

The Power of Prayer

By Clarice Bowman and George Harper

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Introduction to The Power of Prayer

No power is greater than that which comes through prayer.

Prayer gives the power that can
 control the men
 who control the machines.

Prayer gives the power that can
 rule the men
 who rule the world.

Prayer can
 set men free.
 give them guidance.
 save their souls.
 save their world.

Whether or not it will
 Is up to us.

Our decisions must be made
 Quickly. Time is running out.

-- *Clarice Bowman and George Harper*

This book is written with that sense of urgency. Some youth and youth leaders may hear the challenge and take heed. That is the prayer out of which this writing is born.

"I believe that we shall soon witness a new religious movement, which will sweep over our sad and disillusioned world as the early Christian movement swept over that ancient Greco-Roman world, bringing spiritual insight, moral vigor, and therefore a revival of courage, hope and happiness..."

"The new religious movement will start with a comparatively few individuals mostly of humble birth and station who will somehow recover that vision of the Glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ which in centuries past has once and again brought courage and hope to ... the world...

"Naturally they will not be content with things as they are.

* * * * *

"It is likely, therefore, that many of them will be called upon to endure persecution. All manner of evil will be spoken against them falsely for Christ's sake... I anticipate that in not a few bitter and terrible ways history will repeat itself. But this also I firmly believe: As a result of this new religious movement, there will presently appear in the lives of increasing numbers of people a new courage, a new hope and a new happiness. Believing that the glory of God has shone in the face of Jesus Christ, that what dwells eternally at the heart of things is not brute force, but love, men will become courageous. They will also become hopeful. And then, as they devote all that they have and are to a cause which they consider greater than self and dearer than life, they will develop a kind and degree of happiness comparable to that which in those early Christians led Tertullian to say, 'The Church is the one thing in the world that always rejoices.'" *Tittle, 1933*

How to Use this Book

We didn't have to write this book. That is, in one way we didn't. Nobody told us to. But our hearts made us want to share something of what prayer means to us, before it is too late.

You don't have to read this book. Why did you pick it up? What do you hope to receive from it?

This writing is addressed to anyone who feels the need of prayer in his life. It is not for church crowds alone, but for anybody, especially for beginners in prayer life.

This book will not argue with you. For its purpose is not so much to inform or convince, as to set your feet on an upward trail that you will never want to leave. What you find here is but a beginning. Let the great saints and leaders of the Christian faith take you by the hand and lead you farther.

That this Writing may Serve You -

1. First, have a talk with yourself. Ask yourself, "What are my ideas about prayer at present?" "In what kind of God do I believe?" "What have been my three most meaningful prayer experiences that I can remember?" "What made them

meaningful?" "What causes me to want to pray?" "When have my prayers seemed to fail?" "Why?" "Exactly what are my prayer needs?"

Wait a minute! What about our purposes, even in reading a book on power through prayer. Is it the power you crave? A more magnetic personality? Adequacy for the demands you face? Then stop right here and pray that God may cleanse your heart of all self-seeking. Wherever people try to use prayer for their own selfish ends, they block the way for God's power to come in and transform their lives. Seek ye first, God ... and all these things will be added unto you.

2. Hold conversation in your mind with the authors. They may be mistaken. Think through. Decide. Make ideas your own. Relate them to similar experiences in your life. No one can tell another all. Don't let anything here set a pattern that will stunt your growth. You and your God must find your own pathways together.
3. Use other resources, especially the Bible. Choose some saint or leader; feel fellowship with him; write down some of his secrets of prayer. Expose your mind to ever larger thoughts.
4. Keep a spiritual diary. At times, write your prayer thoughts, or describe your experiences, or note down impulses that come to you for service action. But avoid the habit of looking inward, or of taking your spiritual pulse. Record as you go, but keep going forward. Look always to God, the Author and Finisher.
5. Discuss with friends. Find older friends in whom you have confidence. Share with friends your own age. But don't expect them to make your quest for you. Don't lean too much. Each has his own quest to make.
6. Pray. The only way to learn to pray is to pray - and the only way to learn to pray well is to pray much. Don't let reading about prayer (even reading this book) become an escape from real prayer. Reach forth spiritually. Jesus the Christ beckons yonder, "Come up higher." (Luke 14:10)
7. Relate your prayer always to your living. Real prayer involves the person-as-a-whole: your attitudes; your use of time; what you do with your money; how you treat your family and friends; the stand you are willing to take on issues such as race relations, economics, liquor traffic, nationalism; what you are willing to do and give for God.
8. Prepare to wrestle. Prayer involves more than passively enjoying God. Sometimes it tests, stings awake, sends out to hard tasks. Growth in prayer costs. "Whoever would come after me, let him take up his cross and follow." (Mark 8:34)
9. Learn directly from God. Beyond all human helps, both personal or written, He has something to teach you.
10. Make it lifelong. Spiritual heights are attained, not by sudden spurts now and then, but by steady continuous climbing.

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Matthew 6:9-15 "Pray, then, in this way: `Our Father who is in heaven, Hallowed be Your name. `Your kingdom come. Your will be done, On earth as it is in heaven. `Give us this day our daily bread. `And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. `And do not lead us into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For Yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen. "For if you forgive others for their transgressions, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. "But if you do not forgive others, then your Father will not forgive your transgressions. (*New American Standard*)

Matthew 6: 9-15 With a God like this loving you, you can pray very simply. Like this: Our Father in heaven, Reveal who you are. Set the world right; Do what's best - as above, so below. Keep us alive with three square meals. Keep us forgiven with you and forgiving others. Keep us safe from ourselves and the Devil. You're in charge! You can do anything you want! You're ablaze in beauty! Yes. Yes. Yes. "In prayer there is a connection between what God does and what you do. You can't get forgiveness from God, for instance, without also forgiving others. If you refuse to do your part, you cut yourself off from God's part. *(The Message)*

Matthew 6: 9-15 "And then, when you pray, don't be like the play-actors. They love to stand and pray in the synagogues and at street-corners so that people may see them at it. Believe me, they have had all the reward they are going to get. But when you pray, go into your own room, shut your door and pray to your Father privately. Your Father who sees all private things will reward you. And when you pray don't rattle off long prayers like the pagans who think they will be heard because they use so many words. Don't be like them. After all, God, who is your Father, knows your needs before you ask him. Pray then like this - 'Our Heavenly Father, may your name be honored; May your kingdom come, and your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day the bread we need, Forgive us what we owe to you, as we have also forgiven those who owe anything to us. Keep us clear of temptation, and save us from evil'. For if you forgive other people their failures, your Heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you will not forgive other people, neither will your Heavenly Father forgive you your failures." *(J. B. Phillips)*

Matthew 6:9-15 After this manner therefore pray ye: Our Father which art in heaven, Hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil: For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, for ever. Amen. For if ye forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you: But if ye forgive not men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses. *(King James)*

Chapter I

Prayer and My Life

"So this is not a time for confidence, nor is it a time for despair; it is the time to turn to God."
Frank Laubach

Do You Want to Learn How to Pray?

Let your heart make answer. For that question represents a crossroads of decision. The way you answer now may affect all the days of your life.

First let us look again at the words of that question, reading backwards:

Do you want to learn how to pray?

To pray ...

What does this four-letter verb suggest to you? Does it imply that there is a Power, a Being, a Somebody beyond ourselves and the created world, Whom we may call in reverential awe, God?

Does it tell you something about yourself: that you, and all the millions of others like you on this planet, are more than animal, that within you is a spark of divine flame that can respond to God and is restless until it does respond?

Does it suggest the astonishing possibility of communication between this God, with all His galaxies of worlds, and you, in all your smallness and unworthiness?

Does it convey the idea that prayer (a word for this communication) is active, both from the human end and from God's end? That there can be no prayer until someone prays? That prayer makes changes, both in things and in persons? That through prayer comes power?

How...

A veteran was relating a cruel experience. "We needed to pray. And oh, how we wanted to pray. But not one of us knew how."

"Science has put us in the know-how about handling our physical world," observes a youth, "but there must also be laws of the spiritual world that we need to discover and learn how to use."

The disciples, eye-witnesses to the power of prayer in Jesus' life, needed no urging. They wanted to pray. "Teach us how," they plead. (Luke 11:1)

To learn ...

The child learns the multiplication table before he can make mathematics serve him. The musician masters scales before he can express the soul of the composer in a concerto. The person who sets out to learn to pray finds himself growing in skills, understanding, and joy. The more he learns, the more he wants to learn. No one need ever stop learning.

Want...

God Who created His children with freedom for choice, waits to flash His secrets upon those who want.

You...

To each, the chance. No one is denied. Whosoever will may come (Rev. 22:17). An adventure all your own with God, awaits you whom He has created different from every other in the universe.

Do...

You are an active agent. There is a part for you to play in prayer; and a part God plays.

Do you want to learn how to pray?

Is the Case For or Against Prayer?

"If we develop our minds so as to be adequate for whatever comes, why should we need prayer?" asks a student.

Another takes pride in the achievements of science. "Didn't the mighty atom surrender to our genius?"

"Everybody knows that natural laws cannot be bent to the whims of people; why, then, should people pray?"

Others cite situations in which the non-praying person seemingly fared as well as the praying person. "Prayer made no difference," they conclude.

Some who are eager to be about the business of world rebuilding [after WWII] argue that they have no time for prayer. "That is for weaklings who are unwilling to dig foundations or chaperon cattle on relief boats," they say.

Others scoff, "What difference can a little thing like prayer make in the face of personal problems and world conditions so mixed up?"

Yet ... in the face of these and many additional arguments, people pray. All over the world people pray.

One reason they pray is that they are scared, just plain scared. "Mankind has reached its zenith," exulted the announcer reporting the first atom bomb. "Zenith?" The words have a strange hollow ring. The word "power" ought to be spoken with bated [reduced] breath all over the world. Atomic fission has released all peoples from old securities. Uncertain as little children in the dark, people cry, "Teach us to pray."

As individuals, people need to pray, too. No matter how self-sufficient we may count ourselves, there come times when, as Abraham Lincoln said, "The soul is driven to its knees because there is nowhere else to go." Let the conversation in a group get around to life's difficult experiences; you tell yours; the other fellow tells his; you'll find you've

both prayed, or tried to. Your own powers were not enough. You found you couldn't cram for a crisis. You needed God.

Some have been led to pray because of the radiant witness of the power of prayer in another person's life. The number of prayer-filled, God-lit lives today is growing. They have something...

Hundreds are yearning secretly for a way of laying hold on spiritual resources they half-believe are there ...

Others want to learn more about prayer, because they have tasted a little. There was a time when they felt God's heart of love yearning over them as a parent over a hurt child. They felt contact. Something broke through their crust of selfishness, and made them depend upon God. They want more.

Others will say, with earnestness born of desperation, "If prayer can be a counter-active against forces now unleashed, let's have more of it!" They believe the fellows must be right who say that "it must be of the spirit if we are to save the flesh." They agree with Einstein and others that the next advances must be in the realm of the spirit. They want to be there with the advance guard.

A young person wants to give his life in Christian service. But he wants to be able, when a person looks him in the eye and asks for help, to lead him to God.

"I don't believe mere human ingenuity alone can make the grade at the peace tables," remarks a thoughtful youth. "We need to pray."

Is the case for or against prayer? What is your personal verdict?

Questions and More Questions -

Persons who are in earnest about learning how to pray ask questions. They want to know about real prayer, not the "now-I-lay-me" formula outgrown, or thoughtlessly "repeated" phrases.

- "Would God be more likely to help me with this exam if I promised Him I'd give up smoking?"
- "When my brother was in the hospital, and I prayed so hard that his life would be spared, did my prayer make any difference? Wouldn't the surgeon's skill have been the same anyway?"
- "When I pray for someone far away, can my prayer possibly affect his life, if he doesn't *know* that I prayed for him?"
- "My days at school slide into routine and prayer usually gets left out, except when I get a better grade than I expected and something inside me says "Thank you,"

or when I need to ask divine intervention that the house mother of the fraternity house hasn't locked the door. Would you call these experiences prayer?"

- "Does God wait until somebody prays before releasing good gifts to people?"
- "This person lives a good life. This one does not. Both pray - or try to. Which prayer counts for more?"
- "I don't want to start something I'm not sure I can keep up. How do I know I wouldn't be like the disciples that couldn't watch with Jesus one hour?"

What questions have perplexed you about prayer? Bring them out into the open. There may be faith in honest doubt. Prepare to think, giving all your powers full play. Jesus said, "Love God ... with all thy mind" (Matt. 22:37). But don't forget to pray.

It All Grew Out of the Life of One Man

There is no other way to explain Christianity. Because Jesus was what He was the Christian fellowship began and grew. Track Christianity down to its source and you find Jesus the Christ.

It would seem, then, that the important thing to do would be to find the source of Jesus' life power. If we could do that, we would be at the heart of the most powerful movement in history. In a power age, we who search for power would have found the source of real power, power that shapes life and rules death. This is the greatest challenge that can be put to mankind.

And yet there is no secret or mystery to it all. The source of His power, He laid bare for all to see. He pleaded with men to use the same source. He said it was the simplest and most natural way in the world for that power to be attained. But men had been trained for generations to look for something mysterious and out of reach. They could not believe, except in small part, that such a wonderful thing could be true. Nor can we make ourselves believe it today. Jesus says the greatest thing is the simplest; we say it is hidden. It is time now that we take Him at His word, start on the plain facts that are obvious, and build a simple life like His that will move from the same source and in the same direction.

Would anything please God more than for us to live as Jesus did?

Is there any trick to it?

Is God trying to make it difficult for us to live that kind of life?

Would God make a world in which it is not possible to live completely His way of life?

If it is possible, then why can't we do it?

What are your answers?

If your answer is that God is not trying to play a joke on us; if your answer is that we can live as God says we must, then the question has to come, Why don't we?

You say, "This all sounds so simple it scares me." Men have always tried to make a mystery of the plain fact Jesus illustrated and preached. Why can't we be the people who have simple enough faith to accept Him at His word? Must we refuse Him too?

Are you ready then? All right, let's do first what we said we should do first. Let's look at His life and see where the source of power for Him was.

Here it is - in two words: ***He prayed!***

"Oh yes," you say, "but ..."

... but what? Don't try to add anything, don't make it complicated. Keep your finger and your mind right here. This is the spot. This is the source: prayer. See if that is not true.

The Gospel accounts of Jesus are full of records of His taking time to pray. Reading those accounts, you will say, "Above all else, Jesus was a man of prayer." He was.

He grew up in an atmosphere of prayer.

He was praying when John baptized Him.

He charted His life's course in forty days of prayer in the wilderness.

He spent the night in prayer before choosing His inner circle of twelve.

After hard days of work and travel, He went into the hills alone to pray.

Often He rose before dawn and went out to pray by Himself.

He was praying in the Garden of Gethsemane the evening He was betrayed.

He prayed as He was being nailed to the cross, and He prayed while He was on the cross.

His teachings and His authority to proclaim God's will resulted from these hours He spent in trying to find the purposes of God and to be led by Him.

Here, then, is the source of His tremendous power. He said we could have it in the same way, and that it does not come in any other way.

The early Christian fellowship took the cue from Jesus. The first Christians found time for prayer as He had done. "All these with one accord devoted themselves to prayer, together with the women and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with his brothers" (Acts 1:14). The early church built the whole practice of the Christian life around regular prayer. They felt, as did Paul, that they lived "in Christ," in His spirit (2 Cor. 5:17). They found the strength to change the world order. Why were so few able to do so much? Was theirs a secret power we cannot have? No. They simply centered their life in God, and were confident that His spirit in them could conquer the world. Through the centuries since that time, many forms and techniques of prayer have been developed. But the power, the tremendous world-saving power, has slipped away from many Christians. We ask: Has God changed?

Why cannot prayer today become as of old a source of power, of wonder-working, world-changing power?

It can!

Chapter 2

Preparing to Grow in Our Prayer Life

"The blinding realization that by letting Him use us we can help save the world ... presses upon our time, every moment of it, as the air presses every moment against the wings of a plane, holding it to its high course." Laubach

Misunderstanding and problems about prayer usually stem from one of three sources:

- (1) An inadequate view of the God to whom we pray
- (2) An inadequate view of ourselves as the pray-ers
- (3) An inadequate understanding of prayer as contact between God and ourselves.

As a first step in preparation for growth in prayer life, let these three lines come together. Start just where you are. Reach trustfully towards Him, believing that

"Who takes one step towards God through doubtings dim,
God comes a thousand miles in blazing light to him."

Is it more faith you need? Don't wait to become logically convinced as to the foundations for faith before venturing forth upon it! An old man and a younger one were working on a roof. Ladders with sharp spikes on their undersides were thrown down on the roof,

and the boy was told to step out on one of them. He hesitated. "Let your weight down on it, my lad," the old man said. "See how it holds. The heavier the load it carries, the more secure it is."

You will find your faith growing, through experiencing the way it holds you up. You will find your understanding of the nature of God growing, as you commune with Him in prayer as friend to friend. You will find your understanding of yourself becoming clearer, so that you will know better how to rid yourself of hindrances and develop the talents God has given you for fellowship with Himself.

