

Conditions for Answers to Prayer

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Now, before I speak, I want to comfort Brother McAfee. I want you to stand up Brother McAfee, please. He's been walking around upstairs in his study shaking his curly head and saying, oh, it's such a beautiful instrument and it's out of tune. I'm so ashamed. I'm so ashamed. Something happened to our piano. How many here noticed the piano was out of tune? Raise your hand. One? Few people know. Two people knows it's out of tune? Now, isn't that wonderful? Here he's been groaning over the fact that the poor, lovely piano, such a beautiful thing, and it's out of tune. We couldn't get the man to tune it. He was ill. And something happened to it. It was, I suppose a piano can go down with a cold like anything else. And it's out of tune and only the pianist and the Director noticed it. If everybody was, expressed themselves. So, from now on Brother McAfee I beg of you, don't worry about it.

Now, another thing is, the board Sunday night, uh, Thursday night took notice that we're in need of a little facelifting in here. And we are proceeding to have a housecleaning this spring, a new decoration job which should last us another couple of years. This has been about two or three years of Chicago soot, and of course, it's a little dirty. If I hadn't called attention to it you wouldn't notice that either. But I'm as bothered about that as he was about the piano. How many knows how dirty the auditorium is? Well, he had two and I had about a dozen, about a dozen people notice.

Now, last Sunday night, I made the mistake of saying that next Sunday I would speak, give my third in a series of talks. I don't know what was wrong. Brother R.R. Brown says when he gets above 2.98, he's in higher mathematics for him. And when I get above three, I can't figure right. I had three Sundays to conjure with last Sunday when I spoke, next Sunday, that I'll be in Pittsburgh, and tonight that I will be here, leaving right after church. And I told you that it was next Sunday night that I'd finish my series, but it's tonight. And therefore, we're all confused tonight. But you know, it's a blessed thing to not mind it. And I will finish tonight and then I'll be ready for something fresh and new. When I returned from Pittsburgh.

I have talked on prayer from the book of John you know. We're in the book of John, the 15th chapter. And I have taken that passage in John 14:13&14. Whatsoever ye shall ask in My name, that will I do that the Father may be glorified in the Son. If ye shall ask anything in My name, I will do it. If ye abide in Me, and My words abide in you, ye shall ask what ye will and it shall be done

unto you. Now, there are other verses that I have read, but I'll just limit it to those tonight for a few minutes and then I want to read a little more Scripture.

But I have demonstrated before in two previous sermons that prayer has a specific power over the one who prays. And not only that, but that God answers prayer in the world of nature in external matters, so that it is both subjectively and objectively powerful. Prayer changes the individual subjectively, and also prayer changes things objectively. And I think, at least I hope I laid the emphasis upon the former as being the more important. It's vastly more important to me that I should be changed to suit God than that I should have the power to change external things. Though the Bible teaches, as I want to point out, that God does change external things. I preached a sermon on that last week.

Now tonight, I want to talk about conditions, the conditions that must be met. It might be well for you to take this down and think it over later in your prayer times. I want to show you that there are about six conditions. I have no doubt there are more. But there are just six that seemed to me to be important enough to deserve a stress in this message tonight.

The first condition for prayer is that we have a right relationship to God. When ye pray, say, our Father. Now, God does not become our Father by our saying, our Father. And it's not necessarily true that He was our Father and we didn't know it. But he said to those whose children, who were children of God, when ye pray, say, our Father. God hears his children.

Now, there is a popular notion that God hears everybody. And this notion that God hears the prayers of everybody that prays is not an Old Testament doctrine. If I want to stay by the word of God in my beliefs, then I must discover whether a thing is Old Testament doctrine or not. And this is not Old Testament doctrine. In fact, the Scriptures were very plain in the Old Testament that God only heard those who met His terms.

And the idea now popular that God hears everyone is not New Testament doctrine. It is not found in the New Testament either. And Christian testimony all down the years have never taught that God hears everyone. This idea that anybody anywhere, a gangster on his way out to bump off a rival, or someone ready to rob a bank, or a man whose soul is all loaded down with iniquity, that all he has to do is simply pray to the all father or to the man upstairs and he will get the answer. He is unenlightened guessing. It is wishful thinking and no more. It has not tradition behind it, the tradition of holy men. It has not the New Testament behind it. It has not the Old Testament behind it. It has not the testimony of the closest walkers who walk the nearest to God.

