

P R A Y I N G F O R T H E W O R L D

UNDERSTANDING GOD'S HEART
FOR THE NATIONS

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60 UNDATED DEVOTIONS

 **CONTENTS**

EDITOR'S FOREWORD	7
FOREWORD	8
INTRODUCTION	10
EFFECTIVE PRAYER by J. Oswald Sanders	13
THE PRAYER OF FAITH by James O. Fraser	37
PRAYER TOOLS by Will Bruce	59
ABOUT THE AUTHORS	105



EDITOR'S FOREWORD

This book combines the writings of four mighty men of God. Each shares insights from a life given to prayer and each reveals a heart for the lost. In order to make this already popular book more widely useful, it has been rearranged to make it possible to use it as a devotional. Since J. Hudson Taylor's writings were already in devotional format, they have been dispersed throughout the book, one brief reflection at the end of each section. Besides using Hudson Taylor's *When You Pray* devotional, we have also been able to add portions from five other of his works, *Dwelling In Him*, *Fruit Bearing*, *God's Fellow Workers*, *God's Guiding Hand* and *Great Is Thy Faithfulness*.

In order to keep this book helpful for those who do not want to use it as a devotional, the three sections by Sanders, Fraser and Bruce have been kept in their original order. I believe this is the best possible order as it moves the reader from Insight (Sanders) to Experience (Fraser) to Application (Bruce).

Whether you decide to use this as a devotional or just read it through as you would any book, I believe you will want to keep it on hand with your Bible after you are done and use it for years to come.

Prayer puzzles most of us. We find it very difficult to define. Stop and think for a moment about how you would define it, and you will see how hard it is. Part of the mystery is that God is neither ignorant, unwilling nor impotent, and therefore he does not need us to intercede on behalf of other men. He knows not only their needs, but also what is best for them. Yet at the same time he teaches us to pray.

The popular idea of prayer is that it is a means of making God do what we want done. This may be a crude and somewhat pagan concept, but it is by no means dead in Christian circles. The natural man has an inbuilt understanding of God, and his concept of prayer is based on the thought of God being hostile or friendly according to how he is treated. If man fulfils certain conditions, he expects God to treat him in a friendly way and to conform his circumstances or those of others to his own desires. Man's nature is basically unchanged: it centres everything around himself. The fact that prayer is a spiritual exercise by no means excludes self-interest and self-centredness. What we want done may even be what we conceive to be God's work, and yet it may still be based on our desires rather on his will. Self-centredness dies hard.

As I have studied the nature of prayer in the New Testament, it seems to me that there are two related aspects of it which affect each other very much. First of all comes prayer that is related to our own concept and personal relationship to God. Worship, adoration, praise, confession and communion all come under this heading. For instance, our worship and the form it takes depend very much on what we think of God and how we are related to him. The second aspect is related to getting something done that affects our circumstances or the lives and circumstances of others. Supplication and thanksgiving come under this heading. The whole purpose of supplication, from our point of view, is that God might so intervene, as either to alter circumstances in some way, or alter the person's reaction to these circumstances. When this happens, we thank God for answering prayer.

The more I study the New Testament, the more I am convinced that the effectiveness of the second kind of praying flows out of the depth of reality in the first kind of praying. Our intercession is directly related to our worship of and communion with God. This means that the effectiveness of our intercession is directly related to our own spiritual life in relation to God and to our own personal prayer life.

When we look at the life of the Lord, we find these related aspects of prayer perfectly balanced. Indeed, intercession without a close relationship to God himself and a daily walk with him can degenerate into mere words.

Without a prayer-cultivated relationship with God we are liable to be doing our own work in our own way and asking God to help and bless, and that fundamentally is an un-Christian way of looking at God and prayer. Prayer is the means of aligning our will with the will of God, of so communing with him that we not only know what he wants done but are also open to guidance and responsiveness in obedience, even at considerable cost.

We learn best by doing. Prayer is no exception to the rule. Prayer is always the first step in involvement, but rarely the last, for prayer brings us into close contact with the will of God and primarily is intended to bring our wills into line with his. That is why prayer is ultimately so practical. God's concern covers the whole wide world, not just our part of it, nor even that other part in which we may have a particular interest. Prayer for all God's people identifies our outlook with his, for God loves the world. Russia, China, South America, Europe and Africa claim prayers of God's people as urgently as anywhere else. Their battle is ours too.

