

The Power of Travailing Prayer

by Mark Greening

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Transcript

If I don't care, why should God? That is a question that goes through my mind very often when it comes to prayer and praying for the lost and praying for revival. With respect to prayer, very often we have not because we ask not, and sometimes we ask not because we really don't believe God will give us what we ask of Him. When I struggle like this, it is nothing short of spiritual apathy and this attitude is an offense to our loving God because what I'm really saying is I don't believe God will act and answer my prayers.

You see, that was the mindset of the Israelites in Zephaniah 1.12 where we read, at that time I will search Jerusalem with lamps and punish those who are complacent, who are like wine left on its dregs, who think the Lord will do nothing either good or bad. That's an amazing attitude in light of the fact that God says that the effectual, fervent prayers of righteous men and women availeth much. That is a promise, brothers and sisters.

It is one of the 7,487 promises in the Bible. Now I remember hearing that statistic years ago and I wondered what the source was and I discovered that Time Magazine ran an article on that back in 1957, the year I was born. And they ran an article on a man by the name of Everett Storms from Kitchener, Ontario.

He was a school teacher and after reading the Bible for 27 years, he decided to embark on this task, this formidable task of determining how many times God promised something to us and he came up with a total after 18 months of 7,487 promises and as the scripture says, let God be true and every man a liar. Do

you believe that God can answer your prayers? We often think that for God to begin hearing and answering prayers personally or corporately for revival and for salvation, that it takes a group or a congregation or concerts of prayers carefully scheduled and organized and orchestrated across the nation. That is not necessarily the case.

In Ezekiel 22, 30, God says, I looked for a man among them who would build up the wall and stand before me in the gap on behalf of the land so I would not have to destroy it but I found none. The Lord is telling us here that the prayers of one man, one woman, one young person are so important to Him. They are so important to Him that the fate of the whole nation could have been averted by the prayers of just one person.

The question I want to answer this morning and ask as well for each one of us is what kind of prayer is a prayer that availeth much according to James 5, 16? What kind of prayers will change people? Other brothers and sisters in Christ who are struggling with a besetting sin. Those who are struggling with blind spots and rebellion, the lost around us. What kind of prayers avail much? James says the effectual fervent prayers.

Those are the kind of prayers that avail much. That takes into account prevailing prayer. We're all familiar with prevailing prayer.

But have you ever considered or do you know about the power of travailing prayer? This morning I would like to talk on travailing prayer. To define travailing prayer, I would like to describe it as the definition, it is an expression of the grief of the heart of God. In Romans 8, 26 we read, In the same way the Spirit helps us in our weakness, we do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit Himself intercedes for us with groans that words cannot express.

And just as the Holy Spirit uses our mouths to witness on His behalf, and just as He uses our hands to serve on His behalf, so He uses our hearts and emotions to grieve and weep and plead on His behalf as well. Years ago I read about people travailing in prayer, but over the past 18 years, the Lord has allowed me to witness and experience this phenomenon amongst individuals as well as in larger groups. And the effects of this kind of prayer have been nothing less than remarkable.

In a few minutes I'd like to recount to you some of the stories of travailing prayer and the power therein. But before I do that, I want to lay a scriptural basis for travailing prayer so that you understand that I'm not promoting some new technique or methodology or fleshly effort to accomplish the things of the Spirit of God. Then I want to conclude with an encouragement from the Word of God as to how to prepare for this type of ministry in our own lives and in the lives of our churches.

In Scripture, the word travail is used to liken the anguish of childbearing to the anguish of prayer over the burdens of God, specifically for the souls of the lost. This principle comes through in Isaiah 66 where we read that as soon as Zion travailed, she brought forth her children. Now I was present for the birth of my two boys, and I can assure you that children are not born naturally without pain.

And if this is true in the natural realm, should we expect less in the spiritual realm? Is it possible to see happen in the spiritual realm what is impossible in the natural? Can spiritual children be born without soul travail? If we can weep for a loved one who has died and gone to be with the Lord, should we not much more weep for a lost soul, a precious soul, a priceless soul, who will be soon crossing into eternal torment where there is weeping and wailing and gnashing of teeth and the worm dieth not? Is it not better to weep

and travail for a season than for others to weep and wail for eternity? Ecclesiastes 3, verse 4 talks about a time to weep and a time to mourn. And if the harsh reality of a soul entering the despair of darkness, of eternal torment, if that is not a time to weep and mourn, I don't know what is. How little of the Lord's compassion do we possess when we cannot even weep for the lost.

But what joy follows those who have learned to weep over the things that break the heart of God. Psalm 126, 5, we read, Those who sow in tears will reap with songs of joy. He who goes out weeping, carrying seed to sow, will return with songs of joy, carrying sheaves with him.

And according to this passage, tears are often the down payment on the answers we seek from God. The first time ever I heard about prevailing prayer was from a cassette tape a missionary from Operation Mobilization gave me. It was a tape by Leonard Ravenhill.

And I remember a verse he quoted from Isaiah 30, verse 1, when Rachel was pleading with Jacob. She was barren and she said these words to him. She pled with him and she said, Give me children or I die.

If any of you have ever heard Leonard Ravenhill preach or you've listened to him on sermonindex.net, you will know that his words have a way of fastening themselves in your heart like barbs. And I never forgot the way he pled, Give me children or I die. Not long after hearing that message, I entered the pastorate.

And I'll never forget my board meeting, first board meeting, they presented me with this big manual, a strategic planning manual that the board had put together with great effort and pride. Contained therein were all the things that we were telling God He was going to do for us and through us. We had the audacity to tell God how many people He was going to save each year over five years.

It was a marvel to men and angels alike. The problem was the committee had failed to read Lamentations 3.17 where God says, Who can speak and have it happen if the Lord has not decreed it? Despite all our good intentions and wise planning, the Lord was not following our plan. People were not coming to the Lord and our numbers weren't increasing.

