

WATCHMAN NEE

Tell Him

Living Stream Ministry

TELL HIM

by Watchman Nee

CONTENTS

1. Tell Him
2. Prayer
3. What Is Prayer
4. A Prayer For Revelation
5. The Principle Of Praying Three Times
6. Prayer And God's Work
7. Burden And Prayer
8. The Key To Prayer
9. Praying According To God's Desire
10. Questions And Answers Concerning Prayer
11. The Lord's Prayer
12. Prayer

CHAPTER ONE

TELL HIM

CWWN, The (Set 1) Vol. 18:

Notes on Scriptural Messages (2), Issue No. 34

Scripture Reading: Matt. 14:1-12; Mark 6:30-32

The Lord Jesus is a person in whom men can most easily confide. He allows others to tell Him anything. The Bible records many instances in which the Lord spoke to men. But it does not record many instances of men speaking to Him. To my knowledge, there are only two passages of Scripture which talk about this. The first is in Matthew 14, where John's disciples came to tell the Lord something. The second is in Mark 6, where the Lord's own disciples came to tell Him something.

These two passages of Scripture show us two different pictures. One is a sad picture; the other is a happy picture. One picture shows us that John the Baptist's disciples realized that their teacher was dead and had come to a tragic end. What a sad thing this was! After John's disciples had buried their teacher, they came to tell Jesus about it. The other picture shows us the Lord's twelve disciples being sent to preach the gospel, heal the sick, and cast out demons. This was a happy experience, and the disciples came and told the Lord about it.

The Bible records many instances in which the Lord spoke to men. But it does not record many instances in which men came to the Lord to tell Him something. Our Lord is a Lord in whom men can confide. Men can easily tell the Lord what they want to say. Any words can be told to Him. From these two passages, we can see the Lord's sympathy for us. Many times we encounter sufferings. Many times we have joy. Many times we need someone to share our sorrow or joy, but we are unable to find someone. Sometimes when we tell others, they do not listen. If we encounter a difficult or unsolvable problem, we want to tell others, but they may think that it is an unimportant matter. It is something very important and crucial to us. But when we tell others about it, they ignore us. Sometimes we tell others about something very joyous, but they do not understand and share our joy. At

other times we feel depressed, but others cannot share our depression. Sometimes others may have had similar experiences and have the ability to feel our sorrow or joy, but they do not want to share our feelings. They already have enough joy or sorrow of their own, and they are unable to bear the joy or sorrow of others. They cannot feel what we feel. Sometimes we hope to find someone to whom we can tell our sorrows and joys. It is hard enough to find someone who will listen to us. It is even harder to find someone who will sympathize with us.

Many times we think that the Lord is great. Even though our Lord is great, He does not neglect the small things. We may think that what we tell Him must also be something great, or else He will not listen. Little do we realize that our Lord never neglects the small things. There is nothing that is too small for the Lord to listen to. He is willing to listen to everything. He is willing to listen to everything concerning us. He was willing to listen to His own disciples, and He was willing to listen to John's disciples. The disciples of John had followed their teacher for a long time. One can imagine the affection there was between them and John. When their teacher was killed, how could they not be brokenhearted? The Bible does not say that they complained about Herod, nor does it say that they cried all day long. They only buried John's body and then came to tell Jesus.

Some would bury their dead and then say, "Everything with me is over. I have lost all hope. He is dead, and I have lost everything. Everything I had left with him." Yet these are the times when we should draw near to the Lord. We can tell the Lord our sorrow. He will not rebuke us as being too worldly, too affectionate, or too attached to our dead ones. He knows our emotion, and He sympathizes with our heart. Some may have never experienced the sorrow of losing their parents, wife, brothers, or relatives. Nevertheless, when they lose something, they still feel as if their "John" has died, and they are left in despair and disappointment. They feel that the sky above them is no longer blue and that everything around them has lost its ardor; they find no way out. At such times it is most unprofitable to not bury the corpse, to cry, and to be sorrowful over it all the time. They should bury the corpse, like the disciples of John did, and go and tell the Lord. We should realize that when we have a thorough talk with the Lord and pour out our heart to Him, our intimacy with the Lord is one step further, and we know Him a little more. Intimate contact with Him at these times is hundreds of times better than our ordinary fellowship with Him. By these contacts we advance in life. We should bring

our problems to the Lord and tell Him about them. He can comfort us and help us. If a person has never shed tears before the Lord, if he has never shared his joy or sorrow with the Lord, and if he has never talked with the Lord about his private matters, he has never had any intimate fellowship with the Lord; he has never had any deep acquaintance with Him. We are not saying that you cannot ask others to pray for you or ask others to help you. We are saying that one can only be drawn closer to the Lord through telling Him everything.

Once John's disciples told the Lord of their sorrows, every problem dissolved. No matter what we tell Him, He will listen. No man can sympathize with everyone. But our Lord can sympathize with everyone. He is sympathetic to every one of our problems. He cares for the affairs of us all. In His heart, there seems to be no one else's affairs but ours. He bears all our sorrows. No matter how weak we are, He will sympathize with us and bear our sorrow for us. Our Lord is willing to bear all our anxieties and patient to listen to our speaking. Do not think that He will not listen. We should never be lazy in bringing our matters to Him. He is waiting for us to tell them to Him, and He is happy to listen to our speaking.

The Lord not only wants to listen to our sorrows; He wants to listen to our joys as well. We feel that it is relatively easy to mourn with those who mourn, but it is hard to rejoice with those who rejoice. Many people think that sympathizing with others means having pity on them. But having pity on someone is not sympathizing. To sympathize means that one can rejoice with those who rejoice and mourn with those who mourn. Sometimes we may see others bubbling over with joy and consider them to be too exuberant and frivolous. This means that we cannot sympathize with the joy of others. Paul said, "Rejoice with those who rejoice; weep with those who weep" (Rom. 12:15). This is to sympathize with others. The Lord is willing to be sorrowful with us, and He is willing to rejoice with us.

Mark 6:30 tells us that "the apostles gathered together to Jesus and reported to Him all that they did and all that they taught." The things they did were worth rejoicing about (cf. Mark 6:7; Luke 10:17). They went to the Lord and told Him all their joys. Many people go to the Lord when they have difficulties, but how many pray when they are rejoicing? When men are in sorrow, it is natural for them to ask the Lord for help. But when they are happy, it is easy for them to forget about telling the Lord.

Mr. Charles Spurgeon once went with a friend to the countryside for a horseback ride after he became exhausted from his preaching. At one point he was elated, jumped off his horse, and invited his friend to do the same. His friend was surprised at his move and asked him what he was going to do. He said, "Since God has given us such joy, let us thank Him at this very minute." The two of them knelt down by the road and prayed. We cannot have laughter all the time, but whenever we have joy, we should tell the Lord. We should remember the Lord at the moment of joy and share our joy with Him. The Lord never rebukes us for having too much joy. He cares for our feelings in a spontaneous way. Therefore, we should not forget to tell the Lord our joy.

What did the Lord do after He heard His disciples? He said, "Come by yourselves privately to a deserted place and rest a while" (Mark 6:31). The Lord did this in order to give them some rest. Many times we go privately to a deserted place to rest because we are unhappy and depressed. With no other recourse to take, we go to a deserted place all alone to rest. But such occasions frequently make us more distraught than before we went away. Our Lord did not merely tell the disciples to go to the deserted place to rest; He told them to go with Him. The Lord's presence gave them sweet rest and renewed their strength.

Our Lord is happy to listen to our sorrows, and He is happy to listen to our joys. He is the Lord to whom we can tell everything. Since we have such a Lord, why not tell Him all the secrets of our hearts?

CHAPTER TWO

PRAYER

CWWN, The (Set 3) Vol. 48:

Messages for Building Up New Believers (1), Chap. 10

Scripture Reading: John 16:24; James 4:2-3; Luke 11:9-10; Psa. 66:18;
Mark 11:24; Luke 18:1-8

I. PRAYER BEING A BASIC CHRISTIAN RIGHT

Christians have a basic right while living on earth today, the right to receive answers to prayers. The moment a person is regenerated, God gives him the basic right to ask of Him and to be heard by Him. John 16 says that God answers when we ask in the name of the Lord so that our joy may be made full. If we pray without ceasing, we will live a Christian life that is full of joy on earth today.

If we unceasingly pray, yet God does not unceasingly answer our prayer, or if we have been a Christian for years and God hardly or never listens to our prayers, there must be something seriously wrong. If we have been a Christian for three to five years without receiving one answer to prayer, we are ineffectual Christians. We are not just a little ineffectual, but very ineffectual. We are children of God, yet our prayers are never answered! This should never be. Every Christian should experience God answering his prayers. Every Christian should have frequent experiences of prayers being answered. This is a basic experience. If God has not answered our prayers for a long time, it means that there is surely something wrong with us. There is no way to deceive ourselves in the matter of answers to prayer. If it is answered, it is answered. If it is not answered, it is not answered. If it is effectual, it is effectual. If it is ineffectual, it is ineffectual.

We would like to ask every Christian: Have you learned to pray? Has God answered your prayer? It is wrong for prayers to be left unanswered, because prayers are not just a speaking into the air. Prayers are meant to be answered. Unanswered prayers are vain prayers. Christians must learn to have answered prayers. Since you have believed in God, your prayers should be answered by

God. Your prayers are useless if God does not answer them. You must pray until your prayers are answered. Prayer is not only for spiritual cultivation but even more for receiving answers from God.

Prayer is not that easy a lesson to learn. A person may be a Christian for thirty or even fifty years and yet not learn to pray well. On the one hand, prayer is not a simple thing. On the other hand, prayer is so easy that a person can pray as soon as he believes in the Lord. Prayer can be considered the most profound as well as the simplest subject. It is so profound that some still cannot pray well despite learning about it all their lives. Many children of God feel that they do not know how to pray even up to the time they die. However, prayer is so simple that the moment a person believes in the Lord, he can start praying and have his prayers answered. If you begin your Christian life in a good way, you will always receive answers to your prayers. If you do not have a good start, you may not have an answer to prayer for three or even five years. If you do not have a proper foundation, you will need much effort to correct it later. Therefore, once a person believes in the Lord, he must learn to receive answers from God for his prayers. We hope that every believer will pay attention to this matter.

II. CONDITIONS FOR PRAYERS BEING ANSWERED

In the Bible we can see many conditions for having prayers answered, but only a few of them are basic. We believe that if we meet these few conditions, our prayers will be answered. These few conditions are equally applicable to those who have prayed for many years. These are very basic conditions, and we should pay attention to them.

A. Asking

All prayers should be genuine petitions before God. After a brother was saved, he prayed every day. One day a sister asked him, "Has God ever listened to your prayer?" He was surprised. To him prayer was just prayer; why did anyone have to bother about whether or not they were answered? From that time on, whenever he prayed, he asked God to answer his prayer. He began to consider how many of his prayers were answered. He discovered that his prayers were quite vague and capricious. It did not matter whether God answered them, and it did not matter whether God ignored them. They were like prayers to God for the sun to rise the next day; the sun would rise

whether or not he prayed. He had been a Christian for a year, yet none of his prayers were answered. All that time he had been just kneeling and muttering words. He could not pinpoint what he had asked for. This amounted to not having asked for anything at all.

The Lord says, "Knock and it shall be opened to you" (Matt. 7:7). If what you are knocking on is just the wall, the Lord will not open the wall to you. But if you indeed are knocking on the door, the Lord will surely open the door to you. If you ask to go in as well, the Lord will surely let you in. The Lord said, "Seek and you shall find" (v. 7). Suppose that there are many things here. Which one do you want? You must ask for at least one thing. You cannot say that anything will do. God wants to know what you specifically want and what you specifically are asking for. Only then can He give it to you. Hence, to ask means to demand something specific. We have to ask. This is what it means to seek and to knock. Suppose you want something from your father today. You have to ask for the specific thing you want. If you go to a pharmacy for medicine, you must say exactly what medicine you want. If you go to a market to purchase vegetables, you must say what vegetables you want. It is strange that people can come to the Lord without saying what they want. This is why the Lord says that we need to ask and ask specifically. The problem with us is that we do not ask. The hindrance is on our side. In our prayers we need to speak what we need and what we want. Do not pray an all-inclusive prayer in a frivolous way, caring little whether or not it is answered.

A new believer needs to learn to pray. He needs to pray with a specific goal in mind. "You do not have because you do not ask" (James 4:2). Many people go through the motion of prayer without asking for anything. It is useless to spend an hour or two hours or even eight or ten days before the Lord without asking for anything. You need to learn to ask for something; you need to knock, really knock hard, at a door. Once you clearly identify the entrance and seek to go in, knock hard at the door. When you seek something specific, you will not be satisfied with just anything; you want that particular thing. Do not be like some brothers and sisters who stand up in the meeting to pray for twenty minutes or half an hour without knowing what they want. It is strange that many people have long prayers that do not ask for anything.

You must learn to be specific with your prayer. You should know when God has answered your prayers and when He has not answered your prayers. If it makes no difference to you whether or not God answers your prayers, it will

be hard for you to effectively pray to Him if you come across a difficulty in the future. Empty prayers will not be effectual in times of need. If prayers are empty when needs are specific, one cannot expect any solution for the problem. Only specific prayers can deal with specific problems.

B. Not Asking Evilly

We should ask, but there is a second condition to prayer; we should not ask evilly. "You ask and do not receive because you ask evilly" (James 4:3). We should ask God out of necessity. We should not ask mindlessly, unreasonably, or wildly. We should never ask carelessly or evilly for any unnecessary things according to our lust or our flesh. If we do, our prayers will be in vain. While God often gives us "superabundantly above all that we ask or think" (Eph. 3:20), asking evilly is a different matter.

Asking evilly means asking beyond one's capacity or real need. If you have a need, you can ask God. But you should only ask God to take care of your need. Asking beyond what you need is asking evilly. If you have a great need, it is not wrong to ask God to satisfy such a need. But if you do not have a great need, and you ask for it, you are asking evilly. You can only ask according to your capacity and need. You should never ask foolishly for this and that. Asking carelessly is to ask evilly, and such asking will not receive any answer from God. Asking evilly before God is like a four-year-old child asking his father for the moon in the sky. God is not pleased with evil asking. Every Christian should learn to confine his prayers within the proper scope. Do not open your mouth rashly and ask for more than you actually need.

C. Dealing with Sins

Some do not ask evilly, but God does not answer their prayers. This is because there is a basic barrier between them and God—sin. "If I regard iniquity in my heart,/The Lord will not hear" (Psa. 66:18). If a person has obvious and known sins in his heart, yet is unwilling to drop or part with them, the Lord will not answer his prayer. (Note the words in my heart.) The Lord cannot answer a person's prayer when there is such a great hindrance.

What does it mean to "regard iniquity in my heart"? It means to keep a sin in one's heart, being unwilling to part with it. Such a person knows something is a sin, yet he continues to cherish it. It is not only a weakness in conduct or

appearance but also a craving in the heart. This is different from the person spoken of in Romans 7. Although the person in Romans 7 has failed, he hates what he is doing. The person here, however, regards iniquity in his heart. This means he keeps the iniquity to himself and is unwilling and reluctant to let go of it. The sin remains not only in his conduct but also in his heart. The Lord will not hear such a one when he prays. So long as there is one sin, it will hinder God from answering our prayer. We should not keep any favorite sin in our heart. We should acknowledge all sins as sins and should put them under the blood. The Lord can sympathize with our weakness, but the Lord will not allow us to regard iniquity in our hearts. Our prayers will not prevail if we have removed all the sins outwardly but still regard them in our heart and are unwilling and reluctant to part with them. The moment we begin our Christian life, we have to ask for the Lord's grace to keep us from falling and to sanctify us in our conduct. At the same time, we must thoroughly reject all sins in our heart. We should not retain or regard any sin in our heart. Our prayer will be useless if sin remains in our heart. The Lord will not listen to such a prayer.

Proverbs 28:13 says, "He that covereth his sins shall not prosper:/but whoso confesseth and forsaketh them shall have mercy." You must confess your sins. You must tell the Lord, "I have regarded a sin in my heart. I cannot give it up. I ask You to forgive me. I want to forsake this sin. Please deliver me from this sin. Do not let this sin remain in me. I do not want it. I want to reject it." If you confess to the Lord this way, the Lord will forgive; you will receive forgiveness. Then, your prayer will be heard. You must never be loose in this matter. You will not receive anything if you do not ask. You also will not receive anything if you ask evilly. Even if you do not ask evilly, the Lord will not answer your prayer as long as you keep back a favorite sin and regard it in your heart.

D. Believing

A condition on the positive side for having prayer answered is faith. Faith is indispensable. Without faith, prayer is ineffectual. The story in Mark 11 speaks loudly of the need for faith in prayer. The Lord Jesus said, "All things that you pray and ask, believe that you have received them, and you will have them" (v. 24). We must believe when we pray. If we believe that we have received what we are praying for, we will have them. We hope that as soon as a person has received the Lord, even a week after his conversion, he will know

what faith is. The Lord said, "Believe that you have received them, and you will have them." He did not say, "Believe that you will receive them" but, "Believe that you have received them." We should believe that we have received what we asked for, and we will have them. The believing that the Lord speaks of here is followed by its predicate you have received. What is faith? Faith is believing that we have received what we have asked for.

Christians often make the mistake of separating believe from its predicate you have received. They place it before the expression you will have them. They pray to the Lord thinking that it is a matter of great faith to "believe...and you will have them." They pray to the Lord that the mountain be taken up and cast into the sea, and they believe that it will be so. They think that this kind of faith is great faith. However, this is to move believe away from you have received and to place it before you will have them. The Bible says that we should believe that we have received, not that we will receive. The two are definitely not the same. Not only do new believers need to learn this, but even those who have been believers for many years need to learn this.

What is faith? Faith is the assurance that God has answered our prayer. It is not the conviction that God will answer our prayer. Faith is when we kneel down to pray and say in an instant, "Thank God! He has answered my prayer. Thank God! This matter is settled." This is to believe that we have received. A person may kneel down and pray and may rise and say, "I believe that God will definitely hear my prayer." The expression will definitely hear is wrong. No matter how hard he tries to "believe" in this way, he will not see any result. Suppose you pray for a sick person and he says, "Thank God! I am healed." His temperature may still be high; there may be no change in his symptoms at all. But his problem is over because he is clear within himself that he is healed. However, if he says, "I believe the Lord will surely heal my sickness," he will probably need to try harder to "believe." The Lord Jesus said, "Believe that you have received them, and you will have them." He did not say that you will receive if you believe that you will receive. If you turn this around, it does not work. Brothers and sisters, have you seen the key? Genuine faith lies in the phrase It is finished. Genuine faith is thanking God for having already answered your prayers.

