

Highlights from
The Ministry of Intercessory Prayer
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Many people question, "If the answer to prayer is so positively promised, why are there so many unanswered prayers?" Christ taught us that the answer depended upon certain conditions. He spoke of faith, of perseverance, of praying in His name, of praying according to the will of God. But all these conditions were summed up in one truth: "If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be given you." John 15:7 (p12)

This book owes its existence to my desire to enforce two more truths, of which I had no such previous understanding: 1) Christ meant prayer to be the great power by which His church should do its work, and the neglect of prayer is the reason the church lacks greater power. 2) We have far too little understanding of the place that intercession ought to have in the church and in the Christian life. (p13)

Our King is glorified in intercession; and we too will find our highest glory in it. Through it He continues His saving work; in fact, He can do nothing without it. It is our instrument to impart spiritual blessing to others. The power of the church to bless rests on intercession. When, due to lack of teaching of spiritual insight, we trust in our own diligence and efforts to influence the world, and work more than we pray, the presence and power of God will not be seen in our work as they should be. (p14)

Chapter One: "The Lack of Prayer"

You do not have, because you do not ask God. James 4:2 NIV

We all see the contrast between a man whose income barely maintains his family and keeps up his business, and a man whose income enables him to expand his business and also help others. There may be an earnest Christian life that has just enough prayer to maintain the position already attained to, but without much further spiritual growth in Christlikeness. The former is more of a defensive attitude, seeking to fight off temptation, rather than an aggressive one that reaches after higher attainment. If we desire to grow from strength to strength and to experience God's power in sanctification and blessing on others, we must be more persevering in prayer. The Scripture's teaching about crying to God day and night, continuing steadfastly in prayer, watching unto prayer,

and being heard for our importunity, must in some degree become our experience if we are to become intercessors. (p19,20)

God's call to much prayer need not be a burden or cause for continual self-condemnation. He intends it to be a joyful task. He can make it an inspiration. Through it He can give us strength for all our work and bring blessing to others by His power that works in us.

Without hesitation, let us confess our sin of neglect and confront it in the name of our Mighty Redeemer. *The same light that shows us our sin and condemns us for it will show us the way out of it, into a life of liberty that pleases God.* Let our lack of prayer convict us of the coolness in our Christian life that lies at the root of it. God will use the discovery to bring us not only the power to pray that we long for but also the joy of a new and healthy life of which prayer is the spontaneous expression.

...We must begin by going back to God's Word and studying what place God intends prayer to have in the life of His child and of His church. A fresh understanding of what prayer is *according to the will of God*, and of what our prayers can be *through the grace of God*, will free us from our weak and impaired attitudes concerning the absolute necessity of diligent and regular prayer.

As we gain insight into how reasonable and right this divine appointment is, and as we are fully convinced of how wonderfully it fits in with God's love and our own happiness, we shall be freed from the false impression of its being an arbitrary demand. With our whole heart and soul we will agree and yield to it and rejoice in it as the one and only way for the blessing of God to come to earth. (p20,21,22)

Pray that God will visit our souls and fit us for the work of intercession, which is the greatest need of the church and of the world. Only by intercession can that power be brought down from heaven that will enable the church to overcome the world and win souls for Christ.

Stir up the latent gift that remains unused. Seek to gather and train and band together as many as you can to be God's reminders. Nothing but persistent, believing prayer can meet the onslaught of the spirit of worldliness that is reported everywhere. (p23,24)

Chapter 2 The Ministry of the Spirit and Prayer

If you then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him. Luke 11:13

Chapter 2 recounts the spiritual height of the church at Pentecost. The following comes from the end of the chapter:

...Prayer is still the only secret of true church extension, prayer that is guided from heaven to find and send forth people who are called by God and anointed by the Spirit.

In answer to prayer, the Holy Spirit will show those who He has selected; in response to prayer that sets them apart under His guidance, He will give the honor of knowing that they are sent on their way by the Holy Spirit. Prayer links the King on the throne with the church at His feet. The church, the human link, receives its divine strength from the power of the Holy Spirit, who comes in answer to their prayers.

...Two great truths stand out: Where there is much prayer, there will be much of the Spirit; where there is much of the Spirit, there will be ever-increasing prayer. So clear is the living connection between the two that when the Spirit is given in answer to prayer, it stimulates more prayer to prepare for a fuller revelation and communication of His divine power and grace....

