

Moments *for* You

Volume 69, Number 2

Theme: Prayer

PRAYER

has divided seas, rolled up flowing rivers,
made flinty rocks gush into fountains,
quenched flames of fire, muzzled lions,
disarmed vipers and poisons,
marshaled the stars against the wicked,
stopped the course of the moon,
arrested the rapid sun in its great race,
burst open iron gates,
recalled souls from eternity,
conquered the strongest devils,
commanded legions of angels down from Heaven.
Prayer brought one man from the bottom of the sea,
and carries the cries of repentant souls
beginning their journey toward Heaven.

What has prayer **not** done?

—The Anchor



WHY PRAY?

“Praying at all times in the Spirit, with all prayer and supplication. To that end, keep alert with all perseverance, making supplication for all the saints” (Ephesians 6:18).

If we stop and examine the weight of these words, the child of God is driven to say, “I must pray, pray, pray. I must put all my energy and all my heart into prayer. Whatever I am doing, I must pray.” Why is constant, persistent, overcoming prayer so needful?

1. There is a devil. He is cunning, he is mighty, he never rests, and he is always plotting the downfall of the child of God. If the believer becomes weak in prayer, the devil will succeed in ensnaring him. This is the thought in the context of Ephesians 6, which describes our spiritual battle and the need for the Christian to take up the armor of God. Paul tells us that effective spiritual warfare requires prayer—constant, persistent, untiring prayer in the Holy Spirit.

2. Prayer is God’s appointed way for obtaining things. One major source of scarcity in our Christian walk is neglect of prayer. James brings this out very forcibly: “You do not have, because you do not ask” (James 4:2). Many Christians are asking, “Why is it I make so little progress in my Christian life?” Often in Christian service we wonder, “Why is it I see so little fruit from my efforts?” God answers us all: “Neglect of prayer. You have not because you ask not.”

3. The apostles regarded prayer as one of the most important parts of their ministry. When the multiplying responsibilities of the early church

crowded in upon them, they recruited helpers so they could “devote ourselves to prayer and to the ministry of the word” (Acts 6:4). Paul, in what he wrote to churches and individuals about praying for them, made it evident that much of his time and strength were given to prayer.

4. Prayer occupied a very prominent place in the earthly life of our Lord. He was not unfamiliar with “rising very early in the morning” (Mark 1:35), or spending “all night ... in prayer to God” (Luke 6:12). The words *pray* and *prayer* are used at least twenty-five times in connection with our Lord in the brief record of His life in the four Gospels, and His praying is mentioned in other places where these words are not used. A man or woman who does not spend much time in prayer cannot properly be called a follower of Jesus Christ.

5. Praying is the most important part of the present ministry of our risen Lord. Christ’s ministry did not close with His death. After Christ accomplished His atoning work, He rose and ascended to the right hand of the Father, where “He always lives to make intercession for them [believers]” (Hebrews 7:25). “Jesus is the one who died—more than that, who was raised—who is at the right hand of God, who indeed is interceding for us” (Romans 8:34). The ministry of intercession (praying for others) is a glorious and mighty ministry, and we can all have a part in it.

Nothing has so impressed me with a sense of the importance of prayer as knowing that it is the principal occupation of my risen Lord. Since I want to have fellowship with Him, I have asked the Father to make me an

intercessor, to make me a man who knows how to pray, and who spends much time in prayer.

—Adapted from *How to Pray* by R. A. Torrey.

CAN YOU SAY, “FATHER”?

That famous example of prayer we often call “The Lord’s Prayer” (Matthew 6:9-13) begins with “Our *Father* in Heaven.” Everything that follows: conversing with Him, praising Him, petitioning Him—these things *all* start by knowing Him as “Father.”

Is God your Father? Are you a child of God? Some people think we are *all* God’s children, but Jesus taught otherwise. He told those who opposed Him that they were children of the *devil* (John 8:44). The Bible goes on to teach that all who have not answered God’s call to repent and put their trust in Jesus are “children of disobedience” upon whom the “wrath of God” will one day fall (Colossians 3:6, KJV).

