

A COLLECTION OF WEEKLY RADIO MESSAGES BY
R.J. RUSHDOONY



EDITED BY SUSAN BURNS

CHALCEDON/ROSS HOUSE BOOKS
VALLECITO, CALIFORNIA

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This volume is a unique compilation of the text of selected radio messages delivered by the author over KSCO (Santa Cruz, California) in 1953, 1954, 1955, and 1956. They appear here in print for the first time.

Ross House Books
PO Box 158
Vallecito, CA 95251
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Library of Congress: 2018958734

10 digit: 187999884X

13 digit: 978-1-879998-84-1

Printed in the United States of America

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THE MEANING OF JAZZ

August 17, 1954

Good morning, friends. One of the most significant developments of our generation is to be found in the field of music, and because it has such a strong relationship to our spiritual condition, I would like to give a little time this morning to a discussion of the meaning of jazz.

First of all, I think we must recognize that modern jazz has commanded and displayed some of the most amazing talent and virtuosity in the history of music. The purpose of jazz is clear-cut: to express emotion or feeling as clearly and forcefully as possible without any restraint or confinement.

In order to fulfill this purpose, the expression of feeling, jazz has developed two important traits, syncopation and swing. Syncopation means hitting the theme and climax from the beginning; it involves riding the basic feeling of the music full force from start to finish. In swing, the feeling is pushed even further. The individual musician is no longer bound to the sheet music. He develops the theme for himself, improvises as he goes along, and lets the emotion of the music

dominate him rather than the sheet music and the written notes. The result is an emotional intensity and a nakedness of feeling. The music either gets under your skin, or it has no meaning at all for you. This is why a scholar like Richard M. Weaver has called it “a music not of dreams ... but of drunkenness.” It eliminates order, structure, and restraint in order to produce a completely uninhibited expression of feeling.

And that tells us a great deal about our day and age. Ours is a talented and brilliant generation, but its genius is a drunken one, and its product is like jazz, in that it sacrifices law and order for feeling. Our concern is not that standards be maintained, but that our feelings be gratified. We have a completely negative idea of freedom. We talk about freedom, as the framers of the Atlantic Charter did, in negative fashion, as “freedom from,” but freedom is not from something, but for something. The free man is the disciplined man, and the free society is the disciplined society. A person or society that lacks self-control is a slave to itself and its own appetites. There is no freedom without law and self-control. The meaning of jazz, and, for that matter, much of modern art, is that man has surrendered freedom and self-control

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for the sake of feeling and is now the victim of his own emotions.

In religion, the jazz mentality of our age tries to satisfy and gratify people rather than to subject them to the discipline of Almighty God. Not faith and doctrine, but feeling and satisfaction are emphasized. They want syncopated Christianity, which must be practical and nothing more. They want swing religion: each man takes what he wants and nothing more. He sets his own course, and only his feelings are his authority.

But the Word of God is against all such religion. It declares that our faith must be not what we want but what God requires. It declares that the true starting point of all faith must not be the individual and his spiritual needs, but the triune God, God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Ghost. Not our feelings but God's Word must predominate. Not what we say is practical but what God says is necessary must be preached to us. Anything else is a jazzed-up religion. And the jazz mentality in religion today has led to the elimination too often of doctrinal and expository preaching, of catechisms, and Biblical teaching.

There is a penalty for these things. They leave us strangers to the Lord who says, "Yea, before the day was I am he" (Isa. 43:13). They give us too little of the resources of the Almighty and too much of our own feeble ways. All this leads to a fretful faith, one that seeks, by taking thought, to add to its life and stature.

As Gissner has said, "What a man loves attracts his heart like the magnet the iron." If we love ourselves, we seek a religion that caters to us. But if it is the Lord we love, we are drawn to Him and His Word, and we rest in

Him with confidence and strength.

Too much so-called “practical” Christianity is dangerously weak because it begins and ends with man and his needs. Such faith is the jazz mentality applied to religion. True faith begins not with us, but with the Lord, and it gains more for us than the practical outlook hopes to attain. Thus a God-centered and doctrinally-minded faith is all important. And its promise is this: “Seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you” (Matt. 6:33).

VENGEANCE IS MINE, SAITH THE LORD

May 24, 1955

Good morning, friends. According to Solomon's beautiful words in Proverbs 25:21–22, "If thine enemy be hungry, give him bread to eat; and if he be thirsty, give him water to drink: For thou shalt heap coals of fire upon his head, and the Lord shall reward thee."

Very simply stated, we could say that these verses require of us that we replace vengeance with love in our dealings with an enemy, a hater, or one who has wronged us. But while this is true enough, we fail to understand its meaning unless we know what we are talking about when we say vengeance and love.

What is vengeance? Vengeance means literally to vindicate by punishing the offender. The primary purpose of vengeance is to secure justice through our own effort. Vengeance means to vindicate by punishing the offender: what's wrong with that? Why are we asked to avoid it?

Before we deal with that question, let's look at the rest of this proverb. We are told that by returning good for evil, we can witness two practical results. *First* of all,

it brings a man's injustice home to his own conscience; it burns it in his soul; good returned for evil heaps coals of fire upon the head of the guilty man. A good instance of this in Scripture is Saul's relationship to David. When David twice spared Saul's life, each time, it humbled even the disordered mind of Saul and made him a witness to David's innocence and righteousness. The *second* result of returning good for evil, is this, God is pleased by our behavior and rewards us accordingly.

But meantime, what happens to vengeance? After all, if vengeance means righting a wrong, what happens to vengeance if we return good for evil? Does it mean that evil is thereby bypassed and forgotten? Does it mean that there is to be no punishment for evil? Does it mean that we are to say that evil does not count, and that we must wink at evil and therewith forget all about it?

Far from it. The whole weight of Scripture is against any notion that evil can be allowed to go unpunished. Justice does demand vindication. Again and again we have the declaration of Scripture that God is a just God and that He is jealous of anything that infringes upon His justice, that God does demand the fulfillment of justice. Our Lord Jesus Christ Himself said that of all unjust men, this must be said, they shall pay to the last penny (Matt. 5:26). There is no escaping vengeance, there is no escaping it in this life or in the life to come. The claims of justice upon us are strict and inflexible. Every wrong must be paid for, must be atoned for, and no man can escape the inflexible requirements of justice unless he find refuge in Jesus Christ, unless he find in Christ the one who bears the penalty, makes the

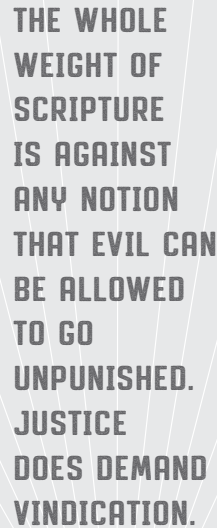
atonement, and rights the wrong for us. Vengeance therefore is not our privilege; it belongs to God.

Man cannot be trusted with vengeance because man's principle of vengeance is not justice but retaliation. Instead of justice, instead of righting a wrong, man seeks retaliation, and then you have the kind of thing which the feuding spirit represents.

Early in Scripture we meet with this spirit. In the Song of Lamech, of the house of Cain, we find a man's declaration that if he has been wronged, he will avenge himself not fairly and with justice, not fourfold, but seventy times seven he will avenge himself. When man is his own god, he has to be the ultimate vengeance and justice also, and man's justice is cruelty.

God has ordained human government as a means of partial justice, and reserved to Himself the final court of appeals and the final and full execution of justice. We cannot play God and take justice into our own hands; we cannot, by acting, speaking, or thinking, try to usurp the execution of justice. Because we are tainted by sin, our personal attempts to be just mean only that we fall into retaliation or winking at sin. We try, not to establish the standard of justice, but to establish and justify our pride, to hurt one who has hurt us.

For this reason, justice and vengeance cannot belong



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to man as an individual. Man cannot be trusted with this task of personal justice because inevitably he corrupts it, inevitably he destroys the very meaning of it.

Therefore the oft-repeated declaration of Scripture is this: Vengeance is mine, saith the Lord: I will repay. Justice is not forgotten: the requirement of vengeance, to vindicate by punishing the offender, is established. We can rest content in this great fact: in the hand of God, justice is sure and infallible.

Meanwhile, as we wait on the justice and vengeance of God upon evil, we have a duty, to manifest love and forgiveness. We are specifically told that God rewards us when we reveal such behavior. Why? Because when we return good for evil, we declare thereby that we understand God's own dealing with us in Christ. We rebelled against God and made our own will our gods, but the Lord in mercy placed the punishment for sin upon the sin-bearer, Jesus Christ, who paid our penalty for us and bought our salvation. Having received grace, we manifest our acceptance of it by revealing it. It is the man who has known the love and forgiveness of God who is ready to be loving and forgiving, not because he lacks a sense of justice, because his is a sharper sense of justice in Christ, but because he leaves vengeance to the Lord and fulfills his obligation, to reveal the redeeming nature of God. This, Paul says, is our permanent obligation, to reveal the redeeming nature of God. This, Paul says, is our permanent obligation and debt in the Lord, to love one another.

Remember, the Lord shall reward thee.

THE GOD OF WIDOWS

May 17, 1955

Good morning, friends. One of the great statements about God, one repeatedly made in Scripture, happens also to be one of the more neglected ones. In Exodus 22:22–23 we read, “Ye shall not afflict any widow, or fatherless child. If thou afflict them in any wise, and they cry at all unto me, I will surely hear their cry.” Deuteronomy 10:18 says that God “doth execute the judgment of the fatherless and widow.” We meet with this declaration more than once in the Psalms, as in 146:9, which declares, “The Lord preserveth the strangers (i.e., the foreigners); he relieveth the fatherless and widow: but the way of the wicked he turneth upside down.” And this declaration is repeated throughout Scripture. But let’s concentrate briefly on one of these statements, Proverbs 15:25: “The Lord will destroy the house of the proud: but he will establish the border of the widow.”

The border of the widow: to what did this have reference? “Border” can also be translated as “landmark.” In ancient times, the survey stones were put at the corners of the fields. When Israel entered the Promised Land, the land was surveyed and stone markers were

put at the corners of every man's field. In corrupt times, it was the custom of men to go out at night and remove those stone landmarks a few feet over and then get up early in the morning before the neighbor was up and plow along there so that the old site of the landmark would not show. And every year or two, they moved those landmarks or borders a few feet over until they had taken acre after acre of a man's field. It was especially done with widows. Babylonian and Assyrian records tell us of the constant trouble the courts had because defenseless widows came complaining that their neighbors were moving their landmarks each year and their land was disappearing on both sides as their greedy neighbors crowded them out by removing their landmarks. But God here declares that He will establish the borders of the widow, that He is the protector of the widow.

God frequently refers to Himself in Scripture as the God of Abraham, of Isaac, and of Jacob, but He also identifies Himself as the God of the widow. He declares that He is the defender, the champion of the widow.

In times of miracles, God especially manifested Himself with protective love towards widows. Take Elijah's day, for example: In 1 Kings 17 we read of two

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great miracles, and both concerned a widow, the widow of Zarephath. In poverty, having nothing, and yet out of her poverty having supplied the needs of the prophet Elijah, God blessed her with the miracles of the barrel of meal and the cruse of oil. We read also that when her son died, God raised that son from the dead and restored him to his widowed mother. The raising of the dead is a miracle which is the highest manifestation of Christ's power as revealed in the New Testament; yet we meet with this same miracle in the Old Testament, manifested towards a widow.

In Elisha's day, after Elijah's ministry, we see likewise God's love and His status as the protector of the widow, as the establisher of the borders of the widow. There was a poor widow who owed a certain sum of money. The creditors came, foreign creditors, to take away her two sons and sell them into slavery to secure the funds she owed them. Elisha asked her to borrow all the pots and pans which she could find, and there again we see the miracle of the oil multiplied, and the widow, selling that oil, met her creditor's demands.

Then we read that our Lord Jesus Christ had a special concern for widows also. Notice how He is thinking of them when He teaches. We have the story of the widow who asked the unjust judge to consider her cause. We see our Lord observing, shortly before His crucifixion, the people who came into the temple and cast money into the treasury, and noticing the poor widow who gave all that she had, the two mites, He called attention to this gift to all the disciples and all those who were round about, saying, "This poor widow has given more than all these because she has given

all that she had.” Then we see His love and concern as manifested toward the widow of Nain, whose only son, her only child, was being taken to the cemetery to be buried. He halted the funeral procession and said to the young man, “Young man, I say unto thee, Arise.” And that young man rose from the dead and was restored to his mother by Jesus.

Again, we see His concern for another poor widow, His mother Mary, when from the agony of the cross He looked down and provided for her future.

We see again in the apostolic church the important role that was given to widows by the apostles, an order of widows established to assist in the apostolic ministry to the church. And that order of widows developed into what we today call the deaconesses, still as of old an important arm of the church, showing forth the grace and the mercy of God.

God is the God of wisdom. This is an aspect of Scripture which needs to be emphasized. It is emphasized in Scripture because a widow, humanly speaking, is a helpless person, and yet God here shows forth His blessing to us in our helplessness and declares, “I will establish the borders of the widow.” He demonstrates in special miracles His love, concern, and care of them.

This is our God, the God of Abraham, of Isaac, and of Jacob, and the God of widows.

Blessed be the name of the Lord our God.

Give thanks unto him, and bless his name. For the Lord is good; his loving kindness endureth for ever, And his faithfulness unto all generations.

(Ps.100:4-5)

“THE STARS IN THEIR COURSES FOUGHT AGAINST SISERA”

November 2, 1954

Good morning, friends. Reading some Bible verses is like meeting old friends again. They vividly bring to mind past experiences and memories and make our lives richer by their presence. One such verse for me is Judges 5:20. During the 1930s, while I was in college, I recall feeling deeply depressed once over some of the evils I saw, the drift to war, indifference and unbelief, a moral outrage that no man righted, and similar things which left me overwhelmed with a sense of the omnipresence and power of evil. Then that evening this verse struck me with tremendous force and gave me a sense of victory and confidence in the face of everything. This was the verse: “The stars in their courses fought against Sisera.”

Now, this verse has primary reference to a providential cloudburst which brought unexpected ruin to the mighty army of the tyrant Sisera. But it has a further meaning: the whole created universe, the stars,

moon, and man, being creatures of and subject to the will of God, cannot but move to His appointed end. And the purpose of the righteous and Almighty God is only good and wholly glorious. The stars in their courses fought against Sisera because by their very creation and nature they could only witness to and serve the Lord God of Hosts. All of creation has but a single witness, and it is to the glory of God.

This witness cannot be silenced. Man may deny the Lord of Glory and turn his back on the Word of God. But, as Jesus said, "I tell you that, if these should hold their peace, the stones would immediately cry out" (Luke 19:40); but man cannot keep silent. As Scripture says, "Surely the wrath of man shall praise thee" (Ps. 76:10). The high priest who pronounced the sentence of death on Jesus Christ believed that thereby the Lord's work was frustrated and ended, when he declared, "It is expedient for us that one man should die for the people, and that the whole nation perish not" (John 11:50). But even as he made this statement, the world's most infamous speech, he was used of God and spoke prophetically. The end of his act was not his hopes realized, but the atoning work of Christ fulfilled and the redemption of God's people everywhere.

There can be no other outcome. Because, as the prophet Zechariah declared, "Out of him came forth the corner, out of him the nail, out of him the battle bow, out of him every oppressor together" (Zech.10:4).

The Lord, in speaking to Habakkuk, declared that "the just shall live by his faith" (Hab. 2:4); faith means our belief that all things are in the hand of the Lord, and He rules and overrules in all the events and things

of Creation. The witness to this divine government and purpose is total. As Habakkuk said, “The stone shall cry out of the wall, and the beam out of the timber shall answer it” (Hab. 2:11). Every fact under the sun, because it is created by God, can have only one witness, and it is to Him. Nothing man can do in his sin and wrath can alter that. “Behold, is it not of the Lord of hosts that the people shall labour in the very fire, and the people shall weary themselves for very vanity?” (Hab. 2:13). Man’s rebellion, his atheism, his sin, all are vanity: he cannot detract from God thereby or frustrate the Almighty. “They weary themselves for very vanity” when they imagine that the righteous God has been successfully frustrated or side-stepped by their sinful dealings. “For the earth shall be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea” (Hab. 2:14).

The stars in their courses fought against Sisera; the stone cried out of the wall against Babylon, and the beam out of the timber answered it.

This has not changed. Today the stars continue their course under the righteous plan of God, and the stone and the timber are still facts of the self-same God’s Creation. They cry out and testify against all evil, and they witness to the providential power of God.

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Having this faith, we can wait with patience for the working of the Lord, confident that He is able and He will and does prevail. Bradford Torrey expressed this faith beautifully in his hymn:

Not so in haste my heart!
Have faith in God, and wait;
Although He linger long,
He never comes too late.
He never cometh late;
He knoweth what is best;
Vex not thyself in vain;
Until He cometh, rest.
Until He cometh, rest,
Nor grudge the hours that roll;
The feet that wait for God
Are soonest at the goal.
Are soonest at the goal
That's not gained by speed;
Then hold thee still, my heart,
For I shall wait His lead. (1875)

HANNAH, MOTHER IN GOD

May 3, 1955

Good morning, friends. Since Mother's Day is just ahead, I'd like to turn our attention this morning to one of the great mothers of history, Hannah, the mother of Samuel.

When we first meet Hannah, she is a childless woman and deeply grieved over her condition. The fact that her husband loves her and is especially good to her does not assuage her sorrow. Elkanah, her husband, tries to comfort her, saying, "Hannah, why weepest thou? and why eatest thou not? and why is thy heart grieved? am I not better to thee than ten sons?" (1 Sam. 1:8).

Elkanah's remark has always seemed to me to be so typically masculine: a man feels that he is equal to anything and should be more important than everyone, including ten sons, in the sight of his wife. But the sometimes sad fact is that women have different ideas than what men expect. Harry Rimmer told a story some years ago to illustrate this point. A group of women in a Midwest country church were discussing whom a woman loved most, her husband, or her children. They assumed a hypothetical test: a fire in the night, with the wife having time only to save either her sick husband or her children, and then asked, which would you save?

One woman, known as Aunt Martha, had a ready answer. She said, "I'd save my own flesh and blood, of course; my husband's no relation to me!"

Well, Hannah expressed no such sentiment, but certainly she felt that she wanted, not only her husband's love, but fulfillment in children.

She went therefore into the sanctuary at Shiloh to pray for a son. We are told that "she was in bitterness of soul, and prayed unto the Lord, and wept sore" (v. 10). Now, in those days it was the custom for worshippers to pray out loud, and the sanctuary was characterized by a constant murmur of prayer, as worshippers, kneeling or standing here and there, prayed vocally to God. Scripture tells us, "Now Hannah, she spake in her heart; only her lips moved, but her voice was not heard: therefore Eli thought she had been drunken" (v. 13). Because Hannah, moved by her grief, swayed as she prayed, Eli, the high priest, hastily and unwisely concluded that she was a drunken woman of low reputation, "a daughter of Belial" (v. 16). In defense of Eli, it can be said that such women were a problem, in that their presence did neither them nor

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the sanctuary any good. In criticism of Eli, it must be pointed out that his criticism was hasty and uncalled for: before he knew the facts, he judged Hannah rudely and ordered her to get out and sober up.

Now, clearly Eli's remark was an insult to Hannah. She had every reason to be angry, and it would have been especially easy for her to turn on Eli and point out his sin. The whole episode could have been made a most humiliating one for Eli. After all, the woman he had insulted was the wife of a man of reasonable importance in his community. But Hannah made not the slightest criticism in her answer to Eli; she said, simply and respectfully, "No, my lord, I am a woman of a sorrowful spirit: I have drunk neither wine nor strong drink, but have poured out my soul before the Lord. Count not thine handmaid for a daughter of Belial: for out of the abundance of my complaint and grief have I spoken hitherto" (vv. 15–16).

Eli, humbled and abashed by her faith and character, answered in like spirit, "Go in peace: and the God of Israel grant thee thy petition that thou has asked of him" (v. 17).

This little incident tells us much concerning Hannah's faith and character, and the reason why she was both a beloved wife and a great mother, as well as a woman of rich faith.

The last chapter of Proverbs, in discussing the ideal woman, says of her, "She openeth her mouth with wisdom; and in her tongue is the law of kindness" (Prov. 31:26).

This is indeed a great virtue and a true indication of faith. It is much easier for one in a dominant position,

or in a position of authority, as men usually are, to speak with kindness: it costs them less. But for a woman, whose tongue can often be her only weapon or answer, to be governed in her speech by the law of kindness and to be guided by wisdom in speaking is an indication of high faith, godly discipline, and great patience.

In the words of Solomon, “Her children arise up, and call her blessed; her husband also, and he praiseth her ... Favour is deceitful, and beauty is vain: but a woman that feareth the Lord, she shall be praised.” (Prov. 31:28, 30)

THE BOOK OF RUTH

(RUTH 1)

September 21, 1954

Good morning, friends. One of the most beautiful stories of all time is the book of Ruth. This morning we will look at the first chapter and the events which led a woman to say, call me no more Naomi, which means pleasant, but call me Mara, bitter, for my life has become a bitter one. The book of Ruth tells a story of events that occurred about thirteen and a half centuries before Christ, “in the days when the judges ruled.” It was an era of often unspeakable corruption, of perversity, and social chaos.

We are told that there was a long drought in the land, or dry spell which led to famine and social disaster. Many small farmers lost their places as the crops dried up and fruit trees withered. One such small farmer was Elimelech, husband of Naomi. With their two sons, Elimelech and Naomi hopefully migrated into Moab after losing their farm in Bethlehem. Like the dust bowl dwellers of our 1930s, they had no choice but to move.

Thus it was economic necessity which drove this family into Moab, not personal preference. For an Israelite, a Moabite was hardly a fit person to associate with. The Moabites were an immoral people in the

main, and a low-grade nation. The family had moved to Moab only because they wanted work, and Moab was the place for it. They hoped some day to return to Bethlehem.

Then Elimelech died, and Naomi was left with two sons in a strange land. To make matters worse, the sons, Mahlon and Chilion, married two Moabite girls, Ruth and Orpha. Naomi's grief at this was perhaps quenched by the character and devotion of the girls, and their obvious love of her. Then, to make matters worse, both her sons died, and Naomi was left alone in a foreign land.

There was only one thing to do, and Naomi made plans for it immediately, to return to Bethlehem. She had left her home town with a family, and now she was returning alone.

Her daughters-in-law, Ruth and Orpha, offered to return with her. It was to Naomi's advantage to take the girls, but she thought of their welfare, and refused them. Orpha returned to her own parents, but Ruth said, "Intreat me not to leave thee, or to return from following after thee: for whither thou goest, I will go; and where thou lodgest, I will lodge: thy people shall be my people, and thy God my God: Where thou diest, will I die, and there will I be buried: the Lord do so to me, and more also, if ought but death part thee and me" (vv. 16–17).

