

# Prayer That Prevails

By Paris Reidhead\*

Will you turn, please, to James, Chapter 5. PRAYER THAT PREVAILS. I shall read for you from verse 13 through the 20th verse, that that which we shall be using as a text will be found in its context:

Is any among you afflicted? let him pray. Is any merry? Let him sing psalms. <sup>14</sup>Is any sick among you? let him call for the elders of the church; and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord: <sup>15</sup>And the prayer of faith shall save the sick, and the Lord shall raise him up; and if he have committed sins, they shall be forgiven him. <sup>16</sup>Confess your faults one to another, and pray one for another, that ye may be healed. The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much. <sup>17</sup>Elias was a man subject to like passions as we are, and he prayed earnestly that it might not rain: and it rained not on the earth by the space of three years and six months. <sup>18</sup>And he prayed again, and the heavens gave rain, and the earth brought forth her fruit. <sup>19</sup>Brethren, if any of you do err from the truth, and one convert him; <sup>20</sup>Let him know, that he which converteth the sinner from the error of his way shall save a soul from death, and shall hide a multitude of sins.

I read this portion, as well as the one in Philippians, in order that you might understand that prevailing prayer is not an item by itself divorced from other kinds of prayer, and other relationships. But this is an expression that has to be total if it is to be effective. Let us remind ourselves of the kinds of prayer we have considered in days past. The overall text to which we have anchored our thinking in these weeks is found in Ephesians the 6th Chapter, where we are told that we are to “pray always, with all prayer.” (Eph. 6:18) And we have sought to distinguish between phases or aspects, forms or kinds of prayer, seeing first the *prayer of a sinner, prayer of acknowledgment of guilt, confession of guilt, and expression of repentance and faith*, repentance toward God, and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ, given in prayer which savingly unites one to Christ. Now if you are a Christian it is because you prayed. No, not because you said prayers, but because having been moved upon by the Spirit of God in His operation of awakening and conviction wherein He had exposed your heart to yourself, and shown you the nature of your crime; namely this, that you had been God in your own life, willed your own will, and lived to please yourself. Then He brought you to that place of repentance which is this, a change from being God to receiving Jesus Christ as God, renouncing your right to rule and submitting to His sovereignty, as well as His Saviorhood. To repent therefore is involved in that word in Romans 10:9, “to confess with the mouth Jesus to be Lord,” a change of direction from being Lord in your life to allowing Him to be Lord.

I had mentioned to someone some weeks ago that they would profit greatly by securing the volume by Dietrich Bonhoefer<sup>1</sup>, The Cost of Discipleship, and that first chapter on cheap or costly grace is worth many times the price of the book. I understand now it has been printed in paper, and is much more reasonable than when first I got it; but it sets forth explicitly and clearly what we would mean by the Word repentance if we were to understand it in its Biblical setting, that it is not an emotion but it is a change. We want to see that people who pray are people who have repented, and have believed. They have not only understood that Jesus Christ is the Son of God, but they have committed themselves to Him, and received Him. The evidence of the genuineness of their repentance and faith is the fact that Christ is come into their heart. “It is Christ in you, the hope of glory.” (Col. 1:27) So many people make the mistake thinking that it is the Christ set forth in the Scripture that is the hope of glory. Well the One that is set forth in the Scripture is the same Christ who died for you, and rose again, and will upon the basis of your repentance and faith come into your heart. But the place of saving relationship is in you. “It is Christ in you, the hope of glory.” “Christ be in you except ye be reprobate.” (II Cor. 13:5) We want to understand the kind of people that pray, and what happens in this prayer that savingly unites us to Christ. At the moment that we savingly embrace the Son of God we are justified in Heaven, all our sins counted to Christ, and the righteousness of Christ counted to us, and we are regenerated in our hearts. This is the work of the Spirit of God, giving to us of Christ to that place where we pass from death to life, and in one beginning sense become partakers of His nature. And “it is thus Christ in us, the hope of glory.”

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<sup>1</sup> Dietrich Bonhoeffer (1906-1945) A German Lutheran pastor.

Now let us understand, therefore, let us recognize and realize that what happens at that first initial aspect of prayer, we are brought out of death into life, we are born of God, we are made, put into His family. Something marvelous has happened as a result of that first prayer.