We need to say a few words more about faith. Consider the matter of healing. We can find some solid examples of faith in Mark's Gospel. There are

three sentences in the Gospel of Mark which bear special significance to prayer. The first relates to the Lord's power, the second to the Lord's will, and the third to the Lord's act.

1. The Lord's Power—God Can

Let us look at Mark 9:21-23, which says, "And He questioned his father, How long has this been happening to him? And he said, From childhood. And it has often thrown him both into fire and into water to destroy him. But if You can do anything, have compassion on us and help us. And Jesus said to him, You say, If You can. All things are possible to him who believes." The father said to the Lord Jesus, "If You can do anything...help us." The Lord Jesus repeated his word and said, "If You can." The Lord's "if You can" is a quotation of the father's "if You can." The Lord Jesus was repeating what the father said. The father said, "If You can do anything...help us." The Lord Jesus said, "If You can. All things are possible to him who believes." It was not a question of "if You can," but a question of whether or not he could believe.

When man finds himself in difficulty, he is usually full of doubt; he cannot believe in the power of God. This is the first thing we need to deal with. It may seem at times that the power of the obstacle is greater than the power of God. The Lord Jesus rebuked the father for doubting the power of God. In the Bible we seldom find the Lord interrupting a person as He did in this case. It seems that the Lord was angry when He said, "If You can." The Lord rebuked the father when the father said, "If You can do anything, have compassion on us and help us." What the Lord meant was, "How can you say, 'If You can'? What is this? All things are possible to him who believes. This is not a matter of 'if I can,' but a matter of whether or not you believe. How dare you ask if I can!" When God's children pray, they should learn to lift up their eyes and say, "Lord! You can."

Mark 2 records the incident of the Lord healing a paralytic. The Lord said to the paralytic, "Child, your sins are forgiven" (v. 5). Some scribes reasoned in their hearts, saying, "Why is this man speaking this way? He is blaspheming! Who can forgive sins except One, God?" (v. 7). In their hearts they thought that only God could forgive sins and that Jesus could not. They regarded forgiveness of sins as a great thing. But the Lord said to them, "Why are you reasoning about these things in your hearts? Which is easier: to say to the paralytic, Your sins are forgiven, or to say, Rise and take up your mat and

walk?" (vv. 8-9). The Lord was showing them that to man it was a question of whether or not one could do it, but to God it was a question of which was easier. For man, it is impossible for anyone to forgive sins or to ask the paralytic to stand up and walk. However, the Lord showed them that He could forgive sins as well as make the paralytic rise up and walk. Both forgiving and making the paralytic rise up and walk were easy for the Lord. The Lord was showing them that "God can." In our prayer we need to know that "God can" and that nothing is too difficult for the Lord.

2. The Lord's Will—God is Willing

It is true that God can do everything, but how do I know that He is willing to heal me? I do not know His will. Perhaps the Lord is not willing to heal me. What should I do? Let us look at another story. Mark 1:41 says, "And He was moved with compassion, and stretching out His hand, He touched him and said to him, I am willing; be cleansed!" Whether or not God can do something is not the question here; rather, it is a question of whether or not God is willing. No matter how great His power is, what does it matter if He is unwilling to heal? If God does not want to heal us, the greatness of His power will be of no consequence to us. The first question that has to be settled is whether or not God can, but the second question that also has to be settled is whether or not God will. The Lord said to the leper, "I am willing." The Old Testament tells us that leprosy is a very filthy disease (Lev. 13—14). Whoever contacted a leper was defiled. However, the Lord's love was so great that He said, "I am willing." The Lord Jesus stretched out His hand and touched and cleansed the leper! The leper entreated the Lord, and the Lord was willing to cleanse him. Can it be that the Lord will not heal our illness? Can it be that the Lord will not answer our prayers? We can all say, "God can" and "God is willing."

3. The Lord's Act—God Has Done

It is not enough for us to know that God can and God will. We need to know one more thing—God has done. We need to go back to Mark 11:24, which we quoted earlier: "All things that you pray and ask, believe that you have received them, and you will have them." This tells us that God has done something already.

What is faith? Faith is not just believing that God can and will do something but also believing that God has done something already. God has accomplished it. If you believe that you have received it, you will have it. If you believe and are confident that God can and will do a certain thing because He has given you a word concerning it, you should thank Him, saying, "God has done it!" Many people's prayers are not answered because they are not clear about this point; they still hope that they will receive something. However, to hope means to expect something in the future, whereas to believe means to consider something as being done. Genuine faith says, "Thank God, He has healed me! Thank God, I have received it! Thank God, I am cleansed! Thank God, I have recovered!" When faith is perfect, it will not only say "God can" and "God wills," but also "God has done."

God has listened to our prayers! God has accomplished everything! If we believe that we have received it, we will receive it. Very often, our faith is a faith that believes in what we will receive. As a result, we never receive anything. We should have the faith that we have already received. Faith is always a matter of "having been done" rather than of "will be done."

Consider a simple illustration. A person has just heard the gospel. If you ask him, "Have you believed in the Lord Jesus?", he may answer, "I have." You may then ask, "Are you saved?" If he says, "I will be saved," you know that he is not saved. Suppose you ask him again, "Do you really believe that you are saved?" If he says, "I will surely be saved," you know that he is still not saved. You may want to ask him again, "Are you really sure that you will be saved?" If he answers, "I think I will," his words do not sound like someone who is saved. If one says, "I will be saved," "I will surely be saved," or "I think I will surely be saved," there is no guarantee that he is saved. If the person says, "I am saved," he has the right tone. Once a man believes, he is saved. Any faith, if it is faith at all, believes in what has been accomplished. For example, once a person possesses faith at the time of his salvation, he immediately says, "Thank God, I have received." Let us lay hold of these three things—God can, God wills, and God has done.

Faith is not a psychological exercise. Faith is receiving God's word and believing with much assurance that God can, God wills, and God has done. If you have not received His word, do not take the spiritual risk of trying to tempt God. The exercise of psychology is not faith. Take illness as an example: All who are healed through genuine faith are not afraid of a medical checkup

(Mark 1:44). The result of a medical checkup for those who have experienced a genuine divine healing will prove that it was a genuine healing rather than something psychological.

When new believers learn to pray, they should pray in two stages. In the first stage they should pray until they receive a promise. They should pray until they receive God's word. All prayers begin by asking God for something. Such prayers can continue for a period of time, sometimes lasting for three to five years. One needs to keep asking. Some prayers are answered quickly, while other prayers continue to go unanswered for years. This is the period of time when one needs to continue to ask. The second stage begins from the time one receives a promise and extends to the time the promise is realized. It begins from the time one receives God's word and extends to the time His word is fulfilled. This stage is not for praying, but for praising. In the first stage one prays, but in the second stage one praises. In the first stage he prays until he receives a word. In the second stage he praises the Lord continuously until the word is fulfilled. This is the secret to prayer.

Some people only know two points about prayer: First, they pray on their knees for what they do not have, and second, they have it; God has given it to them. Suppose I ask for a watch from the Lord, and after a few days the Lord gives me a watch. There are only two events: being without something and having something. Some do not realize that there is another event in between these two—the event of faith. Suppose I pray for a watch and one day say, "Thank God, He has already heard my prayer." Although my hands are still empty, I am clear within that I already have the watch. Indeed, after a few days the watch arrives. We cannot be concerned with just two events: not having and then having. We must be concerned with a third event—an additional event between not having and having, in which God gives us a promise, and then we believe and rejoice over it. Perhaps we have to wait three days before we actually receive the watch. But in our spirit, we received it three days ago already. A Christian should experience this kind of receiving in the spirit. If a person never experiences this kind of receiving in the spirit, he does not have faith.

We hope that new believers will know what faith is, and we hope that they will learn to pray. Perhaps, you have prayed continually for three or five days, a month, or even a year, and still your hands are empty. But deep in your heart, you have a little assurance that the matter will eventually be

accomplished. At that time you should begin to praise God. You should continue praising Him until you have received the thing in your hand. Simply put, the first stage is to pray from nothing to having faith, and the second stage is to praise from having faith to actually receiving.

Why should we divide our prayers into these two stages? Suppose a person prays from having nothing to having faith. If he continues to pray, he may lose his faith. Once a person has acquired faith, he should begin praising. If he continues to pray, he may pray away his faith and not receive anything in the end. "You will have it" is an actual having in the hands, while "you have received it" is a having in the spirit. If the faith is already there, but the things have not materialized, one has to remind God with praise; he should not try to remind Him with prayer. If God has said that He will give us something, what else do we need to say? If we have the inward assurance that "we have received it," what more do we need to pray for? Many Christians have the experience that as soon as their prayer strikes faith, they can no longer continue to pray. They can only say, "Lord! I praise You." They have to keep their faith and praise, "Lord! I praise You. You have heard my prayer. I praise You because You answered my prayer a month ago." If you do this, you will receive. Unfortunately, some people do not have the knowledge. God has already promised them something, yet they still pray. In the end their prayer drives away their faith. This is a great loss.

The word in Mark 11:24 is too precious. In the whole New Testament, we cannot find another passage that explains faith as clearly as this one. "All things that you pray and ask, believe that you have received them, and you will have them." If a person sees this, he will know what prayer really is, and prayer will be a powerful tool in his hands.

E. Persevering in Asking

Another point about prayer which requires attention is that we must persevere in prayer and never stop praying. Luke 18:1 says, "They ought always to pray and not lose heart." Some prayers require perseverance. One has to pray to such an extent that the prayer seems to wear out the Lord and force Him to answer. This is another kind of faith. The Lord said, "Nevertheless, when the Son of Man comes, will He find faith on the earth?" (v. 8). This faith is different from the faith spoken of earlier, but they are not contradictory. Mark 11 says that we must pray until we have faith. Luke 18

says that we must ask again and again. We must have the faith to pray to the Lord persistently until one day He is compelled to answer our prayer. We should not care whether or not there is a promise. We should just pray until God is compelled to answer.

Many prayers are inconsistent prayers. A person can pray for one or two days. But after three months, he completely forgets it. Some people can pray about something only once. They cannot even pray a second time for it. Such ones care little whether they receive what they ask for. Please count how many of your prayers have been offered for the second time, the third time, the fifth time, or the tenth time. If you have forgotten your prayers, how can you expect God to remember them? If you do not have a heart to pray, how can you expect God to have a heart to listen? If you have forgotten your prayer, how can you expect God to remember it? Actually, you have never wanted what you asked for. A person will pray persistently only if he has a real need. One prays persistently only when he is pressed in the environment and driven by needs. In such cases he may persist for decades and still not give up praying, "Lord! If You do not answer me, I will not stop asking."

If you want to ask for something, you should trouble God about it. If you really want it, you must ask persistently until God hears you. You have to ask in such a way that God cannot do anything except answer your prayer. You have to ask until God is forced to answer you.

III. THE PRACTICE OF PRAYER

Every Christian should have a prayer-book, one a year. He should record his prayers as one keeps books in accounting. Each page should be divided into four columns. The first column should record the date he begins to pray for something. The second column should record the prayer item. The third column should record the date the prayer is answered, and the fourth column should record how God answers the prayer. In this way, one will find out how many things he asks God for in a year, how many prayers God answers, and what prayers are still unanswered. New believers should definitely keep such a book. But it is good for those who have been believers for many years to keep a prayer-book also.

The advantage of writing things down in a prayer-book is that it shows us whether or not God is answering our prayers. Once God's answers stop,

something must be wrong. It is good for Christians to be zealous in serving the Lord, but such service is useless if their prayers are not answered. If a man's way to God is blocked, his way to men is also blocked. If a man has no power before God, he will have no power before men. We must first seek to be a man of power before God before we can be useful before men.

A brother once wrote down the names of one hundred forty persons and prayed for their salvation. Some names were recorded in the morning and the persons were saved in the afternoon. After eighteen months, only two on the list remained unsaved. This is a very good pattern for us. May God gain more Christians who will keep a record of their prayers. I hope you will put this into practice. Write down the items you are praying for one by one and the items that God has answered. Any item that has been recorded in the book, but has not received an answer, should be followed up by persistent prayer. You should only stop if God shows you that a certain prayer is not according to His will. If He has not shown you this, pray persistently until you receive an answer. You should not be careless in any way. You should be strictly trained in this matter from the beginning. You should be this serious before God. Once you pray, do not stop until you receive an answer.

In using the prayer-book, note that some items require daily prayer while others require prayer only once a week. The schedule depends on the number of prayer items you have in your prayer book. If you have little to ask, you can pray daily over every item in the book. If there are many items, you can arrange for certain items to be prayed over on Mondays and others to be prayed over on Tuesdays. Just as men schedule their time to do other things, we should set aside a specific time every day for prayer. If our prayers are not specific, we will not need a prayer-book. If our prayers are specific, we will need a prayer-book. We can place this book in the same place we put our Bible and hymn book. They are to be used daily. After a period of time, count how many prayers have been answered and how many prayers have gone unanswered. It is a blessing to pray in a specific way according to a prayer-book.

As for the prayer that the Lord teaches us in Matthew 6, the prayer of 1 Timothy 2, and prayers for light, life, grace, and gifts for the church, these are general subjects for prayer. They should not be classified under ordinary items for prayer. We should pray for these great things every day.

Prayer has two ends—the person who is praying and the one who is being prayed for. Many times, the one being prayed for will not change unless the praying one is first changed. If the situation on their side remains unchanged, we need to seek after God concerning our side. We should say, "O Lord! What changes do I have to make? What sins have I not dealt with yet? What loves should I forsake? Am I really learning the lesson of faith? Is there anything else I should learn?" If there is a need for change on our side, we must change first. We cannot expect those who are being prayed for to change while there is no change at all on our side.

Once a person believes in the Lord, he must learn to pray earnestly. He must learn the lesson of prayer well before he can have a deeper knowledge of God and a fruitful future for himself.

CHAPTER THREE

WHAT IS PRAYER

CWWN, The (Set 1) Vol. 8:

The Present Testimony (1), Issue No. 1

Prayer is the most wonderful action in the spiritual realm; it is also the most mysterious matter.

Prayer is a mystery. After we present a few questions concerning prayer, we will see how mysterious prayer is. These questions are hard to answer. But this does not mean that the mystery of prayer is unknowable or that the questions concerning prayers are unanswerable. It merely means that those who have the answers are few. For this very reason, there are few who can accomplish works for God in prayer. It is not a matter of how much we pray, but a matter of how much we have prayed according to the principle of prayer. Only those prayers that are prayed according to the principle of prayer are worthwhile.

The first question we will ask is: why should we pray? What is the use of praying? God is omniscient and omnipotent. Why would He work only after we pray? Since He knows everything, why do we have to tell Him anything (Phil. 4:6)? Since He is almighty, why would He not do it by Himself? Why does He need us to pray? Why is it that only those who pray receive, and those who seek find, and those who knock enter (Matt. 7:7)? Why does God say, "You do not have because you do not ask" (James 4:2)?

After asking the above questions, we also want to ask: is prayer contrary to the will of God? What is the relationship between prayer and justice?

We know that God does not do anything that is contrary to His will. If it is His will to open the door, why does He have to wait until we knock before He will open? Why would He not open the door for us according to His will, without us knocking? He knows everything. If He knows that we need an open door, why will He wait until we knock before He opens? If the door should be open, if it is God's will that there is the open door, and if God knows that we need to have the door open, why does He not just open the door? Why

do we have to knock? What convenience does it give to God for us to knock on the door?

We also have to ask: Since God's will is to open the door, and since it is His will to have the door open, will God not open the door if we do not knock? Will He allow His will and His justice to be delayed and not accomplished just for the sake of waiting for our prayer? Will He allow His will of opening the door to be limited by our not knocking on the door?

If this is so, then God's will is restricted by us! Is God really omnipotent? If He is, why can He not open the door independent of us? Why must He wait for us to knock before He will open the door? Will God really accomplish His will? If He will, why does the opening of the door (His will) have to be controlled by our knocking on the door (prayer)?

After we have asked these questions, we will see that prayer is indeed a great mystery. Here we can see a principle of God's work. This principle is that God's people have to pray before God will rise up to work. God's will is accomplished by the prayer of those who belong to Him. The believers' prayers accomplish God's will. God will not accomplish His will alone; He will only accomplish His will when His people are sympathetic with Him in prayer.

If this is the case, prayer is nothing but the believers' act of working together with God. Prayer is the union of the believers' will with God's will. The prayer of the believers on earth is an utterance of God's will in heaven. Prayer is not an utterance of our own wishes, a plea for God to yield to our cry and fulfill our own wishes. Prayer is not to compel God to change His will by force or ask Him to do what He does not want to do. Prayer is the believers' utterance of God's will out of their own mouth; it is the believers' request before God that He accomplish His own will.

Prayer does not change what God has ordained. Prayer never changes anything. Prayer only accomplishes what God has ordained. On the contrary, the lack of prayer and the absence of prayer changes things. When God's people do not work together with God, He will allow many of the things ordained by Him to be delayed and not be fulfilled.

"Truly I say to you, Whatever you bind on the earth shall have been bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on the earth shall have been loosed in heaven" (Matt. 18:18). These two sentences are very familiar to us. But they refer to prayer. This is why following this, it says, "Again, truly I say to you that if two of you are in harmony on earth concerning any matter for which they ask, it will be done for them from My Father who is in the heavens" (v. 19).

This passage explains clearly the relationship between prayer and God's work. God in heaven will only bind and loose what His children on earth have bound and loosed. Many things that God should bind, He will not bind alone; instead He wants His people to bind them on earth first, and then He binds them in heaven. Many things that should be loosed, God will not loose them alone; instead He has to wait for His people to loose them on earth before He will loose the same for them in heaven. Every action in heaven is directed on the earth! All the moves in heaven are restricted on the earth! God is willing and happy to let all of His works be managed by His people. (I am not saying such words to fleshly persons, for they are not qualified to hear such words. We should listen carefully, lest the flesh comes in, and we offend God even more.) In Isaiah there is one passage which says the same thing as it says here: "Thus says Jehovah, / The Holy One of Israel and the One who formed him, / Ask Me about the things to come... / And concerning the work of My hands, command Me" (45:11). When we read this, we should be fearful and not allow the flesh to come in. God wants us—the humble human beings—to command Him! His work is carried out through our commanding. Whether it be binding or loosing, all of God's work in heaven is carried out according to our command on earth.