Let us learn what ought to be counted as principles in the work of the church:

1. Heaven has a full store of spiritual blessing just as it did in the days of Pentecost.
2. God still delights to give the Holy Spirit to them that ask Him.
3. Our life and work are still as dependent on the direct impartation of divine power as the disciples' were at the time of Pentecost.
4. Prayer is still the appointed means for drawing down heavenly blessings in power upon all the church.
5. God still seeks for men and women who will, together with all their other work, give themselves to persevering prayer.

We have the privilege of offering ourselves to God to labor in prayer for the blessings He has in store for the church. Shouldn't we beseech God to make this truth live in us? And implore Him that we will not rest until we count the practice of intercession our highest privilege? It is the only certain means of obtaining blessing for the church, for the world, and our own lives.

Chapter 3 A Model of Intercession

Then he said to them, "Suppose one of you has a friend, and he goes to him at midnight and says, 'Friend, lend me three loaves of bread, because a friend of mine on a journey has come to me, and I have nothing to set before him.' "Then the one inside answers, 'Don't bother me. The door is already locked, and my children are with me in bed. I can't get up and give you anything.' "I tell you, though he will not get up and give him the bread because he is his friend, yet because of the man's boldness he will get up and give him as much as he needs." Luke 11:5-8

To pray constantly only for ourselves is a mark of failure in prayer. It is in intercession for others that our faith and love and perseverance will be stirred up and that the power of the Spirit will be found to equip us for bringing salvation to people. How can we become more faithful and successful in prayer? See again in the parable of the friend at midnight (Luke 11) how the Master

teaches us the intercession for the needy is the highest exercise of believing and prevailing prayer. Intercession is the most perfect form of prayer. It is the prayer Christ prays from His throne. Here are the elements of true intercession:

1. *Urgent need.* Intercession has its origin at the point of need. The friend came at midnight, an untimely hour. He had a guest and could not buy bread. If we are to learn to pray as we should, we must open our eyes and heart to the needs around us....

2. *Will love.* The friend took his friend into his house and into his heart. He laid aside the fact that he was already in bed with his family. At midnight he got up and went to his cupboard to find bread and perhaps something to go with it for his friend and the friend's guest. He sacrificed an undisturbed night of rest and his own comfort to find the needed provision. Love "seeks not her own." It is the very nature of love to give up and forget itself for the sake of others. It takes their needs and makes them its own. It finds its real joy in living and dying for others, as Christ did....

3. *The sense of powerlessness.* We often speak of the power of love. In one sense this is true, and yet the truth has its limitations, which must not be forgotten. The strongest love may be utterly powerless. A mother might be willing to give her life for her dying child but still not be able to save it. The friend at midnight was most willing to give his guest bread, but he had none. It was this sense of powerlessness, of his inability to help, that sent him begging. "A friend...is come to me, and *I have nothing* to set before him." This sense of powerlessness in God's servants is the very strength of the life of intercession....

4. *Faith in prayer.* What the man himself doesn't have, another can supply. He has a rich friend nearby who will be both able and willing to give him what he needs. He is sure that if he only asks, he will receive. This faith makes him leave his home at midnight; if he himself has no bread to give, he can ask his friend.

We need this simple, confident faith that God will give what we ask. Where faith truly exists, there will be no possibility of our not praying. In God's Word we have everything that can stir and strengthen such faith in us....

By hundreds of promises and testimonies, Scripture urges us to believe that prayer will be heard, that what we cannot possibly do ourselves for those whom we want to help can be done by prayer. Surely there can be no question as to our believing that our prayer will be heard. We see also that through prayer the poorest and weakest can dispense blessings to the needy, and each of us, even though poor, might make many rich.

5. *Persistence that prevails.* Here is the central lesson of the parable. In our intercession we may find that there is difficulty and delay in the answer. It may be as if God says, "I cannot give to you now." It is not easy, against all appearances, to hold firm to our confidence that He will hear, and then to continue to persevere in full assurance that we will have what we ask. Even so, this is what God desires from us. He highly prizes our confidence in Him, which is essentially the highest honor the creature can render the Creator. He will therefore do anything to train us in the exercise of this trust in Him. Blessed is

the one who is not staggered by God's delay or silence or apparent refusal, but is strong in faith, giving glory to God. Such faith perseveres, persistently, if need be, and will not fail to inherit the blessing.

