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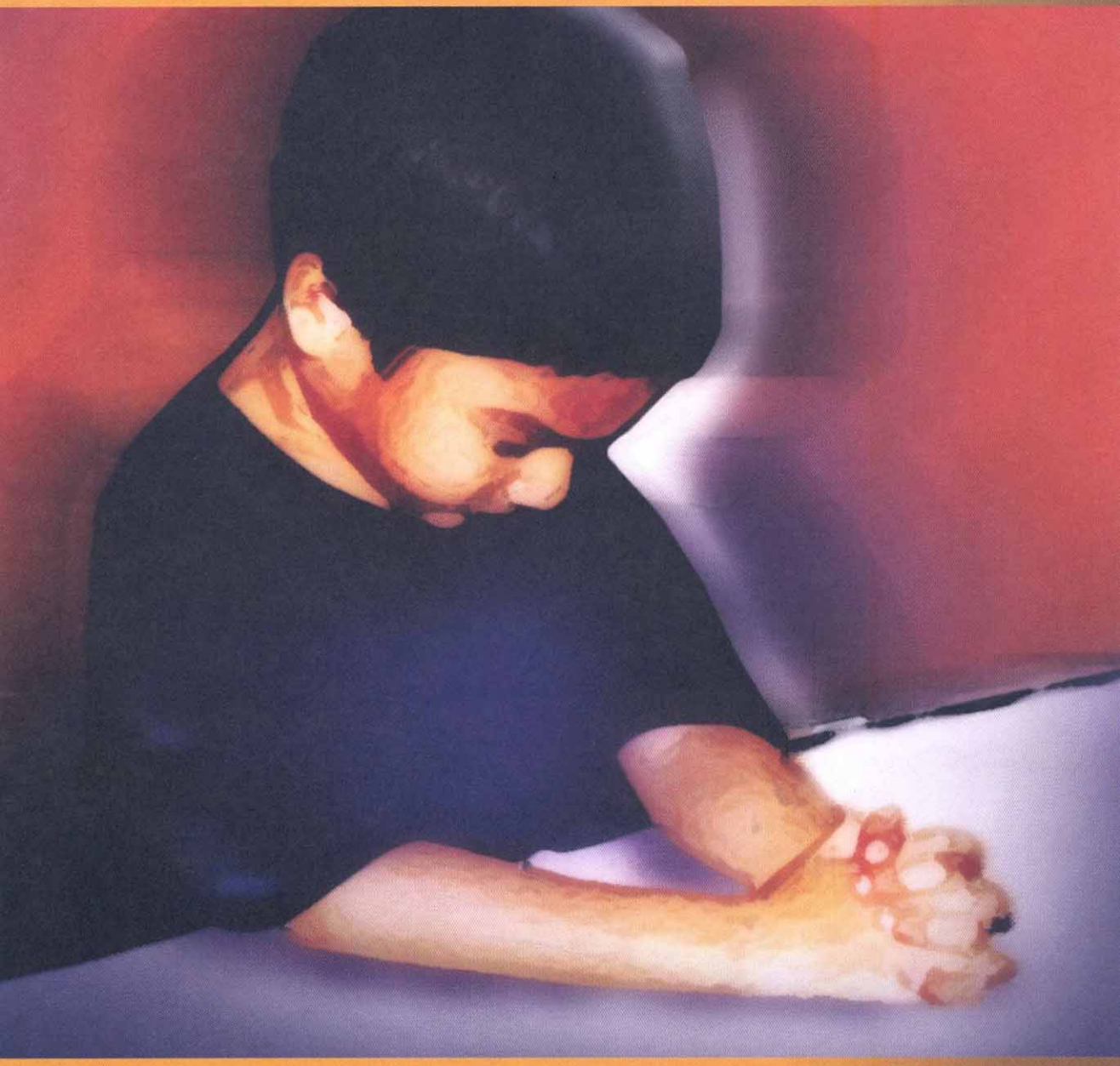
Bible Witness



Inside Articles:

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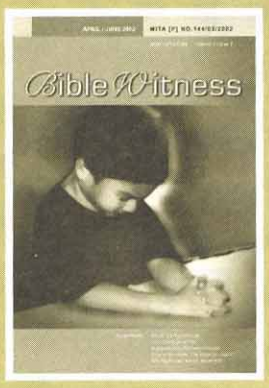
Suggestions for Protracted Prayers
What's Wrong with "The Prayer of Jabez?"
Why My Prayers are not Answered?



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ABCD of a Prayerful Life

Jack Sin

Introduction

Prayer is the powerhouse of the church. Spurgeon says that the spirituality of a church is measured by the substance and demeanour of its weekly prayer meeting. Is there genuine prayerful and evangelistic concern in the church? Is there a heartfelt longing for the conversion of unsaved family members? Is there a strong vision for the lost, a fervent desire for spiritual revival and the propagation of the gospel both locally and to other countries? What is true prayer? John Bunyan defines prayer "as a sensible, sincere and affectionate pouring out of the heart or soul to God through the strength and assistance of the Holy Spirit for such things as God has promised or according to His word for the good of the church with submission in faith to the will of God." (John Bunyan, *Praying in the Spirit*). The church should be rallied frequently at the throne of grace to intercede for the members of the church, that they may enjoy spiritual health and growth to praise and thank God corporately to the edification of saints. There is no greater means of grace bestowed upon the believer than the honour and prerogative of meeting God in private and corporate intercession.

An unknown Christian who wrote the book *The Kneeling Christian* once said, "The secret of all failure is our failure in secret prayer." It can be said that all want of success and all failure in our spiritual life and in Christian work are due to defective or insufficient prayer. In the same vein, all fruitfulness in service is the outcome of persevering and God-honouring prayer. One of the most important preoccupations of a Christian in his relationship with God is in daily communion and intercession for others. A believer's vitality can be gauged not by his eloquence or his zeal or his orthodoxy or his energy but by his prayers.

It was said of David Brainerd, the missionary to the Red Indians (who influenced Jonathan Edwards), that he lived a life of holiness and prayer. His diary was full with the record of his seasons of fasting, prayer and meditation. He gave himself to daily contemplation and prayer, mortification, self-denial, humility and divorcement from the world. "To be little with God in prayer is to be little with God in service." "We are never so high as when we are on our knees before the Almighty Jehovah." Consider the acronym, the ABCD of prayer; namely the Attitude, Basis, Content and Devotion/Discipline.

Attitude

What is your understanding of prayer? Is it a daily chore, a privilege, a pleasure, a joy or drudgery? Why do you think God allows this holy exercise of communication with Him directly? Prayer is one of the highest prerogatives accorded to man. To be granted this audience with the King of kings and Lord of lords is the highest honour ever to be bestowed upon mortal man. Yet many will not take this royal opportunity to commune and meet daily with the sovereign Monarch.

To approach the throne of grace requires godly reverence and fear and much humility. Kneeling gives us a good standing with God. Consider godly Daniel in hostile Babylon in Daniel 6:10, "Now when Daniel .... kneeled upon his knees three times a day, and prayed, and gave thanks before his God, as he did aforetime." A broken and contrite spirit, God will not despise (Isaiah 66:2; Psalm 51:10). The fervent, penitent and searching spirit, God will always honour. The earnest seeker will always have his cause answered according to God's will. (1 John 5:13-15) Our attitude towards prayer determines our spiritual attitude towards God. Consider the

righteous prophet, Elijah, with his fervent spirit was commended by God in James 5:17-18, "Elias was a man subject to like passions as we are, and he prayed earnestly that it might not rain: and it rained not on the earth by the space of three years and six months. And he prayed again, and the heaven gave rain, and the earth brought forth her fruit."

Basis of Prayer

What gives us the right to be able to stand before a holy and awesome God in prayer? What qualifications do we have to approach the Most High (Psalm 15:1-4) when we are all so weak and vile? It is none other than the precious blood of Christ that covers a sinful people in the presence of a thrice-holy God. That is why we must always start by asking the Lord to cleanse us from all our sins before we commence other intercessory requests (Psalm 66:18). Because of the blood of Christ, we are invited to the mercy seat, to come boldly to the throne of grace to find help in time of need (Hebrews 4:16). Jesus enjoins us to come (Luke 18:1), even all those who are weary and are heavy laden to come to Him for spiritual rest and respite for our souls. The throne of grace is a restful place for it is a place where we unload our burdens and our cares (1 Peter 5:7). Remember the popular hymn of old on prayer by Joseph Scriven (1819-1886):

What a Friend we have in Jesus,
All our sins and griefs to bear!
What a privilege to carry
Everything to God in prayer!
O what peace we often forfeit,
O what needless pain we bear,
All because we do not carry
Everything to God in prayer!

Content of Prayer

Prayer is the unbosoming of one's need and an opening of our hearts to God. It is therefore important for us to be specific. The particulars of our prayer should include confession of sins, adoration, thanksgiving, requests and other intercessions. Daniel prayed, thanking and praising God for His past faithfulness and present goodness toward them (Daniel 9). Prayer should normally commence with the adoration, praise and worship of our Heavenly Father (Matthew 6:9) and continue with a sincere and specific confession of our sins and finally to culminate in the intercessory petitions for fellow saints before the throne of grace. Remember that Aaron and Hur upheld Moses' hand in the battle against the Amalekites (Exodus 17:10-12) and the latter was victorious.

George Mueller, the founder of an orphanage in Bristol built solely on faith and prayer, was a godly saint who never lived a day without prayer. That was the secret of his success in his ministry. E. M. Bounds wrote in his book *Power Through Prayer*, "What the church needs today is not more or better machinery, not new organisations or more and novel methods, but men whom the Holy Ghost can use - men of prayer, men mighty in prayer. The Holy Ghost does not flow through methods, but through men. He does not anoint plans but men of prayer." Prayer is not prattle, prayer is battle. Consider what is said after the armour of God in Ephesians 6:18, "Praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, and watching thereunto with all perseverance and supplication for all saints."

Consider this powerful reminder to pray daily by M. A. Kidder, the hymn writer of "Did you think to pray?"

Ere you left your room this morning,
Did you think to pray?
In the name of Christ, our Saviour,
Did you ask for loving favour,
As a shield today?
Oh, how praying rest the weary!
Prayer will change the night to day;
So when life seems dark and dreary,
Don't forget to pray.

Devotion/Discipline

Daily praying to God is a delightful discipline for every regenerate and justified man. It is an expression of sincere dedication to God to wait to commune and seek Him daily in prayer. David says in Psalm 5:3, "My voice shalt thou hear in the morning, O LORD; in the morning will I direct my prayer unto thee, and will look up." Our Lord Jesus Christ set the perfect example when he

spent time with God the Father every morning as a priority in the wee hours of the morning (Mark 1:35).

To dutifully pray for others as requested is a spiritual discipline. Paul encourages his readers to intercede for his gospel ministry in Romans 15:30 - "Now I beseech you, brethren, for the Lord Jesus Christ's sake, and for the love of the Spirit, that ye strive together with me in your prayers to God for me." Let us be responsible and diligent prayer warriors upholding one another, like Epaphras of old (Colossians 4:12).

Another good example of prayer is King Solomon and the Israelites during the dedication of the newly-built temple. They were challenged by God in 2 Chronicles 7:14, "If my people, which are called by my name, shall 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."

Spiritual renewal comes to our hearts when there is humility, devotion, sincerity and ardour in prayer. In 1866, the Prince of Preachers, Charles Spurgeon, instituted daily prayer meetings at the Metropolitan Tabernacle in London at 7:00 am in the morning and again at 7:30 pm each evening. (Holden Pike, The Life and Work of C. H. Spurgeon, Edinburgh, Banner of Truth Trust, 1991). The main Tabernacle prayer took place on Monday evenings attended by over 3,000. To provide for greater participation in prayer, there were even supplementary times for prayer with smaller groups within the church. The church was flourishing because the people were praying fervently and the Lord richly blessed and prospered their ministry. Did not our Lord say in John 16:24 "Hitherto have ye asked nothing in my name: ask, and ye shall receive, that your joy may be full."

