



Open Water Ministries

~ Thought For The Day ~

~gathering from the 4 winds~

“come just as you are”

Refresh, Restore, Rebuild = Healing



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Worship Music

Prayer

Lord, I ask You to help me be wise, prudent, intelligent, discerning, and sensible in the way I think and act. You see everything and know exactly what is really happening so I am leaning on You to lead me in every situation. Teach me when to sit still and when to act. You are my Leader, so I look to You to lead me and to help me do exactly what is right in each situation. In Jesus name. Amen...

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1 AFTER THE death of Joshua, the Israelites asked the Lord, Who shall go up first for us against the Canaanites to fight against them? 2 And the Lord said, Judah shall go up; behold, I have delivered the land into his hand. 3 And Judah [the tribe] said to [the tribe of] Simeon his brother, Come up with me into my allotted territory, so that we may fight against the Canaanites; and I likewise will go with you into your territory. So Simeon went with him. 4 Then Judah went up and the Lord delivered the Canaanites and the Perizzites into their hand, and they smote 10,000 of them in Bezek. 5 And they found Adoni-bezek in Bezek and fought against him, and they smote the Canaanites and the Perizzites. 6 Adoni-bezek fled, but they pursued him and caught him and cut off his thumbs and his big toes. 7 Adoni-bezek said, Seventy kings with their thumbs and big toes cut off had to gather their food under my table. As I have done, so God has repaid me. And they brought him to Jerusalem, and there he died. 8 And the men of Judah fought against [Jebusite] Jerusalem and took it, and smote it with the edge of the sword and set the city on fire. 9 Afterward the men of Judah went down to fight against the Canaanites who dwelt in the hill country, in the South (the Negeb), and in the lowland. 10 And Judah went against the Canaanites who dwelt in Hebron. The name of Hebron before was Kiriath-arba. And they defeated Sheshai and Ahiman and Talmai. 11 From there [Judah] went against the inhabitants of Debir. The name of Debir before was Kiriath-sepher [city of books and scribes]. 12 And Caleb said, Whoever attacks Kiriath-sepher and takes it, to him will I give Achsah, my daughter, as wife. 13 And Othniel son of Kenaz, Caleb's younger brother, took it; and he gave him Achsah, his daughter, as wife. 14 And when she came to [Othniel], she got his consent to ask her father for a [sloping] field. And she alighted off her donkey, and Caleb said to her, What do you want? 15 And she said to him, Give me a present; since you have set me in the land of the South (the Negeb), give me also springs of water. And Caleb gave her the upper and lower springs. 16 And the descendants of the Kenite, Moses' father-in-law, went up with the Judahites from the City of Palms (Jericho) into the Wilderness of Judah, which lies in the South (the Negeb) near Arad; and they went and dwelt with the people. 17 And [the tribe of] Judah went with Simeon his brother, and they slew the Canaanites who inhabited Zephath and utterly destroyed it. So the city was called Hormah [destruction]. 18 Also Judah took Gaza, Askelon, and Ekron—each with its territory. 19 The Lord was with Judah, and [Judah] drove out the inhabitants of the hill country, but he could not drive out those inhabiting the [difficult] valley basin because they had chariots of iron. 20 Hebron was given to Caleb as Moses said, and he expelled from there the three sons of Anak. 21 But the Benjamites did not drive out the Jebusites who inhabited Jerusalem; the Jebusites dwell with the Benjamites in Jerusalem to this day. 22 The house of Joseph also went up against Bethel, and the Lord was with them. 23 And the house of Joseph was sent to spy out Bethel. The name of the city formerly had been Luz. 24 And the spies saw a man coming out of the city and they said to him, Show us, we pray you, the way into the city and we will show you mercy. 25 When he showed them the entrance to the city, they smote the city with the sword, but they let the man and all his family go. 26 And the man went into the land of the Hittites and built a city and called it Luz, which is its name to this day. 27 Neither did Manasseh drive out the inhabitants of Beth-shean and its villages, or of Taanach or Dor or Ibleam or Megiddo and their villages, but the Canaanites remained in that land. 28 When Israel became strong, they put the Canaanites to forced labor but did not utterly drive them out. 29 Neither did Ephraim drive out the Canaanites who dwelt in Gezer, but the Canaanites dwelt in Gezer among them. 30 Neither did Zebulun drive out the inhabitants of Kitron or of Nahalol, but the Canaanites dwelt among them and were put to forced labor. 31 Neither did Asher drive out the inhabitants of Acco or of Sidon or of Ahlab or of Achzib or of Helbah or of Aphik or of Rehob; 32 But the Asherites dwelt among the Canaanites, the inhabitants of the land, for they did not drive them out. 33 Neither did Naphtali drive out the inhabitants of Beth-shemesh or of Beth-anath, but dwelt among the Canaanites, the inhabitants of the land; but the inhabitants of Beth-shemesh and of Beth-anath became subject to forced labor for them. 34 The Amorites forced the Danites back into the hill country, for they would not allow them to come down into the plain; 35 The Amorites remained fixed in Mount Heres [mountain of the sun], in Aijalon, and in Shaalbim; yet the hand of the house of Joseph prevailed, so that they became subject to forced labor. 36 And the border of the Amorites was from the ascent of Akrabbim, from the rock Sela and onward.