6. *Certainty of a rich reward.* If we will only believe in God and His faithfulness, intercession will become the first thing we take refuge in when we seek a blessing for others. It will be the very last thing for which we cannot find time. It will also become an act of joy and hope, because while we pray, we recognize that we are sowing seed that will bring forth fruit. Disappointment is impossible: "I tell you...he will get up and give him as much as he needs."

...The everlasting God and Father waits to be asked. Let us confess before God our lack of prayer. Let us admit that the lack of faith, of which our lack of prayer is the proof, is the symptom of a life that is not spiritual, that is still under the power of self and the flesh and the world. Let us by faith in the Lord Jesus, who told this parable and who waits to make every part of it true in us, give ourselves to the intercessors. Let every glimpse of souls needing help, let every stirring of the Spirit of compassion, let every sense of our own powerlessness to bless, every difficulty in the way of our getting an answer, all combine to urge us to do this one thing: with all boldness to cry to the God who alone can and will help us.....

Intercession is the blessed link between our powerlessness and God's omnipotence. (p34-41)

Chapter 4 Because of His Boldness

I tell you, though he will not get up and give him the bread because he is his friend, yet because of the man's boldness he will get up and give him as much as he needs. Luke 11:8

Have you ever noticed what a part difficulties play in our everyday life? They bring out our strong traits as nothing else can. They strengthen and ennoble our character. It has even been said that people who live in colder climates tend to be stronger in will and purpose than those who live in milder climates. Warmer climates encourage ease and relaxation.

All nature has been so arranged by God that in sowing and reaping, just as in seeking oil or gold, nothing is found without hard work and effort. What is education but a daily developing and disciplining of the mind by new difficulties that the student must overcome? The moment a lesson has become easy, the student is advanced to one that is higher and more difficult. Collectively and individually, it is in confronting and mastering difficulties that our highest attainments are found.

It is the same in our relationship with God. Imagine what the result would be if the child of God had only to kneel down, ask, receive, and go away. What unspeakable loss to the spiritual life would result. In the very difficulty and delay that calls for persevering prayer, the true blessedness of the spiritual life is found. There we learn how little we delight in fellowship with God and how

small our faith is in Him. We discover how earthly and unspiritual our heart is, and how we need God's Holy Spirit. There we are brought to know our own weakness and unworthiness and to yield to God's Spirit to pray through us. There we take our place in Christ Jesus and abide in Him as our only advocate with the Father. There our own will and way are crucified. And there we rise in Christ to newness of life, because now our whole will is dependent upon God and fixed upon His glory. Let us begin to praise God for the need and the difficulty of persistent prayer as one of His choicest means of grace.(p44,45)

Through the ages God's children have sought to understand what these parables and stories teach: God holds himself back from us until what is of the flesh and self and laziness in us is overcome. Then we can prevail with Him so that He can and must bless us. (p47)

...the marks of the true intercessor as taught in the parable:

1. a sense of the need of souls
2. a Christlike love in the heart
3. a consciousness of personal powerlessness
4. faith in the power of prayer
5. courage to persevere in spite of refusal
6. the assurance of an abundant reward

These are the qualities that change a Christian into an intercessor and call forth the power of prevailing prayer. (p48,49)

Chapter 5 The Life that can Pray

If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be given you. John 15:7

Let us learn from our Lord Jesus, in the parable of the vine, what the healthy, vigorous life is that asks and receives whatever it wishes. He says, "If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be given you." He says at the close of the parable, "You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you to go and bear fruit—fruit that will last. Then the Father will give you whatever you ask in my name" (John 15:7,16).

What, according to the parable, is the life that one must lead in order to bear fruit and then to ask and receive what it wishes? What must we be or do to enable us to pray as we should and to receive what we ask? The answer is in one word: *branch*. We are branches of Christ, the Living Vine. We must simply live like branches and abide in Christ; then we can ask what we wish and it will be done for us.

We all know what a branch is and what its essential characteristic is. It is simply a growth off the vine, produced by it and appointed to bear fruit. It has only one purpose: It is there at the bidding of the vine that through it the vine might bear and ripen its precious fruit. Just as the vine solely and wholly lives to produce the sap that makes the fruit, so the branch has no other aim and

object but to receive that sap and bear the fruit. It's only work is to serve the vine that through it the vine may do its work....

