

PRAYER

A close-up photograph of a person's hands clasped together in a prayer position. The hands are resting on an open Bible, which is lying flat on a dark surface. The Bible's pages are filled with text, and a red bookmark is visible at the bottom. In the background, a bright, warm light source, possibly a window or a lamp, creates a soft, golden glow that illuminates the hands and the Bible. The overall mood is serene and spiritual.

STUART ALLEN

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THE BEREAN PUBLISHING TRUST

52A WILSON STREET,
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STUART ALLEN

Author of

Letters from Prison
The Unfolding Purpose of God
On Reading the Bible
The Interpretation of Scripture
The Early Centuries and the Truth
The Lord Jesus Christ, God or only Man?
The Early and Pastoral Epistles of Paul
The Galatian and Roman Epistles of Paul
etc., etc.

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PREFACE

About 37 years ago, it was decided to issue and circulate with *The Berean Expositor* a prayer and news letter, called *Joints and Bands*. We quote from the first issue :

" ... the Head, from which all the body by **joints and bands** having nourishment ministered, and knit together, increaseth with the increase of God" (Col. 2:19).

The verse we have chosen deals with the Unity of the Spirit which derives all its nourishment from the Head, the Lord Jesus Christ.

But from a natural and geographical standpoint, we are anything but united, being scattered in groups all over Britain and the rest of the world, often with little knowledge of the needs and problems of each other. We are trusting that this small leaflet may be a practical way of binding us all together in the realm of intercession for the precious truth for which we stand and its outworking day by day.'

To encourage our readers to join with us in prayer, Mr. Stuart Allen wrote a series of articles on Prayer.

In March 1985, we decided to reprint the series gradually as opportunity permitted and the final article appeared in the January 1990 issue. Several people have expressed their appreciation of this series, so we have now issued it as a booklet.

We pray that readers will be blessed and encouraged in their prayer-life.

‘Continue in prayer, and watch in the same with thanksgiving’ (Col. 4:2.)

The word translated ‘continue’ is interesting. It occurs again in Romans 12:12, ‘continuing instant in prayer’. It has the note of urgency about it. In chapter 13:6 we have it again. Referring to the higher powers, the apostle says ‘they are God’s ministers attending continually upon this very thing’. There is concentration stressed here. In Mark 3:9 it occurs in a non doctrinal setting. ‘He spake to His disciples that a small ship should wait on Him because of the multitude’. The little ship was placed at the Lord’s disposal, awaiting His use as He willed.

These verses throw a vivid light on prayer that is effectual. There must be **urgency** about it, a **concentration** on the outworking of the glorious deposit of truth that has been entrusted to us by the Lord, and all must be along the lines of His will. ‘If we ask anything **according to His will**, He heareth us’ (1 John 5:14).

Shall we persevere in intercession in this way, looking to the Lord to answer as He sees fit? Let us never forget we are dealing with One who is ‘able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that worketh in us’ (Eph. 3:20).

‘Continue in prayer, and watch in the same with thanksgiving’ (Col. 4:2)

In the first article we saw that **urgency** and **concentration** are combined in the word ‘continue’. In Colossians 4:12 Epaphras **labours fervently** in prayers for the Colossian saints.

This word is literally ‘agonise’ and has in its composition the word ‘race’ (Heb. 12:1). It brings before our mind the intensity of effort expended by the athlete running in a race. Our praying should be like this and yet how slack and feeble it often is!

Another point is brought before us in Colossians 4:2. We are exhorted to **watch** in prayer. This word means to refrain from sleep, to be on the alert. It is the word that is constantly used by the Lord, urging those of the end time to be ready for His Coming (*parousia*), Matthew 24:42,43; 25:13. How easy it is to pray and then forget!

It is even possible to be surprised when the answer comes. The Pentecostal Church had prayed for Peter’s release from prison (Acts 12:5). Yet, when God answered their prayer, they refused to believe it, charging the girl that brought the news to them with being mad (Acts 12:12-16). Fancy being surprised when God gives the answer to our requests! This is not faith but unbelief and is the cause of much unfruitfulness.

We must not only labour in prayer but watch for the Lord to work His will. Habakkuk said ‘I will stand upon my watch and set me upon the tower, and **will watch to see what He will say unto me**’ (Hab. 2:1). Let us continue in this labour of intercession for all who need our prayers in this witness and for all the sowing of the seed of a rightly divided Word, whether by speaking or the printed page, and then watch for the increase or growth which only the Lord can give (1 Cor. 3:7).