The Word of God records for us many instances of a church prayer meeting. Acts 1:14 "These all continued with one accord in prayer and supplication, with the women, and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with his brethren." Acts 1:24 "And they prayed, and said, Thou, Lord, which knowest the hearts of all men, shew whether of these two thou hast chosen."

Conclusion

Prayer is the balm of Gilead and the breath of godliness as well as the place where burdens change shoulders. Does prayer make a difference in our gift? Does prayer change things? Paul answers the question in 2 Corinthians 1:11, "Ye also helping together by prayer for us, that for the gift bestowed upon us by the means of many persons thanks may be given by many on our behalf." Do not deprive or forfeit yourself of the peace and comfort that come through an intimate intercessory communion with the Almighty Jehovah. Let us resolve to pray faithfully and fervently for the salvation of our loved ones, the needs of the church, the advancement of God's kingdom on earth and the strengthening of the saints till our Lord returns soon.

Rev. Jack Sin is the pastor of Maranatha Bible-Presbyterian Church.

"You may as soon find a living man without breath as a living saint without prayer."

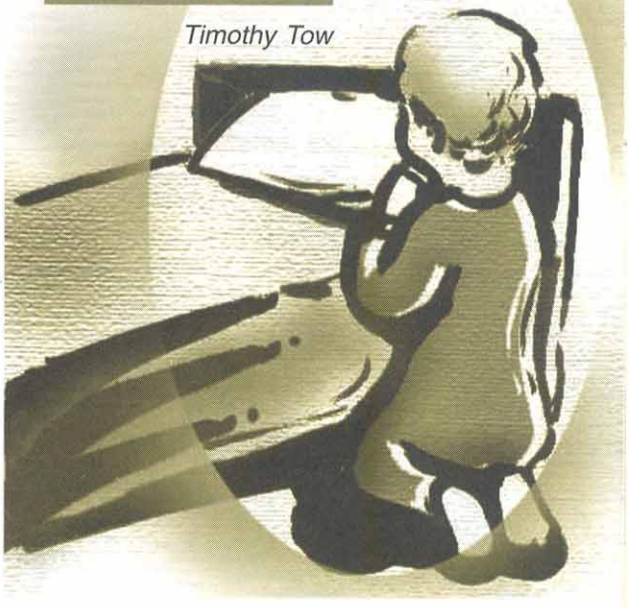
- Matthew Henry

"Some people think God does not like to be troubled with our constant coming and asking. The way to trouble God is not to come at all."

- D.L. Moody

LORD, TEACH US TO PRAY

Timothy Tow



The Lord's Prayer is recorded both in Matthew 6 and Luke 11. "Lord, teach us to pray" (Luke 11) introduces us to that prayer. This is our model prayer, for it teaches us how and what to pray.

There are those who are against reciting of the Lord's Prayer in worship because they say it has become mechanical and therefore meaningless. I retort this is what our Lord has given to the Church in answer to a disciple's request and therefore to be used in our worship. The petition, "And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors" is most effective to subdue me before Him should I have a quarrel with any one! There is power in the words of our Lord.

Though only five verses long, commentaries on these verses have grown to book length. For this devotional article, I divide the Lord's Prayer into three parts.

I. Adoration

"Our Father who art in heaven." The modernists and liberals will say this is a prayer to the Father of all mankind. Buddhists and Muslims can pray this prayer. And why not? When I worshipped at a Methodist Church in Penang over 50 years ago on my way to America, the pastor offered even the Lord's Supper to "brothers" of other faiths on the concept of the "Fatherhood of God and Brotherhood of man."

This concept is affirmed by none other than Billy Graham. In a broadcast in Southern California May 31, 1997 Billy said, "He's calling people out of the world for His name, whether they come from the Muslim world, or the Buddhist world, or the Christian world or the non-believing world, they are members of the Body of Christ because they've been called by God. They may not even know the name of Jesus but they know in their hearts that they need something that they don't have, and they turn to the only light that they have, and I think that they are saved, and they are going to be with us in heaven."

What Billy says, however, contradicts Peter. The Apostle declares, "Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved" (Acts 4:12).

We can come to the Father in heaven only through Jesus Christ. He says, "I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me" (John 14:6). He is the only begotten Son of the Father and by believing in Him we are become adopted children (Romans 8:15) whereby we call Him, Abba, Father.

"Hallowed be thy name." This is the positive expression of the Third Commandment which says, "Thou shalt not take the name of the LORD thy God in vain." Because when we approach God, know how reverent we must be, for He is the Father Almighty, the Lord of hosts. If God's Word teaches us to honour the king (I Peter 2:17), how much more must we honour God.

"Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven." The ultimate state of God's Kingdom on earth, says J. C. Ryle, is when Christ comes again and establishes the throne of David in Jerusalem and rules the earth a thousand years when there will be peace and men will do the will of God as never before. This doctrine of the Restoration of Israel is one important tenet of our Bible-Presbyterian faith.

II. Petition

"Give us this day our daily bread." This petition involves our physical needs. We need God's help to earn a living. Deuteronomy 8:18 reminds us that it is He who gives us power to get wealth. Not only wealth, but also health. There is a Chinese saying, "Not to get sick, that is good health, is equivalent to good wealth." But it is not for a Christian to pray to be rich. We should rather seek God's Kingdom and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added unto us. The Apostle Paul says, "But godliness with contentment is great gain. And having food and raiment let us be therewith content. But they that will be rich fall into temptation and a snare, and into many foolish and hurtful lusts, which drown men in destruction and perdition. For the love of money is the root of all evil" (I Timothy 6:6, 8-10).

"And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors." In America we repeat these very words. In Singapore which is under English culture we say, "And forgive us our trespasses. . ." This is due to the Common Prayer Book from which we in the mission schools have been taught. Nevertheless, the explanatory verse 14 uses the word "trespasses" three times which backs up the usage of the English Lord's Prayer. This emphasises our spiritual need to live a holy life which often is tainted by our sinfulness in trespassing against our neighbours. Therefore, if we need our Father's forgiveness it is incumbent for us to forgive those who trespass against us.

Another spiritual weakness is our inclination to temptation. As discretion is the better part of valour, the surest way not to be led into temptation is to obey God's injunction. Paul says to young Timothy, "Flee also youthful lusts!" (2 Timothy 2:22). Whether old or young, we are to heed this command. Eve taught us a lesson. If she did not go near the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, and keep on admiring it, she would not have succumbed to the temptation. There is a saying, "Out of sight, out of mind."

"And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil." To deliver us from evil, there is the physical as well as the moral. As this world is ruled by sin, both the physical and moral realms are affected. Sickness, accident, danger, death are of the physical. We need God's protection from all these, e.g., accidents. We need to pray for safety in travel, for example. But be sure to thank Him after a safe return.

Spiritual evil, yea, even the Devil himself is like a roaring lion seeking whom he may devour. He is ever on the move to trip us, to cause us to sin, to fall into the pit of hell. Do you always look to Him in prayer?

III. Ascription

This is from the verb "ascribe." It means to give praise to God. Therefore, our prayer cannot end without rendering praise to God. "Whoso offereth praise glorifieth me" (Psalm 50:23). So, we end with "For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, for ever." We must exalt our loving God, for He is the Father Almighty through our Lord Jesus Christ. When we conclude our prayer with such cumulative praise, then He pours down His benediction on His children. And are not our hearts uplifted and our burdens cast away through the three steps of Adoration, Petition and Ascription? Amen.

Rev. Timothy Tow is the pastor of Life Bible-Presbyterian Church and the principal of Far Eastern Bible College.

PRAYER

Paul's Call to Prayer

Cheng Wei Nien

Prayer is an essential part of a believer's life. It is an important weapon in our spiritual warfare. Lack of prayer will weaken our resistance against the devil's attack and is the frequent cause of a believer's defeat. The patriarchs in ancient times built altars everywhere they went in order to offer their prayers to God. Our Lord prayed often while He was on earth. Sometimes He even prayed right through the night. The Apostle Paul wrote: "Praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, and watching thereunto with all perseverance and supplication for all saints; And for me (Paul), that utterance may be given unto me" (Ephesians 6:18,19a).

Praying Always: A believer like any other person in the world is busy with many earthly things and always has difficulty finding time to pray. On the other hand, our Lord is ever ready to hear our prayers at any time and at any place. Believers should therefore seize every opportunity to pray. Our Lord reminded us that: "Men ought always to pray, and not to faint" (Luke 18:1). It is also good that believers should have a fixed time and place every day to pray and make this our daily appointment with our heavenly Father and attend weekly church prayer meeting, for this is pleasing unto Him.

Praying with all Prayer: Our heavenly Father loves to hear all kinds of prayer from His children. We can bring any problem we have, big or small, important or trivial to Him and He will answer our prayers. James says: "Is any among you afflicted? let him pray. Is any merry? let him sing psalms" (James 5:13). Even if we have sinned against Him, we can come to Him in repentance. "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness" (1 John 1:9).

Praying with all Supplication: There is no limit to what we can ask, except that it must be according to His will. He is able to grant us according to His divine wisdom. Often, we do not get because we do not ask or we ask amiss (James 4:3). Sometimes, we are at a loss as to what we should ask especially when we have been blessed with all material needs. In fact, there are many things we can pray for. We should frequently examine ourselves and confess our sins. If God has blessed us, we must not forget to give thanks. Finally, we can ask Him to give us our "daily bread" both for our physical and spiritual needs.

Praying in the Spirit: Too often our prayer is only a daily routine. We pray from our mouths but not from our hearts. Praying is more than just murmuring a few words or memorising a few sentences from a prayer book. Our hearts must communicate with our heavenly Father as the Spirit encourages and leads us.

Watching thereunto with all Perseverance: Our Lord warns us that we should "watch and pray, that ye enter not into temptation" (Matthew 26:41). Our days are evil and we need always to watch and pray or we will become easy prey of the evil one. God does not always answer our prayers immediately. Sometimes the answer could be direct, delayed, different or even a denial. So, we must persevere in our prayer and "shall not God avenge his own elect, which cry day and night unto him, though he bear long with them?" (Luke 18:7)

Make Supplication for All Saints: Too often our prayers are so self-centred that we forget about others who need our prayers also. Remember that we are to "confess your faults one to another, and pray one for another" (James 5:16). The best way to pray for one another is to come to the mid-week prayer meeting of the church where we can pray one for another together. Make an appointment to join the church in corporate prayer. Paul said in Romans 15:30, "Now I beseech you, brethren, for the Lord Jesus Christ's sake, and for the love of the Spirit, that ye strive together with me in your prayers to God for me."

Pray for me (Paul): Do not forget that our pastors, preachers and church leaders need our prayer support also so that "utterance may be given unto them." If Paul needed Christians of his time to pray for him, how much more our pastors, elders and deacons need our prayer support today. Remember, if we are too busy to pray, we are busier than we ought to be.

Elder Dr. Cheng Wei Nien is an elder of Calvary Bible-Presbyterian Church (Jurong).

Practical Suggestions for Protracted Prayers

Prabhudas Koshy

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

Our Lord was mighty in prayer. Though Jesus, being God, had no need of self-examination, though He was untouched by sin, though the devil cannot defeat Him, yet He prayed to His Father. There was none who was more abundant in prayer than our Lord Himself. He prayed intently and persistently that it left a deep impression in the disciples' heart. So one day they requested, "Lord, teach us to pray" (Luke 11:1). Like the disciples, we must also desire to pray like our Master. We are to conform to the image of Christ. Moreover, our Lord commanded, "Men ought always to pray, and not to faint" (Luke 18:1).

