

Prayer and Happiness

PRAYER AND HAPPINESS belong together. No one can be happy who does not have peace of mind. The child of God who trusts his heavenly Father will have the promise of Christ: "Peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you: not as the world giveth, give I unto you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid." John 14:27.

Through prayer one communes with God and is at home in the universe. He is at peace with nature because he knows nature's God. He is at peace with others, even though they may be at war with him. He has the peace of Christ in his heart.

Jesus was always happy. Jesus was never worried. Jesus gave us an example of prayer. He prayed at His baptism; He prayed all night before ordaining the apostles; He prayed on the mountainside after refusing to be made king; He prayed before telling His disciples of His coming crucifixion; He prayed before His transfiguration; He prayed before raising Lazarus from the dead; He prayed on His way to Gethsemane and in Gethsemane; He prayed for His murderers, "Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do." Luke 23:34. His last words on the cross were a prayer. Jesus Himself said: "Men ought always to pray, and not to faint." Luke 18:1.

Prayer is taught from Genesis to Revelation. God desires that we should pray to Him. True prayer is indited by the Holy Spirit. "By the Spirit every sincere prayer is indited, and such prayer is acceptable to God. Wherever a soul reaches out after God, there the Spirit's working is manifest, and God will reveal Himself to that soul. For such worshippers He is seeking. He waits to receive them, and to make them His sons and daughters."—*The Desire of Ages*, p. 189.

We are to pray for counsel and strength in every time of

need. We are to pray for the healing of the sick, for casting out evil spirits. We are to pray in Christ's name, and this is very important. What does it mean to pray in Christ's name? "Whatsoever ye shall ask in my name [said Jesus], that will I do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son." John 14:13.

In that wonderful book, *The Desire of Ages*, by E. G. White, the greatest spiritual life of Christ ever written, we find these suggestions about praying in the name of Christ: "In Christ's name His followers are to stand before God. Through the value of the sacrifice made for them, they are of value in the Lord's sight. Because of the imputed righteousness of Christ they are accounted precious. For Christ's sake the Lord pardons those that fear Him. . . . They may expect large things if they have faith in His promises. But to pray in Christ's name means much. It means that we are to accept His character, manifest His spirit, and work His works. The Saviour's promise is given on condition. 'If ye love me,' He says, 'keep my commandments.' He saves men, not in sin, but from sin; and those who love Him will show their love by obedience."—Pp. 667, 668.

God hears our prayers even when they are not put into words. There was that poor demoniac, a man under the control of evil spirits, whom Jesus met at the Sea of Galilee. In place of prayer, he could utter only the words of Satan, yet down deep in his heart was an unspoken appeal for help, and Christ heard it. "No cry from a soul in need, though it fail of utterance in words, will be unheeded. Those who will consent to enter into covenant relation with the God of heaven are not left to the power of Satan or to the infirmity of their own nature. They are invited by the Saviour, 'Let him take hold of my strength, that he may make peace with me; and he shall make peace with me.' Isaiah 27:5."—*Ibid.*, pp. 258, 259.

God hears the yearning of your heart, the real prayer of your soul. Christ is now in heaven before the Father's throne, and there He presents our prayers as if they were His own. Every sincere prayer is heard in heaven. It may not be eloquently expressed, it may not be placed in the best grammatical form, but God hears and understands it. Every awkward,

stammering word is made beautiful and fragrant in the incense of Christ's perfection.

A nobleman once came to Jesus and asked Him to heal his son who seemed to be suffering from an incurable disease. This man had made certain reservations concerning his belief in Jesus. Unless his petition was granted, he would not receive Him as the Son of God. As the officer waited in suspense, Jesus said: "Except ye see signs and wonders, ye will not believe." John 4:48.

