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PRAYER IN THE LAST DAYS

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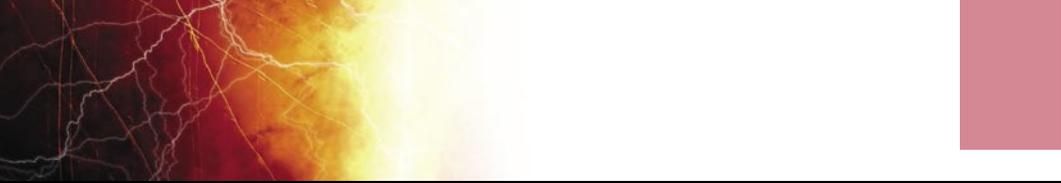
A Christian without a prayer life is a poor Christian. Believers who do not pray cannot change the spiritual climate of their area of influence. Families who do not pray cannot have spiritually strong children; husbands who do not pray cannot lead their families; wives who do not pray become bitter and rebellious; pastors who do not pray cannot make disciples and win the lost; they just become religious.

The human heart can only be changed by prayer. In reality, man cannot even be saved

without the prayers of the saints; he cannot be free from the bonds of pride, self-will and sin without prayer. Sanctification is also a work of prayer and not a work of man's self-righteous efforts.

We don't need to learn about prayer as much as we simply need to pray. While a person

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prays they learn about prayer. The weak spiritual condition of churches, and Christians in them, and their lack of influence in social-political planes is the result of the cessation of prayer. While we ought to be praying more, because we are living in the last days, we forsake the most successful weapon God entrusted to us.

Ministers who do not pray are not God's ministers and are often troublesome in the course of revivals. They do not understand terms such as "God's glory" or "God's presence" and try to effect change through worldly means, with the goal to become better people; in the end there is no difference between their church and the world. They think if they become good people of good breeding with cultural mannerisms that people will come to God. We cannot affect change and draw people to God with our technology, knowledge and understanding, or political savvy; only through prayer can this be done because people will not turn from their sin if the church does not pray. We may gain people for the church, but not for Jesus.

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Plans, good tactics, organization, and even music has its place in the kingdom, but these should never take the place of prayer; because while people may come, and even become members, this does not mean that they know Jesus Christ, because a relationship with Him only grows through prayer.

Without prayer it is impossible to reconcile people. We are witnesses of this as churches have tried in vain to bring peace to their community. However, the church is not responsible to bring peace to the world, rather to help reconcile the world to God.

The church that does not pray does not seek to reconcile people to God; instead seeks to reconcile the world to itself. Without prayer, churches will become backslidden, worldly, and lifeless. Prayer is hard work, and so many choose not to pray; it doesn't come naturally to the fleshly man who is self-willed and independent of God. However, if we want to be pliable and led by the Holy Spirit; if we want to be filled with the Spirit and His power; if we want to reach and lead the lost to God's kingdom then we must become people of prayer. If we belong to Him then prayer is our mission; if we are saved then prayer is our responsibility. It's not necessary to be rich and successful; a man cannot become better or worse simply because of wealth or success but without prayer he certainly cannot become better.

► **1. PRAYER IN THE LAST DAYS IS FIRST OF ALL PRAYER “IN YOUR OWN ROOM”.**

“And when you pray, you shall not be like the hypocrites. For they love to pray standing in the synagogues and on the corners of the streets, that they may be seen by men. Assuredly, I say to you, they have their reward. But you, when you pray, go into your room, and when you have shut your door, pray to your Father who [is] in the secret [place]. (Matthew 6:6)

In that time, as it is today, people (especially believers) often loved to pray in public because people would see them as spiritual and holy. Jesus scorned their self-righteous attitude and clearly showed that personal communication with God takes place in “your own room”.

Unfortunately, believers today claim they do not have time for personal communication with God. So, in place of personal prayer they come to congregational prayer meetings and pray long, theological, or rehearsed prayers, which do nothing to move God’s hand. Moreover, they raise their voice but without true strength and passion. Do we thus pray in our prayer closet? This is what our cries to God ought to look like in our personal prayer life.

It is vital for us to have a good prayer life in these final days, because only those who truly pray will be able to endure the trials and tribulations ahead. We should never come to the place

where we no longer have time for personal prayer. Often times we claim that we simply don’t have time to pray everyday yet we always find time to eat at least one good meal. We fail to pray and then wonder why we encounter so many problems; we wonder why we are so tired, weak, and unhappy; we wonder why there isn’t life in our churches and yet forget that we are the church. Often in place of prayer we try good works, charisma or education.

