

EFFECTIVE PRAYER

by

J. OSWALD SANDERS

A China Inland Mission book



MOODY PRESS

CHICAGO

PENSACOLA CHRISTIAN SCHOOL
LIBRARY

© CHINA INLAND MISSION 1961
MOODY COMPACT EDITION 1963

Printed in the United States of America

CONTENTS

Introduction	7
Creative Praying	15
Unceasing Prayer	17
Unanswered Prayer	19
Praying with Authority	21
Praying for Missionaries	23
Audacious Praying	25
Why United Prayer?	27
Importunate Praying	29
Strenuous Praying	31
Prayer and the Promises	33
Prayer Is Warfare	35
Abraham—Logic in Prayer	37
Moses—Steadfastness in Prayer	39
Daniel—Conflict in Prayer	41
Elijah—Faith in Prayer	43
Jabez—Ambition in Prayer	45
Hezekiah—Simplicity in Prayer	47
Hannah—Wordless Prayer	49
Nehemiah—Ejaculatory Prayer	51
Epaphras—Wrestling in Prayer	53
Prayer Takes Time	55

INTRODUCTION

PRAYER IS A PARADOX. No spiritual exercise is such a blending of complexity and simplicity. It is the simplest form of speech that infant lips can try, yet the sublimest strains that reach the Majesty on high. It is as appropriate to the aged philosopher as to the little child. It is the ejaculation of a moment and the attitude of a lifetime. It is the expression of the rest of faith and of the fight of faith. It is an agony and an ecstasy. It is submissive and yet importunate. In the one moment it lays hold of God and binds the devil. It can be focused on a single objective and it can roam the world. It can be abject confession and rapt adoration. It invests puny man with a sort of omnipotence. Small wonder, then, that even its greatest exponent and example was forced to admit, "We do not even know how we ought to pray." But he was swift to add, "The Spirit comes to the aid of our weakness. . . . Through our inarticulate groans the Spirit Himself is pleading for us, and God who searches our inmost being knows what the Spirit means, because *He pleads*

for God's own people in God's own way"
(Rom. 8:26-28, *New English Bible*).

Our Lord left us in no doubt of the part prayer was to play in the missionary enterprise. He clearly placed it on a prayer basis in the memorable words: "The harvest truly is plentiful, but the laborers are few; *Pray ye therefore* the Lord of the harvest that He will send forth laborers into His harvest" (Matt. 9:37-38). Paul and Barnabas set out on the first missionary journey to the accompaniment of prayer and fasting (Acts 13:2-4). Ever since, the missionary cause has advanced upon its knees. Where prayer has been prevailing, it has prospered. Where prayer has been lukewarm, it has languished.

Is it not strange that in spite of our conviction of its privilege and necessity, we are all plagued with a subtle aversion to praying? We do not naturally delight in drawing near to God. We pay lip-service to its value and potency and yet so often fail to pray. "When I go to pray," confessed one eminent Christian, "I find my heart is so loath to go to God, and when it is with Him so loath to stay." It is here that self-discipline comes in. "When thou feelest most indisposed to pray," counseled an old divine, "yield not to it. But strive and endeavor to pray even when thou thinkest thou canst not pray." Here is an area in which we can avail

ourselves of the Spirit's promised assistance in our weakness.

Intercessory prayer will take time, but could hours be more strategically spent? Time is a commodity of which there seems to be a universal and chronic shortage. Lack of time is a much overworked excuse for neglect of duty. And yet, strangely enough, even in the midst of an exacting routine we always contrive to find time for all we urgently want to do. In reality, the fundamental problem lies not in the time factor, but in the realm of will and desire. We each have all the time there is, and we each choose our own priorities. We automatically place first that which we deem most important. If prayer is meager it is because we consider it supplemental, not fundamental. To our Lord it was not a reluctant addendum, but a fundamental necessity. The time we spend in prayer will depend on the way in which we allocate our priorities. If we share Christ's view of the indispensability of prayer, we will somehow make time for it.

That prayer in one aspect is spiritual warfare is clearly taught in Scripture. "Our fight is not against human foes but against cosmic powers, against the authorities and potentates of this dark world, against the superhuman forces of evil in the heavens. Therefore . . . give yourself wholly to prayer and entreaty; pray on every

occasion in the power of the Spirit. To this end keep watch and persevere, always interceding for all God's people" (Eph. 6:11, 12, 18, 19), *New English Bible*). In this aspect of prayer, three and not two are involved. Between God and the devil, the god of this world, stands the praying man. Though pitifully weak in himself, he occupies a strategic role in this truceless warfare. His power and authority as he battles in faith are not inherent, but are his through his union with the Victor of Calvary.

Throughout the Gospels, Jesus is seen occupied not so much with the wicked man and evil conditions He confronted, as with the forces of evil behind them. In the words of well-meaning Peter, in the treachery of the traitorous Judas, Jesus detected the black hand of Satan. "Get thee behind Me, Satan," He said to Peter. Behind the hideous idol the missionary sees the foul spirit which enslaves the devotee. We see souls bound in sin, but our concern in prayer should be not only to pray *for them*, but also to pray *against Satan* who holds them captive. He must be made to relax his hold on them, and only the power of Christ's victory, appropriated and applied through the prayer of faith, can achieve this. Jesus dealt with the cause, not the effect, and if we are to pray effectively we must follow the same pattern.

