

# Prayer

by J. Sidlow Baxter

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*The sermon emphasizes the importance of prayer as an ever-open access to God, a means of spiritual development, and a strategy for revival, highlighting the need for a consistent, ordered, and anticipative prayer life.*

**Duration:** 48:53

**Scripture:** Ephesians 3:20

**Topics:** "Prayer", "The Power of Prayer", "Spiritual Growth"

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## Description

J. Sidlow Baxter emphasizes the vital role of prayer in the Christian life, highlighting that true spiritual development and revival in churches depend on persistent and united prayer. He explains that prayer should be approached with faith, free from emotional distractions, and focused on interceding for others rather than self-centered requests. Baxter encourages believers to establish a consistent prayer life, utilizing anticipatory prayer and structured times of prayer to deepen their relationship with God. He concludes by asserting that making prayer the central focus of life will lead to divine order and greater effectiveness in all areas.

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## Transcript

My dear friends, I want to talk to you for a little while this morning about prayer, or, perhaps more specifically, about Christian praying. That is, prayer in the name of Jesus, prayer through the virtue of the precious blood, prayer on the ground of the new covenant, prayer by a new and living way, a new way because it is the new way of the cross, thank you, and a living way because it is through a saviour who has conquered death and is the ever-living one. Now, it is no part of my present intention to discuss the philosophy or the psychology or even the theology of prayer.

I am concerned with its practical importance as we see it in the straightforward teaching of the Bible. Dear friends, of all the privileges which our sovereign God has given to us in Christ, the highest is that of an ever-open access to himself, the creator and controller of the universe. The access he has given to himself through our dear saviour, his eternal son, the Lord Jesus.

And of all the means of grace which God has given us for our growth in the Christian life, none is more important than habitual prayer. Without such prayer there simply cannot be any true spiritual development in any individual believer, nor can there be any outstanding movement of the Holy Spirit among our evangelical churches. There will not come revival until our churches learn again the strategy of

pertinacious, united praying.

I say again, if there is to be Christian revival either in the individual believer or in our churches collectively, there must be prayer. As an introduction to my theme this morning, let me now invite you to turn to Ephesians. Paul's letter to the Ephesians, chapter 3, verses 20 and 21.

This is the doxological finale to the first half of Ephesians, which is the doctrinal half of this epistle. This is how it culminates in verses 20 and 21. Now unto him who is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think according to the power that worketh in us, unto him be glory in the church by Christ Jesus throughout all ages, age without end.

Amen. The six chapters of this Ephesian letter break obviously into two main parts. That is, chapters 1 and 2 and 3 constitute part 1. Chapters 4 and 5 and 6 comprise part 2. Part 1 is conspicuously doctrinal.

Part 2 is mainly practical. By doctrinal, of course, we mean truth stated. By practical, we mean truth applied.

The subject of part 1 is the believer's wealth in Christ. The subject of part 2 is the believer's walk in Christ. And part 1 winds to its climax in that midway doxology which we have just read, and that Pauline doxology states for us and presents to us the New Testament norm or standard for the prayer life of Christian believers.

You know, the late Dr. Arthur T. Pearson used to call Ephesians the Switzerland of the New Testament, because in this great Pauline treatise, Ephesians, we are among the alpine peaks and highest altitudes of Christian doctrine and experience. Well now, if Ephesians is the Switzerland of our New Testament, I think that this doxological finale at the end of chapter 3 is Mont Blanc. Do you see the seven steps of ascent here? Now unto him that is 1. able to do.

That is basic to everything, obviously. 2. able to do what we ask. 3. able to do what we think.

4. able to do all that we ask or think. 5. able to do above all that we ask or think. 6. able to do abundantly above all that we ask or think.

And 7. able to do exceedingly above all that we ask or even think. Now of course, that can be spiritually tantalizing to some of us, maybe to many of us. I wouldn't be surprised if many of us in this very moment are asking, well if that is the New Testament standard for my intended prayer life, how is it that there is such a dismaying disparity between that magnificent ideal and my poverty-stricken actual? I'll tell you why.