Therefore, we should throw it out. In case anybody says, well, but if it's not in the canonical Bible, it's found in some other books. Well, I happen to have most of the other books. That is, I have what they call the Lost Books of Eden. And I have also the apocryphal Old Testament and the apocryphal

New Testament. I'm taking the apocryphal Old Testament with me to Pittsburgh to study there in my quiet times. I have read these books, and there isn't anything in any of them that will give credence to the doctrine that God hears everybody. Jesus said, when ye pray, say, our Father and God hears his children.

Now, we go back to the book of 1 John 5, 1 John, the fifth chapter. And listen to this, whosoever believeth that Jesus is the Christ is born of God. And everyone that loveth Him that begat, loveth Him also that is begotten of Him. By this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God and keep His commandments. For this is the love of God that we keep His commandments; and His commandments are not grievous. For whatsoever is born of God overcomes the world. And this is a victory that overcomes the world, even our faith. Who is he that overcome the world, but he that believeth that Jesus is the Son of God. This is He that came by water and blood, even Jesus Christ. Not by water only, but by water and blood. It is the Spirit that beareth witness because the Spirit is true. And there are three that bear witness in earth, the Spirit, the water and the blood. And these three agree in one. If we receive the witness of men, the witness of God is greater. For this is the witness of God which he hath testified of His son, he that believeth on the Son of God hath the witness in himself. And he that believeth not God has made Him a liar, because he believeth not the record. God gave of His Son. He that hath the Son hath life and he that hath not the Son, hath not life.

There you have a sharp distinction drawn as fine as a razor blade between those that do and those who do not; those that are and those that are not; those that had life and those that have not life; those that are God's children, those who do not; those that have the witness; and those who do not have the witness; those that love God, and those that don't; those that keep His commandments, and those that do not. There's a line drawn. You will find that same line drawn through all the New Testament. So one of the conditions for getting our prayers answered is that we should have a right relationship to God. And in Galatians 3;26 it says, we are children of God by faith in Jesus Christ. Now, these are the ones and the only ones that can say, our Father Who art in heaven.

Now, in 1 John 3:16-22, we, uh, 19-22, we read that a good conscience is necessary before we can pray and get our prayers answered. My little children, let us not love in word neither in tongue, but in deed and in truth. And hereby we know that we are all of the Truth and shall assure our hearts before Him. For if our heart condemns us, God is greater than our heart, and knoweth of all things. Beloved, if our heart condemns us not, then have we confidence toward God. And whatsoever we ask we receive of Him because we keep His commandments and do those things that are pleasing in His sight. Now there is a passage from the first John epistle. And thus, the innocent heart is the confident heart. And the man who has a heart that troubles him, a conscience that's bad, can never believe. He can pray, and he can pray endlessly, but he won't get anything for his prayers because God will not hear a man's prayer if he allows unconfessed sin to dwell in his

heart. If he has a bad conscience, says the Holy Spirit, why there's no use to pray. But if his conscience is clear, then he has confidence in God, and whatsoever he asks for, he gets.

And then we must pray according to God's will. I typed these over so I could read them more easily, 1 John 5:14-15. Listen to this, and this is the confidence that we have in Him, that if we ask anything according to His will, He heareth us. And if we know that He hears us whatsoever we ask, we know that we have the petitions that we desired of Him. We have confidence when we ask according to God's will, and we know that then God hears us. And if God hears us, He answers us. The two are the same. One is tantamount to the other and the equivalent of the other. When God hears prayer, He answers it. And we know that we have the petitions that we desire of Him. So there, we must pray according to the will of God. God hears no prayer contrary to His will.