Through Moses, the children of Israel were let out of Egypt and God began to form a national kind of identity and began to forge the beginnings of a nation. At the death of Moses, Joshua, who was the servant of Moses, took over and continued to lead the people now into the land that God had promised to their father Abraham that should be theirs, that they should inhabit. And thus, God keeping his covenant and his word to Abraham.

Now the book of Judges takes up the next period in their history. There were some thirteen Judges over Israel. They became sort of quasi leaders of Israel. They would judge in the matters of the people. They were leaders but never fully empowered by the people as rulers. They were in an interim period between Joshua and the establishing of a monarchy at which time Saul became the first king over Israel. So this book of Judges covers this period of time between the death of Joshua and the coming in of Samuel, who was the final judge over Israel and who anointed Saul to be the first king over Israel, where their form of government was changed from a theocracy, God ruling over to people, to a monarchy. Now the theocracy was not successful simply because the people would not submit to the rule of God. In the book of Judges we find a pattern that emerges, a very tragic pattern, and that is during the time when they were blessed, at ease, without war. They would turn to other gods and begin to worship Baal and Ashtoreth and the various gods of the Canaanites and the Perizzites and the Hivites and the Hittites and the Jebusites, the people in the land in which they were dwelling. And because of their apostasy God would give them over into the hand of their enemies and they would be oppressed by their enemies. And being oppressed by their enemies they would cry out unto the Lord and the Lord would raise up a judge to be a deliverer and they would be delivered from the oppression from their enemies. Then they would have a period of prosperity, the judge would die and back into the same old pattern of turning their backs on God and beginning again to worship Baal and the other gods and the groves and all. And it's just a sad, tragic story of failure, the failure of consistency in the worship of God and in the honoring of God. So, as we enter into the book of Judges we enter the scene at the death of Joshua there in verse one. NOW after the death of Joshua it came to pass, that the children of Israel asked the LORD, saying, Who shall go up for us against the Canaanites first, to fight against them? (Jdg 1:1)

You remember the book of Joshua closed where the people were in the land but there was yet much of the land that was not yet conquered. They had not completely driven out the enemies. They had not yet taken all of the territories that God had promised unto them. So when Joshua died they inquired and they said, "Who shall go up first to take the land that God has given?"

[And so] the LORD spoke and said, Judah shall go first (Jdg 1:2):

Now you remember that Judah was given that land south of Jerusalem. And so Judah said to Simeon, whose lot was the extreme south, even south of Judah down towards Beersheba and all, said to Simeon, "You go out and help us take our portion and then we'll help you to take your portion." And so Judah began to attack the cities and take the cities and possess the cities that God had apportioned unto Judah.

And they came to Bezek: and there they killed ten thousand men of Bezek and took the city and Adonibezek (Jdg 1:4-5):

Now Adoni means "lord" so he was the lord of Bezek or the king of Bezek. They captured him and they cut off his thumbs and his great toes. And Adonibezek said, There have been sixty or seventy kings, that have gathered their meat under my table without their thumbs and toes: as I have done, so hath God requited me (Jdg 1:7).

So it was a practice, I guess, of this particular king, the lord of Bezek when he would conquer a king to cut off his great toes and his thumbs and he would actually be there at the kings' table. Seventy kings he had conquered this way. And he said, "As I have done, now God has requited unto me."

There's a very interesting scripture, it declares "as a man soweth, so shall he also reap." And so many times a person can say, "As I have done, so has God requited unto me."

"For in the same manner in which ye judge, ye shall be judged and whatever measure you meat, it shall be meated out to you. As I have done, so has God requited me."