It's because we overlook the gauge here. Listen. According to.

Now unto him that is able to do exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think. According to. Well according to what? According to the power that worketh in us.

Oh and what is that power? Well the context tells us. Strengthened with all strength by his spirit in your inward man. When the Holy Spirit has the unobstructed monopoly of your personality and mine, our prayer life is nothing less than transformed.

I think while we are touching on this, it might be good to get a little photograph in which we see this kind of praying in actual operation. Will you turn quickly with me to Acts chapter 4, the fourth chapter of the Acts and verse 31. Yes, verse 31.

Let me read. And when they had prayed. One.

The place was shaken where they were assembled together. In other words, the manifested presence of God. Two.

And they were all filled with the Holy Breath. The Pneuma, the Spirit. A new filling by the Holy Spirit for a new emergency.

Three. And they spake the word of God with boldness. Four.

And the multitude of them that believed were of one heart and of one soul. True Christian unity. And the World Council of Churches had never been heard of.

Neither said any of them the thought of the things which he possessed was his own, but they had all things in common. Wonderful Christian unity. Five.

And with great power gave the apostles witness of the resurrection of the Lord Jesus. Witnessing to a living Savior with convincing power. Six.

And isn't this lovely. And great grace was upon them all, even in the deacons' meetings. And seven.

Neither was there anyone among them that lacked. In other words, all need entirely answered. Now I'm not a monger in sevens.

But there's another seven. One. The manifested presence of God.

Two. A new filling by the Holy Spirit. Three.

Speaking the word of God with boldness. Four. True Christian unity.

Five. Witnessing with prevailing power to a living Savior. Six.

Great grace upon them all. And seven. All need entirely met.

Brothers and sisters. If there were praying like that in our evangelical churches up and down the British Isles, I believe that in a very short time, instead of bemoaning our spiritual poverty and our numerical paucity, we would lift up our dragging banners, and like an army victorious we would go forth to prevail upon our leaders and people and countrymen in the cause of God and Christ and light and truth. I believe that.

Do you? Well then, how much praying are you doing? And Mr. Preacher, what about you? Well now, friends, this brings up the whole matter of prayer. I sometimes think that when we come to the end of the present age, and our Lord has returned, I sometimes think that if he allows us to look back over the present age and see it as he sees it, I think there will be three things that surprise and shock us more than all others. One, the fearful perversion of the gospel by the ecclesiasticism of the Middle Ages.

And two, the awful betrayal of the Bible by the main denominations of latter-day Protestantism. And three, the enigmatical neglect of prayer by the continuing evangelical minority. I would not dare to say what I'm now going to say if I did not believe it with every thoughtful conviction of which I'm capable.

I believe, however bad things may be in our beloved little Britain today, I believe that the prayers of the evangelical minority could determine the future destiny of Britain and could flood these islands with a latter-day revival. I believe that. Well, as I was saying, this brings up the whole matter of prayer.

And I thought I would like my parting word with you this morning to be upon this matter that I conceive to be simply, unutterably vital. I've dotted down here on my notes certain pieces of advice that I want to pass on to you. Some of you are inwardly asking, Mr. Preacher, can you tell me why my prayer life is often so vapid, so seemingly unreal, sometimes so disappointing and even frustrating? Can you tell me how my prayer life can be changed? Well, I've dotted down some points of advice.

Let me have a look at you. Are you open-minded this morning? Are you open-hearted? You're getting better, you know. All right.

Here's the first piece of advice. Nine out of every ten of us are needing to rescue our prayer life from the tyranny of our emotions and from bondage to moods or feelings. All too many of us pray only when we feel emotionally drawn to do so or when there seems some special need for prayer.