This raises some interesting questions with regard to prayer. Does God hear the prayers of those who are not His children? How can your prayers be heard by God?

PRAYERS OF THE UNSAVED

Because God is omniscient, He sees and hears *everything*; however, He does not promise to *listen* to or *answer* the prayers of the unsaved. Notice who God takes notice of and listens to: “The eyes of the LORD are toward the *righteous* and His ears toward their cry” (Psalm 34:15).

Most prayers offered up by people who are not God’s children rise no higher than the ceiling. On the other hand, there is *one* prayer of the unsaved that God *always* hears and answers. He has promised that “everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved” (Romans 10:13). When a sinner realizes their

lost condition, turns to God, and cries out for help, He answers that prayer every time!

BECOMING A CHILD OF GOD

To come into God’s family requires a spiritual birth. Jesus said “You must be born again” (John 3:7). By nature, all people are “dead in trespasses and sins,” and our only relationship with God is as “strangers” who are “far off” (Ephesians 2:1,12-13). But God’s Son, Jesus Christ, opened the way for us to be brought into a relationship with God when He willingly laid down His life as the sacrifice and payment for our sin.

How can you be washed clean and made new in God’s sight? Read this carefully: “by grace you have been saved through faith” (Ephesians 2:8). God, in His grace, rescues us when we put our trust in Jesus Christ. Salvation is a gift—bought and paid for by Jesus—which God gives to all who see their need of it and look to Him in faith.

—T. Don Johnson

THE HEART OF PRAYER

God, who is a God of law and order, has set certain conditions on His promise to hear and answer our prayers. What kind of heart must we have for God to hear us?

A Pure Heart: “If I had cherished iniquity in my heart, the Lord would not have listened” (Psalm 66:18). This means that the person who continually practices sin and who has in their heart a purpose to commit sin, and who clings to sin, has no claim upon the ear of God. The only prayer such a person can expect God to hear is one of repentance.

An Unselfish Heart: “You ask and do not receive, because you ask wrongly, to spend it on your passions” (James 4:3). We have no right to ask God for something that only fulfills our own

desires or merely brings us personal satisfaction.

A Humble Heart: *"If My people who are called by My name humble themselves, and pray and seek My face and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven" (2 Chronicles 7:14).* God hates pride, but He loves humility. God says that He hears those who are humble.

A Yielded Heart: *"If we ask anything according to His will He hears us" (1 John 5:14).* A heart yielded to God's will is certainly a heart that is pure and unselfish. The life in which the will of God is foremost is a life which seeks God's glory, and one which will experience His blessings.

A Believing Heart: *"Whatever you ask in prayer, you will receive, if you have faith" (Matthew 21:22).* Nowhere does God promise to answer prayer offered without faith. The Bible teaches that a believing heart is essential if we are to access Him with our petitions.

Christ's Heart: *"Whatever you ask in My name, this I will do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son" (John 14:13).* We are saved only through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. Only through His blood are sins washed away, and only in Him do we become children of God. How proper, therefore, that our prayers to our Father should be in the Name and for the sake of Jesus Christ. Praying "in the Name of Jesus" simply means praying with Christ's interests in mind—asking the Father for the things that touch the heart of Christ. In Christ's Name we may bring our petitions to our Heavenly Father, and "He who did not spare His own Son but gave Him up for us all, how will He not also with Him graciously give us all things?" (Romans 8:32).

—Adapted from *As The Small Rain*.

NECESSITY OF PRAYER

It is interesting to see how much of the Bible is occupied with the subject of prayer, either in providing examples, enforcing precepts, or proclaiming promises. We scarcely open the Bible before we read, "At that time people began to call upon the name of the LORD" (Genesis 4:26). Then, just as we are about to close the volume, the "Amen" of an earnest supplication meets our ear (Revelation 22:21). In God's word we find a wrestling Jacob, a Daniel who prayed three times a day, and a David who with all his heart called upon his God. On the mountain we see Elijah, and in the dungeon Paul and Silas. We have multitudes of commands, and myriads of promises.

