

A STUDY ON PRAYER by DEREK PRINCE

Do you think of God as somewhat like a schoolmaster, sitting in his study at the end of a long corridor and you kind of tip-toe down the corridor the floor boards creaking as you step on them giving warning that you are on the way. And then you'd knock at the door and the rather grumpy voice would tell you to come in . . .

What if you find that he does not scold you, in fact he welcomes you. If anything He says, "Why have you waited so long?"

What a welcome the prodigal son got as soon as he was willing to walk down that corridor and go back home? He never had a chance to say "make me as one of your hired servants," because before that, his father was kissing him and welcoming him back as a child.

That's a beautiful picture of how God receives us. He doesn't scold us, He doesn't blame us, He isn't stern and distant. He's loving and warm and gracious. When we get that picture of God, it *altogether changes the way we pray.*

(This study compiled by Albert Chipps from the Derek Prince Legacy Radio audio series)

Part 1 – GOD WANTS US TO PRAY AND GET WHAT WE PRAY FOR



I'll be dealing here with one of my favorite themes, the theme of prayer. For some people, I suppose, prayer seems like an irksome religious duty. For my part, I *love* to pray—and what's more, I get what I pray for! That's just what I'm going to talk to you about here—*how to pray and get what you pray for*.

As we come to God in prayer, most of us need to begin by changing our negative and unattractive image of God which somehow hinders us and stands in between God and us. I don't know how it is with any of you, but in my experience I remember as a boy growing up at school (and I spent many long and rather weary years in boarding schools) God in my thinking was somewhat like a schoolmaster, and I really wasn't too fond of schoolmasters. But I think I envisaged God as a schoolmaster, sitting at his desk, in his study at the end of a long corridor and if you ever had to go and see the schoolmaster, you kind of had to tip-toe down the corridor and probably the floor boards would creak as you stepped on them and that would give warning that you were on the way. And then you'd knock at the door and the rather grumpy voice would tell you to come in, and probably begin by scolding you for something you'd done or hadn't done. I think that picture of the school-master was really the way I thought about God. And so for me to be able to pray effectively, that picture that I had of God had to change. And I think somehow, there's a similar picture in the minds of many, of somebody who's a rather long way off and doesn't want to be bothered and is probably going to scold us, and, well, the best thing we can do is stay away from him if possible.

Now that isn't at all the truth about God. Actually, when we come to God He does not scold us, He welcomes us. If anything He says, "Why have you waited so long?" There's a beautiful picture of how God welcomes us when we come in the 15th chapter of Luke's gospel. It's the well-known story of the Prodigal Son who'd strayed away from home, wasted all his living, got himself into real deep trouble and ended up absolutely down and out, totally broke with no resources. And when he came to the end of all that his thought was, "I'd better go back home. Perhaps my father will receive me. I couldn't ask him to take me back as a son, but I could ask him to take me as one of his hired hands." And so it says in Luke 15 verse 20, ***"So he got up and went to his father. [Now I want you to notice how his father received him] But while he was still a long way off, his father saw him and was filled with compassion for him; he ran to his son, threw his arms around him and kissed him."*** (NIV)

See what a welcome he got as soon as he was willing to turn around and go back home? He never had a chance to say "make me as one of your hired servants," because before that, his father was kissing him and welcoming him back as a child. That's a beautiful picture of how God receives us. He doesn't scold us, He doesn't blame us, He isn't stern and distant. He's loving and warm and gracious. When we get that picture of God, it altogether changes the way we pray.

Jesus came to represent the Father to humanity. And the teaching of Jesus on prayer was as totally positive as any area of His teaching. This is what He says in the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 7 verses 7–8, ***“Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives; he who seeks finds; and to him who knocks, the door will be opened.”*** (NIV)

Notice those three positive statements. Everyone who asks receives, he who seeks finds, to him who knocks the door will be opened. Again, in Matthew 21:22, ***“Everything you ask in prayer, believing, you shall receive.”*** (NASB) Everything you ask in prayer you shall receive. And again in Mark 11:24, Jesus says, ***“Therefore I tell you, whatever you ask for in prayer, believe that you have received it, and it will be yours.”*** (NIV)

What could be more all-embracing than those statements? Everything you ask in prayer, whatever you ask in prayer and notice what Jesus says in that second context. He says, *“Believe that you have received it.”* It’s so important to realize that we receive when we pray. The actual experience of what we’ve prayed for may have to wait, but by faith we receive what we pray for when we pray. In His closing discourse to His disciples in John’s gospel, Jesus three times assures us that God will answer our prayers. Listen to these words, John 14 verses 13–14, ***“And whatever you ask in My name, that will I do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son. If you ask Me anything in My name, I will do it.”*** (NASB) How comprehensive. *“If you ask anything I will do it”!* John 15:7, ***“If you abide in Me, and My words abide in you, ask whatever you wish, and it shall be done for you.”*** (NASB) *“Ask whatever you wish.”* How could you say more than that? Again in John 16 verse 24, ***“Until now you have asked for nothing in My name; ask, and you will receive, that your joy may be made full.”*** (NASB)

There is a special kind of joy that comes from getting our prayers answered. To know that Almighty God, creator of heaven and earth, the Ruler of the whole universe has His ear open to our personal, individual prayer, that He’ll do what we ask Him to do, individually. That’s one of the most exciting experiences that anybody can ever have. Jesus wants us to have that joy, that special joy that comes from seeing the answers to our prayers. And so He says, *“Ask and you will receive, that your joy may be full.”*

THE FOUR MAIN REQUIREMENTS OF APPROACHING GOD

The first requirement: REVERENT SUBMISSION

I believe that there are four main requirements for a right approach to God. Today, I’m going to deal with the first of these requirements. Jesus is our example. I’ll go back to Hebrews chapter 5 verse 7, the verse that I read in my talk yesterday. This speaks about Jesus’ life on earth and how He prayed, ***“During the days of Jesus’ life on earth, he offered up prayers and petitions with loud cries and tears to the one who could save him from death, and he was heard because of his reverent submission.”*** (NIV)

I pointed out that Jesus is our example as a priest, and that a priest’s primary responsibility is to offer up sacrifice. And that during His earthly life, the sacrifice that Jesus offered up consisted of the prayers and petitions that He offered to the Father. But at the end of that verse we’re told something else that’s also very important. We’re told why God the Father always heard the prayers of His Son, Jesus. It says, *“He was heard because of his reverent submission.”* That’s the point that I want to emphasize in my talk today, *“Reverent Submission.”* That’s the first aspect of approaching God that we need to look at.

How was this reverent submission of Jesus expressed? The writer of Hebrews is referring to the time when Jesus was praying in the Garden of Gethsemane. This is described in Matthew 26 verse 39. It says, ***“And He went a little beyond them, and fell on His face and prayed, saying, “My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from Me; yet not as I will, but as Thou wilt.”*** And then a little further on in verse 42 of the same chapter it says, ***“He went away again a second time and prayed, saying, “My Father, if this cannot pass away unless I drink it, Thy will be done.”*** (NASB) So reverent submission consists in saying to the Father, “Not as I will, but as thou wilt. Thy will be done.” It consists in renouncing our own will and embracing the will of God.

Jesus gave us a pattern prayer. He told us a particular way in which we ought to pray. It’s what we normally call *the Lord’s Prayer*. In part of this prayer He includes this very thing we are talking about. He says, ***“Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.”*** There we are. When we come to God we have to say, “Thy will be done.” And we have to include in that, “And if thy will and my will are not in accord, then I renounce *my* will in order that *thy* will may be done.” Where the two wills conflict, it’s the will of God that must be allowed to have free course.

You see, there’s an aspect of the “old nature” which is being dealt with by this requirement. In Ephesians chapter 4 verses 22–24, Paul says this, ***“You were taught, with regard to your former way of life, to put off your old self, which is being corrupted by its deceitful desires, and to be made new in the attitude of your minds; and to put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness.”*** (NIV)

So there are two ‘selves’, the old self, our nature before God changed us and the new self, what God wants to make of us. Now, for the new self to express itself, we have to first put off the old self. That’s something we have to do, it’s not something that God does for us. And so when we say, “Not my will but Thine be done,” we’re putting off the “old self”—that’s not my will. And when we say, “But Thy will be done,” then we’re putting on the “new self”—that’s being changed or made new in the attitude of our minds.

We have to understand that the old self is a rebel and he has no claims to God’s inheritance. The whole inheritance belongs by right to the new self. But what often happens in our lives as Christians is the old self, the rebel, rises up again and asserts his claim to what is only the rightful inheritance of the new self. So to guard against that rebel claim we have to say as Jesus said, ***“Not my will but Thine be done.”***

Let’s go on a little more with this relationship between the old self and the new. If God were to answer all the prayers of the old self in every one of us, the universe would be in chaos. Let me give you just one or two simple examples. The first example: The Sunday School has a picnic, so they are praying, “Lord, keep the rain away.” Meanwhile the poor farmer’s crops are withering and he’s praying, “Lord, send rain. We need rain.” How is God going to answer both those prayers? Of course, the truth is, He’s not committed to answer either unless it’s the prayer of the new self which has renounced its own will.

Or take another typical kind of example. Two nations are at war with one another. The Christians in each nation are praying, “God give our nation the victory.” How can God possibly do that? But you see, God isn’t committed to do that. God is committed to answer the prayers of the new self but He’s not committed to cater to that old rebel, the old self who just keeps asserting his own will.

So when we pray for anything, we always need to ask ourselves, “Am I praying for this thing because I want it, or because God wants it?” It makes a great deal of difference. If it’s because I want it, my prayers may not be answered; but if it’s because God wants it, then my prayers will be answered.

There are certain areas where people habitually bring their requests and petitions to God. For instance, people may pray to be healed of sickness, or they may pray for a financial need to be met. They may pray for God to send them money. Every time we find ourselves praying that kind of prayer, we need to ask ourselves, “Am I praying for healing because I want to be healed or because God wants me healed? Am I praying for financial prosperity because it’s what I want or because it’s what God wants?” It will make a great deal of difference in our whole approach to God if we settle that issue.

I remember once, some years back, a woman came to me and asked me to pray for her son about 12 years old, who was in hospital with a disease which was diagnosed as incurable. She asked me to go and pray for her son in the hospital. And I was perfectly ready to do it, but without really thinking I said to her, “Have you surrendered your son to the Lord?” And when I asked her that simple question she became hysterical. She thought I was trying to tell her that her son was going to die. I didn’t have that in mind. I simply wanted to point out to her that as long as she was pressing her will, the will of God really couldn’t come to pass. And that as long as she kept her hand by her will over her son, God’s hand couldn’t really reach out and touch her son. As long as we are trying to force our own will through, we do not make room for the will of God.

Now when you think about renouncing your own will and embracing the will of God, there are some things you need to remember. Let me suggest three things you need to bear in mind:

1. God loves you more than you love yourself.
2. God understands you better than you understand yourself.
3. God wants only the best for you.

Are you prepared to say, “*Not as I will, but as Thou will*”?

When you truly yield to God’s will you will discover that it is what the Bible says it is, “Good, acceptable and perfect.” Remember this, prayer is not a way for you to get God to do what you want. Prayer is a way for you to become an instrument for God to do what He wants.

Listen to what Paul says in Ephesians 3:20, “***Now to Him who is able to do exceeding abundantly beyond all that we ask or think, according to the power that works within us. . .***” (NASB) Another translation of that verse says, “***Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us. . .***” (NIV)

So God’s ability to answer our prayers goes exceeding, abundantly beyond all that we ask or think. Well you might say, “How could that possibly be? What is it that could be beyond anything that I could ask or think or imagine or reason?” The answer is, it’s what God wants to do. You see, what God wants to do is far greater and far higher and far better than anything you could imagine or think of for yourself. But as long as we limit God to doing merely what we want, we miss what God wants. So it’s very simple and very logical that in order to receive the best from God in our prayer, we have to come to God the way that Jesus came, with reverent submission. We have to say, “God, not as I will, but as Thou will. God I’m not praying to be healed because I want to be healed, but because I believe you want me to be healed.”

Part 2 – APPROACHING GOD IN FAITH



I'm now going to deal with the second requirement for approaching God in prayer. It can be stated very simply in one word: FAITH.

In Hebrews chapter 11 verse 6, we are reminded that there is one basic unvarying requirement for all who would approach to God. This is what the verse says, ***“And without faith it is impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to him must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who earnestly seek him.”*** (NIV)

Notice that without faith it is impossible to please God. Faith is essential if we are to be accepted by God. Anyone who comes to God must believe, that's an unvarying requirement of God. Furthermore, we are required to believe two things:

1. that God exists and
2. He rewards those who earnestly seek Him.

Now most of us do not have a serious problem about believing that God exists. If that were all that we were required to believe, we would meet the condition, but it's not all. We are required to believe not merely that God exists, but that He rewards those who earnestly seek Him. Do you believe that? That's really the vital question. You may say, “Well, I don't know much about doctrine or theology or creeds. I'm not too clever in any of those things.” Well, I have good news for you. Faith of this kind is not primarily concerned with doctrine or theology. It's a confidence or a trust in God as a person. It's a trust in God's character, His reliability. You come to God believing that if you earnestly seek Him, He will reward you. That's really not much of theology. That's your own personal picture of God. That's why at the beginning of this series of talks I said it's so important that we start with the right picture of God. That's what generates faith. We believe in God's goodness. We believe in His faithfulness. We believe in His reliability. And that's why on the other side unbelief is sinful, which the Bible clearly states it is. Some people don't see why unbelief is a sin, but one basic reason is that unbelief casts aspersions on God's character. It makes a picture of God which is false and unattractive.

