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## **“HITHERTO HATH THE LORD HELPED US”**

*(A New Year Reflection)*

Faithful followers of Jesus Christ realise the wisdom of pausing at the passing of another milestone and at the dawn of a new year to take account of their spiritual welfare and progress, their failures and successes; to reflect anew and the more earnestly, if possible, on the great objective before them, and also upon those issues that are inseparably linked with their solemn covenant to walk with their Saviour in the Narrow Way. No happier reflections can they have than that the Divine leadings and counsel have been theirs thus far. All such can say with zest, “All the way my Saviour leads me, what have I to ask beside!”

### **PAST BLESSINGS**

Thus those who have been blessed with the richest favours of grace Divine, in that knowledge of their high and exalted calling, have a never-failing cause for the most profound gratitude - for therein they realise their unspeakable privilege and heritage as sons, heirs of God “to an inheritance incorruptible, undefiled and that fadeth not away, reserved in Heaven” for the called, and chosen, and faithful, according to His purpose. In addition to all these blessings of hope and promise, there has been the happy realisation during all the year past that though we walk through the valley of the shadow of death (as the Psalmist aptly represents the present life), our blessed Shepherd’s rod and staff have been our comfort and our safeguard.

How often has the friendly crook of the Shepherd stayed us from wandering off into bypaths and kept us in the Narrow Way! How His chastening rod has, from time to time, aroused us from dreamy lethargy and urged us on our way! Glancing now at humanity at large, what a distressed and troubled world we find! But though this hour is one of unprecedented fear, disturbance and disorder throughout the earth, and one of peculiar trial to the Saints of God, it is nevertheless a time also for “lifting up the head” for the faithful with special rejoicing that the Lord has imparted to these, the knowledge of the significance of these days-through special illuminated prophecies that are none other than those uttered by the ancient Hebrew prophets, as also by our Lord and the Apostles. Being thus informed out of our Holy Oracles that there are movements of vast importance in the Realm Above, looking toward world-redemption and “Thy Kingdom come,” the Lord’s Children “fear no evil” from the world’s present dark outlook.

It is well to remember that our dear Saviour, well knowing from the beginning of the Age that the journey of the narrow way was to be a difficult and lonely one, said to His disciples, “Be of good cheer; I have overcome the world.” Indeed, all His footstep followers have had need for just such a comforting assurance. Their pilgrimage through the wilderness of this world was to be a stormy one; they were to be in the midst of devouring adversaries; their numbers were ever to be small, truly “a little flock,” and often they would seem to be without strength, with ever-increasing afflictive sorrows as they drew near to the end of the Age.

### **FAITHFUL ENDURANCE**

The Saints of this present time are even more vitally concerned with regard to the voice of the Good Shepherd and in paying careful heed there to. Jesus said of this hour, “He who patiently endures to the end will be saved.” (Matt. 24:13, Diaglott.) Such language can have but one meaning: “He that cheerfully, in the spirit of full surrender, endures faithfully unto the end of his pilgrimage will be of the saved Elect.” From this point of view, what courage, what fortitude, what overcoming faith will be required to survive the sorrows and the ravages of these days-fierce assaults upon faith, and meeting the cunning strategies of the Evil One.

Hence at such a time as this when there are greater and more difficult trials upon the people of God than in any other era of the Church’s history, the Lord has opened before His faithful ones, still clearer views of the

Truth-the heavenly crown, and the celestial glories, honours, privileges and other untold riches, that these may give renewed strength to the mind and offset the depressing influence of trials and distressing tribulations more or less instigated by the Evil One. The humble obedient ones, having their eyes of faith and their hearts' affections set upon the heavenly treasures, need not the support of earthly relationships, nor the glamour and fascination of the crowd, nor any external manifestations which are often deceptive and illusive.

The faithful Saints of God are "not afraid" of any evil consequences from the smallness of their numbers nor from their loneliness and isolation, because, knowing their Father's plans, they realise they must go the way of their Master, of whom it was written that, "He trod the winepress alone." Truly then, "Be of good cheer," speaks our Divine Lord! Fear not anything. "Be not afraid; help is nigh." Moreover, "Let not your heart be troubled; ye believe in God, believe also in Me." Again, "In quietness and in confidence shall be your strength."