Denis Lane

Prayer is a paradox. No spiritual exercise is such a blend of the complex and the simple. It is the simplest form of speech infant lips can try yet the most sublime strains that reach the Majesty on high. It is as appropriate to the aged philosopher as to the little child. It is the outburst of a moment and the attitude of a lifetime. It is the expression of the rest of faith and of the fight of faith. It is an agony and an ecstasy. It is submissive and yet importunate. In the same moment it lays hold of God and binds the devil. It can be focused on a single objective and it can roam the world. It can be abject confession and rapt adoration. It invests puny man with a sort of omnipotence. Small wonder, then, that even its greatest exponent and example was forced to admit, 'We do not know what we ought to pray for.' But he was swift to add, 'The Spirit himself intercedes for us with groans that words cannot express. And he who searches our hearts knows the mind of the Spirit, *because the Spirit intercedes for the saints in accordance with God's will.*' (Romans 8:26–27, emphasis added).

Our Lord left us in no doubt of the part prayer was to play in the missionary enterprise. He clearly placed it on a prayer basis in the memorable words: 'The harvest is plentiful but the workers are few. *Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field*' (Matthew 9:37–38). Paul and Barnabas set out on the first missionary journey to the accompaniment of prayer and fasting (see Acts 13:2–4). Ever since, the missionary cause has advanced upon its knees. Where prayer has been lukewarm, it has languished.

Isn't it strange that in spite of our conviction of the privilege and necessity of praying, we are all plagued with a subtle aversion to it? We do not naturally delight in drawing near to God. We pay lip-service to its value and potency and yet so often fail to pray. 'When I go to pray,' confessed one eminent Christian, 'I find my heart is so loath to go to God, and when it is with him so loath to stay.' It is here that self-discipline comes in. 'When thou feelest most indisposed to pray,' counseled an old divine, 'yield not to it. But strive and endeavor to pray even when thou thinkest thou canst not pray.' Here is an area in which we can avail ourselves of the Spirit's promised assistance in our weakness.

Intercessory prayer will take time, but could hours be more strategically spent? Time is a commodity of which there seems to be a universal and chronic shortage. Lack of time is a much overworked excuse for neglect of duty. And yet, strangely enough, even in the midst of an exacting routine we always manage to find time for all we urgently want to do. In reality, the fundamental problem lies not in the time factor, but in the realm of will and desire. We each have all the time there is, and we each choose our own priorities. We automatically place first that which

we consider most important. If prayer is meagre it is because we consider it supplemental, not fundamental. To our Lord it was not a reluctant addendum, but a fundamental necessity. The time we spend in prayer will depend on the way we allocate our priorities. If we share Christ's view of the indispensability of prayer, we will somehow make time for it.

That prayer in one aspect is spiritual warfare is clearly taught in Scripture. 'Put on the full armour of God so that you can take your stand against the devil's schemes. For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms. And pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests. With this in mind, be alert and always keep on praying for all the saints' (Ephesians 6:11–12, 18). In this aspect of prayer, three and not two are involved. Between God and the devil, the god of this world, stands the praying man. Though pitifully weak in himself, he occupies a strategic role in this truceless warfare. His power and authority as he battles in faith are not inherent, but are his through his union with the Victor of Calvary.

Throughout the Gospels, Jesus is seen occupied not so much with the wicked men and evil conditions he confronted, as with the forces of evil behind them. In the words of well-meaning Peter, in the treachery of the traitorous Judas, Jesus detected the black hand of Satan. 'Get behind me, Satan,' he said to Peter (Matthew 16:23). Behind the hideous idol the missionary sees the foul spirit which enslaves the devotee. We see souls bound in sin, but our concern in prayer should be not only to pray for *them*, but also to pray *against Satan* who holds them captive. He must be made to relax his hold on them, and only the power of Christ's victory, appropriated and applied through the prayer of faith, can achieve this. Jesus dealt with the cause, not the effect, and if we are to pray effectively we must follow the same pattern.

