

## Striking Examples of Prayer

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**P** RAYER HAS BEEN made the means of obtaining blessings that would not otherwise be received. The patriarchs were men of prayer, and God did great things for them. When Jacob left his father's house for a strange land, he prayed in humble contrition, and in the night season the Lord answered him through vision. He saw a ladder, bright and shining, its base resting on earth, and its topmost round reaching to the highest Heaven. At its top stood the God of Heaven in his glory, and angels were ascending and descending upon the mystic ladder. The Lord comforted the lonely wanderer with precious promises; and protecting angels were represented as stationed on each side of his path. Afterward, while on his return to his father's house, he wrestled with the Son of God all night, even till break of day, and prevailed. The assurance was given him, "Thy name shall be called no more Jacob, but Israel; for as a prince hast thou power with God and with men."

Joseph prayed, and he was preserved from sin amid influences that were calculated to lead him away from God. When tempted to leave the path of purity and uprightness, he said, "How can I do this great wickedness, and sin against God?"

Moses, who was much in prayer, was known as the meekest man on the face of the earth. For his meekness and humility he was honored of God, and he discharged with fidelity the high, noble, and sacred responsibilities intrusted to him. While leading the children of Israel through the wilderness, again and again it seemed that they must be exterminated on account of their murmuring and rebellion. But Moses went to the true Source of power; he laid the case before the Lord. He knew that Israel had provoked divine wrath, and were deserving of punishment; but he could not bear the thought of their being rejected of God.

Moses pleaded the words of God with an earnestness and sincerity which mortals have never equaled: "And now, I beseech thee, let the power of my Lord be great according as thou hast spoken, saying, The Lord is long-suffering, and of great mercy, forgiving iniquity and transgression, and by no means clearing the guilty. . . . Pardon, I beseech

thee, the iniquity of this people according unto the greatness of thy mercy, and as thou hast forgiven this people, from Egypt even until now." And the Lord said, "I have pardoned according to thy word."

Here is an example of intelligent prayer,--an appeal to the reason and the sympathy of Jehovah; and Moses' prayer was answered, because God is reasonable and compassionate. The sorrows of his people touch his heart of love; and will he not hear our prevailing prayer? Will not our very urgency be regarded? His loving-kindness faileth not. As a kind Father, he does not mock the miseries of his children. And will he not avenge his own, who cry day and night unto him?

Daniel was a man of prayer; and God gave him wisdom and firmness to resist every influence that conspired to draw him into the snare of intemperance. Even in his youth he was a moral giant in the strength of the Mighty One. Afterward, when a decree was made that if for thirty days any one should ask a petition of any God or man, save of the king, he should be cast into a den of lions, Daniel, with firm, undaunted step, made his way to his chamber, and with his windows open prayed aloud three times a day, as he had done before. He was cast into the lions' den; but God sent holy angels to guard his servant.

In the prison at Philippi, while suffering from the cruel stripes they had received, their feet fast in the stocks, Paul and Silas prayed and sang praise to God; and angels were sent from Heaven to deliver them. The earth shook under the tread of these heavenly messengers, and the prison doors flew open, setting the prisoners free.

There are two kinds of prayer,--the prayer of form and the prayer of faith. The repetition of set, customary phrases when the heart feels no need of God, is formal prayer. "When ye pray," says Christ, "use not vain repetitions, as the heathen do; for they think that they shall be heard for their much speaking." We should be extremely careful in all our prayers to speak the wants of the heart, and to say only what we mean. All the flowery words at our command are not equivalent to one holy desire. The most eloquent prayers are but vain repetitions, if they do not express the true sentiments of the heart. But the prayer that comes from an earnest heart, when the simple wants of the soul are expressed just as we would ask an earthly friend for a favor, expecting that it would be granted--this is the prayer of faith. The publican who went up to the temple to pray is a good example of a sincere, devoted worshiper. He felt that he was a sinner, and his great need led to an out-

burst of passionate desire, "God be merciful to me a sinner."