‘Continue in prayer, and watch in the same with thanksgiving’ (Col. 4:2)

We have seen that this important verse stresses **concentration**, **intensity** and **watchfulness** in prayer. The apostle Paul adds another ingredient ‘watch in the same **with thanksgiving**’.

It is significant that the early nations departed from God when they refused to recognise Him as such and ceased to be **thankful** (Rom. 1:21). A truly thankful heart is a great preservative against declension. It is when we begin to forget ‘all His benefits’ (Psa. 103:2) and cease to praise, that we begin to lose touch with Him and prayer becomes less and less vital.

As we look back, is there not much that we can thank Him for? In spite of disappointments and difficulties has not His good Hand been over us continually?

Can we honestly say that we have lacked anything that is really needful? No! Well then, let us complain less and praise more! If sometimes 'we know not what to pray for as we ought', we can always find something to praise the Lord for and real prayer is praise as well as making requests.

May this be characteristic of our praying in future days.

'Giving thanks always for all things unto God in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ' (Eph. 5:20).

'In everything give thanks' (1 Thess. 5:18).

4

For what should we pray?

Sometimes we arrive at the point in our prayer life when we are perplexed as to what to pray for. We echo Romans 8:26, 'we know not what to pray for as we ought'. This is owing to our weakness and lack of wisdom or knowledge. But the context should give us great encouragement. 'The Spirit also helpeth our weakness' (infirmities).

God does not need to be informed of our frailty. We are assured of the mighty power of the Holy Spirit in aiding our prayers. He Himself and the Lord Jesus Christ make intercession for us, and do so 'according to the will of God' (verses 26-28, 34). There is therefore no need for us to cease praying because we do not know what to pray for.

Very often our difficulty is due to the fact that we cannot express our deepest feelings in words. Even this need not be a barrier. For 'He that searcheth the hearts knoweth what is the mind of the spirit'. That is to say The Spirit Himself can read and understand all the secret longings of the new nature that He has given us, and can therefore interpret these desires 'according to God'.

Not only does the Holy Spirit give us His Divine aid in prayer by His intercession, but Christ Himself also intercedes for us at the right hand of God (verse 34). The Saviour and the Holy Spirit are both using their almighty power on our behalf.

What a strong position we are in then! And how glad we should be as we realise the greatness of God's provision for our natural weakness so that our prayer life may be really effectual!

5

Prayer time

When ought we to pray? Should there be set times for prayer? Undoubtedly it is good to 'enter into thy closet, and when thou hast shut thy door, pray to thy Father which is in secret' (Matt 6:6). To retire from the noise and bustle of everyday life and lift our hearts to the Lord in praise and communion is a wonderful experience and one that we should practise whenever possible.

On one occasion the Lord said, 'Men ought **always** to pray and not to faint' (Luke 18:1) and we have this exemplified in the witness of the apostle Paul. In Romans 1:9, 1 Thessalonians 2:13, Ephesians 1:16, Colossians 1:9, and 2 Timothy 1:3 he declared that he prayed **without ceasing**.

Does this mean that the apostle was on his knees day and night? By no means. He was the busiest of men. Read again what his faithful witness for the Lord cost him (2 Cor. 11:23-28) ending with 'the care of all the churches'. Yet he never stopped praying! He learned to commune with the Lord under all conditions and at all times. And so can we. In the business or home, along the busy street, or wherever we may be, we can talk to our Heavenly Father through the One Mediator, the Lord Jesus Christ, and so have the joy of continual praise and intercession for the furtherance of the Truth.

When ought we to pray? The answer is **always**.

‘Pray without ceasing’ (1 Thess. 5:17)

6

Access into the presence of the Father.

Among the mighty privileges that prayer gives us is **access** into the Holy Presence of our Heavenly Father. This will be more appreciated if we remember that during the period covered by the Old Testament the average Jew lived his entire life without once entering the Presence of God which was localised in the Tabernacle or Temple.

The Tabernacle was placed in the centre of Israel’s camp where it could be seen by all, yet only one Jew, the high priest, once in twelve months, was ever allowed by God to go inside it, draw aside the veil, and enter the Holy of Holies which contained the blazing Light of His glory over the cherubim, the ark, and the mercy seat.

God was at pains to teach His people the solemnity and tremendous privilege of approaching Him and how impossible this was without sin being put away, which was symbolised by the shed blood of the sacrifice which the high priest took with him.

Now the reality has been offered, the One Sacrifice once for all, and the great barrier of sin swept aside. The redeemed can now have ‘boldness to enter the Holiest by the blood of Jesus’ (Heb. 10:19). They can ‘draw near’ (verse 22) and ‘come boldly to the Throne of Grace’ (Heb. 4:16) not once a year, but **at all times** and always receive a Divine welcome there.

