
***UNLIMITED
POSSIBILITIES
OF PRAYER***

STUDIES 1 - 10

TEACHER MANUAL

Stephen Nemeth Lectures

Unlimited Possibilities of Prayer

Studies 1 - 10

Teacher Manual

TABLE OF CONTENTS

<u>Study</u>	<u>Title</u>	<u>Pages</u>
1	Great And Mighty Things	1
2	The Sin Of Prayerlessness	11
3	The Prayer For Special Guidance	21
4	The Simplicity Of Prayer	28
5	The Prayer For Divine Quickening	37
6	When Prayer And Fasting Go Together	47
7	The Prayer For Searching Of Heart	57
8	The Prayer For God's Will To Be Done	63
9	The Prayer For God To Rend The Heavens	69
10	The Prayer For Deliverance From Trouble	75

Stephen Nemeth Lectures

GREAT AND MIGHTY THINGS

STUDY 1

Scripture Portion: Jeremiah 33:3

Jeremiah 33:3 - *Call unto me, and I will answer thee, and show thee great and mighty things, which thou knowest not.*

Even the most casual reader of the Bible soon discovers that, recorded within its pages, there are many instances of men and women who prayed and received answers to their prayers.

In order to verify this statement, we only have to think of such names as Abraham, Moses, Hannah, Samuel, David, Jeremiah, Daniel, Jonah, etc., in the Old Testament and of Peter, Paul, John, etc., in the New Testament.

In addition to this, as we read the Bible, we find encouragement and even commands to pray.

Think, for example, of all that our Lord said about prayer in the four gospels, and of the constant references to the privilege and responsibility of prayer in the New Testament epistles.

It is true to say that the Bible is a compendium on prayer. It is a textbook which shows us -

 who may pray,
 why we need to pray,
 where we should pray, and
 what happens when we pray.

In saying all this, the challenge comes to us: Why is it that we do not pray more? Why do we make so little use of prayer?

I would like to share with you what God says to us about prayer in one particular verse, for it seems to me that this verse declares the unlimited possibilities of prayer.

Jeremiah 33:3 - *Call unto me, and I will answer thee, and show thee great and mighty things, which thou knowest not.*

As we explore and expound this truth, let us do so with the longing that we may be men and women who not only believe in prayer, but who actually pray.

We have a loving heavenly Father Who waits to heal and to answer the prayers of His children, Who promises that, if only they will come to Him with their needs, He will answer them abundantly.

Let us see, then, how this is brought before us in this great promise of -

Jeremiah 33:3 - *Call unto me, and I will answer thee, and show thee great and mighty things, which thou knowest not.*

Notice first of all that there are two sides to every prayer - the human side and the divine side; man's side and God's side. To put it another way, there is the asking side - "call unto Me" - and there is the answering side - "I will answer thee."

If we will do the asking, God promises to do the answering. There are only two persons involved. Every time we engage in prayer, there is the one who prays and the One Who answers.

How wonderful this is! Our God is so great, yet we may come to Him and make known our requests! He is our loving heavenly Father. He promises to hear and to answer our prayers.

Now, if there are two sides to prayer, it means that prayer is always conditional. In order that God may do His part, man must do his part. This is the meaning of -

James 4:2 - *Ye lust, and have not: ye kill, and desire to have, and cannot obtain: ye fight and war, yet ye have not, because ye ask not.*

What a tragedy it is that we live like paupers when we need not do so!

We could be rich beyond measure if we would only come before the Lord and ask Him to bestow upon us the spiritual blessings we need in so far as they are good for us and are for God's glory, blessings which are material and temporal.

Let us notice, then -

1. MAN'S PART: THE ASKING SIDE OF PRAYER.

What is man's part in the matter of praying? Does it involve learning a formula? Is it only for Christians of many years standing? Must we be in the school of prayer for a long time before we can come to the Lord and pray to Him acceptably?

Man's part in prayer is summed up in three words in the verse we are studying:

"Call unto Me."

The simplest definition of the manward side of prayer is that it is calling upon God. It is the creature calling upon the Creator. It is the child coming to his Father and making known his needs and requests.

There are three things we should carefully notice about the manward, or the asking, side of prayer.

The source of prayer.

Where does prayer begin? If we kneel and pray with a great burden, if we do pray, in fact, to God, is that just the product of something I decide to do and, therefore, do? Is that all that prayer is, or does it consist of more than that?

When we pray, it is always God Who takes the initiative. This is clearly brought out in -

Romans 8:26 - *Likewise the Spirit also helpeth our infirmities: for we know not what we should pray for as we ought: but the Spirit itself maketh intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered.*

We are like ignorant children for we do not know how to pray, but the Holy Spirit comes to us, teaches and leads us forth in prayer according to the will of God.

Let us remember, therefore, that the source of true prayer is the Lord Himself Who begins by saying, "Call unto Me."

The second thing to notice in relation to the manward side of prayer is:

The simplicity of prayer.

"Call unto Me," says God.

Can you think of anything simpler than the word "call?"

It reminds us of the frightened child who wants her mother. What does she do? She calls. This is an instinctive action on the part of the child.

All through the scriptures we find that prayer is couched in this context. Prayer is calling upon God and asking for His gracious help.

We find the first reference in -

Genesis 4:26 - *And to Seth, to him also there was born a son; and he called his name Enos: then began men to call upon the name of the LORD.*

The call may be audible, or it may be the inaudible expression of our hearts. It may never find words, but it may, nevertheless, be truly a cry to God. As one of our hymns puts it -

*Prayer is the soul's sincere desire,
Uttered or unexpressed;
The motion of a hidden fire
That trembles in the breast.
Prayer is the burden of a sigh,
The falling of a tear,
The upward glancing of an eye
When none but God is near.*

James Montgomery

There are occasions when we pray and do not speak words.

In fact, often there is no time to say much, as in the case of Peter who cried out, “Lord, save me.....”

Matthew 14:30 - *But when he saw the wind boisterous, he was afraid; and beginning to sink, he cried, saying, Lord, save me.*

Prayer is so simple yet we are apt to think that it is very involved and difficult.

We say, “Oh, I cannot pray!”

But the Lord says to us, “You are wrong! All you have to do is to call unto Me!”

So the source of prayer is God Himself and the simplicity of prayer is self-evident.

But there is a third thing to notice here in relation to the manward side of prayer.

c. *The scope of prayer.*

What area does prayer cover? What are the limits of prayer?

The answer is this - “Anyone can pray about anything, anywhere and at any time.” It cannot be put more simply than that.

Of course, we must be in a right relationship with God before we can come to Him with confidence and make our requests known to Him. Yet, even if a man is not a Christian, he may call upon the Lord for salvation, for -

Romans 10:13 - *For whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved.*

The Christian can pray at any time, about anything, and he can pray in any place.

This is the manward side of prayer, the asking side, its source, its simplicity and its scope.

Now, let us turn to the Godward side or aspect of this study, which is -

2. GOD'S PART: THE ANSWERING SIDE OF PRAYER.

What happens when man does the calling?

Well, here is God's promise -

Jeremiah 33:3 - *Call unto me, and I will answer thee, and show thee great and mighty things, which thou knowest not.*

In other words, whenever anyone responds to God's invitation to call upon Him, immediately there is a response on God's part. It is quite impossible to pray to Him and not to receive an answer from Him.

Do you believe that? If you are in doubt, look again at the promise of **Jeremiah 33:3**.

God says, "All you have to do is to call. If you will do this, I pledge My word that, as surely as you call, I will answer."

Then, what kind of an answer does God promise to give?

1. He promises a certain answer.

Notice the words "I *will* answer thee....."

We cannot pray and fail to get an answer. Here is God's pledged word that, when we pray, He will answer our prayer. If only our faith would lay hold of this! We believe so much in the word of man. It is absolutely about time that we believe more in the word of God.

If you should say to me, "Will you give me a donation for this worthy cause?" and I should answer, "Yes, I will write out a cheque for you straight away," you would believe me.

Yes, we believe the word of man so easily. But what a great thing it would be if we came to believe more in what God says!

What does He say?

Jeremiah 33:3 - *Call unto me, and I will answer thee, and show thee great and mighty things, which thou knowest not.*

Nothing in the whole world could, or would, ever make God break His word.

There are four words I would like to suggest in connection with God's answering of our prayers. We need to consider them carefully.

(1) *When we pray to the Lord, we may receive a direct answer to our prayer.*

When we bring a request to Him, He very often gives us the answer straight away.

Think of the illustration of the cheque. It is made out to you for a certain amount, so what do you do? You go to the bank and cash it. The money is handed to you. There is no delay at all.

How many times we have prayed and the answer has come just like that. Sometimes we have prayed about little things, sometimes about more important things and God has answered at once.

He has given us a *direct answer*.

(2) *But we may receive a different answer from the Lord.*

The answer will come, but it will be different from what we expected.

Paul had a grievous thorn in the flesh. He prayed earnestly that the Lord would remove it. He thought, "If only I can get rid of this affliction, then I will be more useful in the Lord's service."

Three times he besought the Lord to remove this "thorn," this agonizing affliction, but the Lord said,

"No. I am not going to take it away. I am going to do something very much better for you. I am going to give you a glorious sense of My presence and an abundance of My sustaining power, grace and peace, which will be far better than if you had deliverance from this thorn."

2 Corinthians 12:8-10 - *For this thing I besought the Lord thrice, that it might depart from me.*

9 And he said unto me, My grace is sufficient for thee: for my strength is made perfect in weakness. Most gladly therefore will I rather glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me.

10 Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in necessities, in persecutions, in distresses for Christ's sake: for when I am weak, then am I strong.

Paul had to learn the lesson that sometimes God gives a different answer. When He does this, it is always for His glory, for our good and for the blessing of others. If we are wise, we will see it in that light.

(3) *Then, God's answer to our prayers may be delayed.*

God hears our prayers, but for a good reason He delays in giving the answer. He is waiting for the right moment to fulfill His gracious purpose, which He does in His own good time.

(4)Then, the answer may be denial.

What I mean is that God will answer our prayer by saying “No.” He will do this for a very good reason.

For example, if a small child asks for a pair of sharp pointed scissors, his mother says, “No, dear” and quickly gives him something else to divert his attention from the scissors.

Does God act in this way?

Yes, He does.

Elijah said, “O God, let me die!”

1 Kings 19:4 - *But he himself went a day's journey into the wilderness, and came and sat down under a juniper tree: and he requested for himself that he might die; and said, It is enough; now, O LORD, take away my life; for I am not better than my fathers.*

But God said, “I am going to answer your prayer by saying no. Afterwards, you will see that it was much better that I did so.”

He said ‘no’ to Elijah. He has often said ‘no’ to you and to me.

If God has not given you exactly what you have asked of Him, it is only because He waits and plans to give you something better.

So, whether the answer is *direct, different, delayed* or a *denial*, the answer is still there. It is a certain answer.

God always hears and answers the prayers of His children.

He does not always do it in the way we want, or at the time we think, but He always answers, for He says -

Jeremiah 33:3 - *Call unto me, and I will answer thee, and show thee great and mighty things, which thou knowest not.*

That is the first thing for us to be clear about.

The second thing in regard to the Godward side of prayer is this: God not only promises a certain answer, but -

2. He promises a personal answer.

Notice the pronouns here, “Call unto *Me* and *I* will answer *thee*.....”

The greatest answer to prayer is not to receive some material benefit, or even some spiritual blessing. For example, if you are really in need of a new car, it is good to pray for one. It is wonderful to receive one in answer to your prayer.

If you are needing peace in your heart, it is good to pray for peace and to receive it.

But, the greatest answer to prayer is a revelation of the Lord Himself to the pray-er. It is the inward confidence He gives when God reveals Himself to you and you are able to say -

“Well, I know it is all right! I am in His wonderful hands!”

That is the greatest answer to prayer.

You see, even if the answer to our prayer is different from what we expected, if it is delayed, or if it is in the form of a denial, if we have the Lord Himself, what does it matter?

Thus, we notice that the Lord Himself promises a personal answer.

Jesus said,

Luke 11:9-10 - *And I say unto you, Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you.*

10 For every one that asketh receiveth; and he that seeketh findeth; and to him that knocketh it shall be opened.

In other words, the Lord says, “Call unto Me and I will answer thee.....” The answer will be a personal answer which comes from God to you.

The third thing to notice in relation to the Godward side of prayer is this -

c. God promises a visible answer.

He says -

Jeremiah 33:3 - *Call unto me, and I will answer thee, and show thee great and mighty things, which thou knowest not.*

This reminds us of -

Matthew 6:6 - *But thou, when thou prayest, enter into thy closet, and when thou hast shut thy door, pray to thy Father which is in secret;.....*

Up to this point, everything is done in private. No one else knows anything about it.

How does the verse end?

Matthew 6:6 - *.....and thy Father which seeth in secret shall reward thee openly.*

You see, the praying is a secret matter, but, having prayed in secret, there will be an outward demonstration from the Lord in His answer to our prayer. It will be so definite and real that we will be able to say,

“Thank You, Lord! That is the thing I asked You for and You have given it to me. That is the answer to my prayer!”

So the Lord answers our prayers by giving us a certain answer, a personal answer and a visible answer.

But notice now that -

4. He promises a mighty answer.

Jeremiah 33:3 - *Call unto me, and I will answer thee, and show thee great and mighty things,.....*

The word “mighty” means “inaccessible.” This is to say, when we pray, God does things which no one else but He can do.

We are reminded of the question in -

Genesis 18:14 - *Is any thing too hard for the LORD? At the time appointed I will return unto thee, according to the time of life, and Sarah shall have a son.*

Another rendering of the words “mighty things” is “fenced in things,” things which, humanly speaking, are impossible.

For example, Daniel was enabled to reveal secrets.

Daniel 2:28-30 - *But there is a God in heaven that revealeth secrets, and maketh known to the king Nebuchadnezzar what shall be in the latter days. Thy dream, and the visions of thy head upon thy bed, are these;*

29 As for thee, O king, thy thoughts came into thy mind upon thy bed, what should come to pass hereafter: and he that revealeth secrets maketh known to thee what shall come to pass.

30 But as for me, this secret is not revealed to me for any wisdom that I have more than any living, but for their sakes that shall make known the interpretation to the king, and that thou mightest know the thoughts of thy heart.

Elijah was enabled to prevent its raining for three and a half years, after which time, he was enabled to cause the rain to come.

James 5:17-18 - *Elias was a man subject to like passions as we are, and he prayed earnestly that it might not rain: and it rained not on the earth by the space of three years and six months.*

18 And he prayed again, and the heaven gave rain, and the earth brought forth her fruit.

Peter actually walked out of prison in answer to the prayers of the church - **Acts 12:5-17**.

