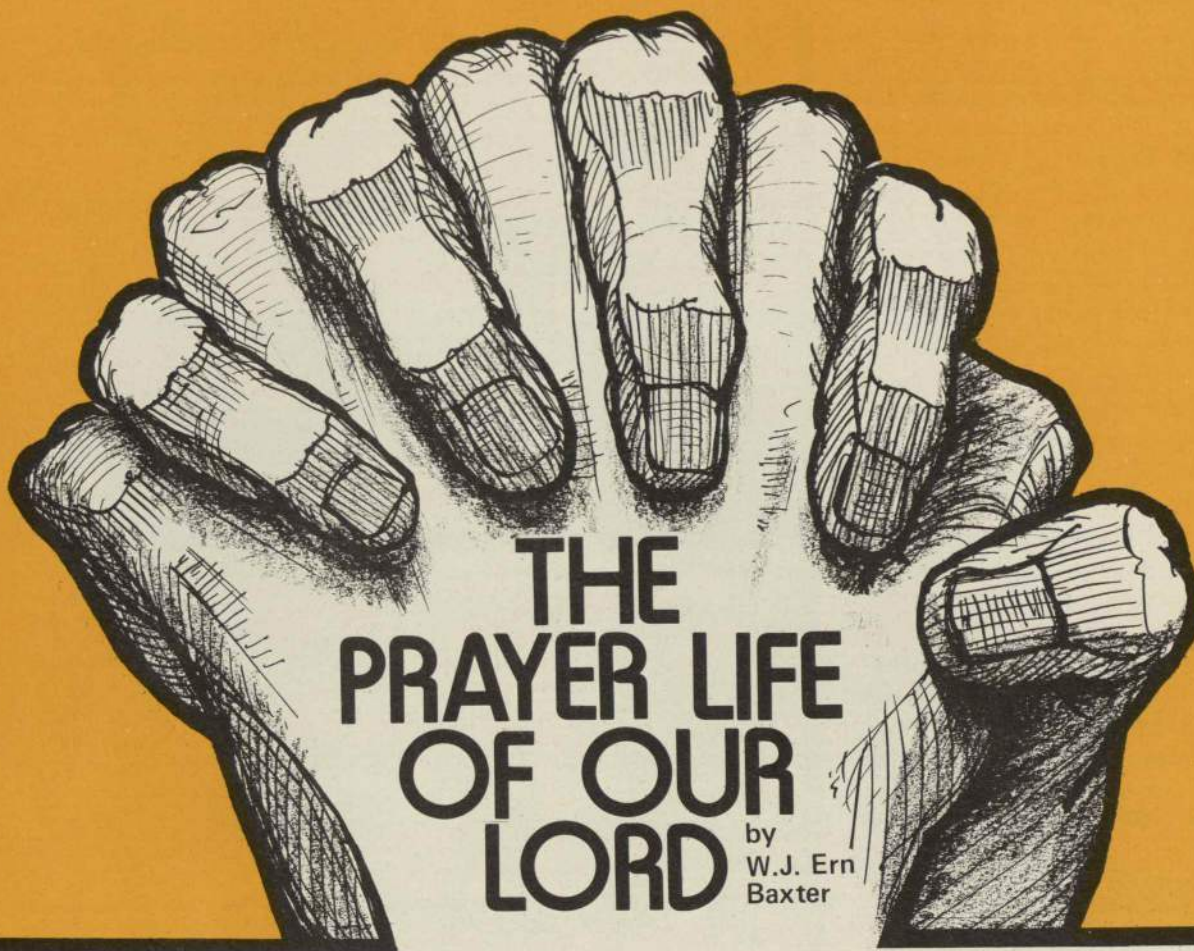


Our pattern for constant prayer fellowship with the Father.