As for the Christian's sorrows and sufferings, surely all those who truly walk by faith realise with the Apostle Paul, "None of those things move me!" For if truly loyal to the Lord, none of the reverses, discouragements, misfortunes, loss of friendships, ignominy and shame, can deter us from our faithfulness to him. There are many persuasive but delusive voices speaking at the present time, scattering a multitude of misrepresentations, fictitious interpretations and impressions-and all of this permitted by an unerring Wisdom for a short time.

### **MORE EARNEST HEED**

Hence the last chapter of the career and sufferings of the Christ is not yet written! The time is drawing nigh when it shall be. Then, with all the dust and smoke of present fabrications, subterfuge and subtle strategies of the Evil One cleared away, many things will be seen in altogether a different light - in their true light! Are we willing to wait? Can we watch with Christ "one hour"?-for He declares that, "Then (in due time) shall the righteous shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father."

In view of such a promise, can we not well afford to "give the more earnest" and patient heed to all the spiritual treasures contemplated in our glorious faith, and so walk before the Lord in all sincerity, devotion, lowliness and humbleness of mind! In these days of many hard trials and fiery ordeals, when God's children are torn and tempest-tossed perhaps as never before, it is eminently important for all to have clearly before the mind what has been and is the vital issue and the real mission of the Church on earth.

### **WALKING IN THE LIGHT**

That which has been of the greatest importance to the Church all along through the Age has not been altered in any sense since the Apostolic Era. In those primitive days the twelve apostles sounded the Gospel trumpet of inspired counsel; it was not an "uncertain sound,"-but one that was definite and clear. None has sounded the keynote for the entire Church more clearly than the Apostle Peter in his inspiring admonition: "Wherefore the rather, brethren, give diligence to make your calling and election sure; for if ye do these things (complete the development of the image of Christ), ye shall never fall." (2 Pet.1:5-10.) It is this same apostle who tell us that true Christians are "A chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a peculiar people," showing forth the praises of Him who hath called them "out of darkness into His marvellous light." - 1 Pet. 2:9.

The Saints are a singular people. It is part of their calling to be such. It is but the honest filling out of their profession, a trait of their citizenship in the realm beyond, to maintain that very course of life which is so unlovely in unsanctified eyes. Christians were told from the beginning that though in the world they were not of the world, The Word of the Lord, His word of Truth, of counsel and Heavenly Wisdom, directed by His Spirit has been the support and stronghold of all who have remained faithful to their covenant of sacrifice-not merely from the standpoint of the Word in theory, but the word "received into a good and honest heart," and that has resulted in the heart undergoing the transforming process, and the renewing of the Spirit.-Rom. 12:1,2.

### **SANCTIFIED THROUGH TRUTH**

Jesus Himself, in His ministry on earth, laid the foundation for this transformation and spiritual development. Indeed, what else could He have meant when He said, "The words which I speak unto you, they are spirit and they are life."? (John 6:63.) Again He said, "I am the Way the Truth and the Life." (John 14:6.) Among His last words were, "Sanctify them through thy truth, thy word is Truth." (John 17:17) Thus it is because the Church's sanctification is by means of, or through the truth, that their endurance of the doctrinal tests of the present time is of much importance; and we need not be surprised that the siftings and shakings of this time are more or less along the lines of one or another of the various features of the Message of Truth that have been given for the last days.

The love of Christ and submission to God's will (which come through the knowledge of the Truth), are necessary to Godliness: and whoever are attempting Godliness without striving for cultivation of these very

essential spiritual qualities will realise their efforts resulting in failure. However in looking forward to the future, we can but expect the same severe trials and tests of faith to continue until every part of our faith and character building is tried, and “the wood, hay and stubble” all consumed; for “the Day that cometh shall try every man’s work of what sort it is.”(1 Cor. 3:13) If in the past our building has stood the test, and not been destroyed, we may well rejoice; but still with trembling, remembering that the trial is not all over yet. “Be not high minded, but fear.” Let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall.”