And so, the two women, Naomi and Ruth, returned

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to Bethlehem, the hometown girl, now grown old and widowed, together with her foreign daughter-in-law. People had trouble recognizing Naomi: the years had been hard on her. When they spoke to her by name, she bitterly denied her name, Naomi, which means “pleasant,” and said, “call me Mara: for the Almighty hath dealt very bitterly with me. I went out full and the Lord hath brought me home again empty: why then call ye me Naomi, seeing the Lord hath testified against me, and the Almighty hath afflicted me?” (vv. 20–21).

Call me Mara, she said, and Mara means “bitter.” Life had become bitter for Naomi, and she felt bitter about God’s treatment of her and her hopes.

Many of us feel at times like Naomi. We feel that God has denied us and frustrated us at every point, and resentment pours out of us.

And yet God blessed Naomi most of all by this affliction. The very things which were a source of bitterness to Naomi became her greatest and deepest joy, and a worldwide blessing to all nations. The very chain of events which led to her bitterness not only restored her farm, led to the birth of King David, and ultimately to Jesus Christ, but left the entire world richer for their occurrence.

What to the world is as bitter as death, God makes into a harvest of good to those who trust in Him.

Naomi and Ruth were both insignificant people in highly troubled times. But God was working, not only in the great events of the day, but in and through His humblest saints. The book of Ruth tells us that the one true circumstance of faith is God. Not environment, death, heredity, race, class, or any such factor is decisive,

but only this, the Lord Himself. If at times, like Naomi, we feel bitter and are tempted to say, call me Mara, let us remember that there is no defeat with God to those who love Him and are the called according to His purpose. Of Him we can joyfully say, "Thou art my hiding place; thou shall preserve me from trouble; thou shalt compass me about with songs of deliverance" (Ps. 32:7).

THE KINSMAN'S FIELDS

(RUTH 2)

September 28, 1954

Good morning, friends. Last week we began a study of the book of Ruth and saw the tragedy that overwhelmed a small and insignificant family when a drought wiped out small farmers. We heard the widowed Naomi, her sons both dead, cry out with grief, "Call me Mara," that is, bitter, because my life is no longer pleasant but bitter. God has forgotten me, Naomi said, amidst all the perplexing and great social problems of the day. Naomi was inclined to doubt that God was the God of small details and little people, but we saw, as we looked ahead, that God blessed Naomi most of all by her affliction. Although Ruth and Naomi were both insignificant people in highly troubled times, God was working, not only in the great events of the day, but in and through His humblest saints. The one true circumstance of faith is God. Not environment, death, heredity, race, class, or any such factor is decisive, but only this, the Lord Himself. This Ruth believed, although Naomi doubted.

The second chapter of the book of Ruth shows us the foreign daughter-in-law, Ruth, supporting her

mother as they settled down in Bethlehem. In ancient Israel, Biblical provisions were made for the poor of every community. Some financial assistance was given: every third year, believers gave a second tithe for the poor. But the major part of the relief was a system known as gleaning. No farmer was permitted to harvest all the wheat, fruit, or produce of his fields. Some had to be left for the poor. The needy then applied to the owner for permission to go in and harvest the remainder. The owner of the field could refuse permission to persons who were undeserving. On the other hand, those granted permission had to work to get the gleanings.

Ruth went out to glean, and providentially went to the field of a rich kinsman of her mother-in-law. This kinsman, Boaz, had already been impressed by Ruth's faith and character, and so he instructed his foreman to keep an eye on Ruth, lest she be molested, and also to instruct the harvest hands to leave extra sheaves of wheat in her path so that Ruth would have enough for her use and some besides to sell.

Ruth's faith and character had not escaped the eyes of man. How could it escape the eyes of God? There is nothing that you and I can see or know that God has not known, yet ordained, to the fullest degree. Boaz the man was quick to help. God's help sometimes seems less quick to our blind eyes, but His help is more abiding and is eternal in its implications.

We are never forgotten of God, nor are any of our needs too small or too remote to be encompassed by God's knowledge, love, and providence. The book of Ruth tells us that God is the mightiest environment of any human life. We tend to feel that we are surrounded

by an environment made up of indifferent, meaningless, or hostile objects, persons, and things. We live in a world which to us is alien, and we feel that our environment is something we have to contend with or work against. But if we recognize that God is the only true environment of human life, then we have reached that same serene faith which characterized Ruth.

There was no bitterness in Ruth, only faith. She believed in the Lord and therefore surrendered her life and its problems into His hands. As a result, she walked free of worry and fretfulness, serene and unafraid. Such faith has its reward. To every Ruth comes the Heavenly Friend, the divine kinsman, to whom belongs all the pastures and fields, and all the good things of life. He comes and by His providence makes all things work together for good. He comes and often leaves us to continue our gleanings in the fields, but we work under His watchful eye, and we have the assurance of His love and care. This world is our kinsman's field; it belongs to the Lord; and therefore we have the assurance that He will care for His own with goodness and with joy.

Our responsibility is to work on in serenity and faith. As Paul wrote to the Philippians, in the words of Phillips translation:

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Don't worry over anything whatever; tell God every detail of your needs in earnest and thankful prayer, and the peace of God which transcends human understanding, will keep constant guard over your hearts and minds as they rest in Christ Jesus.
(Phil. 4:6-7)

OUR NEXT OF KIN

(RUTH 3)

October 5, 1954

Good morning, friends. The past two weeks we have been studying the book of Ruth and have seen that our only true environment is God Himself. We tend to regard the focus of this world, heredity, environment, governments, and men, as the real powers, as our real environment, but Scripture declares that this is not so. God is the true and mightiest environment of any human life, and by faith we have this omnipotent God as our sufficiency and our life.

We saw also that our own perspective on our lives is limited. Naomi saw her life as a bereaved and forsaken one: a widow who had lost both home and husband lost her children also; certainly this seems to be a pattern of defeat and frustration. So Naomi felt, and cried out, "Call me Mara," or bitter, because my life is a bitter one and the Lord "has dealt very bitterly with me" (Ruth 1:20). But the completed pattern of Naomi's life as we see it now was not one of defeat and bitterness but of victory and splendor. Our perspective is a limited one where our own lives are concerned; but God sees the pattern in its entirety, and His plan and providence are good.

In Ruth 3, we find Naomi suggesting to Ruth, her foreign daughter-in-law, that she go to the threshing floor and seek out Naomi's kinsman, Boaz, and ask him to perform the duty of a kinsman to her. To understand this act, we need to know the nature of Biblical society in ancient Israel. The earth belonged to the Lord, and Scripture asserts this without qualification as true for all time. No government has any title to an inch of the earth. When Israel entered the Promised Land, the soil was assigned to the families as theirs under a stewardship to the Lord. The land could not be sold; only so many years of its produce could be sold. On the fiftieth year, the year of Jubilee, the land reverted to the family. However, at any time, the kinsman-redeemer, the next of kin, could redeem the land by purchasing it for the family. The next of kin had a threefold redemption task: *first*, he could restore the forfeited property; *second*, he could redeem his relatives from slavery; and, *third*, he could avenge the death of his relatives. A *fourth* duty was this: he could marry a widow in the family to carry on the family line.

This was Ruth's request of Boaz: "spread therefore thy skirt [or wing] over thine handmaid; for thou art a near kinsman" (Ruth 3:9). Become, she asked, a guardian

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and protector by marrying me and redeeming our lost family inheritance.

This office of kinsman-redeemer has a typical or symbolic significance of great importance. God asserts in Ezekiel 16:8 that He made Himself the kinsman-redeemer of Israel by spreading His skirt or wing over them and making them His people.

When Jesus preached in the synagogue at Nazareth, he quoted Isaiah 61:1–2 and said, “This day is this scripture fulfilled in your ears” (Luke 4:16–21). He meant by this that He Himself was the divine kinsman-redeemer of man. Jesus Christ took upon Himself flesh and blood and became next of kin to all men in order to be our redeemer.

His task as our redeemer is a threefold one. *First* of all, the property which we have lost and forfeited is paradise, and Christ restores paradise to us. By faith we have a taste of it in this life, and the fullness in the world to come. By our rebellion against God, we have fallen into captivity to sin and have become its slaves. From this slavery, He redeems us. By our treason to God’s Kingdom, we have been placed under sentence of death, and from this penalty He redeems us and gives us eternal life. This is the Lord’s work as our kinsman-redeemer.

This is a great and magnificent fact for us to rejoice in. We all of us have this inheritance and privilege as Christians. Jesus Christ, the second person of the Trinity, God manifest, is our next of kin. It may be fine to have a millionaire relative, but after all, what money can do for us is limited. It may be a privilege to have great men in our family, but it does not free us from the power and

penalty of sin and death or restore paradise to us. But when God is our Father and Jesus Christ is our next of kin, we have that glorious liberty which is the privilege of the sons of God. We have a peace which surpasses understanding and a hope which nothing can take away. By faith we receive God as our sufficiency and our life, our true environment, and God the Son as our next of kin.

He says to us,

The mountains shall depart, and the hills be removed; but my kindness shall not depart from thee, neither shall the covenant of my peace be removed, saith the Lord that hath mercy on thee. O thou afflicted, tossed with tempest, and not comforted, behold, I will lay thy stones with fair colors, and lay thy foundations with sapphires ... No weapon that is formed against thee shall prosper; and every tongue that shall rise against thee in judgment thou shalt condemn. This is the heritage of the servants of the Lord, and their righteousness is of me, saith the Lord. (Isa. 54:10–11, 17)

THE INHERITANCE

(RUTH 4)

October 12, 1954

Good morning, friends. In studying the book of Ruth, we have seen that God is man's only true environment, not heredity, environment, governments, and men, but God alone is the real power and effective agent in all history.

We have seen also that our own perspective on our lives is a limited one and therefore not to be trusted. Like Naomi, we see the grief and tragedy of our position and are ready to cry out, "The Lord has dealt very bitterly with me." We are impatient with God and want here and now what only eternity can give us, or what in the fullness of time will be ours, because we lack faith in His control and the perfection of His pattern.

We have also seen that even as ancient Hebrew society had its God-ordained kinsman-redeemer, the next of kin who restored forfeited property, redeemed man from slavery, and avenged the innocent blood, so we too have our next of kin. Our next of kin is the Lord Himself. He restores paradise to us, frees us from the slavery to sin, and gives us ultimate and final victory over death.

In Ruth 4, the last chapter of the book of Ruth, we find Boaz taking steps to secure the redemption of Naomi's land and the levirate marriage of Ruth. Boaz took the man who was closer kin to Naomi than himself to the city court for a hearing before ten men of the elders of the city. There he confronted the man with the situation. Someone, he said, has to fulfill the family's responsibility to redeem and restore our brother Elimelech's property to his widow Naomi. The privilege is first of all yours, as the closest kin, and then mine. Will you do it?

The man promptly replied, "I will redeem it" (4:4). As a man of means, it was no problem to him to purchase the field and restore it to a relative as a gift. But then Boaz added a condition: "What day thou buyest the field of the hand of Naomi, thou must buy it also of Ruth the Moabitess, the wife of the dead, to raise up the name of the dead upon his inheritance" (4:5). At this the relative drew back and said he had no desire to marry this foreign girl and rear children by her to carry on Elimelech's family name; it would hurt his own inheritance to do so; "redeem thou my right to thyself; for I cannot redeem it" (4:6).

There is a great deal of irony in this passage. The man was ready to put out a good sum of money to restore land to a relative, but he was unwilling to marry one of the world's greatest women "lest I mar mine own inheritance" (4:6), lest he spoil his family line! Through Ruth was born King David, her great grandson, and ultimately, Jesus Christ Himself. The thoughtless kinsman rejected participation in the world's greatest genealogy lest he spoil his family line!

By evading his responsibility, he lost his greatest opportunity and inheritance. Too often, we are like that man: for fear of hurting our prospects or our situation, we evade our responsibility and lose our greatest inheritance. The Lord gives to us, not as we run away from our obligations in order to please ourselves, but only as we meet them in all their implications.

Boaz assumed the obligation gladly and married Ruth. Unto them a son was born, Obed, the grandfather of David. By the providence of God, two very diverse lives were brought together and blessed, Ruth and Boaz. Both were true saints, but how different their backgrounds. Ruth came from a background of wild paganism, hardship, and suffering. Boaz knew only wealth and comfort and came from a godly people and family. The book of Ruth points up the fact that circumstances neither make nor mar saints; the Lord Himself is the sufficiency and environment of trusting souls. Moreover, trusting and faithful men and women are the instruments of the Lord, and He works in and through them to accomplish things far beyond their imagination, kin, or scope of view. Neither Ruth nor Boaz could see the ultimate fruit of their union in Jesus Christ. Neither could see the universal scope of

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their little history nor its abiding typical meaning. What they did know was this: the Lord cares for His own, and He will not forsake the soul of those who trust in Him.

Your life and mine have a meaning beyond today. That meaning can only be read and comprehended in its fullness in eternity. Until then, we must walk by faith.

O Lord, how great are thy works! and thy thoughts are very deep.

For thou, Lord, hast made me glad through thy work: I will triumph in the work of thy hands. (Ps. 92:5, 4)

THE BEGINNING OF KNOWLEDGE (PROVERBS 1:7)

May 31, 1955

Good morning, friends. According to Solomon, in Proverbs 1:7, “The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge: but fools despise wisdom and instruction.” How are we to interpret this statement?

When Solomon uses the word “beginning,” he means thereby something rather different from our word “beginning.” The Hebrew word has a richer connotation. We might understand it better if we think of the Greek expression in the book of Revelation, “I am the Alpha and the Omega,” i.e., I am the A and the Z of all things, in other words, the essential part. The Hebrew word “beginning” has the same meaning: thus what Solomon said is this: the fear of the Lord is the essential part of knowledge.

Now, what is meant here when we speak of fear? It means, not terror, but fear in the sense of being afraid of transgression, being afraid of going astray. It is also what we call humility and reverence. And the beginning

or essential part of all knowledge, whether it be spiritual, scientific, philosophical, or psychological, is indeed the fear of the Lord, reverence and humility.

We can go further and say that there is no real knowledge apart from this, the fear of the Lord, a recognition that He is and that we are responsible to Him, a fear of transgressing His divine commandments, reverence and humility as we recognize always that in all our learning we but follow in the footsteps of the Creator.

Finally, we must notice one thing further: it is not the fear of God but the fear of the Lord of which Solomon speaks; he spoke, not of the god of the philosophers, but the God of Israel, Jehovah, the God and Father of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. The god of the philosophers is only an idea whom no one worships or fears: the God of the Bible is the living Lord who made heaven and earth and before whom we stand in awe and fear.

Solomon continues, in Proverbs 1:10–19, to describe the way of sinners as contrasted to the way of wisdom. The way of sinners he describes *first* of all as essentially self-will: the sinner is one who despises God and the will of God in His Word and seeks his own will instead. *Secondly*, his life is characterized by violence and corruption, or more specifically cruelty and covetousness. He wants to kill, or witness killing, or enjoy it vicariously in stories, films, plays, and the like, and he desires the

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possessions of other men. His desire for the possessions of other men leads him either to open violence or to the tacit approval of violence in actuality or in fiction. The modern taste for violence is based on man's sinful desire for the possessions of other men: it is rooted and grounded in covetousness.

A man who makes himself his own god, who determines for himself what is right and wrong, immediately rules out of his world both God and other men. He says in effect, "There is nothing that counts under the sun except this: my will." The Christian says, "Thy will be done." The sinner says, "My will be done, because no one else matters, neither God nor man." And what does my will demand? Well, that I have what I desire. The sinner is a covetous man. He desires the possessions of other men; he is never satisfied, because he is by nature insatiable. Give him one thing, and he desires another, and his desire grows and grows like a cancer. Nothing fulfills his will because he must have everything, an impossible goal, inasmuch as he is god in his own eyes.

Cruelty and covetousness characterize his life. He establishes his superiority over other men by being cruel and hurtful towards others and by seizing their possessions.

The Christian is counseled to love his enemies and to be content with such things as he has, for in God we have all things: the cattle on a thousand hills are ours; we lack nothing when we walk in Him. To the Christian, the greatest gain is peace with God and peace in God.

Thus Solomon says, "My son, consent not to this way because the ends of it are death and destruction, and a man who lays in wait for the blood of others, who

casts a net for the feet of others, shall fall into that net. So are the ways of everyone that is greedy of gain, that taketh away the life of the owners thereof." True wisdom, Solomon declares, has as its essential part the fear of the Lord. This fear is a blessed fear, because it leads to peace with God and peace in God. It leads to joy and thanksgiving.

For the Lord taketh pleasure in his people; he will beautify the meek with salvation. (Ps. 149:4)

Praise ye the Lord. Praise God in his sanctuary: praise him in the firmament of his power. Praise him for his mighty acts: praise him according to his excellent greatness. Praise him with the sound of the trumpet: praise him with the psaltery and harp. Praise him with the timbrel and dance: praise him with stringed instruments and organs. Praise him upon the loud cymbals: praise him upon the high sounding cymbals. Let every thing that hath breath praise the Lord. Praise ye the Lord. (Ps.150)

"IN ALL THY WAYS ACKNOWLEDGE HIM"

January 17, 1956

Good morning, friends. James M. Gray once said, "The first promise that ever gripped me was Proverbs 3:6, 'In all thy ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct thy paths.' It was staggering. It could not possibly mean what it said. I went around it as a kitten does its first saucer of milk. By and by I tasted it, I put it to the test, and body, mind, and spirit have been nourished by it ever since."

This experience of Gray's must be ours also, and to make it truly so, let's examine the promise even as he did, that we might taste and see that the Lord is good. This verse is set in a context which calls for faith and insists on trust as an essential part of faith. Solomon's counsel is that we stop overvaluing ourselves and begin trusting God. "Trust in the Lord with all thine heart; and lean not unto thine own understanding" (Prov. 3:5). "Be not wise in thine own eyes: fear the Lord, and depart from evil" (Prov. 3:7). To place a high value on our own wisdom and to be confident of our own ability to govern our lives inevitably places us on easy terms with evil. No man who leans on his own understanding and

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is wise in his own eyes can ever avoid being compromised with evil or involved in it, because any position other than a trusting dependence on the Lord involves a revolt against Him and so evil a challenge to His sovereignty, that all other acts are only incidental to it and derivative from it. A man either trusts God, or he does not, and if he does not trust in the Lord, he is in effect challenging the righteousness and government of God.

We are asked to acknowledge Him in all our ways, i.e., to give Him sovereignty and trust in every department and every detail of our lives. This does not mean idleness or passivity on our

part, but aggressive action to bring every thought into captivity to Christ, every activity into service to God, every area into obedience to His Word and will.

When we do this, the Lord promises to direct our paths. This means to make the way straight or plain, clearing obstructions. The obstructions are clearly there before us and impossible for us to deal with, but He promises to direct our path, to clear the obstructions. The same word is used in Isaiah 40:3–5 of clearing the highway in the desert. There God the Father declares that for Jesus Christ, God the Son, “Every valley shall be exalted, and every mountain and hill shall be made low:

and the crooked shall be made straight, and the rough places plain: And the glory of the Lord shall be revealed, and all flesh shall see it together: for the mouth of the Lord hath spoken it.”

What the Lord God did for His Christ, in and through Him He offers to do for us, to direct our path, to clear it of all obstructions, never to our glory but always to His. Moreover, trust and obedience on our part will be health to our bodies and marrow to our bones (Prov. 3:8).

This offer is clear-cut and without equivocation: “In all thy ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct thy paths.” What is your answer?

THE PRICE OF WISDOM

June 21, 1955

Good morning, friends. Last week we saw that, according to the Bible, wisdom is basically religious and practical, rather than intellectual and bookish. And the first and foremost human test of wisdom is the home. The wise man is he who is able to meet the requirements of family life in obedience to God's will, in honor and respect for the family and its authority, and in fellowship with men.

Wisdom does not mean avoiding the world and its problems but meeting them with God. Avoiding men and the world settles none of our problems, because, while we can leave the world, we cannot leave ourselves. The root and source of sin, as we saw last week, is in our souls, and to overcome that we do not flee from the world, but must be in the world and yet not of the world. We face life and its evils with an inner security which comes from the Lord.

As we go through the book of Proverbs, we see that it is essentially a practical book as it deals with wisdom in these two spheres, in the home and in the world, and foremost in the home. Proverbs deals at great length with our home life. It speaks of the responsibility of men and the responsibility of women, and it does so

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with a sense of humor and with seriousness. As we read through the book of Proverbs, we see the richness of its humor, and humor is a saving grace. The Lord certainly has it because He created us, didn't He? And we need a sense of humor as we deal with one another, especially in the home.

We see also, as we go through the book of Proverbs, that wisdom cries in the streets, as

the concluding verses of chapter 1 tell us. "She uttereth her voice in the streets: She crieth in the chief place of concourse, in the openings of the gates: in the city she uttered her words saying, How long, ye simple ones, will ye love simplicity? and the scorners delight in their scorning, and fools hate knowledge?" (vv. 20–22).

Wisdom calls in the streets and goes up and down like a street preacher saying, "Here it is." And men will not take it. Offering it freely, and men passing by wisdom because no man accepts wisdom freely. They buy it only at the price of their lives. Not until we surrender our lives in the Lord do we get that wisdom which comes from the Lord. Not until we lay our life completely in His hand do we have that wisdom which enables us to see the deep things of God and to walk according to His will. The price of wisdom is the surrender of our own lives.

We see also that wisdom is offered by the Lord, as the beginning of this first chapter tells us, to the open,

to the foolish, to the young and to the ignorant. This is a different plan of education than that of most schools. Schools have had entrance standards from the beginning of time. Plato, over the gates of his school, had inscribed these words, "Let none enter here save geometricians only." Only those who were masters of geometry could apply to Plato to enter his school. And to this day, advanced schools have entrance requirements: let only the wise come in, only those who have learning.

But this school of the Lord, concerning which Proverbs speaks, is open to all on one condition: none can enter who does not first of all see his own worthlessness before the Lord; none can enter bringing credentials. We only enter as we throw our credentials away and say, "Nothing in my hands I bring, simply to thy cross I cling." This, then, is the meaning of the wisdom which is offered by Proverbs to those who are open, to make them subtle and to make them wise.

Ho, every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters,
and he that hath no money; come ye, buy, and eat;
yea, come, buy wine and milk without money and
without price. (Isa. 55:1)

SEARCH FOR WISDOM

(PROVERBS 2)

July 12, 1955

Good morning, friends. As we begin our study of Proverbs 2, we find that Solomon directs his instructions concerning wisdom to the young in particular. Too often, we learn wisdom when it is too late, when we have already gone the way of trouble and difficulty, when the only way we can enter into the Kingdom is, as our Lord said, lame, halt or blind, having to pluck out our eye, or lose an arm or a leg (Matt. 18:8–9), i.e., to lose a part of our life because we have paid for it at the cost of experience. Too often, we learn wisdom too late to live it. And so Solomon addresses his words concerning wisdom to the young.