Now, the extreme example of praying out of the will of God is the Mohammedins who goes out on a forage to kill and to rob the caravans. And before they go, they kneel on their prayer mat and ask Allah if He will be so kind as to help them murder the traveler and steal his goods. Now, don't smile, the human heart is capable of great iniquity and of great delusion. And of course, these people are deluded, deeply deluded. And they might as well, they'd better pray to the devil, because it's the devil that wants to help them to kill and rob and steal and it's not God, but they pray to God.

Now, no Christian would be so foolish as all that. The Christian ethic is too well known for that. And the Christian standards are too well known. No Christian would do that. But you can refine that a little bit and here at any Sunday morning in the average church, just refine, take away the blood and the bones and the dying and the robbing, and people pray selfishly out of the will of God. And God hears no prayer that is out of His will. And there is no possibility of praying with confidence if we pray out of God's will. And if we pray without confidence, we pray without faith. And if we pray without faith, we pray without effectiveness.

Now, how can we know God's will? There are two ways we can know God's will by the Scripture and by the Spirit, by the Word of God, and by the Holy Spirit. First of all of course, there would be the Scriptures. A man can know that it's the will of God that certain things should be done. And he prays within the bracket of the Word of God, knowing that the word of God gives him full authority thus to pray. And then where the Scripture doesn't cover certain details, then he has the blessed Holy Spirit that can whisper to his inner heart the will of God, not contrary to the Scripture, though there may not be a text to cover it.

In a book on prayer written many years ago; and I read many years ago, but Dr. Reuben A. Torrey, he told about going to a YMCA and preaching on prayer to a young men's group that gathered there. He preached on prayer and Torrey you know, was a believer that when you ask God for anything, you had the right to expect it, and God would give it to you. He just lived like that, though

he was, they said, one of the most learned of the evangelicals. He still had got past that to simplicity of heart. So, he preached on prayer, and after he was over, the very embarrassed leader of the YMCA group said to him very courteously and yet was very much distressed. He said, Dr. Torrey, I'm sorry, and pardon me for mentioning it, but he said, you know, I think you left a wrong impression with these young men. Oh, Torrey said, indeed, and how was that? What did I say? Well, he said, you left the impression that we could ask for specific things and get them. That we could pray for specific events to take place and specific things and God would answer our prayers. Well now, he said, I'm sure you didn't mean to do that. But I'm sure that that's the impression you left.

Well, Torrey breathed a deep sigh of relief and said, well, my young friend, if that's all you're worried about, let me hurry to tell you that I meant to tell them that. That's exactly what I meant to say. And if I said that and made my point, then I'm glad. Oh, but the embarrassed young man said, Dr. Torrey, you know, that's true in the will of God of course, if it's God's will, we can pray and get anything, but how are we to know God's will. How are we to know God's will? Dr. Torrey said, young man, there's a passage that says, if any man lack wisdom, let him ask of God and God will give wisdom to him. So that ended that and the young man probably piped down, but I doubt whether he was convinced that Dr. Torrey, this wise old saint of God, knew that if you didn't know the will of God, you had a perfect right to ask for wisdom that you might know the will of God, and thus pray according to the will of God.

Mostly the Scriptures will cover the will of God, so that we can pray within the will of God according to the Scriptures. But as I say and now repeat, sometimes you cannot know without appealing through the Scriptures to the wisdom of God. And God answers your prayer and gives you wisdom so that you will not be praying out of the will of God.

Now, I don't want to introduce anything humorous here because this is very serious truth, but there have been some very humorous things said and done. I remember a young lady who came to a preacher and said, Reverend, would you pray for me? Well, he said, what's the matter with you? And she said, well, I want you to pray for me that I might be two inches taller. He said, are you healthy? And she said, yes, but I am two inches too short. Well, and you believe that God answers prayer and will do anything the Lord, that we asked Him to do? And I want you to ask the Lord to make me two inches longer and taller. And he said, well, I'm curious, why do you want to be two inches taller? Well, she said I want to get in as one of the girls in the chorus, as a chorus girl and dancer, and I'm two inches too short for the line. And unless I can stretch two inches then I won't be able to get the job in the nightclub. Well, if that preacher was what I think he was, I'm sure he didn't pray for her. I'd like to handle that lady. I'd have enjoyed that, I really would. I'd have liked to enjoyed that.