In the brief scope of this book, attention cannot be given to all the theological questions that may perplex some on their pathway of prayer. References are suggested. Discussions of difficult points with trusted Christian leaders should help.

However, because progress in prayer depends so much upon the way we think of God, a few brief suggestions will be in order here.

A God Who Reveals Orderliness and Purpose through His Created World

We take a walk along a country road and meet thousands of evidences of God's ongoing creation, each evidence a drama of orderly laws at work. We bend back a blade of grass and see myriads of tiny moving things each living out his cycle according to a Plan. We look through a microscope at cells, intricate, infinitesimal, yet each fulfilling its peculiar destiny. We chart the movements of the stars 2,000 years ago and 2,000 years from now. Astronomers have learned to trust the regularity of their orbits. The mechanism of the human body adds evidence of God's care in creation. Implanted there is the urge for growth, and forces that make for health and healing. The surgeon but removes the lesion. The body heals itself.

This Power that set all worlds in motion and that gives us life is beyond the scope of our farthest imagination. Chemistry, physics, astronomy, and biology but reveal glimpses as to *how* He works. The "why" back of it all is not explained, except in a Power that has Purpose.

As we bend our ears to hear God speak through his creation (including ourselves) we marvel to discover that He is continuing to create! He is not static. His strength and power and laws are moving through the universe, even through our bodies. Changes are taking place every minute throughout the earth. God has not wound up His world and left it to run by itself. He is busy at work within it. "My Father worketh .." (John 5:17).

A God Whose Nature is to Love and Care for His Children

If all we had to rely upon to tell us about God was His revelation through His creation, we would probably cower in awe and fear at such Intelligence beyond our comprehension and forces of nature beyond our control.

But Jesus revealed to us a God Who is personal and loving. No word appears so often in Jesus' vocabulary as the word "Father." Because Jesus lived so true to the "nature" God had implanted in Him, we see more of God in Him than in anyone who ever lived. And what we see there is loving.

Jesus often used illustrations of normal family relationships with which men are acquainted. He called this our Father's world. He spoke of persons as God's children. He suggested that in prayer we may go as confidently to God as a child goes to its father. **As wise parents cannot always grant their children's requests, neither can the Divine Wisdom answer all prayers as we would have them answered.** When children disobey, fathers are hurt yet ready to forgive them. For the children's sake, fathers demand repentance and correction of wrong acts. When children leave, the father looks longingly for their return. No matter how much they quarrel, the children are still brothers and sisters. They still have the same father, enjoy the same love, live in the same world.

Does God know each of us individually? Read Matthew 10:29-31.

"Are not two sparrows sold for a farthing? and one of them shall not fall on the ground without your Father. But the very hairs of your head are all numbered. Fear ye not therefore, ye are of more value than many sparrows.

The more efficient a librarian is in his job, the less he sees books in the mass, the more he knows them one by one. Each volume has its special significance. He knows what edition it is, its value, its contents, its author, its purpose. **Only ignorance sees things in mass.** Knowledge breaks up all masses into units, recognizes and knows each unit for what it is.

God, in His knowledge and love, knows, understands, and cares for every individual. He calls us by name. "The Shepherd knows His sheep" (John 10:14). Within each of us He has implanted a part of Himself. Centuries before Jesus' day, the psalmist cried, "Thou knowest my goings out and my comings in ... I will keep thy precepts and testimonies. For all my ways are ever before Thee." (Psa. 119:168).

Yet, despite Jesus' witness that God is loving, some fail to pray in that spirit. There are those who prefer to think of God as vengeful, in order to rationalize their own vengeful attitudes. There are those who prefer to think of God as "King," in order to rationalize their own selfish attitudes of commanding service rather than giving it.

"We are unwilling to rely on the instruments of love - justice, forgiveness and cooperative effort for the good of all. We do not believe that the supreme power in the universe is Love, though we cling to the hope that God will be merciful to *us* at the last." Tittle, 1942, p.18

The closer we come into fellowship with God through prayer, the more he lets us sense His yearning for the world. A wise man once said, "If I were God, the sorrows of the world would break my heart." A wiser one replied, "They *did* break the Heart of Hearts."

The Negro race has expressed this insight in the spiritual, "Were You There When They Crucified My Lord?"

"We crucify Him every day ... when we neglect to vote for the right candidate, or when we spend on soft drinks .the money that would keep a Chinese family alive for a month. We crucify Him when we forget that concern for others must govern our choices. In these days when we become sorry for ourselves, do we forget about the sorrows of God? Multiply our concerns by his infinity, and we can imagine the anguish of God as He watches his children deal in death and starvation and hatred."

This sense of awe at man's possible partnership with God, in the choices he makes for his own life and in his responsibility for others, should nerve us all for heroic praying and self-giving!

Bearing the Cross

"... It's so hard to stand for what you believe in my community. ... My best friends don't like for me to be too particular You wouldn't want me to make the gang mad at me Surely I can't give up everything One woman shut the door in my face ... I can't stand treatment like that You know I have so much to do; I'm so busy"

Yes, it's terrible how much we have to endure.

James the brother of Jesus, and James the son of Zebedee were killed by mobs in Jerusalem; Matthew was slain on a sword in Ethiopia; Philip was hanged in Phrygia; Bartholomew flayed alive in Armenia; Andrew crucified in Achaia; Thomas was run through with a lance in East India; Thaddeus was shot to death with arrows; a cross went up in Persia for Simon the zealot; and in Rome the old apostle Peter was, at his own request, crucified head downward - because he did not think himself worthy to die in the same position as his Lord. Matthias was beheaded. Only John escaped a torturous death, and he died a lonely man in exile. A fair record for eleven weaklings who once ran to hide!

Now, what was that hard cross you have to bear today?

Prayer: Our Father, forgive us for our selfish weakness that makes us afraid to stand for Thee when the going is tough. Help us to live this day that their life and His might not have been in vain. Give us the strength of living with a great purpose. Amen.

Dorothy Harper

Chapter 3

Discovering What Prayer Means

"Prayer will enable God to unlock in the spiritual realm the only power that can save the human race from destroying itself. This is the one and the only contribution most of us can make and it is enough." Laubach

What is prayer? What happens when I pray? What can happen? What may I expect to happen?

There is only one way of knowing what prayer means: from the center. Persons who have not prayed may be able to talk about prayer. But their faces will not have the glow, nor their voices the ring that shows they have experienced prayer. Knowing from the inside what prayer means is more important than being able to define it exactly in words. We can use electricity to light our homes, though we cannot explain it. We can use radio to bring us symphonies, though we cannot explain it.

Dynamic spiritual leaders of the past and present have not only believed that spiritual forces were available, but they have prayed in that belief. From their experiences, we gain light upon the meaning of prayer.

To the question, "What is prayer?", the Westminster Shorter Catechism gives answer:

"The offering up of our desires unto God for things agreeable to His will, in the name of Christ, with confession of our sins and thankful acknowledgment of His mercies."

Georgia Harkness defines prayer as

"The attempt to become consciously aware of God's presence, to discover His will for our lives, to surrender our vagrant thoughts and self-centered desires to His controlling purpose, to find in Him power for living."

Prayer is more than passive waiting. It is an act of devotion. It calls on the fullest powers of will and mind. It changes motives at their very depths.

A prayer has worth in exact ratio to the man behind it. If he who prays is prejudiced, obstinate, undisciplined, his prayer will have these characteristics also - unless he consciously realizes his need and seeks God's help at those points. Prayer can bring an energizing of the total personality. Through prayer, man senses his higher destiny, and stretches toward it. Prayer releases the person from the prison-house of self. He learns to see his true worth as a child of God and a brother of all.

God's love continually surrounds us. His goodness never changes. When we pray, we make answer to His love. Our spirits respond to His. Like air rushing into a vacuum, God's spirit comes into our lives if we open the channels.

A photographer takes a camera and adjusts the lens and the size of the opening until the blurred objects take on form and come into clear focus. In prayer, a person adjusts his mind and spirit until the whirling activities and scenes of his life settle into new focus.

He centers attention upon God. As he prays, the picture of life assumes perspective. First things become first; lesser things are seen in their place. The soul is freed to give itself to concerns that really matter. No longer is the self a battleground of vagrant impulses, but it has become a theater of Divine activity and power. This is the creative process by which man is made new. He is now ready to seek God's help to remake the world.

Prayer does not necessarily require the saying of certain words or even the thinking of exact phrases. It is the focus of the whole heart Godward. It is the concentration of the whole personality - not upon "things" we may wish to ask for, or difficulties we may wish to pray about, not even upon our own feelings as we pray - but *upon God Himself*.

Asked to define prayer, the Japanese Christian Kagawa replied in one word: "**Surrender.**" To really pray, we must surrender our will into the hands of God. "Prayer is the will to cooperate with God in your total life." (Jones, E. Stanley, How to Pray (pamphlet).)

To Seek God in Prayer is Natural

Any other way is unnatural. Just as laws of physical health are written into the cell-structure of our bodies, so laws of spiritual health through communion with God are written into our spirits. Without fellowship with Him, the human spirit has less chance of being healthy than does the human body without food or air. Not to breathe is unnatural. Not to pray is unnatural - for in prayer the human spirit seeks companionship with its Source. A man who prays is not doing "extras"; he is no mere "idealist." He is doing the minimum. He is realistic.

Back across the pages of history, we trace evidences of this longing for God. Primitive grandfathers, moved by fear of evil spirits, appealed to unknown forces for aid and protection. We deem some of their superstitions weird. But the desire to know God was there. Man's knowledge advanced, and his prayers changed first to many gods, then to one supreme God. He became more conscious of spiritual laws of the universe and found ways of better adjusting his life to them; just as he discovered "natural" laws of the physical world and stumbled along his way to modern science.

History brings evidence that the human race created by God for life with Him has always been restless for that fellowship. "In the beginning God created man in his own image." (Gen. 1:27)

Yet, to borrow a phrase from Dr. E. Stanley Jones, "man has allowed himself to become naturalized in the unnatural." A boy became used to riding a bicycle with crooked handle-bars; when the bars were straightened, he fell off! **Man has denied and**

perverted this inner longing for God; he needs to be converted to a new understanding of his nature as a child of God.

Since Jesus' time, the ideas of "natural" and "unnatural" are still reversed. We speak of a "natural" man as one living on a merely human level, out of touch with God. "Well, it is only natural ..."; or, "you can't change human nature." When we find a person in constant communion with God, we are prone to label him an idealist or a religious fanatic or unnatural. But Jesus suggested that the opposite is true. *It is natural to seek communion with God.* Because man has tried to ignore this fact, the world is in a sorry plight today. We need conversion from this perversion of our true natures as children of God and brothers one with another.

"Prayer," said Thomas Carlyle, "is and remains always a native and deepest impulse of the soul of man."

Why such widespread unwillingness to admit this spiritual up-reach as natural to man? Perhaps one reason is the terrific challenge that goes with it! Once seeing himself as a child of God, how can he explain his selfish ways? Once seeing others as children of God, how can he explain his failure to offer them help?

To develop the body into strength and harmonious coordination is natural. To develop spiritually through prayer is natural. As the stalwart rippling-muscled athlete reveals to every growing boy a picture of what he might become, so prayer reveals to us our possible stature of spiritual development. In Jesus the "natural" is pictured in its fullest expression! In Jesus we see what God means when He says "Man"; and what man means when he says "God".

We Feel His Tug upon our Hearts

An old man passed a little fellow who was holding for dear life to a bolt of string that was stretching up - up. "My child," he asked, "why are you still holding to that string? The kite is out of sight." The child answered, "I know it's there. I can feel the tug of it."

Skeptics ask today, "Why keep holding on to this thing called God? He is out of sight, you know." *But we can feel His tug upon our hearts.* Our own experiences, if we had no evidences from nature or from Jesus to convince us, teach us that God is "there" all the time - reaching toward us, seeking, knocking; at times, taking us by the hand and leading us up to where we can see the light.

Have you ever rushed eagerly to the telephone, perhaps to tell your best friend some exciting news or to ask his help on some problem, only to find silence at the other end of the line and to have the operator say, "The line is dead?" Think how God's heart must yearn to "get through" to the hearts of His children. Yet how often we fail to open our minds and hearts to fuller experiences of Him through prayer.

Prayer, then, is not a matter of "overcoming God's reluctance," but rather a "laying hold of His highest willingness." The more we venture upon that faith the fuller grows our experience of communication with Him. We simply open our hearts, knowing that He is there seeking us even before we turn to Him.

The swimmer learns to relax upon the water, knowing that underneath are laws of gravitation that will bear him up. So it is with prayer. Underneath are the "everlasting arms" (Deut. 33:27) ready to bear us up once we "**let go ... let God.**"

Meditation that may Lead to Prayer, or from Prayer to Life Changes

Have you ever tried to "keep" your usual time for prayer, but felt out-of-tune somehow? No time nor energy should be wasted berating one's self. Relax. Take some deep breaths. And set yourself to meditation or "devotional reasoning." Don't try to force yourself to pray unless and until the "the prayer comes." Only then is it true prayer.

"What is the difference between prayer and meditation?" There is a difference between *thinking* about your friend and actual direct two-way *conversation* with him. The former is like meditation. The latter is like prayer. Meditation often helps prepare the way for prayer. Meditation may follow prayer, as you seek to discover the implications for our life. Or meditation may take place in the midst of prayer. Having placed yourself in God's presence through worship, you may meditate, just as with a real friend you may think together in silence.

Meditation is not skirting around a problem, instead of facing it squarely. The act of meditation requires our keenest powers, brought to bear upon the subject. We prod our minds with questions; we move logically from point to point. Meditation is a way of grappling with truth in the presence of God. Our minds may be like rusty hinges at first, but with practice they grow more nimble. We may be surprised at flashes of insight that will come.

Scientists know the experience of wrestling with facts, rearranging them in different patterns tirelessly; until "from out of the somewhere" a new idea flashes. This is "creative meditation." In the Christian life, new insights are needed, as to ways individuals and groups may live and work together and build brotherhood. Consecration of mind as well as heart is needed.

Steps in Private Devotions

Should there be an "order of service" for our private devotions? Prayer is an individual matter. Each must take those steps on the "ladder of faith" that come natural to him. Your sequence might not be that of another. The following is one suggestion:

1. Close the door-against intrusions of thoughts that would interfere, against outside noises or distractions.
2. Open the door of your heart to God. Concentrate upon His holiness ... His love.

3. He will show you your self and your needs. Go over these with Him.
4. Accept His response.
5. Reverently, and not too hurriedly, withdraw from the "interview" keeping its atmosphere of quiet about you.

A similar "pattern" is suggested in the following:

1. Reverently contemplate God. Think of His greatness, His love.
2. Think of yourself in relationship to God. Look at your life as you think He must see it. "Search me, O God, and know my heart; try me and know my thoughts, and see if there be any wicked way in me." (Psa. 139:23-24)
3. Select a specific point at which your life needs to be lifted toward the level of God's way.
4. Concentrate upon fellowship with God about that problem. Exclude the irrelevant and focus your consciousness upon Him. Face it in the atmosphere of God, constantly recalling His presence and His principles. Don't let the problem or concern get in the way of seeing His light.
5. Accept the new illumination that comes. You will see things in a new clarity if you have really looked at them in the presence of God.
6. Plan now to apply the insight that has come to you, in specific action. Go beyond a vague commitment to list specific details in which you will seek to live differently. If we are "disobedient to the heavenly vision" (Acts 26:19) we shall lose it ... Now pray to God, offering yourself at this particular point and asking for his strength and guidance.

* * *

Prayer of Penny in Marjorie Rawlings' "The Yearling," by the grave of the little cripple.

"Almighty God, hit ain't for us to say what's right. Was ary one of us to be a-doin' of it, we'd not of brung this pore boy into the world a cripple. We'd of brung him in straight and tall like his brothers, fitten to live and work and do. But in a way o' speakin' you made it up to him. You give him a way with the creeters. You give him a sort o' wisdom, made him knowin' and gentle so they come to him. Now you've seed fit to take him where bein' crooked don't matter. But it pleasures us to think now you've done straightened out them legs and that pore bent back and them hands. Lord, give him a few redbirds and mebbe a squirrel to keep him comp'ny like he had here. All of us is somehow lonesome, and we know he'll not be lonesome do he have them leetle wild things around him, if it ain't asking too much. Thy will be done. Amen."

Chapter 4

A Rainbow of Moods in Prayer

Prayer consists, not in the things you get, but in what you become.

The great prayers of the Bible range through different moods. So do prayers that have come down to us from illuminated spirits of the church through the ages. A "rainbow" of prayer moods belongs in every person's daily experience. These moods are: Adoration; Thanksgiving; Confession; Petition; Intercession; Dedication; and Closing, or Ascription in the name of Christ. The prayer of Contemplation, or the Unitive Way, may be achieved by those who are spiritually sensitive and who have paid the price of all climbers to the mountaintop: that of discipline.