In a graphic illustration our Lord likened Satan to a well-armed strong man who kept his palace in peace. Before he could be dislodged and his captives liberated, Jesus said he must first be bound. Only then could the rescue be effected (see Matthew 12:28–29; Luke 11:21–22). 'We may be spiritual and prayerful, courageous and determined,' writes Arthur Wallis, 'we may even succeed in breaking into the strong man's house, but if we have not learned the secret of prayer warfare and how to bind the strong man, he will very likely return in fury and drive us out. Such a counter-attack can have a devastating effect on those who have been praying and labouring hopefully, and it can also supply opposers with the ammunition they require.'

What does it mean to 'bind the strong man,' if not to restrain his activity by appealing to the conquering power of him who was manifested to destroy – render inoperative, powerless – the works of the devil? (See 1 John 3:8). And how can this be done but by the prayer of faith, which lays hold of the victory of Calvary and believes for its manifestation in the situation on which prayer is being focused? Let us not reverse the Lord's order – 'first bind ... then spoil' – and still expect to effect the rescue without neutralising the Adversary. Let us confidently accept our divine-given authority and exercise it. 'I have given you authority ... to overcome all the power of the enemy' (Luke 10:19). Of what value is this delegation of authority if the authority is not exercised?

'Satan dreads nothing but prayer', wrote Samuel Chadwick. 'His one concern is to keep the saints from praying. He fears nothing from prayerless studies, prayerless work, prayerless religion. He laughs at our toil, mocks our wisdom, but trembles when we pray.'

In the history of OMF International, the tide in many a crisis has turned when its workers have met the situation with prayer and fasting. Many a stubborn city has opened, many an intransigent heart has yielded, many a financial need has been supplied and many a delicate personal difficulty has been resolved by this means. While fasting is always optional in the New Testament, the record indicates that it was resorted to in the face of special temptation (see Matthew 4:2); where there was a yearning after a closer walk with God (see 1 Corinthians 7:5); where there was deep concern for evangelising the regions beyond (see Acts 13:1–3); where there was spiritual travail for the development of a church (see Acts 14:21–23); and where some stubborn situation had yielded to no other method (see Matthew 17:21). There is still a place for prayer and fasting, though not on legalistic grounds.

The thumbnail studies in this booklet suggest some of the principles underlying effective prayer, and illustrate these principles from the lives of praying men and women of Bible times. They are presented in this form in the hope that they may prove meaningful and helpful in the hour of prayer.

J. Oswald Sanders

EFFECTIVE PRAYER

J. Oswald Sanders

'God ... calls things that are not as though they were.' Romans 4:17

'Have faith in God.' Mark 11:22

It appears that God acted on the principle of faith in the creation of the world. When he said to non-existent light, 'Let there be light,' there was light. It is this same kind of creative faith we are called on to exercise, the very faith of God. 'Now faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see' (Hebrews 11:1), and this conception opens to us a limited realm of possibility.

The noted scientist Dr. Alexis Carrel writes: 'Prayer is a force as real as terrestrial gravity ... it is the only power in the world that seems to overcome the so-called laws of nature.' In prayer, God places in our hands a kind of omnipotence, enabling us to overcome even unchangeable natural law. Hear the affirmation of the Master, 'Therefore, I tell you, whatever you ask for in prayer, believe you have received it and it will be yours' (Mark 11:24). And if that is not enough to kindle expectation and stimulate faith, consider this: 'If two of you on earth agree about anything you ask for, it will be done for you by my Father in heaven' (Matthew 18:19).

Strangely enough, the human heart is so beset by unbelief that these staggering and all-inclusive promises – 'whatever,' "anything" – instead of stimulating our faith tend to paralyse it. The mind busily sets to work to conjure up reasons why these universal words can't mean exactly what they say. But they *do* mean exactly what they say.

Unbelief has always shackled omnipotence. Faith releases its might. And faith is not credulity, it is confidence. It rests its weight on the divine guarantee of the infallible Word. It joyously believes that to the God who 'calls things that are not as though they were,' nothing is impossible.

REFLECTION

'Faith is being sure of what we hope for.'
Hebrews 11:1

'Faith is the substance of things hoped for,' and not mere shadow. It is not less than sight, but more. Sight only shows the outward forms of things; faith gives the substance. You can rest on substance, feed on substance. Christ dwelling in the heart by faith is power indeed.