### **SWEET FELLOWSHIP**

In these days when many disturbing factors and distressing problems confront all people, including the Lord’s children, the natural and common tendency is to lean upon one another for mutual support. The world of humanity knows nothing better than this. Nor are the children of God forbidden to do so, but rather to the contrary, they are admonished in the Word to make use of all opportunities for communing with each other in the spirit.

Thus the Master promised that “Where two or three are met together in My name” etc., His presence and refreshing benediction would be there.

Where the assembling is “in My Name,” the conversation and communion take the turn, not of social themes and earthly discussions, but conversely- the fellowship and communion of the Holy Spirit is experienced. How richly this was in evidence in the primitive Church! How truly the Apostolic Epistles abound with the fragrance of this thought of the mutual helpfulness of the members of Christ! Hence the writers of those Epistles frequently concluded their letters with the kindly words, “The communion and fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all, Amen

### **LOOKING FORWARD**

None of us knows just what the future holds of disturbing factors, of afflictive sorrows and distress, but this we do know, that the old order of things of this Dispensation must pass entirely out! Hence there may be grave and darker days ahead than any that have ever been seen by the children of men; for the way of the Kingdom of Heaven must be prepared. Meantime, the remnant of the Church on earth is wending its way toward the Holy City, and all who are looking forward to an “abundant entrance” should diligently endeavour to become more and more fortified and equipped with the whole armour of God-”That ye may be able to withstand in the evil day and, having done all, to stand.” “He is faithful that calleth you, Who also will do it.”

(WOTM - abridged)

### **A HAPPY NEW YEAR**

New mercies, new blessings, new light on thy way;  
New courage, new hope, and new strength for thy day;  
New notes of thanksgiving, new chords of delight;  
New songs in the morning, new songs in the night.

New wine in thy chalice, new altars to raise;  
New fruit for thy Master, new garments of praise;  
New gifts for His treasures, new smiles from His face;  
New streams from the fountain of infinite grace.

New stars for thy crown, and new tokens of love;  
New gleams of the glory that waits thee above;  
New light of His countenance, radiant and clear;  
All this be thy joy in the happy new year!

(Author unknown)

### **Eternal Love**

One there is above all others.

Well deserves the name of Friend;  
His is love beyond all others,  
Costly, free, and knows no end.  
They who once His kindness prove.  
Find it everlasting love.

(John Newman)

## PRAYER

*“Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition with thanksgiving, present transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts your requests to God, and the peace of God, which and minds in Christ Jesus.” Phil. 4:6,7 NIV*

### A HUMAN INSTINCT

Mankind being created in the image of God is said to be incurably religious. “Atheists are made not born.” Religion is universal and ingrained, prayer is the same, with people everywhere recognising their dependence on some higher order, no matter what their understanding of it might be. People never outgrow their need for prayer anymore than their need for air or food. Living in a precarious world, surrounded by the vast and terrifying forces of nature, inescapably death-shadowed, people in their anguish pray spontaneously.

Especially in times of crisis, the instinctive nature of prayer is disclosed, as shown by the Psalmist in Psalm 107:23-31 - *“Others went out on the sea in ships; they were merchants on the mighty waters, they saw the works of the LORD, His wonderful deeds in the deep. For He spoke and stirred up a tempest that lifted high the waves, they mounted up to the heavens and went down to the depths. In their peril their courage melted away, they reeled and staggered like drunken men, they were at their wits’ end. Then they cried out to the LORD in their trouble, and He brought them out of their distress. He stilled the storm to a whisper, the waves of the sea were hushed. They were glad when it grew calm, and He guided them to their desired haven. Let them give thanks to the LORD for His unfailing love and His wonderful deeds for men.”*