He says that wisdom is not book learning; it is a way of life, an indwelling power. And he says concerning wisdom, in this second chapter, four things. In the first four verses he says wisdom is something we must seek. “Seekest her as silver, and searchest for her as for hid treasures” (v. 4). Hid treasures in antiquity were usually buried. Men had little confidence in banks, and so treasure, their wealth, was usually buried, and buried

deep. It involved considerable digging to locate buried treasure. Seeking her as silver, we mine for wisdom.

Mining then, much more than now, was a difficult process. Mining in our day is still a difficult and a dangerous task. Those of you who have been, as I, in a mine probably decided that the last thing in the world you would want to be is a miner. It involves no small trouble and difficulty to go into a mine, deep down under the earth, and see how under the stress of pressure, great beams buckle and begin to give in, to give you one idea only, to get out.

Mining is a difficult process, and Solomon says that we must search for wisdom, seek it out as the miner seeks out gold and silver, digs for it, works hard. Wisdom must be searched out. It is under the surface of events. As we go along day after day, the same thing happens to two people, but to one person it becomes wisdom, and to the other it is nothing because wisdom is never on the surface: it is underneath, under the surface of events, and a man gains wisdom only with difficulty, only by digging. And so the *first* point Solomon makes concerning wisdom is that it must be searched.

Then the *second* point he makes is paradoxically the reverse. First he says the only way to find wisdom is to dig for it, to search for it, and then he says wisdom is only the gift of God. "For the Lord giveth wisdom," he declares in verses 6-7, "out of his mouth cometh

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knowledge and understanding. He layeth up sound wisdom for the righteous: he is a buckler to them who walketh uprightly.” So wisdom is both our seeking, it is our effort, and yet it is only the gift of God. A paradox, and yet both statements are true.

We have seen that the motto, so to speak, of the book of Proverbs is this, “The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge,” i.e., the essential part of it. The conclusion of the book is Proverbs 28:5. What is the end of wisdom? “They that seek the Lord understand all things.” “They that seek God understand all things.” The beginning of wisdom is the fear of the Lord, and the end of it is this—the understanding of all things.

When we search for the Lord with our whole heart, mind, and being, and surrender ourselves to Him, we have an insight into things that the world does not have. And the Christian who is truly a Christian in the fullest sense of the word has an understanding of himself which exceeds that of any psychologist. He has an understanding of others, he has an understanding of the world, an understanding of all things that come to him, because he has the Lord and the wisdom of the Lord as he meets the world and himself. And so they that seek God understand all things. So wisdom is found only by those that seek it, but wisdom is only the gift of God. There is no other source of wisdom. The Lord is the beginning and the end of wisdom.

Therefore, we need wisdom in order to live in the world and yet avoid becoming its victim. “And this is the victory which overcometh the world, even our faith” (1 John 5:4).

WISDOM AS UNDERSTANDING

(PROVERBS 2:12–19)

July 19, 1955

Good morning, friends. Last week, as we studied Proverbs 2, we saw that Solomon said, *first* of all, that we must search for wisdom under the surface of events and things, and *second*, it is the gift of God.

This morning, let's look further into his analysis of wisdom. Now, the *third* point that Solomon makes about wisdom, in verses 12–19, is that wisdom preserves us from evil society. Man lives in fellowship. The hermit is a contradiction. Man was born for society. He cannot live alone. And so the problem of man is this—there is nothing that draws him away from God more than the wrong kind of companionship, nothing that can destroy him more quickly than that, and yet he cannot separate himself from men. He cannot live, as it were, in a vacuum, as a hermit going into the desert to avoid temptation.

In the early church, in the third and fourth centuries in particular, the hermits arose. It was a powerful movement of the day and was more Greek than Christian, but the essence of it was this—the hermits,

IF WE ARE FORGETFUL OF GOD, WE ARE FALSE TO OUR MAKER, FALSE TO THE WORLD, AND FALSE TO OUR OWN NATURE AS CREATURES. TO BE TRUE TO OURSELVES, WE MUST BE TRUE TO GOD.



forerunners of monasticism, separated themselves from human society. They went into Asia Minor, and especially into North Africa, into desert places and lived there. If they were unable to support themselves, they had people coming from town, making trips perhaps once a week to leave food for them. But if they came and left food for them, it was often at some point where no one could see them, so that the hermit lived without any contact with man.

We have many of the records of these men, writings that they wrote. They went into the desert to escape temptation, to live a godly life, a perfect life, but when

they went into the desert, they took themselves with them. And there in the desert they underwent every kind of torment, every kind of temptation, and lived a more damnable life than a man could in the heart of the great cities of the time. Why? Because they could never run away from the sin that was in them. And so the whole history of the hermits is a sorry one.

Man has to live in fellowship. Solomon recognizes that: to be in the world and yet not of the world. And who is to be avoided? From whom will wisdom deliver us, as we are in the world and yet not of the world? Verse 12 speaks of the evil man, “the man that speaketh

forward (or perverse) things.” The world is full of people of that sort. They have a spirit of contradiction to everything that is good. If a thing is good, they are against it. They hate passionately everything that is decent and godly. We are told of this type of man that he rejoices in evil, evil in himself and in others, this is his delight.

And this kind of person, age after age has been popular, especially so in our time. When you study the heroes of popular literature today, you see that the only kind of man who by and large is successful as a hero is an evil man. Nine-tenths of our literature glorifies that type of man. The more sophisticated, the more intellectual, the more literary a novel is, the more corrupt its outlook, the more it reveals that the hero of our time is hardly more than a gangster, a criminal, an outlaw. And even in the average family magazine, it increasingly is evident that the only man who can be a proper hero is one who has some real weaknesses, some real defects, because if he is a good man, the readers won't like him.

There is a perversity about man today that makes it impossible for him to like one who is truly good. And so the purpose of wisdom is to deliver the believer, the wise one, from the way of the evil man who walks in the ways of darkness, who rejoices to do evil, delights in the forwardness of the wicked, whose ways are crooked and forward or perverse in their paths. And that type of person has a tremendous attraction to the younger generation, and Solomon's advice is all too timely in our day.

Then the *second* thing Solomon says in regards to wisdom delivering us from evil companions, in verses

16–20, is that it is “To deliver thee from the strange woman, even from the stranger which flattereth with her words; Which forsaketh the guide of her youth, and forgetteth the covenant of her God. For her house inclineth unto death, and her paths unto the dead. None that go unto her return again neither take they hold of the paths of life. That thou mayest walk in the way of good men, and keep the paths of the righteous.”

The first thing Solomon says about the strange woman is that she is false, false in three ways; she is false, *first* of all, to those she entices, the young men with whom she commits fornication or adultery, she lies to them, she flatters them. It is the nature of sin that it must lie. A sinner cannot help but lie. He will lie when it is pointless. He will lie when it will bring him no advantage. Sometimes, when I talk to people of this sort, it amazes me the kind of stories they will tell, utterly pointless, no purpose to it but this, I can certainly lie to a preacher. And, as I must be with them patient in all things, I cannot confront them too bluntly with the kind of people that they are. But they lie because they are sinners: it’s their witness to the world. And the meaning of that witness is, “See, I am as God. I can delude people. I can play with them. I can do as I please.” The lie is the witness of the sinner. And so the adulterous woman is false first of all to those whom she entices.

Second, she is false to her husband. And notice what the husband is called here, “The guide of her youth.” The husband is the guide of the wife: the guide of her youth and the guide of her age. And the husband who fails to live up to his responsibility in God leaves a family bereft of the leadership it needs because his role is this—to

be a guide in all things, provide the leadership, morally, spiritually, in every respect. She is false to her husband.

Then the *third* falsity is this, “and forgetteth the covenant of her God” (v. 17). This is the basic falsehood. If we are forgetful of God, we are false to our Maker, false to the world, and false to our own nature as creatures. To be true to ourselves, we must be true to God. To have an understanding mind and heart, we must be obedient to the Lord, “For the Lord giveth wisdom: out of his mouth cometh knowledge and understanding” (2:6).

INHERITING THE EARTH

(PROVERBS 2:20-22)

July 26, 1955

Good morning, friends. Solomon declares, in Proverbs 2:20–22, that the purpose of wisdom is “that thou mayest walk in the way of good men, and keep the paths of the righteous. For the upright shall dwell in the land, and the perfect shall remain in it. But the wicked shall be cut off from the earth, and the transgressors shall be rooted out of it.”

This is a familiar declaration of Scripture: it is repeated in the Sermon on the Mount: “Blessed are the meek: for they shall inherit the earth” (Matt. 5:5). What does it mean? How do the Lord’s people inherit the earth?

According to Scripture, they inherit the earth in a double sense. *First* of all, it is the Lord’s people, who walk in faithfulness to Him, who alone truly enjoy the earth. The man who is at war with God is a driven man who races through life without living it, and laps up this world without tasting it. His days are haunted by the shadow of his conscience and by the wrath of God, and his days are feverish with a quest for life in things rather than in the Lord. He talks about enjoying life,

but the actuality is that life rather frightens him. In the words of Moses, they “grope at noonday, as the blind gropeth in the darkness” (Deut. 28:29). “The sound of a shaken leaf shall chase them; and they shall flee, as fleeing from a sword; and they shall fall when none pursueth” (Lev. 26:36).

The land which the Lord’s people inherited was Canaan, and when they walked in faithfulness to the Lord, they possessed the land and reaped its riches in quietness and confidence. Even this fallen world is good and wonderful in all its ways, but too many people are too driven by their evil consciences to be able to enjoy either life or the world. They live in the vacuum of their own tainted hearts, in the emptiness of their lives, in the loneliness of their selfish souls. A million people can pass near them, but they cannot reach out and touch one of them with love and kinship. If they marry, nearness means, not love and wealth of life, but suffering and punishment as it exposes their emptiness and threatens their selfishness.

But the righteous find strength and joy even in trouble and sorrow. Life for them is progressively richer. The simple things of life, eating and drinking, walking and talking, sleep and work, all alike have a richness. Men, women, and children are met and received with a delight in sharing life’s common grace. Of them it

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is said, “ye shall lie down, and none shall make you afraid” (Lev. 26:6). For the blessed meek, the tamed of God, inherit not only the earth, but in quietness and in confidence they possess their own souls.

But there is a *second* meaning to this text that points to its fullness. The land of inheritance of which Solomon spoke was, of course, Canaan, the Promised Land. But Canaan was not the fullness of the promise, but only a foreshadowing, a type of it. The true Promised Land of the chosen people of God is the eternal Kingdom of God.

Both life and the world as we know them represent only a shadow of the glorious reality which is to be ours in Christ. As Paul expressed it, “This corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality” (1 Cor. 15:53). Our life in that Promised Land is a physical life in a resurrected body; it is a life of perfection and of unending joy. It is a life of work, with the curse removed from all labor and the fullness of satisfaction added to it. It is life in Christ and in the presence of God the Father.

This, then, is the purpose of wisdom: to guide us not only in relation to this world, but in relation to the world to come, to make us meek, tamed of spirit, that we might inherit that great Promised Land, the eternal city of God.

Heaven and earth have a great destiny: recreation into the eternal perfection of His Kingdom. And this great inheritance is laid up in store for us who walk by faith in Jesus Christ.

WISDOM AND THE HOME

June 14, 1955

Good morning, friends. We have seen, in these past few weeks, that the book of Proverbs speaks about wisdom. Its definition of wisdom is basically religious and practical, rather than intellectual and bookish.

And this wisdom, according Proverbs 1 and all of Proverbs, is applied first of all in the home, it begins there. “My son,” verse 8 says, “hear the instruction of thy father, and forsake not the law of thy mother.” Wisdom is applied first of all in the home, because the home is the basic institution of all society. It’s not the government, it’s not the church. The fundamental Christian institution is the home, the family. And, concerning the home and the duty of children, it is said in Scripture over and over again, “honor thy father and thy mother.” Honor, not obey. Obey is used, but obedience is the commandment for children. Honor is the lifelong commandment for every person. The time comes when our period of obedience is ended. We are commanded by Scripture to obey our parents, but the time comes when the period of obedience is ended, and we are on our own. We ourselves become fathers and mothers in Christ. The obligation of obedience ends.

But the obligation of honor is a lifelong one, lasting even unto death.

Proverbs links two requirements closely: *first* of all, fear the Lord, and, *second*, honor your parents. Here are two fundamental principles of Christian practice, of Biblical commandment. The young men are commanded to honor their parents, to be obedient in the home. Then, *third*, in verses 10–19, they are confronted with another situation.

They leave the home for the world, for friendships, and they are urged, “My son, if sinners entice thee, consent thou not.” The world is full of temptation for the young man. When the young man leaves home, he steps from a world in which the Lord is honored into a world where the Lord does not count, or a world in active disobedience to the Lord. He cannot avoid that: we cannot isolate ourselves from the world.

In the early centuries, the hermits left the world and went out into the desert seeking to avoid temptation, seeking to avoid contamination, but when we read the accounts of the lives of the hermits, we find that their sins were often more grievous, more hideous, more depraved than almost anything in the accounts of Christian history.

Because while we can leave the world, we cannot leave ourselves. And the root and source of sin is in our own souls, and to overcome that we do not flee from

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the world, but we must be in the world, and yet not of the world. And our strength is this, to have that inner security which comes from the Lord. In verses 32 and 33, we are told this: "The turning away of the simple shall slay them," i.e., the open, the men whose lives are open by turning away, work their own destruction, "the prosperity of fools shall destroy them. But whoso hearkeneth unto me shall dwell safely (or, as the Revised Version has it, securely), and shall be quiet from fear of evil." Our true security is in the Lord. And when we have that security, we have a strength which enables us to stand in a world of temptation, in a world where sinners entice us, in a world where men lay wait for blood and lurk privily for the innocent without cause.

This is wisdom, to obey God and live according to His commandments. It involves the surrender to His greater wisdom and the trust in Him who does all things well and is able, for whom nothing is impossible. This is wisdom, that a man trust God and strive to live in faithfulness to Him.

TAKEN FOR GRANTED

May 11, 1954

Good morning, friends. One of the commonest complaints of young and sometimes not so young wives is that their husbands take them for granted. They like to think back to the days when they were being courted, when their husband-to-be was constantly on pins and needles trying to win their favor, bringing gifts to please them, and in every way making a special effort to ensure their love. Those were the days! Now, they take everything for granted. If they ever open their big mouths, it's to say, "Why isn't dinner ready?" "Haven't you got any shirts ironed for me yet?" And, "Haven't you darned those socks yet?" It's enough to make a wife shed tears into her coffee, isn't it? Or is it?

Frankly, I think that such women have a great deal to learn about love, or they wouldn't complain about being taken for granted. Because the essence of love is simply this—the ability to take for granted the faithfulness and dependability of a person, and to return that same loyalty and dependability. The women who do not permit their husbands to take them for granted are to be pitied: they are undermining the most vital factor in love, a faithfulness that is so natural that it can be taken for granted, so constant that it becomes as much taken for

granted as the air we breathe.

True love is something that can be taken for granted like the air, the sun, the world, the seasons, it is always there. We accept it as one of the basic conditions of life, and go on from there. If we have to worry about getting enough oxygen to breathe, life suddenly loses all its richness and is reduced to bare survival. If a man, woman, or child cannot take love for granted, life is reduced to a bare and insecure survival, and a meaningless struggle at that. Love has to be taken for granted, or else it ceases to be love and becomes mere whim and passing fancy.

What happens when a woman complains about her love being taken for granted? She serves notice by her complaint that it cannot be taken so—and gives her husband an insecurity in his dearest relationship. Let's put it this way: a pilot who enjoys flying would usually find that all meaning had disappeared from flying if the earth suddenly disappeared while he was in midair. Flying is a joy to him only because he has the stability of the earth to live on, to take off from, and to land on. Remove that earth and leave him stranded in the air, and flying becomes meaningless and even a monstrosity. He enjoys flying because the earth is his, and he can take

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it for granted. Remove from any man, woman, or child, the right to assume love as a basic condition of their life, and you leave them in midair without any point of reference, or any purpose to their life. The happiest home, therefore, is that wherein all the members can take one another's love for granted.

The same situation prevails in our religious life. God is only truly real to us when we can take Him for granted as the basic condition and the one true ground of our lives. If we could not take God for granted, we would be in a hideous plight. We would have to begin our prayers with the anxious question, "Are you there this morning, God?" or, "Are you still interested in me, Lord?" Thank God, we can take Him for granted, because it depends, not on us, but on utterly dependable God. This is the eternal security of Christians, and it is the ground of their confidence and strength.

It is important, therefore, in the realm of our home life, to be able to take love for granted, and important that in all things we take God for granted. The reason for this is clear-cut: our life is controlled, not by the things we fret about so much as by the basic presuppositions that we do not even think about. What a man can take for granted determines his life, his behavior, and his total being. If he can take nothing for granted, he moves in an unstable world as an unstable man. If he can only take selfishness and force for granted, then he reveals a basic hostility, a desire to domineer, and a willfulness of disposition. But if he can take God and the love of his dear ones for granted, then he can live victoriously and with assurance.

We need to examine ourselves at this point: what

are we able to take for granted? What can our wife, husband, or children take for granted? What are we giving them in the way of a basic confidence and faith? Do you take God for granted, or is He something you have to think or wonder about?

If your life is built on the foundation, the rock of ages, Jesus Christ, and the Holy Spirit indwells within you, then you have a blessed assurance and a peace and joy that goes deeper than life and has its roots in eternity. Then you are never anxious, “but in every thing by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God. And the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus” (Phil. 4:6–7).

TO GIVE SUBTILTY TO THE SIMPLE

June 7, 1955

Good morning, friends. Last week, we saw that the central teaching of the book of Proverbs is the meaning of wisdom. This morning, let's look at the audience to whom Solomon spoke. He speaks, he says in Proverbs 1:4, "to the simple," and his purpose is "to give subtilty."

The aim of the book of Proverbs is to speak to the simple. The word "simple" can also be translated from the Hebrew as "open." To give subtilty to the open. And what does it mean when it speaks of men as open, young men in particular? We are open when there are no fences in our lives. A field is open; a range is open when it is unfenced. And when it is unfenced, there are no barriers and all can come and go. An unfenced range is open to everyone; everyone's stock goes into it. Anyone can ride across it or walk across it. It is common property.

And when we are simple in the Scriptural sense, when our lives are open, we become a thoroughfare to the whole world. We are like that field which is a pathway to the world and because men walk on it, trample it down day after day, it is hard, pounded down,

and when the seed is sown into it, it cannot bear good fruit, it has been too open, and, being open to all things, it can receive nothing. And so Scripture speaks to us because that is our weakness, this is our simplicity, this is our folly, we are open men and women.

Day after day, our lives are open to everything. We read a million words, we listen to a million words (on the radio, in the street, and over television), we see a million things, and we are open to all things. And when the Word of God comes to us, because we have been open, an open range, an open field, a pathway for the world, it cannot root properly, and so it does not bear the fruit that it should.

Therefore, the purpose of Proverbs is to give subtilty to the simple, the open. And what is subtilty? We are told in Genesis 3:1 that the serpent was more subtle than any beast of the field. And its subtilty was this, the root word of “subtilty” in the Hebrew is “naked,” or “slippery.” Because it was without any arms or legs, you couldn’t grab a hold of it, it escaped you, it could never be chained, it could never be pinned down, it could always elude. This was the subtilty of the serpent.

We are commanded according to our Savior to be as wise as serpents and as gentle as doves. To have that kind of subtilty that takes us through this world without being pinned down by all the words, the sights, the opinions of this world. If we are open to them, we are hardened by them, but, if we are subtle, we escape being imprisoned by them, marked by them, and trapped by them. And so the purpose of Proverbs is to give subtilty to the open, to give to the young man knowledge and discretion so that he might walk according to the will of

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the Lord. The fear of the Lord, we are told in verse 7, which is the key verse in the book of Proverbs, is the beginning of wisdom. Wisdom is the highest good to be attained.

When we go back into ancient history, we see that Greece sought beauty. And Greece indeed gained beauty in stone and left for the entire world a heritage of magnificent beauty in statuary, in marble. But its own soul, its own life, was nothing but ugliness. Greek civilization was tainted by all kinds of uncleanness, moral perversion, slavery, contempt one for another,

and the beauty it gained in stone it lost in its own soul.

Rome, on the other hand, made its ideal dominion and law, and it established a great empire on those principles. But Rome lacked dominion over itself. It could not rule over itself though it ruled over all the world. And long before the barbarians conquered Rome, Rome had overthrown itself. The worst barbarians ever to walk through the streets of Rome were the Romans themselves.

The Lord gave to Israel and to us not any of these standards that the world seeks and desires, law, dominion, beauty, but rather wisdom. And wisdom is the fear of the Lord. And if we walk according to this knowledge, we have dominion over ourselves, we

have the law of God working in our lives. We have the beauty of His holiness ever present within us. The fear of the Lord is a complete devotion to Him; it's an unconditional surrender of our lives into His hands, our will to His law.

To walk with the simple, is to be open to every influence; to walk with subtilty and wisdom, is to walk with the Lord and under His influence.

The Lord calls us, saying, walk with me.

For the turning away of the simple shall slay them, and the prosperity of fools shall destroy them. But whoso hearkeneth unto me shall dwell safely, and shall be quiet from fear of evil. (Prov. 1:32–33)

LIGHT

August 25, 1953

Good morning, friends. One of the things I remember with special delight from my boyhood is playing in the barn. I suppose nowadays, with tractors replacing horses everywhere, children no longer know the fun that can be had in a hayloft. When the new cut hay was piled high in the barn, we kids used to climb up into the rafters and then drop down into the hay. It was a good feeling, to sink deep down into the still unsettled hay, bounce around in it and wrestle by the hour. Then when we got tired of swinging from the rafters and rolling around in the hay, we stretched out to chew a dry stalk and talk and daydream. Everything smelled good, clean, and fresh.

About that time we'd notice something that never failed to interest us. The barn siding had gaps of about a quarter inch through which the sunlight shone. In the semidarkness of the barn we could see these narrow shafts of golden light cutting across the loft. And in every one of these narrow lines of light it seemed as though a million particles of dust were floating. The air seemed so clean and fresh, the smell of it was so especially good, that it didn't seem possible that so much

dust filled the place. Someone of us would always give a bounce to his hay pile, and a heavier cloud of dust would rise in the shaft of light. Between those cracks of light, the air seemed clean and dust free, but where the light poured through, the dust was highlighted.

It's that way in housekeeping, too: keep the shades down and the light out, and the living room looks passable. Then let in the light, and all the dust stands out everywhere, and the place suddenly looks messy.

It's that way with our lives. We go along with the shades drawn and kidding ourselves that everything is alright and we're a pretty decent sort of person, and then suddenly a shaft of God's light shines through and we see the messiness of it all, the dust, dirt, and confusion.

