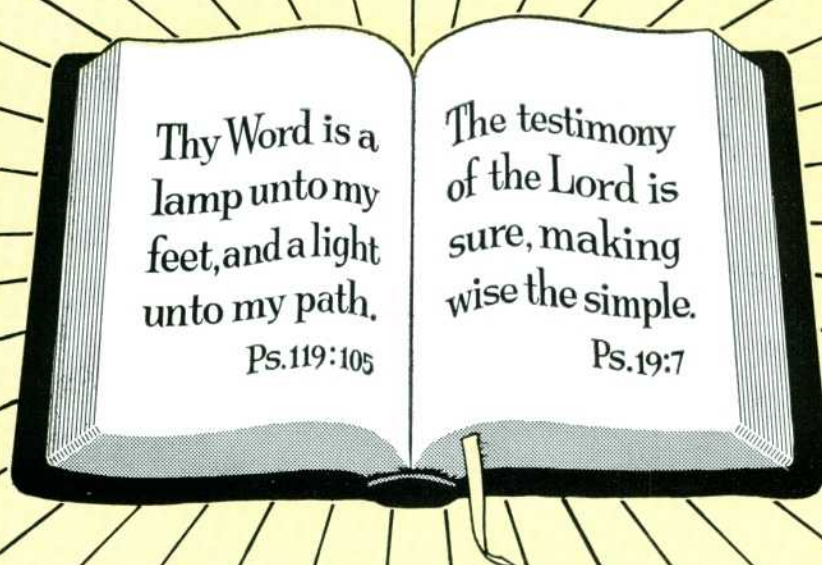


Megiddo Message

DEVOTED TO THE CAUSE OF CHRIST



Waiting In Prayer

Confidence In Prayer

Pentecost and Prayer

"To Him That Overcometh"

Cooperating with the Inevitable

A SIMPLEHEARTED man was once asked how he managed to live in such a state of tranquility even though surrounded by circumstances anything but pleasant. His answer was as profound as it is simple: "I have learned," he said, "to cooperate with the inevitable."

The idea is so wise and so practical that it is hard to see how we can ever manage to overlook it in our everyday living. That we do overlook it, however, is shown by our conduct and conversation. We feel discontented. We murmur; we complain. We "kick against the pricks" time and again, all the while believing that we are doing the will of God. We beat our head against a wall, then wonder why our head hurts.

Some of the moral philosophers of long ago seemed to know something of the secret of cooperating with the inevitable. Epictetus, for instance, would never dream of resenting circumstances or complaining about his lot in life. To do so would be to rebel against God. According to his teaching, men are placed in a world over which they have no control and are therefore not accountable to God for the direction the world takes. What wicked men do should not disturb the good man's tranquility. These things belong to the world outside. It is the inner world that matters, because that is the only world over which we have control, and the only one for which we shall be held responsible. The inner world consists of our thoughts and emotions, presided over by our will. While we cannot determine circumstances, we can determine our reaction to them.

This is also how God would have us view our circumstances. Such faith is not blind fatalism, nor is it a continual striving against the unchangeable, but it is a solid trust in the supremacy of God who is over all and who will bring all to work for ultimate good within His plan. It is God's part to order the universe; it is our part to order our attitude toward it. It is our part to

accept His will wherever it is expressed and keep within ourselves an attitude of worshipful resignation. If my will is to do God's will, then there will be no controversy with anything that comes in the course of my life. Inclement weather, unpleasant neighbors, physical handicaps, sickness, loss, adverse political conditions—all will be accepted as God's will for the time and subject to such alteration as God may see fit to make.

To accept the inevitable within the will of God does not mean, however, to accept evil as inevitable and make no effort to remove ourselves from it or it from ourselves. So to think would be to cancel the plain teachings of the Scriptures. Where a situation is contrary to the will of God, it is our privilege and obligation to pray and labor to bring about a change. Where evil exists in our own lives, it must be overpowered and removed; in the words of Paul, "overcome evil with good" (Rom. 12:21).

Neither are we obliged to passively accept illness, for example, as inevitable and do nothing about it. Rather, we should accept it as the will of God for the time and do our best to recover our health. The greatest test may be in not chafing against our illness or resisting it as something that has come to us outside the will of God. To fret and complain against our afflictions like an animal caught in a trap is to miss the whole disciplinary purpose of God in our lives. Conditions will alter when the time is right, but that time is not right so long as fretful souls chew at the trap of circumstances and pity themselves.

In short, "God grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change, courage to change the things I can, and the wisdom to know the difference." Trust God to work all the "unchangeables" together for our eternal good. The difficulties are only for a moment, anyway, and the benefits of submission will be as enduring as the universe. ●●

MEGIDDO means

"a place of troops" (*Gesenius' Hebrew Lexicon*); "a place of God" (*Young's Analytical Concordance*). Megiddo was and is a town in Palestine, strategically located, and the scene of frequent warfare. In the spiritual parallel, it is a place where soldiers engaged in spiritual warfare gather to renew their strength and courage (II Cor. 10:4, 5).

We believe

—in God the Creator of all things, all men and all life.

We believe

—in the Bible as containing the genuine revelation of God and His purposes for men, and as being our only source of divine knowledge today.

We believe

—in Christ the Son of God and our Perfect Example, who was born of a Virgin, ministered among men, was crucified, resurrected, and taken to heaven, and who shall shortly return to be King of the whole earth.

We believe

—in life as the gift of God, and in our sacred responsibility to use it for God and His coming Kingdom.

We believe

—in all mankind as providing the nucleus from which a superior, God-honoring people shall be chosen to receive the blessings of immortal life.

We believe

—in ourselves as capable of fulfilling the demands and disciplines given us in the law of God, thus perfecting that high quality of character which God has promised to reward with life everlasting in His heavenly Kingdom on earth.

We believe

—in the promise of God, that a new age is coming—is near—when the earth will be filled with His glory, His people, and His will be done here as it is now done in heaven.

Bible Quotations in this issue:

Unidentified quotations are from the King James Version.

Other versions are identified as follows:

NEB—*New English Bible*

NIV—*New International Version*

NAS—*New American Standard*

RSV—*Revised Standard Version*

TLB—*The Living Bible*

TEV—*Today's English Version*

Phillips—*The New Testament in Modern English*

Berkeley—*The Modern Language New Testament*

Weymouth—*The New Testament in Modern Speech*

Moffatt—*The Bible, A New Translation*

Megiddo Message

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EDITORIAL

2 Cooperating with the Inevitable

We cannot always change our circumstances, but we can accept them and trust God to work all together for our eternal good.

ARTICLES

4 Waiting In Prayer

There is strength, courage, power, and help in prayer.

8 Got Any Problems?

A straightforward analysis of our problems—we all have them.

21 With Determination

26 "Teeth" on the Tongue

BIBLE STUDY

10 Confidence In Prayer

Eleventh in a Series on the Epistle of First John

SPECIAL FEATURES

17 To the Seven Churches

On the Very Point of Death
To Him that Overcometh

REGULAR FEATURES

13 Bible Study Hour: *Pentecost and Prayer*

22 Scriptural Spotlight: *Unwise Comparing*

On II Cor. 10:12. We are here to help each other; we are not all alike.

27 Our Readers Write

28 Cover Feature: *My Prayer*

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Waiting In Prayer

PENTECOST is the anniversary of that day nearly two thousand years ago when the glorified Christ sent wondrous power upon His disciples. What a day that was for those clinging loyally in faith. What an experience! There they were, quietly gathered together, much as we are now, when suddenly "there came a sound from heaven as of a rushing mighty wind, and it filled all the house where they were sitting. And there appeared unto them cloven tongues, like as of fire, and it sat upon each of them. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit, and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance" (Acts 2:1-4).

Probably no one who has read this description of the event has been so dissatisfied with it as its author, Luke the physician, who was privileged to be one of those on whom the Spirit came that day. It was an experience impossible to translate into words. To feel the living power of God in one's being, to be directly empowered to perform God's work on earth—what an experience! How could it be adequately described! What would be a man's proper response to such a gift?

What Next?

But at this time, the disciples of Christ may have been ready for just about anything, even the descending power of God. So much had happened in so short a time. A mere two months before, Christ was still among them, preaching as He had been for nearly three years. When He began to tell them that it was all to end shortly, that this was only the first phase of God's plan for Him, they did not comprehend. And then, when He told them His hour had "come," what did that mean?

But they were not long in learning. The day before the Passover He called His apostles together for one last Passover meal with them; Passover was a sacred observance for every loyal Jew. But *that* Passover night was unforgettable. Jesus talked with them as He had never

talked before, it seemed. He spoke of peace and joy, of love and friendship, of highest obligation and sacred duty, of heavenly power and divine blessing. He spoke also of sacrifice and service, and suffering—and death. And before the night was over, He, their Lord and Master, was in enemy hands, suffering the treatment of the worst sort of sinner, He their beloved Lord and Master. And before the day was done, He was on the cross, crucified and dead. Their hopes plunged to the abyss of despair. But scarcely had they found time to think it all through, when word reached them that Jesus was alive again; He had been seen by certain women who were early at the tomb, who went forth testifying that Jesus was alive!

Jesus was indeed alive, and soon the disciples saw Him themselves. Once again He was among them, teaching and preaching the glad tidings of the Kingdom of God. But—what might happen next? Was He among them to stay, to set up His Kingdom, to break the power of Rome and establish Himself on earth's throne? It was a likely possibility; or so it seemed.

More than a month passed, while Jesus was seen by many of the brethren. Still they wondered. What next? One day they were talking as they walked along the road that led away from Bethany to the Mount called Olivet. "Lord," asked one of the apostles, "Wilt thou at this time restore again the kingdom to Israel?" Jesus' reply gave them yet more to think about. "It is not for you to know the times or the seasons, which the Father hath put in his own power," He told them. "But ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Spirit is come upon you: and ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth" (Acts 1:6-8).

While they were still taking in the meaning of these words, He lifted up His hands and blessed them. And as He did so, suddenly He began to ascend. Higher, higher—how their hearts must have stood still as they watched in breathless

amazement. What did *this* mean? Was He—was He *leaving* them?

“And while they beheld, he was taken up; and a cloud received him out of their sight.” He was gone. And as they stood there, gazing blankly into the azure blue, wondering where He was going, what He would be doing, when He would be coming back, “behold, two men stood by them, in white apparel”—glorious, shining immortal beings—“which also said, Ye men of Galilee, why stand ye gazing up into heaven? this same Jesus, which is taken up from you into heaven, shall so come in like manner as ye have seen him go into heaven” (Acts 1:10-11).

What comforting words in that crucial moment. We can imagine the feeling of aloneness that swept over them like a wave. Jesus was gone now; gone; they were on their own. So short was the time He had been with them; now it was over.

There was no point in staying on the Mount of Olives to await His return; who could imagine how many days or weeks it might be—? (At this time they had no possible idea of the time He would be away.) So they returned “unto Jerusalem from the mount called Olivet, which is from Jerusalem a sabbath day’s journey” (Acts 1:12). They returned to Jerusalem to wait. This had been Jesus’ parting word, to “wait for the promise of the Father, which, saith he, ye have heard of me.” At this time it seems possible they could not recall what they had heard of it from Him, but the command to wait was plain. “Tarry ye in the city of Jerusalem until ye be endued with power from on high.” Tarry ye; wait. “Ye shall be baptized with the Holy Spirit, not many days hence” (Luke 24:49; Acts 1:5). Wait, wait; how long? They did not know. How long was “not many days”? There was nothing to do but to wait and see.

Learning to Wait

It is that time of *waiting* that we want to think about this morning. Waiting is not something that thrills any of us. Haven’t we all confronted the meaning of this word too many times? Haven’t we often found it harder to wait than to work? If only we could redeem all the wasted hours of waiting in our lives—.”

But must waiting time be wasted? Indeed not. Waiting time may be put to noble use. The disciples proved this the day Jesus ascended.

Much of our waiting is much less significant than that of the disciples who awaited the coming of the Holy Spirit. Sometimes, unfortunately, it takes only very brief periods of waiting to

grieve us. In the doctor’s office, at the market, at the post office, at the dinner table; we wait for one another in the ordinary course of our lives. But there is something about waiting that violates our built-in sense of economy. We feel we are wasting time if we are not filling it with active busyness. When we plan our day, we seldom set aside time for unexpected “waiting.” Yet how often it comes. Someone has suggested that all of us should work out a practical plan for taking the *grating* out of *waiting*. Unforeseen circumstances are bound to thwart the best-laid plans, and we would do better to plan to use the time profitably—and be richer for it, than to fret and worry at the unavoidable.