And as elders, we became burdened. Burdened because we realized all of a sudden that God's thoughts were not our thoughts and neither were His ways our ways. Then we stumbled across that sobering truth of Jeremiah 8.20 where we read the harvest is past, the summer has ended and we are not saved.

Since my people are crushed, I am crushed. I mourn and horror grips me. Is there no balm in Gilead? Is there no physician there? Why then is there no healing for the wound of my people? Oh, that my head were a spring of water and my eyes a fountain of tears.

I would weep day and night for the slain of my people. Have you ever wept for the lost? Can you weep in light of the message our brother Edgar preached this morning in light of coming judgment? I remember when that truth finally struck us as elders. First, we grieved and wept over our own sin and then over the lost around us.

You know, I've been to many revival prayer meetings over the years, and very often revival prayer meetings involve prayers that preach at others instead of preaching to ourselves. Seth Joshua used to preach. He used to preach, Oh Lord, bend us.

A young man by the name of Evan Roberts started praying that and got convicted, and he stopped short and he said this, Oh Lord, no, bend me. Judgment begins in the house of God. And first, God had to deal

with me as the pastor of that church.

He had to prepare my heart and break up the fallow ground. I remember hearing one of these tapes, I think it was this OM missionary Mike Hack who gave it to me. I remember hearing about General Booth.

He prayed this wonderful prayer. He says, Lord, I pray that all of my elders would be dangled for one minute over the mouth of hell and they would be so transformed by what they saw that they would never backslide again. Well, I thought that was kind of an interesting illustration and so I said to myself, Well, I'm going to modify that prayer.

I kind of like what Isaiah did, you know. He was there and saw the glory of God. And so I said, Lord, I don't want to see hell.

I'd rather see the glory of God. And Lord, if I saw the glory of God, I know I'd never backslide again. I'd be a changed man.

So Lord, would you show me your glory? Now, I wasn't looking for a vision or an experience, folks. You have to understand, I just wanted something. You know, some touch by God so that I could preach more powerfully or something.

I don't know what I was looking for. God didn't answer my prayer and didn't answer my prayer and days went by and a couple weeks went by and I was minding my own business in my apartment, kneeling. I was all alone.

And as I began to pray, and this happened. It doesn't happen that often, but it was so clear in prayer. I just, I saw myself.

We used to have a country place in Vermont and I had the onerous task as a teenager without seniority in the home of digging up the cesspool and changing it. I want to tell you, that's no fun. That's not a fun task.

And I saw myself back there in Vermont in the middle of that cesspool with my nose just above the sludge line. And it was as clear as I'm looking at you today and I said, Oh God, what is this that I see? What is this? And God spoke to my heart and He says, Mark, that's the way I see your sin. And I said, surely not I. Surely that's not my sin, God.

Surely, Lord, that is the sin of the prostitutes and the drug dealers down at King and Jameson in the Parkdale era of Toronto where I used to lead teams to go and we would witness to them, take them out to coffee and we'd hand out tracts and we'd share Christ with those souls. I said, that's their sin. That's not my sin.

And I'll never forget what the Lord spoke to my heart. It was so clear. He says, Mark, that is your sin.

And that's the way I see your sin. Because when those people sin, they do what comes naturally. But when you sin, you sin against knowledge and light.

Your sins are worse in my sight. Some of you have grown up in Christian homes. Many of you, by God's grace, have been spared from many of the big sins.

But I want to tell you something, brothers and sisters. When we have grown up with the law, when we have grown up with the knowledge of right and wrong, and when we sin against that, our sins are more

grievous. We can pray for the politicians.

We can pray for the abortionists. We can pray for all of the people all around. But do you know, when they sin, they do what comes naturally.

But brothers and sisters in Christ, when we sin, we sin against knowledge and light, and our sins are more grievous in God's sight. The Lord shall we mark you have no right to preach at others and pray to others and pray for them to be convicted when you are the man. For two weeks, I wept over my sin.

I prayed every day that God would take my life. I had never seen my sin. He reminded me as if it was some panoramic view of my life of every sin I ever committed.

I didn't know how sinful I had been. I'll tell you the rest of the story at the end of the message. But that's what God had to do to prepare me.

And then God started working on the elders' board. I'll never forget another man, one of the funniest elders I ever knew. Great sense of humor, but he loved the Lord at the same time we had lots of fun.

He was a controller of a company, an engineering company in Oakville, where I live. And I've been sharing these truths. The Lord began burdening us for revival and for the souls of the lost in our church.

You see, in our churches, you want to know why many of our churches don't grow. That's because we're trying to preach to corpses to make them dance. And it became very abundantly clear that if the sign of a Christian is the fruit of the Spirit, then how many in our congregation did not even know the Lord.

One day, I began praying, Oh Lord, you're breaking me, you're showing me, but oh Lord, raise up. Leaders first to pray. One day I get a phone call from this fellow elder.

Dave said to me, I didn't know who it was on the phone. All I could hear was weeping and crying on the other end. And I said, who is this? He says, it's Dave.

I said, Dave, what's wrong? Are you okay? He says, no, I'm not. I said, where are you? He says, I'm at work. I said, what are you doing? He says, I'm on my knees crying behind my desk.

I said, is the door to your office, you had a private office? I said, are the doors shut so that no one sees you? He says, yeah, I shut them first, but I can't get off my knees, I'm weeping. I said, what are you crying over? He says, I'm crying over my sin. God has revealed my sin to me.

I said, come, come, leave work early. Come, we'll come pray. He came to my apartment that night, and we began to weep and pray, praying for the lost in our community.

I remember that verse that says that God would turn the heavens to brass and the ground to iron beneath our feet. And we said, Lord, just break through. Rend the heavens and come down and begin to save in our area.

