

The Shameful Sin of Prayerlessness

by Fred Barlow

Christians are guilty of the shameful sin of prayerlessness, which hinders revival and results from Heaven, and they need to pray with intensity and faith to overcome their lack and bring blessings from God.

Scripture: Psalm 139:23, Matthew 6:6, Mark 11:24, Luke 11:1, Luke 18:1, John 14:13, John 15:7, James 5:16

Topics: "Prayer Life", "Christian Obedience"

Description

Fred Barlow preaches on the disciples' plea to Jesus to teach them to pray, emphasizing the critical importance of a personal, persistent prayer life. He highlights the prevalent sin of prayerlessness among Christians in the twentieth century, stressing the need to move from discussing prayer to actually engaging in fervent intercessory prayer. Barlow challenges believers to obey Christ's command to pray without ceasing, drawing attention to the power and necessity of prayer in every aspect of a Christian's life. He uses biblical examples like Moses, Daniel, and Ezra, as well as the prayer life of Jesus, to underscore the transformative impact of prayer and the need for believers to emulate the prayer giants of the Bible.

Transcript

"Lord, teach us to pray..." (Luke 11:1).

Our text may well have taken place early in the morning "when the dew was still on the roses" and a solitary figure rose from being prostrated in prayer. Some of His disciples had slipped nearby to wait for their Master to terminate His prayer.

The text was surely occasioned by the recognition of those early disciples of the one, single greatest need of their lives--a personal, practical, persistent practice of prayer life.

Need it be added that that petition of the disciples of Jesus Christ strikes at the very heart of the most cardinal crime committed by Christians in this twentieth century--the shameful sin of prayerlessness!

Understand that twentieth-century Christians are guilty of multiplied gross sins against their God. Our churches are cursed by Christians in the congregations who have exaggerating or evil-speaking or ever-gossiping tongues. There are the tight-fisted, pocketbook-pinching, God-robbing believers. Many are the members who forsake attendance at His house. Super abundant are the saints who commit many unsaintly sins. But beloved, the most cardinal crime of the Christian is that of prayerlessness!

Well did those first-century disciples sense their sin of prayerlessness, and as the rueful result--powerlessness. Surely the daily prayer life of Christ was a constant challenge to their own sporadic prayer lives. Thus this appeal to their Lord after He had been engaged in earnest, fervent prayer: "Lord, teach us to pray...."

Read their request rightly! Do not read it "optically correct but mentally wrong." The appeal of these apostles was not, "Lord, teach us how to pray," but, "Lord, teach us to pray." Do not in any way insert in their intercession the three-letter word how. Theirs was no request to learn the proper posture in prayer, nor the particular phraseology of prayer, nor even the places to pray nor the periods of time to pray. Theirs was not an imploration to learn methodology of prayer, but an urgent supplication to be moved, mustered to pray!

Ah, that is what we self-satisfied, spiritually smug, twentieth-century saints need to petition our Christ:

I. Lord, Teach Us to Pray Because We Are Condemned by Our Criminality in Not Praying

Christians discuss prayer, dissect prayer, debate prayer in clinics and in conversations about prayer--but just never do any praying. We are too much like Will Rogers' famous comment about the weather, "Everybody talks about the weather, but no one does anything about it."

How true that testimony is about the average Christian's prayer life--some idle chatter but no importunate calling upon the Lord! It is doubtful that a half-dozen Christians in any congregation could honestly hold up a hand that they averaged fifteen minutes a day in intercessory, importunate prayer for souls, for revival, for God's blessings. In fact, one blessed-of-God evangelist recently charged in a revival meeting, "The average Christian does not spend five minutes a day in prayer," then commented, "and that is why they are average."

Aye, the condemnation upon Christianity, a curse to the church, a pall to the pastor, a grief to the Holy Ghost, restrictor of revival--all are the smug, satisfied, complacent, careless-about-prayer Christians. How tragically true!

Especially is this charge true, and especially need Christians plead to the Lord, "Teach us to pray," because we are commanded by Christ to pray!

"And he spake a parable unto them to this end, that men ought always to pray, and not to faint."--Luke 18:1.