Jesus Christ was very busy while He lived on earth. There were always all kinds of people around Him with all sorts of problems. He had results not because He was God’s Son but because He spent time in prayer. His success through the day was the fruit of his prayer seasons through the night. Every free moment was spent in prayer. Nothing happens apart from God. Prayer strengthened Him to take on the sin of the world and carry the cross. Jesus Christ clearly portrayed for us the way of prayer; so if we truly want to call ourselves His disciples,

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how can we assume that we can succeed differently than He did. Without prayer we cannot live as He did. We can only be religious Pharisees – maintaining an outward appearance of godliness while praying in public, but all the while denying the power that can only be received in private and which alone can change man.

Our evangelistic efforts and good works toward others cannot replace personal prayer. If you have your own room, literally close the door and speak with your Father. If you do not have your own room, find a solitary place where you can have some personal time alone with God because your life depends on it.

If we do not have a prayer life we will become bothersome to the church and discourage our brothers and sisters with our worldly and self-willed living. Moreover, our religious ego will lead us to spiritual blindness, harden our

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hearts and stiffen our necks so that we will no longer be able to hear the truth or recognize what God is saying from His Word. Without prayer and the Word we cannot have the understanding we need.

Without personal prayer our ministry will become service without love or care; our relationships will grow cold, brothers and sisters in Christ will be enemies of one another, and our sermons and evangelistic efforts will not have the effect needed to change lives.

A pastor once heard of a spiritual minister who was very successful in reaching hundreds of souls. This pastor simply wanted to know the secret of this success and decided to pay a visit to the successful minister. After a few days journey he arrived at the minister's poor cottage. The first thing he asked was, "Brother, where do your sermons come from?" Rather than immediately answering the pastor, he led him to a room that was poorly furnished and with his finger he pointed to a threadbare place on the carpet. Beside the carpet was a window that looked out over the hills. Then he answered, "This is the place where I receive these messages. One night my heart was so heavy that I began to cry out for people. Hours went by and night came but I still did not receive an answer. I continued to pray until I saw an image as silver. Later the silver turned to gold and then the sermon came and the power of the Holy Spirit came down on the people.

Without prayer it is impossible to live in the presence of God. Testimonies of other people cannot uphold us; it is impossible to withstand the pressures of these last days without prayer. Believers without prayer closets become religious and unable to bring about the fruit of Christ in their lives; they are helpless to stand against the flood of sin, deception, worry, and worldly ambitions. Pastors and ministers who do not have a prayer closet will become fleshly and begin justifying disobedience to God's Word and an unspiritual way of life. In place of holiness they promote unbridled living; in place of righteousness they speak of tolerance.

▶ **2. PRAYER IN THE LAST DAYS
RECOGNIZES THE IMPORTANCE OF
CONGREGATIONAL PRAYER.**

"Peter was therefore kept in prison, but constant prayer was offered to God for him by the church. And when Peter had come to himself, he said, 'Now I know for certain that the Lord has sent His angel, and has delivered me from the hand of Herod and [from] all the expectation of the Jewish people.' So, when he had considered [this], he came to the house of Mary, the mother of John whose surname was Mark, where many were gathered together praying." (Acts 12:5,11-12)

Today's churches place lesser importance on congregation prayer while those who offer congregation prayer statistically find that this is the least attended meeting. On the other

hand, the church quickly fills to capacity when a seminar, concert or potluck is held; people come who haven't attended in months. While these activities have their place in the church, they often take precedence over or replace congregational prayer.

When Peter was in prison, the church prayed unceasingly for him because they recognized the importance of praying together. This was also the case when the disciples were persecuted; they lifted a united voice to the Lord and sought for greater strength and courage in preaching the Word. When they waited for the promised Holy Spirit, together (in harmony) they waited in the upper room in prayer.

Therefore, we should never neglect the strength of congregational prayer. If believers would come together in prayer their barrenness would turn to fruitfulness, bickering would cease and the church would be victorious and grow. Everything depends upon prayer. It is impossible to sustain evangelistic projects without congregational prayer. After an all-night prayer meeting we

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always see the church filled with new people and those for whom we prayed. The reason is very simple – the attendance of people is also dependent upon congregational prayer.

God does not want the church to forget the only weapon that can destroy the enemy and break the shackles of sin. That weapon is prayer. Jesus said that His house “shall be called a house of prayer”, and yet His house is anything but that. No one is excited about prayer anymore; they say that prayer isn’t always the answer and so they don’t pray.

The church will never see revival if she doesn’t pray. Without congregational prayer she will never see change in her city. We remember the well-known story about the city in Cali, Columbia where the church gathered for prayer many times, after which the cartel was captured and one entire day went by without a shooting or murder. All of this took place because of congregational prayer.