And they fought against Jerusalem and they had taken it; they'd smitten it with the edge of the sword. Then they went down to fight against the Canaanites that swelled in the mountain, and in the south, and in the valley. And they went against the Canaanites in Hebron.

And there Caleb said, the one who takes Kirjathsepher, I will give him Achsah my daughter as a wife (Jdg 1:12). And so Otheniel who was the nephew of Caleb or the cousin of Achsah, went up and took the city and so Caleb gave her to him for a wife. So she then came to her dad and asked for springs. And the story is told there in chapter one of how he gave her the upper and the lower springs for that area. Then we have the tragic story in verse twenty-one.

The children of Benjamin did not drive out the Jebusites that inhabited Jerusalem (Jdg 1:21);

But the Jebusites dwell with the children of Benjamin in Jerusalem to this day.

The house of Joseph, went up against Bethel: the LORD was with them (Jdg 1:22).

They found a man and they said, "Tell us where the secret entrance to Bethel is and we will spare you. So the entrance to the city of Bethel, they went in and destroyed it, but they saved the man and his house alive who went out and established another city, named it after the original name of Bethel which is Luz.

But then Manasseh [in verse twenty-seven] did not drive out the inhabitants of Bethsean and her towns, nor Taanach and her towns, not the other cities (Jdg 1:27),

Including—here is Megiddo. Any of you that have been in Israel have seen the ruins of Megiddo.

And it came to pass, when Israel was strong, that they put the Canaanites to tribute, and did not utterly drive them out. Neither did Ephraim drive out the Canaanites,... Zebulun did not drive out the inhabitants of Kitron [and several cities]. Neither did Asher drive out the inhabitants of Accho, or Zidon (Jdg 1:28-31),

And so the story is that of an incomplete victory. Now, God had told them "When you come into the land, you're to utterly drive out the inhabitants thereof. You're not to make any covenant of peace with them. You're not to dwell together and try to coexist with them in peaceful terms." Utterly drive them out was the command of God. But here is a failure on their part to obey the voice of God.

Now there was no doubt, a rational in their minds. They no doubt thought, "Well, if we allow these people to stay here—actually they want to be on friendly terms. They'll be strengthened by us. We can be strengthened by them being here, and we ought to be able to live peaceably with them, coexist together and they can be our servants. They can cut our wood for us and gather, you know, our crops. And they can build our buildings. And we'll just use them." Whatever the rational is, it is wrong if it's opposed to what God has ordered.

Now, many times in our own minds, what God has required or what God has commanded of us doesn't seem to be for our best interest. It so often seems that we can figure out a better plan than what God did and we are often guilty, as were the children of Israel of not completely obeying the commandment of the Lord because we don't understand why God commanded it. It doesn't make sense to us, but God has a reason for everything that he commands. And whether it makes sense to me or not, it is important that I obey the commandment of God because you'll always find out that God always knew what he was talking about and there was a reason behind the command.

Now, the command to utterly exterminate the people seems to be harsh, it seems to be cruel. To utterly drive them out from their land, that seems to be a very cruel command. And it may be that the people just felt, "Well, that's too harsh, that's too cruel. We don't want to do that." And thus in disobeying God it brought ultimate problems to their children, to their descendents. It became a perennial problem afterwards because they failed to completely obey the voice of the Lord.

(Through The Bible C-2000 Series; Chuck Smith; Bible Commentaries; 1979-1986)

Judges: 300 Years of Oppression and Deliverance

"But you have forsaken me and served other gods, so I will no longer save you. Go and cry out to the gods you have chosen. Let them save you when you are in trouble!"

But the Israelites said to the Lord , "We have sinned. Do with us whatever you think best, but please rescue us now." Then they got rid of the foreign gods among them and served the Lord . And he could bear Israel's misery no longer.

Judges 10:13–16 ; The Period of the Judges: The Hebrew nation, after the death of Joshua, had no strong central government. They were a confederacy of 12 independent tribes, with no unifying element except their God. The form of government in the days of the Judges is spoken of as a "theocracy," that is, God Himself was supposed to be the direct ruler of the nation. But the people did not take their God very seriously—they were continually falling into idolatry. Being more or less in a state of anarchy, harassed at times by civil war among themselves, and surrounded by enemies who made attempt after attempt to exterminate them, the Hebrew nation was very slow in its national development. The Israelites did not become a great nation until they were organized into a kingdom in the days of Samuel and David.