In a graphic illustration our Lord likened

Satan to a well-armed strong man who kept his palace in peace. Before he could be dislodged and his captives liberated, Jesus said he must first be bound. Only then could the rescue be effected (Matt. 12:28-29; Luke 11:21-22). "We may be spiritual and prayerful, courageous and determined," writes Arthur Wallis, "we may even succeed in breaking into the strong man's house, but if we have not learned the secret of prayer warfare and how to bind the strong man, he will very likely return in fury and drive us out. Such a counterattack can have a devastating effect on those who have been praying and laboring hopefully, and it can also supply opposers with the ammunition they require."

What does it mean to "bind the strong man," if not to restrain his activity by appealing to the conquering power of Him who was manifested to destroy—render inoperative, powerless—the works of the devil? (1 John 3:8). And how can this be done but by the prayer of faith, which lays hold of the victory of Calvary and believes for its manifestation in the situation on which prayer is being focused? Let us not reverse the Lord's order—"first bind . . . then spoil"—and still expect to effect the rescue without neutralizing the Adversary. Let us confidently accept our God-given authority and exercise it. "Behold I have given you authority

...over all the power of the enemy" (Luke 10:19, R.V.). Of what value is this delegation of authority if it is not exercised?

* "Satan dreads nothing but prayer," wrote Samuel Chadwick. "His one concern is to keep the saints from praying. He fears nothing from prayerless studies, prayerless work, prayerless religion. He laughs at our toil, mocks our wisdom, but trembles when we pray."

P.19
In the history of the China Inland Mission the tide in many a crisis has turned when its workers have met the situation with prayer and fasting. Many a stubborn city has opened, many an intransigent heart has yielded, many a financial need has been supplied, and many a delicate personnel difficulty has been resolved by this means. While fasting is always optional in the New Testament, the record indicates that it was resorted to in the face of special temptation (Matt. 4:2); where there was a yearning after a closer walk with God (I Cor. 7:5); where there was deep concern for evangelizing the regions beyond (Acts 13:1-3); where there was spiritual travail for the development of a church (Acts 14:21-3); where some stubborn situation had yielded to no other method (Matt. 17:21). There is still a place for prayer and fasting, though not on legalistic grounds.

The thumbnail studies in this booklet, which have appeared in *East Asia Millions*[†], suggest

some of the principles underlying effective prayer, and illustrate them from the lives of praying men and women of Bible times. They are presented in this form in the hope that they may prove suggestive and helpful in the hour of prayer.

J. OSWALD SANDERS

[†]East Asia Millions is the monthly magazine of the China Inland Mission Overseas Missionary Fellowship.

Creative Praying

God . . . calls into existence the things that do not exist.

Romans 4:17

Have the faith of God.

Mark 11:22

IT WOULD APPEAR that God acted on the principle of faith in the creation of the world. When He said to nonexistent light, "Let there be light," there was light. It is this same kind of creative faith we are called upon to exercise, the very faith of God. "Now faith means . . . being certain of things we cannot see" (Heb. 11:1, *Phillips*), and this concept opens to us a limitless realm of possibility.

The noted scientist Dr. Alexis Carrel writes: "Prayer is a force as real as terrestrial gravity . . . it is the only power in the world that seems to overcome the so-called laws of nature." In prayer, God places in our hands a kind of omnipotence, enabling us to overcome even immutable natural law. Hear the affirmation of the Master, "Therefore, I say to you, whatever you ask for in your prayers, believe it granted and it will be granted" (Mark 11:24, *Rieu*). And if that is not sufficient to kindle expecta-

tion and stimulate faith, consider this: "If two of you shall agree . . . as touching *anything* that they shall ask, it shall be done for them . . ." (Matt. 18:19).

Strangely enough, so beset by unbelief is the human heart, that these staggering and all-inclusive promises—"whatever," "*anything*"—instead of stimulating our faith tend to paralyze it. The mind busily sets to work to conjure up reasons why these universal words cannot mean exactly what they say. But they *do* mean exactly what they say.

Unbelief has always shackled omnipotence. Faith releases its might. And faith is not credulity, it is confidence. It rests its weight on the divine warrant of the infallible Word. It joyously believes that to the God who "calls into existence the things that do not exist," nothing is impossible.

Unceasing Prayer

Pray without ceasing. 1 Thessalonians 5:17

WAS THIS EXHORTATION to the Christians at Thessalonica merely a counsel of perfection? Did Paul really consider it an attainable ideal to "pray *always* with all prayer and supplication"? (Eph. 6:18).

Undoubtedly to him this was both a glorious possibility and an actual experience. "Unceasingly I make mention of you in my prayers," he wrote. "Night and day praying exceedingly. . . . Praying at all seasons. . . . Watch ye, and pray always." On God's side, Paul's experience of unceasing prayer sprang from the working within him of the Spirit of prayer. On his own part it was the response of a sensitive and willing spirit. Nor was it confined to formal seasons of prayer. Those informal, involuntary, ejaculatory prayers native to the praying heart were in his view. Charles H. Spurgeon once said that he had not known a half-hour for years in which he had not consciously prayed. To him, through disciplined habit, unceasing prayer had become almost instinctive, as na-

tural as breathing. To the Spirit-indwelt heart every occurrence, every occasion, becomes the inspiration of prayer.

But prayer is not an exercise of the conscious mind alone. Henry Moorhouse, the great evangelist of a past generation, frequently prayed aloud in his sleep. "I sleep, but my heart waketh" (Song of Solomon 5:2), was true of him. Even in sleep, the ever-burning fire of the Holy Spirit within caused the fragrant incense of prayer to ascend from the altar of his heart.