Praying and Waiting

This is something all of us must learn. This is what the disciples did, when they found themselves with an extended period of waiting. What did they do? They returned “unto Jerusalem, . . . and when they were come in, they went up into an upper room, where abode both Peter, and James, and John, and Andrew, Philip, and Thomas, Bartholomew, and Matthew, James the son of Alphaeus, and Simon Zelotes, and Judas the brother of James. These all continued with one accord in prayer and supplication, with the women, and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with his brethren” (Acts 1:12-14). What did they do? These eager disciples, anticipating more of the wondrous working of God among them, spent the interim in prayer. Christ had promised them “power from on high”; they did not know when or how it would come, but they knew for a certainty that it was coming. So in the meantime, while they waited, “all these with one accord devoted themselves to prayer” (Acts 1:14, RSV).

We can readily see why they turned to prayer at such a time as this. Never had they felt more alone or more in need of talking with their Lord and Master. How many questions were on their minds, questions of time and place and destiny, questions about their own duty and responsibility! Christ had told them so many things they did not fully understand when they tried to put it all together. If only they could have learned more while He was right with them! Only a few moments before they had been talking with Him face to face. Now, how could they talk with Him, except by prayer! And so they prayed.

How fervently, how earnestly, how zealously they must have prayed that day. No cool half-hearted, meaningless words or phrases found a place in *that* prayer. They were talking to Him whom they had known so well, whom they had

grown to love and respect and revere. Now they felt desperate for His help, His hope, His power. They realized as never before their need for His strength, His courage, His fortitude, His faith. They needed Him, their Lord and Master; but they could not have Him. And so they prayed; they followed His injunction and prayed to the Father in His name. It was very possibly the first such prayer to escape mortal lips, but we may be sure it was heard in heaven.

Are we not in a circumstance similar in many ways to that of those early disciples? Their Master is ours, also. He is still abiding in that far country. But soon He comes; in the meantime we need His *strength*, His *courage*, His *zeal*, His *direction*. Should we not devote our waiting time to prayer?

Awaiting the Spirit

Those early disciples prayed because they were

literally waiting upon God. They were awaiting the coming of His Holy Spirit. Just so are we waiting upon God. We await the greater outpouring of His power. A greater Pentecost is coming. Any day it may arrive, when we shall be endowed with power from on high. What wonders that power will work among us, changing our small, faltering band into a veritable dynamo of Spirit-filled beings who can go forth to participate in the glorious unfoldings of God's plan. Someday you and I, if worthy, can feel the power of God's Holy Spirit within us. With such a prospect ahead of us, can we not join ourselves ever more firmly to Him who has promised to do all this for us? How fervently *we* should pray, and so much the more as we see the Day approaching. We *must* be ready when it arrives. God forbid that we shall have to look back on time wasted. We know the promise is sure; we should be living even now as though it were already a reality.

Let Us Pray . . .

Our loving Father, Thou mighty Being who formed the earth and created man upon it, who giveth life and breath to all, we thank Thee that it is as well with us as it is, and that in spite of our negligence and indifference the days of our probation still are extended, that we have the chance to improve our record and get right with Thee. Grant that the reading of Thy Word, the reading of the things written aforetime for our learning and instruction may reinforce our faith, warm our hearts, and send us forth on our way singing whatever may come.

We thank Thee for making known to us Thy great plan for the earth and mankind. We rejoice to know a better day is destined to dawn, when the kingdoms of this world shall become Thy kingdom, and Christ and His faithful associates shall reign over a conquered world in peace. Then peace, plenty and Thy will shall fill the earth as the waters fill the sea. Help us to use every energy of our body and mind to prepare for that Day. May we believe with all our hearts that it is coming, and now seek first Thy Kingdom and make every move count in getting ready for it.

May we never procrastinate, or join in the coward's doleful lament: the work cannot be done, the evils of my nature cannot be conquered. But may we declare over and over to ourselves that

the work *can* be done, the work *must* be done, and it is within our power to do it.

Help us to remember the great day of reckoning that is coming. Our eyes have been enlightened; we have covenanted to serve Thee, hence will have to answer for the things done in our body whether good or bad. Thou wilt not always be sowing; the time of reaping will come. Soon the wheat shall be separated from the tares, the sheep divided from the goats, the righteous from the wicked. Help us to live now as we will wish we had lived when we stand before the great Assize.

Help us to be like those early disciples after Jesus' ascension, to be always waiting in prayer, that we may maintain a continual attitude of prayer.

Help us not to set our hearts upon any earthly thing. May we not become too engrossed in our plans or temporal undertakings, but may we hold the things of this life with a loose hand, ready to drop them at a moment's notice when the great Prophet shall return to earth to herald the close of Gentile times and announce the coming of the King of kings.

Forgive us for the sins we have turned from and forsaken, and give us strength to lay aside the last weight that we may share with the good and faithful of all ages immortal life in the world to come.

In Jesus' name. Amen.

In Need of Courage

Those early disciples prayed because they were facing trying days. They recalled the words of Jesus, "Ye shall be hated of all men for my name's sake" (Matt. 10:22). "If the world hate you, ye know that it hated me before it hated you" (John 15:18). The meaning of these words was more than they could fully understand, but they knew how violently the world had hated Jesus; they had even crucified Him! Would the world hate any of them to *that* extent? Were they going to have to face physical death for His name's sake?

Waiting gave them time to think about these things. And how naturally, when thinking, they realized their weakness and turned to God in prayer.

Are we not also waiting in a trying time? And should we not use this waiting time in deep spiritual thought and prayer? As the coming of the Lord draws nearer and nearer, and the world around us grows more and more indifferent until we can scarcely find an ear that will listen to the Word of the Lord, do we not turn more and more to God for help? Ours is not a day of active persecution as was theirs—God be praised! But ours is a deadly snare, the snare of cold indifference from those who know not God and do not care to know Him. We hear the scoffs and jeers of those who say, "Where is the promise of his coming? for since the fathers fell asleep all things continue as they were from the beginning of the creation" (II Pet. 3:3-4). And while they scorn, they give themselves more and more to pursuing the pleasures of this world, with no time or thought for God and the plan that He is working out in our midst. Keeping faith these days is a test; let us never forget to seek God's help for *our* perplexities—in prayer.

In Need of Strength

Then, too, those early disciples prayed because they felt their total dependence upon God. They felt it as they never had before. God was their strength. Christ was their Lord and Director, their Pattern and Example. They were wholly dependent. They knew it was not in them to direct their own steps. Have *we* learned this lesson, that it is not in *us* to direct *our* steps? They were humble, open, ready for any command that might be given them. Is this *our* attitude?

We, too, are totally dependent upon God. The breath in our lungs is from God. It is He who

gave us our goodly mortal frame. We live on food that grows by laws of His creation. We walk upon His soil; we handle His resources. We exist solely by His grace. What have we that we did not receive? Should we not be overwhelmingly grateful?

And when it comes to our prospects for the future, are we not even more dependent? Through His munificence and love we are informed of coming events. Without God and the knowledge He has revealed, we would be living only to die, like sheep upon the plain. Without Him we would not be able to imagine how we could direct our lives to please Him. We wait upon God. Should we not long to communicate with Him?

Those early disciples prayed because they needed the spiritual exercise of faith. It was their one way of contacting the heavenly realm, and they needed that holy association. Now more than ever they needed divine companionship. And do we need it any less, we who have had no direct contact with any of God's heavenly family? Those disciples had seen and known personally the Son of God. Through prayer they could maintain their acquaintance and friendship. This same Son of God is destined to be *our* King forever. Should we not be seeking to know Him—in prayer?

Copying Christ

Those disciples prayed also because that was what their Master had done. No one had ever lived closer to God than He. Time and again they had observed His closeness to God. Now He was gone, and the best they could do was to follow His example. In prayer Jesus had found strength; in prayer *they* could find strength.

Should not we follow His example, and theirs, and pray?

Those disciples knew that in prayer is power, strength, and unfailing help. In prayer the soul of man is linked to the soul of God. Prayer is communication. Prayer is the Christian's vital breath, the spirit of the inner life. Prayer stretches the sinews of the soul and hardens its muscles. To tarry in the presence of the King leads to new loyalty and devotion on the part of faithful subjects. Christian character grows in the secret place of prayer. It has been said that there is no more congenial soil in which to cultivate the fruit of the Spirit than near the throne of grace. There the clusters ripen to perfection, clusters of love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance (Gal. 5:23-24).

(Continued on page 23)

Got Any Problems?

by Ethel Barrett*

DO I have any problems? The answer is *yes*.

And, "I'm in no mood to hear that they are doing me good." Do we ever feel this way? Such is our natural reaction to difficulties. There seems to be something perverse in us that makes us like the little boy who wrote this letter:

*Dear Dr. Heide: I dropped the braces
in your mail-slot. I have decided that I
don't care about straight teeth.
Good-bye. Donald.*

And that should about end the whole thing, except for this: Problems are a fact of life. Although we do have our moments of prosperity and pure happiness and joy, life is sprinkled with problems, whether we like it or not. Settled security is withheld from us; all transient and ephemeral things are subject to change without notice.

We are in school in this life, and although we can take some electives, problems are part of the required curriculum. And we should be thankful; for oftentimes it is only through problems that we learn the real strength and power of our faith. It is only through problems that we may develop the virtues God wants us to have.

The really curious thing about problems is not that they exist, but the various ways we may feel about them. Most of us are prone to think that nobody ever felt just the way *we* feel, nobody ever made the same discoveries *we* have made, nobody ever had a pain as *we* have; nobody was ever hurt as badly, or spoken to as harshly, or tempted so continuously, or—

And our problems go on and on. We seem to forget that "there hath no temptation taken [us] but such as is common to man," and that God will not allow us to be tempted above what we are able to bear.

"But my problem is myself; I'm just so worthless."

We may be tempted to feel this way. "I've taken

second place so long. I've given up hope of ever accomplishing anything. If I were in a committee meeting, I'd take a back seat. If I were in an orchestra, I'd play seventh flute. If I were written up in a story, I'd never be the main character; I'd be his faithful companion. If I were part of a letter, I'd be the P. S. I'm one of those nothing-to-write-home-about people.

Yes. It happens that way sometimes. It happened to Joshua. He played second string to, of all people, Moses.

Now Moses was so first-rate that all by himself he was a majority. Moses was chosen by God, and Moses was the central one, the outstanding one. When they walked outside, Joshua was in his shadow. When they were in the tabernacle, Joshua served and waited. When they climbed Mount Sinai, Moses went to the top and Joshua waited at a distance. He was always behind. He was the P. S.

Again we may complain: "I don't have anything special about my background."

Well, Joshua was born a slave. He was probably dragging a hoe through mud in which to mix straw for bricks when Moses faced Pharaoh and said, "Let my people go!" And when Pharaoh cried "If they don't have enough to keep them busy, I'll give them more!"—Joshua was one of those whose work was doubled. Joshua had a background all right—all negative. He didn't have a thing going for him, it seemed. If he'd been a part of a letter, he would have been the P. S. And so he didn't fully realize what God was preparing him for when he was listening to and learning from Moses. He was just the "faithful companion."

But what is wrong with being a faithful companion? Forty years later, when Moses' work was finished, there was no doubt who the new leader would be. God's instructions were plain. "Go get Joshua." So the man who had nothing going for him, the "faithful companion," the man who had always been "second," became the leader of the whole Israelite nation. God didn't hold his uneventful background against him. God doesn't

* Condensed and adapted from an article by Ethel Barrett, published in *Christian Life*, October, 1974, "Got Any Problems?" Used by permission.

measure such things. Joshua had the qualities God wanted. Having been always a "second" was no disgrace—it was *character* that God wanted.

"I don't see anything great that I can do in the place where I am—my hands are tied." Do we ever feel this way?

There were a couple of men who could have said that and quit, without a word of censure from their fellowmen. Their names were Paul and Silas. And God never put them any place where they *didn't* have a problem, it seemed. But let's take just one place as an example. Philippi.

