

A LIFE OF PRAYER

A LIFE OF PRAYER

A COLLECTION
OF WRITINGS FROM
GREAT CHRISTIAN AUTHORS



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A LIFE OF PRAYER

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1

THE IMPORTANCE OF PRAYER

R.A. Torrey

In Ephesians 6:18, the tremendous importance of prayer is expressed with startling and overwhelming force: “*Praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, and watching thereto with all perseverance and supplication for all saints.*” When the perceptive child of God stops to weigh the meaning of these words, then notes the connection in which they are found, he or she is driven to say, “I must pray, pray, pray. I must put all my energy and heart into prayer. Whatever else I do, I must pray.”

Notice the alls: “*all prayer and supplication...all perseverance..for all saints.*” Note the piling up of strong words: “*prayer,*” “*supplication,*” “*perseverance.*” Also notice the strong expression, “*watching thereto,*” more literally, “in this, be not lazy.” Paul realized the natural apathy of man, especially his natural neglect in prayer. How seldom we pray things through! How often the church and the individual get right up to the verge of a great blessing in prayer and then let go, become lazy, and quit. I wish that these words “in this, be not lazy” might burn into our hearts. I wish that the whole verse would burn into our hearts.

THE NECESSITY OF PERSISTENT PRAYER

Why is this constant, persistent, sleepless, overcoming prayer so necessary? Because there is a devil. He is cunning; he is mighty; he never rests; he is continually plotting the downfall of the children of God. If the children of God relax in prayer, the devil will succeed in ensnaring them.

Ephesians 6:12–13 reads:

For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places. Wherefore take to you the whole armor of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand.

Next follows a description of the different parts of the Christian's armor that we are to put on if we are to stand against Satan and his mighty schemes. Paul brings his message to a climax in Ephesians 6:18, telling us that to all else we must add prayer—constant, persistent, untiring, sleepless prayer in the Holy Spirit—or all will be in vain.

Prayer is God's appointed way for obtaining things. The reason we lack anything in life is due to a neglect of prayer. James pointed this out very forcibly: "*You have not, because you ask not*" (James 4:2). The secret behind the poverty and powerlessness of the average Christian is neglect of prayer.

Many Christians are asking, "Why is it that I progress so little in my Christian life?"

"Neglect of prayer," God answers. "You do not have because you do not ask."

Many ministers are asking, "Why is it I see so little fruit from my labors?"

Again, God answers, "Neglect of prayer. You do not have because you do not ask."

Many Sunday school teachers are asking, “Why is it that I see so few converted in my Sunday school class?”

Still, God answers, “Neglect of prayer. You do not have because you do not ask.”

Both ministers and churches are asking, “Why is it that the church of Christ makes so little headway against unbelief, error, sin, and worldliness?”

Once more, we hear God answering, “Neglect of prayer. You do not have because you do not ask.”

Those men whom God set forth as a pattern of what He expected Christians to be—the apostles—regarded prayer as the most important business of their lives. When the multiplying responsibilities of the early church crowded in upon them, this was the response of the twelve disciples:

[They] called the multitude of the disciples to them, and said, It is not reason that we should leave the word of God, and serve tables. Wherefore, brethren, look you out among you seven men of honest report, full of the Holy Ghost and wisdom, whom we may appoint over this business. But we will give ourselves continually to prayer, and to the ministry of the word. (Acts 6:2–4)

From what Paul wrote to both churches and individuals, it is evident that much of his time, strength, and thought were devoted to prayer for them. (See Romans 1:9; Ephesians 1:15–16; Colossians 1:9; 1 Thessalonians 3:10; and 2 Timothy 1:3.) All the mighty men of God outside of those in the Bible have been men of prayer. They have differed from one another in many things, but in this practice of faithful praying, they have been alike.

THE MINISTRY OF INTERCESSION

Prayer occupied a very prominent place and played a very important part in the earthly life of our Lord. Turn, for example, to Mark 1:35: “In

the morning, rising up a great while before day, He went out, and departed into a solitary place, and there prayed." The preceding day had been a very busy and exciting one, but Jesus shortened the hours of needed sleep so that He could rise early and give Himself to more sorely needed prayer.

Turn to Luke 6:12, where we read, "*And it came to pass in those days, that He went out into a mountain to pray, and continued all night in prayer to God.*" Our Savior occasionally found it necessary to spend a whole night in prayer.

The words *pray* and *prayer* are used at least twentyfive times in connection with our Lord in the brief record of His life in the four Gospels, and His praying is mentioned in places where these words are not used. Evidently prayer took much of Jesus's time and strength. A man or woman who does not spend much time in prayer cannot properly be called a follower of Jesus Christ.