Elisha was empowered to raise the dead - **2 Kings 4:32-37**.

God promises a mighty answer to our prayers. How challenged we should be when God says,

“Bring Me your hardest situation, your biggest problems, the fenced in, baffling things, for nothing is too hard for Me!”

There is one more thing to be noticed regarding the Godward side of this great promise.

Not only does God promise to give us a *certain answer, a personal answer, a visible answer and a mighty answer* to our prayers but -

5. He promises an overwhelming answer.

He says -

Jeremiah 33:3 -(I will) *show thee great and mighty things, which thou knowest not.*

What does that mean?

Think about it for a moment.

When God says, “which thou knowest not,” surely He means that every answer we receive may indeed be greater than the last.

It is as though He says, “I will surpass anything I have ever done for you.”

Ephesians 3:20 - *Now unto him that is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that worketh in us,*

THE SIN OF PRAYERLESSNESS

STUDY 2

Scripture Portion: 1 Samuel 12:23

1 Samuel 12:23 - *Moreover as for me, God forbid that I should sin against the LORD in ceasing to pray for you: but I will teach you the good and the right way:*

I am sure that it is true to say that the majority of Christians would admit that the place where they are most conscious of weakness, and even of failure, is in their prayer life.

The Lord has given us so many incentives and encouragements to pray, promises concerning prayer, examples of men and women who prayed and had their prayers answered.

He actually commands us to pray, yet we have to confess that we pray so little.

We often say that it is unfortunate that we do not pray more. We admit that our prayer life is weak and ineffective. But, have we ever realized that *not* to pray is to commit sin, that it is a sin not to pray?

The verse before us makes it quite clear that to neglect prayer, to be careless about praying, or not to make prayer a priority matter in our lives, is to be guilty of sinning against the Lord.

It might help, at this point, to ask the question, “How much do we pray?”

Perhaps the question would come with greater force if we ask, “How little do we pray?”

Put these questions to yourself now: “How much do I pray? How little do I pray?”

In one of his books, Dr. Andrew Murray tells us that, at a conference of Christian people, the question was asked -

“Will everyone who spends half an hour in prayer hold up a hand?”

One hand was held up.

“Will all those who spend fifteen minutes a day in prayer hold up a hand?”

A few hands went up.

It was then found that the majority present spent only about five minutes each day in prayer. Some did not pray at all!

As we consider Samuel's startling and instructive exclamation in -

1 Samuel 12:23 - *Moreover as for me, God forbid that I should sin against the LORD in ceasing to pray for you: but I will teach you the good and the right way:*

which was made in the presence of a great company of God's people, let us notice two things.

Why it is a sin not to pray and against whom we sin when we do not pray.

3. WHY IS IT A SIN NOT TO PRAY?

It is a sin not to pray because the Bible expressly calls it a sin.

When we do not pray, we sin against the Lord. The Bible says so and that settles it!

The Bible tells us that lying is a sin, bitterness is a sin, envy is a sin, greed is a sin, unbelief is a sin.

The same Book declares when a Christian does not pray, that Christian sins against the Lord.

This is a solemn matter indeed. It is very heart searching.

How much we have sinned against the Lord by our prayerlessness!

It is a sin not to pray because it is right to pray.

On one occasion Jesus gave a parable to underline the fact that -

Luke 18:1 - *And he spake a parable unto them to this end, that men ought always to pray, and not to faint;*

The apostle Paul exhorted the church at Thessalonica to -

1 Thessalonians 5:17 - *Pray without ceasing.*

Paul also said that, as the Lord's soldiers, we should pray -

Ephesians 6:18 - *Praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, and watching thereunto with all perseverance and supplication for all saints;*

From these scriptures we learn that it is right for a Christian to pray. This implies, therefore, that it is wrong for a Christian not to pray.

How wrong is it?

James, in his epistle, answers that question emphatically when he declares that -

James 4:17 - *Therefore to him that knoweth to do good, and doeth it not, to him it is sin.*

There are two kinds of sin: sins of omission and sins of commission.

Not to pray is a sin of omission. It is a failure to do something which we ought to do.

It is a sin not to pray because, when a Christian does not pray, it is a reproach to God.

Romans 14:23 - *And he that doubteth is damned if he eat, because he eateth not of faith: for whatsoever is not of faith is sin.*

This means that prayerlessness is a mark of unbelief -

Hebrews 11:6 - *But without faith it is impossible to please him: for he that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him.*

When you consider it, surely it is a reproach to our loving heavenly Father if we, His children, do not come to Him, talk to Him and spend time alone with Him.

What a reproach it was when the prodigal son was away in the far country, having broken off all communication with his father!

After a while, many who knew him would not recognize him as the son of his father for he was just living as if his father did not exist. He was out of touch with him. He never had any communication with him.

And it is possible for Christians to live like that - to be prayerless, out of touch, not on intimate speaking terms with God.

Unbelief is a besetting sin which we are to lay aside -

Hebrews 12:1-2 - *Wherefore seeing we also are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us, and let us run with patience the race that is set before us,
2 Looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith; who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God.*

One reason why we do not pray is that we do not really believe in God's power and willingness to answer prayer.

Such unbelief is a sin. For this reason, therefore, it is a sin not to pray.

It is a sin not to pray because of all the encouragements that are given to us to pray.

Throughout the Bible we are urged to pray. As we have noticed, God gives us promises and examples of men and women who have prayed and who have received answers to their prayers.

In addition to this, we have a great Partner in prayer, The Holy Spirit, Who dwells in all true believers.

He is here, within us. One of His gracious ministries is to enable us to be effective in our prayer life.

Romans 8:26-27 - *Likewise the Spirit also helpeth our infirmities: for we know not what we should pray for as we ought: but the Spirit itself maketh intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered.*

27 And he that searcheth the hearts knoweth what is the mind of the Spirit, because he maketh intercession for the saints according to the will of God.

Then again, we have our own individual experiences of answered prayer to encourage us and the testimony of others who have prayed and had their prayers wonderfully answered.

It is a sin not to pray because of all that prayer can accomplish.

Think of what prayer can do.

Go through your Bible with this thought in mind and make a list of all the things recorded in the Word of God which happened in answer to prayer.

Because prayer can accomplish so much, it is a sin not to pray, for, by not praying we are damming up the channels through which mighty blessings could, and should, be flowing.

When we do not pray, we deprive the world, the church and our own lives of the blessing of Almighty God.

Abraham interceded for wicked Sodom and God heard and answered his prayer.

What if Abraham had not prayed?

Moses prayed for the deliverance of the children of Israel. God heard and answered his prayer. What if he had not prayed?

Joshua, Samuel, David, Elijah, Elisha, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Daniel - these all came before the Lord and pleaded for His help. Their prayers were answered and God's blessing was outpoured on many people. What if they had not prayed?

Prayer can secure the salvation of our loved ones; the solving of so-called impossible problems; the progress of the gospel; the supply of money for missionary work; the revival of the church; the changing of governments and policies, etc.

If this is true, and it is, what a sin it is not to pray!

f. It is a sin not to pray because prayerlessness leaves the door open for all other sins.

Jesus taught His disciples (and us) to pray -

Matthew 6:13 - *And lead us not into temptation,.....*

He also said -

Matthew 26:41 - *Watch and pray, that ye enter not into temptation:.....*

It was John Bunyan who said, "Prayer will make a man cease from sin, as sin will entice a man to cease from prayer."

Someone else has said, "For the Christian, prayerlessness is identical with backsliding."

What are the sins that are overcoming us? Is it not true that the basic reason for our failure to get victory over our sins is the lack of prayer?

I am quite sure that most of us find it easy to believe that prayerlessness leads to carelessness, slackness and, indeed, to actual sin. When we have lost our temper or have been untruthful or have spoken some hasty words, it has always been due to the fact that we have not prayed, or we have not prayed enough.

In other words, had we prayed, would we have suffered these "breakdowns?"

7. It is a sin not to pray because prayerlessness is the root cause of all our deficiencies and lack of spiritual power.

Why are we so often weak, anaemic and ineffective in our Christian living and service?

Why is the church so powerless? Why does preaching accomplish so little?

Why is there so much effort with so few results?

Is it not that God's people are neglecting the great privilege and responsibility of prayer?

Perhaps we are inclined to answer these questions by saying, "The devil is very strong!" But, "Jesus is stronger than Satan and sin. Satan to Jesus must bow." When we pray, he does bow to Jesus!

Perhaps we say, “But the world is wicked and full of subtle allurements.” But, in answer to prayer, we can be delivered from the world and its evil machinations.

Perhaps we say, “But the times are hard. Christian work is so difficult.” But they are no harder than they have ever been. It is still true that -

James 5:16 -*The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much.*

When we pray, weakness becomes strength; failure is turned into victory; slackness is replaced by burning zeal and effectiveness.

Not to pray, therefore, is to commit sin.

4. AGAINST WHOM DO WE SIN WHEN WE DO NOT PRAY?

There are three clear answers to this question.

It will be a help to us if we will consider them very carefully and thus be set free from the sin of prayerlessness and released into a life of joyful, effective intercession.

8. When we do not pray we sin against God.

Notice that Samuel said -

1 Samuel 12:23 -*God forbid that I should sin against the LORD.....*

Of course, all sin is primarily against the Lord. We cannot possibly commit sin and not sin against God. This is brought out in -

Psalms 51:4 - *Against thee, thee only, have I sinned,.....*

David had, in fact, sinned against Bathsheba in his act of adultery. He had sinned against Bathsheba’s husband, Uriah, when he had him murdered. He had sinned against his soldiers and against the whole nation.

But, primarily, his sin was against God.

This truth is also brought out in the prodigal son’s statement in -

Luke 15:21 -*I have sinned against heaven, and in thy sight,.....*

This young man had sinned against the women with whom he had “wasted his substance.” He had sinned against his so-called “friends” before whom he had been such a bad example. But, primarily, his sin was against his father.

When we remember that prayer is co-operation with God with a view to the accomplishment of His will, and that, by our prayerlessness, we can hinder God from accomplishing His will, then it is easy to see why prayerlessness is a sin against God Himself.

Some things can happen only in answer to prayer. We cannot understand this but it is, nevertheless, true. The Lord waits to do great things, but before He can do these things He says -

Ezekiel 36:37 - *.....I will.....be enquired.....*

To be prayerless is to paralyze the arm of God. To be prayerful opens a channel through which the power of God may flow and the purposes of God may be achieved.

When we do not pray, therefore, we sin, first of all, against God. Serious as this is, it is not the whole story.

9. When we do not pray we sin against others.

Notice that Samuel said -

1 Samuel 12:23 - *.....Moreover as for me, God forbid that I should sin against the LORD in ceasing to pray for you:.....*

We live in a world which is filled with men and women who are spiritually and morally broken and bleeding. Is there anything we can do to help those around us who are in such desperate need?

Yes. We can pray for them and, as we pray, we secure the healing touch of the Great Physician for these suffering ones. Not to pray for them is to deprive them of His help, His enabling, His grace, His power and His blessing.

Therefore, by not praying for our fellowmen, we actually sin against them.

Pause for a moment and think of all that would happen if you, or if your church, would really take prayer more seriously. I think you will agree with me when I say that, before long, there would be a mighty revival.

It might be a good thing if we read that last sentence again and ask ourselves the question: If this is true, why should it not be so? Why should I not give myself to prayer and intercession so that my life may be quickened and my church be revived?

Do you have a family and loved ones? Have you seriously thought of how much blessing your prayers could release into their lives?

Do you work in a shop, an office, a hospital ward or a place where you are surrounded with people who do not know the Lord? Think of the blessing your

prayers could be in opening a channel into the lives of these people through which God could pour His saving grace.

Are you in touch with some of God's servants who are serving Him in the mission field overseas? How much you are able, by your prayers, to share with them in their task and "pray them through" when they are really up against it!

But, what if you do not pray for your loved ones, your fellow workers, your missionary friends? I will tell you: by depriving them of your prayers, you are sinning against them.

c. When we do not pray, we sin against ourselves.

We frequently say that "prayer changes things." This is right. But what we should really be saying is that "prayer changes the pray-er!"

The first result of prayer is a reflex one. It is a deeper fellowship with God, a more intimate communion with the Lord Himself and a greater manifestation of the presence and the power of God.

Yes, prayer changes things. But, primarily, prayer changes the pray-er.

To be a fruitful, victorious, happy and holy child of God, we must make much of the throne of grace. Only then will our lives be power-filled and Spirit-filled.

Not to pray, therefore, is to deny ourselves the blessing of a fruitful, victorious, happy and holy Christian life. It is, in fact, to sin against ourselves.

All that we are saying carries with it a tremendous challenge. If blessing is outpoured when we pray and it is withheld when we do not pray, how solemn and serious a thing it is to be prayerless, to commit this sin against God, against others and against ourselves!

What can we do about it?

We are called to do two things:

*first, we must make an honest confession, and
second, we must make a personal decision.*

The confession we need to make is that we have been prayerless, that we have not prayed enough or that we do not pray, and that we recognize that our prayerlessness is a sin against God, against others and against ourselves.

The personal decision we need to make is the decision which Samuel made when he said-

1 Samuel 12:23 - *Moreover as for me,.....*

as if to say, "I do not know what anyone else is going to do, but I know what I am going to do!"

Let us, therefore, humbly confess that we have been lazy, preoccupied, careless and prayerless. Let us vow, in God's presence, that we will become men and women of prayer.

In concluding this sermon study, I would like to make some suggestions which may help us to overcome the sin of prayerlessness.

1. Plan to have a daily, regular time of prayer when you can be alone with the Lord and talk with Him.
2. Begin each session of prayer by reading a short portion from the Bible. This will help to give you a consciousness of God's presence and a sense of ease and contact as you speak with Him.
3. Pray through the problems of the day as they arise.
4. Make sure that you are not formal in your prayers. Cultivate the habit of talking to the Lord, reverently by all means, but simply and naturally as a child talks to his father.
Talk to Him as you work and as you play. Keep on easy, intimate speaking terms with Him.
5. Study all that the Bible has to say on the subject of prayer. Get into the very atmosphere of the prayers of Abraham, Samuel, Nehemiah, Daniel and of those who were members of the early church.
6. Draw up a prayer list. Write down the names of those for whom you are going to pray regularly and systematically (include your minister and your church in this list).
7. Keep on keeping on - or, as one of our hymns puts it: "Don't stop praying!"

