

Houston Colonial Hills Conference 1995-01

Prayer

by William MacDonald

William MacDonald emphasizes the transformative power of prayer and its crucial role in the life of a believer and the world.

Duration: 38:05

Scripture: Revelation 8:1

Topics: "Prayer"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker shares a story about a man named Frank who ate poisoned meat and became very sick. Frank prayed desperately for help and a tall man appeared with goat's milk, which miraculously healed his friend. The speaker then transitions to discussing the topic of prayer, emphasizing the privilege and confidence believers have in approaching God with their requests. The sermon concludes with a reading from 1 John 5:14-15, highlighting the assurance that God hears and answers prayers according to His will.

Transcript

What's that, 29 years? Seems hardly possible. I'm very happy to be here. I've already seen some friends in the audience and hope to meet many new ones as well.

I don't know what's going to happen to this. Is this? Pardon? Put it in my pocket. That may be the last you'll see of it.

I thought after this time of prayer, and incidentally thank you for good participation in prayer, I thought we might just speak on the subject of prayer tonight. If you'd turn to 1 John 5, we'll read just two verses there. 1 John 5, verses 14 and 15.

1 John 5, verse 14, now this is the confidence that we have in Him that if we ask anything according to His will, He hears us. We know that He hears us. Whatever we ask, we know that we have the petitions that we have asked of Him.

What a marvelous privilege prayer is. Imagine coming into the presence of the sovereign of the universe any time of the day or night and speaking to Him, praying to Him, and knowing that He answers our prayers. Marvelous when you stop to think of it.

Man never comes closer to omnipotence than when he prays in the name of the Lord Jesus. Man will never be omnipotent. We never will have all power, even in heaven.

We will never have the attributes of God. But the closest we'll ever come to it is when we pray in the Savior's name. The reason I say that is when we pray in the name of the Lord Jesus, it's just the same as if He were making those requests to the Father.

That's pretty wonderful, isn't it? To be linked with Christ in prayer, speaking to God the Father. This is an encouragement to me to know there is that power in prayer. And you wonder why we don't use it more often, don't you? Do you sometimes find it hard to pray? Somebody asked an old preacher that.

Do you sometimes find it hard to pray? He said, sometimes. He said, all the time. Why? Because it's not natural.

It's a spiritual exercise, not a natural exercise at all. I like what an old English bishop said once. He said, when I pray, things happen.

When I don't pray, they don't. That's about it, isn't it? When I pray, things happen. When I don't pray, they don't.

When is the last time you had a distinct answer to prayer? Good question, huh? That's a question in the application blank that we do down through the years for those coming to us. What was the last answer to prayer? Well, I think that's one of the sovereignty of God in working out and weaving the threads of life and in answering prayer. And incidentally, I think it's a very good thing.

I haven't done it, but I think it's a very good thing to keep a diary of answers to prayer. Because you think, oh, I'll never forget. But you do forget.

You do forget. And so I really do recommend that we do that. Christians hold the balance of power in the world through prayer.

I really do. I think we forget that. We feel, well, we're just kind of a little despised group of nobodies in the world, and here are all the kingdoms, empires of the world, and they're the ones that wield the power.

Now, I want to tell you, Christians are the ones that hold the balance of power. You and I lived in the time when the Soviet Union broke up. Why did that happen? I think I can tell you why it happened, because Christians prayed.

That's why it happened. Christians praying down through the years for the oppressed people of Russia. God has his schedule and his planes all run on time.

That's why it happened, because Christians prayed. I like to tell the story, some of you may have heard it before, although you'd have to be over 29. About 20 years ago, 22 years ago, we started a prayer meeting up there on the second Friday of every month, young people.

I don't know why I said we, but anyway, young people. I'm the only older person that goes. And we used to pray on into the wee hours of Saturday morning, a missionary prayer meeting.

And I can remember years ago when there were terrible trouble for the Christians in the Chad Republic. A terribly wicked ruler named Tombleby there in the Chad Republic. And that Time Magazine reported that

he buried one Christian, they buried one Christian up to his neck in sand, and the ants killed him.