First there was the rising tide of opposition, then the frenzied mob. Then the officials and the Roman lictors with their bundles of rods for beating. And then the prison. It was an ugly, thick-walled building with huge double doors. The inner dungeon was pitch dark. Their feet were put in stocks that were locked by wooden bars falling into slots. Something scurried past Paul's feet. It was a rat. This was a place in which some men would lose their minds. They were locked in darkness, with their seemingly insurmountable problem, and the hours dragged by.

It was midnight. There was nothing in the blackness but despair. In the outer prison, the men had settled down for another night of tortured sleep.

And then they heard something. Could it be? No, not possible. But wait a minute. It *was*. Singing? Yes, singing! Those two men in the inner dungeon with bleeding backs, were praying and singing praises to the Lord!

What was happening? The ground was shaking. The very walls of the prison were swaying. The wooden bars were being joggled out of their slots.

Earthquake!

The two Christian brothers with their insurmountable problems were thrown against each other and in helping each other up, they realized they were free! Paul, under God, was the irresistible force, and there was no immovable object! That was the night he preached to the jailor. The night that began in tragedy ended in triumph!

We may have other problems. "I know God is with us, yet so many years have gone by and I haven't reached my goal. I still have problems."

Yes, it can be discouraging to be on the home-stretch, so to speak, and have so much against us. Yet this is what happened to Paul on his way to Rome. When he boarded the Alexandrian grain ship at the busy port of Myra amidst the shouting and grumbling, and the striking of the shipwright's mallet and the creaking of pulleys hauling cargo and the squawking of parrots, there

was no inkling of the paralyzing problem that lay ahead. It struck without warning. The wind came swooping down out of the north like a living thing diving at its prey. The vessel tore loose like a frightened animal being chased and not knowing where to go. Like the tail of a kite, the lifeboat they were towing darted crazily behind, sometimes flying through the air. With the goal practically in sight it seemed that Paul's ministry was ended—. In the midst of the sea. And yet, and yet—.

"We are not finished," he cried, "for my life is not my own. It is God's! My work for Him isn't done yet. I have to see Rome. So on to safety—all of you!" Everyone around him thought he had lost his senses. And when the ship got caught between fierce crosscurrents, and ran into a sand-bar—both at the same time—they were sure of it. There was the wrenching creak as timbers tore loose from their metal holdings. And the incredible tangle of men and splintering timber as the ship sighed and groaned and came completely apart, and soldiers, sailors, passengers, prisoners—jumped, slid, clawed, fell—until, one way or another, they were all pitched into the raging sea. But as fast as the breakers plowed them under, they came up again, until, incredibly, they were all hurled up onto the beach. Including Paul, of course. He was unsinkable.

When Paul reached his goal at last, there was no fanfare, no acclaim, no worldwide fame. He passed through the Porta Capena from the Appian Way into the great city. To his right the palaces of the Caesars rose on the Palatine Hill and overlooked the Circus. And farther to the right was the Forum where he would be tried before Caesar. And end his ministry in a blaze of glory? Not now. For instead of a trial, there had to be two years of house arrest. Then in prison as a malefactor, sentenced to death.

He had been on the shelf, or had his hands tied, or fought opposition, most of his life. But it hadn't stopped him. He was irreversible, irresistible, irrepressible, unsinkable—and unstoppable. Riddled with problems? Yes. On the shelf? Yes. Out of work? Never. He had a purpose. He had a God. He had a goal. And he made all his time count to his credit. He dictated most of his Epistles from prison cells, and he preached the Gospel whether he was on the shelf or not. Had he ever been discouraged? Yes. Tired, weak? Yes.

But his voice thunders down to us through the ages, "I am chained . . . but the Word of God is not chained. . . . I solemnly urge you before God . . . to preach the Word of God urgently at all times . . . when it's convenient and when it is not . . ." (Continued on page 26)

From

John the Elder



Eleventh in a Series on the Epistle of First John

Confidence In Prayer

A Study of First John 5:14-17

JOHN writes warmly to believers; he describes his own experience, as well as theirs:

"And this is the confidence that we have in him, that, if we ask any thing according to his will, he heareth us" (I John 5:14).

Confidence in God—what a blessed feeling! Their lives are in line with His, and they feel free to approach Him anytime. They believe in Him absolutely. He is their strength, their hope, their trust. Continually they feel His protecting hand. They are thrilled as they pray, feeling that God is hearing them—they are confident.

We must not fail to notice John's modification of the prayers which God hears. They are those "according to His will." Earlier John wrote that prayers are answered when suppliants are keeping God's commandments. They whose hearts condemn them cannot have confidence (I John 3:21-22). How could the Almighty grant petitions contrary to His will? He is not like men, weak and shifting, changing at every turn, depending on his frame of mind. God is infinite in wisdom and power and all goodness. We with our limited foresight do not always know what is best for us. We should always qualify our prayers as Jesus did in Gethsemane, "Nevertheless not as I will, but as thou wilt."

Prayer is not a way for us to induce the Almighty to fulfill our desires; rather it is a means by which our ways may be redirected into the channel of His divine will. A Greek philosopher who had been a slave for a time wrote, "Have courage to look up to God and pray, 'Deal with me as Thou wilt from now on. I am one with Thee; I am Thine; I flinch from nothing so long as Thou dost think that it is good. Lead me where Thou wilt. Wouldst Thou have me hold office or eschew it, stay or flee, be rich or poor? For all

this I will defend Thee before men.' " These words are something to ponder. Those who have confidence toward God are one with Him and will indeed be ready and eager to do His will whatever it may be.

Then John underlines what he has said in these words:

"And if we know that he hear us, whatsoever we ask, we know that we have the petitions that we desired of him" (I John 5:15).

The word "if" does not indicate any uncertainty here. John is not contradicting what he has just said. Weymouth words this text, "And since we know that He listens to us, whatever we ask, we know that we have the requests that we have asked of Him." John is absolutely certain. If we know that He hears us, as we certainly may if we are asking "according to His will," we may be equally sure that our prayers are answered. Earnest believers know that their prayers are not wasted breath; their prayers are not lost in empty air.

John's wording may sound as though petitions are granted immediately; but the thought seems rather that God recognizes the petition immediately and answers according to the time when He in His omniscience sees best. He may give or withhold our desires, or He may delay for our good. It may be that our faith needs to be exercised, our trust needs testing, or our spiritual fiber needs strengthening. It may be there is something we can do ourselves. We should not expect God to work a miracle for us. When we pray, we should go to work for the answer. If we pray for courage, we should summon it; if we pray for light we must search for it. If we pray to be kept from temptation, we must do all in our power to avoid it. God helps those who help themselves.

The apostle Paul tells of an occasion when his

petitions were not granted. Thrice he besought the Lord to remove a certain trial from his life; thrice the request was denied. The Lord's answer was, "My grace is sufficient for thee." Paul immediately directed himself into the channel of God's divine will. From henceforth he rejoiced in his infirmities, in his necessities, in persecution and distresses; he realized that these hardships were working good for him and he glorified God in them (II Cor. 12:7-10).

Today we walk by faith alone. God does not manifest His power openly; He does not answer our prayers audibly. But God's promise to hear and help is as certain as it was in any age: "I will not fail thee, nor forsake thee" (Josh. 1:5). The question is with us, whether we will pray according to His will, whether we will show ourselves worthy of His protecting Hand.

May ours be a living faith like that of John the Elder. By aligning our lives with the Father's we too may have joy and confidence that He hears and answers us.

A Special Case—Intercessory Prayer

From the assurance that God hears prayer, the Apostle turns to a particular case in which prayer may be benevolently and effectively employed in saving a brother from death.

"If any man see his brother sin a sin which is not unto death, he shall ask [pray], and he shall give him life for them that sin not unto death. There is a sin unto death: I do not say that he shall pray for it" (I John 5:16).

From the original Greek we may understand that the phrase "sin unto death" means properly a sin which tends to death, which would terminate in death, of which death is the penalty or will be the result unless it be arrested.

John's words concerning prayer for a brother suggest the sense of intimate solidarity and responsibility which characterized the early Christians. The love which binds Christians together in fellowship ministers to spiritual needs as well as to physical needs. The glorious anticipation of eternal life never causes the Christian to be so preoccupied with himself that he neglects his brother. This glorious hope effervesces in his heart with a longing for others to have life also. John says when one sees a brother sin, that one should pray to God that he may see his error and repent. Thus by his intercessions he becomes the way for God to give that brother eternal life, if he continues in the way.

Consistently, if that same sin be discovered in myself, I will not excuse it. I will not find secret

pleasure in it. I will abhor it—in myself first.

There is a certain tenderness about John's words "If a man see his brother sin." What shall our conduct be? Are we to judge, condemn or despise him? Are we to turn away from him as if he were unclean and we holy? The Apostle bids us hurry into our secret closet and pray. We must remember that he who has sinned is our brother. The more we realize God's long-suffering and forbearance toward us, the more merciful and patient we will be with our brother.

But when we have prayed for our brother, our duty is not done. As in all other things, our duty is to seek to make our prayers come true. It may be our duty to speak to the brother himself. God needs a channel through which His help may come. He needs an instrument through whom He may act, and it may well be that we are the voice to speak to the one who has gone astray.

How unspeakably great and precious is the blessing which by our prayers we may secure for our erring brother! Not thousands of gold and silver, not the wealth of worlds can compare with a boon like this—even eternal life. The very knowledge that we may help obtain such a blessing for him should be a powerful stimulus to us to pray for our brother. How can we do otherwise than pray for him when our prayers may have such a glorious issue! What joy will be ours in the Day when the faithful gather, if we may see our brother there who triumphed because of our intercessions.

In his thoughts on intercessory prayer John mentions a limitation: "There is a sin unto death." He did not mean that they should pray for such. Thus he did not mean that they should pray indiscriminately for all sinners. It is sad to think that there is sin that is beyond forgiveness; but there is. This point was especially applicable in John's day, when Christians could partake of the heavenly gifts and taste the mighty powers and wonders of the world to come through the Holy Spirit. If they who experienced this wonderful power, if they deliberately apostatized and insulted and denied the saving truth, willfully taking pleasure in sin and the ungodly world, it was impossible for them to come to repentance (see Heb. 6:3-6 and Heb. 10:26-29). Jesus spoke the same of this sin: "it shall not be forgiven" (Luke 12:10).

But there are elements in this apostasy which we would do well to take seriously. Because we do not have the Holy Spirit power, we in our day can never be guilty of sinning against it. However, any sin persisted in and unrepented of be-

comes a sin unto death. God may urge, God may plead, God may warn, God may offer, but God will never violate man's freedom of choice. When we stubbornly refuse to walk in the way of life, any intercessory prayers in our behalf are canceled. It is not that the sin itself is beyond forgiveness, but the hardening process in the heart steadily goes on and it becomes impossible for any appeals to move it. All such hardness of heart is self-caused. Such a one is no longer a "brother." He has "unbrothered" himself. As Hosea the prophet said of the apostates whom he termed "Ephraim," "Ephraim is joined to idols: let him alone" (Hos. 4:17).

Let us be concerned lest we go along in sin so long that no appeal will move us, or until our strength is gone and we are too weak to overcome our sin. Our sanctification must be a daily process as we practice self-examination, self-discipline and self-sacrifice.

John concludes his thoughts on prayer with these words:

"All unrighteousness is sin: and there is a sin not unto death" (1 John 5:17).

John wants his readers to know how wide is the scope for intercessory prayer. He who loves his brother will pray for him, and it is the sweetest sacrifice before the throne of God. He who prays receives the first blessing; he becomes more kind, more considerate, more unselfish toward others. How can one offend a brother, how can he be a source of temptation, how can he put a stumbling block in his way, if he is praying for him? Intercessory prayer is a sign of brotherliness, a bond that is real and living. But John here is talking especially of the blessing of life which one may receive through a brother's intercessions. He is stressing the need for our prayers. Prayer is effective, he is saying; learn to intercede faithfully, earnestly, perseveringly.

May we not despise the power which God has placed within our reach. ●●

Daily Dying

There is a sense in which we die daily in denying ourselves. But there is need for one more evidence of this daily death. It is a definite crisis, a definite moment, a definite time of execution, when death is chosen by each of us, when "those who belong to Christ have nailed their natural evil desires to his cross and crucified them there" (Gal. 5:24).