All of this demonstrates the sacred importance and necessity of prayer. We may be certain that whatever God has made prominent in His word, He intended to be conspicuous in our lives. If He has said much about prayer, it is because He knows how much we need it. So deep are our necessities, that until we are in Heaven we must not cease to pray. A prayerless soul is a Christless soul. Prayer is the simple cry of the new Christian, the shout of the fighting believer, and the sacred whisper of the dying saint falling asleep in Jesus. It is the breath, the comfort, the strength, and the honor of a Christian.

Pray that this year you may be holy, humble, zealous, and patient; that you may have closer communion with Christ, entering more frequently into communion with Him. Pray that you may be an example and a blessing unto others, and that you may live more to the glory of your Master. The motto for this year must be, "Continue in prayer."—C. H. Spurgeon

CONFESSION

“Search me, O God, and know my heart! Try me and know my thoughts! And see if there be any grievous way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting!” (Psalm 139:23-24).

One element in true prayer is confession. I do not want Christian readers to think I am talking to the unsaved. I think we, as Christians, have a good many sins to confess.

If you go back to the Scripture records, you will find that the men who lived nearest to God, and had the most power with Him, were those who confessed their sins and failures. Job was no doubt a holy man, yet he had to fall in the dust and confess his sins. When Isaiah saw the purity and holiness of God, he beheld himself in his true light, and he exclaimed, “Woe is me! For I am lost; for I am a man of unclean lips” (Isa. 6:5). You will notice that when Daniel got that wonderful answer to prayer, he was confessing his sin (Daniel 9). It was when David said, “I have sinned!” that God dealt in mercy with him (2 Samuel 12:13).

If we are regarding iniquity in our hearts, or living on a mere empty profession, we have no claim to expect that our prayers will be answered. It is well for us to search our hearts, and find out why it is that our prayers are not answered.

—From *Prevailing Prayer* by D. L. Moody.

TWO-WAY COMMUNICATION

Have you ever been stuck in a conversation with someone who talks only about themselves? Imagine what it must be like for our heavenly Father to listen to our prayers during our devotional time. We may have read a portion of His word, but then in prayer we swiftly shift focus exclusively to our needs. We ask for help

in solving a problem, providing for a financial need, or healing a physical ailment. But the passage we’ve just read doesn’t even enter into our prayers. What God has just said to us goes largely unacknowledged.

Apparently the writer of Psalm 119 did not have this perspective. Instead, he sought God’s help in understanding the word: “Open my eyes,” he said, “that I may behold wondrous things out of Your law” (v. 18). And as he prayed he expressed how he treasured God’s word, calling it his “delight” (v. 24).

Let’s develop a discipline of praying our response to the word. It just might transform our devotional time. Bible reading and prayer should reflect a two-way communication. Listen to God’s word, then pray about what you’ve heard.

—Dennis Fisher, *Our Daily Bread*

WORK AND PRAYER

Here is the great secret of success. Work with all your might, but trust not in the least in your work. Pray with all your might for the blessing of God, but work at the same time with all diligence, with all patience, with all perseverance. Pray then, and work. Work and pray. And still again pray, and then work. And so on all the days of your life. The result will surely be abundant blessing. Whether you see much fruit or little fruit, such kind of service will be blessed. —George Müller

When we rely upon organization, we get what organization can do. When we rely upon education, we get what education can do. When we rely upon eloquence, we get what eloquence can do. But when we rely upon prayer, we get what God can do.

—A.C. Dixon

PEOPLE OF PRAYER

"Epaphras, who is one of you, a servant of Christ Jesus, greets you, always struggling on your behalf in his prayers" (Colossians 4:12).

We are thankful for preachers, pastors, teachers, and missionaries; but we also need men and women of prayer, those who minister like Epaphras. Without a spirit of fervent, agonizing, persevering prayer, no spiritual work can prosper.