Christians must learn to pray, even to tarry long in prayer like the Lord Jesus. It will benefit us greatly to have extraordinary seasons of prayer. Jesus "continued all night in prayer to God." Most Christians can't even continue half an hour in prayer! Though just a sigh of the soul can be an effectual prayer, it is good for our souls to be in prayer for a protracted season as it enters into an intense and deep devotion with the help of the Holy Spirit. Hardly any of us knows the blessings of protracted prayers. The protracted fellowship we have with God can transform our lives to greater love for Him. The effect of a night spent in prayer can be very great. A night of prayer can turn our sorrowful hearts into joy. It can transform our doubt-ridden hearts into courageous and bold hearts. O what great spiritual wealth await our poor souls, if we spend a season of time in prayer!

O how important it is that in this weary earthly journey of ours we learn to seek the Lord in protracted seasons of prayer! Is it too much to pray for an hour or two, or even a night? Christians, have a holy desire to pray. Where are our sacred ambitions? Where is our zeal for the presence of God? Cannot we set apart a night or few hours of a day to pray for the benefit of our souls? Let us rebuke ourselves for not finding delight in prayer. O how often we spend time to feed ourselves with entertainment and material pleasures? Is it not a great folly that Christians do not spend time before God to purify, to strengthen and to revive their souls unto God's glory? It is a great shame that we have neglected prayer and wasted many hours and nights watching TV and indulging in worldly amusements and pursuits. Let us repent and rise up with a holy zeal to pray.

Suggestions for an Hour of Prayer

One may quip, "An hour? How could I pray for an hour? I'd run out of things to pray!" But, many a time, we had spent more than an hour chatting with our friends. If talking to God for one hour seems intimidating, it's probably because we're still learning just to share ourselves with Him as we would with a friend.

The following suggestions are designed to help you to see that spending an hour or more with the Lord is necessary and possible. After the first hour of prayer, perhaps you won't need the following guidelines. You'll find there's plenty to talk to God and there is no need for a guide.

Preparation

Start by choosing a place and time that no one will disturb your conversation with God. Jesus sought solitude on a mountain, according to Luke 6:12. He also chose, at times, the quietness of the garden of Gethsemane, and even the wilderness. It is important that you make sure that you will not be disturbed. If it is at home, let it be known to all that you are not to be disturbed, or choose time that none will disturb you. Turn off the pager, mobile phone, TV, radio, etc. It is important that we seek perfect solitude, as much as possible undisturbed by the noise of the world around us.

Take your Bible, hymnal, church's current prayer list, perhaps a church directory and prayer items of your friends and relatives.

Prayer Guidelines

Following is a suggestion for spending one hour in prayer. Do not worry about keeping to the times suggested here. It's only to get you started, to show you that you actually can spend sixty minutes in prayer. As you start praying, you'll find the Spirit aiding you in your prayer time. It is not a programme, it is a growing relationship.

Beginning Prayer (1 minute): Ask God to help you spend this hour of prayer profitably with Him. Acknowledge your need to be enabled by His Spirit to pray. Seek His help to be focused and undivided in concentration while you pray. Ask the Lord to give you a peaceful heart and a quiet surrounding to pray. Give yourself to Him that He may mould you while you commune with Him through the hour.

Self-examination and Confession (5 Minutes): Spend a couple of minutes examining your lives. As you look through your thoughts, words, behaviour and actions, confess before the Lord each of those sins you have committed recently. But don't dredge up old ones which you have already confessed. You must also confess your negligence of spiritual duties.

You may then read from the Scripture, promises of His forgiveness such as Psalm 32:1-6; 86:5; 103:3; 1 John 1:8-10. You may also choose a hymn about confession of sins or His forgiveness. Ask for His cleansing, then accept it by faith and thank Him for it. He is far more willing to forgive than you ask!

Praise and Thanksgiving (10 Minutes): Now start to thank Him for His goodness to you, your family, your church and your friends. Our Lord is one who "inhabitest the praises of Israel" (Psalm 22:3). As your heart begins to praise Him, you'll be drawn closer to Him.

Pray about Your Life's Challenges and Difficulties (10 minutes): Take time to talk to the Lord about your personal struggles. Tell the Lord your difficulties in your relationship with your spouse, parents, children, siblings, or friends. You can cast your burdens of financial needs, studies or job on Him. But don't stop here. Now move on to pray for the needs of others.

Intercede for Friends, Relatives, Neighbours and Colleagues (7 minutes): Don't just read out a list of names to God, but talk to Him about their lives and needs.

Intercede for Your Church (12 Minutes): Pray for faithfulness, fruitfulness and needs of pastors, elders and deacons. Pray for church administration staff. Pray for the church that the Lord will revive every member unto a renewed love for God. Intercede for the children and the youths, the families, the singles, the widows and the sick. Pray for the return of absentees or backsliders to church. Call on God for an increase in giving so the church can effectively support the various ministries it has undertaken for His glory. Pray for the various fellowship groups and their committees.

Intercede for Your Church's Missions and missionaries (10 minutes): Pray for your church's outreach programme, missions and missionaries. Pray for Bible College students your church supports. Pray for pastors and Christian workers whom you know. Pray for their special needs.

Pray for the work of Christ throughout the world. Intercede for unreached peoples; call on God to send labourers into His harvest. Pray for

missionaries and for the people of God who are suffering persecution.

Pray for Your Nation (5 minutes): That God will guide our president, prime minister, cabinet members, legislators, civil servants, etc. Pray for righteousness in government and a public policy sensitive to the needy. Pray for peace and security of the nation.

Now that's 60 minutes already. Now you may say, "O, I've not prayed for everything I should pray." As we start praying in this manner, we will find more reasons for extending our prayers beyond one hour. So get started on a life of prayer.

Rev. Prabhudas Koshy is the pastor of Gethsemane Bible-Presbyterian Church.

seven 7 biblical facts about prayer

Khoo Peng Kiat

Prayer is a Christian's most powerful experience. When we pray, we link ourselves with the inexhaustible power that governs the universe.

Prayer, to put it simply, is opening our hearts to God. What a wonderful privilege we have that we are able to talk to God in prayer! It pleases our Heavenly Father when we talk to Him. In the same way that parents are pleased when their children tell them of their love for them and of their needs, God is also pleased when we come to Him with our joys, burdens, cares and desires. It has been said that prayer is offering up of our desires to God for all things lawful and needful; with humble confidence that we shall obtain them through the mediation of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ and the power of the Holy Spirit.

What are the Seven Facts about Prayer?

1. Its Character

Prayer is characterised by **a**doration, **c**onfession, **t**hanksgiving and **s**upplication (**acts**). "O come, let us worship and bow down: let us kneel before the LORD our maker" (Psalm 95:6). "I acknowledged my sin unto thee, and mine iniquity have I not hid . . ." (Psalm 32:5). "Be careful for nothing; but in every thing by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God" (Philippians 4:6). "I exhort therefore, that, first of all, supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks, be made for all men" (1 Timothy 2:1).

2. Its Certainty

a. *God hears our prayers.* "LORD, thou hast heard the desire of the humble: thou wilt prepare their heart, thou wilt cause thine ear to hear" (Psalm 10:17).

b. *God answers our prayers.* In Psalm 99:6 we read, "Moses and Aaron among his priests, and Samuel among them that call upon his name; they called upon the LORD, and he answered them."

God said in Jeremiah 33:3, "Call unto me, and I will answer thee, and shew thee great and mighty things, which thou knowest not."

God's answers to our prayers may be "yes," "no," or "wait," depending upon His will that always works for our good.

3. Its Conditions

a. *We must pray according to the will of God* (Romans 8:27). Our Lord prayed, ". . . nevertheless not my will, but thine, be done" (Luke 22:42).

b. *We must have a forgiving spirit.* "And when ye stand praying, forgive, if ye have ought against

any: that your Father also which is in heaven may forgive you your trespasses" (Mark 11:25).

c. *We must come in humility.* 2 Chronicles 7:14 reads, "If my people, which are called by my name, shall 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."

d. *We must pray in faith, believing.* "What things soever ye desire, when ye pray, believe that ye receive them, and ye shall have them" (Mark 11:24). And in James 1:6–7, "But let him ask in faith, nothing wavering. For he that wavereth is like a wave of the sea driven with the wind and tossed. For let not that man think that he shall receive any thing of the Lord."

e. *We must obey His commandments.* "And whatsoever we ask, we receive of him, because we keep his commandments, and do those things that are pleasing in his sight" (1 John 3:22). "He that turneth away his ear from hearing the law, even his prayer shall be abomination" (Proverbs 28:9).

f. *We must pray in the Holy Spirit.* "Praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, . . ." (Ephesians 6:18). ". . . praying in the Holy Ghost" (Jude 20). The Holy Spirit's aid is required for effective praying for He is the power and energy behind it.

g. *We must pray in Jesus' name.* "And whatsoever ye shall ask in my name, that will I do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son" (John 14:13). "Hitherto have ye asked nothing in my name: ask, and ye shall receive, that your joy may be full" (John 16:24).

4. Its Barriers

Victory through prayer is often hindered because of sin of unbelief which separates us from God. Our prayers do not ascend unto God's throne of grace because of barriers such as an unforgiving spirit (Mark 11:25), unconfessed sins, wrong motives, etc. David said in Psalm 66:18, "If I regard iniquity in my heart, the Lord will not hear me." "But your iniquities have separated between you and your God, and your sins have hid his face from you, that he will not hear" (Isaiah 59:2). "Ye ask, and receive not, because ye ask amiss, that ye may consume it upon your lusts" (James 4:3).

5. Its Place

a. *Private*: Matthew 6:6 says, "But thou, when thou prayest, enter into thy closet, and when thou hast shut thy door, pray to thy Father which is in secret; and thy Father which seeth in secret shall reward thee openly."Jesus Christ was constant in private prayer and He sets us an example in Matthew 14:23.

b. *Public*: "O come, let us worship and bow down: let us kneel before the LORD our maker" (Psalm 95:6). Solomon prayed to God before the great congregation of Israel in 1 Kings 8:22–53.

c. *Family*: The family altar is perhaps the most important small group prayer meeting. Every Christian home should have a family worship. Even if not all of the members of the family are Christians, the few who are believers should unite in prayer for the rest who are not saved. "A family that prays together stays together." Matthew 18:19–20 says, "Again I say unto you, That if two of you shall agree on earth as touching any thing that they shall ask, it shall be done for them of my Father which is in heaven. For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them."

6. Its Posture

It has been said that "kneeling in prayer keeps you in good standing with God." However, there are no hard and fast rules about posture in prayer. The following postures have been mentioned in the Bible: Kneeling—2 Chronicles 6:13; Luke 22:41; Acts 20:36; Psalm 95:6; Standing—Mark 11:25; 1 Kings 8:22; Bowing down—Psalm 95:6; Falling on the face—Numbers 16:22; Joshua 5:14; 1 Chronicles 21:16; Matthew 26:39; Lifting up the hands—Psalm 28:2; Lamentations 2:19; 1 Timothy 2:8.

7. Its Time

"No man is safe for a day or an hour without prayer." "Men ought always to pray, and not to faint" (Luke 18:1).

a. *Night and Day*: ". . . continueth in supplications and prayers night and day" (1 Timothy 5:5; Psalm 88:1).

b. *Morning*: "My voice shalt thou hear in the morning, O LORD; in the morning will I direct my prayer unto thee, and will look up" (Psalm 5:3).

c. *Noon and Evening*: "Evening, and morning, and at noon, will I pray, and cry aloud: and he shall hear my voice" (Psalm 55:17).

d. *Constantly*: "Pray without ceasing" (1 Thessalonians 5:17). "Seek the LORD and his strength, seek his face continually" (1 Chronicles 16:11). "We will give ourselves continually to prayer" (Acts 6:4).

Now that we know the seven facts about prayer, it is my prayer that you and I will put these into practice, for prayer is only learned by praying. Ask the Holy Spirit, the Master Teacher, to teach us to pray and to enable us to tap the resources of His infinite power—power which can change the course of your life and mine—power which can help us to live a victorious Christian life.