Beginners in prayer are prone to let petition overshadow the other moods. To the extent that selfish concerns dominate prayers, they dominate life. One of the evidences of spiritual growth is an increasing tendency towards the unselfish prayer moods of adoration, thanksgiving, and intercession. **Our prayers are a test, to reveal whether we are becoming more God-centered and others-centered and less self-centered.**

Is there an exact sequence that should be followed for these moods in prayer? No. To follow routine would be insincere. Each must speak forth to his God the deepest impulses of his inmost self. Would it not be artificial if what was uppermost on your heart had to wait until you had methodically checked off other items on your prayer agenda? The listing above suggests a sequence commonly found in group worship. But the individual finds his own natural order.

Preparing the Heart for Prayer

A veteran tells of a crisis at the front when he "really prayed." A mother tells of the illness of a loved one, when she "really prayed." What do they mean?

First, their own act of prayer was whole-hearted. In their anguish, doubts were swept away. They concentrated all their powers upon finding God. Here was no lazy wool-gathering, no shallow self-centeredness.

Second, they will testify that, even though the specific answer they requested may not have come, they felt a response.

Crisis prayers are real. The tragedy is that the same earnestness does not carry over into ordinary times. Can you determine now, to make your prayers of the everyday, as earnest as those from a life-raft?

Instead of wandering vaguely in your prayers from one idea to another, decide beforehand just what moods your prayer will take. Then put all of you back of this prayer act. If you say, "My prayer now will be a thanks-giving," recount to yourself your

blessings, and mean your gratitude from the depths of your heart. If you say, "I must now confess," think specifically of your sins; concentrate on God's loving forgiving spirit; purpose that with His help you will not commit those sins again. Pray each time as if this were the last prayer you might ever pray this side of eternity.

Prepare to listen. All of us would do well to echo the spiritual, "I'll be somewhere listening for my name." The purpose of prayer is not merely to find expression for what we want to say, but through two-way conversation (which involves listening on our part) to hear the divine call. **The habit of humble, God-absorbed listening is the best known remedy for self-love.** Prayer at its highest is preparation of ourselves to let Him flow through us and out over the world in endless benediction.

Another condition we must fulfill is that of absolute confidence in God. He has taken care of the past. He will take care of the future. Having done our best, we can leave the rest with Him. Jesus warned against the sin of being over-anxious. Read Matthew 6:19-34 and you will feel the magnificent sweep of Jesus' confidence in God. Hear, too, His stinging condemnation of our trust in things.

Matthew 6:19 "Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth, where moth and rust doth corrupt, and where thieves break through and steal: {20} But lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust doth corrupt, and where thieves do not break through nor steal: {21} For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also. {22} The light of the body is the eye: if therefore thine eye be single, thy whole body shall be full of light. {23} But if thine eye be evil, thy whole body shall be full of darkness. If therefore the light that is in thee be darkness, how great is that darkness! {24} No man can serve two masters: for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other. Ye cannot serve God and mammon. {25} Therefore I say unto you, Take no thought for your life, what ye shall eat, or what ye shall drink; nor yet for your body, what ye shall put on. Is not the life more than meat, and the body than raiment? {26} Behold the fowls of the air: for they sow not, neither do they reap, nor gather into barns; yet your heavenly Father feedeth them. Are ye not much better than they? {27} Which of you by taking thought can add one cubit unto his stature? {28} And why take ye thought for raiment? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they toil not, neither do they spin: {29} And yet I say unto you, That even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. {30} Wherefore, if God so clothe the grass of the field, which to day is, and to morrow is cast into the oven, shall he not much more clothe you, O ye of little faith? {31} Therefore take no thought, saying, What shall we eat? or, What shall we drink? or, Wherewithal shall we be clothed? {32} (For after all these things do the Gentiles seek:) for your heavenly Father knoweth that ye have need of all these things. {33} But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you. {34} Take therefore no thought for the morrow: for the morrow shall take thought for the things of itself. Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof.

"Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof." It is as if Jesus were saying, "O little man, quit worrying about things you cannot control." This does not mean that we would not take all our concerns, particularly about the evils of the world, to God in Prayer. But,

having aligned our wills with His and dedicated our powers, we must not then dissipate them by lack of trust, or cloud our efficiency by worry. Bishop Quayle told of lying awake anxiously one night until at last he seemed to hear God say, "Now, William, relax and go to sleep; I'll sit up the rest of the night." When you drop a seed into the ground you trust that it will grow according to God's laws. The Lord of the harvest is the Lord of your life; trust Him.

Adoration

"Set the Lord before you," said the Psalmist (psa. 16:18). To do so may involve a definite act of mind and will. For, crowding before you are probably hundreds of other ideas, concerns, desires, duties. To shut the door upon these, and open the door to God is your first step.

Prayer begins in consciousness of God: "Our Father ... Which art in heaven ..."
"Hallowed be Thy name ..." (Matt. 6:9) "Let the beauty of the Lord our God be upon us."
(Psa. 90:17) "Bless the Lord, O my soul, and all that is within me, bless His holy name."
(Psa. 103:1) "Lord, Thou hast been our dwelling-place in all generations." (Psa. 90:1)

The ancient Hebrews so revered the name *Jahweh* that they dared not pronounce aloud the vowel sounds. Think of some aspect of God such as His holiness, His all-encompassing, unfailing love; or perhaps let your thoughts be guided by some gracious picture or promise Jesus gave. "I am the Light of the world." (John 8:12) Let the wonder of it fill your heart ... as if you were viewing a magnificent sunrise for the first time. Give yourself utterly to the experience. Let yourself be "carried away" into the thought of God.

The twenty-third Psalm does not ask something from God. It meditates about God and His ways. Read, with your heart vibrating in answering adoration: Psalms 1, 8, 19, 27, 139. Or sing in your mind such hymns as: "Our God, Our Help in Ages Past"; "The Spacious Firmament on High"; "Holy, Holy, Holy"; "God of Grace and God of Glory"; "Joyful, Joyful We Adore Thee." Adoration means "loving God back." In adoration, says Muriel Lester, "we enjoy God."

A little girl went into the study of her uncle who was at work. She stood by his side a few minutes. Finally, he asked kindly, "What did you come for, Mary?" "Nothing," she replied, "just to be with you."

A French peasant had a custom of coming into the church and sitting for a long time after his day's toil. A priest asked him what he prayed about. He answered, "O, I just look up at Him and He looks down at me." As one put it, "In adoration we hold ourselves toward God as one holds cold hands to a fire."

Brother Lawrence was able, after patient practice, to say, "As for my set hours of prayer, sometimes I consider myself a stone before a carver, whereof he is to make a statue;

presenting myself thus before God, I desire Him to form His perfect image in my soul and make me entirely like Himself."

A would-be follower observed St. Francis in an all-night prayer-vigil, and found that he spent the entire night in prayer of adoration, breathing, "My Lord and my God."

Thanksgiving

The step from adoration to thanksgiving is short. "In everything give thanks" (I Thessalonians 5:18). Once there was an ugly little man, abused and miserably persecuted for his energetic preaching and practicing of a truth in which he firmly believed. Publicly ridiculed, flogged, thrown into prison, still this staunch little man could bravely, joyously say to his fellow Christians, "In everything give thanks." Paul was reminding us that **what matters most is not what happens to us, but how we take it.** Something significant happens to us when, under the stress of distracting and discouraging circumstances, we can open our eyes and our hearts to God's goodness, and *give thanks.*

Let us pray. O God, forgive me when I go about with my eyes to the ground, seeking my heaven in the dust. Give my spirit wings of gratitude to soar higher than my complaining self to Thee, in Thine unending love and mercy to me. Make me aware of Thee, My God - and thankful.

Yet, despite all we have to be thankful for, gratitude is not always spontaneous in us. All the more reason, then, why we should keep a place for it in our prayers. Whatever our mood, whether we feel thankful at the moment or not, the act of praying in consciousness of God's goodness may open our dull hearts. Thanksgiving should become a part of the "set" of our spirits toward God. "Count your blessings" and you may be quickened into a new aliveness.

Grace at table reminds us of God's good gifts, and of that Supper when Jesus bade His disciples, "This do in remembrance of Me." (1 Cor. 11:24) The food, of which we are about to partake imparts strength for His work.

When you use a form of thanksgiving from prepared materials, consider each new idea until it becomes your thanksgiving. Think of new experiences, new realizations that have come to you. Let the little things of life have place in your prayers. See all of life in the framework of the "Eternal Goodness."

"I know not where His islands lift
Their fronded palms in air,

I only know I cannot drift
Beyond His love and care."

John Greenleaf Whittier

Growth takes place in our prayers of thanksgiving, as in other phases of our prayer experience. At first, we may have stopped with gratitude for material things. Venturing deeper, we grow able to thank Him for sadness, for sorrows, for disappointments which may have helped us grow. Have we reached the point where we can thank God for answering our prayers *in His own way*?

The *use* we make of our gifts bespeaks our thanksgiving more than our words. Thanksgiving is thanks-living. We need not fear to use God's gifts to the fullest when thankfulness is in our hearts.

Sometimes, to accept a gift from God means that we have to turn out of our hearts something that is blocking the way.

We take God's gifts and offer them back, to be of use to Him as He wills. Thus consecrated, they become more sacred to us. Our lives become a holy stewardship. For example, to thank God for a happy and comfortable home is not enough. Are we willing to undergo our part of the sacrifices involved in making that home loving, and in devoting that home to His service?

Thanksgiving brings us close to intercession for others. We covet that others may have the good gifts we enjoy. Prayer for them becomes inspiration to action.

Confession

Contemplation of God in His goodness brings a sense of our own unworthiness. Awareness of what He has done for us brings a keen sense of how little we have done for Him.

One spiritual leader suggests that, in addition to our regular periods of prayer daily, we set aside at least a half-hour each week for rigid self-examination and confession, when unhurriedly we may look at ourselves "as if we were someone else" and judge ourselves by the Christian ideal.

God makes His own examination. He may uncover some habit that we ourselves might prefer not to call a sin. We list our sins as we feel ourselves judged by Him. We cannot confess what we only half-acknowledge to ourselves. But in our prayer of confession, we should neither exaggerate nor minimize. The devil has a way of withdrawing us from the real evils into preoccupation with small things.

There are our personal sins or "trespasses": laziness, irritation, jealousy, desire to be in the spotlight, pettiness, compromise, discouragement. There are also the "soiling" experiences of so much contact with evil in the day's living.

In addition, there are the sins of the world. The world's sin is our sin. We cannot turn aside from it as too big for us. Each individual shares responsibility. He cannot escape it. The world's pain must be his own pain. If enough people were sorry enough about the ills in the world today, they could make a difference.

Sins of omission should be confessed, as well as sins of commission. "I have done those things I ought not to have done, and have left undone those things I ought to have done." Specifically, what have we done that we ought not to have done, and to whom? Specifically, what have we left undone that we ought to have done? When was that? What can we do about it?

In confession, there is no need to narrate to God at great length what He knows already. In penitence, we cast our burdens at the foot of the cross. Brooding over sins merely brings remorse and deepens them in our minds. To repent is not to repine.

"Search me, O God, and know my heart.
Try me and know my thoughts,
And see if there be any wicked way in me,
and lead me in the way everlasting."

Psalm 139:23-24

At times, when our penitence is especially deep, we feel unworthy to come into God's presence, to ask forgiveness. God knows. He will accept us as we are.

To accept God's forgiveness is an active experience. "As far as the East is from the West, so far hath He removed our transgressions from us." (Psa. 103:12) "Though thy sins be as scarlet, they will be as white as snow." (Isa. 1:18) Come in faith ... go in the same faith. The prophets, Jesus, and the apostles all declared God's cleaning love. "Unto seventy times seven" (Matt. 18:22) is His forgiveness.

Experiencing forgiveness does not necessarily mean escaping from the consequences of our acts, or even from the habit-patterns that may have been given a good start within ourselves. But through forgiveness, we are buoyed with new courage and morale. We can watch those dangerous pitfalls more carefully.

You may be perplexed as to what to do about righting the wrongs you have committed. Accept God's leading. You may feel that some word should be spoken, or some act of restitution made. No general rule can be given as to steps after forgiveness. Each situation and each individual differs. Let God lead.

But of each, a definite act of will is expected: to renounce with honesty and strength that particular sin or shortcoming *for good*, for God. Otherwise, confession becomes a habit of indulgence. Sometimes acceptance of God's forgiveness involves our forgiving others. "Forgive us ... as we forgive." (Matt. 6:12)

Petition

God knows us through and through. We need not fear nor hesitate to talk with Him about any desire of our hearts. But how His heart must at times yearn over us when we act like "spiritual cry-babies" pleading for things, instead of taking His spirit into our hearts!

For what should we ask? We can scarcely expect God to grant desires that are wrong. A prayer in Jesus' name ("in His spirit") means that we will not ask for evil to happen to anyone else or for good to come to us at the expense of others. We will not ask for easy lives, but for strength and wisdom to meet our tasks. We even pray for courage to take on hard or unpleasant work. Prayer for basic physical and material needs may be made "in His name", if our motive is to serve God more fully through them. But we must be willing, if need be, to go on serving without them! In short, our prayer may be for whatever seems appropriate to the nature of God as Jesus pictured Him.

Christian petition is always prefaced by "if": if it be His will. Can we admit that, if something is not according to His will, we will gladly go without it? Can we, in the words of a young person, "make His will our wish"?

How are our petitions dealt with? Sometimes it seems as if God is strangely silent. We have tried sincerely to offer our prayer in Jesus' spirit; and we have sought to find His will. Nothing seems to be happening. Perhaps the "answer" is coming in ways we have not yet learned to understand. Through some train of circumstances, He may be revealing the way to take. He may have different plans for us. Sometimes after long delay, answering thoughts flash into our minds.

That period of preparation was necessary and therefore not wasted. Sometimes we are given that for which we pray, but in a different form. Many times there is a definite "No". In childlike trust, we can relax upon His goodness, knowing that He knows our needs and has our interests at heart more deeply than does the most loving parent. We rejoice, even in a negative response, for "we crave a God we can worship, not one we can coerce."

There is a "character test" to prayers of petition, as there is to prayers of confession. Are we ready to receive that for which we ask? Do we honestly *expect* something to happen? Few of us pray as if we expected to receive, nor do we live as if we did. We pray that our youth fellowship may be a spiritual force in the community life and the nation, and that other youth may want to commit themselves more fully to Christ. But if a host of youth lived up to the condition of that prayer - what a difference it might make! Are the youth, who would thus pray, willing to make a public witness of their faith?

If we ask God for a Christian world where wars will be outlawed forever, we ought to believe we will receive it! Is not such a world in line with what we understand of God's own nature? Hatred and prejudice and destruction are foreign to the way of life Jesus

taught. Prayer for a peaceful world, then, should be easy. But it is too easy, if we overlook the heart of the matter: our prayer must be our life!

Many of us are too much like St. Augustine when he prayed, "O God, make me over - but not yet," or like those who subconsciously add under their breath, "Thy kingdom come" - "but not now."

If we ask for a Christian world order by devoting every minute of our time, every bit of our talent and energy, and every penny of our money to living out God's way, then we shall receive it. That is not easy! It is not even halfway easy. But it is not impossible. *"Dreams are they - but they are God's dreams."* (Thomas Curtis Clark)

Intercession

What we ask in deepest desire for ourselves, should we not also ask for others? Petition and intercession are close, particularly when both are God-centered at heart. In a completely unselfish prayer, our own deepest petition is for another's good. The Lord's prayer is for "us," not "me" alone or "they" alone.

Yet many are perplexed about intercessory prayer. Is it reasonable to suppose that God can (or will) influence persons at a distance in response to our prayer, except through stirring us to do something for them? And if God should answer our prayer for others, would it not be forcing our will upon them and taking away their freedom?

Jesus, however, prayed for others as naturally as He prayed for Himself. In His long prayer near the end of His ministry, His great heart overflowed, in intercession for those He was leaving. To the Christian, prayer for others is not only right but essential - in fact, natural and inevitable, the more we grow in our understanding of God, of others, and of ourselves.

Intercession may be defined as "communion with God about others," seeking to learn His will for them, and to cooperate therewith.

Can intercessory prayer accomplish some of the claims made for it?

We may be on the fringes of spiritual laws whose workings have not yet been fully apprehended. A man can speak into a microphone and be heard thousands of miles away before he is heard in the back of the room in which he is speaking. Several messages can travel over telephone wires at the same time. Surely divine and human intercommunication can take place. The workings of people's sub-conscious minds have not yet been explored fully. In recent experiments in extra-sensory perception, findings indicated that telepathy took place more readily between persons who were closely knit by ties of love or relationship.

"We are probably linked to each other in mysterious ways besides the more obvious outward bonds of union. We do not yet know clearly how this is so; but it is a fact beyond dispute that mind can influence mind in ways beyond comprehension. And if we can influence other minds by these deep and mysterious means, it is not very difficult to believe that The Mind which is in vital touch with all minds, and from Whom they derive their very existence, can influence us all."
Ronald Sinclair

Genuine intercessory prayer also has a "character test": it demands that we offer ourselves so wholly to God as to renounce our own thoughts and feelings about others. We take His into our hearts instead, holding them there until they color our attitudes, dispel our prejudices, and nerve us to unselfish action!

We have prayed for ourselves and been answered. We have prayed for our brothers and been answered. Now dare we pray for the whole brotherhood of man? Sometimes we are tempted to hold our prayers to the range of what we consider possibility. We dare not lift our eyes and imaginations to far horizons, and to pray seemingly impossible prayers. Yet Paul prayed, as if he thought there were no limitations on the power of God's love! Read Ephesians 3:14-21.