And another Christian, they put him in a drum and beat on the drum until he starved to death. And I remember two o'clock Saturday morning, we had a letter from Dick Sanders, who was serving the Lord in Chad, the Chad at that time. And he told us something about what was going on.

He said, don't feel sorry for the Christians that have died. He said, but pray. He said, pray for the Christians who have survived out here.

Well, I can remember that night. You know, sometimes when you pray with a group like that, you have a sense of having touched the throne of God. And we had that when we left that prayer meeting.

Saturday morning, Sunday morning, I was driving to one of the local assemblies for the meetings, and I turned on the radio. Military coup in the Chad Republic. Tombled by slain.

A new military general rises to power, favorable to the evangelical cause. Why did that happen? Well, I'll tell you. If you talk to any of the young people that were there that night, they'll tell you, they know why it happened.

It happened to a little group of nobody's there in San Leandro, California, praying. That's what I mean when I say Christians hold the balance of power in the world today. And it's marvelous to think that we can influence the destiny of nations down here.

And I believe that too. I really believe that, that we can influence the course of human history by our prayers. I think we all know that the best prayer comes from a strong inward necessity.

You've noticed that in life, and I notice it too. When things are going along swimmingly, your prayer life can be rather dull and insipid. But I tell you, when you're in a crisis, when you need help, you really know how to pray, don't you? Maybe it's a terrible sickness that has afflicted you.

Maybe it's some severe trial in your Christian life. That's what I mean when I say the best prayer comes from a strong inward necessity. The best prayer comes from people who are living a life of faith when they're cast upon the Lord.

Why do we do ourselves this disservice of cushioning ourselves from all of the possible things that can happen to us in life that make us independent of the Lord? We're very security conscious today. Sometimes I think we do ourselves a great wrong in being that. God has called us to a life of faith.

We walk by faith and not by sight. And I want to tell you tonight, the people that walk by faith are the people that are cast upon the Lord, and they're the ones that see the wonderful answers to prayer. I don't know if you've ever heard the story of Frank Hagerty and his friend Ben.

They were down there in Bolivia serving the Lord, and they were way out in the boondocks there, actually, and they were in the jungles serving the Lord. They just had nothing but the Lord. But having Him, they had everything.

And one night, they were weary. They came to a town, and they pitched camp outside the town, and they went in to see if they could get something to eat. And there was a hotel there, and there was a restaurant in the hotel.

Actually, there was a house next to the restaurant. It was the house of the local priest, and there was a private entrance from the priest's house to the restaurant. So, they went in and asked the woman in charge if they could get something to eat, and she said she didn't have anything.

She knew they were evangelicals. So, they left, and they went down to the police station, and they said to the gentleman in charge there, could you tell us where we could go and get something to eat? And he said, sure. He said, there's a restaurant down there in the hotel.

Well, we went there, and she said that she didn't have anything. Well, he said, come with me. So, he took them back to the hotel, and he said to the woman, get these men something to eat.

And she said, come back in 45 minutes. So, they went back in 45 minutes, and she had taken some potatoes and cut them in chunks and deep fried them, and then she had cooked some lungs for them. And they sat down and gave thanks and began to eat.

And Frank said, I don't like this meat. And I tell you what, I'll give you my potatoes, and you give me the meat. And he started to eat the meat, and his stomach began to burn, burn, burn.

She had put rat poison in the meat. And then he began to drink water, and he couldn't get enough water to drink. Finally, they just had to leave, and they went back to the campsite.

When they got there, they began to lose consciousness. So, Frank cried out to the Lord. Before he lost consciousness, Ben said to him, just send my Bible back to my father in Australia.

That's a closing request. Frank prayed, desperate. A tall man appears on the scene.

The man said, your friend is sick. He said, my friend is dying. Well, he said, you just wait here, he said.

And he went away, and he came back with an earthenware vessel filled with goat's milk. He said, get your friend to drink it. Frank said, my friend, he's unconscious.

He said, force it down his throat. So, he began to force the milk down his throat. And after a while, Ben opened his eyes.

Frank said, drink this, drink as much of it as you can drink. And he began to drink it. And after quite a while, he said, the burning is gone.

Well, they spent the night there. In the morning, they decided to leave. They left the earthenware vessel there with some money under it to express their appreciation to that tall gentleman.