It is ours to form this blessed habit, to find in God a Friend *always* within call, to use *everything* as an occasion for prayer. Through intimacy and obedience we may know the Holy Spirit's unceasing intercession *within* us (Rom. 8:27), just as on high our Great High Priest makes unceasing intercession *for* us (Heb. 7:25).

Unanswered Prayer

Have faith in God.

Mark 11:22

IT IS EASY to become a fatalist in reference to prayer. It is easier to regard unanswered prayer as the will of God than to deliberately reason out the causes of defeat." But should we be less honest in our approach to this perplexing problem than a merchant to his adverse balance sheet? Perhaps our reluctance to analyze our failures in prayer is rooted in a mistaken solicitude for God's honor. God is more honored when we ruthlessly face our failure and diligently search for its cause than when we piously ignore it.

The underlying reason for every unanswered prayer is that in some way we have asked amiss (James 4:3). Could it be that we have substituted faith in prayer for faith in God? We are nowhere exhorted to have faith in prayer, but we are counseled: "Have faith in God" (Mark 11:22). Faced with this problem the disciples asked: "Why could not we . . . ?" "Because of your unbelief," replied the Master. An analysis of our prayers might afford the dis-

concerting discovery that many of them are not the *prayer of faith* at all, only the *prayer of hope*, or even of despair. We earnestly hope they will be answered, but have no unshakable assurance to that effect. God has, however, undertaken to answer only the prayer of faith. "Whatever you pray for and ask, believe that you have got it, and you shall have it" (Mark 11:24, Moffatt). Don't think the translator has his tenses wrong! It is we who have our attitude wrong! _____

Another prolific cause of defeat in the prayer life is a secret sympathy with sin. "If I regard [cling to] iniquity in my heart, the Lord will not hear me." Then let us search out and rectify the causes of our unanswered petitions.

Praying with Authority

Behold, I have given you authority . . . *over all the power of the enemy.* Luke 10:19, R.S.V.

THE MISSIONARY is engaged in a spiritual warfare against intangible and spiritual foes. For such a conflict only spiritual weapons are adequate, but they are "mighty through God to the pulling down of strongholds." Of these the most potent is the weapon of "all prayer" (Eph. 6:18), and it can be wielded by others on his behalf.

To His seventy eager disciples the Lord to whom "all authority in heaven and on earth" had been committed (Matt. 28:18) said, "*Behold, I have given you authority . . . over all the power of the enemy*" (Luke 10:19, R.S.V.). It should be noted that He linked with this affirmation, "I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven." The unmistakable inference was that, through exercising their delegated authority, they too would see the overthrow of Satan in their sphere of responsibility. Nor were they disappointed. "Lord, even the demons are subject

to us *through thy name*," the radiant missionaries reported.

This promised authority was not withdrawn, but when they lost vital faith in Christ's promise His disciples were powerless to deliver a demon-possessed boy (Matt. 17:19). They were paralyzed by their own unbelief. After His resurrection the Master once again affirmed their privilege. "Making use of My name [My authority] they shall expel demons" (Mark 16:17, *Weymouth*).

It is open to us today to exercise in the realm of prayer the spiritual authority over Satan's power thus bestowed upon us. Christ, by His death and victorious resurrection, has "destroyed"—rendered powerless—the devil. As members of His body, united by a living faith, we may participate in His victory, not for ourselves alone, but on behalf of those in lands afar. His triumph becomes ours. Making use of Christ's authority so clearly delegated to us, through our prayers we can be instrumental in binding "the strong man" in any given situation. The missionary can then "spoil his goods."

Praying for Missionaries

*...ye also helping together by prayer for us.
II Corinthians 1:11*

STRIVE TOGETHER *with me* in your prayers to God *for me*," pleaded the great missionary apostle (Rom. 15:30). Despite his great gifts of nature and of grace, we search in vain for any sign of conscious adequacy. "Who is sufficient for these things?" Paul asks. Small wonder if his weaker successors crave the intercessions of God's people. But what shall we ask of God for them?

A veteran missionary facing the fierce opposition of the Adversary in the South Seas wrote: "There is nothing more profitable, more priceless, that you can ask for us than that in spite of physical weariness, frequent infirmities and the care of multiplying converts, we may be *enabled to remain on our knees*, for there is a praying in detail to be done, if the infant churches are to grow and prosper." Here then is a key subject for intercession, for our prayers can make the prayers of our missionary friends especially potent and prevailing.

Note in these verses the juxtaposition of the hard-pressed missionary's extremity and his deliverance. "We were pressed out of measure, above strength...but God delivered us...*ye also helping together by prayer for us*" (II Cor. 1:8-11). Our intercessions may be instrumental in delivering missionaries from "unreasonable and wicked men" (II Thess. 3:2). *Closed doors* can be made to swing open on their unwilling hinges as we lay hold on God (Col. 4:2).

Though preaching presented no difficulty to Paul, he entreated the Ephesians, "Ask on my behalf *that words may be given me*, so that, outspoken and fearless, I may make known the truths of the Good News" (Eph. 6:19, *Weymouth*.)

Joshua prevailed in the valley conflict only while Moses' hands were raised to heaven. When they grew slack and fell, Amalek prevailed. Ours can be the strategic upholding ministry of Aaron and Hur.

Audacious Praying

*Whatsoever ye shall ask the Father in My name,
He will give it you.* John 16:23

HOW TAME AND INSIPID is much modern praying—a respectable asking for a minimum expenditure and exhibition of divine power. Seldom do our petitions rise above the level of natural thought or previous experience. Do we ever dare to pray for the unprecedented? The whole atmosphere of the age tends to make us minimize what we can expect of God, and yet His Word reveals that the extent of legitimate expectation is literally without limits.