Ephesians 3:14: For this cause I bow my knees unto the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, {15} Of whom the whole family in heaven and earth is named, {16} That he would grant you, according to the riches of his glory, to be strengthened with might by his Spirit in the inner man; {17} That Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith; that ye, being rooted and grounded in love, {18} May be able to comprehend with all saints what is the breadth, and length, and depth, and height; {19} And to know the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge, that ye might be filled with all the fulness of God. {20} Now unto him that is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that worketh in us, {21} Unto him be glory in the church by Christ Jesus throughout all ages, world without end. Amen.

The New Testament tells of the bedridden man whose friends were so eager for his healing that they lowered him through the roof. "And Jesus, *seeing their faith ...*" (Matt. 9:2) Can our faith expressed through intercession be the means of releasing further spiritual energies for others?

We do not know *how*, but prayers seem to open up channels between God and man, and between man and man. Testimonies have multiplied from persons who seemed to feel that they were being prayed for.

How can we learn to pray intercessory prayers? For those who do not find it easy to think of others, let them start with themselves and ask also for others. Do you find it difficult to resist temptations? Then pray for all who may be tempted in the same way. Do you face sorrow? Turn abruptly from self-pity and remember more difficult sorrows others may face. Does joy sing in your heart? Think of others who face life with a smile.

The long prayer of Jesus suggests a "pattern":

First, He prays for his nearest friends, with a warm intimacy of spirit that betokens deep friendship and understanding. But watch! He does not ask that they be given earthly security or ease, but that they may be kept from evil ... "safe with me as here on earth, and safe in Thee."

Then, as a fan spreads out from its base, His prayer widens step by step. He prays for those whose lives will be touched by the deeds and words of those there present. Then His prayer stretches to include all His loved ones of all space, all time.

Love must be back of our intercession, as it was back of His. We may start with those we love most. Then we include all those near to the heart of Christ.

Into our prayer will come the thought of persons working in far-away places for God. With our financial support should go our loving prayers and our personal interest. Alongside them we see countless hosts of other workmen for God, facing difficulties unimaginable to us.

"Away in foreign fields, they wondered how
Their simple word had power.
At home, some Christians, two or three had met
To pray an hour.
We are always wondering, wondering how,
Because we do - not see
Someone - perhaps unknown and far away -
on bended knee."
- Laubach

Prayer is especially needed for those representatives of governments responsible for the destinies of peoples all over the earth. Do we stop for ten seconds, while reading the newspaper or hearing radio newscasts, to pray for a person or group who is likely to affect world affairs?

Muriel Lester suggests praying for persons we pass on busses or crowded streets. They may be strangers, yet they are God's children. Our sense of kinship grows as we pray silently, "God help you - you look as though you are facing a problem!"; or, "Thank God," if the face seems glad.

The more vividly we can picture peoples in other lands as fellow human beings (and in our own land too!), the more we learn about their customs, their music, their worship, their interests, the more fully we can pray for and with them. Folk games and songs, folk stories and other lore can enhance our prayers.

The difficult question comes, "Can I pray genuinely for someone I dislike?" No, not until there is true forgiveness in your heart, or willingness to be led of God into fellowship with that person. Try to imagine Jesus in your place. Hear Him praying, "Father, forgive them." (Luke 23:34) He had no enemies! Concentrate upon the worst enemy you know. True, you may feel a sense of righteous indignation that this person or group is acting from selfishness or greed and causing suffering to others. But the energy of love demands that you pray that he may be turned away from these evil ways. You do not meekly condone injustice in our prayers. You work actively towards casting down from positions of power such persons or groups, through your voting and in other ways.

But always in your prayers, you see persons as persons. Think what it might mean to the world if they became followers of the Christ. Have you faith to believe that with God all things are possible? Above all, oust hatred from your own outlook and motives. Unless you do, it may propel your actions in wrong directions. Only when in deep humility, we face our weaknesses, can we become instruments of reconciliation.

"Lord, make me an instrument of Thy peace. Where there is hatred, let me sow love. Where there is injury - pardon. Where there is doubt - faith. Where there is despair - hope. Where there is darkness - light. Where there is sadness - joy. O divine Master, grant that I may not so much seek to be consoled, as to console; to be understood, as to understand; to be loved, as to love. For it is in giving, that we receive. It is in pardoning, that we are pardoned. It is in dying, that we are born to eternal life." *St. Francis of Assisi*

Dedication, Submission to God's Will, Commitment to Service

The final act of prayer is the yielding up of ourselves to God. All the other moods of prayer are incomplete without this.

Would you believe that a boy is sincere who tells a girl he loves her and then becomes engaged to another girl? Do you believe a person's prayer is sincere if he tells God he is grateful for blessings and earnestly seeks His light, and then fritters away his time on non-essentials of a selfish nature?

The act of dedication releases us from a feeling of inferiority into the glorious knowledge that God has created us for Himself, and that we - even we, with all our weaknesses and failures - can have a part in fulfilling His will here on earth. All our work ahead is haloed with this sense of mission.

Details we must do each day do not bother us. We remember that Jesus lived the greater part of His life amidst the details of carpenter work, village gossip, preparation of meals, sleeping, walking, talking with neighbors. Of that stuff a kingdom of love can be built! It became a reality first in His life, then in His teachings!

We may not always be able to see clearly the steps to take, following our commitment. Sometimes there is no sense of "green light" for a while. Yet usually the immediate step just ahead is clear. By taking that, a subsequent step appears and then another. Dedication is not one act, so much as a "set" of the spirit in seeking to know and to follow God's will - all the way.

Closing

Beautiful, and of profound meaning, is the custom of closing a prayer "in Jesus' name," or "in the name and spirit of our Lord Jesus Christ." As has been seen, such phrases must square with our inmost motives. We have not prayed, in the real sense, until we have prayed in His name.

As Jesus went forth to let His life be used by God, so our prayers in His name imply our willingness to serve.

Contemplation

Prayer at its highest level becomes "unitive" - "communion with God." In utter quietness we expose ourselves to God, as the lake bares itself to the reflection of the stars.

Our purpose in contemplation has been cleansed of all self-seeking. No longer are we preoccupied with our own concerns. Our one object is to achieve unity with Him, the Maker of our Being. Probably our prayer has gone beyond words, beyond music, beyond conscious thought. All else has been blotted out in a "cloud of the unknowing." There is often a sense, not so much of praying, as of being prayed through.

Whereas in meditation, you may have to force yourself to concentrate mentally, to hold your thoughts "in loving attention to God," in contemplation you are on a higher level and "wandering thoughts have no more influence over your contemplation than a flight of birds over a plowed field." In contemplation the mind is empty of self, empty of all things save God. Your prayer is now reduced to its simplest form: waiting upon God.

How long should one remain in contemplation? There is no answer. Some, are capable of longer periods than others. Time is not the question, but the reality of the experience. There may not be any direct result "no prophet ecstasy, no sudden rending of the veil of clay." Yet, upon going about other duties later, you are likely to find a new light shed upon your way, a new grace in your soul. Some truth may have been made clear. Wherever your deepest need was, there a Divine Hand has touched -if for healing, or consolation, or courage, or strength.

* * *

From Japan:

Now let me live
To manifest Thee, O Lord
Unto my people -
But let me hide behind Thee
Lest their eyes should rest on me.
from D. J. Fleming

O Thou, whose glory reaches to the heavens, our Peerless One, grant that as Fuji's pain-wrought crown is reflected in the muddy paddy fields near its base, we may each in his own place and in his own pattern catch a fragment of Thy likeness and all together reveal the perfection of Thy beauty.
from D. J. Fleming

Chapter 5

Overcoming Difficulties

"Explorers in the realm of the spirit are like Columbus when he landed on a new continent and did not know what lay beyond. We probably have only just reached the beach-heads of prayer."
Laubach

Practice in prayer should be in the right direction. It is possible to practice a mistake until you learn that well. You may be practicing wrong ideas of God. Or your prayers may be on an immature level when you might be growing.

Wrong Ideas as to the Purpose of Prayer

While some neglect prayer completely, others pray with the wrong purpose: that of seeking to get something they want, or of trying to bend God to their ends. A child thinks the world revolves around him and cries to get others to do as he wishes. A test of growing maturity in prayer-life is decrease of petition and increase of adoration and intercession.

What does it mean to say at the end of a prayer, "in Jesus' name"? Is it a way of "drawing a blank check upon the bank of God and endorsing it through Jesus Christ our Lord"? No prayer that is selfish can be offered in His spirit. A good test is to ask, "Is this the kind of prayer that Jesus Himself might pray?"

Jesus made His life and His prayer one. He lived the Lord's Prayer. Through surrender of self, He was God's instrument, kept perfectly attuned. To pray in His spirit, "Thy will be done," (Matt. 6:10) is no mere resignation. It is active will and dedication. It is affirmation of partnership with God.

Our prayer, as our lives, needs to be marked by the cross: the capital letter "I" crossed out, its arms reaching toward others on a limitless horizon. "Prayer is not an easy way of getting what we want; it is the only way of becoming what God wills us to be."

Our Need for Growing Ideas of God

The idea you have of your friend influences the way you act when with him. The ideas we have of God influence, sometimes limit, our prayers.

What about the impulse to dictate our own wishes? To urge God, or to demand? Or what about our efforts to beg God, to try cleverly to get around Him? Do we grovel in false humility? Do we sometimes promise something in return for what we want Him to do for us?

What ideas about God do these prayer attitudes reveal? Some persons let narrow, warped, inadequate ideas of God keep them from having a rich, full prayer experience their whole lives through. If we feel ill-at-ease and awkward in another's presence, we are not likely to seek his company often. But we will delight to be with the friend with whom we feel joyously at home and who brings out the best in us. It is the same with prayer. Small, mistaken ideas of God show up in prayer *Ideas suggested by Chalmers -*

Fire Insurance - The idea, perhaps unconscious, that God will "get" you unless you say your prayers before going to sleep. Prayer thus is regarded as a kind of "premium" you pay, or like carrying a rabbit's-foot to ward off danger. The idea is not far from primitive.

Emergency service - While there is no doubt a sincerity as well as desperation in fox-hole prayers, the tragedy is that the same spirit of dependence upon God does not carry over into all life. Chalmers calls this use of prayer a "towing-in service for stranded Christians when out of gas or broken down on the road."

Spiritual gymnastics - Some regard prayer (a few minutes in the morning, a few minutes at night) as a spiritually healthy exercise, a kind of "daily dozen." To what extent do some youth groups in the church allow their periods for worship and prayer to lapse into mere 'devotional exercises'?

Light switch - Prayer is like pushing a button; God waits ready, but man must pray first. Does this imply that God will not heal until someone prays?

Pious routine - The Pharisees had made of prayer a pious habit, but they took pains to be sure they were where others might see them when they prayed. Has any youth, in a period of sentence prayers, found himself thinking more about others' opinions of his prayer than about the God to Whom he was praying?

A common difficulty is that we do not know enough about the God to whom we pray, as the above attitudes reveal. Take this hint then; read the gospels constantly. Go with Jesus in imagination up the hillside to pray, or as He labors among the pressing mobs.

Hear in imagination the reassuring tones in His voice as He breathes the word "Father." Let Him guide you to a Christ-hearted God.

Some labor under false ideas as to the way God works. They set up a picture in their minds of a Being easily moved by whims, One who "plays favorites" by granting something special to one of His children as over against another. Some ascribe to God attitudes less admirable than those of a loving parent.

Our faith in God should not be staked on whether or not a particular prayer was answered in just the way we demanded. A girl whose fiancé was killed in the war turned bitterly against God. Many have been tempted to similar reaction. Yet so long as there are wars on earth, persons will be killed. Why deny one's self the solace of prayer when it is most needed?

Whatever one's stage of understanding or brand of theology, he can begin to pray. He can trust God and use what light he has. He will learn more as he goes along. His "system of beliefs" does not have to be complete for him to begin to pray. Upon entering friendship, he does not have to dissect all the principles and draw up a creed or contract or agreement. Beliefs will grow out of prayer and action, as well as from logic; and will under gird both. To be sure, inadequate beliefs may stunt or hold back the progress of prayer. But in confidence that God has a reservoir of spiritual resources available, take courage and tap it!

Difficulties in Terminology

When one *wants* to pray, he finds the words. The form does not matter; it is the spirit that counts. The spirit will determine the form.

What words should be used in addressing God? While many feel that "Thee" and "Thou" betoken reverence in a way colloquial English does not, let each person use those forms that express his prayer most sincerely! Do not allow your prayer life to be hindered by worry as to the proper "etiquette" of approaching God. He is our Father.

Nor are words always necessary in prayer. We seldom formulate our fondest day-dreams into definite words or sentences. Prayer may rise in terms of mental pictures, or music, or unworded aspiration. Yet always it should be definite, and God-centered.

Danger of Thinking of Prayer Too Much in Terms of Feelings

Emotion plays a part in all the great adventures of life. But prayer is more than a matter of emotions.

Emotional responses differ in persons. Some live on an even keel and are rarely disturbed. Others' emotions flash like quicksilver and change rapidly. Much depends upon glandular equipment and habit patterns. In the same person, emotional responses differ from day to day.

Thus, it would be foolish to attempt to judge the vitality of prayer life by *feelings*. To rise from your knees with your feelings stirred, yet with no definite resolution for our daily life, is dangerous. It leads toward using prayer as an escape for action. It might be compared to running a motor with the clutch out; the engine races and gas is wasted, but the car does not move.

Man is a three-fold being: of thought, feeling, will. Prayer makes full use of all three. If, then, for long periods, you may "feel" nothing when you pray, do not grow discouraged. Your mind and will may be in process of becoming more acutely tuned to God. The quiet, steady habit and follow-through involve mind and will.

What we need to do is to forget ourselves, anyway. If we keep taking our feelings out and looking at them, we will get nowhere in our prayer. What should be a window looking Godward becomes a mirror picturing self.

Whether or not you feel a *sensation* of love does not matter so much, as your determination to act lovingly towards all. Whether or not you feel a *sensation* of sin is not so important as that you determine to give it up!

If you expect an inrush of power and joy every time you pray you will probably be disappointed. You do not pray for the "bang" you want to get out of it, but to know God and his will. Power, peace, and joy come as by-products.

Hurry

Real prayer takes time. God works by a different time-clock than do His hurried children. "Hurry is the death of prayer." One can at any moment turn to Him, for His heart is attuned to the wavelength of His own. But to know the Mind and Will of God through prayer takes time, a certain "quiet spaciousness." If all our prayers are as feverish as our lives, we can not expect much poise and serenity from them. **We have not passed the first test for entering into prayer-fellowship with God, unless through determined will we find or make time for prayer.** (See further discussion, Chapter VI.)

Difficulty in Finding a Place

Many live out their waking hours amidst crowded conditions: rooms that allow little or no privacy; a general atmosphere of over-population and over-stimulation.

Again, a strong, determined will must be called into play. Find moments when you can be alone at a certain spot each day. Some find inner aloneness while walking amidst crowds. Some withdraw to a quiet church (if they can find one open, at the time they need; and worshipful).

Through constant practice, one can grow in skill for "shutting the door" upon distracting conditions and withdrawing into a Quiet place within. "In the castle of my soul is a little

postern gate, whereat, when I enter, I can be where God is." (See discussion, Chapter VI.)

Wandering Thoughts

"But I cannot make myself concentrate in prayer!" The experience is probably as widespread as there are persons who pray. John Donne of three centuries back said:

"I throw myself down in my chamber and I call in and invite God and His angels thither; and when they are there, I neglect God and His angels for the noise of a fly, for the rattling of a coach, for the whining of a door... A memory of yesterday's pleasures, a fear of tomorrow's dangers, a straw under my knee, a noise in my ear, a chimera in my brain, troubles me in my prayer."

What can you do? There are several steps you may take. If you form the habit of concentrating in other phases of your life, you will find it easier to do so in prayer.

"... One is to realize that everybody's thoughts are subject occasionally to such vagrancy, and one ought not to be too much worried about it. But if one's mind wanders habitually there is a reason, and one ought to find the cause and correct it if possible. One may be too tired, or too uncomfortable, or there may not be enough ventilation in the room... You may not be sleeping enough at night to pray alertly in the daytime. You may have undertaken too much work and screwed yourself into a tension from which you cannot let down. You may have so many other pressures from persons that God seems a long way off. Part of this you can correct by analysis and adjustment of circumstances; part of it will recede only as you care enough, to make a time for quiet waiting before God, for relaxed receptivity in which God has a chance to capture and redirect your thoughts."

Difficulties Arising from Wrong Relationships with Others

This difficulty is the most serious of all, for no amount of escaping into prayer can undo a wrong done another, or do him a service that needs to be done. Jesus even went so far as to suggest that, although a person had already knelt at the altar, if he remembered that his brother had anything against him, he should leave the altar, make it right, and come before God anew.

Almost every utterance from Jesus' mouth had something to do with personal human relationships. He linked these relationships up with one's prayer life. "Forgive as we forgive." "Our Father"; "our daily bread." You cannot say the Lord's Prayer and even once say "I" or "my" or "mine" or "me."