It must first be bound on earth before heaven will bind. It must be loosed on earth before heaven will loose. God will not do anything against His will. It does not mean that when something is bound on earth God will be forced to bind what He does not want to bind. God in heaven is binding what has been bound on earth because He has already intended to bind what has been bound first on earth. He is waiting all the time. When His people on earth bind what He in heaven intends to bind, He will follow their command and bind according to their requests. The fact that God is willing to follow His people's command to bind what they are binding shows that it has been God's will all along—which is eternal—to have such things bound.

Then why will God not bind such things sooner? Since it is His will to bind and since His will is eternal, why will He not bind what should have been bound long ago according to His will? Why does He have to wait until they are bound on earth before He will bind in heaven? Does it mean that He will not bind in heaven if it has not been bound on earth? Does it mean that when the binding on earth is delayed He will also delay the binding in heaven? Why is it that what God has desired to bind for a long time will only be bound when it is bound on earth?

If a believer can answer these questions, he will become more useful in the hands of God. We know that God created man for the purpose that man would become one with Him to destroy Satan and his works. Man has a free will, and God's intention is that man would will to join his will to God to oppose the will of Satan. This is the purpose of creation; it is also the purpose of redemption. The life of the Lord Jesus demonstrates this. Although we do not know the reason, we know that God would not act independently. If God's people would not sympathize with Him, if they would not subject their wills, and if they would not express their oneness with God in their prayer, God would rather delay and sit back, than do anything alone. God has shown great honor to His people to allow them to work with Him. Although He is omnipotent, He loves to be restricted by His children. Although He is zealous for His own will, He would rather allow Satan's evil plots to run rampant, if His people neglect His will and do not sympathize with Him or work with Him. Oh! If God's children will not be as cold as they are now, and if they will be willing to stop themselves, to submit to God's will, to care for God's glory, and to keep His word more, God's eternal purpose concerning what He intends to accomplish in this age will be fulfilled much sooner. The church also would not be in so much confusion, sinners would not be so stubborn, the Lord Jesus would return sooner, the kingdom of heaven would descend sooner, Satan and his hosts would be cast into the abyss sooner, and the knowledge of Jehovah would spread over the earth sooner. It is because believers care too much for themselves and do not work with God that so many enemies and so much lawlessness remain unbound, and so many sinners and so much grace are not loosed. Oh, heaven has been too restricted by men on earth! Brothers, God has entrusted so much to us. Do we trust in God in the same way?

How do we bind what God intends to bind? How do we loose what God intends to loose? The Lord's answer is to ask "in harmony." This is the

meaning of prayer, and this is the prayer of the Body. The highest point of our working together with God is to ask in one accord for God to accomplish what He intends to accomplish. The true meaning of prayer is for the praying one to seek for the accomplishment of the will of the One to whom he prays. Prayer is an indication that we want God's will. It is to say that our will is standing on God's side. Without this kind of prayer, there is no real prayer.

How many prayers today are for the expression of God's will? How many prayers are a setting aside of oneself and a seeking for the accomplishment of God's will? How many believers are there who truly work together with God in prayer? How many believers echo back to God His heart's desire daily before Him and empty out their hearts to seek after God and to ask for God to accomplish what they understand as God's will? Oh! Let us realize that a selfish heart is no less prominent in prayer than in other things! How many of our own requests are standing in the way! How numerous are our own wills, our own desires, our own plans, and our own cravings! With so many things of our own, it is difficult to expect that we can forget about ourselves completely in prayer and seek after God's will alone. One should, of course, deny the self in everything, and to deny the self in prayer is as important as to deny the self in our walk. We should know that as saved ones we should live unto the Lord who died and resurrected for us. Therefore, we should henceforth live completely unto Him, not reserving anything for ourselves. Among all the things in our life of consecration, prayer should also be one consecrated item. One great and common error in our thoughts is to consider that prayer is an expression of our needs and that prayer is but our cry to God for help. Little do we realize that prayer is to ask God to fulfill His need. We have to realize that God's intention is not for the believers to accomplish their will through prayer. God's intention is to accomplish His own will through the believers' prayer. This does not mean that believers should not ask God to fulfill their needs. It only means that believers should first understand the meaning and principle of prayer.

Every time believers have a lack, they should first ask whether or not such a lack will affect God. Is it God who ordains that they have such a lack? Or is it God's will that they be supplied? Only after one has seen that it is God's will that his needs be met, should he pray for God to accomplish His will (with regards to meeting his need). Only after one has understood God's will, should he pray for the will of God which he has understood and ask that God's will be accomplished. The question now is not whether or not you have a lack

or that you need to be supplied. The question now is whether or not God's will is accomplished. Although your prayer may be the same as before, your attention is turned to the accomplishment of God's will in such matters and not to the fulfilling of your own needs. Here lies the failure of many. Believers think that their own needs are the priority. Even after they have understood that God's will is to supply their need, they still pray tenaciously for their own needs. We should never pray for our own needs. There is only one legitimate prayer in the whole universe—only one prayer that pleases God—the prayer that asks for the accomplishment of His will. Our needs must be lost in God's will. Whenever we see God's will concerning our need, we have to drop our need immediately to seek after the accomplishment of God's will. A direct prayer for the fulfilling of needs (whatever kind of need it may be) is never the noblest prayer. All prayers for personal needs should only be made indirectly while one is seeking for the accomplishment of God's will. This is the secret to prayer, and this is the secret to victory in prayer.

God's goal is that we be filled with His will to such an extent that we forget our own interest. God wants us to work together with Him to accomplish His will. The way to work together with Him is to pray. For this reason He wants us to abide in Him to learn His will in various matters and then ask according to His will.

Genuine prayer is a real work. Prayers that are according to God's will and which ask for God's will to be done are a work of dying to the self. We must be weaned from the self completely, that is, we must not have a bit of self-interest. We must live completely to God and only seek after His glory. Then we will like what He likes, pursue what He pursues, and pray what He wants us to pray. Indeed, it is difficult enough not to have any self-interest in working for God. It is even more difficult not to have any self-interest in praying for God's will. One who would live completely to God must be so.

In the past generations, God could have done many things and, in fact, would have liked to have done many things, but because His children did not work together with Him, He did not perform them. It was not God who failed, but His people. If we review our entire personal life, we will see the same story. Had we only had greater faith and more prayer, our life would not have been so. Today God is seeking that His children would be willing to be one with His will and through prayer proclaim this kind of union. No believer has ever fully experienced the greatness of being completely one with God's will.

Once a servant of the Lord said well that "prayer is the railroad track of God's work." What tracks are to a train, prayer is to God's will. A locomotive does have great power and ability; it is able to run thousands of miles in one day. But if there are no tracks, the locomotive will not be able to move one inch. If it tries to move one inch, it will sink into the mud. It can go everywhere except where no tracks have been laid by man. This is the relationship between prayer and God's work. We do not need to explain in detail. The meaning of the illustration should be obvious to all. Indeed, God is almighty. No one can oppose His work. However, if you and I do not work together with Him in prayer or prepare the way for His will through prayer or by means of all prayer allow Him the possibility to move in many directions, He will not work and cannot work. Today locomotives cannot pass through many places in interior China. It is not because their engines have no power, but because there are no tracks on which to run. God wills and wants and even delights to do many things. But because His children do not express their sympathy with Him or pray to open the way for Him, He is limited. All of us who are fully consecrated to God should consider if we are daily limiting Him.

Thus, our most important work is to open the way for God. There is no other work more important than this. With God there are many possibilities. But if we do not open the way for Him, all will become impossibilities. Therefore our prayers in one accord with God should increase more than ever. Let us pray thoroughly—let us pray on all sides—so that God's will will reach all directions. No doubt our activities among men are important. But before God, working together with Him by prayer is even more important.

To pray does not mean to change the mind of heaven. It is the greatest mistake to think that God is hard and stubborn and that we must use prayer to battle with Him until He yields to us and changes what He has predetermined. Actually, any prayer that is not according to God's will is useless. Because God's will has suffered a hindrance from either men or demons, we come before God (as if we are wrestling with Him), asking that He execute His will and that His (predetermined) will not suffer through hindrances to His "permitted will." If we really desire God's predetermined will and if we have such prayer, such wrestling with God, and such resisting of any hindrance to His will, it will cause Him to carry out His predetermined will, not allowing anything of men or demons to (temporarily) come in the way. It is true that it appears that we are wrestling with God. Actually, this is

for the accomplishment of His will. It is not that we have a certain idea and are trying to change His will. For this reason, unless we really know what God's will is, we shall not be able to work together with God in prayer.

Dear brothers, once we know the true meaning of prayer, we have to be careful not to allow the flesh to speak anything. O dear ones, if God will send laborers by Himself, the Lord would not have told us to ask the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers! If His name will automatically be hallowed, if His kingdom will come without our cooperation, and if He will cause His will to be carried out on earth by Himself, He would not have taught us to pray this way. If He will come again without the need for the sympathy of the church, His Spirit would not have inspired the apostle to ask Him to come quickly again. If God the Father will automatically cause His believers to be one, there would not have been the need for the Lord to pray such a prayer. If the cooperation of God and man is not important, what is the point of Christ interceding in heaven continuously today? O dear ones, praying in sympathy with God is more important than doing anything else. He can only work on matters in which His children sympathize with Him. He is not willing to work where there has been no prayer, where He does not have His people's will in union with Him. This union of the wills is real prayer. Obtaining an answer to prayer is not the highest goal of prayer. The purpose of prayer is that we be one with God's will so that God can work. When our will is one with God, even though we may at times ask amiss and our prayer is not answered, God still receives the benefit because He is able to work as a result of our sympathy with Him.

CHAPTER FOUR

A PRAYER FOR REVELATION

CWWN, The (Set 2) Vol. 36:

Central Messages, Issue No. xx

Scripture Reading: Eph. 1:3-23

As we begin to know God, His work, and His eternal plan which He purposed in eternity, we begin to realize that the light in the book of Ephesians is abundant, high, and special. We need to realize one thing before the Lord: in the book of Ephesians, God caused Paul to pray two prayers. One prayer is found in chapter one, while the other is found in chapter three. The prayer in chapter one is basic, while the prayer in chapter three is for the building. In chapter one, Paul prayed that we would realize our relationship with the Lord. In chapter three, he wanted us not only to realize our relationship with the Lord, but also our relationship with the church. Now we will speak on Paul's prayer in chapter one.

In verse 17 Paul prayed, "That the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give to you a spirit of wisdom and revelation in the full knowledge of Him." Why did Paul want the believers to have a spirit of wisdom and revelation? He wanted them to have it in order to know the following things:

(1) "The full knowledge of Him" (v. 17). This is to know God Himself.

(2) "The hope of His calling, and what are the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints" (v. 18). This refers to God's eternal plan and the accomplishment of His plan. God's calling is for us to be His sons. These sons are His inheritance. God's calling was made before the foundation of the world. In the coming eternity, He will have an inheritance in the saints, an inheritance that is full of the riches of glory. In eternity past God made a decision, and in eternity future God will gain a result. These two things added together make up God's eternal plan and its goal. Paul was trying to make known to us the eternal plan of God.

(3) "The surpassing greatness of His power toward us who believe" (v. 19). This refers to the kind of power God uses today to reach His goal and accomplish His plan. Today this is related particularly to our relationship with Him and His eternal plan. We have to know these few things, and we must receive revelation before the Lord concerning them.

THE FULL KNOWLEDGE OF HIM

Paul asked God to give us a spirit of wisdom and revelation to know these three things. The first is to have "the full knowledge of Him." How wonderful it is that we can have the full knowledge of God.

While Paul was in Athens, he passed by an altar, upon which was inscribed, "TO AN UNKNOWN GOD" (Acts 17:23). In the minds of the Athenians, there was no way to know God. They could not know God by their mind or by their philosophies. They could hypothesize and speculate, but they still did not know God. This is like some men today who say that there is a God with their mouth, but who do not know Him.

Before the Lord Jesus died, He said, "And this is eternal life, that they may know You, the only true God, and Him whom You have sent, Jesus Christ" (John 17:3). He showed us what eternal life is. Eternal life is just the knowledge of God. The Ephesian saints knew God already; we cannot say that they did not know anything about God. They definitely knew God, because they had eternal life already. But Paul prayed in his first prayer that God would "give to you a spirit of wisdom and revelation in the full knowledge of Him." While the Athenians did not know God at all, this prayer reveals that a Christian, who has received eternal life and who has known God initially, may still not have a sufficient knowledge of God.

Immediately after we believe in the Lord, or a few years after we believe in Him, we cannot say that we do not know something about God. Yet we often depend very much on our mentality or our feeling to support us in our journey. We know a little about God. But other than the little that we know, we very much depend on our thoughts and ideas. If we do not have these thoughts and ideas to support us, we feel that our knowledge of God is not that sure and our reasonings not that sound. Therefore, we often need the support of our mind in maintaining our Christian walk. It seems that when we reach an impasse in our reasoning or in our doctrines, we cannot go on

without the help of our mind. At other times, we need feelings, feelings of warmth, feelings of joy, and feelings of exuberance. We need these feelings in addition to our knowledge of God before we can go on.

Yet one day God gives to us a spirit of wisdom and revelation. Then He reveals Himself to us in a fresh, special, and deepening way, so that we can say that not only do we know Him, but we have a full knowledge of Him. Then we can declare, "Now I know. I have seen, and I am clear. I do not need any other support. I do not need my mind or my feelings to support me anymore. I have the full knowledge of God now."

Perhaps some of you do not understand what I mean. I will illustrate with a few examples. A Christian once said, "I have been a believer for twenty-two years. During the first two years, I tried hard to believe. If you asked me if I was saved, I could tell you definitely that I was; no one could say that I was not saved. I knew that I was saved, and I knew that I had eternal life. But there was one problem: when others asked if I believed in God, I had to push myself very hard to tell them that I did. It seemed as if I was grasping hold of my believing, and that if I did not grasp on to it, I would become a non-Christian. My believing in the Lord was a tiresome believing. Did I believe in God? Yes, I did. But did I know Him? No, I did not. I needed many reasons and doctrines to support my belief. I could only be at peace when I found enough reasons to justify myself and when I found the right doctrines. Only then could I speak to others about my faith. I needed the support of my mind to be a Christian. But today I can testify that I am not like that anymore. I can say that I know my God. I do not need any reasons to support my faith, and I do not need any external evidence to defend my belief."

Brothers and sisters, this is what it is like when we truly know God. This kind of knowledge comes from revelation. It is not a matter of a lucid teaching, but a matter of inward knowledge. This knowledge is unlike the knowledge we had when we first believed, which had to be handled with much care, like a cup full of water, lest it spill. Many people believe in the Lord Jesus in a way that is like holding a cup full of water; they walk very carefully. They are afraid of hearing this or that. But one day God gives them a revelation, and they know Him; they begin to have the full knowledge of Him, and they truly see Him. Then they no longer have any problems. Brothers and sisters, if you truly know Him, the whole world's faith will not help you, and the whole world's unbelief will not shake you. Even if the arguments of others sound

reasonable, even if they say that the Bible is false, and even if there are more reasons to disbelieve than to believe, no reason can shake you. You can boldly declare, "I know inwardly. My knowledge is deeper than my mind. My knowledge is deeper than my feelings. Nothing outward can shake this inward knowledge of mine."

This is indeed a very crucial matter. Many Christians live by their feelings. If they feel happy and joyful, they say that God has been gracious to them. If they feel cold and indifferent, and if they lose their taste for everything, they almost say, "Where is God? It is hard to know Him!" Many people are sustained by their feelings. Once their feelings are gone, they waver and shake. They are this way because they do not have the full knowledge of God. God has to lead us to the point that we no longer care if we feel cold or hot, indifferent or excited, because we have known God. Our knowledge is deeper than our joy, our pain, or any feeling. Although outwardly there may be joy, pain, or other kinds of feelings, no feeling will change us, because we know Him inwardly. Brothers and sisters, only this kind of Christian will stand, and only this kind of Christian will not be shaken. God can only use this kind of person.

There was a brother who was told not long after he became a believer that there were mistakes in the Bible. He became so worried that he almost cried. He believed that the Bible was right, and he believed that there could not be anything wrong with it. But others pointed out to him several places which made him a little concerned. He worried about what would happen if the Bible was indeed wrong. He referred this matter to an older sister. He thought that she would definitely be concerned if she heard about some mistakes in the Bible because she loved the Lord and the Bible so much. But to his surprise, after he mentioned it, the sister acted as if nothing had happened. She only said, "It does not matter." The brother thought, "It does not matter to you. But it matters to me." He pressed on for an answer from the sister. Eventually, the sister replied that one's knowledge of God does not depend on such questions being answered. The brother thought, "Perhaps a person as old as you does not need to think about these questions. But I am a young person, and I have a mind that thinks. It is impossible for me to let this matter go so easily." Later that brother spent a year to study the Bible and investigate the allegations. Eventually, he found the evidence to prove that the Bible had no mistake and that it was right. He felt that a big rock was removed from his heart. Actually, had that brother known God, he would not

have needed to waste his time worrying. Brothers and sisters, if you have the full knowledge of God, even if more questions come, you will not have any rock in your heart, and nothing will bother you. Others may prove this and that, but Christians can prove one thing—God is God. We know our God. He is so real. Once we know, we know. If we have the full knowledge of Him, every problem will go away. It is not a matter of persuasive reasonings or clear doctrines, but a matter of revelation. Revelation is indispensable. We have to ask God to give us a spirit of revelation, so that we can have the full knowledge of Him. This knowledge is foundational to a believer, and it is quite necessary.

KNOWING GOD'S CALLING AND HIS INHERITANCE

Not only does God want us to know Him; He wants us to know His calling. He wants us to know what our calling is and what is His inheritance in the saints. In other words, not only does God want us to know Him, but He wants us to know what He is doing from eternity to eternity. He wants us to know His eternal plan and its purpose.

Ephesians speaks of things that span from eternity to eternity. It shows us God's eternal plan. Paul speaks of God's calling, His inheritance in the saints, and His power toward us who believe. This tells us that when a man truly understands God's eternal plan, and when he sees what God is doing from eternity to eternity, he will realize that God's eternal plan is related to everyone who is called. It is also related to the inheritance which God secures in the saints and to the power which He manifests among them. This shows us that God's eternal plan is not something abstract; it is not something unimportant, dispensable, or something that one can shuffle aside. Brothers and sisters, God's eternal plan has a great deal to do with every one of us. When we speak of God's eternal plan, do not think that this is something unfathomable or incomprehensible. No, God's eternal plan has a great deal to do with our calling; it has a great deal to do with God's inheritance, and it has a great deal to do with God's power and its operation in us.

