

# The Christian's Vital Breath

by W.H. Griffith Thomas

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*Prayer is essential for spiritual growth, guidance, and power in service, and is the appointed means for developing spiritual faculties and leading to spiritual ripeness.*

**Scripture:** Mark 11:24, Ephesians 6:18, Philippians 4:6, Hebrews 5:7, 1 John 5:14

**Topics:** "Prayer Life", "Divine Revelation"

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## Description

W.H. Griffith Thomas preaches on the essential foundations of the Christian faith, emphasizing the importance of Divine Revelation through God's Word and the necessity of Human Response through prayer. He delves into the significance of prayer in the lives of believers, drawing examples from biblical figures like Abraham, Moses, David, and Paul, as well as historical Christian figures like Augustine and Luther. The sermon explores various aspects of prayer, such as the expression of need, desire, humility, consecration, fellowship, and enquiry, highlighting the importance of a sincere and heartfelt connection with God.

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## Transcript

The Christian religion rests upon two great facts. The first is that God has spoken to man in the Lord Jesus Christ, and still speaks by the Holy Spirit. The second is that man can hear God's voice and speak to Him in return. Divine Revelation and Human Response to it are thus the two foundations of all true life. The voice of God to man is heard in the Word of God applied by the Holy Spirit. The voice of man to God is mainly expressed in prayer.

We have already considered the former of these two subjects, the Revelation of God in His Word in its relation to the Christian life. To the latter we now turn our attention in order to discover some of the secrets of that most wonderful of all human powers, the ability to speak to the "Lord who made heaven and earth."

Prayer has always been prominent in the lives of the people of God. Whether we study the lives of the men of God recorded in the Bible, and look at the history of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Moses, Joshua, Samuel, David, Hezekiah, Isaiah, Ezekiel, Daniel, Peter, Paul, and John; or whether we take up some of the great biographies of the Christian centuries, and read of Augustine, Luther, Rutherford, Brainerd, McCheyne, and a host of others, we can easily see the prominence of prayer in every instance, and this prominence is a sure sign of its necessity, importance, and blessedness. Above and beyond all other proofs is the example of our Lord, true "Son of Man," whose life on earth was a life of prayer. In the second Gospel, which, as is well known, is preeminently the record of His constant service and marvelous

activity, there are no less than ten occasions recorded of His retirement for prayer and communion with God.

In view of the paramount importance of prayer let us consider some of the inexhaustible wealth of New Testament teaching connected with it, giving ourselves mainly to the study of the various words and phrases associated with prayer in the Word of God.

## 1. Aspects of Prayer

Prayer is a sense of need (δ■ησις and δ■ομαι and their cognates). The substantive δ■ησις occurs nineteen times and the verb δ■ομαι twenty-three times. The former is translated in Ephesians 6:18 by "supplication," and the meaning there, as elsewhere, is the acknowledgment of a sense of need. This is, perhaps, the most elementary idea of prayer, and it may be well for us to ask ourselves whether we realize our need when we pray. Is it a fact that when we come before God in prayer we have a definite and real consciousness of need? Is there a vacuum in our spiritual life, so that we feel we must be filled with the presence and grace of God? It is well for us to test ourselves after a season of prayer, and to ask ourselves, What have I been asking for? Do I remember the petitions I have offered, and have they really been the expression of my sense of genuine need? Even the most mature believer may well go back from time to time to this simple and elementary touchstone of the reality of his prayers.

Prayer is an expression of desire (αιτ■ω, α■τημα). The Greek words are found altogether in some seventy-four passages. "Let your requests (αιτ■ματα) be made known unto God" (Phil. 4:6) is one of these, and "Ask (αιτειτε), and it shall be given you" (Matt. 7:7) is another.

"Prayer is the soul's sincere desire."

The thought here is associated with the attitude of a petitioner, one who has a deep desire, and expresses it in prayer. Does this accord with our experience of prayer? "What things soever ye desire" (Mark 11:24). Do our prayers truly voice our strongly felt desire? If so, we know a little of what prayer means; but if there is no real desire, our words count for nothing. Prayer is a spirit of humility. This aspect of prayer comes before us in one passage only (Heb. 5:7) where the word ικετηρ■α refers to our Lord's prayer in Gethsemane, and is translated in our Authorized Version "supplications".

"Who in the days of His flesh, when He had offered up prayers and supplications with strong crying and, tears unto Him that was able to save Him from death, and was heard in that He feared." The picturesque and beautiful thought imbedded in the word is suggested by the fact that it was originally used for the olive branch which a suppliant had in his hands as he came towards a king from whom he desired some favour. He thus grounded his application on his attitude as a suppliant, on his humility.

From the application of the word to the olive branch came its use to express the thing signified by the olive branch, the spirit and attitude of a suppliant. How beautiful is the word in connection with our Lord's earthly life of prayer as an indication of His true and perfect manhood. The word sums up the teaching of the Epistle to the Hebrews as to the perfect oneness of our Lord with us in His humanity (apart from sin). "He was made like unto His brethren in all things" (Heb. 2:17 and 4:15).

In Him, and like Him, we too come before God as suppliants. We approach the King of kings (Who is none the less King of kings because He is our Father in Christ Jesus) in the merits of our Lord, with the olive branch of peace made through the blood of His Cross. Is this the spirit of our prayers? It is possible to

abuse the covenant of grace and to become unduly familiar with God and holy things. While it is true that we have entrance to the presence of God in Christ, it is "entrance into the holiest".

"Holy and reverend is His Name." There is far too little of the spirit of humility and reverence in our prayers. We must take the shoes from off our feet, for the place whereon we stand is indeed holy ground. "Prayer is an attitude of consecration. In no less than one hundred and twenty-five passages of the New Testament we find the words προσευχ■ and προσε■χομαι used to express the idea of prayer. It is by far the commonest word denoting prayer to God, and its root idea is consecration.

It is compounded of ευχ■, "a vow" and πρ■ς, "turning towards"; and means the turning of ourselves to God in surrender. It is an attitude of worship expressed in prayer. It will suffice to refer to Acts 1:14 and 10:9 as two out of the many passages. When we remember the large number of occurrences of these words, we can readily see what is the normal attitude of the believer in prayer. It is the attitude of a worshipper, of one who is turned towards God with all his heart and soul.