Then of course we have seen the *prayer of affirmation*. When you come with concerns for which you must pray, needs for which you must pray, it does you well to affirm again all that we have seen, that you were a rebel and a traitor, and that you were a servant of Satan, and a traitor, and a slave of your lusts, and you did rule your life. But you have repented, and reaffirm again in this prayer of affirmation, be it daily or as often as you need lest-however avoid that it become a ritual to you. We don't want to establish Stations of the Cross again. We want to have a relationship to the Lord which we are affirming by our lives and by our attitudes, as well as by our words and prayer. It would be quite possible for one to take what I am saying to that point of literalness where what you do is simply repeat certain words, and this of course would be extremely deadening, and I am not prescribing that at all. It is to see something; it is to understand something; and it is to live constantly in the affirmation of what you have seen and understood, and experienced.

Then we have seen the *prayer of brokenness*. We have this before us here. I do not wish to speak at any length on the matter of calling for the elders when one is sick, but the word here translated sick is the word, *asthenia*, and it has reference to that which we currently use, neurasthenia, or nervous exhaustion I am told, and it has reference to exhausted, sick and exhausted, from having sought the Lord. We have told you in days past, and shall as opportunity is afforded, dwell on it even more in the future, that there are at least seven ways to take life from the Lord in our pilgrimage, to take healing and strength, from Him. Well apparently these were understood, and someone has not received, and so they are continuing and they are exhausted. They were afflicted and they prayed, and now they have become sick, and they are exhausted, and they have not been able to touch the Lord. So then called the elders, all of whom were to have been Spirit filled men, and in the presence of the elders would be all the gifts and anointings, and graces of the Spirit. And it would be prayerly gathered here that as the elders came they joined with the one involved, and say now, Lord, why? And there is the possibility, as it is expressed in verse 16, really in verse 15, "If he have committed sins." There might be something that has been hidden, something that has been covered, and something that has not been seen. And so the presence of the elders there was that there might be a discovering of the reason. Now I think this is the Biblical setting of this particular portion. And by their being gathered together, and by their united prayer, Why, Lord, has not so and so touched you, then came this thing. This is the issue, this is the attitude, this is the thing in the past, "and if they have committed sins they shall be forgiven him. Confess your faults one to another" is the prescription. And so we see, and when it comes to the matter of prevailing in prayer there has to be again brokenness. This is what I want you to see at this point. If it is true in respect to prayer for the sick among us, it is also true in respect to any other need. Therefore the prayer of brokenness is not something that you pray on Tuesdays as it were, or Good Friday, or some other time. It isn't as some of the people will on a given day go into a place of worship and bewail their sins. But the prayer of brokenness is the attitude that at any moment the Spirit of God reveals to us that we have grieved God, there, then, at that point we break before Him.

The great more of God in Kenya, and Uganda, down in Africa has demonstrated to us that a principle the Spirit of God seeks to establish again in the church is the necessity of keeping short accounts with God, or instantaneously dealing with whatever grieves Him. But when it comes to a matter of particular prayer, and a burden that you are carrying, there has to be an opening of your heart to the Lord. Lord, deal with anything in my life, deal with any attitude, deal with any action, any relationship, anything that grieves You. So in a sense it is very good for you to become involved in prayer needs in your life, and in the lives of others; because in so doing you are pressed again to open your heart to the laver, and open your heart to the Word and to the Spirit of God. And there ought to be on the heart of every Christian, constantly, not periodically...

Incidentally I am remembering something Dr. Brown said, R. R. Brown said in Chicago, in the 1954 Council, the first that I was privileged to attend. There at the preachers chorus concert at Southside Church, he said, "I rather think sometimes we are becoming Catholic Protestants. We have our annual, or semiannual, or oftener meetings in which people come to the same altar and confess the same things, twice a year, or annually, or more frequently," and he said, "This is a catholicizing this is a ritualizing," and it is to be understood by us that a broken and a contrite heart is the only kind God won't despise, and you can't afford to have something in your heart today and not deal with it until next October in the convention; because between