And we began to pray that God would burden the hearts of the men, specifically the leaders in our church, to pray. We began not long after that to experience the truth of Isaiah 66, as soon as Zion prevailed, she brought forth her children. I'll never forget, it was December 31st, 1992, when the Lord began to save people in the most remarkable way.

Remarkable because we were not following any evangelistic technique. We were not handing out tracts or doing anything according to a plan, let alone that telephone book-sized strategic plan that was an abomination to the Lord. We had stopped organizing, and we had started agonizing.

And God came. The first clue that God was visiting us was the fact that there was this hunger, this unexplainable hunger for God amongst the unsaved. I'll never forget, at the back of the church one Sunday after I preached, this lady came up to me and she introduced herself to me.

I said, oh, I've never seen you before. Have you been to this church? She says, no, I don't go to church. She says, I've never been here.

I said, why did you come this morning? She says, I have no idea. God woke me up and told me to come. I took my Bible.

We sat down at a pew, and she came to Christ. People would have this hunger. After the service, sometime a holy hush would come on the place.

No one would move. After a while, people would get up, they would come and say that they were under conviction. It had nothing to do with our preach.

I could have preached on anything. I could have preached on creation, and people were getting convicted. It didn't matter what we said.

People were coming up and saying, God spoke to me about this. What was it? It had nothing to do with my message. I remember we would open the scriptures, and I would sit in front of people, and it usually took ten minutes for people to get saved.

Thirty seconds for me to open the scriptures and let them read, and nine and a half minutes of them travelling and weeping under conviction of the Holy Spirit until they were saved. I never led anyone in a sinner's prayer. God did it all.

There were no human fingerprints on what was taking place in those days. People would hear about this. I remember there was one man in our congregation who was friends with an NHL hockey player.

He played for the Boston Bruins. The man was unsaved, and he had gone to psychiatrists and psychologists and counselors, and no one could help him. So this man in our congregation called down to Boston, and he said, Sean, come on up.

There's someone who can help you. And so one day I was at home, and all of a sudden there's a knock at the door, and here this fellow shows up. He filled the door.

He was a defenseman. And he says, I need help. Can you help me? I said, what's your problem? He says, I'm going to go home and kill my father and mother.

I'm going to kill my parents. I'm glad he said parents and not the pastor. He stood there, and I thought, what am I going to do, Lord? So I took him out to the picnic table in our backyard.

We had an open backyard into an open area, and I thought, he's big, but I'm small and fast, and I'm going to run if he comes for me. My wife quickly assessed the situation, and she went up. She's a prayer warrior.

She was praying for protection over me and our kids. And I said, Lord, what am I going to give this fellow? I don't know what's wrong. No one can help him.

And the Holy Spirit reminded me of something I read in my devotions in the Book of Romans. To this day, I still can't remember what it was. I remember in my doors reading, I said, that's a really obscure thought.

It was a random thought as far as I was concerned. And the Holy Spirit said, you get him to read beginning at that verse. I thought to myself, Lord, are you sure I'm listening to you? This is so random.

I don't know what was in that passage, but he began to read. Three verses deep into the passage, he began weeping like a baby. He wept for ten minutes, got up, saved.

He began praising God in terms that I've never heard an elder pray. He began glorifying God. He stood up.

He gave me a big bear hug, left the home. I never saw him again for three years. Three years later, Dick Siple from Canadian Revival Fellowship came to our church to preach.

And after Dick came to the back, this fellow approached me, and he said, Mark, do you remember me? I said, no, I'm sorry, I don't remember you. He says, I got saved at your picnic table three years ago. I said, brother, what happened to you? He says, I left, and God began working in me.

I went back to my church. I was discipled. He says, I'm graduating next month from Bible college.

I'm going into the pastorate. We would open the Scriptures to people, and scores of people, as they read the Scriptures, they would weep their way into the kingdom with us saying nothing at all. Do you know that God even saved people that didn't want to get saved? We think it's so hard for people to get saved.

Do you know that God can save people who don't even want to get saved? Isn't that what happened to the Apostle Paul on the roads of Damascus? Was that just a coincidence? No, the church was travelling on behalf of that man. Someone was praying for the Apostle Paul. They were travelling for him, and God met him.

I remember this man. He had just become a Christian. They were refugees from Vietnam.

They were Buddhists. He had come to the Lord, and his wife was completely antagonistic to the Gospel. And so he said to me, Pastor, if you talk to my wife, she will get saved.

And I said, I don't save anybody. I don't lead anybody to the Lord. I will let them read Scripture.

I will pray with them. I will point them to Christ, but I don't lead anyone to the Lord. He says, well, I want to get to you.

I said, okay, why don't you come over this Friday, bring your wife, we'll have dinner at our house, and I'll talk to her. So this woman came. She didn't want to be there.

You could see it all over her face. Probably I discerned with the gift of discernment God gave me because she couldn't understand English. And so I sat there, and here he is with his Vietnamese wife, and her English was very halted, and she'd never learned French.

I understand some speak French, so I couldn't speak French to her. And so I tried my best in English to communicate with her. And so I told her the testimony of her husband, and I said, you know, your husband wanted you to come hear something tonight, and I'm just going to tell you why he's so excited and why his life changed.

And I told her the gospel through the context of her husband's salvation. And at the end, I said to her, would you like to become a Christian tonight? And she sat there, and she said, no. I said, do you believe these things that I've shared with you tonight? She says, no.

That was the only English she said to me the whole night. So, flesh gives birth to flesh, but spirit to spirit, you don't push these things. You can't, don't make people read a sinner's prayer.

So we changed the subject, and 10 minutes later, she begins to cry. She's crying at the dinner table. And I thought, oh no, she doesn't like my wife's cooking.

And I looked at my wife, and I thought, what did you feed her? But it tasted good. And she was just crying and crying and crying, and we didn't say anything. We were used to this by now.