There is not the least doubt that our deliverance from the power of all fleshly lusts is in the precise measure in which we have embraced the idea of complete severance from them, which is suggested in the one final, all-severing, awful word—death. In other words, we are not delivered from sin by keeping it around and giving it visiting privileges. As long as it is alive and skulking about, it will sneak in the back door while we are closing the front door. It will lie in the attic of the mind like a bunch of old rags, waiting for the proper conditions for spontaneous combustion. The way to get rid of it is to die, and that is a definite act of the will. The secret of our will-power is simply to die, die to sin. ●●

The Bible is . . .

*the begetter of life
the revealer of God,
the light of the intellect,
fashioner of the law,
guide to history,
foe to superstition,
comfort in sorrow,
the enemy of oppression,
strength in weakness,
star on death's night,
promise of the future,
pathway in perplexity.*

The Bible is . . .

*an escape from temptations,
illumination of darkness,
secret of national progress,
charter of all true liberty,
forerunner of civilization,
guide in the day,
guardian of the night,
molder of institutions,
regulator of all the high and worthy things of life,
answer to the deepest hungerings of the heart.*

"The words of the Lord are pure words" (Ps. 12:6).

A LEGEND FROM THE TALMUD:

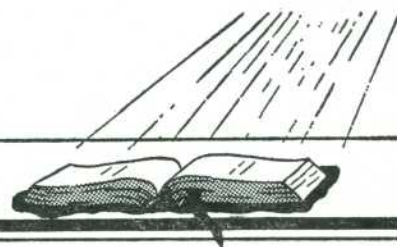
Alexander the Great, the Conqueror of the world, at last stood before the gates of Paradise. He knocked. "Who is there?" asked the keeper of the gate.

"It is I, Alexander the Great!"

"I do not know you," replied the gatekeeper. "Go away. Only the righteous may enter here."

God recognizes neither a man's gold, nor his distinction, nor his worldly power; their value is but as dust. Only a life full of good deeds, like a pomegranate is full of seeds, lives in God's memory.

BIBLE STUDY HOUR



Pentecost and Prayer

Our study today centers around this most notable event. The name "Pentecost" comes from the Greek *pentekoste* meaning "fiftieth day." The day was to be "an holy convocation"; none of their daily work was to be done.

Q. The Pentecost we are most familiar with was the first to be celebrated after Jesus' death, resurrection and ascension. We may think of it as the first Pentecost, but when was the feast of Pentecost established?

A. Pentecost was one of three important feasts designated in the Mosaic law. It had been kept from the time of Moses.

Q. Yes, that is right, Israelite men were duty bound to attend the Passover, Pentecost and the Feast of Tabernacles. Could somebody find the proof for that in the Bible?

A. "The feast of unleavened bread thou shalt keep. And thou shalt observe the feast of weeks, of the first-fruits of wheat harvest, and the feast of ingathering at the year's end. Thrice in the year shall all your menchildren appear before the Lord God, the God of Israel" (Ex. 34:18, 22-23). The feast of unleavened bread was the Passover, the feast of weeks was Pentecost and the feast of ingathering was the Feast of Tabernacles.

Q. That is correct. Could somebody tell us just when the Feast of Pentecost was held in Moses' time?

A. It was seven full weeks from the day after the Passover. "And ye shall count unto you from the morrow after the sabbath, from the day that ye brought the sheaf of the wave offering; seven sabbaths shall be complete: Even unto the morrow after the seventh sabbath shall ye number fifty days; and ye shall offer a new meat offering unto the Lord" (Lev. 23:15).

Q. I think it is a little clearer from June, 1979

the New English Bible.

A. "From the day after the sabbath, the day on which you bring your sheaf as a special gift, you shall count seven full weeks. The day after the seventh sabbath will make fifty days, and then you shall present to the Lord a grain offering from the new crop."

Q. The sabbath here referred to was the Passover. Can someone tell us when that was held?

A. "In the fourteenth day of the first month at even is the Lord's pass-over" (Lev. 23:5). That would be the 14th of Abib, the second sabbath of the first month of the Bible year.

Q. Can we have Bible proof for that? And how was the new year determined?

A. The Bible new year was always the first new moon after the spring equinox—when the days and nights are equal. Exodus 23:15 connects the feast of unleavened bread or the Passover with the month Abib. "Thou shalt keep the feast of unleavened bread: . . . in the time appointed of the month Abib; for in it thou camest out from Egypt." The Passover commemorated their deliverance from Egyptian bondage.

Q. This year the Bible New Year began with the new moon of March 27, when we celebrated the birth of Christ. Then the Passover should have been 14 days later. Is that correct?

A. No. Jesus instituted a new Passover one day earlier than the old Jewish Passover, so we keep the Passover on the 13th of Abib. This year it was April 8, and the anniversary of Jesus' resurrection was the morning of April 11.

Q. Could we have some evidence from the Bible for the date of the new Passover?

A. In John 13:1, where Jesus ate the Passover with His disciples, it reads:

"Now before the feast of the pass-over . . ." The next verse says, "And supper being ended . . ."—the Jewish Passover had not yet begun, and Jesus and His apostles had already completed theirs.

There is further evidence in Luke 23 where it tells about Jesus being put in the tomb. Verses 53-54 tell that He was laid in a sepulcher "wherein never man before was laid. And that day was the preparation, and the sabbath drew on." The preparation day was the day before the sabbath, and we learn from these verses that Jesus was already dead and placed in the tomb. Verse 56 says that they "rested the sabbath day according to the commandment." It was early the next morning (the first day of the week) when they returned to the sepulcher with the spices they had prepared.

Q. Because the new Passover is one day earlier than the old Jewish Passover, we count 50 days from Jesus' resurrection to establish the date of Pentecost. The new Passover would be on Abib 13th, which this year was April 8. The anniversary of the resurrection was the morning of April 11. That would correspond to the day after the old Passover, making Pentecost this year on May 30.

How long after Jesus' ascension did the apostles have to wait for Pentecost?

A. Ten days. Acts 1:3 states that Jesus was with them forty days after His resurrection, so it would have been another ten days, or fifty days after His resurrection, until Pentecost.

Q. What had Jesus commanded them to do when He left them?

A. They were to preach "repentance and remission of sins . . . among all nations, beginning at Jerusalem." He told them to "tarry . . . in the city of Jerusalem, until ye be endued with power from on high" (Luke 24:47-49). They were to wait for the promised Holy Spirit power.

Q. What does the Bible say they were doing while they waited? And how many were there that waited?

A. There were about 120. And "These all continued with one accord in prayer and supplication, with the women, and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with his brethren" (Acts 1:14-15).

Q. That doesn't seem like very many after all the miracles Jesus had performed, does it? The Bible says they "continued with one accord in prayer and supplication." In other words, they were in union. Unity is very important in the body of Christ. Could we have some Bible proof for this statement?

A. Paul compared the Church to a human body. "Now ye are the body of Christ, and members in particular. But now are they many members, yet but one body" (1 Cor. 12:27, 20). All parts of the body must be joined together, or it is not a body.

Q. There is another good text I can think of in one of Paul's letters.

A. "Now I beseech you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye all speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions among you; but that ye be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment" (1 Cor. 1:10).

Q. Yes. The Church cannot be many men of many minds, but all must speak alike on matters of doctrine. That doesn't mean that we all have to wear the same color of clothing, but we must be of one mind on matters of faith and doctrine. There is another good verse on unity in Philippians. Would somebody please read chapter 1, verse 27?

A. "Only let your conduct be as it becometh the gospel of Christ, that whether I come and see you, or else be absent, I may hear of your affairs, that ye stand fast in one spirit, with one mind striving together for the faith of the gospel" (Scofield Reference Bible).

Q. God's family must be one in mind and one in purpose, in perfect accord. Jesus and His Father were in perfect accord, for He said "I and my Father are one" (John 10:30). These disciples continued in one accord until the Holy Spirit came upon them. Could we have Acts 2:1-4 please?

A. "And when the day of Pentecost was fully come, they were all with one accord in one place. And suddenly there came a sound from heav-

en as of a rushing mighty wind, and it filled all the house where they were sitting. And there appeared unto them cloven tongues like as of fire, and it sat upon each of them. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit, and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance."

Q. This was in fulfillment of Jesus' words: "Behold, I send the promise of my Father upon you." They had received the Holy Spirit. Was the Holy Spirit a new thing on the earth at Pentecost?

A. No, God's power was very much in evidence throughout the Old Testament period. He used human instruments such as Abraham, Moses, Joshua, and Gideon, but it was by means of His Spirit that He made His will known to men. It was by means of that same Holy Spirit power that Moses was enabled to record the first five books of the Bible.

Q. Yes. The prophets—like Jeremiah and Amos—who were so bold to denounce evil, received their messages through that same power. But today we are thinking more about the Holy Spirit in the New Testament because of the nearness of the anniversary of Pentecost. Had the apostles had the Holy Spirit before Pentecost?

A. They had been given the power to perform miracles as they went about teaching. In Matthew 10:1 we read where Jesus "called unto him his twelve disciples, [and] gave them power against unclean spirits, to cast them out, and to heal all manner of sickness and all manner of disease." That must have been Holy Spirit power.

Q. Yes, but apparently it was not a power equal to what they received at Pentecost, because there was one time they were unable to perform a healing. Can someone tell us about that?

A. The incident is in Mark 9. A certain man came to Jesus with his son who, he said, "hath a dumb spirit," or in other words, he was mentally ill. The disciples had attempted to heal the child, but could not. Jesus healed the child without difficulty. But we do not read of the disciples having any such problems after Pentecost.

Q. There is another mention of Holy Spirit power given the apostles before Pentecost. Can we have John 20:22-23?

A. "And when he had said this, he breathed on them, and saith unto them, Receive ye the Holy Spirit: Whose soever sins ye remit, they are remitted unto them; and whose soever sins ye retain, they are retained."

Q. Notice this was after the resurrection. Apparently the power given them here was the power to forgive sins.

What was the immediate evidence of the power given at Pentecost?

A. They began to speak in other tongues. The Bible lists 17 different nationalities gathered in Jerusalem and says that all heard the apostles speak in their own tongue or language. It was a miracle of speaking or hearing—or both!

Q. Yes. The fact that it was Pentecost accounts for the international assembly that witnessed the event and heard the apostles speak. Filled with the power of the Holy Spirit, they spoke boldly of "the wonderful works of God." But let us go back to the time before they received the power; what do the Scriptures say concerning their waiting?

A. They "continued with one accord in prayer and supplication" (Acts 1:14). They no doubt missed their departed Leader, and prayer was their only means of contact with Him; so while they waited, they prayed.

Q. Prayer is also our only means of contact with God, and a very important part of our spiritual life, so we will devote part of our study to it.

Prayer is a Bible command. Could we have some proof for this statement?

A. Jesus said, "Watch and pray, that ye enter not into temptation: the spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak" (Matt. 26:41). He also told us to pray for the Kingdom to come.

Paul said to "Pray without ceasing. In everything give thanks: for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning you" (1 Thess. 5:17-18).

Q. Prayer was important in the lives of God's people from the beginning. Can we have some examples of Bible characters who prayed?

A. Moses frequently prayed to God while leading the children of Israel out of Egypt. Whenever he did not know what to do, he prayed to God. When God sent the fiery serpents among the people because they spoke against him, Moses prayed for the people, and the Lord took away the serpents (Numbers 21).

Q. Yes. Moses probably had more contact with God than any other leader in the Bible. Can we have some other examples?

A. Hannah prayed to God for a son, and her prayer was answered in the birth of Samuel (I Sam. 1:10-20).

Elisha prayed God to restore the life of the Shunammite woman's son—and his prayer was answered. That's in II Kings 4:33-35.

The apostle James says that Elijah prayed that it not rain—and it didn't rain for three and a half years. Then he prayed again, "and the heaven gave rain, and the earth brought forth her fruit" (Jas. 5:17-18).

David was a man of prayer; the Psalms bear witness to his prayer-life.

Jeremiah must have prayed frequently, although it is not often mentioned.

Nehemiah frequently called on God. The closing words of his chronicle are, "Remember me, O my God, for good."

Q. I am sure we could mention many more because God's servants have communed with Him through prayer down through the ages.

The skeptics say, Why should we pray? "What profit should we have if we pray unto him?" (Job 21:15). But why should we pray?