All of us are aware, perhaps painfully so, of times when we failed to achieve a sense of communion with God because of some gnawing sense of having failed in some relationship with others. So long as there is an un-Christian feeling in our hearts toward anyone, to that extent our prayer will be lifeless. **For one of the "laws" of the spiritual universe is that to get right with God, we must get right with our neighbors.**

This does not mean that we cannot pray about these very problems. Through prayer our wills may be strengthened to the point where we will make the needed apology; or seek out the one who is lonely; or make amends for wrong done. **Prayer and living are inescapably related.** Prayer is no mere matter of seeking an emotional glow for the pleasure it gives us. Prayer is a virile challenge to bring all of life, in all the network of human relationships, into harmony with God's will.

In one sense, prayer is solitary, as between the individual and his God. But in another sense, prayer must always be social, in that we bring our relationships, both near and far, into the prayer-place to be judged by Him.

Kagawa interprets Jesus' admonition in striking language:

"If he visits the prison after going to the temple; does he not by so much delay his meeting with God? If he goes first to the church and then to the hospital; does he not by so much postpone beholding God? If he fails to help the beggar at his door and indulges himself in Bible-reading, there is a danger lest God, who lives among the mean, will go elsewhere. In truth he who forgets the unemployed forgets God." Kagawa

Some questions for your quiet time (by Russell E. Clay), are:

Is there any desire, thought, imagination, fear, anxiety, word, deed, attitude, or habit blocking God from me today?

Is there any person in whose presence I am uncomfortable and would rather not meet? Why? What shall I do about it?

Is there any wrong I should right or broken relationship that I should restore today?

What sort of happenings raise a conflict within me? Why?

Where do I play too close to the edge of temptation?

Is there anything in my life that I must defend or hide? Why?

Does Jesus' motive of love completely saturate all my thoughts, plans, and actions?

What message does the Bible have for me today?

For what should I be thankful today? What persons should I thank?

What persons should I remember in prayer today? For what Kingdom interests should I especially pray today? (Family, local church, missions, social morality, racial harmony, world peace, economic justice and brotherhood.)

Are there any letters I should write today?

Are there any debts I should pay today?

Is there any person needing my friendship, time, help or money today?

What should I personally do to enrich our home life today?

What should I personally do to further social morality today?

What should I personally do to promote racial harmony today? To promote economic justice and brotherhood today? To advance world peace today?

What does God want me to do as the next step?

Are all my motives for today's decisions and plans completely Christlike?

The Tyrannies of Our Own Consciousness

Self can get in the way, and eclipse prayer life. A penny held before your eye can shut out the sun.

The *ego* is the "self that is unduly concerned with self." It is the tendency to emphasize "I." Can you think of God for five minutes without some thought of self intruding?

Things get in our way, too: money, clothes, food, etc. Can you think of God for five minutes without some thought of things coming into your mind?

Only when we can achieve emancipation from self-interests and from things, can we have that "uninterrupted consciousness of God by which we are transformed into his likeness." We need God's help, in freeing ourselves from these tyrannies. We cannot effect it alone. But He needs our cooperation.

"He can never have us nor we him unless we are willing to undertake the practices which will help him to help us out of the tenacious, earthly entanglements of our own consciousness."

A. E. Day

Just as the farmer takes responsibility for preparing the soil, so we are responsible for the condition of our consciousness: whether ego-dominated, or thing-dominated, or God-centered. Disciplines are needed - to weed, cultivate, plow, prepare, that God may plant.

The Difficulty of Seeming to Get Nowhere

Do we expect too much all at once? Beginners often do. To be sure, a vision came to Paul on the Damascus road. But few persons are in Paul's situation. For most, spiritual adventuring means a patient, even plodding, upward climb. We cannot jump suddenly to the mountaintop. Each step upward is of itself important, in building spiritual stamina.

Nor do we have to wait to get "in the mood" to start. We can begin where we are. The Chinese have a proverb that "a journey of a thousand miles begins with a single step." It comforts us to remember that "He knoweth our weakness; He remembereth that we are dust" (Psa. 103:4). As St. Augustine prayed, we can pray: "Make me to be what I cannot be, and to do what I cannot do." Set yourself at the highest place spiritually you know; then let yourself to be led upward from there, *by the grace of God*.

We have to work at developing prayer life, just as we have to exert effort to grow in any skill or knowledge. A man does not sit down and say, "I think I will be a great artist. I will paint a masterpiece now." Inspiration requires 99% concentration and perspiration. Hours of study, days of work are essential.

If a boy set out to be a baseball star without practice, he would never make the team. A girl who has never learned to sew cannot expect to produce a finished garment the first day she takes Home Economics. Yet there are those who say they do not believe in prayer, for they tried it once and it failed them.

Growth in prayer can be gradual; but it is sure - as sure as the fact that by climbing steadily, you gain greater heights up the mountain. It may take five years before you achieve the level of which you now dream. **Growth should be lifelong.**

Another experience of the spiritual life is that of coming upon plateaus, or periods of "dryness." The saints and mystics of the spiritual life have all written about such periods in their experience. If it happens to them, then we will not worry when it happens to us. They offer the suggestion that we wait in patience, as the mountaineer waits for the fog to lift. "Trust God even when you cannot feel His presence near." "Rest in the knowledge that light will come at the end of the tunnel."

* * *

Prayers from China:

Dear Saving Lord, make me a bamboo pipe that I may carry living waters to nourish the dry fields of my village.

from D. J. Fleming

(A newly literate refugee woman)

We are going home to many who cannot read. So, Lord, make us Bibles so that those who cannot read the book can read it in us.

from D. J. Fleming

Chapter 6

Aids in Achieving "Disciples' Disciplines"

"Your thinking this very day has helped make the world what it is. When you think in perfect harmony with God, the titanic forces of the universe bend like gravity to pull things and people your direction, because you are going in God's direction." Laubach

What Does it Mean to "Pray without Ceasing"?

"Pray without ceasing," (1 Thess. 5:17) admonished Paul. Swift thoughts of God spring upward like brief exclamation points. They may be petitions: "God, help me in this." Or, they may be little prayers of thanksgiving: "Father, that was a lovely time" ... or, in the words of the old Negro woman, "God, you're gonna spoil me with your goodness!"

All phases of life become hallowed with a sense of Presence; and take on new *importance* when prayer is thus a part of them. All acts of our conscious life - eating, drinking, sleeping, waking, walking - become as "sacraments." The student thus attuned finds the power of God demonstrated a hundred times in one session in the chemistry laboratory. Fair play on the football field underscores a Christian tenet. Brother Lawrence, whose very name recalls the phrase, "practicing the Presence of God," stated:

"The time of business does not differ with me from the time of prayer, and in the noise and clatter of my kitchen while several persons are at the same thus calling for different things, I possess God in as great tranquility as if I were upon my knees at the Blessed Sacrament."

Dr. Frank Laubach, a modern mystic, may have had in mind a similar level of spiritual achievement, when he spoke of "being aware of God one second out of every minute during the day" (Game). A young person observes, "Those little moments when quick arrow-thoughts dart Godward are real prayers."

Are these arguments against having a definite time and place each day for more extended prayer? Those looking for an excuse for not observing daily disciplines might like to believe that. Paul's admonition has been quoted as an excuse for not having regular periods of prayer.

But once a person begins to make excuses, he will likely excuse himself from prayer altogether. True, he can associate walking, eating, and other events of his day with prayer - but will he? True, he can make of the kitchen a sanctuary, as did Brother Lawrence - but will he?

Brother Lawrence did not find it easy. It took him eight long years of unremitting disciplines before he was able to "practice the Presence" there in the dirty kitchen. To be a practicing Christian, one must work at the job. There is no short cut. Can a musician interpret Beethoven without first mastering his scales?

"Disciples' Disciplines"

We are going in training now, to become spiritual athletes. We will set up certain daily practices for ourselves. One will be that we set aside certain periods of time each day for prayer. Another will be that we will find and use such materials as will aid us in our spiritual growth. Another will be that we will adopt those customs of meditation and prayer that will enable us to make progress.

Yet we will make none of these an end in itself. We will remember at all times that God is not so much interested in observing rigid rules as in our growing in understanding of Him and in willingness to cooperate with Him. Should we "slip" on one day, we will not waste time in discouragement, but will seek out the cause for the failure and purpose to do better next time. We will build a framework for these disciplines, yet keep it flexible.

Dorothy Canfield Fisher, in the novel "Rough Hewn" makes one of the characters, an old actor, say,

"By changing the very fiber of your being; that is the only way to become anything worth becoming. And you cannot change the fiber of your being without dying a thousand deaths and knowing a thousand births."

One of the mysteries of life is the ability in persons to grow in skills. Memory can be strengthened. Will power can be developed. Intellectual faculties can be sharpened. Emotions can be controlled and regulated. If this be true in regard to other phases of life, how true in regard to prayer *which makes use of all these faculties*.

In proportion as you are willing to put disciplined effort into your prayer life will be your results. "Discipline" is not a pretty word, nor always a welcome word. We all prefer ease. We tend to follow the line of least resistance. We want to get results without paying the price. By habit and inclination we tend to remain on lower levels when we could be ascending towards the heights.

Our lives have grown complex. That simplicity of faith and singleness of purpose that was in the first disciples is harder for us to attain, probably, than for those Galilean fishermen. By effort we need to free ourselves from "the tyranny of things," to become at heart as little children. **It takes discipline to focus our lives in prayer.** It takes discipline to find a quiet place and quiet moments for prayer each day. It takes discipline to shoulder new tasks of service as outgrowths of our prayer. Discipline means the "ordered control of outward action and inward mood." Discipline is the path of discipleship.

I. Time

Prayer takes time. How much depends upon the person and his felt needs. At the beginning, you would not want to make your time-period so long as to be mechanical or tedious. Consciously watching the clock takes attention from the prayer itself. The time should be definite, unhurried, and guarded against intrusion.

"The establishment of an unbreakable relationship with God is the most important thing in our lives, therefore we must never permit it to become secondary to some other concern." Kirkland

Some claim they are too busy to pray. But having experienced the values from prayer, Stanley Jones remarked of a particularly busy period in India, "We were so rushed those days that we *had* to spend three hours a day in prayer."

Too busy to pray? Such a statement suggests that we consider other activities of our day more important than prayer. Each person is awake almost 1000 minutes per day. Would it be too much to ask that one-thirtieth of that time be scheduled for fellowship with God? Martin Luther wrote:

"By the grace of God. I desire to lay down the rule not to speak with man until I have spoken to God; not to do anything with my hand until I have been upon my knees; not to read letters or papers until I have read something of the Holy Scriptures."

A beginner in regular prayer-habits will find it a good idea to keep a little notebook for jotting down the excuses he offers himself for failure to observe his prayer-times.

Some prefer to spend fewer minutes more often during the day in prayer and meditation. Some feel that there should be at least one "block" of time for deeper prayer; then brief ejaculatory prayers at odd times during the day.

Surely ten minutes a day is as little time as the beginner could set. One group of youth, most of whom were students with extremely busy schedules and limited privacy, felt that each could easily find twenty minutes a day, and that this should be their minimum.

When is the best time for prayer?

The answer is to be found by each individual as he studies his own schedule. One prefers the early morning. Another finds that he can be alone at a later time during the day. All of us can take advantage of odd moments: the few minutes between bells, waiting for a bus or train, waiting for a caller, waiting for the water in the bathtub to run.

How can daily prayer-time be best used?

Leaders vary in their suggestions. Take a look at some of the opportunities during your day. Answer the question for yourself.

a. Early morning, as soon as you awaken. In these first moments of returning consciousness, let your greeting be to God. Many a day is made or marred by what you let "steal" your mind during these first formative moments. Worries, plans, temptations will try to come in and take over. But training, even for a few mornings, will enable your mind to hold the reins, and your will to turn actively to God. Making a choice at the beginning of one's day colors the whole day; and makes other choices easier.

b. Morning meditation. Early in the day (before breakfast if possible) take from five to fifteen minutes for meditation. If you can be alone and quiet, good. If not, think and pray while walking or while washing dishes. This is your opportunity to offer the day to God; to go over its possibilities with Him.

"Be ready in the morning and come up ... present yourself there to me on the top of the mountain, and no man is to come up with you." (Read Exodus 34:2, 3, and Matthew 6:5-15.)

This is your morning "watch." You must never face the day until you have faced God, nor look into the face of the people you meet until you have looked into His. Meet Him alone as Moses did, as all the great religious men and women have done. Take time in the morning to read His story in the Bible until His personality and enthusiasm become a part of you. Take time to ask yourself, "How would Jesus have me live this day?" Ask Him to keep you from trivial things and wasted time.

Mystics have called this a "prayer of intention" - placing ourselves and our work in the hands of God.

c. Food should be taken at mealtimes as a gift from God, and in remembrance of persons everywhere who experience the same physical needs. Let a sober reminder cross your mind of persons who are hungry, near and far; and with that reminder, let there be a swift winging prayer that all may be given what is needful. Answering that prayer may mean going without something yourself. The earth brings forth her fruits and enough has been provided for all - if all share in brotherhood.

d. During the day. Walking, with the blood pounding healthily in your veins, may remind you that God's way is full of abundance, vigor, joy. Breathing fresh air may remind you of the "atmosphere" of God's love all around you. Instead of seeing crowds who frustrate your progress, see individuals with problems and dreams - some weary, some anxious, but all your brothers. Can you radiate poise and serenity to at least one person who may be a stranger?

A leader of students offers some practical suggestions:

"Instead of spending the few minutes between bells worrying about whether one will get an invitation to that formal or reviewing notes for an exam (nothing is usually learned then if it hasn't already been learned), why not look out the window at a pretty tree and recall the devotional thought read that morning, or think of some person who needs your prayers and thoughts? Minutes spent waiting to see professors, or for a practice room to be idle, or for the

mail to be put up, need not always be spent in idle talk. They may be precious opportunities for turning thoughts inward and upward to, God." (Roberta Dillon)

A temptation comes. A need arises. Ask God for help. You make a mistake. Seek forgiveness. You rejoice in some success. Breathe a prayer of thanksgiving. Such prayers may take place without changing your position or stopping what you are doing. These little "grace notes" will enrich your life.

e. Middle of the day. Some take the stroke of noon as a special time for prayer. At that moment, the shadows are vertical, symbolic that the sun's rays fall in impartial angles over all. What more appropriate time, then, for intercession, for remembering persons over the world and gathering them into a prayer-impulse of love?

Noontide is a fitting time for praying for missions over the world. "Thy kingdom come." When it is remembered that time-belts change all over the world, a time-chain of prayer may be established and a twenty-four-hour-a-day prayer-watch kept regularly.

Prayer at noon may also be a time for reaffirming basic beliefs. You may say over in your mind a chosen creed or your own personal statement of beliefs. Repeat with Paul, "I know in Whom I have believed." Let the heart rise in a "*Te Deum*" of thankful affirmation.

f. Evening prayer. Prayer-time in the evening can be both restful and invigorating, in spite of fatigue. Look back over the hours of your day. Note how God has shown Himself in all its events, in the people you have met, in the beauty of nature, and in new ideas that have challenged you. **Note how He has shown Himself in that which has been difficult or disappointing.** Recall the events of the day and the conditions that made you realize anew God's love, and that led you to give yourself more fully in service.

Evening is also a time for confession. In sincere penitence we can lay our sins and short-comings before Him and *leave them there*.

"Remember when you've got to the end of your tether, there always stands the Savior, understanding every problem, stronger than any foe, the overcomer of every evil, your friend, Jesus Christ." Lester

Offer your night hours, before going to sleep, to God for His certain watchful care. Some find it helpful to repeat a chosen word or phrase or bit of a hymn or scripture verse - what Gerald Heard calls a "song-word" - such as "love," "joy," "peace," "In Thee I rest," "The peace that passeth understanding."

"Drop Thy still dews of quietness
Till all our strivings cease."

"O love that wilt not let me go,
I rest my weary soul in Thee."

Not only is there great psychological and spiritual value in this act of letting God calm our spirits. But who knows but that spiritual growth takes place even during unconscious hours; or that, in Brother Lawrence's word, it may be true that "those who have the gale of the Holy Spirit go forward even in sleep?"

Whatever your time-period for prayer each day, use it well and use it all! Nothing is gained by dawdling, or wool-gathering. In fact, bad habits are being engraved upon your sensitive personality.

First establish "stillness" around your prayer-time. Make preparation for it, as carefully as you would prepare for a worship service in which you are to lead a group. Even if you have only a few minutes when you can be assured of aloneness for prayer, spend a third of the time, if need be, in preparation of spirit. Begin, not with nervous agitated sentences, but with inner stillness and relaxation. "Let go ... let God."

II. Place

Finding a place for personal devotions is sometimes as difficult as finding time.

Youth at camps and conferences have been asked what to them was an outstanding worship or prayer experience. Almost invariably they mention first, an experience in the out-of-doors "when I felt God near."

But prayer is more than a mood of enjoyment of the wonders of nature, more than feeling an expansion of soul. It must be an active, *willed* experience of at-oneness with God. The vestibule of nature may invite one to seek the living Presence.