And they went on their way. Months, months later, they came back to that place. We're going to look up, they said.

We're going to look up that tall man and thank him for what he did. So, they went to the people there in the village, and they described this man to them. And they said, there are no tall men here.

And you know, if you were there in Bolivia, you'd know exactly what that means. There are no tall men there. One young fellow saw Brian Killins and myself, and he said, I thought that David killed all the giants, that we look like giants to them.

He's six foot tall. Well, they said, this man came with a vessel full of goat's milk for us when we needed it. They said, there are no goats here.

At that time, there was a Dr. Brown from New Zealand serving with the assemblies out there in Bolivia. And they told him what happened. And he said, she put white phosphorus in the meat.

And the best known antidote is goat's milk. Now, my point in that story is this. The more we're cast upon the Lord, you know, that didn't happen in Houston today, did it? It didn't happen in Houston today.

No, because we're not cast upon the Lord. I want to tell you, when you really put yourself in that position, put yourself in the way of a blessing, God really works on your behalf in a wonderful way. God seldom, if ever, does anything except in answer to prayer.

Do you believe that? God seldom, if ever, does anything except in answer to prayer. Let me read you what Spurgeon said. Prayer is the forerunner of mercy.

Turn to sacred history and you'll find that seldom, ever, did a great mercy come to this world unheralded by supplication. Prayer is always the preface of blessing. It's certainly true with revivals.

If you've studied the history of revivals, it's people who pray. Two old women in the Hebrides praying. God visiting that place in a mighty revival.

Really marvelous. Somebody else has said, God has limited certain of his activities to responding to the prayers of his people. Unless they pray, he will not act.

Heaven may will something to happen, but heaven waits and encourages earth's initiative to desire that will and then to will and pray that it happens. The will of God is not done on earth by an inexorable juggernaut omnipotence out there overriding or ignoring the will of man on earth. On the contrary, God has willed that his hand be held back while he seeks for a man, an intercessor to plead, thy will be done on earth in this or that specific situation.

Somebody else said he bids his own work wait on man's prayers. I believe God to do things that he wouldn't otherwise do. I know a lot of teaching contrary to that.

Well, all prayer does is bring you into line with what God was going to do anyway. I hear that all the time. Prayer is good for you.

I mean, God has his program and it's all scheduled. It's all predestined. It's all chosen.

But when you pray, you just submit to what God's going to do anyway. No, that isn't what my Bible teaches. My Bible teaches that prayer moves the hand of God to do things that he wouldn't otherwise do.

Say, where do you believe that? Where do you get that in Scripture? Well, I get it in James chapter 4 verse 2. You have not because you ask not. Remember what it says? James chapter 4 verse 2 and James chapter 5 verse 16. Well, that's really marvelous, isn't it? To think of a little puny person down here on earth, a mere cosmic speck in this universe, and here in the name of Jesus, we can pray to God and move that hand to do something that otherwise he would not do.

Why do we deny ourselves the wonderful privilege of prayer? I like to think this in connection with my prayer life. God answers prayer. I believe he answers every prayer.

Every prayer prayed in the name of Jesus. God answers prayer in exactly the same way you would answer it if you had his wisdom, love, and power. If you knew what God knows, if you loved the way God loves, and if you had the power that God has, you would answer your prayers just the way he answers them.

That might seem a bit hard to believe, but it's true. God nothing does nor suffers to be done but what you would yourself if you could see the end of all he does as well as he. That's what gives you peace in your prayer life.

You pray and seemingly nothing happens, but something has happened. God is working it out some way that you don't realize at the time. But how do you reconcile that with the whole problem of praying for unsaved loved ones? I pray and I pray and I pray and nothing happens.

I'll tell you how I reconcile it. You can talk about it afterwards among yourselves. I believe when I pray for an unsaved person, God brings some influence to bear upon that person.

Maybe somebody will pass them a crack. Maybe they'll flick on the radio or the television just by chance and hear some blip about the Lord. Maybe they'll drive along the highway and see a sign that says Jesus saves.