Now this requirement that we approach God in faith is universal for any way of approaching God, but it is applied particularly to prayer. For instance in Matthew 21 verse 22, Jesus says, ***“and everything you ask in prayer, believing, you shall receive.”*** (NASB) That's the key word there in the middle: “Believing.” Everything you ask in prayer, believing, you shall receive. And then again in 1 John 5:14, we read this, ***“And this is the confidence that we have in him, that, if we ask any thing according to his will, he heareth us. . .”*** (KJV) That's what I'm talking about just now. It's confidence in God. It's not essentially believing right doctrine, or being able to repeat a creed, or a statement of fundamentals, but it's

confidence in God Himself as a Person, confidence in His goodness, confidence in His character. If we come to God with that confidence, then whatever we ask we know He hears us.

So start with that approach of complete trust and confidence in God. Try to be like a little child coming to its parent, being convinced that its parent loves it and whatever it asks, the parent will do for it. That's the basis of approaching God in faith. Get away from the thought of theology. It's not theology. It's a personal relationship to God that we're speaking about just now.

How then can we acquire this kind of faith that I'm talking about? The faith that approaches God with confidence? Thank God that the New Testament not merely tells us that we have to approach God with faith, but it also tells us in a very practical way how faith comes. We find this in Romans chapter 10 verse 17. Make a note of that verse. It's one of the key verses. How does faith come? Faith comes from hearing. It comes from listening to God. You see, prayer is not just talking to God. Prayer is two-way communication with God. It's holding a very intimate personal conversation with God. So many people think of prayer as merely telling God what they want and what they need. They come to God with a kind of shopping list, present the list, and say "Amen." That really is hardly praying at all. How would you feel as a parent if your child only came to you with a list of what it wanted done for it. You wouldn't feel that the relationship was right, and that's how God feels. When you come to Him with your shopping list God says, "I can easily deal with the things on your list, but it's you I'm interested in, not the things you need." So, God is waiting to have communication with us. He's not merely waiting to hear what we have to say, but He wants us to hear what He has to say. And actually of the two, what God has to say is much more important than what we have to say. Jesus told us that our Father already knows the things that we need. When we come to God telling Him we need things, we're not telling Him something that He doesn't already know. It's not so much telling God what you need, it's getting into that attitude and relationship with God where you know you'll receive what you need when you tell Him. And that comes from hearing what God has to say.

HAVE A 'HEARING HEART'

In the Old Testament, after the temple of Solomon had been built, God appeared one night to Solomon in a dream and said, "What do you want, I'll give it to you?" And Solomon made a very wise answer. He said, "Give your servant an understanding or a discerning heart." That's the English translation, but the Hebrew says, "A 'hearing' heart." There's nothing more precious than a "hearing heart", a heart that hears God.

So let me give you this advice: pray with your Bible open. In fact, I would suggest never begin a serious time of prayer without first reading your Bible. Why? Because there are two reasons:

1. God speaks primarily through the Bible. If you want to hear God, most often you'll hear Him through the Bible.
2. Anything that does not agree with the Bible is not from God. Sometimes there are deceiving voices that represent themselves as the voice of God, but they are not. To guard against that, pray with your Bible open.

Now I'm going to speak about the third requirement, which is that **WE MUST PRAY IN THE NAME OF JESUS**.

Let's look at some scriptures in the New Testament where this is so clearly stated. In John 14: 13–14, Jesus says, ***“And whatever you ask in My name, that will I do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son. “If you ask Me anything in My name, I will do it.”*** (NASB) And then again in John 16 verses 23–24, ***“And in that day you will ask Me no question. Truly, truly, I say to you, if you shall ask the Father for anything, He will give it to you in My name. “Until now you have asked for nothing in My name; ask, and you will receive, that your joy may be made full.”*** (NASB)

In those verses, the phrase *“in My name”* occurs four times. Three times it's spoken of asking God in the name of Jesus, but the fourth time it says that God will give what we ask in the name of Jesus. In other words, the relationship to God is in the name of Jesus both ways—in our asking and in God's giving.

Now, what is implied when we pray in the name of Jesus? I suggest that there are three main things implied by coming to God in the name of Jesus.

1. We are coming to God on the basis of what Jesus has done on our behalf.

Let me say that again, *on the basis of what Jesus has done on our behalf*. Now on our behalf Jesus has paid the penalty of sin, He's died in our place, He's taken our guilt and our condemnation, and He's made the way open for us to come to God without feeling guilty or ashamed. This is what it says in 1 Peter 3:18, ***“For Christ also died for sins once for all, the just for the unjust, in order that He might bring us to God . . . ”***(NASB) The purpose of His death on the cross, bearing our sins in our place, was that He might bring us to God, that we might have the right of access to God. Again in Ephesians 2:13, Paul says, ***“But now in Christ Jesus you who formerly were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ.”*** (NASB) The blood of Christ is the visible, eternal evidence of the sacrifice that Jesus made on our behalf. When we come in the name of Jesus, we come in the merits of the blood that He shed on our behalf. In Hebrews 12:24, it says this about the things that are in the heavenlies; ***“And to Jesus, the mediator of a new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood, which speaks better than the blood of Abel.”*** (NASB) There's a beautiful comparison there based on an incident in the Old Testament. You remember the story of Cain and Abel? Cain murdered his brother Abel, and then God spoke to Cain and said, *“What have you done?”* And when Cain pleaded ignorance and innocence, God said, *“The voice of your brother's blood is crying to me from the ground, crying for vengeance and justice.”* But here the writer of Hebrews says the blood of Jesus is sprinkled on our behalf in the heavenlies, and it speaks *better* things than Abel's blood. In other words, the blood of Jesus is speaking of reconciliation, mercy, forgiveness, atonement. When I'm under pressure and I find it hard to pray, one of my greatest consolations is that even if I don't know what to say, the blood of Jesus is always speaking in heaven on my behalf. And when I come in the name of Jesus, that's included in coming in His name.

2. We come on the basis of who Jesus Himself, is.

In Hebrews 10:19 and following, the writer says, ***“Since therefore, brethren, we have confidence to enter the holy place by the blood of Jesus, and since we have a great priest over the house of God, let us draw near with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith . . . ”*** (NASB)

We come with Jesus as our great priest. And then again in 1 John 2:1, John says, ***“My little children, I am writing these things to you that you may not sin. And if anyone sins, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous. . ”***(NASB) The word that's translated “advocate” means literally “someone called in alongside to help us and to plead our cause for us.” So when we come in the name

of Jesus, we come with Jesus as our High Priest and our Advocate. As our High Priest He offers up our prayers to God on our behalf, and because they're offered up by Jesus, we know that they reach God, and as our Advocate, He speaks to God on our behalf. He pleads our cause better than we could ever do ourselves.

3. It bases our coming to God on the relationship that we have to God through Jesus.

Listen to what Paul says in Ephesians 1:3–6, ***“Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ, Just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before Him. In love He predestined us to adoption as sons through Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the kind intention of His will, to the praise of the glory of His grace, which He freely bestowed on us in the Beloved.”*** (NASB)

Notice God had an eternal purpose that was in His heart and mind before time ever began, or creation ever took place. God foreknew us and He determined that through Jesus Christ He would adopt us into His family as His sons, as His children. All this was worked out in time and human history when Jesus came and died on our behalf. But it wasn't something that God had just thought up. It was an eternal purpose that was being worked out in human history. And the purpose of God was He predestined us to adoption as sons through Jesus Christ to Himself. And then it says, *“This is to be to the praise of the glory of His grace which He freely bestowed on us in the Beloved.”* Now in the King James Version, that sixth verse of Ephesians 1 is translated this way, ***“To the praise of the glory of his grace, wherein he hath made us accepted in the beloved.”*** (KJV) I love that phrase, *“Accepted in the beloved.”* That's what we are. We are accepted by God as His children when we come to Him in the beloved, Jesus Christ. We're not accepted because of what we were but because of what Jesus is.

FROM REJECTION TO ACCEPTANCE

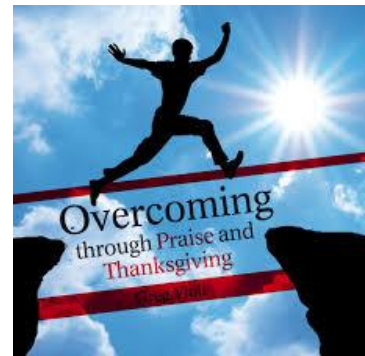
One of the biggest psychological and emotional problems of our contemporary culture is the problem of rejection. So many people go through life feeling rejected, unwanted, second-rate—perhaps because of a wrong attitude of parents in childhood, or perhaps of a wrong attitude of a husband or a wife in a marriage situation. And probably there's no greater wound than the wound of rejection. But the first step to the healing of that wound is to realize that when we come to God in Jesus we are *not rejected*. God *never* rejects His children. We are *accepted in the Beloved*, and that makes all the difference in the way that we come to God. Now once we come to God through Jesus on this basis, here are some of the wonderful things that are made available to us. First of all, Romans 8:32, ***“He who did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how will He not also with Him freely give us all things?”*** (NASB) Isn't that a marvelous phrase? With Him, with Jesus, God will freely give us all things. But it all depends on the “with Him,” the “with Jesus.” With Jesus we're entitled to everything as God's children, but without Him we have no claim upon Him at all. And then in Philippians 4:19, ***“And my God shall supply all your needs according to His riches in glory in Christ Jesus.”*** *“All your needs.”* That means no needs of yours need go unsupplied, and the supply comes from God's riches. And I believe that God is rich enough to supply the need of all His children and not even notice that He's lost anything, but the supply is in Christ Jesus. Outside of Christ Jesus we have no claim to God's supply at all.

And then listen finally to 2 Corinthians 1:20, ***“For no matter how many promises God has made, they are “Yes” in Christ. And so through Him the “Amen” is spoken by us to the glory of God”*** (NIV) somebody's estimated that the Bible contains about 8,000 promises that God has made. But Paul says

here no matter how many promises that God has made, it doesn't matter if they're infinite in number, they are all *"Yes in Christ."* Every promise God has made He's committed to fulfill in Christ. So God says "yes" and when we appropriate the promise and come to God on the basis of the promise, we say our "amen" back to God.

God says "yes," we say "amen" and that settles it because it's in Christ.

Part 3 - APPROACHING GOD WITH WORSHIP PRAISE AND THANKSGIVING



Today I'm going to speak about the first element of a successful prayer. It can be stated two ways: one positive, the other negative. Positively, it is with confidence. Negatively, it is without condemnation. These are like the two opposite sides of one coin. The positive side with confidence, the negative side without condemnation. Condemnation will always undermine confidence. Let's look at some Scriptures which emphasize this aspect of successful prayer. I'll turn, first of all, to Hebrews chapter 4 verse 16, ***"Let us therefore draw near with confidence to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need."*** (NASB) Two reasons are given here why we should have this kind of confidence. First of all, we're praying to someone who's on a throne. What does a throne indicate? A King. Not merely *a* king, but *the* King. The King of all kings, the Lord of all lords, the Supreme Ruler of the universe, the One who said, *"All authority is given unto Me in heaven and in earth."* We're praying to someone who has both the authority and the power to do what we ask. He's sitting on a throne. Let's lift our eyes from ourselves and our own needs and problems and look up to that glorious throne.

Then it's a throne of grace. Grace is always more than we can deserve or earn. Grace is one of the key words in the New Testament and it always stands for something that goes beyond anything we can earn or achieve by our own efforts. So, because it's a throne of grace we are not limited to what we deserve or to what we can achieve or to what our own efforts can accomplish for us. So, as you come in prayer, remember you're coming to a throne and it's a throne of grace.

Then, a second reason why we can come with confidence is because we have been invited by God to come. And God invites us that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need. One of the things I've always been conscious of in my Christian life is that I stand in need of the mercy of God. But this Scripture encourages me to believe that if I ever come for mercy, mercy is what I will receive. I believe that the reason some people do not receive mercy is simply that they don't see their need of it and come in faith to receive it. And then it says we're to come for help in time of need. We're not to look at the circumstances. We're not to say, "Well, the situation is so grave and the problems are so great that there's nothing to be done about it." Because it's just at a time of need, it's just when the problems are great, that God invites us to come.

Let's look at another beautiful Scripture in Hebrews 10 verses 19 and 22, ***"Since therefore, brethren, we have confidence to enter the holy place by the blood of Jesus, let us draw near with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith . . ."*** (NASB) Notice, confidence and full assurance. Everything suggests boldness—boldness based upon the fact that the blood of Jesus has been shed on our behalf and has

been sprinkled in the very presence of God. And the blood is now speaking on our behalf even when we do not know how to pray.

I've said that from the positive point of view we are expected to approach God with confidence. I've said that the negative side of that is that we do not come with condemnation. Let's look at some of the passages of Scripture that speak about the need to be free from condemnation. One good passage is Psalm 66 verse 18 where the psalmist says: ***"If I regard wickedness in my heart, The Lord will not hear..."*** (NASB) I believe that means that if I begin to search my own heart and doubt my own standing before God and question whether I'm really forgiven and begin to doubt God's mercy and God's grace, which He's invited me to receive, I begin to think in terms of my own merits and the devil is permitted to remind me of bad things I've done, and of my failures and weaknesses. If the devil can once get us to focus on our own selves and weaknesses and failings in our own lives, then we do not approach God with confidence. And so the psalmist says, "If I regard wickedness in my heart, the Lord will not hear." The lesson is that we're not to look at ourselves. We're to lift up our eyes to that throne of grace. We're to realize that we're not coming in our own merits or our own righteousness.