1 Thessalonians 5:17 - *Pray without ceasing.*

Philippians 4:6-7 - *Be careful for nothing; but in every thing by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God.
7 And the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.*

*Lord, teach us how to pray aright,
With reverence and with fear;
Though dust and ashes in Thy sight,
We may, we must draw near.*

*We perish if we cease from prayer;
O grant us power to pray!
And when to meet Thee we prepare,
Lord, meet us by the way.*

James Montgomery

THE PRAYER FOR SPECIAL GUIDANCE

STUDY 3

Scripture Portion: Genesis 24:10-27

Although it is, in fact, an ancient record, **Genesis 24**, reads like a page from a modern thriller.

In this chapter we have the account of Abraham's commission to his eldest and most trusted servant to go out in search of a bride for Isaac. The servant's name is not mentioned here as he is a type of the Holy Spirit Whose ministry is always to call attention to the Lord Jesus.

John 15:26 - *But when the Comforter is come, whom I will send unto you from the Father, even the Spirit of truth, which proceedeth from the Father, he shall testify of me:*

John 16:13-15 - *Howbeit when he, the Spirit of truth, is come, he will guide you into all truth: for he shall not speak of himself; but whatsoever he shall hear, that shall he speak: and he will show you things to come.*

14 He shall glorify me: for he shall receive of mine, and shall show it unto you.

15 All things that the Father hath are mine: therefore said I, that he shall take of mine, and shall show it unto you.

Abraham was getting very old -

Genesis 24:1 - *And Abraham was old, and well stricken in age: and the LORD had blessed Abraham in all things.*

Isaac, at this time, was more than forty years of age and still unmarried, so the commission was given to Abraham's servant to set out in search of a bride for Isaac.

Read carefully **Genesis 24:2-9**.

We have the story very simply told of the way in which this trusted servant prepared for his journey and then set out to go as far as Mesopotamia, to the city of Nahor, in quest of a bride for his master's son.

Genesis 24:9-10 - *And the servant put his hand under the thigh of Abraham his master, and sware to him concerning that matter.*

10 And the servant took ten camels of the camels of his master, and departed; for all the goods of his master were in his hand: and he arose, and went to Mesopotamia, unto the city of Nahor.

Abraham, of course, was much in prayer about all this, as is suggested by the words at the end of -

Genesis 24:7 - *.....Unto thy seed will I give this land; he shall send his angel before thee, and thou shalt take a wife unto my son from thence.*

So was Abraham's servant -

Genesis 24:12 - *And he said, O LORD God of my master Abraham, I pray thee, send me good speed this day, and show kindness unto my master Abraham.*

How could he possibly choose the right girl unless he received some special guidance in the matter? He not only needed guidance in a general sense, but he needed it in a very specific, special sense.

It is important to notice that the guidance that God gives to His children may be general or special.

By general guidance, we mean that guidance which God gives as we walk with Him in fellowship with Him from day to day.

We just trust God to order our ways. We are not specially conscious of our need of guidance. We believe the truth of -

Psalms 37:23 - *The steps of a good man are ordered by the LORD: and he delighteth in his way.*

We know that God is directing our steps. We trust Him to do it.

By special guidance, we mean that guidance which God gives concerning particular needs that arise of which we are conscious.

We come to the crossroads. We have to make a decision and we do not know which way to go.

It is then that we ask God to give us special guidance. And He does so.

It is rather like taking a journey along a straight road. We do not need to seek guidance for this, for the road is straight and there are no turnings to the left or right.

A little later on, we come to the crossroads. Then we need special guidance to know whether we should turn to the left or to the right, or whether we should, in fact, go straight on.

Now notice the sequence of teaching in this passage of scripture concerning the prayer for special guidance.

1. ABRAHAM'S SERVANT NEEDED SPECIAL GUIDANCE.

Try to picture the scene.

He was to set out on a very long journey in search of a bride for his master's son. It was rather like looking for a needle in a haystack! He certainly needed God to direct his steps for he knew full well the truth of -

Jeremiah 10:23 - *O LORD, I know that the way of man is not in himself: it is not in man that walketh to direct his steps.*

If God did not direct his steps, he could not fulfill his task. Moreover, he might make a wrong choice.

Perhaps at this moment you are in need of special guidance -

- whether or not to purchase a house.
- whether or not to propose to your Rebekah.
- whether or not to accept that invitation.
- whether or not you should enter Bible College.
- how to distribute that special sum of money.
- whether or not to emigrate.
- which school to send your child to.

Now, all these important decisions need special guidance. You have to make a decision. The road is no longer straight ahead of you. The way part and special direction is needed.

Abraham's servant knew his need for God to guide him.

ABRAHAM'S SERVANT BELIEVED THAT GOD COULD, AND WOULD, GUIDE HIM.

This fact is clearly brought out as we read the exciting story recorded in the first part of this chapter.

There is no doubt that this trusted old servant had the assurance that God was willing to guide him and that He would, in fact, guide him.

At the end of -

Genesis 24:7 - *.....Unto thy seed will I give this land; he shall send his angel before thee, and thou shalt take a wife unto my son from thence.*

we have the words of Abraham which gave assurance to his servant. And the prayer that is recorded in -

Genesis 24:12 - *And he said, O LORD God of my master Abraham, I pray thee, send me good speed this day, and show kindness unto my master Abraham.*

is a prayer that is offered with the same assurance.

In like manner, we have wonderful words of assurance, not from Abraham, but from God Himself, that He is willing and ready to guide us.

For a few examples of these, look up the following scriptures -

Psalms 32:8 - *I will instruct thee and teach thee in the way which thou shalt go: I will guide thee with mine eye.*

Proverbs 3:5-6 - *Trust in the LORD with all thine heart; and lean not unto thine own understanding.*

6 In all thy ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct thy paths.

Isaiah 58:11 - *And the LORD shall guide thee continually, and satisfy thy soul in drought, and make fat thy bones: and thou shalt be like a watered garden, and like a spring of water, whose waters fail not.*

The Lord is always more willing to guide us than we are to be guided. A New Testament illustration of the way in which He sometimes does this is found in -

Acts 8:5 - *Then Philip went down to the city of Samaria, and preached Christ unto them.*

and **Acts 8:26-40**.

3. ABRAHAM'S SERVANT ASKED GOD TO GIVE HIM THE SPECIAL GUIDANCE HE NEEDED.

We have the servant's prayer in -

Genesis 24:12 - *And he said, O LORD God of my master Abraham, I pray thee, send me good speed this day, and show kindness unto my master Abraham.*

It is simple and direct. It reveals the fact that this man was certainly on close and speaking terms with God.

Alexander MacLaren says that, "The first condition of securing real guidance in our daily life is to ask for it. The second step is to look for it. The third step is to be

willing to accept it, whether the finger points down the broad road that we would like to go upon or through some tangled path that we would fain avoid.”

Surely these words seem to sum up the attitude of Abraham’s servant. In his case it was a very big thing concerning which guidance was needed.

Does God guide in the big decisions? He most certainly does!

But He also gives us guidance just as clearly concerning the little things when we are willing humbly to bring our needs to Him and ask Him to direct our steps.

Ponder again the beautiful prayer recorded in **Genesis 24:12**.

Is it possible for a child of God to pray, “Send me good speed this day” and not to receive from God Himself the guidance which is so much needed?

4. ABRAHAM’S SERVANT ASKED GOD TO GIVE HIM A SPECIAL SIGN.

We read about this in -

Genesis 24:13-14 - *Behold, I stand here by the well of water; and the daughters of the men of the city come out to draw water:*

14 And let it come to pass, that the damsel to whom I shall say, Let down thy pitcher, I pray thee, that I may drink; and she shall say, Drink, and I will give thy camels drink also: let the same be she that thou hast appointed for thy servant Isaac; and thereby shall I know that thou hast showed kindness unto my master.

It raises the question, “Was this man wrong in acting this way?”

The answer is that he *was not* wrong.

The fact that he acted in this way shows us that he wanted to be absolutely sure of His guidance, and he was commended for this.

Anything that we do says, “We have no right to ask for signs for the gratification of a morbid curiosity. But we are justified in asking for the concurrence of outward providence indicating the will of God.”

Another instance of a man of God asking for a sign from God is found in -

Judges 6:36-40 - *And Gideon said unto God, If thou wilt save Israel by mine hand, as thou hast said,*

37 Behold, I will put a fleece of wool in the floor; and if the dew be on the fleece only, and it be dry upon all the earth beside, then shall I know that thou wilt save Israel by mine hand, as thou hast said.

38 And it was so: for he rose up early on the morrow, and thrust the fleece together, and wringed the dew out of the fleece, a bowl full of water.

39 *And Gideon said unto God, Let not thine anger be hot against me, and I will speak but this once: let me prove, I pray thee, but this once with the fleece; let it now be dry only upon the fleece, and upon all the ground let there be dew.*

40 *And God did so that night: for it was dry upon the fleece only, and there was dew on all the ground.*

5. ABRAHAM'S SERVANT RECEIVED THE SPECIAL GUIDANCE FOR WHICH HE HAD PRAYED.

The words “before he had done speaking” -

Genesis 24:15 - *.....before he had done speaking,.....*

remind us of -

Isaiah 65:24 - *And it shall come to pass, that before they call, I will answer; and while they are yet speaking, I will hear.*

The words “and the man of God wondering at her held his peace” -

Genesis 24:21 - *And the man wondering at her held his peace,.....*

remind us of -

Isaiah 28:16 - *Therefore thus saith the Lord GOD, Behold, I lay in Zion for a foundation a stone, a tried stone, a precious corner stone, a sure foundation: he that believeth shall not make haste.*

See how marvelously God answered this man's prayer and showed him, in very truth, what His will was concerning the choice of a bride for Isaac.

Read **Genesis 24:15-27**.

It is most important, as we meditate upon this study, that we apply it to ourselves and to our own circumstances and that we do not imagine that, because all this happened four thousand years ago, it cannot, or does not, happen today.

God is still the same. He still desires to undertake for His children concerning their day to day need of special guidance.

Read the account again in **Genesis 24:1-27**.

Especially note the servant's true humility as he got down low before the Lord to make known his need; his pure motive as he desired his prayer to be answered for the sake of Abraham, his master.

Above all else, he desired to be pleasing to God his heavenly Father.

Genesis 24:48 - *And I bowed down my head, and worshipped the LORD, and blessed the LORD God of my master Abraham, which had led me in the right way to take my master's brother's daughter unto his son.*

THE SIMPLICITY OF PRAYER

STUDY 4

Scripture Portion: James 4:8

James 4:8 - *Draw nigh to God, and he will draw nigh to you. Cleanse your hands, ye sinners; and purify your hearts, ye double minded.*

These words, “Draw nigh to God, and He will draw nigh to you,” emphasize the simplicity of prayer. As we look at them carefully, we see that they contain a precept and a promise.

The precept is: “Draw nigh (or near) to God.”

The promise is: “And He will draw nigh (or near) to you.”

This reminds us of the utter simplicity of prayer.

If we will seek the Lord and make our requests known to Him, He promises to draw near to us and to listen to our prayer.

In one sense, of course, we are always near to God and He is always near to us. As the psalmist said -

Psalm 139:7-10 - *Whither shall I go from thy spirit? or whither shall I flee from thy presence?*

8 If I ascend up into heaven, thou art there: if I make my bed in hell, behold, thou art there.

9 If I take the wings of the morning, and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea;

10 Even there shall thy hand lead me, and thy right hand shall hold me.

The apostle Paul, in his sermon on Mars Hill, also made reference to our nearness to God when he quoted from one of the poets of a former day, and said -

Acts 17:27-28 - *That they should seek the Lord, if haply they might feel after him, and find him, though he be not far from every one of us:*

28 For in him we live, and move, and have our being; as certain also of your own poets have said, For we are also his offspring.

Having said this, however, we need to remind ourselves that, in another sense, we are far away from God.

By nature we are spiritually cut off from Him because He is holy and we are sinful. We, like the prodigal son, are away in a far country.

Luke 15:13 - *And not many days after the younger son gathered all together, and took his journey into a far country, and there wasted his substance with riotous living.*

We are estranged from God. The solemn truth of this estrangement is brought out vividly in -

Ephesians 4:17-18 - *This I say therefore, and testify in the Lord, that ye henceforth walk not as other Gentiles walk, in the vanity of their mind, 18 Having the understanding darkened, being alienated from the life of God through the ignorance that is in them, because of the blindness of their heart:*

The apostle Paul reminds us that, by nature, men and women walk in the vanity of their mind.

In a spiritual sense, therefore, we are far away from God.

The wonderful thing is, however, that God invites us and urges us to draw near to Him. If we will draw near to Him in the right way, He will accept us.

This is what James is saying to us - draw near to God and He will draw near to you.

But how can we, who are sinful men and women, draw near to a holy God?

The Bible tells us that there are several requirements.

FIRST - we must come in repentance.

The prophet Isaiah reminds us that -

Isaiah 53:6 - *All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way; and the LORD hath laid on him the iniquity of us all.*

Then he goes on to say -

Isaiah 55:7 - *Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts: and let him return unto the LORD, and he will have mercy upon him; and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon.*

If we would draw near to God, we must begin by forsaking our own way, our own thoughts and our sin. In other words, we must repent.

SECOND - we must come in faith.

The writer to the **Hebrews** reminds us that -

Hebrews 11:6 - *But without faith it is impossible to please him: for he that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him.*

What a wonderful verse is this!

If we would draw near to God, we must believe that God is alive, that He is active and that He is willing and waiting to receive us.

THIRD - we must draw near to God through Christ.

There is only one way for a guilty sinner to enter into the presence of a holy God and that is through Jesus Christ our Lord Who said -

John 14:6 - *Jesus saith unto him, I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me.*

There is only one way into God's holy presence -

Hebrews 10:19-21 - *Having therefore, brethren, boldness to enter into the holiest by the blood of Jesus,
20 By a new and living way, which he hath consecrated for us, through the veil, that is to say, his flesh;
21 And having an high priest over the house of God;*

FOURTH - we must draw near in sincerity.

This is clearly brought before us in -

Hebrews 10:22 - *Let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience, and our bodies washed with pure water.*

FIFTH - we must draw near with reverence.

Read in **Exodus 3:1-6** how Moses approached the Lord. He took off his shoes and worshiped the Lord with great reverence.

The important thing however, is that we do come to Him, that we do draw near, for the Lord says, "If you will draw near to Me, I will draw near to you."

I want now to apply these words to a variety of needs.

In doing this, I am quite sure that, at some point along the line, you will feel that the words "draw near to God, and He will draw near to you" will be just His words to you in your present circumstances.