Or maybe they'll turn on a football game on the TV and see some man there with John 3 16 written on a cardboard or something like that. I believe when I pray for an unsaved person, God brings some influence to bear as a result of that prayer, but he doesn't save people against their will. The human will is involved as well.

God does his part, but he expects that person to respond. I often think of Eddie Rickenbacker, you know, cats that drift with those men in a lifeboat during the Second World War, and they weren't particularly separated saints, I would say. But never mind, they prayed.

They prayed. And a bird came. They were starving.

They had run out of food, and a bird came and landed on the head of one of them. They took the bird and killed it and ate the meat, and it kept them going until rescue came. See, God was speaking to them, but God still left it up to them.

What are you going to do with the revelation of you that I have given to you? That's what I believe. I believe when we... I like when I meet some young believer. He's still in, you know, the first glow of salvation.

I like to ask him, who prayed for you? Well, I have a grandmother that I believe is a Christian, you know, or something, invariably say something like that. It might be remote. It might be a couple of generations back.

I have a young friend, he's a missionary down in Brazil, and I said, who prayed for you? And he said, I don't know. But you know, later on, I talked to his mother, who's far from being a believer, and found out that when the mother got married, the grandparents gave her a Bible. So it told me that the grandparents living in Philadelphia were Christians, and were praying.

Praying for succeeding generations, too. Donald Ross, before he died, prayed that not one hoof would be left behind. It's marvelous how in that family, down through the years, the Ross family people have got

saved right and left.

Because Donald Ross prayed that not one hoof would be left behind. The work of God is done more in prayer than in any other way. You wouldn't think that today with all our programs, all the things go on.

But it's true, the prayer really is the cutting edge in the work of God. A lot of things can go on in a religious way that might not be the will of God at all. But true work for God is done in prayer.

Somebody said this, it's not a supplemental spiritual rocket to get some well-meaning effort off the ground. Prayer is the work and the working power in any spiritual ministry. It should be the central thrust.

The spiritual history of a mission or a church is written in its prayer life. The expression of corporate life is not measured in statistics, but in prayer depth. I think that's good.

In a day that so much emphasis is put on church growth and numbers, I like that. The expression of corporate life is not measured in statistics, but in prayer depth. Not how big a church is, but how holy the members are.

That's what counts. The program of preaching, teaching and serving, the goal-setting, the adoption of new 20th century techniques, seminars on time management and administrative procedures are all good, but effective and productive in God's economy only as they are the subject. There are mysteries in connection with prayer.

There are mysteries in connection with prayer. You can ask a lot of questions that I can't answer, but I want to tell you they're answered in the best possible way that the mind of God can conceive. That's wonderful, isn't it? Your prayers, little you, little me, our prayers are answered in the best possible way that the mind of God can conceive.

So I want to tell you, don't get hung up with the mysteries of prayer. It's better to pray than to solve the mysteries of prayer, isn't it? Leave the mysteries to somebody else. I like Paul's suggestion in Philippians chapter 1-4 that prayer should be a joy, not a duty, not a drudgery.

Do I have to pray? No, but he says, well let's read it, Philippians chapter 1-4. He puts those things together and I want them to stay together in my own life too. Philippians chapter 1-4, always and always in every prayer of mine making requests for you all with joy.

That's good, with joy. How different this is from many text books on prayer. Paul says, pardon me, but I happen to enjoy it.

I think that's very good. Prayer often deals in the realm of the impossible and accomplishes it. I like that.

Prayer often deals in the realm of the impossible and accomplishes it. Prayer has divided seas, rolled up flowing rivers, made flinty rocks gush into fountains, quenched flames of fire, muzzled lions, disarmed vipers and poisons, marshaled the stars against the wicked, stopped the course of the moon, arrested the rapid sun in its great race, burst open iron gates, recalled souls from eternity, conquered the strongest devils, commanded legions of angels down from heaven. Prayer has bridled and changed the raging passions of man and routed and destroyed vast armies of proud, daring, blustering atheists.

Prayer has brought one man from the bottom of the sea and carried another in a chariot of fire to heaven. What has not prayer done? It really is wonderful when you think of it. Prayer and faith lead you to heights

that make reason dizzy, really do.