A. Christ was our example and He prayed frequently. And He commanded us to pray with the words: "Watch and pray, that ye enter not into temptation: the spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak" (Matt. 26:41).

Q. That is a very good reason for praying. And that verse gives another good reason: The flesh is weak. The flesh is our lower nature, our natural desires. Our weak wills need strengthening and prayer is a good antidote.

A. We are dependent on God for everything—even our breath. That should be reason enough to pray, to thank Him for all His goodness toward us. Job reminds us that if God should withdraw our breath, "All flesh shall perish together, and man shall turn again unto dust" (Job 34:14-15).

We should be thankful and grateful to Him for the prospect of a future life. Only through Him and His power could we ever have a resurrection. Paul said, "Thanks be to God, which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ" (I Cor. 15:57).

Q. Those are both very good reasons for praying. Thanksgiving has been as-

sociated with prayer from the beginning. Under the Law they had to offer a sacrifice of thanksgiving. We have no record of prayers being associated with the offerings, but the sacrifices were a form of worship.

I am sure there are many more verses showing why we should pray, but can we have some now showing how we should pray?

A. James says that "The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much" (5:16). So if we want our prayers to be effective we must pray fervently.

Q. What does it mean to pray fervently? Would it not be a heartfelt prayer, to pray as though our life depended on it?

A. Fervency in prayer should cause our lips and lives to agree. If we have a prayer on our lips, and our life is not behind it, then we can know our prayer will not be heard.

Q. That is a good definition of fervent prayer. How else are we told to pray?

A. We must be sincere in our prayers. The Psalmist said, "Hear the right, O Lord, attend unto my cry, give ear unto my prayer, that goeth not out of feigned lips" (Ps. 17:1).

Paul said we should pray without ceasing, or continually. Colossians 4:2 says, "Continue in prayer, and watch in the same with thanksgiving."

Q. How can we pray continually? Does that mean we should do nothing else?

A. To pray without ceasing would be to live a godly life, to take God into all our plans. He must be uppermost in our affections. We must have His law so firmly fixed in our minds that we can answer every temptation as did Jesus—"It is written."

Q. I am sure God does not expect us to spend our lives on bended knee. Jesus, in fact, condemned those Pharisees who made long prayers in the marketplace to be seen of men.

A. The Pharisees lacked humility. Our prayers should be from a humble heart. "Humble yourselves therefore under the mighty hand of God, that he may exalt you in due time: casting all your care upon him; for he careth for you" (I Pet. 5:6-7). We have to realize God's greatness and our littleness in His sight.

Q. There is one other condition concerning prayer that we have not had;

it concerns how we should ask.

A. We have to ask according to His will if we expect our prayers to be answered. There would be no need to pray for things that we knew His law denied. The apostle John said, "And this is the confidence that we have in him, that, if we ask any thing according to his will, he heareth us" (I John 5:14).

Q. Yes, that is good. We should pray, "Thy will be done," not "My wish be granted." Someone has compared God to a "sort of cosmic grocer whom one calls up when the larder is low—and when the order is not filled, they rebel against Him." God forbid that we should be in that category!

How can we know whether or not our prayer will be heard?

A. The Wise Man said, "He that turneth away his ear from hearing the law, even his prayer shall be abomination" (Prov. 28:9). God will not hear such prayer.

"If I regard iniquity in my heart; the Lord will not hear me" (Ps. 66:18). If we are harboring any evil, we cannot expect our prayer to be heard. On the other hand, "the effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much" (Jas. 5:16).

Q. Yes. It is like the apostle John said, "Whatsoever we ask, we receive of him, because we keep his commandments, and do those things that are pleasing in his sight." If we are not doing for Him, we cannot expect Him to do for us. What should be one of the main ingredients of our prayers?

A. Praise is an important part. The Psalms are filled with praises to God. The Jews made use of the Psalms in their worship services, singing or chanting a Psalm at each service.

Q. Before we ask God's blessing, we should thank and praise Him for previous mercies to us. The Psalms are really a book of praises to God. David had known God's correction and also His mercy, and he was thankful for both. There is another kind of thanksgiving that is much neglected in the world today; what is that?

A. Giving thanks at the table, being thankful for our daily bread. Many today "eat and run," so to speak, and give no thought to the Giver of all things.

Q. That is certainly true today. But

that was not the way of Jesus and the apostles. Can we have some examples of their giving thanks?

A. When Paul was on board a ship in distress, he appealed to the ship's crew to "take some meat" for the sake of their health. "And when he had thus spoken, he took bread and gave thanks to God in presence of them all: and when he had broken it, he began to eat" (Acts 27:34-35).

Jesus set a good example for us by giving thanks. He was not ashamed to give thanks in public, for when He fed the five thousand He "took the five loaves, and the two fishes, and looking up to heaven, he blessed, and brake"—and the loaves and fishes were multiplied! And when He fed the four thousand He performed a similar miracle, but first He gave thanks. At the Last Supper, He gave thanks separately for the cup and the bread.

Q. Yes. We must not fail to give thanks for our food, and also for the Word and the example He left us of the living out of the Word.

There is another important part of prayer that we have not mentioned. That is prayer for forgiveness. What is the Bible teaching concerning it?

A. We need forgiveness, but to gain it we must first confess and forsake our sins. The Wise Man said, "He that covereth his sins shall not prosper: but whoso confesseth and forsaketh them shall have mercy" (Prov. 28:13).

Q. Jesus made an important point on forgiveness in the Lord's prayer. What is that?

A. If we want to be forgiven, we must also forgive others.

Q. Which comes first, our forgiveness or our forgiving others?

A. We have to forgive others first. Our common version of the Bible reads, "Forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors." But newer translations make it clear that we must forgive others first. The New English Bible translates the phrase, "Forgive us the wrong we have done, as we have forgiven those who have wronged us" (Matt. 6:12).

Q. Do we have any guide as to what we should pray for, or what not to pray for?

A. The Lord's Prayer is a good guide to follow. Luke 11:1 says that the disciples came to Jesus and asked, "Lord, teach us to pray." In

response to the question He spoke what we know as "The Lord's Prayer."

Q. Yes, it is always good to pray the Lord's Prayer. But can we have some specifics concerning the proper use of prayer? Should we pray only when we feel we are in need?

A. Jesus and the apostles used prayer on many different occasions—sometimes it was when they were in great distress; but it would seem that they prayed regularly.

Q. Yes. I believe prayer was very much a part of the early Church. Jesus made frequent use of prayer and the apostles followed His example. Could we mention a few occasions where it was recorded that Jesus or the apostles prayed?

A. Jesus spent the night in prayer before He chose the twelve apostles. He was seeking guidance to make the right choice.

He was praying in the garden of Gethsemane at the time of His betrayal and arrest.

He spoke several parables to teach the value of prayer—and of persistence in prayer. The parable of the Importunate Friend and of the Unjust Judge both taught the lesson of persistence. And the parable of the Pharisee and the Publican illustrated the need for humility in prayer.

When Peter was in prison, the Church met at the home of Mary, the mother of John Mark, and "prayer was made without ceasing" on his behalf until he knocked at the door.

Q. Those are all good examples. And I am sure we could mention many more. But should we expect our prayers to be answered immediately—like theirs for Peter?

A. No, sometimes our prayers are answered without our recognizing it—because the answer is NO. Everything we ask for might not be the best for us or others; we have to accept God's answer whether positive or negative.

Q. We have not yet mentioned whom we should pray for. Should we pray for all mankind indiscriminately?

A. No. There are examples in the Bible that show we should not pray for everybody. Jeremiah said, "Therefore pray not thou for this people, neither lift up cry nor prayer for them, neither make intercession to me: for I will not hear thee" (Jer. 7:16). That was the word of God through His prophet, Jeremiah. The people had forsaken

God and He was warning them that He would no longer hear their prayers.

Q. What about Jesus? Did He pray for everyone?

A. No. In His prayer at the Last Supper, Jesus said, "I pray not for the world, but for them which thou hast given me; for they are thine." And later in the same prayer He said, "Neither pray I for these alone, but for them also which shall believe on me through their word" (John 17:9, 20). That prayer is for us and all who believe in these last days.

Q. That is right. If Jesus would not pray for the world, neither should we. But there is a command concerning a specific group that we should pray for. What might that be?

A. Are you thinking of the words of Paul to Timothy? Paul said that we should pray for "all that are in authority; that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and honesty" (1 Tim. 2:2).

Q. Yes. We should pray for those who govern our land that they may do so in a way that we may have the freedom to worship God as we please. I like the New English translation of that last phrase, "that we may lead a tranquil and quiet life in full observance of religion and high standards of morality." Prayer is very important. We should make it a habit. The Bible tells us about someone who prayed three times a day. Can someone tell us who it was?

A. David said, "Evening, and morning, and at noon, will I pray, and cry aloud: and he shall hear my voice" (Ps. 55:17).

Q. That is true, but it wasn't the one I was thinking about. There is another.

A. Is it Daniel? When King Darius made a decree that only he should be worshiped, Daniel "kneeled upon his knees three times a day, and prayed, and gave thanks before his God, as he did aforetime" (Dan. 6:10). Daniel had made such prayer a habit—it says he prayed as "he did aforetime."

Q. Yes. We too should make prayer a habit. Let us follow the example of Christ; in the words of our hymn:

O Thou by whom we come to God,
The Life, the Truth, the Way,
The path of prayer Thyself hast trod:
Lord, teach us how to pray.

TO THE 7 CHURCHES

On the Very Point of Death

ON THE VERY point of death. . . . Nothing you have done is complete." A serious indictment indeed! But what had caused this shocking deterioration in the Church at Sardis? What appalling sins had they committed to call forth such condemning words from our coming King?

Does our surprise betray us as we learn that no heinous crime is mentioned? Have we forgotten how God abhors *all* sin, however small or seemingly unimportant?

Before we judge them too harshly, think: What would Christ's words be to you and me, were He to deliver an indictment to us? Would His be words of commendation, or would they be reproachful as those spoken to the Church at Sardis? Would He say, "Well done, good and faithful servant," or would He remind us that our works are so faulty that nothing we have done is complete and acceptable to our God?

And what is our response, should a rebuke be ours? Has sin so deadened our conscience that such a stinging rebuke no longer causes a burning shame? Have we grown cold and hardly realize it?

We, as those of Sardis, live in a decadent age, an age unsurpassed for comforts and conveniences—and wickedness. Can *we* withstand the downward pull, the paralyzing indifference of this ungodly world? The answer is Yes; we can if we *will*. How can we know? Because even in wicked Sardis were a "few" who had "not defiled their garments; and they shall walk with me in white, for they are worthy." But unfortunately, those in that number were "few."

Sardis was one of the greatest cities in the world. It had splendor, magnificence, luxury, and almost unlimited wealth. In such an environment seeds of softness, flabbiness, and degeneration are sure to grow.

According to history, twice this great city fell because they were too lazy to watch for the

"Wake up, rally what is still left to you, though it is on the very point of death: for I find that nothing you have done is complete in the eyes of my God"

—Revelation 3:2, Moffatt.

enemy. When John wrote his letter to the Church at Sardis, there was very little life or spirit there. In that enervating atmosphere of degeneration and decay, the Christian Church too had lost its vitality and its power, and was a mere corpse instead of a living Church.

The Church at Sardis was untroubled by any attack from the outside; the truth was that the Sardis Church had ceased to matter; it was so lifeless that it was not worth attacking! It was not worth expending powder and shot on.

Paul aptly describes every decaying church thus: "For though they keep up a form of religion, they will have nothing to do with it as a force" (II Tim. 3:5, Moffatt). Phillips' translation words it, "They will maintain a facade of religion, but their conduct will deny its validity."

Does this description in any way fit us? How many times have we paid lip service when our heart was far from Him? To profess when we do not perform is an abomination to God.

Now there is good reason for us to consider our own life and see whether it is comparable to that of Sardis. How is it with us? Have we gone a certain distance in this way of life and then because of some obstacle or our own inexcusable indifference, been stalled?

"Awake!" says Jesus. "Awake." The word suggests that some are insensible to God. It is because of our slowness and the inability to feel the contamination of evil that we become insensible to God and need awaking.

There is something else about sleepiness—it is contagious. We see someone else yawn, and we find ourselves yawning also. The world's indifference to God will have this same effect on us too if we do not keep wide awake and active in the works of righteousness.