It's a part of that natural instinct we call original sin to keep everything in the dark. It's the easiest way to keep house in our lives sometime. But it doesn't lead to anything but dust and trouble, a bigger and bigger mess in which we stumble around trying to make sense of the darkness.

The answer to all this is a simple one: let in the light. Throw open the windows of Scripture and prayer and let in God's light and clean air. Then we can see things as they really are, and we can throw open the door and invite God to come in and take over. And He does. He takes away the darkness. There's too much of

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that in all our lives. We spend our days working and planning, fussing and fretting, figuring that when we have done these things we can begin to live. We go through life postponing living until tomorrow, because today we're too busy. Tomorrow we'll enjoy the children, but today we have to shoo them out of sight. There's too much to do, to worry over and fret about, and life starts disappearing, the years begin racing by, and we are waiting for time to live. And He says to us: Be still and know that I am God. I can give purpose and direction to all this and make all things work together for good.

Then He removes the fear. Life today is so complicated, with the presence of atom bombs, bills, death, taxes, bills, and more bills, that we fall into the routine of fear. The stage setting for all our lives becomes a heavy and oppressive cloud of fear. Our Lord says to this: "Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid" (John 14:27). "I, even I, am he that comforteth you: who art thou, that thou shouldest be afraid of a man that shall die, and of the son of a man which shall be made as grass; and forgettest the Lord thy maker, that hath stretched forth the heavens, and laid the foundations of the earth" (Isa. 51:12-13).

Finally, He takes away the dirt and dust from our lives and remakes them, so that we can say with the disciples of old: now we are clean through thy word.

So: let in the light. Let God take over and have the handling of our lives. The things we fail to see in life and in ourselves because our light is poor, He highlights for us. We see the good as never before, and we see the evil, and we see His cleansing work, as well. In thy light, we see light.

After that, we can say, like one many long ago did, when God had taken away the darkness and given light, removed the fear and replaced it with love, and cleaned out the dirt and dust and given him a new heart:

The Lord is my light and my salvation; whom shall I fear? the Lord is the strength of my life; of whom shall be afraid? (Ps. 27:1)

When thou saidst, Seek ye my face; my heart said unto thee, Thy face, Lord will I seek. (Ps. 27:8)

Wait on the Lord: be of good courage, and he shall strengthen thine heart: wait, I say, on the Lord. (Ps. 27:14)

LOVE OF GOD AND HIS WORD

December 28, 1954

Good morning, friends. Our Scripture today is Psalm 119:1–40. This psalm has many familiar verses and here are a few of them:

Wherewithal shall a young man cleanse his way? by taking heed there according to thy word. (v. 9)

Thy word have I hid in mine heart, that I might not sin against thee. (v. 11)

I will delight myself in thy statutes: I will not forget thy word. (v. 16)

Open thou mine eyes, that I may behold wondrous things out of thy law. (v. 18)

I am a stranger in the earth: hide not thou thy commandments from me. (v. 19)

My soul cleaveth unto the dust: quicken thou me according to thy word. (v. 25)

Behold, I have longed after thy precepts: quicken me in thy righteousness. (v. 40)

One characteristic of this psalm stands out immediately. This is the longest psalm in the Bible, with

176 verses, and every verse except number 122 refers to the will of God as it is revealed in His Word, the Bible. Ten different words are used for this revealed will of God. It is called law, word, sayings, commandment, statutes, judgments or ordinances, precepts or injunctions, testimony, way, and path. The obvious and passionate fact is this: the deep and overriding love of the psalmist for God and His Word. The psalmist declares emphatically, "This I have had," i.e., the major blessing of my life, "that I have kept thy precepts" (v. 56, JPS). The experience of faithfulness gives him a deeper and more passionate desire for greater faithfulness, and for this he looks to God and His Word.

This psalm is an important one precisely because our modern weakness lies at this point. The psalmist loved, studied, and obeyed the Word of God. For all too many Christians nowadays, the Bible is a dusty book. Worse than that, for many its contents are taken with a grain of salt and a double dose of cynicism.

To take the Bible other than on its own declared value is to deny the claims it makes. When the Bible says one thing and we say another, we declare the Bible to be wrong or counterfeit and our word to be true. There is no point in evading the force of this issue: whose word shall we accept?

Nothing you and I can say about God has any value apart from Scripture. None of us can know God except as He reveals Himself to us in the person of His only begotten Son and through His Word, the Bible. To set ourselves up above His Word in criticism or judgment is to exalt our word above God and to declare His Word to be counterfeit. This is not faith, but unbelief; not

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strength, but weakness.

The strength of the psalmist who wrote Psalm 119 is simply this: his unreserved devotion to and love of the revealed will of God. And this love shines through in every verse.

Let's consider this matter of love briefly. When two people are in love, they not only enjoy being together but they also enjoy talking with one another. Good friends can stand in a doorway, unwilling to say goodnight, and talk for another hour and enjoy every minute of it. It's not the subject matter alone. The same topic can be deadly dull with

someone else; it's the sense of communion that is a part of all talk with people we love.

It is this sense of delight in every word of God which rings out in Psalm 119. "Thy testimonies," the writer declares, "also are my delight and my counselors" (v. 24).

The word and will of God is not only his joy but, in time of trouble, his consolation. He looks to the Lord and says:

My soul melteth for heaviness: strengthen thou me according to thy word. (v. 28)

My soul cleaveth unto the dust: quicken thou me according to thy word. (v. 25)

The psalmist declares (vv. 145ff.) that he, on occasion of deep suffering, cried through the night and arose

with this conviction: “Thou art near, O Lord; and all thy commandments are true” (v. 151, RSV). His basic faith and assurance is this: God is sovereign and all powerful. In His hands are all things, and He governs the destinies of all men. Yet this almighty and infinite God is also the God who approaches man and talks to him on his own level of understanding.

As a result, he says with joy, as he contemplates the majesty and the nearness of God:

Seven times a day do I praise thee because of thy righteous judgments.

Great peace have they which love thy law: and nothing shall offend them. (vv. 164–165)

This last phrase, nothing shall offend them, is better translated, they shall have no occasion for stumbling. Life will not trip us up and leave us fallen and offended if we delight in God’s Word and make it our meditation and our daily bread.

How can we have this peace and this victorious life that does not stumble as it meets God’s providence and His dealings? The psalmist sees no way other than through the Word of God, Scripture.

If we lack this peace and victory, we can ask, and it shall be given. We can pray with the psalmist, “Open thou mine eyes, that I may behold wondrous things out of thy law” (v. 18).

SHEEP

July 14, 1953

It was twelve years ago that I first moved into cow country in Nevada. A cattleman came up to me, after a service in which I had used the familiar words of the Twenty-third Psalm, and he said, "Here in cattle country, we don't like to hear the parts of the Bible that talk about sheep. We don't like being called sheep, and the Lord being compared to a low-down shepherd." I soon found out that just about everybody felt as he did; sheep and sheepmen were not especially popular. In our little community, I was never able to buy lamb or mutton in the eight-and-a-half years we were there. There is nothing unusual in all this. Much earlier in Western history, the sheep and cattle wars divided many a community and often brought considerable bloodshed to an area.

An amusing instance of this prejudice was an Indian family in our congregation. Little Eddy, a six-year-old Indian boy, was a high-spirited youngster. In his veins flowed the blood of the great Chief Joseph of the Nez Perce tribe, and Chief Arimo of the Shoshones. At six, Little Eddy was a good horseman, and, in fact, trick rider. I remember seeing his father standing on a bareback Palomino, at full gallop, with Little Eddy. But if

he ever got out of hand, his father could always make him mind, in fact, have the boy in tears, simply by shaking his head and saying, "Son, I guess a boy as disobedient as you will only grow up to be a sheepherder." That did it.

Well, in a very real sense these cattlemen are right. When the Bible calls us sheep, it doesn't mean to be sweet or sentimental. We know sheep, most of us, as cute little animals pictured on magazine covers every spring. We fail to understand, therefore, that when David said, "The Lord is my shepherd" (Ps. 23:1), he knew how low he was rating himself

in comparing himself to a sheep. When our Lord said, "I am the good shepherd and know my sheep" (John 10:14), He wasn't flattering us: He knew what it meant to call us sheep.

Let's look at sheep as they are and see what it means to be compared to them. First of all, sheep tend to follow blindly and unthinkingly. One of the worst things that can happen to a sheep range is road construction. As soon as sheep, in their grazing, hit a road or a trail, they stop feeding and start trailing. Mile after mile, they follow the leader, until they are headed off. It's all pointless, but it's the nature of sheep to follow, and to follow blindly. If we face ourselves honestly, we recognize that we, too, are like that. The very fact that we have

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styles in our clothes indicates that we are sheep-like: we depend upon leaders to determine what we shall wear and hate to be more than slightly out of line in such matters. Styles, fads, fashions, all indicate our sheep-like following the leader. Advertising appeals to the sheep in us and depends on it for success.

We are like sheep also in that we are easily lost. A horse knows its way home. In a storm, when you are lost and can't see any kind of trail in the whirling snow, if you give your horse a free rein, he will take you home. A dog finds its way too, but God, looking at lost and wayward humanity, could only say: "All we like sheep are gone astray" (see Isa. 53:6).

We are like sheep also in that we have the same affinity for dirt. A cat cleans itself patiently and meticulously. Cows, horses, and pigs roll around on the ground, or rub up against a fence or tree to clean themselves, but not sheep. Their heavy wool picks up dirt and becomes a gray-brown color. The matted dirty wool has an odor which is one of the things cowboys despise most about sheep. Sheep are totally incapable of cleaning themselves, and so God, looking us over, and seeing our inability to change our sinful nature, called us sheep.

Sheep also are tender-skinned and easily hurt. The whole of a sheep's life seems to be one hurt after another, and we are all too much the same. Thin-skinned and sensitive, we drift from one hurting experience to another, or run headlong from one trouble into the next.

Finally, sheep are dependent animals. They must always be protected and provided for. In the face of a real threat, they are helpless and futile. We, too, when we face the facts of sin and death, have a like helplessness.

We sin and we die, and we can do nothing to eliminate either from our lives. We are dependent on God for our salvation from both, and we require His protection and providential care.

Thus the cattlemen are right. For the Bible to call us sheep is really an insult to our pride. We hate to admit the truth, although in our very rebellion we show our sheep-like nature, our impotent pride in the presence of God, our natural affinity for trouble, our inability to do anything but to sin and die.

And so Christ says to us, "I am the good shepherd and know my sheep" (John 10:14). "Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest" (Matt. 11:28).

Then, when we follow Him, we are no longer lost, no longer helpless and hurt, no longer unclean, no longer trotting blindly down the trail of death; we have a good shepherd, and He leads us now. With David, we can joyfully say:

The LORD is my shepherd: I shall not want.
(Ps. 23:1)

THE SHEPHERD

July 21, 1953

Good morning, friends. Thank you for your telephone calls and notes of appreciation for last week's chapel talk. We discussed, you remember, what it means to be called sheep by Scripture. We are called sheep because we tend to follow blindly, are easily hurt, have a natural affinity for dirt, and need protection. I cited the remark of a Nevada cattleman concerning the Twenty-third Psalm: "We don't like being called sheep, and the Lord being compared to a low-down shepherd."

The Western cowboy or buckaroo tends to look down on the shepherd as a lower class of person. He himself rides his cowpony and does a more gentlemanly kind of work: no handling of dirty critters, no long hours of foot work, no messing around with animals like a nursemaid, no night work—just a good clean ride in the wide open spaces. The buckaroo regards his work with the satisfaction of dignity and pride. He doesn't get mixed up emotionally with his animals: a cow is a cow to him, so much meat and money on the hoof. A buckaroo loves his horse but despises the cows he works.

The shepherd spends most of his time down on the ground with his sheep. His is a twenty-four-hour

job. He checks the fold throughout the night, and when he sleeps, his dogs keep a constant watch over the sheep. Winter and summer, snow, sun, or rain, he lives with his sheep. He protects them from wolves, coyotes, and bears. He makes sure that they stay in the best pastures. He leads them to greener fields and keeps them near water. When lambing time comes, he acts as midwife. The old ewes get special attention, and the orphan lambs are provided for. An article in the July 11, 1953, *Collier's* speaks of the herder as "father, mother, guardian and midwife" to his sheep, and it gives some especially interesting stories of sheepherders who in our own day, here in this country, have given their life for their sheep.

All this makes the essential difference between the cowboy and the sheepherder crystal clear: the sheepherder gets involved in the lives of the animals in his charge in a way that the buckaroo never does. He lives on their level, in a sense, and breaks off normal human ties for a life with his sheep.

In Bible times, the sheepherder was financially responsible to the owner for any loss of sheep unless he could prove that the loss was not due to his neglect. Because the flocks were generally small, the sheepherder knew each of his flock intimately, had a name for every one, called them by name, and the sheep, recognizing their shepherd's voice and their own names, responded to them. This is still true in many parts of the Orient.

Of course, the first thing that occurs to us as we survey the lonely and hard life of the sheepherder is this: is it worth it? Why give up human society and a much easier and better paying job for something as hard and lonely as a herder's life? Why live a sheep's life

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when there are better jobs for the asking? These questions make sense: there is no good reason for anyone being a shepherd except one: a love for the work.

All this makes clear what the Bible means when it calls the Lord our Good Shepherd. There is no good reason why God, who is so much above and beyond us, should ever have anything to do with us. But supposing He does decide to work with us, why not do it in a clean and dignified way, as a buckaroo range boss, riding a horse and keeping clear of the livestock? Why get down and mix with the dirty animals, why live

with them night and day, why share a common life with us, the sheep of creation, when He as the Creator can live in eternal glory and splendor?

The answer is a simple one: God is love, and out of love, not necessity, He comes down to our level to shepherd us. It doesn't make sense for Him to do so on any other ground. We don't deserve the love He gives us, but He gives it freely and fully. Our Lord declared on the night of the Last Supper:

The good shepherd giveth his life for the sheep.
(John 10:11)

He reaches out toward those of us who are strays and tracks us down to restore us to the fold: He tells us, too, that,

... them also I must bring, and they shall hear my voice; and there shall be one fold, and one shepherd.
(John 10:16b)

Thus the Bible not only calls us sheep, but it compares the Almighty to what cowboys call a low-down sheepherder. This means that the Lord lives our life with us and knows all its problems and difficulties closely and intimately. As our shepherd, He makes our problems His own. It's no wonder that life becomes richer, fuller, and easier when we stop being strays and follow His leading. Then with peace and contentment we can say with David:

The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want.
(Ps. 23:1)

THE PATHS OF RIGHTEOUSNESS

July 28, 1953

Good morning, friends. During the past two weeks, we have been discussing the reason why we are called sheep in Scripture, and the Lord a shepherd. We saw that it is our tendency to follow blindly, our inclination to be easily lost, and our natural affinity for dirt that marks us as sheep-like. On the other hand, the Lord is called our shepherd because, like a true shepherd, He lives His life unto us, shares in our life as our protector, and is our constant guide.

This morning, let's take a look at the kind of leading this shepherd gives us. The first two statements make sense immediately:

He maketh me to lie down in green pastures: He leadeth me beside the still waters. (Ps. 23:2)

This is logical and to be expected of the faithful shepherd. But the third statement is not so readily understood by most of us.

"He restoreth my soul," we are told. How? Well, by leading me in the paths of righteousness for His name's sake.

What are the paths of righteousness? We can't fully appreciate what David meant here until we understand the meaning of the word translated as "paths." In the Hebrew it means, literally, wagon paths, or wheel ruts made by a wagon.

I wonder how many of you have seen wagon roads that have been made and cut down to smoothness only by the constant traffic of slow-going, horse-drawn wagons? I have read that in some parts of the country the wagon trails made by the covered wagons of a century ago can still be seen. As train after train of covered wagons moved westward on the Oregon Trail or California Way, their slowly turning wheels cut deep ruts into the hard and rough ground. Gradually, this left a smooth and relatively easy roadway for later travelers. I have traveled by wagon on wagon trails, and I know the difference it makes: you leave the rough and rocky mountain terrain and step easily and surely into the smooth and easy grooves cut by countless wagon wheels. It's the difference between rough and uncertain going and an easy way. The important thing to do in such country is to get into the rut, ride the well-worn trail, and reach your destination without losing a wheel or straining your team.

And this is precisely what the Lord does for us. To restore our souls, He leads us into the ruts of righteousness. Now, most people talk about *getting into a rut* as though it were an unwise or even unhealthy thing to do. That would surely be the case if the rut you're getting into is the wrong one, and the path one leading to the false destination.

But some ruts are necessary for a true and happy life.

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Without certain good habits, and habits are behavior ruts, our lives would be barren and aimless. A consistent sense of responsibility, honesty, watching our tongue lest we talk foolishly or maliciously, such habits are healthy behavior ruts. Going to church, reading your Bible, praying, trusting in the Lord, applying your faith to your daily needs and problems, these things constitute in part the path, the wheel tracks or ruts of righteousness that David talked about.

Now, some of you have shared with me these past two weeks troubles and tragedies of a really fearful sort, the kind of things that come suddenly and seem to destroy everything you have ever lived for. Suddenly, the future becomes dark and bleak, and you wonder whether life will ever have any joy for you again. But what

happened? The Lord through the years has led you into the ruts of righteousness, and what would have derailed others left you still solidly in the wheel tracks, moving forward. You believed earnestly and firmly in spite of all the seeming evidence to the contrary, that the Lord would indeed make *all* things, including this tragedy, work together for good. And so in quietness, confidence,

and patience you possessed your souls. Then, because you were in His wheel tracks, His ruts of righteousness, He did restore your souls. He gave you peace and, being in the ruts and not off in the brush and rocks, you had a safe and even ride through the difficult places. Where others would have felt desperate, having no guide and no easy wheel tracks to follow, you had the assurance of the ruts of righteousness.

Now, most of us are very definitely in a rut, but it's generally the wrong one and leads us nowhere. We spend a lot of time getting nowhere, and very often we're off any and all tracks completely, floundering around in rough and stony ground.

We need to get into the right rut, and the Lord has marked that one out very clearly for us and given us the map of it in Scripture. Our way is an endless trailing nowhere. His way is a path of righteousness that leads us safely through the valley of the shadow of death, past the threatening presence of trouble and of enmity, and finally into the house of the Lord forever.

When we walk in that path, then we can indeed say:

The Lord is my shepherd:

I shall not want.

He leadeth me...and

He restoreth my soul.

THE VALLEY OF THE SHADOW OF DEATH

August 4, 1953

Good morning, friends. This morning we're going to continue our discussion of the shepherd's psalm as it relates to us. We, as natural born strays with an instinctive tendency to wander, require a shepherd to keep us in line. This He accomplishes by leading us into the ruts of righteousness, that is, in the wagon tracks, the ingrained and imbedded habits of Christian living with and in Him.

If we're honest about this psalm, we have to admit that the fourth verse goes against the grain and leaves us more than a little unhappy. What David said was this:

Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil:

For thou art with me; Thy rod and thy staff they comfort me. (Ps. 23:4)

This is a definite promise of trouble, and none of us like any kind of complication in our lives. We can look around us and say of this or that person that they have been spoiled by too much easy living and need a dose of trouble to jolt them out of it. It's easy to prescribe

trouble as a cure for others: we see their sometimes desperate need for something to jar them out of their smug complacency, their selfishness, and their waywardness, but as for us, well, we have learned all that we need to know. Let the Lord lead us only beside the still waters, and the green pastures: then indeed we shall not want. But suddenly we find ourselves walking through the valley of the shadow of death, under affliction, troubled and pressed almost to the breaking point, and we cry out in hurt and bewilderment: Why did this happen to me, Lord? I had my share of this before you led me. The word “why” becomes the cry of our heart’s perplexity.

To understand the why of the valley of the shadow in our lives, let’s turn to the sheep again. A hard winter recently took a considerable number of livestock in all the Intermountain country. The snows grew deep, feed grew short, and cows, horses, and sheep began to die. During one such hard winter of some few years ago in Colorado, my brother-in-law kept his sheep alive by keeping them on a bitterly cold and windy mountainside. From the standpoint of the sheep, we could say that it was the poorest place to be. The wind blew raw and cold and almost without letup. You and I in their place would have felt that the shepherder was

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heartless in holding them strictly and carefully to so hard and exposed a position. And yet it was that difficult place that saved their lives. The brutally cold wind stripped enough snow off the brush to make possible some kind of feeding—enough to keep alive. Elsewhere in more protected positions, sheep and cattle died because feed could not be reached.

Then again one of the things that young lambs protest most strongly about as they go to the range each spring is the fording of streams. It's a real strain on them to plunge into the icy waters, and they set up quite a bleating about it, and the sheepdogs have to drive them into the stream. And yet we know that these difficult crossings are necessary for life. All of us come to the place of crossing in our lives, and nothing seems worse than the right path laid down by the Shepherd of our souls.

And yet this very thing that so distresses us is a sign of love and care. We are told in Scripture that whom the Lord loves He disciplines in order to train us into the way of righteousness. And we need this disciplining. We expect God to rearrange everything to satisfy us, and forget that He satisfies us only as *we* rearrange everything, under His rod, to satisfy Him. It takes an act of faith to say, Thy rod and Thy staff—your discipline, Lord, it comforts me. Most of the time, we feel only a discomfort in that discipline. We react very much as our children do when we discipline them. They love us and are put out and upset that we deny them or discipline them. But we often deny things to those whom we love for their own welfare, and out of love, and nothing destroys that love more quickly than a wrong

gratification. The spoiled child shows little love for his parents: the lovingly disciplined child responds with love.

The Lord disciplines us, His sheep, because we are natural-born strays, every one of us. We love ourselves and our own will primarily, and it is only as we are disciplined by His rod and staff, and as we walk through the valley of the shadow of death, that we die to ourselves and are alive unto Him. And that's His purpose in the whole process: that we die in our old self-centered lives and become new creatures in Him. In this objective of love, He leads us through the dark valleys. More than that, the suffering we undergo is nothing He asks us to undergo alone: He already has experienced it, as Scripture says:

Though he were a Son, yet learned he obedience by the things which he suffered. (Heb. 5:8)

Some of us, this morning, are going through the valley of the shadow. For many of us, life is a constant testing. We cannot see the way, and we wonder where the Shepherd leads us. It seems impossible, as we look at the way and at our failures, that all things can work together for good. But the Lord says to us, "O thou afflicted, tossed with tempest, and not comforted. Fear not, for thou shalt not be ashamed ... For the mountains shall depart, and the hills be removed; but my kindness shall not depart from thee (see Isa. 54) ... Be content with such things as ye have and bear your adversity, for He hath said, I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee" (see Heb. 13:5), so that we may boldly say, the Lord is my helper, I shall not fear nor be lonely.