As though to anticipate our reluctance to ask audaciously, God employs every universal term in our language in His promises to the praying soul. Here they are: *Whatsoever, wheresoever, whensoever, whosoever*, all, any, every. Take one such promise. "*Whatsoever ye shall ask the Father in my name, He will give it you*" (John 16:23). Trace the other words in their relation to prayer and note how they encourage large petitions. It has been said that God's only limitation and condition of

prayer is found in the character of the one who prays—“According to your faith be it unto you.”

God delights to respond to daring prayer. How quickly He responded to the audacity of the Syrophenician woman though her prayer had no right of claim. He encourages us to ask as freely for the impossible as for the possible, since to Him all difficulties are the same size—less than Himself. Because this was so Jesus said, “If ye have faith as a grain of mustard seed ye shall say to *this mountain*, Remove hence. . . and it shall remove; and *nothing shall be impossible* unto you” (Matt. 17:20). In the parallel passage, it is a tree and not a mighty mountain. But audacious prayer is no more dismayed by a mountain than a tree, since “All things are possible to him that believeth.”

Why United Prayer?

... But prayer was made without ceasing of the church unto God. Acts 12:5

THAT UNITY BEGETS STRENGTH is a principle of grace as well as of nature. A number of Christians uniting in prayer for a given person or objective brings special power into operation, for their unison demonstrates that oneness which God delights to see and acknowledge (John 17:11). Both Scripture and contemporary experience indicate that there is a cumulative power in united praying. Faith is infectious, and infection spreads where numbers congregate. Unbelief thrives more readily in isolation. Only with great difficulty can a fire be kindled with a single stick.

Our Lord suggested the intensification of prayer force in united praying. “If two of you shall agree on earth about anything they shall ask,” He said, “it will be done for them” (Matt. 18:19). It was at a united prayer meeting that the mighty power of Pentecost was unleashed (Acts 2:1, 2). It was when the believers “lifted up their voices together to God” that the place

was shaken (Acts 4:24, 31). It was the prayer of the whole church that secured Peter's release (Acts 12:5). The missionary enterprise had its birth in a united prayer meeting of church leaders (Acts 13:1-4).

The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much. But Scripture and experience combine to teach that the united prayers of many such avail yet more.

Importunate Praying

Men ought to pray continually and never lose heart.
Luke 18:1

OUR LORD TAUGHT His disciples by contrast as well as by comparison. Contrary to what may superficially appear to be the teaching of two parables recorded in Luke's Gospel, God is neither a churlish neighbor loath to bestir himself to grant our requests (Luke 11:5), nor is He a rapacious judge dispensing reluctant justice (Luke 18:7). He is illustrating one of the secrets of prevailing prayer. If an ungenerous neighbor can in the end be coerced by his friend's shameless persistence (the very word used) *into granting his request, how much more* will their heavenly Father give them what they need? If an unjust judge can be badgered into giving justice to a wronged widow simply because he is wearied to death with her appeals, *how much more* will God respond to the urgent cry of His children?

Halfhearted asking comes away empty-handed. Lukewarmness in prayer as in everything else is revolting to God. Shameless per-

sistence, an urgency which will not be denied, returns with the desired boon in its hands. It was shameless asking that brought to the suppliant friend as many loaves as he needed. His first "asking" met with curt refusal. Then he began to "seek," to implore his neighbor's help in his distress, only to be denied again. At last he resorted to "knocking" and hammered at the door until importunity triumphed over obstinate refusal. The same shameless persistence secured for the widow the vindication and redress she had so long and vainly sought.

"Men ought to pray continually and never lose heart," counseled the Lord (Luke 18:1). God may not always give at our first asking because He has something important to teach us as we "call upon Him day and night." We may need to "seek" and "knock" as well as "ask." But He is not impatient of our constant coming, and He will respond to our importunity.

Strenuous Praying

Strive together with me in your prayers to God for me.
Romans 15:30

ALL VITAL PRAYING makes a drain upon a man's vitality. True intercession is a sacrifice, a bleeding sacrifice, a perpetuation of Calvary, a filling up of the sufferings of Christ." Such was the conviction of Dr. J. H. Jowett. Jesus worked many mighty works without outward sign of strain, but He "offered up prayers and supplications with strong cryings and tears" (Heb. 5:7). Our Lord's intercession was to Him a costly ministry and so will it be to the one who follows in His train.

Intercession is no dreamy reverie accompanied by a warm glow of pleasing emotion. Rather it is depicted as "wrestling," "agonizing," "Epaphras . . . is always wrestling for you in his prayers" (Col. 4:12, *Way*). Our English word *agonize* derives from the Greek word here used. How pale a reflection of Epaphras's intercessions are our languid prayers!

The same word is used of a man toiling at his work until thoroughly weary (Col. 1:29).

or striving in the arena for the coveted prize (I Cor. 9:25). It describes the soldier fighting for his life on the battlefield (I Tim. 6:12), or the man who struggles to defend his friend from danger (John 18:36). It pictures the agony of earnestness of a man to save his own soul (Luke 13:24). But its supreme significance appears in the tragedy of Gethsemane. "Being in an agony He prayed more earnestly" (Luke 22:44), an agony induced by His identification with and grief over the sins of a lost world.

True intercession is costly. Our Lord first gave Himself, and then made intercession for His murderers. He could do no more for them. "Are we asking of God something we could ourselves supply? Can it be intercession until we are empty-handed? True intercession demands the sacrifice and dedication of all."

Have we given ourselves and all we can for those for whom we intercede, or are our prayers costless and crossless?