Churches also are vestibules for the worship of God. But where is the church kept open during the day for a lone worshipper to bow before his God? Is there some time during the week when the organ may be playing and when persons may drop in for meditation guided by music? Churches should serve the worship needs of people, not alone one hour per week, but seven days a week. One group of youth took turns opening the church and looking after lights and music, and announced to the community the hours for meditation.

In an increasing number of churches and on an increasing number of campuses are to be found upper rooms or prayer chapels. In youth and student meeting rooms worship centers are prepared. Outdoor chapels or green cathedrals are set up at camps. On one campus, a small garden plot that was secluded was chosen as the place for prayer.

Some persons have a special prayer corner in their rooms at home or in the dormitory. They can fashion their own settings, using such reminders as will help them "center" their thoughts upon God. [*But beware of elevating "reminders" into idols!*] A small picture may be used on a shelf or desk. In a corner of a mirror may be placed a brief poem or inspirational thought. Housewives may paste bits of poetry or scripture above their sinks, on their eye-level as their hands are busy about dishes. A young person who is

skilled in crafts may make small wooden crosses or triptychs or simulated stained glass windows for the prayer-corners in rooms. Small luminous crosses are available which will glow for a while after the light has been turned out.

Times remembered when prayer has taken place amidst beautiful surroundings will help the individual when he tries to pray amidst unbeautiful surroundings.

What did Jesus teach about places for prayer? Interesting clues may be found in such references as Mark 11:15-17; Luke 4:16-19; 6:12; 10:17, 21; John 4;19-21; 23-24.

You cannot always go apart. But each of us has that door marked "private." Only we have the key. No one need ever know - not even the persons with whom we may be conversing at the time

"Mid all the traffic of our ways,
Turmoils without, within,
Make in my heart a quiet place,
And come and dwell therein."
John Oxenham. Hymn, "Mid All the Traffic."

III. Materials

Once you have established your time and place for prayer, what you will *do* and what helps you will use depend upon *what you want to have happen to you*.

If you wish to pick up hurriedly some piece of devotional literature or even the Bible, read a bit, feel a warm glow, and check off your duty for the day, then that is one thing. It looks easy. Scan a few lines of devotional material (some persons can read very fast), capture a thought, perhaps think about it for a minute, then go on your way. But is that all you want to happen to you?

The Bible and other devotional material should help us think of God. But all materials are tools. They cannot worship for us.

You have not prayed when you have merely read (or even assented to) a prayer someone else has written. Sometimes printed materials and pictures stimulate us to think our own thoughts, to pray our own prayers. Sometimes they merely lead us to the place where we are ready to do so. They may serve as a "spark" to set off a flame within us.

As you hold your Bible or bit of devotional material in your hands, think of it as different from ordinary printed words on pages. Each phrase comes from the heart of someone who himself was seeking earnestly to respond to "the impulse of God's love." Can life speak to life? Can God's Life speak through the life and words of some long-ago hymn-writer or poet, to your life in the here and now? Will you in turn express a thought, for someone who may come after you?

The use of carefully selected devotional materials can help widen our range of prayer. It lifts our eyes above our narrow horizons and concerns. It deepens our understanding of people far away. It reminds us of blessings we may have ignored in our thanksgiving. It teaches us more about God.

Just as, when worshipping in a group, we "unite our hearts" in prayer, so in using devotional materials and prayers of others we seek to unite our hearts with theirs in a fellowship no less real because it centers in Him.

a. The Bible.

More than any other book in the whole world, the Bible helps persons feel the need of prayer. The chief character in the Bible is God. The Bible prepares us to walk the way with others who have prayed. The prayer-life of Jesus stands before us as silent condemnation of our weaknesses and failures.

The basic source for our help on prayer is found in the biographical material about Jesus, especially the two long prayers recorded. We speak of the one as "The Lord's Prayer," but both are His prayers. In the one case, He was giving His followers a model; in the second, He was demonstrating by the spontaneity of the prayer that His concerns centered in God's will and in those He loved.

Probably no prayer has ever been used more widely or more thoughtlessly than "the Lord's Prayer." Never say, "let's *repeat* the Lord's Prayer." Prepare to pray it. Study it carefully, a phrase a day, until it prays itself through you. Within it are thoughts as dangerous for conventional Christian living as the power of an unexploded atom. Can you add with each phrase, "**beginning with me, right now**"?

You will find it helpful to have a Bible you can mark for use in your devotions. "A marked Bible is a loved Bible." When you discover some passage in the Old or the New Testament that helps you understand a little more clearly about the nature of God, read it over aloud and mark it so that you can spot it easily again. Take, for example, such passages as: Isaiah 55; Psalms 19, 138, 139; Matthew 5, 6, 7; Romans 12; Ephesians 6:1-20; James 1. Reading aloud may help bring out new meanings, or transport you into something of the mood the writer may have had. Can you read Psalm 148 or 150 without feeling your spirit lifted and the majesty of the whole universe thrilling your soul as you sing, "Let everything that hath breath praise the Lord!"

Not all of the 66 books of the Bible are suitable for devotional use. Too often the procedure is to open the Bible at random, without stopping to think of the background, meaning, or type of literature of a particular passage; and then to try to squeeze from the passage meanings that may be too literal or not in harmony with the context. The same could be done with a book on physics or biography. One experiment will reveal how ridiculous is the custom.

Seek to find the truth that is there, with as honest and open a mind as you would take to any truth. Do not distort meanings. You will not need to. If you live with the Bible, until you know how to find and interpret, there will always be new vistas waiting for your eager eyes.

The new American revised standard version of the New Testament brings clearer focus and closer view. It should help particularly in understanding the life and words of Jesus. Let there be no qualms against using more "modern" versions. After all, all the Bibles in the English language are translations from translations. It stands to reason that with present-day scholarship we may be approaching more closely to the meanings Jesus intended than has been possible in any generation from His time to this! Moffatt's and Goodspeed's versions will help give new meaning to difficult passages.

A single verse may be as much as you will wish to read at some meditation period. Again, several chapters may be necessary for the telling of a story. Let your Bible reading be flexible; guided by your needs and by the meanings you are discovering, rather than by any mechanical "budgeting" of your plans.

A good concordance will give the key word for a particular problem or need upon which you may wish to find help. You may be amazed at the treasure-store of material thus opened up.

The prophet Jeremiah is sometimes called "the Father of true Prayer." Whereas other leaders spent their efforts on preaching and reform, Jeremiah records his deep-felt need of God, his cries to God for help and the answers God gave him. See Jeremiah 15:1-21; 17:5-19; 20:7-18.

Further passages with helpful guidance for the spiritual life are: Hebrews 11; Psalms 1, 8, 15, 23, 24, 27, 63, 91, 95, 98, 100, 103, 104, 121, 146, 148, 150; Isaiah 9:27; 11:1-9; 53:1-7; 12; Romans 8:31, 39; Philippians 4:4-9; Jeremiah 7:1-11; I Corinthians 13; Revelation 21:1-7. As you read, imagine yourself a part of each scene. Picture the way the men and women are dressed; imagine you hear their voices. Think how they might have felt - where their needs may have coincided with your needs now. Thrill to the artistry of expression in such a psalm as the 51st or the music of Isaiah 35.

You may wish to make your own devotional Bible by purchasing a ten-cent story copy or two, cutting the parts that appeal to you and pasting them in a blank notebook. Your "Short Bible" will grow as your knowledge of the Bible and its meaning for your life grows.

No difficult experience you may ever be called upon to face can equal the agony of Gethsemane. No joy or sorrow or problem may come for which you cannot find a "Word" in the Bible!

Yet to take the Bible seriously is no light matter. We find our own lives weighed in the balances and found wanting. As Kierkegaard says, "Being alone with God's word is dangerous business."

"Beyond the Sacred Page,
I seek Thee, Lord,
My spirit pants for Thee,
O Living Word."

Use your church hymnal too. In the hymnal is a treasury of prayer-hymns, coming out of as many different moods as a person might express in a lifetime.

Certain loved prayer-hymns may be learned from memory; associations built around them, both in group and individual worship, will come back "on wings of song" as they are repeated silently in the mind in time of need. The prayer-spirituals are among the most deep-felt expressions of the heart in all poetic literature: "Lord, I Want to be a Christian in My Heart"; "Every Time I Feel the Spirit"; "Were You There?" You may be tempted to select in the main the simple, intimate first-person-singular hymns. Yet you should also let your spirit be stirred and fanned to new challenge by hymns of social-consciousness: "O Young and Fearless Prophet"; "Where Cross the Crowded Ways of Life"; "These Things Shall Be." Going to the days' work, keep rhythm to your footsteps in "Forth in Thy Name, O Lord, I Go."

There are two types of devotional literature on prayer: books *about* prayer, that describe the process as others have found light; and books *of* prayers and direct devotional meditations. The student of prayer needs both - perhaps the former more than the latter. If he uses the latter only, he is tempted to depend too much upon it. There are certain classics of the devotional life with which everyone should become acquainted: Thomas À. Kempis "The Imitation of Christ"; Brother Lawrence, "Practice of the Presence of God"; Augustine, "Confessions."

Making your own devotional anthology is a meaningful practice. As you read, both from books about prayer and books of prayers, you will come upon certain arresting passages that you would like to come back to and think about further. Copy these, noting accurately the page and book source.

Books containing prayers and devotional thoughts from great spirits of the past and present, kindle our own spirits.

Music is another resource for prayer. Some of the classics of musical literature were composed in deep religious awareness. Themes (such as are found in many church hymnals) call the soul to prayer. By use of a record-player, or by recalling to mind such passages, you may use them as a "call to worship."

Good pictures likewise call to worship. Taylor's "When I Survey Thy Heavens" transports you to the hillside beneath the brilliant Syrian stars, until you stand with that

lone shepherd psalmist. Cheap, gaudy representations of Christ have no place; but many have found it helpful to collect the works of various artists as they have sought to depict this greatest Life - that out of the composite, they might discover for themselves a way of picturing Him for themselves. Nature pictures have a place in the prayer-corner, along with nature-hymns.

In turn, God may be depending upon you, to speak a word from your heart ... or compose a hymn ... or paint a picture ... that will help someone else along the way.

IV. Customs

Man is a creature of habit. To the extent that routine matters can be reduced to habit, he can free his conscious mind for weightier considerations. Habit comes to the assistance of worship and prayer life.

Through the centuries, customs for group worship and ritual have grown up. Their merit is not in themselves - for a loving God would not wait upon forms; but in their helpfulness in bringing the worshipper into the right frame of mind. The wealth of associations accumulated from previous experiences comes flooding back and enriches the moment. Your feet know well the pathway to your friend's house. In the same way a worship custom provides a well-worn pathway to your divine Friend.

In private worship, customs may be used as pathways, but should never be made ends in themselves. Never think that, after you have observed a ritual or custom, you have prayed. The goal is not mere observance, but fellowship with God.

Some of the customs suggested below, from various spiritual leaders of the past and present, have to do with "setting the conditions" around you, so that you can better pray; or "using reminders" to calm and center your thoughts. **Seek, as rapidly as possible, to go beyond the need for any such aids.** Seek to learn to enter the Presence directly, not depending upon any crutch.

Using interruptions as God's opportunities

Dr. E. Stanley Jones suggests making of interruptions "interpretations." He tells of looking up in the midst of his meditation and noticing that the clock had stopped. He thought, "It needs winding, and so do I. God, wind the spring of my life and set the hands to Thy timing and Thy purposes."

When the fleeting thoughts that come are definitely sinful, let them be the occasion of a deeper upsurge of prayer that God may lift you and your thoughts. Don't try to struggle against them yourself, for that will but carve them deeper into our mind. Again the formula, "let go ... let God."

In the midst of our prayer or meditation a thought may flash - say, of someone we haven't seen for a long time; or of something we might do that we had not thought of

before. Who knows but that God may be bringing us a new concern, inviting us to share concern with Him? Of course, not all suggestions that may come into our minds are of the nature of "guidance." There is one test that can always be applied: "Is this thing that I am prompted to do completely loving?" If so, we can be assured that to follow the "leading" that seems to have come, would be in accord with the life and spirit of Jesus.

Our interruptions can be "God's opportunities" to use us in a deeper way. Perhaps the very way we deal with wanderings of mind in our prayer-life is building stamina into our Christian characters. Jesus' life was a constant stream of interruptions. Yet He never muddled, but always mastered them.

Using silence

"In deep mid-silence open-doored to God." Tyrell wrote to von Hugel, "God has often to undo all our work for Him and build it up again His own way." Reason? Not because we haven't tried or because we haven't worked hard. But because we failed to wait, in silence, for His leading first.

Silence is mighty. Christ before Pilate - in strong silence, until Pilate grows confused. He is the one judged. Peter Scott trying to give a "religious" talk to unemployed miners at Bryn Mawr in Wales, poor dirty fellows who had been out of work from seven to ten years. They say nothing as he talks and talks ... until their silence chokes him ... judges him ... and he decides to throw in his lot with them to rebuild through cooperatives. Jane Addams took a neighborhood woman from Halsted Street with her when she went anywhere to talk about Hull House. The woman sat silently. But Miss Addams knew that silence would keep her from exaggerating or leaving false impressions.

Silence can be adventure. Silence can be *action*, in the richest sense of the word. Silence can be God's chance. Only when we are silent enough ourselves can we hear Him speak.

Using symbols

An engagement ring is a symbol; it carries an emotional freight far beyond its worth in dollars and cents. A flag is a symbol. Traffic lights are symbols. They convey meanings without words. Our lives are full of symbols.

Coming to us through a rich Christian heritage are numerous symbols - some of which are familiarly used in church worship, and others of which may not be so well known. Imagine the early Christians, hunted, persecuted, discovering ways of conveying messages to one another through pictures and signs. Imagine the depth of fellowship-feeling that went with these symbols. With such a symbol as that of a youth fellowship, goes not only a consciousness of what this organization stands for, but a warm personal fellowship-feeling, a "belonging."

Dr. Allan Knight Chalmers suggests a way of using the hands. He calls to mind first the picture of Jesus the lad in the carpenter shop, stretching after a hard day's work, his shadow forming a cross upon the wall. He suggests a way by which we may imaginatively enter more fully into the meaning of the cross -

"In between the past and the future you stand. Open your left hand. Look at your fingers one by one. Name each finger for a man or a woman in the past who kept the faith. Close your fingers and lock them with the thumb to represent the eternal Christ."

"Open your right hand. Name your fingers one by one with the great impassable obstacles of war, and race, and bread, and power. Think of those who will someday solve these problems. Close your fingers in the grip of the eternal Christ."

"Now let your arms be outstretched with the thought of holding on to the past and the future. The shadow of the cross! One is conscious, then, of the aching muscles of the spirit. - One sees why life pulled Him part at thirty-three." Chalmers

Some have drawn for themselves sketches of two hands, writing by each finger the name of some spiritual leader or much-admired hero of past or present; and, for the other, some problems or difficulties both personal and social. The clenching of the one hand signifying great souls in Christ, may represent the drawing in of power ... the clenching of the other may represent depth of conviction and purpose, or out-flowing of power from us into those problem-areas. When faced with a difficult situation, or when tempted to become angry, the clenching of the left hand may bring a fresh sense of power and strength.

Again, let us remind ourselves that any symbol can be misused; our prayer is not the symbol, but through it to God! Let it become a pathway - a quick "shortcut" to prayer. In describing a difficult situation in which the clenching of his hand behind his back opened a spiritual door, Dr. Chalmers observes: "Hours and hours of thought about His way went into that clasped hand."

The picking up of a pen - one we use to write to our friends, write our themes, write our checks - may become a symbolic act, accompanied by a prayer: "Let the beauty of the Lord our God be upon me, and establish Thou the work of my hands." The taking of a telephone off its receiver may be made a symbolic act, "God, be in this conversation." Each person should select his own symbols, and put into them whatever meaning he chooses, that his day may be full of little commonplace "reminders" that he has set himself upon the adventurous highroad of "disciples' disciplines."

Using mental pictures

God has given us imaginations. By them we picture the unseen.

Imagination is a more powerful character-builder than most people realize. **What a person admires most and thinks about most often he tends to imitate and**

become like. The mind is like a sensitive photographic plate which reproduces what it visualizes. The more vivid the picture, the more drastic its effect upon mind and character.

How can this God-given faculty be turned to His service in prayer? When you telephone your friend, you mentally picture him. How do you "picture" Jesus? The mental image many persons have is distorted, sometimes untrue. No artist has ever done Him justice. Each has painted something that appealed to him; and probably each has felt that his representation fell short of what he wanted to express. Through careful effort, we can learn to "picture" Jesus - not in a static frame as in a picture, but moving through crowds. We can watch his electric effect upon them; their response, sometimes puzzled, sometimes laughing at his humor or catching a note of cheerfulness in his voice, sometimes sober as if awakened to new levels of living they had not dreamed possible.

Jesus painted for all men everywhere "the portrait of the Unseen God." He gave His life, His daily life. **God is Christlike.** Thus, if we could but "see" Him as He goes about His daily life, we would be viewing what the Father Himself is in His dealings with men. As Jesus met with men, God deals with them today; as Jesus loved them, God loves us today. When we pray, we can remember that God is Christ-like.