You see, people were praying for her even while we were witnessing. And as she wept, her husband eventually started talking to her in Vietnamese. And he looked at me, and with his heavy accent, he said, Pastor, I have good news for you.

She's under conviction of the Holy Spirit. She's under conviction of the Holy Spirit. We weren't even talking about anything at that point.

She wept for about 10 minutes, and she began praying in Vietnamese, and tears of joy streaming down her face, and she came out a Christian. No one knows how she got saved except by the power of God. She didn't understand anything I said, but she heard the Holy Spirit speaking to her, saying, why are you kicking against the goals? God did the most remarkable things.

The people that were getting saved in this context, they just thought this was normal. As a matter of fact, they read the book of Acts and weren't surprised about anything. This was the normal Christian life.

I remember one man who was quite successful as a venture capitalist, living for himself, very oppressed by the enemy. Any of you got BlackBerrys? You know the BlackBerry phones? He was the one who discovered them and invested in them. Successful businessman.

He told me one day, he says, oh, I'm a Christian. I said, oh, is that so? What makes you think so? Well, he told me, well, I prayed a sinner's prayer, blah, blah, blah, but we knew that there was no fruit in his life, and so I said to him, brother, I said, or friend, I said, you don't know the Lord yet. This is what it means to be a Christian.

He says, okay, then I want to get saved. So he came over to our apartment, and for two hours, we travailed over his soul. Three of us there, my wife had some other women travailing in another house, and he was on the ground with his face to the floor, beating his fists on the carpet, saying, Lord, deliver me.

Deliver me. Get this thing out of me. Deliver me.

And after two hours of travailing and seeking the Lord, he was saved. He understood the power of God because he had been rescued from the dominion of darkness and brought into the kingdom of the Son he

loved. So he just understood God's power to save.

And one day, he and another man who had just been saved, this guy who was a male model, we never thought he'd ever be saved because he had such a struggle with women, but God saved him and delivered him. He's celibate to this day, by the way. These two men were friends, and they're saved and all excited in the Lord, and they're at Morley's apartment, and Bill gets a phone call on his cell, and he says, hello.

And the fellow said, why did you call me? Bill says, I didn't call you. Sorry, you must have, there must be a mistake. He hung up the cell.

He continued talking with Morley, and all of a sudden, he gets a phone call again. He says, hello. The man said, why did you call me? You've called me twice now.

Your telephone number of your cell is coming up on my call display. So Bill said, I'm sorry, there must be a technological glitch. I did not call you.

Goodbye. But when he said goodbye, he said, God bless you. Hung up.

A minute later, he got the third phone call from this man. This man said to him, why do you keep calling me? Bill remembered the story of Samuel, and he said to the man, realizing that this was divine appointment because he did not call. This was of God.

He said, sir, I don't know you, but I am a Christian, and I want to ask you a question. What were you doing when God called you? The man said, if it wasn't for you calling me three times, I was trying to jump off my balcony and commit suicide, and you interrupted me three times. Bill says, where do you live? What is your name? He went with Morley.

The man came to Christ. You see, folks, as soon as Zion travailed, she brought forth her children. There is power in travailing prayer.

Now before I go on with more firsthand stories that have happened literally in the last three or four months because I've noticed over the years, there's seasons of sowing and reaping, actually sowing and weeping and reaping. I've seen three moves of God in this way. I believe I would have seen more had there been humility and people believing the promises of God.

But nevertheless, we're happy for what God has done and is doing. And so I'd like to go to Scripture first before we continue on with stories and see that travailing was normal. We don't have time to fully look into this topic today, but for sake of time, we find that it was normal for the Apostle Paul.

In Acts chapter 20, 17, we read, from Miletus, Paul sent to Ephesus for the elders of the church. And when they arrived, he said to them, You know how I lived the whole time I was with you from the first day I came into the province of Asia, I served the Lord with great humility and with tears. Most people think that they are serving God, and they only think about serving God in terms of what they do in exercising their gifts and talents and spending of their money.

But have you ever considered this morning that you can actually serve God with your tears? Ignatius, one of the early church fathers who lived at the turn of the first century, used to talk about the gift of tears. In fact, he tells us that we should pray for this great gift, that our hearts be so moved by God that we are

moved to tears and that we grieve over the things that grieve the heart of God. Then he tells us that when he had no words to utter, he would only groan and weep when pleading with God about the souls of the lost.

The Apostle Paul lived like this. He says that he lived with them for years with tears. But he doesn't tell us what the weeping was about.

But I believe a clue is found in Galatians 4.19 where he said, My little children of whom I travail in birth again until Christ be formed in you. They were Christians, but they had fallen into legalism. I want to say something, that legalism and traditionalism is deadly and dangerous because it makes a person feel spiritual even when they're not.

I would rather deal with a drug addict with a prostitute than try to convert a legalistic Christian who thinks they're saved. Because they already got all the right answers. They have all the right theology.

These people, they honor me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me. Their rules are but what? Traditions taught by men. And so Paul travailed in prayer because somehow these Christians, had they started with grace, they were taught about grace, but they were going back to the law.

Don't do this. Don't do that. Don't eat this.

Don't go here. Don't go there. Don't, don't, don't, don't, don't.

They were acting out of duty instead of devotion. They were acting out of compulsion instead of compassion. They were acting out of legalism instead of love.

And he had to start travailing in prayer for them in order that the meek and the mild and the loving Christ be formed in them. We often think of travailing in prayer for revival and for the lost, but I want to say this. We need to start travailing in our churches for one another and for those who are bound by legalism and the things that keep them, the besetting sins that so easily beset.

It was normal not only for the Apostle Paul, it was normal for the Lord Jesus. And if it's true that we're to be imitators of Christ, then it is true that one of the things we should imitate in this prayer life is how he prayed. In Hebrews 5, 7, we're given a glimpse into how Jesus prayed.