This is one of the essential secrets of prayer, the soul's wholehearted surrender and consecration. David said, "If I regard iniquity in my heart, the Lord will not hear me" (Psa. 66:18); and if the soul is unwilling to surrender all to God and to turn to Him in wholehearted devotion, our prayers will never receive an answer. On the other hand, when we turn to God in submission and dedication, the initial act becoming a permanent attitude of the life, our prayers prevail, and "we have the petitions that we desired of Him," (1 John 5:15).

Prayer is a privilege of fellowship. This thought is suggested by the rare word εντε■ξις, which occurs only twice in the New Testament (1 Tim. 2:1, 4:5), being rendered "intercession" in the former, and "prayer" in the latter passage. The verb associated with this substantive (εντυγγ■νω) is found in Romans 8:27, 34; 11:2; Hebrews 7:25, and is invariably rendered by "intercede" or "make intercession". It is necessary to remember that in the course of time, since our Authorized Version was given to us, the meaning of the word "intercession" has become modified.

We are now accustomed to limit the word to prayer for others, but there was no such limit three hundred years ago. In 1 Timothy 4:5, the Greek word cannot mean prayer for others only, and is probably to be limited to prayer for one's self. The original word [Trench, Synonyms of the New Testament, p. 190.] implies the meeting of two friends who talk together and ask each other for something, thus realizing and expressing their fellowship. The word suggests the thought of prayer as familiar speech, as to the privilege of close friendship and intimate fellowship.

This is one of the deepest and most precious aspects of prayer. "Truly our fellowship is with the Father, and with His Son Jesus Christ" (1 John 1:3). It was this fellowship and holy familiarity of friendship that Enoch and Noah enjoyed as they "walked with God". It was this which led to Abraham being called "the friend of God," and it was familiar intercourse with God which led to Moses being described as one "whom the Lord knew face to face" (Deut. 34:10). This is the culminating point of Christian privilege and opportunity, fellowship with God and the power of intimate and blessed intercourse in prayer.

Prayer is a spirit of enquiry. The word suggesting this is ερωτ■ω (John 16:23). Our Lord said to His disciples, "In that day ye shall ask Me no questions," i.e., in the day of the Holy Spirit's full revelation the disciples would have no need to make enquiries of their Master; all the things which had troubled them would be made clear. And yet this word is used once in the New Testament in connection with prayer. In 1 John 5:16 we read of "sin unto death," i.e., not any particular sin, but sin, the state and condition of evil.

The Apostle then goes on to say, "I do not say that he should make enquiry (ask a question) concerning this." The thought suggested is that of the believer asking questions, seeking light on a difficulty, "Lord, what is the meaning of this?" This is part, and a most precious part, of our life of privilege, that of going to the Lord in prayer, seeking light and explanation. One of the most beautiful illustrations of this is found in the story of the Last Supper as recorded by St.

John. When John was leaning on the bosom of Jesus, Peter, wishing to know who was about to betray their Master, beckoned to John to ask Jesus who it was. In the Revised Version we read, "Then John, leaning back, as he was, on Jesus' breast, said, Lord, who is it?" He was already leaning on the bosom of his Master, and he had no need to come closer: so he simply leaned back and asked, "Lord, who is it?" This is the true attitude of the believer, in such close fellowship with Christ that he can simply ask his Master about any difficulty, and seek for the explanation.

Prayer in this sense is not for gifts or grace so much as for guidance and light. The Lord "will be enquired of" for this. He delights to have us take our difficulties and problems to Him. He Himself said, "Shall I hide from Abraham that thing which I do?" and "Henceforth I call you not servants; for the servant knoweth not what his lord doeth: but I have called you friends; for all things that I have heard of My Father I have made known unto you." Let us treasure and use the privilege of fellowship more and more.

"Were half the breath vainly spent" in telling our difficulties to others used in telling the Lord about them, we should soon have fewer problems and many more solutions. Prayer is a bond of union. In Matthew 18:19 we read, "If two of you shall agree on earth as touching anything that they shall ask." The word translated "agree" is συμφωνῶ, from which we get our word "symphony". "If two of you shall symphonize," the two voices blending in beautiful agreement. Prayer, therefore, is more than the request of one individual, and is kept from being solitary and even selfish by being exercised in union with others.

Union in prayer is one of the most blessed and potent influences of true Christian life, and we cannot have too much united prayer. The "symphony" of God's people in prayer is the sure harbinger of spiritual blessing from God. These are seven of the most prominent aspects of prayer as revealed in the New Testament, and we may use them as a touchstone of our ideas of prayer, and also the reality of our own prayer life. They will show us what God means by prayer, and what He has for us of spiritual blessing by means of it.

As the Puritan Trapp quaintly says, "God respecteth not the arithmetic of our prayers, how many they be; nor the rhetoric of our prayers, how long they may be; nor the music of our prayers, how methodical they be; but the divinity of our prayers, how heart-sprung they are. Not gifts, but graces, prevail in prayer."

"To stretch my hand and touch Him,

Though He be far away;

To raise my eyes and see Him

Through darkness as through day;

To lift my voice and call Him -

This is to pray!

To feel a hand extended  
By One Who standeth near;  
To view the love that shineth  
In eyes serene and clear;  
To know that He is calling -  
This is to hear!"

## 2. Subjects of Prayer

From the thought of what prayer is, we naturally turn to consider the teaching of Holy Scripture as to the subjects of prayer, what we should pray for, the main and outstanding petitions warranted and encouraged in the New Testament. What are the things laid down in Scripture as to which there can be no doubt that we may and should pray to God?