1. DRAW NEAR TO GOD ACKNOWLEDGING YOUR NEED OF SALVATION AND HE WILL RECEIVE YOU.

The scripture for this is -

John 6:37 - *All that the Father giveth me shall come to me; and him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out.*

Whose words are these?

They are the words of Jesus. He says that, if anyone will come to Him, He will receive him. No one will be turned away.

This is the glorious invitation of the gospel. If we will draw near to God, humbly, reverently, acknowledging our need, He will receive us.

Notice that there are no “ifs,” “ands,” or “buts” in this gracious word of invitation. There are no conditions laid down. All we have to do is to come.

The Lord says, “Draw near” and all we have to do is to draw near.

He says, “Come” and all we have to do is to come, just as we are.

Charlotte Elliot proved this in her experience. She sat down and wrote -

*Just as I am, without one plea,
But that Thy blood was shed for me,
And that Thou bidst me come to Thee,
O Lamb of God, I come!*

Have you come? You know about the Lord but have you come to Him?

Draw near to God acknowledging your need of salvation and He will receive you.

5. DRAW NEAR TO GOD CONFESSING YOUR SIN AND HE WILL FORGIVE YOU.

The scripture for this is -

1 John 1:9 - *If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.*

What do these words mean?

They mean that, if we are conscious of having sinned against the Lord in some specific way, then He invites us to draw near to Him, confess it, and He guarantees that, as we do so, He will forgive us and cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

Our confession is to be made to God.

Notice also that it is to be a particular confession and not a general confession.

It is a comparatively easy matter to say, “O Lord, I am a sinner....” But the implication and requirement of this verse is that we come before Him and say, “O Lord, I confess that I told a lie. I am sorry that I was unkind when I”

As long as we make a particular confession and specify the way in which we have sinned against and grieved the Lord, we may be sure that He will not only hear our confession, but He will forgive us our sins and cleanse us.

He has guaranteed to do it for “He is faithful and just....” So we may rest assured that He has forgiven and cleansed us.

It may be that you need to come and make your confession to Him now. What a relief it will be to you to know that, once you have confessed it and because you have forsaken it, He has freely pardoned you!

Proverbs 28:13 - *He that covereth his sins shall not prosper: but whoso confesseth and forsaketh them shall have mercy.*

6. DRAW NEAR TO GOD WITH YOUR TROUBLE AND HE WILL HELP YOU.

The scripture for this is -

Psalm 50:15 - *And call upon me in the day of trouble: I will deliver thee, and thou shalt glorify me.*

How very many people are in trouble! It may well be that you are, too.

What should you do with your trouble?

Go to the Lord about it and call upon Him. As you do this, He promises to undertake for you in such a way that glory will be brought to His Name.

He will hear you in your time of trouble if you will go into the presence of God and tell Him about the thing which is weighing you down.

You may get some relief by going to your doctor, or to a friend, or perhaps it would help to go to a solicitor or to someone else who could give you necessary advice.

But above all else, and first of all, you should draw near to the Lord Himself. He is the One Who can give you the greatest help. He is the One Who will draw near to you in your trouble.

7. DRAW NEAR TO GOD WITH YOUR PROBLEM AND HE WILL UNDERTAKE FOR YOU.

The scripture for this is -

Psalm 55:22 - *Cast thy burden upon the LORD, and he shall sustain thee: he shall never suffer the righteous to be moved.*

This is a wonderful promise.

The tragedy is that very often, when we are faced with immense problems, we go to friends or to some other counselor who we feel can give us the expert help we need, and we leave the Lord out of the situation.

If we are wise, however, we will at once draw near to the Lord with our problems. We can be quite sure that when we do this He will undertake for us.

Have you ever felt devastated by an unkind letter which has arrived in the post?

This happened to king Hezekiah on one occasion. His enemy Sennacherib, king of Assyria, wrote him just such a letter and Hezekiah was shattered by it.

What did he do? Did he send an equally unkind letter back? Did he go around trying to justify himself in the eyes of the world? No. He did not do that. What did he do?

Isaiah 37:14-17 - *And Hezekiah received the letter from the hand of the messengers, and read it: and Hezekiah went up unto the house of the LORD, and spread it before the LORD.*

15 And Hezekiah prayed unto the LORD, saying,

16 O LORD of hosts, God of Israel, that dwellest between the cherubims, thou art the God, even thou alone, of all the kingdoms of the earth: thou hast made heaven and earth.

17 Incline thine ear, O LORD, and hear; open thine eyes, O LORD, and see: and hear all the words of Sennacherib, which hath sent to reproach the living God.

Hezekiah recognized the greatness and the power of the all-loving, all-seeing God Whom he worshiped. I am quite sure that, long before he reached the end of his prayer, he was confident that the Lord would solve his problem.

This is just what the Lord did!

Isaiah 37:36-38 - *Then the angel of the LORD went forth, and smote in the camp of the Assyrians a hundred and fourscore and five thousand: and when they arose early in the morning, behold, they were all dead corpses.*

37 So Sennacherib king of Assyria departed, and went and returned, and dwelt at Nineveh.

38 And it came to pass, as he was worshipping in the house of Nisroch his god, that Adrammelech and Sharezer his sons smote him with the sword; and they escaped into the land of Armenia: and Esarhaddon his son reigned in his stead.

Is it too much for us to expect the Lord to do the same for us? Of course not!

If we will draw near to Him, putting our trust in Him, recognizing His sovereignty, His power and His readiness to hear and answer our prayer, then He will most certainly draw near to us and undertake for us.

8. DRAW NEAR TO GOD ACKNOWLEDGING YOUR WEAKNESS AND HE WILL STRENGTHEN YOU.

The scripture for this is -

Isaiah 40:28-31 - *Hast thou not known? hast thou not heard, that the everlasting God, the LORD, the Creator of the ends of the earth, fainteth not, neither is weary? there is no searching of his understanding.*

29 He giveth power to the faint; and to them that have no might he increaseth strength.

30 Even the youths shall faint and be weary, and the young men shall utterly fall:

31 But they that wait upon the LORD shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings as eagles; they shall run, and not be weary; and they shall walk, and not faint.

Who among us does not feel weak at times! Over and over again we feel quite inadequate to cope with the situations which face us. But God has made provision for this.

He invites us to draw near to Him, acknowledging our weakness. He says that, when we do this, He will impart strength to us.

What more can God say to us?

What greater incentive can He give to us to come before Him in our weakness and to wait upon Him that we may be undergirded and empowered with His strength?

The apostle Paul well knew the experience of drawing near to God in his weakness. When he did so, the Lord said to him -

2 Corinthians 12:9-10 - *And he said unto me, My grace is sufficient for thee: for my strength is made perfect in weakness. Most gladly therefore will I rather glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me.*

10 Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in necessities, in persecutions, in distresses for Christ's sake: for when I am weak, then am I strong.

When he heard those words, and when he experienced the wonderful consciousness of the presence of the Lord with him, Paul was enabled to exclaim with joy, "most gladly....then am I strong."

It is when we are in the place of temptation, and also at times when we go forth to serve the Lord, that we are most conscious of our lack of strength.

What should we do at such times?

We should draw near to God, acknowledging our weakness and He will strengthen us and make us to be more than conquerors over sin, self and Satan -

Romans 8:37 - *Nay, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him that loved us.*

and to be strong in the Lord -

Ephesians 6:10 - *Finally, my brethren, be strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might.*

9. DRAW NEAR TO GOD WHEN YOU NEED GUIDANCE AND HE WILL LEAD YOU.

The scripture for this is -

Proverbs 3:5-6 - *Trust in the LORD with all thine heart; and lean not unto thine own understanding.*

6 In all thy ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct thy paths.

When we turn to the scriptures and read God's promises to guide His people, it becomes abundantly clear to us that God is always more willing to guide us than we are to be guided.

He wants us to live guided lives, not lives which are muddled and misdirected.

It is certainly not a vain hope or an empty prayer that John Greenleaf Whittier expresses when he wrote -

*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.*

My word to you is this: Draw near to God when you need guidance and He will lead you. Your life will become ordered and you will know the beauty of God's peace.

Philippians 4:7 - *And the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.*

10. FINALLY, IN VIEW OF ALL THAT WE HAVE CONSIDERED, WILL YOU DRAW NEAR TO GOD NOW?

Perhaps you have not come to Him as a sinner needing and seeking salvation.

Will you come now, recognizing that He is the only One Who can save you, believing that He is willing to receive you, to forgive you and to make you His own?

Perhaps you need to draw near to the Lord in one of the other ways I have mentioned:

- to confess your sin,
- to bring Him your troubles,
- to take your problems to Him,
- to acknowledge your weakness,
- to seek His guidance.

I have reminded you of His promises.

Will you act upon His Word and prove that He means what He says?

Draw near to God and He will draw near to you.

THE PRAYER FOR DIVINE QUICKENING

STUDY 5

Scripture Portion: Psalm 80:18

Psalm 80:18 - *So will not we go back from thee: quicken us, and we will call upon thy name.*

The word we will consider in this study is the word “quicken” (or quickened, quickeneth or quickening). This word in one of its forms occurs twenty-five times in the Bible.

Psalm 71:20 - *Thou, which hast showed me great and sore troubles, shalt quicken me again, and shalt bring me up again from the depths of the earth.*

Psalm 80:18 - *So will not we go back from thee: quicken us, and we will call upon thy name.*

Psalm 119:25 - *My soul cleaveth unto the dust: quicken thou me according to thy word.*

Psalm 119:37 - *Turn away mine eyes from beholding vanity; and quicken thou me in thy way.*

Psalm 119:40 - *Behold, I have longed after thy precepts: quicken me in thy righteousness.*

Psalm 119:50 - *This is my comfort in my affliction: for thy word hath quickened me.*

Psalm 119:88 - *Quicken me after thy lovingkindness; so shall I keep the testimony of thy mouth.*

Psalm 119:93 - *I will never forget thy precepts: for with them thou hast quickened me.*

Psalm 119:107 - *I am afflicted very much: quicken me, O LORD, according unto thy word.*

Psalm 119:149 - *Hear my voice according unto thy lovingkindness: O LORD, quicken me according to thy judgment.*

Psalm 119:154 - *Plead my cause, and deliver me: quicken me according to thy word.*

Psalm 119:156 - *Great are thy tender mercies, O LORD: quicken me according to thy judgments.*

Psalm 119:159 - *Consider how I love thy precepts: quicken me, O LORD, according to thy lovingkindness.*

Psalm 143:11 - *Quicken me, O LORD, for thy name's sake: for thy righteousness' sake bring my soul out of trouble.*

John 5:21 (twice) - *For as the Father raiseth up the dead, and quickeneth them; even so the Son quickeneth whom he will.*

John 6:63 - *It is the spirit that quickeneth; the flesh profiteth nothing: the words that I speak unto you, they are spirit, and they are life.*

Romans 4:17 - *(As it is written, I have made thee a father of many nations,) before him whom he believed, even God, who quickeneth the dead, and calleth those things which be not as though they were.*

Romans 8:11 - *But if the Spirit of him that raised up Jesus from the dead dwell in you, he that raised up Christ from the dead shall also quicken your mortal bodies by his Spirit that dwelleth in you.*

1 Corinthians 15:36 - *Thou fool, that which thou sowest is not quickened, except it die:*

1 Corinthians 15:45 - *And so it is written, The first man Adam was made a living soul; the last Adam was made a quickening spirit.*

Ephesians 2:1 - *And you hath he quickened, who were dead in trespasses and sins:*

Ephesians 2:5 - *Even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us together with Christ, (by grace ye are saved;)*

Colossians 2:13 - *And you, being dead in your sins and the uncircumcision of your flesh, hath he quickened together with him, having forgiven you all trespasses;*

1 Timothy 6:13 - *I give thee charge in the sight of God, who quickeneth all things, and before Christ Jesus, who before Pontius Pilate witnessed a good confession;*

1 Peter 3:18 - *For Christ also hath once suffered for sins, the just for the unjust, that he might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh, but quickened by the Spirit:*

The word means “to bestow life and to preserve life.”

This covers our basic needs, because we need to receive life and to be preserved by life.

We need to receive life initially, which takes place at the time of conversion. But we also need to be preserved by life continually, which refers to God's work of sanctification.

From several scriptures we learn two things:

1. The Holy Spirit is the Quickener.

Compare -

John 6:63 - *It is the spirit that quickeneth; the flesh profiteth nothing: the words that I speak unto you, they are spirit, and they are life.*

1 Peter 3:18 - *For Christ also hath once suffered for sins, the just for the unjust, that he might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh, but quickened by the Spirit:*

2. The Word of God is the Instrument.

The Holy Spirit uses the Word of God to accomplish His quickening work. We learn this from the many references in **Psalm 119**. For one example, look up -

Psalm 119:50 - *This is my comfort in my affliction: for thy word hath quickened me.*

IT IS THROUGH THE WORD OF GOD THAT THE HOLY SPIRIT QUICKENS US WITH NEW LIFE SO THAT WE BECOME PARTAKERS OF THE DIVINE NATURE.

Ephesians 2:1 - *And you hath he quickened, who were dead in trespasses and sins:*

We are, by nature, spiritually dead. When the miracle of the new birth takes place, we are born again by the quickening work of the Holy Spirit.

The Word of God is the instrument used by the Holy Spirit to make us partakers of the divine nature.

2 Peter 1:4 - *Whereby are given unto us exceeding great and precious promises: that by these ye might be partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust.*

It is the "seed" of the new life which is dropped into our souls which makes us "alive."

1 Peter 1:23 - *Being born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the word of God, which liveth and abideth for ever.*

Romans 6:11 - *Likewise reckon ye also yourselves to be dead indeed unto sin, but alive unto God through Jesus Christ our Lord.*

Romans 6:13 - *Neither yield ye your members as instruments of unrighteousness unto sin: but yield yourselves unto God, as those that are alive from the dead, and your members as instruments of righteousness unto God.*

A Christian is one who is born again -

John 3:3 - *Jesus answered and said unto him, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.*

John 3:6 - *That which is born of the flesh is flesh; and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit.*

John 3:8 - *The wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh, and whither it goeth: so is every one that is born of the Spirit.*

and who receives the new life of the risen Lord -

John 1:12-13 - *But as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name:*

13 Which were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God.

An illustration of all this is found in **Ezekiel 37:1-10**.

IT IS THROUGH THE WORD OF GOD THAT THE HOLY SPIRIT QUICKENS US IN OUR DESIRE TO PRAY AND GUIDES OUR PRAYING.