The exact duration of the period of the Judges is uncertain. When we add all the years of the oppressions, of the individual Judges, and of the periods of rest, they add up to 410 years (see chart Oppressor(s)). But some of these figures may overlap. Jephthah, who lived near the end of the period, spoke of it as 300 years (Judges 11:26). It is thought to have been, in round numbers, about 300 years, roughly from about 1400 until 1100 b.c. The entire period from the Exodus to King Solomon, which includes also the 40-year period of travel through the wilderness as well as the eras of Eli, Samuel, Saul, and David, is given as 480 years in 1 Kings 6:1 . There also were oppressions by Sidonians and Maonites (Judges 10:12).

"40 Years" and "40 Days"

Othniel, Deborah and Barak, and Gideon are each said to have judged Israel for 40 years; Ehud was judge for twice 40 years. Later, Eli judged for 40 years. And Saul, David, and Solomon each reigned 40 years. "Forty years" seems to have been a round number denoting a generation or completion. Similarly, "40 days" is used as a round number to indicate completion or fullness. Note how often 40 is used throughout the Bible:

- During the Flood it rained 40 days
- Moses fled at age 40, was in Midian for 40 years, and was on Mount Sinai for 40 days
- Israel wandered in the wilderness for 40 years
- The spies spent 40 days in Canaan
- Elijah fasted 40 days
- Nineveh was given 40 days' respite (Jonah 3)
- Jesus fasted 40 days (Matthew 4: 1–11) and was on earth for 40 days after the Resurrection

Judges 1. Canaanites That Were Left in the Land; Joshua had destroyed the Canaanites in some sections of the land and had kept others in subjection (Joshua 10:40 , 43 ; 11:23 ; 13:2–7 ; 21:43–45 ; 23:4 ; 24:18). After his death, there remained considerable numbers of Canaanites (Judges 1:28–30 , 32–33 , 35). God had commanded Israel to utterly destroy or drive out the Canaanites (Deuteronomy 7:2–4). Had Israel fully obeyed this command, they would have saved themselves a lot of trouble.

Iron in Palestine; The Bible states that the reason Israel could not drive out the Canaanites and Philistines is that they had iron, while Israel did not (Judges 1:19 ; 4:3 ; Joshua 17:16–18 ; 1 Samuel 13:19–22). Only after Saul and David broke the power of the Philistines did iron come into use in Israel (2 Samuel 12:31 ; 1 Chronicles 22:3 ; 29:7). Although iron objects begin to appear in Palestine at about the time of the arrival of the Philistines, it wasn't until the 11th century that they became more common. Broken spears, hoes, etc., were not discarded, but were typically melted down and the metal recast.

(Halley's Bible Handbook; Zondervan; Henry Halley; 2000: Bible History and Commentaries; pages 200-202)

VIII. (Purpose In Prayer; EM Bounds; Chapter 8; Edward McKendree Bounds (August 15, 1835 – August 24, 1913) was a clergyman of the Methodist Episcopal Church South and author of eleven books, nine of which focused on the subject of prayer.)

"In God's name I beseech you let prayer nourish your soul as your meals nourish your body. Let your fixed seasons of prayer keep you in God's presence through the day, and His presence frequently remembered through it be an ever-fresh spring of prayer. Such a brief, loving recollection of God renews a man's whole being, quiets his passions, supplies light and counsel in difficulty, gradually subdues the temper, and causes him to possess his soul in patience, or rather gives it up to the possession of God".—Fenelon

"Devoted too much time and attention to outward and public duties of the ministry. But this has a mistaken conduct, for I have learned that neglect of much and fervent communion with God in meditation and prayer is not the way to redeem the time nor to fit me for public ministrations." "I rightly attribute my present deadness to want of sufficient time and tranquillity for private devotion. Want of more reading, retirement and private devotion, I have little mastery over my own tempers. An unhappy day to me for want of more solitude and prayer. If there be anything I do, if there be anything I leave undone, let me be perfect in prayer." "After all, whatever God may appoint, prayer is the great thing. Oh that I may be a man of prayer."—Henry Martyn

That the men had quit praying in Paul's time we cannot certainly affirm. They have, in the main, quit praying now. They are too busy to pray. Time and strength and every faculty are laid under tribute to money, to business, to the affairs of the world. Few men lay themselves out in great praying. The great business of praying is a hurried, petty, starved, beggarly business with most men.