In the valley of the shadow, we are never so much

alone as when we forget that the Good Shepherd is there with us. We are not alone, for Thou, Lord, art with me. Thy rod and Thy staff they comfort me.

MY CUP RUNNETH OVER

August 11, 1953

Good morning, friends. The first four verses of the Twenty-third Psalm deal, as we have seen these past few weeks, with the Lord as our Shepherd, and we as the sheep.

In verses five and six, the figure changes suddenly, and God is compared to a host, and we to guests. Now, most of us have entertained guests frequently enough to know what it means to be a host or hostess. At home, we ourselves are looking forward to some especially welcome guests in a few days. Such an event means a considerable amount of activity for days in advance: the house is put in order, something special in the way of food and entertainment is planned, and the whole schedule of daily life is readjusted to prepare for the friends who are coming. There is a very real joy in welcoming a person we love into the life and fellowship of our home.

On the other hand, look at it from the guest's point of view. It adds something to our lives to be received with love and joy and to know how much we mean to our friends. It's especially telling when unexpected and undeserved. I recall my arrival six years ago to a major Eastern city where I had a small speaking engagement.

I was met, to my surprise, by a group of men, and they expressed deep respect for my very small work as a missionary. Day by day, as I remained in that city, I was overwhelmed with undeserved appreciation, manifested in a variety of forms.

Our spiritual experience is comparable to that. We are travelers through this world, and it is not an easy journey, nor exactly a pleasure trip. It has its joys, but it has its sorrows also. One of the constant sources of anxiety to many is *the fear of evil*.

We are surrounded by so much evil in this world that we sometimes live in dread lest it touch our lives, and the lives of our loved ones. In this modern age especially, in this day of atomic warfare, when it can rain death from the skies in a moment, the fear of evil is a very real thing, a lurking, nagging cloud across our lives. To us, in the midst of this distress, comes the calm and reassuring words of David, "I will fear no evil, for thou art with me."

We find ourselves in this life constantly in the presence of enemies, seen and unseen, inner enemies and outer. Often, there is an enemy in our own souls, waging war against all our efforts and our desires to follow in the path of righteousness. We cry out against the enemy, but the struggle only continues. Or it may be an enemy or a problem in our outward lives, one which makes of our

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daily life a steady conflict and a constant strain. But this is life, not only a journey and an effort, but also conflict and hard work.

Then, suddenly, in the midst of conflict and in the presence of our enemies and our problems, we are able to say with David,

Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of mine enemies: thou anointest my head with oil; my cup runneth over. (Ps. 23:5)

This is the life in Christ, “always conflict, but always a spread table” (Maclaren). And notice the nature of the table. Our struggle is a conflict comparable to warfare, and we to soldiers. In the presence of enemies, a soldier eats quickly and hastily. But the Lord our host, in the midst of Christian warfare, feeds us, not in brevity and haste, but from the leisure of a spread table.

We who are unworthy to be His guests, we who are failing oftentimes in our warfare, *we* find the Divine Host coming to meet us at the place of battle and showering us with the abundance of blessing. This is the constant surprise of the Christian life, the goodness of God’s providence, grace abounding to sinful man.

But that isn’t all. Our heads are anointed with oil. Now, the significance of this anointing is an important one. It is a ritual reserved to kings and priests and typifies their special authority and its divine derivation. God anoints our heads with oil: He makes us, His people, a Kingdom and a priesthood unto Him. In the presence of our enemies, it means that we are marked by God as His own, destined to be heirs of eternity and of His Kingdom. This is the reassurance that the Lord gives to us in the midst of our struggle.

We are further told that our needs are surpassed by God's supplies to the point that our cup, our lives, run over, and others can share in its bounty. This again is a surprise. There is so little to our lives that we cannot sustain ourselves. Then God comes and spreads the table before us, and, anointing us His heirs, makes us rich enough to help others in this conflict of life.

Thus, as we face the daily task, the constant struggle, the problems within and without, we have His assurance:

When thou passest through the waters, I will be with thee; and through the rivers, they shall not overflow thee. (Isa. 43:2)

The Divine Host spreads His table before us and invites us:

Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. (Matt. 11:28)

The invitation comes to us, we who are limping in the struggle of life, we who are paralyzed by the fear of evil and made silent by the threatening future, we who are blinded by our own sins and failures, to us He says:

Come, for all things are ready.
My table is spread, and my banquet is ready.

Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need. (Heb. 4:16)

WHAT ARE YOU WAITING FOR?

November 3, 1953

Good morning, friends. Most of us have the feeling that we spend hours, days, and years waiting for things to happen. Children feel that way. Their parents are always telling them to wait until they're a little older before they can have this or that thing—or wait until we can afford it or you can earn it. The parents' theme song seems to be “wait, wait, wait.” Most men feel that they put in far too much time in waiting for their wife to get ready. She's never ready when it's time to go, and she's always making you wait. And the wives feel the same way. The children and the husband start asking about dinner a half an hour ahead of time, and then, when it is ready, you call and wait, call again and wait some more, and then start scolding before they even budge to come to the table.

This is simple, everyday waiting. Most of us do a great deal more waiting than that. There are things we plan to do, hopes we dream of daily, a life we want to live, and it seems daily as though we are simply waiting for the big moment of our lives to begin. What are you waiting for?

A man named David asked himself that question many years ago. Psalm 39 tells us that. “My heart,” he said, “was hot within me” (v. 3). I asked the Lord to make me to know my destiny, “and the measure of my days, what it is: that I may know how frail I am” (v. 4). “And now, Lord, what wait I for?” (v. 7).

I hardly know, David said, what I really am waiting for. I do know this: my life is too short to be spent in waiting for things that will not come, and things that have far too little meaning when they do come.

What are you really waiting for? When you come right down to it, most of us get a great many of the things we’ve been wanting. And then what happens? Well, we keep on waiting. We get the job, the husband or wife we wanted, the house or even the money we hoped for, and still we wait. Some of the world’s unhappiest people are those who have these things.

We continue wanting and waiting because no matter what life brings us, we are still the same. We are never satisfied, because whatever comes, we are still no different. We keep waiting for the world to change, when it is we who need to change, or be changed.

Now, it’s certainly true that the world can do with some face-lifting. There’s no arguing that point: this world could be improved. But it wouldn’t make any difference as long as we remain the same. Adam was given a perfect world, and he turned it into a wilderness. Mankind was given a perfect Savior, and they wasted no time in crucifying Him. Columbus opened up a new world for men in 1492, but because men were no different, they laid waste to two continents, destroyed untold natural resources, mistreated the Indians, and

WHEN WE WAIT ONLY ON GOD, IT MAKES ALL THE DIFFERENCE TO OUR LIVES. INSTEAD OF WAITING FOR THE WORLD TO CHANGE, WE WAIT ON GOD, ASKING HIM TO CHANGE US.



then started gouging each other. We keep ruining the only world we know, while we go on dreaming about a new world free from present problems. We wait, and whatever comes to us in our waiting, we touch, and it turns to dust and ashes.

We can wait for the world to change, but it does no good when we remain unchanged. A person with a bad case of stomach ulcers can dream about a steak dinner, corn on the cob, curried lamb with rice, or good sharp cheese, but it does him no good to get it. It only leaves him sicker than he was before. In the same way, the

perfect answer to our waiting leaves us only worse off, because we can't take it. The best food is the worst for the ulcer case. And a rich and secure life is bad medicine for us in our sin-filled state.

David found the answer when he changed his waiting. "What am I waiting for?" he asked himself; my hope should be in the Lord; in fact, my only realistic hope is in Thee, Lord. "My soul, wait thou *only* upon God" (Ps. 62:5).

When we wait only on God, it makes all the difference to our lives. Instead of waiting for the world to change, we wait on God, asking Him to change us. And He does. Day by day, the new man grows in us. The more we wait on Him, the stronger our growth, the

happier our waiting. We see and know that all things are in His hands, and nothing happens except by His will and power. Therefore, there is no point in waiting on anything or anyone, except the Lord.

Isaiah called Him “a God ... which worketh for him that waiteth for him” (Isa. 64:4, ERV). “There can be no good but what God works” (Murray), and we need to see Him working in and through us, and to wait quietly on Him. “The meek will He guide ... in his way” (Ps. 25:9). We need to wait on Him in prayer, in our moment-by-moment living in everything. Waiting on God means simply this: we recognize that He is the only true God, and nothing has any meaning, except in Him and from Him. All waiting apart from Him is meaningless.

What are you waiting for? For the world to change, while you continue to stew in frustration with your unchanged self? Are you waiting for the Lord to bring the world to you when you will not come to Him? “My soul, wait thou only upon God”!

And it shall be said in that day, Lo, this is our God; we have waited for him, and he will save us: this is the Lord; we have waited for him, we will be glad and rejoice in His salvation (Isa. 25:9).

JOURNEY'S END

August 18, 1953

Good morning, friends. A good many people have come into Santa Cruz this summer seeking rest and peace after a hot and hard journey. A traveler especially appreciates rest and quiet lodgings after a tiring road.

The Twenty-third Psalm gives us this same feeling as we come to its close. We are led by the Good Shepherd through the difficult places, through the very valley of the shadow of death. The Divine Host spreads a table before us in the presence of our enemies, and anoints us as heirs of eternity.

Then, David tells us,

Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life: and I will dwell in the house of the Lord for ever. (Ps. 23:6)

Some people are followed by fear and a bad conscience. They can travel to a different place, assume a new name and a new occupation, but the old man still walks with them, the same troubled heart pounds out in every step, and fear and a bad conscience follow them all the days of their life. They live with it, wherever they go.

But we who follow the Divine Shepherd have a

different experience. The evil in our lives does not follow us: it is forgiven and is blotted out by the Redeemer. Instead, *only* goodness and mercy travel with us, and, at the journey's end, become our everlasting companions. He who walks with fear and a troubled heart, lives with fear and a troubled heart: they follow him through life and all eternity. But he who walks with the Lord lives with the Lord forever. With whom are you walking this morning, with fear and a bad conscience, or with the goodness and mercy of God?

The time span of our walk and its name in David's song is not the *years* but the *days* of our life. We measure our life by the years, and date ourselves accordingly. We look into the past and borrow its burdens to carry with us today. We look ahead into the troubles of tomorrow and seize them ahead of time to make sure that we miss no grief. We live in yesterday and tomorrow let their problems crowd out the only life we have: *today*. Our Lord said, "Take therefore no thought for the morrow: for the morrow shall take thought for the things of itself. Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof" (Matt. 6:34). Life is not made up of years, but of days. *This day* is your life and mine. We are asked to pray: "Give us *this day* our *daily bread*" (Matt. 6:11). Begin this day with God, and live it with Him. No day is too long, no night too dark, no morning too clouded with storms, no noonday heat too great for Him to overcome and fill with goodness and mercy. Begin this day with God, and live with and in Him, and He will be all your tomorrows.

Then you will find Him there *all* the days of your life. On the black and stormy days, He will be there. On the bright and radiant days, He will be there. He

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says to us: "I will be with thee, whithersoever thou goest. Lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world."

Thus the Twenty-third Psalm closes with two great promises: If we walk with God, we have the blessedness of contentment on the road, and contentment eternally in His home. Goodness and mercy walk with us on the road, and the end thereof is peace.

If there is anything this world lacks, it is exactly this: peace.

Most men live haunted and restless lives, troubled by things outside of them and things inside of them. They have their moments of relative peace, but it is only the calm on an ever restless ocean, a restless thing and quickly broken. The life of the sea is under the sway of the wind and the storm, and most men are under the power of the weather of this world's troubles. Their peace is not their own, and is quickly lost.

But the man who finds his *all* in God, lives in a different climate. His life is no longer his own and is now the property and instrument of God. He becomes a partaker of the divine nature, and the old storms touch him less and less, because they have no part in him. He walks on life's journey with goodness and mercy, and the journey's end is peace. He walks with the words of our Lord resounding in his heart:

Peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you:
not as the world giveth, give I unto you. Let not

your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid. (John 14:27)

When the Lord is your Shepherd, your needs will be met, your soul shall be refreshed, your life disciplined and comforted, your journey blessed, and your eternal dwelling place made the house of the Lord forever.

The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want. (Ps. 23:1)

THE NEW YEAR

December 29, 1953

Good morning, friends, and a happy new year to all of you. On New Year's Eve several million people across America will spend the evening in noise-making. It's an old tradition to do so, and friends through countless years have gathered together to greet the New Year. When midnight strikes, and the first seconds of 1954 start ticking, then everyone shouts, beats a pan, blows a horn, and makes all the noise possible.

Have you ever wondered why people do that? Christmas carols make sense at Christmas, but why noise at the start of the New Year? It's a custom deeply rooted in man's nature and his past, and takes a little digging to trace.

But we can understand New Year's Eve noise-making this way: Have you heard of people trying to whistle up courage going past a graveyard in the dark? I've seen pagan funerals characterized by noise-making, in which a brass band helped, the purpose of which was to forestall the powers of darkness. And I've gone past a lonely country graveyard at midnight with a frightened man who thought he heard the spirits talking and begged me to talk fast and loud to scare them away. He couldn't talk.

The purpose behind this is clear-cut. Man has through the ages had a deep fear of the dark and the unknown. He is terrified by what it may contain, and its existence threatens his peace and security. His reaction, therefore, to both the dark and the unknown has been a noisy one: to make all the noise possible to overcome the presence of the terror by familiar sounds. Did you know that you have to come into the Christian world to find a quiet funeral? Elsewhere, wherever it is any kind of ceremony, it is generally characterized by noise-making, not a quiet, confident, and victorious look at death.

This, then, is the background of New Year's Eve noise-making. Man tries to drown out the insecurity of the unknown by old familiar sounds and the press of familiar companions. But what is it that man has through the ages feared at New Year's Eve that drives him to such a primitive and superstitious display?

At New Year's Eve, faced with another year, we recognize the passing of time, and the coming end of time. We realize that the old familiar things are disappearing, one by one, and we with them slipping steadily away. The rest of the year, the days slip by easily and quickly, and we don't realize how much we and the world around us have changed and are changing. Everything remains the same through the weeks and

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the months: the same work, the same routine, the same faces, and the world seems unchanging. But on New Year's Eve, we see that the world is changing, and we are too. We who were young are older now. The years that once passed by so slowly now race by. It's a little frightening to think about. We realize suddenly that we have so little time, and yet so much to do. The years have taken so much from us; what will tomorrow do? And so people run away from New Year's Eve and its sobering reflections to find refuge in the age-old sanctuary of noise-making. Drown out the dark and the unknown by noise, and by the time the party's over, the safe and old routine will be back again.

The Christian has no need of noise to meet the new year. He meets it with the Lord. For him, there are no dark places, because God's light illumines everything. In the words of the familiar hymn, we are always "stepping in the light" when we walk in His steps. We are not in the hands of the world, darkness, death, or anything else, but always in His hands, and therefore there are no dark places for us here. We find Him everywhere, and He is the light of the world.

Again, we have no fear of the unknown. At the end of the road for us is not the terror of the unimagined, the unforeseen, and the unknown, but the Lord of Glory.

We feel as David did, who faced a future that could have led him anywhere and into anything, and yet wrote confidently:

Whither shall I go from thy spirit? or whither shall I flee from thy presence? If I ascend up into heaven, thou art there: if I make my bed in hell, behold, thou art there. If I take the wings of the morning, and

dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea; Even there shall thy hand lead me, and thy right hand shall hold me ... Yea, the darkness hideth not from thee; but the night shineth as the day: the darkness and the light are both alike to thee. (Ps. 139:7–10, 12)

This is our faith. We do not know what 1954 will bring to us. It is indeed dark and unknown to us and outside our jurisdiction. But it is not dark and unknown to the Lord, nor is it outside His jurisdiction.

Our times, O Lord, are indeed in thy hands, and Thou doest all things well. Therefore our trust is in Thee. Our new years may not always be happy ones, but of this we are certain: they will always be blessed ones, and the blessing of the Lord, maketh rich (Prov. 10:22).

HOW TO PRAY

PART I - TEACH US TO PRAY

February 21, 1956

Good morning, friends. One of the most important things the disciples ever asked of Jesus Christ was their humble petition, “Lord, teach us to pray.”

Prayer has sometimes been defined as “talking with God,” a definition which will suffice as a starting point. Before we talk with God, we must believe that He is God, “for he that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him” (Heb. 11:6). This is important, because we talk to people in terms of what they are. We speak one way with a child, another with a friend, another with a stranger, and still another to a great dignitary. A teacher talks to his pupils as one who is over them, and in charge of them. A parent speaks to children as one who loves and governs them. When we speak to God, we must be mindful of our double relationship to Him. As creatures, we are as dust before Him. His power, majesty, and sovereignty is total and absolutely determinative, and beyond our fathoming. We stand in awe of the triune God in whose hand is the breath of every living thing, who raiseth up one and setteth down another, and

whose ways are not our ways, nor His thought our thoughts. And yet as adopted sons of God, in Christ we have the relationship of a father to his children. God the Father invites His children in Christ to come to Him and to make all our wants and wishes known. Thus our relationship to God in prayer has this dual aspect: we speak as creatures to the Almighty Creator and as children to the loving Father.

Before we can learn to speak to our parents, as babies we learned simple words and sentences and said those first of all. We have never had to unlearn those words; we still use them daily; they are basic to all life. In the same manner, the best way to learn to pray is to say simple sentence prayers to God; this kind of praying does not diminish in its importance. It is as important to a mature Christian as it is to a new believer.

What do we do in sentence prayers? Throughout the day, as the need arises, we lift up our hearts, and sometimes our voices, to the Lord, with a simple and direct petition. These simple prayers ask for help for the need at hand. We may ask, "Lord, give me patience as I deal with this person"; "Lord, give me strength to do the day's work, and to do it joyfully"; "Lord, take away my

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pessimism and give me confidence and hope”; “Lord, take care of my loved ones in this matter”; “I thank Thee, Lord, for this that has come to me.”

Sentence prayers are thus direct and simple requests and remarks to God. When our days are filled with sentence prayers, so that morning, noon, and night, all our moment-by-moment needs and problems are thus discussed with God, things begin to happen to us. God hears and answers our prayers. And because our minds are increasingly opened to Him in these sentence petitions, His presence in our lives becomes increasingly manifest and active. Our longer prayers are deepened and made more realistic. Our relationship to our work, to people, and to problems has this constant source of strength, relief, and refreshing; we can in a sentence invoke the Father’s loving help and care.

Sentence prayers are basic to any healthy relationship to God in prayer. Not all our communication with other people is in the form of long and carefully worded speeches; most of our conversation is in sentences, short and direct remarks. The more we have of this kind of easy communication, the more readily we can speak at length to them. Likewise, in speaking with God, the more we talk freely and directly to Him in sentence prayers, the easier it becomes to speak at length when our needs so require it.

Open your heart to Him, therefore, at all times, in simple sentence prayers, and learn how rich life is when lived with the Lord.



HOW TO PRAY

PART 2 - VITAL, FREQUENT PRAYER

February 28, 1956

Good morning, friends. If prayer is talking with God, then our prayer life is most vital when it is most frequent, when our hearts and minds readily and constantly call upon God in every kind of situation. Prayer is basic to our spiritual growth. To be prayerless is to be in sin, to be out of communion with God, and to be in active flight from His presence. People give all kinds of excuses for not praying: they lack time, have little to ask for, or are content to worship God in other ways. But the real reason for prayerlessness is man's desire to avoid God lest his sin be exposed. We avoid talking with people we dislike, or who might embarrass us. In like fashion, we avoid talking with God when we secretly fear or hate Him. We need to pray, because without prayer we drift away from God into easy alliance with sin.

We need to pray because we cannot do God's will without God's power, and must therefore come before the Lord and lay hold on His omnipotence to become triumphant Christians. We are not sufficient to ourselves nor to any of life's problems, and must therefore seek

God's grace and mercy in order to live victorious rather than frustrated lives. We all find life at times most difficult to live, and if we fail to call upon the Lord, it is either because we overrate our capabilities or underrate God. In either case, we are most grievously wrong. John R. Rice has observed that "prayerlessness is almost proof of idolatry."

When we pray, we need to pray specifically. Most vague praying is so much idle talk. At the table, when we ask for food, or at a restaurant, when we order a meal, we specify our needs specifically because we mean business. We want specific things and therefore name them. When we approach God, our honest needs are always honestly and plainly expressed. We cannot talk vaguely about real needs. If our house is on fire, we do not, when we telephone the fire department, talk vaguely about a problem of combustion: we tell them that we have a fire and give our address. If we indulged in a long, roundabout conversation expressing our appreciation of their ability, reminding them that we are taxpayers, and then taking time to describe our house down to its new drapes instead of giving our address, the fire department would have reason to doubt our sanity and to wonder if we really had a fire. In like manner, much of our praying reveals itself as clearly meaningless to God: He recognizes that we really are asking for nothing, are merely making talk, are striving to be poetic or

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worshipful rather than honest, and so pays no attention to our petitions.

Jesus said, “Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you: For every one that asketh receiveth; and he that seeketh findeth; and to him that knocketh it shall be opened” (Matt. 7:7–8). When you pray, Jesus said, avoid the vain repetitions, the meaningless talk, of the unbelievers and pray simply and directly, making known your needs as children to a father.

All Christian praying is in Jesus’s name. This means that we recognize that of ourselves we are not worthy nor able to approach God in our own person. In Christ, however, as members of His body, we are adopted sons and heirs of God the Father and can boldly approach the throne of grace in prayer. To pray in Jesus’s name, therefore, means to pray as a member of Christ and to claim from God the privileges which appertain to Christ Himself, which He shares with all who are members of His body.

In view of these things, we need to follow Paul’s advice to the Philippians (4:6), translated so beautifully by Williams: “Stop being worried about anything, but always, in prayer and entreaty, and with thanksgiving, keep on making your wants known to God.”

HOW TO PRAY

PART 3 - DECLARING OUR DEPENDENCE ON GOD

March 6, 1956

Good morning, friends. A few years ago, a man in very serious trouble was discussing his problem with me. I had known him for some time and we were fairly good friends, and so his situation was well known to me, and he knew it. An able, likeable, and robust man, he had by his own admission messed up his own life and that of every one who came too close to him. Everything in life was a big joke to him, and a rather cynical one, at that. Now he was afraid that he would soon drink himself to death, that his own nature and his appetites were fast getting out of hand, and he was deeply afraid of himself. In the course of our conversation, I happened to mention the word “prayer,” and he immediately responded, “Rush, how can a man lower himself to pray?” And that remark was the key to his whole problem. He wanted to be independent of all responsibility to God and man; the heart of his personal creed was that at all costs he must be a free man. He had refused with wit and humor every attempt any man or woman made to tie him down; he had declared

his independence of his parents and family, and of every tie and claim that ever asserted itself. He had faithfully tried to become a free man, only to be a slave to himself and his own nature. He had freed himself of all normal ties, only to be in bondage now to every vague fear, haunted by drunken nightmares, and deathly afraid that life might catch him in a sober moment and show him what his freedom amounted to. When men declare their independence of God, they end up, not as free and independent men, but as slaves and runaways, in flight from God, man, and themselves.