'Pray continually.' 1 Thessalonians 5:17

Was this exhortation to the Christians at Thessalonica merely a counsel of perfection? Did Paul really consider it an attainable ideal to 'pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests'? (Ephesians 6:18).

Undoubtedly to him this was both a glorious possibility and an actual experience. 'I remember you in my prayers at all times,' he wrote (Romans 1:10). 'Night and day we pray most earnestly' (1 Thessalonians 3:10). 'Pray the Spirit on all occasions' (Ephesians 6:18). 'Be always on the watch and pray' (Luke 21:36). On God's side, Paul's experience of unceasing prayer sprang from the working of the Spirit of prayer within him. His own part was the response of a sensitive and willing spirit. Nor did he limit himself to formal seasons of prayer. Those informal, involuntary, bursts of prayer native to the praying heart were normal for him. Charles H. Spurgeon once said that for years he had not known a half-hour in which he had not consciously prayed. To him, through disciplined habit, unceasing prayer had become almost instinctive to him, as natural as breathing. To the Spirit-indwelt heart every occurrence, every occasion, becomes the inspiration of prayer.

But prayer is not an exercise of the conscious mind alone. Henry Moorhouse, the great evangelist of a past generation, frequently prayed aloud in his sleep. 'I sleep, but my heart waketh' (see Song of Songs 5:2, κην), was true of him. Even in sleep, the ever-burning fire of the Holy Spirit within caused the fragrant incense of prayer to ascend from the altar of his heart.

It is our privilege to form this blessed habit, to find in God a friend always within call, to use everything as an occasion for prayer. Through intimacy and obedience we may know the Holy Spirit's unceasing intercession within us (see Romans 8:27), just as on high our great high priest never ceases interceding for us (see Hebrews 7:25).

REFLECTION

'We will give ... our attention to prayer.'
Acts 6:4

Shall we not, each one of us, determine to labour more in prayer and cultivate more intimate communion with God by his help, thinking less of what we do and more of what he does? Then he will in actual deed be glorified in and through us!

'Have faith in God.' Mark 11:22

It is easy to become a fatalist in regard to prayer. It is easier to see unanswered prayer as the will of God than to deliberately reason out the causes of defeat. But should we be less honest in our approach to this perplexing problem than a merchant to his adverse balance sheet? Perhaps our reluctance to analyse our failures in prayer is rooted in a mistaken concern for God's honour. God is more honoured when we ruthlessly face our failure and diligently search for its cause than when we piously ignore it.

The underlying reason for every unanswered prayer is that in some way we have asked amiss (see James 4:3). Could it be we have substituted faith in prayer for faith in God? Nowhere are we exhorted to have faith in *prayer*, but we are counselled: 'Have faith in God' (Mark 11:22). Faced with this problem the disciples asked 'Why couldn't we?' 'Because you have so little faith', the master replied (see Matthew 17:19–20). An analysis of our prayers might bring about the disconcerting discovery that many are not the prayer of faith at all, only the prayer of hope, or even of despair. We earnestly hope they will

be answered, but have no unshakable assurance that they will. However, God has agreed to answer only the prayer of faith. 'Whatever you ask for in prayer, believe that you have received it, and it will be yours' (Mark 11:24). Don't think the translator got his tenses wrong! It is we who have got our attitude wrong!

Another prolific cause of defeat in the prayer life is a secret sympathy with sin. 'If I regard' – cling to – 'iniquity in my heart, the Lord will not hear me.' So let us search out and correct the causes of our unanswered petitions.

REFLECTION

'How will he not ... graciously give us all things?' Romans 8:32

We never have to wait for God's giving. God has already 'blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ.' We may reverently say, he has nothing more to give for he has given his all. Yet we may be unable to receive all he has given if the self-life is filling to some extent our hearts and lives.

'I have given you authority ... to overcome all the power of the enemy.' Luke 10:19

The missionary is engaged in a spiritual warfare against intangible and spiritual foes. For such a conflict only spiritual weapons are adequate, but they are 'mighty through God to the pulling down of strongholds' 2 Corinthians 10:4, κJV). Of these the most potent is the weapon of 'all prayer' (Ephesians 6:18), and it can be wielded by others on the missionary's behalf.