Christ's command put prayer in the imperative and took it out of the optional when He cited that "men ought always to pray." Christians are not to pray only when they can, but also when they should. Christians are not only to pray when they feel like it, but also when they don't feel like it: "men ought always to pray, and not to faint."

Put it down: we are more prone to faint than to pray, and that is the real reason why we do more fainting than praying.

In World War II, when German shells were showering their destructive fury upon London, a newspaper carried this charge to its fearful citizens: "If you must fall, fall upon your knees!" Amen!

Dr. Bob Jones, Sr., showed the difference between fainting fits and prayer's purpose and power when he related this incident in a revival campaign:

Home for a few days between meetings, Dr. Jones was relaxing on his front porch when he heard a scream from his neighbor's yard. The neighbor boy, while playing, had stumbled and fallen over a short picket fence, wounding himself severely.

His dad happened to be at home and, hearing the cries of his son, rushed to him, gathered him in his arms and began to carry him down the street to a doctor.

The mother, also hearing the screams of her son, raced to the front porch. Seeing her husband with the shrieking son in his arms running down the street, she cried out, "Honey, what's wrong?"

The husband only momentarily slackened his steps, turned and shouted back, "Billy fell over the fence. I'm carrying him to the doctor!"

The mother reached her hands to her head. "Oh," she exclaimed, "I'm going to faint."

The husband halted. "Listen," he rebuked her, "this ain't no faintin' time. Pray!"

Right! Pray when you feel like fainting! And "pray without ceasing," commands I Thessalonians 5:17.

There is no context in which light we can interpret this command. It stands alone in a series of staccato sentences of commands of God.

To some Christian who queries, "Is it possible for a Christian to obey this command, 'Pray without ceasing'?" I submit these well-written words of Dr. John R. Rice:

How could one pray without ceasing? Is that not an impossible standard? I answer no; the Bible can be taken at face value. God's standards are proper, and God's words mean what they say and say what they mean. Prayer ought to arise from the heart like the fragrance of burning incense off an altar day and night, all the time....As a mother in her sleep listens for the cry of her baby, so a Christian's heart can be attuned to God while he is absorbed in daily duties or even when he sleeps!

There is another meaning and message in the phrase, "Pray without ceasing."

Dr. R. A. Torrey, in his message "How to Pray," penned these instructive and inspiring words that challenge Christians to spend and be spent in persistent prayer:

Now let us consider another of the four phrases used in Acts 12:5 that contain the whole secret of prevailing prayer, the two words, "without ceasing." "Prayer was made without ceasing of the church unto God for him."...The Greek word used, which is *ektenos*, [literally means] "stretched-out-edly."...The word is pictorial, as many words are. It represents the soul stretched out in the intensity of its earnestness toward God.

Those who have watched a track meet will understand what Dr. Torrey was talking about. The racers toe the mark, feet in the starting chuck, fingers digging into the track, awaiting the signal to start. At the crack of the gun they leap forward. Every ounce of strength, every fibre of their being is put into their quest to reach the goal first.

But their intensity is even more evident at the close of the race. Legs churning like pistons, bulging veins, bursting lungs, the strained, pained look, stretched-out chest and arms all vividly illustrate that every nerve, every muscle, every fibre of their being is ektenos, "stretched-out-edly," and is a vital illustration of the kind of praying we Christians ought to be practicing!

John Welsh prayed that way! Consumptive, coughing, anemic, sickly unto death, that nonconformist Scottish preacher in the reign of King James was imprisoned in dungeons for his faith and his preaching. Son-in-law of John Knox, it was said that Mary, Queen of Scots, was more afraid of him than the whole of the French or English armies. Think of that!

One night after his release out of the dungeon, in the middle of the night, Mary, his wife, awoke to find her husband's side of the bed empty and cold. She heard a movement on the floor. Looking down she saw him stretched out on that cold earthen floor, wrapped in a spread, weeping and groaning in prayer. She urged him to return to bed lest he get even worse in his sickness. He said something which she interpreted as an assent, and she fell asleep again.

The morning sun woke her. John was still on the floor, deep in agonizing prayer. She bent over, touching him on the shoulders, urging him to get in bed and get warm. He lifted his tear-stained, twisted face to her and said, "O woman, let me alone! I have three thousand souls on my heart this night, and I know not how it is with them!"