But the man was right in his description of prayer: it is a lowering of oneself before the majesty and omnipotence of God. It is a declaration, not of independence, but of dependence to an absolute degree. It is an affirmation that God is our Creator, Redeemer, and Sustainer, that in Him we live and move and have our being.

Prayer indeed is a cry of dependence and a call for help. However, instead of producing a weak and dependent character, it develops instead strength of will and independence of spirit, a godly character and Christian courage. The more we pray, the more we depend on God and the less on this world. The more we

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pray, the less we fear men, the less we are swayed by what people say or think. The more we pray, the less timid and anxious we become, and the more courageous and bold.

It is necessary for us to pray in order that we might become strong. It is necessary for us to declare by the act of prayer that we are weak and dependent in order that we might receive the power and grace of God. Prayer thus is the way to strength and courage, the antidote to fear.

The effect of prayer has been well described by Richard C. Trench in his familiar poem, "Prayer":

Lord, what a change within us one short hour
Spent in Thy presence will avail to make!
What heavy burdens from our bosoms take!
What parched grounds refresh as with a shower!
We kneel, and all around us seems to lower;
We rise, and all the distant and the near,
Stands forth in sunny outline, brave and clear;
We kneel, how weak! We rise, how full of power!
Why, therefore, should we do ourselves this wrong,
Or others—that we are not always strong—
That we are sometimes overborne with care—
That we should ever weak or heartless be,
Anxious or troubled—when with us is prayer,
And joy and strength and courage are with Thee?

HOW TO PRAY

PART 4 - LONG UNANSWERED PETITIONS

March 20, 1956

Good morning, friends. One of the problems of prayer is the fact of long-unanswered petitions. Someone asked me recently why God waits so long sometimes before granting our prayer. Perhaps we have prayed for justice, for a long desired hope, for something we feel clearly is in the will of God and yet does not seem to be heard by God. This is the familiar experience of every praying Christian. Our Lord gave specific answer to this problem in His parable of the persistent widow:

And he spake a parable unto them to this end, that men ought always to pray, and not to faint; Saying, There was in a city a judge, which feared not God, neither regarded man: And there was a widow in that city; and she came unto him, saying, Avenge me of mine adversary. And he would not for a while: but afterward he said within himself, Though I fear not God, nor regard man; Yet because this widow troubleth me, I will avenge her, lest by her continual coming she weary me. And the Lord said, Hear what the unjust judge saith. And shall not God avenge

his own elect, which cry day and night unto him, though he bear long with them? I tell you that he will avenge them speedily. Nevertheless when the Son of man cometh, shall he find faith on the earth? (Luke 18:1–8)

The *first* and most obvious point here is that God requires that we be persistent in prayer. If persistence prevailed with a corrupt judge, how much more likely it is to prevail with the righteous God. Persistence is therefore a basic requirement of faithful prayer.

Second, the woman's cry was, "Avenge me of mine adversary," or, "Do me justice with regard to my adversary." Jesus declared that God will avenge His own elect, will give them justice and relief, in full and willing answer to their cry day and night unto Him. The Lord will give His people justice, "though he bear long with them," Jesus said. These words, this forbearance, have reference to the adversary. As McNichol (in Davidson) has pointed out, "His forbearance is shown, not to His elect, but to their oppressors." God delays in answering, not because of any unwillingness to deliver His people, but because of His patience and long-suffering with regard to their oppressors. The patience of God far exceeds the patience of man, even as the justice and judgment of God are far more rigorous and total than man's. This means that persevering prayer receives the fullness of answer in the fullness of time, that God delays only to render a complete and total answer to the prayers of His elect. His final and eternal answer comes with His second advent, but even now He answers the persevering prayer.

Third, in His concluding sentence, our Lord asked,

“When the Son of man cometh, shall he find faith on the earth?” More literally, this sentence reads, “Shall he find the faith?” i.e., “the kind of faith that persists in prayer” (J. McNichol). This, then, is our Lord’s declaration of faith, that it persists in prayer. The widow is used to illustrate also the nature of the man of faith. Widows in antiquity were often most helpless and defenseless in corrupt times and especially prey to fraud and exploitation. Their helplessness in such an age meant that they had no human recourse except the judge. We are much the same, in that our only real help is in God. In terms of the immensity of our problems, we stand helpless and without any hope. True faith sees its helplessness but is never hopeless; true faith persists in prayer in the confidence that God is no corrupt judge but the righteous and holy Lord of heaven and earth, whose purpose it is to redeem His own, and who delays only in patience and forbearance, not in neglect.

This therefore gives us great ground for confidence in prayer. We can pray boldly, knowing that our persistence is blessed in the sight of God and is described by Him as faith. We can pray hopefully in the face of our helplessness, knowing that our helplessness is undergirded by the omnipotence of God. We pray

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because we have no other recourse, and also because we know that no other possible recourse is equal to the full and final providence of God. Knowing these things, then, “men ought always to pray, and not to faint.”

HOW TO PRAY

PART 5 - THE FELLOWSHIP OF PRAYER

April 3, 1956

Good morning, friends. Fellowship is a basic requirement of human nature: man was not made to live alone, and one of the greatest curses is loneliness. In our prisons, the heaviest penalty that can be imposed on a rebellious prisoner is solitary confinement. According to Scripture, the basic purpose of marriage is fellowship: God said it is not good that man should live alone, and marriage fulfills its truest function when it becomes a community of life. Society is not an accident of history, nor government a merely human contract, but rather, they are divine ordinances that answer to the nature of man and fulfill the purpose of God. One of the central tragedies of our generation is the rootlessness and loneliness of man: when men are born lonely and die alone, it means that life is no longer life but a burden, that marriage and the family have lost their meaning, that the words “friend” and “neighbor” are no longer symbols of a key reality of man’s life, and that man stands amidst the ruins of a world that may be standing physically but has fallen spiritually.

The basis of all human fellowship is fellowship with God. No other relationship has more than a superficial significance when the key relationship is lacking. Man was created to live in fellowship with God, and, walking in that blessed bond, to have fellowship with other men. When the relationship to God is weakened, the relationship to men is correspondingly weakened, and where the relationship to God is broken, the relationship to man is broken.

Our fellowship with God is established through Jesus Christ, and maintained by our daily walk. In the reading of Scripture, we hear God speak to us, and in prayer, we speak to God, and by maintaining this dual relationship we grow in grace and in our relationship to men. Thus prayer is an important element of fellowship with God and therefore a prerequisite to closer fellowship with men.

And yet, although prayer is our speaking to God, it is still not our work but God's work in us. According to St. Paul, the Spirit "maketh intercession for the saints" (Rom. 8:27). God prays in us: our prayer is our own communication and yet at the same time the work in us of the triune God. We pray to God the Father, in the name and person of God the Son, and through the Holy Spirit, the third person of the Trinity. God the Father hears and answers our prayers; God the Son intercedes for us, for our prayers are made in His name, as members of His body; and God the Holy Spirit prays in and through us and expresses those yearnings we are unable to formulate.

The consequences of this fellowship of prayer are manifold, but certainly the central result is this: "the

inward man is renewed day by day” (2 Cor. 4:16). This is a reversal of the natural order of daily life: without this fellowship of prayer with God, we are worn out daily; “our souls go out at the elbows,” and we feel increasingly the burden of life’s frustrations and tensions. Life whittles away at our souls and bodies until it seems as though we are without hope of escape from the problems of life and the frowning loneliness of our being. The answer to this and its reversal is fellowship with God through prayer, whereby “the inner man is renewed from day to day.”

To this fellowship we can bring nothing except our willingness to receive, and faith means our trust in God and our willingness to receive His fellowship and His gifts, and to submit the whole of our lives to His sovereign will. As Andrew Murray has pointed out, “We must have faith in all that God is willing to do for us. We must have faith each day according to our special needs.” Where full fellowship exists, secrets are shared and reserve gives way to communion and trust. When we maintain true fellowship with God, the same is true. We meet God as we are, without hypocrisy, pretense, or reserve. We know that we are acceptable to Him and loved by Him, not because of what we are in ourselves, but because of Jesus Christ and our membership in Him. We therefore open our hearts and lives to Him freely

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and readily, that He might work in us that which is well-pleasing in His sight and have fellowship at every point of our lives. Then loneliness disappears, and life grows daily richer and stronger in us. This is the result of fellowship with God through Jesus Christ: “Whom having not seen, ye love; in whom, though now ye see him not, yet believing, ye rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory” (1 Pet. 1:8).

HOW TO PRAY

PART 6 - BEING MINDFUL OF WHAT YOU PRAY FOR

April 17, 1956

Good morning, friends. We are more likely to be troubled by God's "no" than by His answers to our prayers. In fact, it is very rare that any Christian complains or expresses regret because God has answered his prayer. And yet Scripture clearly asserts that at times the worst thing that can happen to us is for God to hear and answer our petition.

Psalm 106:15 gives a forceful illustration of this. Speaking of Israel in the wilderness, it declares that God "gave them their request; but sent leanness into their soul." The Lord granted a nation their prayers, but with tragic consequences.

Israel had been redeemed from slavery to Egypt and led miraculously into the wilderness. The journey from the Red Sea to the shores of the River Jordan was a short, quickly accomplished trek, but the Lord held Israel in the wilderness, purposing to prepare them for the responsibilities of liberty by means of the testing of hardship endured for freedom's sake. Obviously, the wilderness experience involved serious difficulties. A vast population, living in tents, moving slowly and

requiring great areas for grazing their livestock, they faced as well hunger, thirst, loneliness, enemies, and manifold inconveniences. All these things were intended by God as part of their training. It was part of the rough curriculum of the school of experience, but the end result, freedom in the Promised Land, was clearly presented to them, as were the difficulties en route.

Instead of accepting God's plan and purpose, Israel resented it and complained bitterly against it. They expressed a passionate preference for comfortable slavery rather than responsible and tested liberty. As a result, they prayed for comfort and ease, for special miracles to remove all difficulties from their path, and for the privileges of graduation at the time of testing. "He gave them their request; but sent leanness into their souls."

They paid a heavy price for answered prayer. In being delivered from the burdens of the present, they were also delivered from the privileges of the future. We can never run away from today without at the same time running away from tomorrow. The very blessings and privileges God purposed to give them required the present problems. They closed the door to the Promised Land by refusing to accept the wilderness experience

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as God intended it. When they reached the Promised Land, they were afraid of the responsibility of conquest as they had been of the responsibility of hardship. As a result, with the exception of Caleb and Joshua, that whole generation perished in the wilderness they would not accept.

To reject the discipline of life is to reject also the privilege of life. To pray for escape from responsibility and all that it involves is actually to pray for death. Thus Israel had its prayer answered as divine punishment, only to receive with it leanness of soul and ultimately a miserable death in the wilderness.

We need, therefore, to be mindful of what we pray for. Our prayers are more than the words of our lips. They involve our innermost being. What is it that we really want in life; what is it that we hunger and thirst after, yearn above all else for? In some sense or other, all our prayers are geared to that innermost desire.

If God hears and answers these prayers, if He gives us what we really want, if He shapes our lives in terms of our inner and hidden character, we will find that indeed answered prayer can bring leanness and misery to our souls.

We need, therefore, to come humbly to the Redeemer, asking, "Lord, teach us to pray." Apart from His teaching and guidance, our praying can be dangerous. We need to pray "in Jesus's name," in His person and in His Spirit, because any other praying runs the risk of being answered to our sorrow. But to pray truly "in His name" means to ask that His will and not our' be done. It means that we ask Him to pray in and through us and to give us grace to pray as we ought.

Then God can hear and answer, sending not leanness but strength, joy, and peace to our souls. Accordingly, the disciples' petition needs to be ours: "Lord, teach us to pray."



HOW TO PRAY

PART 7 - PREVAILING PRAYER

April 24, 1956

Good morning, friends. In the closing week of our Lord's ministry, the disciples, startled by the rapid turn of events and appalled by the dread prospect of their Lord's predicted death, were further shaken by His declaration that their nation was to wither like the smitten fig tree and disappear. It was for them a moment of fear and horror. They looked expectantly to the Lord: He who had predicted such dread events could no doubt predict something hopeful with regard to their own future. This expectation was not met. Jesus refused to say anything at this point concerning His disciples. Instead, He commended them to prayer, saying:

Have faith in God. For verily I say unto you, That whosoever shall say unto this mountain, Be thou removed, and be thou cast into the sea; and shall not doubt in his heart, but shall believe that those things which he saith shall come to pass; he shall have whatsoever he saith. Therefore I say unto you, What things soever ye desire, when ye pray, believe that ye receive them, and ye shall have them. And when ye stand praying, forgive, if ye have ought against any:

that your Father also which is in heaven may forgive you your trespasses. But if ye do not forgive, neither will your Father which is in heaven forgive your trespasses. (Mark 11:22–26)

Prayer can give us more than the most accurate prediction of the future. It was prayer, therefore, that was urged on the disciples. More than that, the means to prevailing prayer was clearly stated.

According to our Lord, prevailing prayer turns on two conditions (C. E. Graham Swift, in Davidson), our relation to God and our relation to man.

The first condition is simply stated: “Have faith in God.” “Without faith it is impossible to please him: for he that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him” (Heb. 11:6). When we walk in faith, we face still many trying problems, but by the grace of God the mountains are made low, the rough places plain, and the valleys are exalted. Every mountain of obstructions can be met, challenged, and overcome by the man of steadfast faith. When Prince Zerubbabel was confronted by apparently insurmountable obstacles, God spoke to him through the prophet Zechariah, saying, “Who art thou, O great mountain? Before Zerubbabel thou shalt become a plain” (Zech. 4:7).

In effect, Jesus told His disciples this: the key to your future is not in prediction but in prayerful faith. To say that our future can be fully described by even accurate prediction is to reduce life to events and to declare that life can be made or broken by events. In actuality, events can be made or broken only by life, and hence the essence of our life must be faith and prayer, in

order that in all things we may be more than conquerors through Him that loved us. The victory that overcomes the world and all its events is this, even our faith (1 John 5:4), the faith given and declared by God in His Word and apprehended by us and made one with our life. The *first* condition of prevailing faith is therefore faith in God.

The *second* condition is our relation to men, and this is specifically described as forgiveness. We live in a world in which offenses must needs come. It is impossible to find an honest human situation anywhere without finding out at the same time a wide area of offenses. We are not asked to forgive the sins, trespasses, offenses, or unkindnesses of others because they are of no account. On the contrary, sin is always very real and always most serious.

But we must forgive, for three reasons. *First*, we must forgive because it is God who requires it of us. When God speaks, we cannot argue. *Second*, we must forgive, because otherwise God will not hear us when we pray nor hearken to our own hunger for grace. *Third*, we must forgive, because it means leaving God's work to God. "Vengeance is mine; I will repay, saith the Lord" (Rom. 12:19). God undertakes the task of justice and judgment: this responsibility He delegates in limited areas to duly constituted authorities in church, state, and home. The

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task of forgiveness He delegates through Christ to every believer, asking them at the same time to forego judgment. It would be easier for us to forgive if we could also judge, but it requires humility to withhold judgment and extend God's forgiveness. And here, as Peter made clear, we have an example: "Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that ye should follow his steps ... Who, when he was reviled, reviled not again; when he suffered, he threatened not ... Who, his own self, bare our sins on His own body on the tree ... by whose stripes ye were healed" (1 Pet. 2:21, 23–24).



HOW TO PRAY

PART 8 - HYPOCRITICAL PRAYER

May 1, 1956

Good morning, friends. Our Lord, in teaching the disciples how to pray, warned them against the hypocrisies of the Pharisees, against meaningless prayers which sounded good, but did not express the honest truth nor any sincere request. This warning is timely in every age and in every place. Insincere prayer is offensive to God and a dangerous thing. Let us examine, therefore, our prayers: what are we asking for, and do we really want our prayers to be answered?

Not too long ago, a layman from another community expressed his distaste for all prayers for peace: he was against them, did not want peace, and doubted that many people honestly desired it. If we have real international peace, he argued, it will mean economic ruin for all of us. It will release men from the army and create unemployment, rob farmers and businessmen of their surest market, and create an international disaster. He was ready to take an occasional war, he declared, in preference to permanent tragedy. While I cannot agree with this man, I think that one aspect of his argument is true: many people who pray for peace probably want

with it all the supposed values of a war-gearred economy. All such prayers for peace are in the eyes of God hypocritical.

Prayers for justice are similar. So many people are ready to pray for justice who would be the last to desire it, if justice became a reality. If God tomorrow brought justice to bear on every community in the world, it would overturn every community and most families of the world. As the psalmist observed, "If thou, Lord, shouldest mark iniquities, O Lord, who shall stand?" (Ps. 130:3). Justice on earth would create tomorrow a greater revolution than any the world has seen or imagined. Do we really want justice when we pray for it?

When we pray, therefore, we need to pray honestly, and to understand what we ask for, not according to our private definition, but according to God's truth. Our conception of peace and justice is often very different than God's definition. Thus, we need to pray honestly and with knowledge of God's truth.

Moreover, we must recognize that God answers prayers, not according to our expectation but according to His requirement. When we pray for patience, we want it ready-made. But God gives us patience through tribulation, and we cannot receive the one without the other. When we pray for health, we must recognize that healing brings with it new responsibilities in gratitude and service. All answers to prayer are to the glory of God

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and our joy in Him, and we must pray and receive His answers with this understanding.

Our Lord, in warning us away from the hypocrisies of the Pharisees, concluded thus: "Be not ye therefore like unto them: for your Father knoweth what things ye have need of, before ye ask him" (Matt. 6:8). Because of God's foreknowledge, because the Father knows all our needs before we express them, therefore we are urged to be honest in our praying. This means not only an honest confession of sins and a reliance on His forgiveness, but more than that, a frank presentation of all our needs. It is a test both of our faith and our humility when we freely and openly make known the needs God already sees in us. What are your needs, your honest needs? Face yourself frankly in the light of God and His Word, and by His Spirit see your needs, your hunger, thirst, and longing as it actually is in your heart. God asks for honest praying and delights in it: anything less than that is not prayer but pretense.

We therefore pray to Almighty God, who knows our necessities before we ask, knows our ignorance in asking, and we make all our requests known unto Him. He enables us to see our desires as He sees them, gives us grace to wait on Him, and in His infinite love and mercy, grants us our petitions. Honest prayer therefore brings both answer at the last and joy in the process. In honest prayer we see ourselves as we are and God as He is and rejoice that in Christ Jesus we have access to the throne of grace and source of all power.

For a man to indulge in counterfeit prayer is as senseless as expressing a preference for counterfeit money. Such spurious currency eventually buys nothing

but trouble and imprisonment, and no man in his right mind can prefer it. Likewise no man should dare to approach God with counterfeit prayer, when true and honest prayer is so rich in grace and answer. Therefore, commanded the Lord of His disciples, “When thou prayest, thou shalt not be as the hypocrites are” (Matt. 6:5).

HOW TO PRAY

PART 9 - HOW GOD HEARS PRAYER

May 8, 1956

Good morning, friends. How does God hear prayer? With what frame of mind, with what approach does He view our requests? Our Lord answered this question in His parable of the man who knocked at midnight:

And he said unto them, Which of you shall have a friend, and shall go unto him at midnight, and say unto him, Friend, lend me three loaves; For a friend of mine in his journey is come to me, and I have nothing to set before him? And he from within shall answer and say, Trouble me not: the door is now shut, and my children are with me in bed; I cannot rise and give thee. I say unto you, Though he will not rise and give him, because he is his friend, yet because of his importunity he will rise and give him as many as he needeth. And I say unto you, Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you. For every one that asketh receiveth; and he that seeketh findeth; and to him that knocketh it shall be opened. If a son shall

ask bread of any of you that is a father, will he give him a stone? or if he ask a fish, will he for a fish give him a serpent? Or if he shall ask an egg, will he offer him a scorpion? If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children: how much more shall your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to them that ask him? (Luke 11:5–13)

The man who knocked at midnight had a very real need. A friend had unexpectedly arrived, after a hard day's journey. Travel in antiquity was by donkey or on foot, and the friend had undoubtedly been long on the road, was travel-weary, and very hungry. But there was no food in the house, no store nearby, and none open at that hour. The housewife no doubt intended to bake early in the morning, but the guest needed food now. So the host knocked at midnight on his neighbor's door, begging food. The neighbor, irritated at the disturbance, refused, but the man continued to knock: there was no one else he could ask, and ask he must. Finally, because he had no choice but to give food or else continue to be disturbed, the neighbor gave the man his request.

Our prayers find us in a like predicament. We turn to God, having no other recourse. We ask, and continue to knock at heaven's door, because there is nowhere else for us to turn. But here there is a tremendous difference: to ask a neighbor, as the man who knocked at midnight was compelled to do, is embarrassing, and an answer was forthcoming only because the neighbor wanted to get rid of a nuisance at his door. But God hears us rather as a loving Father who delights in providing for His children. To ask a Father who loves to help is a joy and a privilege, not an embarrassment.

Moreover, the Father we ask is the all-holy and omnipotent one, not a man such as we are. Jesus called attention to our original sin: “we being evil” by nature, He pointed out, cannot be compared to the Father in Heaven. And yet, “we being evil,” we being vitiated by original sin, still are capable of loving our children and seeking their good as far as we can foresee or understand it. We do not deliberately and willfully give them perverse gifts in answer to their requests: we

do not give them a stone for bread, a snake for a fish, or a scorpion for an egg. Neither does God the Father give us perverse gifts, although, from our sinful, limited, and ignorant perspective, it seems at times as though His gifts are perverse. God’s gifts are always good and gracious: our capacity to receive them is not always equal to His gifts. A child once fretted because, having asked for a real gun, his parents, in addition to various gifts, gave him a gift to provide for his first year of college when he grew up. To the child, his parents were perverse, when in actuality the perversity was all in the child. To us too often God seems perverse, but the perversity is entirely in us and must be recognized and cast out.

God’s simple invitation through Jesus Christ is, “Ask ... seek ... knock ... it shall be given ... ye shall find ... it shall be opened.” We are to pray in this confidence and without perversity. If our human parents have been

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capable of good toward us, “how much more shall your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to them that ask him?” Notice exactly how God gives when He answers prayer. *First* and foremost, He gives the Holy Spirit, then our particular requests. *First*, God gives us the capacity to receive, appreciate, and use His gifts, and *second*, He gives us the gifts. Pray, therefore, in faith; wait upon God; receive as He gives and praise Him for His giving. As the psalmist declared, “I had fainted, unless I had believed to see the goodness of the Lord in the land of the living” (Ps. 27:13). This is our confidence. Therefore, “Wait on the Lord: be of good courage, and he shall strengthen thine heart: wait, I say, on the Lord” (Ps. 27:14).