now and then you are in a position where God can't answer your prayer. "For if I regard iniquity in my heart the Lord will not hear me." (Psa. 66:18) Therefore, if you are to have any affect in prayer, or any effectiveness in prayer, the prayer of petition, to reach out, that releases God to work, then there must be "a broken and a contrite spirit." (Psa. 51:17) "Who shall ascend unto the hill of the Lord? He that hath clean hands and a pure heart." (Psa. 24:3,4) Now none of us knows that this is our state by nature. We were sinners under the sentence of death. When we came to Christ all the sins of the past were removed as far as the east is from the west. Where then does this occur? Where does this clean hands and pure heart come from? By our constant dependence upon the Lord. And whenever in attitude, or in action, or in word, we grieve God, there at that point, as soon as it is discovered to us, and if we are walking in fellowship with the Lord, oh how quickly does He cause the hot flush of grief come to our hearts when we have spoken uncharitably, or unkindly, or unwisely, or we have done something. And if we will at that moment deal, it is so much easier often than having the thing lay in our hearts for days, weeks, and months, until what could have been dealt with as an open, clean cut, has to be dealt with as a deep, eating ulcer. And so the prayer of brokenness. And you ought to be constantly on praying ground.

Therefore, when in conversation you speak that which is grieving to the Spirit of God, or in action you do that which is grieving to the Spirit of God, or in thought allow that which is grieving to the Spirit of God, there, then at that point, as soon as you are aware of it, deal with it. Do not allow it to infect your heart, and your mind, and your spirit. Deal with it then. For as long as you are in relationship wherein He is grieved, prayer will be but a complaint that you make toward Heaven, rather than a release of God to answer. So the prayer of brokenness is a constant attitude.

We've said it again, and will probably repeat it in the future. As the Dairy Association says, "You never outgrow your need for milk," so we would say, "You never outgrow your need for brokenness." However long we have walked with the Lord, and however close we have come to Him, and however dear He has become to us, the moment that we grieve Him that is the moment that we do again our first works of judging it and forsaking it, and confessing it, that there might be a restoration to fellowship, and a removal of all the hindrances that keep prayer from being answered. And it is very clear here in this context that this is a prerequisite.

Now we recognize that there is the *prayer of thanksgiving*. If you are going to be encouraged to pray for the need of the present, you had better remember the blessings of the past. And every answered prayer of the past is but another lever to your heart, to lift you out of the natural slough of despond into that foundation of faith where you can take hold of the Lord for the need of the present. And therefore there ought to be this matter of thankfulness as a continuous expression of your heart. What I am trying to say is this, that prevailing prayer is not the product of a particular effort, but it is the result of a vital, constant relationship. And so frequently people go on, not praying, not needing to pray, as though they were getting along quite right, and then all of a sudden their little world collapses, and everything has got to be dealt with at once. We have all experienced this, and some of us have experienced it quite recently since the Spirit of God spoke so plainly to us through our Brother Gesswein. How imperative it is, absolutely imperative it is for us to realize and recognize that the Spirit of God is seeking to keep us in a relationship with God wherein prayer, prevailing prayer is not something that requires a great deal of preparation. But it is the product of a relationship with Him. We are living in that place of fellowship, so that we can go immediately, at the moment of opportunity into the presence of God.

Thus the prayer of thanksgiving is so dreadfully overlooked, and it is a sin in a sense, for Paul indicted the generation of which he described in his second letter to Timothy in the third chapter, saying that there would come a generation that would have the form of godliness, and deny the power thereof, and perilous times, from whom he warned Timothy, and all who would like Timothy to please God to turn away and he said, You will know this generation because they are unthankful, they are unthankful; ingratitude is a sin in their life. That is why in everything we must give thanks, the good that seems good to us, and that which seems bad to us; because everything that touches us is from Father's hand, and nothing can get through that hand that was pierced at Calvary to us, unless it is to the end of conforming us to the image of His Son.