Beloved, that is praying without ceasing, compassionate, concerned, "stretched-out-edly" praying! O God, teach us to pray!

We need to pray that prayer, "Lord, teach us to pray," not only because we are commanded to pray, but also because we are obligated to others to pray!

First Samuel 12:23 is one of the most convicting passages in the Bible pertaining to prayer: "Moreover as for me, God forbid that I should sin against the Lord in ceasing to pray for you: but I will teach you the good and the right way." Almost every Sunday school pupil knows the background of that soul-searching speech of Samuel.

Israel was a theocracy; God was their King. But they wanted a human king like all the other nations, a monarch, a man, a flesh-and-blood king who would sit on a throne, crown on head, sceptre in hand, one who could counsel them face-to-face; one who would stand tall and brave in his chariot, leading them into battle against their enemies.

God granted them their desire, and Samuel the priest anointed Saul to be their king. But God, evidencing His holy displeasure over their rebellious desires, sent a storm, unleashing His fury in thunder and rain at the time of harvest. Every Jew knew it was judgment from Heaven; the people then pled with their priest, "Pray for thy servants unto the Lord thy God, that we die not: for we have added unto all our sins this evil, to ask us a king" (1 Sam. 12:19).

Samuel's answer, seen in part, is probing and powerful: "God forbid that I should sin against the Lord in ceasing to pray for you" (vs. 23).

I have underlined the words "the Lord" in my Bible to remind me always who the real recipient of our prayerlessness is.

We Christians are commanded, "Pray one for another" (Jas. 5:16); and when we do not, we sin against our brethren, the pastor in particular, the deacons to greatest degree, the trustees in the truest sense, the Sunday school staff to be sure, the evangelists extremely so, the missionaries mightily, the Bible college personnel pathetically. But first, foremost and most infamously, our iniquity of prayerlessness is leveled against the Lord God!

As Christians, citizens of our country, we are commanded to pray "for kings, and for all that are in authority" (I Tim. 2:1-3). To fail to supplicate for our president, his cabinet, the Congress, the Senate, our governor, mayor, etc., is capital crime against our country and against the individuals. But it is even more; it is gross sin against God!

As we read further in verses 3 and 4, "God, our Saviour; Who will have all men to be saved, and to come to the knowledge of the truth," it is imperative that we intercede for the unsaved also. Consider the cardinal criminality of Christians who are not spent in supplications for the souls of sinners.

As shameful as the sin of not prevailing and travailing for lost souls is, it is at its paramount worst because it is a sin against the Lord.

We need to pray, "Lord, teach us to pray," not only because we are commanded by Christ, but because it is necessitated by our own needs.

Surely one of the sharpest indictments against the iniquity of our prayerlessness is James 4:2: "Ye have not, because ye ask not."

The Lord Jesus charged Christians, "Ask, and it shall be given you" (Luke 11:9), but we ask not! He stated, "Seek, and ye shall find," yet we seek not! He continued: "Knock, and it shall be opened unto you," but we knock not! Thus we have not!

Consider our lamentable lack, then consider the all-adequate supply that is ours through persevering prayer. Dr. Hyman Appelman scripturally summed up some of these in these sentences:

The lack of talent, lack of training, lack of equipment, lack of help, lack of opportunities--all can be conquered through prayer. Prayer will build your Sunday school. Prayer will fill your auditorium. Prayer will raise your money....We can conquer every need, everything--the world, the flesh, the Devil--all obstacles, by prayer.

What needy sinners we saints really are because we do not pray. A Christian, it seems, will resort to every trick and tactic to get his needs--except prayer. He will beg of brothers, infringe on the family and friends, borrow from the bank--everything but pray. Christians will go further than that in their gross sin to get what they want and need without prayer. The prayerless Christian will "politick," "polish apples" and "pull strings." He will supplant; he will steal. He will fawn over folk, fake and figure to get his desires. As the Scriptures state, the Christian will even war, wreck and ruin to get his ways:

"From whence come wars and fightings among you? come they not hence, even of your lusts that war in your members? Ye lust, and have not: ye kill, and desire to have, and cannot obtain: ye fight and war, yet ye have not, because ye ask not."--Jas. 4:1,2.