The pages of the Bible supply abundant evidence that many of the religions of the area had prayer as a way to contact their supreme being. Thus the priests of Baal called unto their gods as we read in 1 Kings 18:26-29- *“So they took the bull given them and prepared it. Then they called upon the name of Baal from morning till noon. ‘O Baal, answer us!’ they shouted, but there was no response, no one answered. And they danced around the altar they had made. At noon Elijah began to taunt them, ‘Shout louder!’ he said, ‘Surely he is a god! Perhaps he is deep in thought, or busy, or travelling. Maybe he is sleeping and must be awakened.’ So they shouted louder and slashed themselves with swords and spears as was their custom, until the blood flowed. Midday passed, and they continued their frantic prophesying until the time for the evening sacrifice, but there was no response, no one answered, no one paid attention”*

### CHRISTIAN PRAYER

Although prayer is a universal phenomenon, it however becomes unique and commanding in Biblical faith. It is said that Christianity is the peculiar home of personal prayer. It has also been said that to be a Christian means to be one who prays. Luther remarks in his homely way that, as a shoemaker makes a shoe and a tailor makes a coat, so ought a Christian to pray. Prayer is the daily business of a Christian. Scripture nowhere offers any written defence of prayer, it simply assumes the necessity and effectiveness of praying to God, provided that certain conditions are met. It is not demanded that we must pray, there is no direct penalty if we do not pray, However, we thus lose the power of communicating with our Creator. Prayer shows the sovereignty and activity of the living God in whose hands nature is like pliable clay. Consequently it teaches that in answer to prayer God may produce events that are in harmony with His great plan, that a system of man-made laws could not produce.

If God is wise, all powerful, all good and all knowing, is prayer then not superfluous and futile? Does not the very idea of prayer imply a ‘Deity of one whose mind can change’? In His omnipotence, He knows our needs just as in His goodness and omnipotence He will certainly supply our needs. Moreover, He has assuredly mapped out for all eternity the entire course of things. Why then pray? The Bible does not debate these issues, which emerge from the paradoxical relationship between human responsibility and divine sovereignty. Prayer, however, presupposes that the relationship between God and mankind is genuinely interpersonal, not the relationship of an operator and an impersonal automaton, but that between a parent and a child, friend and friend, master and servant, king and subject, creator and creature. Hence it makes God’s knowledge, power and goodness the very ground of petition.

We read in Matt. 7:7-11 - *“Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives; he who seeks finds and to him who knocks the door will be opened. Which of you, if his son asks for bread, will give him a stone? Or if he asks for a fish, will give him a snake? If you, then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give good gifts to those who ask him?”* Prayer becomes a channel of human creativity and development in co-operation with divine ordaining and over-ruling. Things are brought to pass only as people pray; without prayer, some things will not happen as Paul says - *“I urge, then, first of all, that requests, prayers, intercession and thanksgiving be made for everyone, for kings and all those in authority, that we may live peaceful and quiet lives in all godliness and holiness. This is good, and pleases God our Saviour, who wants all men to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth.”* (1Tim 2:1,2) Such prayer, together with its answer and all of its outworkings, is of course embraced in God’s eternal counsel.

## ELEMENTS OF PRAYER

Prayer has many facets to it, it is not merely reduced to petition, as some people seem to feel. Prayer cannot simply be compressed into ‘getting things from God’. Prayer essentially is **communion**, a desire to enter into a conscious and intimate relationship with our Heavenly Father, who is our life. The psalmist tells us - *“O God, you are my God, earnestly I seek you; my soul thirsts for you, my body longs for you, in a dry and weary land where there is no water. I have seen you in the sanctuary and beheld your power and your glory. Because your love is better than life, my lips will glorify you; I will praise you as long as I live, and in your name I will lift up my hands. My soul will be satisfied as with the richest of foods, with singing lips my mouth will praise you. On my bed I remember you; I think of you through the watches of the night. Because you are my help, I sing in the shadow of your wings. My soul clings to you, your right hand upholds me.”* Psa 63:1-8 The apostle John also brings out this beautiful picture (1 John 1:3) - *“We proclaim to you what we have seen and heard, so that you may have fellowship with us; and our fellowship is with the Father and with His son, Jesus Christ.”*

Prayer is also **adoration**, the praise of God because of His greatness and kindness. The book of Psalms is a collection of man’s loving, awe-inspired praise, as, contemplating his Creator and Saviour, he is lost in wonder and amazement at the purity, pity and power of the perfect being. Again, prayer is **thanksgiving**, the outpouring of gratitude to God for his grace, mercy and loving-kindness. Psalm 103 is a classic expression of the emotion aroused by unmerited blessing. *“Praise the LORD, O my soul; all my inmost being, praise His holy name. Praise the LORD, O my soul; and forget not all his benefits; who forgives all your sins and heals all your diseases, who redeems your life from the pit and crowns you with love and compassion, who satisfies your desires with good things so that your youth is renewed like the eagle’s.”* (Verses 15) The entire psalms are indeed full of such praise.