Spiritual Adjustment. 2 Cor. 13:9, "This also we wish, even your perfection." The word means "adjustment," the proper and due adjustment of the soul's relation to God. This word and its cognates occur pretty frequently, and the meaning is invariably the same. "That the man of God may be adjusted" (2 Tim. 3:17). "For the adjusting of the saints" (Eph. 4:12). The word is used of "mending their nets" in Matthew 4:21, and the above passage in Ephesians 4:12 might literally be rendered, "for the repair of the saints". The people of God often need spiritual "repair," their nets to be "mended"; and this was the prayer of St. Paul for Corinth, where his anxieties about the spiritual life of the Church had been so great. "This I wish, even your repair." When anything has become wrong in the life of a believer the primary necessity is readjustment. As an arm which has been dislocated must be set before health and strength can return, so the soul must be reinstated in a right position with God before a healthful condition again becomes possible. The cause of so much dryness, weakness, powerlessness, in many a Christian life is that the soul is out of adjustment. This is one of our true aspirations in prayer, and no one can exaggerate its importance and necessity. For spiritual readjustment and repair, for reinstatement in the right position, for vigour of life, let us be much in prayer. Prayer brings us into the presence of God and enables us to see what is wrong. Prayer then brings to us the healing, forgiving grace of God which adjusts the soul and places it once more in that living union and communion with our Lord, from which all vigour, blessing, and joy naturally flow.

"Drop Thy still dews of quietness,  
Till all our strivings cease:  
Take from our souls the strain and stress,  
And let our ordered lives confess  
The beauty of Thy peace.  
Breathe through the pulses of desire  
Thy coolness and Thy balm;

Let sense be dumb, its heats expire:

Speak through the earthquake, wind, and fire,

O still small voice of calm!"

Spiritual Progress. Col. 4:12. Epaphras prayed for those at Colossae, that they might "stand perfect and complete in all the will of God." The word "perfect" here, as elsewhere, means mature, full-grown, ripe in experience (τέλειος). There is no allusion whatever in the word or context to the entire absence of sin or sinlessness. St. Paul frequently uses the word to denote a fully developed or ripening Christian as distinct from a new beginner, a "man in Christ" from a "babe." In 1 Corinthians 2:6, he writes, "We speak wisdom among them that are "mature," those that have reached or are approximating towards the end or goal (τέλειος) of their Christian life. It is this that our Lord meant when He said, "Be ye therefore (or, ye shall be) perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect" (Matt. 5:48). God is spoken of in the context of that verse as sending down His rain on the just and unjust, being kind indiscriminately to the unthankful and evil, and the Lord applies this to His disciples and says, "Do likewise, do not limit your attention to the good and beneficent. Be mature (and not immature) as is your Heavenly Father."

The precise form which Epaphras desired this maturity to take at Colossae was that they should stand "fully assured in all the will of God" (R.V.). The will of God is the crown of life, and when a believer is "fully assured" concerning it, its clearness, its blessedness, its authority, then indeed is he making spiritual progress.

Toward this end prayer is the appointed means. Prayer develops spiritual faculties and leads to spiritual ripeness. Prayer makes real the presence of God, and in that presence the will of God becomes clear and asserts its complete yet blessed authority. The more we pray, the riper we become and the more completely assured of the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning us. As a well-known writer, Dr. Schauffier, says, "When we are on our knees, then light flashes; then the intellect is clarified; then the conscience is aroused; then the spiritual sensibilities are quickened; and we can learn more of our duty and of His will than in hours of argumentation. So Jesus learned by prayer, and all He derived from men and nature was clarified and illuminated when the divine light came down as He was holding communion with His heavenly Father."

"O Jesus Christ, grow Thou in me,

And all things else recede;

My heart be daily nearer Thee,

From sin be daily freed.

Each day let Thy supporting might

My weakness still embrace;

My darkness vanish in Thy light,

Thy life my death efface.

In Thy bright beams which on me fall

Fade every evil thought;  
That I am nothing, Thou art all,  
I would be daily taught.  
Make this poor self grow less and less,  
Be Thou my life and aim;  
O make me daily, through Thy grace,  
More worthy of Thy Name."

Spiritual Power. Mark 9:28-29. "Lord, why could not we cast him out? ... This kind cometh not out but by prayer ..." There had been failure, dire and deplorable, on the part of the disciples in their Master's absence. A case of great need had been brought before them, and they had utterly failed to expel the demon, notwithstanding the power previously given to them for this very purpose. The power was evidently not absolute but conditional, and they had forgotten to fulfill the condition and so maintain the power.

The explanation of their failure is plainly told them by their Master. "This kind cometh not out but by prayer." They had failed in power because they had failed in prayer. If we would have power in service we must pray. The "demons" still to be found in our cities and villages, in our congregations and homes, will never be cast out except by prayer. "Lord, why is it my sermons are so powerless?" "Lord, how is it my Bible class lessons make no impression?" "Lord, why could I not lead those boys to Thee?"

"This kind cometh not out but by prayer." We must prepare, but we must also pray. Our life of service must be permeated with prayer. Sermons, classes, visiting, open-air speaking, every form of Christian service must be suffused with prayer. Then will come power and blessing, with glory and praise to God. Hitherto our aspirations in prayer have been concerned with ourselves and our own needs. We must now turn to the needs of others. A very large part of true Christianity is occupied with prayer for others.

Christian Fellowship. James 5:16. "Pray one for another." This is a call to pray for our friends and fellow believers in Christ. God has so constituted the Church that a great part of our spiritual blessings are mediated through others, and especially through the prayers of others. Samuel had a very high idea of the importance of praying for others when he said, "God forbid that I should sin against the Lord in ceasing to pray for you" (1 Sam. 12:23). The absence of intercessory prayer, then, is a sin.

How solemn and searching this is! How many of us commit it by limiting our prayers too much to ourselves, our own life and its needs. And yet who that has tried it does not know the unspeakable joy that comes from bearing up before God the name of friend after friend in earnest, constant and believing prayer. Some seem to find it a burden to do this. They have so many friends and acquaintances within their circle that it is quite impossible to bring them one by one to God and seek for definite blessing.

They therefore content themselves with the most general and inclusive prayer for blessing and grace on their friends. But this is to lose blessing for themselves and for others. Intercessory prayer need not be a burden but a joy if we only set about it carefully and simply. A little book such as Dr. Harford's Daily or Dr. Andrew Murray's Helps to Intercession will enable us to spread the names of our friends over a week, or

two weeks, or even a month, and so bring them before God without any difficulty and with ever-increasing delight.

Best of all, if we prepare our own little book of intercessory prayer, according to our particular needs and circumstances, and then use it day by day in intercessory prayer, we shall find this exercise of our Christian priesthood (Heb. 5:1) one of the greatest joys and most special privileges of our Christian life. In addition to the blessings that will surely come to those for whom we pray, we must never fail to remember the reflex benefits on our lives which come from seeking grace for others.

