



Faith Pulpit

Seeing Answers to Our Prayers

One cannot read widely about our Christian heritage without being impressed with the important place of fervent prayer in launching movements and spiritually sustaining great men and women of God in the past. Major periods of revival and evangelistic activity have usually been preceded by times of earnest prayer. Yet today we seem to find little time to spend in prayer. We are preoccupied with others things. We deceive ourselves by speaking of the quality of our prayers and not their quantity. We are intent on developing programs and establishing empires, and so our prayer lives often become rather empty, routine, and mechanical. Then we wonder why we do not have power with God, and a genuine spirituality seems so elusive to us—even when things outwardly appear to be positive. Some have even disparaged expressions of godliness and piety as if they were signs of compromise or mere sentimentality. Yet when we give the matter serious thought, it is obvious that human programs and carnal methods are a poor substitute for the power of God in response to His people's earnest prayers.

One of the problems facing an educational institution which purposes to prepare people for vocational Christian ministry is this: How can students be taught the vital importance of prevailing prayer—especially when often they have never experienced its reality in their own lives, in the lives of family members, or in their own local churches? What may a school do to counter this? (1) We can offer courses in the spiritual life which will teach these truths; (2) We can emphasize it throughout the curriculum in every class; (3) We can assign reading which relates the great work of God of times past in response to earnest prayer; (4) We can model these concepts as a part of our own lives and ministry; (5) We can provide specific times set aside to concentrated earnest prayer and gather together with like-minded others who mean business for God; (6) We can bring in chapel authors who will reinforce these truths also. Might not a concerned pastor adopt some of these same suggestions in bringing these truths to his people?

We need to be careful, however, lest there develop only external forms without the genuine inward reality of godly praying. Such genuine praying consists of several essential qualities which will mark our prayers if we expect to see again the hand of God mightily at work in answer to our petition. What are some of these essential qualities?

1. Righteousness

Scripture tells us that it is the effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man which availeth much (James 5:16b). The prophet rebuked Israel and said: Your iniquities have separated between you and your God, and your sins have hid His face from you, that He will not hear (Isa. 59:1,2). If we expect to have answers to our prayers, we need to be on praying ground—spiritually in tune with God, having put away sin and desirous of pleasing God in our lives.

2. Yieldedness to the Will of God

John reminds us that if we ask anything according to His will, He heareth us (1 John 5:14). In another place John quotes our Lord as saying: If ye abide in Me, and My words abide in you, ye shall ask what ye will, and it will be done unto you (John 15:7). An important mark of prevailing prayer is to be sensitive to that which will best honor our Lord and accomplish His purposes. This, however, should not be an excuse for unbelief in prayer and adopting a fatalistic attitude that whatever will be, will be, whether we pray or not. It is, rather, to recognize that often we know not what we should pray for as we ought (Romans 8:26, 27), and we want our requests conditioned by the will of God.

3. Fervency

James has told us it is the fervent prayer that availeth much (James 5:16b). This speaks of seriousness and purpose and of being deeply burdened that God's prescription for Israel's restoration from sin given to Solomon includes this quality: If My people, which are called by My name, shall humble themselves, and pray and seek My face (2 Chronicles 7:14). It is also seen in the great prayers recorded in Scripture (see 2 Chronicles 6:12–42; Genesis 18:20–32; Exodus 32:11–13; Daniel 9:3–19). Paul speaks of it when he requests fellow believers to strive together with me in your prayers to God for me (Romans 15:30). When we have no burden, we often do not see the mighty moving of God in our behalf.

4. Persistence

Some have intimated that persistence in prayer is a sign of unbelief or a questioning of God's desire to grant our requests. This is not, however, what Scripture teaches. Our Lord teaches persistence in prayer in Luke 11:5–13 where a parable of importunity becomes the basis for commanding us to keep asking, seeking and knocking before the throne of God. This is also true in Luke 18:1–8 where the parable of

the unjust judge is told by our Lord to this end, that men ought always to pray, and not to faint (Luke 18:1). Let us not give up in bringing our requests to God.

5. Belief

Many scriptures point out this essential mark of godly and effective prayer. The Savior Himself, clearly taught this in Mark 11:12–14, 20:24 . His words serve to remind us that what things soever ye desire, when ye pray, believe that ye receive them, and ye shall have them (Mark 11:24). It is in this context that He commands us: Have faith in God (Mark 11:22). James instructs the believer to ask in faith, nothing wavering (James 1:6–8). Sometimes God’s people will believe only when they can see how the prayer can be humanly answered. This is hardly faith. Believing prayer trusts God to do that which is right and needful.

Have we caught onto getting answers to our prayers? If we have put aside sin, are walking, step-by-step under the Spirit’s direction, and if we will trust God to answer mightily, we can pray with confidence, fervency and regularity. And when we do this, we will see answers to prayer never dreamed possible.

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