To his seventy eager disciples the Lord to whom 'all authority in heaven and on earth' had been given (Matthew 28:18) said, 'I have given you authority ... to overcome all the power of the enemy' (Luke 10:19). With this affirmation, he linked, 'I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven.' The unmistakable inference was that, through exercising their delegated authority, they too would see the overthrow of Satan in their sphere of responsibility. Nor were they disappointed. 'Lord, even the demons submit to us in your name', the radiant missionaries reported (Luke 10:17).

This promised authority was not withdrawn, but when they lost vital faith in Christ's promise his disciples were powerless to deliver a demon-possessed boy (see Matthew 17:19). They were paralysed by their own unbelief. After his resurrection the

Master once again affirmed their privilege. 'In my name' – my authority – 'they will drive out demons' (Mark 16:17).

In this way, we have been given this same spiritual authority today over Satan's power, to be exercised through prayer. Christ, by his death and victorious resurrection, has 'destroyed' – rendered powerless – the devil. As members of his body, united by a living faith, we may participate in his victory, not only for ourselves, but on behalf of those in distant lands. His triumph becomes ours. As we pray, making use of Christ's authority so clearly delegated to us, we can be instrumental in binding 'the strong man' in any given situation. The missionary can then 'spoil his goods'.

REFLECTION

'If you have faith as small as a mustard seed ...' Matthew 17:20

Though your faith were small as a grain of mustard seed it would be enough to move mountains. We need a faith that rests on a great God, and that expects him to keep his own word and to do just as he has promised.

'You help us by your prayers.'
2 Corinthians 1:11

Join me in my struggle by praying to God for me' the great missionary apostle pleaded (Romans 15:30). In spite of his great gifts of nature and of grace, we search in vain for any sign of conscious adequacy. 'Who is equal to such a task?' Paul asks (2 Corinthians 2:16). Small wonder if his weaker successors crave the intercession of God's people. But what shall we ask God for them?

A veteran missionary facing the fierce opposition of the Adversary in the South Seas wrote, 'There is nothing more profitable, more priceless, that you can ask for us than that in spite of physical weariness, frequent infirmities and the care of multiplying converts, we may be enabled to remain on our knees. For there is a praying in detail to be done if the infant churches are to grow and prosper.' This is a key subject for intercession. Our prayers can make the prayers of our missionary friends especially potent and prevailing.

Note in these verses the juxtaposition of the hard-pressed missionary's extremity and his deliverance. 'We were under great pressure, for beyond our ability to endure ... but [God] has delivered us from such a deadly peril ... as you help us by your prayers' (2 Corinthians 1:8-11). Our intercession may be instrumental

in delivering missionaries from 'wicked and evil men' (2 Thessalonians 3:2). Closed doors can be made to swing open on their unwilling hinges as we lay hold of God (Col. 4:2).

Though preaching presented no difficulty to Paul, he entreated the Ephesians, 'Pray also for me, that whenever I open my mouth, words may be given me so that I will fearlessly make known the mystery of the gospel' (Ephesians 6:19).

Joshua prevailed in the conflict in the valley only while Moses' hands were raised to heaven. When they grew slack and fell, Amalek prevailed. We can have the strategic upholding ministry of Aaron and Hur.

REFLECTION

'God's fellow workers.'
2 Corinthians 6:1

I so want you to realise this principle of working with God and asking him for everything. If the work is at the command of God, then we can go to him in full confidence for workers; and when God gives the workers, we can go to him for means to supply their needs.

'My Father will give you whatever you ask in my name. He will give it to you.'
John 16:23

How tame and insipid is much modern praying – a respectable request for a minimum expenditure and exhibition of divine power. Seldom do our petitions rise above the level of natural thought or previous experience. Do we ever dare to pray for the unprecedented? The whole atmosphere of the age tends to make us minimize what we can expect of God. Yet his Word reveals that the extent of legitimate expectation is literally without limits.