Psalm 80:18 - *So will not we go back from thee: quicken us, and we will call upon thy name.*

It is the indwelling Holy Spirit Who prompts us to pray. For an illustration of this, turn to -

Acts 9:11 - *And the Lord said unto him, Arise, and go into the street which is called Straight, and inquire in the house of Judas for one called Saul, of Tarsus: for, behold, he prayeth,*

Immediately after his conversion and, as an evidence that he really had been converted, Saul of Tarsus prayed!

This is the first exercise of the new life.

Luke 18:13 - *And the publican, standing afar off, would not lift up so much as his eyes unto heaven, but smote upon his breast, saying, God be merciful to me a sinner.*

As Christians, we are frequently conscious of the Holy Spirit within us urging us to pray.

He leads us to the place of prayer and then He shows us how to pray.

Romans 8:26-27 - *Likewise the Spirit also helpeth our infirmities: for we know not what we should pray for as we ought: but the Spirit itself maketh intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered.*

27 And he that searcheth the hearts knoweth what is the mind of the Spirit, because he maketh intercession for the saints according to the will of God.

Think how the disciples needed this quickening when they were in Gethsemane.

Read **Matthew 26:36-44**.

3. IT IS THROUGH THE WORD OF GOD THAT THE HOLY SPIRIT QUICKENS US WHEN WE ARE IN DANGER OF GETTING SLACK, DULL AND CARELESS.

Psalm 71:20 - *Thou, which hast showed me great and sore troubles, shalt quicken me again, and shalt bring me up again from the depths of the earth.*

The operative word is “again.” The psalmist had fallen and he needed to be lifted up.

Often our spiritual life flags and we need to be revived. It is easy to get spiritually out of touch with the Lord and -

to become disobedient -

Jonah 1:1-3 - *Now the word of the LORD came unto Jonah the son of Amittai, saying,*

2 Arise, go to Nineveh, that great city, and cry against it; for their wickedness is come up before me.

3 But Jonah rose up to flee unto Tarshish from the presence of the LORD, and went down to Joppa; and he found a ship going to Tarshish: so he paid the fare thereof, and went down into it, to go with them unto Tarshish from the presence of the LORD.

to deny the Lord -

Read **Luke 22:54-62**.

to turn away from the Lord -

John 6:66 - *From that time many of his disciples went back, and walked no more with him.*

to become carnal -

1 Corinthians 3:1-4 - *And I, brethren, could not speak unto you as unto spiritual, but as unto carnal, even as unto babes in Christ.*

2 I have fed you with milk, and not with meat: for hitherto ye were not able to bear it, neither yet now are ye able.

3 For ye are yet carnal: for whereas there is among you envying, and strife, and divisions, are ye not carnal, and walk as men?

4 For while one saith, I am of Paul; and another, I am of Apollos; are ye not carnal?

to walk in the flesh -

Galatians 5:16 - *This I say then, Walk in the Spirit, and ye shall not fulfil the lust of the flesh.*

Galatians 5:25 - *If we live in the Spirit, let us also walk in the Spirit.*

to allow wrong attitudes -

Philippians 4:2 - *I beseech Euodias, and beseech Syntyche, that they be of the same mind in the Lord.*

to become lukewarm -

Revelation 3:15-16 - *I know thy works, that thou art neither cold nor hot: I would thou wert cold or hot.*

16 So then because thou art lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will spue thee out of my mouth.

At such times we need the quickening work of the Holy Spirit to renew our love for the Lord and our determination to please Him.

Psalms 119:88 - *Quicken me after thy lovingkindness; so shall I keep the testimony of thy mouth.*

Notice the significance of the word “so” and of what follows.

4. IT IS THROUGH THE WORD OF GOD THAT THE HOLY SPIRIT QUICKENS US WHEN WE ARE IN BONDAGE AND HE SETS US FREE.

Psalms 119:154 - *Plead my cause, and deliver me: quicken me according to thy word.*

How easy it is to get into bondage -

to sin -

Romans 6:12 - *Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal body, that ye should obey it in the lusts thereof.*

to self -

Romans 6:16 - *Know ye not, that to whom ye yield yourselves servants to obey, his servants ye are to whom ye obey; whether of sin unto death, or of obedience unto righteousness?*

to Satan -

Luke 22:31 - *And the Lord said, Simon, Simon, behold, Satan hath desired to have you, that he may sift you as wheat:*

In **Psalm 119:154**, the psalmist prayed, "Plead my cause.....deliver me....." This reminds us of the Saviour's present work of intercession on our behalf.

Hebrews 7:25 - *Wherefore he is able also to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by him, seeing he ever liveth to make intercession for them.*

How is this prayer of intercession answered?

The Lord Jesus Himself, from the throne, is the great Liberator, as we learn from -

Romans 8:2 - *For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus hath made me free from the law of sin and death.*

and the medium through which He works is the Word of God.

4. IT IS THROUGH THE WORD OF GOD THAT THE HOLY SPIRIT INSTRUCTS US IN THE WAY OF RIGHTEOUSNESS AND ENABLES US TO PLEASE GOD.

Psalm 119:40 - *Behold, I have longed after thy precepts: quicken me in thy righteousness.*

Here the psalmist prays, and his prayer was simply that God would show him the right way and enable him to walk in that way.

This is exactly what the Holy Spirit does as we turn to the Word of God with the desire -

to hear God speaking to us -

Psalm 119:18 - *Open thou mine eyes, that I may behold wondrous things out of thy law.*

as we meditate upon what we read -

Psalm 119:15 - *I will meditate in thy precepts, and have respect unto thy ways.*

and as we compare scripture with scripture -

Acts 17:11 - *These were more noble than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the word with all readiness of mind, and searched the scriptures daily, whether those things were so.*

This is the only way to discover the kind of life God wants us to live and to receive the divine enabling to live it.

This is why we must not neglect our Bible.

6. IT IS THROUGH THE WORD OF GOD THAT THE HOLY SPIRIT WEANS US FROM WORLDLINESS AND SETS OUR AFFECTIONS ON THINGS ABOVE.

Psalm 119:36-37 - *Incline my heart unto thy testimonies, and not to covetousness. 37 Turn away mine eyes from beholding vanity; and quicken thou me in thy way.*

Compare -

Colossians 3:1-2 - *If ye then be risen with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God.*

2 Set your affection on things above, not on things on the earth.

How can we be weaned away from worldliness and become absorbed with those things which are glorifying to the Lord?

It is so easy to become a worldly Christian. What a tragedy it is when this happens!

The psalmist prayed that he might have his eyes turned away from beholding “vanity,” which simply means “that which is vain, empty, unprofitable, useless and perishable.”

What a description of the world!

1 John 2:15-17 - *Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him.*

16 For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world.

17 And the world passeth away, and the lust thereof: but he that doeth the will of God abideth for ever.

7. IT IS THROUGH THE WORD OF GOD THAT THE HOLY SPIRIT COMFORTS US AND SUSTAINS US IN TIMES OF TRIAL AND AFFLICTION.

Psalm 119:92-93 - *Unless thy law had been my delights, I should then have perished in mine affliction.*

93 I will never forget thy precepts: for with them thou hast quickened me.

The writer seems to say, "If God had not quickened me when I was in the midst of trouble, I would have perished. But God *did* quicken me and He did it through His law, His Holy Word."

Compare -

Psalm 143:11 - *Quicken me, O LORD, for thy name's sake: for thy righteousness' sake bring my soul out of trouble.*

We all experience trial, trouble and testing. At such times we should turn to the Word of God and wait for the Holy Spirit, through the Word, to quicken us with His sustaining grace.

1 Peter 4:14 - *If ye be reproached for the name of Christ, happy are ye; for the spirit of glory and of God resteth upon you: on their part he is evil spoken of, but on your part he is glorified.*

Compare -

Psalm 119:49-50 - *Remember the word unto thy servant, upon which thou hast caused me to hope.*

50 This is my comfort in my affliction: for thy word hath quickened me.

51 The proud have had me greatly in derision: yet have I not declined from thy law.

John 14:26 - *But the Comforter, which is the Holy Ghost, whom the Father will send in my name, he shall teach you all things, and bring all things to your remembrance, whatsoever I have said unto you.*

In concluding this study, please notice again that the Holy Spirit is the Quickener and that He quickens us through the Word of God.

This means that, in order to benefit from His quickening ministry, we must do two things -

1. **Ephesians 5:18** - *And be not drunk with wine, wherein is excess; but be filled with the Spirit;*
2. **Colossians 3:16** - *Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom; teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord.*

WHEN PRAYER AND FASTING GO TOGETHER

STUDY 6

Scripture Portion: Mark 9:27-29

Mark 9:27-29 - *But Jesus took him by the hand, and lifted him up; and he arose.*

28 And when he was come into the house, his disciples asked him privately, Why could not we cast him out?

29 And he said unto them, This kind can come forth by nothing, but by prayer and fasting.

Peter, James and John had had a very wonderful experience. Jesus had led them to the top of a high mountain where He had been transfigured before them. Moses and Elias had appeared and had talked with Jesus.

More wonderful still, God the Father had spoken from out of the cloud which had overshadowed them. This was such an overwhelming experience that Peter wanted it to go on forever. However, this could not be.

Jesus led them down again to the busy, sin-stricken world below. What a disappointment awaited them there!

During their absence, a distraught father had approached the other nine disciples with the request that they should bring healing to his sick boy by casting out “a dumb spirit..... and they could not.”

Mark 9:17-18 - *And one of the multitude answered and said, Master, I have brought unto thee my son, which hath a dumb spirit;*

18 And wheresoever he taketh him, he teareth him: and he foameth, and gnasheth with his teeth, and pineth away: and I spake to thy disciples that they should cast him out; and they could not.

The crowd was disappointed. The father was disappointed. The disciples were disappointed.

And when Jesus appeared on the scene, He was disappointed, too.

Immediately the father approached Jesus Who performed the miracle, and the boy was healed.

A little later, in the house, the crestfallen disciples were humbled enough to ask Jesus -

Mark 9:28 - *.....Why could not we cast him out?*

Jesus replied -

Mark 9:29 -*This kind can come forth by nothing, but by prayer and fasting.*

Thus, Jesus linked prayer and fasting together. He said that there are times when prayer, before it can be effectual, needs to be accompanied by fasting.

Many of us know something of the experience of praying, but how many of us know, from practical and personal experience, anything about fasting?

What is fasting? Is it just going without food or drink? Is there more to it than that?

Let me give you this definition -

Fasting is the voluntary denial of things which ordinarily, and in themselves, are quite lawful and legitimate, in order that the face of God may be sought in earnest, definite, persistent and believing prayer.

Yes, fasting in scripture may have reference to food or drink, but it involves very much more.

Consider the following -

(1) Food.

After David had confessed his sin of adultery to God, he fasted.....neither did he eat bread -

2 Samuel 12:16-17 - *David therefore besought God for the child; and David fasted, and went in, and lay all night upon the earth.*

17 And the elders of his house arose, and went to him, to raise him up from the earth: but he would not, neither did he eat bread with them.

Esther sent a message to Mordecai, saying -

Esther 4:16 - *Go, gather together all the Jews that are present in Shushan, and fast ye for me, and neither eat nor drink three days, night or day:.....*

As the result of Jonah's preaching, the decree went out -

Jonah 3:7-8 -*Let neither man nor beast, herd nor flock, taste any thing: let them not feed, nor drink water:*

8 But let man and beast be covered with sackcloth, and cry mightily unto God:.....

So, to fast certainly does include the voluntary denial of food and drink.

(2) Sleep.

We read of David abstaining from food and drink. We are also told that he -

2 Samuel 12:16 - *.....lay all night upon the earth.*

This presumably means that he denied himself sleep in order to beseech the Lord for His gracious help to be given.

So, to fast may be to deny oneself sleep.

(3) Pleasures and comforts.

There is a very moving connection between -

John 7:53 - *And every man went unto his own house.*

and -

John 8:1 - *Jesus went unto the mount of Olives.*

It was perfectly legitimate for the Lord Jesus to sleep. As man He needed to sleep, but here was an occasion, when denying Himself the comfort of a night in bed, He went to the mountain top to pray.

(4) Human relations.

The intimate marriage relationship between husband and wife is God-given, but there are times when there should be a mutual abstention.

In **Exodus 19**, we read that God gave Moses instructions to sanctify the people as He intended to -

Exodus 19:11 - *.....come down in the sight of all the people upon mount Sinai.*

Exodus 19:14-15 - *And Moses went down from the mount unto the people, and sanctified the people; and they washed their clothes.*

15 And he said unto the people, Be ready against the third day: come not at your wives.

Paul also had something to say on this matter -

1 Corinthians 7:5 - *Defraud ye not one the other, except it be with consent for a time, that ye may give yourselves to fasting and prayer;.....*

From these references we see that there should be times in the life of every Christian when he deliberately puts aside certain things in order to concentrate upon prayer to the Lord for His rich blessings to be outpoured.

If this should be so in the life of every Christian, it should also be true in the life of every church.

But, when should prayer be accompanied by fasting?

PRAYER SHOULD BE ACCOMPANIED BY FASTING WHEN COMMUNION
NEEDS TO BE DEEPENED AND FAITH NEEDS TO BE RESTORED.

Do you ever find yourself becoming slack and careless in your Christian life? Do you ever find that your love for the Lord is diminishing? Do you ever find that you are losing the sense of His presence or of His anointing upon you as you seek to serve Him and preach His Word?

My own answer is - Yes.

I also believe that, whenever we are conscious of any deficiency in our communion with God, or when we feel that we have, in any sense, lost the anointing of His Spirit which formerly rested upon us, we should at once set aside a time for prayer and fasting.

Sometimes a Christian doubts God's loving plan and purpose for him.

He questions the truth of -

Romans 8:28 - *And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose.*

What should he do at such a time?

I believe he should at once "proclaim a fast," that is, put other things to one side.

He should set apart a definite time in order to seek the face of the Lord in prayer and in the devotional reading of His Word.

PRAYER SHOULD BE ACCOMPANIED BY FASTING WHEN PRAYER NEEDS
TO BE EMPOWERED AND VICTORIES HAVE TO BE WON.

From our Lord's statement about prayer *and* fasting, it seems very clear that some prayers need to be accompanied by fasting in order to ensure victory.

It is not enough for us to pray and then, when nothing happens, to say, “Oh well! The Lord must be hearing our prayers. He promises to do so,” whereas, there is no evidence that He is hearing and answering.

Nothing is too hard for the Lord and yet, often nothing seems to happen in response to our prayers.