In the first epistle of John chapter 3 verses 21–22, John expresses the same thought, ***"Beloved, if our heart does not condemn us, we have confidence before God; and whatever we ask we receive from Him..."*** (NASB) You see, we have to get rid of that condemnation in our own heart. Any attitude that thinks that we have some kind of righteousness or claim in ourselves to approach God always results in our approaching Him without full confidence because there's nothing ultimately in ourselves. We have no righteousness of our own. Our confidence cannot be based in ourselves. So, we've got to come to a place where we do not allow our hearts to condemn us. We have to come to a place where we're trusting, not in our own righteousness or our own wisdom, but trusting in God's faithfulness, and that produces confidence.

Again, in Romans chapter 8 verse 1, Paul says, ***"There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus."*** (NASB) And in the remainder of the chapter he paints the most glorious picture of the life that's filled and controlled by the Holy Spirit, all the blessings and privileges and benefits of that life. But the entry into that chapter and the entry into that kind of life is there in the first verse, ***"There is no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus."*** We must lay aside condemnation.

Part 4 - ELEMENTS OF SUCCESSFUL PRAYING 1



PRAYING WITH THE RIGHT MOTIVE

Yesterday I dealt with the first element of successful praying from two points of view: the positive, that we must come with confidence; the negative, that we must come without condemnation. Today I'm going to speak about the second main element of successful praying. It is that we pray with the right motive, and it's very important that we know what the right motive is. The right motive is for God's glory.

Religious people often tend to focus on externals. They're concerned about the way people dress, the entertainments that they enjoy, the things they eat. In the days of the Pharisees there were all sorts of ordinances that they insisted upon, like washing their hands before meals. Generally speaking, religion starts at the outside and looks at externals. It's hard for religious people to realize that God starts at the inside and works from inside outward. God looks below the surface. He's a discerner of the thoughts and intents of our heart. One particular thing that He searches is our motives. God is not concerned merely whether what we want when we pray is good, but He's also concerned as to why we want it. This is explained more fully in James chapter 4 verses 2–3. In verse 2, James says, ***"You do not have because you do not ask."*** (NASB) (there's one very simple and practical reason why a lot of people don't get things that they could have from God simply because they don't ask. Looking back at my own life I recognize many times the many situations where I did without things that God would willingly have granted me simply because I never asked for them. So remember that one reason why you and I often do without things that God wants us to have is that *we do not ask*.) However, that's not the only reason, in the next verse, verse 3, James says also this, ***"You ask and do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives, so that you may spend it on your pleasures."*** (NASB) Notice, here we have people who do pray but they still don't receive because they're praying with wrong motives and particularly the motive that James says is wrong is that you may spend it on your pleasures. This brings us back to the difference between the old self and the new self. Remember that Paul says we have to "put off the old self" and then we have to put on the new self. I told you that the old self is a rebel; he's self-assertive, he's egotistic, he's filled with his own wants and needs. "I want this, I want that, I think this, I think that." And God doesn't bargain with the old self. As a matter of fact, God has only got one remedy for the old self and that's 'execution'. The good news of the gospel is that the execution took place in Christ when Jesus died on the cross. Our old self was crucified with Him. But that's got to become effective in the life of each one of us; so each one of us, on the basis of what Jesus did on the cross, has to put off that old self with his self-centeredness, his self-seeking, his emphasis on his own needs and pleasures. As long as we pray with *those* motives, our motives are wrong and it's very possible for that reason God

will not grant us what we pray for, even though what we pray for in itself may be good. So we ask, "What is the right motive for praying?" And Jesus states it clearly in John chapter 14 verse 13. He says, **"Whatever you ask in My name, that will I do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son."** (NASB) There's a comprehensive promise that whatever we ask, Jesus will do. But you'll notice the basis on which He will do it, *"that the Father may be glorified in the Son."* And so the right motive for praying is that the answer may bring glory to God.

As a matter of fact, that's not just the right motive for praying but that's the right motive for living. The supreme purpose of life when we view it aright is to glorify God. The greatest privilege that any of God's creatures can have is to bring Him glory and praying is just one of the ways in which God has ordained that we shall be able to bring Him glory when our prayers are answered in the name of Jesus.

I've said that there's only one right motive for praying and that is for the glory of God. We can look at this from the opposite side. We can see it in the very essence of sin. The essence of sin, that is, wrong living, is that it robs God of the glory due to Him. Many people haven't seen this, but it's stated a number of times in the epistle to the Romans. For instance, in Romans chapter 1 verse 21, Paul is describing how the whole human race has turned away from God and descended into a life of darkness and ignorance and wickedness and futility. And in verse 21 of this chapter, Paul describes the steps that led to this awful descent into the abysses of darkness and sinfulness. And he says this, **"although they knew God, they neither glorified him as God nor gave thanks to him, but their thinking became futile and their foolish hearts were darkened."** (NIV) What are the first two steps down? The first one: the failure to glorify God; the second one: the failure to be thankful. And when men took those two first steps downward, they were set on a slippery path that leads to a condition that ultimately is too horrible to think about. Therefore, in praying we have to be careful that we do not make those errors. We have to be careful that we start with a motive of glorifying God and with the expression of giving thanks to Him.

And so, when we are praying with that motive, that God may be glorified, then God says something truly wonderful. He says all His promises are made available to us. This is stated in 2 Corinthians chapter 1 verse 20, **"For no matter how many promises God has made, they are 'Yes' in Christ. And so through Him the 'Amen' is spoken by us to the glory of God."** (NIV) Isn't that staggering! No matter how many promises God has made, and someone's estimated that there are 8,000 promises of God in the Scripture, they are all "Yes" in Christ. When we come to God in Christ, God never says, "I didn't mean that promise," or "You can't have that promise." He says they're all "Yes." But the response of faith is that to God's "Yes" we say "Amen." And it's our "Amen" that clinches God's "Yes" and makes the promise ours. However, we say "Amen" to the glory of God. I've paraphrased that statement there and I've said it this way; and let me leave this with you to meditate on.

"Every promise that fits my situation and meets my need is for me, now, if I claim it in the name of Jesus and if I claim it to the glory of God."

PRAYING OUT OF RIGHT RELATIONSHIPS

The next important element of successful praying is that we pray out of right relationships. This is one aspect of prayer that Christians often tend to overlook. Nevertheless, the Bible has much to say about it.

Let's begin in the Sermon on the Mount, which is a kind of charter for Christian living. In Matthew chapter 5 verses 23–24, Jesus says this, ***“If therefore you are presenting your offering at the altar, and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your offering there before the altar, and go your way; first be reconciled to your brother, and then come and present your offering.”*** (NASB)

Now of course, that's couched in the terminology of Old Testament sacrifices but it has an application in the New Testament. We don't go, normally, to a literal altar but we go to God's presence and we kneel there. And so Jesus is saying, “If you're on your way to pray to God and you suddenly remember on your way that your brother has something against you, that there's something you've done that has wounded or offended or harmed your fellow believer and you haven't been to him about it, you haven't put it right. Then Jesus says, ***“Leave your offering there before the altar*** (and your offering includes your prayer). Don't go on praying but go back to your brother first, put the matter right with him and then come and present your offering (that is, your prayer).” This clearly indicates to me that we cannot expect God to hear our prayer if we pray out of a wrong relationship with some other believer. If we want our prayer to be heard, first of all, we've got to go back to that other believer and put that relationship right. Now, I've proved that within my own experience more than once. I've seen how, as I was seeking God in prayer, the Holy Spirit would bring to my conscience something that I'd said or done and I had to go back and put that right.

In 1 Peter chapter 3 verse 7, this is applied specifically to the husband/wife relationship. Peter says, ***“You husbands, likewise, live with your wives in an understanding way, as with a weaker vessel, since she is a woman; and grant her honor as a fellow-heir of the grace of life, so that your prayers may not be hindered.”*** (NASB) Notice, if there's a wrong relationship between husband and wife; it's very possible that their prayers will be hindered. God will not move in answer to their prayers until that relationship has been adjusted and primarily God puts the responsibility on the husband to do it. He says, ***“Live with your wives in an understanding way.”*** Remember, the wife is a weaker vessel. Now, in the world when people meet somebody weak, they tend to treat them with contempt or to keep them under or to suppress them, but the spirit of the gospel is totally different. Paul says, “Just because she's a weaker vessel, grant her that much more honor and remember that she's a *fellow-heir* of the grace of life, a co-heir.” As I understand it, according to the law that applied in those days, if two people were co-heirs of a certain inheritance, neither of them could claim the inheritance apart from the other. And I believe that's how it is when a husband and wife are both Christians. They have a wonderful inheritance in God which is theirs to claim, but neither of them can claim it apart from the other. Each of them is dependent upon the other to enter into the inheritance. That means they've got to claim it out of a right relationship with one another. How are we going to achieve this kind of right relationship that I'm speaking about? I believe one key word is the word “forgive.” So many times, the first thing we have to do in coming to God is practice forgiveness of other people. This is built right in to the Lord's Prayer, that pattern prayer for all of us as Christians. Matthew 6:12, Jesus tells us to pray this way, ***“forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors.”*** (NASB) Notice we are not entitled to claim from God forgiveness above the proportion in which we have forgiven our fellow human being. If we have totally forgiven all others, we can claim total forgiveness from God. But if there are some whom we have not forgiven, or there are some things we have not forgiven, then we cannot claim full forgiveness from God. And as long as we do not have full forgiveness from God, there may be much that will hinder our prayer.

Now, upon whom does God place the obligation to forgive? He places it upon the one who's going to pray. You may say, "Well, I want to pray and I know I have resentment against others and if they would come to me and ask me for forgiveness, I would forgive them." But that's not how it works. You have to forgive them even if they don't come to you, even if they don't acknowledge that they've offended you. If you want God to answer your prayers, you have to begin by forgiving those people.

Listen to what Jesus says in Mark 11:25, ***"And whenever you stand praying, forgive, if you have anything against anyone; so that your Father also who is in heaven may forgive you your transgressions."*** (NASB) Jesus says, "Forgive, if you have anything against anyone." That leaves out *nothing* and *no one*! And He puts the obligation to forgive squarely and fairly upon the person who's praying. And He says, "If you forgive, your Father will forgive you. If you don't forgive, your Father will not forgive you."

In another place Jesus has a parable about a servant who owed his master ten thousand talents (which is equivalent maybe to six million dollars) and he couldn't pay, and so he plead with his master for mercy and his master forgave him that whole debt. But then he went out and met a fellow-servant who owed him a hundred pence (about seventeen dollars) and he demanded payment of that debt. And even though his fellow-servant plead for mercy, he refused to give him mercy but cast him into prison. When the master heard about this he was angry with the unforgiving servant and said, "You wicked servant," and he cast him into the prison and said, "You will not come out till you've paid the uttermost farthing." Well, that's a parable. Each one of us has a debt to God that's astronomical. It goes far beyond six million dollars, but if we plead with God for mercy, He'll forgive us, but on one condition: that we go out and forgive our fellow-servant. But if we hold against our fellow-servant that which he owes us, then God reserves the right to hold against us that which we owe Him. It's a question of tearing up IOUs.

I remember once I was preaching on this theme and I said, "You may be a woman, your husband may owe you much that he hasn't paid you, the IOUs are legitimate, but God has got a lot of IOUs from you in His hand. God says, "If you'll tear yours up, I'll tear mine up, but if you hold on to yours, I'll hold on to Mine." At the end of that particular message, a lady came up to me and her face was beaming. A smart, well-dressed lady, probably in her early 30s. She said, "I just want to tell you, Mr. Prince, I've just torn up about thirty thousand dollars' worth of IOUs!" and her face was radiant. So remember, if you're going to come to God and pray successfully, you may have to tear up a whole lot of IOUs.

Part 5 - ELEMENTS OF SUCCESSFUL PRAYING 2



PRAYERS DIRECTED BY THE HOLY SPIRIT

Now I'm going to deal with the next important element in successful praying. This has to do with the part that the Holy Spirit plays in our prayers. It can be stated very simply:

The only kind of prayer that is acceptable to God is one directed by the Holy Spirit.

Actually, this goes far beyond our prayers. It applies to *every* area of the Christian life. The only kind of Christian life acceptable to God is one directed by the Holy Spirit.