St. Paul calls a halt, and lays a levy on men for prayer. Put the men to praying is Paul's unfailing remedy for great evils in Church, in State, in politics, in business, in home. Put the men to praying, then politics will be cleansed, business will be thriftier, the Church will be holier, the home will be sweeter.

"I exhort, therefore, first of all, that supplications, prayers, intercessions, thanksgivings, be made for all men; for kings and all that are in high place; that we may lead a tranquil and quiet life in all godliness and gravity. This is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Saviour ... I desire, therefore, that the men pray in every place, lifting up holy hands, without wrath and disputing (I Timothy 2:1-3, 8).

Praying women and children are invaluable to God, but if their praying is not supplemented by praying men, there will be a great loss in the power of prayer—a great breach and depreciation in the value of prayer, great paralysis in the energy of the Gospel. Jesus Christ spake a parable unto the people, telling them that men ought always to pray and not faint. Men who are strong in everything else ought to be strong in prayer, and never yield to discouragement, weakness or depression. Men who are brave, persistent, redoubtable in other pursuits ought to be full of courage, unfainting, strong-hearted in prayer.

Men are to pray; all men are to pray. Men, as distinguished from women, men in their strength in their wisdom. There is an absolute, specific command that the men pray; there is an absolute imperative necessity that men pray. The first of beings, man, should also be first in prayer. The men are to pray for men. The direction is specific and classified. Just underneath we have a specific direction with regard to women. About prayer, its importance, wideness and practice the Bible here deals with the men in contrast to, and distinct from, the women. The men are definitely commanded, seriously charged, and warmly exhorted to pray. Perhaps it was that men were averse to prayer, or indifferent to it; it may be that they deemed it a small thing, and gave to it neither time nor value nor significance. But God would have all men pray, and so the great Apostle lifts the subject into prominence and emphasizes its importance. For prayer is of transcendent importance. Prayer is the mightiest agent to advance God's work. Praying hearts and hands only can do God's work. Prayer succeeds when all else fails. Prayer has won great victories, and rescued, with notable triumph, God's saints when every other hope was gone. Men who know how to pray are the greatest boon God can give to earth—they are the richest gift earth can offer heaven. Men who know how to use this weapon of prayer are God's best soldiers. His mightiest leaders. Praying men are God's chosen leaders. The distinction between the leaders that God brings to the front to lead and bless His people, and those leaders who owe their position of leadership to a worldly, selfish, unsanctified selection, is this, God's leaders are pre-eminently men of prayer. This distinguishes them as the simple, Divine attestation of their call, the seal of their separation by God. Whatever of other graces or gifts they may have, the gift and grace of prayer towers above them all. In whatever else they may share or differ, in the gift of prayer, they are one. What would God's leaders be without prayer? Strip Moses of his power in prayer, a gift that made him eminent in pagan estimate, and the crown is taken from his head, the food and fire of his faith are gone. Elijah, without his praying, would have neither record nor place in the Divine legation, his life insipid, cowardly, its energy, defiance and fire gone. Without Elijah's praying the Jordan would never have yielded to the stroke of his mantle, nor would the stem angel of death have honored him with the chariot and horses of fire. The argument that God used to quiet the fears and convince Ananias of Paul's condition and sincerity is the epitome of his history, the solution of his life and work—"Behold he prayeth." Paul, Luther, Wesley—what would these chosen ones of God be without the distinguishing and controlling element of prayer? They were leaders for God because mighty in prayer. They were not leaders because of brilliancy in thought, because exhaustless in resources, because of their magnificent culture or native endowment, but leaders because by the power of prayer they could command the power of God. Praying men means much more than men who say prayers; much more than men who pray by habit. It means men with whom prayer is a mighty force, an energy that moves heaven and pours untold treasures of good on earth. Praying men are the safety of the Church from the materialism that is affecting all its plans and polity, and which is hardening the life-blood. The insinuation circulates as a secret, deadly poison that the Church is not so dependent on purely spiritual forces as it used to be—that changed times and changed conditions have brought it out of its spiritual straits and dependencies and put it where other forces can bear it to its climax. A fatal snare of this kind has allured the Church into worldly embraces, dazzled her leaders, weakened her foundations, and shorn her of much of her beauty and strength. Praying men are the saviours of the Church from this material tendency. They pour into it the original spiritual forces, lift it off the sand-bars of materialism, and press it out into the ocean depths of spiritual power. Praying men keep God in the Church in full force; keep His hand on the helm, and train the Church in its lessons of strength and trust. The number and efficiency of the labourers in God's vineyard in all lands is dependent on the men of prayer. The mightiness of these men of prayer increases, by the divinely arranged process, the number and success of the consecrated labours. Prayer opens wide their doors of access, gives holy aptness to enter, and holy boldness, firmness, and fruitage. Praying men are needed in all fields of spiritual labour. There is no position in the Church of God, high or low, which can be well filled without instant prayer. No position where Christians are found that does not demand the full play of a faith that always prays and never faints. Praying men are needed in the house of business, as well as in the house of God, that they may order and direct trade, not according to the maxims of this world, but according to Bible precepts and the maxims of the heavenly world. Men of prayer are needed especially in the positions of Church influence, honour, and power. These leaders of Church thought, of Church work, and of