"He that watereth shall be watered also himself" (Prov. 11:25). Enlargement of soul, increase of sympathy, a deepening tenderness, a growing unselfishness, and a gradual conformity to the image of Him Whose main thought is (and was) always for others (Phil. 2:8) will mark the life of the believer who makes prominent the work of intercessory prayer. "The Lord turned the captivity of Job when he prayed for his friends" (Job 42:10).

"The weary ones had rest, the sad had joy

That day, and wondered 'how'.

A ploughman singing at his work had prayed,

'Lord, help them now.'

Away in foreign lands they wondered how

Their simple word had power.

At home, the Christians two or three had met

To pray an hour.

Yes, we are always wond'ring, wond'ring 'how':

Because we do not see

Someone, unknown perhaps, and far away,

On bended knee!"

F. M. Nesbit.

The Ministry. 2 Thess. 3:1. "Pray for us, that the Word of the Lord may run and be glorified." The Apostle Paul depended much and often on the prayers of his fellow Christians. "Ye also helping together by prayer for us" (2 Cor. 1:11). Prayer for the ministry is one of the most pressing duties and one of the most blessed privileges of Christian people. Mr. Spurgeon was once asked how it was that he obtained such great blessings in his church. "My people pray for me," he replied.

It is one of the joys and chief sources of power and encouragement in a minister's life to know that he is surrounded by a praying people. He knows and feels as he stands in the pulpit before the sermon commences that loving hearts are to be found in the congregation praying for the message he is about to deliver, and this gives him inspiration and power. And then to realize that during the week the concerns of

the church and congregation are being daily brought before God by his congregation in private and family prayer is a guarantee of true fellowship and constant blessing on church life.

A man cannot but preach with power if his people pray for him, and that church cannot help being a center of life and influence where the people are individually and unitedly waiting on God for spiritual blessing in the ministry. Some time ago a clergyman received a letter from a stranger who said that sixty years before she had received blessing in the particular church to which the clergyman ministered. Since then she had not failed to pray for the minister and congregation every Sunday morning, and she now wrote to enquire after the welfare of that church and to know something of its affairs after sixty years of absence and change.

Who can tell how much of the blessing which has been granted to that church has been due to that old saint's prayers? We cannot gauge the influence of our prayers as we plead for the ministry that it may be a ministry of power, that the Word preached may "run and be glorified," and that the Gospel may come not in word only, but also in power, and in the Holy Ghost, and in much assurance (1 Thess. 1:5). Worldwide Evangelization. Matt. 9:38. "Pray ye therefore the Lord of the harvest, that He will send forth labourers into His harvest."

Why "therefore"? Because "the harvest truly is plenteous, but the labourers are few" (verse 37). The place of prayer in connection with missions is thus clear and undoubted. One might think that in a work calling for thought, energy, devotion, effort, the need of prayer would be scarcely, if at all, felt. But the Lord here makes it prominent, and bases it on the greatness of the need and the fewness of the supply of workers. And Christian experience universally bears witness to the power of prayer in connection with the evangelization of the world.

We sometimes hear it said in missionary sermons and addresses when appealing for more help, "If you can do nothing else for us, you can pray," as though prayer were the easiest thing in the world. It is in reality the hardest thing to do for foreign missions. It is much easier to read of missions, or to give, or even to go. If a man begins to pray for missions he will soon find that the expenditure of spiritual power and energy is by no means small, if his prayers are in any sense real.

His prayers will lead to enquiry about missions, his inquiries will lead to knowledge, his knowledge to interest, his interest to sympathy, his sympathy to gifts, and his gifts to the consecration of his life to this paramount duty of the Christian Church. To pray definitely we must know something of the great field, for only thus can our prayers become definite, earnest, and certain of an answer. Prayer for missions should be our daily work and joy. In connection with almost all our Missionary Societies there are Cycles of Prayer covering a week or a month, during which we can plead with God definitely and intelligently for the various parts of the great harvest field as well as for the congregations at home where there are so many Christians who at present are doing nothing for their Master.

A strong, vigorous, growing Christian life will always make daily prayer for the evangelization of the world a foremost duty, and find in it a precious privilege and an increasing blessing. The Church of Christ. Eph. 6:17ff. "Praying ... for all saints." What a glorious conception the Apostle gives us in Ephesians of the fellowship of all Christians in the mystical Body of Christ our Lord! That Epistle is essentially the Epistle of the Church rather than of the individual, and in addition to the teaching of the Epistle as a whole (especially chapters 1-4) the phrase "all saints" occurs twice to remind us of the place and power of the whole community of Christians.

In chapter 3:18-19, St. Paul prays that Christians may be able to comprehend "with all saints what is the breadth, and length, and depth, and height; and to know the love of Christ." All the saints are required for this, for the love of Christ is beyond the comprehension of any individual Christian. From another point of view we see the importance of the whole church when we are asked by the Apostle to pray "for all saints". Fellowship is one of the most characteristic elements of true Christianity, and the true life can only be lived aright in proportion as we seek to realize and benefit by the fullest possible fellowship among Christians.

A solitary and purely individualistic Christianity is at once an impossibility, and an absolute contradiction of the very essence of the Gospel. The influence and blessing of the Church on the individual, and the corresponding action of the individual as part of the church are two sides of a great truth. We can readily understand, therefore, the necessity, power, and blessing of prayer for the whole church. Such prayer keeps the one who prays from narrowness, selfishness, and mere individualism, while the answer to the prayer blesses the church and enables it to realize more fully the purpose of God concerning it as a witness for Christ.

Prayer "for all saints" should ever be prominent and persistent in our Christian life of prayer. All the world. 1 Tim. 2:1. "For all men." What a revelation of the heart of St. Paul we have in this verse; nay, more, what a revelation of the heart of God Who inspired the Apostle to write! What a revelation, too, of the power of prayer as embracing the whole world! God has indeed set the church a work to do in making supplication for all mankind. In this worldwide work of prayer we find the true, deep meaning of the Christian priesthood.