We read, During the days of Jesus' life on earth, He offered up prayers and petitions with loud cries and tears. Jesus Himself was a wonderful example of travailing in prayer on behalf of others. Until recently, I never noticed that in the story of Lazarus and his rising from the dead that Jesus actually started to prevail before the miracle took place.

Starting in verse 32 of that chapter, we read this, Then when Mary was come where Jesus was and saw Him, she fell down at His feet saying unto Him, Lord, if You had been here, my brother would not have died. When Jesus therefore saw her weeping and the Jews also weeping which came with her, He groaned in the Spirit and was troubled and said, Where have You laid Him? And they said to Him, Lord, come and see. And then we read, Jesus wept again.

Here we learn that Jesus had such a burden over this situation that He not only groaned, He actually wept. He wept tears, real tears. And He wasn't crying, folks, because Lazarus was dead, because He knew He was going to raise Him from the dead.

He was crying because His tears were showing the compassion for the human race bound by the curse of death from which it could not loose itself. He was crying because of the lostness and unbelief of others around Him. And then in verse 38, we pick up the story, Jesus therefore again, groaning in Himself, went to the grave.

And it was a cave and a stone lay across it. And Jesus said, Take the stone away. And Martha, the sister of Him that was dead, said to Him, Lord, by this time He smells.

For He had been dead four days. And Jesus said to her, Did I not tell you that if you'd believe, you would see the glory of God? Notice that Jesus was still in travail. Up until the point, He came to that tomb.

And in that state of mind, that travailing of spirit, He uttered the command for Lazarus to come forth, and the miracle was accomplished. Of course, the greatest travail of all time was the travail in the Garden of Gethsemane before being crucified for the sins of the world. Luke 22, 44, we read, And being in anguish, He prayed more earnestly, and His sweat was like drops of blood falling to the ground.

And what was the result of His travail? We read about it in Isaiah 53, 11. He shall see the travail of His soul and shall be satisfied. Why? By His knowledge shall My righteous servant justify many.

And folks, it's not just the fact that Jesus died that saves people. Have you ever thought of that? It's not just the fact that Jesus died that saves people. It is the fact that He travailed in His soul, that salvation has been brought to you and me and to those who will come to know Him.

And in case we question this, the Lord reinforces this point in the next verse in verse 12 of Isaiah 53. We read, And He bore the sin of many and made intercession for the transgressors. Is it any wonder our evangelistic techniques are so anemic? Is it any wonder that some of the stats in our evangelistic crusades are that only 2% darken the door of a church a year later after praying a sinner's prayer? Can spiritual birth take place without travail when it does not happen physically in the natural realm? The answer is no.

And as Christians, as pastors, as churches, we cannot minimize the importance of travailing for the purposes of bringing about salvation to the lost and revival amongst God's people. That is why we read in Joel 2.17, Let the priests... Do you know we are a royal priesthood, all of us here today? You are a royal priesthood. I am a priest along with you, according to 1 Peter 2.9. Let the priests who minister before the Lord weep between the temple porch and the altar.

Let them say, Spare your people, O Lord. Over the past six months, the Lord has in a new way impressed upon our church fellowship the importance of travailing in prayer. I'd like to share with you some recent stories.

There are so many that I would run out of time and I'm going to try to keep to my time frame here. But the Lord began to burden first the sister and then others in our church about the meaning of travailing prayer. And in our prayer meetings, by the way, almost everyone who comes on Sunday also comes to prayer meeting.

And sometimes more prayer is done on Sunday than on our Wednesday prayer meeting because usually people don't leave until around 10 o'clock at night. Now it's a little easier because we've started a new work and we're meeting in a home. So I understand that the venue and the logistics are a little different than when I had a church in a church building.

But we began to travail and people began to travail in spirit and to seriously seek the Lord. So God sends people into the most miraculous way to be saved. One man by the name of Arium from Columbia, a Spanish-speaking fellow, one day through an interesting set of circumstances he shows up.

I preach the message. Then we go and we have potluck every Sunday. And then all of the one and others, you know all the one and others in Scripture, you know pray for one another, encourage one another, bear one another, all the one and others, they wonderfully take place that I don't have to orchestrate or organize it.

It just happens. And so he made his way over to me and he said, I have some questions about this book. Can you tell me what it says? I shared very simply the gospel with him.

And he looked at me and he said this. He said, I have been to mosques. I've been to Hindu temples.

I've been to Buddhist temples. I have been to the Mormon temple. I have been to the Jehovah Witness Hall.

I have been to many churches. I have been seeking for the truth for years, but I want to tell you something, Mark. I don't even need to know whether you're telling me the truth today because I can feel it in my heart because of the love and what he was soon to realize was the power of the Holy Spirit because of the prayers of people in another room praying for him to get saved.

Is that not what Jesus said? By this shall all men know you are my disciples. What, if you have love one for another? And that love is never there unless there's the unity and the power of the Holy Spirit present as well, brothers and sisters. And so I shared the gospel.

And of course, remember, I don't lead anyone to Christ. The Holy Spirit does that. And he left, and that night, in the quietness of his own room, he got saved.

Wonderfully saved. He was so excited that on prayer meeting, he didn't know any different. You see, he hasn't been taught that you've got to come to a church where it's seeker-sensitive or user-friendly.

By the way, stop being seeker-sensitive and user-friendly, won't you? Jesus is the sensitive seeker. We don't have to be. We just have to love people and speak the truth in love.

The only thing that counts is faith expressing itself through love. We can have all the theology, but just make sure when we preach it, we have love in our hearts. Or it'll take care of the rest.

So, of course, he had not read the church growth manuals, and so he figured he'd bring his two unsaved brothers to Wednesday night prayer meeting where we pray, and it's not an organ recital as our brother shared the other night. We get down to brass tacks. We never know how long we're going to pray.

We just let the Holy Spirit lead that. And he brings his two brothers, and both of them, 19 and 20, they had demonic experiences when they were younger. They told me that the devil had appeared to them and he had marked their family, and their family had been involved with witchcraft and all kinds of stuff in Columbia.