What should we do at such times? I believe we should add fasting to our praying.

In **Acts 12**, we read of a desperate situation in the life of the early church. James had been beheaded and Peter was in prison. It could well be that he would be beheaded, too.

What did these early Christians do?

Acts 12:5 - *Peter therefore was kept in prison: but prayer was made without ceasing of the church unto God for him.*

Those two words “without ceasing” indicate fasting.

The ordinary routine life of those Christians was, at any rate for a few days, completely disorganized - family life, business life, personal life.

All this was disrupted for the time being because Peter was in prison and the church was praying “without ceasing” to God for His intervention.

The matter was so urgent that quite legitimate things were put aside in order that the face of God might be sought.

How seriously do we want God to answer our prayers?

If we are really determined to gain God’s help in times of great difficulty, we will put any number of things to one side for the time being. We will fast as well as pray.

3. PRAYER SHOULD BE ACCOMPANIED BY FASTING WHEN SIN NEEDS TO BE EXPOSED AND WRONG HAS TO BE RIGHTED.

There is a very solemn incident recorded in **Joshua 7**. We are told -

Joshua 7:1 - *But the children of Israel committed a trespass in the accursed thing: for Achan, the son of Carmi, the son of Zabdi, the son of Zerah, of the tribe of Judah, took of the accursed thing: and the anger of the LORD was kindled against the children of Israel.*

Joshua did not know anything about Achan's sin. As Ai was the next city to be conquered, and it was only a small city, he sent a comparatively few soldiers to capture it.

But God will not condone sin in His people. He allowed their enemies to inflict a crushing defeat upon Joshua's army -

Joshua 7:4 - *So there went up thither of the people about three thousand men: and they fled before the men of Ai.*

Joshua 7:6-7 - *And Joshua rent his clothes, and fell to the earth upon his face before the ark of the LORD until the eventide, he and the elders of Israel, and put dust upon their heads.*

7 And Joshua said, Alas, O Lord GOD, wherefore hast thou at all brought this people over Jordan, to deliver us into the hand of the Amorites, to destroy us? would to God we had been content, and dwelt on the other side Jordan!

In other words, he prayed to the Lord and fasted. What happened then?

Joshua 7:10-11 - *And the LORD said unto Joshua, Get thee up; wherefore liest thou thus upon thy face?*

11 Israel hath sinned, and they have also transgressed my covenant which I commanded them: for they have even taken of the accursed thing, and have also stolen, and dissembled also, and they have put it even among their own stuff.

Then it was that the sin of Achan was detected, uncovered and judged.

In like manner, prayer and fasting will reveal to us the hindrances in our lives and in the work of the churches in which we are laboring for the Lord.

It would be a good thing if in every church, when things are not going too well, the leaders would call for a time of prayer and fasting and of waiting upon God, in order to see what is wrong.

Such times of voluntary humiliation before the Lord might reveal that there is "sin in the camp," and that in the membership there are some people who, because of hidden

sin, inconsistent living or wrong relationships with other Christians, are blocking the channels for revival.

A great evangelistic campaign was in progress. For nearly a week the gospel had been faithfully preached, but there seemed to be little response to the message.

Then the evangelist faced the congregation and said, "Men and women, there is something wrong! Something is hindering the work of the Holy Spirit. If any of you know what that is, I implore you, in God's Name, that you will remove it!"

There was a stir and two men from opposite sides of the building moved to the centre of the church and shook hands. That was all - but it was enough. From that moment the power of God fell upon the meetings night by night.

What had happened?

These two men were deacons of the same church, but they had been at loggerheads with each other. Now, by their action, they were saying, "I am sorry! Forgive me!" And the windows of heaven were opened.

4. PRAYER SHOULD BE ACCOMPANIED BY FASTING WHEN CONFESSION NEEDS TO BE MADE AND FORGIVENESS HAS TO BE SOUGHT.

As we read **2 Samuel 11 and 12**, we discover that it was while David was praying and fasting that he made his confession to the Lord of the sin he had committed with Bathsheba and of having had her husband conveniently killed in battle.

It was while he was down before the Lord that he sought and found His forgiveness. As a result of this humbling experience, David wrote **Psalms 32 and 51**, which are known as the great penitential psalms.

Have you ever read them while on your knees and been greatly humbled and then wonderfully uplifted as a result?

If a child of God falls into sin, that sin will be forgiven immediately it is repented of and confessed, for we read in -

1 John 1:9 - *If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.*

But, if the devil has proved to be too strong for us and we have stumbled and fallen, we should not only ask the Lord to forgive and cleanse us and to lift us up again, we should give ourselves to a time of voluntary humiliation before God concerning the whole matter.

Without this, we will have very light views of sin. We will even find ourselves saying, “Well, it does not matter very much if I do that thing again. I have only got to go to the Lord and confess it and He will forgive it.”

It is true that, if we sin and then humbly confess it, He will forgive us, but we must not for one moment tolerate any light views of sin. Therefore, in order that we may be delivered from this danger when we have sinned against the Lord, we should not only confess our sin but we should come before Him in a time of fasting.

5. PRAYER SHOULD BE ACCOMPANIED BY FASTING WHEN GUIDANCE NEEDS TO BE RECEIVED AND DECISIONS HAVE TO BE MADE.

When we read the early part of **Acts 13**, we discover that the church at Antioch had a great missionary vision. They wanted to send forth men to more distant parts of the globe, but whom should they send? God left them in no doubt, for we read -

Acts 13:2-3 - *As they ministered to the Lord, and fasted, the Holy Ghost said, Separate me Barnabas and Saul for the work whereunto I have called them. 3 And when they had fasted and prayed, and laid their hands on them, they sent them away.*

Have you ever had a great difficulty in reaching a decision about an important matter? What should you do?

Surely the best possible thing would be to set aside a time to fast. In other words, put aside things which you would ordinarily do and enjoy, then go into the presence of God and receive from Him the direction you so much need.

One of my friends in the ministry received a very pressing invitation to go to another church. There seemed little indication that he should leave the work in which he was very happily engaged and in which God was quite clearly blessing him, so he turned down the invitation, feeling confident that this was the right course to take.

However, as the days and weeks passed by, he became increasingly uneasy, until he came to the point where he was in real doubt as to whether he had done the right thing. So, what did he do?

He said to his wife, "I am going away into the country for a few days. I want to be alone with the Lord and to find out what He wants."

He went away, and there, in the quietness of the countryside, he waited upon God and God gave him the certain knowledge of His will.

When he returned home, he wrote a letter and accepted the "call" to the other church!

From time to time we all have to make very important decisions.

It is a good thing, at such times, for our prayers to be accompanied by fasting.

6. PRAYER SHOULD BE ACCOMPANIED BY FASTING WHEN SERVICE NEEDS TO BE RENDERED AND POWER HAS TO BE SECURED.

At some point during his ministry, every preacher comes to the place where he asks himself, "How much more would have been accomplished through my ministry if I had always fasted and prayed before preaching?"

If he is honest with himself, he recognizes that certainly very much more would have happened than had happened. It is a humbling confession.

The most important thing for a preacher is that he should be clothed *upon* with the power of God.

If members of his congregation are conscious that their minister is preaching in the energy of the flesh, they should be the ones to exercise the joint ministry of praying and fasting before they criticize him.

If we would fast and pray, we would be endued with the power of the Holy Spirit.

Luke 24:49 - *And, behold, I send the promise of my Father upon you: but tarry ye in the city of Jerusalem, until ye be endued with power from on high.*

We do not need to "tarry" because God is unwilling to empower us, but we do need to "tarry" in order that we may be in the right attitude of heart and mind and receptivity for God to hear and answer our prayer and anoint us with His Spirit.

7. PRAYER SHOULD BE ACCOMPANIED BY FASTING WHEN REVIVAL NEEDS TO BE EXPERIENCED AND TEARS NEED TO BE SHED.

God certainly wants us to be a joyful people, but there is a very real sense in which, in these days, when the need in the world and the church is so great, we should also be a tearful people.

Nehemiah was a very sensitive man of God. When the news came to him in Shushan of the situation of God's people in Jerusalem, he broke down and wept -

Nehemiah 1:3-4 - *And they said unto me, The remnant that are left of the captivity there in the province are in great affliction and reproach: the wall of Jerusalem also is broken down, and the gates thereof are burned with fire.*

4 And it came to pass, when I heard these words, that I sat down and wept, and mourned certain days, and fasted, and prayed before the God of heaven,

He not only prayed, but he humbled himself before God. He fasted with tears and in great agony of soul.

This is what is needed today. If the people of God would follow Nehemiah's example, the result would be revival instead of the present threat of revolution and ruin!

Thus, we have seen that there are some situations where prayer is not enough. Prayer must be accompanied with fasting.

As Jesus Himself said, certain things can only happen when prayer and fasting go together.

THE PRAYER FOR SEARCHING OF HEART

STUDY 7

Scripture Portion: Psalm 139:23-24

Psalm 139:23-24 - *Search me, O God, and know my heart: try me, and know my thoughts:*

24 And see if there be any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting.

Have you ever prayed this prayer which forms the theme of this study?

The prayer reminds us of the old English custom of spring cleaning. It points immediately to the need there is in the life of every Christian for the equivalent of this house cleaning.

It is for this that David prays.

Notice about his prayer that -

(1) He addresses God.

God is the only One Who really knows our hearts.

Psalm 139:1-4 - *O LORD, thou hast searched me, and known me.*

2 Thou knowest my downsitting and mine uprising, thou understandest my thought afar off.

3 Thou compassest my path and my lying down, and art acquainted with all my ways.

4 For there is not a word in my tongue, but, lo, O LORD, thou knowest it altogether.

No psychiatrist knows our hearts or our minds but the Lord Himself is the Searcher of hearts and He knows us intimately and accurately.

(2) He asks God to search him through and through.

He prays for searching of heart, for searching of his thoughts and for such an intimate inspection that, if there was any “wicked way,” it would be revealed to him.

The word “search” means “to ransack.”

It reminds us of a policeman with a search warrant.

It reminds us also of the searching look of a loved one, or of the searchlight which penetrates the darkness and reveals the enemy.

David prays that God will ransack him and search him through and through to see if there is any hidden sin, anything that grieves Him, in his life.

(3) He shows courage, sincerity and humility in praying this prayer.

No one can pray this prayer lightly, insincerely or with a proud heart. It would be mockery to do so.

(4) He prays as one who is hungry for God and who wants to go on with God.

This prayer of David reminds us of -

Matthew 5:6 - *Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness: for they shall be filled.*

Do you desire to go on with the Lord? Are you hungry for His best?

8. WHY WE SHOULD PRAY THIS PRAYER.

There is one answer: because our hearts and our lives quickly get cluttered up with dirt, dust and rubbish. It is so very easy for any of us to let wrong things in and then to harbor them.

In this connection, look up -

Nehemiah 4:10 - *And Judah said, The strength of the bearers of burdens is decayed, and there is much rubbish; so that we are not able to build the wall.*

Lamentations 3:40 - *Let us search and try our ways, and turn again to the LORD.*

How easy it is for us to become slack, careless and spiritually insensitive!

How easy it is to become guilty of wrong attitudes toward others, to become prayerless, to become careless about the desperate need of men and women around us who are without God and without hope for this life and for the life to come.

Ephesians 2:12 - *That at that time ye were without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope, and without God in the world:*

How easy it is to become formal in our worship -

Matthew 15:8 - *This people draweth nigh unto me with their mouth, and honoureth me with their lips; but their heart is far from me.*

to become lukewarm in our love for the Lord Jesus -

Revelation 3:15-16 - *I know thy works, that thou art neither cold nor hot: I would thou wert cold or hot.*

16 So then because thou art lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will spue thee out of my mouth.

It is for these reasons that we should pray this prayer of David's, that God will reveal to us our sin and our failure, and that God will be unsparing and faithful in doing so.

*Search me, O God! My actions try.
And let my life appear
As seen by Thine all-searching eye
To mind my ways make clear.*

9. WHEN WE SHOULD PRAY THIS PRAYER.

We should pray this prayer when we come to the Lord's table.

1 Corinthians 11:28 - *But let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of that bread, and drink of that cup.*

We should pray this prayer when we are expressing prosperity.

Why? Because at such a time we are likely to become spiritually slack.

Psalms 63:10 - *They shall fall by the sword: they shall be a portion for foxes.*

Compare -

Psalms 119:67 - *Before I was afflicted I went astray: but now have I kept thy word.*

c. We should pray this prayer when we are experiencing adversity.

Why? Because such adversity could be the Lord's loving chastening in order to bring us back into, and to encourage us to follow on along, the line of His will.

Read **Hebrews 12:6-11**.

4. We should pray this prayer when our service seems fruitless and barren.

The Lord's will is that we should bring forth fruit.

John 15:16 - *Ye have not chosen me, but I have chosen you, and ordained you, that ye should go and bring forth fruit, and that your fruit should remain: that whatsoever ye shall ask of the Father in my name, he may give it you.*

- e. ***We should pray this prayer when revival is needed in the church.***

Read through the whole of **Psalm 85** carefully.

5. We should pray this prayer when our prayers do not seem to gain the ear of God.

Often we pray and our prayers do not seem to be answered.

Psalm 66:18 - *If I regard iniquity in my heart, the Lord will not hear me:*

Compare -

Isaiah 59:1-2 - *Behold, the LORD'S hand is not shortened, that it cannot save; neither his ear heavy, that it cannot hear:*

2 But your iniquities have separated between you and your God, and your sins have hid his face from you, that he will not hear.

6. We should pray this prayer when we find ourselves getting critical and careless.

We should pray this prayer when we are very conscious that all is not well with our Christian life.

10. HOW WE SHOULD PRAY THIS PRAYER.

1. We should pray this prayer in relation to ourselves.

Notice how personal David's prayer was - "Search me....."

2 Samuel 12:7 - *And Nathan said to David, Thou art the man. Thus saith the LORD God of Israel, I anointed thee king over Israel, and I delivered thee out of the hand of Saul;*

Matthew 26:21-22 - *And as they did eat, he said, Verily I say unto you, that one of you shall betray me.*

22 And they were exceeding sorrowful, and began every one of them to say unto him, Lord, is it I?

Compare -

Matthew 7:3 - *And why beholdest thou the mote that is in thy brother's eye, but considerest not the beam that is in thine own eye?*

2. We should pray this prayer in private and in the light of God's Word.

Because of the seriousness with which we should pray this prayer, it is important to get alone with the Lord and with the open Bible. It is then that such a prayer will glorify God and bring blessing into our lives.

c. *We should pray this prayer with determination.*

The determination will show itself in three ways.