The precious labors of the prayer warrior demand no special gift, no peculiar talent, and no preeminent mental abilities. A Christian may not have the ability to preach, teach, write, or travel; but *every Christian can pray*. What we need in the church is a real spirit of prayer, a spirit that enters into the present need of the church and bears that need up to God in persevering, fervent, believing intercession at all times, and in all circumstances. —C.H. Mackintosh

SPIRITUAL BREATH

Paul's command in 1 Thessalonians 5:17 to "pray without ceasing" can be confusing. Obviously, it cannot mean we are to be in a head-bowed, eyes-closed posture all day long. Paul is not referring to non-stop talking, but rather an attitude of God-consciousness and God-surrender that we carry with us all the time. Every waking moment is to be lived in an awareness that God is with us and that He is actively involved and engaged in our thoughts and actions.

When our thoughts turn to worry, fear, discouragement, and anger, we are to consciously and quickly turn every thought into prayer and every prayer into thanksgiving. In his letter to the Philippians, Paul commands us to stop being anxious and instead, "in

everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God" (Philippians 4:6). He taught the believers at Colossae to "continue steadfastly in prayer, being watchful in it with thanksgiving" (Colossians 4:2). Paul exhorted the Ephesian believers to see prayer as a weapon to use in fighting spiritual battles (Ephesians 6:18). As we go through the day, prayer should be our first response to every fearful situation, every anxious thought, and every challenge we encounter. A lack of prayer will cause us to depend on ourselves instead of depending on God's grace. Unceasing prayer is, in essence, continual dependence upon and communion with the Father.

For Christians, prayer should be like breathing. Most of the time, we do not have to think about breathing: it just happens. And when we breathe, atmospheric pressure helps the air to flow into our lungs. Similarly, when we are born into the family of God, we enter into a spiritual atmosphere where God's presence and grace exert pressure, or influence, on our lives. Prayer is the normal response to that pressure. As believers, we have all entered the divine atmosphere to breathe the air of prayer.

Unfortunately, many believers hold their "spiritual breath" for long periods, thinking brief moments with God are sufficient to allow them to survive. Such restricting of their spiritual intake is usually caused by an awareness of unconfessed sin, or a lack of acknowledging our proper dependence upon God. The fact is that for a believer to be fully functional, they must be continually in the presence of God, constantly breathing the soul-nourishing blessing of prayer.

When life is easy, many Christians lose the attitude of depending on

God's grace, and instead presume there is little need for prayer. We can become satisfied with physical blessings and have little desire for spiritual ones. And in our Christian service, when programs, methods, and money produce impressive results, there is an inclination to confuse human success with divine blessing. When that happens, passionate longing for God and yearning for His help will be missing. Continual, persistent, incessant prayer is an essential part of Christian living and flows out of humility and dependence on God.

After long periods of physical inactivity, we might find that simply climbing a flight of stairs makes us short of breath. If our spiritual breath has grown weak, it's time to exercise our right to approach the throne of grace at every opportunity so we can fulfill Paul's command to "pray without ceasing."

—Adapted from GotQuestions.org

PRAYERLESSNESS

A Christian overheard several co-workers having a discussion in which some very harsh and cruel things were said about Christians. When he could stand it no longer, he said, "I admit there are some hypocrites in the church, but most of us are sincere believers."

Turning their attention to him, they proceeded to ask him whether or not he truly believed that all unsaved people were destined for an eternity in Hell. "Yes," he replied. Then they asked whether or not he believed God truly answers prayer. "Yes, I do," he declared confidently. "Then tell us: during the years that we have worked together, how many nights have you spent in prayer for our salvation? How much time have you spent in prayer for us *this week*?"

The Christian hung his head in shame, realizing that his actions were not living up to his beliefs and profession. What about you? Are you guilty of the sin of prayerlessness? Do you lightly promise others that you will pray for them and about their circumstances, and then forget as soon as the words have left your lips?