Splits, schisms, divided, defeated congregations and churches; a grieved and hindered Holy Spirit; withheld revival and results from Heaven; a tarnished testimony in the community; disappointed and

discouraged members--these are some of the awful prices Christians must pay for going after some good things in wrong ways. The safe way, the sure way to get what you want, if it is right, is to go after it the scriptural way--PRAY! Our Saviour said it this way: "What things soever ye desire, when ye pray, believe that ye receive them, and ye shall have them" (Mark 11:24).

Dr. John Rice's comments on this promise have been a rich and rewarding challenge to my prayer life:

If it is not wrong to want something, it is not wrong to pray about it. And if it is not wrong to pray about it, it is not wrong to believe God will answer you.

Amen! "Lord, teach us to pray!"

Another real reason we Christians need to be taught to pray is:

II. We Are Shamed by the Prayer Lives of God's Giants; We Need to Pray the Disciples' Prayer, "Lord, Teach Us to Pray"

Every person found in Scripture that God has used mightily has been possessed of a powerful prayer life.

I make mention of Moses. Coming down from a season of communion with God in Mount Sinai, Moses saw his people turned from God to idolatrous dancing before a golden calf. Moses destroyed the idol, upbraided the people for their appalling iniquity and retreated into the mountain to pray.

Dr. Lee Scarborough spoke Bible truth when he penned of that prayer:

There have been only two other prayers recorded that are the equal to it in passion, purpose: Christ's prayer for forgiveness for His enemies as He hung on the cross, and Paul's prayer as recorded in Romans 9:1-3.

Moses' prayer saved his nation from annihilation and spared them from the full measure of the intensity and fury of God's poured-out wrath.

We should be shamed when we measure our puny, passionless praying against that earnest entreaty of Moses, man of God:

"Oh, this people have sinned a great sin, and have made them gods of gold. Yet now, if thou wilt forgive their sin--; [Moses must have paused as he pondered the enormity of the result of his request] and if not, blot me, I pray thee, out of the book which thou hast written."--Exod. 32:31,32.

Beloved, that's praying!

Daniel determined and dared to pray. Under the threat of death, Daniel prayed three times daily with windows open toward Jerusalem. The intensity of his intercessory prayer over his sins and for his people is seen in these Scriptures:

"In those days I Daniel was mourning three full weeks. I ate no pleasant bread, neither came flesh nor wine in my mouth, neither did I anoint myself at all, till three whole weeks were fulfilled."--Dan. 10:2,3.

Those were desperate days. Israel was in servitude because of her sins. Daniel's comeliness had turned into corruption. Daniel needed a visitation, a vision from Heaven. He had no alternative: he prayed, he poured out his soul, he fasted for three whole weeks.

I am often asked, "Dr. Barlow, do you believe in fasting?" My answer without hesitation is in the affirmative. I do not particularly believe in setting days of fasting, Monday or Wednesday or Friday, etc., but I believe there comes a time when we find ourselves in such urgency, or such emergency, that we must fast. It would seem to me when our ministries are powerless, fruitless, so helpless, so hopeless in our service and our soul winning, that we would have no hunger for food but only a hunger for God.

We lose our love for food and fellowship at other times of crisis.

On my forty-eighth birthday I drove into my driveway from a campaign in Columbus, Ohio. My wife, a Southern-born girl with all the culinary ability of that part of the world, had prepared my birthday supper. On my birthday, I get my favorite foods--from Southern fried chicken, okra and cornbread to orange-coconut cake.

Shortly before supper the telephone rang. It was a long-distance call from my mother--not a birthday greeting, but the shocking news that my father had just died of cardiac arrest. I tell you the truth, that delicately prepared meal lost all of its appeal. My mother had just lost the man she loved and had lived with forty-nine years, ten months and twenty days. Hundreds of miles away, pining at her loss, brokenhearted, she needed her only son to be at her side, to kiss and embrace her frail body. Aye, food was the least of my concerns that birthday.

Friend, it seems to me there must come a time in our lives when it is crisis hour spiritually--emergency hour. We find ourselves powerless. When we see no growth in our schools and churches, no souls saved, no victories realized; when we see all about us unmoved sinners, depravity and destruction saturating our sinful society, it would seem then, like a Daniel, we would desire no pleasant bread...no flesh in our mouths, no food, no fellowship--nothing but a hunger to get alone with our God and pray until the answer comes!