Well, now that's funny, but she was a serious young woman. Now, nobody told her any better. And until you're told better, sometimes you can be very foolishly wrong about very evident things. Things, that we after we see them and see how wrong we were, we smile at ourselves or blush. But until we are told and it's pointed out to us, we can be very badly deluded. This young lady was. Now, that is a grotesque example of praying out of the will of God. There just isn't any use to pray out of the will of God. If you pray in the will of God, God hears you. And if God hears you, He answers your prayer.

Now, right here, it's not in the sermon, but I'd like to step aside from the regular development of the truth long enough to say this to you. Don't press your prayers and expect them to be answered immediately. I suppose there are prayers that will have to be answered immediately or they won't be answered at all. When Peter said, Lord help me, as he was sinking beneath the wave, he had to have an answer within one and a half minutes or there would have been no Peter. They would have fished him out and buried him somewhere. So I suppose there are prayers that have to be answered immediately, but they're not very many. Mostly, God allows our prayers to drag along a long time. And it's for our good that we might learn patience, that we might learn to trust Him, that we might have an opportunity to be disciplined and chastened and taught, instructed, and led in the right way. And that we might have an opportunity to check to see whether that prayer is of God or not, and then see whether we really mean it.

I don't like to do this, but sometime I like to travel around and take down the number of petitions that I hear in prayer meetings or church services, and then check on how many of them ever get answered. Well, not only do most of them not get answered, but it would be a total surprise if they were answered because most of us pray more than we remember what we prayed for. We asked for things that we promptly forget because we've heard somebody ask for those things. We rib the Catholics because of their formality and ritual and because they pray by set form. We Protestants pray by set form too, the difference being that they've worked it out so that it sounds beautiful and we just improvise as we go along and play by ear. And because we haven't the time to do it, mostly, it's pretty bad. I believe there's just about as much ritual in the average Protestant churches there is in the Catholic or the Lutheran or any other the ritualistic churches, they print theirs, and repeat them. And we remember ours and repeat them. And they're about the same old thing. I could pray a pastoral prayer if it was nine o'clock any evening hanging by my toes on a clothesline wire, and know exactly how to intone it and how to make it work and then how to finish it off.

Now that's, that's simply religious habit. Brethren, by the grace of God I want to be delivered from that, even if it means that my prayers can't be beautiful, and they can't be, can't be eloquent, they just have to be blunt preaching I pray. I remember one time that old W.T. MacArthur, William T. MacArthur was asked to lead in prayer. This sharp old man who God, one of the sharpest brained old man I've ever known, and a spiritual man, walked with God, but he wasn't anybody's fool. But he said, now we'll have brother William T. Macarthur lead us in prayer. He got up and waddled

over and he said, what do you want me to pray for? He wasn't going to waste his words nor go through a ritual. He wants to know what they wanted done and what they wanted God to do for them and he wanted to pray with some meaning back of it. I thought it was rather blunt, but I'm not sure but it wasn't all right. What do you want me to pray for him He said. They got him straightened out and the old man prayed and sat down.

Well now, the next thing is, what have I said up to now, you got to have a right relationship to God. There must be a good conscience, and it must be according to God's will. And then in Jesus name, John 14:13-14. Ye shall ask anything in my name, I will do it. Whatsoever ye shall ask in My name, that will I do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son. Now, this is so overwhelming that you won't believe it. And it is so huge that I scarcely believe it even as I preach it. I pray that I might believe it. And I try to believe it and I cry, O Lord, I believe, help my unbelief. But you know what He says here. He gives power of attorney to praying people. How many here know what power of attorney is. You go to a lawyer, an attorney, and you sign over, sign your name to certain papers giving that man a right to act for you in anything pertaining to your business. He can commit you to anything, power of attorney.

Putting it around another way and giving it a biblical figure rather than the one I've chosen, He puts in the hands of any of God's children, the royal seal. Did you know back in those old Bible days, they didn't have typewriters and telegraphs and TVs and radios and all the rest that they have now? A man had a seal, a royal seal, a king did. And that royal seal had to be on all documents or they were invalid. Anything that was supposed to go out from the King and it didn't bear the royal seal, they could have torn it in pieces and laughed at the messenger and thrown it on the floor. It didn't have the royal seal on it. But everything that came out with the royal seal on it, instantly must be done, because it had the seal of the King on it, the emperor's seal.

