

Lesson 7
Sabbath Afternoon, May 09
Practical Prayer

A deep sense of our need and a great desire for the things for which we ask must characterize our prayers, else they will not be heard. But we are not to become weary and cease our petitions because the answer is not immediately received. "The kingdom of heaven suffereth violence, and the violent take it by force" (Matthew 11:12). The violence here meant is a holy earnestness, such as Jacob manifested. We need not try to work ourselves up into an intense feeling, but calmly, persistently, we are to press our petitions at the throne of grace. Our work is to humble our souls before God, confessing our sins, and in faith drawing nigh unto God. . . . It is the design of God to reveal Himself in His providence and in His grace. The object of our prayers must be the glory of God, not the glorification of ourselves. . . .

God has honored us by showing how greatly He values us. We are bought with a price, even the precious blood of the Son of God. When His heritage shall conscientiously follow the Word of the Lord, His blessing will rest upon them in answer to their prayers. "Therefore also now, saith the Lord, turn ye even to me with all your heart, and with fasting, and with weeping, and with mourning: and rend your heart, and not your garments, and turn unto the Lord your God: for he is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and of great kindness" (Joel 2:12, 13).

In secret prayer the soul should be laid bare to the inspecting eye of God. . . . How precious is secret prayer—the soul communing with God! Secret prayer is to be heard only by the prayer-hearing God. No curious ear is to receive the burden of petitions. Calmly, yet fervently, the soul is to reach out after God; and sweet and abiding will be the influence emanating from Him who sees in secret, whose ear is open to the prayer arising from the heart. He who in simple faith holds communion with God will gather to himself divine rays of light to strengthen and sustain him in the conflict with Satan. —*That I May Know Him*, p. 272.

Family prayer and public prayer have their place; but it is secret communion with God that sustains the soul-life. It was in the mount with God that Moses beheld the pattern of that wonderful building which was to be the abiding-place of His glory. It is in the mount with God—the secret place of communion—that we are to contemplate His glorious ideal for humanity. Thus we shall be enabled so to fashion our character-building that to us may be fulfilled the promise, "I will dwell in them, and walk in them; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people." [2 Corinthians 6:16]. . . .

Prayer is the breath of the soul. It is the secret of spiritual power. No other means of grace can be substituted, and the health of the soul be preserved. Prayer brings the heart into immediate contact with the Well-spring of life, and strengthens the sinew and muscle of the religious experience. Neglect the exercise of prayer, or engage in prayer spasmodically, now and then, as seems convenient, and you lose your hold on God. The spiritual faculties lose their vitality, the religious experience lacks health and vigor. —*Gospel Workers*, p. 254.

Sunday, May 10
Elijah—Praying in Crisis

Important lessons are presented to us in the experience of Elijah. When upon Mt. Carmel he offered the prayer for rain, his faith was tested, but he persevered in making known his request unto God. . . . Had he given up in discouragement at the sixth time, his prayer would not have been answered, but he persevered till the answer came. We have a God whose ear is not closed to our petitions; and if we prove His word, He will honor our faith. He wants us to have all our interests interwoven with His interests, and then He can safely bless us; for we shall not then take glory to self when the blessing is ours, but shall render all the praise to God. God does not always answer our prayers the first time we call upon Him; for should He do this, we might take it for granted that we had a right to all the blessings and favors He bestowed upon us. Instead of searching our hearts to see if any evil was entertained by us, any sin indulged, we should become careless, and fail to realize our dependence upon Him, and our need of His help.

Elijah humbled himself until he was in a condition where he would not take the glory to himself. This is the condition upon which the Lord hears prayer, for then we shall give the praise to Him. The custom of offering praise to men is one that results in great evil. One praises another, and thus men are led to feel that glory and honor belong to them. When you exalt man, you lay a snare for his soul, and do just as Satan would have you. . . . God alone is worthy to be glorified. —*Conflict and Courage*, p. 212.

The servant watched while Elijah prayed. . . . As he searched his heart, he seemed to be less and less, both in his own estimation and in the sight of God. It seemed to him that he was nothing, and that God was everything; and when he reached the point of renouncing self, while he clung to the Saviour as his only strength and righteousness, the answer came. —*Sons and Daughters of God*, p. 206.