Which sentences suggest another giant of prayer--Jacob. Jacob, as his name suggests, was a supplanter, a cheater, a deceiver, one who lived by his wits; and he was not a half-wit either. He had supplanted his brother, Esau, of the blessing of the firstborn of the family. Then with subtlety he had stolen that birthright from his father as he posed to be Esau. He had faked and fabricated to get his wealth. Afraid to go back to his boyhood home and ashamed of his tarnished testimony where he had sojourned for years, Jacob was commanded by God to return home.

En route home, hearing the report that Esau and an army were coming to meet him, Jacob, ever true to his name and nature, resorted to politics to save his life. He sent an ambassage ahead laden with gifts to appease Esau. He sought with palaver and praise to propitiate his brother as he called him by the elevated title "lord," while demeaning himself as "your servant." He positioned his family to ensure that he and his most loved ones would be spared to the last in case of attack.

But after all this, Jacob suddenly sensed his real need was prayer! So he prayed. The Scriptures record that hour:

"And Jacob was left alone; and there wrestled a man with him until the breaking of the day. And when he saw that he prevailed not against him, he touched the hollow of his thigh; and the hollow of Jacob's thigh was out of joint, as he wrestled with him. And he said, Let me go, for the day breaketh. And he said, I will not let thee go, except thou bless me. And he said unto him, What is thy name? And he said, Jacob. And he said, Thy name shall no more be called Jacob, but Israel: for as a prince hast thou power with God and

with men, and hast prevailed."--Gen. 32:24-28.

I like that, don't you? That heavenly messenger said, 'Jacob, you are no longer a supplanter, a cheat, a deceiver. No longer will you get your needs by craft, skill and wit. You are a prince--a prince with God and a prince with men; and you have power with God and power with men!'

Ah, that is what I need in my ministry. That power is what I need when I preach sermons. That power is what I need when I pen messages on paper. That power is what I need when I do personal soul winning. That power is what I need daily as I purpose to live for Christ--and so do you.

The source of that power that makes us a giant for God like Israel, instead of a manipulator, a crafty operator like Jacob, is importunate, prevailing prayer!

Giants of prayer--consider Ezra. He had led a company of captives from Babylon back to Jerusalem. However, the spirit of that spiritually corrupt country had not been left behind, and an iniquitous Israel soon was inter-marrying and intermingling with the uncircumcised in their homeland. The purity and spirituality of the priest Ezra were so piqued by these abominable alliances that Ezra expressed his experience:

"And when I heard this thing, I rent my garment and my mantle, and plucked off the hair of my head and of my beard, and sat down astonished."--Ezra 9:3.

Then the priest prayed! Ezra's entreaty to God for his people in their impurity must rank as one of the most illustrious examples of intercessory prayer recorded in the Scriptures. It bleeds with brokenheartedness. It pulses with penitence. It bares the soul crushed in confession of sin. It is the prayer of a priest looking at sin through the eyes of a sin-hating God. It is the prayer of a priest identifying himself with the impurities of his people and entreating God for forgiveness, for cleansing.

Limitation of space prohibits more than mere mention of the reference--Ezra 9:5-15. Read it. Weep with Ezra. Repent with him, and realize this kind of praying is revival-producing praying because the Word of God witnesses:

"Now when Ezra had prayed, and when he had confessed, weeping and casting himself down before the house of God, there assembled unto him out of Israel a very great congregation of men and women and children: for the people wept very sore....and said unto Ezra, We have trespassed against our God...yet now there is hope in Israel concerning this thing. Now therefore let us make a covenant with our God to put away [sin]."--Ezra 10:1-3.

And what shall I more say? For the time would fail me to tell of Gideon, Elijah, Elisha, Hannah, Abraham, Samuel, Paul, Peter, the apostles, people who prayed:

"who through faith subdued kingdoms, wrought righteousness, obtained promises, stopped the mouths of lions, Quenched the violence of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, out of weakness were made strong, waxed valiant in fight, turned to flight the armies of the aliens."--Heb. 11:33,34.

