

# SEED & BREAD

FOR THE SOWER    ISA. 55: 1 0    FOR THE EATER  
BRIEF BIBLICAL MESSAGES FROM

## THE WORD OF TRUTH MINISTRY

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# CONCERNING PRAYER

I believe in prayer. I believe that men ought always to pray and not to faint (Luke 18: 1), that they should pray without ceasing (1 Thess. 5: 17). I believe that in everything by prayer and petition with thanksgiving we should let our requests be made known to God (Phil. 4:6). I believe that prayer is essential if the believer would have all parts of his God-given armor to operate effectively (Eph. 6: 13-18). I have the conviction that my life in relationship to God will become confused, fragmented, and chaotic if I do not continue in prayer.

These words, in a limited way, express my belief in the importance and value of prayer; but I feel I should also state some things I do not believe concerning prayer-things that many Christians hold and practice.

I do not believe that prayer should be given the preeminent place in our relationship with God. Since the Bible tells us that God has established a certain order or arrangement so that in every respect Christ Jesus should have the preeminence (Col. 1: 18) it is my conviction that we should give Him this place in our lives. He is more important to us than the privilege of prayer, a truth that all children of God can accept without depreciating the value of prayer in the least.

I cannot sympathize with those who make a religion out of the practice of prayer. These think that prayer is a ritual to be performed wherein certain words are to be said, at certain set times, and under certain fixed conditions. They are exercised about how many times a day one should pray, whether one should be standing or kneeling, whether he should look upward to heaven or downward to the floor.

There are many who feel that if they can discover the proper position or attitude, the right words of salutation, the correct tone of voice, along with suitable closing expressions, then they will receive favorable consideration of their petitions. Then there are those who feel that prayer offered in a building called a church is far more effective than prayer offered in a house or in the open air. Many indeed think that prayer offered in some lofty location (prayer tower, church steeple, or mountain top)

does not have as far to travel as the one offered while standing upon the ground.

Questions are constantly asked as to whether one should finish his prayer by declaring to God that these things are asked "in Jesus' name," or "in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ"; should prayer be addressed to God, to the Father, or to Jesus Christ.

Only recently a letter came to my desk asking if I prayed to God or to the Father. After reading I sat and thought that in all my sixty-three years as a believer in Jesus Christ I had never even considered which title I used in approaching the Almighty. Since God is the Father and the Father is God, did it make any difference which title I used? As I meditated I thought that my more or less formal prayers usually started with: "My God and my Father, the God and Father of my Lord and Savior Jesus Christ." But there have been occasions when I did not have time for this and simply cried out "Help me!" And that prayer was answered.

Questions as to proper wording in our approach to God are often asked and are regularly discussed in Sunday School classes and Bible groups. I am sure that if I had to have the answer to any one of them before praying, I never would get around to letting my requests be made known to God. In this connection there comes to mind the amusing poem, usually credited to Mrs. Edward Craster:

The centipede was happy quite  
Until a toad in fun,  
Said, "Pray, which leg goes after which?"  
That worked her mind to such a pitch,  
She lay distracted in a ditch,  
Considering how to run.

Most people feel that prayer is primarily and basically a way of getting things from God, that this is the real value and purpose of prayer. And while it is true that many good things will come to us as the result of prayer; nevertheless, this should be last and least in our minds when we approach God. The utmost purpose in prayer should always center in the privilege of communicating with Him.

It is not right for any man to think of his friends as being sources from whom he can get things when they are needed. True, many good things will come to us from our friends, but it is not right to use them this way. And it is not right to use God in this manner. James declared to those to whom he wrote: "**You are requesting, but you are not obtaining, because you are requesting in a base way, that you may be using it on your gratifications**" (James 4:2 TRV). God will not aid us if when we pray there is some selfish striving for personal gain.

The most serious offenses in regard to prayer are those committed by Christians who claim promises that were never made to them, and those who take passages that have nothing to do with prayer and apply them to this subject. This is done habitually, and there are as a result of this misapplication many who are disillusioned and sorely distressed at the seeming failure of God to make good on what they call "the plain prayer-promises of the Bible."