Prayer is also **confession** as sinful man acknowledges his guilt. David’s remorseful frankness in Psalm 51 voices the common experience of transgression followed by grief-stricken remorse before God - *“Have mercy on me, O God, according to your unfailing love, according to your great compassion blot out my transgressions. Wash away all my iniquity and cleanse me from my sin.”* (Verses 1,2) Then the prayer becomes one of **petition** as the offender beseeches cleansing as we read in Verses 9-12 - *“Hide your face from my sins and blot out all my iniquity. Create in me a pure heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me. Do not cast me from your presence or take your Holy Spirit from me. Restore me to the joy of your salvation and grant me a willing spirit to sustain me.”* Like the psalmist, we as Christians also feel the guilt of our sins, a sense of powerlessness which prevents us from going forward in confidence and hope. Nothing but divine grace, freely bestowed, can transform bitter self condemnation to firm self-confidence, the trembling fear to peace and trust. Prayer still further then, is petition, a plea for personal help. This was certainly bought out in the Lord’s Prayer, also by Paul in Phil. 4:6, the text verse.

Prayer is also **intercession**, which we may define as petition on behalf of another, entreating for his or her good or needs. Consider Paul’s burden for Israel, as we read in Romans 10:1 - *“Brothers, my heart’s desire and prayer to God for the Israelites is that they may be saved.”* Paul also prayed for the various churches that he had set up, as well as for individual members that he knew. Prayer finally is **submission**, as we abandon our own desires and surrender our wills to God. This is probably prayer at its highest level, achieved when by faith we commit our lives unreservedly to the divine love, wisdom and power. The supreme illustration of such surrender is our Lord Jesus Christ who, after His struggle in the garden of Gethsemane could say - *“Father, if you are willing, take this cup from me; yet not my will but yours be done.”* Luke 22:42. So when we as true children of God pray, we may be engaged in adoration, communion, thanksgiving, confession, petition, intercession and submission.

## ATTITUDES OF PRAYER

Regardless of the type of prayer we as Christians are offering, the critical factor for all of us is our attitude. Posture, language, place or time - none of these trifles matter. In all such respects the greatest liberty is permitted as long as our hearts have the right attitude towards our Heavenly Father. In the Bible there are many

accounts of the different ways, places, and reasons for people to pray. Let us consider some examples from both the Old and the New Testaments. Firstly, kneeling is mentioned in Daniel 6:10 - *"Now when Daniel learned that the decree had been published, he went home to his upstairs room where the windows opened towards Jerusalem. Three times a day he got down on his knees and prayed, giving thanks to God just as he had done before."* Standing - In Jer. 18:20 we read - *"Remember that I (Jeremiah) stood before you (Jehovah) and spoke on their behalf to turn your wrath away from them."* Sitting - 2 Samuel 7:18 records - *"Then King David went in and sat before the LORD, and he said, Who am I. O Sovereign LORD, and what is my family, that you have brought me this far?"*

God's people sometimes prayed with their hands uplifted, as we are instructed by Paul in 1 Tim. 2:8 - *"I want men everywhere to lift up holy hands in prayer."* Sometimes our prayers are silent because of situations in which we find ourselves or because this is the most appropriate way. In 1 Samuel 1:13 we read - *"Hannah was praying in her heart, and her lips were moving, but her voice was not heard."* At other times, we may have need to pray out loud as was the case in Ezekiel 11:13 - *"Then I fell face down and cried out in a loud voice, Ah, Sovereign LORD! Will you completely destroy the remnant of Israel?"*