I think I've already suggested this, but I'll say it again. It's fervent prayer that reaches the throne of God. Spurgeon said that another man said cold prayers are as arrows without heads, as swords without edges, as birds without wings.

They pierce not, they cut not, they fly not up to heaven. Cold prayers always freeze before they get to heaven. Very, very good.

It's not the arithmetic of our prayers, how many they are, nor the rhetoric of our prayers, how eloquent they be, nor the geometry of our prayers, how long they be, nor the music of our prayers, how sweet our voice may be, nor the method of our prayers, how orderly they may be, nor even the theology of our prayers, how good the doctrine may be, which God cares for. Fervency of spirit is that which availeth much. A fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much.

A lot of people, a lot of men in the assemblies and meetings, publicly, are afraid to pray. Why are they afraid to pray? They're afraid that they might say something wrong and be criticized for it afterwards. I like Revelation chapter 8 in that regard.

I'd like you to turn to it. Revelation chapter 8. This has been a help to me. It was a help to me as a young believer.

When I saw this truth in the word of God, I really rejoiced in it. When he opened the seventh seal, there was silence in heaven for about half an hour, and I saw the seven angels who stand before God. To them were given seven trumpets.

Then another angel, having a golden censer, came and stood at the altar, and he was given much incense that he should have offered with the prayers of all the saints upon the golden altar which was before the throne. The smoke of the incense with the prayers of the saints ascended before God from the angel's hand. What's that all about? What is that? Just a holy jumble of words? No, it is not.

It's very practical instruction for us. First of all, the angel. It's generally accepted that the Lord Jesus is the angel there.

You say, the Lord Jesus? Yes, don't be surprised. Any time the expression is used in the Old Testament, the angel of the Lord, it refers to the Lord Jesus in a pre-incarnate appearance in the Old Testament. The angel of the Lord.

So here you have him, the angel, another angel. Not one of the seven, another angel. What's happening there? Well, I'll tell you what's happening.

Your prayers and my prayers and the prayers of God's people are going up to heaven. Sometimes we don't know what to pray for. You don't know what to pray for.

Maybe we have a loved one who's dying, you know, and suffering terribly, you know, quality of life's not good at all. And we just cry to God, spare her, spare him, you know, don't let him die. I've gone through that myself.

It wasn't the right prayer. Maybe some young fellow will get up and he'll worship in the breaking of bread service and he'll thank God the Father for dying for him on Calvary's cross. You know, you've heard

that.

And some of the older brethren really squirm when they hear something like that. They shouldn't squirm. They shouldn't squirm.

This passage of scripture takes care of it. Look, the Lord Jesus is there. He has a golden censer and he stands at the altar and he has incense and the prayers of God's people are ascending to God the Father and he adds incense to him.

What is the incense? Well, I would suggest to you that the incense is the fragrance, the perfection of his person and work. And I want to tell you, dear friends, when those prayers get to God the Father, they're absolutely perfect. He's taken out all the imperfections and they're absolutely perfect.

So that should be an encouragement. You young people, don't hesitate. Don't hesitate to pray, you young fellows, to pray publicly.

Don't think it has to be in fancy theological language. It doesn't. The best prayer is not.

And just remember, the Lord Jesus takes care of it before it ever gets to God the Father. It's absolutely perfect. I've used that illustration of the businessman that left home.

He's going to be gone two weeks. And on the day that he was to return, his little girl went out in the backyard and she picked a little bouquet for him. There were some dandelions there and some violets there and some clover there and some grass there and sprigs and straw and all the rest.

And she brought it in to the mother. And you know, the mother took her. She pulled out that piece of grass and she pulled out that piece of straw and all of those things.

And she just rearranged it and put it in a little vase. So when the Father got home, there was a nice little bouquet for him. That's what God does.

That's what the Lord Jesus does with our prayers. We pray to God the Father through the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of God. But that doesn't mean that we don't pray to Christ directly, too, because we do many, many instances of that in the Word of God.

Prayer is more important than service. It really is. I like what somebody has said.

God sets more value on prayer and communion than on labor. The heavenly bridegroom is wooing a wife, not hiring a servant. It's very good.