(1) We will admit what God reveals.

If we are sincere in praying this prayer, we will be quick to admit any revelation that God makes to us of anything in our lives that is grieving or displeasing to Him.

(2) We will confess and renounce what God reveals.

If He shows us that we have a critical spirit, that we have been slandering some other Christian, or that we have taken something that does not belong to us, we will be willing at once to confess the thing that is wrong and to renounce it and to rejoice in the gracious provision of -

1 John 1:9 - *That was the true Light, which lighteth every man that cometh into the world.*

(3) We will make restitution where this is required.

If we have slandered someone, we will apologize to them.

If our careless speaking has misrepresented them before others, we will confess this.

If we have taken something that does not belong to us, we will restore the stolen thing.

Notice how the prayer concludes - "Lead me in the way everlasting."

This is the way of peace and joy and power and usefulness.

Will you pray this prayer, not only now but frequently?

"Almighty God, unto Whom the hearts are open, all desires known and from Whom no secrets are hid, cleanse the thoughts of our hearts by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, that we may perfectly love Thee and worthily magnify Thy Holy Name through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen."

THE PRAYER FOR GOD'S WILL TO BE DONE

STUDY 8

Scripture Portion: Psalm 143:10

Psalm 143:10 - *Teach me to do thy will; for thou art my God: thy spirit is good; lead me into the land of uprightness.*

What a beautiful prayer this is - "Teach me to do Thy will!"

It occurs in the last of the seven penitential psalms. It is the heart cry of the psalmist for grace to know how to do God's will.

The late Dr. G. Campbell Morgan says in his book, "God's Perfect Will," published at the turn of the century, that "there is no phrase more often in use among Christians than that of the will of God."

He closes the same book with the words, "There is but one thing that matters, knowing and doing God's will."

This was the important thing in the life of the Lord Jesus.

Compare -

Psalm 40:7-8 - *Then said I, Lo, I come: in the volume of the book it is written of me, & I delight to do thy will, O my God: yea, thy law is within my heart.*

Matthew 26:39 - *And he went a little farther, and fell on his face, and prayed, saying, O my Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me: nevertheless not as I will, but as thou wilt.*

John 4:34 - *Jesus saith unto them, My meat is to do the will of him that sent me, and to finish his work.*

John 17:4 - *I have glorified thee on the earth: I have finished the work which thou gavest me to do.*

What does this prayer of David's - "Teach me to do Thy Will" - tell us?

IT STATES THE FIRST HEART CRY AND LONGING OF THE TRULY BORN AGAIN SOUL.

Before we become a Christian, we are little interested in God's will. We are concerned only to go our own way.

Isaiah 53:6 - *All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way; and the LORD hath laid on him the iniquity of us all.*

What happens when God steps into our life and when we can say -

Psalms 143:10 - *.....thou art my God:.....*

At once we find ourselves praying the prayer -

Psalms 143:10 - *Teach me to do thy will;.....*

This was so in the case of Saul of Tarsus -

Acts 9:6 - *And he trembling and astonished said, Lord, what wilt thou have me to do? And the Lord said unto him, Arise, and go into the city, and it shall be told thee what thou must do.*

When we pray in this way, it is a sure sign that there has been a real work of grace in our hearts. If we do not pray this prayer, we ought to ask the question - "Are we, in fact, the Lord's?"

2. IT DECLARES THE FACT THAT GOD HAS A PURPOSE AND PLAN FOR THE LIFE OF EACH OF HIS CHILDREN.

The fact that God has a plan for each one of His children is declared throughout the Bible. It is proved in the individual experience of God's people.

Read through the book of **Psalms** with this thought in mind.

Look also at -

Colossians 1:9 - *For this cause we also, since the day we heard it, do not cease to pray for you, and to desire that ye might be filled with the knowledge of his will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding;*

Colossians 4:12 - *Epaphras, who is one of you, a servant of Christ, saluteth you, always labouring fervently for you in prayers, that ye may stand perfect and complete in all the will of God.*

Then we read the biographies of such men and women as Wesley, Whitefield, F. B. Meyer, Mary Slessor and Amy Carmichael.

Who can doubt that these Christians moved along in the plan and purpose of God for their lives?

3. IT AFFIRMS THAT GOD IS READY AND WILLING TO REVEAL HIS WILL TO HIS CHILDREN.

Christians are often perplexed. They say, “How can I know God’s will?”

Let us always remember, when we ask this question, that God is far more willing to guide us along the pathway of His will than we are to be guided. He wants the very best for us.

It is important for us to distinguish between what we might describe as the directive and the permissive will of God.

By His directive will we mean that which is His highest and most gracious purpose. But, His permissive will indicates that which He may allow and yet not really approve.

He may permit that which He may not desire.

We may choose the will of God for our life. That choosing will bring great pleasure to Him and great blessing to us.

On the other hand, it is possible for us to make our own plans and insist on our own ways. God will still love us, but we will be the losers.

Psalm 106:15 - *And he gave them their request; but sent leanness into their soul.*

4. IT INDICATES THE CONDITION THAT MUST BE MET IF WE ARE TO KNOW AND DO GOD’S PERFECT WILL.

What are these conditions? Are they intricate?

Will it be a strain to discover and find grace to do God’s will?
It should not be. It need not be.

What are the conditions that we must meet if we are to know and do God’s perfect will?

There are three.

We must have a teachable attitude.

Notice how David prays, “Teach me to do Thy will.” He obviously had a childlike spirit and he acknowledged his need to be taught.

Jeremiah 10:23 - *O LORD, I know that the way of man is not in himself: it is not in man that walketh to direct his steps.*

Matthew 18:3-4 - *And said, Verily I say unto you, Except ye be converted, and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven.*

4 Whosoever therefore shall humble himself as this little child, the same is greatest in the kingdom of heaven.

b. We must have an intense desire to know God’s will.

David’s prayer reveals this. The Bible is full of specific promises to stimulate our desire to know the will of God.

As examples of these promises, read -

Psalms 37:5 - *Commit thy way unto the LORD; trust also in him; and he shall bring it to pass.*

Proverbs 3:6 - *In all thy ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct thy paths.*

Proverbs 16:3 - *Commit thy works unto the LORD, and thy thoughts shall be established.*

James 1:5 - *If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, that giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not; and it shall be given him.*

Have you an intense desire to know God’s will?

3. We must have a willingness to do His will whatever it involves.

David prayed, “Teach me to do Thy will,” not only to *know* it, but to *do* it.

When we pray this prayer, we must be willing to do what God wants, whether it seems to us to be pleasing or painful, whether it harmonizes with what we would like or with something that we had not expected at all.

John 7:17 - *If any man will do his will, he shall know of the doctrine, whether it be of God, or whether I speak of myself.*

5. IT PROVOKES THE QUESTION: HOW DOES THE LORD TEACH US TO DO HIS WILL?

The answer to this important and practical question is very clear. He does it in three ways.

1. By the teaching of His Word.

In the Bible, the Word of God, we have a declaration of God's will in general terms.

Most of the guidance God gives in His Word is given through certain clearly stated principles.

Concerning any matter upon which we need guidance, we can learn immediately from the Bible the answer to the following questions:

Will it glorify God?

Will it honor the Holy Spirit?

Does it conflict with any clear command?

We must be careful not to use the Bible as a 'magic' book. God guides us by the teaching of His Word, where He reveals His will in general terms.

There are some occasions when we need not general guidance but particular guidance.

How does God guide us them?

- b. By the promptings of His Spirit.*

The work of the Holy Spirit is especially referred to in -

Psalm 143:10 - *Teach me to do thy will; for thou art my God: thy spirit is good; lead me into the land of uprightness.*

Compare -

Romans 8:14 - *For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God.*

When God would have us take a certain step, He leads us according to the principles of His Word and the burden which the Holy Spirit places upon our hearts.

No “supposed” guidance of the Holy Spirit is really the Holy Spirit’s guidance if it is contrary to the clear teaching of God’s Word.

3. By the overruling of His providence.

This means that God guides us through what we call “the circumstances of life.” He opens and closes doors -

Revelation 3:8 - *I know thy works: behold, I have set before thee an open door, and no man can shut it: for thou hast a little strength, and hast kept my word, and hast not denied my name.*

He leads us by the wise counsel of Christian friends and loved ones.

In concluding this study, it is very important to notice that, to be sure of God’s will, these three ways in which He leads us must harmonize.

That is to say, when it is God’s will for us to take a certain step, He will lead us not only by the teaching of His Word, or by the prompting of His Spirit, or by the overruling of His providence, but in *all* three ways.

The three ways will harmonize to confirm to us that the step we are about to take is, indeed, God’s will for us.

How wonderful is the promise in -

1 John 2:17 - *And the world passeth away, and the lust thereof: but he that doeth the will of God abideth for ever.*

THE PRAYER FOR GOD TO REND THE HEAVENS

STUDY 9

Scripture Portion: Isaiah 64:1-3

Isaiah 64:1-3 - *Oh that thou wouldst rend the heavens, that thou wouldst come down, that the mountains might flow down at thy presence.*

2 As when the melting fire burneth, the fire causeth the waters to boil, to make thy name known to thine adversaries, that the nations may tremble at thy presence!

3 When thou didst terrible things which we looked not for, thou camest down, the mountains flowed down at thy presence.

The great need on every hand is for spiritual revival, for an outpouring of the Holy Spirit upon all the work of the church, for a real visitation of God.

In this study we are to consider whether such a reviving is possible and what we must do, on our side, to open the channels through which God may pour out such a blessing.

Half a century ago, Dr. R. A. Torrey said:

“I have a theory, and I believe it to be true, that there is not a church, chapel or mission on earth where you cannot have a revival, provided there is a little nucleus of faithful people who will hold on to God until it comes.”

Of course, there is a very real sense in which revival is always the sovereign act of God.

Scripture and experience prove that He can give it or withhold it, but it is also true that revival comes in response to certain human conditions.

This is what Finney meant when he said, “A revival is no more a miracle than a crop of wheat!”

The Bible teaches this, so does experience. The words upon which this study is based, **Isaiah 64:1-3**, help us to see this truth.

The words are expressive of real spiritual experience.

What do they tell us about revival?

THE MEANING OF REVIVAL IS EXPLAINED.

What is revival?

We know what is meant by a revival in commerce, or what we mean by reviving a person after a fainting attack, but what is spiritual revival, revival in a church?

Isaiah tells us -

Isaiah 64:1 - *Oh that thou wouldst rend the heavens, that thou wouldst come down, that the mountains might flow down at thy presence.*

In other words, revival is a mighty manifestation of the presence and power of God.

There was such a manifestation on the Day of Pentecost, when a group of the early Christians were met in Jerusalem and suddenly they were all filled with the Holy Spirit. The heavens were rent and the Lord Himself came to His temple.

What a change took place! The distinctive evidence of which they were all conscious, was a new and wonderful sense of the presence and power of God.

Read **Acts 2:1-21**.

If you had asked Peter, James, John or Mary, “What happened? What did you feel? How would you describe the experience?” they would have said, “The Lord came down among us and we were overwhelmed with the sense of His presence and power!”

This is what revival is.

This is what happened in -

Acts 4:31 - *And when they had prayed, the place was shaken where they were assembled together; and they were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and they spake the word of God with boldness.*

This is what happened on many occasions when Wesley and Whitefield preached.

This is what happened in the revival of 1859.

This is what happened in the valleys of Wales in 1904.

This is what always happens when God’s people pray for revival and God, in His sovereign will, is pleased to answer their prayers, rend the heavens and come down.

2. THE NEED OF REVIVAL IS DECLARED.

Why is revival needed? Why do we need it in all the work in which we are engaged? What are the evidences that we need revival?

To answer this question, we must look in two places.

In the Word of God.

When we read **Isaiah 64:1-11**, we see the need that existed in B.C. 700. It is similar to our need today.

(1) ***Great mountains, obstacles, were hindering God's blessing.***

Isaiah 64:1 - *Oh that thou wouldst rend the heavens, that thou wouldst come down, that the mountains might flow down at thy presence.*

(2) ***There was a great deal of open sin.***

This is indicated by the words in -

Isaiah 64:5-6 - *.....behold, thou art wroth; for we have sinned: in those is continuance, and we shall be saved.*

6 But we are all as an unclean thing, and all our righteousnesses are as filthy rags; and we all do fade as a leaf; and our iniquities, like the wind, have taken us away.

(3) ***There was a prayerlessness.***

Isaiah 64:7 - *And there is none that calleth upon thy name, that stirreth up himself to take hold of thee: for thou hast hid thy face from us, and hast consumed us, because of our iniquities.*

(4) ***God's judgment was resting upon His people.***

Isaiah 64:9 - *Be not wroth very sore, O LORD, neither remember iniquity for ever: behold, see, we beseech thee, we are all thy people.*

(5) ***The Holy City was in a state of desolation.***

Isaiah 64:10-11 - *Thy holy cities are a wilderness, Zion is a wilderness, Jerusalem a desolation.*

11 Our holy and our beautiful house, where our fathers praised thee, is burned up with fire: and all our pleasant things are laid waste.

When we look into our churches we recognize the desperate need for revival.

The situation described in **Isaiah 64**, and outlined above, is descriptive of our need today. In the church there are many who profess to know the Lord but who do not, in fact, know Him.

2 Timothy 3:5 - *Having a form of godliness, but denying the power thereof: from such turn away.*

Congregations are small, conversions are rare, prayer meetings are neglected and there is much coldness, deadness, dullness and worldliness.

Frequently the message of the gospel is not clearly proclaimed and the authority of the Bible is questioned.

In many cases there are frictions and factions. Christians are not loving one another and few seem to have a vision to save souls. Fewer still are ready to go to the mission fields where the need is so great. Read again -

Isaiah 64:10-11 - *Thy holy cities are a wilderness, Zion is a wilderness, Jerusalem a desolation.*

11 Our holy and our beautiful house, where our fathers praised thee, is burned up with fire: and all our pleasant things are laid waste.

How we need revival to sweep away sin and to remove the mountains of pride, jealousy, complacency and laziness!

3. THE SECRET OF REVIVAL IS REVEALED.

In **Isaiah 64** are mentioned some of the conditions which must be met if revival is to come.

We are not forgetting that God is sovereign and that He can send revival anytime, but we are emphasizing the fact that, because the need is great, the responsibility rests upon us to do all we possibly can to make revival possible, and, if it should be God's gracious will, to send it, to make revival actual.

What is the secret of revival?

Revival cannot be worked up. The language of **Isaiah 64:1** makes this perfectly clear. Revival is the presence and power of God coming down.