Remembering all the mercies supplied in the past, and looking forward to the time that lies ahead of us with all its opportunities for witness and work for the Lord, shall we not avail ourselves continually and consistently of the tremendous privilege of access into the Lord’s Presence that prayer gives us?

7

Unselfish Prayer

We have been seeking guidance from the Word of God regarding prayer so that it may be really effective. We have seen that there must be an **urgency** and **concentration** about it; that it should always contain the element of **thanksgiving**; that, although we may not always know what to pray for, we have the **almighty aid of the Holy Spirit** making intercession for us (Rom. 8:26-28); that there is no special time for prayer. We should pray **without ceasing**, remembering that it gives us the mighty privilege of **access** into the Holy Presence of our Heavenly Father.

We go on to note that effective prayer puts God first, others second and self last. In the Kingdom prayer of the Lord we have first of all three references to the Father: ‘**Thy** Name ... **Thy** kingdom ... **Thy** will’ (Math 6:9,10) before there is any mention of the believer. The apostle Paul’s prayers are always a model for us, specially those in the epistle to the Ephesians recorded in chapters one and three. They are both taken up with the glories of the ascended Christ and then the need of the Ephesians saints to come to an experimental knowledge of these riches of revelation. Not until he gets to the last chapter does he remember his own needs and ask for prayer for himself. Even then he says first ‘praying **always** with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, and watching thereunto with **all perseverance and supplication for all saints**’. Not until he has stressed this does he say ‘and for me, that utterance may be given unto me, that I may open my mouth boldly, to make known the mystery of the Gospel’ (Eph. 6:18,19).

Selfishness is a blight on a believer’s life. May we all be delivered from it and go on to be more occupied with ‘things above where Christ is seated’ (Col. 3:1-3) and the needs of others to get to know these wonders of God’s will. We can then go on together in fellowship, witness and service in connection with the sacred stewardship entrusted to us.

8

Effective Prayer

We can say, as a definite fact, that all the saints of God who occupy a conspicuous place in His Word for faithfulness and witness were men of prayer. Take Elijah as an example. What power he must have had to have been able to close the heavens and prevent rain for three and a half years! (1 Kings 17:1). And also to have been able to reverse this and cause rain to fall! Yet when we read the comment of James on his action, we are told that he

was a 'man subject to like passions as we are' (James 5:17). He was an ordinary mortal being and yet, if this was so, what was the secret of his effective praying?

He based it on the Word of God and its promises. Moses, in Deuteronomy 11:13-17, had warned Israel that departure from God would bring drought on their land with consequent famine and destruction. Elijah knew this, and in a time of apostasy under Ahab, he asked God to fulfil His Word in judgment to bring Israel back again to Him in repentance. He said, in effect, what David prayed at an earlier date, 'LORD, let the thing that Thou hast spoken ... be established for ever, and **do as Thou hast said**' (1 Chron. 17:23).

Effective praying is based upon the Word of God. But here we must be careful to apply the great principle of 2 Timothy 2:15. It will be useless for us to pray, in a dispensation of reigning grace, according to the conditions of a dispensation of law. What we need therefore, is to get to know the particular Scriptures that are addressed to us Gentiles, namely the epistles of Paul. These reveal our high calling, its practical walk and its hope. Then, having this word of Christ dwelling richly within, our thoughts, desires and aspirations will be moulded by the precious truth revealed within, and we shall be able to say in our measure, as David did: 'Lord, Thou hast said ... do as Thou hast said'. We are dealing with a God Who always honours His own Word and the exceeding great and precious promises which are centred in the Lord Jesus Christ.

9

Christ the One Mediator

One of the great truths for the present time is the Mediatorial work of Christ. 'For there is One God, and One Mediator between God and men, the Man Christ Jesus ... the testimony (to be rendered) in its own appointed time to which I was appointed a herald and apostle' (1 Tim. 2:5-7). So Paul wrote under inspiration, and this is made very clear in his prayers. There is only one approach to God now by believer or unbeliever and that is through Christ, the Way. 'No man cometh unto the Father **but by Me**' (John 14:6).

We should always remember this when we pray. Sometimes the question is asked, 'to Whom should we address our prayers?' and often one hears prayers offered to the Lord Jesus Christ. If we study the model prayers of the apostle Paul in Ephesians one and three, we shall find that they are addressed to the **Father** (1:17; 3:14) and in Ephesians 5:20 we have 'giving thanks unto God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ' (see also Col. 1:3,12; 3:17).