And so the younger brother began to pray. I mean, you can't even get Christians to pray in a prayer meeting, and he's not as saved, and he's oppressed, and he starts to pray, and his prayer was anything but theological. It was actually heretical.

I had to stop him in the middle of his prayer. But I did it in love, and I said, friend, you're here to learn. Just listen to the way we pray.

And under my breath, I'm thinking, stop praying to Harrison. That's okay. You know, that really threw a wrench, because, you know, you talk about grieve the Holy Spirit, I can really feel there's a spiritual battle there, because when he was praying, it was a demonic type prayer.

It was very unsettling, to say the least. But I closed the prayer meeting, and we had, by the way, the devotional we had read that night was from 2 Chronicles 20, when Jehoshaphat had to go out and fight the Ammonites and Moabites, and God said, the battle is not yours, it's the Lord's. And so he sent out, remember, the singers went ahead of them to give praise and thanks to the Lord, and when they got to the battlefield, God had already taken care of the armies and defeated them on their behalf, and all they did was sing.

That was devotional. And so I closed in prayer, and I said, Lord, what the enemy has meant unto us for harm tonight, thinking of that situation, you've meant unto us for good. Praise be the name of the Lord.

So we had our snack, and there's an unspoken rule when I or anyone else is witnessing to someone, people just break off, and they go into other rooms, and they begin to seek the Lord and travail for the lost. So here I am sitting with this young man, and as I'm sitting there, his face is going into contortions. He was demonized, possessed, whatever you want to call it.

We don't use techniques. It's just the word of God and prayer. Jesus said, these kind come not out except by prayer.

And I'm sitting there for a half hour, and just giving scripture to this kid was like using a pea shooter against a Sherman tank. Nothing was working. I mean, he's bound by chains of iron.

His mind was bound. He was in torment. And about a half hour, I said, Lord, I'm just going to shut this thing down.

He needs to hear more. You know, faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word. He needs to hear more of the word.

And the Holy Spirit says, Mark, don't leave. You wait this out. I thought that was the flesh.

So I said, Lord, did you really tell me that? And the Lord lay in my heart, don't you leave this room. You wait this out. Half hour goes by, an hour goes by, an hour and a half goes by, an hour and 45 minutes, and I'm looking out the glass windows, and I can see in the other room that people are there travailing for this young man.

And all of a sudden, one of our new brothers, the new convert, who was a Christian, but he wasn't born again, and then realized he needed to get born again, and he got saved earlier this year, but the Spirit of the Lord is on him, and he remembered the devotional that I shared in 2 Chronicles, and I could hear him singing. He began to sing, I love you, Lord. And as soon as he got halfway through the first verse, the Spirit of God descended on that young man, delivered him and saved him, and he wept tears of joy and rejoiced in the Lord he was delivered.

Travailing prayer. His brother likewise was oppressed, but he was not repentant, and I told him, you can't come back here anymore until you repent of your sin and allow God to deliver you, and you come to faith in Christ. I said, when you're ready, you come back, but not until then.

It's too unsettling. Very terrible. As a matter of fact, twice when he came, our recording stopped, right in the middle, as soon as he walked in.

Very demonic presence. A few weeks ago, that young man came back, but no one saw him come in. He stayed in the hallway near their grandfather clock, and no one saw him because I was teaching in our living room.

But one of the ladies in our church who travails in prayer, immediately the Spirit of God told her, without her knowing, that man, you pray for his salvation. You pray for Andres' salvation. She got up to leave, to go up to the third floor to get alone to pray, and there he is in the hallway, and she knew that it was the Spirit of God.

She went up, and she began to travail for him, and right after the message, he came to me and says, I need to get right with God. I said, where would you like to talk? He says, let's go down to the lake, Lake Ontario. Let's go down.

I just want to be alone. So we went down, and while we went, all the brothers and sisters, they began to weep for his soul. For two hours, they wept for his soul, and after two hours, God saved him.

Right there on the park bench, saved him and delivered him. I said to him, Andres, do you realize that we love you very much? There's other brothers and sisters right now who are praying for you. They're your family.

We love you. He says, let's go and see my brothers. By the way, he was a semi-professional soccer player.

He was coming up to Toronto to work for, hopefully play for Toronto FC. He says, our semi-professional in Columbia will kick you guys up here, he said. He got saved, and God changed his plans, and now he wants to be a medical doctor.

But you know, he came through the front door, and he saw everyone's tears. People were still weeping as we walked in. Weeping.

His brothers weeping for him. Everyone embraced him. Hugged him.

Welcomed him into the family of God. And the travailing was over. You know, the Lord says, I will build my church, and the gates of hell will not prevail against it.

When we stop trying to build the church, and let the Lord move in, He does wonderful things. I remember our elders had a saying. It was coined from Lee Trevino years ago.

Lee Trevino, I believe it was him, was teeing off. No sooner did he go for his backswing, and a lightning bolt struck him, and he was knocked unconscious, and was taken to the hospital. Afterwards, a reporter asked him, he said, Mr. Trevino, what did you learn from this event? And he said, I learned this, that when God wants to play through, you let him play through.

I remember we used to pray that as elders. Lord, just help us to stay out of the way. We're going to pray.

We don't want any human fingerprints on this. We're just going to stay out of the way. But Lord, please play through.

And he did. How important is travailing in prayer for the souls of the lost, and the complacency of Christians, and the church. It is so important that God takes special note of those who travail.

This was true in Ezekiel's day, and it's true in our day as well. I'd like to read for you from Ezekiel 9.4 where we read that the Lord said to the man who was clothed in linen, He said, go throughout the city of Jerusalem and put a mark on the foreheads of those who grieve and lament. And in the authorized version, it says literally, for those who sigh and cry for those who sigh and cry over all the detestable things that are done in it.