A priest is defined as one who "is ordained for men in things pertaining to God" (Heb. 5:1). His work was preeminently associated with the offering of sacrifices and intercessions. The Christian Church as a whole, with each Christian in particular, is now called upon to engage in this holy work of priestly intercession. From one point of view the Church is God's witness to the world, bearing testimony to Him Whom the world has rejected. In another sense, and with equal reality, the Church brings the world before God, bearing before the Throne of Grace its deep needs, even though the great mass of mankind is utterly unconscious of them.

We are told of God's attitude to the world in the very significant word "philanthropy" (Titus 3:4, Greek), i.e., the love of man as man, or "man-lovingness," as the late Archbishop Benson once rendered it. It was the same spirit of love for man as man that prompted the barbarians at Melita to show the Apostle and his companions no little "philanthropy" (Acts 28:2, Greek). How much more shall the Christian be a true "philanthropist," showing his love to man in the best possible way by earnest, loving, constant prayer for all men.

And if we read the context of the Apostolic injunction, we shall have a further truth of the power and scope of prayer. "For kings, and for all that are in authority" (1 Tim. 2:2). As Dr. Andrew Murray well says, "What a faith in the power of prayer! A few feeble and despised Christians are to influence the mighty Roman Emperors, and help in securing peace and quietness. Let us believe that prayer is a power that is taken up by God in His rule of the world. ... When God's people unite in this, they may count upon their prayer affecting in the unseen world more than they know."

"Lord, for the lonely heart

I pray apart.

Now, for this son of sorrow  
Whom this tomorrow  
Rejoiceth not, O Lord,  
Hear my weak word.  
For lives too bitter to be borne,  
For the tempted and the torn,  
For the prisoner in the cell,  
For the shame lip doth not tell,  
For the haggard suicide,  
Peace, peace, this Christmastide.  
In the desert, trod  
By the long sick, O God;  
Into the patient gloom  
Of that small room  
Where lies the child of pain  
Of all neglected most - be fain  
To enter, healing, and remain.  
Now at the fall of day,  
I bow and pray,  
For those who cannot sleep  
A watch I keep.  
Oh, let the starving brain  
Be fed and fed again;  
At Thy behest  
The tortured nerve find rest.  
I see the vacant chair,  
Father of souls, prepare

My poor thought's feeble power  
To plead this hour:  
For the empty, aching home,  
Where the silent footsteps come,  
Where the unseen face looks on,  
Where the hand clasp is not felt,  
Where the dearest eyes are gone,  
Where the portrait on the wall  
Stirs and struggles as to speak,  
Where the light breath from the hall  
Calls the colour to the cheek,  
Where the voice breaks in the hymn  
When the sunset burneth dim,  
Where the late large tear will start,  
Frozen by the broken heart,  
Where the lesson is to learn  
How to live, to grieve, to yearn,  
How to bear and how to bow.  
Oh, the Christmas that is fled!  
Lord of living and of dead,  
Comfort Thou!"

### 3. Conditions of Prayer

Prayer must be unceasing (ἀδιάλειπτως), Rom. 1:9; 1 Thess. 5:17. What is the meaning of unceasing prayer? How is it possible to "pray without ceasing"? The true idea is that of the constant spirit of prayer which should characterize our life. The soul needs first of all its stated times of prayer, day by day. These stated times of prayer act as reservoirs of spiritual power which influence the whole life. The result is that the soul becomes permeated with spiritual force and blessing which leads instinctively to a continual spirit of prayer and fellowship with God.

We use a picturesque and beautiful word when we speak of "ejaculatory" prayer. It comes from "jaculum," a dart or arrow, and fittingly describes prayer which "darts" up to God at all times. This is the true

expression of the spirit of prayer, a spirit which in any moment of opportunity lifts itself up in a few words of prayer and intercession. Prayer, then, is at once an act and an attitude, and as it has been well said, "Whatever may be the attitude of the body, the soul should be ever on its knees." We may turn every circumstance, experience, and incident of the day into prayer, and find in the "daily round, the common task," constant opportunities of ascending to God in prayer and praise.

"I need not leave the jostling world,  
Or wait till daily tasks are o'er,  
To fold my palms in secret prayer  
Within the close-shut closet door.  
There is a viewless, cloistered room,  
As high as heaven, as fair as day,  
Where, though my feet may join the throng,  
My soul can enter in and pray.  
And never through those crystal walls  
The clash of life can pierce its way,  
Nor ever can a human ear  
Drink in the spirit-words I say.  
One hearkening, even, cannot know  
When I have crossed the threshold o'er;  
For He alone, Who hears my prayer,  
Has heard the shutting of the door."

Prayer must be steadfast (προσκαρτερω), "continuing instant," Rom. 12:12. The word is used in several connections, all of which illustrate its meaning when applied to prayer. It is the word used of the little ship which was to "attend continually" on Jesus Christ" (Mark 3:9), and it describes the attitude of Simon Magus in his "continuing" with Philip (Acts 8:13). It is also used of those who were "waiting" for the day of Pentecost (Acts 1:14), and the thought of the word is that of someone putting forth his whole strength in order to wait.

It conveys at once the idea of activity and passivity. It is well rendered by the word "steadfast" - a state in which you put forth your entire strength simply to wait. It denotes the spirit of waiting continuously, steadfastly, upon God in prayer. We can see from all this something of what prayer really means. It calls for persistent activity and patient abiding, the power of the whole soul being concentrated on this blessed and fruitful experience. Prayer must be active (αγωνιζομαι), Col. 4:12; (αγων) Col. 2:1.

The Greek words are rendered exactly in English by our words "agonize" and "agony". We sometimes speak of "agonizing in prayer," but it is incorrect to associate the words with the idea of pain, sharp pain, or suffering. It is a word used not of pain, but of strenuous effort in a contest; it is the activity of the wrestler concentrating his whole energy on his effort; and when St. Paul said of Epaphras that he was always "agonizing in prayers," we must be careful not to think of our English word, which implies physical suffering.

That is not in the Greek word at all; the idea is of "a contest". You do not imagine an athlete in positive pain when wrestling or when endeavouring to win a race; he strains every muscle to get to the winning post, and puts forth all his strength, vigour, and strenuousness. We have great need of care when we speak of our Lord being "in agony". No doubt our Lord was in pain, but it is not included in that word "agony". Αγωνα is a contest, a struggle with an opponent, and therefore a putting forth of our whole strength and vigour in that which we have to do.