If we pray directly to Christ, then we are, in effect, by-passing Him as the One Mediator. He Himself said: 'whatsoever ye shall ask the **Father in My Name**, He will give it you. Hitherto have ye asked nothing **in My Name**: ask, and ye shall receive, that your joy may be full' (John 16:23,24). Our petitions then should be addressed to God the **Father**, through the **Son**, as enabled by the Spirit.

Instead of hastily concluding our prayers by saying 'for Christ's sake, Amen', as is so often done, or even not mentioning Christ at all, shall we realise that the Mediation of our Saviour is the most important item in our praying and is one glorious fact that makes answered prayer possible?

10

Unanswered Prayer

In previous articles we have considered many important aspects of prayer. This time we pause to ask why prayer sometimes receives a negative answer from our Heavenly Father.

1. 1 John 3:22, reads: 'And whatsoever we ask, we receive of Him, because we keep His commandments, and do those things that are pleasing in His sight'. 'We receive of Him', says the apostle, because we are obedient to His commands. If there is any degree of unfaithfulness or disobedience, can we expect to 'receive of Him' and have abundant answers to our prayers? The answer is obvious.

2. In the fourth chapter of the epistle of James and verse three, we have: 'Ye ask, and receive not, because ye ask amiss, **that ye may spend it in your pleasures**' (R.V.). How many times have believers prayed for things that merely minister to self gratification? Such asking is evil (amiss) says James and will be disregarded by God.

3. Our praying may be undispensational, that is, while we may be very sincere, we can be asking according to conditions that were true in a past dispensation, but are not true today. Hence the tremendous need to 'rightly divide the Word of Truth' (2 Tim. 2:15).

4. Praying that is contrary to the will of God will surely not be answered in the way we desire. 'If we ask anything **according to His will, He heareth us**' (1 John 5:14).

This brings us to possibly the most important reason for prayer, and that is **to bring us into line with God's Will**. It is when we are completely emptied of selfish desires and want the Lord's will more than anything else, that our prayer life becomes real and we have the joy of rich answers to our requests.

11

Thy Way, not Mine

In the last article we pointed out that one of the most important aspects of prayer is to bring us into line with God's will (1 John 5:14). It is not easy to subject our will to His, specially when in intensity of desire we want something very badly. Such a condition can be dangerous as Israel found when they tired of the manna and determined to have flesh to eat. They worried the Lord until He answered their desire, but with disastrous consequences (Num. 11). The Psalmist's comment is 'He gave them their request; but sent leanness into their soul' (Psa. 106:15). Of what use is the satisfaction of desire when it leads to such unhappiness?

Equally unsatisfactory is the Christian life which is devoid of prayer. 'Ye have not, because you ask not' (James 4:2). It is part of our spiritual discipline leading to growth and fruitfulness that we constantly acknowledge our utter dependence on the Lord in prayer.

He may and does determine to do wonderful things for us, but He wills that we shall ask Him for these things and not take them for granted. God said, concerning Israel, that He would restore them and their land in abundant blessing, 'yet for this will I be enquired of by the house of Israel to do it for them' (Ezek. 36:33-37).

In the training of children it is good for them to be taught to say 'please' when they want something, and 'thank you' when they have received it. Prayer does the same for the believer. It says 'please Lord, will you do this for me if it is Thy will' and then praises and thanks Him whichever way His love chooses to answer.

12

Does Prayer change anything?

Does prayer alter things? If we pray for someone else, can the affairs of this person be changed? Not if every detail of human existence has been fixed by Divine decree from eternity as some believe who take extreme and unscriptural views of election and predestination. But our guide here, as in all things, is the Word of God. The apostle Paul writes: 'Finally, brethren, pray for us, that the Word of the Lord may have free course and be glorified' (2 Thess. 3:1).

Now it could be argued that whenever God's Word is preached faithfully, automatically it will have 'free course and be glorified', in which case it would appear to be unnecessary and a waste of effort to pray for it. In Philippians 1:19 Paul says: 'I know that this shall turn to my salvation **through your prayer**', so obviously the prayer of the Philippian saints for Paul's release from prison counted vitally in his eyes. When writing to Philemon the apostle expresses a similar hope: 'but withal prepare me also a lodging: for I trust that **through your prayers** I shall be given unto you' (22).

Here was such an important question as Paul's release from prison being affected by the prayer of one person! It is idle to speculate whether Paul would have been set free if Philemon and the Philippian saints had **not** prayed. The fact is that **they did** and God heard their intercession and answered their prayer for him.

This should encourage us all not to get weary in our prayer life. Prayer **does** affect others, and we should pray without ceasing for them along the line of God's will and for every aspect of this witness. We can then confidently wait for the answer and not be disappointed, for we deal with One Who is 'able to do exceeding abundantly **above all that we ask or think**' (Eph. 3:20).