And thus our prayer times become sporadic, disconnected, evanescent, and seemingly exasperating. Also, there are many Christians who seem to have the strange idea that unless they become emotionally stimulated during a time of prayer, their praying has been merely skyward talk lost in empty space. You know as well as I do how often people talk about having, and I put this in inverted commas, having a good time in prayer by which they mean a kind of emotional luxury in their season of prayer.

And if they don't get that inward emotional stirring, they feel that their praying has been empty and vain. Now, listen to me. All of us are needing to learn deeply and permanently that the validity of prayer is utterly independent of any emotional condition in the one who prays.

Emotionally, at the time of my praying, I may be either equatorially hot or arctically cold. But whether my feelings are tropic or frigid, the thing that makes prayer valid and vital is that my faith lays hold on God's truth and presses for an answer in the name that is above every name. Get rid of your blessed emotions.

They are a perfect nuisance in this matter of prayer. I would say to all, guard your prayer times vigilantly from all subtle tyranny of your emotions and from all bondage to mere mood. Why, when you reflect on it, a good part of praying consists in intercessory pleadings for unsaved souls.

And another aspect of prayer is that of warfare against the powers of evil. Such praying as that, other than merely engendering exuberant emotions, often means tears and sometimes sweat. It certainly does not induce any subjective ecstasy, though it does develop a joy of communion with God which is as much above mere emotional thrills as the Himalayan peaks are high above the valleys.

Yes, make sure that your prayer life is a matter of will and of resolute habit, completely free from all bondage to your changeful emotions. Otherwise, your prayer history will be that of a limping cripple. Well, that's point number one.

Have I hammered it in? Right. But now, secondly, and just as necessarily, we must emancipate our praying from egocentricity or self-centeredness. Most of us never know the larger power and richer depths of prayer because our praying is a continual running in circles around our own self.

We are so full of our wants that we forget our greatest need of all, that is, to be lifted completely out of our hereditary selfism into a Christ-like otherism, a burning concern for the saving and blessing of others. Our praying is self-circling instead of outgoing. It's nearly all begging instead of largely interceding.

Such self-preoccupied praying soon becomes a withered fig tree. All the liberation that comes to our own spirit when we forget ourselves and give ourselves to praying for others. May I remind you of the epilogue to that magnificent poem, The Book of Job? It says, And the Lord turned the captivity of Job when he prayed for himself.

Does it? No. Now, if ever a man needed to pray for himself, Job did. And if ever a man pleaded for himself, Job did.

But the Lord turned the captivity of Job when he prayed for his friends. His what? Ooh, what friends they were. They came ostensibly to be his sympathizers and they turned out to be his cruelest condemners.

And they talked and talked and talked until their cloudy verbosity nearly sent poor Job dotty. They all needed to have their blocks knocked off. But God said to Job, Pray for those three friends of yours.

And the Lord turned the captivity of Job when he prayed for his friends. I'll give you a motto for prayer. Ego-centricity triangulates it.

Catholicity sublimates it. And if you want to know the wonderful reflexive benefits of prayer, forget yourself and pray for others. I'll bear my grateful testimony this morning to this fact.

When the embers of my own spiritual fire have been burning low, there are two procedures, either of which or both of which together, have always brought me wonderful emancipation and restoration. First is this. Put your jacket on and go out and sidle up to somebody in the street somewhere and begin talking about Jesus.

Try and win a soul. And if I can't do that, the other is to go for an hour of prayer and never mention Sid Lowe Baxter. There's a wonderful liberating power comes to your own heart if you forget yourself and pray for others.

Now, I'm looking at you again. Has that got home? Oh, you're doing well this morning. Three.

Many of us never know the enriching deeper meanings and rewards of prayer because our prayer times are too broken apart from each other by inconstancy. Our praying is too intermittent, too fragmentary to give God any real chance of transacting with us. Our praying is too irregular, too random to make us practiced pleaders at the throne.