# THE PRAYER LIFE OF OUR LORD

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**J**esus, the Christ, was the only perfect man that ever lived. He was a pattern person, God's singular Son. The maturing of His humanity was processively attained, and consisted of undeviating obedience to the will of God. Such a relationship was enabled and maintained on the human side, through prayer (Heb. 5:7,8). "Having been made perfect He 'qualified' to become 'the author of eternal salvation.' " The Man-Redeemer fulfilled His God-appointed task through obedience, and left "us an example that we should follow in His steps" (1 Pet. 2:21). Since prayer was such an important part of His perfecting, it is essential that we who are "going on to perfection" (Heb. 6:1) should consider the prayer life of our Example. If we can determine the place prayer had in

His life we can learn something of prayer's intended purpose.

## BEGINNING IN PRAYER

Jesus was reared in a devout home, and His mother and Joseph are said to have "performed all things according to the law of the Lord" (Luke 2:39). In this atmosphere then "the child grew, and waxed strong in spirit, filled with wisdom: and the grace of God was upon Him (Luke 2:40). The

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following verse tells us of the consistency of our Lord's parents in their devotion to the things of God saying of them that, "his parents went to Jerusalem every year at the feast of the passover." So our Lord in the years prior to His ministry enjoyed a home where God and His word were held in high and holy esteem. His public ministry was commenced with His baptism by John (Luke 3:21-22). At the time of His baptism we read ". . . that Jesus also was baptized, and while He was praying, heaven was opened, and the Holy Spirit descended upon Him in bodily form like a dove, and a voice came out of heaven, 'Thou art My beloved Son, in Thee I am well pleased.'" And so Jesus' ministry was introduced by submission to baptism and communion with God in prayer.

Prayer was prominent at the very beginning of His ministry. As a result of obedience in baptism and His communion in prayer, there followed a series of significant happenings. "The heaven was opened, and the Holy Spirit descended . . . and a voice came out of heaven," acknowledging Jesus to be God's "beloved Son."

As our Lord commenced His ministry in prayer, prayer was to become the pattern of His life. Not only the beginnings of His ministry, but the pattern of His life. Not only the beginning of His ministry, but the beginnings of all heaven-ordained undertakings were immersed in prayer, as were all His ongoings, and all of His conclusions. His ministry began in prayer, and on the mortal side concluded with the significant prayers of Calvary. His entire life was a life bathed in prayer.

### CONSTANTLY IN PRAYER

In the days of His flesh, when He offered up both prayers and supplications with loud crying and tears to Him who was able to save Him from death, and who was heard because of His piety, although He was a Son, He learned obedience from the things which He suffered; and having been made perfect, He became to all those who obey Him the source of eternal salvation (Heb. 5:7-9).

We shall be considering a number of scriptural passages on the prayer life of our Lord, but this particular one serves to give us a general view of His reasons for prayer, and the extent of His comprehensiveness of the issues which were at stake in His praying, and the manner in which His prayers were ultimately answered. We are told that "Jesus the Son of God," is "not an high priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities [have fellow feeling with our weaknesses' - Rotherham], but was in all points tempted like as we are [one who has in every way been tempted, exactly as we have been' - TCNT] yet without sin [without committing any sin' - Goodspeed]" (Heb. 4:15).

Here we see the reason for our

Lord's personal prayer life. Being a man, and subject to all creature temptations, He found the strength to withstand the lure of these temptations through maintaining constant relationship with the Father in prayer. It is at this point that the writer to the Hebrews urges us to "come boldly unto the throne of grace that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in the time of need" (Heb. 4:16).

As we go on into chapter five we are told that prayer was the constant practice of our Lord "in the days of His flesh" (Heb. 5:7). This phrase is variously translated as "in the days of His earthly life" - (TCNT); "during His earthly life" - (Weymouth), and "during His mortal life" - (Vincent). The statement here indicates that during His lifetime He prayed much, because prayer is a necessity if mortals are to walk in victory over sin.