Praying is the most important part of the present ministry of our risen Lord. This reason for constant, persistent, sleepless, overcoming prayer seems, if possible, even more forcible than the others.

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Christ's ministry did not end with His death. His atoning work was finished then, but when He rose and ascended to the right hand of the Father, He entered into other work for us, work just as important in its place as His atoning work. It cannot be separated from His atonement

because it rests on that as its basis and is necessary to our complete salvation.

We read what that great, present work is by which He carries our salvation on to completeness: "*Wherefore He is able also to save them to the uttermost that come to God by Him, seeing He ever lives to make intercession for them*" (Hebrews 7:25). This verse tells us that Jesus is able to save us to the uttermost, not merely from the uttermost, but to the uttermost—to entire completeness and absolute perfection. He is able to do this not only because He died, but also because He "always lives."

The verse also tells us why He now lives: "*to make intercession*"—to pray. Praying is the principal thing He is doing in these days. It is by His prayers that He is saving us.

The same thought is found in Paul's remarkable, triumphant challenge: "*Who is he that condemns? It is Christ that died, yea rather, that is risen again, who is even at the right hand of God, who also makes intercession for us*" (Romans 8:34).

If we are to have fellowship with Jesus Christ in His present work, we must spend much time in prayer. We must give ourselves to earnest, constant, persistent, sleepless, overcoming prayer.

I know of nothing that has so impressed me with a sense of the importance of praying at all seasons—being much and constantly in prayer—as the thought that this is the principal occupation of my risen Lord even now. I want to have fellowship with Him. For that reason, I have asked the Father, whatever else He may make me, to make me an intercessor. I pray that He will make me a man who knows how to pray and who spends much time in prayer.

This ministry of intercession is glorious and mighty, and we can all have a part in it. The man or woman who cannot attend a prayer meeting because of illness can have a part in it. The busy mother and the woman who works outside the home can have a part. They can mingle prayers for the saints, for their pastor, for the unsaved, and for missionaries with their day's work. The harddriven man of business can have a part in it, praying as he hurries from duty to duty. But we must, if we

want to maintain this spirit of constant prayer, take time—and plenty of it—when we shut ourselves up in the secret place alone with God for nothing but prayer.

RECEIVING MERCY, GRACE, AND JOY

Prayer is the means that God has appointed for our receiving mercy and obtaining grace. Hebrews 4:16 is one of the simplest, sweetest verses in the Bible: "*Let us therefore come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need.*" These words make it very clear that God has appointed a way by which we can seek and obtain mercy and grace. That way is prayer—a bold, confident, outspoken approach to the throne of grace, the most holy place of God's presence. There, our sympathizing High Priest, Jesus Christ, has entered in our behalf. (See Hebrews 4:14–15.)

Mercy is what we need, and grace is what we must have; otherwise, all our lives and efforts will end in complete failure. Prayer is the way to obtain mercy and grace. Infinite grace is at our disposal, and we make it ours by prayer. It is ours for the asking. Oh, if we only realized the fullness of God's grace—its height, depth, length, and breadth—I am sure we would spend more time in prayer. The measure of our appropriation of grace is determined by the measure of our prayers.

Who does not feel that he needs more grace? Then ask for it. Be constant and persistent in your asking. Be diligent and untiring in your asking. God delights in our persistence in prayer, for it shows our faith in Him, and He is mightily pleased with faith. Because of our perseverance, He will rise and give us as much as we need. (See Luke 11:8.) What little streams of mercy and grace most of us know when we might know rivers overflowing their banks!

Prayer in the name of Jesus Christ is the way He Himself has appointed for His disciples to obtain fullness of joy. He states this simply and beautifully: "*Until now have you asked nothing in My name: ask, and you shall receive, that your joy may be full*" (John 16:24). Who does not wish for joy? Well, the way to have full joy is by praying in the name of

Jesus. We all know people who are full of joy. Indeed, it is just running over, shining from their eyes, bubbling out of their very lips, and running off their fingertips when they shake your hand. Coming in contact with them is like coming in contact with an electrical machine charged with gladness. People of that sort are always people who spend much time in prayer.

Why is it that prayer in the name of Christ brings such fullness of joy? In part, because we get what we ask. But that is not the only reason, nor is it the greatest. Prayer makes God real. When we ask something definite of God, and He gives it, how real God becomes! He is right there! It is blessed to have a God who is real and not merely an idea. I remember once when I suddenly and seriously fell ill all alone in my study. I dropped on my knees and cried to God for help. Instantly, all pain left me, and I was perfectly well. It seemed as if God stood right there, reached out His hand, and touched me. The joy of the healing was not as great as the joy of meeting God.