Let us first consider God's calling and His inheritance, and then we will consider the power which is manifested toward us who believe.

First, let us look at God's calling. Verse 18 says, "The eyes of your heart having been enlightened, that you may know what is the hope of His calling."

I do not know how many Christians know that there is a hope before them. Many people only hope for heaven. Thank the Lord that there is heaven; it is true that there is heaven. But this is not the goal for which God has called us. This is not the hope of His calling. What then is this calling? Verse 4 says, "Even as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world to be holy and without blemish before Him in love." This is God's calling. God's calling is that we be like God. On the positive side, it is to be holy, and on the negative side, it is to be without blemish and blameless. Brothers and sisters, what a grand calling this is! If you have never been weak, and if you have never realized that you have erred, you will not realize how special this calling is. But if you know a little about how weak and worthless you are, and how wrong you have been, you will realize the preciousness of this calling. You will say, "Thank the Lord. You have called me to be holy and without blemish; You have called me to be blameless and to be as perfect as You are." Thank the Lord that one day the goal for which God has chosen us will be reached. It does not matter how weak and worthless we are today, and it does not matter how many defects and faults we have today. Thank Him that one day He will bring us to the point where we will stand before Him holy and without blemish as He is. This is what God has chosen us for, and this is what He has called us into. Since He has ordained this, He will surely accomplish it. Now we know the kind of hope we have before God. We have hope, and our hope is to be like God. God has chosen us and called us for this.

Second, let us consider God's inheritance in the saints. Verse 18 says, "The eyes of your heart having been enlightened, that you may know...what are the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints." What is the inheritance God has in the saints? The saints are God's inheritance; they are God's possession. This verse does not say that God has given the saints an inheritance. Rather, it says that the saints have become God's inheritance. Paul said that God has an inheritance in the saints. Such an inheritance is glorious. It is not only glorious, but in it are the riches of glory.

In Ephesians 1:5 and 11, the word predestinate is used. Verse 5 says, "Predestinating us unto sonship through Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the good pleasure of His will." This tells us that we were predestinated unto sonship. Verse 11 says, "In whom also we were designated as an inheritance, having been predestinated according to the purpose of the One who works all things according to the counsel of His will." This tells us that we were

predestinated to become His inheritance. There is a slight difference between verse 5 and verse 11, though the two are related.

God has an eternal plan which spans from eternity to eternity. His plan is to gain many sons. Many people do not realize how great the matter of sonship is. But we have to realize that God's goal is to have sons. God's plan involves sons. Galatians 4:6 says, "And because you are sons, God has sent forth the Spirit of His Son into our hearts, crying, Abba, Father!" This shows us that God has put the Spirit of His Son in us for the purpose of making us His sons. Hebrews 2:10 says, "For it was fitting for Him, for whom are all things and through whom are all things, in leading many sons into glory." This shows us that when God reaches His goal, many sons will be in glory. God is leading many sons into glory. His purpose is to gain sons. He calls these sons His inheritance. In Ephesians 1, God shows us, on the one hand, that He has predestinated us to be sons (v. 5), and on the other hand, He has predestinated us to be His inheritance (v. 11).

What is God's inheritance? God's inheritance means something that belongs to God. God has predestinated us unto sonship, and He has also predestinated us to be His inheritance. Every one of us belongs to God. Paul prayed that the eyes of our heart would be enlightened to know the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints. What is this glory? This glory is to be the same as God is and to glorify God. This is what God desires. He has chosen us to be His people, His inheritance, and His sons. May the Lord open our eyes to see what a glory this is!

Not only should we know Him, we should also know His work, His plan, and His goal. In order to have this knowledge, we need a vision. Without a vision, we will see little; it will be limited and temporary. Concerning spiritual works, we are often burdened with the little projects in our hands. We are happy when we see good results from our works, and we are sad when we do not see good results from our works. Our view is limited to a small sphere, and we do not see the greater things before the Lord's eyes. What we see is indeed trifling. We are like a small child with a ten dollar note in his hand; he is overwhelmed by the note. It is his total possession. Many times, our views are just as small; we do not see the eternal things. We have to realize that God's view is from eternity to eternity. He desires to open our eyes and deliver us from being narrow. Man is too narrow. We are too narrow, and the works in our hands are too narrow. God wants to deliver us from this narrow realm.

He wants to show us the hope of His calling and the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints. This is not merely a matter of man's need, but a matter of God's need. Why do we have to preach the gospel? We preach the gospel not only because man has a need, but because God has an even greater need. Do not think that the gospel of grace and the gospel of the kingdom are two different gospels. No, they are not two different gospels; they are one gospel from two different angles. On man's side, it is the gospel of grace. On God's side, it is the gospel of the kingdom. God wants to gather many people unto Himself and have many people to fulfill His purpose. For this reason, we should not base our work on man's view only, but on God's view. God wants to gain a people; He wants to gain men to glorify Himself. Our preaching of the gospel and our gaining of men are for the purpose of meeting this need of God. Hence, God's children need a vision, a vision of eternity. A vision will change our work, our view, and our Christian life. Once we see a vision, we can no longer remain in our trifling work. We cannot hold on to our past views and methods, and we cannot be concerned all the time with our trifling gains and losses.

Some brothers and sisters have heard of God's plan and purpose. But when they turn around to work and preach the gospel, they say, "I do not know how to relate my work to God's plan. When I become busy with my work and when my hands are on my work, I lose sight of what I have heard concerning God's eternal plan and purpose. His eternal plan and purpose fade away and disappear. While I was hearing about them, I was very clear. But within a short time I forgot all about them." We have to realize that what we hear can be easily forgotten, but what we see is not easily forgotten. It is easy to forget doctrines, but it is not easy to forget a vision. The question therefore lies in whether or not we have seen something, and whether the eyes of our heart have been opened. If God has opened the eyes of our heart, and if we truly see God's calling, His inheritance, His plan, and His purpose, we will spontaneously see that all our works, both great and small, must be related to God's plan. If they are not linked to His plan, they cannot be considered God's work.

We need God to open our eyes and give us a vision. This will be a great deliverance; it will deliver us from ourselves and from our narrow world. We will feel that as long as the work of eternity is not finished, it is impossible for us to rest. As long as God's eternal plan is not fulfilled, it will be impossible for us to be satisfied. The commitment of our heart, the burden on our

shoulder, and the work in our hands will be nothing less than what God wants to do. Even the moving of a little piece of stone should be toward the building of that one work which spans from eternity to eternity. May the Lord grant us grace to remain in this vision. How easy it is for us to lose sight of this vision. How easy it is for our work to come short of this vision. God does not necessarily want us to do great works. Yet whatever work we do must be within that great realm, must be joined to that great goal, and must be a part of that great work. It is hard to say if our life's work consists merely of the little that we are doing. But if this little is what God wants us to do, it is actually a great work because it is surely a part of the work which God is carrying out from eternity to eternity.

KNOWING HIS POWER

Ephesians deals with something that spans from eternity to eternity. On the one side, we see eternity past. In eternity past, God had a predestination, a plan, and a will. On the other side, we see eternity future. In eternity future, God will accomplish His own purpose and gain what He is after. In between the two eternities, within the span of time, what is He doing? What is He doing to accomplish what He determined to do in eternity past and what He will gain in eternity future?

Paul's prayer has two aspects, the subjective aspect and the objective aspect. On the objective side, he prayed that we would have the full knowledge of God and know the hope of His calling and the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints. On the subjective side, he prayed that we would know "the surpassing greatness of His power toward us who believe." After we have known God and His work from eternity to eternity, we will see this power within us, and only then will the subjective aspect begin. First we need the objective seeing, and then we need the subjective working. Many Christians have dropped one of these two sides; they have neglected altogether one of these two aspects. They think that they can put aside the knowledge of God and His eternal will, and make it their first priority to acquire power from God for themselves, so that they can be more holy, more victorious, and more spiritual in themselves. Their attention is on themselves and not on God. But God's focus is different: through our knowledge of Him and of His eternal purpose, He will work in us to the extent that we fulfill His eternal purpose. God works within us for the purpose of fulfilling His eternal will. All of our

personal victories and individual works are for the fulfillment of God's eternal goal.

Among God's children, many have reversed this order. Their attention is on personal things. They are concerned with their personal victories, their personal holiness, and answers to their personal prayers. This is true of those who do not have a seeking heart for the Lord. But it is also true of those who are seeking, who hope to go on properly before the Lord. Many times, they only desire that their personal problems would be solved before God. Their attention is on their personal problems. Their desire and hope are merely for God to deliver them and release them to live a peaceful and happy life. Many people are centered on themselves. Their lives revolve around themselves, and their attention is only on themselves.

It is true that God needs to work on us, and we need personal victories, holiness, power, strength, freedom, and deliverance. But there is more at issue than this. First, God wants us to see a vision and know the goal of His work, and then He wants to work within us to fulfill that goal. God's goal is not merely to grant us an overcoming life or a holy life. God's goal is not that small. God desires to show us His work which He intends to accomplish from eternity to eternity. Every redeemed person has a part in His plan, and God works according to the operation of the might of His strength for the purpose of fulfilling His eternal plan.

Hence, we must see one crucial principle: the subjective work is based on the objective seeing. The subjective power is based on the objective vision. First there is the vision, and then there is the power. First there is the objective, and then there is the subjective. If a man does not have a vision, he cannot expect God to work within him. Suppose a father asks a son to buy him something, and he gives him some money for that purpose. The father's goal is not to increase the money within his son's pocket. The father's goal is for the son to come back with the purchased goods. In the same way, God has given us power not for our personal spiritual enjoyment only, but for the purpose of reaching His goal. We must deal with this matter in a thorough way before the Lord. We may think that this matter is too broad. This matter is indeed great, but it is very much related to our spiritual future. Many people do not experience God's subjective work within them because they have never received a vision. All subjective work is based on the vision we have received from God. Vision comes first, and then subjective work follows.

First we see the vision, and then we have subjective work. First we know the hope of the calling and the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints, and then we know the surpassing greatness of His power toward us. May the Lord grant us grace to see that it is not enough for us to be servants in the house of God; it is not enough to merely perform some duties. We must be God's friends, those who understand His heart. We have to see, know, and have a vision; this vision must seize us and capture our heart to the extent that we realize before the Lord that God's work is our work.

One can only become useful before God when he sees a vision; he can only become useful when he knows the work of Christ within him and God's power within him. A vision allows us to see God's plan, while the power enables us to fulfill His plan. The vision causes us to understand God's plan, while the power causes us to carry out His plan. The apostle showed us that we must not only know the hope of God's calling and the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints, but we must also know "the surpassing greatness of His power toward us who believe." Not only must we know God, His plan, and His goal, we must also know the might of His strength. If God's power has not done anything in us, it means that we do not truly know God, and we do not truly know His plan and purpose. If we only know God and only know His plan and His purpose, without knowing the surpassing greatness of His power, everything is still objective; it is not subjective. This is why we need to know God. We need to know His plan and purpose, and we need to know the power of His resurrection.

Verse 19 says, "And what is the surpassing greatness of His power toward us who believe." This power is indeed great. It is so great that God must open our eyes before we can see its greatness. It is so great that even the Ephesian saints did not know its magnitude. It is so great that they could not fathom it by themselves; they needed Paul to pray for them, so that God would grant them a spirit of wisdom and revelation and open the eyes of their heart. We cannot say how great this power is. We can only say that it is great; it is greater than what we think and what we know.

Hence, we must never underestimate what is inside this earthen vessel. We have to realize that there is a treasure within this earthen vessel (2 Cor. 4:7). Do we believe this? There is a treasure within this earthen vessel. The treasure within this earthen vessel is so precious that even we ourselves are not clear how precious it is. On the one hand, we see that this earthen vessel is an

earthly tabernacle that will pass away. But on the other hand, we see the surpassing greatness of the Lord's power toward us. God's children must know what they received the minute they were regenerated. When a man is regenerated, he receives the Lord. The experience may only last a minute, but it takes thirty to forty years for a man to discover what he received during that one minute. The experience of that one minute passes away quickly, but a man needs thirty to forty years to continually experience the great gift that he received during that one minute, and for God to open his eyes to see such a gift. From that minute on, the surpassing greatness of God's power begins to work in him. Regeneration happens within a very short time. But those whose eyes are opened will agree that what they have is a life of eternity; this life will last for eternity, and there is a surpassing greatness to God's power. No child of God can fully comprehend the greatness of what he received at the moment of his regeneration. But blessed are those who know a little more than others do.

Our growth does not depend on how much power we receive from the Lord, but on how much we see concerning the power we received from the Lord. At the instant we were regenerated, God put such a treasure within the earthen vessel, but we need a whole lifetime to discover the greatness of this treasure. We need a whole lifetime to discover what kind of treasure this is. If a man sees no difference between the treasure he received on the day he was saved and the treasure he has ten or twenty years afterwards, he has not made any progress. Although he has lived ten or twenty years as a Christian, he is the same as a newborn baby. God desires that we see the surpassing greatness of His power toward us through the revelation of the Holy Spirit. Whether we are strong or weak depends on how much we see. Those who see are strong, and those who do not see are weak. The strong ones are not those who have received, and the weak ones are not those who have not received; we have all received. The question today is whether or not we have seen. God works within us not because we ask Him for this or for that. He has given us everything that can be given; everything is within us. Today we need to ask God to give us a spirit of wisdom and revelation so that we can see. Those who see have the experience. In the past, many saints experienced a spiritual breakthrough not by receiving a puff of power from God, but by waking up in themselves and exclaiming, "Thank the Lord, all these things are mine." They did not beg again and again for what they did not have. Rather, they saw that

they had everything, and they uttered thanksgiving and praise. Those who have never seen this do not know the surpassing greatness of His power.

How great is this power? Paul said that it is "according to the operation of the might of His strength." We should take note of the words "according to." We have to realize that the power which is toward those who believe is according to the operation of the might of His strength. In other words, the power that operates in the church is as great as the might of strength that operated in Christ. The might of strength which God operates in us is as great as the might of strength which He operated in Christ. There is no difference between the two. I do not know if you have seen this. If you have not seen this, you need to pray. You should not think that you are all right, just because you have read the book of Ephesians a few times and can memorize 1:19 and 20. Whether or not you can memorize them does not count; what counts is the revelation and the seeing. Paul prayed that we might see the surpassing greatness of God's power given to us. If we have not seen that the power in us is the same as the power that is in Christ, we still need to pray for the seeing. If the power that is manifested in us does not match the power that is manifested in Christ, we have to confess that there are still things we have not seen. We have to admit humbly that there are still many things we have not seen, and that God has to show them to us. But whether or not we have seen them, the fact remains: the power that is in those who believe in Christ is as great as the power that is in Christ. Thank the Lord that this is a fact. May the Lord open our eyes so that we would truly see. We do not ask God to transmit more power to us from the outside. We only need to ask God to help us discover and see more of what we have within us. If God opens our eyes and we see, we will praise Him for what we already have.

Now let us consider what this power has done. Paul said, "According to the operation of the might of His strength, which He caused to operate in Christ in raising Him from the dead." This power enabled Christ to be raised from the dead. Every time we consider resurrection, it is a precious thought to us. Resurrection means to be loosed from the pangs of death (Acts 2:24). Death cannot hold Christ. No one who went into death could ever come back alive. There has never been such a person. Everyone died throughout the past ages, went into death, and remained in death; they could not come out. But here was a man who came out of death. This One is our Lord. He said, "I am the resurrection and the life" (John 11:25). He is the life; therefore, those who believe in Him will never die. He is the resurrection; therefore, those who

believe in Him, though dead, will be raised up again. Everyone who went into death was imprisoned by death; no one could come out. Only one power was strong enough to enter death and come out of death. That power is the power of God. Brothers and sisters, when you see a man dying and you wish that he could live on, you will realize at that moment how great the power of death is. It is easy for man to enter into death, but it is impossible for him to come out of death. It is possible for man to refuse life, but it is impossible for man to refuse death. Satan's work comes through darkness and through death. But there is a power from God which can pass through death without being imprisoned by death; the authority of the devil cannot overcome it, nor can the power of Hades swallow it. This is resurrection. Resurrection is that which passes through death and which is not affected by death. This power is now within us. The power which raised Christ from the dead enables us to pass through death without being seized by death. This power enabled the Lord Jesus to be raised from the dead; it also enables us to resurrect from death.

This power from God not only raised Christ from the dead, but also seated Him "at His right hand in the heavenlies, far above all." Furthermore, it "subjected all things under His feet and gave Him to be Head over all things to the church." God made Christ the Head over all things to the church. Christ as the Head over all things is for the benefit of the church. This is why the church can receive the supply of power from the Lord. Brothers and sisters, the power within you is such a power. There is such a treasure within you. If you still say that you cannot make it to be a Christian, what more can God give to make you able? You should say to the Lord, "There is no need to give me anything anymore. You have done everything." This power is now installed within you. For a Christian, there is no unsolvable problem, and there is no unsurmountable temptation. The power within a Christian is the resurrection power; it is a power that transcends everything, that puts everything under Christ's feet. It is the same power that operated in Christ.

Paul was very careful in writing the book of Ephesians. He was afraid that we would be misled to think that this subjective work is something personal. Therefore, following the phrase "gave Him to be Head over all things," he added the words "to the church, which is His Body, the fullness of the One who fills all in all." The subjective work is not for individuals, but for the Body. God shows us that His plan for eternity is related to the church and not to individuals. It is the church that is involved with God's eternal plan. In eternity past, it was the church. In eternity future, it will be the church. Today

God's work is also the church. Everything has to do with the church, not with individuals. If power is manifested in you today, it is for the church, not for you alone. God wants the church, not individuals, to receive this power. By ourselves, we can never acquire this power. We have to ask God to be gracious to us so that we see the Body of Christ, and see that our life is only preserved in the Body. An isolated member is worthless. For life to be preserved means that the life within is not disrupted, and the life within others is not disrupted. If a blood vessel breaks, and the leakage of blood continues, the whole body will die. On the positive side, when the ears hear, the whole body hears. When the eyes see, the whole body sees. What one member receives is received by all the members. Hence, we have to learn to live in the Body. We have to learn to consider less about ourselves and learn to appreciate the church. We have to learn to go on together with all other children of God. We have to see that the Body is the vessel that preserves life. Paul said, "The church, which is His Body, the fullness of the One who fills all in all." Such a surpassing greatness of power is experienced by those who know the church. If a person does not see the church and does not deny himself, there is no way for the surpassing greatness of power to be manifested in him. Hence, when we speak of God's subjective work in us, the basic unit is the church, not an individual.