Ah, they were giants for God, all right, but prayer was the real reason. Saints they were, but not super-saints, not giants, for God's Word witnesses that those like an Elijah were men "subject to like passions as we are, and... prayed earnestly" (Jas. 5:17).

In the light of these luminaries whose exploits fill the pages of the Bible, surely we powerless people of God need to pray, "Lord, teach us to pray."

Beloved, the supreme shame in our prayerlessness is not the example of those giants of God, but the paramount place the Lord Jesus Christ gave prayer!

The Gospels glow with accounts of Christ's prayer life. Astute students of Scripture chronology attest to the fact that of Christ's recorded earthly ministry of about three years, only sixty-two or sixty-three actual days are recorded.

If this be true, then what pre-eminent place Christ gave to prayer! Such a record of that sinless One prostrate before the Father in prayer by day and by night should shame us and shock us into being a people possessed by prayer! If He had to pray--and He did; if He had to pray often--and He did; if He had to pray over every decision and about all duties, how much more we frail sons of Adam's fallen race need to give ourselves to unceasing prayer!

See a few of the Scripture passages that pertain to Christ's prayer life:

"He went up into a mountain apart to pray; and when the evening was come, he was there alone."--Matt. 14:23.

"And in the morning, rising up a great while before day, he went out, and departed into a solitary place, and there prayed."--Mark 1:35.

"And it came to pass in those days, that he went out into a mountain to pray, and continued all night in prayer to God."--Luke 6:12.

"And it came to pass...he took Peter and John and James, and went up into a mountain to pray. And as he prayed, the fashion of his countenance was altered, and his raiment was white and glistening."--Luke 9:28,29.

"And it came to pass, that, as he was praying in a certain place, when he ceased, one of his disciples said unto him, Lord, teach us to pray."--Luke 11:1.

Even a superficial study of Christ's prayer life shows He prayed at all hours: early in the morning, late at night, all through the night; that He prayed about all things: the choosing of the twelve, that Simon Peter would not fail, the raising of Lazarus from the dead, etc.; and that He prayed everywhere: on mountains, in the wilderness, in solitary places, in graveyards, in homes, in the Garden of Gethsemane, even on the cross when He was crucified!

The recorded prayers of Christ lay bare His compassion, the throes of travail He suffered as He supplicated for sinners. Of Gethsemane's Garden experience, the Scriptures sound out His sorrow and suffering in this sentence: "Who in the days of his flesh, when he had offered up prayers and supplications with strong crying and tears unto him that was able to save him from death..." (Heb. 5:7). That agonizing over, and anguish for, the lost was so intense that Dr. Luke recorded the same scene: "And being in an agony he prayed more earnestly: and his sweat was as it were great drops of blood falling down to the ground" (Luke 22:44).

Oh, the all-important priority Christ gave to prayer!

Dr. Lee Roberson wrote on this rightly when he penned:

Prayer to our Lord was more important than teaching and healing, for great multitudes came together to hear and be healed, and He withdrew Himself into the desert and prayed: "But so much the more went there a fame abroad of him: and great multitudes came together to hear, and to be healed by him of their infirmities. And he withdrew himself into the wilderness, and prayed" (Luke 5:15,16).

Prayer to our Lord was more important than rest, for "In the morning, rising up a great while before day, he went out, and departed into a solitary place, and there prayed" (Mark 1:35).

Prayer to our Lord was more important than sleep. We read in Luke 6:12: "And it came to pass in those days, that he went out into a mountain to pray, and continued all night in prayer to God."

Prayer to our Lord was more important than working miracles, for instead of working a miracle to deliver Peter, He said, "But I have prayed for thee, that thy faith fail not: and when thou art converted, strengthen thy brethren" (Luke 22:32).

Prayer to our Lord was more important in securing workers than money or machinery, for as He looked upon the multitude, He said, "The harvest truly is plenteous, but the labourers are few; Pray ye therefore the Lord of the harvest, that he will send forth labourers into his harvest" (Matt. 9:37,38).

We sing the little chorus, "To Be Like Jesus"--and I am sure we pray to be like our Lord--but if we ever attain to any semblance of His spirituality, we will be possessed by tireless prayer in the interests of evangelism, spiritual conquests, God's will and His glory.