Prayer and the Promises

Every promise of God finds its affirmative in him, and through him can be said the final Amen, to the glory of God. II Corinthians 1:20, Phillips.

A PROMISE BY GOD is a pledge by God. It provides the warrant and forms the basis of the prayer of faith. The stability of a promise rests upon the character and resources of the one who makes it, even as the value of a check depends on the probity and resources of the one who signs it. The character and fidelity of God vouch for the credibility of the promises He makes.

It is entirely with such promises the prayer of faith has to do. As we claim a promise of the Word of God, the Holy Spirit imparts the faith to believe that its terms will be fulfilled in the context of our prayer. With God, promise and performance are inseparable. 9-6-31-10

But promises must be distinguished from facts. We accept a stated fact of God's Word, but we plead a promise. When God proclaims a fact, faith accepts and acts upon it. When God makes a promise, we comply with its con-

ditions, claim its fulfilment and receive the promised favor. The function of the prayer of faith is to turn God's promises into facts of experience. The patriarchs through faith obtained the fulfilment of God's promises (Heb. 11:33), and turned them into personal experience.

The prayer of faith has its basis in neither outward circumstances nor inward feelings. It is when sight brings no helpful vision and comfortable emotions are largely absent that the prayer of faith finds its greatest opportunity. It springs from the naked promise or affirmation of the Word of God, for faith proceeds only from a divine warrant. The prayer of faith is the power which converts promise into performance.

Prayer Is Warfare

The weapons of our warfare are . . . mighty through God to the pulling down of strongholds.

II Corinthians 10:4

PRAYER IS NOT PIOUS REVERIE; it is spiritual warfare. "Ours is not a conflict with mere flesh and blood," says Paul. Then what is it? It is conflict "with the despotisms, the empires, the forces that govern this dark world—the spiritual hosts of evil arrayed against us in the heavenly warfare" (Eph. 6:12, *Weymouth*). But what an unequal contest! What a frightening prospect to one conscious of his own weakness! Yet it is to such a conflict we have been committed.

What is the divine strategy? The fulcrum on which the battle turns is our ability to pray aright. It is a spiritual as well as a military maxim that the best defense is attack. The plan of our Commander is that His church be constantly attacking on all fronts. He nowhere envisages a church on the defensive. It is to press the battle to the very gates of Hell, and they "shall not prevail against it" (Matt.

16:18). The devil's last line of defense is unable to withstand that victorious assault.

What is our weapon? Our Leader has placed in our hands the irresistible sword of the Spirit which defeated the devil in the wilderness—the Word of God. But its aggressive and conquering power is released only through the prayer of faith. Our instructions are, “Take the sword of the Spirit . . . praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit . . . with all perseverance.” This is no mere passive praying. Only aggressive prayer based on the Word of God dislodges the enemy from his citadel, for “the weapons of our warfare are . . . mighty through God to the pulling down of strongholds.” Such praying releases all the resources of God and brings them into play on the field of battle. Costly? Yes, but also conquering!

Abraham—Logic in Prayer

Abraham drew near, and said, Wilt thou also destroy the righteous with the wicked? Genesis 18:23

GENESIS 18:16-33

THE PROCESSES of prayer and answer are not irrational. Indeed God encourages argument in prayer. While He requires submission to His revealed will, He is not pleased with languid passivity. “Set forth your case, says the Lord. Bring forth your proofs” (Isa. 41:21, *R.S.V.*). We are invited to muster and present the strongest possible arguments for our petition and to press it with logic and vigor.

Confronted with the imminent doom of Sodom, home of his nephew Lot, Abraham, one of the great praying men of the Bible, does just this. His first recourse is prayer to the God with whom he enjoyed such unique intimacy that they actually shared secrets (v. 17). In the intensity of his desire, Abraham mixes audacity with argument and petition with pleading. Mark his holy daring as he intercedes. Note his growing confidence as he marshals his propositions. “Wilt thou indeed destroy the right-

eous with the wicked? Far be that from thee! Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?" (vss. 23-25). He argues that such action would compromise God's moral character and tarnish His honor. As God graciously responds, Abraham returns time and again with larger demands, yet tempering his boldness with becoming reverence. "I am but dust and ashes . . . Let not the Lord be angry." He ceases his suit upon reaching what he doubtless considered to be the irreducible minimum of righteous people in Sodom.

His optimism proved unwarranted. He ceased pleading before he had exhausted the mercy and grace of God, and therefore was ineffectual to save Sodom from its doom. Nevertheless, his intercession snatched his nephew from the very jaws of death, for "God remembered Abraham and delivered Lot."

Moses—Steadfastness in Prayer

His hands were steady until the going down of the sun.
Exodus 17:12

Exodus 17:8-14

THEN CAME AMALEK and fought . . . and Joshua discomfited Amalek." Between these cryptic sentences stands a third. "I will stand on the top of the hill with the rod of God in my hand." Here is a pictorial presentation of God's missionary strategy—chosen men interlocked with the foe, a chosen man exercising his authority in prayer. No possible connection is apparent between these isolated men, yet their functions were inextricably linked. In the fluctuations of battle the key to final victory was in the hands, not of the fighters on the field, but of the intercessor on the mount.

Prayer is more potent than armies. It was the weaponless hand of prayer that controlled the issues of battle. "When Moses lifted up his hand, Israel prevailed: and when he let down his hand Amalek prevailed." Holding aloft our hands in prayer can be exhausting work. As the tides of battle ebbed and flowed, "Moses' hands

grew weary." The inactivity of praying on the mount is a much greater test of spiritual stamina than battling in the valley. When Moses could no longer stand, he sat. When he could no longer raise up his hands, he summoned help. *He must not fail Joshua in the valley.* At whatever cost, the rod of God must be held aloft.