Quite often Hebrews 5:7 is used to refer specifically to the prayers offered by our Lord in Gethsemane. However, as we have seen, the prayers referred to here, were offered "during His earthly life," of course including the Gethsemane prayers. They were emotion-filled prayers being described as offered with "strong crying and tears." The extent of the emotions involved in such praying is brought out in other translations as "mighty outcries and tears" - (Rotherham); "in desperate prayers and the agony of tears" - (JBP). The reason for the vehemence of His praying is described in the next phrase, where it is said, these prayers were offered "unto Him that was able to save Him from death."

The writer goes on to say that He "was heard in that He feared." If our Lord prayed "unto Him that was able to save Him from death and was heard," then apparently His being saved from death does not mean that He was saved from Calvary, because He did die on the cross. The apparent contradiction however seems to be resolved by translating the passage "out of death" (marg.) rather than "from death." This could mean that our Lord was praying that He would be brought "safe out of death into a

new life." Undoubtedly the prayers of Gethsemane were involved, but the general nature of the whole passage points to our Lord's times of prayer in facing temptation triumphantly, thus qualifying Him as the perfect man and as our Savior, who could experience death and be delivered out of it. He would not have been delivered "out of death" had He not "prayed through" temptation and emerged from each confrontation "without sin." Having successfully walked in His mortality, free from sin, He was able to experience "victory over death the fruit of sin."

Our Lord knew that to be the Savior of men He had to walk sinlessly to qualify. Such sinlessness derived from His constancy in prayer fellowship with the Father and in obedience to the revelation of the Father's will. And "though He were a son, yet learned He obedience by the things which He suffered; and being made perfect, He became the author of eternal salvation unto all those who obey Him." To successfully fulfil His destiny as "the author of eternal salvation" it was necessary to maintain a consistent prayer life, which many times because of the intensity of the confrontation, caused Him to engage in "mighty outcries and tears." Praise God, "He was heard," and not only triumphed personally, but became our Savior as a result of His triumph, and afforded us an example of the manner in which victorious living can be enjoyed.

We should observe the reason why He was heard. He "was heard in that He feared." The word "feared" means "to act cautiously, beware, fear." "The image in the word is that of a cautious taking hold and careful and respectful handling: . . . Christ in His prayer took account of all things, not only His desire, but His Father's will" (Vincent). He knew that He wanted to be saved from death the fruit of sin, therefore His mortal life consisted of prayer and obedience. How the Father would save Him out of death was a matter of the Father's will. He would do His part, and He knew the Father would do His part. The Father heard

Him and responded to Him, both in life and resurrection, because "He feared." Dean Alfred's translation at this point is very interesting, "having been heard by reason of His reverent submission." Thank God He was heard during the days of His earthly life, and He was heard as He submitted to Calvary, in that God raised Him from the dead.

### OUR LORD'S PRAYER PRIORITIES

*Prayer Had Priority Over His Social Life.* "And when He had sent the multitude away, He went up into a mountain apart to pray: and when the evening was come, He was there alone" (Matt. 14:23).

As we look at this picture we see our Lord turning from the normal and legitimate relationships of social life to give priority to prayer. He not only "sent the multitude away," but in verse 22 we read that He "constrained His disciples to get into a ship, and go before Him unto the other side." He must pray! He was in a time of crisis as the multitude and His disciples wanted to make Him the kind of king that He had not come to the earth to be. He must get to the Father about this matter and therefore must forego the society of friends and intimate disciples. Desirable as it might be to take time after a long day for social intercourse with those near Him, He realized that prayer must have priority.

The way of less disciplined humanity would probably be to try to forget the problems in the society of friends, or to meet with a few intimates, such as His disciples, and discuss it. We probably all relate to this human way of dealing with our problems. We would rather do anything but pray about the crisis at hand. But with our Lord, prayer had priority over His social life, and when He faced a crisis, He would forego the pleasant relief found in social relationships, to seek the face of the Father.