Now, many people who've been born again really don't know how to be led by the Holy Spirit when it comes to Christian living. This is perhaps particularly true when it comes to praying. In Romans 8:26–27, Paul says, ***“And in the same way the Spirit [capital S, the Holy Spirit] also helps our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we should, but the Spirit Himself intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words; and He who searches the hearts knows what the mind of the Spirit is, because He [that's the Holy Spirit] intercedes for the saints according to the will of God.”*** (NASB)

Paul says that we have a weakness, we *all* have a weakness and it's not a physical sickness, it's not even a mental sickness but it's part of our old, carnal nature. And the weakness is this: *we don't know how to pray as we should*. There are different versions of that verse, some say we don't know what to pray for, others say we don't know how to pray. I believe both are true. We don't know what to pray for, we don't know how to pray. Sometimes we think we know what to pray for but we still don't know how to pray about it. But at other times we don't know either what to pray for or how to pray. We're at a loss. God's remedy for this is to send us the Holy Spirit to help us. He's the comforter, the helper, the One who comes to help us lead the kind of life and pray the kind of prayers that we need. And so Paul says here that when the Holy Spirit comes in, in a certain sense, He takes over for us and, as we yield to Him, He does the praying that we need through us. Paul's language is very personal here. He says, *“The Spirit Himself intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words,”* and again, in the next verse, *“He [the Holy Spirit] intercedes for the saints according to the will of God.”* In a certain sense, the secret of successful praying is turning over to the Holy Spirit, yielding intelligently but voluntarily to Him, and letting Him pray through you the kind of prayer that really needs to be prayed. Notice that Paul says this kind of prayer can come in various ways. One way that he speaks about here is in groanings too deep for words. Now, I've been present when people were given that kind of prayer. It's very moving, it's very solemn. It's almost frightening. It's important to understand that many of the things that we really need to pray

about are too deep for words. The ordinary words of our normal expression just are not adequate for the things that we need to say in prayer. So, one of the ways that the Holy Spirit liberates our spirit to pray effectively is with groanings that are too deep for words.

That's one kind of prayer. Now, another way that the Holy Spirit can help us is by giving us the right prayer in our own language, but it's not a prayer that we would ever have prayed if left to ourselves.

Now, there's a third way in which the Holy Spirit can help us to pray and that is through a prayer language, in an unknown tongue. This is spoken about, of course, many times in the New Testament. Some people find it hard to understand. The truth of the matter is it can't be fully understood. It's one of those activities of our spirit which goes beyond the ability of our little minds to fully to comprehend. But thank God, that Christian experience is not limited to what our minds can comprehend. Thank God that we have a God that's bigger than our little mind, and one of the ways in which God liberates us from the tyranny of our mind over our total lives is by giving us, through the Holy Spirit, a prayer language. We are praying in a language that's very real but it's not a language we ourselves understand. We just hand it over to the Holy Spirit and let Him pray through us what needs to be prayed in this new prayer language. Today, all around the world millions of people are entering into this experience and finding it corresponds exactly to what's written about it in the New Testament. Listen to what Paul says about it in 1 Corinthians 14 verses 2–4, ***“For one who speaks in a tongue [an unknown tongue] does not speak to men, but to God; for no one understands, but in his spirit he speaks mysteries. One who speaks in a tongue edifies himself . . .”*** (NASB)

So, what are we doing when we pray in this prayer language, this unknown tongue? Paul says we're doing three things:

1. We're speaking direct to God, not to man; that's a privilege in itself, to be able to speak *directly* to Almighty God.
2. In our spirits we're speaking mysteries, things too deep and profound for our little minds fully to grasp.
3. When we speak in a tongue we're edifying or building ourselves up spiritually even though our mind doesn't really understand all that's going on.

Paul returns to this in 1 Corinthians chapter 14 verses 14–15 and he says this, ***“For if I pray in a tongue, my spirit prays but my mind is unfruitful. What is the outcome then? I shall pray with the spirit and I shall pray with the mind also; I shall sing with the spirit and I shall sing with the mind also.”*** (NASB)

Notice that we have various options as to how to pray. Sometimes we pray with the mind. We pray with words that we understand but we trust the Holy Spirit to correct us. At other times we give our minds a rest and we let the Holy Spirit take over and through our spirit pray with a language and words that we ourselves do not understand. But we know, according to Scripture, that we're speaking to God, that we're speaking mysteries, we're sharing God's secrets, and that we're edifying ourselves.

All right, listen to what Paul says now in Ephesians 3:20, ***“Now to Him who is able to do exceeding abundantly beyond all that we ask or think, according to the power that works within us.”*** (NASB)

Notice that the answer to our prayers depends on the *power that works within us*. What is that power? Of course, it's the power of the Holy Spirit. The more He works in us, the more effective our prayers are.

PRAYING ACCORDING TO GOD'S WORD

I've now explained four important elements of successful praying. The first, that we pray with confidence, without condemnation. The second, that we pray with the right motive, which is for God's glory. The third, that we pray out of right relationships with our fellow human beings, especially those closest to us. And the fourth, that our prayers are directed by the Holy Spirit. Today I have one more important element of successful praying to deal with: it is that we pray *according to God's Word*. The principle is this: **God's Spirit always works with and through God's Word**. Therefore, it is not enough just to have the Spirit of God but we must combine with that the Word of God.

There's an example of this in Psalm 33 verse 6, where this principle is applied to the creation of the universe. The psalmist says, ***"By the word of the Lord the heavens were made, And by the breath of His mouth all their host."*** (NASB) Where the English translation says "breath," the Hebrew says literally "Spirit." So by the word of the Lord and by His Spirit the heavens and all their host were made. In other words, these are the two agents behind *all creation*. ***The entire created universe was brought into being by the combination and cooperation of the Spirit of God and the word of God.***

If we turn to the opening chapter of Genesis, we see an example of how this actually took place historically. Genesis chapter 1 verses 2–3, the writer says, ***"... the earth was formless and void, and darkness was over the surface of the deep; and the Spirit of God was moving over the surface of the waters."*** [Notice that the Spirit of God was already there and moving but nothing effective was yet happening. But the next verse says:] ***Then God said, "Let there be light"; and there was light.*** (NASB) "God said" means that God's word went forth. So, where the Spirit of God already was, the word of God went forth and the union of the Spirit and the word of God produced creation. God said the word "light," and the thing "light" came into being. Now, there's a tremendous truth to grasp here and I'm going to put it this way:

The entire creative power of God can work *through us* when God's Spirit and God's word are combined in our prayers.

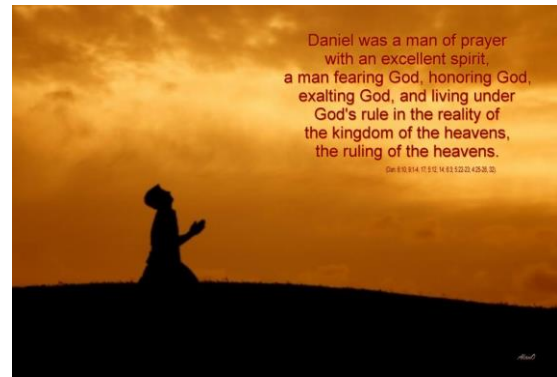
We may be in our own sight very weak, we may be very limited, but if we can make ourselves channels for the Spirit of God and the Word of God, if we can so unite ourselves with God that we don't stand in the way of God's Spirit and God's word; if we're yielded and submissive and obedient and flexible, then *the entire creative power of God can work through our prayers*. Because it only required those two things to bring the universe into being. The Spirit of God and the word of God and those two things are equally available in our prayers if we know how to yield ourselves to them and let them have free course through us.

I want to give you an example of the limitless power of prayer through just one man when it's the Spirit of God and the word of God working through that man. The example is Elijah. The passage that speaks about this is found in the New Testament in James chapter 5 verses 17–18. James says this about Elijah, ***"Elijah was a man just like us."*** [Notice that, no different from the rest of us, a man just like us, but] ***He prayed earnestly that it would not rain, and it did not rain on the land for three and a half years. Again he prayed, and the heavens gave rain, and the earth produced its crops."*** (NIV)

So, Elijah was a man no different from us but by his prayer he controlled rainfall in the land of Israel for three and a half years. That's staggering, isn't it? And yet Elijah is not set forth as someone completely different and unlike us but he's set forth as a challenge and an example. He *did it* and James is saying we

can do it too! What was the secret of Elijah's prayer? I believe it was this: That his prayer was based on the word of God. That in his prayer he gave release by his faith to the limitless power of God's word when united with God's Spirit. Elijah was not praying on his own initiative. He wasn't thinking up his own prayer but he was praying according to the word of God. When we look at the scene there on the top of Mount Carmel, Elijah has challenged the prophets of Baal and challenged them to call down fire from heaven on their sacrifice and they'd been praying all day, cutting themselves with lances and jumping on the altar, becoming frantic and beside themselves but nothing has happened. At the close of the day, Elijah builds his altar and offers his sacrifice. And then he prays this very, very simple prayer. No shouting, no screaming, no jumping up on the altar but a prayer that's based on the word of God. Listen to what he says [in 1 Kings 18:36], ***"Then it came about at the time of the offering of the evening sacrifice, that Elijah the prophet came near and said, "O LORD, the God of Abraham, Isaac and Israel, today let it be known that Thou art God in Israel, and that I am Thy servant, and that I have done all these things at Thy word."*** (NASB) What's the key? It's that last phrase. *"I have done all these things at Thy word."* I've not improvised, I've not followed my own leadings or impulses, I've not based my actions on some kind of human philosophy but I've based all that I've done on Your word, Lord, and therefore I can expect that you'll stand behind me because you're standing behind your own word.

Part 6 - PRAYING FOR OUR GOVERNMENT



RULING BY PRAYER

Now I'm going to open up for you some of the limitless possibilities of believing prayer. To begin with, let me remind you of three main truths:

1. First, God has made us a *kingdom of priests*. As such, our responsibility is to *rule by prayer*. The Bible reveals that this world is not really ruled by kings and presidents and governors and dictators. They only *seem* to rule. The people who *really* rule the world are those who know how to pray.
2. To be effective, our prayers must be both directed and empowered by the Holy Spirit. Without the help of the Holy Spirit *we cannot pray effectively*.
3. The Spirit of God and the Word of God always work together. The power of the Holy Spirit only works through our prayers in so far as they are in line with the Word of God, that is, the Bible. This means that to pray effectively we must know what the Bible says.

For an example I'm going to go to Elijah. This is what the Bible says about Elijah in the first epistle of James chapter 5 verses 17–18, "***Elijah was a man with a nature like ours. . . [That's emphasized right at the beginning. Elijah was not a different kind of person. He had the same nature, the same problems, the same weaknesses] and he prayed earnestly that it might not rain and it did not rain on the earth for three years and six months. And he prayed again, and the sky poured rain, and the earth produced its fruit.***" (NASB) There was a man with a nature like ours, and yet for three and a half years Elijah controlled the rainfall over the land of Israel. If there's one thing that normally is not under the control of man, it's rainfall. Scripture indicates again and again that God keeps the rainfall under His sovereign control. But at this point in the history of Israel, Elijah took over the control of the rainfall for three and a half years. What was his secret? His secret was that he *knew and applied the truths of God's Word*. His prayer had that amount of power and effectiveness because in his prayer he was applying the truths of God's Word.

Let's look briefly at the truths of God's Word on which Elijah's prayer was based. In the book of Deuteronomy chapter 11 verses 16–17, before Israel ever entered the land of their inheritance, Moses warned them that they were not to turn aside after other gods and become idolatrous. And he warned them that if they did God would shut up the heavens and there would be no rain. Here is what Moses actually said to them before they actually entered the land, "***Beware, lest your hearts be deceived and***

you turn away and serve other gods and worship them. “Or the anger of the LORD will be kindled against you, and He will shut up the heavens so that there will be no rain and the ground will not yield its fruit; and you will perish quickly from the good land which the LORD is giving you.” (NASB) Notice the warning. If you turn aside after other gods, God will shut up the heavens and there will be no rain. That’s just what Israel had done. They had turned aside after other gods and so on the authority of God’s Word, Elijah shut the heavens so that there was no more rain. But then when Israel turned back to God there was another promise in the Word of God that Elijah was able to claim. This was something that was said by Solomon at the dedication of his temple. In 1 Kings chapter 8 verses 35–36, Solomon says this, ***“When the heavens are shut up and there is no rain, because they [that’s Israel] have sinned against Thee, and they pray toward this place and confess Thy name and turn from their sin when Thou didst afflict them, then hear Thou in heaven and forgive the sin of Thy servants and of Thy people Israel, indeed, teach them the good way in which they should walk. And send rain on Thy land, which Thou has given Thy people for an inheritance.”*** (NASB) So there’s the opposite side, that’s God’s mercy when His people turn and repent. His Word declares that He will then send rain again. So when there was evidence that Israel was turning back to God, Elijah had the right, based on the promises of God’s Word, to claim that God would send rain again upon the land; so that the effectiveness of Elijah’s prayer was due to the fact that it was based directly on the clear promises of Scripture. That’s the secret that we need to bear in mind—that our prayers are effective when they’re right in line with the statements and the promises of God’s Word, the Bible.

Remember what I’ve said before, in Psalm 33 verse 6, ***“By the word of the LORD the heavens were made, And by the breath [or the ‘Spirit’] of His mouth all their host.”*** (NASB) In other words, the entire created universe was brought into being by two things working together: the Word of the Lord and the spirit of His mouth. When God’s Word and God’s Spirit work together, all His creative power and effectiveness is in them, and that applies to our praying.

When God’s Word and God’s Spirit work together in our prayers, then the same power that brought the universe into being is flowing through us.

Do you believe that kind of thing can happen today? One problem of many of us Christians is we are too self-centered. Somebody once quoted this as the typical prayer of the average church member, “God bless me and my wife, my son John, and his wife; us four, no more. Amen.” That kind of prayer is not going to get the kind of results that we’re talking about.

I want to ask you this, “will you let God enlarge your horizons as we continue with this theme of “Praying According to God’s Word”?”