There will be many times when we will pray alone as our Lord often did and as we read in Mark 1:35 - *"Very early in the morning, while it was still dark, Jesus got up, left the house and went off to a solitary place, where He prayed."* On other occasions, as in our meetings and conventions and in our family units, we will pray together, as David shows in Psalm 35:18 - *"I will give you thanks in the great assembly, among throngs of people I will praise you."* The place where we pray is also not important. We have examples of prayers being made in many locations on the open fields, as in Gen. 24:11,12 - *"He (Eliezer) made the camels kneel down near the well outside the town; it was toward evening, the time the women go out to draw water. Then he prayed, O, LORD, God of my master Abraham, give me success today, and show kindness to my master Abraham."*

Prayer may be offered in temples, synagogues and even at the riverside, as Paul did. Acts 16:13 - *"On the Sabbath we went outside the city gate to the river, where we expected to find a place of prayer. We sat down and began to speak to the women who had gathered there."* It may be offered on the seashore - Acts 21:5 - *"But when our time was up, we left and continued on our way. All the disciples and their wives and children accompanied us out of the city, and there on the beach we knelt to pray."* As we have seen, we have the honour and privilege from God to commune with Him wherever, whenever and for whatever reason.

*"In every case should Christians pray, If near the throne of grace they'd live."*

## **PATTERNS OF PRAYER**

The intensity, freedom and effectiveness of prayer can best be seen in the lives of those who, in the Bible, have sought to live their lives in harmony with God, such as - Moses, Jacob, Elijah, David, Solomon, Paul and of course the supreme example, our Lord Jesus Christ. In our faith and practice, prayer is essential. It is carried on apart from our sacrifice, study, works and gatherings. It is a matter of continual communication with God. Prayer is not only a human activity, but is elicited and energised by the power of our Heavenly Father. Prayer is a gift from God that requires us to conscientiously desire, develop and discipline our lives. Prayer is not request for mundane happiness but rather for divine fellowship and eternal salvation. Prayer involves much more than petition and persuasion, it is adoring reverence, wonder, yearning desire, surrender, love, confidence, trust and resolve. True prayer is in spirit and in truth, as our Lord told the Samaritan Woman - John 4:24 - *"God is spirit, and His worshippers must worship in spirit and in truth."* - releasing us from all limitations of space. Thus the believing heart becomes God's temple, as Paul tells us in 1 Cor. 6:19,20 - *"Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit, which is in you, which you have received from God? You are not your own, you were bought at a price. Therefore honour God with your body."*

When it comes to the pattern that our prayers should follow, as in every aspect of our relationship with God, our Lord Jesus Christ has left us an unsurpassed and perfect example. Peter reminds us in 1 Peter 2:21 - *"To this end you were called, because Christ suffered for you, leaving you an example, that you should follow in His steps."* Prayer occupied a place of singular importance in His own life and teaching. In time of decision and crisis He gave Himself to prayer. Thus our Lord prayed when He was baptised as we read in Luke 3:21,22 - *"When all the people were being baptised, Jesus was baptised too. And as He was praying, heaven was opened and the Holy Spirit descended on Him in bodily form like a dove. And a voice came from heaven, You are my Son, whom I love, with you I am well pleased."* Our Lord also prayed before He chose the twelve apostles - Luke 6:12,13 - *"Jesus went into a mountainside to pray, and spent the night praying to God. When morning came, He called His disciples to Him to choose twelve of them, whom He also designated apostles."*

Jesus prayed when He was engaged in sustained and exhausting service, as we read in Matt 14:23 - *"When He had sent the multitudes away, He went up into a mountain apart to pray, and He was there alone".* When He was performing miracles, He called upon God, as in the case of Lazarus recorded in John 11. *"So they*

took away the stone, then Jesus looked up and said, Father I thank you that you have heard me. I know that you always hear me, but I said this for the benefit of the people standing here, that they may believe that you sent me." Jesus prayed when He was concerned for Simon Peter - Luke 22:31,32 - "Simon, Simon, Satan has asked to sift you as wheat, but I have prayed for you, Simon, that your faith may not fail, and when you have turned back, strengthen your brothers."