Church life should be men of signal power in prayer. It is the praying heart that sanctifies the toil and skill of the hands, and the toil and wisdom of the head. Prayer keeps work in the line of God's will, and keeps thought in the line of God's Word. The solemn responsibilities of leadership, in a large or limited sphere, in God's Church should be so hedged about with prayer that between it and the world there should be an impassable gulf, so elevated and purified by prayer that neither cloud nor night should stain the radiance nor dim the sight of a constant meridian view of God. Many Church leaders seem to think if they can be prominent as men of business, of money, influence, of thought, of plans, of scholarly attainments, of eloquent gifts, of taking, conspicuous activities, that these are enough, and will atone for the absence of the higher spiritual power which much praying only can give. But how vain and paltry are these in the serious work of bringing glory to God, controlling the Church for Him, and bringing it into full accord with its Divine mission. Praying men are the men that have done so much for God in the past. They are the ones who have won the victories for God, and spoiled His foes. They are the ones who have set up His Kingdom in the very camps of His enemies. There are no other conditions of success in this day. The twentieth century has no relief statute to suspend the necessity or force of prayer—no substitute by which its gracious ends can be secured. We are shut up to this, praying hands only can build for God. They are God's mighty ones on earth, His master-builders. They may be destitute of all else, but with the wrestlings and prevailings of a simple-hearted faith they are mighty, the mightiest for God. Church leaders may be gifted in all else, but without this greatest of gifts they are as Samson shorn of his locks, or as the Temple without the Divine presence or the Divine glory, and on whose altars the heavenly flame has died.

The only protection and rescue from worldliness lie in our intense and radical spirituality; and our only hope for the existence and maintenance of this high, saving spirituality, under God, is in the purest and most aggressive leadership—a leadership that knows the secret power of prayer, the sign by which the Church has conquered, and that has conscience, conviction, and courage to hold true to her symbols, true to her traditions, and true to the hidings of her power. We need this prayerful leadership; we must have it, that by the perfection and beauty of its holiness, by the strength and elevation of its faith, by the potency and pressure of its prayers, by the authority and spotlessness of its example, by the fire and contagion of its zeal, by the singularity, sublimity, and unworldliness of its piety, it may influence God and hold and mould the Church to its heavenly pattern. Such leaders, how mightily they are felt. How their flame arouses the Church! How they stir it by the force of their Pentecostal presence! How they embattle and give victory by the conflicts and triumphs of their own faith! How they fashion it by the impress and importunity of their prayers! How they inoculate it by the contagion and fire of their holiness! How they lead the march in great spiritual revolutions! How the Church is raised from the dead by the resurrection call of their sermons! Holiness springs up in their wake as flowers at the voice of spring, and where they tread the desert blooms as the garden of the Lord. God's cause demands such leaders along the whole line of official position from subaltern to superior. How feeble, aimless, or worldly are our efforts, how demoralised and vain for God's work without them! The gift of these leaders is not in the range of ecclesiastical power. They are God's sifts. Their being, their presence, their number, and their ability are the tokens of His favour; their lack the sure sign of His disfavour, the presage of His withdrawal. Let the Church of God be on her knees before the Lord of hosts, that He may more mightily endow the leaders we already have, and put others in rank, and lead all along the line of our embattled front.