I heard some time ago about a certain vagrant. I think he was a hippie type and he went to one of our British, do you still call them unemployment bureaus? Do you still call them that? Yes. Well, this hippie type chap went to one of these unemployment bureaus.

He wanted a job. So the official behind the counter said, Oh, so you want a job, mister? All right. What have you been doing until now? Well, he said, Just this and that.

Just this and that. Well, where have you been doing it? Oh, just here and there. Just this and that, just here and there.

Well, when have you been doing it? Oh, he said, Just off and on. So the clerk behind the counter began to ponder and he said, Uh-huh, just this and that. Just here and there.

Just off and on. Well, he said, I think you'd better call in just now and then. I sometimes wonder, Could it be that some of ourselves look rather like that to the angels in heaven? Are we rather like that vagrant when we apply for help at the heavenly throne? Just now and then.

Just off and on. I remember during the war one of my most delightful and loved members, a dear elderly lady at Charlotte Chapel, Edinburgh, with troubled look on her dear face, said to me one morning, Oh, Pastor, I've been praying so hard for the people at Random. Oh, where? She said, At Random.

Oh, I said, Is that in Britain? Yes, oh yes, she said, It's somewhere down in the south. Oh, well, she said, I read yesterday that the German bombers had come over and they'd been bombing at Random. I wouldn't be surprised if there were dozens of bombers at Random here this morning.

You'll never know the meaning of prayer if you're just a random prayer. It's got to be a matter of the will. And you've got to stick at it and stick at it and then stick at it.

Many of us are needing to learn that, don't you think? But now, you're not getting tired, are you? No. The fourth thing that I have dotted down is this. Our prayer times should be orderly.

My advice to you is don't let your prayer times be either over-planned or under-planned. If your prayer seasons are over-elaborate, you may find yourself flying a balloon instead of transacting business. On the other hand, if you have no system at all, your prayer life will become without form and void and soon there'll be darkness on the face of the one who prays.

There must be some kind of order. But it's the order that belongs to the nature of the business. We're not coming to an accountant.

We're coming to a father, to a savior, to a comforter. I'll tell you one thing that I would like to recommend to you. Oh, yes, here it is.

See, I'll tell you. And although you may not know it, some of your names are in this little yellow book. It's just a sheet of yellow paper.

I divide it in half and cut it through, then divide it again and fold it round, and every so often I have a new one, but I don't trust my memory in the matter of prayer. My memory is rather like that definition given by the little Lancashire boy when somebody asked him, well, what is memory? He said, oh, it's the thing you forget with. So, I won't trust a memory.

And as King Hezekiah long ago spread the letter of Sennacherib before Jehovah, every morning when I'm at home in Santa Barbara, out comes my little yellow book, and some of the brethren on the platform this morning are prayed for every morning from that little yellow book. Now, I would recommend you get your little yellow book and put down those persons and concerns for whom and for which you should pray. And day after day spread your little book, and I always keep an empty column there to make a note of answers.

And some of them are getting quite full now. See? Well, you can't see, but they're here anyway. So, I'm recommending you have some kind of order.

Don't start sectionizing your praying into one, adoration, and two, contemplation, and three, supplication, and four, intercession, or you'll get really mixed up. But have some order, the kind of order that helps and doesn't destroy sanctified spontaneity. And now I come to another point that I think is exceedingly important.

You're listening. We should learn the practice of anticipative praying. I'll say it again.

Anticipative praying. Prayer beforehand is a far better preservative than any hasty emergency prayer after an event has hit us. The old proverb says to be forewarned is to be forearmed.

Similarly, to be spiritually conditioned in advance by prayer is eight-tenths of the battle against temptation or trouble of any kind when it comes. You see, we all know that every day we're going to meet certain persons, some of whom may be very difficult. We're going to go to the same place of business.

We're going to encounter continually recurring temptation. And in many other ways we can anticipate things that are likely to come and we should learn the practice of getting in first. Oh, we can learn that again and again from the life of our dear Master.