When our Lord was faced with betrayal, execution and momentary divine abandonment, He turned once more to His Heavenly Father, as we read in Mark 14:32-36. "They went to a place called Gethsemane, and Jesus said to His disciples, Sit here while I pray. Going a little further, He fell to the ground and prayed that if possible the hour might pass from Him. 'Abba, Father,' He said, 'everything is possible for you; take this cup from me, yet not what I will, but what you will.'" But the prayer most dear to all of us was the one made for His disciples there with Him, and also for all such in the future and for the ministry. This is contained in John 17, reading verses 20,21 - "My prayer is not for them alone, I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message, that all of them may be one, Father; just as you are in me and I am in you. May they also be one in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me."

Our Lord also prayed at times of joy, as Luke tells us (Ch. 10:21) - "At that time, Jesus, full of joy through the Holy Spirit, said, I praise you, Father; Lord of heaven and earth, because you have hidden these things from the wise and learned, and revealed them to little children. Yea, Father; for this was your good pleasure." He was also grateful for the food that His Heavenly Father provided for His people, as we read at the time of the Last Supper in Luke 22:17 - "After taking the cup, He gave thanks and said, Take this and divide it among you." Another example was at the feeding of the five thousand (John 6:11) - "Jesus then took the loaves, gave thanks, and distributed to those who were seated as much as they wanted. He did the same with the fish."

### **"LORD, TEACH US TO PRAY"**

Prayer was such an integral part of our Lord's life that His example has aroused in His followers a longing for the same communication and blessing that prayer has to offer, as we are told in Luke 11:1 - "One day Jesus was praying in a certain place; when He finished, one of His disciples said to Him, Lord. Teach us to pray, just as John taught his disciples." Every kind of prayer may be found in the Gospel record - communion, adoration, thanksgiving, petition, intercession and submission, every kind except confession. With that exception, it may be said that our Lord's model prayer in Matt 6:9-13, together with His parables and discourses on the subject, sprang from His own experience with the Father. When instructing on prayer, our Lord used examples that were well known to His disciples, such as in Matt 6:1-7 - "Be careful not to do your 'acts of righteousness' before men, to be seen by them. If you do, you will have no reward from your Father in heaven and when you pray, do not be like the hypocrites, for they love to pray standing in synagogues and on the street corners to be seen by men. I tell you the truth, they have received their reward in full. But when you pray, go into your room, close the door and pray to your Father, who is unseen. Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you."

In John's gospel also, Jesus shows us the heart attitude needed (John 14:13,14) - "And I will do whatever you ask in my name, so that the Son may bring glory to the Father. You may ask me for anything in my name, and I will do it." Later in the same gospel, we see the reason why God is willing to answer our prayers. (John 16:24-27) - "Until now you have not asked for anything in my name. Ask and you will receive, and your joy will be complete. Though I have been speaking figuratively, a time is coming when I will tell you plainly about my Father. In that day you will ask in my name; I am not saying that I will ask the Father on your behalf, no, the Father Himself loves you because you have loved me and have believed that I came from God." Paul in the letter to the Hebrews tells of the special function of our Lord now that He is risen and sitting at the right hand of God. (Heb 7:21-26 reading in part) - "The Lord swore and will not repent, thou art a priest forever after the order of Melchisedec. By so much was Jesus made a surety of a better testament this man, because He continueth ever, hath an unchangeable priesthood. Wherefore he is able to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by Him, seeing He ever liveth to make intercession for them. For such a High Priest became us, who is holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners, and made higher than the heavens." (KJV)

### **PRINCIPLES OF PRAYER**

Doubtless, some of the requests that we have made through life's journey have been denied. However, we remember that fervent pleas do not go unanswered, some may be answered with a 'not yet', others in some strange guise or in a way we may not have expected. Sometimes we have periods in our lives when prayers seem to go unanswered, as David states in Psalm 88:13,14 - "I cry to you for help, O LORD; in the morning my prayer comes before you. Why, O LORD, do you reject me and hide your face from me?" Another example is in Hab. 1:2 - "How long, O LORD, must I cry for help, but you do not listen? Or cry out to you, Violence!, but you do not save? Sometimes our prayers may be unanswered for the reason given in James 4:3 - "You ask, and receive not, because you ask amiss, that you may consume it upon your lusts." All importantly, it is

dependant on our having fully accepted Christ as our Saviour and having been accepted as God's children, as we read in Romans 8:14,15 - *"Those who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God, for you did not receive a spirit that makes you a slave again to fear, but you received the Spirit of sonship by which we cry, Abba, Father."*