The world is coming into the Church at many points and in many ways. It oozes in; it pours in; it comes in with brazen front or soft, insinuating disguise; it comes in at the top and comes in at the bottom; and percolates through many a hidden way. For praying men and holy men we are looking—men whose presence in the Church will make it like a censer of holiest incense flaming up to God. With God the man counts for everything. Rites, forms, organisations are of small moment; unless they are backed by the holiness of the man they are offensive in His sight. "Incense is an abomination unto Me; the new moons and sabbaths, the calling of assemblies I cannot away with; it is iniquity, even the solemn meeting." Why does God speak so strongly against His own ordinances? Personal purity had failed. The impure man tainted all the sacred institutions of God and defiled them. God regards the man in so important a way as to put a kind of discount on all else. Men have built Him glorious temples and have striven and exhausted themselves to please God by all manner of gifts; but in lofty strains He has rebuked these proud worshippers and rejected their princely gifts. "Heaven is My throne and the earth is My footstool: where is the house that ye build unto Me? and where is the place of My rest? For all those things hath Mine hand made, and all those things hath been, saith the Lord. He that killeth an ox is as if he slew a man; he that sacrificeth a lamb, as if he cut off a dog's neck; he that offereth an oblation, as if he offered swine's blood; he that burneth incense, as if he blessed an idol." Turning away in disgust from these costly and profane offerings, He declares: "But to this man will I look, even to him that is poor and of a contrite spirit, and trembleth at My word."

This truth that God regards the personal purity of the man is fundamental. This truth suffers when ordinances are made much of and forms of worship multiply. The man and his spiritual character depreciate as Church ceremonials increase. The simplicity of worship is lost in religious aesthetics, or in the gaudiness of religious forms. This truth that the personal purity of the individual is the only thing God cares for is lost sight of when the Church begins to estimate men for what they have. When the Church eyes a man's money, social standing, his belongings in any way, then spiritual values are at a fearful discount, and the tear of penitence, the heaviness of guilt are never seen at her portals. Worldly bribes have opened and stained its pearly gates by the entrance of the impure. This truth that God is looking after personal purity is swallowed up when the Church has a greed for numbers. "Not numbers, but personal purity is our aim," said the fathers of Methodism. The parading of Church statistics is mightily against the grain of spiritual religion. Eyeing numbers greatly hinders the looking after personal purity. The increase of quantity is generally at a loss of quality. Bulk abates preciousness.

The age of Church organisation and Church machinery is not an age noted for elevated and strong personal piety. Machinery looks for engineers and organisations for generals, and not for saints, to run them. The simplest organisation may aid purity as well as strength; but beyond that narrow limit organisation swallows up the individual and is careless of personal purity; push, activity, enthusiasm, zeal for an organisation, come in as the vicious substitutes for spiritual character. Holiness and all the spiritual graces of hardy culture and slow growth are discarded as too slow and too costly for the progress and rush of the age. By dint of machinery, new organisations, and spiritual weakness, results are vainly expected to be secured which can only be secured by faith, prayer, and waiting on God.