Let me remind you quickly. Lazarus was seriously ill and the two disturbed and anxious sisters sent a special emergency call to Jesus. And we read, Now Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus, therefore he abode two days in the same place where he was.

It seemed a very strange way of showing love. But you have to follow it through to the sequel. By the time Jesus came, Lazarus was dead and was in the sepulcher.

And Martha and Mary thought he'd let them down badly. Ah, they had to learn something big and wonderful. There came the moment when our Master stood against that forbidding-looking sepulcher and with the voice that wakes the dead he raised Lazarus, but before he called him out he lift up his eyes to heaven and in the hearing of the multitude he said, Father, I thank thee that thou dost hear me.

Oh, but the Greek is in the Aries tense. Father, I thank thee thou didst hear me. Thou didst? When? Why, it was in those two days that Jesus carried.

He knew somehow at once that he was going to be confronted by a climactic challenge at Bethany and he wouldn't go until he had the Father's pledge that he was going to conquer the enemy and either restore or raise from the dead his friend Lazarus. And now with that anticipated prayer and its pledged answer in his mind he says, Father, I know that thou didst hear me. And then he turns to the grave and he says, Lazarus, come forth.

And Lazarus came forth. Of course, he couldn't walk out because he was wrapped by the funereal wrappings. He couldn't clamber down from the rocky ledge where his corpse had been deposited.

But while the people looked out through the dark mouth of that grave that body came floating three or four feet above the ground and then gently deposited itself on the ground. I'd love to have been there, wouldn't you? And Jesus had to say, because they were all so thunderstruck, he had to say, now, hadn't you better loose him and let him go? Don't you remember also how Jesus said to Simon, Simon, Simon, uttering the name twice to express intensity of feeling. Simon, Simon, Satan hath obtained you by asking that he may sift you as wheat.

But, I've got there first, but I have prayed for thee that thy faith fail not. Are you getting the idea? Anticipative praying. Let me give you one quick illustration and then we'll leave that.

I took my training for the ministry at Spurgeon's Theological College, London. And I knew very well a student there who was in pretty poor circumstances financially. Now, there used to be four lectures every morning Monday to Friday, nine to ten, ten to eleven, then to noon, and then to one.

And believe me, after four hours of that kind, when one o'clock came, what an appetite we had. But, there was a break at eleven o'clock for fifteen minutes, and we used to go and sit in the common room. And one of the students would come round with a tray of chocolate.

And he would say, chocolate, chocolate, chocolate. And you'd see the saliva glands all round the common room, working away. And a look of despair on many of the faces of the holy brethren.

Now, this particular student, he was very, very fond of milk chocolate. I knew him well, and he was very frank with me. And he told me, he said, you know, Sid, it's an awful problem to me, this chocolate.

He said, I'm so empty by eleven, but I've no money to buy. And then I go and commit sin, because I say, come here, Bob. And I take a packet of chocolate, and I say, put it down to my account.

And then he said, when the end of the month comes, I'm in debt, and no Christian should be in debt. But he went on to tell me this. He said, I've learned a secret.

If I get up earlier, and if at seven o'clock in the morning I deal with that temptation, when eleven o'clock comes, I've got victory. But if I get up late, and I haven't had that time of prayer, when eleven o'clock comes, I'm vulnerable. And it's agony.

And I know he wasn't exaggerating, because I was the student. Ha, ha, ha, ha, ha, ha, ha. Are you clapping for my victory? I might have thought you would have wept for my lack of chocolate.

But have you got hold of that idea? Don't wait till eleven o'clock. Anticipate it at seven. And you'll find then, when the dragon comes, you've got a sharp sword that's too much for him.

Now, have I time for anything else? Hmm. Ha, hmm. Ha, ha, ha, ha, ha, ha, ha.

Yes. I, I, I'll just quickly add this. Do some of you here this morning have a problem with wandering of the mind? Well now, don't, don't keep slogging yourself about that.