Monday, May 11
When Prayers Seem Unanswered

Naaman the Syrian consulted the prophet of God as to how he could be cured of a loathsome disease, the leprosy. He was bidden to go and bathe in Jordan seven times. Why did he not immediately follow the directions of Elisha, the prophet of God? . . . In his mortification and disappointment he became passionate, and in a rage refused to follow the humble course marked out by the prophet of God. "I thought," said he, "he will surely come out to me, and stand, and call on the name of the Lord his God, and strike his hand over the place, and recover the leper. Are not Abana and Pharpar, rivers of Damascus, better than all the waters of Israel? may I not wash in them, and be clean? So he turned and went away in a rage." His servant said: "My father, if the prophet had bid thee do some great thing, wouldest thou not have done it? how much rather then, when he saith to thee, Wash [merely], and be clean?" Yes, this great man considered it beneath his dignity to go to the humble river Jordan, and wash. The rivers he mentioned and desired were beautified by surrounding trees and groves, and idols were placed in these groves. Many flocked to these rivers to worship their idol gods; therefore it would have cost him no humility. But it was following the specified directions of the prophet which would humble his proud and lofty spirit. Willing obedience would bring the desired result. He washed, and was made whole.

Our plans are not always God's plans. . . . In His loving care and interest for us, often He who understands us better than we understand ourselves refuses to permit us selfishly to seek the gratification of our own ambition. . . . Many things He ask us to yield to Him, but in doing this we are but giving up that which hinders us in the heavenward way. . . .

In the future life the mysteries that here have annoyed and disappointed us will be made plain. We shall see that our seemingly unanswered prayers and disappointed hopes have been among our greatest blessings. —*Conflict and Courage*, p. 228.

As the Giver of every blessing, God claims a certain portion of all we possess. This is His provision to sustain the preaching of the gospel. And by making this return to God, we are to show our appreciation of His gifts. But if we withhold from Him that which is His own, how can we expect Him to entrust us with the things of heaven? It may be that here is the secret of unanswered prayer. —*Christ's Object Lessons*, p. 144.

Tuesday, May 12
Jesus Teaches Us How to Pray

Christ did not give this prayer [the Lord's Prayer, Luke 11:2-4] for men to repeat as a form. He gave it as an illustration of what our prayers should be—simple, earnest, and comprehensive.

Many prayers are offered without faith. A set form of words is used, but there is no real importunity. These prayers are doubtful, hesitating; they bring no relief to those who offer them, and no comfort or hope to others. The form of prayer is used, but the spirit is wanting, showing that the petitioner does not feel his need. . . .

Learn to pray short and right to the point, asking for just what you need. Learn to pray aloud where only God can hear you. Do not offer make-believe prayers, but earnest, feeling petitions, expressing the hunger of the soul for the Bread of Life. If we prayed more in secret, we should be able to pray more intelligently in public. These doubtful, hesitating prayers would cease. And when we engaged with our brethren in public worship, we could add to the interest of the meeting; for we should bring with us some of the atmosphere of heaven, and our worship would be a reality, and not a mere form. . . . If the soul is not drawn out in prayer in the closet and while engaged in the business of the day, it will be manifest in the prayer meeting. . . .

The life of the soul depends upon habitual communion with God. Its wants are made known, and the heart is open to receive fresh blessings. Gratitude flows from unfeigned lips; and the refreshing that is received from Jesus is manifested in words, in deeds of active benevolence, and in public devotion. There is love to Jesus in the heart; and where love exists, it will not be repressed, but will express itself. Secret prayer sustains this inner life. The heart that loves God will desire to commune with Him, and will lean on Him in holy confidence.

Let us learn to pray intelligently, expressing our requests with clearness and precision. Let us. . . pray as though we meant it. "The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much." James 5:16. —*Our High Calling*, p. 130.

Christ was continually receiving from the Father that He might communicate to us. "The word which ye hear," He said, "is not Mine, but the Father's which sent Me." John 14:24. "The Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister." Matthew 20:28. Not for Himself, but for others, He lived and thought and prayed. From hours spent with God He came forth morning by morning, to bring the light of heaven to men. Daily He received a fresh baptism of the Holy Spirit. In the early hours of the new day the Lord awakened Him from His slumbers, and His soul and His lips were anointed with grace, that He might impart to others. His words were given Him fresh from the heavenly courts, words that He might speak in season to the weary and oppressed. "The Lord God hath given Me," He said, "the tongue of the learned, that I should know how to speak a word in season to him that is weary: He wakeneth morning by morning, He wakeneth Mine ear to hear as the learned." Isaiah 50:4.

Christ's disciples were much impressed by His prayers and by His habit of communion with God. One day after a short absence from their Lord, they found Him absorbed in supplication. Seeming unconscious of their presence, He continued praying aloud. The hearts of the disciples were deeply moved. As He ceased praying, they exclaimed, "Lord, teach us to pray." —*Christ's Object Lessons*, pp. 139, 140.