I have some friends and they had a shouty dog, Shelly. That dog was so affectionate. I mean, you went in and she just jumped on you and lathered all over you, you know, and it was really wonderful.

She was just all love. She was a worshiper. She really was.

And you know, I don't live in that house. I just visit there. But you know, when I slammed the door of my car to go in, she knew it was me, you know.

I mean, how can you resist a dog like that? Well, Shelly died. And they got another dog, another shouty, actually. Shelly was a female, of course.

This one's a male, Max. And Max, you care less when you go in. You know, you just care less when you go in.

If you throw a ball, he'll play with you. He likes activity, but he never comes and, you know, leans his chin on my knee or anything, never does that. And the other day I was saying to them, I wish that they had got another dog like Shelly.

And then the Lord said to me, Bill, you've been like Max all your life. All activity, you know, just keeping busy all the time, driving yourself like a Toyota. We're driven.

But where was the communion? Where was the love? Wonderful how God can use a dog, isn't it, to rebuke you. And he used that dog to rebuke me. Let me read that again.

God sets more value on prayer and communion than on labor. The heavenly bridegroom is wooing a wife, not hiring a servant. We honor God by the greatness of our prayer.

The Lord likes us to come before him with great prayers for his glory and for the blessing of others. A beggar once asked Alexander the Great. Alexander the Great used to have a day when he'd sit out in the public and the people could come and talk to him and they'd make requests of him.

And this beggar came and asked him for a dowry for his daughter and an education for his son. And his aides reproached him. They said, why did you do that to that beggar coming up and complying with his request like this? And Alexander said, I get tired of these people who come asking for a gold coin.

That saucy beggar treated me like a king. He asked big. There.

He asked big. And we don't. We don't.

If you had been living when Christ was on earth and had met the Savior kind, what would you have asked him to do for you? Supposing you were stone blind? The child considered and then replied, I suppose that without doubt I have asked the Lord for a dog with a chain to lead me daily about. How often thus in our faithless prayers we acknowledge with shamed surprise we've only asked for a dog with a chain when we might have opened eyes. You honor God.

I honor God by the greatness of, by the greatness of the prayer that we ask. Just one final word. When we get to heaven, we're going to wish we had prayed more.

I know I am. I'm going to wish I had prayed more. When I think of the remarkable answers to prayer, remarkable answers to prayer.

Absolutely. Uh, amazing. I was thinking today of that time when it was a dear lady, I think it was a Heathrow airport in London.

And she had a little ministry of just going there and sitting beside people in the airport and talking to them about Jesus. And one day she sat beside, um, a flight attendant who was waiting for her flight. And do you know that flight attendant was ready and she trusted the Lord Jesus Christ as her savior.

And then she said, look, I've got to go. I've got to go. My flight's leaving.

And the lady, the dear Christian lady said, well, here's a little booklet for you to take and read. If you ever get some free time on your flight, you just take this and read it. And then that dear Christian lady shot up a little prayer to heaven and the girl got on the flight.

She was busy, of course, serving meals and all the rest. And, um, there was a quiet time later on, and she sat down in one of the seats and took out this book by Francis Schaeffer and started to read it. And pretty soon there was a man standing beside her.

He said, do you understand what you're reading? And she said, well, she said, I, she said, I'm only a Christian for a very short time. And she said, I confess it's a little deep for me, but he says, just move over and let me sit down, explain it to you. His name was Francis Schaeffer.

Marvelous, isn't it? Marvelous. A marvelous coincidence of circumstances. God bringing circumstances together like that.

Can he do it? He's doing it all the time. And the more we cast upon him in fervent prayer, the more we'll see him do it. Let's put him in prayer, and perhaps our brother Martin will have a closing hymn for us.

Father, first of all, we've come to you in confession, I, myself, and doubtless others here as well, and just bemoan our prayer life. We, we count our successes and our gains and all the things that we've accumulated. And you weep when you think of the number of hours we spent on our knees.

Father, we pray that you'll awaken us all to the reality of prayer, that, that we might learn to move men through God by prayer. That we might be mighty, valiant men and women of prayer. That we might see our lives crackle with the supernatural, and that when we touch other lives, something will happen for God.

We ask it in his worthy name, and for his sake. Amen.

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