PRAYING FOR OUR GOVERNMENT

I’m now going to speak about our obligation to pray for our government. It’s an unfortunate fact that multitudes of Christians are not aware of this obligation that is directly placed upon us by the New Testament. The passage I’m going to look at first is in the first epistle of Timothy chapter 2 verses 1–4. This is what Paul says, ***“First of all, then, I urge that entreaties and prayers, petitions and thanksgivings, be made on behalf of all men, for kings and all who are in authority, in order that we may lead a tranquil and quiet life in all godliness and dignity. This is good and acceptable in the sight***

of God our Savior, who desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth." (NASB)

This is one of the most logical passages that I know of in the Bible. It unfolds a series of thoughts and obligations upon us and it gives us the most sound and logical reasons for what it is saying. Let me explain it to you in the following steps. First of all, the first public ministry of the church coming together in assembly is prayer. Paul says, *"First of all, I urge that entreaties, prayers, petitions and thanksgivings be made on behalf of all men."* If we sum up those four words in one, the one word would be prayer. So the first public ministry of the church coming together in assembly is prayer. The first particular thing that we are required to pray for is all men. In other words, our prayers are to be as wide in their outreach as the love and the mercy of God and the offer of the gospel to all men. The first particular category of men that we are to pray for, according to Paul's word, is "kings and all who are in authority." Of course, in this western side of the Atlantic there are not many kings. So let's just leave out that and just say all who are in authority: rulers, the government. Do you realize that, that the first particular topic that we are to pray for when we come together as Christians in church is our government, those in authority over us? My observation is that in multitudes of churches they never think about that, even once a month. And yet Paul puts it first. What are we to ask God to do for and through the government? Paul says, *"That we may lead a quiet and tranquil life in all godliness and dignity."* Let's ask ourselves this simple question. Does the government we live under affect the life we lead? Obviously it affects it in many ways continually. So if we want to lead a good life, logic and self-interest alone would indicate that we should pray for our government. What are we to ask that the government will achieve? It will achieve a situation in which we who are under the government may lead a tranquil and quiet life in all godliness and dignity. I believe that's the primary function of government clearly described. In other words, what we are really to pray for is that the government will do its job properly. Or more simply still, we're to pray for *good government*.

Now in the next verse, Paul goes on to say, *"This is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Savior."* What's the "this" refer to? The thing in the previous verse that we've just analyzed which is good government. So Paul is saying, and this is tremendously important, good government is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Savior.

I wonder how many Christians realize that God approves of good government. Good government is the *will of God*. Now, the next verse tells us one great basic reason why God approves of good government, why it's His will. It says, *"God desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth."* I pointed out already that God's mercy and love are outstretched to the whole human race. God wants *all* men to be saved, but they cannot be saved without coming to the knowledge of the truth. And they cannot come to the knowledge of the truth unless the truth, the truth of the gospel, is presented to them, is preached to them. So for that very simple and logical reason, God wants the truth of the gospel proclaimed to all men everywhere. All we have to do then is ask ourselves one more question. Which makes it easier to proclaim the gospel; good government or bad government? I think the answer is too obvious to need a lot of explanation. Bad government hinders the preaching of the gospel. Good government, in many different ways, facilitates the preaching of the gospel. *So good government is the revealed will of God.*

To sum up what I have just been saying, I'm going to read to you now a brief passage from my book, *'Shaping History through Prayer and Fasting.'* This is what I say on page 42 of the book:

We are now in a position to present the teaching of 1 Timothy chapter 2 verses 1–4 in a series of simple logical steps:

1. The first ministry and outreach of believers meeting together in regular fellowship is prayer.
2. The first specific topic for prayer is the government.
3. We are to pray for good government.
4. God desires all men to have the truth of the gospel preached to them.
5. Good government facilitates the preaching of the gospel, while bad government hinders it.
6. Therefore good government is the will of God.

Let me read that conclusion once more, it's one of the most important conclusions in the whole of the Scriptures. It affects our whole lives. *"Good government is the will of God."*

Now let me relate to that a passage in the first epistle of John chapter 5 verses 14–15 where John tells us a simple, basic requirement for receiving the answer to our prayers. This is what he says, ***"And this is the confidence which we have before Him, [that is before God] that, if we ask anything according to His will, He hears us. And if we know that he hears us in whatever we ask, we know that we have the requests which we have asked from Him."*** (NASB) You see the basis of successful praying is knowing that you're praying according to the will of God. And the will of God is revealed primarily in the Bible.

Let's apply this principle of praying according to the will of God and knowing that God hears us and knowing that we have what we've prayed for to the particular theme we're dealing with, that is praying for our government. I'll sum it up this way: If we pray according to God's will He hears us. If we know that He hears us, we know that we have what we asked for. We know that good government is according to God's will, therefore, if we pray for good government, we know that God hears us and if we know that God hears us, we know that we have what we asked for. What are we talking about? We're talking about good government.

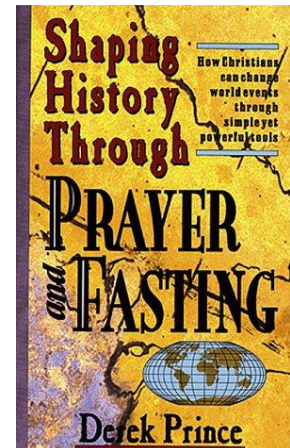
So, let's give it a very practical application that applies to the situation in the United States today. If we do not have good government (and I am only saying an "if") each one of us has to decide how far we consider our government good or ineffective or inefficient or whatever estimate we make of the government—but if we do not have good government, what is the reason? There are only two possible reasons if we believe what the Bible teaches. The first reason is we have not prayed as we ought to. And I suppose that applies to well over half the professing Christians in the United States. They never really pray intelligently and with real concern for the government. They shrug their shoulders and criticize the government but they do not pray for it. Let me point out to you that there's no authority in Scripture to *criticize* the government but there *is* an obligation to *pray* for it. And if you're one of those who criticize let me suggest that if you spent less time criticizing and more time praying, you might have less to criticize.

So the first possible reason, which is the commonest, is that we have not prayed. But there's another possible reason which is that we have prayed but without knowing that good government is the will of God. Because it's only if we pray, *knowing what is God's will*, that we can say we have what we've prayed for, that is, *good government!*

Now why do we Christians find it so hard to believe that so much depends on our praying? We take the attitude that the government is outside our control, there's nothing we can do about it. We shrug our

shoulders and we criticize, we complain, but we don't pray. *I believe the real reason why we don't pray is because we have not understood the limitless possibilities of praying according to God's Word!*

Part 7 - I HAVE SEEN HISTORY SHAPED BY PRAYER



For my first example I'm going to go back to the early years of my Christian experience. In 1940 I was called from a position as a professor of philosophy at Cambridge University into the British Forces in World War II. In 1941 my unit was sent out to North Africa, and I found myself serving as a hospital attendant with the British Forces in North Africa. At that point the fate of the whole Middle East hung in the balance. If the Axis forces could press through and capture Cairo, they would command the Suez Canal, cut one of the main lifelines of the British Empire and ultimately the land of Israel, and the oil resources of the entire Middle East would be at their mercy. So it was a critical moment.

Now as a Christian who had come to know the Lord and had a very definite relationship with him and believed in the Bible, I felt I ought to pray, but I just didn't know *how* to pray. And so I more or less waited for God to give me a prayer, the kind of prayer He wanted prayed. And after a while God gave me this specific prayer:

"Lord, give us leaders such that it will be for your glory to give us victory through them."

Once I started praying that prayer, I prayed it every day regularly. Now I didn't know what was happening but God began to move swiftly. The British government appointed a new commander for their forces in the Middle East in North Africa, an officer who was serving up in the desert. He was flown back to Cairo to take command but his plane crashed on landing and he was killed. So at this very important time in the most active theatre of the war, the British Forces were left without a commander. In that situation, Winston Churchill, who was Prime Minister of Britain at the time, acted more or less on his own initiative and appointed an unknown officer who was flown out from Britain. His name was *Bernard Montgomery*. Now I have to say on the basis of observation that Montgomery was a committed Christian and a God-fearing man. He was also a very fine commander and a man of great discipline. And he went to work reorganizing the British Forces. He restored discipline and morale; he changed the whole attitude and bearing and conduct of the officers; and then there was fought the well-known battle of *El Alamein*, which was the first major Allied victory in the whole of that theatre of war. In fact, in the whole war. And it reversed the whole course of war in North Africa in favor of the Allies.

Now I was serving with a military ambulance up in the desert, a little way behind the advancing British forces, and on the tailboard of the truck there was a little portable radio and a news commentator was

describing the preparations at Montgomery's headquarters just before the Battle of El Alamein was fought. And he described how Montgomery came out and assembled his officers and men and said,

"Let us ask the Lord, mighty in battle, to give us the victory."

And as I listened to those words, what I call "heaven's electricity" went through me from the crown of my head to the soles of my feet, and God spoke very quietly but very firmly to my spirit and said, "That is the answer to your prayer!" So early in my Christian experience I learned that prayer can change the course of history.

The second example I'm going to give you of history being shaped by prayer happened in the country of Kenya in East Africa in 1960 when I was serving there in educational work with African students and teachers. At that time Kenya was scheduled to receive independence from British Empire within just a couple of years and the country had gone through a tremendous political crisis. The Mau-Mau emergency which had torn the country in two and created enmity and suspicion, not only between blacks and whites, but between the different African tribes. Just at that time the Belgian Congo to the west had received independence from Belgium and had immediately been plunged into bitter Civil War. All the political experts predicted that Kenya would go the same way as the Belgian Congo, only worse.

Now in August of that year, I was one of the speakers at a Bible convention for young African people. The convention lasted a week and we had come to the closing night. And somehow the Spirit of God moved in in a rather sovereign and unique way; and at a certain point I felt that we had tapped the resources of God's Almighty and that it was our responsibility to use them aright. So I went up to the platform and silenced the young people who were praying and I challenged them to pray for their nation's future. I pointed out to them that Christians have a responsibility to pray for their government and that their country was facing a major crisis, and that probably their prayers were the only thing that could save their country from disaster. Well, they united in prayer and for about ten minutes everybody, something like two or three hundred people, were just praying, laying hold of God—one of the most dramatic experiences I've ever been in. Then when they became silent, the young African who'd been standing beside me on the platform, quietly spoke to his fellow Africans and said, "I want to tell you that while we were praying I had a vision. I saw a man on a red horse, and the horse was very fierce and very cruel—was coming toward Kenya from the east. And behind it were other red horses, also fierce and cruel. But," he said, "While we were praying I saw these red horses turn around and move away from Kenya toward the north." And he said, "As I was meditating on this, God spoke to me and said this, 'Only the supernatural power of the prayer of my people can turn away the troubles that are coming upon Kenya.'"

Now I cannot go in full length into the history of the years that followed but I have to say that that vision granted to that young African was *exactly* fulfilled. About three or four years later there was a serious Communist attempt to move into Kenya and take the country over from the east, but it was foiled by the wise and the prompt action of Jomo Kenyatta, the first president of Kenya; and the Communists never have made any real advance in Kenya. It was brought about by prayer, by concerted, corporate, believing prayer at a crisis in the nation's destiny.

Could the same be true of the United States? Could it be true of the United States, what God said to that young African in 1960 about Kenya? "Only the supernatural power of the prayer of My people can turn away the troubles that are coming upon the United States?"

OUR RESPONSIBILITY AS CHRISTIANS – SALT, LIGHT and a CITY SET ON A HILL

I'm going to deal now with the situation that arises where God's people have *failed* to pray as they should for the government of their nation and, as a result, the course of events in the government, and in the nation at large, has *not* been in line with the will of God. Is there anything that we can do to remedy this situation? My reply is: Yes! The Bible has a clear and practical answer to this question, but before we turn to the Bible's answer, let us first face up to the full extent of our responsibility as Christians to exercise a unique and decisive influence on the society in which we live. Jesus states this for us in the Sermon on the Mount.

He uses in succession three vivid metaphors:

1. Salt
2. Light
3. A City on a hill.

Here is what He says in Matthew 5 verses 13–14, ***"You are the salt of the earth; but if the salt has become tasteless, how will it be made salty again? It is good for nothing any more, except to be thrown out and trampled underfoot by men. You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden."*** (NASB) So there are the three metaphors: Salt, Light, A City set on a hill. Let's look at the particular significance of each metaphor, and I'll deal with them in the reverse order to which Jesus mentioned them.

1. CITY ON A HILL

First of all, we Christians are a city set on a hill. What does that mean? I think the word that sums it up is we're conspicuous. We can be seen from all angles at all times. And we're always being watched. That's true. The moment you let people know that you believe in Jesus Christ, that you're a committed follower of His, that you attend such and such a church, people begin to look at you in a special way. They analyze your life, your conduct, your behavior. What they're saying is, "Is it real or is it just a religious act that he's putting on?" They won't look at you in the church, but they'll look at you in places like the office, or the factory, or the kitchen, or wherever it may be. Remember then, all of us who profess faith in Jesus, we are collectively a city on a hill. We're being watched all the time.

2. LIGHT

Secondly, Jesus says, "We are the light of the world." There's one important thing about light— there's *no substitute for it*. Nothing else can take the place of light. And that's true of us as Christians in this world—there's no substitute for us, no one else can take our place or do our job. Also, another fact about light, it's the only answer to darkness. There's no other way to deal with darkness but by light. And where light comes, really you don't have much more of a problem with darkness. The light automatically takes care of the darkness and that is how God expects us to be in the world, to be a light that automatically takes care of darkness.