When we thus take away the thought of pain, we remind believers that there is nothing terrible, awful, and sad in praying, though there is everything earnest, strenuous, determined, and decided. It means that we should put forth all our moral fiber and spiritual energy in order to pray. And it also gives us more than a hint of a strife, an effort on the part of our spiritual adversary to prevent us from praying, and, still more, from getting our prayers answered. Prayer must be intense (εκτενωσ, εκτενωστρον) Acts 12:5, Luke 22:44.

The above are the only two passages where the word is used in relation to prayer. It comes from εκτενω, "to stretch out," and implies an intensity by which we nerve ourselves, and, as it were, stretch ourselves out in order to do our very utmost in prayer. It implies a bow drawn to its full length and strength. So should our hearts be in prayer. Once more, then, we see what prayer really means as an element of true spiritual life and experience. It is no mere spiritual luxury to be enjoyed or not at will.

It is the outgoing of every faculty of our spiritual being in a wholehearted approach to God. At this point it is possible that someone thinking of these four words - "incessant," "steadfast," "active," "intense" - is saying, "This is too great a demand in the strain which it puts upon me. This is emphasizing the human side of prayer to such an extent that it is beyond me. Not only are my past prayers rebuked, but my future prayers seem hopeless." But in reply it should be remembered that God knows our need, and shows us the human side in order to reveal to us the divine side also.

As we continue the consideration of these conditions of prayer we shall see how wonderfully God Himself provides for the fulfillment of these requirements. Prayer must be submissive. 1 John 5:14. "According to His will." Prayer is necessarily based on God's revelation of Himself and His will. His promises encourage, and His commands incite us to prayer. At the same time the will of God gives us the due and necessary limit of prayer. There are many things for which we never think of asking, simply because they are not only not included in, but are clearly opposed to, His revealed will.

There are other matters about which we are certain that they are according to His will, and as to these we plead His promises and continue praying, waiting, expecting the answer in God's good time. Yet again, there are many things about which there is no revelation in the Word of God, and with reference to these we pray in submission to the will of God, and wait His way of revealing to us in daily circumstances and experience whether the prayer is in harmony with His purpose concerning us.

This spirit of submissiveness is one of the primary conditions of prayer and one of the essential marks of a true spiritual life. Our Lord, in Gethsemane, prayed in this spirit, "Not My will, but Thine be done," and when the soul is ready to trust God fully and rest on His perfect wisdom, the joyous experience is that of the Apostle when he said, "This is the confidence that we have in Him, that, if we ask anything according to His will, He heareth us" (1 John 5:14).

"If when I kneel to pray,

With eager lips I say:

'Lord, give me all the things that I desire;

Health, wealth, fame, friends, brave hearts, religious fire,

The power to sway my fellow men at will,

And strength for mighty works to banish ill';

In such a prayer as this,

The blessing I must miss.

Or if I only dare

To raise this fainting prayer:

'Thou seest, Lord, that I am poor and weak,

And cannot tell what things I ought to seek;

I therefore do not ask at all, but still I trust

Thy bounty all my wants to fill';

My lips shall thus grow dumb,

The blessing will not come.

But if I lowly fall,

And thus in faith I call:

'Through Christ, O Lord, I pray Thee give to me,

Not what I would, but what seems best to Thee,

Of life, of health, of service, and of strength,

Until to Thy full joy I come at length';

My prayer shall then avail,

The blessing will not fail."

Prayer must be in the name of Christ. John 14:13, 16:24: "In My Name." The "Name" of Christ is the revelation of His Person and Character. It is not a mere title, but the expression of everything we know of Him. The "Name" is the nature, so far as we possess the manifestation of it. "In His Name" implies union and communion with Him. And "praying in His Name" means asking in union and fellowship with Him as the sphere and atmosphere of our life. Our Lord had taught His disciples many lessons on prayer from the beginning of His ministry, but this lesson of praying "in His Name" was a new one (John 16:24) and marked an advance on their former knowledge and experience.

In these chapters of St. John (14-17) we have several references to the "Name" of Christ, and to the blessings associated with it. The more fully we get to know the Lord in the plenitude and power of His presence and grace, the more truly we shall be enabled to pray "in His Name". The Word of God carefully and constantly studied will reveal to us more of the "fullness of the blessing of Christ," and this will make our prayers richer, fuller, deeper, and more closely in union with the will and purpose of God.

We shall enter more deeply into fellowship with our Lord as He pleads above, and our prayers will bring power and blessing to all for whom we pray. Let us take time to learn from God the increasing and infinite possibilities of prayer "in the Name" of our Lord Jesus Christ. Prayer must be in the Spirit. Jude 20, "Praying in the Holy Ghost"; Eph. 6:18, "Praying ... in the Spirit". This condition shows at once the Divine requirement and provision in relation to prayer. The indwelling of the Holy Spirit is the unspeakable blessing of every believer's life, and this Divine presence is intimately connected with our life of prayer.

The Holy Spirit pleads within us (Rom. 8:26), and we in turn "pray in the Holy Spirit". The word "Advocate" as applied to our Lord (1 John 2:1) and the word "Comforter" as applied to the Spirit are the same, and the meaning is "one called to help". The Advocate above pleads before the Throne, the Advocate within pleads in our hearts, and thus we are linked to the Throne of God and are enabled to pray in the Holy Spirit. He reveals our needs, prompts our petitions, influences our desires, strengthens our faith, and confirms our hope and expectation of answers to our prayers.

The more fully we can realize our union and communion with the Holy Spirit, the more we shall experience the joy and power of "praying with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit." It is because we are living and praying in the Holy Spirit that we are enabled to fulfill all the other conditions and pray incessantly, actively, strenuously, and intensely. Thus the human side of prayer is met by the Divine; and if we are abiding in the Holy Ghost, we shall be enabled to put forth all these activities, and prayer will not only not be a burden, but on the contrary a positive delight and a genuine blessing.

"Lord, I have shut my door!

Come Thou and visit me; I am alone!

Come, as when doors were shut, Thou cam'st of yore,

And visitedst Thine own.

My Lord, I kneel with reverent love and fear,

For Thou art here."