*Prayer Had Priority Over His Physical Rest.* "When it grew late He was there by Himself . . ." (Matt. 14:23, JBP).

As we consider this particular event, we find that He appeared to His disciples "about the fourth watch" which would be sometime between 3:00 and 6:00 A.M. Assuming that He went to prayer about 7:00 P.M. and prayed till between 3:00 and 6:00 A.M., it would mean that He spent nine or ten hours of the night in prayer. In Luke 6:12 we read that He "went out into a mountain to pray, and continued all night in prayer to God." Again in Mark 1:35 it is recorded that "In the morning, rising up a great while before day, He went out, and departed into a solitary place, and there prayed." Thus we see that our Lord would deny Himself physical rest if the time was needed for prayer, rising up "while it was still dark" or praying all night.

*Prayer Had Priority Over Appetite.* ". . . Master, eat. . . I have meat to eat that you know not of. . . hath any man brought Him aught to eat? . . . My meat is to do the will of Him that sent Me. . ." (John 4:31-34).

God's will, including prayer, was more important at times than food. There is nothing wrong with social life, physical rest, or eating, but in the life of our great Example, all of these legitimate things must take second place when the will of God commands a higher priority. Therefore eating, which is a legitimate, and enjoyable, and a constant aspect of physical life, was often foregone in order that He might respond to a higher priority. We would not infer that this was necessarily a hardship, for our Lord had said, "I delight to do thy will." He set us an example of a higher and more satisfying life: a life spent in doing the will of God. It has been, and is, the testimony of God's devoted servants, that our Lord's priorities, when pursued, invariably afford the greatest satisfaction.

### OUR LORD PRAYED WHEN UNPOPULAR

[The scribes and the Pharisees] were filled with madness; and communed one with another what they might do with Jesus. And it

came to pass in those days, that He went out into a mountain to pray and continued all night in prayer to God (Luke 6:11,12).

He prayed during the days of popularity and success, and He prayed when unpopular and facing the angry death-designs of His enemies. He could not face the rage and fury of men who were plotting His murder without divine aid. The satanically-inspired religious opponents were more than a match for His unsupported humanity. He could not, would not, and did not, meet these dark powers on His own. In the midst of such jeopardy He went to His source of strength and direction, spending the entire night in prayer.

Again the example is obvious. If He, the Perfect Man, with all His nature functioning in perfect obedience to God, would not attempt to meet the combined fury of His enemies apart from intense and prolonged prayer to the Father, how much more we, who move from a position of human nature in the process of restructuring, need to spend much time in the Father's presence to enable us to withstand the fury and rage of satanically-inspired enemies who would seek to destroy us. This is no place for false bravado, but rather for sober and sound evaluation of our restricted abilities. Without Him we can do nothing. And certainly without Him we cannot withstand the dark powers that are constantly arrayed against us.

### OUR LORD PRAYED WHEN JOYFUL

In that hour Jesus rejoiced in spirit, and said, I thank Thee Oh Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that Thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent, and hast revealed them unto babes: even so, Father; for so it seemed good in thy sight (Luke 10:21).

Life is complex and various, and consists of many situations with their corresponding emotional expenditures, and character responses. We probably do not find it hard to pray when unpopular or when suffering, or in crisis, but do not think of praying when all is well. We are inclined to

share our burdens with the Father, but fail to include Him in celebrating our joys. Not so our Lord. When Jesus saw His disciples excited because of the operation of divine authority in their lives, and responding to His adjustive teaching, His heart was thrilled. It was in the midst of this joy that He turned to the Father to express in prayer His joy over what He was seeing in His disciples, and also His delight in the Father's principle of operation, as divine truths are being hidden from the proud, haughty, wise, and prudent men of worldly wisdom and lifeless religion, and being revealed to men who according to human standards were but "babes." The fact that ordinary, unlettered men such as Peter and John, more familiar with boats and fish nets and the rugged vernacular of a common and limited vocabulary, should be recipients of divine insights, was cause for great joy to our Lord.