As though to anticipate our reluctance to ask audaciously, God employs every universal term in our language in his promises to the praying soul. Here they are: Whatever, wherever, whenever, whoever, all, any, every. Take one such promise. 'My Father will give you whatever you ask in my name' (John 16:23). Trace the other words in their relation to prayer and note how they encourage large petitions. It has been said that God's only limitation and condition of prayer is found in the character of the one who prays – 'According to your faith will it be done to you' (Matthew 9:29).

God delights to respond to daring prayer. How quickly he responded to the audacity of the Syrophenician

woman though she had no right to claim an answer. He encourages us to ask as freely for the impossible as for the possible. To him all difficulties are the same size – less than himself. Because this was so Jesus said, 'If you have faith as small as a mustard seed, you can say to this mountain, "Move from here to there" and it will move. Nothing will be impossible for you' (Matthew 17:20). In the parallel passage, it is a tree and not a mighty mountain. But audacious prayer is no more dismayed by a mountain than a tree, since 'everything is possible for him who believes' (Mark 9:23).

REFLECTION

'He who promised is faithful.'
Hebrews 10:23

If any of you were offered a Bank of England note, whether for five pounds or for five thousand pounds, you would never doubt the value of it. You would take the words printed on it as sure. And are not the words printed in this book (the Bible), as sure? No part of the book is unworthy of our belief. It is either God's word or it is not.

'But the church was earnestly praying to God ...' Acts 12:5

The fact that unity gives birth to strength is a principle of grace as well as of nature. A number of Christians uniting in prayer for a given person or objective brings special power into operation. Their unison demonstrates that oneness which God delights to see and acknowledge (John 17:11). Both scripture and contemporary experience indicate there is a cumulative power in united praying. Faith is infectious, and infection spreads where numbers congregate. Unbelief thrives more readily in isolation. A fire can be kindled with a single stick only with great difficulty.

Our Lord suggested the intensification of prayer force in united praying when he said, 'If two of you on earth agree about anything you ask for, it will be done for you' (Matthew 18:19). At a united prayer meeting the mighty power of Pentecost was unleashed (see Acts 2:1-2). When the believers 'raised their voices together in prayer to God' the place was shaken (Acts 4:24, 31). The prayer of the whole church secured

Peter's release (see Acts 12:5). The missionary enterprise had its birth in a united prayer meeting of church leaders (see Acts 13:1-4).

The effective fervent prayer of a righteous man can accomplish much. But scripture and experience combine to teach that the united prayers of many righteous accomplish still more.

REFLECTION

'They all joined together constantly in prayer.' Acts 1:14

Not many days after this, in answer to united and continued prayer, the Holy Spirit did come upon them, and they were all filled ... since the days before Pentecost, has the whole church ever put aside every other work, and waited on God for ten days, that that power might be manifested? We have given too much attention to method and to machinery and to resources, and too little to the source of power.

'They should always pray and not give up.' Luke 18:1

Our Lord taught his disciples by contrast as well as by comparison. Contrary to what may superficially appear to be the teaching of two parables recorded in Luke's Gospel, God is neither a cranky neighbour unwilling to get up to grant our requests (see Luke 11:5), nor is he a greedy judge dispensing reluctant justice (see Luke 18:7). He is illustrating one of the secrets of prevailing prayer. If an ungenerous neighbour can in the end be coerced by his friend's shameless persistence (the very word used) into granting his request, how much more will their heavenly Father give them what they need? If an unjust judge can be badgered into giving justice to a wronged widow simply because he is wearied to death with her appeals, how much more will God respond to the urgent cries of his children?

Half-hearted asking comes away empty-handed. Lukewarmness in prayer, as in everything else, is revolting to God. Shameless persistence, an urgency that will not be denied, returns with the desired favour in its hands. Shameless asking brought the petitioning friend as many loaves as he needed. His first 'asking' met with

curt refusal. Then he began to 'seek,' to implore his neighbour's help in his distress, only to be denied again. At last he resorted to 'knocking' and hammered at the door until insistence triumphed over obstinate refusal. The same shameless persistence secured for the widow the vindication and compensation she had so long and vainly sought.