Do you remember back in the Old Testament when Joseph received the seal from Pharaoh? And that meant that anything that Joseph did, the King had to back. He had the royal seal. And so, Jesus Christ puts the royal seal in the hands of His people. They usually wore it as a ring. That's where we get our word signet ring. You know, occasionally now you'll see some youngster running around with the signet ring with his initials, or initials cut in it. And that's an old hangover from the days of the royal seal.

When a king had his seal on his ring, just to save him time, I think it's pretty neat myself; in place of having to hunt around for the thing, he just had it on and all he had to, was just turn it over and stamp it and it was sealed with the royal seal. And when the King gave that royal seal to anybody, he could go throughout all the King's domain and act for the King and have all the authority of the King and the power of the King. There wasn't anyone from the corner policeman on up to the assistant king but what had to hop to attention when anything was spoken in the name of that royal seal.

That's exactly what Jesus had in mind and what He meant, and it was out of that background, the figure that Jesus said, anything ye asked in My name, I will do it. I hereby bestow upon you the royal seal. I put the ring on your finger and all you have to do is pray and turn it over and stamp it with My name. And it carries all the power of the King. It carries royal power with it--absolute authority. Now, I said before I introduced that idea that you wouldn't believe it. And I said that I have difficulty believing it. It's true. I believe it's true. But to believe that means, me, now that's a difficult thing.

Do you know what unbelief says? Unbelief says, some other time, not now. Somewhere else, not here. Somebody, else not me. And faith says, if it happened somewhere else, it can happen here. If it happened to other people, it can happen to me. If it happened at some other time, it can happen now. There's the difference. There's what's hard. O Lord, help our unbelief. God puts into the hands of his children the royal seal. But do you notice my brethren? God is not foolish, and God will not give the royal seal to the wrong man. Never would a king give that royal seal to an outlaw. Never would he give that royal ring to a man that he had reason to believe that would betray Him. He gave that royal seal only to one who had proved himself to be worthy of every confidence.

So before Jesus turns the royal seal over to His children, He says, you must have a right relationship to my Father by the new birth so you can say, our Father who art in heaven. You must have a good conscience. For if your conscience is against you, how can you use a holy thing like My name? And you must act in my Father's will, because if you're not in my Father's will, then you're in rebellion. And how could I give a royal seal to someone in rebellion? And having met these tests, being children of God and being good children of God with good consciences, and living and walking in God's will and praying in God's will, we have all the authority to move heaven and earth that Jesus Christ has. Do you believe that? Does anybody here believe that? That's true, my brethren. That is true. That's what the New Testament says. That's what the Bible says. That's true. And our wretched unbelief is the reason we do not put it in operation.

And then, here's what the Scripture says. The Scripture says in Matthew 7:7-8, ask and it shall be given you. Seek, and ye shall find. Knock, and it shall be opened unto you. For everyone that asketh, receiveth. And he that seeketh, findeth. And to him that knocketh, it shall be opened. If ye then being evil know how to give good gifts unto your children, how much more shall your Father which is in heaven give good things to them that asked Him. In other words, if you're born in sin, conceived in iniquity, having walked in the ways of sin, and having the disadvantage of having been a sinner, if yet your love for your little children makes you willing to give your little children anything they want, If it's good for them of course, how much more will your heavenly Father give good things to them that ask Him. He didn't say, how much more will your heavenly Father give anything to them that asked Him. I wouldn't hand a revolver to a two-year-old child. I wouldn't

hand a razor to a two-year-old child. I wouldn't hand a pound box of chocolates to a two-year-old child. But I would give good things to that child.

And so, He doesn't say He will give anything. He says He will give good things. And the good things are in His will. And the good things are the things you want if you're right with God. And in Mark 11:22-24, Jesus answering saith unto them, 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 said should come to pass, he shall have whatsoever he saith. Therefore, I say unto you, whatsoever things ye desire when you pray, believe that you receive them and ye shall have them.