The following would then be the scriptural principles of effectual Christian prayer -

(1) Prayer avails only when made in faith. *"Without faith, it is impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to Him must believe that He exists and that He rewards those who earnestly seek Him."* Heb. 11:6.

(2) Prayer avails only when it is made in the name of Jesus. *"I will do whatever you ask in my name, so that the Son may bring glory to the Father."* John 14:13.

(3) Prayer avails only when it is according to God's will. *"This is the confidence we have in approaching God; that if we ask anything according to His will, He hears us; and if we know that He hears us, whatever we ask, we know that we have what we asked of him."* 1 John 5:14,15.

(4) Prayer avails only when offered under the power and the direction of the Holy Spirit. Not because of indifferent hearts, but because of human weakness, we may be ignorant of God's will. *"But you, dear friends, build yourselves up in your most holy faith and pray in the Holy Spirit."* Jude 20. Paul expands on this in Romans 8:26,27 - *"In the same way, the Spirit helps us in our weakness. We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit intercedes for us with groans that words cannot express, and he who searches our hearts knows the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints in accordance to with God's will."*

(5) Prayer avails only when we realise our own shortcomings and our need to rely on our Heavenly Father, as David tells us - Psalm 66:18-20 - *"If I had cherished sin in my heart, the Lord would not have listened, but God has surely listened and heard my voice in prayer. Praise be to God, who has not rejected my prayer or withheld His love from me."*

(6) Prayer avails only when we have a forgiving heart the inability to forgive will hinder us in making effective intercession. Our Lord showed this in Matt. 18:21,22 - *"Peter came to Jesus and asked, Lord, how many times shall I forgive my brother when he sins against me? Up to seven times? Jesus answered, I tell you, not seven times, but seventy-seven times."* This was followed by the parable of the king and his servant who was forgiven his debt but refused to forgive the debt someone owed him. When the king heard of this, he had his servant cast into gaol until he could pay in full. Jesus added - *"This is how my Heavenly Father will treat each of you unless you forgive your brother from your heart."* Matt 18:35.

(7) Prayer avails only when made in the context of harmonious human relationships, as we read in Matt 5:23,24 - *"Therefore, if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there in front of the altar. First go and be reconciled to your brother, then come and offer your gift."* In 1 Peter 3:7, the apostle urges marital harmony *"so that nothing will hinder your prayers."*

(8) Prayer avails only if made with persistence, evidence of genuine care, compassion and concern as shown in Luke 18:1-8. *"Then Jesus told His disciples a parable to show them that they should always pray and not give up. He said, in a certain town there was a judge who neither feared God nor cared about men. And there was a widow in that town who kept coming to him with a plea, Grant me justice against my adversary. For some time he refused, but finally said to himself Even though I don't fear God or care about men, yet because this widow keeps bothering me, I will see that she gets justice, so that she won't eventually wear me out with her coming. And the Lord said, Listen to what the unjust judge says. And will not God bring about justice for His chosen ones .....I tell you, He will see that they get justice and quickly."*

(9) Prayer avails only when made with concentration and intensity as James tells us (Jas 5:16) - *"The prayer of a righteous man is powerful and effective,"* while Paul tells us in 1 Thess. 5:17,18 - *"Pray without ceasing. In everything give thanks, for this is the will of God concerning you."*

Let us never forget the very special privilege that we have, as followers of Christ, to come before the throne of grace to communicate with our Heavenly Father, a direct link made possible by the sacrifice of our Lord Jesus Christ. Let us pray with rejoicing hearts and give thanks for this great privilege of prayer. (RJC: 1996)