No joy on earth or in heaven is greater than communion with God. Prayer in the name of Jesus brings us into communion with God. The psalmist was surely not speaking only of future blessedness, but also of present blessedness, when he said, "*In Your presence is fullness of joy*" (Psalm 16:11). Oh, the unutterable joy of those moments when, in our prayers, we really enter into the presence of God!

Does someone say, "I have never known joy like that in prayer"? Do you take enough leisure for prayer to actually sense God's presence? Do you really give yourself up to prayer in the time that you do take?

FREEDOM FROM ANXIETY

In every care, anxiety, and need of life, prayer with thanksgiving is the means that God has appointed for our obtaining freedom from all anxiety and the peace of God that passes all understanding. Paul said:

Be careful for nothing; but in every thing by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the

peace of God, which passes all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus. (Philippians 4:6-7)

To many, this initially seems like the picture of a life that is beautiful but beyond the reach of ordinary mortals. This is not so at all. The verse tells us how this life of peace is attainable by every child of God: “Be careful for nothing” (verse 6). The remainder of the verse tells us how to do this. It is very simple: “...but in every thing by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God.”

What could be plainer or more simple than that? Just keep in constant touch with God. When troubles or afflictions—great or small—occur, speak to Him about it, never forgetting to return thanks for what He has already done. What will the result be? "*And the peace of God, which passes all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus*" (verse 7).

That is glorious, and it is as simple as it is glorious! Thank God, many are trying it. Do you know anyone who is always serene? Perhaps this person has a very temperamental nature. Nevertheless, when troubles, conflicts, opposition, and sorrow sweep around him, the peace of God that is beyond all understanding will keep his heart and his thoughts in Christ Jesus.

We all know people like that. How do they do it? By prayer, that is how. They know the deep peace of God, the unfathomable peace that surpasses all understanding, because they are men and women of much prayer.

Some of us let the hurry of our lives crowd prayer out; what a waste of time, energy, and emotion there is in this constant worry! One night of prayer will save us from many nights of insomnia. Time spent in prayer is not wasted; it is time invested at a big interest.

VEHICLE FOR THE HOLY SPIRIT

Prayer is the method that God Himself has appointed for our obtaining the Holy Spirit. The Bible is very plain on this point. Jesus said,

"If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children how much more shall your Father which is in heaven give good things to them that ask Him?" (Matthew 7:11).

I know this as definitely as I know that my thirst is quenched when I drink water. Early one morning in the Chicago Avenue Church prayer room, where several hundred people had been assembled a number of hours in prayer, the Holy Spirit fell so fully that no one could speak or pray. The whole place was so filled with His presence that sobs of joy filled the place. Men left that room and went to different parts of the country, taking trains that very morning, and the effects of the outpouring of God's Holy Spirit in answer to prayer were soon reported. Others went into the city with the blessing of God on them. This is only one instance among many that might be cited from personal experience.

If we would only spend more time in prayer, there would be more fullness of the Spirit's power in our work. Many who once worked unmistakably in the power of the Holy Spirit now fill a room with empty shouting, beating the air with meaningless gestures, because they have neglected prayer. We must spend much time on our knees before God if we are to continue in the power of the Holy Spirit.

BE READY FOR HIS RETURN

Prayer is the means that Christ has appointed so that our hearts will not be overcome with indulgences, drunkenness, and the cares of this life, so that the day of Christ's return will not come upon us suddenly as a snare. (See Luke 21:34-35.) We are warned in Scripture: "Watch you therefore, and pray always, that [we] may be accounted worthy to escape all these things that shall come to pass, and to stand before the Son of man" (verse 36). According to this passage, there is only one way that we can be prepared for the coming of the Lord when He appears: through much prayer.

The second coming of Jesus Christ is a subject that is awakening much interest and discussion in our day. It is one thing to be interested in the Lord's return and to talk about it, but it is another thing to be

prepared for it. We live in an atmosphere that has a constant tendency to make us unsuitable for Christ's coming. The world tends to draw us down by its self-indulgences and cares. There is only one way by which we can triumphantly rise above these things—by constant watching in prayer, that is, by sleeplessness in prayer. "Watch" in this passage is the same strong word used in Ephesians 6:18, and "always" means to pray at all times. The man who spends little time in prayer, who is not steadfast and constant in prayer, will not be ready for the Lord when He comes. But we can be ready. How? Pray! Pray! Pray!

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WE NEED TO PRAY

Prayer is necessary because of what it accomplishes. Much has been said about that already, but more should be added. Prayer promotes our spiritual growth as almost nothing else, indeed, as nothing else except Bible study. Prayer and Bible study go hand in hand.