I said a while ago that we will not depress our prayers and would be discouraged if we didn't get them answered right away. I believe that faith can afford to wait. Real faith can afford to wait. And the way God operates is very likely to be in nature the way it is in grace and vice versa. If you want a stick of chewing gum, or a little bar of Hershey's, put a penny in a slot in the subway and you'll get it. If you want an ear of corn, plant a grain of corn and wait. Cultivate it and watch it grow and wait. First the blade, then the tassel and the green ear and then the full corn, ripe corn in the ear. That's the way God works.

God doesn't work with slot machines. I am on a one-man lonely crusade against slot machine religion. I'm a voice crying in the wilderness. And nobody in within hearing distance, slot machine religion, put a nickel in the slot and get anything. Well, that's the way people work, but that isn't the way God works. If God wants chickens, He waits 21 days and makes the old hen sit for 21 days patiently there. I used to pity them. I used to say, Oh my, why couldn't you just flop down and get up and they would follow her away. But no, she had to sit there for 21 days. And with some birds, it's 28 days, and with others it's still longer. If God wants an oak tree, it takes him 20 years to grow it. When He wants wheat, it takes all winter and up to July of the next year. And the God of nature is the God of grace, so that I think that the parallel there out to teach us that we oughten to rush heaven when we pray; that we ought to pray in the will of God and then watch God work slowly.

I've asked God for things and almost got discouraged, and then saw them begin to happen. They're too personal. I would not want to introduce them here. But I would only say that some of the prayers that I'm carrying around with me in a little notebook. I bought a little notebook in a little 10-cent store in this little town of what I call the lazy sprawling village of Nyack one time when I wrote about it. I got it. I never have been without except once. I was afraid that I had lost it, but I found it around the house. I've carried that little thing with me since about, I guess, 17 years. And I have prayers in there that I look over every once in a while, and remind God of them. And you know, some of them aren't answered yet. In 17 years, God hasn't answered them. But some of them have not only been answered, they have been answered so far beyond what I asked, that I wouldn't have accepted it as a fact if God had told me what He was going to do then.

Sure, you can afford to knock and then wait. An American, you know, have brass knockers and they knock three times and want to go right in. But the kingdom of heaven can wait. You can wait and I can wait. So, let's trust God and be patient. Some of them in the Old Testament even in that 11th chapter of Hebrews which is the Westminster Abbey of the Bible, even there some of them died without ever having their prayers answered. They got them answered, but not during their lifetime.

Now another thing about prayer if you want to pray successfully, and I take it you do, is that the whole life's got to pray. God sometimes answers emergency prayers. There isn't any doubt about that. They say that once during a flood, there were two houses. One was going one direction; another was swirling in another direction and they passed within hearing distance. And there was a colored woman on top of the roof of one of those houses, and somebody else on the roof of the other and the one was praying loudly to God; and the colored woman shouted, God doesn't hear scared prayers, son. But God does hear scared prayers. He hears the prayers of His true people no matter, and He does hear emergency prayers.

So, I'm not going to stand here and tell you that your life must be perfect before God can, will hear your prayers, but I am going to tell you this, that while God does turn aside and hear sometimes emergency prayers, prayers that are a little above the level of our living, that isn't His highest will. His highest will is that we should live the way we pray. William Law in his most famous book, "A Serious Call to Religion," this William Law makes an argument which I have always thought, I guess I read this 25 years ago and it's stuck with me ever since. He says that our trouble is often, we pray one way and walk another. And we cross ourselves up. He said, we ought to go the way we pray. Our prayer ought to go the way our life is going. If a man walks a holy walk, he can pray a holy prayer. But if he tries to pray a holy prayer and walk an unholy life, he's crossing himself up. And he pleads that the people of God might begin to live the way they pray.