How easy it is to drift off to sleep when others around us are sleeping. We just let the cares and interests of this life crowd out the Word; we give

God second place in our lives; we spend our leisure moments as we please, prayer is neglected, evil thoughts and vain imaginations enter our minds, and—spiritually speaking—we are dozing. Gone is the tension we used to keep tight; gone is the suspicion of ourselves that we used to keep alive.

There is another danger threatening—it is the danger of our deceiving ourselves into thinking that we can secure the eternal riches without doing exactly what the law of God requires. A little allowance here, a slight deviation there, and how soon “obedience” is lost in a mass of our own devisings. “There are many devices in a man’s heart,” said the Wise Man, but he did not say all would stand (Prov. 19:21).

Let us read our text again. In it is couched a glorious ray of hope. Although spiritually these people are at death’s door, the Lord tells them they need not remain there. “Don’t stay there, awake and rally what is still left!”

It is the gracious offer of forgiveness still extended, if they will turn: “If the wicked will turn from all his sins that he hath committed, and keep all my statutes, and do that which is lawful and right, he shall surely live, he shall not die. All his transgressions that he hath committed, they shall not be mentioned unto him: in his righteousness that he hath done he shall live” (Ezek. 18:21-22). Again in Hebrews 8:12 God assures us that He will remember our sins no more, once we have merited His forgiveness.

Our sins may be great, yet while the day of probation lasts it is possible for us to amend our ways, if we take advantage of every opportunity and show our sincerity by a life of good fruits. The depth of our desire is proved by the intensity of our effort.

Christ taught absolute surrender to the will of God. His love was a real, living, growing thing. So must ours be. The more completely we submit to His law today, the deeper will be our love tomorrow.

We cannot watch when we are asleep. But if truly awake to righteousness, we will see danger, we will hear it, we will feel it, we will sense it, and we will flee from it.

In these closing moments of salvation’s day, we should deliberate on our course with caution and act with decision.

The maintaining of holiness requires alertness during every wakeful moment of our everyday lives. It reaches into every avenue of life; it is the compelling motive behind every action taken, controlling mind and body in the smallest detail. It supervises our thinking, impelling us to think

only upon the things pure and noble; it bridles our tongue, allowing us to speak only to edification, and only such words as will upbuild others and be to the glory of God; it compels us to speak the truth at all times and under all circumstances; it directs our interests into a channel where we will put the seeking of the Kingdom of God first and all else secondary.

We live in the shadow of eternity. This means we will engage every day in the task of making every day fit for Him to see, and being at any moment ready to meet our King.

Wise is the man who never forgets that he must be ready when the summons comes. If he lives in that awareness, for him that day will not be terror but eternal joy.

May we consecrate ourselves, our all, yes, all we have and are to the mighty God of heaven. Only in this way can we prove that we are awake and have the strength to rally that which is left to us, though it be on the very point of death. Only in this way can we have the overpowering zeal that will allow us to concentrate our full energy on the task of making our works perfect and complete in the eyes of our God. ●●

To Him that Overcometh

“... will I give to eat of the tree of life, which is in the midst of the paradise of God”

“... shall not be hurt of the second death”

“... will I give to eat of the hidden manna, and I will give him a white stone, and in the stone a new name written, which no man knoweth saving he that receiveth it”

“... and keepeth my works unto the end, to him will I give power over the nations”

“... will I grant to sit with me in my throne, even as I also overcame, and am set down with my Father in his throne”

—Revelation 2:7, 11, 17, 26; 3:21

UPON the pages of Sacred Scripture is inscribed many a brilliant and expressive promise—promises so expansive and so enduring that our finite minds fail utterly to compre-

hend them. The Eternal Creator's ability to give is unlimited—His mercy extends from everlasting in the past to everlasting in the future. The only limitation is that of man's capacity to receive.

And that capacity need not be forever limited. God has provided a way by which these promises may be obtained. They are "to him that overcometh"—which means that God's promises are to act as an incentive, a stimulus to draw from man his highest and best in service and sacrifice. How else can man truly "overcome"?

Hearken! It is the Lord who speaks; it is a message that thunders from Patmos.

TO HIM THAT OVERCOMETH . . . "will I give to eat of the tree of life, which is in the midst of the paradise of God" (Rev. 2:7).

What is the promise? Life! "to eat of the tree of life, which is in the midst of the paradise of God." What greater boon could we desire?

Would we escape the remorse of condemnation when arraigned before the great Judge? Would we remain a lampstand bearing a light that will shine on through eternity, and eat of the tree of life that is in the midst of the paradise of God?

If we would be heirs to this promise, we are called upon to submit ourselves to a standard of conduct far above a mere legal obedience to rules and regulations. We must think right. We must do right. We must be "overcomers."

What we think upon is of first importance, for our character gradually takes on the hue of our personal musings and meditations. Victorious thinking, then, will result in victorious living. Jesus taught the lesson that all evil results from evil thoughts; so if we are controlled by sordid and ungodly thoughts, our character will slowly become warped. Likewise, virtue will spring from virtuous, victorious thinking.

Good deeds are the paper currency of thoughts stamped in the mint of purity. Good thinking will thus result in good acting—which will result in good eating, even of the tree of life!

TO HIM THAT OVERCOMETH . . . "he shall not be hurt of the second death" (Rev. 2:11).

Freedom from death! what an exceeding great and precious promise. But this promise, too, is strictly conditional; it is to "him that overcometh."

Are we fully loyal to Him? Let us take inventory.

Second Timothy 3:2 and 5 contains an important truth for every Christian. Merely looking like a godly person isn't the same as *being* one. We need the inner strength and character,

the inner light that comes through a continual yielding to God. Without these we are left with a mere form of godliness, something that is infirm and totally lacking in power.

Jesus Christ is the light that knows no power failure. Christians are windows through which the glory of Christ should shine. Are we willing to have the glare of self-glory eliminated so that Christ may shine forth through us?

Many a professed Christian worker lacks much of being what Jesus calls an "overcomer." In fact, he may even be unconsciously a hinderer of the cause which he is claiming to promote. Let us look to ourselves: A vexation arises, and our expressions of impatience or a look or tone of depression, or an unkind word, or a discouraging remark hinders another from learning the holy lesson of charity that "thinketh no evil." This ought not to be.

The Christian's life is the world's Bible. Remember, the only "translation" some people will ever read is the one they see in us. Make sure it is like the "original."

TO HIM THAT OVERCOMETH . . . "will I give to eat of the hidden manna, and I will give him a white stone, and in the stone a new name written, which no man knoweth saving he that receiveth it" (Rev. 2:17).

If today we eat of the manna which is hidden to the world because they refuse to seek for it the way the Lord directs, in that coming Day He will permit us to eat of the new store—immortality, the knowledge of those things which are now far beyond our comprehension.

But before these privileges can be ours, there must be deliberate effort on our part. As without training no power of man can be truly developed, so without self-denial the higher life would be impossible.

The man who knows himself best, knows that he must keep his foot on himself in things that no one else imagines, perhaps in some sting of self-interest, some secret thought, some wounded pride, some selfishness. Each life has its own battlefield, where the lower wars against the higher. This is where the work of "overcoming" can be done, the work which will merit God's approval and blessing.

All overcomers shall be presented with the "white stone" bearing a new name, the mark of accomplishment, the mark of acceptance, the mark of righteousness that will assure its holder of everything beyond.

TO HIM THAT OVERCOMETH . . . "and keepeth my works unto the end, to him will I give power over the nations" (Rev. 2:26).

Of all things this world can give, nothing is more alluring than power. The inherent desire for importance drives man to seek power over his fellows by fair means and foul. Almost invariably the will to power is abused; but rightly understood and controlled, it is a legitimate urge. Do we aspire to power? Would we be a part of that divine super-government which will right earth's wrongs? Then let us absorb ourselves now in the work of overcoming.

To men and women who would accomplish this, magnanimity is indispensable. Magnanimity—that loftiness of spirit that enables one to bear troubles nobly, calmly, and courageously—is to the Christian character what the third dimension is to art—it adds depth. Without it, character is flat.

Magnanimity can bear ills which cannot be cured; it can tolerate wrongs which cannot now be righted. It has a calmness which indicates spiritual depth. By turbulent behavior we betray our shallowness when the storms of life assail.

When a person recognizes no progress of which he himself is not the sponsor, that attitude is not magnanimity but pettiness. It is the mark of a shriveling soul, narrowed by selfishness and soured by envy.

Let us measure our soul. Have we that third dimension? If so, then the dazzling promise which is held before our eyes—power that is certain and satisfying and eternal—will be ours.

TO HIM THAT OVERCOMETH . . . “will I grant to sit with me in my throne, even as I also overcame, and am set down with my Father in his throne” (Rev. 3:21).

The coronation of the overcomer—the boundless grandeur of the promises made to the man who is victorious through Christ, flashes out in these amazing words, “I will grant him to sit with me in my throne.” There is not only felicity here, but authority and power as well. Christ does not allow His throne to put distance between Him and His followers. He shares His throne with him who conquers. This is one of the grandest promises of the Christian hope.

It is one of life's sternest truisms that we can't have everything, but only a choice of things. In the things that really count, the choice is ours, all ours. And since we pass along this way but once, the choice we make is a serious matter.

Trials will come, but they never come to the Christian unless there is a divine purpose behind them. We are often led through valleys of suffering and over rugged paths of trouble, but these experiences are wisely planned by God for our good.

The year ahead is untried; it is a beckoning tomorrow that abounds with fresh possibilities and challenging assignments. No doubt it will be filled with difficult decisions requiring spiritual discernment and a closer walk with the Heavenly Father. With eternal values in view, and a solemn knowledge that the Lord will judge all that we do, let us go forward prayerfully, performing our duties faithfully as unto the Lord. Determine to take advantage of every opportunity to bring glory to God. This is the way we may overcome even as Christ overcame, and may partake someday of those exceeding great and precious promises. ●●

Are We Only HALF Men?

I AM trying to take heed to the good advice, “Watch therefore, for ye know not what hour your Lord doth come,” and press forward to put away all evil.

James 2:18-19 tells us, “But some one may well say, ‘Have you faith?’ My answer is, ‘I have deeds, show me your faith apart from your deeds and I will show you my faith by means of my deeds.’ You say that you believe there is one God, excellent! The demons also believe the same thing and shudder in terror.”

I read an excellent comment on this verse, which is as follows: “In the well proportioned life there must be thought and action. It is tempting and it is common to think that one may be either a man of thought or a man of action. The man of thought will sit in his study and think great thoughts; the man of action will be out in the world doing great deeds. But that is wrong. The thinker is only half a man unless he turns his thoughts into deeds. He will scarcely even inspire men to action unless he comes down into the battle and shares the arena with them.”

We would not like to think of ourselves as half men, but unless our deeds harmonize with what we say, that is all we are, half a man. Kipling said, “England is a garden, and such gardens are not made by saying, ‘Oh, how beautiful!’ and then sitting in the shade; while better men than we began their working lives by digging weeds from garden paths with broken dinner knives.”

But before action there must be thought. Today's deep thinking person will show by his actions that he believes that God is to set up His Kingdom on earth in the very near future, and that he expects to be part of that arrangement.

—Contributed

With Determination

HOW fleeting are the days and joys of man on this earth. No sooner do we begin to enjoy one another and it is time to separate. Wonderful will be the day for the faithful when separation will be unknown. The thought of being forever together enjoying God's wondrous promises is exhilarating.

But before that there is a work to be done; we have begun a new year. Already we have taken a few steps into it. God grant that they may have been in the right way. A good start is very helpful. But the pathway to life and the true secret lies in prompt and uninterrupted continuance in well-doing. God has not given us His Word just for us to speculate upon it or discuss it, but He has given it that we may yield a hearty and trustful obedience to our Father's just and righteous arrangements.

The path ahead looks bright enough, and we are happy the Lord is still lengthening the day of our probation, ere the shadows of evening drop down with utter finality. Whatever the days may bring, we are not alone. God's guiding and the protecting angels are forever present at our side. Our pathway may yet lead into mysterious darkness and perplexing situations. We may have to be squeezed into a wedge from which there may seem no possible escape. But though the problems are difficult and serious to the last degree, they are perfectly right. It is God who is directing all. His Almighty wisdom and power is being displayed in our lives. Not only will He deliver us but in doing so He will teach us a lesson never to be forgotten, that we may sing praises to Him for His merciful goodness to us.