And as I listened, He said to the others, follow him through the city and kill without showing pity or compassion. Slaughter old men, young men and maidens, women and children, but do not touch anyone who has the mark. Begin at My sanctuary.

So they began with the elders who were in front of the temple. How important is it that we travail and seek God in prayer so important that it is as it were that He puts a mark, an anointing. He gives us a ministry.

I love what Psalm 126, 5 and 6 says. Those who sow in tears will reap with songs of joy. He who goes out weeping, carrying seed to sow, will return with songs of joy, carrying sheaves with him.

What are the steps if we are to become the kind of men and women whom God is seeking to raise up to pray? First step is we must pray for God's grace. Pray for the enablement of the Spirit of God by the grace of God to empower us and enable us to pray. Jesus said, Without Me you can do nothing.

It's not by might or by power, but by My Spirit, says the Lord. Do you know that I don't expect that this message will have any kind of effect on anyone in this whole world if it's not for the Spirit of God and His grace accompanying the Spirit of God to enable us to pray? Do you know that? That's why I don't try to make anyone guilty and convict people. I stopped trying to convict my congregation a long time ago.

I can't convict people. That's the role of the Holy Spirit. Pastors, stop trying to... You can't be the Holy Spirit in the life of someone else.

Father, you can't change your children or your wife. Wife, you can't change your husband and your children. Why are you playing the Holy Spirit in their lives? Surrender them to the Lord.

I love this verse in Zechariah 12.10. It became the cry of our church where I saw the first move of God. God says, And I will pour out on the house of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem a Spirit of grace and supplication. And then they will look on Me, the one they have pierced, and they will mourn for Him as one mourns for an only child and grieve bitterly for Him as one grieves for a firstborn son.

You know what we used to pray? I began praying, O Lord, descend upon my leaders and the people, specifically the men of this church, that You would fall upon them by Your Spirit of grace and supplication if You do not give them the grace and the Holy Spirit to enable them to pray. They will not pray. Oh, I remember, I used to try to be the Holy Spirit.

I remember preaching a sermon entitled, My house shall be called a house of prayer. Boy, you could smell the fire and brimstone coming off that message. We used to have eight people in our prayer meeting up until that message, and I thought, now we're going to pack them out.

We're going to start selling tickets and be standing room only. Oh, it was a wonderful message. And that Wednesday, I went there prepared for a big crowd, and actually, the attendance did grow.

It went from eight to nine. One person. One poor, convicted, battered soul.

And the next week, the conviction wore off and she didn't come back. We were back to eight. But when we realized that this was a work of the Holy Spirit and the grace of God, three of us as elders began praying.

Three months later, out of the clear blue, 17 men approached us in the congregation under deep conviction of the Holy Spirit, and they said, we want to pray like you men. We want to begin having cottage prayer meetings like you elders do. How do we pray? And the Spirit of God convicted and now we had 20 of us praying.

And then the wives came to us. This was shocking. The wives came, and I thought these were the spiritual women in our church, and they said, guess what? We want to start our own ladies' prayer meeting.

I said, why? They said, our husbands are leaving us in the dust spiritually. Isn't that a great problem to have in a church when the men leave their wives in the dust spiritually? And so the women began to pray and began to travail too. And then three months later, God came and began saving.

We saw 14 weeks without a break where God saved people every week in the most remarkable ways. Most remarkable ways. And there were no human fingerprints on anything.

First, we pray for God's Spirit and His grace. And then secondly, realizing that He will give us His grace if we seek Him. That's what He wants to do.

If God has given you grace to be saved, He will give you grace to be sanctified. Part of the sanctification process is prayer. The second step is to humble ourselves.

We heard this from our brother Roberts last night. 2 Chronicles 7.14. It's the flagship verse for revival. If my people who are called by my name will humble themselves and pray.

But I want to quote two other passages that will help us understand what it means to humble ourselves. In Psalm 51.16, we read, You do not delight in sacrifice or I would bring it. Folks, all the things that you and I do, you know, all of your service and the gifts and talents and money and everything else we do in church.

You know what? God doesn't delight in that alone. And He may not delight in it at all. If our hearts are not right, He goes on and He says, this is the right heart I accept.

You don't delight in these things, but the sacrifices of God, the things He delights in, are a broken spirit, a broken and contrite heart, O God, You will not despise. Then Isaiah 57.15, For this is what the high and lofty One says, He who lives forever, whose name is holy, I live in a high and holy place, but also with Him who is contrite and lowly in spirit, to revive the spirit of the lowly and to revive the heart of the contrite. A broken and a contrite heart.

That's what it means to be humble. We ask for God's grace and His Holy Spirit to touch us, and then we expect that God is going to help us to be contrite and broken. We pray for tears to be able to weep over our own sin.

You say, contrite and broken over what? Our sin. Remember, brothers and sisters, when we sin, we sin against knowledge and light, and our sins are greater than anyone else's. You see, we can criticize the adulterers and the murderers out there, but if we lust and hate, right now, I'm sitting with a room full of adulterers and murderers of whom I'm chief.

I've hated before. I've lusted before. Oh, don't say that from the pulpit.

Everyone knows it's true, but don't say it. Maybe that's why in our churches we don't have people getting real with the Lord and one another because in the pulpit, we're afraid to be vulnerable before people. But him who is without sin this morning cast the first Bible.

You know what I'm talking about. So that means a wonderful thing. Each one of us has a wonderful testimony because God delivers us from these things.

Amen? He delivers us. He delivers us. And that is what some of you were the Apostle Paul said to the Corinthians.

That is what you were. But you were washed. Amen? And then when we're broken and contrite over our own sins, then we can break over the sins of others and weep for them and see God move in their hearts.

I started telling you the story of what happened to me after two weeks of weeping over my own sin. And then one night, I came home and I was distraught. I said, Lord, you can never use me again.