3. SALT

And then the third picture that Jesus uses is that of the salt of the earth. Now salt is very familiar, of course, in our daily lives and there's much that could be said about salt, but I would just point out to you two main functions of salt:

1. To give flavor
2. To hold back corruption.

For instance, if food is not very tasty, maybe it's an egg that you're eating, what do you do? You sprinkle salt on it, and the salt gives flavor to that which otherwise might be flavorless. And so we're the salt of the earth. We're like the little grains of salt sprinkled across the earth's surface. Our responsibility is to give the earth flavor. Flavor for whom? The answer of course, is for God. Our presence should make the earth acceptable to God in a way that it would not be acceptable to God if we were not here as Christians, living out our lives in the grace of God and the love of God, worshiping and praying and praising God. Our presence makes all the difference to how God views the earth. In fact, I believe the earth will discover that one day when God takes us all out, but that day hasn't come yet, and meanwhile we're responsible to be the salt.

And then the second function of salt is to hold back corruption. In the days before refrigeration, when sailors took meat on a long voyage, how did they preserve it? How did they prevent it going bad too soon? By salting it. And so our responsibility in the earth is to 'salt it', to hold back the forces of corruption—moral corruption, social corruption, political corruption—until God's purposes of mercy and grace have been worked out for this world of ours.

Now, suppose we fail in our function as salt—to give flavor and to hold back corruption. Listen to what Jesus says, "If the salt doesn't do its job, it is thenceforth good for nothing anymore." Do you realize that applies to us if we're not doing what we should? We're good for nothing anymore! Except one thing, "To be thrown out and trampled underfoot of men." How would you feel if that happened? You see, it's a realistic fact that there are millions and millions of people across the earth's surface today who would count it their greatest privilege to trample underfoot the Christians of America. God is not going to come down and trample us under foot Himself. He's going to turn us over to those who hate Christianity and all that it stands for. And the most bitter reflection of such a moment would be, "We *deserved* it. Jesus *warned* us. We didn't listen. He said that if we didn't serve as salt, we'd be thrown out and trampled underfoot of men."

Is there a remedy? Is there a way out? Or is it just inevitable that we will be thrown out and trampled under the foot of men? I believe God offers us an alternative, an alternative of mercy, a way to change the situation for the better. There's one key verse in 2 Chronicles chapter 7 verse 14, where God says this, "***if my people, who are called by my name, will humble themselves and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then will I hear from heaven and will forgive their sin and will heal their land.***" (NIV) Let's consider for a moment of whom that is spoken. God says, "*My people who are called by My name. . .*" The Hebrew says "*Upon whom my name is called.*" That describes you and me as Christians exactly. We are Christians because the name of the Lord Jesus Christ is called upon us. We are His people, so that promise applies to us. God says that he requires us to do four things. Then, if we do four things, He will do three things.

Let's look first at the three things that God says He will do:

1. I will *hear* from heaven,
2. will *forgive* their sin,
3. and will *heal* their land.

Notice God is not committed to hear all prayers in the sense of responding to them and answering them. But God says if we'll meet His condition, then He will hear and respond to our prayer, He will forgive our sin. Notice it's the sin of His people. We need to understand that. What stands between God and the intervention of God in this land is not the sin of the unbelievers, it's the sin of God's people.

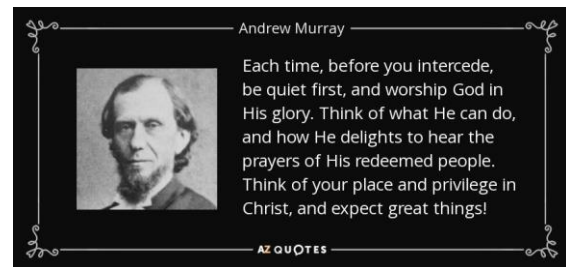
The third thing that God says He will do is heal our land. Let's look at our land for a moment and see, does it need healing? What would you say? I would say that the American people, the American nation has *never needed healing more desperately at any time in its history than it does today!* And God says there's a way that He will heal our land. Surely that's a promise for us today. But remember, it's a conditional promise. God says we have to do certain things first before He'll do those three things: hear, forgive our sin and heal our land.

So what does God require us to do? What are the four things God asks of us? Here they are:

1. The first is to *humble* ourselves.
2. To *pray*.
3. To *seek* God's face
4. To *turn* from our wicked ways.

You see, the first thing we have to do is humble ourselves. The Scripture says, "*God resists the proud, but gives grace to the humble.*" We can pray, but if we pray out of pride and arrogance and self-righteousness, God does not hear our prayer. So we have to humble ourselves, and God places upon *us* the responsibility. I don't think it's scriptural to pray, "God, make me humble," because God says, "You humble yourself." Secondly, when we've humbled ourselves, then we pray. Thirdly, we seek God's face. What does that mean? I think it means more than just a prayer meeting. Prayer meeting begins at 7:30 and ends at 9:00, but seeking God's face means we pray until we know we've met God and the answer is on the way. And fourthly, we have to turn from our wicked ways. Let's face the fact it's *our* wicked ways that have caused the problem in our land. Our prayerlessness, our lack of witnessing, our lack of forthright open righteousness that challenges the ungodly and the unbeliever—the responsibility is upon *us*.

Part 8 – HUMILITY, PRAYER AND INTERCESSION



In my talk yesterday I dealt with a very important and practical question: Suppose we acknowledge that we Christians have failed—through prayerlessness and in other ways—to exercise our potential influence for good in our nation. Is there anything we can do to remedy this situation? My reply was, “Yes. The Bible has a clear and practical answer to this question and it’s found in 1 Chronicles 7 verse 14, ***“If my people, who are called by my name will humble themselves and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then will I hear from heaven and will forgive their sin and will heal their land.”*** (NIV)

1. FASTING

The first thing that God requires us to do is to humble ourselves. And all through Scripture where God talks about humility, He places the responsibility upon us. God does not make us humble. We have to humble ourselves. Humility is not an emotion, it’s not a religious facade; it’s a decision of the will that has to be carried out in action. God says, *“You humble yourselves!”* Furthermore, the Bible gives us a very specific and practical way in which God expects us to humble ourselves. To me, this is good news. There was a time in my Christian experience when I wanted to humble myself, but I really didn’t know how to do it. And then I stumbled on a secret, a secret that has been lost for many Christians, but I believe God is restoring to us today. The secret is that the appointed scriptural way for us to humble ourselves is by *fasting*. That’s an unfamiliar word to many Christians today, yet it’s one that occurs many, many times in the Bible. In fact, there are few of the great men in the Bible of whom we do not know for sure that they practiced fasting.

Let me begin by briefly defining fasting. As I understand it, fasting is deliberately abstaining from food for spiritual purposes. Sometimes it’s from food and water, but normally it’s only from food. And I want to give you three examples from the Old Testament of how fasting is an appointed scriptural way for us to humble ourselves. The first example is the testimony of David. In Psalm 35 verse 13, he says, ***“... I humbled my soul with fasting; And my prayer kept returning to my bosom.”*** (NASB) We see there that David combined fasting with prayer, and that through fasting he humbled his soul and this made his prayer more intense and more effective. I believe that’s how it should be, that *fasting intensifies prayer*.

Why should we need to humble our souls? As I understand Scripture, the soul is the ego, it’s the self-assertive, demanding part; the part that always says, “I want; this is what I need; bless me; pray for me; help me.” It’s the thing in us that makes us self-centered and I believe it’s a tremendous barrier between us and the answer to our prayers, between us and the right relationship to God. We need to humble that soul; we need to bring it into subjection and fasting is a way to do it.

Then we look at Ezra, and the returning exiles from the Babylonian captivity. Ezra 8:21 and 23, ***“Then I proclaimed a fast there at the river of Ahava, that we might humble ourselves before our God to seek***

from Him a safe journey for us, our little ones, and all our possessions. So we fasted and sought our God concerning this matter, and He listened to our entreaty.” (NASB) Ezra and the exiles were about to undertake a very dangerous, long journey through country infested by enemies and brigands, with all their wives and children and the sacred vessels of the temple that were being taken back to Jerusalem. And in order to obtain safe passage, they humbled themselves with fasting and besought God. And God heard them and granted them a safe journey.

So we see that all through the Old Testament, fasting is recognized as a scriptural way for us to humble ourselves. Fasting then is God’s appointed way for us to humble ourselves.

2. PRAYER

What are the steps that follow from that in this promise in 2 Chronicles 7:14? The next step is that we pray, but we pray out of humility, out of a brokenness, out of a humble dependence upon God, out of an acknowledgement that we need God desperately, and if He does not come to our help there is no other source of help that can meet our need. I believe that’s why humbling ourselves comes first, because a prayer that’s prayed out of arrogance and self-righteousness and self-sufficiency will not move the arm of Almighty God.

3. SEEKING GODS FACE

Then the next thing that we have to do is to seek God, to seek His *face*. In Hosea chapter 10 verse 12, we read these words, ***“Break up your fallow ground, for it is time to seek the LORD until He comes to rain righteousness on you.”*** (NASB) It’s a different thing just to go to a prayer meeting and pray for an hour or so than it is to seek the Lord until He comes, until there’s a definite, specific response from God. I believe in 2 Chronicles 7:14 God is speaking about our seeking Him in prayer, until He comes, until we see His arms stretched forth and we see definite evidence that God is moving to answer our prayer. Hosea says, ***“Break up your fallow ground . . .”*** One of the ways that we can do that is by fasting. There are areas of our lives that have not been cultivated, that are not bringing forth fruit for God; they’re just areas that there’s no real results, there’s no real work of the Holy Spirit. And so God says, ***“Break up your fallow ground and seek the Lord until He comes and rains righteousness on you.”*** Frankly, I believe that’s the only hope for this nation of ours, that God will come and rain righteousness upon this land. But, He requires us to seek His face.

4. TURNING FROM OUR WICKED WAYS

And then the last thing that He requires of us is that we turn from our wicked ways. Perhaps you may say, “Well, what wicked ways do I have? I go to church, I say my prayers, I read my Bible, I pay my taxes, I do nobody any harm.” Well, just wait a minute. Who’s right? You or God? Paul said, ***“Nay, but O man who art thou that repliest against God.”*** Are you arguing with God? Are you saying to God that you or I, we don’t have any wicked ways? God says it’s *our* wicked ways that brought the problem on our nation.

THE MINISTRY OF INTERCESSION

I’m going to speak about one of the highest and most powerful ministries open to any Christian, “The Ministry of Intercession.” I believe that this ministry is God’s answer to problems that cannot be resolved in any other way: problems in the lives of individuals of families and of whole nations.

First of all, I need to define what is meant by intercession. The word “intercession” in English actually comes from a Latin root which means “to come in between” and in the other languages that are relevant to Scripture, both Hebrew and Greek, the word has basically the same meaning, “to come in between.” An intercessor is one who comes in between. “In between” whom or what? The answer is that the intercessor comes in between God and the objects of God’s just wrath and judgment. The intercessor stands before God, positions himself between God and those who deserve God’s wrath and judgment and says, “God, I acknowledge Your justice. You have every right to smite these people, but if You smite them You’re going to have to smite me too, because I’m standing in between You and them.”

We’re going to look at a number of the Lord’s servants who played the role of intercessors and I think you’ll find that all of them were men close to the heart of God. I believe this particular posture, this ministry, is something very, very close to the heart of God.

The first example we’re going to look at is the example of Abraham interceding on behalf of the city of Sodom which was a very wicked city and ripe for God’s judgment. In the 18th chapter of Genesis, we read how the Lord had come to visit Abraham and the Lord had two angels with Him. Abraham welcomed them and entertained them and they gave Abraham the promise of the heir that was to come, Isaac. And then they were ready to move on. And the Lord told Abraham, “I’m going on to have a look at the city of Sodom for Myself to see if it’s really as bad as the reports I’ve heard about it.” And we’ll read now at this point in Genesis chapter 18 beginning at verse 17, ***“And the Lord said, ‘Shall I hide from Abraham what I am about to do . . . ? [Another Scripture in the book of Amos says that God will do nothing except He reveals His secrets to His prophet. Abraham was a prophet and God wanted to share His counsel and His purposes and His thoughts with Abraham.] Then the Lord said, ‘The outcry of Sodom and Gomorrah is indeed great, and their sin is exceedingly grave. ‘I will go down now, and see if they have done entirely according to its outcry, which has come to Me; and if not, I will know.’ Then the men turned away from there and went toward Sodom, while Abraham was still standing before the Lord. [I want you to notice those words, ‘Abraham was standing before the Lord.’ That’s between the Lord and the city of Sodom, which was the object of God’s pending judgment.] And Abraham came near and said, ‘Wilt Thou indeed sweep away the righteous with the wicked? ‘Suppose there are fifty righteous within the city; wilt Thou indeed sweep it away and not spare the place for the sake of the fifty righteous who are in it? ‘Far be it from Thee to do such a thing, to slay the righteous with the wicked, so that the righteous and the wicked are treated alike. Far be it from Thee! Shall not the Judge of all the earth deal justly?’”*** (NASB)

Now, I want to point out the main features of this situation and its implications for intercession. I’ve already said we need to see Abraham’s posture. He was standing before the Lord, standing between the Lord and Sodom, as it were, holding up his hand and saying, “Lord, don’t go any further.” Then we want to notice Abraham’s intimacy with the Lord. Elsewhere in Scripture Abraham is called the *“friend of the Lord.”* And here he was talking to Almighty God as an intimate and personal friend. We need to notice also Abraham’s boldness. He was actually challenging God’s righteousness. He was not afraid to speak out and say what he thought, and yet with holy reverence at the same time. And then we need to notice also that Abraham had an absolute conviction of God’s justice, both positive and negative. Negatively, that God would punish the wicked; positively, that God would not deal with the righteous as with the wicked. That is an essential part of the ministry of an intercessor, a conviction of God’s absolute justice.