★ If our life and will are not aligned with His will and righteousness; if our hearts are rebellious to His Word and His worldview, then despite praying in tongues we are not praying in cooperation with the Holy Spirit.

Therefore, God never wants us to circumvent the principle of prayer. Prayer may be an arduous task but the efforts are worth the cost because it is better to have devoted time to congregational prayer than to various seminars and teachings. How will people be reconciled if their hearts are not changed and how can a heart be changed without prayer?

Let us sacrifice time for congregational prayer. Let us come to all-night prayer meetings, Morning Prayer, and let us simply pray. God will do unbelievable things just as He did for Peter when the church prayed in unity as they showed that they truly believed in God. When problems come our way we must first come to God in prayer; there is nothing simpler that we can do than pray to Him. Yet at times it seems we do not like simple solutions; sometimes it is as if we do not even want to really solve our problems.

The angel came to Peter, struck him on the side, lit up the cell; then they passed by two prison guards, the prison doors opened of their own accord and Peter found himself free standing on the street. This event was so powerful and unbelievable that those in the prayer meeting were confused. In fact, they rebuked the servant-girl who opened the door because they couldn’t believe what had taken place so suddenly. You see, the prayer of a righteous man can do many things if it is fervent, and more if there are many fervent righteous men in one place (Acts 12:6-16)

► **3. PRAYER IN THE LAST DAYS IS
PRAYER IN COOPERATION WITH THE
HOLY SPIRIT.**

“...praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, being watchful to this end with all perseverance and supplication for all the saints.” (Ephesians 6:18)

There is much misunderstanding and unrest in these last days when the Holy Spirit is mentioned in the church, and even more when we mention speaking in tongues. Because of examples where these gifts were used out of balance, many churches no longer wish to speak of the Holy Spirit and speaking in tongues. What they fail to understand is how they sell themselves short by cutting off the intercession of the Holy Spirit in prayer.

I don't wish to speak about the baptism of the Holy Spirit and the understanding of the gift of tongues as much as the importance that our prayers in these last days be in cooperation with the Holy Spirit. In other words, I consider it vital to seek the baptism and power of the Holy Spirit, because without this power, it is impossible to be an effective believer in the long run and to endure the pressure of the last days. Furthermore, without the help and cooperation of the Holy Spirit our prayers will only be intellectual and of the soul without great strength to affect change or bring about lasting results.

When our spirit is filled with God's Spirit and

when we are obedient to God's will we can bravely and freely seek that which the Holy Spirit shows us is His will. If, rather than being filled with the Holy Spirit, we are filled with our own will and fail to submit to God's Word and His righteousness, our prayers will be selfish and focused on our own wants, needs, and desires; these prayers will not be answered.

Therefore, if our life and will are not aligned with His will and righteousness; if our hearts are rebellious to His Word and His worldview, then despite praying in tongues we are not praying in cooperation with the Holy Spirit. Perhaps these prayers can appear passionate and loud but these elements are not important in praying in concordance with the Holy Spirit; rather this will simply prove that we are passionately surrendered to something or someone and wish to gain our desires at any price regardless of God's Word. The theory of “praying in the Spirit”, which is also known as “praying in tongues”, without obedience to God's Word is ineffective. To be sure, it is good to pray in tongues, but we cannot pray as we ought to, in cooperation with the Holy Spirit, if we are disobedient to His Word.

It is vital that our thoughts are filled with God's Word; our spirit with His Spirit, and our will aligned with His will in order for the Holy Spirit to pray for us and through us; and therefore we also are praying in Him and through Him. The Holy Spirit places in us the prayers we need to pray and we add to those prayers our heart and voice.



Prayer in these final days must be in cooperation with the Holy Spirit; which is why must decide to throw off all other philosophies and empty subtleties, renew our personal and congregational prayer, and be filled with the Holy Spirit rather than with the spirit of this world. It is time for us to turn off our televisions and begin to pray like never before because the time of His arrival is at hand. It is time for us to radically turn from sin, guilty pleasures and self-righteousness; to radically surrender our selfish ambitions and desires to serve Him. Intellectual, dry, sermonized, theological and selfish prayers cannot affect change, which is why we must purify our hearts and cry out to for the Holy Spirit to come on us.

Prayer is the place where the Holy Spirit dwells and works; therefore we must pray without ceasing together with Him because only then can we endure these last days,

become fruitful, and bring life to those around us. Prayer with the Holy Spirit is a hidden treasure that we must seek for, find, and use!

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