The man and his spiritual character is what God is looking after. If men, holy men, can be turned out by the easy process of Church machinery readier and better than by the old-time processes, we would gladly invest in every new and improved patent; but we do not believe it. We adhere to the old way—the way the holy prophets went, the king's highway of holiness. An example of this is afforded by the case of William Wilberforce. High in social position, a member of Parliament, the friend of Pitt the famous statesman, he was not called of God to forsake his high social position nor to quit Parliament, but he was called to order his life according to the pattern set by Jesus Christ and to give himself to prayer. To read the story of his life is to be impressed with its holiness and its devotion to the claims of the quiet hours alone with God. His conversion was announced to his friends—to Pitt and others—by letter. In the beginning of his religious career he records: "My chief reasons for a day of secret prayer are, (1) That the state of public affairs is very critical and calls for earnest deprecation of the Divine displeasure. (2) My station in life is a very difficult one, wherein I am at a loss to know how to act. Direction, therefore, should be specially sought from time to time. (3) I have been graciously supported in difficult situations of a public nature. I have gone out and returned home in safety, and found a kind reception has attended me. I would humbly hope, too, that what I am now doing is a proof that God has not withdrawn His Holy Spirit from me. I am covered with mercies." The recurrence of his birthday led him again to review his situation and employment. "I find," he wrote, "that books alienate my heart from God as much as anything. I have been framing a plan of study for myself, but let me remember but one thing is needful, that if my heart cannot be kept in a spiritual state without so much prayer, meditation, Scripture reading, etc., as are incompatible with study, I must seek first the righteousness of God." All were to be surrendered for spiritual advance. "I fear," we find him saying, "that I have not studied the Scriptures enough. Surely in the summer recess I ought to read the Scriptures an hour or two every day, besides prayer, devotional reading and meditation. God will prosper me better if I wait on Him. The experience of all good men shows that without constant prayer and watchfulness the life of God in the soul stagnates. Doddridge's morning and evening devotions were serious matters. Colonel Gardiner always spent hours in prayer in the morning before he went forth. Bonnell practised private devotions largely morning and evening, and repeated Psalms dressing and undressing to raise his mind to heavenly things. "I would look up to God to make the means effectual. I fear that my devotions are too much hurried, that I do not read Scripture enough. I must grow in grace; I must love God more; I must feel the power of Divine things more. Whether I am more or less learned signifies not. Whether even I execute the work which I deem useful is comparatively unimportant. But beware my soul of lukewarmness." The New Year began with the Holy Communion and new vows. "I will press forward," he wrote, "and labour to know God better and love Him more. Assuredly I may, because God will give His Holy Spirit to them that ask Him, and the Holy Spirit will shed abroad the love of God in the heart. O, then, pray, pray; be earnest, press forward and follow on to know the Lord. Without watchfulness, humiliation and prayer, the sense of Divine things must languish." To prepare for the future he said he found nothing more effectual than private prayer and the serious perusal of the New Testament. And again: "I must put down that I have lately too little time for private devotions. I can sadly confirm Doddridge's remark that when we go on ill in the closet we commonly do so everywhere else. I must mend here. I am afraid of getting into what Owen calls the trade of sinning and repenting ... Lord help me, the shortening of private devotions starves the soul; it grows lean and faint. This must not be. I must redeem more time. I see how lean in spirit I become without full allowance of time for private devotions; I must be careful to be watching unto prayer." At another tune he puts on record: "I must try what I long ago heard was the rule of E—the great upholsterer, who, when he came from Bond Street to his little villa, always first retired to his Closet. I have been keeping too late hours, and hence have had but a hurried half hour to myself. Surely the experience of all good men confirms the proposition, that without due measure of private devotions, the soul will grow lean." To his son he wrote: "Let me conjure you not to be seduced into neglecting, curtailing or hurrying over your morning prayers. Of all things, guard against neglecting God in the closet. There is nothing more fatal to the life and power of religion. More solitude and earlier hours—prayer three times a day at least. How much better might I serve if I cultivated a closer communication with God." Wilberforce knew the secret of a holy life. Is that not where most of us fail? We are so busy with other things, so immersed even in doing good and in carrying on the Lord's work, that we neglect the quiet seasons of prayer with God, and before we are aware of it our soul is lean and impoverished.

"One night alone in prayer," says Spurgeon, "might make us new men, changed from poverty of soul to spiritual wealth, from trembling to triumphing. We have an example of it in the life of Jacob. A foretime the crafty shuffler, always bargaining and calculating, unlovely in almost every respect, yet one night in prayer turned the supplanter into a prevailing prince, and robed "him with celestial grandeur. From that night he lives on the sacred page as one of the nobility of heaven. Could not we, at least now and then, in these weary earthbound years, hedge about a single night for such enriching traffic with the skies? What, have we no sacred ambition? Are we deaf to the yearnings of Divine love? Yet, my brethren, for wealth and for science men will cheerfully quit their warm couches, and cannot we do it now and again for the love of God, and the good of souls? Where is our zeal, our gratitude, our sincerity? I am ashamed while I thus upbraid both myself and you. May we often tarry at Jabbok, and cry with Jacob, as he grasped the angel? "With thee all night I mean to stay, And wrestle till the break of day." Surely, brethren, if we have given whole days to folly, we can afford a space for heavenly wisdom. Time was when we gave whole nights to chambering and wantonness, to dancing and the world's revelry; we did not tire then; we were chiding the sun that he rose so soon, and wishing the hours would lag awhile that we might delight in wilder merriment and perhaps deeper sin. Oh, wherefore, should we weary in heavenly employments? Why grow we weary when asked to watch with our Lord? Up sluggish heart, Jesus calls thee! Rise and go forth to meet the Heavenly Friend in the place where He manifests Himself."

We can never expect to grow in the likeness of our Lord unless we follow His example and give more time to communion with the Father. A revival of real praying would produce a spiritual revolution.

(Amplified Bible; Joyce Meyers; 2006; Faith Words; Scripture; Commentaries; pages 340-341)

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