...It is the branch-life existing solely for the Vine that will have the power to pray aright. As we are abiding in Him, and His words are abiding and ruling in our heart and life—transmitted into our very being—there will be grace to pray and faith to receive “whatever we wish.” (p52,53)

It is not left to our faith or faithfulness to maintain our union with Christ. God, the Father of Christ, who united us with Him, will see to it that the branch is what it should be. He will enable us to bring forth the fruit we were appointed to bear. Hear what Christ said of this: “Every branch that does bear fruit he prunes so that it will be even more fruitful” (John 15:2). More fruit is what the Father seeks; more fruit is what the Father himself will provide. It is for this reason that He, as the Vinedresser, prunes the branches. (p56)

It is only our own will, our strength, our effort, our pleasure, are cut back—even where these appear perfectly natural and sinless—that the whole energies of our being are free and open to receive the vital life of the Heavenly Vine, the Holy Spirit. Then we shall bear much fruit. It is in the surrender of what by nature we hold onto but yield to God's holy pruning knife that we shall come to what Christ chose and appointed us for—to bear fruit, that whatever we ask the Father in Christ's name, He may give us. (p57)

...A branch that is abiding in Christ will bear much fruit. In the power of such a life we will love prayer, we will know how to pray, what to pray, and we will receive whatever we ask. (p59)

Chapter 9 The Secret of Effective Prayer

Therefore I tell you, whatever you ask for in prayer, believe that you have received it, and it will be yours. Mark 11:24

There are some who have strong desires in their heart without bringing them to God in a clear expression of specific prayer. There are others who go to the Word and its promises to strengthen their faith but who do not actually ask God what they desire Him to do. Still others come in prayer with so many requests and desires that it is difficult even for them to say what they really expect of God.

If you want God to give you the gift of faithfulness in prayer and power to pray aright, begin to pray about that. Declare to God and to yourself, “Here is something I have asked and am continuing to ask until I receive it. As plain and pointed as words can make it, I am saying, ‘My Father! I do desire, I do ask of you, and expect of you, the grace of prayer and intercession.’” (p90)

Ask God. Believe that you have received what you ask. If you still find it difficult to do this, say that you believe on the strength of His Word.

Believe that you have received. Begin with the faith you have, even though weak. Step by step, be faithful in prayer and intercession. The more simply you hold to this truth and expect the Holy Spirit to work, the more surely will the Word be made true for you. (p93)

Chapter 12 My God Will Hear Me

Yet the Lord longs to be gracious to you; he rises to show you compassion. For the Lord is a God of justice. Blessed are all who wait for him! O People of Zion, who live in Jerusalem, you will weep no more. How gracious he will be when you cry for help! As soon as he hears, he will answer you. Isa. 30:18

What a responsibility on the church to give herself to the work of intercession! What a responsibility on every minister, missionary, and layworker, set apart for the saving of souls, to yield themselves wholly to act out and prove their faith: "My God will hear me!" What a call on every believer: instead of burying and losing this talent, to seek to use it in prayer and supplication for all saints and for all others. The deeper our entrance into the truth of this wonderful power God has given to us, the more wholehearted will be our surrender to the work of intercession. (p117)

Chapter 14 God Seeks Intercessors

I have posted watchmen on your walls, O Jerusalem; they will never be silent day or night. You who call on the Lord, give yourselves no rest, and give him no rest till he establishes Jerusalem and makes her the praise of the earth. Isa. 62:6,7

Think of three elements first: There is the world with its needs, entirely dependent upon and waiting to be helped by intercession (knowing or unknowingly); there is God in heaven with His all-sufficient supply for all those needs, waiting to be asked; and there is the church (or the body of Christ) with its magnificent calling and its sure promises, waiting to be stirred to a sense of its awesome responsibility and power. (p134)

Chapter 15 The Coming Revival

Will you not revive us again, that your people may rejoice in you?
Psalm 85:6

...The great work of intercession is needed. Here the coming revival must find its strength. Let us begin as individuals to plead in secret with God, confess whatever we see of sin or hindrance in ourselves....Revival must come from above. It must be received in faith, but brought down by prayer.

As each of us pleads for revival throughout the church, let us also cry to God for our own neighborhood or sphere of work. Let there be great searching in the heart as to whether we are ready to give such time and strength to prayer as God would have. Let us take our places in the front rank of the great intercessory host.... Revive your work, O Lord! (p149)