May God open our eyes so that we may truly see His work within us. This great power comes from our seeing; it does not come from any other means of grace. The basic issue is the revelation and seeing. It is useless to merely listen to doctrines. If we hear many doctrines, but do not have any revelation, we will not experience any power in us, and the doctrines we have heard will be like delinquent accounts, which can never be cashed or used. May the Lord deliver us from such delinquent doctrines, and may He grant us a spirit of wisdom and revelation so that we can truly see something.

THE NEED FOR REVELATION

We have seen something concerning Paul's prayer for the saints in Ephesians 1. There is one main point to this prayer: he hoped that they would receive a spirit of wisdom and revelation so that their eyes would be opened to see some things. The one thing Ephesians 1 speaks of is that all of God's works are finished. We do not need God to do more works, but we need to have the revelation concerning the works that He has completed. God has planned and purposed. Today God's children need to know His plan and His purpose. "He who comes forward to God must believe that He is" (Heb. 11:6). God is He

who is; He never changes. Today we need revelation to see God. The apostle prayed that God would grant us a spirit of wisdom and revelation in the full knowledge of Him who already "is," that we would have a full knowledge of His predetermined plan and have a knowledge of His accomplished works. Many people hope that God will make some new arrangements and do some new works in His plan. But the apostle showed us that God does not need to do this. He wanted us to see clearly that God already "is." It is not a matter of wishing God's plan to be this or that; God has arranged everything already, and we only need to see what He has arranged. We do not need Him to do one thing more; we only need to see what He has already done. Once we see, we will have a fresh experience. We need a spirit of wisdom to understand His work, and we need a spirit of revelation to know what He has done. Then we will become useful persons in God's eyes.

Paul showed us two parts to God's work. The first part was done before the foundation of the world. The second part was done on the cross. One has to do with His eternal plan, which was made before the foundation of the world. The other has to do with our fall and our failure, which were dealt with by Him on the cross. In eternity God had a calling, a selection, and a predestination. Everything He wanted was decided before the foundation of the world. He selected and predestinated, and no one can shake it. From the foundation of the world, man became fallen, and Satan entered in to damage God's work. But thank the Lord that there is the surpassing greatness of His power toward those who believe. There was the fall, but there was also redemption. There was death, but there was also resurrection. God has an eternal plan, and He also has a cross of redemption. It seems as if the eternal plan was damaged by man, but what the fall damaged, resurrection has recovered and brought back. The cross can break the spell of the fall, and resurrection can remove death. We can find God's work completed through the cross and through resurrection.

God's work is completed. None of us need to ask God to do one more thing for us. Some have said, "It would be wonderful if God had made an additional arrangement before the foundation of the world." But Paul said that His arrangement before the foundation of the world was perfect. We may say, "How wonderful it would be if God would do one more thing for us today." But God wants us to realize that everything has been completed on the cross and through resurrection. Today believers do not need to ask God to do anything more. What we need today is God's revelation. Paul did not pray for

God to do a little more work. He did not wish God would give us a little richer grace. He did not pray for God to manifest more of His power in us. He prayed that God would give us a spirit of wisdom and revelation in the full knowledge of Him, and that He would enlighten the eyes of our heart to see and know the hope of our calling, the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints, and the surpassing greatness of His power toward us. Paul was not praying for us to have more of Him, but for us to see the glory, the riches, and the greatness of the things we have received. What is lacking today is not God's work, but the revelation of His work. What we need today is not more of God's work, but to see more of His work. Paul's prayer in Ephesians 1 is for the saints to see what God has already done. He did not pray for God to give the believers more power; he did not pray for God to do more work. He prayed for wisdom and revelation. This wisdom and revelation will enable us to see what God has accomplished. The answer to this prayer is seeing. This is not a matter of whether or not God has a work. This is a matter of whether or not we have received the revelation. There is a great distinction here. Many Christians are hoping for this and that, as if God has never done any work on them or given them anything. But what is so special about Ephesians 1 is that it shows us that God has done everything; He has left nothing for us to do. God has accomplished everything in eternity past, on the cross, and in resurrection. There remains only one question today: do we see or do we not see? Whether or not God has worked is not the crucial question. Whether or not we have seen God's accomplished work is the crucial question.

Suppose a brother has a terrible temper (using a simple matter as an illustration), and he cannot overcome it once, twice, and three times. He wonders why God does not deal with his temper. It seems as if he puts some of the blame on God. Have you realized that his problem lies in the fact that he still hopes that God would do a work? He thinks that everything would be well if God moved His finger a little. But Ephesians 1:3 says that God "has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenlies in Christ." "Has blessed" means that it is done. God does not want us to ask Him to do anything more. He wants to open our eyes to see that He has done everything. Hallelujah! God wants us to see that He has done everything already. This is what Ephesians 1 shows us. We may pray, "God, why don't You give me more power so that I can chase away my bad temper and evil habits?" We may pray for greater power, but the Bible says that we do not need greater power; what we need is a spirit of wisdom and revelation in order to see the surpassing

greatness of the power within us. If God opens our eyes one day, we will see how great the power within us is. Then we will readily agree that there is nothing greater than this power.

Brothers and sisters, do you realize that the power of resurrection is God's greatest power? The Bible reveals one fact to us: resurrection is the peak of God's work. At the time of resurrection, God's work reached the peak. God wants to open our eyes to see that He does not need to do any more work. God's work in Christ had reached its peak; it is impossible to add anything more to it. As a consequence, in Ephesians 1, Paul did not ask God to do anything more. In his prayer, Paul did not expect God to do anything more. Thank and praise the Lord! God's work is completed. It is impossible to add anything to it. All that God wants to do is to open our eyes and show us a little. As soon as we see the kind of power that exists, it will be manifested in us.

Among God's children, many hope for a future salvation. To them, salvation may come tomorrow or next year. But God wants to show us an accomplished salvation. There is no need to wait for the future. To many, victory is something that belongs to tomorrow or to the future. The aspirations, hopes, and prayers of many people are for the future. But if we have the revelation, we will see God's accomplished facts. Revelation shows us what God has accomplished, not what He will accomplish. Many people hope for deliverance because they have certain weaknesses and failures in themselves. But if God opens our eyes, we will see that our weaknesses and failures were dealt with on the cross. When our eyes are opened, we will say, "God, thank and praise You because You have accomplished everything. Thank and praise You because You have overcome these matters already."

We treasure Ephesians 1 very much because it shows that forgiveness, redemption, and the receiving of the Spirit are all accomplished facts. It shows that everything is ours already, and that we only need one thing—revelation. Once we have revelation, everything will be in place. We are still so weak because we have not seen. We are still so useless because we have not seen. Even though the Lord Jesus was so powerful when He was on earth, we are so weak because we have not seen. The power which God has toward those who believe is the same power which operated in Christ. God has given us this power. The difference lies in the fact that we do not see as much as our Lord saw. Today the difference does not lie in the kind of power that we have or in the degree of power. The difference lies in our seeing. What

we lack today is revelation. Once we have revelation, everything will be all right.

This is why we repeatedly emphasize the need for revelation. Without revelation, nothing will prevail. We repeatedly emphasize the fact that it is useless to simply hear something; there must be the seeing. It is a matter of revelation, not a matter of doctrine. It will not do us any good even if we familiarize ourselves with and memorize all of Ephesians 1. But the minute we see, we become a different person. Paul prayed that "God...may give to you a spirit of wisdom and revelation" (v. 17). Other than the Holy Spirit, nothing will avail. Cleverness is worthless, and doctrines are useless. The Holy Spirit alone can open our eyes and grant us sight. When the Holy Spirit truly opens our eyes and gives us sight, we will immediately say, "Thank God that it is done." We should not expect God to give us greater power. We only need to see the greatness of the power God has already given us. A spirit of wisdom will make us understand, and a spirit of revelation will enable us to see. There is the need for wisdom, and there is the need for revelation. We need wisdom before we can understand and become clear, and we need revelation before we can see and comprehend.

Perhaps we have heard of God's eternal plan many times, and perhaps we have heard about the position of the church in His eternal plan. But when do we begin to be related to this eternal plan? Our revelation is the beginning. Revelation enables us to see God's arrangements and His accomplished work in eternity past, and revelation enables us to see what God has done on the cross. Revelation shows us the plan of eternity and the work of the cross, and revelation enables us to understand, see, and know the power that God has toward us. Revelation makes us a part of the church, and revelation henceforth makes us a useful vessel in the hand of the Lord.

Perhaps some of us are very familiar with this word already. But we need to be reminded once again before the Lord of the importance of revelation. We believe that God in heaven today is concerned for His revelation because He has already accomplished all that He wants to accomplish. The question today is how much has man seen. We do not need to ask for anything else. We should be like Paul, who prayed for himself and for the other brothers and sisters that God would grant us a spirit of wisdom and revelation. We have to humble ourselves before God and pray, "Lord, I want to see! I want to see!"

CHAPTER FIVE

THE PRINCIPLE OF PRAYING THREE TIMES

CWWN, The (Set 2) Vol. 37:

General Messages (1), Chap. 11

Scripture Reading: Matt. 26:44; 2 Cor. 12:8

A key to prayer is to pray "three times" to the Lord. "Three" does not refer literally to the number three; it merely signifies multiplicity. The Lord Jesus prayed to God three times in Gethsemane, and when God answered His prayer, He stopped praying. Paul also prayed three times to the Lord, and when he received an answer from the Lord, he stopped praying. Hence, all prayers have to take care of the principle of praying three times. This does not mean that we should pray once, twice, and three times and then stop. It means that we have to pray until we are through and until God has answered us.

The principle of praying three times is an important principle. Not only must we pay attention to the principle of praying three times in our personal prayer, but we must also take care of the same principle in the prayer meeting. If we expect our prayer to fulfill the ministry of church prayer and accomplish what God wants us to accomplish, we must keep this principle in mind.

The principle of praying three times means that we have to pray in a thorough way. We have to pray until we get through, until we are clear about God's will, and until we receive an answer from the Lord. In the prayer meeting we must never think that just because a matter has been brought up and a brother has prayed about it we do not need to pray about it more. Suppose a sister is sick, and we pray for her. After one brother has prayed, it does not mean that I do not have to pray more. No, after that brother has prayed, I can still pray, and another person can still pray. This does not mean that every matter must be covered by three prayers. It means that whoever has the burden should pray. Sometimes we need to pray five or ten times. The

important thing is to pray until the burden is released. This is the principle of praying three times. This is the key to success in our prayer meeting.

Our prayer should not be like grasshoppers, jumping from one place to another. We should not jump to a second thing before the first thing is thoroughly prayed over and then jump back to the first thing before the second thing is thoroughly prayed over. This kind of skipping prayer will not release the burden or receive answers from God. Such prayers are useless and do not fulfill the ministry of prayer.

In order to fulfill the ministry of prayer, we must have a burden to pray before the Lord. We are not setting up a law; we are merely laying down a principle. We have to know that burden is the key to prayer. If a man does not feel any burden to pray for a certain thing, he will not succeed in his prayer. In the prayer meeting, many brothers and sisters mention many things in prayer. But if you are not touched by those things, you cannot pray for them. Every brother and sister must come to the prayer meeting with a burden for prayer before they can pray. At the same time, we should not merely pay attention to our burden but to the burden of the other brothers and sisters as well. Suppose a sister has a husband who is giving her a difficult time, while another brother has incurred a sickness. In the prayer meeting, one brother may pray for the salvation of the sister's husband. After this, another brother may pray for God to heal the sick brother. Then a third brother may remember another matter. These prayers are isolated prayers; they are not according to the principle of praying three times. There has not been a thorough prayer in one matter before going on to another matter. In the prayer meeting, we have to watch to see whether the burden for prayer has been released. If the prayer burden for that sister has been released, we can go on to pray for the sick brother. But if the first prayer burden has not been released, we should not jump to the second or the third thing and pray for those matters. If the burden of the whole meeting is not released concerning a certain matter, we should not insert another prayer according to our personal feelings. We have to sense the spirit of the whole meeting and enter into the feeling of the whole meeting. Some matters are answered after one prayer. Some matters are answered after two prayers. Some matters require three or five prayers before the burden can be released. No matter how many prayers there are, the burden must be released before the prayers can stop. The principle of praying three times is to pray until the burden is released.

We have to note the difference between personal prayers and prayers in the prayer meeting. When we are praying by ourselves, we only have to take care of our personal burden. But in the prayer meeting, we have to take care of the burden of the meeting, and we must not care for our personal burden alone. Therefore, in the prayer meeting, we have to learn to sense the feeling of the meeting. Some matters only require one prayer; there is no need to pray anymore for them because the meeting has no more burden for it. But some matters require more than one prayer; they need to be prayed about over and over again. If a burden is not released, we should not pray for another matter. We can only change the subject when the burden is released. Only then can we pick up another burden from the Lord to pray. In the prayer meeting, we have to learn that when one prays for a matter, the second, third, fourth, and fifth person should also pray for the same matter. Even if one person can pray by himself or five persons can pray by themselves, when they come together, they may not be able to pray in one accord. The prayer of one accord is something that one learns. One person may know how to pray by himself, and five persons may know how to pray by themselves. But when they come together, they still need to learn a new kind of prayer; they need to learn to pray in one accord. Our prayer in the meeting is something that is learned; it is not something that we know how to do right from the beginning.

If two persons pray in one accord, God will answer this prayer (Matt. 18:19). This is not a small thing. We have to enter into others' feelings and know what the prayer of the church is. We have to learn to feel whether or not a prayer burden has been released. If we do this, we will know how to fulfill the ministry of prayer in the meeting.

CHAPTER SIX

PRAYER AND GOD'S WORK

CWWN, The (Set 2) Vol. 38:

General Messages (2), Chap. 41

Scripture Reading: Eph. 6:18; Ezek. 36:37; Isa. 62:6-7

ONE

God works according to certain laws and principles. Although He can act as He pleases, He does not act recklessly; He acts according to His preordained laws and principles. God is above all laws and principles; He is God, and He can act as He pleases. Yet we see a wonderful thing in the Bible. Although He is so great and can act as He pleases, He acts according to laws, and it seems as if He has voluntarily placed Himself under law and is willing to be governed by law.

What are the principles of God's work? One main principle of God's work is the need for man's prayer. He wants man to cooperate with Him in prayer.

There was once a Christian who was very experienced in prayer. He said that all spiritual work consists of four steps. In the first step, God intends to do something; there is God's will. In the second step, He reveals this will to His children through the Spirit so that they know His will, His plan, His desire, and His aspiration. In the third step, God's children return His will back to Him through prayer. Prayer is the echoing of God's will. If our heart is in tune with God's heart, spontaneously we will speak forth God's will. As a result God will accomplish His work in the fourth step.

We will not look at the first and second steps now. We will pay attention to the third step, which is returning God's will back to God. Please pay attention to the word return. All worthwhile prayers are a kind of returning. If our prayer is only for the fulfillment of our plans and wishes, it will not have any value in the spiritual realm. Only the prayers that are initiated by God and that echo what He has initiated have any worth. God's work is governed by prayers. God is willing to do many things, but He will not do them when His

people do not pray. He must wait for man to agree with Him before He will do them. This is a great principle of God's work, and it is also one of the most crucial principles in the Bible.

TWO

The words in Ezekiel 36:37 are most peculiar. God said that His purpose is to "increase them with men like a flock." This is God's ordination. He will surely accomplish what He has ordained. But He has to wait; He cannot accomplish it immediately. What is God waiting for? He said, "I will yet for this be inquired of by the house of Israel, to do it for them." God ordained that the men of the house of Israel be increased. Yet He had to wait for the Israelites to inquire of Him. Once the Israelites inquired of Him, He would fulfill it. God is determined to do something, but He will do it only after man has given his consent; He will not do it immediately. When God works, He does not work only according to the fact that He has a will; He also waits until there is a response from His children before He acts. This is a most amazing fact.

We must remember that spiritual work is a matter of God determining and His children agreeing. God initiates, and then His children agree. This is an important principle in spiritual work. God said, "I will yet for this be inquired of by the house of Israel." God's work required the Israelites to inquire. One day, when the Israelites truly inquire of the Lord, God will accomplish it for them. Brothers and sisters, this is the principle of God's work! God may initiate a work, but He will not accomplish it until we pray. From the time the church was formed, God has not done anything without the prayer of His children. From the time that there have been children of God, everything has been done according to the prayer of His children; everything is accomplished by the prayer of His children. We do not know God's reason for doing this. But we know that this is a fact. God is willing to place Himself in this position. He wants to carry out His will through the prayers of His children.

Another example can be found in Isaiah 62:6-7: "Upon your walls, O Jerusalem,/I have appointed watchmen;/All day and all night/They will never keep silent./You who remind Jehovah,/Do not be dumb;/And do not give Him quiet/Until He establishes/And until He makes Jerusalem /A praise in the earth." God wants Jerusalem to become a praise in the earth. How does He accomplish it? He appointed watchmen upon the walls to remind Him.

How should they remind Him? They should not be dumb, and they should not give Him quiet. We must not stop our reminding, and we must not allow God to become quiet. We have to pray until He answers and accomplishes His work. God has a will, and His intention is that Jerusalem would become a city of praise, yet He appointed watchmen on the walls of Jerusalem and charged them to pray. Only after they pray will He work. He asks them not to pray once but unceasingly. They have to pray unceasingly until God's will is accomplished. In other words, God's will is governed by man's prayer. God is waiting for us to pray. The content of God's will is determined by God alone; it is not determined by us, and we have no part in the determination of it. However, the carrying out of His will is governed by our prayer.

A brother expressed it very well when he said, "God's will is like a train engine, and our prayer is like the tracks of the train." The train can go many places, but it can only travel along the tracks. The power of the engine is very great, and it can go east, west, south, or north. Yet it can only go where the tracks are laid. God is not without power, yet He is controlled by man's prayer. All worthy prayers are prayers that pave the way for God's will. Hence, if we do not take up the responsibility of prayer, we will frustrate the accomplishment of God's will.

THREE

When God created man, He gave man a free will, so that now there are three wills in the universe. One is the will of God, the second is the will of Satan, and the third is the will of man. Man wonders why God would not destroy Satan quickly. But God would not do this. He wants man to join Him in dealing with Satan. God has His will, Satan has his will, and man also has his will. God wants man's will to be joined to Him; He does not want to destroy Satan alone. We do not fully understand, but we know that God wants to do it this way. He does not want to act alone; He wants man to cooperate with Him. This is the responsibility of the church on earth.