In order to have spiritual life and energy, we must have actual intercourse with God. Our minds may be drawn out toward him; we may meditate upon his works, his mercies, his blessings; but this is not communing with him. To commune with God we must have something to say to him concerning our actual life. The long, black catalogue of our delinquencies is before the eye of the Infinite. The register is complete; none of our offenses are forgotten. But He who wrought wonderfully for his servants of old will listen to the prayer of faith and pardon our transgressions. He has promised, and he will fulfill his word. Then why should not the desires of our hearts go out after him, and the attitude of our souls ever be that of supplication?

"If ye abide in me," says Christ, "and my words abide in you, ye shall ask what ye will, and it shall be done unto you." There are some who do not abide in Jesus, and his words do not abide in them, and these make little of prayer. They talk of praying in secret, but not in public nor in the family; but such ones seldom pray at all. Our Saviour taught his disciples: "But thou, when thou prayest, enter into thy closet, and when thou hast shut thy door, pray to thy Father which is in secret; and thy Father which seeth in secret shall reward thee openly." This was not said to forbid public prayer, but to warn the disciples against praying as the Pharisees did, in the corners of the streets and in the market places to be seen of men. Jesus prayed, sometimes alone, sometimes in the presence of his most intimate disciples, sometimes in the presence of the twelve, and sometimes in the presence of the Jews.

Jesus promised a special blessing on united prayer. After his death, the disciples often prayed together in the place where they assembled for worship; they also resorted to the temple at the hour of prayer. Paul exhorted the Ephesians to pray "always with all prayer." He who loves to pray alone, as did Daniel, may be assured that in public prayer his motive is not to be heard of men. {ST, August 14, 1884 par. 11 }

Oh that we could impress on the minds of all the great willingness of God to help and strengthen every one who looks to him in trusting prayer. The oil and wine of consolation will be given to those who seek for it; the importunate soul will know him as the One who hears and answers prayer, the One who "comforteth those that are cast down." He is a God over all the earth, exercising over the whole human family an unwearied and solicitous watchcare which nothing can escape. Every

moment he grants audience to those who lay their wants and desires before him; and every moment he is ministering to the necessities of thousands who live upon his bounties, yet yield him no tribute of grateful praise, give no token that they realize their dependence upon him.

After we have offered our petitions, we are to answer them ourselves as far as possible, and not wait for God to do for us what we can do for ourselves. The help of God is held in reserve for all who demand it. Divine help is to be combined with human effort, aspiration, and energy. But we cannot reach the battlements of Heaven without climbing for ourselves. We cannot be borne up by the prayers of others when we ourselves neglect to pray, for God has made no such provision for us. Not even divine power can lift one soul to Heaven that is unwilling to put forth efforts in his own behalf. The unlovely traits in our characters are not removed, and replaced by traits that are pure and lovely, without some effort on our part.

As thus step by step we ascend the shining ladder that leads to the city of God, oh how many times we shall be discouraged, and come to weep at the feet of Jesus over our failures and our defeats. In our efforts to follow the copy set us by our Lord, we shall make crooked lines, and leave many a page blotted and blistered by our tears of repentance. Yet let us not cease our efforts. Heaven can be attained by every one of us if we will strive lawfully, doing the will of Jesus and growing into his image. Temporary failure should make us lean more heavily on Christ, and we should press on with brave-heart, determined will, and unfaltering purpose.

We should be continually loosening our hold upon earth, and fastening it upon Heaven. Soon we must render an account to God for all the deeds done in the body. This accountability extends to our minutest acts, words, and thoughts, and even reaches to the unconscious influence that breathes out from our life like the fragrance from a flower. We must give an account, not only for what we have done both of evil and of good, but for what we might have done, but have neglected. Viewed in this light, life is a sacred trust. It is not mere play. Every moment of it is intensely real, fraught with eternal interests. Let us, then, realize our great need of Christ and our dependence upon him; and let us thank God that help has been laid upon One who is mighty to save. *Signs of the Times*, August 14, 1884.