How can we secure this?

There are four conditions.

4. There must be intense desire.

This is indicated in the first words of -

Isaiah 64:1 - *Oh that....*

They are words that convey passion, longing, a burden, tears and concern.

Have you any real concern for God to come into His church in reviving and quickening power, or are you satisfied with things as they are: complacent, unmoved, content with life at a low ebb, with few conversions?

b. *There must be amendment of life.*

Surely this is inferred in this chapter. There must be a confession of sin, a putting away of sin. There must be a drastic dealing with anything that would hinder the blessing of the Lord and which would grieve the Holy Spirit.

Ephesians 4:30 - *And grieve not the holy Spirit of God, whereby ye are sealed unto the day of redemption.*

There must be a willingness on the part of God's people to pray the prayer in -

Psalms 139:23-24 - *Search me, O God, and know my heart: try me, and know my thoughts:*

24 And see if there be any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting.

and to pray it sincerely.

3. There must be the prayer of intercession.

Isaiah 64:1 - *Oh that thou wouldst rend the heavens, that thou wouldst come down, that the mountains might flow down at thy presence.*

This is such a prayer. It is definite and urgent. The prayer is not simply, "Lord, bless us" but it is "Oh that Thou wouldst rend the heavens and come down.....!"

What would happen in your church if the members really prayed a prayer for revival like this?

The people of God cannot pray, really pray and go on praying, and fail to experience some measure of true revival.

So, will you begin to pray, to pray daily, to pray with others and to pray on until the answer comes?

4. There must be the exercise of faith.

That is to say, we must believe that revival is possible and that God longs to send it. It would seem that Isaiah's prayer was certainly a prayer of faith.

What he really asked was this, "Lord, come down and move these mountains.....!"

Compare -

Mark 11:22-24 - *And Jesus answering saith unto them, Have faith in God.*

23 For verily I say unto you, That whosoever shall say unto this mountain, Be thou removed, and be thou cast into the sea; and shall not doubt in his heart, but shall believe that those things which he saith shall come to pass; he shall have whatsoever he saith.

24 Therefore I say unto you, What things soever ye desire, when ye pray, believe that ye receive them, and ye shall have them.

and see how Isaiah indicated his faith in -

Isaiah 64:8-9 - *But now, O LORD, thou art our father; we are the clay, and thou our potter; and we all are the work of thy hand.*

9 Be not wroth very sore, O LORD, neither remember iniquity for ever: behold, see, we beseech thee, we are all thy people.

To these four conditions may be added another. The prayer for revival must be offered with a pure motive. The prayer of Isaiah included this condition.

What he asked for, he asked for God's glory. That is the true motive in prayer. And the result of praying along these lines we have considered is revival!

4. THE RESULT OF REVIVAL IS STATED.

Isaiah 64:1-2 - *Oh that thou wouldest rend the heavens, that thou wouldest come down, that the mountains might flow down at thy presence.*

2 As when the melting fire burneth, the fire causeth the waters to boil, to make thy name known to thine adversaries, that the nations may tremble at thy presence!

Revival results in a mighty quickening work of the Holy Spirit in the church and a movement of the Holy Spirit throughout the church and in the world.

When true revival comes, the people are on fire for God's glory, filled with a love for His Name, for His work, and they go out to a needy world and proclaim the gospel in the power of the Holy Spirit which causes the nations to "tremble at His presence!"

THE PRAYER FOR DELIVERANCE FROM TROUBLE

STUDY 10

Scripture Portion: Jonah 2:1-9

Key verse -

Jonah 2:1 - *Then Jonah prayed unto the LORD his God out of the fish's belly,*

In the concluding study of this series, the important word in the key verse is, “*Then.*”

What are the antecedents of this “then?” What was it that happened prior to the point in Jonah’s experience when we are told that he began to pray?

In the first chapter of the prophecy, we read the sad record of the prophet’s disobedience and doubt, and of the consequent trouble that befell him.

It was after this, and only when he was in real trouble, that he prayed.

We all experience trouble. The fact that we are Christians does not give us any immunity from trouble.

Indeed, the fact that we *are* Christians ensures trouble as we learn from the following scriptures -

Philippians 1:29 - *For unto you it is given in the behalf of Christ, not only to believe on him, but also to suffer for his sake;*

Read **Hebrews 12:5-12**.

1 Peter 1:7 - *That the trial of your faith, being much more precious than of gold that perisheth, though it be tried with fire, might be found unto praise and honour and glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ:*

But sometimes trouble comes upon us because of our own folly and sin.

This was so in the case of Jonah. The story is moving and heartbreaking. It is also challenging and very practical in its application to ourselves.

Consider, to begin with -

5. JONAH’S GREAT TROUBLE.

It will be well to read **Jonah 1**, carefully and to notice how Jonah's trouble increased with mounting intensity until, in **Jonah 2**, we find Jonah giving his testimony about his trouble and the Lord's gracious deliverance.

Concerning his trouble, notice -

The nature of it.

We read about this in -

Jonah 1:15 - *So they took up Jonah, and cast him forth into the sea: and the sea ceased from her raging.*

Jonah 1:17 - *Now the LORD had prepared a great fish to swallow up Jonah. And Jonah was in the belly of the fish three days and three nights.*

This man was cast into the sea and then swallowed by a great fish. He was surely in great trouble which was of a threefold nature.

(1) ***He was in trouble physically.***

His body was affected -

Jonah 2:2 - *And said, I cried by reason of mine affliction unto the LORD, and he heard me; out of the belly of hell cried I, and thou heardest my voice.*

(2) ***He was in trouble mentally.***

His mind must have reeled at the very thought of his predicament.

Jonah 2:6 - *I went down to the bottoms of the mountains; the earth with her bars was about me for ever: yet hast thou brought up my life from corruption, O LORD my God.*

(3) ***He was in trouble spiritually.***

He was out of touch with God.

Jonah 2:4 - *Then I said, I am cast out of thy sight; yet I will look again toward thy holy temple.*

What trouble he was in!

How does your trouble compare with Jonah's?

The intensity of it.

It was very severe indeed, as we learn from -

verse 2 - “mine affliction” and “out of hell.”

verse 3 - “the floods compassed me.....passed over me.....”

verse 7 - “my soul fainted.”

This was no ordinary trial. It was an overwhelming one.

How does your trouble compare with this in its severity?

But, what was the reason for Jonah’s trouble?

c. *The reason for it.*

Jonah was in this trouble because he had disobeyed and distrusted God. In this he had committed a grievous sin against the Lord. This was the reason for, and the cause of, Jonah’s trouble.

God’s sovereignty and activity are very clearly brought out in this prophecy.

Notice what “the Lord” did -

Jonah 1:1-4 - *Now the word of the LORD came unto Jonah the son of Amittai, saying,*

2 Arise, go to Nineveh, that great city, and cry against it; for their wickedness is come up before me.

3 But Jonah rose up to flee unto Tarshish from the presence of the LORD, and went down to Joppa; and he found a ship going to Tarshish: so he paid the fare thereof, and went down into it, to go with them unto Tarshish from the presence of the LORD.

4 But the LORD sent out a great wind into the sea, and there was a mighty tempest in the sea, so that the ship was like to be broken.

Jonah 1:17 - *Now the LORD had prepared a great fish to swallow up Jonah. And Jonah was in the belly of the fish three days and three nights.*

Notice also that in -

Jonah 2:3 - *For thou hadst cast me into the deep, in the midst of the seas; and the floods compassed me about: all thy billows and thy waves passed over me.*

he attributes the storm, the waves and the trial to the Lord.

God had brought this great trial as a chastening, as His loving and sanctifying purpose to break His servant’s self will and stubborn disobedience. The Lord has done this in love.

If you are in trouble, it does not follow that this is due to wilful disobedience or distrust. It could be so, and only you know whether or not it is so.

Is God's hand heavy upon you because of some wilful disobedience? If so, what should you do? What should any Christian do in any time of trouble?

We should do what Jonah did.

6. JONAH'S URGENT PRAYER.

It is important to compare the following -

Jonah 1:17 - *Now the LORD had prepared a great fish to swallow up Jonah. And Jonah was in the belly of the fish three days and three nights.*

Jonah 2:1 - *Then Jonah prayed unto the LORD his God out of the fish's belly,*

How urgent was this man's prayer! He made his prayer to the Lord only when he was really in a tight fix.

Read the following verses from **Psalm 107** -

6 - Then they cried unto the LORD in their trouble, and he delivered them out of their distresses.

13 - Then they cried unto the LORD in their trouble, and he saved them out of their distresses.

19 - Then they cry unto the LORD in their trouble, and he saveth them out of their distresses.

20 He sent his word, and healed them, and delivered them from their destructions.

and then the closing verse -

43 - *Whoso is wise, and will observe these things, even they shall understand the lovingkindness of the LORD.*

Concerning Jonah's prayer, notice -

1. The place of his praying.

Jonah 2:1 - *Then Jonah prayed unto the LORD his God out of the fish's belly,*

What a queer prayer chamber!

Daniel prayed in his house -

Daniel 6:10 - *Now when Daniel knew that the writing was signed, he went into his house; and his windows being open in his chamber toward Jerusalem, he kneeled*

upon his knees three times a day, and prayed, and gave thanks before his God, as he did aforetime.

Peter prayed on the roof top -

Acts 10:9 - *On the morrow, as they went on their journey, and drew nigh unto the city, Peter went up upon the housetop to pray about the sixth hour:*

Lydia prayed by the riverside -

Acts 16:13 - *And on the sabbath we went out of the city by a river side, where prayer was wont to be made; and we sat down, and spake unto the women which resorted thither.*

Paul prayed in prison -

Philippians 1:4 - *Always in every prayer of mine for you all making request with joy,*

Jesus prayed on the mountain top -

Luke 6:12 - *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.*

But Jonah - he prayed from the inside of a fish!

This reminds us that we can pray anywhere and in any time of trouble.

2. The faith in his praying.

Here is something important to notice. Jonah was God's servant, in spite of the fact that he was disobedient. He knew that the Lord could, and would, hear his prayer if it was offered sincerely, penitently, with confession and in faith. His prayer was God-directed -

Jonah 2:1 - *Then Jonah prayed unto the LORD his God out of the fish's belly,*

It was offered in faith -

Jonah 2:4 - *Then I said, I am cast out of thy sight; yet I will look again toward thy holy temple.*

It was offered in the light of what God was going to do for him -

Jonah 2:9 - *But I will sacrifice unto thee with the voice of thanksgiving; I will pay that that I have vowed. Salvation is of the LORD.*

When Jonah prayed he rejoiced in the fact that “salvation is of the Lord.” He had faith to believe that the Lord could, and would, save him from his trouble. All appearances were against him.

He was still in the fish, but God would get him out!

c. *The answer to his praying.*

Jonah 2:10 - *And the LORD spake unto the fish, and it vomited out Jonah upon the dry land.*

What a great answer it was! How immediate, dramatic and miraculous!

God always answers prayer, sometimes by saying “no” and sometimes by saying “wait.” He is very gracious in spite of our disobedience.

Compare -

Jonah 4:2 - *And he prayed unto the LORD, and said, I pray thee, O LORD, was not this my saying, when I was yet in my country? Therefore I fled before unto Tarshish: for I knew that thou art a gracious God, and merciful, slow to anger, and of great kindness, and repentest thee of the evil.*

Psalms 145:8-9 - *The LORD is gracious, and full of compassion; slow to anger, and of great mercy.
9 The LORD is good to all: and his tender mercies are over all his works.*

But most of all, God’s grace and graciousness are seen in the last point we will consider.

7. JONAH’S SECOND CHANCE.

What wonderful words are recorded in -

Jonah 3:1 - *And the word of the LORD came unto Jonah the second time, saying,*

Jonah was given a second chance after his disobedience.

So was Peter after his denial -

John 21:15-17 - *So when they had dined, Jesus saith to Simon Peter, Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou me more than these? He saith unto him, Yea, Lord; thou knowest that I love thee. He saith unto him, Feed my lambs.*

16 He saith to him again the second time, Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou me? He saith unto him, Yea, Lord; thou knowest that I love thee. He saith unto him, Feed my sheep.

17 He saith unto him the third time, Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou me? Peter was grieved because he said unto him the third time, Lovest thou me? And he said unto him, Lord, thou knowest all things; thou knowest that I love thee. Jesus saith unto him, Feed my sheep.

So was Thomas after his doubt -

John 20:24-29 - *But Thomas, one of the twelve, called Didymus, was not with them when Jesus came.*

25 The other disciples therefore said unto him, We have seen the Lord. But he said unto them, Except I shall see in his hands the print of the nails, and put my finger into the print of the nails, and thrust my hand into his side, I will not believe.

26 And after eight days again his disciples were within, and Thomas with them: then came Jesus, the doors being shut, and stood in the midst, and said, Peace be unto you.

27 Then saith he to Thomas, Reach hither thy finger, and behold my hands; and reach hither thy hand, and thrust it into my side: and be not faithless, but believing.

28 And Thomas answered and said unto him, My Lord and my God.

29 Jesus saith unto him, Thomas, because thou hast seen me, thou hast believed: blessed are they that have not seen, and yet have believed.

So was John Mark after his desertion -

2 Timothy 4:11 - *Only Luke is with me. Take Mark, and bring him with thee: for he is profitable to me for the ministry.*

There is a second chance for you if you will come back to the Lord in penitence and faith.

Notice about Jonah's second chance.

(1) *It was unexpected.*

It was certainly more than Jonah could have hoped for. He believed God would deliver him, but he could not have expected that God would recommission him.

(2) *It was undeserved.*

How completely undeserved it was for Jonah.

How completely undeserving we are of the Lord's gracious dealing with us!

(3) *It was unequivocal.*

There was absolutely no doubt about it. There were no two ways about it! It seemed too good to be true, but it *was* true!

So, Jonah, poor Jonah, got out of his trouble.

If your trouble has come upon you because of disobedience and distrust, you may get out of your trouble and back into the plan and purpose of God for your life if you will turn to Him with all your heart.

Compare -

2 Chronicles 30:9 - *For if ye turn again unto the LORD, your brethren and your children shall find compassion before them that lead them captive, so that they shall come again into this land: for the LORD your God is gracious and merciful, and will not turn away his face from you, if ye return unto him.*

Joel 2:12-13 - *Therefore also now, saith the LORD, turn ye even to me with all your heart, and with fasting, and with weeping, and with mourning:
13 And rend your heart, and not your garments, and turn unto the LORD your God: for he is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and of great kindness, and repenteth him of the evil.*