Now, let's read how the conversation proceeded. [Genesis 18:26–33:] So the Lord said, ***"If I find in Sodom fifty righteous within the city, then I will spare the whole place on their account."*** And Abraham answered and said, ***"Now behold, I have ventured to speak to the Lord, although I am but dust and ashes. "Suppose the fifty righteous are lacking five, wilt Thou destroy the whole city because of five?" And the Lord said, "I will not destroy it if I find forty-five there."*** And [Abraham] spoke to Him yet again and said, ***"Suppose forty are found there?" And the Lord said, "I will not do it on account of the forty."*** Then [Abraham] said, ***"Oh may the Lord not be angry, and I shall speak; suppose thirty are found there?" And the Lord said, "I will not do it if I find thirty there."*** And [Abraham] said, ***"Now behold, I have ventured to speak to the Lord; suppose twenty are found there?" And [the Lord] said, "I will not destroy it on account of the twenty."*** Then [Abraham] said, ***"Oh may the Lord not be angry, and I shall speak only this once; suppose ten are found there?" And [the Lord] said, "I will not destroy it on account of the ten."*** And as soon as [the Lord] had finished speaking to Abraham [He] departed; and Abraham returned to his place." (NASB)

Again, I want to point out two additional points, that God responds to the prayers of His servant. God did not brush Abraham aside, He listened. And, in a certain sense, He allowed his course of action to be influenced by what Abraham said to Him.

Think of both the privilege and the responsibility of being able to speak to God in such a way that we *actually influence* His course of action!

And then we note that God delights to show mercy. He came down, step by step, from promising to show mercy if there were fifty to the last promise He made that he would show mercy if there were only ten righteous persons in that entire wicked city. So the Lord said He would spare the entire city of Sodom if He found ten righteous persons in it.

This raised a question in my mind some years ago. What was the probable population of Sodom in the days of Abraham? And, after some considerable research, I came to the conclusion that there must have been at least ten thousand persons as a minimum in Sodom at that time. So, ten persons could cause God to spare a city of at least ten thousand and that gives us an interesting proportion. One to a thousand. One righteous person can ward off God's judgment from a thousand wicked persons. You see, we come back again to that illustration of salt that I spoke about in my talks last week. Jesus said we are the salt of the earth. Two functions of salt: first of all, to give flavor to that which would otherwise lack flavor; secondly, to hold back the process of corruption. But salt is not dumped out in one piece or one lump or one big portion anywhere, but it's scattered in little grains across whatever has to be salted. And that's how we Christians are. Each of us should be just a little grain of salt but we should be holding back the process of corruption, recommending the particular area of the earth where we live to God's mercy and to God's favor.

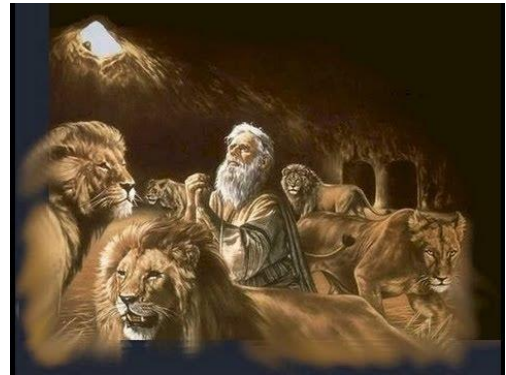
Is your life so righteous, so pure, so upright before God, that your very presence would hold back God's judgment from the entire community or area where you live?

We need to take into account the tremendous influence that righteous persons can have in the world today. There are two ways:

1. by their prayers, and
2. by their presence.

By their prayers, like Abraham, we can stand between God and the objects of His just wrath and hold off His judgment; and by our very presence we commend the area where we are—the community, the society—to God’s mercy and God’s favor. Our presence can cause God to hold back His righteous judgment from an entire community or city or even nation. But, on the other hand, passivity and indifference in the face of evil is sinful. James 4:17 says, ***“Therefore, to one who knows the right thing to do, and does not do it, to him it is sin.”*** (NASB) That Scripture really faces us with some kind of a choice. Are we going to commit ourselves to be righteous persons, prayer warriors, intercessors, holding off God’s wrath and judgment on our nation, or are we going to be passive and indifferent and fail to do what the situation demands?

Part 9 - MOSES AND DANIEL PRAYERS



Today our lesson on the power of intercession will be taken from the life of Moses. We'll begin with an incident where Moses had been up at the top of Mount Sinai—communing with God—receiving from God the revelation of God's purpose and God's plan for the future of Israel. At a certain point in this communion between the Lord and Moses, the Lord changed the direction of the conversation and He told Moses that while Moses had been up at the top of the mountain, the Israelites down at the foot of the mountain had turned aside from the way that God had set before them and had gone into idolatry, and had actually made a golden calf and were worshiping it at that very moment while Moses was up there with the Lord at the top of the mountain. The Lord's attitude was, "Moses, let Me alone, I'll destroy this people and I'll make a greater nation out of you." We'll read now the words that describe the incident, beginning in Exodus chapter 32 verse 7, ***"Then the Lord spoke to Moses, 'Go down at once, for your people, whom you brought up from the land of Egypt, have corrupted themselves.'"*** Let me point out something that's almost comical in the midst of this intensely serious situation. Neither the Lord nor Moses would accept responsibility at this point for Israel. Each of them was so disgusted with Israel. The Lord said to Moses, ***"Your people, whom you brought up."*** A little later on we'll see that Moses said to the Lord, ***"Thy people, whom Thou broughtest up."*** So, as it were, Israel was in such a state of degradation that neither the Lord Himself nor Moses wanted to be identified with them. God goes on saying to Moses, ***"They have turned aside quickly from the way which I commanded them. They have made for themselves a molten calf, and have worshipped it, and have sacrificed to it, and said, 'This is your god, O Israel, who brought you up from the land of Egypt!'"*** And the Lord said to Moses, ***"I have seen this people, and behold, they are an obstinate people. 'Now then let Me alone, that My anger may burn against them, and that I may destroy them; and I will make of you a great nation.'"*** Now we have Moses' response, ***"Then Moses entreated the Lord his God, and said, 'O Lord, why doth Thine anger burn against Thy people whom Thou hast brought up from the land of Egypt. . . [Notice Moses said, 'Lord, they're not my people, they're Thy people whom Thou hast brought up from the land of Egypt.']. . .with great power and with a mighty hand? 'Why should the Egyptians speak, saying, 'With evil intent He brought them out to kill them in the mountains and to destroy them from the face of the earth?' Turn from Thy burning anger and change Thy mind about doing harm to Thy people. 'Remember Abraham, Isaac and Israel, Thy servants to whom Thou didst swear by Thyself, and didst say to them, 'I will multiply your descendants as the stars of the heavens, and all this land of which I have spoken I will give to your descendants, and they shall inherit it forever.'"*** So the Lord changed His mind about the harm which He said He would do to His people." (NASB)

Let's pick out now the main salient features of this tremendous incident, this outstanding example of the power of intercession. I've already pointed out that neither God nor Moses, at that moment, wanted to be identified with Israel. God said to Moses, "*Your people, whom you brought out.*" Moses said to God, "*Thy people, whom Thou hast brought out.*" And then I also noted that in verse 10, the Lord said to Moses, "*Let me alone that My anger may burn against them.*" Have you considered that? That God, in a way said, "Moses, if you'll step aside, I'll act. But if you remain there before Me, I can't act." You see, that's the whole faith of the intercessor, that the intercessor's presence between God and the object of His wrath restrains God's wrath. Just imagine Almighty God saying, "*Let Me alone.*" But you see the marvelous thing about Moses was that he wouldn't let God alone. He stayed there, he held on.

Then look at the motivation of Moses. God gave him the most tremendous promise. He said, "I'll blot these people out and I'll make of you a great nation." How many people would have been delighted with the prospect of becoming the unique head and founder of that great nation? But Moses was not concerned for his own glory, he was greatly concerned for God's glory; and when he spoke back to the Lord, the first thing he said was, "If you do that then the Egyptians will say You never meant to do Your people good. You brought them out only to do them harm. Think what will happen to your reputation in the earth." So you see, Moses was not concerned for his own glory, but he was greatly concerned for God's glory.

And then notice the basis of Moses' appeal to God. He appealed to two things:

1. God's Word and
2. God's oath.

"Remember," he said, "Thy servants to whom Thou didst swear by Thyself and didst say to them, 'I will multiply your descendants. . .'" That's really the basis on which the intercessor comes to God. God's Word, God's oath, God's commitment. He says, "God, You're a covenant keeping God. I trust You to keep that covenant You've made. I believe You won't break it. I'm standing here because I believe that."

And then notice, as I've said already in regard to Abraham, God responds to the prayers of His servants. The translation that I read says, "*The Lord changed His mind.*" That somehow staggers my own mind. That a man, by his prayer, can cause God to *change His mind*. And yet the Scripture indicated that it's so. God *wants* us to influence Him. He *wants* to be changed by us in the direction of His highest will, but He *waits* for us to do it. By that act of intercession, one man, Moses, saved a whole nation. That's the power and the possibility of intercession.

DANIEL

Now I'm going to turn to another great servant of God, Daniel. The incident that I'm going to speak about is found in the 9th chapter of Daniel, but first I want to look at something that took place in the 6th chapter of Daniel. I want you to see the background of Daniel's habit of prayer. Some things don't just come automatically, at a moment's notice. There are things in our lives that have to be carefully cultivated by the right habits. And Daniel was a man who had cultivated the habit of prayer. At this particular point in his career he was, as it were, the prime minister of the Persian Empire. But the men under him were jealous of him and they tried to get him put out of his position. They couldn't find anything to criticize the way he handled his job, so eventually they knew the only way they could get at

him was on the basis of his religion. So they persuaded the emperor of Persia to pass a law that for 30 days no one was to pray in that empire except to the emperor. Now of course, for Daniel as an orthodox conforming Jew, that was an impossible situation. Daniel always prayed three times every day with his window open toward Jerusalem, and when this new law was passed that made it death to do so, he still went on doing the same. This is what we read in Daniel 6:10, ***“Now when Daniel learned that the decree had been published, he went home to his upstairs room where the windows opened toward Jerusalem. Three times a day he got down on his knees and prayed, giving thanks to his God, just as he had done before.”*** (NIV)

I want to pick out some features which I think are significant. First of all, three times a day every day, speaks of persistence. And then that window opened toward Jerusalem speaks of focus to prayer. Daniel is an example of persistent, focused prayer. How important it is that we're persistent and also that we focus our prayers on specific objectives which are in line with the will of God.

Then I want you to see how important prayer was to Daniel. Prayer was so important to him that he Would not give it up even if it meant going to the lion's den. And the other thing I want you to see is that Daniel's prayers were so effective, Satan feared Daniel's prayers so much, that he worked to change the laws of the Persian Empire just in order to stop Daniel praying. And I'd like that you and I would ask ourselves, “Do our prayers frighten the devil that much that he wants to change the laws?” Maybe they do.

Now I want to go on to Daniel chapter 9, the particular incident that I want to look at in a little more detail. It says there, in the first three verses, and Daniel is speaking, ***“In the first year of Darius son of Xerxes (a Mede by descent), who was made ruler over the Babylonian kingdom— in the first year of his reign, I, Daniel, understood from the Scriptures, according to the word of the Lord given to Jeremiah the prophet, that the desolation of Jerusalem would last seventy years. So I turned to the Lord God and pleaded with him in prayer and petition, in fasting, and in sackcloth and ashes.”*** (NIV)

One thing we need to see there is that our great source of understanding and direction is the Scriptures. Daniel was not only a man of regular prayer, but clearly he was a man who regularly read the Scriptures; and it's important that always our original and primary source of inspiration and direction and understanding of the will of God should come from the Scriptures. Secondly, I want you to see how Daniel responded to the revelation that he found in the Scripture. He found there that the desolation of the city of Jerusalem was to last seventy years. As he had a position of influence and authority in the Persian Empire, he had access to the records of the empire and he knew that the seventy years had almost run their course. In other words, it was time for God to restore the Jewish people to Jerusalem and to build up the city of Jerusalem again.

Now some people, when they get a revelation from the Scripture, it goes to their heads. They become opinionated and they become super-spiritual and they tell everybody how much they've found in the Scripture, and they kind of explain God's plans and God's purposes. I don't believe that revelation is given to make us feel super-spiritual. I find that Daniel responded to this revelation by appropriate action. He didn't simply say, “Isn't that interesting. God is soon going to restore Jerusalem.” He saw that it placed a personal responsibility upon him that if it was God's purpose to restore Jerusalem, then it was his duty to move in and associate himself with the purpose of God and commit himself in prayer and in fasting to what God intended to do.