We have thought of that "inner sanctuary" each of us can build for himself in his heart. On the walls should be pictures of Jesus in action and in prayer. By spending time "seeing" Him, we shall grow more like Him.

Ronald Sinclair, in describing the method of "picture-prayer" advocated by Studdert-Kennedy, suggests one picture:

"In the case we are considering, we shall imagine the little band of friends climbing up the outside stairway of the house to the upper room. Their voices are raised in anger. They are tired and dusty and hot. They are very like tired children. We shall follow them into the cool upper room. What is it they are quarrelling about? Simon Peter says that he has always been the first, James and John argue that they are young and zealous, and so on. Instinctively we turn and look at Jesus. What will He say? He looks terribly sad. It is His last night on earth; on these twelve men He had lavished all His care; He had given them His most priceless teaching; they had lived day in and day out with Him. It all seemed to be in vain. Their minds were still dwelling on ambition rather than service; pride still ruled their wills. We watch Him. Quietly He lays aside His garments He takes a towel, pours water into a basin, and gently and lovingly washes each dusty foot in turn. It was the work of the meanest slave boy; but Jesus was ever among them as He that serveth. Slowly the work of love goes on and He comes around at length to Simon Peter. We hear the latter's protest, and the answer. At long last He comes to - Judas. We wonder what will happen now. Judas looks away: it is almost too much for him: he cannot bear it. 'He that hath seen me hath seen the Father.' I think the moments which we have spent in that upper room - for we seem to have been there taking part in the picture - will have made us just a little more humble." Sinclair

A further step in "Picture-prayer" is to take some scene in our own lives which we must face in the near future, and upon which we need God's help. We carefully visualize it, in "technicolor," with all the main characters including ourselves. Now, in place of ourselves, we imagine Jesus in that scene. How would He meet the situation? Later, imitating Him as we go through that situation, we may find ourselves mysteriously empowered to meet it in His spirit. **Using "props" or reminders**

The "props" are an important part of every drama. Certain "props" may help you in your prayer life.

One man takes a map of the world and divides it into six segments. Each evening in his prayers he concentrates on a sixth of the world. He tries to picture the people there and their need. On the seventh evening he tries to encompass the whole world in his prayer of intercession.

There is no magic in the use of the map. It simply helps bring more vividly to his mind and heart the part of the world he is lifting to God in prayer. It is in himself that the changes are wrought. He finds himself thinking during the day of these peoples; the newspaper headlines and radio flashes come alive with new meaning.

An individual may use whatever "props" he needs. One girl who was interested in athletics used occasionally her tennis racquet in her worship setting, in order that she might be reminded of her need for a true Christian spirit in her play.

The youth in a certain camp symbolized the constancy of the prayer-experience by keeping a votive light burning in their chapel night and day. Each hour a different camper or counselor kept watch, praying there not only for the camp but for persons over the world. A new spiritual dynamic was felt in the camp.

Music

Can you "sing mentally"? One who loves music found that to "sing over" in his mind certain passages of music helped prepare his spirit for prayer. Music may become the prayer, as in Mendelssohn's "Hear My Prayer, O Lord" or Bach's "Breathe On Me, Breath of God." Some hymn remembered from summer camp or conference may come to have special meaning in a person's life. One young woman has a photostatic copy of her favorite hymn framed on her desk. Memorization of hymns furnishes the mind and heart with unfailing helps for prayer. Listening to a classical or hymnic recording may prove a means of inspiration. All of us need variety in our meditation, to broaden and round out our experiences.

Making affirmations

In a world of much unbelief, Christians need to reaffirm their convictions. Pull yourself erect, square your shoulders, stand before an open window with feet firmly on the floor,

and repeat the words of your creed - your church creed, or your own individual creed. Try to write what you believe and why in words a ten-year-old could understand.

Keeping diaries

Thousands have found it helpful to keep "prayer diaries," little "letters to God." Writing helps us reach up and catch thoughts that might otherwise be vague and express them in exact words. It strengthens our spiritual muscles, and sharpens our minds. It also tends to give us something definite from our prayer experience to follow through. Once an idea is written, its challenge is inescapable. We cannot fool ourselves. There it is before us. Diaries also help us look back and see how far we have come - or whether we have advanced at all.

Some occasionally write out their sins and failures in a prayer of confession and then burn these in the fire - symbolic of God's consuming forgiveness.

Making days meaningful

Days may have special meanings, as we link them with happenings in the ministry of Jesus on earth. Thursday may symbolize to us the Lord's supper. The question, "Master, is it I?" may be asked in our own hearts. [Actually on a Tuesday.]

Friday is commemorative of that first Friday - "Good Friday," the day of the cross. [Actually on a Wednesday.]

"Think what might happen if we took not one Good Friday a year, but Friday of each week as a day in which to stand before the cross, trying to fathom and share the tremendous love of God which is there revealed. Gradually the insight would dawn that Christ is bending in compassion over the need of all mankind today. Then we should see that wherever Christ bends over human need you and I belong. We should become sensitized to the pain and tragedy of our world. We should pour out strong prayers of intercession and rise to that high point of consecration in which we would say, like Christ, 'For their sakes I consecrate myself.'" [Radcliffe](#)

Benedictions

In group worship, the benediction means a reverent withdrawal from the place of worship to everyday pursuits - in the words of a young person, "Asking God to go home with you."

Look again at Ephesians 4:7-13. "The *grace ...*" - His excellence of thought, word action ... "*with you*" - a part of you, until you can say with Paul, "For me to live is Christ."

"The love of God" - the love that passes all understanding, that is broader than the measure of my comprehension or yours; this love be with you, until you find yourself striving to love as He loves, and to give as He gives!

"The communion of the Holy Spirit" - that very personal contact with the Eternal that swells your heart and gives purpose, power, direction to your life ...

Twelve men received the benediction long ago. Great souls down the centuries have followed, and the world still shakes with their footsteps!

* * *

"More things are wrought by prayer
Than this world dreams of. Wherefore let thy voice
Rise like a fountain for me night and day.
For what are men better than sheep or goats
That nourish a blind life within the brain,
If, knowing God, they lift not hands of prayer
Both for themselves and those who call them friends?
For so the whole round earth is every way
Bound by gold chains about the feet of God."
- Tennyson

Chapter 7

Prayer Changes Things --- and Persons

"Your thoughts grow wider and higher. Your selfishness melts away. You become Christlike. You bless mankind." Laubach

What happens when we pray? What results can be expected?

- If we are praying as we should, such questions are not our worry. "The issue is in the hands of God."

Results of prayer cannot be measured: kinetically, as in power reaction; or quantitatively, as in a test tube. Many years (or, by contrast, a matter of seconds) may elapse before the results of a single prayer are realized.

Looking feverishly for results betrays lack of trust. St. Monica prayed for years for her wayward son Augustine. The day came when he gave himself completely to the will and

way of God, and his Confessions (334-430 A.D.) help point the way for others. What if Monica had grown impatient for results and stopped praying?

Some expect dramatic, even fantastic, results from prayer. Some will make astonishing claims as to benefits they have derived from prayer. Others, hearing, may seek those same results; but failing to receive them in identical fashion, may develop doubts about prayer.

Prayer is powerful. Yet its power is not so much that of the sledgehammer, crushing with one blow, as that of the young plant nurtured by sunlight and moisture and soil, pushing its way upward through concrete.

There are three avenues down which we may look for results from prayer:

1. Growing fellowship with God
2. Growing transformation of ourselves
3. Growing Godlike concern for others and willingness to serve

1. Growing fellowship with God

Prayer centers in God. Its major result should be to help us to grow in our knowledge of Him, and in our consciousness of fellowship with Him.

"Revelations" of the nature of God come to us through prayer. We learn better how to interpret His ways of working through His physical universe, and through people.

God does not step out of the physical and moral order He has created, to answer prayer. He does not act upon whims. He does not show favoritism, nor upsets the dependability of those laws which furnish security for all who live. Yet on the other hand, in the words of Dr. Radcliffe, "He is not a prisoner entangled in his own universe."

"There are undoubtedly times when man's cooperation with God in prayer fulfills the moral and spiritual conditions for the release of His emergent purpose." Radcliffe

Laubach tries to imagine God's response to the soul seeking communion with Him:

"I have been waiting for this moment all your life, waiting until you opened the channel, so that I could speak. I have wonderful plans for you which cannot be realized until you listen as you are listening now." Laubach

The direct consciousness of divine response is not always experienced in every prayer; and not experienced in any two people in identical ways; and not experienced the same

way twice in the experience of any one person. An endless variety of adventures awaits the pray-er!

2. Growing transformation of ourselves

"Lord, what a change within us one short hour spent in Thy presence will avail to make."

Our selves are the instruments through which prayer takes place. Certain drives have been placed within us - drives common to all persons, whatever their race, color, creed, or nation. Much of our waking time and effort is spent in satisfying these drives, whether consciously or unconsciously.

First, there are our organic needs. Within us is the urge for self-preservation that causes us to seek food, shelter, warmth, sleep. Some make physical security the goal of their lives. Prayer helps to overcome slavery to physical appetites. The human body is a marvelous servant, but a tyrannical master. Paul advanced through prayer until he could say, "I keep my body under and bring it into subjection." (1 Cor. 9:27)

A second major drive is that for response and recognition from other persons. Man does not live alone. We crave response from others. We are social to the core of our natures. This need finds high expression in the union of man and woman. The kind of response some seek from others is in terms of what others can do for them. Some of us are still Pharisees doing good works to be seen of men. Wherever people make persons a means to *their* ends, human values are being sacrificed. Reform from slavery, from terrible prison conditions, from economic servitude, from prejudice, from wars, will come only when people learn, through hearts made sensitive in prayer, to respect others' personalities as sacred in the sight of God. "Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself" is a moral law written into human relationships.

Prayer helps our sympathies to grow, almost without our willing it. Persons *count* more with us. We become like highly sensitized film. We take more of a God's eye view. Headlines stating in bold generalizations, "10,000 estimated killed" will stab us with fierce agony. As self-interest fades, we become a channel through which God's love flows, less hindered than before. Imaginations are kindled. Thoughts come as to new ways into other lives, that we may lead them into His love.

Third is the major drive for a sense of achievement. Man longs to express himself - from the grunts and gestures of primitive man, to our complicated network of printing, radio, and television. Sue bakes a cake. Jim plays a saxophone. Both have confidence for they have mastered a piece of their world.

Prayer helps us rethink what goals we are seeking to achieve. When goals have been selected that appear in harmony with God's will, prayer nerves us with new confidence for action.

Prayer helps to heal the spiritual "diseases" that may sap our strength, endanger our mental health, and make us difficult persons to live with. Any failure to rise to our God-selves - physically, mentally, socially, spiritually - may be called, in the language of psychology, "diseases"; or in the language of religion, "sins."

Guilt-sense is such a disease. Everyone makes mistakes. Some are most embarrassing. **Through prayer, we experience God's forgiveness and loving strength so that we can move forward, although the fact of the mistake is not erased nor its consequences waived.**

Tension is another such disease. Sin splits personality apart. All of us are at times the victims of contradictory impulses. The judgment wars with the emotions. Through prayer, impulses become fused around a dominant purpose and Personality. We need not strain any longer. Relaxed, we can let God work in and through us. "It is no longer I that live, but Christ liveth in me" (Gal. 2:20). **We are not merely a reservoir with only so much to give before draining dry; we are channels attached to unlimited resources!**

Needless to observe, all life is quickened to higher powers when such calmness and strength are realized. Among the results are flashes of insight which surprise us.

These drives, God-implanted as they are, are the "raw materials" for Christian character development. With them, God has given us the power of choice. Personality, once it finds its *natural* heritage in God through prayer, has almost limitless possibilities!

3. Growing Godlike concern for others and willingness to serve

Prayer takes God's concern for others and lays it on our hearts. It is but human to respond to those whose sufferings we can see or whose cries we can hear; it is divine to respond to those too far away to see or hear, except through the eyes and ears of the heart.

We can train ourselves through prayer to "recognize" without hesitation others as brothers of God. Such recognition saves us from degrading reactions of enmity or blame or ill-will.

Kagawa states in striking language where he thinks men will find God:

"God dwells among the lowliest of men. He sits on the dust heap among the prison convicts. With the juvenile delinquents he stands at the door begging bread. He throngs with the beggars at the place of alms. He is among the sick. He stands in line with the unemployed ..." Kagawa

Are we willing to dedicate mind, imagination, will, energy to "following-through," so as to prove the workability of God's way of love?

The early Christians had three qualities: they believed in God; they believed in prayer; and they believed in a new era to come. No wonder their gladness was so convincing. They took each step as if accompanied by an Invisible Companion.

Praying people can be the *peace-makers* and the *pace-makers*. Going forth with conviction that they are men and women of destiny, they will find ways every hour that God can use them!

"... a keen sense of social responsibility has not kept pace with scientific development. In this interdependent world a single act of ours may affect the lives and destinies of multitudes of people unknown to us ... church people owning stock in munitions factories ... sale of distillery stock ... business men accepting enormous dividends immediately after crushing reduction in the wages of workers... The content of social application must be put into the teaching concerning individual regeneration." Geer

Often the test comes in a simple way. God does answer our prayer. His spirit begins to lead our thinking, that has been turned over to Him. God opens the door of our minds - not with a clap of thunder, but with the name of a person that keeps coming into our thoughts, or with the remembrance of a letter that ought to be written, or with a concern that keeps bidding us investigate and act. We think these little thoughts that keep bothering us while we pray are distractions, of which we must be rid, before we can hear the still small voice. Sometimes they are; but we must look at them carefully. They may be the keys with which God opens the door to service.

A simple problem or concern may gnaw at our hearts. Answering that, we may be led to a larger one next time. God puts upon us a few central tasks. We cannot die on every cross every day - nor are we expected to. There are differences of talent and skill among His children. He matches the expectation with the person. But He expects us not to drain off the great challenge into a lot of non-essentials. There are high moments when the soul is bade to

"Attempt great things for God!" - "Expect great things from God."

First test each impulse for action by what you know of the life and teachings of Jesus. If at any point, the impulse is not in line, then you may doubt that you are being guided.

Being born again through prayer

What was Jesus' way of seeking for the Kingdom of God? Where did He look? He looked within. He climbed the mountain, not to look for far routes to travel, or even for places of need that called Him, but to be alone with God. He knew that the Father who drew the plans for His life would prove to be the most willing counselor to help Him work out those plans. He knew that it was useless to organize and plan and work, until He was absolutely sure within Himself of what God had planned for Him.

When a man awakens to that life plan, it is like being born again [or "*begotten again*", if you prefer]. The second birth is more important than the first. Without it no meaningful membership in the family of God is entered. It is useless to talk of the "brotherhood of man" and the "Fatherhood of God" without this second birth; for physical kinship is too weak a tie to bind a universe of personalities together into a family. In seeking God's plan, we are not taking on a strange new life, so much as we are being restored to the life God planned for us to begin with. We are prodigals coming home.

The world being born again through lives of prayer

The world about us is born again through the simple acts of everyday life. We rise from our knees to go about doing ordinary necessary things in the routines of the day. We meet friends upon the street, sit around the family table and talk about the news of the day. Yet in the simple walks of everyday life, the world can be made new. "One loving soul sets another on fire." How often do we make a light thing of friendship, when in reality true friendship is infinite? Family love is the most sacred thing on earth, yet we make it a farce in thousands of homes today - and in our love affairs in high school and college.

We begin to see what prayer for a Christian world order involves. It means first that we will try to abolish all hatred, anger, fear, intolerance, selfishness, and all the things wars are made of, from our own lives. In their places, we will put unselfish love for all men whatever their color or condition in life.

When I have made my personal life consistent with my prayer for a Christian world order, then I am ready to take the second step. Some plead that society must be cured of its ills before the individual can live a Christian life. What they say is true; but they may defeat their purpose by separating society from the individuals who make it up. On the other hand, there are religious people who think that salvation has no relation to the world and that unless the individual is changed the kingdom cannot come. What they say is true, too; but they may defeat their purpose by failing to see that what a man does and the kind of society he is content with helps determine what he is.

I must match my belief with action. I must study hard to learn what is the best type of political order. I must do my best to see that the men who work for that way get my vote and confidence. **I will not ask God for a new world order, and then leave my part of the politics and business of the world up to someone who does not share the same desire.**

Not only as individuals must we live out our prayers, but as large groups - youth fellowships across nations and across the world, church and churches banded together. Are we guilty of having felt that the issues at stake were too big to be changed? Have we knocked without *expecting* that doors would be opened unto us? Have we voiced our convictions in a manner that has been more voice than conviction?