It's no argument against prayer. I'm not sure that it's an argument against you. You see, our grandsires lived by the sundial.

And a little bit later, by the old grandfather's clock. But we twentieth century moderns, we live by the alarm clock. Doing the next thing next, the next thing next, the next thing next.

Until there develops a, a mental habit of doing, doing, doing. And then we become bodily stationary. And we want to pray.

But the mind keeps, hmm, hmm, hmm, hmm, hmm, hmm. Don't you find that? Now, I want to tell you of a simply infallible cure. I've never once known it to fail.

It's this. Start praying your Bible. Oh? What do you mean? Well, let me ask you.

Have you ever prayed right through an epistle? I mustn't wear my heart on my sleeve in a way that is unbecoming for a public speaker. But if I can be affectionately frank for a moment, I could never tell you, and I'm picking the word carefully, I could never tell you the thrill I have had in going verse by verse in prayer through Philippians and Ephesians. Taking every promise and praying that it might be fulfilled in me.

Taking every admonition and praying that God would help me to obey. Taking every great truth, pondering it, praying about it, thanking God for it. Oh, brothers and sisters, there are wonderful hours of communing with God if you pray through an epistle.

Have you ever prayed through the Sermon on the Mount? I have. And it's a wonderful mixture of torture and conviction with wonderful liberation. Pray through the Sermon on the Mount and you'll soon know what a sinner you are and what a saint you can become. Do you use your hymn book in prayer? I could never tell you what the hymn book has meant in my prayer life.

Oh, I've had great times with some of Francis Habberghal's hymns. Do you ever pray a hymn like this? Lord, speak to me that I may speak in living echoes of thy tone. As thou hast sought, so let me seek thine erring children lost and lone.

Oh, strengthen me that while I stand firm on the rock and strong in thee I may stretch forth a loving hand to wrestlers with life's troubled sea. Oh, fill me with thy fullness, Lord until my very heart o'erflows in kindling thought and glowing word thy love to tell, thy praise to show. Oh, use me, Lord, use even me just as thou wilt and when and where until thy blessed face I see thy rest, thy joy, thy glory share.

You might not think it, but not long since I had a wonderful time in prayer with a hymn that you'd never think suitable. It was Rescue the Perishing. Lord, help me to do it.

Care for the dying. Lord, give me sympathy and urgency. Snatch them in pity from sin and the grave.

Oh, Lord, may I never get used to seeing souls on the way to destruction. Weep o'er the erring one. Father, Savior, give me tears.

Lift up the fallen. Lord, help me to do it with sympathy and kindness. Tell them of Jesus, the mighty to save.

Lord, save me from dumbness. Give me the overflowing heart and the tongue that speaks easily of Jesus. Are you following? Well, hmm, time has gone.

But you can't see my Bible, can you? But I have the week here in columns. Sunday, Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday, Friday, Saturday. And in those seven columns I travel right round the world in prayer once every week.

You know, Mr. Gleg, I think that's another good thing to do. Well, I'll have to leave you because there's another meeting and it's 11 o'clock. But, brothers and sisters, my parting word to you here at Filey, except I think I have to speak again tonight, but so far as the Bible readings are concerned, my parting word to you is decide that from Filey 1973 prayer is not just going to be one little spot on the rim of the wheel.

You're going to make prayer the hub in the wheel of your available time. And if you make prayer the hub and not a mere incidental, you'll soon find, as we all do, the whole wheel runs better. And strange as it

may seem, the more you stick at it and keep prayer in the middle, the more time you'll have for other things because it brings a divine orderliness into your days.

And keep praying for Britain. When our God beholds us there wrestling in the place of prayer, then the tide of battle turns, then the flame of conquest burns, then the faltering wail of fear turns to victory's ringing cheer, then the flag of truth prevails. Oh, slink back and Satan quail.

Bring us, Lord. Oh, bring us there where we learn prevailing prayer. God bless you.

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