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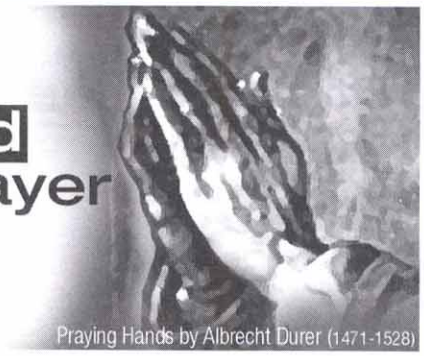
The Right Attitude Toward God in Prayer

Luke 11:1-4

Charles Seet



Praying Hands by Albrecht Durer (1471-1528)

Prayer is one of the most basic necessities in every believer's life. It is our lifeline to God, for it is the important channel of communication that links us with God, who is our life. But just as a child needs to learn about the proper way to communicate with people, we have to learn the proper way to communicate with God. Are you communicating well with God? How many times have you prayed, and then after that you felt, *"I don't think that was the best prayer. I don't think I prayed right. Something important was missing from my prayer. I wish I could learn how to prevail with God in prayer."*

It is therefore worthwhile for us to learn the proper way to pray from our Lord Jesus, and particularly about the right attitude one should have in prayer: Can we regard ourselves as being on equal terms with God? Can we relate to Him on the same level, like the way a person puts his arm around the shoulders of a familiar friend and saying, *"Hey, I'm in trouble now. You must help me out of this."* We want to understand the proper view of our standing before God when we pray.

In recent years, there is an idea that has become very popular in some circles and churches; that God is just waiting for us to challenge His power when we pray and ask Him to bless us and enlarge our territory. According to this erroneous teaching, He has obligated Himself to answer such prayers because He wants to demonstrate all the wonderful things He can do for us when we pray. And all we need to do is to say the right prayer, the prayer that will unlock all His blessings for us.

We must be discerning and careful not to fall for this self-exalting and self-centred teaching on prayer! The same thing is being promoted by all the pagan religions where men believe

that they can procure for themselves from their gods the prosperity, good fortune and favour they want by flattering their gods and lavishing them with joss sticks, fruits and candles, libations and offerings. These worshippers would gladly make these offerings to the gods which would give them the most impressive package deal in life, and they would readily give up worshipping one god for another if the latter is rumoured to give a better deal. This pragmatic approach to prayer is typical of unbelievers.

A few weeks ago, I received a strange call in the church office. The caller asked me this question, *"Can you please tell me the name of the god or goddess who can give me the most money?"* My reply to him was that it is we who must give ourselves to God rather than expect God to give things to us. I told him that he must come to worship God without any ulterior motive of expecting any gain or blessing from Him in return. The caller was not happy with my reply and put down the phone.

Dearly beloved, if prayer to us is a means to get the things we want from God, then we would be treating Him like a mere dispensing machine. And we come to expect that when we just put in the right amount of effort in prayer, we must receive what we want. We use prayer to extract all kinds of material, social and emotional blessings from Him by presumptuous petitioning. Just think of it: How can anyone dare to treat the almighty sovereign God like this?

Therefore, dearly beloved, when you come before God in prayer you must be careful how you regard Him. Your prayer would become an abomination to God if you treat Him as a means to an end. Has your praying become like that? Are you praying self-centred prayers?

As we think about this, the prayer we should study is the one which our Lord Jesus Christ taught His disciples to pray, found in Luke 11:1-4. When you want to learn how to pray effectively, there is no better person that you can learn from than the Lord Jesus Himself. It is our privilege to ask Jesus now, just as the disciples asked Him before, *"Lord, teach us to pray."*

Let us consider Luke 11:2-4 to see how Jesus answered this request from His disciples. He taught them to pray by giving His disciples a model prayer. This prayer has become very well known to us as *"The Lord's Prayer."* This prayer is found twice in the New Testament – here in Luke 11 and also in Matthew 6:5-13. Jesus taught it on two separate occasions.

There are many things that we can learn from the Lord's Prayer, but we just want to observe three important principles about prayer in relation to our position before God. The first is found in the fact that the Lord's Prayer does not begin with a request for oneself. It begins: *"Our Father which art in heaven, hallowed be Thy name."* This teaches us that:

I. Prayer must always be focused on God rather than on oneself.

It is God whom we must seek in prayer. His purposes must be our concern even in our prayers. His exaltation must be our aim when we pray. His glory must be our aspiration when we pray. And so our first thought in prayer should be nothing else but God Himself. *"Hallowed be Thy name."* Sometimes we approach God's throne with a shopping list or wish list.

We pray like this. *"Dear God, I would like to have a good day, travelling mercies, good relationships with everyone I meet, good health and a good night's rest. Thank you. Amen."* If your prayers tend to be like that, then there may be something wrong with your theology. Your theology may be egocentric (or self-centred) rather than theocentric (or God-centred). We should have a God-centred theology, seeing Him as the centre of all things - and if we have this correct theology it will be reflected in the way we pray. God becomes more important to us than our own needs and petitions. And our prayers will begin and end by focusing upon Him.

Please remember this: God must be always sought for no other reason than the fact that He is God. He is worthy of our highest regard, worthy of our worship and reverence. And so, when we pray, we ought to be seeking the Giver rather than the things that He gives. Whether He eventually

gives and blesses us or not, is not important at all. What really matters most to us is that He is God, and that we earnestly seek Him for who He is, and not for what He does for us, or what He gives to us. Let us seek the Lord primarily because He is God. Then all our prayers will be God-centred and not self-centred.

One example of a person who sought the Lord with such pure motives is the Old Testament patriarch, Job. As you know, Job was severely tested because Satan wanted to prove that Job was seeking God purely for selfish reasons. Satan proposed that as long as God was blessing Job, his ardent devotion to Him would continue, but once God stopped blessing him, that devotion to Him would also stop. In the end, Satan failed to prove this, because in response to the severe trials that came upon him, Job said, *"Though he slay me, yet will I trust in him"* (Job 13:15).

Dearly beloved, here is a very searching question to ask yourself, and try to be honest in your answer. If the Lord does not bless you, and does not provide for your needs; if He does not grant you your prayer requests and does not help you in times of trial, will you still trust in Him, will you still seek Him in prayer, will you still honour Him and praise Him? Or will you stop praying because you think that it is an unprofitable and unproductive effort? What if you prayed for relief from your burdens, but instead of getting lighter, your burdens get heavier? What if you prayed for peace, but all that you receive is more trouble? Will you still thank God for answering your prayers?

If your prayer life tends to slacken whenever your prayers are seemingly not answered, and you are disappointed, doubting God, could this not be an indication that you have been seeking self rather than seeking God in your prayer life? Please be completely honest with yourself in this important matter. What is your real motive for praying? Perhaps you need to ask the Lord to help you to seek Him and Him alone in prayer. And that is why the first petition in the Lord's teaching model of prayer is *"Hallowed be Thy name."*

As we read on in the Lord's Prayer, we come now to the second and third petitions and we notice that these still have absolutely nothing to do with self: *"Thy Kingdom come; Thy will be done as in heaven, so in earth."* These teach us the second thing that we need to observe about how to pray:

II. Prayer must always be submitted to God's will and not to our own wills.

Not only must prayer have God as its object, prayer must also have the will of God as its chief concern. 1 John 5:14 tells us – *"And this is the confidence that we have in him, that, if we ask any thing according to his will, he heareth us."* We would be very mistaken to think that prayer is all about asking the Lord to do what we wish according to our own will. Here in the Lord's Prayer the petition, *"Thy will be done"* comes at the head of all the petitions we make for ourselves. This means that every request that comes after it has the implied condition that God wills it. In other words, the thought is: *"Thy will be done in giving us our daily bread." "Thy will be done in forgiving us our sins." "Thy will be done in leading us not into temptation."* And *"Thy will be done in delivering us from evil."* Everything we ask for in our prayers must be asked with the willingness to submit to the will of the Lord.

But if you were to listen to the prayers that are being uttered most of the time, will you find submission to the will of God? Very often people actually pray in effect, *"not Thy will, but My will be done!"* Instead of submitting to God's will, they impose their wills upon Him. They may even use Scripture to justify doing this. They quote Matthew 21:22 out of context which says *"And all things, whatsoever ye shall ask in prayer, believing, ye shall receive."* Thinking that this verse provides a scriptural 'blank cheque' for them to claim anything under the sun that they wish from God, they pray for something they want, believing that they would receive it.

Actually, the word *"believing"* in this verse is not at all to be understood as assuming that the things asked for are already given. This is what some have used this verse to teach and it is not right. Rather, it means believing that God has the full power and authority to grant all that

has been asked for. The scriptures are firmly against this practice of imposing our selfish wills on God when we pray. As James wrote in James 4:3, *"Ye ask, and receive not, because ye ask amiss, that ye may consume it upon your lusts."*

A sister from our church once shared at our Tuesday prayer meeting about a boy who asked her: *"When I am playing a computer game, can I ask God to help me to get to the next level?"* A football fan may perhaps ask a similar question: *"When I watch the world cup series, can I pray that God will make my favourite team win the game?"* And they might even try to justify it like this: *"Will this not glorify the Lord, when I can tell people that He answered my prayer: I prayed that He would make my team win the game, and my team really won the game – praise God!"*

If this is the way you think, I have got news for you: This will not glorify God. It will only make people think that God can be used to make our dreams and wishes come true like a divine fairy godmother, and that it is to your advantage to get Him to be on your side. But how can we, who are mere creatures made by God, dictate to God what He should do? How can we, who are sinners saved by grace, issue orders to God and make Him work for us as if He were a waiter or office boy?

So it is absurd that anyone should not pray in submission to God's will. Let us take great care not to be found guilty of this sinful attitude in prayer. Let our prayers always be made with the condition *"Not my will, O Lord, but Thine be done."* We move on now to the last thing we want to observe in this article concerning the way we should regard ourselves in prayer.

III. Prayer should be seen as our Privilege, and not our Right

Prayer is a high privilege that God grants to every believer, where the great sovereign God of the universe condescends to listen and consider the insignificant pleas of mere mortal creatures like us. Like salvation, this privilege comes to us by God's grace alone. When we understand prayer as a privilege given to us, we can see that God does not owe us any answer to our prayers. It is, after all, His prerogative whether or not He wants to give attention to our prayer.

This being the case, we should never think of prayer as our entitlement to make claims from God. When we come before God in prayer, we have no entitlements at all to claim or to make demands from Him. We cannot say to God, *"If you don't answer my prayer, I will not worship you and serve you."*

Let us consider the petitions found in the Lord's Prayer: *"Give us day by day our daily bread. And forgive us our sins; for we also forgive every one that is indebted to us. And lead us not into temptation; but deliver us from evil"* (Luke 11:3, 4). The tone in each of these petitions is more of pleading, begging and asking. The verbs *"give," "forgive," "lead us not"* and *"deliver"* in this prayer are not demands at all.

We know this by simply comparing the structure of these petitions with similar prayers of petition found in the Old Testament. In the Hebrew language there is a certain letter of the alphabet which when added to command, softens its force to that of a plea. This letter is called the "Cohortative He" and it is used in prayers of petition, like those made by Daniel, Ezra, Nehemiah, David and others. Thus the petition to God to forgive could be translated *"please forgive us our sins"* instead of just *"forgive us our sins."* The rest of the petitions could likewise be translated with the word *"please"* before each of them.

We can safely say therefore, that the petitions found in the Lord's Prayer were meant to be pleas to God rather than commands. This is important for us to note. When we come before God we should never command, demand, or even claim; our attitude with regard to our requests should be one of pleading; pleading for things which are not ours to claim at all.