In order to do something, God must first put His will within us through the Holy Spirit. He will only accomplish something after we have echoed it in our prayer. God operates through this procedure. He works this way. He wants man's cooperation; He wants a will that is one with Him and that echoes Him. If God does everything without us, then man does not need to be here, and we do not need to know God's will. Yet every part of God's will needs someone to

carry it out, and He wants our will to become one with His will. The first step in carrying out His will is to pray out God's will and utter His will through our prayer. From this we see that prayer is a work. There is no work more important than this work because prayer is the speaking of God's will and the accomplishment of His will. Brothers and sisters, we have to know that God's will is uttered through our prayers. Therefore, prayers that originate from our self-will are useless prayers. Prayers that are according to God's will originate from God. He conveys His will to us through the Holy Spirit, and then we return the same thought to Him through our prayer. Prayers that are after God's heart have God's will as the starting point; man is merely the transmitting and responding organ. Prayer that originates from ourselves has no spiritual value.

In reading church history, we find that every great revival began with prayer. Prayer enables God to do what He wants to do. We cannot ask God to do what He does not want to do, yet we can delay what He does want to do. God is absolute, and we cannot change Him at all. We cannot ask God to do what He does not want to do, and we cannot ask Him not to do what He wants to do. However, if God needs a channel to carry out His will and we do not cooperate with Him, His work will be hindered on account of us. Hence, when we pray, we are not asking God to do what He does not want to do, and we are not asking Him to change His will. Rather, we are declaring God's will in prayer so that He can do what He intends to do. If we think that by begging desperately we can make God do what He does not want to do, we are wasting our energy; the effort is fruitless. If God does not want to do something, no one can make Him do it. We can only do one thing, and that is to pray for God to do what He wants to do. God will accomplish His work through our oneness with Him.

The descending of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost was prophesied a few hundred years prior to its occurrence, in the time of Joel. Yet many disciples had to pray before the Holy Spirit would descend on them. God had ordained it already, but there had to be men who prayed before it could be fulfilled. Although God can do everything alone, He loves to wait for man to pray before He does anything. God can do many things, but He is waiting for our consent. God is willing to accomplish many things, but He is waiting for our willingness. God is ready to do many things, but without our consent, He still has to wait. Brothers and sisters, although we cannot force God to do what He does not want to do, we can ask Him to do what He wants to do. We have lost

many spiritual blessings because we have not expressed God's will through our prayers.

It would be wonderful if we could engage ourselves exclusively in the work of prayer. God is waiting for man to cooperate with Him so that He can accomplish His work. Some Christians have asked why God does not save more sinners. Why does He not make every believer victorious? We sincerely believe that God would do these things, if there were men who first prayed for them. God is not reluctant to work. He is waiting for a group of people who will cooperate with Him. As soon as man cooperates with God, He will work. There is much spiritual work to be done, but God is waiting for His children to respond. Whether or not the work will succeed depends on how God's children pray. We should respond to God by consenting to work together with Him. He is waiting to bless us. The question is whether or not we will ask.

Those who do not know God will say, "If God wants to do anything, He can do it all by Himself. Why is there the need for our prayer? God knows everything. If we pray too much, we may tire Him out." We have to remember that man has a free will. God will not act contrary to His will, but neither will He take over man's will. If man does not pray for God's will, He has to wait. If He wants His will to be done on earth as in heaven, He can do it Himself. Why does He need the disciples to pray, "Our Father who is in the heavens...Your will be done, as in heaven, so also on earth"? (Matt. 6:9-10). If God wants His kingdom to come, He can do it Himself. Why is there the need for His disciples to pray, "Your kingdom come"? If God wants His name to be sanctified by all people, He can do it Himself. Why does He have to ask the disciples to pray, "Your name be sanctified"? The answer to these questions is that God does not want to do anything alone; He wants man's cooperation. God is powerful, but we have to lay the tracks. The more tracks we lay, the more God works. Therefore, our prayers should be like a railway network, the more the better.

FOUR

How should we lay the tracks for God's will? Ephesians 6:18 says, "By means of all prayer and petition, praying at every time in spirit and watching unto this in all perseverance." Our prayer should be by all means and at every time. We should have general prayers, and we should also have specific prayers. Many of our prayers are too loose and too careless; there are too

many loopholes. This is why Satan finds many opportunities to creep in. If our prayers are fine and careful, and if we cover everything in prayer, Satan will not be able to do anything.

Suppose a brother is about to travel to another place to preach the gospel. You should lay the tracks for him so that God's will can be fulfilled in him. If you only pray a few words for him and ask only that God bless him, protect him, and supply him, this prayer-net is too loose. If you want to pray for a person, you need to lay a very careful prayer-net for him so that Satan cannot creep in from any direction. How should you pray? You should start from the time he leaves his home. You should pray for his health, his luggage, and his train. You should pray for the time he will board the train, his food, and his sleep on the train, as well as the people he will meet on the train. You should also pray for everything he will encounter after he leaves the train and for the house where he will eventually be staying. You should pray for the neighbors and the things he will need while he is staying there. You should pray for the time of his work and everything related to him. After you have prayed for him in such a thorough way, Satan will find it very difficult to identify any loopholes from which to attack him. Hence, the work of prayer is a very practical work. Whoever is lazy, foolish, and loose cannot participate in the work of prayer. After we have earnestly prayed over all the aspects of a certain matter, we often find the matter eventually being accomplished.

There is still one lesson that we have to learn. Satan is full of deception, and we can never anticipate all the schemes that he has. It is impossible for us to pray over them one by one. We can only pray, "Lord, please deal with everything from Satan with Your precious blood." We must realize that the blood is the answer to all the works of Satan. Such a prayer is the best way to deal with Satan. He can never penetrate through these prayers to attack us.

Every time we pray we have to see three things. First, we must see to whom we are praying. Second, we must see for whom we are praying. Third, we must see against whom we are praying. Many times we remember only two of the three aspects; we remember that we are praying to God and for men, but we put Satan aside. In our prayer, we must not only know to whom we are praying but also against whom we are praying. We must not only know for whom we are praying but also that an enemy is out there to damage us. Our prayer is to God; it is for men, and it is against the devil. If we deal well with these three aspects, God will work for us.

Everyone who has a genuine desire to work for the Lord must set up a prayer-net so that God can work through him. God is not reluctant to work; He is waiting for men to pray before He will work. He is looking for some who will have a life of prayer. His will is waiting for man's prayer. There is often no predisposed intention to pray, yet something within urges you to pray. This means that some items of God's will are waiting for your prayer. When you have a burden to pray, and you pray accordingly, that prayer is according to God's will; it is the Holy Spirit who is urging you to pray a prayer that is according to God's will. When the Holy Spirit urges you to pray, you should pray. If you do not pray then, you will feel clogged up, and you will feel that something is left undone. If you continue to refuse to pray, you will feel more clogged up. If you insist on not praying to the end, the spirit of prayer and the feeling for prayer will become dull, and you will not be able to easily pick up the same feeling again later. You will have failed to pray according to God's will.

Every time God wants to put a burden for prayer within us, the Holy Spirit will first give us a feeling and a burden to pray for certain things. Once we have such a feeling, we should immediately pray conscientiously; we should pay a price to pray for that matter. Once we have the prompting of the Spirit, we will immediately have a burden in our spirit, and the burden will remain there. Once we pray, we will feel released, and the rock will be removed. If we do not pray for it conscientiously, we will feel that something is still there. If we do not pray for it, we will feel that we are not being one with God. If we are faithful to prayer and pray immediately after we have a burden, our prayer will not become a burdensome task but an easy and refreshing work. Unfortunately, many people quench the Spirit; they quench the feeling for prayer which the Holy Spirit has put within them. After a while, these feelings no longer come to them, and they are no longer useful vessels in God's hand. They can no longer accomplish anything for the Lord or execute God's will by prayer. Brothers and sisters, if we are this way before the Lord, having lost all feeling for prayer, we are probably in a very dangerous condition. We have lost our fellowship with God, and God can no longer use us for His work. We must be very careful with the feeling that the Holy Spirit gives to us. Anytime we have a burden to pray, we should immediately ask, "God, what do You want me to pray for? What do You want to do now? And what do You want me to pray about?" If we get through in our prayer with this one burden, the Lord

will entrust us with a second prayer. If we have not released our first burden, we will not receive a second burden.

We need to ask the Lord to make us a faithful praying person. Once there is a burden, we should release it immediately; we should express it through prayers. If the burden is too heavy and we cannot release it through prayer alone, then we need to fast. Anything that cannot be released through prayer can only be dealt with by fasting. Fasting can release the burden of prayer quickly; it can help us to unload our heaviest burdens. If we continue to engage ourselves in the work of prayer, we will become a flowing channel for God's will; He will come to us whenever He has something that He wants us to pray about. Brothers and sisters, God's will is always seeking an outlet; God is forever seeking men to be the spokesmen for His will. If many people are raised up to do this work, God will accomplish many things through their prayers.

CHAPTER SEVEN

BURDEN AND PRAYER

CWWN, The (Set 2) Vol. 38:

General Messages (2), Chap. 50

Scripture Reading: Jer. 33:2-3; 1 Thes. 5:19

ONE

Every child of God should have some God-given burden. No child of God can say that God has never given him or her a burden. However, burdens can only be received from God when our spirits are open to Him. An open spirit to God is the condition for receiving burdens from God. Having received a burden, we must learn to discharge it faithfully through prayer. When we have discharged the first burden, we will receive a second, and when the second is discharged, we will receive a third. Therefore, the most important thing is to open our spirits to God. We should say to God, "I open myself before You to pray." Because of our unfaithfulness we often do not receive any burdens; therefore, if we want to be those who bear God's burdens, we must be very sensitive and not reject any feeling that comes from Him. If we feel we should pray for something, we should do it immediately. At the outset, these feelings may be faint, but they will gain in strength as we go on. If we quench the Spirit and do not release our burden through prayer, we will lose our burden. Then the only way to recover it is to confess our sin and thereafter faithfully respond to every God-given feeling. As soon as we are moved to pray, we should pray. As we faithfully discharge the burdens we have, God will continually give us further burdens to bear. The sole reason for not receiving further burdens is that we have not released the burden we already have, and the unreleased burden has squelched us. If we unload the burden, a second burden will follow. A burden may be very faint at the beginning, but we must be faithful to it. If we are faithful to do this repeatedly before the Lord, God will continue to dispense burdens to us one after another. O brothers and sisters, if we hope to be of any use to God, we must recover our lost burdens.

Burdens are especially related to the work of God. Therefore, we must seek to do His will in everything and wait on Him in His work until He

communicates His burden to us. His burden is the manifestation of His will. The burden we receive is the very will of God, and it is also the means by which God manifests His will.

For example, God may give you a clear and strong burden to preach the gospel. If you go along with it and act according to God's will, the more you preach, the more the burden will be released. The burden may be heavy at the beginning, but the more you preach, the lighter the burden will become. However, if you fail to discharge your burden, it will weigh down heavily on your spirit, and you will feel its weight becoming heavier and heavier as time goes on. Eventually, your feeling will become numb, and you will no longer feel the burden. The life within will seem to perish, and there will seem to be a barrier between you and God. (This does not mean that you will eternally perish, as in the case of eternal perdition; it merely means that you will feel as if your life has ceased.) It will seem as if you can no longer touch God and that the burden has crushed you. All spiritual work issues from such burdens. If you try to work without a burden, your work will be ineffective. But if you work in accordance with the burden that is upon you, your whole being will be increasingly liberated as you advance. You may start off by having a heavy burden, but as you go on, the burden will be released, and you will be uplifted. The value of your work depends on the burden you bear in connection with it. Without a burden, there is no spiritual value to your work. But with a burden, there is spiritual value. Every time you work according to a burden, you will be refreshed and edified. As your load is discharged, you will be edified in the process. If you work without a burden, you will sense that you are laboring in vain and may even be conscious of reproof as you labor. In relation to all spiritual work, you should wait on God for His burden and then set out to discharge it in a conscientious way.

TWO

But this does not mean that we need to constantly look within to discover whether or not we have a burden. Among God's children, there is nothing more damaging than introspection. Let us bear this in mind—the most damaging thing is to turn our gaze inward. This may be even more serious than sin. Sin is readily recognized as such, but introspection is not detected so easily. An unsuspected disease is always more serious and damaging than an apparent one. If you were asked whether it is wrong to be proud, you would immediately answer that it is obviously wrong. If you were asked whether it is

wrong to be envious, you would know quite well that it is wrong. These flaws are obvious. But you can become introspective twenty times in a single day without any sense of wrongdoing. If you quarrel, you soon become aware that you have done something wrong; you quickly identify your sickness. But you can be introspective and be totally unaware of its evil. Looking within is the most hurtful thing in the Christian life. Many Christians are given to introspection, and they are living a life of false spirituality. Before doing any work, they stop and ask, "Do I have a burden for this? Is the feeling I have a burden or not? Is this a burden? What is a burden?" If a man continually asks these questions, he does not know what a burden is.

Suppose someone asks you to help him carry a table from one room to another. While you are doing it, do you wonder whether this is a burden? Would you say that it is not a burden if it were lighter and that it is a burden if it were heavier? No. As long as something is burdening you, it is a burden. Remember that a burden is what you know, not what you have to discover. If you have a burden, you know it. It is wrong to look inward to see whether or not you have a burden. A burden is known rather than found. It is of great importance to recognize this fact. There is no profit in introspection. The greatest damage a Christian can suffer comes from introspection; it will cheat you. It is not necessary to look for a burden day and night. If you feel that you should preach the gospel to someone and you stop to ask whether or not you have a burden, the opportunity will disappear while you are asking your questions. O brothers and sisters, it is unprofitable to look within. Whether or not you have a burden will be apparent—either you have a burden or you do not. In both cases you will know; there is no need to discover one. If you have to turn inward to find one, you do not have a burden. There is no need to ask anything. If you have it, you will know. If anything weighs upon you, that is your burden.

If you feel heavy within, you have a burden, and if you act in accordance with it, you will be liberated. Then you will be free to receive further burdens from God, and you will be edified in the process. All the work of God is done this way. The ministry of prayer is carried on this way. Prayer and work are inseparable. Without prayer, there is no work. Therefore, you have to learn to pick up burdens as well as release burdens through prayer. The Lord may put a certain matter within you and give you a burden for it. If you pray, it will be released, and you will be refreshed. But if you do not pray, you will be crushed beneath the burden. If you do not pray today, tomorrow, or the next day, you

will feel bothered whenever you think about it, and the burden will become heavier and heavier because you have not done what you are supposed to do. After setting it aside once or twice, eventually, you will not feel it anymore. If you repeatedly act contrary to your feeling, at a certain point you will not feel it anymore. You will lose touch with God and no longer be able to fellowship with Him. A barrier will develop between you and God because you have betrayed the burden and not acted according to God's direction. Every work has to be conducted with a burden, whether the work is directed toward God or toward men. At the same time, once you have a burden, you should act according to the burden. If you do not act according to the burden, you will become deadened because you have violated God's will. A burden is a necessary requirement in God's work. Once you have a burden you have to work accordingly.

THREE

While it is true that the burdens we have are from God and that our burden is God's will, it is also true that our knowledge mainly governs our burdens initially. There are exceptions. For instance, God may call certain things to our remembrance and may ask us to pray for them, or in the middle of the night God may call us to get up and pray for a brother in a remote place. These experiences do occur, but they are not common, and God does not do this kind of thing very often. Sometimes God cannot find anyone nearby, and He has to go to someone far away; however, these are exceptions. Under ordinary circumstances, God directs men according to their knowledge. This is why we say that knowledge governs a burden in its initial stage. However, after one has knowledge, it does not necessarily mean that he will have a burden. We may know about the condition and everything else related to certain brothers and sisters yet not have any feeling for them or be stirred up within. We have the knowledge, but we do not have the burden. Therefore, burden does not come ultimately from knowledge. Yet knowledge does govern our burden in its initial stage. For example, God may give you knowledge of certain matters and the burden to pray and help out the situation. In this way, the burden comes. A burden can be formed at the beginning through knowledge. Most burdens even have knowledge as their starting point. It is rare for God to start a burden without giving any knowledge of it. There are exceptions. Sometimes God may give you a burden to pray for a brother. He may be sick or he may be in difficulty, but you know nothing about it; you have not received any news from him. Yet God puts a clear burden within you

to pray for him. Perhaps after a few weeks or a few months, you may receive a letter from him and find that he was indeed sick and in difficulty. There are cases like this, but they are exceptions. They may happen once in a thousand times. Generally, burdens start from knowledge. Yet this does not mean that knowledge is burden.

FOUR

Since prayer is a Christian ministry and an important ministry, a question arises: When there is a heavy burden to pray, do we express it through words, or should we be quiet and silent? Can we just bear our burdens silently before God?

We believe that if God gives us a prayer burden, then He wants it to be uttered. If we have only a few disjointed words, we should express ourselves with these words. Burdens are released only through utterance. If we remain silent before God, the burden will not leave; rather, it will become heavier and heavier upon you. Brothers and sisters, in the spiritual realm, it is an amazing principle that utterance counts. God takes account not only of what we believe but also of what we say. He is mindful not only of the intents of our heart but also of the words in our mouth. Our Lord said to the Canaanite woman, "Because of this word, go. The demon has gone out of your daughter" (Mark 7:29). The few words the woman uttered caused the Lord to work. We may make a request in our hearts, but there is more effect in an uttered request. God seems to require that we speak what is in our heart. The Lord's prayer in the garden of Gethsemane was a crucial prayer, but it was a prayer with "strong crying" (Heb. 5:7). We do not insist on loud prayers. Sometimes there is no need to pray in a loud way. But if there is a heavy burden within, there should be a correspondence between the inner burden and the outward expression. If the burden within is not strong, loud prayers are nothing but noise. But if the burden within is heavy, it must be uttered with audible sounds. If we cannot pray aloud in our homes, let us find a place where we can utter our burden as the Lord did. At times He went to a deserted place (Mark 1:35) and at other times He went to the mountain (Luke 6:12). Even if we cannot go to the wilderness or the mountain, we should pray audibly even if it means praying in a low voice. The important thing is that our prayers have to be audible. If our burden is strong enough, we can find a suitable place to pray. God wants our burdens to be articulated. If we have not articulated our burden, the burden will remain. Some say that they pray

silently and that it matters little whether or not the burden is released. This is not true. If a man has not finished the work he has in his hands, he cannot go on to more work. In the same way, if our burden is not released, God cannot give us another burden. We have to discharge our burden with our words so that God can give us a fresh burden.