It is becoming obvious as we consider our Lord's life patterns, that every area was covered by prayer. He shared the total life with the Father, holding it before Him for scrutiny, adjustment, or reception.

### OUR LORD PRAYED WHEN SUFFERING

And being in *an agony* He *prayed more earnestly*: and His sweat was as it were great drops of blood falling down to the ground (Luke 22:44).

We have already made reference to Gethsemane's agonizing prayers in the early part of our article. The passage in Hebrews, chapter 5, makes clear that suffering is essential to the development of Christian character. If our Lord learned obedience through the things which He suffered, then certainly we who are "predestinated to be conformed to His image," (Rom. 8) should expect the same character-building situations to eventuate in our lives. In the type of tests and divine confrontations intended for our maturing, we can only successfully endure such, as He did — *spending much time in prayer*. For it is in prayer that the Father is able to give

strength to endure, and the understanding of the whys of our suffering. It is only in prayer that we are able to incorporate into our lives the lessons to be learned, which are to become a part of our mature character. It is in prayer that we maintain the tenderness and sensitivity of spirit, that enables us to appreciate the divine intention in the trials designed for the strengthening of our faith.

### OUR LORD PRAYED IN CRISIS

*... continued all night in prayer to God.* And when it was day, He called unto Him His disciples and of them *he chose twelve*... (Luke 6:12,13).

Our Lord maintained a constant attitude of prayer and it seemed to be habitual for Him to spend nights in prayer. It is quite obvious that He entered into an intensity of prayer when making crisis decisions. In choosing the twelve who were to become the foundation of the new order, He spent an entire night in prayer, and the following day chose the twelve disciples whom He called Apostles. Undoubtedly our Lord had observed the disciples, and felt directed to those who should serve in this special relationship. He did not however depend alone on His judgments and evaluations, but held them before the Father in an all night of prayer for divine approval. He apparently came away from that time of intimate relationship with the Father, confirmed in His mind as to whom He should choose.

It is extremely important that we follow our Lord at this point. Crisis decisions can have such long range effects. How often we have made decisions quickly, thoughtlessly, and certainly prayerlessly, only to regret the decision made and suffer the continuing results of our precipitated action. So often the demands of a crisis throw us into a state of apprehension and fear, which is certainly not the mental and emotional state in which to make a crucial decision. Our Example shows us that an extended period of prayer

in a time of crisis will provide us with divinely directed conclusions, enabling us to face the crisis with calm, courage, and conviction as to the course to take.

There is a phrase that has become traditional among God's people, and we feel that it has some merit. We speak of "praying through." We may not all mean the same thing when we use this phrase, but we suggest that there is a place in prayer where we know we have heard from the Father concerning the matter we are sharing with Him. This may not come at once, but as we wait on God holding the matter before Him, ruling out all self-gratifying motives, we find the answer coming into clear focus. The time involved in this prayer exercise may not only have to do with getting an answer in that particular crisis, but may also have to do with the refining process in our own nature which the Father undertakes, using that particular crisis as the occasion for the larger and more extensive sanctifying operation.

As we survey the prayer patterns of our Lord's earth life, it becomes obvious that prayer was the foundation upon which our Lord built a life of perfect obedience, and from which He derived inspiration and enablement to successfully and ideally endure the variety of situations that are common to all humanity. "Tempted in all points like as we," He nevertheless, through maintaining unbroken fellowship with the father in prayer, and depending entirely upon the eternal Spirit as the source of His life and energy, was able to leave a record of complete victory in every life situation. From this it is hoped, we will experience a renewed desire to give prayer a larger place in our lives, not as some kind of a legal "must," but rather as a blessed divine provision to enable us to experience the fulness of God's intention for our redeemed humanity. How wonderful to be able to have access into the presence of the same God who directed the man Jesus in the days of His earthly life. His father is our Father. As He prayed so may we. Let us pray. 🍷