Oh how imperative, important it is that we should, if we are to understand prevailing prayer, we should recognize that the blocks of the foundation are gratitude to God, thanksgiving. Have we have rendered to Him the sacrifice of our lips, the claves of our lips in thanksgiving, we see through the Psalms over and over again that David's heart was enlarged and enriched and

strengthened to believe for the current crisis, because He remembered what God had done for Israel. He remembered what He had done for David, and he was living therefore in the good of all that had transpired in the past, because he had a thankful heart. And if you are to understand prevailing prayer, you have got to carry the past with you. This is why allowing disappointment is so disastrous to faith. I've given to you so many times in the past the five deadly d's that absolutely make it impossible for you to pray prevailing prayer with expectancy, *disappointment*, leading to *discouragement*, to *disillusionment*, to *depression* and to *defeat*. And these are the steps that take you down to the place where prayer is a mockery as far as effectiveness is concerned. And it all begins with the inability to say, Thank you to the thing which you have judged to be unpleasant, or hurtful, because such ingratitude is an implication that God is not all that you thought He was. And it strikes at the very character of God.

So if you are to have prevailing prayer, at the moment of need there must be preparation for it by thankfulness. Then of course there has to be the prayer of praise. How essential it is that you should remember the distinction between praise and thanksgiving. Thanksgiving is gratitude for God's dealing with you in the past, but praise is the discovery through the Word, and by the Spirit, of the attributes of God. And obviously if you are to pray in prevailing prayer, you have got to know to whom you come. This is why the Word says, "Him that cometh to God must believe that He is." (Heb. 11:6) That He is what? That is an incomplete statement. And it's only completed in your need. He is what? He is what He says He is. And you see in the names of Jehovah in the Old Testament that He said, Jehovah is His Name, the self-existent One who reveals Himself. But if you see the Jehovah compound Names then you discover something of His nature, and there you see that He is the Lord our Righteousness, and the Lord our Victory, and the Lord our Provider, and the Lord our Shepherd, and the Lord our Healer, and the Lord our present One, Jehovah Shamah. And in all of these names He is revealing Himself to us, and it is in the revelation of God to our hearts in praise, when we praise Him for all that we have seen in the Word, and discovered from the past, and all that God has done, that on the foundation of prayer there arises this superstructure that can reach right across space into the very presence of God and take hold of Him for the need. So praise, magnify the Name of the Lord, is the Psalmist's prescription for his own flagging heart. For when he would faint, and fear, and falter, he would magnify the Name of the Lord. And as God became magnified before Him all of the problems receded into proper perspective. They lost their enormity.

Have you ever seen a little chameleon in the ground? You know, if you got trick photography, and mirrors, and put that thing on it, it would look like one of the enormous prehistoric dragons. Just get it in the right place, wrong place, and see the flame, the little darting tongue, and the color. It is big enough to sit on your hand. It would not hurt you if it did. But you just get that in such a way that you photograph it from underneath, and put trees, and miniature behind it and you would be terrorized by your own photography. This is the strategy of the dragon, the devil. He tries to get us in such a place that we're looking up at the scales, and looking over and seeing the enormous claws, and seeing Him. But you know, if you realize that we are seated together in the Heavens, then he is down there wounded with the head wound, and only for the little day time, until our Lord comes does he writhe; but he has been defeated. And so it as we praise the Lord, and exalt Him, that God is magnified, that our problems are of the proper perspective.

And so we had also last week the place of *intercessory prayer*. And oh how imperative is that we realize that the place from which we always pray is not under the circumstances. Our place of prayer is seated with Christ in the Heavens. This place is the source of our intercessory strength, and courage, is in union with Christ, crucified with Him, and buried with Him, and quickened with Him, and raised with Him, and seated with Him, and all prayer ought to be from that point.

But we also have seen, in reading from Philippians, that the end of all prayer is the glory of God. Now if you are to prevail in prayer, this must be clear in your mind and heart. Perhaps is something very mundane, and very necessary. You have your home. You have opened it for visit, and ministry, and Bible Class, and the rug in the front room is worn, and threadbare, and loose, and it isn't the testimony that you want it to be. Now James has said, "If you ask and ye receive not because ye ask amiss that ye might heap it on your lust." (Jam. 4:3) God is not particularly interested whether you have a rug or rug's sake or not; it is not necessary for your eternal welfare. But if there is a rug, and you are involved in the matter of a rug, and it is there, what is the grounds of your petition here? What is the reason for believing God should be interested enough to in some way engineer, and operate, and move to the point of bringing a rug to your front room. Well the answer comes from this. The only reason for asking anything of God, and expecting the answer to come is the glory of God, the glory of the Lord Jesus Christ, and