Through prayer, my sin—my most hidden sin—is brought to light. As I kneel before God and pray, "*Search me, O God, and know my heart: try me, and know my thoughts: and see if there be any wicked way in me*" (Psalm 139:23–24), God directs the penetrating rays of His light into the innermost recesses of my heart. The sins I never suspected to be present are brought to light. In answer to prayer, God washes away my iniquity and cleanses my sin. (See Psalm 51:2.) My eyes are opened to behold

wondrous things out of God's Word. (See Psalm 119:18.) I receive wisdom to know God's way (see James 1:5) and strength to walk in it. As I meet God in prayer and gaze into His face, I am changed into His image "*from glory to glory*" (2 Corinthians 3:18). Each day of true prayer life finds me more like my glorious Lord.

John Welch, the soninlaw of John Knox, was one of the most faithful men of prayer this world has ever seen. He counted any day in which seven or eight hours were not devoted solely to God in prayer and the study of His Word as wasted time. An old man speaking of him after his death said, "He was a type of Christ." How did he become so like his Master? His prayer life explains the mystery.

Prayer also brings power into our work. If we wish power for any work to which God calls us, whether it is preaching, teaching, personal work, or the raising of our children, we can receive it by earnest prayer.

A woman, with a little boy who was perfectly incorrigible, once came to me in desperation and said, "What should I do with him?"

I asked, "Have you ever tried prayer?"

She said she had prayed for him, she thought. I asked if she had made his conversion and his character a matter of specific, expectant prayer. She replied that she had not been definite in the matter. She began that day, and at once there was a marked change in the child. As a result, he grew up into Christian manhood.

How many Sunday school teachers have taught for months and years and seen no real fruit from their labors? Then, they learn the secret of intercession; by earnest pleading with God, they see their students, one by one, brought to Christ! How many poor teachers have become mighty people of God by casting away their confidence in their own abilities and gifts and giving themselves up to God to wait on Him for the "*power from on high*" (Luke 24:49)! Along with other believers, the Scottish evangelist John Livingstone spent a night in prayer to God. When he preached the next day, five hundred people were either converted or marked some definite uplift in their spiritual lives. Prayer and power are inseparable.

Prayer avails for the conversion of others. Few people are converted in this world in any other way than in connection with someone's prayers. I previously thought that no human being had anything to do with my own conversion, for I was not converted in church or Sunday school or in personal conversation with anyone. I was awakened in the middle of the night and converted. As far as I can remember, I did not have the slightest thought of being converted, or of anything of that nature, when I went to bed and fell asleep. But I was awakened in the middle of the night and converted probably within five minutes. A few minutes before, I was about as near eternal damnation as one gets. I had one foot over the brink and was trying to get the other one over. As I said, I thought no human being had anything to do with it, but I had forgotten my mother's prayers. Later, I learned that one of my college classmates had decided to pray for me until I was saved.

Prayer often avails where everything else fails. How utterly all of Monica's efforts and entreaties failed with her son! But her prayers prevailed with God, and the immoral youth became St. Augustine, the mighty man of God. By prayer, the bitterest enemies of the gospel have become its most valiant defenders, the most wicked the truest sons of God, and the most contemptible women the purest saints. Oh, the power of prayer to reach down, where hope itself seems vain, and lift men and women up into fellowship with and likeness to God! It is simply wonderful! How little we appreciate this marvelous weapon!

Prayer brings blessings to the church. The history of the church has always been full of grave difficulties to overcome. The devil hates the church and seeks in every way to block its progress by false doctrine, by division, and by inward corruption of life. But by prayer, a clear way can be made through everything. Prayer will root out heresy, smooth out misunderstanding, sweep away jealousies and animosities, obliterate immoralities, and bring in the full tide of God's reviving grace. History abundantly proves this. In the darkest hour, when the state of the church has seemed beyond hope, believing men and women have met together and cried to God, and the answer has come.

It was so in the days of Knox, and in the days of Wesley, Whitefield, Edwards, and Brainerd. It was so in the days of Finney and in the days of the great revival of 1857 in this country and of 1859 in Ireland. And it will be so again in your day and mine! Satan has organized his forces. Some people, claiming great apostolic methods, are merely covering the rankest dishonesty and hypocrisy with their loud and false assurance. Christians equally loyal to the great fundamental truths of the gospel are scowling at one another with a devilsent suspicion. The world, the flesh, and the devil are holding a merry carnival. It is a dark day, but now "*it is time for You, LORD, to work: for they have made void Your law*" (Psalm 119:126). He is getting ready to work, and now He is listening for the voice of prayer. Will He hear it? Will He hear it from you? Will He hear it from the church as a body? I believe He will.