The Christian never stands still; he is always going forward. No matter if he has to pick his way in and among the rocks and trials of his daily encounters, he is going forward at the word of the Lord. Those besetting sins so much a part of the unregenerated human nature are hard to crucify indeed, but they must be cut off and cast away, never to be displayed in our lives again. The Lord demands that we lay aside every weight and the sin which so easily besets us and run with patience the race to the end.

That the Lord will help us we have His assurance. He has said, "I will never leave thee, nor

forsake thee" (Heb. 13:5). What need we fear? These are words of faith and trust to be grasped as an all-conquering weapon for our manifold needs. The Word of the Lord is a two-edged sword, trusty and reliable, our daily resort from which to draw delight in the hours of stillness, to receive strength for daily conflicts and to keep our determination without wavering that we may scale the heights in Christ Jesus.

What God wants—and will have—is holiness. In His sight, the conquest of self is greater than anything else we may achieve. There are no sins so formidable that they cannot be cleansed away with persistent washing in the water of life. In time the stains will yield. We *can* have victory over self and sin; we *can* expel all pride, vanity, self-righteousness, self-seeking, desire for applause, honor and promotion from this world, and then in the day of God's promotion we can wear the victor's crown because we were not afraid to step out of the lowlands of self-seeking into the glorious liberty of the sons of God.

May this be our aim is my earnest and sincere prayer.

—Contributed

Preparation

I heard that the Master was coming,
To honor our town today,
And none could tell at what house or home
The Master would choose to stay.
So I thought while my heart beat wildly,
"What if He should come to mine?
How should I strive to entertain
And honor the guest divine?"

So straightway I turned to toiling,
To make my house more neat,
I swept, I polished and garnished
And decked it with blossoms sweet....
I was troubled for fear the Master
Would come ere my work was done,
So I hastened and worked the faster,
As I watched the hurrying sun.



SCRIPTURAL SPOTLIGHT

"For we dare not make ourselves of the number, or compare ourselves with some that commend themselves: but they measuring themselves by themselves, and comparing themselves among themselves, are not wise" (II Cor. 10:12).

HERE PAUL speaks of a certain kind of measuring and comparing that is not wise. He says, we dare not be of those who do this. They commend themselves. They rank high in **their own estimation** and with a watchful and anxious eye, compare themselves with others.

The human mind makes many a comparison in the flash of a second. We compare our appearance, our possessions, our abilities, our energies, our popularity, our work, our children. And each one of these may be divided into a hundred areas where the mind may make comparisons. Probably each one of us has sometime, with a feeling of dislike, observed another excelling in some way. Many times the subject of our comparison is no factor in our salvation, but our attitude and judgment always is. And it would certainly help us when we begin to measure and compare ourselves among ourselves if the consciousness could produce a direct shout in our ears that we are "not wise." It would seem we would realize the confusion and strain we put upon ourselves by this unwise trait. We will find it much easier to work with an eye single to God's glory than to measure and compare ourselves with a score of people around us. With such divided attention, our spiritual progress will soon be down to a minimum.

We have an example in the case of Saul, the first Hebrew king. When David returned victoriously from battle, the women came forth from the cities, playing their instruments and singing, "Saul hath slain his thousands and David his ten thousands." Immediately Saul was greatly displeased. He was angry, and it is said that from this time forward he kept his eye on David—a jealous eye it was. He would have taken David's life if he could have. This was the beginning of Saul's downfall, his disobedience, and

rejection. We must take a lesson from his mistake and curb this fleshly emotion if our end is to be a glorious one.

In the Gospel of John we are told of an occasion when Jesus pointed out a lesson on this very subject. It was a case of Peter watching the disciple John. After Jesus had served the fishermen some bread and fish from the fire of coals on the seashore, He had a good talk with Peter, concluding with this exhortation, "Follow me." Then Peter, turning about, saw John following Jesus, and this impetuous apostle said to Jesus, "Lord, what shall this man do?" Jesus replied, "What concern is that of yours? follow me yourself." Jesus' answer implied that Peter was too much concerned about John's status, when he should have been concerned about himself. John was following Christ and Jesus loved him; there was apparently no reason for Peter's anxiety. We know that Peter was eventually an overcomer, for he writes later in life of anticipating the inheritance "incorruptible and undefiled, and that fadeth not away." Having passed through suffering and trial, he was in a position to help others. So with fatherly kindness he longs to help his fellow Christians. ". . . See that ye love one another with a pure heart fervently," ". . . yea, all of you be subject one to another, and be clothed with humility" (I Pet. 1:22; 5:5). Let your concern be for one another's good, he exhorts; never be moved by jealous comparing. We are thankful for the good example Peter provided in this respect.

Unwise measuring and comparing is an envious competition. It is that miserable disposition which makes us feel like blowing out our neighbor's light in order to let our own shine. It is easy to become so carried away with the will to excel that feelings of disquietude arise

in us when others outshine us. Here again we need the educated conscience that will shout in our ears that such comparing is "not wise."

God did not make us all alike. He wanted us to learn to rejoice when we are brought low, rejoice in another's victories, and be sorry for another's failures. Victory is in our own hands. The race for eternal life is a competition between only our own flesh and spirit. As Paul said, "The flesh lusteth against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh" (Gal. 5:17). Our fellow travelers on the highway to life are not our opponents. We are our own opponents. We are here to help each other. There is a crown of life for each one of us who is sufficiently determined to receive it.

In contrast to unwise measuring and comparing, there is a wise measure and comparison that we should make. The Psalmist was making this comparison when he wrote, "My soul is continually in my hand: yet do I not forget thy law" (Ps. 119:109). We find in this chapter much expression of the Psalmist's love for God's Word, and the ardor with which he went about obeying it. Obedience was no irksome task, no driving duty, but a loving privilege that brought joy and comfort to him. What spiritual growth we should make if we would delight in God's law and continually compare our souls with it!

We also have Christ our perfect Example for a standard of comparison. We are bidden to follow Him. "The disciple is not above his master: but every one that is perfect shall be as his master" (Luke 6:40). How does our daily conduct in word and deed measure and compare with His holy and righteous character? By continual comparison we can make His great example a vital force in our lives and we shall grow to be like Him.

The difference between the good, and the unwise measuring and comparing, really lies in our motives and attitudes and the points that we compare. It is the difference between an attitude prompted by the flesh and one by the spirit of God. Unwise comparing disquiets the soul; good comparing, moved by the spirit, creates respect, stimulates love and esteem for another, and is gladdened by goodness. There is no feeling of thrusting another behind us but rather a readiness to help him further excel us, if such be possible.

Godly comparing is marked by a keen recognition of good and a desire to copy it, like the apostle Paul who could say, "Copy me as I copy Christ." Now the things we want to recognize and compare are those that are vital to our

eternal salvation: faith, zeal, courage, humility, patience and every godly virtue. Every successful contestant can win a crown. God planned that we love and help each other toward that end. Our one object is to be a part of God's eternal glory. It is the right spirit to work with all our mind, might, and strength for eternal life, but not with the anticipation of leaving another behind. We want to share it together. So let us help each other and do the right kind of measuring and comparing so that we will not be found wanting when Jesus comes. ●●

Waiting In Prayer

(Continued from page 7)

Those early disciples waited in prayer "continually" (Acts 1:14). Is not that the proper course for us today, to adopt an attitude of prayer that will be with *us* constantly?

Power In Prayer

Oh, the strength we could gain if we would devote ourselves to prayer as they did. Just think what a constant attitude of prayer can do for us. How can we feel truly our dependence upon God and at the same time think too highly of ourselves? How can we look up to God in prayer and down upon our fellowmen in anger? How can we maintain an attitude of reverence before Him and speak words that are light and frivolous among ourselves? How can we be all concerned with the working out of His will and be petty and peevish about the things that displease us here? How can we have our minds stayed on Him and at the same time get so absorbed in our own little pursuits that we forget Him? How can we feel love and devotion to Him for His boundless goodness to us and at the same time hold bitterness and resentments and grudges in our hearts against our brethren? It is *impossible*. True, earnest prayer is a purifier of the heart. We cannot be right toward God and wrong toward men. We cannot maintain ourselves in the love of God and at the same time be seeking our own low ambitions. We cannot devote ourselves in prayer to God and have our hearts far from Him.

Oh, the marvelous transforming power of prayer, even to the changing of our tastes and our natures! Prayer lifts our desires above the level of this world to the realm of the divine. Like the presence of great masterworks of art,

it cures the heart of second-rate satisfactions. It is hard for one who has been brought up on the music of the early masters to be satisfied with the tunes of tin-pan alley. Just so it is hard for one who has feasted at the table of the heavenly King to enjoy the greasy hamburger stands of the world. It is hard for one who has dwelt in the company of the divine to take delight in the pleasures of those who are low and groveling. It is not only hard, it is impossible. Living in the presence of the best changes our tastes so completely that a return to the lesser is virtually impossible, so long as the new, higher taste is maintained. This is the change that will be wrought in us by companying with the divine, by devoting ourselves to God and maintaining constantly an attitude of prayer.

The Benefits of Prayer

Let us think further about those early disciples. What could they expect to gain by praying? They knew their prayers could not bring Jesus back. They knew they could not bring fire down from heaven. They knew their prayers would do nothing to alter God's plans in the least. By praying they could not shorten the time of waiting or hasten the coming of the Spirit. What, then, did they accomplish by devoting themselves to prayer?

The benefit was all theirs, and what benefit it was! By prayer they submitted themselves to God. By devoting themselves to prayer they were saying, "Not our will, but thine be done." They were fitting themselves into the divine scheme. They were making themselves participants in it. They were linking themselves to the divine.

And is not this our purpose in prayer? Even so do we realize that our prayers will not change the plan of God. Our prayers will not hasten or retard the arrival of the great Day of the Lord. It will come at the appointed time. Nevertheless, God wants us to pray for it. He wants us to pray for it with all of our heart and soul. "Thy kingdom come, thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven," is perhaps the highest petition in the Lord's Prayer. We want to pray for it, because in so doing we join our mind to God's, our purposes to His, and our lives to His. We let ourselves in on His plans, His arrangements, His future. When we pray we reach out beyond our small world into God's vast, limitless realm.

A Command: "Pray"

Furthermore, we want to pray because God has commanded it. God means for us to pray.

If we do not, we cut ourselves off from Him. God does not know the prayerless man. He has not even talked with Him. Such a one is not part of His family. What do we think of a supposed friend who never speaks to us or seeks our company? The man or woman who has not tried to contact God in prayer as He has directed is surely not among His friends. God does not go after us; we must seek Him. "Ye shall seek me, and find me, when ye shall search for me with all your heart" (Jer. 29:13). "Seek ye the Lord, while he may be found" (Isa. 55:6). The first step must be ours. We must desire to learn of Him. We must seek. We must pray.

But prayer is never meant to be a substitute for work and intelligence. God gave us minds for thinking and bodies for working, and He would defeat His own purpose if He permitted us to obtain through prayer what He deems must come through work and intelligence. Prayer is not a substitute but a supplement, a supplement for our best, though feeble, efforts; it is an extension of our limited intelligence. God is not so absolutely sovereign that man is absolutely helpless. He has given us certain abilities, and He expects us to use these to their maximum, in the meanwhile praying for help in that which lies beyond us.

For example, we should pray that God will deliver us from evil. This also is in the Lord's Prayer: "And leave us not in temptation, but deliver us from evil." But we do not expect a prodigious thunderbolt from heaven to come down and blast the evil away. We must use all of our God-given powers to resist, and what we cannot do, God will do for us. When we have proved our determination to resist, God will deliver us. And He will see that we are not tried beyond our ability to endure.

Watch and Pray

This is why Jesus combined the command to pray with the command to "Watch." The two cannot be separated. We cannot be fully alert and fail to pray, nor can we truly pray and not be fully alert. "Watch and pray, that ye enter not into temptation" (Matt. 26:41). Watch! Watch what we are doing. Watch those words that slip so quickly from our tongues; watch to see what example we are setting before others; watch to see what is the pattern of our lives; watch to see that we keep ourselves in a humble attitude of prayer before God. "Watch and pray."