we are to therefore have as the prime reason, and motive, and purpose for all of our praying, the glory of God in Christ. As soon as this is the case, then we do not just begin to ask God for something. We begin to pray about it. Many times when a prayer matter comes to you, rather than saying, O Lord, give me this. Beware, He might do it. You know He just might do as He has done with so many of us, He gave us the desires of our heart, and He sent leanness to our soul. And if prayer is nothing but asking and receiving, then it is exceedingly dangerous, because it might be God would give you what you found later you really didn't want. And this is why when you are coming to the place of prayer; you've got to have a motivation in prayer, a touchstone, something that is going to measure it. And the measure is, Is this to the glory of God? Now we realize that Elijah is praying, and has involved the whole nation. It was a prayer that might have had great repercussions, one we would be... I can't even pray for clear weather on the day of the Sunday School picnic, much less that it won't rain for three years and six months, naturally, unless I had prayed about it for a while. Because I don't want to get involved with the meteorological plans the Lord has, and upset them for me. But here was Elijah, and this was the prayer that he prayed with fasting, and he prayed with tears, and with great longing; and do you know why? Because he had prayed about this thing until he was absolutely convinced that this was to the glory of God, that this was what God wanted, that this was what God needed to get the glory that He deserved from a rebellious people that had sinned against light.

And so he had good grounds for his praying. He was on that place where the reason for it wasn't to prove that he was what he said he was, or to vindicate his ministry. He was interested in the glory of God. And therefore when you come to your home, everything is to be prayed about. There is nothing that is to be excluded from prayer. It is in everything by prayer, entitles us, not only entitles us but actually commands us to bathe our entire lives in prayer. Nothing too small to be included, too unimportant. But it is really that we might see the other basic principle given here in Colossians the 3rd Chapter, in the 16th verse, where we are told, "Let the Word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom," and in verse 17, "Whatsoever you do in word or deed, do all in the Name of the Lord Jesus," or on account of the reputation of Christ, or for the glory of Christ. And therefore, if you are to prevail in prayer, it is going to be absolutely necessary for you to have so oriented your life in the will of God, that the purpose and stream of your life is in His plan and in His will; but secondly, the particular item that comes before you, rather than that at the initial point saying, O Lord, give me this, I believe you would find your heart life greatly enriched if you would say, Lord teach me how to pray about this, teach me what is involved in this, help me to see it clearly. And instead of trying to get to the balcony, as I have said, by standing down here and jumping, and then saying, Well I do not know why God does not answer my prayer, I must not have the gift of faith; if you remember that over there we have got some steps, and instead of standing here and trying to get by one leap, just go step by step. Pray about it, and get an answer, and move on from that, and then move on to the next aspect. Prevailing prayer isn't certainly just a matter of having faith where you can say, Lord, do, and He does. But it is that you have so related yourself to Him, and all that He asks, and you have so related yourself to Him in all that you want Him to do, that you recognize that the many things that are presented to you for prayer in your own life, and in the lives of others are not sufficiently clear that at the first moment of hearing you can say, Lord, do. Because He might do, and then you would later on find out it was not really what ought to have been done, or you wanted Him to do. And so many times, when we pray and the answer doesn't come, instead of giving it up and saying, This isn't the will of God, we ought to do finally what we should have done firstly, and pray about it, and go through the various things and approach it in different ways, and pray to this point and to that, and to the other. Prayer is to be our life. It isn't just something we do, put the switch on, press the button, the car doesn't stop, so we drop the car, give it away, let somebody... No. It is supposed to run. It will run. And if it is not running, there is a principle violated.

Now let us discover what His principle is, rectify it, and proceed. And I believe that prevailing prayer is on the basis of principle, not just on the basis of personality. Some people can and some cannot. I believe that God has made it abundantly clear that prayer is to be the breath, life of the child of God, that all of us have the same privilege of any of us; namely, being believer priests, free to go into the presence of God.