Watering the Seed by Prayer

We have seen something of the vital part that prayer should take in the life of a believer. To work for the Lord and seek to spread the Truth of His Word without praying is like sowing seed in the ground and then forgetting all about it. The gardener knows the attention that must follow seed sowing.

Likewise in the realm of spiritual things; God's Word is likened to a **seed** (1 Pet. 1:23; Luke 8:11). This Word is living and incorruptible and is therefore always good seed. In the parable of the sower, we find that good seed was sown, but in three instances the sowing was ineffective owing to the **nature of the soil**. This represented the state of mind and heart of those who heard, and we are therefore reminded that it is not sufficient just to proclaim Truth.

Good seed on bad soil produces no results, and making known God's Word will not achieve what we desire unless the mind of the recipient is prepared to receive it.

Now this work is not ours but that of the Holy Spirit, but prayer becomes effective when we ask the Lord to prepare the soil, so that the seed of Truth may fructify. Nor should it stop after the seed has been sown; we should still persevere in prayer that, in the Lord's time growth and harvest may result.

Let us wait on the Lord and ask Him to bring our way to people who are needy and hungry for Truth. One can do nothing with self satisfied people whether believers or unbelievers. There must be a sense of need in the mind first, and so it is our privilege to pray along these lines and to watch for His answer which will surely come if we do not grow weary in well doing.

'In due season we shall reap, if we faint not' (Gal. 6:9).

Prayer is like Incense

'We know not what to pray for as we ought' (Rom. 8:26). This realisation comes to every child of God at some time or other. We know how inadequate our praying often is. If the apostle Paul felt this, how much more it applies to us! It makes us wonder whether our Heavenly Father gets any pleasure at all from our poor prayers. Yet we believe that the Word indicates that He does.

There was an altar in the Tabernacle ritual which had no outward connection with sacrifice or shedding of blood. This was the Golden Altar of Incense in the Holy Place. Incense was compounded to a Divine formula not to be copied and specially fragrant to God (Exod. 30:34-38).

Now the Psalmist connects his praying with the symbolism of incense - 'Let my prayer be set forth (directed - margin), before Thee **as incense**' (Psa. 141:2) and we find the same association in Revelation 8:3,4 : 'Another angel came and stood at the altar ... and there was given unto him **much incense**, that he should offer it **with the prayers of all saints** upon the golden altar ... '.

Can it be that for all their inadequacy our prayers give God delight? The answer is 'Yes', if they are covered by the **fragrance of Christ**. God loves to hear His people pray and He is far more ready to listen than we are to make intercession to Him.

If we pray along the lines of His will in the Name of the Lord Jesus Christ (as we are bidden to do, John 16:24; Eph. 5:20), then our prayers rise to our Heavenly Father as fragrant as the incense of the Old Testament.

What encouragement to us to pray and that continually.

The Ministry of the Ascended Christ

In article No.14 we were concerned with the typical teaching of the Golden Altar of incense which stood in the Holy Place of the Tabernacle, and we saw that it represented intercession as being specially fragrant to God. There is one

thing, however, that we must not forget: our prayers would be valueless without the Lord's great ministry of intercession for us.

While intercession for others is a real and vital ministry for all saints, we rejoice to know that our Saviour is constantly remembering us and interceding on our behalf. He is now glorified at the right hand of God 'Who also maketh intercession for us' (Rom. 8:34). We can rest assured that He knows us and all our needs far better than we do ourselves and this gracious ministry is without ceasing, full and perfect.

Moreover it is vitally connected with our Christian witness and growth in grace which is linked up with our 'perfecting' or in the New Testament sense of the word, reaching the **goal** of the new life in Christ, namely **spiritual maturity**. Hebrews 7:25 tells us He is not only able to save, but also able to save **to the uttermost** (literally, to all perfection or maturity), 'seeing that He ever liveth to make intercession for them', that is those who come to God through Him.

How fragrant and wonderful must be this present ministry of the Ascended Christ on our behalf! It brings before us once more the tremendous debt we owe Him not only for His redeeming and atoning work on the Cross, but also for this precious and vital work for us now.

Realising this afresh, let us go forward undaunted and with full assurance as we rest upon His redeeming love and all the gracious provision that goes with it, together with His wondrous and continual intercession for us now.

And so we end, appreciating we sincerely hope, the great importance that prayer, based on a 'rightly divided' Word of God, should occupy in the life of the believer in Christ.

It is surely true to say that a prayerless life is a fruitless life. May we constantly avoid this.

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