4. Accompaniments of Prayer There are several things recorded in the New Testament as associated with prayer, and a careful study of them will be of great service in learning how to pray. Prayer must be

accompanied by faith (πιστις), Mark 11:24. This is the inevitable and essential accompaniment of all true prayer. Prayer must be based on Divine Revelation and find its warrant in the promises and assurances of God's love and grace. This distinguishes Christian prayer from everything that goes by the name of prayer in heathen religions.

Christian prayer is based on the Word of God. God encourages, commands, invites, welcomes prayer. The charter of prayer was given by our Lord at the outset of His ministry. "Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you." This charter was confirmed again and again through His earthly ministry until it found its crown in His fullest, deepest teaching on Prayer on the eve of the Crucifixion, when, as we have seen, He taught His disciples the meaning of prayer: "in My Name".

This warrant of prayer is accordingly met by our response of trust. Our faith accepts the assurance that prayer will be heard and answered, and pleads the fulfillment of Divine promises. Faith is thus the only possible response to the Divine revelation, and apart from our belief in God as the Hearer of prayer there could not be any real prayer or genuine blessing. "He that cometh to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of them that diligently seek Him" (Heb. 11:6).

Herein lies the intimate and necessary connection between the Word of God and Prayer. The greater our knowledge of the Scriptures and the richer our experience of its preciousness, the fuller and deeper will be our prayers, until it shall become the simplest and most natural and most instructive experience of our life to live in the Divine Presence and rest on the Divine promises, and then to pour out our souls in the prayer of faith and believe to see the goodness of the Lord in the land of the living.

Prayer must be accompanied by frankness (παρρησια). In 1 John 5:14, the word is rendered "confidence," and means "freedom of speech," or "unreserved conversation" as between those who fully trust each other. This word occurs four times in St. John's first Epistle, twice with reference to the believer in relation to the future, and twice in relation to the present. It is helpful to render it in 1 John 2:28, as giving the true meaning, by "And now, little children, abide in Him; that, when He shall appear, we may tell Him everything, and not be ashamed before Him at His coming."

Our true attitude at that day will be "freedom of speech," nothing between us, nothing kept back. We find the same word in chapter 4:17, "That we may have boldness in the day of judgment" (παρρησια). Also in chapter 3:21, "Beloved, if our hearts condemn us not, then have we confidence (boldness) towards God." And then chapter 5:14, "This is the confidence we have in Him, that if we ask anything according to His will, He heareth us." When we kneel in prayer, this should be the spirit of our approach to God, a spirit of confidence, of unreserved speech, which tells Him everything, and a spirit of childlike faith and assurance which rests on His promises and expects their fulfillment in answer to prayer.

Prayer must be accompanied by fasting (Acts 14:23). From time to time in the New Testament prayer and fasting are associated (cf. Mark 9:29). In these passages the references are doubtless to abstinence from food, but we may well believe that fasting from food is only one precise way in which the spiritual action associated with the idea is to be expressed. Fasting represents an attitude of detachment from the things of time and sense whether it be from food, or pleasure, or lawful ambition.

Prayer represents the complementary attitude of attachment to the things of God and the spiritual world. When we thus realize our need of detachment from earth, we shall readily determine, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, what particular forms our fasting shall take. In the times of our Puritan forefathers the

spiritual value of fasting from food was fully realized, and there can be no doubt whatever of the relation of physical food to spiritual blessing. The sin of overeating is only too apt to hinder spiritual power in prayer; while if we "keep under the body," we shall certainly be conscious of more liberty and blessing as we fulfill our work of prayer and intercession.

What we need concerning food, dress, books, recreation, friendship, ambition, is the resolute determination to be above them, superior to them, in order that the spiritual may rule everything. Like St. Paul, we should say, "All things are lawful for me, but I will not be brought under the power of any" (1 Cor. 6:12). This is the true idea of fasting, and in this spirit of detachment from things earthly we obtain one of the true accompaniments of, and helps to, that spirit of attachment to God which is found in prayer.

Prayer must be accompanied by watching. "Watching thereunto with all perseverance" (Eph. 6:18); "Continue in prayer, and watch in the same with thanksgiving" (Col. 4:2). There are two words rendered by our word "watch"; one simply means "the absence of sleep," and the other "expectation". This "watching" is associated with prayer in a number of passages. But what does it mean? It is very suggestive and significant to notice that in the New Testament we never find any object attached to the word "watch".

We are never told what to watch. It does not say, "Watch your enemies," or "Watch Satan," or even "Watch yourselves." The word is absolutely free grammatically from any definite object; and this may be intended to teach us we are to be concerned only with watching Christ. Not looking in, watching our sins; not looking round, watching our enemies - we shall get baffled if we watch them; not looking round and watching men; but watching Christ, "looking unto Jesus". If we look into our hearts, we shall despair; but if we look to Christ, we shall see ourselves as He sees us, and we shall see the precious blood and the merit of the atoning sacrifice.

Occupied with Him we shall be guarded, guided, and blessed in all things, and be enabled to wait in expectation of His answers to our prayer. So "watching unto prayer," our eyes will be fixed on Christ in an attitude of expectation, looking off from everything else to Him, and waiting His answers to our petitions. "I will direct my prayer unto Thee, and will look up" (Psalm 5:3). May this ever be the necessary accompaniment to our prayer. Prayer must be accompanied by obedience (1 John 3:22).

We obtain our petitions because we obey God and do what is pleasing in His sight. This does not mean that obedience is the ground of answered prayer, for God's mercy and love are the only foundation of blessing. It means that only in an obedient spirit can we expect blessing. It would be incongruous and impossible for us to pray and expect answers while our lives are out of harmony with God and we are living in disobedience to His will. "If I regard iniquity in my heart, the Lord will not hear me."

When the soul is true to God, blessing inevitably comes, for obedience is ever one of the pathways to power in prayer. Prayer must be accompanied by forgiveness (Mark 11:25). The necessity of forgiveness of our fellow Christians and of all men is frequently emphasized by our Lord and also by His Apostles (Matt. 6:14, Mark 11:25, Eph. 4:32, Col. 3:13). In the Lord's Prayer we are taught to ask for God's forgiveness, since we ourselves have the spirit of forgiveness which we desire to receive ourselves.