Joshua must fight as though there was no uplifted rod in the mount. Moses must pray as if there was no drawn sword in the valley. "Which things are an allegory." Divinely chosen warriors are battling satanic powers in distant lands. The issue lies finally in the hands of intercessors far removed, who have been entrusted with divine authority (Luke 11:10). Only as their hands are "steady unto the going down of the sun" will Amalek be utterly destroyed.

Daniel—Conflict in Prayer

Fear not, Daniel . . . thy words were heard . . . but the prince of the kingdom of Persia withstood me.
Daniel 10:12-13

Daniel 10:12-14

ELIJAH WAS A BRILLIANT METEOR in Israel's firmament, whereas Daniel was a fixed star. For over seventy years, and through five reigns as prime minister of mighty Babylon, he wielded a prodigious influence. The divine record compresses his secret into four words: "He kneeled . . . as aforesaid"—a thrice daily spiritual exercise. The tyrant king could not compel him to bow the knee to his golden image. The jealous courtiers could not keep him on his feet when the appointed hour for prayer arrived.

Ezekiel selected Daniel as one of the great intercessors of Old Testament times (Ezek. 14:14). It was his praying which broke the chains of the Babylonian captivity, setting Israel free to fulfil the divine purpose. But it was no desultory and sporadic prayer. It took seventy years of faithful intercession before he wit-

nessed their emancipation. Nor was his praying uncontested. His visible enemies endeavored to keep him from the act of prayer. His invisible adversaries opposed the answering of his prayer. "The prince of the kingdom of Persia withstood me one and twenty days" (Dan. 10:13).

Daniel learned that it is invisible forces which rule the world, that the course of global events can be influenced by the persistent praying of one man. Once the angel Gabriel came to him while in the act of prayer (Dan. 9:21). Now it was Michael who became his ally against his unseen foe (Dan. 10:13), assuring him that his prayer was heard from the very moment it was uttered, though the answer was delayed for three weeks.

Prayer is often a contest between angels who minister and demons who hinder. Prayer unanswered is not always prayer denied. Sometimes it is prayer delayed through invisible spiritual activity. It was Daniel's continued wrestling on earth while the battle raged in the heavenlies, which finalized the victory.

Elijah—Faith in Prayer

...subject to like passions as we are, and he prayed earnestly...
James 5:17

I Kings 17:21, 18:36, 37, 42

GOD'S MAN for the hour is the man who has mastered the prayer of faith. Because of his prayers, Elijah flamed like a meteor across the midnight of Israel's apostasy. Man of like passions with us, he was a man of unlike passion in prayer. He threw all the fiery forces of his nature into his praying (Jas. 5:17). Before ever he crashed onto the stage of Israel's history, he had graduated in the school of prayer. He was no tyro in the art of taking hold of God. Only long intimacy with the Almighty could give birth to such audacious prayers of faith.

Who else had the serene faith to expect God to stay the beneficent course of nature at his word (James 5:17)? Who else had offered a prayer that rent the sky with Heaven's vindicating flame (I Kings 18:38)? His prayers had prevailed in private before he put God to the test in public. His faith created the atmos-

phere in which God could work His miracles. Because he stood consciously before God, he could stand fearlessly before the king (18:15). The divine response to his prayer of faith demonstrated to the nation that God was God, and brought them on their faces in awe before Him (18:39).

Elijah's faith had the divine promise of rain on which to rest (18:1). But he had no promise of fire. Yet so well did he know his God that he dared to so commit Him that He could not fail to respond without compromising His own character and existence (18:36, 37). His prayers invaded a realm never before challenged—the domain of death (17:21, 22). When he prayed for rain, he did not require the comforting assurance of sight (18:43). He could believe God without any evidence to the senses. This is the prayer of faith.

Jabez—Ambition in Prayer

O that Thou wouldest bless me indeed, and enlarge my coast.
I Chronicles 4:10

I Chronicles 4:9, 10

THERE IS AN AMBITION in prayer which is well-pleasing to God. He is not honored by the presenting of minimum requests. Because we are coming to the throne of a great King, we should honor Him by bringing worthy petitions. Granting them will not strain His resources.

Jabez is an example of ambitious praying which merits our emulation. That his praying met the conditions of divine approval is attested by the divine response: "And God granted him that which he requested." Despite the hereditary handicap hinted at in his name (Sorrowful) his prayer life lifted him far above the level of his contemporaries. "Jabez was more distinguished than his brothers." From the graveyard of the dead whose names are recorded in these opening chapters, he alone is singled out for honorable mention. And it was his prayer which gained him this fame.

His intensity of aspiration is evidenced in its opening clause—the vocative plea of Holy Writ. He would be content with no ordinary blessing from the hand of God. He appealed for an extension of his boundaries. He was not “content to fill a little space” for God when he could fill a great one. The unselfishness and purity of his motives is guaranteed by the answer granted. Such ambition will prevent our spiritual stature from shrinking.

With true realism he asked that God’s hand might be with him to equip for larger responsibilities. Because enlarged territory inevitably attracted the increased attention of his enemies, he pleaded for God’s enviroing and protecting presence. His prayer antedated the prayer of our Lord, “I pray that thou shouldest keep them from the evil one.”

God is still looking for men and women whose ambition expresses itself in such a prayer as that of Jabez.