We read that Daniel found in the Scriptures that the desolation of Jerusalem was to last seventy years. It's important to ask ourselves, "Where did Daniel find this in the Scriptures?" One Scripture where this is clearly stated is Jeremiah chapter 29, verses 10 through 13 and the prophecy of Jeremiah undoubtedly was available to Daniel at that time. We'll read these verses in Jeremiah 29 verses 10-13, ***"This is what the Lord says, 'When seventy years are completed for Babylon, I will come to you [that's the Jewish people] and fulfill my gracious promise to bring you back to this place [that is, Jerusalem]. For I know the plans I have for you,' declares the LORD, 'plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future. Then you will call upon me and come and pray to me, and I will listen to you. You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart.'"*** (NIV)

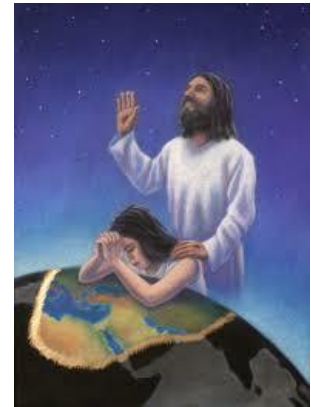
So Daniel knew that his responsibility was not merely to have an interesting revelation that the time had come to restore Jerusalem but that his responsibility was to fulfill the part of God's people to pray. And God said you're going to have to pray in a special way. You're *really* going to have to pray. He says, ***"You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart."*** When you give yourself unreservedly to seeking me and to prayer, then I will respond and do what I've committed myself to do.

Now, Daniel doubtless read those words, "When you seek me with all your heart." How did he respond? Well, he says himself, ***"I turned to the Lord God and pleaded with Him in prayer and in petition, in fasting, in sackcloth and ashes."*** Now, sackcloth and ashes were the recognized marks of mourning in that time. So Daniel, in a sense, became a mourner. He mourned the desolation of Jerusalem. There is a kind of godly mourning which is very close to the heart of God. Jesus said in the Sermon on the Mount, ***"Blessed are they that mourn, for they shall be comforted."*** Isaiah 61:3 says, ***"God has news for those who mourn in Zion. He will give them the oil of joy for mourning, beauty for ashes, the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness."*** That's not self-centered grief, but that's mourning over God's people and the situation of God's city, it's mourning in Zion and Daniel was that kind of a mourner and it meant much to God.

Now I want to show you the kind of prayer that Daniel prayed out of this situation of mourning and fasting and seeking God with all his heart. It's a very important pattern for us. He says, in Daniel 9:4 and following, ***"I prayed to LORD my God and confessed: 'O LORD, the great and awesome God, who keeps his covenant of love with all who love him and obey His commands, we have sinned and done wrong. We have been wicked and have rebelled; we have turned away from your commands and laws. We have not listened to your servants the prophets, who spoke in Your name to our kings, our princes and our fathers, and to all the people of the land. 'LORD, you are righteous, but this day we are covered with shame'"*** (NIV) I want you to notice how the word "we" occurs again and again in that short passage of prayer. Daniel was one of the most righteous men whose lives are recorded in Scripture. In fact, there's no actual sin recorded in the life of Daniel. He could have easily taken a self-righteous attitude concerning his fellow Israelites and said, "These are the wicked people. These are the people who deserve your judgment." But he didn't. He identified himself with God's people. He took his place with them and said, "We have sinned, we have failed. Judgment belongs to us."

Contrast the Pharisee who went up into the temple to pray, you remember what he prayed? "God, I thank Thee that I am not as other men are." Which kind of prayer reaches the heart of God? Not the prayer of the Pharisee, but the prayer of the man who was fasting and mourning, who casts himself without reservation on the mercy of God, identifying himself with the needs of God's people.

Part 10 - WILL YOU BE AN INTERCESSOR?



The incident we're going to look at is taken from the 4th chapter of the book of Esther. But first, we need to fill in briefly the historical background. Esther was a beautiful Jewish maiden in the Persian Empire in the time of the exile of the Jewish people from their land and from the city of Jerusalem. She was an orphan who had been brought up by her uncle Mordecai. Mordecai was an important official in the court of the Persian Emperor. At a certain point, Esther had been chosen to become the new queen of the Persian Empire and had been raised up to a position of tremendous influence and importance in the Emperor's palace, in the King's palace. However, Esther had never publicly revealed the fact that she was Jewish.

After she'd been raised up as queen, a certain anti-Semite, an official in the court of the Persian Emperor named Haman, had hatched a plot and obtained the endorsement of the Emperor that on a certain day somewhere ahead there would be a pogrom against the Jewish people in the entire Persian Empire and they would all be destroyed. His plan was nothing less than that of total genocide, the destruction of the entire Jewish nation. And probably all the Jews in the world were living at that time within the borders of the Persian Empire. So it was a *desperate* situation.

When this decree went forth, Mordecai sent a message to Esther in the Queen's palace that it was her responsibility to get to the King and persuade him to change his mind about the decree. Esther sent back word that she had had no access to the King for quite a while. Then the message came back again from Mordecai to Esther and that she was to go in on behalf of her people. She sent back again this word, and we're going to read now from Esther chapter 4 verse 11, ***"All the king's officials and the people of the royal provinces know that for any man or woman who approaches the king in the inner court without being summoned has but one law: that he be put to death. The only exception to this is for the king to extend the gold scepter to him and spare his life. But thirty days have passed since I was called to go to the king." When Esther's words were reported to Mordecai, he sent back this answer: "Do not think that because you are in the king's house you alone of all the Jews will escape. For if you remain silent at this time, relief and deliverance for the Jews will arise from another place, but you and your father's family will perish. And who knows but that you have come to royal position for such a time as this?" Then Esther sent this reply to Mordecai: "Go, gather together all the Jews who are in Susa (that's the capital city), and fast for me. Do not eat or drink for three days, night or day. I and my maids will fast as you do. When this is done, I will go to the king, even though it is against the law. And if I perish, I perish." So Mordecai went away and carried out all of Esther's instructions."*** (NIV)

Well, there's a picture again of an intercessor. Note the commitment. *"If I perish, I perish."* Whether I live or die, that's not the most important question. The most important question is that I do what I can on behalf of my people.

Now, we'll read how Esther went in to the king. Reading on in the fifth chapter in the book of Esther, ***"On the third day Esther put on her royal robes and stood in the inner court of the palace, (I like that phrase, "the inner court"; intercession always means coming into the inner court, into the immediate presence of the Lord) in front of the king's hall. The king was sitting on his royal throne in the hall, facing the entrance. When he saw Queen Esther standing in the court, he was pleased with her and held out to her the gold scepter that was in his hand. So Esther approached and touched the tip of the scepter. By that act, she availed herself of the mercy that the king was offering. [I think that's something that we have to learn to do, to go into God's presence and when He stretches out the scepter of mercy, we have to touch the tip of the scepter.] Then the king asked, "What is it, Queen Esther? What is your request? Even up to half the kingdom, it will be given you."*** (NIV)

She had prevailed! The rest of the book of Esther is the unfolding of the consequences of her intercession. But that is the point at which the victory was won for the Jewish people. It always is, I believe, won in intercession. That's the place where history is made, the course and destiny of nations are changed, *that's where we become the kind of rulers that God wants us to be.*

I just want you to see one beautiful fact about Esther that when she went in to the king, she didn't go in as a beggar, she didn't grovel. She put on her royal robes; she stood there in his presence a beautiful and lovely queen. She recognized who she was. She took her rightful position. I believe the same applies to you and me as Christians. We've got to recognize who we are in God's sight, the position that God has elevated us to. We're not to grovel. We're not to go as beggars. Listen to these beautiful words in the 52nd chapter of Isaiah, ***"Awake, awake, O Zion, clothe yourself with strength. Put on your garments of splendor, O Jerusalem, the holy city. The uncircumcised and defiled will not enter you again. Shake off your dust; rise up, city enthroned, O Jerusalem. Free yourself from the chains on your neck, O captive Daughter of Zion."*** (NIV) I believe that's a challenge to us and the way we pray. We are to become what God says we are. We're not to grovel. We're to get out of the dust. We're to arise and sit on the throne that God has offered us that we may rule with Him in prayer and intercession.

WHAT HAPPENS WHERE THERE'S NO INTERCESSOR?

Well, we've looked at situations where God found an intercessor, where the situation was saved, a nation maybe was saved where history was changed. But what does the Bible have to say about situations where there *was* no intercessor? We'll turn, first of all, to Isaiah 59. This is a terrible catalog of the sins and the backslidings of God's people, Israel. It's a picture of almost unredeemed and unrelieved failure and wickedness. It's given in the first person plural. It's an acknowledgement by the people of their own condition. We'll read from verse 12 of Isaiah 59, ***"For our offenses are many in your sight, and our sins testify against us. Our offenses are ever with us, and we acknowledge our iniquities: rebellion and treachery against the Lord, turning our backs on our God, fomenting oppression and revolt, uttering lies our hearts have conceived. So justice is driven back, and righteousness stands at a distance; truth has stumbled in the streets, honesty cannot enter. Truth is nowhere to be found, and whoever shuns evil becomes a prey,*** (What a terrible situation. Now we see God's reaction in the middle of verse 15) ***"The LORD looked and was displeased that there was no justice. He saw that there was no one, and He was appalled that there was no one to intercede . . ."*** (NIV)

Isn't that an amazing statement? Let me read that again, ***"God was appalled that there was no one to intercede."*** It seems to me that the worst part of the entire situation was not the wickedness of the people, although that was bad enough, but the final thing that made God appalled, that He could hardly conceive, was that there was *no one to intercede*. It seems to me that that's the final evidence of backsliding and hardness of heart in the people of God, when there's no one left to intercede. And it seems to me that at that point the situation must truly be called hopeless. As long as there's an intercessor there's hope, but where there's no more intercessor, it seems to me on the basis of Scripture we have to say there's no more hope.

The one person that God looks for in such a crisis is the intercessor.

We've looked at the situation in Isaiah chapter 59 where the nation was totally corrupt and there was no intercessor and this caused God to be appalled. Let's look at a similar situation now portrayed in Ezekiel chapter 22, somewhat later in the history of Israel but a similar type of situation. Beginning at verse 23 of Ezekiel chapter 22. The prophet says, ***"And the word of the Lord came to me saying, 'Son of man, say to her (that's the land of Israel), 'You are a land that is not cleansed or rained on in the day of indignation.'"*** (NASB)

It came to me very vividly one time that when a land is wicked and backslidden, the only thing that can cleanse it is the *rain*, not the literal rain but the rain of God's Holy Spirit. And last week I spoke about the injunction in Hosea, *"It is time to seek the Lord until He comes and rains righteousness upon us."* That's the kind of rain that can cleanse a land. I do personally believe it's the *only* kind of rain that can cleanse this land of ours.

Now, let's go on with the catalog that follows of the failure of every section of God's people in this situation. Now, we find that there are four categories of people listed by coincidence with each of them beginning with the letter "P". They are Prophets, Priests, Princes and People. And it's significant that God begins His catalog of wrongdoing with the prophets and with the priests. The princes I take to be the secular rulers, but God doesn't lay the blame primarily at the door of the secular rulers. He lays the blame at the door primarily of the spiritual leaders: the Prophets and the Priests. I would say the prophet is the one whose responsibility it is to declare the counsel of God to God's people. The priest is the one who cares for the daily life of the congregation of God's people. Let's see now what God says about prophets, priests, princes and then all the people. Ezekiel 22:25–31, ***"There is a conspiracy of her prophets in her midst, like a roaring lion tearing the prey . . . 'Her priests have done violence to My law and have profaned My holy things. . . 'Her princes within her are like wolves tearing the prey... 'Her prophets have smeared whitewash for them, seeing false visions and divining lies for them...*** notice the prophets, instead of reproving the wickedness, have covered it up with false excuses and religious talk. And finally, ***"The people of the land have practiced oppression and committed robbery..."*** So, all sections of the entire nation are held guilty before God, the prophets, the priests, the princes and the people. What was the general characteristic, what was the general guilt of all of them? I would say it would be summed up in the phrase *"the ruthless pursuit of selfish ends."* Everyone was putting his own gain, his own selfish ends, before those of his fellow men and before the interests of God.

Now, how did God respond to this desperate situation of wickedness? We read the two closing verses of that chapter, verses 30 & 31. God is speaking, He says, ***"And I searched for a man among them who should build up the wall and stand in the gap before Me for the land, that I should not destroy it; but I***

found no one. “Thus I have poured out My indignation on them; I have consumed them with the fire of My wrath; their way I have brought upon their heads,” declares the LORD God.” (NSAB)

In this desperate situation God did not look for a large group. He did not necessarily go to the rulers or even the prophets or the priests, but He looked for one man. What kind of a man? A man who would stand in the gap before Him for the land. What kind of a person is it who stands in the gap before God for a land, for a city, for a nation? It's an *intercessor*. And I suppose one of the most tragic statements of Scripture is there at the end of verse 30 where God says, ***“I found no one.”***

It seems to me to indicate that even in that desperate situation, one intercessor could have changed the whole course of history and could have prevailed with God to the sparing of the judgment that came upon God's people, but when God could find no more intercessors, then there was no more hope. Let me say that again:

***As long as there's an intercessor there is hope,
but when there's no more intercessors, there's no more hope.***

How do you see the situation in our country today? Isn't it very much like the situation in Ezekiel? Isn't there guilt and failure on the part of almost every section of the populace—the prophets, the priests, the secular rulers, and the people at large? What is the situation? What is God's response? I believe God is looking for a man to stand in the gap, to make up the hedge—a man or a woman, an *intercessor*.

Will you offer yourself to God for this ministry?