Let us consider the actual case of one who suddenly faced a most desperate need—the illness of his devoted and beloved wife, the mother of his five young children. That which seemed to be a temporary illness turned out to be an inoperable malignancy. There seemed to be no hope, until he was visited by his minister who told him that he need not despair, that all he needed to do was lay hold of God's promise. The minister opened his Bible and pointed him to the words spoken by the Lord Jesus Christ in Matthew 21:22 which declares: "**And all things, whatsoever ye shall ask in prayer, believing, ye shall receive.**" Thus, on the basis of this promise all he needed to do was to pray earnestly for his wife's healing, and to firmly believe that God would answer, and she would be healed. The husband then had hope, and as a smile of joy wreathed his face, the minister pointed out another statement of the Lord Jesus in Matt. 18:19: "**Again I say unto you, that if two of you agree on earth as touching anything that they shall ask, it shall be done for them of my Father which is in heaven.**"

He then made application of these words by saying: "Most certainly you want your wife to be healed, and I want her to be healed. That's two of us. And there are others who want the same—in fact, there are at least 700 more in our church who want her to be healed, since they were told of her need last Sunday. So let us who are now present here kneel in prayer, claim this promise, and call upon God to fulfill His Word."

This they did, but it was all to no avail. Three weeks later the woman was dead, bringing a resultant loss of confidence in the Word of God, caused by taking a passage which was misinterpreted, and taking a promise made to certain people and applying it to themselves.

In Matt 21:22 our Lord is dealing with a state of affairs where a definite principle of faith is involved. This principle is expressed in the word "believing," which many take to mean confidence or faith in our prayers, that is, the belief that they will be answered.

The Greek word for "believing" here is **pisteuo**, the exact form, being **pisteuontes**. The words for "faith" and "believe" in the Greek are the same words, but since we do not as a rule say "faithed" or "faithing" (even those these forms are given in Webster's Unabridged Dictionary), we usually find "believing" used as a verb and that it sets

forth an action, its meaning can best be expressed by saying "acting in faith." thus, this passage should read: "**All things, whatsoever ye shall ask in prayer, acting in faith, ye shall receive.**" The words "acting in faith" sets forth the element that must be there if the prayer offered is answered favorably.

Since faith comes by a communication that is heard and in all matters related to God must be from Him and concern the situation that exists, there can be no faith apart from this. Take for example the time when Peter walked upon the water (Matt. 14:29). He had a word from Christ that told him to do this. All he needed to do was take Christ at His Word and step out of the ship. In so doing he would be "acting in faith." Apart from a word from Christ he could never have walked upon water.

The great fact to be faced here is that God has never, at any time, in any manner, or in any place told you or me to walk upon water, to move a mountain, to heal the sick, to cleanse lepers, to raise the dead, to cast out demons. We cannot "act in faith" in regard to any of these things. If we try, we will be motivated by our own desires, acting in self-will.

The passage in Matt. 18: 19 was spoken to the twelve apostles (commissioned ones), men who had positions in the Israel of God that were out of the Lord Jesus Christ. To them had been given the power to bind or to loose a matter on earth and their actions would be ratified in heaven. When a problem arose between two believers in Israel they were to take it to these men. They were told here by their Lord that any two of them would make a quorum and could act for the larger body. This passage has nothing to do with prayer.

In the Philippi an epistle, Paul tells the saints to whom he is writing that they are to be "**testing the things that carry through**" (Phil.1:10). This important directive has long been lost to the reader of the King James Version due to a foolish rewriting of the first part of this passage. It tells us that after Paul's great pronouncement in Acts 28:28 some things do carry through and in Phil. 4:6 he gives us a paramount truth to guide us in regard to prayer in this dispensation. There we are told: "Be anxious for nothing; but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God. And the peace of God, which is superior to every frame of mind, will garrison your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus."

Let us start out by getting rid of worry, fear, and anxiety. These things create great stress, and stress kills more people than war. To get beyond the reach of these things is the precious privilege of all who are now believing in Jesus Christ. "But how do we do this?" someone is sure to ask. The answer is "In everything that is causing worry, fear, or anxiety, by prayer and petition with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. Having done this, then leave your requests to God to act upon them as He

determines."

Even as the song says, "Take your burden to the Lord and leave it there." There is in this passage no promise of an answer, except that His peace, which is superior to every frame of mind will guard your heart and mind. The thing that has befallen you could be so great as to cause heart to stop and mind to fail, but this can be overcome if we make our requests known unto God and be at peace. As Sir Robert Anderson has said: "If the matter were one within the power of a friend to deal with-a friend whose wisdom we could trust and of whose love we were assured - should we not be content to say, after telling him all, 'Now you know my feelings and my wishes, and I leave the case entirely in your hands!' And this is just what God invites."

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