That's what I mean tonight. I mean, our whole life ought to pray. I mean our whole life should be a prayer. I mean it should be a sacrifice on the altar. But the whole life should be. And I mean there should be nothing in the life that can cancel out the prayer. There should be nothing in my conduct, in my thoughts, in my deeds or ambitions, or my relationship to people that could make it impossible for God to answer my prayer. My whole life ought to pray. And you know what I think? I think the greatest prayer in the world is the unuttered prayer of a great life. I believe that. Jesus prayed. He sent up ejaculatory prayers. He prayed long prayers. He prayed before meals. He prayed in company. He prayed with the people. He prayed alone. He prayed every kind of prayer, I suppose there was. But the greatest prayer He ever made was the walk He took from the time He toddled out of Joseph's carpenter shop until they nailed Him on a cross. His life was his greatest prayer.

The Bible says He pleads for us at the right hand of God the Father Almighty, making intercession for us continually. That has given some people the impression that Jesus Christ is engaged in a perpetual prayer meeting on His knees before the Father, interceding forever. No, His presence there is the most eloquent prayer in all the wide world. That He is there and that we are here, and that He wears our nature and has our shape and looks like us. And an angel walking about could see that form and say, a Man has arrived. A Man's in heaven, a man. Sure, a Man is there, our Man, God's Man, the sample Man, the second Adam, He's there. And His presence there by the right hand of God is the great eloquent prayer for you and me. He bears our names on his hands and on His shoulder and on His breast. And there before the Father His eloquent presence is His mighty efficacious prayer.

And I believe the greatest prayer in the world is the prayer of a life, a life that goes in the right direction. That's not to spiritualize praying and that is not to give it a mystical turn and relieve us of the privilege and necessity to pray for specific things and expect them. I think we should do both. I think a man is a mighty unskillful, is mighty unskillful in prayer if he has to unscramble himself, wash up and get a quick haircut and straighten himself out and try to look decent as he walks into the presence of God. He should have been like that all the time, should have been. Children of God should be presentable all the time. A man who allows himself to run down, four days growth of beard and clothes that are soiled and then suddenly he has to appear before the King; he's got to do some fast footwork to get ready for that royal appearance. He should be ready all the time.

God's people should never need morally and spiritually to have to rush around and get straightened up to get into the presence of the King. They should live so they can enter that Presence without embarrassment anytime. They should have on the robes of Presence that would allow them to go in before the King without embarrassment.

Now, three more thoughts and I'm through. In the Book of James it says, ye have not because ye ask not and ye ask and receive not because ye ask to consume it upon your lusts. And then it says, ask and ye shall receive. Now, here we have the word "ask" three times. Ye have not because ye ask not, and there is the penalty of prayerlessness. You could have it if you had asked for it. You're not asking for it and therefore you're not getting it. How little we have may be the result of how little we ask. More asking means more getting. Less asking means less getting. Ye have not, because ye ask not. That's the penalty of powerlessness. But, ye ask and receive not because ye ask amiss, that you might consume it upon your lusts. There's the penalty of selfishness. To ask selfishly that I might have it to consume upon my lusts is to make it impossible for God to answer. And then, ask and ye shall receive, and there's the reward of faithfulness. Anybody can have that outline who wants it and you preachers, ye have not because ye ask not, the penalty of prayerlessness; ye ask and receive not because ye ask amiss, the penalty of selfishness; and ask and ye shall receive, the reward of faithfulness.

So now I hope that this may have encouraged you to know that prayer is not simply something that religious-minded people mumble, but that it is a science, that it is an art, that it is a skill to be learned by the grace of God, that it is a privilege to be enjoyed, that it is authority to be wielded, that it is a right you and I have in the blood of the Lamb. And we can go to God and ask what we will and it shall be done unto us. Do you believe that? Will you then practice it a little more than you have been? If I could be sure that you would pray 15 minutes more a day than you've been praying, it would be well, would have been worth my time here tonight. Will you do it? Will you take it on yourself? Will you dare to go to God? If you shouldn't have it, don't ask for it. Don't want it. Stop wishing.