Pleading on no other ground than God's mercy and grace alone; pleading with complete trust in God to deal with us in whatever way He wills. You know, those of us who are parents teach our children to say *"Please,"* in order to teach

them the proper attitude they should have towards us. And if a child does not say "please" but demands things and said, *"I want ..."* or *"Give me ..."* we would remind them to ask politely. Please remember this. Sometimes we take for granted that God must be listening to our prayers and that He must grant them.

We forget that when we stand before the Almighty God, we are treading on holy ground, where angels fear to tread, and instead of pleading, the tone in which we make our requests becomes one of telling God what to do or even demanding Him to do them. Let us remember that prayer is really pleading before God in humble submission to His will.

In Genesis 18, there is an account of how Abraham prayed before God to be merciful to the righteous minority who lived in the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah when He destroys the two cities. Genesis 18:27, 30 – *"And Abraham answered and said, Behold now, I have taken upon me to speak unto the Lord, which am but dust and ashes... And he said unto him, Oh let not the Lord be angry, and I will speak: Peradventure there shall thirty be found there."*

It is my hope that all of us will be careful from now on about how we pray. Let us not take too much upon ourselves and end up making presumptuous prayers which are displeasing to God. Let us remember these three things about prayer: Firstly, prayer must always be focused on God rather than on oneself. Secondly, prayer must be submitted to God's will rather than to our own wills. Thirdly, prayer must be seen as our privilege and not as our right before God. May the Lord help each one of us to treasure the great privilege that we have, of being granted an audience with the King of kings and Lord of lords. That is what prayer is all about.

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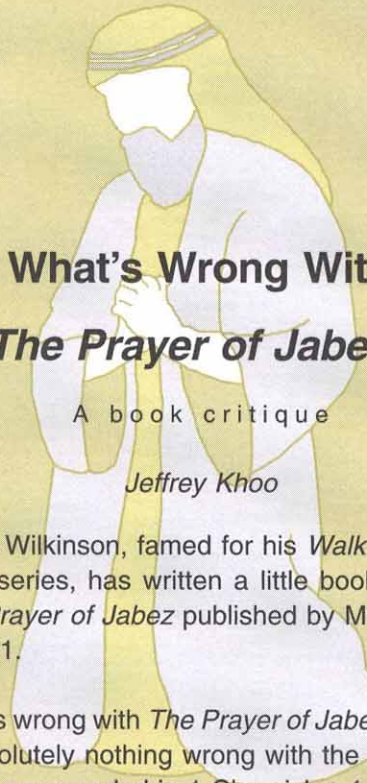

What's Wrong With *"The Prayer of Jabez?"*

A book critique

Jeffrey Khoo

Bruce Wilkinson, famed for his *Walk Thru the Bible* series, has written a little book entitled *The Prayer of Jabez* published by Multnomah in 2001.

What's wrong with *The Prayer of Jabez*? There is absolutely nothing wrong with the prayer of Jabez as recorded in 1 Chronicles 4:10 which reads, "And Jabez called on the God of Israel saying, Oh that thou wouldest bless me indeed, and enlarge my coast and that thine hand might be with me, and that thou wouldest keep me from evil, that it may not grieve me! And God granted him that which he requested." What is wrong is Wilkinson's use of it to promote his erroneous concept of prayer.

Wilkinson's book has taken the Christian world by storm. However, it is at best utterly misleading and at worst downright deceptive. The thrust is rather man-centred than God-centred. It encourages selfish not selfless prayers.

Wilkinson's opening statement in the preface already raises a red flag. He began by saying, "I want to teach you how to pray a *daring* prayer that God *always* answers." He then says that one can expect to see "miracles happen on a regular basis" (which he says he personally experiences "every day"). In other words, the prayer of Jabez is an "Open Sesame" magic formula you can use to get what you want (even

the unexpected and miraculous) from God every time, every day.

His very first chapter is enticingly captioned, "Little Prayer, Giant Prize." He trumpeted that praying Jabez's prayer "word for word" for 30 years has "revolutionized" his life and ministry. He says that God has many "unclaimed blessings," and these so-called "unclaimed blessings" (health, wealth, property, success, power ... you name it) can be yours if only you will repeatedly utter the Jabez prayer—God's best kept secret until now, thanks to Wilkinson.

For what should Christians pray? In the chapter, "Living Large for God," Wilkinson wrote, "If Jabez had worked on Wall Street, he might have prayed, 'Lord increase the value of my investment portfolios.' When I talk to presidents of companies, I often talk to them about this particular mind-set. When Christian executives ask me, 'Is it right for me to ask God for more business?' My response is, 'Absolutely!'"

Wilkinson's advice sounds good but is utterly selfish, and feeds on the greed of man. We ought not to fill our minds with more business and more money, but more of God's kingdom and His righteousness. Jesus said, "But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you" (Matthew 6:33). We should simply focus on living Christ-like lives in our respective occupations or vocations, and then leave the rest (the provision of our needs and wants) to Him. God certainly knows how to bless us even without our asking.

Consider the example of Solomon: "In Gibeon the LORD appeared to Solomon in a dream by night: and God said, Ask what I shall give thee. And Solomon said, ... Give therefore thy servant an understanding heart to judge thy people, that I may discern between good and bad: for who is able to judge this thy so great a people? And the speech pleased the Lord, that Solomon had asked this thing. And God said unto him, Because thou hast asked this thing, and hast not asked for thyself long life; neither hast asked riches for thyself, nor hast asked the life of thine enemies; but hast asked for thyself understanding to discern judgment; Behold, I have done according to thy words: lo, I have given thee a wise and an understanding heart; so that there was none like thee before thee, neither after thee shall any arise like unto thee. And I have also given thee that which thou hast not asked, both riches, and honour: so that there shall not be any among the kings like unto thee all thy days. And if thou wilt walk in my ways, to keep my statutes and my commandments, as thy father David did walk, then I will lengthen thy days" (1 Kings 3:5-14).

Wilkinson puts the cart before the horse. Never do that! God blessed both Jabez and Solomon because they sought first God's kingdom and His righteousness. They got their priorities right! Know also that the blessings of God might not be physical, but spiritual (love, joy, peace, etc). And if God blesses us materially, it is for us to use it for the extension of His kingdom, not ours!

Listen not to Wilkinson, but to Paul, "But godliness with contentment is great gain. For we brought nothing into this world, and it is certain we can carry nothing out. And having food and raiment let us be therewith content. But they that will be rich fall into temptation and a snare, and into many foolish and hurtful lusts, which drown men in destruction and perdition. For the love of money is the root of all evil: which while some coveted after, they have erred from the faith, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows. But thou, O man of God, flee these things; and follow after righteousness, godliness, faith, love, patience, meekness. Fight the good fight of faith, lay hold on eternal life, whereunto thou art also called, and hast professed a good profession before many witnesses" (1 Timothy 6:6-12).

Instead of Bruce Wilkinson's charismatically oriented "health and wealth," "name it and claim it" version of the prayer of Jabez, read Spurgeon's Spirit-filled 1871 sermon on the same prayer reprinted in the January 2002 issue of *The Burning Bush* (http://www.lifefebc.com/febc/BurnBush/V8N1.htm).

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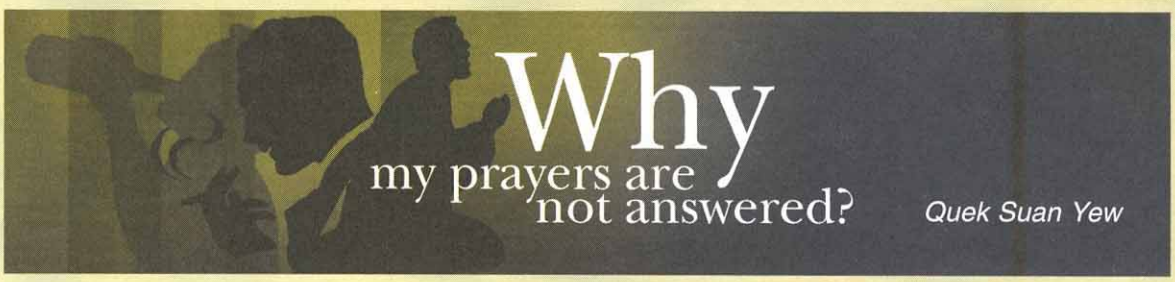

Why my prayers are not answered?

Quek Suan Yew

Prayer is one of the most important privileges given by God to His children. Our Lord Jesus Christ taught us to address the Creator of Heaven and Earth, "our Heavenly Father!" What great power God gives to sinful creatures like us, even the strength of His almighty arm, through our prayer! However, the Bible gives several warnings as to why our prayers will not be heard or answered by God when we pray.

Unrepented known sin – Psalm 66:18, "If I regard iniquity in my heart, the Lord will not hear me." The truth from this verse is crystal clear. If a known sin remains in my heart, my prayers will not be heard by God. Sins in our lives must be confessed and repented of or else God will not hear our prayers. Our life of devotion and service will not make any difference to our prayer life if we know of a sin and refuse to confess and repent of it. God will still not hear our prayers no matter how theologically correct our prayers may be. When that happens, we do not pray anymore, but say prayers only.

Ask for the wrong reason – James 4:2-3, "Ye lust, and have not: ye kill, and desire to have, and cannot obtain: ye fight and war, yet ye have not, because ye ask not. Ye ask, and receive not, because ye ask amiss, that ye may consume it upon your lusts." Asking God for selfish reasons makes our prayers go askew. Some people pray in order to gratify their ego and promote their own name. They spin tales about their spirituality and present an appearance of godliness that people become mesmerized by their hypocrisy, like the Pharisees in the days of Christ. So when they pray, God says to them, "I do not answer because you ask for selfish reasons to extend your own self-seeking ambitions." Their desire ("lust") might be very strong, and they might even resort to "killing" and "fighting" to get what they lust after but God says they will fail. God will not grant to them what they ask for, because He is not mocked by their hypocrisy. For example, have you ever prayed for an increase in attendance in your church? Why do you ask for more people to come? Is it to hear you preach or that you have an obsession with numbers? This kind of selfish desire will result in unanswered prayers from God.

Prayer becomes an excuse not to sanctify – Joshua 7:6-11, "And Joshua rent his clothes, and fell to the earth upon his face before the ark of the LORD until the eventide, he and the elders of Israel, and put dust upon their heads. And Joshua said, Alas, O Lord GOD, wherefore hast thou at all brought this people over Jordan, to deliver us into the hand of the Amorites, to destroy us? would to God we had been content, and dwelt on the other side Jordan! O Lord, what shall I say, when Israel turneth their backs before their enemies! For the Canaanites and all the inhabitants of the land shall hear of it, and shall environ us round, and cut off our name from the earth: and what wilt thou do unto thy great name? And the LORD said unto Joshua, Get thee up; wherefore liest thou thus upon thy face? Israel hath sinned, and they have also transgressed my covenant which I commanded them: for they have even taken of the accursed thing, and have also stolen, and dissembled also, and they have put it even among their own stuff."

In this passage of the Bible, Joshua and Israel had just suffered their first military defeat in the Promised Land. Thirty-six of their fighting men had died and they were utterly demoralized by this (the hearts of the people melted like water). Joshua rent his clothes, fell on his face and put ashes on his head as he prayed to the LORD for intervention. Apparently, Joshua had

forgotten God's promise to him in Joshua 1:5 where God said that no man will be able to stand up against him all the days of his life. God will never fail him nor forsake him. Be strong and of a good courage for every place that the sole of his foot tread upon will be his to own. Joshua also knew from forty years of experience under the tutelage of Moses, his teacher, that it was always when sin is in the camp that Israel experienced deaths and defeats. What God demanded from Joshua was to get up and sanctify the camp. There is sin in the camp that must be dealt with. Prayers cannot be used as an excuse not to deal with sin in the church. When leaders of the church "do not wish to be the bad guy" or "afraid to discipline someone in the church who has sinned" then the prayer life of the church will be nullified. Prayer cannot become a substitute for failing to sanctify.