HOW TO PRAY

PART 10 - HALLOWED BE THY NAME

May 15, 1956

Good morning, friends. First things must come first in any honest and ordered situation, for to give centrality or primacy to trifles means basically to trifle with life itself. When our Lord responded to the disciples' request, "Lord, teach us to pray," He gave, as the first and foremost petition of His prayer, "Hallowed be thy name." In so doing, He did not require that we always begin in this identical fashion, but that in all our living as well as our praying, the hallowing of God's name have centrality.

Since such importance is given to this petition, it is important for us to understand it clearly. It means that we must regard with holy awe and reverence God's character or essence, that we must give glory to God as He is in Himself, not in terms merely of His relationship to us and His goodness towards us. It means that our first desire must be for the glory of God, and our joy must be in its manifestation. It compels us to recognize that because God alone is God and we but creatures, the glory of God is our only true hope for good. We cannot

ask God to stop being God in order to indulge us in our hope of man-centered glory. Our surest hope of finding answers to all our creaturely hopes is to seek God's glory in terms of His Word. A carburetor built for a particular model automobile will work only in terms of that car, because it was created for a specific function and none other. Man was created by God for a specific function in terms of His eternal purpose and glory, and for man to seek any other function than that of a creature under God is to misuse and waste his life, to render it useless and purposeless, and to deny himself the joy that comes in true calling, in fulfilling the purpose of our creation.

To hallow God's name means, moreover, to know God, not according to our thoughts, but according to His thoughts, not according to our reasoning, but according to His revealing. We do not hallow God's name if we undervalue the holiness of His purpose and the righteousness of His law. We cannot expect God to act like a sentimental or doting grandfather who indulges his loved ones. To hallow His name is to see God as God, and to recognize the majesty and transcendent nature of His justice and law. But neither do we hallow God's name if we reduce Him to an impersonal law and a soulless justice. God is never to be confused with a rigid determinism and an inflexible causality. "When ye pray," said Jesus, "say, Our Father

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which art in heaven” (Luke 11:2). We have failed to hallow His name unless we truly and from our hearts can call Him “Our Father.” The relationship is personal. The starting-point of all true prayer is a recognition of God as He is and as He reveals Himself to be toward us. He is not to be called “My Father.” Christ alone has that singular relationship. He must be called “Our Father,” and by that declaration we pray, not as isolated persons, but as members of a great household with relations to the whole of it. And when we declare Him to be “Our Father,” we also declare Him to be no cold and impersonal first cause, but the great Creator, Sustainer, and Redeemer of all Creation. Of a first cause, we can ask nothing. Of the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, we can ask all things whatsoever we have need of. The god of the philosophers is the prisoner of his laws. The God of Scripture manifests fully His justice and His love in Jesus Christ, and, without setting aside either His love or His justice, satisfies both, manifests Himself, and redeems man. He is a God of law but not the prisoner of law: He is “Our Father,” and the almighty and omnipotent one, the only truly free being. And we in our sin and our bondage can pray to Him in His freedom and law and call Him “Our Father” and be assured of His readiness to answer. Let us therefore hallow His name that we might live in terms of our God-given function and calling and might fulfill our creaturely hopes, given by God for a purpose, to be brought to Him in prayer, and to be submitted to His loving care. “Our Father which art in heaven, Hallowed be thy name.”

HOW TO PRAY

PART II - THY KINGDOM COME

May 22, 1956

Good morning, friends. A fatherless home is a broken home, one lacking its true support and authority. Likewise, a people whose lives are lived apart from God the Father are without true authority and security. A godless nation is a nation in which authority and law are broken or corrupt, because the only source of authority is denied or neglected. The nations of today are broken homes, breeding delinquency in the body politic because of their prodigal wandering from the authority of God the Father, who is alone the true sovereign of all nations. Having rejected His authority, they are subject to His judgment.

It is for this reason that the Lord's Prayer summons us to pray, "Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven." Here is a petition that God overrule us, both in our personal and our national lives. To pray in these words sincerely is to confess that our will often fails to move in conformity to the Lord's will. Our Lord, in giving us this prayer, gave thereby a confession of sin for us to echo, and yet one

of such significant direction. The focus is not on our sin, nor on our wayward will, but instead on God's Kingdom and His will. Prayer must be made for confession of sins, and thanksgiving for forgiveness is essential, but prayer cannot revolve around our life, our will, our hopes, or our planning. That God has room in His purpose for our hopes and needs is clear enough in the next petition, wherein we are asked to pray for our daily food, but to limit

prayer to our lives and our will is to abuse prayer, if it is constantly done. At times, indeed, pressing personal problems overwhelm us, and our prayer cries out in purely personal tones. This is right, and pleasing to God. But the proper perspective for the whole of our prayer life must be in terms, not of our will, but that His will be done, not in terms of our petty domain, but that His Kingdom come.

However, as Dr. James Reid has pointed out (*Hear My Prayer*, p. 330), "the Kingdom begins within ourselves. Our heart is a world in itself. God's rule must begin there." In his *Confessions*, St. Augustine candidly comments that during one period of his spiritual pilgrimage his prayer seemed to have been, "Lord, make me pure, but not yet." This kind of praying is all too common in every generation. What we want of others, we are unwilling to ask of ourselves. The

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character we demand of the nation, we too often refuse to manifest in our personal lives. Humility is a great virtue, and we are anxious to see it in others, but less anxious about our own lack of it. Other people should be patient and loving and thereby put less strain on our own disposition. So many people feel that it would be a wonderful world if other people were righteous so that we could be comfortably undisturbed in our sinning, or in our spiritual laziness.

This petition is directed against all these things when, by its simplicity and plainness, it overrules all persons in heaven and earth and supplants their will and their planning with God's will and God's Kingdom.

Jesus Christ established the pattern of obedience in this respect in His faithfulness to His appointed task, establishing the Kingdom and manifesting His faithfulness to God the Father. He declared, "Here I come—in the roll of the book this is written of me—I come to do thy will, O God" (Heb. 10:7, Moffatt). "Not my will, but thine, be done" (Luke 22:42). The world cannot be left out of our praying, but neither can we leave out ourselves as an object of the Lord's chastening, reviving, and overruling providence. This petition has in mind the great reality that the kingdoms of this world are and shall be the Kingdoms of our Lord and of His Christ.

It finds total fulfillment only at the end of history when the recreation of all things is consummated, but it finds daily fulfillment in your life and mine as the Lord comes into our hearts in power and in truth, received by us in faith and daily glorified by our trust and obedience. It finds fulfillment as the nations are brought into the

light of the gospel and the joy of the Lord. To limit God's answer to the end of history is to refuse an answer and to resist the reality of His present sovereignty.

Therefore, let us pray in faith, saying,

Our Father, who art in heaven,
Hallowed be thy name.
Thy Kingdom come. Thy will be done,
On earth as it is in heaven.



HOW TO PRAY

PART 12 - PRACTICAL PRAYER

May 29, 1956

Good morning, friends. One of the invaluable lessons taught us by the Lord's Prayer is its practicality. Too much praying is too spiritual to be human. It assumes that we have no bodies and no physical needs or requirements. It moves in the world of clouds rather than in a world of men. One of the surest marks of unbelieving prayer is its vagueness and its exclusively spiritual nature. People who avoid asking God for things do so simply because they believe Him to be incapable of giving them.

Jesus ruled out all such lifeless praying when He included this petition, "Give us this day our daily bread," in what was given to the disciples as a practical lesson in prayer. Hunger is the most elemental of our physical needs, and hungry men have created revolutions, incited riots, and committed crimes. God recognizes this need as a valid one, and asks that it be brought to Him. He thereby gives recognition to all our physical needs and summons us to seek His blessing with provision with regard to them.

This petition finds its place in the Lord's Prayer

immediately after the words, “Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.” God’s will and our needs must both find expression in all healthy prayer. Moreover, the Lord’s Prayer gives us the right to say that it is a part of the Lord’s will and of His Kingdom plan that our daily needs be met through Him, that they be brought to Him in prayer, and that they be recognized as God-given hungers and needs, requiring God’s blessing and filling.

Every healthy physical need and hunger in your life and mine is there because God so created us. God rejoiced in all His creation and declared it wholly good. To feel that any of our needs or problems are unworthy of God’s attention is to despise God’s creative purpose and to dishonor Him. Age after age, God has ministered to the hunger and thirst of His people; to Israel in the wilderness, He gave meat, manna, and water; to Elijah in the desert, He gave food; to the multitudes that followed our Lord into the wilderness, He gave a miraculous feeding. He clothed Adam and Eve after their fall, despite their sin, and Israel in the wilderness. He clothed Solomon in all his glory, and also the flowers of the field. He gave to young Adam a helpmeet, declaring that is not good for man to live alone, and to the aging Moses, the woman of Cush to give him joyous companionship in the trials

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of leadership. Well could Mary sing with joy, as she considered the works of the Almighty:

My soul doth magnify the Lord, And my spirit hath rejoiced in God my Saviour. For he hath regarded the low estate of his handmaiden: for, behold, from henceforth all generations shall call me blessed. For he that is mighty hath done to me great things; and holy is his name. And his mercy is on them that fear him from generation to generation. He hath shewed strength with his arm; he hath scattered the proud in the imagination of their hearts. He hath put down the mighty from their seats, and exalted them of low degree. He hath filled the hungry with good things; and the rich he hath sent empty away. He hath helped his servant Israel, in remembrance of his mercy; As he spake to our fathers, to Abraham, and to his seed for ever. (Luke 1:46–55)

The barren Hannah rejoiced in her son Samuel and declared, “He raiseth up the poor out of the dust, and lifteth up the beggar from the dunghill, to set them among princes, and to make them inherit the throne of glory: for the pillars of the earth are the Lord’s, and he hath set the world upon them. He will keep the feet of his saints, and the wicked shall be silent in darkness; for by strength shall no man prevail” (1 Sam. 2:8–9).

To believe in God, therefore, means to pray both for His will and our needs, knowing that such is His requirement and expectation. Paul declared, “In nothing be anxious, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God” (Phil. 4:6, ASV). “My God shall supply all your need” (Phil. 4:19).

Open your hunger to God in prayer. Commit it to the Lord, and wait patiently for Him. We are summoned to do this by the triune God, who asks us to make known all our wants and wishes that He might give, not only to our needs as He sees them, but above all, to our faith. Therefore pray believing in Him, that you might receive, and receiving, be filled.

HOW TO PRAY

PART 13 - FORGIVE US

June 5, 1956

Good morning, friends. One of the most objectionable aspects of Scripture to many people is its constant emphasis on sin. Many people prefer to bypass this unpleasant reality in the hopes of eliminating it, but such a strategy is as hopeless as trying to eliminate the sun by closing our eyes to it.

The Lord's Prayer asks for us, "Forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors." Some versions read "transgressions" for "debts." Perhaps the clearest expression of its essential meaning is to be found in Luke's version of the prayer: "Forgive us our sins" (Luke 11:4). By sin, Scripture certainly has reference to all those offenses and transgressions whereby men offend God and seek to hurt their fellow men. It has reference, however, not only to the acts but to the life behind the act, the heart, mind, and will which impel a man to a course of rebellion against God. Both the condition and act characterize even the greatest saint in this life, and the life of faith shows a constant yearning for victory through the forgiveness and grace of God through Jesus Christ.

When we pray for and receive forgiveness, it means that we are restored to communion with God and receive His grace and fellowship. God, forgiving all our sins through Jesus Christ, treats us as though we are sinless as Jesus Christ, and, when we become members of Him, such a purity is imputed to us and then works in us to accomplish its implications. Our sins and our iniquities He will remember no more (see Heb. 10:17). “As far as the east is from the west, so far hath he removed our transgressions from us” (Ps. 103:12). Such is the forgiveness we receive, but we receive it day by day as we also give it. The forgiveness of justification is there, but the daily grace and cleansing, the sanctifying love, are given on another basis. The petition makes this clear: “Forgive us ... as we forgive.” The force of this is given further emphasis by our Lord in His insistent declarations: “forgive, and ye shall be forgiven.” “If ye will not forgive neither will your heavenly Father forgive you” (Mark 11:26).

Too many Christians are receiving no answers to their prayers because they nurse an unforgiving spirit. The Lord makes it clear that what we want from Him we must be willing to give to others. His forgiveness is absolute. He buries our past completely and gives us a totally new status and a new life as well. The divine forgiveness not only cancels our sin but blots it out as well.

When God’s forgiveness towards us is so great, it can only be accounted ingratitude and rebellion on our part when we refuse to extend forgiveness to others for offenses or transgressions which are by comparison so little. Moreover, we reveal whether we want forgiveness

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by the way we give it. Harsh and unforgiving people are more insistent on their righteousness than the righteousness of Christ. They do not forgive others because they fail to see how much they need to be forgiven.

When we pray, “Forgive us ... as we forgive,” God takes us at our word: He allows no trifling with words, and out of our own mouth, He shames us, if we are insincere in this petition. But if we indeed forgive as we have been forgiven, then the grace of God flows richly and freely into our lives and through us into the lives

of others. We then walk, in the words of Dr. James Reid, “in the realm of mercy, not of merit.” And to walk in a world of mercy is to live in a realm of inexhaustible love and peace, in an area of wealth and power, and above all, to walk in freedom. Forgiveness gives us liberty from the past and victory over it; it releases us from hatred and resentment. It moves in a world wholly ruled by God and therefore to be left to His all-wise government. The freedom of forgiveness is the glorious liberty of the sons of God and at the heart of their new life. Out of forgiveness, the forgiveness of Calvary, comes the great regeneration, the new heaven and new earth, and the glory of the resurrection of the dead. Forgiveness is freedom under God and the essence of our liberty. Forgiveness through the blood of Jesus Christ is the

beginning of our liberty, and our extension of that forgiveness to those who sin against us is the realization and the application of our freedom. We reveal whether we have forgiveness by the way we give it. O Lord our God, forgive us as we forgive.

HOW TO PRAY

PART 14 - TEMPTATION

June 12, 1956

Good morning, friends. Perhaps the most difficult petition in the Lord's Prayer is the last, "And lead us not into temptation; but deliver us from evil."

The very wording of this plea recognizes two basic facts: *first*, that God can and often does lead us into a place of temptation, because all our ways are in His hands, and *second*, having led us into such a testing, only He can deliver us.

To understand our deliverance from evil and from the evil one, we must first understand the meaning of God's guidance. What is the meaning of temptation in our life? God never leads us into sin, but He often leads us into temptation. Of Jesus Himself, it is said that He "was led up of the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted of the devil" (Matt. 4:1). Paul wrote, "There hath no temptation taken you but such as is common to man: but God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that which ye are able; but will with the temptation also make a way of escape, that ye may be able to bear it" (1 Cor. 10:13). In other words,

Paul asserted that God provides both the temptation and the way of escape. To understand why God so leads us, we need to understand the meaning of temptation. Temptation can be either the prelude to sin or the prelude to victory. Our Lord's temptation in the wilderness was the beginning of the restoration of paradise, whereas Adam's temptation in the garden turned the world into a wilderness. Our Lord's life was full of temptations: He "was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin" (Heb. 4:15). The wilderness temptation was followed by many others. But, having met these temptations victoriously, He could say of Himself at the Last Supper, "the prince of this world cometh and hath nothing in me" (John 14:30). It has been well said, "No man has been through the university of life till he has been well tempted."

Thus we can be sure that God's guidance means testing for us, means tribulation and temptation. And yet we are asked to pray, "Lead us not into temptation," and God never asks us to pray for anything which He does not intend to give. This petition needs to be understood in terms of its relationship to the previous one: "Forgive us ... as we have been forgiven." To pray for either means to pray for both. To know forgiveness is

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to know its cost to God, the blood of Jesus Christ. And to know this cost is to hate sin and our inclination to sin and to pray earnestly for deliverance from it. Thus, in our petition we pray not for an easy life, far removed from all testing and temptation, but for a victorious life, one free from any offense against our Redeemer. The heart of the petition is seen in the latter half: "deliver us from evil." The petition is a cry for guidance, for God's leading to preserve us, not from any and all testing, but only from temptation to sin, from a surrender to evil. This is a plea for sanctification, for growth in the Lord and in His Spirit. Sometimes the only way we can be delivered from evil is to be tested, tried, and refined by fire. Temptation is either the prelude to victory or the prelude to sin. In neither case do we enjoy it, but the heart of our plea is for deliverance, not from testing, but from evil. Lead us, we pray, into no temptation that will deliver us to evil. Remember our frailty, and may Thy testing and leading be only into that which we are able to bear for our sanctification in Thee.

Jesus Christ accepted temptation for all of us in the wilderness, and gained victory for all who by faith lay hold of His salvation. Into that temptation, He was driven or led by the Holy Spirit in order that He might gain the victory that could be won on no other battleground. To meet that temptation, He prayed. We are called upon to meet our temptations by prayer and by the might of the Spirit of God, to meet them as members of Christ that we might share in His victory. We pray for God's guidance so that we might be delivered from the evil one, and God leads us with this purpose, our sanctification, so that the time may come when the prince of this world finds nothing in us, and

we stand redeemed in Christ, before the throne of His glory, eternally delivered from all evil and delivered into eternal life by His grace.

Therefore, in the words of James, “My brethren, count it all joy when ye fall into divers temptations; Knowing this, that the trying of your faith worketh patience. But let patience have her perfect work, that ye may be perfect and entire, wanting nothing” (James 1:2-4).

HOW TO PRAY

PART 15 - DOXOLOGY

June 19, 1956

Good morning, friends. The Lord's Prayer concludes with a glorious doxology which echoes the essence of Old Testament faith: "For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, for ever. Amen." In David's benediction we have the same witness: "Blessed be thou, Lord God of Israel our father, for ever and ever. Thine, O Lord, is the greatness and the power, and the glory, and the victory, and the majesty: for all that is in the heaven and in the earth is thine; thine is the kingdom, O Lord, and thou art exalted as head over all" (1 Chron. 29:10–11). Psalm 115 begins, "Not unto us, O Lord, not unto us, but unto thy name give glory, for thy mercy, and for thy truth's sake" (Ps. 115:1).

Behind these joyful declarations stands the basic Biblical witness: "The earth is the Lord's, and the fullness thereof; the world, and they that dwell therein" (Ps. 24:1). Everything that is, was created, is sustained, and absolutely governed by Almighty God, and is therefore in total dependence upon God. The very reason why we approach God in prayer, making all our spiritual and material wants and wishes known to Him, is given

in this joyful doxology: we ask Him because His is indeed the Kingdom, the power, and the glory. Thus the heart of prayer is well stated by David: “And now, Lord, what wait I for? my hope is in thee” (Ps. 39:7). “My soul, wait thou only upon God” (Ps. 62:5).

We cannot pray except in this spirit and in this faith, “for he that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him” (Heb. 11:6).

Thus, one of the most significant aspects of the modern decline in the prayer life is well stated by Peter Eldersveld: “Men have become so big and God has become so small.” Men have come to boast in all their doings that theirs is the kingdom, the power, and the glory. Today man is in the process of destroying the world and himself while boasting of soon conquering time, space, and even death. The more desperate his condition becomes, the more extravagant his boasting. When a British astronomer expressed some elementary humility with regard to the difficulties of space travel, he was reprimanded by other scientists. Man feels himself too big to pray; his hope is in himself, and there is his frustration. Our world has become man-centered, and as a result is frustrated in the midst of plenty, whereas our forefathers in faith rejoiced in the face of want. Our world has become man-centered, and accordingly its vision is out of focus, and “where there is no vision, the people perish” (Prov. 29:18).

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The doxology is a joyful one because it rejoices in God's omnipotence and government, being confident of its purpose and its glorious end. It calls upon us to be anxious about nothing, "but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God" (Phil. 4:6). It declares our faith that our fulfillment is in God, and that only the government and the grace of God can answer the hunger and thirst of our being.

It declares that there is nothing we cannot ask God for, because all things are His, and it is His express desire that we look unto Him for all things. More than that, it implies that our very growth is to be measured in terms of our increasing reliance and trust in the Lord for all things, and our obedience to Him according to His Word.

We can therefore approach with happy confidence the Lord who not only teaches us to pray but includes all our needs in that prayer. "He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things?" (Rom. 8:32). "For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, for ever. Amen."

HOW TO PRAY

PART 16 - AMEN

June 26, 1956

Good morning, friends. Our prayers are ended with a most significant word, “amen.” The word “amen” is rendered in our Bible also as “verily,” a favorite word of our Lord. It means firm, true, reliable, something that cannot be shaken. We are asked to pray always in Jesus’s name, and the only Christian prayer which is not in Jesus’s name is the Lord’s Prayer, where the use of His name is made unnecessary because we pray in His own words. When Jesus puts the amen to His own prayer, He declares that God’s promise to hear and answer that prayer is unshakeable. And when we pray “In Jesus’s name, amen,” we declare that because we pray in and through Jesus Christ, we pray in the confidence that God’s promise is unshakeable: He will hear and answer out of heaven, and He will reveal Himself as the God who harkens unto prayer. Jesus Christ summoned us to pray in this confidence, when He declared, “Verily, verily (or amen, amen), I say unto you, Whatsoever ye shall ask the Father in my name, he will give it you” (John 16:23). Here is a double amen, a double assurance from God the Son of His promise

to hear and answer. Is it any wonder that James 4:2–3 asserted that “ye have not, because ye ask not. Ye ask, and receive not, because ye ask amiss, that ye may consume it upon your lusts.”

The word “amen” is thus a word of great importance and great significance. To say amen is to place our confidence in an unshakeable God whose absolute government is our only confidence. When Moses pronounced the curses on sin in Deuteronomy 27, the repeated refrain required of the congregation is specifically stated: “And all the people shall say, Amen.” Their amen was the recognition of the whole purpose of God to bless faith and obedience, and to curse unbelief and disobedience. Amen is the response of faith to the sovereignty of God and His saving grace in Jesus Christ. In saying amen we affirm our confidence in our Creator and Redeemer. We ask of Him our daily needs, and we give to Him our joyful confidence as our thanks-offering. In the words of William Van Peursem, “Amen is also the renewal of our dedication to God. As God gives Himself to us, we give ourselves to God. God has bound Himself to us by His Amen, and we bind ourselves to Him by our Amen.”

We sometimes hear it said that amen means “so be it.” More accurately, it means “so is it” or “so it shall be” and is closely related to the basic meaning, “unshakeable,” “firm,” or “supported.” When we say amen, we declare our faith that God holds as true the declaration of our lips or will or can make it true. It is thus again a witness to the sovereignty and grace of God.

In some churches, the people say amen to underscore the preaching, and this too is a proper use of amen,

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which is so used in Revelation 22:20, and it is a witness to our believing acceptance of the Word of God.