Hezekiah—Simplicity in Prayer

And Hezekiah . . . spread it before the Lord.
Isaiah 37:14

Isaiah 37:14, 38:2-5

SIMPLICITY is not necessarily stupidity. A man may be child-like without being childish. Indeed, faith is always characterized by simplicity. Hezekiah, king, soldier and poet, was artless in his relation with God. Rabshakeh and his overwhelming hosts were surrounding the royal city. He was using every wile to shake the morale of the people. When confronted with a taunting and blasphemous letter from Rabshakeh, Hezekiah’s spontaneous reaction was to commit the matter to his God. “Hezekiah went up unto the house of the Lord and spread it before the Lord.” Behold the simplicity of faith! As though God could not read the letter when rolled up! But his was a simplicity which moved the heart and hand of God. Hear the sequel. “Then the angel of the Lord . . . smote . . . of the Assyrians a hundred and four score and five thousand.” Mighty armies are defenceless before the feeble breath of prayer. Heze-

kiah's enemies were destroyed not by his military might or strategy but by his simple prayer.

To ask God to reconsider and revoke His decree presented no insuperable problem to this man of simple heart. When Isaiah communicated to him God's edict that he would die, his faith was not staggered. As was his habit, he turned to God in prayer (38:2-3). And in response to Hezekiah's prayer God changed His mind!

Think of the height to which his prayer soared. Not only did he have no promise of healing as a basis for his faith, but he had the decree of God that he should die. In spite of this he pressed his plea, and God responded magnificently. After this experience, we need never doubt the power of prayer to move the hand of God. The man who knows God may even reverently challenge His decrees.

Hannah—Wordless Prayer

Hannah... spake in her heart. I Samuel 1:13

STRONG, SPIRITUAL LEADERS usually have strong praying mothers. It is not mere coincidence that Bible history frequently records the ancestry of its great men. Praying Samuels come from praying Hannahs. Indeed, Samuel was the direct creation of his mother's wordless praying. "The Lord remembered her; and in due time she bare a son, and called his name Samuel, for . . . I have asked him of the Lord" (I Sam. 1:19, 20).

The traditional shame of her childlessness was crushing her spirit. Her rival, Elkanah's other wife, "provoked her mercilessly to make her irritable" (I Sam. 1:6). Tried beyond endurance, she repaired to the temple and there poured out her soul to a listening God. The aging priest, Eli, dozing on his seat "observed her mouth. Hannah was speaking in her heart; only her lips moved, and her voice was not heard" (I Sam. 1:13). Eli mistook her inarticulate grief for maudlin intoxication. "How long will you be drunken?" he chided her. She pro-

tested that her trouble was grief of heart. She was beside herself with the intensity of her supplication, a prototype of those for whom "the Spirit himself intercedes with sighs too deep for words" (Rom. 8:26). Some prayers affect us too deeply for formal articulation.

Hannah's prayer was accompanied by a vow. "If thou wilt remember . . . I will give" (I Sam. 1:11). She kept her promise, and as soon as Samuel was weaned, she presented him to the Lord for life. "And they worshiped the Lord there" (I Sam. 1:28). But now it is not wordless praying. "Fervent, passionate words flow out of her heart in an uncontrollable tide of adoration" (I Sam. 2:1-10). It was a rhapsody worthy of those of Miriam and Deborah and Mary. Small wonder then that Samuel's early years spent in the company of his praying mother made him a man whose ministry was bathed in prayer.

Nehemiah—Ejaculatory Prayer

*For what dost thou make request? So I prayed . . .
Nehemiah 2:4*

TRUE PATRIOT that he was, Nehemiah's heart was deeply distressed at the desolation of his beloved Zion. Like all other spiritual men he turned his heart burden into prayer. "I wept, and mourned, and fasted, and prayed" (Neh. 1:4). And what a model prayer it was, combining adoration, confession, argument and petition (Neh. 1:5-11). The sheer impossibility of his desire being granted—leave of absence from the side of a despotic Eastern tyrant for four months—did not daunt his faith. He was sure of his God.

God can never resist faith. As Nehemiah prayed, God worked in the king's heart and suddenly the prayed-for opportunity came (Neh. 2:1-6). Between the despot's unexpected question and Nehemiah's daring request, he found time for ejaculatory prayer. "So I prayed to the God of heaven" (Neh. 2:4). Not only was he granted leave to go to Jerusalem, but full provision for the expedition as well. Once

again prayer had invaded the realm of the impossible.

His plan of campaign for the restoration of the city wall was simple. "So I prayed . . . so built we the wall." He prayed as he worked and worked as he prayed. Did enemies mock and hinder? He utters an ejaculatory prayer and keeps on building (Neh. 4:4-6). Did they threaten attack? "We made our prayer . . . and set a watch" (Neh. 4:9). Prayer was no substitute for earnest endeavor and prudent preparation, and work was no hindrance to prayer. He did not reserve his prayers for special occasions, they pervaded all his activities. He worked no mighty miracle. He saw no spectacular vision. But the prayer of his burdened, believing heart secured dramatic results. In fifty-two short days he was able exultingly to report, "So the wall was finished" (Neh. 6:15).

Let us practice ejaculatory prayer.



Epaphras—Wrestling in Prayer

Always laboring fervently for you in prayers.
Colossians 4:12

Colossians 4:12, 13

EPAPHRAS, Paul's fellow-prisoner, cherished an intense solicitude for the Christians of his native Colosse and in the neighboring Lycus valley. "From my own observation," Paul wrote, "I can tell you that he has a real passion for your welfare." He was one of them, a fellow-citizen, but the warmth of close natural ties passed over into the passion of spiritual concern. "He is always wrestling for you in his prayers."