Wednesday, May 13
Praise, Confession, Requests, Thanksgiving

On the day of Pentecost the Infinite One revealed Himself in power to the church. By His Holy Spirit He descended from the heights of heaven as a rushing mighty wind to the room in which the disciples were assembled. Words of penitence and confession of sin were mingled with songs of praise for sins forgiven. Words of thanksgiving and of prophecy were heard. All heaven was bending low to behold and adore the wisdom of matchless, incomprehensible love.

The apostles and disciples were lost in wonder, and exclaimed, "Herein is love!" They grasped the imparted gift. Their hearts were surcharged with a benevolence so full, so deep, so far-reaching, that it impelled them to go to the ends of the earth testifying, God forbid that we should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ. They were filled with an intense longing to add to the church such as should be saved. . . .

As the disciples went forth to proclaim the gospel, filled with the power of the Spirit, so God's servants are to go forth today. All around us are fields white unto the harvest. These fields are to be reaped. We are to take up the work, filled with an unselfish desire to give the message of mercy to those who are in the darkness of error and unbelief. God will move on the hearts of believers to carry forward His work to the regions beyond. . . .

The Lord God is bound by an eternal pledge to supply power and grace to every one who is sanctified through obedience to the truth. Jesus Christ, to whom is given all power in heaven and on earth, unites in sympathy with His instrumentalities—the earnest souls who day by day partake of the living bread "which cometh down from heaven" (John 6:33). The church on earth, united with the church in heaven, can accomplish all things. —*That I May Know Him*, p. 344.

The Lord calls upon us for confession of His goodness. . . . Our confession of His faithfulness is Heaven's chosen agency for revealing Christ to the world. We are to acknowledge His grace as made known through the holy men of old; but that which will be most effectual is the testimony of our own experience. We are witnesses for God as we reveal in ourselves the working of a power that is divine. Every individual has a life distinct from all others, and an experience differing essentially from theirs. God desires that our praise shall ascend to Him, marked by our own individuality. These precious acknowledgements to the praise of the glory of His grace, when supported by a Christlike life, have an irresistible power that works for the salvation of souls. —*God's Amazing Grace*, p. 277.

Thursday, May 14
Other Questions About Prayer

God does not always answer our prayers the first time we call upon Him; for should He do this, we might take it for granted that we had a right to all the blessings and favors He bestowed upon us. Instead of searching our hearts to see if any evil was entertained by us, any sin indulged, we would become careless, and fail to realize our dependence upon Him, and our need of His help.

There are precious promises in the Scriptures to those who wait upon the Lord. We all desire an immediate answer to our prayers and are tempted to become discouraged if our prayer is not immediately answered. Now, my experience has taught me that this is a great mistake. The delay is for our special benefit. We have a chance to see whether our faith is true and sincere or changeable like the waves of the sea. We must bind ourselves upon the altar with the strong cords of faith and love, and let patience have her perfect work. Faith strengthens through continual exercise. This waiting does not mean that because we ask the Lord to heal there is nothing for us to do. On the contrary, we are to make the very best use of the means which the Lord in His goodness has provided for us in our necessities. —*Prayer*, p. 110.

It should be the special object of the heads of the family to make the hour of worship intensely interesting. By a little thought and careful preparation for this season, when we come into the presence of God, family worship can be made pleasant and will be fraught with results that eternity alone will reveal. Let the father select a portion of Scripture that is interesting and easily understood; a few verses will be sufficient to furnish a lesson which may be studied and practiced through the day. Questions may be asked, a few earnest, interesting remarks made, or incident, short and to the point, may be brought in by way of illustration. At least a few verses of spirited song may be sung, and the prayer offered should be short and pointed. The one who leads in prayer should not pray about everything, but should express his needs in simple words and praise God with thanksgiving.

In arousing and strengthening a love for Bible study, much depends on the use of the hour of worship. The hours of morning and evening worship should be the sweetest and most helpful of the day. Let it be understood that into these hours no troubled, unkind thoughts are to intrude; that parents and children assemble to meet with Jesus and to invite into the home the presence of holy angels. Let the services be brief and full of life, adapted to the occasion, and varied from time to time. Let all join in the Bible reading and learn and often repeat God's law. It will add to the interest of the children if they are sometimes permitted to select the reading. Question them upon it, and let them ask questions. Mention anything that will serve to illustrate its meaning. When the service is not thus made too lengthy, let the little ones take part in prayer, and let them join in song, if it be but a single verse. —*Child Guidance*, pp. 521, 522.

Friday, May 15
For Further Reading

Steps to Christ, "The Privilege of Prayer," pp. 93–104.

Ye Shall Receive Power, "The Heavenly Dove," January 6, p. 14.