God's poor sheep wishing, wishing wishing like the farmer that sits on the front porch and wishes for 10 acres of golden corn. And he calls his wife and says, May, would you please join me in wishing for 10 acres of golden corn. So she joins him. She says to him, George, I think that we ought to call in our neighbors. I think there's power in numbers. Let's call in our neighbors. So she goes to the old phone and rings three times and the neighbor answers and she says, come on over, George and I are sitting on the front porch wishing for 10 acres of golden corn. Pretty soon, they have a front porch full of people all sitting there wishing for corn. I know it's ridiculous. I know it, but a lot of God's children are doing the same thing. They're wishing for things. Stop wishing. If you ought to have it, pray and you'll get it. And if you can get it without asking for it by a miracle, get it. Go do it. God won't do what you can do. And there's no use for you to try to do what only God can do. And if we can get untangled on this thing so we're not trying to do what only God can do, and not asking God to do what we ought to go do.

Could I tell again the old story of Moody? It is so old that it's as worn as the shoes that he looked at when he came into a prayer meeting one time and there were a lot of monied-men, Christian men with money. Here they were, and as he walked in, all he saw was the soles of a whole lot of businessmen's shoes all around a circle. They were asking God for \$1,500. Little old blunt Moody said, Brethren, get up. I don't think I'd bother God anymore about that. He had it. Any one of them could have written a check and never noticed it. But they were down on their knees asking God Almighty to give them what they could have gotten by a scratch of the pen. Don't waste your time asking for things you can do yourself. Do them! God isn't going to spoil us by waiting on us hand and foot. God won't make your bed. God won't wash your dishes. God won't mow your lawn. God won't shovel your snow. And be careful you don't do what I did. I shoveled snow twice during the week I had off and I've had a sore back ever since. But watch it. But you do it. If you can do it, do it. Hire it done, but get it done. Don't bother God about it.

But oh, there are so many things you can't do, and those are the things God wants to do for you. God specializes in the impossible. With God, all things are possible. And all things are possible to him that believeth. And there's a realm of impossibilities, a realm of exploits where human brains

can't do it and human hands can't do it. Only God Almighty can do it. That's where prayer becomes powerful. Prayer moves the hand that moves nature in the world. But if you can do it, do it. And if God doesn't want you to have it, don't waste your time wishing for it. You only learn bad mental habits. If God doesn't want you to have it, don't want it. And if He wants you to have it and you can't honestly get it, pray for it, that is, if it's in His will. If it's unselfish, if it's for His glory, if it's for the good of humanity, pray for it. And the Lord will answer your prayers.

Amen. You've got the royal seal. I hope you use it. I hope you'll learn to use it. What couldn't we do if we learned to use the authority given us by our Savior? What couldn't we do?

We're deliberately not using man's methods in this church, deliberately not using man's methods. We repudiated them as bad, opportunism and advertising methods and big businesses. We've thrown them out as being bad and we're trying to go the New Testament way. We must look out now that if we choose the New Testament way, that we have the New Testament Spirit, because technically to take the New Testament way and then not live the New Testament life is to work against ourselves. Let's believe God together and let's pray more than we have. Ye have not because ye ask not. Put prayer to work and see what God will do for you and your family, your business, your home and your church and your life and your country. And everywhere within the will of God, green grass will spring up by the water courses. And where dragons used to lie, roses shall bloom, and you will find yourself wonderfully enriched as you pray believing.

Now let us pray. Heavenly Father, we thank Thee for the privilege of prayer. We thank Thee that we're not out of touch with heaven. We thank Thee Thou dost incline thine ear unto us and hear us. We confess to Thee our staggering unbelief and our doubtings. We confess to Thee Lord, that as a company we've not dared to be as bold as we should. But we want to correct that. We want to come boldly to the throne of grace and ask for what we need. Thank Thee for the answers we've seen, marvelous answers Lord that couldn't come except Thou didst send them. But there are still some things unanswered. O Lord, we pray Thee, make this a praying church. Make these people so bold, so aggressive in their praying that they will cry under Thee boldly and dare to continue to pray until the answer arrives even if it takes weeks and months, and in some instances may be some years. But it will come, for Thou art God and Thou wilt not confuse Thy people nor cause their faces to be ashamed. Teach us to pray O Lord. Teach us to pray. In Jesus name, Amen.