That 'they should always pray and not give up' was our Lord's word to the disciples. God may not always give at our first asking. He may have something important to teach us as we 'cry out to him day and night' (Luke 18:7). We may need to 'seek' and 'knock' as well as 'ask'. But he is not impatient with our constant coming, and he will respond to our importunity.

REFLECTION

'He asked this only to test him.' John 6:6

Difficulties are sure to increase, but the power of the Lord is unlimited. When he asks you or me where we shall buy bread, or how we shall solve this or that problem, it is only to prove us. He always knows what he will do; and if we wait his time, he will show us also.

'Join me in my struggle by praying to God for me.' Romans 15:30

All vital praying makes a drain upon a man's vitality. True intercession is a sacrifice, a bleeding sacrifice, a perpetuation of Calvary, a filling up of the sufferings of Christ.' Such was the conviction of Dr. J. H. Jowett. Jesus worked many mighty works without outward sign of strain, but he offered up prayers and supplications with 'loud cries and tears' (Hebrews 5:7). Our Lord's intercession was a costly ministry for him. It will be the same for the one who follows in his train.

Intercession is no dreamy reverie accompanied by a warm glow of pleasing emotion. Instead it is depicted as 'wrestling', 'agonising'. 'Epaphras ... is always wrestling in prayer for you' (Colossians 4:12). Our 'agonise' derives from the word used here. How pale a reflection of Epaphras' intercessions are our languid prayers!

The same word is used of a man toiling at his work until thoroughly weary (see Colossians 1:29), or striving in the arena for the coveted prize (see 1 Corinthians 9:25). It describes the soldier fighting for his life on the battlefield (see 1 Timothy 6:12), or the man who struggles to defend his friend from danger (see John 18:36). It pictures the agony of earnestness of a man to

save his own soul (see Luke 13:24). But its supreme significance appears in the tragedy of Gethsemane. 'Being in anguish, he prayed more earnestly' (Luke 22:44). It was an anguish induced by his identification with and grief over the sins of a lost world.

True intercession is costly. Our Lord first gave himself, then interceded for his murderers. He could do no more for them. 'Are we asking God for something we could supply ourselves? Can it be intercession until we are empty handed? True intercession demands the sacrifice and dedication of all.' Have we given ourselves, have we given all we can for those we intercede for, or are our prayers costless and crossless?

REFLECTION

'If it dies, it produces many seeds.'

John 12:24

Fruit-bearing involved cross-bearing. 'Except a corn of wheat falls into the ground and die, it abideth alone'. We know how the Lord Jesus became fruitful - not just by bearing his cross, but by dying on it. Do we know much fellowship with him in this?

'For no matter how many promises God has made, they are "Yes" in Christ. And so through him the "Amen" is spoken by us to the glory of God.'

2 Corinthians 1:20

A promise by God is a pledge by God. It provides the guarantee and forms the basis of the prayer of faith. The stability of a promise rests on the character and resources of the one who makes it, in the same way the value of a check depends on the probity and resources of the one who signs it. The character and fidelity of God vouch for the credibility of the promises he makes.

It is entirely with such promises that the prayer of faith is concerned. As we claim a promise of the word of God, the Holy Spirit imparts the faith to believe that its terms will be fulfilled in the context of our prayer. With God, promise and performance are inseparable.

But promises must be distinguished from facts. We accept a stated fact of God's word, but we plead a promise. When God proclaims a fact, faith accepts and acts on it. When God makes a promise, we comply with its conditions, claim its fulfilment and receive the promised favour. The function of the prayer of faith is to turn God's promises into facts of experience.

The patriarchs obtained the fulfilment of God's promises through faith (see Hebrews 11:33), and turned them into personal experience.

The prayer of faith is neither based on outward circumstances nor on inward feelings. The prayer of faith finds its greatest opportunity when sight brings no helpful vision and comfortable emotions are largely absent. It springs from the naked promise or affirmation of the word of God. It proceeds only from a divine guarantee. The prayer of faith is the power which converts promise into performance.

REFLECTION

'For the eyes of the Lord are on the righteous and his ears are attentive to their prayer.'

1 Peter 3:12

From the commencement of my Christian life I was led to feel that the promises were very real, and that prayer was, in sober matter of fact, transacting business with God. This could be on one's own behalf, or on behalf of those for whom one sought his blessing.