The realization of my sin is overwhelming. And I got down on my knees and I did a Bible roulette thing. You ever do Bible roulette? You just kind of flip and point.

And I did that. I turned to Micah 7, verse 18. Who is a God like you who pardons sin and forgives the transgression of the remnant of His inheritance.

You do not stay angry forever, but delight to show mercy. You will again have compassion on us. You will tread our sins underfoot and hurl all our iniquities into the depths of the sea.

You will be true to Jacob and show mercy to Abraham as you pledged an oath to our fathers in days long ago. And with that, the tears of sadness turned to tears of joy as the love of God was shed abroad in my heart according to Romans 5.5 by the Spirit of God. And I wept because I now understood how much God loves us.

He's calling us to humble ourselves today not to come before an angry God who's going to judge us. If He was that way, none of us would be here this morning. He's slow to anger, abounding in mercy.

Moses wanted to hear the Lord. He goes up and he's going to get all the laws, all the do's and don'ts so he can be a good Christian, right? And God proclaims His name, the Lord, the Lord. The compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness.

That's who you come to today. Moses says, Oh God, if you don't go with me, I won't go. I want to see your glory.

Cause your glory to come in front of me. And what did God say? Oh Moses, you don't know what you're asking for. Just knowing my glory and my holiness isn't going to get you anywhere.

You're going to feel like nothing. You're going to be less than nothing. Moses, here's what I'm going to do.

And we read in the passage that God caused all His what? Goodness. His goodness to pass in front of Him. When the kindness and love of God, our Savior, appeared, He saved us.

Does that know what Scripture says? I want to say something to you preachers. If we don't preach the love of God and balance the love of God with His judgments, you're not going to see anyone come to the Lord. You'll be so afraid of Him.

But God is a compassionate God. He knows and remembers that we are dust. Henry Morehouse, the boy preacher, I believe he was 17.

He preached at Moody's Church, D.L. Moody's Church, for seven nights. He preached on John 3, 16. Moody says he was so revolutionized by the love of God, his ministry was never the same again.

You say, Mark, do you not preach hell? Do you not preach hell? I sure do. But I speak the truth in love. And as our brother Edgar said this morning, judgment is God's last way, His last way of averting us from certain destruction.

But until then, He's extending His arms like the father of the prodigal son. Every day He's there at the road looking to you. Will you come to Him today? The Lord says this in Jeremiah 29 in closing.

For I know the plans I have for you, declares the Lord, plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you a hope and a future. Then you will call upon Me and come and pray to Me, and I will listen to you. You will seek Me and find Me when you seek Me with all your heart.

And I will be found by you, declares the Lord, and will bring you back from captivity. Some of you are in captivity today and in bondage to sin. And I want to tell you something.

We preach so often the ministry of Christ and the finished work of Christ at the cross, and it stops there, but I want to tell you, with the work of Christ comes not only forgiveness, but freedom on the other side of the cross through the power of the Holy Spirit. I've mentioned before and I'll say it again, the symbol of the Christian faith is not just an empty cross, it is an empty tomb and an occupied throne. That power is like the working of His mighty strength, which He exerted in Christ when He raised Him from the dead.

We often talk about, I'm crucified with Christ. Don't. That's true.

But realize that He raised you for the power of sin and death through the power of the Holy Spirit who now lives in you, if you believe. It is for freedom that Christ has set you free. Galatians 5.1. Do not be burdened again by a yoke of slavery.

You will know the truth and the truth will set you free. What's the truth? The truth is the power of God through the Holy Spirit will raise you and by His grace will keep you. He began a good work and you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ.

How? Through the grace of God. So this morning, the Lord has spoken to you. I trust that you will seek to get alone with Him.

You're welcome to pray at the front. It's lunchtime now and after this message you're dismissed. But to get alone with the Lord and to seek Him.

But I implore you by the grace and mercy and love of God, be reconciled to Him. The Lord Jesus loves you. He loves you.

As Edgar said, how precious are your thoughts towards me. He thinks such precious thoughts to you. If He wasn't, we wouldn't be here.

And He bids you come today. And ask Him, say, Lord, I have not prayed. My heart's been cold.

Lord, I haven't even shed a tear. Not only for the loss, not even for my own family. When was the last time when someone was taken in a sin? Those of you who are spiritual, go and restore such a one in a spirit of meekness.

Lest you also be tempted. You say, well, how am I going to be tempted with their sin? I don't sin like that. You know, the temptation is not the temptation for their sin.

It's a temptation of pride or arrogance or harshness. You know, the Lord has done a work in your heart when you can kneel beside a brother and sister who's fallen and struggling and you can hold them by the hand and pray for them and weep over their sin. When you can get on your knees and weep for the lost, when you can get on your knees and weep before you preach, you will seek me and you will find me when you seek me with all your heart and I will be found by you and I will bring you back from captivity.

Let's pray. Heavenly Father, we thank you for your word. Lord, without these promises, the lies of the enemy are so great that we could never think clear.

But you will know the truth and the truth will set you free and I pray, Heavenly Father, that as Zechariah prayed that your spirit of grace and supplication would fall today, now, on my brothers and sisters whom I love in Christ. Would you please fall on them as you fell on us? You have no favorite children. Fall on them, whether it's now, whether it's in an hour, whether it's tonight, whether it's next week.

Fall on us. Oh, God, raise up a people of prayer. Raise us up to pray and to travail in prayer for only then will we produce children, spiritual children.

Thank you, Father, that this is your work, not ours, else we'd be proud. We thank you. Without you, we could do nothing.

Thank you that you will give us this grace and your Holy Spirit to accomplish what only you can accomplish for the honor and glory of your name and for everlasting results. We pray these things in the name of our wonderful Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Whoever lives to intercede for us that he's praying for us now that we would submit to him.

We thank you, Heavenly Father, in the name of your Son. Amen.

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