—Robert A. Laidlaw, adapted

PRAYING THE PROMISES

The book of Psalms records many sermons King David preached to himself during difficult times. Those sermons focused his thoughts on truth and positioned him to experience God's power. Like David, when we pray God's promises, we are telling Him we trust Him to keep His word. Here are ten prayers of promise:

Lord, You promise never to leave me alone nor to abandon me in my time of need. Even when I can't feel Your presence, I know You are near. Your promises are true. Thank You for Your faithfulness. Lord, teach my heart to rest in Your presence and not to be afraid or anxious. I will trust in You. (See Deuteronomy 31:6; Hebrews 13:5.)

Lord, You promise to work all things together for the good of those who love You. I know that You are at work in my life. No matter how I feel or what troubles I face, You are working things out for my good. Thank You for being a sovereign God who sees the end from the beginning and uses even painful things to bring about good. (See Romans 8:28.)

Lord, You have promised to prepare an eternal home for me in Heaven where sin and sickness and sorrow don't exist. I can't wait to be there, Lord! Thank You for my future hope. Thank You that I can rejoice despite the circumstances in

this world. Because I know it is just the beginning, I can look beyond this life. Thank You for trusting me with these momentary afflictions on earth, which are preparing for me an eternal weight of glory. Thank You for the hope I have in Jesus. (See Revelation 21:4; 2 Corinthians 4:17-18.)

Lord, You promise to forgive me and to cleanse me from unrighteousness if I confess my sins to You. You are always faithful to forgive—no matter what I've done. Thank You for accepting my repentance. I confess my sins, and I trust You to forgive them. Thank You for allowing me to walk in the freedom of Your forgiveness. (See John 1:12; Psalm 51:17.)

Lord, You promise to fight for me. I stand still before You, acknowledging that You are God, You are in control, and You are all-powerful. Thank You for Your protection. Thank You for Your peace that guards my heart and mind as I trust in You. Thank You for upholding Your promises. (See Exodus 14:14; Philippians 4:7.)

Lord, You promise to supply wisdom—all I must do is ask. So now, Lord, I ask for Your wisdom, knowing that You will provide it. Thank You for giving out of Your abundance, and not according to what I deserve. Thank You, Lord, for Your unfailing promises! (See James 1:5; John 14:13-14.)

Lord, You promise to accomplish Your purposes through the Bible. As I pray for [a specific person or circumstance], I trust that Your word will perform its renewing work. Your word is powerful! It teaches what is true and exposes errors. Lord, help me to understand Your truth and equip me for every good work. (See Isaiah 55:11; 2 Timothy 3:16-17.)

Lord, You promise to enact justice. One day, Your truth will be pro-

claimed throughout the world. When the time is right, You will destroy evil forever. I cry out to You as the great Judge who upholds justice and mercy. God, I trust You to avenge the evil that has touched my life. Thank You that final justice is not my responsibility. I will strive to live at peace with everyone, knowing vengeance is Yours. Lord, I trust Your timing, Your power, and Your promises. (See Psalm 37:8-9; Romans 12:19.)

Lord, You promise to know me intimately. You know the number of hairs on my head. You hold each of my tears in a jar. You know my secrets. You know me better than anyone—better than I know myself! I trust You with all that I am. Lord, will You help me to understand truth? Guide me. Remind me who I am. Give me rest in the knowledge that I am Your child. (See Matthew 10:30; Psalm 56:8; Psalm 44:21.)

Lord, You promise to give me strength. You supply limitless power to the weak, and You increase the strength of those who need it. Thank You for renewing my strength each day as I trust in You. Lord, teach me to wait on You. Lift me up on the wings of eagles so that I can soar above my circumstances. My to-do list is long, and my trials are great, but You give me strength. You have no rival, no equal. You are the Creator of Heaven and earth. Nothing is too much for You! (See Isaiah 40:28-31.)

God will keep every promise He has ever made: "I am watching over My word to perform it" (Jeremiah 1:12). God is unchanging and His word cannot be broken. The Bible says, "Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever" (Hebrews 13:8). May we live each day of our lives in the power of His promises!

—Adapted from DavidJeremiah.org