Now let me ask you a question in closing. How long has it been since a particular request that you have offered to the Lord has been answered clearly enough, specifically enough, and near enough to the time of being prayed that you know you have an answer to prayer. We have asked in the past congregations. Now tell us the last time you had a clear cut answer to prayer, and they have had to go back sometimes 20 years. Sometimes 30 years since there has been an answer to prayer. This is wrong,

dear friends. You and I are to recognize that prayer is not only our privilege, but prayer is our responsibility. And that part of all the other aspects of prayer is to bring us into a relationship with Jesus Christ where the prayer of faith, prevailing prayer, is not the unusual, but it is merely the expected outflow of a relationship that He has made our life.

O if you can see this. It is not some... George Müller<sup>2</sup> you know didn't have a life of prayer simply because his name began with M, or he was a German that was living in England. This wasn't the reason why he had this. No. You cannot trace it to some accident. George Müller had a life of prayer because he lived a life of prayer. He had answers to prayer because he recognized that prayer was his business. Prayer was his life, his responsibility, his privilege. Now I am not saying for a moment that you will have the same ministry in prayer that George Müller had. I don't suppose that that is the case. But you have the same privilege of prayer that George Müller had. You pray to the same God who's as willing and ready to answer. Therefore we can properly say this, that my total ministry for Christ is going to be in direct ratio to my relationship with Him in prevailing prayer. And therefore if you have a prayer need, don't just make a little flare of incense to send up, put it on the altar, sort of a tissue, let it burn. Well the answer didn't come. Now we will see what we can do this way. This isn't the attitude at all. Prayer is to become our life, and these principles of prayer are all related to God's great and glorious purpose, that we as a church, being members of His body, should have this high priestly privilege of prayer.

O that God can press upon our hearts that prevailing prayer, answered prayer, petitions that are answered, is not to be the unusual, the unexpected, but it is to be the normal outflow of a relationship of the believer as God wants him to be with the Lord Jesus, a church as God wants it to be. And may it become to your experience... Perhaps I could say that the level of faith of the whole body of believers is geared to yours. How many times we fail to see ourselves a chain. We want all the other links to be strong, and we are not prepared to recognize that part of it, perhaps the faith leverage, is no stronger than our own relationship with Him.

So prayer that prevails is not a goal toward which you should look longingly, and hopelessly, but it is to be an attitude, and an action, and a relationship that becomes your constant privilege in Christ. O that the Spirit of God can press upon our hearts the Word that we are to always pray and not to faint. Shall we bow our hearts together.

Our Heavenly Father, this tremendously important privilege and this great responsibility that rests upon every one of us in Christ. And how frequently we've lightly carried it, and carelessly allowed it, rather than recognizing that this is to be our life, that ours is to be a life of prayer, just as our Lord Jesus prayer, as was constantly a ministry of prayer, so is ours to be, not just asking, constantly, but in such a relationship with Thee through prayer that when Thou didst press upon our hearts needs for which we are to pray we know that Thou dost hear us, and knowing Thou dost hear us we know that we have that for which we pray. Lord, teach us to pray, how to pray, what to pray, when to pray, with whom to pray, and grant, our Father, that Thou wilt get here at all cost a praying church, and Thou wilt have to begin with the one that is speaking to this people, in an ever deepening and enlarging way, Lord, make me increasingly a man of prayer, and a ministry of prayer. And what I pray for myself I pray for elders, and deacons, and deaconesses, and all whom Thou hast joined to what Thou art doing here. Lord, make us a people of prayer. In every sense, in every degree, in every manner that Thou dost please, and for this we would give Thee all the praise in the worthy Name of our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen. [Tape stops]

Let us stand for the Benediction. Now may the God of peace that brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus, that great Shepherd of the Sheep, through the Blood of the everlasting Covenant make us perfect in every good work to do His will, working in us even in prayer that which is well pleasing in His sight, through Jesus Christ, our Lord, to whom be the glory now and forever. Amen.

\* Reference such as: Delivered at The Gospel Tabernacle, New York City on Sunday Morning, March 31, 1963 by Paris W. Reidhead, Pastor.

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<sup>2</sup> George Müller (1805-1898) Christian Evangelist and Director of the Ashley Down Orphanage