If there is any grudge or resentment in the heart, to say nothing of anger and malice, there is no possibility of prayer being answered. If we should say, "I forgive but I cannot forget," it may well mean that we do not really forgive after all. Without a sincere and hearty spirit of loving forgiveness there cannot possibly be any power in prayer, and the Lord's word stands out clear and sharp. "When ye stand praying, forgive." Prayer must be accompanied by thanksgiving. Philippians iv. 6 is one among many passages.

"In everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving, let your request be made known unto God." Why is thanksgiving so frequently associated with prayer? There must be some reason for it. If we look at St. Paul's Epistles we very seldom find the one mentioned without the other. It is probably intended to suggest the attitude of appropriation as well as of supplication. Prayer is asking; thanksgiving is testifying that we have received. It is just here that we fail; we ask, but we do not accept and appropriate.

Faith in Scripture is twofold in meaning. There is the faith that asks and the faith that accepts. The faith that asks is expressed in prayer; the faith that accepts is expressed in thanksgiving. We are continually asking, but have we the faith that appropriates? A Christian man went to lunch with an intimate friend whom he had known for twenty-five years, and after "grace" was said, the ordinary phrase being used, asking to be "made truly thankful," the guest, claiming the privilege of friendship, enquired, "When do you expect to get that prayer answered?"

You have been praying all these years to be made thankful!" The man had been "asking," but never appropriating. He had the faith that asks, but not the faith that accepts. Many a Christian would find life more powerful and blessed if he knew a little more of the faith that appropriates, faith that expresses itself in thanksgiving, "O God, I thank Thee!" We may see this in the Revised Version of Mark 11:24, "Whatsoever things ye desire when ye pray, believe that ye have received them, and ye shall have them."

Let us not fail to accompany our prayer with this appropriation of thanksgiving. Prayer must be accompanied by joy. "Making request with joy" (Phil. 1:4). In some respects this is the deepest and most inclusive element. When we come before God, our prayer should be accompanied with inward satisfaction, because we are going to meet our God and are sure of His blessing. We should experience the very opposite of pain or anguish, and have the consciousness of a privilege, a joy, in approaching God.

There is no joy like the joy of living in the presence of God, the joy of asking Him for what we need, the joy of receiving His blessed answers to our prayers. It is the joy of joys to realize our true position before Him, and to be assured of power in prayer. It is the joy of a great peace, the joy of a holy privilege, the joy of a perpetual fellowship, the joy of a perfect satisfaction.

"My inmost soul, O Lord, to Thee

Leans like a growing flower

Unto the light; I do not know

The day nor blessed hour

When that deep-rooted, daring growth

We call the heart's desire

Shalt burst and blossom to a prayer

Within the sacred fire

Of Thy great patience; grow so pure,

So still, so sweet a thing

As perfect prayer must surely be.  
And yet my heart will sing  
Because Thou seem'st sometimes so near.  
Close-present God! to me,  
It seems I could not have a wish  
That was not shared by Thee;  
It seems I cannot be afraid  
To speak my longings out,  
So tenderly Thy gathering love  
Enfolds me round about;  
It seems as if my heart would break,  
If, living on the light,  
It should not lift to Thee at last  
A bud of flawless white.  
And yet, O helpless heart! how sweet  
To grow, and bud, and say:  
'The flower, however marred or wan,  
Shall not be cast away.'

We have now considered the main lines of Scripture teaching on the subject of prayer, though only the fringe of a vast territory has been touched. By means of a concordance we may work out more fully for ourselves these lines of meditation and study, and find in them the source of increasing spiritual blessing.

If anyone should inquire how such a life of prayer is possible, the answer is clear and unmistakable. For this attitude of prayer we must have times of prayer. The attitude is based on acts, and times of prayer are necessary as the occasions of storage and accumulation of light, and power, and grace. Let us see to it that not a day passes without definitely going aside with God for solitary prayer.

How shall we commence? Let us start with five minutes only. Opening our Bible with a prayer for God's illumination, let us read a verse or short passage as the message of God to our souls. Then we may turn the verse into prayer and thus spend those five minutes with God. Let us do this again the next day, and again the day after. We should not go beyond the five minutes until these are fully enjoyed. It will not be long before we shall be conscious of spiritual illumination and satisfaction as we wait before God in prayer, and very soon our five minutes will be extended. We shall enjoy this time so much that the minutes will be all too short, and we shall find it possible to do that easiest of all things in the world, make time!

It is this failure to spend a definite, even though it be short, time each day with God that is the secret of all weakness, variableness, and shallowness in our spiritual experience and service. We sometimes sing,

"Oh, the pure delight of a single hour

That before Thy Throne I spend."

A single hour! How often do we do it? How many of us do it? A single hour! And yet we hurry over our prayer time and fail to give God one quarter of a single hour. Of course He only expects the "hour" if we really can give it, and it is wonderful how much prayer we can put into five minutes and how much blessing we can get out of it if only these few minutes are practicable for us. Our time may not be long, but it must be regular; and from the act will come the habit, and from the habit the attitude, and from the attitude the character, settled, strong, sure, and abiding, wherein God's presence will be more and more a delight, and God's power more and more realized.

"When thou wakest in the morning,

Ere thou tread the untried way

Of the lot that lies before thee

Through the coming busy day,

Whether sunbeams promise brightness,

Whether dim forebodings fall,

Be thy dawning glad or gloomy,

Go to Jesus - tell Him all.

In the calm of sweet communion

Let thy daily work be done,

In the peace of soul outpouring

Care be banished, patience won.

And if earth with its enchantments

Seek thy spirit to enthrall,

Ere thou listen - ere thou answer,

Turn to Jesus - tell Him all.

Then as hour by hour glides by thee

Thou wilt blessed guidance know.

Thine own burden being lightened,

Thou canst bear another's woe.  
Thou canst help the weak ones onward,  
Thou canst raise up those that fall,  
But remember, while thou servest,  
Still tell Jesus - tell Him all.  
And if weariness creeps o'er thee  
As the day wears to its close,  
Or if sudden fierce temptations  
Bring thee face to face with foes,  
In thy weakness, in thy peril,  
Raise to heaven a trustful call,  
Strength and calm for every crisis  
Come - in telling Jesus all."  
G. M. Taylor.

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