This nobleman had some faith, for he asked Christ to heal his boy. His love for his son burst through his unbelief and he cried out, "Sir, come down ere my child die." Verse 49. Then his faith took hold of Christ, and Jesus said to him: "Go thy way; thy son liveth." Verse 50. That very hour those who watched the dying child said they saw a mysterious change—the dim eyes brightened, the flush of fever gave place to the glow of returning health. The family was amazed and there was great rejoicing. While the father was still some distance from his home the servants came out to meet him to relieve his suspense, but he showed no surprise at the news they brought. With great interest he asked at what hour the child began to mend. They said, "Yesterday at the seventh hour the fever left him." Verse 52. At the very moment that the father's faith grasped the assurance of Christ's statement, "Thy son liveth," divine love touched the dying child.

Why do we not have more direct answers to prayer? God is just as anxious to help us as He was to help this boy. "The Saviour longs to give us a greater blessing than we ask; and He delays the answer to our request that He may show us the evil of our own hearts, and our deep need of His grace." You see, the nobleman wanted to see the fulfillment of his prayer before he believed. But he had to accept the word of Jesus before his request was heard. So we, too, must trust in God's promises. We must believe Him, not because we see or feel that He hears us, but because of His promise that He will hear us.

"When we come to Him in faith, every petition enters the heart of God. When we have asked for His blessing, we should believe that we receive it, and thank Him that we *have* re-

ceived it. Then we are to go about our duties, assured that the blessing will be realized when we need it most. When we have learned to do this, we shall know that our prayers are answered. God will do for us 'exceeding abundantly,' 'according to the riches of His glory,' and 'the working of His mighty power.' (Ephesians 3:20, 16; 1:19.)"—*Ibid.*, p. 200.

One reason that our prayers are not answered is that we lack faith. Sometimes our petitions are answered but not in the way we expect. Other times the answer is delayed. In either case, the child of God must trust in God and pray as the Lord Jesus Himself prayed, "Nevertheless not my will, but thine, be done." Luke 22:42. Sometimes our prayer is not "Thy will be done," but "Thy will be changed." But should it be that? No.

And remember this: Prayer is not merely demanding things of God. Too many of us are like the prodigal son when we pray, "Father, give me . . ." Luke 15:12. Prayer is communion. Prayer is a two-way road. Prevailing prayer is not only petition, it is thanksgiving, adoration, praise, submission to the will of God. God desires that we ask things of Him, but He also wishes to speak to us. Often as we linger before Him in quietness, some text of Scripture is brought to our minds and we are deeply impressed with our duty. God is longing to speak to us through His Holy Spirit.

Another thing, prayer is not a substitute for work. God will strengthen us, He will guide us, but we should not ask Him to do for us what He has given us the ability to do for ourselves. For instance, we must learn the multiplication table in order to do our mathematical problems. We should not expect God to put it into our mind without any effort. He has given us our mind, He has given us our muscles; and He expects us to use them. The aim of prayer is not merely to get something that we want from God, but to find out what He wants us to do.

There is such a thing as agonizing, prevailing prayer, prayer that goes to the heart of things and finds the will of God and does it. Jesus prayed all night. Jacob wrestled with the angel. Daniel sought the Lord with prayer and fasting. Paul prayed to the Lord again and again. So we, too, need to pray, but we

must pray in faith. Remember, prayer is not a monologue, but a dialogue—fellowship, and understanding, and abiding in the presence of the Lord.

Meditation is a very important part of prayer. When we pray, let us linger before the Lord in silence. David was a man of prayer, and we read of his experience especially in Psalm 63:5, 6: "My soul shall be satisfied as with marrow and fatness; and my mouth shall praise thee with joyful lips: when I remember thee upon my bed, and meditate on thee in the night watches." Notice, he was satisfied, filled with peace and happiness when he meditated before God in the quietude of the night.

All Christians pray, for certainly one who does not pray is not a true Christian. But many do not receive the power and peace and happiness that they desire because they do not quietly commune with God. Their hearts are restless. They want to be up and going, but it takes more than a go-getter to get things from God. We must—

"Take time to be holy, speak oft with thy Lord;
Abide in Him always, and feed on His word;
Make friends of God's children, help those who
are weak,
Forgetting in nothing His blessing to seek."