But very often our difficulty is that even when we are conscious of a burden to pray, we do not know how to pray when we kneel down. We know that something is weighing within us, but we do not know how to pray. There is a burden in our spirit, but we do not know what to pray. We need to realize that our burden is a matter of the spirit, whereas our comprehension of the burden is a matter of the mind. When our spirit touches our mind, we will understand the nature of the burden in our spirit. When the spirit and the mind touch, both will become clear. Some people feel that they have a burden but do not know what it is. This is because their spirit has not yet touched their mind. Therefore, when their spirit has a burden, their mind does not comprehend the burden. How can contact between the spirit and the mind be established? It is quite simple. If you want to find anything, how should you go about it? If it is to the west and you go east, how would you find it? You would have to circle the globe before you found it. The object may be only a mile away, but you would have walked around the globe before you found it. You should take the point where you are as the center and look around in a circle, moving out steadily from the center to the circumference, expanding the circle as you move. In this way, you can cover all four directions. This is the best way to look for things. When your spirit has lost touch with your mind, you should do the same thing. When you kneel down to pray, do not hold on tenaciously to one thing. That would be like walking in one direction, and you will not find what you are looking for easily. Pray for many things and from many directions. After praying a few sentences for one thing, you may feel that it is not the right thing to pray about. You should drop it and change to another subject. You may have to change your subject two, three, or four times. Or you may become clear after you come to the second subject. You may also have to mention five or six things before you feel that you have touched something that releases your burden; once you pray for this, your mind and your spirit become linked together. You should then pray specifically for that matter in order to release your burden. Once you pray this way, you will feel released, and when you have released your first burden, you will be ready to receive a second burden from God.

FIVE

Many Christians cannot be used by God in the prayer ministry because they are over-burdened. They have never released any of their burdens. God gives them a burden to pray, and they may know what it is; their mind and their spirit may be connected, yet they do not pray. Instead, they allow the burden to become heavier and heavier until they are so crushed that they cannot bear it any longer; the feeling for the burden will be gone, and they can no longer pray. Oh, brothers and sisters, the work of God will be seriously hampered if we do not have a free spirit to serve as instruments for His use. If we asked someone to help us with a certain job but found that his hands were full, it would be useless to seek his aid. In the same way, if we are weighed down by many burdens, how can God commit anything further to us? This is why we must release our burdens. The release of the burden will set us free, and God will be free to give us additional burdens. Without this, we will not be able to fulfill a ministry of prayer before the Lord. The ministry of prayer requires a liberated spirit. If we have a burden in our spirit and do not pray for it, we cannot go on to a second thing. If we have a burden but are not faithful to pray and take up the ministry of prayer before the Lord, we will feel heavy the first day, heavier the second day, and still heavier the third day. After a few more days, the burden will gradually go away, and the strength to pray will be gone as well. If we have a burden and do not pray, eventually it will cost us our prayer ministry. We must, therefore, devote time to fulfill our ministry of prayer. The best way to pray is to pray with two or more people; this will save us from being individualistic. Many people have not learned to pray together with others. In praying with others, we must not only pray with our mouths but listen with our ears. If we learn to pray in this way, the "spiral" prayer that we mentioned earlier, praying from the center to the circumference, will come into effect. Through prayer, we can release the burden that God has given us. Prayer frees our spirit and liberates our being. This will allow God to commit fresh burdens to us continually. Today God needs the cooperation of His church on the earth, and we can cooperate with Him through prayer. May there be a way for the working out of His will!

CHAPTER EIGHT

THE KEY TO PRAYER

CWWN, The (Set 2) Vol. 38:

General Messages (2), Chap. 51

Scripture Reading: Matt. 7:8; Isa. 62:6-7

Prayer is a matter of great importance in the spiritual life of a Christian. Every true Christian realizes this and prays. However, even though some of the Lord's children spend time praying over many matters, they do not seem to get through in prayer. It seems as if they have not found the way to pray. This is because they have not discovered the key.

In whatever we do, we must first have the key, the secret. If we want to enter a room and the door is locked, we will not find the way in unless we possess the key. Suppose we need two people to carry a table through a door. Some may do it without a problem; but others may do it awkwardly, bumping and banging it in a vain effort to get it through the door. The size of the table and the width of the door is the same; the only difference is with the people who are carrying the table. Some have the key to carrying the table, while others do not. People who have found the key do things well; they are able workers. Once a person gets the key, he can do things twice as fast as others do, while those who do not have the key labor in vain. The same principle applies to prayer. Matthew 7 speaks of principles relating to prayer, one of which is, "He who seeks finds" (v. 8). Seeking requires effort. Anyone who looks in a half-hearted, leisurely manner will probably not find anything. Seeking involves patience and perseverance, and unless we are thorough, we will not find what we seek. If God does not answer our prayers, we must exercise patience and diligently seek the key to prayer. God answered the prayers of many of the saints in the past because they had the key to prayer. By reading the biography of George Müller, the one who founded a number of orphanages, we can see that he was a man of prayer; throughout his entire life, he was always receiving answers to prayer. George Müller had discovered the key. Many earnest Christians pray at great length; they pray wordy prayers, but they do not receive answers from God. In prayer, words are essential, but

our words must be to the point; they should be words that touch the heart of God and move Him so that He has no alternative but to grant our requests. Words that are to the point are the key to prayer. These kinds of words match God's will, and He cannot but respond to them. Let us find the key to prayer from a few scriptural illustrations.

ABRAHAM'S PRAYER FOR SODOM (GENESIS 18:16-33)

When God made known to Abraham that He was about to execute judgment on Sodom and Gomorrah for their wickedness, Abraham waited before God. Then he began to pray for Sodom. He did not just open his mouth and say, "O God, have mercy on Sodom and Gomorrah!" He did not beseech God with great intensity, saying, "Oh, forbid that Sodom and Gomorrah should be destroyed!" Abraham laid hold of the fact that God is a righteous God (Gen. 18:25); this was the key to his prayer. In deep humility and with great earnestness, he proceeded to ask God one question after another. His questions were his prayers. As he proceeded in prayer, he stood steadfastly on the ground of God's righteousness. At length he said, "Oh let not the Lord be angry, and I will speak yet but this once: Peradventure ten shall be found there" (v. 32). Following this he did not ask or make any more requests. After God answered, we are told that "the Lord went his way" (v. 33). Abraham did not try to hold on to God; he did not try to go on praying. He returned to his place. Some people may think that Abraham should have continued beseeching God and that he should not have stopped with just ten people. However, the Scriptures show that Abraham knew God, and he knew the key to prayer. He heard the Lord say, "The cry of Sodom and Gomorrah is great, and...their sin is very grievous...the cry of it...is come unto me" (vv. 20-21). If there were not even ten righteous people in a city, what kind of a city was it? The Lord loves righteousness and hates lawlessness (Heb. 1:9). He cannot cover sin and refrain from judgment. The destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah was the awful consequence of their sin, and it was the manifestation of God's righteousness. When He overthrew those cities, He did no injustice to a single righteous person; He "rescued righteous Lot, who had been oppressed by the licentious manner of life of the lawless" (2 Pet. 2:7). Abraham's prayer was to the point, and it was answered. There was no unrighteousness with God. He did not "slay the righteous with the wicked" (Gen. 18:25). We worship and we praise Him.

JOSHUA'S INQUIRY ABOUT THE FAILURE AT AI (JOSHUA 7)

When the children of Israel attacked the city of Ai, "they fled before the men of Ai. And the men of Ai struck some of them, about thirty-six men; and they pursued them from before the gate unto Shebarim and struck them on the slope. And the heart of the people melted and became like water" (Josh. 7:4-5). After such a mighty triumph at Jericho, why did the children of Israel suffer such a dire defeat at Ai? The only thing that Joshua could do was to prostrate himself before God, seek after God, wait on Him, and inquire into the cause of the defeat. Joshua was grieved on account of the danger that Israel had fallen into, but he was grieved more by the dishonor that was brought to the name of the Lord; therefore, he inquired, "What will You do for Your great name?" This was the key to his prayer. He honored the name of God. His concern was for what God would do for the sake of His own name! When Joshua came to this point, God spoke. He said, "Israel has sinned....Thus the children of Israel are not able to stand before their enemies....I will not be with you anymore, unless you destroy that which was devoted to destruction from among you" (vv. 11-12). God was concerned for His own name and could not tolerate sin among His people. He heard Joshua's prayer and instructed him to discover and do away with the sin that had caused the trouble. After Joshua was clear about the reason for Israel's defeat, he rose up early in the morning to deal with the matter and discovered that the trouble was Achan's sin of covetousness. When Israel had dealt with this sin, their defeat was turned into victory. To tolerate and hide one's sin is to cause God's name to be blasphemed and to give Satan occasion to attack God's people. Joshua did not just open his mouth in undiscerning zeal and plead with God to save His people and make them victorious once again. The dishonor that was brought upon God's great name grieved him, and his plea reminded God to take up the matter for His own name's sake. His prayer was to the point, and it brought an answer from God. Joshua had to first find the reason for failure. He had to discover the sin and deal with it before glory could be given to Jehovah the God of Israel.

DAVID'S INQUIRY ABOUT THE THREE-YEAR FAMINE (2 SAMUEL 21:1-9, 14)

"Then there was a famine in the days of David three years, year after year; and David inquired of the Lord" (v. 1). David did not simply open his lips and pray, "O God, this famine has lasted three years; we beseech Thee to have mercy on us. Take this famine away from us and grant us a rich harvest this year." No, David did not pray in that way. "David inquired of the Lord." He sought to find the cause of the famine. David's inquiry was to the point; he touched the key. God said, "It is for Saul, and for his bloody house, because he slew the Gibeonites" (v. 1). God will not tolerate the sin of breaking a vow, and David had to deal with this sin. After he dealt with this, the Word of God records that "God was entreated for the land" (v. 14). David possessed the key to prayer; his prayer was to the point, and his prayer brought God's answer.

THE PRAYERS OF THE LORD JESUS

(JOHN 12:27-28; MATTHEW 26:39-46)

The prayers of our Lord were always perfect, and they always touched the key to prayer. When He refused to see the Greeks who sought Him, He said, "Now is My soul troubled; and what shall I say?" (John 12:27). He turned the matter over carefully and thought, "What shall I say? Father, save Me out of this hour." No, He knew He could not pray in that way. He realized, "For this reason I have come to this hour" (v. 27); therefore, He prayed, "Father, glorify Your name." This prayer was answered immediately. "Then a voice came out of heaven: I have both glorified it and will glorify it again" (v. 28). If this is the way the Son of God, as the Son of Man, prayed to God on the earth, how dare we on the impulse of the moment open our lips and utter rash prayers! It is essential that we learn the key to prayer.

That night in the garden of Gethsemane our Lord Jesus was exceedingly sorrowful, even to death. How did He pray under those circumstances? "My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from Me; yet not as I will, but as You will" (Matt. 26:39). He possessed the key to prayer. He had no fear of death, and He was not without His own will. But He did not choose to take His own will; He wanted to take the Father's will. So He prayed a second time, "My Father, if this cannot pass away unless I drink it, Your will be done" (v. 42). He prayed a third time, "saying the same word again" (v. 44). When He was utterly clear concerning the Father's will, He said to His disciples, "The hour has drawn near....Arise, let us be going" (v. 45-46). If our Lord as a man on the earth mastered the key to prayer and set Himself aside in order to seek

after God's will, how dare we randomly utter a few words in prayer and conclude we have discerned God's will!

THE PRAYER OF THE CANAANITE WOMAN

(MATTHEW 15:22-28; MARK 7:24-30)

When the Canaanite woman was in distress, she cried out in her need, "Have mercy on me, Lord, Son of David!" (Matt. 15:22). Was she earnest in prayer? Truly she was. But it is amazing that the Lord "did not answer her a word" (v. 23). The disciples seemed to be in sympathy with her because they said on her behalf, "Send her away, for she is crying out after us" (v. 23). But what did the Lord reply to them? He said, "I was not sent except to the lost sheep of the house of Israel" (v. 24). The Lord's reply gave the woman the key to approach Him. She saw that the Son of David was related only to the house of Israel, not to the nations. So she came and worshipped Him, saying, "Lord, help me!" (v. 25). She called Him "Lord," not "Son of David." She realized that only the house of Israel had the right to use that title, so she forsook the wrong ground on which she had been standing and addressed her prayer to Him as Lord. This prayer brought His answer: "It is not good to take the children's bread and throw it to the little dogs" (v. 26). The answer seemed so cold that it sounded as though the Lord was rejecting and embarrassing the woman. Actually, He was trying to show her where she stood so that she might know the meaning of grace. The woman saw her own place; she saw the Lord as well as His grace, and seizing the key to prayer, she said, "Yes, Lord, for even the little dogs eat of the crumbs which fall from their masters' table" (v. 27). This called forth the Lord's commendation, and He said to her, "O woman, great is your faith!" (v. 28). She had found the key to prayer, and spontaneously she had faith. In Mark 7 the Lord said, "Because of this word, go. The demon has gone out of your daughter" (v. 29). Her prayer was answered "because of this word." Her word touched the key to prayer. This is what we need to learn. Often we pray, yet our prayer seems to disappear like a stone dropped into the ocean; it goes away without any answer from God. We have not found the right key to unlock the door; however, we do not try to discover the reason that God has not answered our prayer. Brothers and sisters, how can we expect God to answer such foolish prayers? In all of our prayers we must first find the key; only as we do this can we expect to have constant answers from God.

Having looked at these illustrations related to prayer, bear in mind that as we pray we should heed the inner voice and not be governed by our circumstances, thoughts, or affections. When that still small voice within tells us to pray, when in the depths of our being we have a sense that we should pray, then we should pray at once. Circumstances should only be a means of driving us into the presence of God to wait on Him; they should not be our master, and we should not be hindered by them from praying. Our mind should only serve to organize our inner feelings, which should be then expressed in words; our mind should not be the source of prayer. Prayer is the expression of the inner feelings through the mind; it does not originate in the mind. Prayer according to the will of God is only possible when we are in harmony with His will; it is not an exercise of forcing God to oblige man's emotions. Unless our emotions are dealt with, it is impossible for us to pray; prayers will not have a way to be released. Once we are under the control of our emotions, we will pray in a natural way according to our subjective desires; it will be hard to pray according to the inner leading. Therefore, we must touch the key to prayer. Whenever we find ourselves praying ineffectively, fruitlessly, and insufficiently, we must ask the Lord for light and seek to discover the cause. As we inquire of the Lord, we will reach a point at which we feel that we have gotten through, when something within clicks, and a still small voice within says, "That's it!" We have found the key to prayer. As we use the key and pray on, we can be assured that God will answer our prayer.

Isaiah 62:6 says, "Upon your walls, O Jerusalem,/I have appointed watchmen;/All day and all night/They will never keep silent." These watchmen are men of prayer. They have to be on watch tirelessly in order to know if something is happening and cry out when it does. A man of prayer must be one who reminds the Lord continually. This is not the work of one individual or a few men; there is the need for a group of men to pray this way. "All day and all night they will never keep silent." These are companies watching together, and together they discover something, and together they pray unceasingly to God. Their prayers do not cease "until He establishes/And until He makes Jerusalem/A praise in the earth" (v. 7). We must persevere in prayer until the Body of Christ is built up. God needs our prayers. He wants us to have a spirit of prayer, the atmosphere of prayer, and the key to prayer. Brothers and sisters, let us arise and learn to pray. Let us seek the key to prayer so that we may meet God's need today.

CHAPTER NINE

PRAYING ACCORDING TO GOD'S DESIRE

CWWN, The (Set 2) Vol. 38:

General Messages (2), Chap. 59

Scripture Reading: 1 John 5:14; Psa. 119:147-148; Dan. 9

In Daniel 9 we should pay attention to two things concerning Daniel's prayer. First, a genuine man of prayer is not only one who comes before God continually but also one whose desires are fully blended into God's desires. In other words, his thoughts are fully one with God's thoughts. This is a very important principle in prayer.

Some prayers originate from our needs. Sometimes God answers these prayers, but He does not gain anything through these prayers. Psalm 106:15 says, "And He gave them their request,/But He sent leanness into their soul." What does this mean? This means that in the wilderness the Israelites prayed to God for the satisfaction of their lust, and God answered their prayer. He gave them what they wanted, yet they became weak before His eyes. Brothers and sisters, sometimes God answers our prayers to satisfy our needs. Yet these prayers do not satisfy God's desire. These prayers are of little worth.

There is another kind of prayer—one that originates from God's needs. It comes from God and is initiated by God. This kind of prayer is valuable. Those who have this kind of prayer must be in God's presence continually, and their desires and thoughts must be mingled with God's desires and thoughts. Because these ones live in God's presence continually, He shows them and touches them with His desires and thoughts. These desires and thoughts become the praying ones' desires, which in turn become their prayer.

We must learn to pray this kind of prayer. Although we are childish and weak, we must still come into His presence and allow His Spirit to mingle our desires with His desires and to lead our thoughts into His thoughts so that we

can touch and participate in His desires and thoughts. If we do this, we will understand something of God's way and demands on man. Brothers and sisters, the more we enter into God's desires and thoughts, the more we will understand these desires and thoughts. Eventually, His desire will become our prayer. These prayers are precious. Daniel joined himself to God's thoughts; he touched God's desire and will, and they became the desires of Daniel's heart. God's desires were imprinted in Daniel and became Daniel's desires. When Daniel prayed according to these desires, crying out or groaning because of these desires, they became God's desires. We must have this kind of prayer, a prayer that touches God's heart. More words are not needed, only more of a touching of His desires is needed. We should allow God's Spirit to lead us into His heart. We should spend time to learn this lesson. When we first begin to pray in this way, there is no need to say or consider much. Our heart should be calm and undisturbed. We can bring the things we have encountered into God's presence and consider them, or we can forget about these things and simply meditate on God's Word. We can remain in His presence, touching God in our spirit and allowing God to touch us in the spirit. Actually, we do not have to go to God to touch Him; we can simply wait on Him. While we wait on Him in this way, something will come to our attention, and we will gain something. Then we will touch God's desire. The greatest wisdom comes from this kind of waiting. In this way our desires are mingled with God's desires, and our thoughts are one with God's thoughts. Based on this, we can pray to God.