When it is against God's revealed will – There were at least two occasions in the Bible when Moses prayed, and God said I do not answer this kind of prayers because the prayers were not according to My will. Exodus 32:31-33, "And Moses returned unto the LORD, and said, Oh, this people have sinned a great sin, and have made them gods of gold. Yet now, if thou wilt forgive their sin–; and if not, blot me, I pray thee, out of thy book which thou hast written. And the LORD said unto Moses, Whosoever hath sinned against me, him will I blot out of my book." Moses' misplaced love for Israel resulted in him praying that God will forgive the sinners in exchange for Moses' own salvation. From a human standpoint, this sounded very noble. But it was not wrong for Moses to pray this way as it was as God said that whosoever has sinned against Him will be blotted out of His book. However, this kind of "exchange" is impossible. Prayers that are based upon sentimentality and misplaced emotions, no matter how noble they may appear to us, will not be answered by God.

Deuteronomy 3:25-26, "I pray thee, let me go over, and see the good land that is beyond Jordan, that goodly mountain, and Lebanon. But the LORD was wroth with me for your sakes, and would not hear me: and the LORD said unto me, Let it suffice thee; speak no more unto me of this matter." This second incident involved Moses personally. He had sinned against God by disobeying His command in front of all the people of Israel (cf. Numbers 20:7-13). This serious sin resulted in Moses not being allowed to enter the Promised Land. Moses prayed that God might change His mind and let him enter. But God told Him "NO" and that Moses was not to pray this prayer again! God had already revealed to Moses His will for his life regarding this matter and for Moses to pray that God might change His mind was wrong. Moses must accept this from the Lord and live within His will. We cannot say to God, please do not mind what sin Moses had committed, for he had done so much these past forty years? Why cannot you give him another chance, Lord, for he is our leader? God is no respecter of persons. Moses' prayer stopped immediately for it ran counter to the revealed will of God.

The more God's people read and study the Bible, the more they are able to pray within His revealed will, and the more their prayers will be answered.

Conclusion

Pray without ceasing is the injunction given to us by God (cf. 1 Thessalonians 5:17). Yet even as we pray continuously, we must bear in mind that there are hindrances in our lives that will negate our prayers, no matter how fervent our prayers may appear. Deal with sin in your life, pray for the glory of God, do not use prayer as an excuse not to deal with sin, and always pray within the revealed will of God and our prayers will surely be able to move the arm of the Almighty. AMEN.

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OBEDIENCE

The Key to Spiritual Excellence

Prabhudas Koshy

Obedience is the key to spiritual excellence. When there is a lack of obedience, there will also be a lack of the best virtues and experiences of Christian life. Obedience not only channels God's blessings to a Christian, but also transforms him to be a blessing and joy to fellow Christians. The Apostle Paul's commendation of the Roman Christians point to this truth – "For your obedience is come abroad unto all *men.* I am glad therefore on your behalf" (Romans 16:19). Obedient Christians will bring forth joyful thanksgiving from those who witnessed the blessings of their obedient lives.

Obedience: The key to a blessed life

Obeying God is essential to pleasing Him. This is the truth of Samuel's famous words to the disobedient King Saul – "Hath the LORD as great delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices, as in obeying the voice of the LORD? Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice...." (1 Samuel 15:22). The Lord is not pleased to hear the prayers of the disobedient or bless him. Likewise, Jeremiah reminded the people of Israel repeatedly that obedience is the only way by which they can have the pleasure of God for themselves. He also taught them that the blessings of being God's people can be fully realised only if they obey the voice of the Lord. "Obey my voice, and I will be your God, and ye shall be my people: and walk ye in all the ways that I have commanded you, that it may be well unto you" (Jeremiah 7:23; cf. 11:4, 7). Obedience to God's Word alone can make us a people of God's pleasure.

Moreover, only hearts that are committed to obey God can have triumphs in living a righteous life. This is the truth that the Apostle Paul taught the Romans in Romans 6:17-18, "But God be thanked, that ye were the servants of sin, but ye have obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine which was delivered you. Being then made free from sin, ye became the servants of righteousness."

Obedience: The key to a secured life

When God commands us to obey Him, He is giving us a principle by which to live. It also functions as a fence around our lives to prevent us from straying into all forms of evil that lurk in the world.

In order to grant us permanent protection, God requires our obedience under all circumstances. Obedience is required not just in times of deep, serious temptation but also in moments of simpler testing. Telling a so-called white lie can be just as detrimental to our spiritual well-being as yielding to a greater temptation like adultery or stealing. In fact, there is never a time when obedience is unimportant.

When we obey God, we choose the way of wisdom, which is the safe way of life. "He that keepeth the commandment keepeth his own soul; *but* he that despiseth his ways shall die" (Proverbs 19:16). "But he that keepeth the law, happy *is* he" (Proverbs 29:18).

Obedience: The key to true maturity

When some elderly folks think of obedience, their thoughts turn to their children or some other young people. They surmise that others, especially today's youth, need to learn how to be obedient.

As we grow older, we find ways to remove our sensitivity toward an obedient life. We reason

that we have learned how to live obediently before God, and, therefore, we do not need to dig deeper into the issue of obedience. We assign to others the commandment to obey God while dismissing it from our own lives.

However, obedience is for every one, regardless of his age and experience in Christian life. Obedience is the root of our spiritual growth. Like a tree that ceases to grow when its root is cut off, a Christian who neglects obedience shall cease from spiritually maturing.

Our prayer and resolve should be that of the Psalmist who prayed, "Depart from me, ye evildoers: for I will keep the commandments of my God" (Psalm 119:115). When God spoke through Moses, He specifically advised His people their individual responsibility of being obedient to the Lord all the days of their lives, first the parents (the elderly), and then the children. "That thou mightest fear the LORD thy God, to keep all his statutes and his commandments, which I command thee, thou, and thy son, and thy son's son, all the days of thy life; and that thy days may be prolonged" (Deuteronomy 6:2).

A father must first of all be concerned with his own obedience to the Lord, and then his children's. No young person should say "Well my parents, or some leaders in the church are not obeying the Lord in this matter, so why should I?" Every individual ought to be devoted to the Lord by being obedient to His Word, regardless of the disobedient behaviour of others around him.

Obedience: The key to abundant fellowship

He commands our obedience not because He is an unreasonable, domineering taskmaster. On the contrary, it is His loving concern for us that demands our obedience. Disobedience and sin will hinder our close walk with God and thus destroy the joy of our Christian life. Sin will hinder our communion with God.

Our chief adversary, the devil, however, has his own agenda in tempting us to disobey God and thus to damage our walk with God. This was the enemy's goal in the Garden of Eden and it remains his central focus today. He knows that if he can entice us to disobey the Lord, our actions will dishonour the Lord and thus grieve His Spirit. Disobedience has fierce repercussions that can make our fellowship with God almost non-existent. Consequences of disobedience such as feelings of guilt, shame and worthlessness can drive us away from communion with God and His people. Disobedience can also bring about broken lives, shattered relationships, destroyed marriages and bitter disputes, which will eventually bring about separation from Christian fellowship. While sin cannot change God's eternal love for us, it certainly disrupts our fellowship with the Saviour because it alienates the believer from God's blessings. This alone is enough to cause us to sense the Lord's rebuke, which is God's way of saying, "What you are doing is not right. Turn away from it and return to Me."

Obedience will lead us to higher spiritual fellowship with God. Jesus said, "He that hath my commandments, and keepeth them, he it is that loveth me: and he that loveth me shall be loved of my Father, and I will love him, and will manifest myself to him" (John 14:21). He repeated, "If ye keep my commandments, ye shall abide in my love; even as I have kept my Father's commandments, and abide in his love" (John 15:10). The Apostle John affirms this truth once again in 1 John 2:5 – "But whoso keepeth his word, in him verily is the love of God perfected: hereby know we that we are in him."

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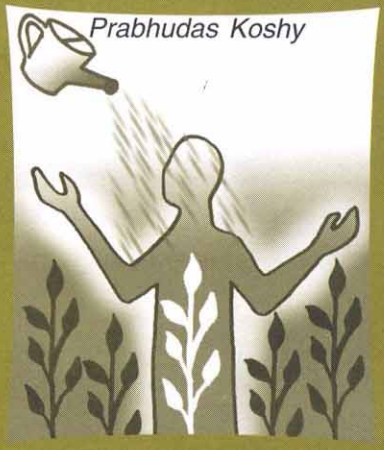
"The golden rule for understanding in spiritual matters is not intellect, but obedience."

- Oswald Chambers

Nurturing an Obedient Life

Prabhudas Koshy



Often many Christians wonder how they can live a life of obedience. Following are some essential principles that God's Word offers us that we may nurture an obedient life. (Please be sure that you read the Scripture references given.)

- **Trust God with your life and all that concerns you.** You cannot go wrong if you place your hope and trust in God. He created you and He redeemed you for He loved you with an eternal love. Therefore your life is His concern and you don't have to be troubled to take the path that He shows (Proverbs 3:5-7).

- **Wait on the Lord for an answer to your problem or situation.** When you are in doubt about the right decision, do not move ahead until you know God's will for you (Psalm 27:13-14; 37:34; Proverbs 20:22).

- **Meditate on God's Word.** When you saturate your mind with the Word of God, you gain God's viewpoint. This will help you to discern right from wrong and to act appropriately when a temptation comes. Never underestimate the power of God's Word in your life (Joshua 1:8; Psalm 119:9-11, 15-16, 48, 148; 1 Timothy 4:15).

- **Yield to the Holy Spirit.** Today the Spirit of God speaks to us through His Word, and through the biblical counsels of pastors, elders and matured Christians. The way to recognise the guidance of the Spirit of God is to seek His counsel through prayer and His Word (Romans 8:4-5).

- **Be willing to wait or walk away when the way before you is not clear.** Obedience to God will require you to be firm that the way you choose shall be absolutely pleasing to God. If you do not sense clear guidance in a particular situation, ask God to confirm His will to you through the light of His Word. His will for your life always reflects what is written in the Bible (Psalm 77; 86:7; 1 Peter 1:7; 4:12).

- **Leave the consequences to God.** Obedience to God is not popular. But it will put you in a favourable position before God. Therefore, be obedient and leave the rest to Him (Psalm 31:14-19). Do not worry about people's response.

- **Accept God's discipline with thanksgiving.** The story told by Jesus of the prodigal son (Luke 15:11-32) is especially significant. In it we read of God's unconditional love and forgiveness. Perhaps you have made a wrong decision. You wonder what the outcome will be. Apart from God, the outcome always is one of sorrow and grief. If you repent and turn to God, though He may not remove all the heartache and pain that your decision has caused, He can and will forgive you and restore you into His eternal joy.

The prophet Isaiah reminds us that when we turn to Him in repentance, He washes sin's dark stain from our lives so that we become white and pure as snow. If this is your desire, perhaps the following prayer is one that will bring rest to your troubled heart. "Father, I thank Thee for Thy grace, love, mercy, patience and goodness. I have faltered many times and fallen deep into sin. However, Thou has picked me up and placed me back on the right path. I pray that Thy Spirit will continue to instruct me and guide my life. By thy grace, O Lord, I choose to walk obediently before Thee, knowing that when I do, I will receive a greater blessing than anything this world has to offer. Give me discernment to know right from wrong in every situation I face. For Thy glory, I humbly pray in Jesus' name. Amen."