"The speaking on the part of those who do it is sometimes considered the end of the process; and those who have traditionally opposed the speaking, after a while tend to consider it a necessary safety outlet for the enthusiasm of youth, knowing full well that it will end there and nothing dangerous will happen. Something dangerous ought to happen. The Christian faith is a revolutionary faith. It grows out of the life of a man who did what He professed and acted as He spoke. We must learn, as youth fellowships, to act as we speak; and sometimes to refrain from speaking until we have acted and tested our thought in the actual experience of a life situation."
Bremer

Did Jesus mean that if we wanted to see Christian ideas inserted into governmental plans, we ought to knock at the door of the treaty-rooms and UNO and other meeting rooms until they are opened to us? But what if we knock and are refused admittance? Then knock again and again. The world is not run on whim and fancy, but ultimately on the laws of God; and what is in harmony with those laws will not be forced outside forever. It takes courage to knock and knock again. Almost anyone can muster courage to knock or call once. But it takes a dogged, determined courage to keep knocking, even with no prospect in sight of the door's opening. How many times have we knocked on the door of race relations? How often do we rap on the door labeled "social morality?" Race prejudice is so deeply ingrained in American life that it can move even church members to commit terrible crimes. Social immorality is very profitable for industries like the liquor industry that runs into billions of dollars every year. But as long as these and other doors are locked to Christ and His way of life, Christian persons ought to knock and keep knocking. For every single knock helps to increase the vibration that shall one day bring the house of sin crashing down, and the world's doors *shall* be opened. "Ask, and ye *shall* receive. Seek, and ye *shall* find. Knock, and it *shall* be opened unto you." (Matt. 7:7)

God's call to a life of service

Remembering that only intelligent, persistent, whole-hearted prayer brings results in life, we seek guidance in the spirit of Gethsemane, "Nevertheless ... not my will but Thine ..." (Luke 22:42). Instead of instructing God in our prayers as to the task we prefer to be called to, we place ourselves willingly at His disposal for use where He sees fit, and at whatever task He wills.

We must be careful lest we miss that call. Sometimes our minds are so made up as to the lifework we prefer that it is impossible for us to hear His call. While it is true that God uses our own preferences and bents to call us to a task, there are other ways He calls us as well.

Another danger is constantly with us, too: that of expecting God's will to come in some certain pattern or way. We must be alert to all of life, for His call may come through any aspect of our awareness. God may call a man to a life of scientific research by letting him watch an apple fall. Or he may call a man to paint a great portrait of Christ through the appeal of paintings in his own home as a boy. Or he may call a man to the ministry

through the suggestion of another man. **God may call you in a way you wouldn't dream, to do a job that you alone can do.**

However the call may come, three steps of preparation are always in keeping:

(a) Wait in prayer before the Lord, in a manner that is as patient as it is earnest. Ask Him to show you a door through which you may pass to your largest service. Do not expect a sudden sureness; perhaps conviction will grow gradually as the dawn.

(b) Study diligently the life and teachings of Jesus; and the record of God's ways with men, in the Bible. See how others have followed.

(c) Do not allow yourself to become complacent in the face of the needs in society. The very mass of suffering in the world may cause us to grow immune.

Make a list of the things that need doing, the conditions that need to be remedied, within your own realm of experience. Form the habit of looking squarely at the needs around you. Remember that the deepest needs are sometimes spiritual ones that may not be associated with poor housing or inadequate food. The list will be long, even if you live in the "best" part of town, or if the people involved are largely church members!

Our prayer for a call to the task is not ended when the call comes. It has only begun! Our prayer becomes our life - if we yield our all to the call - and God's Kingdom is one person nearer

Chapter 8

Toward a Fellowship of Power

The current of power can only flow through a circuit which is complete. Life is not lived between people only. Life is not lived between God and me only.

However friendly and kind and helpful we are to each other, our fellowship will lack timelessness, unless we are related to God.

If I try to keep my relation with God, and then fail to live its spirit of fellowship with others, I become the end of a process that should go on. Life must be lived in a fellowship that includes God, others, and me. My life is grounded in God; I build relationships with others on that ground. Power comes to me from God; I share that power with others. I am lost in God's love; I love others as He would love through me. Others must ground themselves in God, too, else there is no common meeting-place for our spirits.

When more than one of us has the same life center, we become parts of a unit. No word is adequate to describe what happens. The word "Fellowship" is perhaps closest, but the greatness and warmth of the new experience of togetherness is too great for any word.

We vaguely suspected before that there could be such a fellowship of sharing and love. Here it is, and we are surprised to find ourselves in it. These were the bonds that knit the early Christians together in a fellowship of power that enabled their small group to overbalance the rest of the world.

Life is changed for us. Our personal relations begin to line up in a changed way. Certain acquaintances slip into the background, as we see that our relations with them have always been near the surface of life. We may have shared years of comradeship and common adventures, but now we know that down deep we have never been together in that place where God's power of love flows. They, too, will need to become God-centered in order to understand the real life we find. We long for them to have this new life. We sorrow over their dimness of vision. We feel for them what Jesus must have felt for His family and friends. Yet the fellowship of power is necessarily reserved for those who live the new life; power comes from a uniting purpose that binds together in a life experience beyond ourselves.

While some acquaintances move away from the center of our new relationships, others move in. They may not have been considered as special friends before. Suddenly we know them - really know them to the depths - because they are in the same fellowship.

A new sense of values changes our religious opinions. Some things we have counted valuable are seen to be worthless. We see some to be self-seeking, agitated, half-committed persons, working feverishly to cover up the fact that poise and peace of new life has not come to them. We see others giving themselves without reserve yet seemingly unwearied. We see ourselves, gripped by good intentions and very busy. Fast motion has kept us out of focus so that the love of God has had no chance, to "take." Now our hearts leap with the joy of discovery; and we are welcomed by those who patiently understand, into the fellowship of the power of love.

Those who observed the Christian community of the first century exclaimed, "See how these Christians love one another!" (*Tertullian*, 160-220). The fellowship of power has always astonished those who stood outside. In the early church, the concrete expression of love through the sharing of goods was only the outcropping of a profoundly deeper sharing of new life.

Through history, various upsurges of real fellowship in God have appeared: in the early church, in the beginnings of the order of St. Francis, in the group of early Friends [Quakers], in the early days of the Evangelical movement. In addition, there have been thousands of small fellowships-of-power across the centuries: wherever a handful of people centered in the love of God have lifted the life of their nameless community

nearer heaven. History books do not recount these group experiences, but we cannot guess how much we owe to them today.

Man alone cannot create such a fellowship. We find God, give ourselves completely to Him as Jesus suggests. Then we find ourselves in the fellowship. As we increase in Him, we increase in the fellowship - the more powerfully as we have more of His life in us. The term "communion of saints" describes it. Paul saw the whole fellowship to be "the body of Christ" (1 Cor. 12:27).

Ideally, the entire church should be - could be - a Fellowship of Power. Actually, there has always had to be a Fellowship within the fellowship of the church.

In such a Fellowship, things are different. God's way cannot be forced into the mold of our little prejudices and social customs. In the Fellowship, the walls of racial differences are down, because they could never exist. National, cultural, economic, educational differences are all leveled. The Fellowship is not exclusive, not a society for "holier-than-thou's." Each person determines for himself whether he will belong, by his relationships first to God, and then with others.

The depth of the Fellowship is not measured by man-made social groupings. One may experience a deeper kinship with another member of the Fellowship who is of another race, than with one of his own racial acquaintances who refuses to enter. Here all men are on one basis: they are sons of God, living in His love, blessed with His presence, in brotherhood with each other. The scholar and the man of no formal education speak of the same experience, and know the same truths.

Members may hold to different theologies or systems of thought, but their hearts may glow with the same love. That is what counts, and upon that basis we find fellowship. Church boundaries are overleaped. Methodists, Lutherans, Roman Catholics, Pentecostal Holiness - yes, and Jews and Christians together - all may be in the same Fellowship [from a human perspective, but Our Father may not agree totally with our authors about this! He requires us to worship Him "in Spirit and in Truth". Remember that "Thy word is truth." And Jesus said "I am the truth, the way and the life!"].

Such a Fellowship extends past boundaries of place and time. Kinship may be felt with those who lived in this fellowship centuries ago. We read with new appreciation the testimonies of the saints and seers, astonished, perhaps, to find how similar are experiences they describe to ours. We read the Scriptures (not merely as pious exercise or from a sense of duty), but because we wish to meet on this new basis the great souls of that day who were finding God and being found by Him. Minor differences of opinion about informational points in the text seem insignificant. We are trying to know the writers who lived this life with such power.

Great devotional literature becomes more meaningful. Brother Lawrence becomes brother Lawrence. Augustine becomes a friend through his "Confessions." The practical admonitions and whimsicalities of Thomas À. Kempis in his "Imitation" are not "old

stuff," but life speaking to life. The saints of the past and spiritual leaders of today - like E. Stanley Jones, Glenn Clark, Kirby Page, Frank Laubach, Albert Day, Rufus Jones, Thomas Kelley, etc. - speak a common language because they describe in various ways a common experience: a Fellowship of Power.

The ground of this Fellowship through the ages is in God. Lives surrendered to Him (as the mystics say, "drowned" in Him) know one another in Him. When a person is wholly surrendered to God, no one can touch him without touching God also, observed Meister Eckhart of the 14th century. Like mountains rooted in the same earth, persons in the Fellowship of Power are related to one another through Him.

This fellowship is deeper than democracy. It is more than good-group-living together. It is more than a method of getting along with each other. God rules. Each person listens for His voice, seeks to follow His will. Political structures and systems change with the times, but this fellowship in God is eternal. Differences in national organization or creed cannot hold back this power.

Is this fellowship merely a general, universal fellowship with no local loyalties, no particular groups? No! There is the wide general fellowship, transcending space and time as well as man-made differences of language, etc. But within it there are opportunities for forming small, close-knit special fellowships of persons who can meet together often and carry a special concern for each other and for others.

Families

Families are our most intimate and constant relationships. They are the ones who love us best and whom we love best. The old practice of "family worship" is not as widespread as it used to be. Families need more than horizontal relationships: ties of blood that bind them person-to-person. They need a divine relationship, which will give new meaning and depth to all their days.

The family, because of these close-knit ties, can be the natural channel for a fellowship of power. Even after one or two periods of deep-felt prayer together, a family may grow into a new experience of one-ness. New joys are experienced in family fellowship in other realms - in fun, in work together, in purposes shared.

Rufus Jones describes his earliest memories of family worship at the farm home. There were cattle to be fed; breakfast was to be prepared; a thousand chores needed to be done. Yet here sat his family in quiet serenity for what seemed to him a long time. Soon he realized that they considered the Worship of God more important than any of these things. Even though as a child he could not fathom all the reasons why, he caught the contagion of their conviction.

Best friends

Next in our circles of intimate relationships come our best friends, those who understand us most. A student on campus may get to the place where he wants to share his prayer life with his room-mate or best friend. At first there may be a bit of embarrassment, but probably that room-mate or friend was eager for help once the door was opened.

One young couple, who had established a meaningful prayer life together, asked to have the Lord's Supper administered to them at the communion table alone, just before their marriage. Surely such a relationship founded upon the "depth-dimension" of prayer should last an eternity, as a fellowship-of-power.

Prayer-circles

An intimate group of a few persons find a spiritual kinship; share a spiritual preaching. "Where two or three are gathered together, there am I in the midst of them" (Matt. 18:20). The number may be 8 or 10. Here is a little group whose members are in living touch with one another through the common ground of Him who underlies each individual life separately. There is a divine fellowship there, a "plus" added to their relationships.

When they gather, they may pray or seek guidance silently together, or read from some stimulating materials of devotions or discuss information about world conditions. They may speak or sing or keep silence as they feel moved to do. Theirs is not an "organization" with committees "to get up programs." Rather, in free informality and friendliness, they seek God and deeper fellowship through Him with each other. To be sure, they may make plans for their gathering-times; yet always whatever plans they make are subject to the "tides of the spirit."

How often does such a group meet? The number of times of getting together is not necessarily the index of a group's strength. How often they can meet, and how much they share depends upon how much time they have; what the conditions are; and a number of ordinary factors.

There come times when words only hinder ... when only in divine silence do we share and understand. "All friendships short of this are incomplete. All personal relations which lie only in time are open-ended and unfinished." [*Kelly*](#).

Sometimes those outside tend to criticize members of a prayer-circle as being exclusive. No sincere God-seekers intend to be exclusive; it is their whole-hearted wish that as many as will join them. Those willing to undertake definite disciplines for growing spiritually, and for becoming a fellowship of power are few - too few.

The law Jesus spoke about individuals, holds true of groups also: that "whoso will save his life shall lose it" (Matt. 16:25). Only as a prayer-circle becomes more concerned for

God's will and for others, than for itself as a group, will it have vitality as a leaven in a campus or church or community or world.

John Wesley used the idea of a fellowship-of-power in his "class meeting." Members met in small groups weekly, reporting and testifying to each other, and seeking guidance together for the coming week.

Farther back than that, the little groups that Paul set on fire "turned the world upside down" (Acts 17:6). As Muriel Lester suggests, "It was through the fellowship of the catacombs that the early Christians achieved the courage of the coliseum."

Youth groups in the Church

Youth groups in the church, often called "youth fellowships" may; or may not be, fellowships of power.

But where a few individuals within a group take their prayer life seriously, and seek God unreservedly, and try to practice Jesus' law of love in all their relationships, something soon happens in the group. A spiritual momentum begins to be felt. Prayer-time in their group worship takes on new depth and sincerity. There is direct carry-over into the stream of the group's actions and program. Its recreation takes on new zest, its service action is more wisely planned and more eagerly done.

The ideal is for a normal healthy youth fellowship in a church to become *like* a prayer-circle, in that:

- its members practice Christian brotherhood with each other.
- there is freedom for sharing of thought, and no one is made to feel silly or embarrassed to discuss the deeper things of the spiritual life together.
- organization and program routines are kept subordinate to the deeper needs of the youth.
- there is clear purpose in all plans and activities, a purpose constantly examined in the light of the teachings and life of Jesus.

What are some steps an adventurous group may take?

First, they need to become *interested* in worship and prayer - so much so that they will give it some thought.

Second, those who plan for worship in the group need to awaken to the sacredness of their responsibility! Let them pray before they plan. Let them realize that the group is depending upon them for guidance, in entering into the presence of God. Let them think

of their part as "leaders", as not central, but from the sidelines; they are merely helpers to usher the group towards God.

Meaningless routines need to be ruthlessly cut. Never sing a hymn or read a poem, or do anything that does not have a definite purpose in helping a group worship God. Let prayer take a more central place: the climax, the high moment when the soul meets with God and finds fellowship to affect his life.

Materials for use in worship should be selected with utmost care. Ready-manufactured "programs" or "services" should be shunned, lest the group use them mechanically and fail to experience worship.

Third, customs such as having "opening" devotionals preceding discussion before the group is ready to worship, need to be re-thought. Let worship take place whenever in the course of a meeting the group has reached the place where it can worship in spirit and in truth.

Fourth, plans for worship in the group should anticipate a *movement* of the spirits of the worshippers Godward. It is not enough to assemble materials developing a theme; the sequence should help the youth "move" toward God. For example,

First, center upon God ... Take time to become aware of Him.

Lead the youth to that act of will by which they affirm that consciousness of God's presence, and willingness to be led by Him.

Second, with as much of a "God's-eye point of view" as possible, center upon the needs of *persons*, upon human relationships, upon the job ahead.

Third, the answer: self-giving. Perhaps at times, a deep awareness of places where we are failing; a consideration of the task, and prayer for strength of will and hand to follow through.

For worship and prayer to be meaningful and life-changing in a group as for an individual takes *time*. It also takes careful, prayerful preparation that is God-centered, not centered in the group itself, or in materials, or any human factor.

Pentecost comes again

When groups pray in two-dimensional fellowship, the same conditions are fulfilled as existed at Pentecost when, according to the story in the Acts 2,

"These all continued with one accord in prayer and supplication... When the day of Pentecost was come, they were all with one accord in one place... And they, continuing daily with one

accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, did eat their meat with gladness and singleness of heart."

Can it be that God's love is constantly ready, eager to break through, but is hindered except where the circuit is completed: fellowship of man with Him, of man with man through Him?

Why cannot all our relationships be made to pass through Him? The goal of all our living ought to be just that. Yet do we, as Christians, even expect to arrive at such a goal? But, starting from where we are, from our end of the relationships, we can begin and do our part. We can be hopeful, meeting each person with a silent prayer of love, doing all we can to make the relationship between us a "circuit" for divine love.

"The total effect, in a living Church, would be sufficient intersection of these bonds to form a supporting, carrying network of love for the whole of mankind." Kelly

The Christian brave of all the past are about us as a cloud of witnesses, a timeless Fellowship of Power. We join, with them, in prayer to the same God ... the same God who helped Peter grow from a wishy-washy opportunist into an unflinching Rock ... the same God who confronted Saul, the persecutor, and made him Paul, the Apostle ... the same God who led Judson, Slessor and early modern missionaries to the lands where darkness waited for light ... the same God who works with all who give themselves to His way upon earth today.

Fellowship stretches ahead. Our searching spirits seek out the saints of today and tomorrow, illumined, God-directed souls who will someday bring to more perfect fruition the work we are trying to do so crudely today. When all on earth actually share this Kingdom of Heaven within us, the Fellowship of Power will be complete, and the Kingdom of God will be on earth as it is in Heaven. And *"there shall in no wise enter into it (the beloved community) any thing that defileth ... or maketh a lie They shall not hurt nor destroy in all my holy mountain; for the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord as the waters cover the sea"* (Rev. 21, 22; Isa. 11)