Prison walls could not restrain the flight and freedom of the soul of this spiritual giant. Denied personal contact with his loved flock, he could still exercise on their behalf the most potent of all ministries. His concern for their spiritual advancement expressed itself in agonizing prayer—for that is the very word used—a pale reflection of his Lord's Gethsemane travail. No mere passive and benevolent desire this praying! He took it seriously. So real was

his identification with his children in the faith that it became a matter of life and death. The picture is of a perspiring wrestler straining every muscle, summoning every last ounce of strength as he contends in the games. Epaphras prayed to the point of exhaustion. Indeed, it became almost an obsession: "*Always wrestling for you.*"

His prayers were not concerned with the trivial. As he prayed, his soul soared in aspiration for his friends. He prayed for their constancy, that without wavering, they might stand firm in the face of seduction and opposition not easy of attainment in a licentious pagan city. He pleaded for their spiritual maturity, that they might go on to perfection, standing perfect and complete. He asked that they might have spiritual discernment and conviction, being "thoroughly convinced in all that concerns the will of God."

It was Epaphras's kneeling which kept the Colossians standing.

Prayer Takes Time

Are there not twelve hours in the day? John 11:9

WHO OF US has not experienced the difficulty of insufficient time for prayer? At least we tend to excuse ourselves by saying we do not have sufficient time. The late Dr. J. H. Jowett was not sympathetic to such an excuse. "I think one of the can't phrases of our day," he wrote, "is the familiar one by which we express our permanent want of time. We repeat it so often that by the very repetition we have deceived ourselves into believing it. It is never the supremely busy men who have no time. So compact and systematic is the regulation of their day that, whenever you make a demand on them, they seem able to find additional corners to offer for unselfish service. I confess, as a minister, that the men to whom I most hopefully look for additional service are the busiest men."

Let us face the fact squarely and without equivocation—*Each of us has as much time as anyone else in the world.* As in the parable of the pounds, we have each been entrusted

with the same amount of time, but not all so use it as to produce a tenfold return. True, we do not all have the same capacity, but that fact is recognized in the parable. The reward for the servant with the smaller capacity but equal faithfulness is the same. We are not responsible for our capacity, but we are responsible for the strategic investment of our time. If we consider prayer as a high priority, we will so arrange our day as to make time for it. When we have comparatively little to carry in our case it seems as full as when we have much, because the less we have the more carelessly we pack it. The man who claims to have no time is most likely guilty of "careless packing."

What practical steps can be taken to safeguard the securing of sufficient time for prayer?

Stop Leaks. Do not consider your day only in terms of hours, but in smaller areas of time. If we look after the minutes, the hours will look after themselves. Few men packed more into a lifetime than Dr. F. B. Meyer. Of him it was said that like John Wesley he divided his life into spaces of five minutes, and endeavored to make each one count for God. One would expect such a program to create intolerable strain, but not so with Dr. Meyer. According to his biographer, "his calm manner was not the sleep of an inactive mind, it was more like the sleep of a spinning top." Just a little while

before his departure he said to a friend, "I think I am an example of what the Lord can do with a man who concentrates on doing one thing at one time." The secret of Charles Darwin's achievements, it is said, was that he knew the difference between ten minutes and a quarter of an hour.

Mr. D. E. Hoste, successor to Mr. Hudson Taylor, in a life acknowledged to be extremely full, always made time for a deep and full prayer-life. He gave prayer priority in his life because he deemed it most important. But he did not arrive immediately at the mastery of his time. "It is easy to waste time," he wrote. "The missionary after breakfast may sit down to read the newspaper, or let time slip by in another way. But this cannot be done in business life. I have found the need of much watchfulness and self-discipline in this matter during my years in the interior. . . . A sensitive conscience about the use of time needs to be maintained."

Study Priorities. Much time which is not actually wasted, is spent on things of only secondary importance. A fool has been described as a man who has missed the proportion of things. Some of us have the unfortunate habit of being so engrossed in the secondary that we have no time left for the primary. We give such undue attention to petty details that matters of major

importance are squeezed out. Especially is this the case where prayer is concerned, and our adversary will do all in his power to aid and abet. Check to see whether the essentially spiritual is receiving adequate time, or whether the best is being relegated to a secondary place by that which is good.

Our Lord indicated that the secret of successful living was to sacrifice the pearl of inferior value for the pearl of transcendent worth. Are you doing the most important things, or do you procrastinate, substituting the secondary which makes less stringent demands on you? Weigh up carefully the respective values of the opportunities and responsibilities which claim your attention. Omit altogether, or give a very minor place to things of little importance. John Wesley used to say, "Never be unemployed, and never be triflingly employed."

The Impelling Motive. To effect a radical change in our use of time so as to make more time for prayer will require strength of purpose and a deep dependence on the Lord's enabling. Not all of us naturally possess inflexible wills, but these may be reinforced for we may and should be "strengthened with might through His Spirit in the inner man."

The use of time depends largely on the pressure of motive. Are there motives sufficiently compelling to enable us to change the pattern

of our lives, to run counter to long-indulged habits of laxity in the use of time? Henry Martyn found it impossible to waste an hour in his translation work, through the vision of nations waiting for the truth which lay locked up in the book he was translating. The need of a lost world proved to be an impelling motive to redeem the hours. The driving force in the life of our Lord was revealed in one of His incidental sayings, "I do always those things that please Him." And for Him there were always twelve hours in the day. There might not always be time to eat, but always He made time to pray. There will always be time for everything that is within the will of God.