How could I state what I want to say stronger or more sincerely than in words I read written by Dr. Lee Scarborough:

I could wish that I myself and all those who through the Gospel seek to win men and women to Jesus could pray as often, as much, as intently, as unselfishly, and as powerfully, as Jesus did through the years of His public ministry.

Aye, Lord, teach us to pray!

But may I add one more unimpeachable, all-important reason why we must pray the disciples' prayer:

III. We Are Challenged by the Precious Promises of Christ to Pray--"Lord, Teach Us to Pray!"

Christ not only prayed, but He gave His followers exceeding great, abiding, precious promises touching prayer which we ought to learn and claim and cash at the bank of God.

Here are a handful of precious promises by our living, loving Lord to challenge us to pray and get answers from Heaven:

"But thou, when thou prayest, enter into thy closet, and when thou hast shut thy door, pray to thy Father which is in secret; and thy Father which seeth in secret shall reward thee openly."--Matt. 6:6.

"Therefore I say unto you, What things soever ye desire, when ye pray, believe that ye receive them, and ye shall have them."--Mark 11:24.

"And I say unto you, Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you. For every one that asketh receiveth; and he that seeketh findeth; and to him that knocketh it shall be opened."--Luke 11:9,10.

"And whatsoever ye shall ask in my name, that will I do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son. If ye shall ask any thing in my name, I will do it."--John 14:13,14.

"If ye abide in me, and my words abide in you, ye shall ask what ye will, and it shall be done unto you."--John 15:7.

These are only a few of the precious promises preached by the Saviour to enlist us to pray, enrich us in our poverty and encourage us in our faith.

May I be quick to cite in the words of Dr. John R. Rice, that that is exactly what the promises of Christ are--"promises," not "conditions"--that the multiplicity of Christ's promises of prayer "are all enlargements of promise and not limitations... promises, not strictures"; that all these "are to make prayer easier and not harder...and any Christian who meets a single one of God's promises can get everything that promise of God has offered."

Amen! Yet too often we Christians live poverty-riddled lives in the realm of the spiritual, the physical, the financial, the moral. We are too much like the widow of whom Dr. Hyman Appelman witnessed in one of his writings:

An Irish woman had a son named Jack. He drank heavily. One day under the influence of drink he was shanghaied aboard a ship bound for Australia. After docking, somehow he escaped into the interior. There he discovered gold and became very rich.

Jack loved his mother and wrote her regularly. He told of his wealth, about his wife, his two children, his automobiles, his home.

The mother grew old and tired, but the son could not leave his business to go to her.

She finally became too feeble to work. The priest and the people of the parish decided she must be sent to the poorhouse.

The priest went to her about it. The mission pained his heart. Finally he spoke. "Daughter, I have always wanted to ask you what became of your son. He left home. What ever happened to him? Do you hear from him?"

"He went to Australia," she related. "He is very rich now. He has a wife and children."

"How often do you hear from him?" the priest asked.

"Every two weeks, regularly."

"But doesn't he ever ask what you are doing? how you are getting along? if you need any help?"

The woman shook her head. "No. He has never asked, and I have never mentioned it. I do not want to worry him."

"Hasn't he ever sent you anything?"

"No, except for some small presents on my birthday and holidays."

"I can't understand it," said the priest. "He loves you. He has written to you every two weeks during all these years. Yet he has never sent you a thing."

The woman replied, "No, except in every letter there is a little greenish-blue slip of paper."

The priest was no fool. "What do you do with these slips of paper?" he queried, surmising what they were.

"They looked so pretty; I have pasted them up in my bedroom."

They walked to the room. Pasted neatly from one side of the wall to the other, from ceiling to floor, were money orders covering thousands of dollars.

That woman did not know what they were; she had plastered her walls with them!

We may smile at that poor washerwoman's ignorance; but beloved, in light of the multiplied exceeding precious promises of prayer structured by the Saviour to meet every conceivable need of the Christian, we poor, poverty-stricken saints are not guilty of ignorance if we do not claim them or cash them in, but we are grossly guilty of consummate iniquity.

May we at this very moment confess such crime and call upon our Christ, "Lord, teach us to pray!"

Source: <https://sermonindex.net/speakers/fred-barlow/the-shameful-sin-of-prayerlessness/>

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