The use of amen is noteworthy in Isaiah 45:15, where the prophet proclaims, “Verily thou art a God that hidest thyself, O God of Israel, the Saviour,” as well as in Revelation 3:14, where it is a name or description of Christ, “the Amen, the faithful and true witness.” God is the great Amen, the faithful and unshakeable one, and Jesus

Christ is God’s resounding Amen

declared unto earth, His unshakeable justice revealed on Calvary and His faithful love revealed in grace unto salvation. Of Him Paul writes, “For all the promises of God in him are yea, and in him Amen, unto the glory of God by us” (2 Cor. 1:20). In Him we have the glorious assurance of which Romans 8:32, in Moffat’s translation, speaks: “The God who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, surely he will give us everything besides!”

“Blessed be the Lord for evermore. Amen, and Amen” (Ps. 89:52).

HOW TO PRAY

PART 17 - CONSEQUENCES OF PRAYER

July 10, 1956

Good morning, friends. Scripture speaks frequently and compellingly of both the obligation to pray and the consequence of prayer. We are told:

If thou canst believe, all things are possible to him that believeth. (Mark 9:23)

What things soever ye desire, when ye pray, believe that ye receive them, and ye shall have them. (Mark 11:24)

And this is the confidence that we have in him, that, if we ask any thing according to his will, he heareth us: And if we know that he hear us, whatsoever we ask, we know that we have the petitions that we desired of him. (1 John 5:14–15)

Call unto me, and I will answer thee, and show thee great and mighty things, which thou knowest not. (Jer. 33:3)

The man of faith is the man who lives “with all prayer and supplication praying at all seasons in the Spirit, and watching thereunto in all perseverance and

supplication for all saints” (Eph. 6:18, ASV). By prayer we are brought nigh to God and to His blessings for us. While we are not promised that we will be spared from troubles and hardships, we are definitely promised that through them we shall be delivered into greater good, and the very trials made the means of blessing.

Then why is it that Christians are so slow in praying? Through prayer, we can have access to the throne of God. Through prayer, we can make intercession for those whom we love, as well as for ourselves. Through prayer, we draw nigh to God and are made strong in faith and hope. We lose nothing by praying except our burdens, and we gain so much. Then why are we so often slow to pray when we are quick to complain?

The answer is almost painfully obvious. To pray, we must love both God and our neighbor. To pray, we must enjoy fellowship with the Lord and have a loving concern for our fellow men. If we are to pray, we must love, and if we do not pray, or pray only a little, it is because we have little or no love for God and for our neighbor.

Thus, if we are not praying, we are neglecting more than prayer. We are neglecting our obligation to love God with all our heart, mind, and being, and

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our neighbor as ourself. The love of God is practically revealed in our joy in His Word and His sovereignty, and in love for one another. “By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another” (John 13:35). Peter asked the Christians of his day this standard: “above all things being fervent in your love among yourselves” (1 Pet. 4:8, ASV). The word for “fervent” has also been rendered by other translators as “constant,” “unfailing,” and “intense.” Any way we render it, it presents an embarrassing obligation to most Christians, whose attitude towards their fellow members can sometimes scarcely be called love, what more fervent or unfailing love.

But Scripture plainly declares that “the fruit of the Spirit is love” (Gal. 5:22), and that if the Spirit of God dwell within us, He will manifest Himself in love through us. And love reveals itself also in intercessory prayer for one another. The great high priestly prayer of our Lord, recorded in John 17, reveals this clearly as characterizing the essence of our Lord’s intercession for us. He prayed “that they may all be one, even as we are one: I in them and thou in me ... that the world may know that thou hast send me, and hast loved them as thou hast loved me ... that the love wherewith thou has loved me may be in them, and I in them” (John 18:21–23, 26).

The prophets of the Old Testament were called not only to speak for God but to plead with Him for their people. In the words of Isaiah 62:6-7, “I have set watchmen upon thy walls, O Jerusalem, which shall never hold their peace day nor night: ye that are the Lord’s remembrancers, keep not silence, And give Him

no rest.” This duty belongs now to all who are members of Christ: to be watchmen on the walls, and, seeing the course of things, to be intercessors with God through Christ: to “keep not silence, and give Him no rest.”

To be slow in praying means that we are slow in loving, too much wrapped up in ourselves to think of God and our neighbor. We need all of us to echo the words of Elizabeth Prentiss’s hymn (1856):

More love to Thee, O Christ,
More love to Thee!
Hear Thou the prayer I make
On bended knee;
This is my earnest plea:
More love, O Christ, to Thee,
More love to thee, more love to Thee!

Jesus asked Peter, Simon, son of John, do you love me? When Peter insisted that he did, Jesus immediately pointed to a responsibility, “Feed my sheep.” Essential to all our responsibilities to God and man is a prayer-relationship to God. If in this we are faithful, then God will be merciful to us, and bless us, and cause His face to shine upon us, that His way may be known upon earth, His saving health among all nations (Ps. 67:1–2).

HOW TO PRAY

PART 18 - STRIVING IN PRAYER

July 17, 1956

Good morning, friends. One of the curious aspects of Biblical phraseology, as it concerns prayer, is that it is spoken of as work, and wrestling. Jacob's encounter with the angel of His presence was a wrestling in prayer; Paul summoned the Christians of Rome to "strive together with me in your prayers to God for me" (Rom.15:30); and the word "strive" is translated by Williams as "wrestle." We find the same usage in Colossians 4:12-13 (ASV), where Paul speaks of Epaphras as "always striving for you in his prayers."

At first glance, it seems strange that such language should be applied to the simple act of prayer, but on second thought it becomes increasingly apparent that prayer is, after all, not so simple an act. When prayer offers us the omnipotence and love of God as our refuge and strength, it seems natural that we should constantly rely on prayer and resort to it. And yet so many Christians are slow to pray and quick to say amen. Despite all our evasiveness, it is apparent that there is some kind of difficulty attached to prayer, and perhaps Paul is right, and Hosea (12:4) also, in speaking of it as wrestling.

Certainly, the wrestling is not with God. He speaks all too clearly about His delight in hearing us, and of His joy in our conversation. The wrestling, therefore, is, as Hallensby has pointed out, quite obviously with ourselves.

In the Old Testament, we find believers filled with fear on having a vision of God. This, in fact, was one of the marks of a true vision. Instead of acting as a press agent over his honor, as false prophets of modern times do with regard to their false and pretended visions, the Old Testament prophets were filled with fear and, in fact, even expected to die. The reason was always clear-cut: in God's light, they saw their own darkness; in the blaze of God's holiness, their own sin stood out, and they felt the force of God's judgment against all sin.

Our feeling with regard to prayer is often similar. If we are afraid to pray, or slow in praying, it is because we are afraid to face God in His holiness when we ourselves are so much at ease in our sin. To draw nigh to God means, therefore, to wrestle with the old Adam in us and to subordinate ourselves totally, even with all our pleading, to the most holy and sovereign God. As we pray for loved ones, the Holy Spirit within us prays with us, and also at the same time reminds us how much we have left undone and unsaid in manifesting our love to those whom we ask God to help. When we pray for ourselves, the Holy Spirit says amen to our prayer and with it reminds us afresh of our sins and our carelessness with our own lives. Thus prayer can be very embarrassing, and it does involve a wrestling with ourselves.

But prayer is also a very great joy. The wrestling is nothing compared to the victory it offers. Since our

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praying is in Jesus's name, our prayer is therefore in the power of His victory.

Jacob's wrestling left him crippled for life as far as his pride and self-righteousness were concerned, but that crippling also made him Israel, a prince with God. You and I are called upon to follow Jacob's example in this respect. The more the old Adam in us is crippled, the more we prevail with God, and the greater the joy we have in Him.

Pray, therefore, and commit yourself into the hands of the Almighty, for "as is His majesty, so is his mercy" (Sirach 2:18).

"They that trust in the Lord shall be as mount Zion, which cannot be removed, but abideth for ever. As the mountains are round about Jerusalem, so the Lord is round about his people from henceforth even forever" (Ps. 125:1-2).



HOW TO PRAY

PART 19 - PRAYER AND THE WORD OF GOD

July 24, 1956

Good morning, friends. There is no better guide to prayer than the Bible itself, and our communion with God thrives in proportion to our readiness to hear His Word. In the book of Psalms particularly we find the prayers of saints to give us a vivid account of actual prayer, as witness Psalm 62:

Truly my soul waiteth upon God: from him cometh my salvation. He only is my rock and my salvation; he is my defence; I shall not be greatly moved. How long will ye imagine mischief against a man? ye shall be slain all of you: as a bowing wall shall ye be, and as a tottering fence. They only consult to cast him down from his excellency: they delight in lies: they bless with their mouth, but they curse inwardly. Selah. My soul, wait thou only upon God; for my expectation is from him. He only is my rock and my salvation: he is my defence; I shall not be moved. In God is my salvation and my glory: the rock of my strength, and my refuge, is in God. Trust in him at all times; ye people, pour out your heart before him:

God is a refuge for us. Selah. Surely men of low degree are vanity, and men of high degree are a lie: to be laid in the balance, they are altogether lighter than vanity. Trust not in oppression, and become not vain in robbery: if riches increase, set not your heart upon them. God hath spoken once; twice have I heard this; that power belongeth unto God. Also unto thee, O Lord, belongeth mercy: for thou renderest to every man according to his work. (Ps. 62:1–12)

This psalm was obviously written at a time of crisis, probably during the revolt of Absalom. David emphatically eliminates as any source of possible help either the common people of the nation or its leaders. He was certain that there was no hope in either: both were “altogether lighter than vanity.” This distrust was well-founded. He knew other people because he first of all knew himself. David knew the extent of his own sin, his own waywardness and rebelliousness. More than that, he knew that the issue was in God’s hands. He cannot find words sufficiently strong to express the absolute security and the unalterable and unchanging strength of the Almighty who is his salvation. Thrice he uses the word “only” to assert that God alone is his hope, while the “only” hope and consultation of his enemies is in their self-will. In this he takes courage. David clearly placed no confidence in his status before God as a man: he knew his sin clearly, but equally clearly, the mercy of God. Emphatically he asserts, “In God is my salvation and my glory.”

Outwardly, David appears doomed, resembles a collapsing wall or a tottering fence. But David

recognizes by faith that appearances are deceiving and that in God, he is a tower built upon the rock, secure in a refuge which cannot be shaken. Though David indeed has sinned, and can be accused by men, he rests confidently in the known and proven mercies of the almighty and sovereign God.

His earnest plea to his followers therefore is this: "Trust in him at all times; ye people, pour out your heart before him: God is a refuge for us." It is easy to pour out our hearts to one whom we love and trust: if we fail to pour out our hearts to God, we reveal a lack of love and trust. God has no heart of stone but rather a heart of love. He has an infinite and perfect capacity for understanding as well as aiding us. If we avoid prayer, it is because we are afraid He does understand us all too clearly, and we prefer to retain our hypocrisies. But when like David we come, confessing our sins and receiving His mercy and grace, we pour out our hearts to Him gladly, and, in distress, gain confidence, knowing that our trust is in God, who is our salvation and our defense. "My soul, wait thou only upon God; for my expectation is from him."

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A HAPPY NEW YEAR

GOODBYE TO A TROUBLE-FILLED YEAR

December 27, 1955

Good morning, friends. In a few days, the year 1955 will be over, and most of us will be glad to see it go. It has been a trouble-filled year. To recall the year is almost to make a roll call of troubles, and to top it all, the flood has devastated the community. To see the muddied and silt-covered stores and homes is a sickening sight, a hard reminder of the frailty of our existence and the meaning of disaster. What we want now is a happy new year, a year in which things will be different and our lives trouble free. What we want is a rest from trouble and a little less of grief and disaster breathing down our necks. We wish one another a happy new year, and certainly it is our prayer for ourselves.

But let's be honest with ourselves; let's be realistic; let's look at things clearly and in focus. The next year is likely to be very much like the year past, no floods, we hope and pray, but full of its share of troubles and griefs. War will be as close as ever and will continue to haunt the nation. Money, in our inflated economy, will be plentiful but will be as hard to hold on to as a greased pig. The forthcoming elections will offer us marvelous

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hopes but will leave us as usual in the same round of problems and tensions. None of us will grow any younger, and some of us considerably older.

This is an honest picture of 1956, apart from any unforeseen disaster, economic collapse, or issue of war. And it looks very much like every other year. The plain fact is that the world has been very much like this for a long time, and is likely to continue so beyond our time and our kin. If we plan, therefore, to have a happy new year, we must plan to have it, not because

of 1956, but in spite of 1956. If we wait for the time to bring us the conditions of happiness, we will wait forever, because those conditions will never come. Happiness is not a condition of time and circumstance, but a condition of life, a product of faith and a witness to inner security. The world's unhappiest people are not those whom disaster has laid low, but those who wait for conditions to change that happiness might be their lot. The change that must occur before happiness can be ours is a change within ourselves. The years remain the same, and they promise us little or nothing. If we remain the same, then we remain frustrated and impatient, outsiders to happiness and peace.

The years remain the same and therefore offer us no hope. But the Lord God also remains the same, and this is the basis of all our hope and our happiness. When

we begin to wait, not on things changing, but on the unchanging God, then our days and our years become happy, and their promise is good. But too often we make things our condition of happiness, expecting that God give us this, or that God remove that, that we might become happy. Instead, the Lord asks us to be content with Him, in whatsoever state we find ourselves, and in everything to give thanks, recognizing that in everything He purposes our blessedness, our true happiness.

Our happiness, therefore, does not depend on a new year or a changed situation, but upon the Lord and our changed relationship, our deepened growth, in Him and in terms of His will for us. We often want things so desperately, and changed situations so earnestly, and we pray zealously to God for these things. But the Lord asks us first of all to receive Him and to accept His will, because, until we do, neither time nor circumstance can give us anything. This is the word of the Lord: "Seek ye first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things shall be added unto you" (Matt. 6:33 ESV).

OUR CERTAINTY

April 20, 1954

Good morning, friends. There *are* times when all of us would like to do a little talking back or indulge in some loud heckling. I feel that way this morning. I've been reading too many articles about the H-bomb and what it's going to do to the world, and heard too many people mention some speaker harping on the horrors that lie ahead. None of this talk makes too much sense to me. I'm not trying to discount what the bomb can do, and underrate the necessity of either defense or information, but I think the truth involves much more than these things.

I suppose that I could point out that the world has lived through some very ugly experiences. Certainly, the millions of victims of Nazi Germany could have told a story of horror, and the millions of slaves in Soviet Russia's slave camps might consider an H-bomb a blessing. History is full of horror, and nothing has ever equaled or is likely to equal, the long and tortured agony of the Jewish War of A.D. 66–70. Next to these things, atomic warfare seems a quick and clean way out. As for civilians being affected, outside of America, they almost always have been, often in unspeakable ways and means.

The ugliness of war and destruction is nothing new.

WE HAVE THIS ASSURANCE ALWAYS, THAT IN HIM, THE GREATEST EVIL THAT BEFALLS US WILL BE MADE TO PRODUCE A FAR GREATER GOOD.



It is as old as man himself, and remains with man, because the most elemental and devastating war is that which is within him. Everything else springs out of that inner war.

Thus man's destructiveness is very real and a fact we have to live with. There is no hiding from it. But here is where a sense of perspective is urgently needed. Another fact, of even greater importance, cannot be overlooked. The fact behind all things is God Almighty. The Bible records in detail both His will for us and

His promises to us. One of His first promises is Genesis 8:22: "While the earth remaineth, seedtime and harvest, and cold and heat, and summer and winter, and day and night shall not cease." Right now, I'm surrounded by springtime reminders of His faithfulness in this promise. Here in Santa Cruz, we live in the midst of a profusion of beauty, and it's been an especially beautiful spring. As far as I'm concerned, it makes much more sense for me to enjoy this than to brood about what might happen.

But there's more to it than that. I feel free to enjoy life, in spite of everything, and am confident that all things will work together for good, because I believe in the God revealed in Scripture. And because I know Him to be the only true God, I cannot believe that man has suddenly gotten out of hand, and the universe out of control. If God be God, and nothing is understandable

unless He is, then God is the ruler yet, and nothing is out of hand. The H-bomb is no surprise to God: man has not started to run wildly and out of control. I believe literally and fully what Acts 15:18 declares: “Known unto God are all his works from the beginning of the world.” Nothing happens by chance: all things are within the providence of Almighty God. Why things are the way they are is more than I can explain. To understand the works of God, I would have to have a mind equal to God, which none of us have. But this we know, that God is the ruler, and in full control, and He is our redeemer and guide. As Luther said, in facing the darkness ahead of him in his day, “I do not know the way, but well do I know my guide.”

We know that our redeemer lives, and that He is our sure and certain guide. He has never promised us an easy life, but He has promised us a blessed one in spite of everything. I know that this world, and certainly my parents and grandparents who saw their loved ones massacred, has seen much horror and will see more. But the more important thing for us to remember is that man has not suddenly superseded God as the governor of the universe. God is the ruler yet. If we believe in Him as revealed in Christ, we have this confidence: “We know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose” (Rom. 8:28). If we live in Him, all things work together for good, both now and for the life to come. Apart from Him, all things work together for evil. We have this assurance always, that in Him, the greatest evil that befalls us will be made to produce a far greater good.

Thus, in facing an H-bomb future, I am confident that I am in God's hands. I know that physical pain is after all limited, and death promises everything to a believer. On the other hand, spiritual and mental pain are unlimited, and there is no horror or agony equal to that of a mind lost and without God, troubled and at sea in a horror-filled world and life. Any kind of physical pain is better than that, because it ends either in healing or in death, but the desolation of life apart from God has no end.

I do *not* know what lies ahead for Santa Cruz, for myself, or for my children, but I do know this, that although I may not understand what comes, I can understand the love of God and trust in Him, in the face of all things.

In this faith, we can say with Paul, "What shall we then say to these things? If God be for us, who can be against us?" (Rom. 8:31)

Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? ... Nay, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him that loved us. (Rom. 8:35, 37)

In this faith, I thank God for what He brings, enjoy the loveliness with which He surrounds me now, and walk in this confidence, that God is not only at the end of this road I walk, but with me all the way.



"LIFE GOES ON"

March 29, 1955

Good morning, friends. By now, the fire here at KSCO three weeks ago today is no longer news, but there's an aspect of that story I'd like to tell you about. When I reached the station that morning, the fire department was still here, and still at work. The place was a sorry sight, but one fact about the whole confusion stood out beautifully and impressively. The staff and management were not wasting their time moaning about the loss or inspecting the damages. As soon as I stepped up to the door, I saw your announcer, Dick MacAlur, and Mrs. Hartin, busy mopping up and sweeping out the water. It was exactly 8 o'clock, but the manager, Mr. Berlin, was already downtown to see the insurance agents, then the banks, and other persons, in order to plan a speedy reopening. And although the firemen were still at work, a window-cleaner's panel truck drove up to begin washing the smoke-stained windows.

There was something very commendable about the whole operation: no time was spent in crying over spilt milk or even looking it over. The one central concern was this: let's try to get back on the air in thirty-six hours.

Of course, you can say that it was merely good business to face the reality of the fire in terms of

constructive action. You can say that any good business man would try to do the same, although perhaps not quite so fast.

Well, now, since you feel that way, why not take a dose of your own medicine and apply it to your personal problems. Scripture declares, "Whatsoever thy hand findeth to do, do it with thy might" (Eccles. 9:10). In other words, we are asked to live one day at a time, not fretting about the griefs of the past or dreaming idly about the future, but tackling the job and responsibility that is at hand. Good Christian faith lives in an eternally responsible and accountable present; it leaves the dead past to bury itself, and it does not trouble itself over a nonexistent future.

Our Lord said,

Which of you by taking thought, can add one cubit unto his stature? And why take ye thought for raiment? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they toil not, neither do they spin: And yet I say unto you, That even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. Wherefore, if God so clothe the grass of the field, which to day is, and to morrow is cast into the oven, shall he not much more clothe you, O ye of little faith? Therefore take no thought saying, What shall we eat? or, What shall we drink? or, Wherewithal shall we be clothed? (For after all these things do the Gentiles seek:) for your heavenly Father knoweth that ye have need of all these things. But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you. Take therefore no thought for the morrow: for the morrow shall take thought for the

things of itself. Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof. (Matt. 6:27–34)

Now, some people will say that it's one thing to face a fire and start working for the future, and another to deal with personal problems. After all, when we deal with material things, like a building, we have something we can control, plan, and execute. We need not fret because we can handle the situation. On the other hand, when we deal with something beyond our control, it is impossible, many will say, to avoid worrying and fretting, because when we face some problems, there is nothing that we ourselves can do.

But our Lord said that it is precisely in these situations that are beyond our control, things that can be compared to our stature, over which we have no control, in these things that we should be free from anxiety.

Why? Because these things which are beyond our control are in better hands than ours: they are in the hands of Almighty God. It is a kind of idolatry to feel confidence concerning things we handle, but anxiety concerning that which is obviously out of our hands and in God's control.

Every time we worry about things which are outside

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our control we are doubting God: we are in effect saying, if I were in charge, then I could feel a little more at ease about matters, but since God is in control, I am uneasy. Such an attitude is, of course, idolatry.

The Lord God took care of all creation before we were born, and will continue to do so with the same infinite wisdom after we are gone. During our brief span of life, we can rest content in His keeping. We can avoid all anxiety about yesterday and tomorrow and content ourselves with living our life as we find it. We can say to ourselves, "My soul, wait thou only upon God" (Ps. 62:5). Such a faith does not free us from the battle of life, but it does give us victory in it.

Too much of our grief stems from the fact that things are outside our control: as we grow in faith, our strength and peace comes from the realization that things are, happily, not in our hands but the Lord's. And so we gladly leave them there and turn in faith to assume the daily task He gives us, mindful of His Word, "Whatsoever thy hand findeth to do, do it with thy might."

THE AUTHOR

Rousas John Rushdoony (1916-2001) was a well-known American scholar, writer, and author of over thirty books. He held B.A. and M.A. degrees from the University of California and received his theological training at the Pacific School of Religion. An ordained minister, he worked as a missionary among Paiute and Shoshone Indians as well as a pastor to two California churches. He founded the Chalcedon Foundation, an educational organization devoted to research, publishing, and cogent communication of a distinctively Christian scholarship to the world at large. His writing in the *Chalcedon Report* and his numerous books spawned a generation of believers active in reconstructing the world to the glory of Jesus Christ. Until his death, he resided in Vallecito, California, where he engaged in research, lecturing, and assisting others in developing programs to put the Christian Faith into action.

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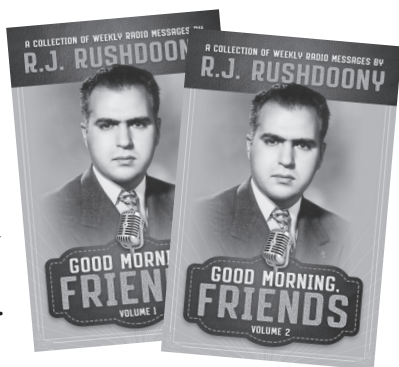
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