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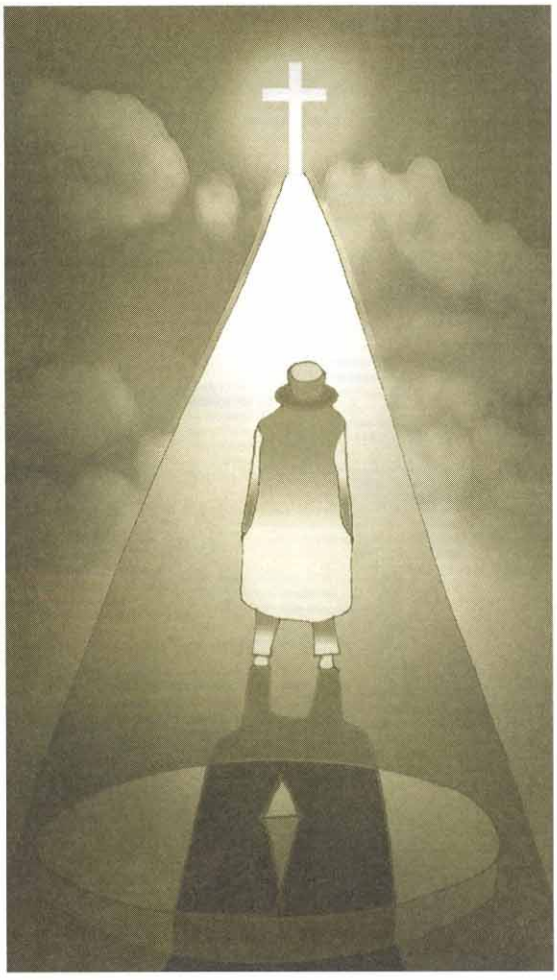

Stay the Course

Mah Chin Kwang

A familiar song that we often sing is made up of these two simple lines:

I have decided to follow Jesus,
No turning back, no turning back!

It is a beautiful song, both in its melody and its simple truth. When we decided to follow Jesus, our commitment and dedication should have been such that we do not turn back. It is as though we have crossed a narrow bridge from Sin City to the City of Abundant Life. Having crossed over, we have also burnt the bridge behind us. There is no way we can return to Sin City. And really we should have no desire too.

Our love and dedication to our Master demands more than being prevented from going back. Do we ever linger on in our spiritual walk and wonder how things would have been on the other side? Do we ever look back wistfully at our former lifestyle and friends?

Our Lord gave us a serious warning, "No man, having put his hand to the plough, and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God" (Luke 9:62). Remember too the punishment that befell Lot's wife when she looked back wistfully at the city of Sodom when she was already on her way to safety (Genesis 19:26). Looking back (spiritually speaking) is a sin. Christians who are truly committed to the Lord cannot be in two minds about their allegiance.

When we became believers, there was no guarantee that our life would henceforth be easy and comfortable. There was no assurance that our present living would be like sailing on a calm lake on a lazy Saturday afternoon. Indeed, for many of us, our experiences have been as though we were in a small craft in a turbulent storm. Were there not many times in our lives when we felt so weary and discouraged that we wanted to give up our journey?

Take courage, brethren, the storm will soon pass. Let us stay the course. Many things in our lives right now may discourage and even frighten us. Our Lord may not necessarily remove these trying times from us right away, but when we look to our Master, He will give us strength and see us through.

For those of us who have been deeply involved in the church ministry, this truth is particularly relevant. We might have experienced many squalls and storms in our church life. There may yet be more. The Lord, as always, has been gracious and we carry on. We need to stay the course and not be distracted by changes in circumstances that come along the way. Brethren, let us not look back. Let us stay the course.

Elder Mah Chin Kwang is an elder of Gethsemane Bible-Presbyterian Church.

Saved to Serve

Tan Choon Seng

"For they themselves shew of us what manner of entering in we had unto you, and how ye turned to God from idols, to serve the living and true God" (1 Thessalonians 1:9).

Salvation is a gift of God to sinful mankind. It is the gracious act of God in delivering us sinners from the bondage, guilt and penalty of sin through the finished work of the Lord Jesus Christ on the cross. Thank and praise God that we are saved from sin and the damnation of sin. However, receiving God's gift of salvation is not an end in itself; it is the beginning of a new life. This new life that Christians enjoy and experience is not self-centred but God or Christ-centred.

In writing to the Christians in Thessalonica, the Apostle Paul reminded the believers in the church that they have been saved and delivered from living under the bondage of sin and idolatry, and how they ought "to serve the living and true God." Christians are saved to serve. Instead of serving ourselves – our own interest, desire and ambition – we are to serve God. One of the great transformations that take place in our lives when we come to faith in Christ is the shift in the object of our focus. The centre of the Christian's focus in life is God, not self. (Idolatry is replacing God with someone or something else in our lives. It is not giving God the rightful place in our lives as we should). To serve God is to do what God desires of us, to bring delight to Him, to carry out what He commands us in His Word, etc. And one of the things that God requires of us is that we serve one another (Galatians 5:13).

Since you became a Christian, has there been a change in your mindset? Do you seek to serve, or do you still demand or insist to be served?

In many societies and cultures, the quest for greatness is seen as the ultimate goal, and greatness is always seen and measured in terms of how well one is being served, or the amount of attention that one receives. Serving and waiting on others is neither a virtue nor something that is highly esteemed or regarded. Yet the Lord Jesus told His disciples that "whosoever will be great among you, shall be your minister; and whosoever of you will be the chiefest, shall be servant of all" (Mark 10:43-44). As Christ's disciples, we are to follow the example of our Saviour who taught His disciples: "For even the Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many" (Mark 10:45). Christ came to serve so must we who are His disciples.

In His last act, prior to His arrest and crucifixion, the Lord Jesus impressed upon His disciples how they ought to serve one another.

"So after he had washed their feet, and had taken his garments, and was set down again, he said unto them, Know ye what I have done to you? Ye call me Master and Lord: and ye say well; for so I am. If I then, your Lord and Master, have washed your feet; ye also ought to wash one another's feet. For I have given you an example, that ye should do as I have done to you. Verily, verily, I say unto you, The servant is not greater than his lord; neither he that is sent greater than he that sent him. If ye know these things, happy are ye if ye do them" (John 13:12-17).

Dear readers, I would like to urge all of you who have professed faith in the Lord Jesus Christ to come forward and serve the Lord with whatever gifts He has given you. Serving God – and our fellow men – is not only a command given to us; it is also an evidence of our faith and the regeneration that has taken place in our lives (James 2:14-20).

"Let us consider one another to provoke unto love and to good works" (Hebrews 10:24). Brethren, let us encourage one another to serve the Lord and to minister to one another in love.

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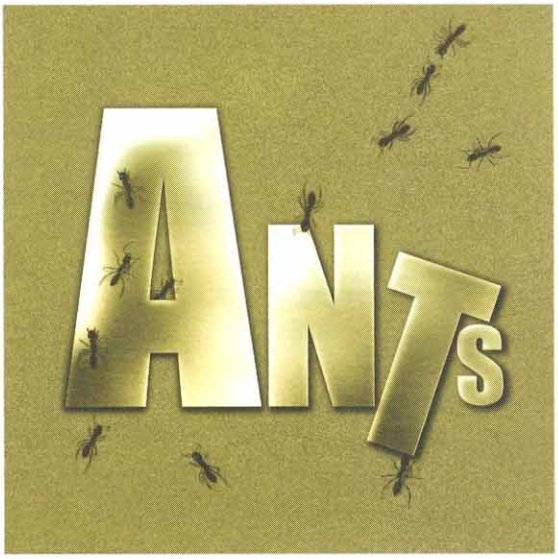


"...little upon the earth, but they are exceeding wise" Proverbs 30:24

Simon Nagarajan

Man's heart and mind are easily drawn to anything gigantic and complex. Dinosaurs, whales and such large creatures capture our attention with their sheer build, size and strength. But we also ought to be fascinated by the tiny ants as well. God's power, wisdom and glory are manifested in all His beautiful creation, even in tiny creatures like the ants. Ants are found almost everywhere – in our homes, gardens, backyards, offices, cars, restaurants, etc. There is a lot of literature on ants in books, on the Internet, yes, even in the Bible. According to the College Encyclopaedia, there are some 2,000 species of ants in the world! Ants are not to be ignored. The Holy Scriptures remind us: "The ants are a people not strong, yet they prepare their meat in the summer" (Proverbs 30:25). What lessons can we learn from the tiny ant?

Purpose and Industry

The Palestinian ants are very organised and industrious. They travel long distances from their nests to gather seeds. Their well-marked trails are often seen on the Palestinian floors, especially where seeds are found. The life of the ants speaks of industry, diligence, sharing, planning, co-operation and preparation. They work hard to gather food before winter sets in. There is purpose and a sense of urgency in their operations. Ants are not put off by adverse weather conditions or other obstacles. They scale walls, swim over puddles of water, crawl on ceiling, exploring every nook and corner of their environment. They are busy, busy, forever busy. Prudence and forethought are commendable virtues that we can learn from the ant. Think of how hard they work and how heavy the loads they carry on their backs. An ant is capable of lifting 50 times its body weight! If man can do that, he might just about lift up a small car!

Our Lord Jesus Christ said "I must work the works of him that sent me, while it is day: the night cometh, when no man can work" (John 9:4). Our Lord was conscious of doing the Father's will within the allotted time He had on earth and to finish His mission before the time of His return to the heavenly abode. Brethren, we too must be conscious of God's mission for us and be faithful in our service. Let us not confine our service to God in the church alone, or in distributing a Gospel tract to a stranger. We are to serve our Risen Saviour wherever we are and at all times – in our places of work, in school, at home, in travel overseas. Our life, every minute of it, must be tuned into serving God to extend His Kingdom.

Urgency

Ants have a short life. The survival of the colony depends on them and they are fully devoted to that mission. I have not come across a sleeping ant, or a resting ant, or one lazing around day-dreaming. It just seems that ants never rest,

day or night. Day-dreamers we are many a time! The Bible tells us: "Go to the ant, thou sluggard; consider her ways, and be wise" (Proverbs 6:6). Ants are constantly on the move, labouring for the common good of the colony. A lesson for us here: There is urgency for us as believers to do God's work and finish it before night falls. For us, night would mean death or the return of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. Our life on earth is short. The Bible compares it to the "wind" (Job 7:7). Wind is swift, transitory, intangible and unseen. However, its effect is felt wherever it passes. What will our life accomplish for God as we pass through this earth? "The days of our years are threescore years and ten; and if by reason of strength they be fourscore years, yet is their strength labour and sorrow; for it is soon cut off, and we fly away" (Psalm 90:10). Life on earth is also uncertain.

Don't count on serving God during your retirement only. Firstly, we do not know when the Lord's appointment of our death would come. Our time is in God's hands (Psalm 31:15). Secondly, as we grow older, our physical bodies weaken, taking a toll on our effectiveness for God (Ecclesiastes 12:1-6). Let us give our best years to the Lord and not the worst years, or what is left over. Some of us have already lost many precious years to the devil, to fleshly lusts and to the allurements of the world before we came to Christ. Sadly, considerable time has also been wasted in idleness even after we came to the Lord. The time to serve God is now, today! Not tomorrow, or next week, next month, next year! Let us serve God faithfully (1 Corinthians 4:2) and cheerfully (Psalm 100:2) every minute of our life (Ecclesiastes 9:10) whilst we have breath in our nostrils.

Like the ants, we too should work hard to prepare for the onset of winter. Christians must guard themselves against idleness, lethargy or laziness. Our Lord had been very busy during His years of ministry on earth – preaching the Good News, ministering, teaching, healing, comforting, encouraging, bringing relief to the sick and distressed. Let us learn from our Lord to keep busy in God's service, ever conscious of the urgency to tell the Gospel to the unsaved, and to minister in love to the brethren.

Unity and Harmony

If you watch a moving line of ants closely, you will not find any bogged down by having an angry exchange, a fist-fight or a wrestling match. When one ant meets another, there is some kind of communication when their feelers touch each other's. How about us when we meet? Let there be a simple greeting, the joy of meeting, an update of information, a request for help, or something to spur one another on to good works. I believe an ant colony survives on a clear sense of mission, industry, harmony, unity and good teamwork. Brethren, should it not be so in the Church of Jesus Christ? We are not only called to be hardworking in service (Romans 12:11) having a sense of urgency (John 9:4), but also to promote peace and harmony in the Body of Christ (Romans 12:18; Ephesians 4:3). Then the fruits of our labour will be more abundant and sweeter.