Prayer trains us in watchfulness. It strength-

ens our minds in higher loves and nobler satisfactions. How we need prayer to revive our declining faith after we have been in the midst of the business of life where men speak and act as though there were no God. We must pray, lest our secular lives become divorced from the sacred. In God's book there is no separation; both are one, and both must be devoted to Him.

A prayerful attitude will help us in another way. It will help us to recognize our *faults* and *failings*. We cannot look at God's perfection and virtue without realizing the more keenly our own deficiencies. Again and again we need to utter from the heart that prayer of the Psalmist: "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" (Ps. 139:23-24). We need to pray that we may learn what we are and what we ought to be, and the difference between the two. In any enterprise of life we need to pray for that holy degree of spiritual precaution that will keep us from going wrong. We need to have our senses exercised to discern between what is good and what is evil in God's sight, and how is this possible, if we exclude God from the realm of influence upon our lives? He who lived without transgressing the law of God once He knew it needed to pray—how much more should we, who have fallen time and again into sin?

Prayer strengthens the mind, purifies the emotions, and invigorates the will. Prayer produces a sense of sin; if we are near to God, He pours contempt on all our pride. Prayer produces submission in a wayward will, for prayer is in its essence surrender to God. It is the heart saying, "Not my will, but thine, be done."

How shall we pray?

Let us pray with love. Happy are they who think seriously of the grand truths of the gospel of God; far more happy are they who feel, and love, and *live* them! We must ardently desire spiritual blessings from God; and the ardor of our wishes must move us to fit ourselves to receive those blessings. Far be it from God to bestow His riches on those who have not learned to love them. Our longings must be His, our tastes His, our desires His. If not, how can we say that the love of God dwells in us? And how can we expect Him to love us and shower upon us eternal blessings?

Then let us pray in sincerity. If we pray only from custom, from fear in the time of trouble; if we honor Him with our lips while our heart is far away, if we feel a chilling indifference in

approaching Him who is a consuming fire, if we have no zeal for His cause or feel no jealousy for His glory, if we do not feel a passionate hatred for all sin and a genuine thirst for perfection, can we hope for His blessing?

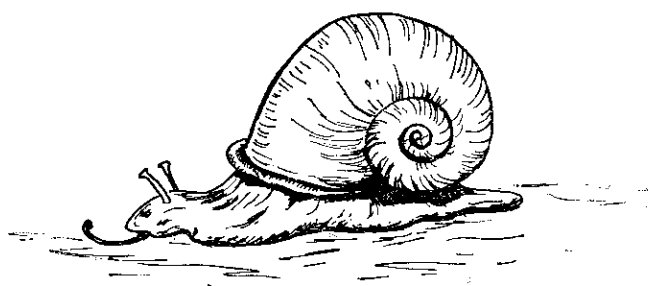
God listens to the voice of the heart, not that of the lips. The words may be beautiful; but if the heart is soiled, God does not hear. When we pray, our whole heart must be engaged in prayer. Can we imagine those loyal disciples who gathered after Jesus ascended, praying with less than their whole heart? Their minds were not on the fishing trade they had forsaken, or on their relatives down in Capernaum; nor were they worrying about the misdemeanors of the Roman government officials in Council Hall, or about the riot that had occurred on the streets of Jerusalem the night before. They were with one heart intent upon getting an audience in the presence of God.

So let us be; for nearer, nearer, nearer draws the greater Day of Pentecost. And what will that Day mean for you, for me? That is the Day we are waiting for, and our waiting shall not be in vain. That is the Day we are praying for, and our prayers shall not be in vain. That Day *will come*. And what a day, glorious day it will be!—for all who have prepared themselves to see it. That Day will come—it may be this year, or this month, or this week, or yet today—when we shall see the beginning of the fulfillment of all that has been spoken by God's holy prophets. Any day now we may welcome the prophet Elijah, him who comes to "restore all things." Have we prepared our "welcome"?

And think of the events that will follow. The dead in Christ shall awake—those who have been sleeping for centuries, and those whom we ourselves have known. They shall arise, and we will be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air. What a Day that will be, when the greater Pentecost has come! Then the deaf shall hear, the blind shall see, the lame shall walk, and unto the utmost ends of the earth shall echo the praises of our King. All sickness, all suffering, all sin will be gone, and gone forever, ere that Day shall end; for "the earth shall be filled with the glory of the Lord as the waters cover the sea."

This is what we are waiting for, and working for, and praying for. And it IS coming! Oh! Let us project ourselves into that time, and feel what it will be to be there! So let us watch and pray with hearts that are bursting in joyous expectation, that we may be ready when the greater Day of Pentecost is fully come. ●●

"Teeth" on the Tongue



A SNAIL is a very small but very interesting creature. Naturalists tell us that it has teeth on its tongue. A scientist examining one such organ under his microscope counted a snail's teeth and found that it had 135 rows of teeth with 115 teeth in each row. That means the lowly creature has more than 15,000 teeth!

The snail keeps its toothy little tool rolled up like a ribbon, until it is needed; then it thrusts out the sharp appendage and, although its teeth are very small, it saws through the toughest leaves and stems with comparative ease.

There are some men and women who also have "teeth" on their tongues, and who are always ready to use them to cut down the character and reputation of even the most consecrated serv-

ants of the Lord. Many hearts and homes are broken, many lives blasted—all because of those unbridled human tongues which seem to have more "teeth" than even a lowly snail.

Evil words can also be like boomerangs. They can come back and hit you! One who noticed that those who speak evil of others are seldom happy has rightly observed, "Gossips usually get caught in their own mouth-traps."

We may think that the effect of our tongue is only microscopic, that an unkind word here or there can do little damage; but remember the little snail; he prevents scores of plants from blossoming and bringing forth fruit by the almost unobservable action of his tiny teeth. And many innocent people have likewise been deeply cut by the sharp words of those who have "teeth" on their ungoverned tongues.

*Lord, put a seal upon my lips;
Help me to guard with care
The things I say and swift repeat;
O tongue of mine, beware!*

Someone has said that people with sharp tongues often end up cutting their own throats. This is why James 4:11 advises, "Speak not evil one of another, brethren, lest ye be condemned." ●●

Got Any Problems?

(Continued from page 9)

And he might have added, "When you feel like it, and when you do not, . . . when you are problem-free and when you are not.

"But my problem is different," we say—or at least feel.

But no, it isn't. You will find its parallel if you read the Word of God long enough. Moses was misunderstood, grumbled against, heckled and threatened. And he had the worst congregation on record and was sabotaged by his own leaders. Joseph was falsely accused by a vindictive woman, imprisoned, ignored and neglected, and had one of the longest waits on record for answered prayer. David suffered the indignities of a jealous superior, was mocked by his wife, and nearly killed by his son. The apostles ran the gamut of problems, too many to mention here. Mark was a dropout and had to make a comeback. Peter struck bottom the night of the crucifixion, when he denied the Lord. The list is practically endless.

Do we have to have problems?

The Bible says it is only "through much tribu-

lation" that we can enter into the Kingdom. Do we want the Kingdom? Then we must learn to want the problems. There's just no other way. "For unto you it is given in the behalf of Christ, not only to believe on him, but also to suffer for his sake; having the same conflict which ye saw in me, and now hear to be in me"—these are the words of the victorious Paul. Believe. Suffer. Have conflict. It may be pain; or opposition; or someone whose very presence seems to put a thorn in our flesh. It may be bad investments.

Problems are not easy. Betrayal, hurts, neglect, rejection, unfair criticism, illness, death, financial reverses, and a myriad of things that befall us that seem aimed with precision at our own peculiar weak spots. "I could have stood anything but that," we say. Of course. That is why you got *that*. God knows what we need.

But if we really believe in God and the hope He has set before us, if we value life eternal above everything of this world, we will welcome the chance to meet our problems and confront them in a manly manner. And when a new problem comes our way, perhaps one we had long feared and hoped would never be ours, we will go to God in prayer and say, "Thanks, Lord, for the opportunity!" ●●

Our Readers Write...

Thankful

As I met my neighbor on the way home this morning, she said, "Winter still! When are we going to get out of it?" I replied, "Spring is just around the corner." She said, "You are always so cheerful, you are a tonic to me." I have so much to be thankful for, it helps me keep cheerful—the songs, magazines, tapes, rich sermons, dramas that are so vivid. I live them with you; sensing the reality I am carried aloft. Feeding on the lush spiritual food which is so carefully prepared, I am lost in wonder, love and praise. Thank you all.

What promises we have if we are faithful! To feel and know that everything is beyond and is attainable by working for it makes us strive daily to be worthy of such a full life. Nothing else is so rewarding. It will impel all who desire it to be like Paul, "This one thing I do." The hundredfold now is a blessing, but what will it be to be there! It is no secret what God can do. These thoughts come crowding into my mind as I go about, and make me contented. Surely my cup runneth over.

Cheshire, England

N. T.

To Remember

To remember the things we read and hear is done only with great difficulty for some of us. I must plead guilty to the fault of not trying harder to remember the things of most importance. The mind is quite fickle in that things we should put out of our minds seem to persist in coming back, while the things we need to remember flee from us. A lot of this trouble is lazy-mindedness, indeed, and we need to try our best to overcome this ailment. We need to constantly remind each other of our high calling and refresh our memories daily from the storehouse of all true knowledge.

Someone has said, "When people say, 'I forgot,' they did not; usually what happened was that they did not remember in the first place." How can you forget something you did not remember originally?

Minnedosa, Manitoba

E. H.

Help to the End

We are so close to the time of the Lord's return; if not ready, we will be saying, "The harvest is passed, the summer is ended, and we are not saved." That will be a sad day for us. It is wise for us to take the advice of Jeremiah the prophet, "Give glory to the Lord your God before he cause darkness, and before your feet stumble upon the dark mountain" (Jer. 13:16).

Peter stumbled and fell, but it is good to know he didn't stay down long. We read of a lot who stumbled and fell but didn't have the courage to try again. That is the sad part.

May the good Lord help us that when we come to the end of our life's little day, we may have no regrets but that we may be able to say we have kept our eyes on the joy set before us.

Newfoundland, Canada

G. W.

June, 1979

Yearning

Proverbs 2 informs us about God's Holy Word and what it requires of us before we can understand what God has caused to be written for our learning. In order to understand His Word, we must have a yearning for understanding, and this yearning must come to the point of spiritually crying after knowledge, lifting up our voice for knowledge, searching as for silver and hidden treasures; then and only then shall we understand what the fear of the Lord is and find the knowledge of God.

To the truth-seeking heart, godly wisdom is pleasant. Discretion shall preserve him, and understanding shall keep him.

In this life we are beset with trials and tribulations; these things make us mindful of the value of our faith, providing we are exercised thereby (Heb. 12:11).

Ontario, Canada

A. B.

Rejoice in the Lord

I hope you are all well and happy in the Lord. We can always rejoice in the Lord, when we realize that the whole world lies in darkness. And when we acknowledge God in all our ways, He will direct our paths, and our footsteps will be flooded with light.

All the faithful in Christ, those who have endured unto the end, run the race for immortal life, kept their eyes on the Lord, will be made partakers of the exceeding great and precious promises of God. Great and astonishing things will happen in the near future. "Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither hath it entered into the heart of man the things that God hath prepared for them that love him" (I Cor. 2:9).

Swansea, South Wales

G. S.

A Generous God

I am sure you must agree that our God has been more than generous with us, supplying us with not only our needs as He promised but also little extra gifts of love which now and again come our way. We must give God thanks and praise for the measure of health and strength granted us, besides the hundred and one things we take for granted which in His great mercy He has seen fit to bestow upon us; for although at times we think we have but little of this world's goods, we in truth have enough and to spare. If we could see into some other people's lives less fortunate than ourselves we would really appreciate what our God has done for us.

Nottinghamshire, England

H. L.

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My Prayer

*Live in my living; think through all my thought,
Will through my will till only Thine is wrought;
Move through each impulse, temper each desire,
Cleanse all my motives in Thy heavenly fire.*

*Speak through my speaking; love in all my love.
Shed through each feeling fragrance from above;
Come, blest Shekinah, flame throughout my mind,
Till, cleansed from dross, I am as gold refined.*

*Bid high aspirings in my heart awake,
And my whole life Thy worthier dwelling make;
Come, with Thy heavenly, sin-consuming flame,
And for Thy temple my whole being claim.*

--Selected.