—*W. D. Longstaff.*

In Psalm 4:4 we read: "Stand in awe, and sin not: commune with your own heart upon your bed, and be still." To some, this listening side of prayer is a new idea. Of course, we must not go to extremes. We must be sure that any word that comes to us is in harmony with God's written Word. His message to us will never be different from that. Satan is always ready to instill his ideas, but God is ever near to help and to guide us.

Moreover, all prayer must be sincere. We must come to God honestly and mean what we say. There must be repentance in our lives, godly sorrow for sin. We must confess our sins and make restitution. In order to be answered, prayer must be based on an honest willingness to do God's will.

Let us never forget the story Jesus told about the unjust judge in Luke 18:1-8: "And he spake a parable unto them to this end, that men ought always to pray, and not to faint; saying, There was in a city a judge, which feared not God, neither regarded man: and there was a widow in that city; and she came unto him, saying, Avenge me of mine adversary. And he would not for a while: but afterward he said within himself, Though I fear not God, nor regard man; yet because this widow troubleth me, I will avenge her, lest by her continual coming she weary me. And the Lord said, Hear what the unjust judge saith. And shall not God avenge his own elect, which cry day and night unto him, though he bear long with them? I tell you that he will avenge them speedily. Nevertheless when the Son of man cometh, shall he find faith on the earth?"

The word *avenge* here does not mean "revenge." It simply means "to give justice." The judge was a hard man. He would not give justice because it was right to give it, but because this widow wore him out, by her continual coming. The lesson Christ wants us to learn is that, if it was possible to get justice from this sort of man by troubling him, should it not be much easier to get justice from God who is willing to help us and avenge us of our adversaries? God is ready and waiting to come to our rescue. If He delays, it is not for the same reason that prompted the unjust judge to delay his answer.

Does it sometimes seem that God does not hear our prayers? Yes, we must admit that that is true. Are we to keep on praying? Yes. This parable was given to teach us that "men ought always to pray, and not to faint," not to stop. God may be working on your case right now. He knows all about it, but "the Lord seeth not as man seeth." 1 Samuel 16:7.

God cannot force people to come to Him, for He has limited Himself with the free will of man. We are asking the impossible when we ask God to convert someone by using force. But He can use us to bring about that desired end if our hearts are pure.

We are living in a solemn time of this world's history, but Christians should be happy, even in the midst of it all. Why

not? Their sins have been forgiven, and they are at peace with God. They are justified, sanctified, saved, children of the Most High, walking with God. No wonder they are happy in His love. Jesus said, "Peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you." John 14:27. That's His legacy, and what wonderful words they are! His peace is that quiet assurance that comes from confidence in God. When Jesus spoke these words He was nearing Calvary. He was soon to die the cruel death on the cross, yet He did not waver. His heart was filled with peace. He knew the Father and He trusted in Him. So He rested in this blessed knowledge and peace. And He gives it to us—oneness with the Father, fellowship, communion.

Ah, my friends, you may have it through prayer and communion with God—quietude, joy, rest, contentment, faith, hope, love; no fear, no worry, no anxiety, but peace which passes all human understanding. In every experience the believer will have a source of strength because he is tuned in to the Infinite. The same power that swings the planets on high and sets suns aflame, is ours.

"Prayer is the key in the hand of faith that unlocks heaven's storehouse, where are treasured the boundless resources of Omnipotence."—*Steps to Christ*, p. 99. Friend, use that key. Begin to pray in a new way. Search the Scriptures for examples of prayer. Study them carefully and follow those examples. You, too, can commune with God anywhere, anytime; and soon you will be led into the deep things of His Word.

Remember, God always speaks to you directly in the same way that He speaks in the Holy Scriptures. Never does He contradict Himself. So commune with Him in reading the Holy Bible and in personal, private prayer and meditation.

"Prayer is the soul's sincere desire,
Uttered or unexpressed;
The motion of a hidden fire
That trembles in the breast."

—James Montgomery.