When we bring our desires and thoughts to God, He will imprint His desires and thoughts into us to the extent that they become our desires and thoughts. These prayers are the most precious of all prayers; they are the most weighty prayers. Brothers and sisters, we have to remember the Lord's Word, which tells us to pray this way: "Our Father who is in the heavens, Your name be sanctified; Your kingdom come; Your will be done, as in heaven, so also on earth" (Matt. 6:9-10). We should not just memorize these three sentences. They should afford God's Spirit the opportunity to bring our thoughts to God so that His desires and thoughts can be imprinted in us and become our desires and thoughts. When that happens, the prayers that we utter will be valuable.

The same thing can result in two different kinds of prayers. One kind of prayer originates from our own desire; we pray according to our own concepts and wishes. God may answer these prayers, but there is very little value to

these prayers. However, if we bring this matter to the Lord and His Spirit mingles our desire with His desire, leads our thoughts into His thoughts, and imprints His desires and thoughts into us, we will find ourselves having intense desires and thoughts. If God is grieved and sorrowful over man's condition of death, the same grief and sorrow will be imprinted in us, and we will have a desire to see man delivered from death. There will be a groaning within that will be turned into prayer. If God is grieved and anxious over His children's failures and this is imprinted in us, we will also have a desire to see that none of His children fall into sin or darkness. We will utter such prayers and supplications from within; we will confess our sins and ask for His forgiveness and cleansing of His children. One kind of prayer issues from man's own will, while another kind of prayer is based on the desire which comes as a result of the imprint of God's desire. These two kinds of prayers are different. Brothers and sisters, when we come to God and His desires are imprinted in us, these desires will become our breath and groaning. Prayers that are precious and weighty are those that are based on inward desires.

God has much work to do on earth; there are many things He wants to accomplish. We cannot pray according to our own feelings or thoughts; rather, we should come before His presence and draw near to Him and look to Him. We should allow Him to imprint us with the things that He wants to do on earth and turn them into our groaning. When we draw near to God, He may imprint the desire in us to preach the gospel. We will have a desire within to preach the gospel, and this desire will become a burden. When we pray according to this burden, there will be nothing but this burden in our groaning. Brothers and sisters, when we draw near to God in this way, He may reveal more of His desires, and more will be imprinted in us. When God imprints His desires into a person, he will turn God's desires into his own and pray accordingly. When Daniel went to the Lord, he touched something. When he prayed and groaned for what he had touched, the prayer became precious and weighty. It became something that sanctified God's name, something that brought in His kingdom, and something that enabled His will to be done on earth.

Second, we should also realize that this kind of prayer will shake the seat of Hades and affect Satan. Hence, he will frustrate such prayers. Any prayer that comes from God will inevitably touch the power of darkness. This will bring in the spiritual warfare. Our bodies, families, and everything around us will come under Satan's attack. Whenever we pray this way, we will become

vulnerable to Satan's attacks. He will attack until we cannot go on in our prayer. He will even try to stop us by nullifying our prayers and delaying their answers. A prayer may deserve immediate answer, yet it may still hang in the air. God answered Daniel's prayer, but Satan hindered the answer to his prayer for twenty-one days. Daniel went down on his knees and waited until the answer to his prayer arrived. Brothers and sisters, have you ever wondered why your prayers have not been answered quickly? Perhaps it has been less than twenty-one days since you prayed! Perhaps the throne has answered your prayer, but the answer is hindered and still in the air; there is the need for prayer on earth, the need for men to endure in the presence of the Lord, and the need for some to go down on their knees.

Brothers and sisters, if we come to God and remain calm before Him, giving up our thoughts to enter into His thoughts, we will see the great need for prayer, we will see that God is waiting for us to pray about so many things, and we will see that everything around can become the subject of our prayer. In fact the whole earth can become the subject of our prayer. We should not pray according to our feelings. We must mingle our desires with God's desires and allow God's desires to become our desires, groanings, and yearnings for the universe. God's desires cannot be released without first passing through man, and God's desires, when expressed through man's desires, will be opposed by the power of Satan. In order to fulfill God's desire, we have to pray, and in order to remove Satan's frustration, we have to pray. We have to exercise the authority of prayer and release what should be released and bind what should be bound. We should not pray according to our own desire; we should go to the Lord and pray according to the desire that He has imprinted in us. When God says that something is needed, we should say the same, and when He says that something cannot remain, we should also say the same. We should forget about ourselves and touch God's desire and express His desire through our prayer.

CHAPTER TEN

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS CONCERNING PRAYER

CWWN, The (Set 2) Vol. 38:
General Messages (2), Chap. 60

ONE

Question: Has God given us a full provision for our prayer?

Answer: Yes, God has given us a full provision in His Son through His Spirit. If we did not have a full provision from the Lord, we might withdraw from our privilege and duty to pray. Thank the Lord that He has fulfilled all of the requirements for drawing near to Him and living before Him. We can sum up the Lord's provision with two words: trust and help.

First, let us consider trust. Trusting means committing and having the boldness to depend with full assurance. Many things are included in this word. A trusting spirit is very crucial to prayer and the Christian life as a whole. If we waver before the Lord, and if we lack assurance and trust in Him, our life will suffer a fatal blow. Let us pay attention to a few portions of the Word:

Hebrews 10:19-22 says, "Having therefore, brothers, boldness for entering the Holy of Holies in the blood of Jesus, which entrance He initiated for us as a new and living way through the veil, that is, His flesh, and having a great Priest over the house of God, let us come forward to the Holy of Holies with a true heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience and having our bodies washed with pure water."

Romans 5:2 says, "Through whom also we have obtained access by faith into this grace in which we stand and boast because of the hope of the glory of God."

Ephesians 2:18 says, "For through Him we both have access in one Spirit unto the Father."

Ephesians 3:12 says, "In whom we have boldness and access in confidence through faith in Him." We do not come to God according to our worthiness. Christ holds our hand and leads us to God. It is the Lord Himself who recommends to God those who are washed by the blood and who are alive from the dead. We put Him on as our robe of righteousness. Hence, our trust is in Christ Himself.

True faith is based on one thing—Christ Himself. We have an absolute right to come to God. He Himself is our right to come to God. This is His provision. We can come to the Father at any time in His name. We do not have to come to the Father according to our condition or in our own name (this is impossible in any case). We come to the Father in the name of the Son.

Second, let us consider help. Blessed are those who come to God through trusting in the Lord! However, even though we have such a tremendous privilege, we may feel impotent, weak, foolish, and unable to pray. It is marvelous to have help from the Spirit.

Romans 8:26-27 says, "Moreover, in like manner the Spirit also joins in to help us in our weakness, for we do not know for what we should pray as is fitting, but the Spirit Himself intercedes for us with groanings which cannot be uttered. But He who searches the hearts knows what the mind of the Spirit is, because He intercedes for the saints according to God." Our weaknesses are most readily manifested in our prayers. Nothing exposes our spiritual weakness more than prayer. We know how difficult it was for the disciples to pray in the garden of Gethsemane; they could not watch and pray. But thank the Lord that we have the mighty Spirit as our help. We must trust in the indwelling Spirit to operate in us according to His power, because He is our help in our time of weakness and foolishness. Although we do not know how to pray, the Holy Spirit is in us; He knows the will of God and He will teach us to pray according to God's will. He will teach us to fellowship with God intelligently and bring us into the reality of fellowship. We should trust in the Christ in whom we believe and the Spirit who sustains us and helps us pray.

TWO

Question: Why is Satan doing everything he can to frustrate our prayers?

Answer: Satan will do anything that he can to cut off our fellowship with heaven. Consequently, he will pay any price to frustrate genuine prayer. We must be on the alert. He constantly attacks the prayers of the believers and the prayers of the church. He knows that once he prevails in his attack on prayers, he can rest in peace. Therefore, we must be watchful and on guard against Satan, particularly when we pray. We have to pay attention to several things when we deal with Satan's attacks:

(1) Satan will attack our faith in the Lord. He knows that as long as he can make us feel unworthy, weak, and lacking in faith towards the Lord, we will lose our heart to pray.

(2) Sometimes he attacks our body, mind, mentality, and other physical faculties. When we feel tired and enervated, we have no interest in praying. We must guard ourselves from these things. These things are surmountable. The Lord will take responsibility for the things that are beyond our power.

(3) Sometimes Satan will attack the time we have set aside for prayer, whether it is our individual prayer time or the prayer time of the church. Many people have similar experiences. Satan is very subtle in his deception. He either usurps the time of prayer, or he causes us to not pray genuine prayers. Sometimes we have the time to pray, but lack the life to pray.

(4) Sometimes Satan will frustrate us from having uninterrupted fellowship with the Lord. He will produce a barrier between us and the Lord so that we cannot contact Him. It is as if a cloud strangely appears between us and Him.

(5) Finally, Satan is determined to shut us up in darkness so that we do not see the need for prayer. He turns our focus continually to other things so that we suffer in our prayer life. We must never fall into Satan's trap. We have to look to the Lord, gather material for prayer, and pay more attention to the Lord's interest and needs. We have a great responsibility to pray. Consequently, we have to watch and pray.

THREE

Question: According to the Lord's Word, what kind of prayer should we pay attention to other than our personal prayers?

Answer: We should pay attention to corporate prayers, that is, the prayer of the church. When we talk about the prayer of the church, we do not mean that personal prayers are unimportant; we are not insensitive to the need of personal prayers. But there is a law in God's kingdom: Some things are impossible for an individual to do alone; they require a collective effort and mutual support. Mutuality is particularly necessary in the matter of prayer. Those who follow the Lord constantly realize the need for praying with other believers. Sometimes it is not enough for a person to pray alone. Particularly for matters as great as God's kingdom, the only prayer that works is one in which the whole church strives to pray. The Lord said, "My house shall be called a house of prayer" (Matt. 21:13). We can follow this with the phrase "whose house we are" (Heb. 3:6).

The Lord said, "Again, truly I say to you that if two of you are in harmony on earth concerning any matter for which they ask, it will be done for them from My Father who is in the heavens. For where there are two or three gathered into My name, there am I in their midst" (Matt. 18:19-20). Both fact and experience tell us that when we are gathered together in the Lord, there is more of the Lord's presence than when we are by ourselves. The Lord is in the midst of the church; He cannot be in the midst of individuals. (With individuals, there can be no "midst." The Lord can only be inside an individual. The portion of the Lord which is assigned to "in their midst" cannot be found in individuals.) When we truly are gathered together into the Lord, we will feel the broadening sphere of our prayer, and we will be much more empowered in our prayer-battle. Moreover, in our prayer meeting we can often experience the Holy Spirit revealing God's will to us, burdening us, and giving us utterance for prayer. We can, of course, say much more on the prayer of the church. But I will stop here and say only one important word: The prayer of the church cannot replace our personal prayers. At the same time, personal prayers will always come short of the prayer of the church; they are not on the same level as the prayer of the church.

FOUR

Question: What do we need to take care of in our prayer?

Answer: There are many things that we have to take care of in our prayer. Let me list them below:

(1) We must sustain a proper fellowship with the Lord in everything. We must bring everything in our daily life to the Lord because nothing in the Christian life is common or inconsequential. We should have a daily and spontaneous habit of fellowshiping with the Lord in everything (Phil. 4:6).

(2) We should petition again and again. The Lord loves to see men petitioning Him. He is a gracious Giver, and He wants man to pray. "But if any one of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all liberally and does not reproach, and it will be given to him. But let him ask in faith, doubting nothing" (James 1:5-6). "You do not have because you do not ask; you ask and do not receive because you ask evilly" (4:2b-3). Petitioning involves trust and hope. As long as the motive for our petition is pure, we can petition as much as we want.

(3) Our prayers should involve meditation and supplication, that is, going before the Lord to pray on behalf of others (Col. 4:12). Strictly speaking, this is participating in the fellowship of the Lord as the High Priest, because He is praying for His people and their needs all the time.

(4) We should persevere in prayer. The need for perseverance or earnestness in prayer does not mean that it is difficult for God to answer our prayers. Persevering in prayer means that we should clearly identify God's need before Him and persist in praying about it. If this is the case, why does not God answer us immediately? Why does He delay His answer? There are at least two reasons for this. First, God wants His people to have an adequate reaction to His deep longings and concerns. Second, certain necessities and circumstances have a need for persevering prayer. Satan has strongholds, and we have to offer up strong prayers before these strongholds can be torn down (Mark 9:28-29).

(5) We should have reigning prayers. We must be joined to the Lord on the throne (Eph. 2:6), who is the Lord over all, and we must pray according to the name which is above every name.

(6) We should have fighting prayers. We should deal with matters by exalting the victory of the cross through our prayers. The direction of our prayer should follow that of the Lord's victory (6:10-20).

(7) We should have faith in prayer. Under certain circumstances, the Holy Spirit will give men an inward assurance; they will know God's will. When this happens, their prayers will be answered immediately (Acts 9:40).

(8) We should be burdened for prayer. Prayer is like a spiritual travail for birth. It is fellowshiping with the Lord's suffering, fellowshiping with the Father's heart, and being in harmony with the Spirit's groaning until the day of glory (Gal. 4:19).

FIVE

Question: What is the central goal of prayer?

Answer: The central goal of prayer is for God to have a glorious church. The central subject of prayer is to prepare a glorious church for Christ, a church that will match Him. This is the revelation of the whole Bible and God's central goal, and we must pay special attention to it. This is also the Lord's desire. Before He was crucified, His prayer revealed this desire (John 17). At the same time, we can see the same desire in Paul's Epistles. This does not mean that we should pray less for other things; it merely shows us the central goal of all our prayers. Once we have this goal in us, we can raise other prayers to a higher level. If we see that the gospel not only brings men out of death and into life but also joins men in an unspeakably wonderful union with the glorious Christ, our prayer for the world will only increase; it will not decrease. Carrying this one step further, there is a great need today for the world to see the glory of Christ through the church. The church, through the Spirit, should convince the world that it is the channel through which blessing is brought to the world.

Finally, God wants us to enter into a more intelligent and deeper fellowship with Him. He wants us as His many sons to come to Him through His beloved Son, our Lord Jesus Christ. He wants many priests to accompany the High Priest, who is living forever to intercede for us, and to bear the work of supplication before Him. "And made us a kingdom, priests to His God and Father" (Rev. 1:6). "But you are...a royal priesthood" (1 Pet. 2:9).

CHAPTER ELEVEN

THE LORD'S PRAYER

CWWN, The (Set 2) Vol. 46:

Conferences, Messages, and Fellowship (6), Chap. 171

Scripture Reading: Matt. 6:10

God is waiting for the prayers of His children to bring His kingdom in. The Lord taught us to pray, "Your kingdom come." This age is important, but the kingdom age is more important. All the privileges and power we now enjoy are only a foretaste and pledge of the age to come. The fullness of God is manifested in the kingdom age. In the light of this we see the importance of "the Lord's prayer." (This prayer was not contested until the last century when it was said to be only a prayer for the tribulation saints.) God has commanded His people to pray for thousands of years, but He has given no instructions throughout the centuries concerning what we should pray about other than this one prayer. What is prayer? True prayer begins in the heart of God, is made known to the hearts of men, and is prayed back to God; then God answers. This is not merely a definition. We must understand the principle of God's work in the universe. God has a purpose, and He will not accomplish His purpose without the cooperation of the human will. Prayer is the only way we can put the human will on the side of the divine will. Prayer is the exercising of our will in order to declare that God's will will be done. Without our prayers God will do nothing. He makes known His will and puts prayer into our heart, but He waits for a response from our heart. Someone has said, "God's power is like the steam engine, our prayers are the rails." The steam engine is very powerful, but it cannot move without the rails. Our prayers make a way for God to come in. Prayer is always three-sided. It involves someone who is prayed to, someone who is prayed for, and someone who is prayed against.

The great trouble with prayer today is that we only ask, "Is my prayer according to God's will?" The question should not be, "Is it according to God's will?" but, "Is it God's will?" Prayer is for God to notify us of His will, and for

us to pray His will back to Him. God's will is the starting-point. He makes His will known, and we will that will in prayer. This is the cycle.

The Lord's prayer is not just a model for us, but a revelation of God's heart. For thousands of years He did not tell anyone what He was working toward, but in this prayer it is made known. This is a great revelation. "Your kingdom come; Your will be done, as in heaven, so also on earth." "Your will be done." Yes, but where? "On earth." This is the only place where God's will is not done. Genesis 3 tells us that Satan is bound up with this earth. God's kingdom can be brought in by the created will of man being in union with the uncreated will of God and seeking the displacement of the rebellious will of the devil. The kingdom means the sovereignty of God. Wherever there is the created will linked with the uncreated will, there is God's sovereignty and authority. When human wills express themselves in this way, God can move. He is waiting for this. We do not know how much prayer is needed, but there must be a sufficient spiritual force on earth to bring in the kingdom. Our prayer must not just be, "Your will be done in me." That is the starting-point; it must go on to "Your will be done on earth." Note that the will of God is connected with the kingdom. "Not every one who says to Me, Lord, Lord, will enter into the kingdom of the heavens, but he who does the will of My Father who is in the heavens" (Matt. 7:21). All we are and have must be set for the will of God. Only then can we pray effective prayers to drive a wedge into the power of the enemy. This is overcoming. God must have a few men throughout the nations who will persevere to bring in the next age. He must have a few who will hold the ground for God as to (1) ourselves, (2) our immediate concerns, and (3) the kingdom. If our prayers are ineffective in ourselves and our immediate concerns, they will not be effective in the kingdom. We must not be content to work for this age. We must definitely seek to work for the bringing in of the age to come.

Why do we want deliverance from sin? Why do we want enduement? God's children today are taken up with far too many small things. God is waiting for that importunate cry day and night (Luke 18). It is a widow, that is, a helpless one without resources, who implores the Lord.

CHAPTER TWELVE

PRAYER

CWWN, The (Set 2) Vol. 46:

Conferences, Messages, and Fellowship (6), Chap. 201

Many prayers are not answered because our faith is too big! God requires faith only as large as a mustard seed and no larger. We may feel that we have little or no faith. We may be before Him with no confidence in our own faith, in fear and trembling, and with no assurance whatever, but this does not matter, because God answers according to what He is. Our feelings have nothing to do with whether or not God will answer. We may feel that we have great faith for a thing, or we may feel that we are weak and full of doubts. But these are nothing but feelings, exterior and superficial. True faith will always be like a mustard seed, deep within our spirits, springing out of brokenness and weakness, but knowing that God is God and that He has His perfect plans and ways and that He will accomplish His work no matter what we are. He is faithful, and He must ever act in faithfulness, according to His character and His sovereign will.