Almost half a year has fled us by. How have we served the Lord thus far? Let us each take a quick inventory of our service for the Lord. How much have we accomplished, and how much more can we do for the Lord? How can we better equip ourselves to serve God more effectively? Have we been zealous, diligent, single-minded and cheerful in serving God? Have we been encouraging and spurring each other on to greater work for our Lord? May God help us.

Rev. Simon Nagarajan is an assistant pastor of Galilee Bible-Presbyterian Church.

"We may easily be too big for God to use, but never too small."

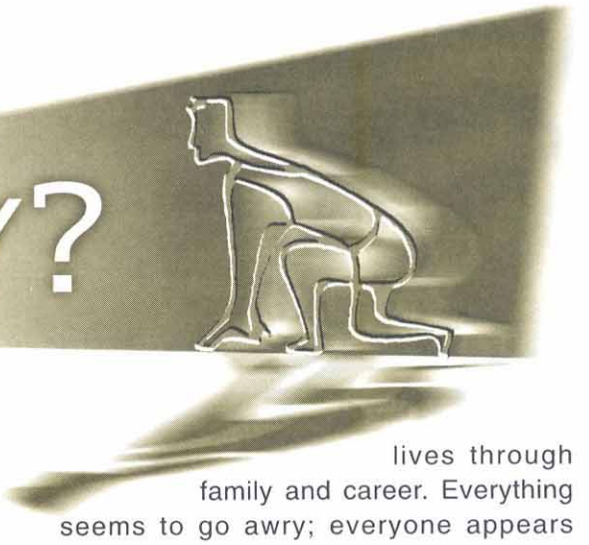
- D.L. Moody

"It is a sin to do less than your best."

- Dr. Bob Jones Sr.

Esther Chew

READY?



What does it mean to be "ready"? It means to be "immediately available whenever needed!" How imperative it is not to be caught napping at any time, for opportunity may knock just once! Let us estimate our spiritual readiness promptly and honestly, because "...the night cometh, when no man can work" (John 9:4b).

"Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, which...hath begotten us again...by the resurrection of Jesus Christ...To an inheritance incorruptible,...reserved in heaven for you, Who are kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation ready to be revealed in the last time" (1 Peter 1:3-5). Thank you Lord for this precious gift of eternal life! Are we able to share the gospel message? "But sanctify the Lord God in your hearts: and be ready always to give an answer to every man that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you with meekness and fear" (1 Peter 3:15).

Paul was willing to spend and be spent for the Lord, "...for I am ready not to be bound only, but also to die at Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus" (Acts 21:13b); and "...I am ready to preach the gospel to you that are at Rome also" (Romans 1:15). What about us? Are we prepared to serve, to go the extra mile, for His sake, especially at the expense of our small or big ambitions? Will we ever emulate Paul's example, saying in faith, "For I am now ready to be offered..."? (2 Timothy 4:6a)

May we stand firm and not be moved from our spiritual goal though we be frayed by Satan's fiery darts of doubt, turmoil or confusion in our lives through family and career. Everything seems to go awry; everyone appears antagonistic and every situation hopeless. "He that is ready to slip with his feet is as a lamp despised in the thought of him that is at ease" (Job 12:5). How we need to persevere in prayer, turning our eyes upon the Lord Jesus! "Watch ye and pray, lest ye enter into temptation. The spirit truly is ready, but the flesh is weak" (Mark 14:38). Setback after brickbat can be most intimidating; but despair not. "Then saith he to his servants, The wedding is ready, but they which were bidden were not worthy. Go ye therefore into the highways, and as many as ye shall find, bid to the marriage" (Matthew 22:8-9).

Are we basking in God's manifold blessings, contented that He is pleased with us and we could rest on our laurels? "...For unto whomsoever much is given, of him shall be much required: and to whom men have committed much, of him they will ask the more" (Luke 12:48b); and again in 1 Timothy 6:17-18, "Charge them that are rich in this world, that they be not highminded, nor trust in uncertain riches, but in the living God, who giveth us richly all things to enjoy; That they do good, that they be rich in good works, ready to distribute, willing to communicate." Besides, it is prudent to utilise our time for godly service, "Then Jesus said unto them, My time is not yet come: but your time is alway ready" (John 7:6).

Sinners are we all, "but thou art a God ready to pardon, gracious and merciful, slow to

anger, and of great kindness, and forsookest them not" (Nehemiah 9:17b). O Lord, enable us to forgive those who trespass against us too; because Thou hast loved and forgiven us our iniquities! How many times are we supposed to forgive? "Jesus saith unto him, I say not unto thee, Until seven times: but, Until seventy times seven" (Matthew 18:22). Are we ready to obey? "Keep thy foot when thou goest to the house of God, and be more ready to hear, than to give the sacrifice of fools: for they consider not that they do evil" (Ecclesiastes 5:1).

When we are ready to be led by His Blessed Spirit, we will be tutored for His higher purpose. "The heart also of the rash shall understand knowledge, and the tongue of the stammerers shall be ready to speak plainly" (Isaiah 32:4). How "plainly"? "...my tongue is the pen of a ready writer" (Psalm 45:1b). As long as we wait upon His will, He will use us, whatever our limitations or capabilities. "Put them in mind to be subject to principalities and powers, to obey magistrates, to be ready to every good work" (Titus 3:1) and "Feed the flock of God which is among you, taking the oversight thereof, not by constraint, but willingly; not for filthy lucre, but of a ready mind" (1 Peter 5:2).

It is much later than we think and there are never enough labourers; are we ready to pitch in, while it is yet day? "Be ye therefore ready also: for the Son of man cometh at an hour when ye think not" (Luke 12:40). Otherwise we might miss the celestial boat! – "And while they went to buy, the bridegroom came; and they that were ready went in with him to the marriage: and the door was shut" (Matthew 25:10). One final warning we should heed – "Be watchful, and strengthen the things which remain, that are ready to die: for I have not found thy works perfect before God" (Revelation 3:2); and by His grace we will echo "The LORD was ready to save me: therefore we will sing my songs to the stringed instruments all the days of our life in the house of the LORD" (Isaiah 38:20).

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Signs of a life pleasing to God

1. *You will be most careful to understand the Scripture, to know what doth please and displease God.*
2. *You will be more careful in the doing of every duty, to fit it to the pleasing of God than men.*
3. *You will look to your hearts, and not only to your actions; to your ends, and thoughts, and the inward manner and degree.*
4. *You will look to secret duties as well as public ...*
5. *You will reverence your consciences, and have much to do with them, and will not slight them: when they tell you of God's displeasure, it will disquiet you; when they tell you of His approval, it will comfort you.*
6. *Your pleasing men will be charitable for their good, and pious in order to the pleasing of God, and not proud and ambitious for your honour with them...*
7. *Whether men be pleased or displeased, or how they judge of you, or what they call you, will seem a small matter to you... comparison to God's judgement...You can bear their displeasure, censures, and reproaches, if God be but pleased. These will be your evidences.*

-Richard Baxter

Occupy Till I Come

Stephen Khoo

In both his letters to the Christians in Corinth, Paul reveals that there will be a judgment day for all Christians. A day has been appointed in which every Christian will give an account of what he has done in his life on earth. Paul exhorts the Christians: "For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ; that every one may receive the things done in his body, according to that he hath done, whether it be good or bad" (2 Corinthians 5:10). This Judgment Seat of Christ is for all Christians.

Do not confuse this judgment for all Christians with the ultimate Judgment of the Great White Throne for all non-believers. That latter judgment is revealed in Revelation, the last book of the Bible (20:12): "And I saw the dead, small and great, stand before God; and the books were opened: and another book was opened, which is the book of life: and the dead were judged out of those things which were written in the books, according to their works." Then people will be judged for sinning against God and rejecting the gracious offer of God in Christ Jesus for the cleansing of their sins. And all of them whose names were not written in the Book of Life, will be cast into the Lake of Fire, where they "shall be tormented day and night for ever and ever" (Revelation 20:10). This is a horrible end for all who harden their hearts and reject God's invitation to them to believe in His Son, Jesus Christ, in order that they may have the forgiveness of sins and the gift of eternal life. What a great salvation that God has given to every believer in Christ! The Lord be praised.

On the other hand, there will be another judgment for all Christians, without exception. This is the Judgment Seat of Christ mentioned in 2 Corinthians 5:10. Christians will not be judged concerning their salvation. That judgment is already passed at the cross where Jesus died and paid the full penalty for the sins of all who believe in Him. God has forgiven all the sins of the believers in Christ, and has

imputed upon them the righteousness of Jesus Christ. But every Christian "shall give account of himself to God" (Romans 14:12). Each Christian's work on earth will be judged. The question: "What have you done with your life on earth for the advancement of God's kingdom and for His glory?" will be asked. What we, as Christians, do for our Lord Jesus Christ and for His sake will be examined. Our works will be "revealed by fire" meaning that they will be severely tried or tested. And if a Christian's work survives the test, he shall receive a reward. But if his work is "burned" meaning that he fails the test, he "shall suffer loss, but he himself shall be saved" (1 Corinthians 3:13-15).

This brings back to our mind the Parable of the Ten Pounds told by our Lord Jesus Christ (Luke 19:11-27). The parable is about a certain nobleman who went into a far country to receive for himself a kingdom, and to return. He called his ten servants and gave them ten pounds, each one a pound. He told them to carry on with his business till he returned. But the citizens of the country hated him. Now the nobleman returned after he had received the kingdom. He called his servants. The first one said that he had carried on business and gained ten more pounds. The nobleman commended him saying, "Well, thou good servant: because thou hast been faithful in a very little, have thou authority over ten cities." The second servant appeared before him. This servant reported that he had gained five more pounds with his pound. The nobleman commended him the same as he did the first servant. The third servant came before him. This servant returned the pound back to his master. He said that he had kept his master's pound safely and had not carried on the business with the pound he had received from him. He went further saying, "I feared thee, because thou art an austere man: thou takest up that thou layedst not down, and reapest that thou didst not sow." The nobleman responded and said to him, "Out of thine own mouth will I judge thee, thou wicked servant. Thou knewest that I was an austere man, taking up that I laid not down, and reaping that I did not sow: wherefore then gavest not thou my money into the bank, that at my coming I might have required mine own with usury?" And the nobleman told his other servants to take the pound, and give it to him who had ten pounds. And our Lord Jesus Christ concludes that "unto every one which hath shall be given; and from him that hath not, even that he hath shall be taken away from him" (Luke 19:26). But those who rejected his rule over them were slain.

The main lesson of the parable is stewardship of the resources and opportunities which the Lord Jesus Christ has given to us to be used for the development of His kingdom in the period before His return. This is a sobering truth. Our Lord Jesus Christ has saved us, and has bestowed upon each of us equal resources and opportunities to serve Him. Question: Are we serving Him in the church? How do we serve Him? Do we serve Him for His glory or for our own glory? Are we serving Him conscientiously and diligently even to make time and marshal our talents so that the work we do is effective and God-honouring?

If we believe that the Bible is true, that Jesus Christ is Lord indeed, and that He gave His life for us, and that He will reward us richly for doing His business well, and that He is coming back; if we believe all these, should we not be serious about serving Him, and serving Him with joy, making any kind of sacrifice to advance His kingdom? "Occupy till I come" says our Lord Jesus Christ. Let us willingly obey Him!

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After Thine Heart

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Music by Daniel Chia

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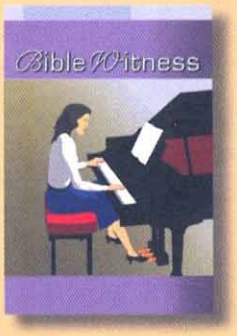

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