).

“If ye shall ask any thing in My name, I will do it” (John 14:14).

3. IN ADVERSITY—NEEDING FINANCIAL RELIEF.

“For the Lord heareth the poor” (Psalm 69:33a).

“He will regard the prayer of the destitute, and not despise their prayer” (Psalm 102:17).

“But my God shall supply all your need according to His riches in glory by Christ Jesus”
(Philippians 4:19).

4. IN PERIL—NEEDING PROTECTION

“He that dwelleth in the secret place of the most High shall abide under the shadow of the Almighty. I will say of the Lord, He is my refuge and my fortress: my God; in Him will I trust. Surely He shall deliver thee from the snare of the fowler, and from the noisome pestilence” (Psalm 91:1-3).

“For this shall every one that is godly pray unto Thee in a time when Thou mayest be found: surely in the floods of great waters they shall not come nigh unto him. Thou art my hiding place; Thou shalt preserve me from trouble; Thou shalt compass me about with songs of deliverance” (Psalm 32:6, 7).

Consider also the scriptures for Deliverance, above.

5. IN DOUBT—NEEDING GUIDANCE.

“Call unto Me, and I will answer thee, and show thee great and mighty things, which thou knowest not” (Jeremiah 33:3).

“If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, that given to all men liberally, and upbraideth not; and it shall be given him” (James 1:5).

“He will be very gracious unto thee at the voice of thy cry; when He shall hear it, He will answer thee. And thine ears shall hear a word behind thee, saying, This is the way, walk ye in it” (Isaiah 30:19b, 21a).

6. IN SIN—NEEDING SALVATION.

“For whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved” (Romans 10:13).

“Seek ye the Lord while He may be found, call ye upon Him while He is near; let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts: and let him return unto the Lord, and He will have mercy upon him; and to our God, for He will abundantly pardon”
(Isaiah 55:6,7).

“Take with you words, and turn to the Lord: say unto Him, Take away all iniquity, and receive us graciously” (Hosea 14:2a).

“And the publican, standing afar off, would not lift up so much as his eyes unto heaven, but smote upon his breast, saying, God be merciful to me a sinner. I tell you, this man went down to his house justified rather than the other; for every one that exalteth himself shall be abased; and he that humbleth himself shall be exalted” (Luke 18:13, 14).

7. IN SPIRITUAL DEARTH—NEEDING REVIVAL.

In such need we are inspired by the example of God's people, in their prayer:

“Wilt Thou not revive us again: that Thy people may rejoice in Thee? Shew us Thy mercy, O Lord, and grant us Thy salvation” (Psalm 85:6, 7).

“O Lord, revive Thy work in the midst of the years” (Habakkuk 3:2).

We are spurred to prayer by the sense of helplessness in the face of conditions about us:

“It is time for Thee, Lord, to work: for they have made void Thy law” (Psalm 119:126).

Our faith is also reassured by God's many gracious promises and purposes of salvation, e.g.,

“Who will have all men to be saved, and to come unto the knowledge of the truth” (I Timothy 2:4).

“The Lord is not slack concerning His promise, as some men count slackness; but is longsuffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance” (II Peter 3:9).

“Have I any pleasure at all that the wicked should die? saith the Lord God: and not that he should return from his ways, and live?” (Ezekiel 18:23).

~ end of chapter 2 ~

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